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## **Cartographies of Sound: Emilio Villa and the Sonic Landscape of the Brazilian Forest**

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Riassunto:

La poesia di Emilio Villa intreccia spazi fisici e simbolici, unendo lingua, storia e geografia in un processo continuo di reinvenzione. La sua opera attraversa mondi antichi e moderni — dai contesti mesopotamici e biblici alle città contemporanee — esplorando al contempo le dimensioni sonore del linguaggio e della natura. La scrittura di Villa non è solo visiva e testuale, ma risuona con una forza uditiva che evoca i suoni dei paesaggi abitati. Questo studio ne indaga la pertinenza a un progetto di sonorizzazione della foresta brasiliana, concentrandosi su come la sua poesia trasformi i paesaggi naturali in suono attraverso trame fonetiche, strutture ritmiche e sperimentazioni linguistiche. I versi di Villa riflettono i paesaggi sonori della natura: distorsioni fonetiche, echi e schemi ritmici creano un linguaggio che incarna l'essenza dell'ambiente. Sfocando confini temporali e territoriali, la sua geografia poetica invita ad 'ascoltare' i paesaggi, instaurando un dialogo tra parole e mondo risonante. In Villa, il suono diventa spazio d'incontro fra mondo naturale e linguistico, favorendo un'intensa relazione con la natura.

Parole chiave: Emilio Villa, Geografia poetica, Ecosemiotica, sperimentazione fonetica, paesaggio sonoro.

Abstract:

Emilio Villa's poetry fuses physical and symbolic spaces, uniting language, history, and geography in continual reinvention. His work moves between ancient and modern worlds—from Mesopotamian and biblical realms to contemporary cities—while exploring the sonic dimensions of language and nature. Villa's writing is not only

visual and textual but resonates with auditory force, evoking the sounds of the landscapes he inhabits. This study examines his relevance to a project on the sonorization of the Brazilian forest, focusing on how his poetry transforms natural landscapes into sound through phonetic textures, rhythmic structures, and linguistic experimentation. Villa's verse mirrors nature's soundscapes: phonetic distortions, echoes, and rhythmic patterns create a language that embodies the environment's essence. By blurring temporal and territorial boundaries, his poetic geography invites us to 'hear' landscapes, establishing a dialogue between words and the resonating world. In Villa's work, sound becomes a medium where natural and linguistic worlds converge, fostering a deep engagement with nature and offering a model for experiencing place as both an auditory and poetic phenomenon.

KEYWORDS: Emilio Villa, Poetic Geography, Ecosemiotics, Phonetic Experimentation, Soundscape.

## Introduction

Emilio Villa (1914–2003)—Italian poet, translator, philologist, and visual artist—was one of the most radical and visionary figures of 20th-century literature. He was a polyglot and polymath who wrote in Italian, Latin, French, Greek, and many Semitic languages, weaving together etymological layers with a postmodern and ancient sensibility. His work defies classification, since it encompasses a variety of fields and media, such as critical essays, visual art, poetry, and translation. Villa's radical examination of language as a living being—a sensual and historical body that is prone to mutation, fragmentation, and renewal—rather than just as a means of expression is what ties this diverse corpus together.<sup>1</sup> Villa's brief but influential experience in Brazil (1951–1952) stands out as a moment of profound change among the many crucial moments in his career. The move away from purely visual or logocentric modes of composition toward a poetics based on sound, breath, rhythm, and acoustic resonance was sparked by Villa's exposure to the linguistic and environmental diversity of Brazil. In his poetic work, language becomes performative, embodied, and ecological rather than a transparent system of signs or representations.

This paper approaches Emilio Villa's poetic work through the lens of ecosemiotics, paying particular attention to theories of soundscape and sonic mapping. Ecosemiotics offers a valuable conceptual framework for analyzing how sign processes structure and transform physical environments. Emerging from biosemiotic thought, this branch of semiotics explores how ecological relationships are constituted not solely through biological or spatial mechanisms, but also through communication and sign activity.<sup>2</sup> It emphasizes

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<sup>1</sup> A. TAGLIAFERRI, *Il clandestino. Vita e opere di Emilio Villa*, collana Ricerche e studi villiani, Milano, Mimesis, 2016, pp. 9-12.

<sup>2</sup> N. WINFRIED, *Ecosemiotics and the semiotics of nature*, «Sign System Studies», 29 (1), 2001, pp. 71-81; <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2001.29.1.06>

how both human and nonhuman organisms perceive, categorize, and interact with their environments, making landscapes and ecosystems dynamic semiotic systems shaped by interspecies relations, cultural mediation, and material affordances.<sup>3</sup> Considering this theoretical context, Emilio Villa's poetry can be understood as an experiment in sonic cartography—an epistemological alternative to traditional, visually dominated mappings of space. Rather than relying on coordinates, symbols, or lines, Villa reimagines spatiality through acoustic textures, syllabic rhythms, and phonemic interference. His Brazilian *corpus* in particular becomes a resonant topology in which sound, geography, and language are inextricably entangled. The poem, no longer a descriptive object, becomes a reverberating field—an echoic landscape that listens rather than sees, enacting space through vibration, breath, and sonic presence. This paper contends that Villa's Brazilian writings represent a 'phonotextual ecology'—a poetics where meaning is produced by the materiality of sound and where the textures of the landscape are conveyed through poetical utterances' cadences and interruptions.

Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of listening as an ontological mode «to be listening is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently, toward the world»,<sup>4</sup>—in Villa's poetry resonates with this conceptualization of sound as a force that creates the world. This relational dynamic is triggered by Villa's work in Brazil, which positions poetry as an act of listening—a sensitivity to the rich, auditory ecologies of urban and natural settings. In this perspective, Villa not only pushes the limits of poetic form, but also reimagines the senses that allow us to perceive the world.

### **1. Brazil as Sonic and Mythic Origin**

Emilio Villa lived in Brazil for less than two years, from late 1950 to mid-1952, but the impact of this brief stay on his poetic and artistic development was significant and long-lasting. For Villa, Brazil became a place of mythic reconfiguration and creative renewal rather than just a geographical diversion in his artistic itinerary. Before leaving Italy, he had already started to envision Brazil as a conceptual force that could revitalize tired poetic forms and allow for a more radical interaction with language, space, and sound. In this way, Villa's Brazil serves more as an origin myth for a novel form of poetic and sonic ontology than as a real-world referent. Villa's correspondence with Pietro Maria Bardi, the renowned Italian critic and the director of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) at the time, is an early example of this mythopoetic projection of Brazil. In letters written between 1950 and 1951, Villa describes a creative and imaginative project aimed at integrating sonic technology with urban and

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<sup>3</sup> T. MARAN and K. KULL, *Ecosemiotic main principles and current developments*, «Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography», 96 (1), pp. 41-50, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> J. NANCY, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, New York, Fordham University Press, 2007, p. 6.

natural settings. Villa's Brazil functions as both an external location and a conceptual laboratory, serving as a forerunner to the field recordings, soundwalks, and audio cartographies that would later play a key role in the experimental practices of sound art in the late 20th century.

Crucially, Villa also imagined Brazil as a place of linguistic experimentation and cultural hybridity. Here his vision met, albeit subtly, with the *antropofágico* (cannibalistic) poetics of the Brazilian Concrete poets, particularly Haroldo de Campos. Oswald de Andrade had previously described a method of cultural production based on the symbolic consumption and modification of foreign influences in the *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), transforming European high culture into the foundation for a uniquely Brazilian modernism.<sup>5</sup> Villa seemed to work in a similar register, even though he was not officially associated with the Concrete Poetry movement. The Concrete poets' attempts to emphasize the visual and aural materiality of language are strongly echoed in his writings of these years, which exhibit a fascination with linguistic collision, polyglossia, and phonetic play. As a result, Villa's interaction with Brazil can be viewed as a proto-*antropofágico* encounter<sup>6</sup> that operated through semiotic reterritorialization.

According to Susana Scramim, Villa's polyglossic practices—his blending of Portuguese, Italian, and phonetic invention—prefigure the *entre-línguas* poetics of the 1960s and 1970s, which view language as a space of semantic instability and translingual friction.<sup>7</sup> Villa's poetics thrives on disjunction, sonic texture, and phonemic interplay rather than fluency or fidelity to any linguistic system. In this view, Villa contributes to a distinctively sonic and transnational modernism based on cultural migration and experiential multiplicity, in addition to foreshadowing important ideas of later post-structuralist language theory. As a result, Villa's experience in Brazil functions as a mythopoetic allegory, a sonic experiment, and a biographical episode. Whether viewed through the lens of sound art, Brazilian modernism, or multilingual poetics, Villa's Brazil continues to be a source of aesthetic potential rather than national identity.

## 2. Sonic Utopia: Villa's Letter to Bardi

Emilio Villa describes what could be considered a proto-conceptual blueprint for a sound installation *avant la lettre* in a remarkable letter to Pietro Maria Bardi written in the 1960s. Villa, using wildly hybridized language, envisions a world

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<sup>5</sup> O. DE ANDRADE, *Manifesto Antropófago*, «Revista de Antropofagia» n. 1, 1928. For an English translation, see Leslie Bary, *Cannibalist Manifesto*, «Latin American Literary Review» 19, n. 38, 1991, pp. 38-47.

<sup>6</sup> N. MONTECHIARI, «Poesia è una scimmia che sta in Brasile»: *La produzione letteraria brasiliana di Emilio Villa*, in *Emilio Villa visto da entrambe le sponde dell'Atlantico*, ed. by G. Rizzo, Genova, Zona, 2024, pp. 15-23, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> S. SCRAMIN, *Polifonia e Poesia: Villa e os Limiares da Linguagem*, «Revista Entre-Línguas» 9, no. 2, 2013, pp. 143-159.

in which poetry, electronic media, and the environment merge into a single sensory continuum:

Carissimo Bardi, [...] Volevo anche proprio parlarti di una cosa così, cioè proprio di una impresa, una vera, grossa, che dovremmo fare. Chiamiamo a raccolta tutti gli operatori di poesia della maggiore avanguardia del mondo (una cinquantina, sono tutti amici, son tutti sotto mano, in Europa, in USA, in America, in Giappone), + realizzatori, registi, operatori, tecnici. Li aduniamo a S. Paolo (Museo de Arte, meglio, o se no, dovunque). [...] Li registriamo in nastri, riproduciamo in elettronica, transistorizziamo, fotocellularizziamo, discografiamo, cinematografiamo (sia poemi in lettere che in happenig). [...] Con questo materiale creiamo i nuovi, inauditi, non mai auditi, orizzonti sonori, di logos-phonos, con megafoni piazzati sugli alberi, sonorizzando foreste, grattacieli, animando gli smog, e poi juke-box per dischi, sui pali telegrafici, nei porti, per le strade, in locali, magazzini, e insomma nuovi panorami sonori cittadineschi. Un festival universale... Ad ogni modo, è una cosa che ho pensato di fare con te. O niente. Pensaci solo un momento.<sup>8</sup>

This is more than just a letter; it serves as a brief manifesto in which «nature is envisioned as an active co-creator».<sup>9</sup> Techno-poetic neologisms, which are verbs created through poetic license and infused with an electrified sense of the future, are arranged in a phonetic choreography. Megaphones give trees a voice, jukeboxes are attached to telegraph poles and port buildings, and even the 'smog' is 'animated' into sonic life in Villa's performative urban forest. The urban sensorium is being transformed into what could be called a 'sonic ecology', in which sound mediates the relationships among the technological, environmental, and human domains.

Villa's vision involves a complete rethinking of the material infrastructure and social reach of the medium, not just an extension of poetic form. Poetry must be removed from the page and re-dispersed throughout public and environmental spaces, according to his imagined «festival universal». Villa seems to have anticipated this assertion decades earlier in his proposal for a distributed, immersive poetics, as Brandon LaBelle contends that «sonic materiality gives way to "micro-epistemologies", with echo, vibration and rhythm, for instance, opening up to specific ways of knowing the world».<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. VILLA, letter to Pietro Maria Bardi, ca. 1960s, in A. LOMBARDI, «Sonorizzare le foreste». *Emilio Villa e l'avanguardia letteraria brasiliana*, in *Emilio Villa visto da entrambe le sponde dell'Atlantico*, ed. by G. Rizzo, Genova, Zona, 2024, pp. 26 and 27.

<sup>9</sup> A. LOMBARDI, «Sonorizzare le foreste». *Emilio Villa e l'avanguardia letteraria brasiliana*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> B. LABELLE, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, London, Bloomsbury, 2010, pp. 21-22.

According to Villa, the poem turns into this exact area of straining—through, toward, and beyond language—where auditory connectivity and phonetic excess trump semantic closure. Villa places sound at the center of poetic production rather than treating it as a representational supplement. This places his work in line with what Adriana Cavarero refers to as a «vocal ontology»,<sup>11</sup> where the voice is valued for the uniqueness of its enunciative force rather than for what it says. Additionally, Marshall McLuhan's theory of media as extensions of human perception is also consistent with this model.<sup>12</sup> Loudspeakers and jukeboxes serve as prosthetic agents of poetic dissemination in Villa's sonic cartography, decentering authorship and spreading the poetic voice throughout ecological, architectural, and mechanical circuits. In this sense, Villa's soundscapes function as ecological and technological systems of poetic thought, in addition to being performances.

In this perspective, ecosemiotic inquiry draws particular attention to how meaning emerges through environmental perception and conceptual categorization in the design, transformation, and experience of landscapes. Rather than treating nature as a mute or neutral substrate, ecosemiotics emphasizes that environments are imbued with signs—visual, spatial, acoustic—which organisms interpret in ways that shape their behavior and ecological niches.<sup>13</sup> Within this framework, sound becomes a crucial medium for understanding how living systems communicate, adapt, and co-evolve. A central distinction in ecosemiotic sound studies is that between *soundscape* and *soundtope*.<sup>14</sup> The soundscape refers to the total acoustic environment, encompassing geophonies (nonliving natural sounds such as wind, water, and volcanic activity), biophonies (sounds produced by living organisms), and anthrophonies (sounds generated by human actions).<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the *soundtope* denotes the organism's subjectively perceived and cognitively processed acoustic environment. It is embedded in the organism's *Umwelt*—the meaningful world of experience—and provides vital

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<sup>11</sup> A. CAVARERO, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 5-8, pp. 169-72.

<sup>12</sup> M. MCLUHAN, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1994 [1964], pp. 7-21.

<sup>13</sup> T. MARAN and K. KULL, *Ecosemiotic main principles and current developments*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> «The soundtope thus becomes an important component of every individual Umwelt, and an investigation thereof can help us to understand the role of acoustic communication for maintaining individual fitness and, contemporarily, increasing the survival of a population and maintaining community cohesion in birds». In A. FARINA, N. PIERETTI, Farina, *From Umwelt to soundtope: An epistemological essay on cognitive ecology*, «Biosemiotics» 7 (1), 2013, pp. 1-10, p. 5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12304-013-9191-7>.

<sup>15</sup> Pijanowski, B. C., Farina, A., Gage, S. H., Dumyahn, S. L., & Krause, B. L. (2011). *What is soundscape ecology? An introduction and overview of an emerging new science*. *Landscape Ecology*, 26, 1213– 1232, in A. FARINA, N. PIERETTI, Farina, *From Umwelt to soundtope: An epistemological essay on cognitive ecology*, «Biosemiotics» 7 (1), 2013, pp. 1-10, p. 6.

information for survival, such as species identity, population density, and inter- or intra-species interactions.<sup>16</sup> In light of soundscape theory, Emilio Villa's experimental poetics can be understood as a deliberate engagement with the acoustic environment as a dynamic field of meaning-making. Rather than treating language as a purely representational system, Villa reconfigures it as an embodied sonic medium—responsive to and in dialogue with geophonies, biophonies, and anthrophonies. His poetic practice foregrounds the *soundtope*—the subjectively perceived and cognitively processed soundscape—by embedding poetic language within a biosonic ecology. Through his use of amplification devices such as transistors, photocells, and megaphones—not as neutral tools, but as active collaborators—Villa dissolves the boundary between voice and environment, speaker and medium. His poems emerge as vibratory ecosystems in which linguistic material is shaped by acoustic resonance, feedback, and interruption. In this way, Villa enacts a poetics of sonic attunement, where language becomes not only audible, but also affectively and materially entangled with its surroundings. His work offers an alternative sonic cartography, one in which poetry participates in the semiotic negotiation of space, presence, and ecological cohabitation.

### **3. 17 *Variazioni*: Biosonic poetics and Polyglossia**

Villa's phonetic radicalism predates this moment by several years and reaches a new level of intensity in *17 Variazioni su temi proposti per una pura ideologia fonetica* (1955), a cycle of 17 compositions that reject linguistic purism in favor of maximal hybridization. To create a vibrant mosaic of idioms, historical strata, and phonetic mutations, his poetic technique purposefully breaks down linguistic unity. Even though Italian is still the most widely spoken language, Latin, French, English, the Lombard dialect, Spanish, and even Provençal are continuously incorporated into it, contaminating and enriching it. As a philologist and translator, particularly of ancient and Semitic languages, Villa viewed poetry as a cosmological investigation of the beginnings, boundaries, and constraints of human expression rather than as a contemporary literary endeavor.

Within this ecosemiotic perspective, Emilio Villa's poetry can be understood as a unique articulation of 'biosonic thinking'. His work does not simply describe the acoustic dimensions of environment; it performs them. Villa's soundscapes are not representational, but operative: they function as both ecological and technological systems of poetic thought. His poetic language inhabits the soundscape as an immersive, vibratory field where presence, absence, memory, and materiality are entangled through sound. This biosonic poetics produces what I called in this paper 'lyric soundscapes': immersive auditory environments in which rhythm and evocative imagery unsettle conventional

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<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 5-7.

sensory registers. Language becomes a porous, wounded, and self-renewing body—animated by breath, echo, silence, and interference. Villa's poems thus echo the layered complexity of soundtopes: they do not merely describe ecological relations, but instantiate them through poetic form. The result is a tactile, sonorous writing that listens as much as it speaks—where meaning emerges not through assertion, but through attunement and acoustic relationality.

Every composition functions as a linguistic palimpsest, with neologistic, vernacular, and archaic forms coexisting in a nonhierarchical manner. The second most common language is French, which frequently coexists with Latin and Milanese Lombard dialect in a single poem to produce rich interlingual textures. In other works, English plays a major part, sometimes by itself and at other times in combination with Italian to create striking hybrids. Rare but noteworthy appearances of Spanish and Provençal are made, such as in one case where the Provençal poem is accompanied by its own auto-translation, which highlights the translation process as an integral part of the poetic gesture.<sup>17</sup>

Another common element of these poems, albeit one that is constantly subverted, is the invocation of divine or metaphysical forces. For instance, the opening piece uses the conventional apostrophe tone: «imprestami una battaglia di suggestioni tassative [...] spirami speculazioni apparenti [...] cantami i disastri accertabili.....»,<sup>18</sup> yet swiftly destroys the sacred appeal by using syntactic play and semantic ambiguity. Likewise, an English stanza in the fourth variation transforms into a bizarre mantra of phonetic rhythm and repetition: «it is world of the back hune wone it is | it is world of the horse half heart head | it is world of the work work it is is».<sup>19</sup> These lines demonstrate a poetics of semantic dissolution in which the logos is broken down into elemental utterance and sound triumphs over sense. In general, a polymetric impulse is reflected in poems' visual structure, which includes erratic lineation, blank spaces, and text cascades organized in blocks or stair-steps. As suggested by Dominic Siracusa, this attitude points the way through Villa's highlights: «the indeterminate nature of language; a breakdown in the relationship between language and the object it describes».<sup>20</sup> As part of its semantic strategy, the text's visual appearance enacts fragmentation and variation both linguistically and graphically. Indeed, the very term 'variations' gestures toward this ongoing process of disruption and renewal, where each poem modifies the one before, altering tone, time, and structure.

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<sup>17</sup> B. BATTILOCCHI, *Diciassette variazioni senza pudore di Emilio Villa*, in «Griseldaonline», n. 13, (2013), p. 2

<sup>18</sup> E. Villa, *Opere poetiche I*, cit., p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> E. VILLA, *Introduction*, in *The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa*, ed. Dominic Siracusa, Los Angeles, Contra Mundum Press, 2014, p. XIX.

A key component of Villa's poetics is this experimentation with typography. His unrestrained use of line spacing, capitalization, italics, and visual alignment causes the poem's rhythmic and visual flow to break. Villa does this exactly through the use of fragmentation and spacing. The reader does not traverse a clean, syntactically ordered path; rather, they are halted, redirected, and made aware of the materiality of words. As a result, the poem turns into a sculpture that is both visual and acoustic, a porous structure that invites performative reading. Villa's reactivation of the poetic voice in opposition to the abstraction of semantic transparency is consistent with a larger biopoetic turn, which views writing as a site of bodily encounter, interruption, and respiration. In this sense, Villa's work is consistent with the principles of material ecocriticism, which views matter as a layered entity that actively participates in the construction of meaning, as argued by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann.<sup>21</sup> According to this perspective, language is a material ecology rather than an abstract system. Villa's words serve as visual, auditory, and tactile artifacts in addition to being signifiers. He decouples syntax from semantic obligation, moving the emphasis from signification to sensation by emphasizing the act of utterance. Villa reclaims poetry as a dynamic, physical art form throughout all of this. His writing maintains that poetic expression is irreducible, a realm in which language exists as vital substance that is both mutable and incarnate rather than as code.

#### 4. Mapping phonotextual soundscapes

Villa creates a poetics in this phonotextual setting which can be expressed along three main axes. The first entails the **Lyric Soundscapes**: the combination of evocative imagery and rhythm destabilizes sensory registers. These sound- and image-rich fragments help map the poem as a sonic landscape, where lyric pulses and echoes reverberate beyond semantic coherence.<sup>22</sup> The second one is related to **Visual Fragmentation**: through the strategic use of white space, disjunction, and parataxis, meaning is suspended. Semantic voids and visual rhythms that defy straightforward interpretation are produced by this visual disturbance.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the third axis may be identified as **Lexical Deconstruction**: a process through which morphemic units are disaggregated and recombined, thereby subverting conventional lexical integrity and foregrounding the generative instability of linguistic meaning.<sup>24</sup> An outline of the approach is presented below, with selected examples.

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<sup>21</sup> S. IOVINO and S. OPPERMANN, *Material Ecocriticism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2014, pp. 7-11.

<sup>22</sup> See *Variazioni* n. 3 and n. 12

<sup>23</sup> See *Variazione* n.16.

<sup>24</sup> See *Variazione* n. 13.

1. **Lyric Soundscapes:** Villa crafts immersive auditory environments in which rhythm and evocative imagery disorient conventional sensory registers, mapping a fragmented yet resonant landscape where poetic language echoes with acoustic texture.

### **Variation n. 3**

scroscia l'acqua al quinto piano palpita  
Sotto la coscia d'albicocche gorgogliano le tubature  
ribolle il lume elettrico  
tenebre sgargianti  
che sentano!  
filiture d'aria nel frastuono di cicli  
quando suona / il campanello  
[...] ruggini e iridate le gronde  
raccolgono una vuota eco e un secolo di ricordi

### **Translation:** <sup>25</sup>

the water roars on the fifth floor throbs  
under the apricots' thigh the pipes gurgle  
the electric light boils  
in the vivid darkness  
let them hear it!  
threads of air in the rumble of cycles  
when the doorbell / rings  
[...] rusty and iridescent eaves  
gather an empty echo and a century of memories

### **Variation n. 12**

Ululavano monosillabi ossificati, sillabe  
plurali al cloro, e mascelle-caverne,  
e le meningi esorbitanti di curiosità [...]  
I sassi? amano il silenzio / il silenzio.  
I sassi strutturano il sibilo / e la traiettoria.  
I sassi quanti secoli / vincolano dentro? e non piangono, non  
sanguinano: sposano l'ombra, la ripudiano,  
sposano il vento, la forza, la calma, tutto...  
forse le leggi umane son di sasso?  
I sassi sono dure leggi sul terreno [...]

### **Translation:**

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<sup>25</sup> All English translations of Villa's poetry are taken from E. VILLA, *The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa*, ed. Dominic Siracusa, Los Angeles, Contra Mundum Press, 2014.

They howled ossified monosyllables,  
 plural chlorine syllables, and cavern-jaws,  
 and the meninges exorbitant with curiosity [...]  
 The stones? They love silence / in silence.  
 Stones structure the hiss / and the trajectory.  
 How many centuries do stones bind?  
 They never cry, never bleed:  
 they marry the shade, and disown it,  
 they marry the wind, the force, the calm, everything...  
 could human laws be made of stone?  
 Stones are harsh laws on the terrain [...]

2. **Visual Fragmentation:** Villa's use of parataxis and syntactic discontinuity suspends linear meaning, creating a visual poetics of interruption. Words and phrases are arranged in fractured constellations across the page, challenging the eye to navigate gaps, silences, and abrupt transitions. This fragmentation resists narrative coherence and invites the reader into a participatory act of reconstruction, foregrounding the materiality of the text and the visual dimension of poetic form.

**Variazione n. 16**

matter			and	egg		eyes
and		egg	eyes	jewels		and
crammings		egg	eyes	jewels		and
+	grateful	dark	drive	VIRUS		+
and	old	VIRUS	as	infinitive		eyes =
as	Select	Souls	in	dwelling		of
of	WEST	MATTER	WEST	HIGH		WEST
as	old	Furies	of	the		Philosophy
of	the Socratic	Hope	and			Surplus
with	greatful	Night's	Pole	in	the	lung
of	a	mad	horse			
			and	instantaneous		VIRUS
and	sky	of	the			GREATVIRUS

**3. Lexical Deconstruction:** Villa's poetic practice is characterized by the systematic dismantling and recombination of morphemic units, resulting in neologisms and hybrid lexical formations that foreground the material density and semantic instability of language. This approach subverts conventional paradigms of meaning, privileging linguistic substance over referential transparency. Through phonetic invention and morphological experimentation, Villa constructs a polyphonic lexicon that resists fixed interpretation and gestures toward a pre- or post-verbal poetics—one in which semantic multiplicity converges with historical and mythopoetic resonance, and language functions less as a communicative tool than as an ontological event.

### ***Variatione n. 13***

les morphèmes vi-vides  
les théorhèmes avides  
Les myephèmes midides  
Les chœurs èpiquederniques  
du stéatopyge  
du mélampyge  
du yacintopyge  
du leucopyge  
pyge pyge pyge sur les épaves rohoeurpyge  
noirnoir des voixons subtilisées  
jusqu'au NUL qui est bien l'outre ou l'autre

Villa's linguistic practice foregrounds the instability of signification, privileging the generative potential of sign interplay over fixed semantic reference. As Giorgio Agamben articulates, «the voice as pure potentiality» designates the threshold at which language suspends its referential function and enters a state of ontological intensity.<sup>26</sup> Within this framework, Villa's poetics may be understood as an investigation of the pre-semantic: a modality of expression grounded in presence rather than representation, wherein speech resonates not as a vehicle of meaning but as an event of being.

Moreover, Villa's poetry is replete with motifs of apertures, such as holes, gashes, and voids, which serve as metaphors for both creation and dissolution. These figures first appear as 'caves', 'tears', and 'the gash on the side of the shroud' in early compositions. Later, they reappear in more abstract

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<sup>26</sup> G. AGAMBEN, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 73.

formulations like 'celestial crevasse' and 'black holes'.<sup>27</sup> These voids are dynamic thresholds, or what Julia Kristeva refers to as «abject spaces», where the lines separating the self from the other and the interior from the exterior dissolve and reassemble.<sup>28</sup> In Villa's work, the wound is both ontological and symbolic, a primordial crack that both forms and fractures poetic subjectivity. Zero, whether represented by the egg, the wound, or the open mouth, represents a tense convergence of opposites—origin and end, fullness and void, sound and silence—rather than nothingness.<sup>29</sup> Instead of serving as a null value, it turns into a generative paradox cipher, a place where obliteration and creation collide. Liturgical invocations frequently result from this symbolic tension, as in the following verse: «o mia dolce alta preda / delle foreste di oscurità [...], dove custodisci le viscere labirintiche».<sup>30</sup>

In the end, Villa portrays language as a wounded body that speaks to heal the underlying rift in existence, but is never able to find true closure. In a paradoxical act of naming that both sutures and exposes, the poetic word becomes a liminal space where healing and rupture occur.

In this sense, Villa's writings represent a poetics of ontological instability in which meaning constantly shifts between being present and not. According to Maurice Blanchot: «the word is not the thing itself, but the abyss that opens in its place».<sup>31</sup> That abyss is sonorous to Villa—an open mouth resonating with the inexpressible.

## Conclusion

### Toward a Sonic Poetics of Place

Through his poetry, Emilio Villa reimagines language as a living, breathing entity that is alive with matter, memory, and sound rather than as a static, symbolic system. In contrast to the instrumental use of language as a transparent means of conveying meaning, his poetics envisions words acting as biological entities—sensory membranes that vibrate, listen, decompose, and regenerate.

In the context of material ecocriticism,<sup>32</sup> Villa's biosonic poetics imagines the poem as a living, breathing thing that is porous, rhythmic, wounded, and self-renewing rather than as a static artifact. The poem's materiality is not metaphorical; rather, it is physically sensitive to the world's textures, absorbing etymological sediment, geographical traces, and atmospheric

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<sup>27</sup> B. BATTILOCCHI, *Diciassette variazioni senza pudore di Emilio Villa*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 3-6.

<sup>29</sup> B. BATTILOCCHI, *Diciassette variazioni senza pudore di Emilio Villa*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> E. VILLA, *Opere poetiche I*, ed. by A. Tagliaferri, Milano, Coliseum, 1989 p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> M. BLANCHOT, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1982, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> See S. IOVINO and S. OPPERMANN, *Material Ecocriticism*, cit.

resonance. According to this perspective, language is nature—distorted, fractured, and reanimated through acoustic intensities—rather than a transparent medium for representing nature. The focus of material ecocriticism on the agency of matter and the intertwining of text with the nonhuman world is echoed in Villa’s methodology. Breath, rupture, echo, and silence are not literary abstractions; rather, they are fundamental forces that influence poetic expression as a dynamic, environment-co-constitutive process. Villa challenges the traditional distinctions between environmental rhythm and poetic form by treating sound as a spatial, nearly tactile phenomenon. Syntax blurs the boundaries between language and landscape by imitating the motion of voice, wind, water, and rust. Because of this characteristic, Villa’s writings speak to current issues of linguistic precarity, cultural extinction, and ecological collapse. From an ecosemiotic perspective, through vocalizations, movement, and other communicative gestures, each organism contributes to a complex web of eavesdropping and broadcasting of relationships which sustains ecological cohesion and fitness.<sup>33</sup> Even though empirical studies of soundtopes remain limited, it is reasonable to hypothesize that they contain semiotic patterns rich in ecological significance—ranging from alarm signals to territorial negotiations and mating cues.<sup>34</sup> In this light, ecosemiotics provides geography and the environmental humanities with critical tools for analyzing the communicative infrastructures of place, offering new insights into how environments are shaped not just by physical forces, but also by sensory and semiotic interaction.

In light of this, Villa’s biosonic poetics offers a crucial framework for poetical practice in the context of the ecological crisis. Here, poetry manifests as bodily matter—porous, rhythmic, wounded, and regenerative—rather than as pure representation. Language is conceived as a living entity that encompasses breath, silence, and rupture, intertwined with geography, memory, and sound waves. This writing style prioritizes resonance, permeability, and attunement while rejecting linguistic sovereignty. The word turns into a membrane that can register the materiality of the world without enclosing it; it can echo, pulse, and sediment. Instead of providing interpretive resolution, Villa’s poetics fosters sensitivity, attention, and an embodied listening style that is suitable for the present’s fragility. In this configuration, poetry is conceived as a living, breathing surface, shaped by sound, pressure, and time, rather than as something that stands apart from time.

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<sup>33</sup> J. M. BURT and S. L. VEHRENCAMP, *Dawn chorus as an interactive communication network*, in P. K. McGregor (Ed.), *Animal communication networks*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 320–343, in A. FARINA, N. PIERETTI, Farina, *From Umwelt to soundtope: An epistemological essay on cognitive ecology*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

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