

## “Small Is Viable”: The Arts, Ecology, and Development in Peru

Man is small, and therefore small is beautiful.

E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful* (2010, p. 169)

In Peru “small is beautiful” should be primarily understood as “small is viable.”

Gustavo Buntinx, “Communities of Sense/Communities of Sentiment”  
(2006, p. 239)

### *Lima en un árbol* (1981)

On a sunny day in May 1981 Rossana Agois (b. 1954), Wiley Ludeña (b. 1955), Hugo Salazar del Alcázar (1954?-1996), and Armando Williams (b. 1956) placed a tree at the center of a busy intersection in Lima's Centro Histórico. Video footage of the event shows the group slowly making their way down a crowded sidewalk as they transport a slender eucalyptus in a wooden crate equipped with makeshift handles.<sup>1</sup> Upon their arrival at Avenida Nicolás de Piérola (La Colmena) and Jirón Rufino Torrico, they quickly move to the center of the intersection and deposit the tree. With choreographed precision, each member of the quartet then grabs a length of rope anchored to the crate and heads for a different street corner to tether their end to a sign or lamppost, so that the entire intersection is suddenly cordoned off. In the moments of confusion that ensue, traffic halts. The sound of horns, shouts, and whistles rises. Drivers and passengers

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<sup>1</sup> *Lima en un árbol* (11:45) is accessible on YouTube in two parts. The video was edited by El Centro de Teleducación de la Universidad Católica del Perú (CETUC) and included in the Propuestas II exhibition organized by the Museo de Arte Italiano de Lima in 1981. In addition to the four participants who appear in the video, Carmen Rosa Martínez also assisted with the action. In 2002 the video was recovered and restored by Alta Tecnología Andina (ATA) and the Micromuseo for a public discussion held on Earth Day at the Centro Cultural de San Marcos. Two decades later, Gustavo Buntinx included *Lima en un árbol* in his documentary history of the Lima-based arts collective E.P.S. Huayco, which was also established in 1980; the artists' dates come from this source. Among the participants in *Lima en un árbol*, Armando Williams also participated in Huayco's public events and projects involving urban visual culture (Buntinx 2005, p. 44; Buntinx 2013; Lerner Rizo-Patrón and Villacorta Chávez 2008, p. 152; Ludeña 1982; Salazar 1983).

exit their vehicles to observe the scene, and pedestrians gather at the street corners. Some watch with amused expressions as two police officers attempt to unknot the ropes blocking the lanes. At last, the police succeed, only to confront an unruly traffic jam. Through it all the tree remains, its branches swaying gently, obliging drivers to swerve slightly as they cross the intersection.

*Lima en un árbol* (Lima in a tree), described by the Argentine-Peruvian curator and critic Gustavo Buntinx (b. 1957) as “probablemente...la primera performance de signo ecológico realizada en el Perú” (probably the first performance under the sign of ecology created in Peru) (Buntinx 2013), is captured in just over eleven minutes of unsteady, low-resolution video that was restored from a single surviving copy for screening at a 2002 Earth Day event featuring Ludeña and collaborators.<sup>2</sup> Recorded with ambient audio from two locations overlooking the street and intersection, the video features high-angle long shots depicting the tree’s arrival, punctuated by swish pans and zooms that impulsively home in on individuals and points of interest as the action unfolds. Six digital-font intertitles announce *Lima en un árbol* as an act of transgression in protest of the urban development that has led to the disappearance of green space in Lima.<sup>3</sup> Editing accentuates the video narrative: cutaways to the cycling traffic light suspended above the intersection mark the passing minutes, and the video concludes with a repetition of the key scene depicting the placement of the tree at the intersection.<sup>4</sup>

The creators of *Lima en un árbol* were associated with non-objective art movements in Lima during the late 1970s and 1980s, when informal collectives often coalesced to create projects in public places,

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<sup>2</sup> See Salazar regarding the use of mass media and technology in Peruvian non-objective art movements (1983, p. 115).

<sup>3</sup> The intertitles read as follows: LIMA ES UNA CIUDAD ESPECULATIVA DE 5 MILLIONES DE HABITANTES/LAS DEMANDAS DEL CAPITAL GOBIERNAN Y SIGNAN NUESTRA CIUDAD/LIMA ACUSA DESAPARICIÓN DE AREAS VERDES/COMPORTAMIENTOS COLECTIVOS SOCIALMENTE PROGRAMADOS Y ALIENANTES/ESTA ACCIÓN PROPONE CONFRONTAR LA RELACIÓN NATURALEZA-ARTIFICIO/TRANSGREDIR LA RUTINA DE LA PROGRAMACION URBANA, FELIZ DEMOCRATICA E INMANENTE (Lima is a speculative city of five million inhabitants/The demands of capital govern and shape our city/Lima accuses the disappearance of green space/Alienating and socially programmed collective behaviors/This action proposes to confront the nature-artifice relation/Transgressing the routine of happy, democratic, and immanent urban programming).

<sup>4</sup> In the second iteration, the image quality of this scene appears to be deliberately degraded.

taking as their point of departure the idea that “a utopia could be built on the basis of popular urbanism” (Lerner Rizo-Patrón and Villacorta Chávez, 2008, p. 152). At the Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Arte No-Objetual (the First Latin American Colloquium on Non-objective Art) held in Medellín in 1981, Alfonso Castrillón, professor of art at the University of San Marcos, cited *Lima en un árbol* as exemplary of work that was being produced by university-affiliated artists with commitments on the left (Castrillón 1985, p. 28). He emphasized that non-objective art in Peru did not seek to dematerialize the art object per se, a strategy often identified with US and European currents of conceptualism, as much as it sought to recuperate sensoriality, prioritize human visual-sensory needs, and create “un arte para la vida y no una mercancía” (an art for life rather than a commodity) (Castrillón 1985, p. 29).

Indeed, *Lima en un árbol* derives its impact by drawing attention to the tree’s physical presence as an obstacle to the habitual flow of pedestrian and vehicle traffic in a bustling commercial district mostly devoid of plant life. Inspired by its organizers’ formations in art, architecture, and urban planning, the action of Agois, Ludeña, Salazar del Alacázar, and Williams bears formal similarities to other examples of contemporary art that engaged systems theory and ecology.<sup>6</sup> Yet, their action extends land art’s explorations of ecological interconnectedness in environments beyond museums and galleries to stage an intervention in which “nature” and “culture” align against capitalist development. *Lima en un árbol* reflects critically on the legacies of modernization initiatives that regarded land and trees alike as depletable and monetized at an historical moment when such initiatives were undergoing a resurgence in Peru. In the following decades, other Lima-based artists, including Carmen Reátegui (b. 1946), whose work I discuss later in this article, also confronted the relation between nature and artifice, to adapt a phrase from *Lima en un árbol*,<sup>7</sup> through public art

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<sup>6</sup> Agois, Ludeña, and Salazar had backgrounds in architecture, while Williams was an artist (Castrillon 1985, p. 28; Buntinx 2005, p. 42). On the intersection of ecology and systems theory in US- and Latin America-based conceptualisms, I draw on studies by Benezra 2020; Nisbet 2014; and Shtromberg 2016. Nisbet offers a useful definition of ecology that is relevant for the present discussion: “By ‘ecology,’ I refer not only to concerns about pollution, resource management, and earthcare in general, but also to how information travels and coheres into historical explanation” (p. 2).

<sup>7</sup> See note 3.

projects centering prominently around reclaimed trees. By presenting trees as individuated, bearers of collective memory, and subjects of ritual interaction, they contest extractivist economies associated with both afforestation and deforestation. The tree that appears in *Lima en un árbol*, as it happens, was a familiar icon of economic development in the Peruvian sierra, yet this performance centers it as a living being that contributes to social welfare and collectivity: the city in a tree.

### **A Diasporic Tree**

The title of *Lima en un árbol* invites us to regard its protagonist as generic: a fragile being claiming space in a hostile environment, and at the same time, the embodiment of a city that could be. It is fitting that this tree was a eucalyptus, both widely available and associated with distinct practices of land use from the colonial era to the present. Introduced in Peru from Australia, *Eucalyptus globulus* (Blue Gum), one of eleven eucalyptus subspecies currently found in Peru, was initially cultivated by Franciscan friars and wealthy landowners. In the capital, the trees' need for irrigation confined it to elegant parks and elite settings (Dickenson 1969, p. 296). By the mid-nineteenth century, however, global capitalism had spurred a "eucalyptus diaspora" (Luzar 2007, p. 86) that effectively propelled this species to regions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas that were climatologically similar to its native Tasmania, including the southern Peruvian sierra. At higher elevations, *Eucalyptus globulus* required less irrigation than it did on the coast and was cultivated by landowners as a field border and construction material. Eucalyptus supplemented a scarcity of native timber suitable for the construction of buildings that could support the heavy tile roofs associated with Spanish colonial architecture (Dickenson 1969, p. 300). The potential for its timber to serve also as a structural support for mining and as a heating fuel led to expanded cultivation through the twentieth century (Luzar 2007).

By the end of the 1960s, eucalyptus had become the dominant tree in the Peruvian sierra and the main source of hardwood on the national market. The tree was thoroughly engrained in material culture associated with mining, construction, and agriculture in distinct Peruvian regions, where its cultivation ushered in cash economies and electrification (Dickenson 1969, p. 295-296, Luzar 2007, p. 92). Integral to intangible culture as well, eucalyptus was widely used for medicinal purposes (Luzar 2007, p. 89) and even inspired a

*huayno*.<sup>8</sup> Eucalyptus was, moreover, a key factor in large-scale economic development programs spearheaded by the Peruvian state intended to provide timber for industry and alleviate rural poverty. During the early 1960s, eucalyptus was cultivated on communal grazing lands in the sierra through programs designed to remediate overgrazing and soil erosion sponsored by the Peruvian Forest Service with funds from the US Agency for International Development (Dickenson 1969, p. 304; Luzar 2007, p. 88). Later, it played a role in development programs launched by the center-left military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975), which encouraged eucalyptus cultivation as a source of income for rural and Indigenous communities in conjunction with the administration's sweeping agrarian reforms and land redistribution (Luzar 2007, p. 88). When Agois, Ludeña, Salazar del Alcázar, and Williams created *Lima en un árbol*, they were not seeking the restoration of a pristine environment—in fact, there are claims that eucalyptus itself contributes to environmental degradation<sup>9</sup>--but rather, repositioning this familiar and adaptive tree as part of the commons, the focal point of an ephemeral park, following a period of its intensified cultivation as a cash crop.

Beyond confronting the “plant-blindness” endemic to utilitarian perspectives on nature,<sup>10</sup> *Lima en un árbol* also invites associations with human migration, uprooting, sacrifice, and displacement, similar to that experienced by Indigenous and rural communities during eventful decades marked by economic crisis and violent civil conflict. The fact that *Lima en un árbol*'s protagonist undertakes a journey to the city center, occupies precarious housing, and disrupts the orderliness of the colonial street grid not only evokes the migration of genus Eucalyptus, but also the parallel journeys of thousands of people who arrived in the capital from the sierra, leading to dramatic population growth in Lima and the transformation of the city's urban culture.<sup>11</sup> Olga Rodríguez-Ulloa observes that beginning in the 1960s, the figure of “the migrant,” generic,

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<sup>8</sup> Luzar 2007, p. 86. A *huayno* is a popular form of Andean music and dance.

<sup>9</sup> Luzar's informants observe, for example, that eucalyptus outcompetes other species, consumes water that might be used to support food cultivation, and releases resins into watersheds (2007, p. 86).

<sup>10</sup> According to de León, “plants tend to be narrated in neutral collective terms such as forests, landscapes, crops, or agriculture, signalling how their existence matters culturally in relation to human use and consumption” (2022, p. 130). For more on “plant-blindness” see Gagliano, Ryan, and Vieira 2017; on colonialism and the instrumentalization of nature, see Ghosh 2021.

abstract, and implicitly racialized, was constructed by predominantly white (criollo) artists and intellectuals in Lima as an agent of “marginal[ity], overflow, [and] informality,” whose presence suddenly irrupted into a “well-contained and functioning city prior to migration” (Rodríguez-Ulloa 2020, p. 12, 14, 15). The tree at the center of *Lima en un árbol* likewise can be understood as a perturbation to the prevailing urban order. However, it is significant that the creators of *Lima en un árbol* valorize the disruption that the tree unleashes. An embodiment of the city, the tree defies state authorities and those who profit from unregulated development. Through a highly condensed performance that invites spectatorial reflection on the “perceived disjunction between humans and the planet, between our ‘species’ and a dynamic external ‘nature,’” *Lima en un árbol* also reinforces the fact that extractivism depends on the exploitation of “nature and labor.”<sup>12</sup>

*Lima en un árbol* took place in the context of renewed modernization initiatives that accompanied the reelection of Fernando Belaúnde Terry to the Peruvian presidency in 1980. Belaúnde was previously elected president in 1963, the same year that the US-funded eucalyptus program launched. However, Belaúnde’s first term ended abruptly in 1968 through the military coup that brought Velasco to power. With Belaúnde’s return to office in the early 1980s came a resurgence of the liberal democratic and developmentalist discourse associated with his previous term in office during the 1960s. A generation of artists steeped in emergent aesthetic and social movements were poised to reflect critically on the “almost nostalgic notion of the ‘modern’” (Buntinx 2006, p. 232) that resonated throughout the second Belaúnde administration in the early 1980s, even as they were coming to terms with the frustrated socialist ideals of the previous decade (Buntinx 1987). Their keen awareness of the hollow grandiosity of 1960s-era aspirational modernization *and* its aesthetic corollaries reveals itself through a rejection of monumental scale and elite institutional

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<sup>11</sup> Lerner Rizo-Patrón and Villacorta Chávez 2008, p. 160. The potential of the tree to disrupt both the colonial city and the modernist grid are suggested in this action (Rama 1984).

<sup>12</sup> The first quote is from DeLoughrey (2019, p. 4), and the second from Hoyos (2019, p. 3). I am grateful to Gisela Heffes (2022) for her valuable exploration of these two critics’ work from a Latin American studies perspective.

presentation. With simplicity and economy of means, the creators of *Lima en un árbol* register two decades of dramatic transformation in Lima, while also prioritizing humans and trees in the urban environment.

Like the action of Agois, Ludeña, Salazar del Alcázar, and Williams, the projects that I discuss in this essay arose urgently on the ground, yet their ethical and aesthetic interventions anticipate topics that would come to dominate global policymaking and academic debates about climate change and sustainability. Alejandro Ponce de León, for example, has recently described a “botanical turn in Latin American cultural studies,” marked by interdisciplinary collaborations oriented toward the protection of the life world that seek “not necessarily...to think *about* plants but to think with or *amidst* plants” (2022, p. 131). As a coastal capital shaped by centuries of colonial and neocolonial extractive capitalism, Lima is an important location for the emergence of such collaborations. During the 1980s, as the civil conflict intensified in Peru, “sustainability” became a key concept in international policymaking arenas, aimed at ensuring appropriate use of natural resources for the long-term survival of humans and planetary ecosystems. The circulation of this concept owes much to Peruvian diplomat Javier Pérez de Cuellar (1920-2020) who in his capacity as Secretary General of the United Nations (1982-1991) appointed the Brundtland Commission which popularized the phrase “sustainable development.”<sup>13</sup> Cultural policymakers in turn adapted this concept to pertain to the survival and protection of human knowledges and practices. Many organizations have since elaborated proposals for “cultural sustainability” in recognition of the fact that some forms of human cultural transmission can only take place in specific environments (Throsby 2001, pp. 61-73; UNESCO Culture and Sustainable Development).

In contrast to the authoritative policies conceived by international organizations, *Lima en un árbol* forges a conjunction between culture and sustainability in a small-scale direct action that was likely deemed

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<sup>13</sup> The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, created in 1983, is also known as the Brundtland Commission after its first chairperson, Norwegian politician Gro Harlem Brundtland. In 1987 the Commission released an influential report titled *Our Common Future*, which defined “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Throsby 2001, p. 53; World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 43).

unlawful by local authorities. Hierarchies of scale tend to privilege international over local actors, as Mary Pat Brady observes: “As a vertical metric, scale...assigns glamour and power to larger scales and denigrates and dismisses the quotidian, gendered female, and parochial local practices by scaffolding meaning within relations of value. To territorialize is to scale and inevitably privilege larger movements and to assign value for the movement of small to larger” (2017, p. 225-226). By drawing attention to the work of Lima-based artists dating from the 1980s through the 2000s that deliberately embraces the small and the quotidian, I want to bring greater recognition to cultural placemaking as a source of knowledge in ongoing public conversations about human-environmental interactions. The work of artists often serves as “models” that inspire, yet become effaced, in the process of policy formation. While this confirms Brady’s characterization of normative scalar hierarchies, anthropologist Anna Tsing also reminds us that scalar metrics themselves are socially produced, meaning that the tendency toward abstraction and value accruing to larger scales is not inevitable, but rather continually subject to confirmation and contestation. According to Tsing, attending to the material contexts in which different scalar claims intersect enables us to punch through a conceptual impasse in contemporary cultural analysis: “We know the dichotomy between the global blob and local detail isn’t helping us. We long to find cultural specificity and contingency within the blob, but we can’t figure out how to find it without, once again, picking out locality” (Tsing 2005, p. 58). For Tsing, approaching scales as a series of linkages and encounters, rather than concentric circles, offers the potential for often marginalized perspectives associated with the local and quotidian to communicate across distinct scales.

I admire *Lima en un árbol* for making such conceptualization visible: foregrounding the human-tree relationship over a few minutes at a particular intersection in Lima at once evokes multiple spatio-temporal scales, from human and arboreal existence to the creative-destructive cycle of capitalist real estate speculation. Though audiovisual and digital media, this action continued to resonate two decades later at the 2002 Earth Day event where the restored video debuted, and now that video is on YouTube, accessible to new generations of viewers. Storytelling, as Michel de Certeau has argued, is another strategy for denaturalizing



scalar hierarchies.<sup>17</sup> To that end, in what follows, I recount how critic and curator Gustavo Buntinx and artist Carmen Reátegui devised an ecologically oriented aesthetics of “smallness.” But first, to establish a context for their interventions, I turn to an obscure episode from the first Belaúnde presidency.

### **E. F. Schumacher Travels to Peru**

In 1967 the German-British economist E. F. (Ernst Friedrich) Schumacher (1911-1977) was invited to Peru as the guest of Fernando Belaúnde Terry to advise the president about strategies to slow the arrival of migrants from the Andean sierra to Lima. An economist by training, Schumacher participated in the reconstruction of German and British markets following World War II and witnessed the birth of postwar liberal institutions in Europe.<sup>18</sup> As an expert in energy commodities and long-term advisor to the British Coal Board, Schumacher grew critical of post-war modernization envisioned as infinite growth, and he became a vigorous supporter of natural resource conservation. His commitments eventually led him to leadership roles in organizations dedicated to organic farming, worker-owned cooperatives, economic decentralization, and regionalism.

The grandson of a German diplomat to Peru and Colombia, Schumacher initially welcomed Belaúnde’s invitation as an adventure linked to his family history (Wood 1984, p. 332). Over the course of his consultancy, he traveled by presidential plane to sites along the Peruvian coast, sierra, and Amazonia (Wood 1984, p. 333). The trip occurred shortly after Schumacher founded the Intermediate Technology Development Group in 1966 and was exploring ways to alleviate poverty and decrease “developing” countries’ dependence on foreign aid (Wood 1984, pp. 312-329). Presented with an opportunity to implement those

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<sup>17</sup> “What the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (de Certeau 1984, p. 129).

<sup>18</sup> E. F. (Ernst Friedrich) “Fritz” Schumacher was born in Germany and attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. He relocated permanently to the UK in 1936. The last seven years of Schumacher's life gave rise to the publications and international lectures for which he is perhaps best known, including the book *Small Is Beautiful* (1973) and its companion volumes, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1977) and the posthumously published *Small Is Possible* (McRobie 1981). Today Schumacher's ideas are recognized in the mission statements of many organizations (Practical Action).

ideas, Schumacher proposed to Belaúnde that Peruvian internal migration be curbed through the adoption of “intermediate technology” which would incentivize rural and small-town dwellers to remain in place. This concept refers to the use of tools that do not necessarily increase productivity and employ state-of-the-art technology, but rather, ones which maximize employment, are easy to use, and improve quality of life. To provide an oversimplified illustration: between digging a hole with a stick and using a bulldozer, a shovel might serve as an intermediate technological solution.<sup>20</sup>

One archival trace of Schumacher’s trip is a memo dated 3 November 1967, titled “Uninhibited Musings,” with a handwritten note stating that a copy was “filed with the letter to President of PERU.”<sup>21</sup> Presumably drafted after Schumacher’s visit, the memo offers a series of schematic recommendations to its Peruvian reader. Among them: shift toward a de facto federative model of government and relocate the national capital from Lima to the interior of Peru, along the lines of Brasília, to dissuade migration to the coast. Schumacher suggests the Marginal de la Selva as a possible location for the future capital, referring to an ambitious highway system that was being constructed to connect the Amazonian regions of the Andean countries. The highway was likely a stop on Schumacher’s Peruvian itinerary, and though it remains incomplete, construction of a Peruvian section of the route got underway during the Belaúnde presidency. Truly alarming are Schumacher’s staccato warnings about dystopian consequences for Lima if internal migration continues unabated: “If things are left to themselves, the growth of Lima will kill the rest of the country and Lima as well....Will someone try and visualize Peru in A.D. 2000? What size Lima? What proportion of the total population will be in Lima?” (Schumacher 1967, p. 3).

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<sup>20</sup> In *Small Is Beautiful*, Schumacher remarks in an aside that when he presented a paper on intermediate technology at the Conference on the Application of Science and Technology to the Development of Latin America, organized by UNESCO in Santiago de Chile, he was “treated with ridicule” (2010, p. 180) for his rejection of state-of-the-art methods. The paper in question, adapted as chapter III.2 of *Small Is Beautiful*, outlines the bases of the Intermediate Technology Development Group.

<sup>21</sup> E. F. Schumacher 1967. The typescript is dated 3.11.1967; based on Schumacher’s archival records, I believe that this refers to 3 November 1967.

Schumacher's daughter and biographer, Barbara Wood, notes that her father's ideas about intermediate technology were not well received in the Peruvian capital:

He had had his share of ridicule from the economists in Lima, who could only see the advantages of modern economies of scale in factory production and failed to grasp that the detrimental effects the cheap goods had on the rest of the primitive economy eventually destroyed their market. He was delighted that this time the man who really mattered [Belaúnde] was taking him seriously. Unfortunately, a coup not long afterwards ended any immediate hope of intermediate technology in Peru, but Fritz [Schumacher] retained a lifelong affection for President Belaúnde (Wood 1984, p. 333).

The fate of Schumacher's proposals was ultimately thwarted by Belaúnde's simultaneous courting of aid through the US-led Alliance for Progress, a massive development program designed to counter the appeal of the Cuban Revolution among Latin American societies. The Alliance supported initiatives favorable to foreign investors, in contrast to Schumacher's prioritization of regional self-sufficiency. Belaúnde's intention to expand public welfare programs and infrastructural improvements throughout the country—"picos y palas para una revolución sin balas" (picks and shovels for a revolution without bullets)--foundered on his administration's entanglement with the foreign-owned International Petroleum Company, an affiliate of the US-based Standard Oil Company (Cotler 1978, p. 344). As a condition for receiving Alliance aid, the US pressured Belaúnde to resolve disputes over oil field leases in favor of the company. Scandal erupted over the public revelation of the terms that Belaúnde had offered, and the ensuing political crisis precipitated the military coup that brought Velasco to power.<sup>22</sup> Having lost his Peruvian laboratory, Schumacher moved on to other consultancies,<sup>23</sup> while the military government implemented import substitution industrialization and enacted dramatic agrarian reforms aimed at rectifying social inequalities.

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<sup>22</sup> Cotler 1978, p. 335-383. For more on Peruvian arts in relation to this political crisis, see Fox 2018.

<sup>23</sup> The Schumacher Archives (Box 2, Folder 15: Industry in Rural Areas) include documents about Tanzania (1968) and Zambia (1969) that develop recommendations similar to the ones he made regarding Peru.

Six years after Schumacher's visit, he published his bestselling and widely translated economic treatise, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (1973). Peru plays an outsized, if underacknowledged, role in this work. The chapter most centrally based on Schumacher's consultancy, "A Question of Size," concludes the book's first and most polemical section and inspires its overall theme.<sup>24</sup> In it, scale emerges as a primary technique of social engineering and the antidote to migration defined as a problem: "The factor of footlooseness is, therefore, the more serious, the bigger the country" (Schumacher 2010, p. 75), Schumacher explains. Repeating several phrases from his 1967 memo, he establishes Lima as a case in point:

As an illustration, let me take the case of Peru. The capital city, Lima, situated on the Pacific Coast, had a population of 175,000 in the early 1920s, just 50 years ago. Its population is now approaching three million. The once beautiful Spanish city is now infested by slums, surrounded by misery belts that are crawling up the Andes. But this is not all. People are arriving from the rural areas at the rate of a thousand a day –and nobody knows what to do with them. The social or psychological structure of life in the hinterland has collapsed; people have become footloose and arrive in the capital city at the rate of a thousand a day to squat on some empty land, against the police to come to beat them out, to build their mud hovels and look for a job. *And nobody knows what to do about them.* Nobody knows how to stop the drift (Schumacher 2010, p. 75).

Schumacher's glib references to people becoming "footloose" are nothing if ironic in light of the author's emigration from Germany to England in 1936. His impressions elide recognition of the complex factors that impel people to migrate, while also denying migrants knowledge and agency to make decisions on their own behalf. Though the local and small are privileged categories in Schumacher's thinking, *Small Is Beautiful* turns Peru into an engine of generalizable conditions. Two decades later, however, Gustavo Buntinx would return Schumacher's titular phrase to its Peruvian context and imbue it with the texture of everyday life.

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<sup>24</sup> This key chapter is based on lecture given in London in August 1968 that was later published in the journal *Resurgence* (Schumacher 2010, p. 320).

### **The Afterlives of Intermediate Technology**

In June 2022, at the Bar Café La Habana in the Miraflores neighborhood of Lima, I asked Gustavo Buntinx whether he was aware of Schumacher's visit to Peru in 1967. He was not, nor of Practical Action, a contemporary NGO with headquarters in Lima, which grew out of Schumacher's Intermediate Technology Development Group. But that phrase did trigger a memory, an apocryphal anecdote that Buntinx speculated might have its distant origin in the context of Schumacher's visit: during the second Belaúnde presidency in the early 1980s, a homemade explosive device was hurled through the window of a government building. The official who commented about the incident to the press referred to the explosive as "intermediate technology" (Buntinx 2022).

I pressed on, asking Buntinx if he had read *Small Is Beautiful*, a phrase that appears in his critical writings. He cautioned me not to make too much of this; it's a generational catchphrase. But he recalled that he did read the book, shortly after it came out and probably in English. At the time Buntinx was in his teens and residing in the United States, where his family had relocated during the Velasco regime (Borea 2021, p. 66).

### **The Micromuseo: "Small Is Viable"**

The phrase "small is beautiful" appears repeatedly in Buntinx's writings about the Micromuseo, a mobile, multi-platform museum that Buntinx founded in 1983 with his partner, artist Susana Torres Márquez, as an affirmation of initiatives that are accessible and inclusive of Lima's diverse urban visual cultures. Inviting an "allegorical allusion" to the microbus, an ubiquitous late-twentieth century form of public transportation in Lima, Buntinx conceived the Micromuseo's flexible, street-level events and fluid constituencies as a counter to the aspirations of urban elites who repeatedly sought to remedy Lima's "syndrome of marginal occidentality" through their decades-long quest to found a grand brick-and-mortar contemporary art

museum in the Peruvian capital.<sup>25</sup> Prior to his first election to the presidency, Fernando Belaúnde Terry was a leader of those museum-building efforts, having served as the first vice-president of the Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo (IAC), founded in Lima in 1955.<sup>26</sup> But the IAC struggled during the military government, and eventually, it closed its doors in 1974. After several false starts, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo did materialize in the Barranco district of Lima in 2013. Yet, during the period of the “museum void,” eventful decades also marked by devastating civil conflict, near collapse of government institutions, and the implementation of austere neoliberal economic policies, the Micromuseo articulated a powerful “alternative museality” in the capital (Borea 2021, pp. 93-111; Buntinx 2006, p. .230-31; Germana and Bowman McElhone 2016; Germana and Bowman-McElhone 2020). Though the Micromuseo eventually assembled a collection of contemporary art, its operations were primarily oriented toward the organization of events and exhibitions in diverse locations, publications, and the creation of a digital archive and website. Buntinx as its curator and director exerted considerable influence in the contemporary art scene and garnered international recognition for his innovative museum practice.

The Micromuseo evolved out of collaborative projects that married museology to ecology, approaching Peruvian cultural institutions as an ecosystem. At the Primer Encuentro de Museos Peruanos (First Meeting of Peruvian Museums) held in 1986, curators, critics, and museum professionals commiserated about the inadequate support for cultural institutions emanating from both the state and private sector. Their conclusions endorsed lateral network-building across the country, while also “respetando el contexto ecológico y socio-cultural” (respecting the ecological and socio-cultural context) of distinct regions (Primer Encuentro 1986, conclusiones, p. 2). At that meeting, Gustavo Buntinx proposed the creation of a “museo alternativo” which would engage Lima's working-class and migrant neighborhoods by pursuing unconventional partnerships with local venues. The events and exhibitions organized by this alternative museum would, in his words, “...apreciar y rescatar la cultura propia de la barriada, vinculándola con la historia, con el entorno,

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<sup>25</sup> Buntinx 2006, p. 237, 224. For more about the institution's name, see Buntinx 2006, p. 236-38.

<sup>26</sup> Belaúnde himself was an architect prior to becoming president.

con las demás manifestaciones de la experiencia urbana” (appreciate and rescue the very culture of the neighborhood, linking it to history, the environment, and other manifestations of urban experience), and “al mismo tiempo rescata y restaura aquellas obras ‘cultas’ que por lo heterodoxo de su propuesta han sido despreciadas en el mercado artístico tradicional, sumiéndose en el deterioro y el olvido” (at the same time rescue and restore those ‘cultured’ works that, owing to their heterodox proposals, have been devalued in the traditional art market, sinking into decay and oblivion).<sup>27</sup> Buntinx's call for a decentralized mode of institutionality based on an alliance between visual cultures produced by the “popular” sectors and “critical” middle-class artists and intellectuals has been distilled in practice through the events and exhibitions convened by the Micromuseo from the mid-1980s to the present.

The phrase “small is beautiful” enters Buntinx's publications sometime in the late 1990s, where it embellishes ideas presented in previous writings.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Schumacher's axiom proved serviceable for the evolution of Buntinx's own critical vocabulary. In two of Buntinx's most ambitious essays about the history of the Micromuseo, produced in 2006 and 2007, he repeats “small is beautiful” twice, and on the third iteration, substitutes the word “viable” in place of “beautiful.”<sup>29</sup> Though it is likely that Schumacher, too, would have found viability beautiful, Buntinx's revision is significant because it highlights the practical and material limitations of organizing exhibitions and events in the “bad new days,”<sup>30</sup> with minimal financial resources, no physical premises, and no government or private patronage. Under such circumstances,

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<sup>27</sup> Primer Encuentro 1986, p. 8-9. A revised version of Buntinx's contribution dated 1985-86 appears in *Micromuseo* 2001, pp 3-7.

<sup>28</sup> The first published source that I have been able to identify in which Buntinx utilizes the phrase “small is beautiful” (in English) is the premier issue of *Micromuseo* “*Al fondo hay sitio*” dedicated to the topic of “Museotopías”; the issue includes a previously unpublished text from 1998, titled “‘Al fondo hay sitio’: Rutas para un Micromuseo” (2001, pp. 11-13). The phrase also appears in Buntinx 2006 and Buntinx 2007; see also Micromuseo website.

<sup>29</sup> Buntinx 2006; Buntinx 2007. Buntinx renders the phrase in English in his Spanish-language writings. It is interesting that the translation of Schumacher's book title in Spanish uses “hermoso,” (beautiful), but Buntinx favors “bello” in his glosses, perhaps emphasizing the latter's resonance as a marker of elite taste.

<sup>30</sup> I am improvising on Bertolt Brecht's aphorism.

Buntinx emphasizes, “beauty” is an inconceivable luxury, and “small” is the only viable scale of operation. Networks based on reciprocity, rather than financial and social capital, are the path to cultural sustainability (Buntinx 2022).

For his part, Schumacher arrived at his memorable phrase in an improvisation on the Beatitudes that appears midway through his book: “We need a gentle approach, a non-violent spirit, and small is beautiful.”<sup>31</sup> Schumacher’s twentieth-century Sermon on the Mount explains that for humans to become peacemakers they must to adopt a scale of economic activity that will ensure the wellbeing of all passengers on ‘Spaceship Earth,’ in a nod to the title of Buckminster Fuller’s 1969 bestseller.<sup>32</sup> As noted previously, scaling down emerges as one of Schumacher's primary foci: it governs everything from resource conservation to appropriate technology and the optimal population of towns and cities.<sup>33</sup> With ethical bases in Buddhism, Ghandism, and Christianity, and teaching moments culled from Tolstoy, Kafka, and the *I Ching*, it is not surprising that *Small Is Beautiful* attracted many non-economist admirers, especially among artists and humanists attuned to 1970s countercultures. The volume calls upon readers, presumably from educated backgrounds, to enact a large-scale shift in social values by rejecting individualism and the pursuit of wealth to make a long-term investment in social collectivities. Schumacher chastens wealthy nations, especially the US, for their pursuit of limitless profit and consumption in the face of mounting environmental harm. His prescient observations about reliance on fossil fuel have sparked renewed interest in his work, in particular his denunciation of the petroleum industry that “lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as

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<sup>31</sup> Schumacher appears to revise these lines from the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... /Blessed are they who thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.../Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the Sons of God (Catholic Encyclopedia). And here is Schumacher’s version: --We are poor, not demigods./--We have plenty to be sorrowful about, and are not emerging into a golden age./ --We need a gentle approach, a non-violent spirit, and small is beautiful./--We must concern ourselves with justice and see right prevail./--And all this, only this, can enable us to become peacemakers (Schumacher 2010, p. 166).

<sup>32</sup> Schumacher 2010, p. 15. For more on Fuller’s influence on contemporary art, see Nisbet 2014, pp. 67-128.

<sup>33</sup> Schumacher goes so far as to recommend that urbanizations ideally be capped at 500,000 inhabitants (2010, p. 71).



income” (Schumacher 2010, p. 21). A second English-language edition of *Small Is Beautiful* published in 2010 features a preface by environmental writer Bill McKibben, who praises the book as a “masterpiece” and highlights its relevance for new generations of readers who are grappling with climate change.<sup>34</sup>

Far-ranging as *Small Is Beautiful* is, the book has little to say about art and culture, which fall into the vast category of human activity that Schumacher deems “non-economic” (Schumacher 2010, p. 44). “Beauty” in Schumacher’s prose is generally associated with enjoying unalienated labor in an undegraded environment (Schumacher 2010, p. 121, 161). How, then, did economic proposals that failed to launch in Peru during the early 1960s lend themselves to the formation of an alternative museum in the 1980s opposed precisely to the “developmentalist euphoria” (Buntinx 2006, p. 231) with which the former era was associated? I understand Buntinx’s citation of Schumacher’s maxim to be a creative adaptation that is also critical of several of the latter’s key formulations. It is telling, for example, that Buntinx qualifies Schumacher’s phrase with “in Peru,” implicitly questioning its universalist framing. Buntinx’s disciplinary formation in history and art history informs his awareness that extractivist logics additionally apply to knowledge production and hierarchies of aesthetic value in which Peru has often served as a source of “raw material” for the global north, even as elites wield regional, race- and class-based hierarchies internal to the nation (see e.g., Gómez Barris 2017). While both Buntinx and Schumacher affirm the value of smallness and place-based practice, they differ crucially in terms of how each understands temporality and coloniality entering the global economy and transnational circulation of ideas.

Theodore Roszak notes in his Introduction to *Small Is Beautiful* that Schumacher participates in an underground tradition of “libertarian political economy that distinguishes itself from orthodox socialism and capitalism by insisting that the *scale* of organization must be treated as an independent and primary problem” (Roszak 2010, p. 4). Schumacher’s idiosyncratic “third way” opposes modernization initiatives for

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<sup>34</sup> McKibben’s foreword to the 2010 edition offers a useful historical contextualization of the book’s initial reception in the US. In contrast to Roszak’s 1973 “Introduction,” McKibben does not characterize *Small Is Beautiful* as an “underground” or cult classic, but rather as an epiphenomenon marking the mainstreaming of grassroots environmental movements which culminated in environmental legislation passed under the Nixon administration (2010, pp. xi-xvi).

decolonizing countries spearheaded by both the US and the USSR on the grounds that they create dependency on foreign technical and financial assistance and cleave to an “idolatry of giantism” that is fundamentally alienating to humans (Schumacher 2010, p. 72). In spite of his disidentification with global superpowers, Schumacher nonetheless operates within a developmentalist framework that recurs to the “traditional wisdom of mankind” (Schumacher 2010, p. 318) and seeks to preserve traditional ways of life. Many of Schumacher's formulations imply a linear conception of human evolution that regard rural communities as precursors to a modernity exemplified in large cities. The latter, he argues, need to reverse course and “return” to an earlier stage of development, taking the former as models. Through examples in *Small Is Beautiful* drawn from India, Burma (Myanmar), Turkey, Puerto Rico, and Southern Italy, in addition to Peru as a key topos, Schumacher's enthusiasm for “communal handicraft, tribal, guild and village lifestyles as old as the neolithic cultures” (Roszak 2010, p. 5) regards non-European-descendant peoples to be non-contemporaries of urban dwellers. Roszak dryly notes that this way of seeing “has reemerged in countercultural experiments” (Roszak 2010, p. 5), leaving the reader to fill in the blanks with hippies, communes, and Gaia. Anti-migration bias permeates Schumacher's very terminology: those who embrace the latest technologies, for example, he dubs the “forward stampede,” while those who feel that “technological development has taken a wrong turn and needs to be redirected” are the positively valued “home-comers” (Schumacher 2010, p. 164-165). By cultivating modest lifeways, rural and small-town dwellers will save the planet from the missteps of “overdevelopment.”

In contrast to *Small Is Beautiful*, Buntinx's writings on the Micromuseo emphatically reject the denial of coevalness toward both rural communities and migrants on the part of technocrats, instead taking everyday life in the “(post)modern” metropolis as a point of departure.<sup>35</sup> Buntinx's use of the term “(post)modern,” with the prefix in parentheses, asserts the coexistence of multiple lived temporalities on the

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<sup>35</sup> My comments about temporality here are shaped distantly by Fabian (1983) and more immediately by Smith (2019).

part of Lima's inhabitants.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the parentheses generate ambiguity around the notion of epochal succession with neat demarcations between the past and the present, leaving the possibility for modernity to manifest as an inclusive and place-based project in which different epistemologies overlap and coexist. Perhaps the greatest transformation incurred by Schumacher's "small is beautiful" en route to Buntinx's "small is viable," however, is that the latter celebrates rather than stigmatizes movement, circulation, and migration. The Micromuseo exploits the metaphor of public transportation to yield a fanciful terminology of routes, stops, and itineraries in lieu of more conventional museological designations. The microbus driver's refrain, "al fondo hay sitio" (there's room at the back), is integrated in the museum's official title, and Buntinx is the Micromuseo's self-described "chófer." In the face of Lapsarian discourses about Lima pre- and post-migration, the Micromuseo enacts a performative dissolution of hierarchies: its exhibitions, events, ephemera, and website playfully subvert or frankly level distinctions among tutored studio art, mass-produced items, and works produced by non-elite artists, the guiding rationale being one of image circulation rather than object accumulation.<sup>37</sup> In a challenge to hierarchical distinctions between non-elite makers of "arte popular" versus academically trained artists, Buntinx debuts an egalitarian nomenclature of "artífices" (makers) who produce "artefactos."<sup>38</sup>

The Micromuseo's celebration of urban cultural encounters and transformation through movement is inspired by a corpus of texts by white and mestizo Peruvian intellectuals, including José María Arguedas, Aníbal Quijano, and Mirko Lauer, who have approached the topic of migration as a complex phenomenon with attention to Indigenous and mestizo communities of Lima as well as the sierra.<sup>39</sup> The Micromuseo's anti-hierarchical stance toward class, racial and ethnic, regional, educational, and taste formations, coupled

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<sup>36</sup> Buntinx 2006; Buntinx 2022. Buntinx's elaboration of this term seems to evolve out of his earlier formulations about "popular modernity" (see, e.g., Buntinx 1987).

<sup>37</sup> Buntinx 2006; the Micromuseo website is an important aspect of its commitment to image circulation.

<sup>38</sup> On recent critical interventions problematizing the long-standing hierarchies of aesthetic value between studio and gallery art and artisanry or "arte popular," see Borea 2021; Dorotinsky 2020; and Smith 2019.

<sup>39</sup> For references to these intellectuals, see Buntinx 1987.

with its critique of modernity conceived as an elite and European- or US-identified project, also resonates with Néstor García Canclini's elaboration of hybridity in his influential *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity, 1990), which examines contemporary urban cultures of Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Like the Micromuseo, García Canclini privileges Latin American megacities as places from which to theorize a cultural pluralism manifest in audiovisual media, performance, and visual cultures. García Canclini's tendency to treat hybridity as a space for the negotiation of differences rather than for the emergence of conflict or appropriation bears similarities to the way Buntinx characterizes "friction" as an operative principle of Micromuseo projects. For Buntinx, friction is produced through the interaction between "the lettered petite bourgeoisie and the emergent popular cultural experience" (Buntinx 2006, p. 220), yet it often appears poised to challenge the elite power structures rather than scrutinize differences internal to the coalition of interests that it convenes.

There are more sanguine ways, however, of interpreting Buntinx's "friction" as a potentially empowering, generative force that can become activated through the Micromuseo's ephemeral coalitions. For Anna Tsing, "'friction' describes the 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference'" (Tsing 2005, p. 4). In her work on Indonesian ecological movements during the 1980s and 1990s, a period of rampant economic liberalism leading to environmental degradation, Tsing observes that struggles for environmental protection gather force through networks of groups that do not necessarily speak the same language or even share common goals and worldviews, such as, for example, nature-loving university students and villagers who practice swidden agriculture (Tsing 2005, p. xi). Interactions between these groups are not necessarily harmonious, but they can lead to impactful social change, especially when "objects in common begin to coalesce in the space of partial agreement" (Tsing 2005, p. 271-72). According to Tsing, friction is a necessary accompaniment to scale-jumping, as ideas and practices transfer through embodied interactions among interlocutors who express distinct scalar commitments. Under certain circumstances, she finds, "links among varied scale-making projects can bring each project vitality and power" (Tsing 2005, p. 58). Returning to the cultural ecosystem supported by the Micromuseo, friction holds out the

possibility of amplifying local perspectives precisely through circulating cultural projects in different contexts. A compelling example of such a project is Carmen Reátegui's *Árbol*, an interactive sculptural installation that makes multiple, overlapping publics visible around collective responses to the death of a tree.

### **Carmen Reátegui, *Árbol* (2002-2008)**

The same year that the restored *Lima en un árbol* video was screened at an Earth Day event at the Universidad de San Marcos, artist Carmen Reátegui produced a sculptural installation in protest of the removal of century-old cedar and eucalyptus trees that had lined over twelve blocks of an avenue near her home in the Lima district of Chorrillos.<sup>41</sup> The felling of the trees was carried out in 1999 under the orders of mayor Pablo Gutiérrez toward the end of the Alberto Fujimori administration (1990-2000).<sup>42</sup> The trees were supposedly removed to facilitate construction along the avenue, although laborers and onlookers interviewed for Reátegui's video about her project speculated that the trees' removal was unnecessary and that they were harvested for profit by corrupt officials.<sup>43</sup> Moved to grief at the sudden loss of the trees, Reátegui, hired a crane truck to exhume one of the enormous stumps and transport it to her home. On Good Friday 2002, she exhibited the tree in the Plaza Mayor de Surco. The massive *Árbol de la vida* (Tree of Life), over twice the height of an adult human, was installed with its roots facing upward on a circular marble plinth in the plaza where Catholic faithful were gathering for Good Friday religious observances and an evening procession. On this most solemn day of the liturgical calendar that commemorates Jesus's death prior to Easter Sunday, Reátegui made *detentes*, hand-embroidered devotional objects traditionally worn on the body and often associated with the Passion of Christ, available to anyone who wished to affix one to the tree; by nightfall the

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<sup>41</sup> Reátegui was aware of *Lima en un árbol*, however, she describes her work as the “producto de una pulsión ante la insania del agravio” (arising impulsively in the face of the insanity of an [injurious] grievance) (Reátegui 2022a).

<sup>42</sup> Gutiérrez was an ally of Fujimori, whose second term in office was marked by an intensification of autocratic neoliberalism.

<sup>43</sup> As I explain below, Reátegui produced two videos about her work: *Detente* (2002) and *Árbol* (2002-2008) (2008). My references in this article are based on the latter production.

tree was covered with them.<sup>44</sup> Over the course of the day and with assistance from a video crew, Reátegui recorded people's interactions with the installation and conducted interviews about the work with members of the public. This footage, combined with scenes documenting the trees' removal, was compiled in a brief video titled *Detente* (2002).

Dismayed that the production company hired to record the event ended up destroying a good part of footage, Reátegui resolved to exhibit the tree again in another location and record public interactions with it.<sup>45</sup> Two more installations followed, at the Parque Universitario (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos) on the Feast Day of Santa Rosa of Lima in 2003 and at the Cementerio Nueva Esperanza on the Day of the Dead in 2004, where she changed the title of the work simply to *Árbol*. Footage from all three installations was then incorporated into a second and more polished video titled *Árbol (2002-2008)*, to which I refer here. Following an introductory narrative about the trees' removal, *Árbol* presents three thematic segments each focusing on one of the installations. The intertitles Reconocimiento, Celebración, and Conciliación (Recognition, Celebration, Conciliation) suggest a movement from acute grief to the celebration of life and acceptance of loss. A soundtrack of Andean music performed by Tito La Rosa establishes a mood for each segment, while all three unfold through conventional documentary techniques, including establishing shots and clips of interviews with members of the public in which the interviewers' voices are mostly muted.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Detentes* were traditionally made by Catholic nuns and often featured embroidered images of the Sacred Heart and other icons relating to the Passion of Christ. They were carried or worn by the faithful in a manner similar to scapulars. Reátegui recalls detentes being utilized through the 1950s to reinforce the petitions of the devout. She came across some detentes in an antique store and saved them without knowing how she would eventually use them (Reátegui 2022b). It is interesting that the detentes which Reátegui supplied for her installation are scaled to the tree's "body"; that is, they are larger than typical scapulars and used in a manner similar to ex votos. In the video, one can see some metal milagros affixed to the tree, also. The fact that Reátegui refers to these objects as "ropaje" (garments) not only reinforces the tree's personhood, but also the resonance of her work with Catholic devotional rituals associated with the exhibition of relics and statuary (Reátegui 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Vich relates that the videographer was a religious fundamentalist who destroyed most of the recording because he objected to the "idolatry" of the project (2022, p. 44).

<sup>46</sup> According to Reátegui, she was present at the recording, and there were no interview prompts (Reátegui 2022a).

Initially, several interviewees in the *Árbol* video respond to the removal of trees in Chorrillos through a framework similar to that of *Lima en un árbol*. One woman asks, “Nosotros mismos vamos destruyendo la naturaleza. ¿Qué será dentro de pocos años de nuestra planeta?” (We ourselves are destroying nature. What will become of our planet in a few years?). Another laments the destruction of “una de las avenidas más hermosas” (one of the most beautiful avenues). Interspersed with comments that decry the loss of green space, however, are others that appeal to the sanctity of life. A man on the street describes the felling as a “matanza” (massacre), and a young woman exclaims, “[Es] como arrancar a una criatura del vientre de su madre” (It's like ripping a child out of its mother's womb). These set the scene for the sacralization of the tree and direct comparisons to Christ that become the dominant chord as members of the public interact with Reátegui's installation in situ. At the Plaza de Surco one woman responds to the tree with a forceful declaration underscoring its anthropomorphic qualities: “Lo que estoy viendo es a Cristo crucificado” (What I'm seeing is Christ crucified). Another asserts that though the tree is not human, it is nonetheless sentient: “El árbol es un ser también vivo, ¿no?...que no habla, pero sí siente” (The tree is a living being, too, no?...which doesn't speak, but does feel).

At each venue where *Árbol de la vida* was presented, Reátegui devised methods for members of the public to interact with the installation through Catholic devotional gestures typically associated with prayers of thanks, remembrance, or petition. On the Feast Day of Santa Rosa, patron of Lima and the Americas, Reátegui made roses and olive branches available in buckets at the base of the tree for passersby to affix to the trunk. And, on the Day of the Dead, visitors to the cemetery were invited to attach white paper flowers to *Árbol* (Reátegui 2022a). Reátegui's installation draws attention to how ritualized human interaction with sacralized objects and places channels acute emotions associated with grief and remembrance. Instead of staging an act of disruption against the prevailing social order, as in *Lima en un árbol*, Reátegui relies on members of the public to assign meaning to her work; they in turn avail themselves of contextual cues that encourage imbuing the tree with spiritual significance. Meanwhile, Reátegui's artist statement and video propose multiple interpretative frameworks relating to art, civics, and religiosity through which her *Árbol de la vida* might be understood. An opening intertitle of *Árbol*, for example, states,

El árbol se carga de significado al momento en que el ciudadano impone su mano. Se comienzan a llenar espacios simbólicos en el sentir popular. La acción se convierte en un ritual, en el que van tomando parte los ciudadanos. El muñón del árbol, el pueblo quebrantado, se va transformando en una escultura viva. (The tree is charged with meaning the moment that the citizen places their hand on it. Symbolic spaces begin to fill within popular sentiment. The action becomes a ritual, in which citizens take part. The tree stump, the broken people, are transformed into a living sculpture.)

Each of these transformation-oriented sentences builds a bridge across distinct social domains. Reátegui's final sentence affirms that the tree's polysemic qualities have the potential to generate new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between life and death, human and nature. As "citizens" interact ritually with *Árbol de la vida*, they engage in a collective act of world-making, and together, form "a living sculpture" which includes themselves, the tree, and their surroundings. In a critical essay about this work, Víctor Vich explores the idea that Reátegui's incorporation of popular religiosity in her installation facilitates understanding the tree's death as an act of sacrificial violence resulting from human barbarism. By exhibiting the mutilated stump in settings where rituals around death and remembrance are already being enacted, the tree enters the image repertoire of vernacular Catholicism and enlists spirituality in condemning the human instrumentalization of nature. Vich summarizes the broader implications of this positioning, as a call for the protection of other vulnerable trees: "[P]odemos decir que este árbol no parece ser solo un árbol; es también un signo de toda una maquinaria extractiva que en el Perú continúa desarrollándose sin marcos normativos adecuados" (We can say that this tree does not appear to be only a tree; it is also a sign of an entire extractive machinery that is developing in Peru without adequate normative frameworks) (Vich 2022, p. 47). Today this connection is all the more urgent, as unregulated clear-cutting of Peruvian forests by foreign-owned corporations has become a significant sector of the economy. The comparatively small scale of *Árbol* at once contrasts with the immense loss perpetuated by extractivist economies. At the same time, *Árbol's* exhibitionary affordances—its slight elevation and theatre of the round presentation--inspire awe, reverence, and respect on the part of people in proximity to the installation.



Just as the creators of *Lima en un árbol* posed the question as to where a tree falls on the nature/artifice divide, so, too, does Réategui take up this problematic by heightening the tree's aesthetic qualities in death. She inverts its usual orientation, so that as one interviewee notes, its roots appear to be appendages clamoring heavenward. She displays it on a plinth of Travertine marble typically used for the display of classical statuary, and she invites others to touch and adorn it.<sup>48</sup> One woman interviewed in the Good Friday segment of the video offers a description of *Árbol* that plays on the double meaning of “rebirth” as it relates to the Resurrection and display of found objects as art: “El árbol en sí es una ofrenda maravillosa...el haber utilizado esta pieza, este árbol muerto, ¿no? y darle vida de esta manera, ¿no? revivirlo, renacerlo...” (The tree in itself is a marvelous ofrenda...using this piece, this dead tree, no?, and giving it life in this way, no? making it live again, making it reborn.) Underscoring the interviewee's remarks, each of the video's segments opens on a still photograph of the tree shot against a black background, akin to an object on display in a museum or gallery, before segueing to the vibrant interactive scenes of the tree in situ.<sup>49</sup>

The third installation of *Árbol* is significant because the tree's itinerary culminates in a location associated predominantly with working-class migrants and their descendants, whereas the publics depicted at the previous two venues include people of diverse racial and class backgrounds. The installation in Nueva Esperanza cemetery recalls Buntinx's early proposal to establish a strategic alliance among constituencies by utilizing unconventional exhibition spaces. Nueva Esperanza is the largest cemetery in Peru. Located in the Villa María del Triunfo neighborhood, the cemetery was created to accommodate adjacent migrant communities, and it attracts many visitors on feast days when the cemetery is populated by families, musicians, and vendors.<sup>50</sup> The video segment of *Árbol* dedicated to this third venue is more ambitious than the previous two:

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<sup>48</sup> For a parallel discussion of *Árbol de la vida*'s auratic qualities, see Vich (2022, p. 47).

<sup>49</sup> There are four shots in all. In the first, the tree is “unclothed,” and in each of the subsequent shots, the tree is decorated with the detentes and flowers affixed at each of its exhibitions.

<sup>50</sup> For more information about the cemetery, see Pérez 2016. Relevant to Réategui's exhibition in this location is the work of artist Jaime Miranda Bambarén who has also created public art works using reclaimed trees. Miranda Bambarén's *Monumento en Honor a la Verdad para la Reconciliación y la Esperanza* (Monument in honor of Truth for Reconciliation and Hope), also known as *Arbol desarraigado* (Uprooted Tree),

it opens with aerial shots that capture the vastness of the cemetery and then segues to a montage depicting scenes of people tending graves and engaged in prayer in the interior of a chapel. The shift toward a more observational ethnographic documentary mode in this segment seems to correlate with Reátegui's own outsider status in this milieu.<sup>51</sup> The mood also lightens through up-tempo music on the soundtrack, as establishing shots depict a festive environment with families gathered at the graves of loved ones and groups of strolling musicians playing requests for patrons. At this venue, few interviewees reflect on the meaning of the tree. Instead, most share for whom they are offering a flower. A middle-aged woman states, “Voy a poner una flor blanca para mi mamá porque ella está muerta en Cerro de Pasco” (I'm going to attach a white flower for my mom because she's dead in Cerro de Pasco). An older woman places a flower “para que mi hijita sea feliz al lado del Señor” (so my little daughter is happy beside the Lord). And a young boy takes one for “mi abuelita [que] está lejos en Cañete” (my grandma [who] is far away in Cañete). Their comments affirm that the dead are present, and even those who are far away remain close, above all on the Day of the Dead. In contrast to the previous two exhibition venues, this public's engagement with *Árbol* is more performative than interpretative, and the installation itself is integrated as an ofrenda in this environment.

Reátegui states that she was initially compelled to exhibit *Árbol de la vida* out of a desire for public recognition of the violence that had been done to this once living being (Reátegui 2022a). By the final installation, however, the need to behold the body of the recently deceased becomes less pressing than to remember and honor all those who have passed. The tree becomes a focal point for the expression of collective memory. The connections to migrant communities and their experiences of displacement in this final stop for *Árbol* allude to myriad forms of social violence, including those who died in the civil conflict and whose bodies were never recovered. The artist and critics concretize such associations: Vich refers the fallen trees

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was inaugurated in Villa María del Triunfo in 2007 and surreptitiously destroyed in 2010 (Miranda Bamba-rén website; Quijano 2013).

<sup>51</sup> In “La Gesta del Árbol,” a brief narrative about her work, Reátegui recalls her reception at the cemetery: “¿Turista? No, artista. ¿A qué [h]a venido? Trayendo un árbol, muy grande, tirado en la calle, sucio, desarraigado” (Tourist? No, artist. Why have you come? Bringing a tree, very big, cast out on the street, dirty, uprooted) (Reátegui 2005).

of Chorrillos as “cadáveres” (2022, p. 43), and Buntinx reminds that a hastily planted upside-down sapling was a clue that led investigators to the clandestine burial site of university students from La Cantuta who were disappeared during the civil conflict (Micromuseo website). For her part, Reátegui's reference to the people who interact with her installation as “ciudadanos” is also suggestive: while most often referring to human inhabitants of a city or nation, in Latin American languages, the cognates of this word have also been used to encompass all denizens of a place, including flora and fauna. For Reátegui, the form of *Árbol* also resembles that of un quero (kero), a drinking vessel for chicha utilized by the Inca, which she envisions to be transculturated with the Holy Grail or Catholic chalice (Reátegui 2022a; Micromuseo website). Given the diverse ethnic and cultural groups that increasingly came to define the capital beginning in the 1960s, the interactive dimensions of *Árbol* have the potential to become a hub around which manifest what Marisol de la Cadena describes as the “radically different *and* partially connected worlds” (2015, p. 110), spanning Western epistemologies in which humans understand themselves to act upon a nature that is separate from them, and Indigenous ontologies “where earth-beings, plants, animals, and humans are integrally related” (2015, p. 112). By presenting *Árbol* (and *Árbol de la vida*) in places associated with the sacred, Reátegui creates contexts in which the tree's personhood can be acknowledged.

### **Conclusion: “Will someone try and visualize Peru in A.D. 2000?”**

Posed in 1967, E.F. Schumacher's rhetorical question implies that soon Peru will become unrecognizable or unimaginable under the pressure of internal migration. From the 1980s through the 2000s, the oblique rejoinders of Agois, Ludeña, Salazar del Alcázar, and Williams, Buntinx, and Reátegui arrived to stand Schumacher's question on its head, by instead visualizing unlimited economic growth as unsustainable and seeking alliances between nature and culture. Their respective projects creatively take up the grand plans of 1960s-era modernization—its eucalyptus plantations, highways through the rainforest, museum blueprints, and forgotten economic proposals—as aesthetic “raw material” in small-scale acts of cultural placemaking that advocate human coexistence with nature, even in inhospitable environments.

The videos pertaining to both *Lima en un árbol* and *Árbol* are featured prominently on the Micromuseo website, and Buntinx has written and organized events about these and other cultural projects with an ecological focus. While championing the local and the small, the very form of placemaking practiced by the Micromuseo challenges the notion of territoriality as a proprietary investment in place, such as that practiced by real estate developers, nation states, and major museums. The live and virtual circulation of art and visual culture coordinated by the Micromuseo offers paths for local perspectives to cross scales, and although scale-jumping is not intrinsically beneficial, as Anna Tsing argues, it can be empowering when it serves as a conduit for disenfranchised people and communities to assert their views on urgent matters that require concerted action, such as state violence and climate change.

Now at several decades' remove, these innovative cultural productions of the late twentieth century have been succeeded by new generations of ecologically oriented interventions (Blackmore 2022). No longer can Lima be described as a peripheral location among global art worlds, as it frequently appears in Buntinx's late-twentieth-century writings (Borea 2021, p. 187). Today the city is a cultural destination, and within its arts institutions, as Giuliana Borea observes, curatorial discussions about representation have given way to ones about participation, with heightened attention to the self-presentation of artists from migrant communities and diverse regions of the country, including Amazonia as well as the sierra (Borea 2021, p. 320). Lima's ascension to art capital nevertheless underscores an enduring problematic boldly confronted by the projects under consideration in this essay: namely, that cultural sustainability exists in tension with capitalist development.<sup>52</sup> Where culture is increasingly a driver of economic activity, "small is viable" continues to serve as a powerful critical methodology.

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<sup>52</sup> The scholarship on the expansion of cultural and heritage sites in Peru is extensive. See for example, Borea 2021; Gómez-Barris 2017; Ramón Joffré 2014; Rice 2018; and Silverman 2015.

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