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appropriated indigenous knowledges and skills  
fully doing the work of decolonization.

the Manahatta<sup>6</sup> thanks to Jeannette and Colo,

V: Yes, Manahatta! I feel that in ancient times, before Manhattan was built, this was a swampy area. And I can tell that that is the case because of the behavior of water when it rains. When it rains, water gathers in this neighborhood; before they did some engineering, there would always be huge pools of water here and I would always take the occasion to create works in these pools of water.<sup>7</sup> This piece is in Laight Street. Laight means depth, in other words, it's a gathering place of water. And that is just the next block over. You can see the size of that pool. It was immense. So I did this rather large web there. These pools were very beautiful places, because they became like mythical places, where the world was reflected and reversed.

M: It's awe-inspiring how you have refined your capability to see the past in the present. To find portals, mirrors and other fluid technologies to move through time, beyond space. I am thinking of that notion of yours that when you write—because ink comes out of your hands, in a way—it is like ink and writing were your body fluids, moving onto the paper. *Signs in the Water*, right?

V: Yes, I had been working with that idea always, so when I work with the ocean, making things for it to erase, it's like the liquid re-encounters itself in its different languages and forms. Like an extension of the writing, but a writing that the sea and the river take in, very willingly.

In the decade after 2000, I started to go back to Chile regularly. And in 2006, when Michelle Bachelet was being elected

president, I couldn't vote, because the records of all the voters had been burned by the military, and I had not had time to reinscribe myself in the new, so-called democratic system that we have now in Chile. So I voted differently, I went up to the foot of the glacier in front of Santiago, and I did this *quipu*.<sup>8</sup> Working with the idea that in the *quipu*, the body is a knot, because, the *quipu* is really like a cosmic umbilical cord. I think it's a creation of women, because of the way women experience the baby as hanging from their bodies at birth, tied to them by a knotted chord, it's the same configuration as the *quipu*: The umbilical chord and the knots from which we hang. So I go up the mountain, and I am hanging...from the Andes, and you will find this image throughout my poetry; the idea that water itself is a thread, the thread of life. That's why I use wool, because wool is the language of the water, the way you speak to the dead. Water and wool are completely entwined, metaphorically, symbolically. One as a manifestation of the other. And the wooly animals, like the vicuña, guanacos, alpacas and llamas, they are born where the springs are born. The animals themselves are a manifestation of water, and so are we. In the Andean world-view, everything is a manifestation of the water.

M: Cecilia, the little I know about the *quipu* is that it was a writing tool that allows for communication of other ways of sensing, is that right? Could you say more about the *quipu*?

V: The *quipu* is 5,000 years old, which makes it probably even older than writing in Mesopotamia. It has been called a record-keeping system and the permutations that the knots allow are equal to the alphabet. It has hundreds of permutations that allow, just by the twisting, coloring, and positioning of the knot, the encoding of information. The information encoded in the *quipu* can be historical, mythical, poetical, musical, and the one that the Europeans un-

derstood was the statistical ones referring to tax accounting. If you look up the *quipu* online, they say that it is a mnemonic device, for keeping statistics, which is 1 per cent of the truth. There are two *quipu*, in addition to the tactile *quipu* there is the virtual *quipu* meaning that it exists only in the minds of people. And that is the one that interests me the most. It's called *ceque*. I have done many works for that *ceque*.<sup>9</sup> The idea is that Cuzco is the center of the *quipu*, and there are forty-one lines that connect Cuzco to the sources of water in the universe, in all directions. These are virtual, mental lines, sight-lines between Cuzco and each one of those sites at the top of mountains. And throughout, there are temples. But temples can be nothing! They can be a hole in the ground. A temple can be just a spring that happens to cross the sightline. It can be a stone. You know, this to me is the most beautiful thing: how these temples, *huacas* they are called in Quechua, these sacred sites, are places for gathering the awareness of the people, of the responsibility to care for water and for distribution of water as well. When the Spaniards came, they looked at these *quipus* and they said, "oh, these are mops, just pieces of thread," and they let them be. For one hundred years, people kept doing *quipus*. And the Spaniards were very happy, because they thought this was nothing, until the Spaniards started to take over the land of the people. And the people saw that the Spaniards had courts and that their laws were written on paper, so they went to court for this land. That's when the *quipus* were forbidden and burned. And everybody who was a wise person of the *quipu*—which in all the books it says they were "men" or "*quipucamayoc*," meaning the keeper of the *quipus*, but these books were written by men and it is starting now to appear that women were also *quipucamayoc*—was killed.<sup>9</sup>

