



THE MATTER AND IMAGERY OF AIR IN EDUARDO CHILLIDA'S *THE COMB OF THE WIND XV*

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ABSTRACT: Eduardo Chillida's *The Comb of the Wind XV*, embedded in natural rocks rising from the Cantabrian Ocean in 1977, expresses the artistic potential of air as a material, a metaphor, and as an art-maker. With this sculpture, Chillida opened up the possibility for air itself to show indefinite imageries. Although much has been written about this sculptural group from different perspectives, no study has been systematically undertaken to analyze it regarding the theme of the matter of air, which should be considered the core of the work of art. As Gaston Bachelard stated: ‘Chillida wished the iron [of *The Comb of the Wind XV*] to show aerial realities.’ Hence, this article seeks to study to what ‘aerial realities’ Chillida might refer, and the relationship between air and his artwork. First, this paper delves into the meanings and functions that air involves in Chillida's artwork, as well as into how the sculptor embodied his poetic of air and allowed the spectator to perceive his sculptural installation with five senses. Also, the interaction between Chillida's work and Luis Peña Ganchegui's architectural installation *La Plaza del Tenis* is examined under the scope of Martin Heidegger's notion of place. All these aspects are discussed to help readers realize why the air in natural motion is the foundation of *The Comb of the Wind XV*, and map the holistic imagery of air that Chillida intended to express.

KEYWORDS: : Air art; Art as experience; Contemporary art; Eduardo Chillida; Imagery of air; Metaphor of air; Public art; *The Comb of the Wind*

Essences of Air

'How profound is the air' (Chillida, 1996; RTVE, 2016).¹ Air is one of the natural elements appreciated by some contemporary artists. It is for them a material as essential as metal or stone (Chillida, 1996). For example, Marcel Duchamp (1919), Alexander Calder (c.1932), Eduardo Chillida, Todor Todorov (2006) and Emily Parson-Lord (2014) have visualized the atmosphere of Earth from different approaches. From a molecular viewpoint, air is a substance, a real thing. However, when it is displayed in an art museum or gallery, it becomes a *quasi-non-thing*. Marcel Duchamp's ready-made *50 cc of Paris Air* (1919) humorously represents this paradoxical aspect of air: an empty ampoule bought from a Parisian pharmacist that contained nothing but the air of the place. We do not see air, but it is there. Duchamp pioneered the link between air and the visual. He used real air not only as a subject theme but also as a physical object matter. Several decades after Duchamp's work, Eduardo Chillida also did some sculptures related to air (1977). He widened the visual possibilities of air already challenged by Duchamp, or rather, he opened the possibility for real air itself to express indefinite imageries.

When examining the relations between the conception of air in Chillida's sculptures and Martin Heidegger's notion of space, Irigaray (1999: 8) denotes that air is our habitation as mortals, and there is no dwelling more spacious than that of air. With these words, she draws the link between the air and space. Inline with Irigaray's conceptualization, Connor (2004) describes the air to be the 'living room,' because 'the air is where we live, and largely what we are.' Another essence of the air is 'orientations' (Connor, 2004), capable of carrying and guiding living beings in the different directions. The concept of air is complex.

Countless metaphors and phenomena abstracted from this natural element have mirrored this reality. We can make either a positive or negative reading of its essences and effects. Chillida (1977) adopted the first attitude. He visualized his positive approach towards air in a series of sculptural works, especially in *The Comb of the Wind XV* (Figure 1), also known as *The Comb of the Wind*, which is a

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sculptural group set up by three 'three grasping prong shapes,' an expression used by Kelly Crow (2015) to describe this work of art.



Figure 1. The Comb of the Wind XV – *Haizearen orrazia XV*. Photo credit: Mei-Hsin Chen, 2013.

Much has been written about the artwork in question (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986; Chillida, Huici and Fernández León, 1990; De Barañano Letamendía, 1992, 2008; Elósegui Itxaso, 2008; Gausch, 1985; Mitchell, 2010: 69-90). Nevertheless, none of the studies has examined the work regarding the theme of the matter of air, which should be considered mainstay of *The Comb of the Wind XV*. Gaston Bachelard revealed his friend sculptor's intention for the creation: 'Chillida wished the iron [of *The Comb of the Wind XV*] to show to us aerial realities' (1997 [1956]: 57).² Now, what kind of 'aerial realities' did the artist wish to convey? The core intention of the present article is to respond to this question. The 'aerial realities' that Chillida expressed earlier embrace not only the significance and functions that air entails in the artwork in question but also how he visualized his artistic conception of air.

Before we can give a proper answer to the question, it is essential to understand the meanings and role of air in Chillida's creative process; the way he expressed the significations of air; and possible readings of this artwork, which undoubtedly stays open, as the sculptor himself stated (Ugarte, 1995: 94). While delving into the visualization of the sculpture, I will turn the focus slightly to the

sensorial perception of the spectator towards the same artwork, which is another aspect which has remained unexplored. I believe that the same artwork should be experienced not only visually but also with the senses of touch and hearing, and even with the senses of smell and taste. It is only in this way, I think, we can accordingly map the holistic imagery of air that Chillida intended to embody in his work and realize why the air in natural motion is the mainstay of this work of art.

Evolution of the Project of *The Comb of the Wind XV*

The Comb of the Wind XV was born of a gradual and long process of ripening (Euskal Telebista – ETB 2, 2012; RTVE., 2012 [2009]). The idea of casting a sculptural work with this poetic title began in 1952 (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 22-23; Euskal Telebista – ETB 2, 2012). From then until his death in 2002, Chillida made at least 24 different versions of the wind combs. Following the chronological order of production, the sculpture *The Comb of the Wind XV*, cast in COR-TEN steel and installed on different rocks at the base of the Igueldo Mountain in San Sebastián city, belongs to the numbers 14, 15 and 16 (Elósegui Itxaso, 2008: 119-123). Chillida stated that he took 25 years to get it right from the first design in 1952 until the final sculptural group installed in San Sebastián in 1977 (Chillida and Chillida, 2003: 14-16). It was not easy to achieve the imagery of air and its expression of tension out of the fight against gravity through this cyclopean mass and hooks rooted in rocks. Finally, thanks to close collaboration with the engineers José María Elósegui and José Antonio Fernández Ordoñez, the sculpture, composed of three independent pieces, could be successfully fixed to the rocks between August 17 and September 3, 1977 (Elósegui Itxaso, 2008: 29).

The main difference between this final design and his earlier ones was the protagonism of air, its movements, and sensorial effects (Chillida and Dupin, 2004: 128). Along the development of his artistic conception, Chillida realized that the typologies of his previous *combs* were too complicated and ostentatious for the natural components of its surroundings: the horizon with its atmospheric refraction; the movements of the sea surface with its struggles; human beings coming closer to seek the unknown behind natural scenery and its countless variations. Here nothing is repeated. The skyline, air, wind waves, and people are never different but never the same, like the sea and Bach's music (Chillida and Chillida, 2003). Chillida decided to create a work which asks and responds to questions. Once he outlined the basic idea, he then started to work with three pieces, not equal but very similar in shape and scale. Here, in this sculptural group, weathering steel forms are mixed, creating a dialogue with the forces and aspects of air. These

three sculptures are soberly seen upon the horizon and make the life of the sea expressed by wind waves participate in the whole scene. The artist chose the number 3 because, as he stated, it was for him the most elemental and economical way for it to create influence in space (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 79).

Meanings of Air: Wind, Aroma and *Genius Loci*

When describing the matter of air, Chillida used terms like wind, aroma and *genius loci* to express the different entities, dimensions, and roles that the earthly element entails in *The Comb of the Wind XV*. Connor described the privileged relationship that air has with the struggle of art with or without objects (2007: 1). Due to its apparent invisibility and immateriality, which seem to impede its ability to form shapes, we might find it difficult to recognize its potential as a material object of art, not to mention as the maker of art. However, for Chillida air had an entity as well as an identity before, during and after his creation. In this section, I will make inquiry into the meanings and role of air in the artwork in question.

Air is for him like a seed, which transforms growing. The element of air is completely involved in the conception and teleological purpose of the piece. It is the wind that he admired like he admired the people of his hometown (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 80). The wind is the end and the beginning of this sculpture; it is the author, object, and subject of the eulogy. Why was this element so important for Chillida? How did he perceive it? What did it mean for the Basque sculptor?

Air means much to Chillida. He considered air his guide, which whispered in his ear how to drive his sailboat in the right direction among the turbulent ocean or in the middle of the thick fog. This analogy mirrors his creative process, from its very beginning to the end. In such a situation of uncertainty, experience alone is not enough. Only a docile artist, who wants to listen to the wisdom of air, is capable of distinguishing its whistle from the other noise floating in the wind, and of doing so while not losing vision and control. Chillida bestowed a tangible name to this sort of air, which guides or orients with fragrance; he called it 'aroma,' and used this term as a metaphor, perhaps likening himself to an artist finding the scent of the emerging steps of the work.³ His attention to this element is poetically expressed in one of his poems, entitled *Guided only by an aroma*; he wrote:

I don't understand almost anything, but space is beautiful, silent and perfect. I don't understand almost anything, but I share the blue, the

yellow and the wind. An aroma guides every step of each artwork between the known and the ignored. In the beginning, the form is an undefined aroma that commands while specifying. This pre-knowledge or aroma is my guide in the unknown, in what is desired, in what is required. I never argue with aroma *a priori*, and I never stop doing the same *a posteriori* (Chillida and Dupin, 2004: 11).⁴

The notion of aroma carries a significance similar to the spirit it inspires. Chillida explained the meaning and the role of aroma:

I always know beforehand the spirit of the artworks that I am going to make, but I never have a concrete idea about their form. I only have a spirit, and 'aroma' as I call it... I know the work before carrying it out, but I don't know what it will be like, and I don't want to know. I know its aroma (Iturbi, 1967).⁵

The root of this artistic work resides in this spirit of 'aroma,' which is something vague but real at the same time, situated between the state of being and the action of that which is to be. Once the artist had grasped the spirit – aroma – he held it firmly, while allowing it to mature and grow in his hands. To wit, the fragrance of air, aroma, was the first breath that gave birth to Chillida's art and the

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guide leading him to incarnate his indefinite idea step by step between the known and the unknown (De Barañano Letamendía, 1998: 38). What the sculptor did was merely to discover it and follow its guidance, being free from any personal mindset or idea (De Barañano Letamendía, 1998: 31). In this context, we can say that the aroma was the core that made *The Comb of the Wind XV* happen and inspired the artist to say: 'Art is linked to what is not yet created' (Martínez, 2001).⁶

The Comb of the Wind XV harbors metaphors of air and empirical realities of air that are surprising. The wind is one of the expressions of air; it is air in motion. Chillida looked carefully at the human relationship with air, as well as exploring its existential and metaphorical meaning. The emphasis of the empirical or sensorial dimension of this natural element is precisely shown under the denominations, such as aroma, referring to the

fragrant air, and sea wind, referring to the salty air. With these nomenclatures, Chillida alluded not only to the passive role but also to the active character that air played in its own creative course.

Chillida incorporated the natural phenomenon of the wind in his medium of artistic expression and, moreover, he considered it the co-author and even maker of *The Comb of the Wind XV*. When being interviewed on one occasion, the sculptor explained: 'I have carried out this artwork, but it is not done by me. The wind, the sea and the rock, all of them took part in a decisive way' (Sánchez, 1977, cited in Martínez, 1998: 59).⁷

We can change this statement into the following question. Can air not be an object matter of sculpture, with the artist meanwhile determining its visual form? Certainly, Chillida would give an affirmative response to this question.

It is not easy at all to retain such a real thing like air, the coming and going wind that cleverly escapes from your palms. Chillida's plastic version of air conveys that a human body is not only outside the air, as Duchamp's ampoule did (1919), but also inside it, being either aesthetically nourished as a sensorial experience or materially tainted as weathering steel. Air gives us birth, yet can free us from life. Air has power, strength, and resilience. It shakes and shouts but is always capable of returning to its original silence and gentleness, like a breeze. Air is fragilely able, like the clay developing and strengthening gradually under the caress of artist's hands. Air is light but as heavy as steel. Human beings are circled by the wind that they wish to receive and have to thrust. This was the context of Chillida's place of air, its 'habitation' and 'living room' (Irigaray, 1999: 8; Connor, 2004) – a space full of paradoxes, just like human existence.

Furthermore, Chillida considered the aroma the representation of the *genius loci*, namely the genius of the place, a personified nomenclature to designate the wishing-to-be in a phenomenological sense inherited from Heidegger (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 12-15) and Christian Norberg-Schluz (1980), both Chillida's friends. Just as with the aroma, the *genius loci* belongs to the key concepts that we need to know for making a proper reading of *The Comb of the Wind XV*. If we want to understand the meaning and identity of the *genius loci*, it is necessary to explain first the relationship between the sculpture and the place where the artwork was constructed and installed. That is to say, it has much to do with the notion of habitat and place – a place-to-meet, in Heidegger's sense (2002 [1950]).

Visualization of Air: from *Rocks* to a *Place*

The Comb of the Wind XV, as I have mentioned before, refers to a habitation or living room where the wind resides, rather than to a mere sculptural group of steel and stones. It likewise means a place to meet, where the most primitive and the sacred encounter. They are both, in fact, air.

The location of this artwork is in San Sebastián, a city facing the Bay of Biscay, which forms part of the city itself, its culture and life. It also leans back on mountains that capriciously climb from the sea and reach into the sky. *The Comb of the Wind XV* stands on the outreach of the Ondarreta beach, under the Igeldo Mountain. Local people regard it as the starting point and, at the same time, the *finisterre* of the city. Like air, it symbolizes the first thing they take from the world and the last thing they return to it because the artwork was built almost entirely upon an obsolete sewer pipe which was later restored and transformed into a new-born space (Bilbaoarchitecture.com, 2017). In other words, the city inaugurated its new identity in this place, representing the way in which the cycle of life intertwines with nature. As Bazal, Chillida, and Peña Ganchegui. wrote (1986: 13): 'I dare to affirm that for San Sebastián, *The Comb of the Wind [XV]* is its place since space which the works compacts, defines... the nature and vocation of the city.'⁸

Standing near *The Comb of the Wind XV*, Peña Ganchegui's architectural design *La Plaza del Tenis*, located at the end of *Paseo del Tenis*, functions as a stage for contemplating the sculpture and the spectacular dynamism that it carries (Ganchegui.com, 2017; Bazal, 2002: 532-533). In fact, it is an artificial topology intentionally built for discretely facilitating the integration of Chillida's sculptural group with the natural sea landscape (Ganchegui.com, 2017; Sangalli Uggeri, 2013: 122-123). Together with the sculptor, the architect designed the preamble for the 'linking together' and for the successional character, declaring the sequential pattern of the three *combs* (Sangalli Uggeri, 2013: 123). The Greek theatre-like precinct also possesses a remarkable Renaissance flavor, both in material and in design, leading the spectator gradually into the heart of *The Comb of the Wind XV* (Sangalli Uggeri, 2013: 124-127). First, upon arrival, there is an entrance hall to welcome the guest. While amazed by the reception, one feels unexpectedly shifted into a sense of the original, of being-in-the-primitive, of being in the space of before-the-after. The sculptor and the architect both considered this extended preamble, hosting the artwork as a simile of the Greek *temenos*, the preparatory area that precedes the Greek temple Parthenon (Bazal, 2002; Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986:48).

In fact, this well-thought space turns Chillida's three sculptures into a meeting place because they bring the world together. Here the most primary and most sacred converge on the same site, surpassing any temporal character. It is a place of transition and metamorphosis, a place between not-yet-being and being, which determines air and the wind, an indefiniteness that is defined (Chillida and Chillida, 2003: 17). This thought is very much in the line of the Greek philosopher Anaximenes of Miletus, who considered air the origin of the Cosmos and that it had the power to transform; that is to say, air is the essence of everything and is something sacred (Guthrie, 1962: 116). Interestingly, the similar Greek conception regarding air and its relation with the place are likewise found in Heidegger's (2002 [1950]) writing, *The Origin of the Work of Art* (its original title in German: *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*). Reflecting on Greek temples, the German philosopher wrote:

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws out of the rock the darkness of its unstructured yet unforced support. Standing there, the building holds its place against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm visible in its violence. The gleam and lustre of the stone, though apparently there only by the grace of the sun, in fact first brings forth the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air. (2002 [1950]: 21)

If we replace the words 'building' and 'temple' from the text with 'sculpture' or 'sculptural group', and do the same with the word 'stone', which can be substituted for 'steel' or 'iron', Heidegger's description becomes a passage visualizing the meaning of *The Comb of the Wind XV*, the worship of air, rather than space. The connection among Chillida, Heidegger, and Greek art is not a mere coincidence. Chillida mentioned on various occasions his great admiration towards Greek culture and his friendship with the German philosopher, whose thoughts greatly influenced his conception of art (Chillida and Chillida, 2003: 28-30; Martínez Aguinalalde, 1998: 81, 87; Mitchell, 2010: 66-90; Ugarte, 1995: 36-38, 50-52).

The three *comb* sculptures generate a field of a timeless character. However, the timelessness that these works embody is not static but something dynamic and sequential, like the wind waves (Martínez, 1998: 59). They refer to the past, present, and future. These three *combs* have the same weight (of ten tons), and all of them were made to a similar scale (Treinta-Hermanos Aguas,

2008). Their shape is alike but not identical. Each piece has its own positioning and meaning.

The two first *combs*, one in the side of the rock right on the shoreline and the other on the right side, stand in front of the previous one. These two pieces were horizontally installed because Chillida thought that such an arrangement could convey the fact that one was searching for the other, for the complementation and completion, like a return from the present to the past, uniting what had been united, as they were part of the same stratum. It is not coincidental that both *combs* are in the same geological stratum (Elósegui Itxaso, 2008: 73-94). Chillida declared that he intentionally planned such an arrangement because, in this way, the geological history of his hometown could be visually presented (Aguinalde, 1977).

Chillida then embedded the third *comb* in a further, isolated rock. The position of this piece is vertical, which is different from the other two. The idea was inspired by the *iron-tree* symbolism created by Bachelard (Elósegui Itxaso, 2008: 50-52), one of Chillida's acquaintances. Its shape recalls Le Corbusier's monument of *The Open Hand* in Chandigarh, India. The meaning that Chillida ascribed to this vertical piece, described by Bachelard as 'an iron antenna which should vibrate to all kinds of wind movements' (1997 [1956]: 57),⁹ was a statement of the future, memories of the past and present, and a call to the unknown (Martínez, 1998: 25, 59), as the sculptor himself explained: '[*The Comb of the Wind XV*] is a work with a vocation to interrogation; is an interrogation to the unknown, to the horizon, to the future' (Ugarte, 1995: 94).¹⁰

How was the location chosen, and by whom? Chillida clarified in different conversations that it was the place which chose him, and not *vice versa* (ETB, 1995, cited in Martínez, 1998: 59). It was the *genius loci*, the wishing-to-be of the place, in the form of aroma, that he encountered. The sculptor repeated several times that the only thing that he did was to discover it and to inhabit it: to convert it into a place, a dwelling place under the extension of the sky. Chillida explained:

This place is the origin of all... The real author of these sculptures was it. I discovered it and then paid an homage to it... That place had captured my soul before I knew I was going to do something in it... much before I became a sculptor... much before I finished my high school... I could be fourteen years old then wondering where the waves would come from... (Bazal, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 27).¹¹

A year before the execution of this artwork, he reaffirmed the idea of discovery when he was interviewed by the journalist Juan José Iturbi (1967, cited in Elósegui, 2008: 31, 99): 'The idea for this site and this rock occurred to me some time ago [since 1952]. They wanted to organize an exhibition for the tribute, but I didn't think that was a good idea. I preferred something more permanent'.¹²

Experiencing Winds Combing the *Habitat*

After reviewing several key elements and notions that might contribute to a better understanding of *The Comb of the Wind XV*, I would like to query the holistic significance of this artwork. At first glance, we might imagine that the first two words of the title, *The Comb*, refer logically to the three weathering steel sculptures, and thus the wind is combed consequently by these metal combs in vertical and horizontal directions. However, the sculptor himself made a different interpretation to this *logical* analysis. Chillida explained to Iturbi that *The Comb of the Wind XV* is first of all about 'building a comb so that the wind comes inland to comb my hometown [San Sebastián]' (1967, cited in Elósegui Itxaso, 2008: 32, 99).¹³ To wit, the *combs* firmly embedded in rocks symbolize the wind from the Bay of Biscay combing the city of San Sebastián. Such imagery of air is very similar to what the lyrical Spanish Baroque poet Luis de Góngora wrote in *The Fable of Polyphemus and Galatea*, writing that the wind combs Polyphemus coarse hair with more fury and care (De Góngora y Argote and Dent-Young, 2007 [1613]: 173-210). Both artists imagine wind as an invisible hand that combs the ocean, land, forest, and human beings. Paradoxically, the invisibility of air in motion is, in reality, visible. How can this be possible? Chillida gave his answer: 'I didn't see the wind but the clouds moving. I didn't see the time but the leaves falling' (1994).¹⁴

For Chillida, *The Comb of Wind XV* is the manifestation of the aroma that the place embodies. The sculptor searched for the expression and awakening of what things are naturally, without the imposition of the exclusive personal ego-expression upon nature. Here, the artist wished us to conceive his work as an 'experienced place', a habitat, as well as a place for experiencing (Messer, 1989), rather than expecting people to perceive certain beautifully shaped pieces of steel, installed on rocks, playing with the air and the sea. One of his sons, Luis Chillida, stressed the notion that his father considered this artwork should be experienced as a whole. This not only refers to the sculpture but also *La Plaza del Tenis* and all the environment and nature that surrounds it (Euskal Telebista – ETB 2, 2012). This consideration implies that *The Comb of the Wind XV* is intended to be an experience, rather than a mere visual perception. Chillida invited us to experience the wind combing the whole 'habitat' where the sculpture is situated. For the

sculptor, the term 'habitat' does not only refer to the physical features of San Sebastián city and the surrounding nature, but to a place for encounters, such as encounters with people, events, and, in addition, a place for new experiences.

Peña Ganchegui (1985, personal communication, cited in Baza, Chillida and Peña Ganchegui, 1986: 45) mentioned that *La Plaza del Tenis* expresses a way of intervention in the city that has much to do with the romantic German thinker Novalis, who understood nature as something not to be exploited and abused but to be comprehended and accordingly interpreted. *The Comb of the Wind XV* is no doubt a metaphor for this attitude, embodying the respect and intrinsic union between the natural and artificial. He said:

“The life of the city depends on the air and on all kinds of consequences that it brings, no matter whether they are material, spiritual, personal, collective, or environmental.”

I understood I had to make a preamble to the sculptures in a place that is the beginning and the end of the city... as a symbol of the meeting of the city with nature. Of a city that ends in an absolute which is the sea... (Sangalli Uggeri, 2013: 122).¹⁵

Like his architect friend, Chillida's concerns for nature and habitat as well as their dialogues with his artistic work are evident. He described it as such (Chillida, 2005: 78):

The steel forms [of *The Comb of the Wind XV*] blend with the forces and aspects of nature, they interact with them, they are questions and statements. Perhaps they are there to symbolize the Basques and their country, situated between two extremes, the point where the Pyrenees end and the sea begins.¹⁶

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In a similar way to Robert Smithson, Chillida fused art with nature. However, unlike the former American artist of Land Art, who tried to materialize the Theory of Non-Sites (Smithson, 1996 [1973]), Chillida developed Heidegger's theory of Site, conveying the personal and collective vivid experience of place and locality. On the

other hand, Chillida thought that art was about freedom, to work in real habitat or in the reality of landscape using raw materials, such as stone, iron, water, sound, and certainly, air. Using engineering and art, Chillida cast an air-space that alters with sun and rain, with day and night, with flying clouds and air, with the sound of the ocean and with the wind. His dream became a reality (Euskal Telebista – ETB 2, 2012).

The air-of-habitat, the wind-comb that *The Comb of the Wind XV* determined, is empirically present and talks to its audience's five senses. When spectators see this artwork in place, they have the chance to challenge, to a greater degree, their personal sensorial capacities, to experience a new way of perceiving artworks. In fact, they are physically immersed in the work, like babies in their mother's womb. Their skin is dressed, sometimes delicately and sometimes roughly, by the saline air from the sea and inland, or unexpectedly by the brine, whose taste might tangibly confirm the reality of an encounter. The music that the air and ocean play sounds in the ears and goes straight to the hearts of sensitive listeners, even to those of slow-witted ones. The smell breathes its fragrance in the fresh air while their eyes enjoy the visual beauty of the artwork and its habitat (Explora Films, Marmoka Films, and TVE, 2013).

Air in Visual Art as a Being and Becoming

Chillida's work, as Bestegui wrote in line with Irigaray's thoughts, 'suggests that art brings this "there is" of air into the open, that it brings the open into the open, presents it, in a way irreducible to any ideal or theoretical representation' (Beistegui, 2005: 154). These words imply the permanent character and becoming nature of air, both which are likewise present in *The Comb of the Wind XV*. Furthermore, Chillida embodied these two qualities of being and becoming of air, both metaphorically and physically. Two kinds of air art, one figurative/spiritual, like the 'aroma,' and the other real/material, like the 'wind,' are artistically merged and pressed into sculptural appearing. He engaged in a dialogue with both types of air through humans' sensory systems. However, in my opinion, the singularity of his creation mainly resides in two aspects: firstly, from the artist's perspective, the multiform manipulation of the object air; and secondly, from the spectator's viewpoint, the different ways of experiencing the artwork, namely the air, through the traditional five senses.

Air is not immobile, and neither is *The Comb of the Wind XV*. Air is essentially a dynamic object. When air combs, when the wind breathes into San Sebastián, the sculptural group can be perceived in different ways like the wind

itself. This perception alternates according to the natural phenomena and conditions that are around – for example, the atmosphere and the agitation of air. The strength, direction, and degree of humidity of the wind decide the visual aspects of the work, due to its complete integration in the dynamism of nature. All these facts come to show that the leitmotif of *The Comb of the Wind XV* is the air, which dresses and encompasses the habitat of San Sebastián.

If the ludic attitude characterizes Marcel Duchamp's *50 cc of Paris Air* (1919), I would say that Eduardo Chillida searched for the nature of art, the poetic of air, and the significance of human existence with *The Comb of the Wind XV* (1977) and queried, allegorically, the existential meaning of air for life and habitats. However, paradoxically, the sculpture reveals that there are no definitive answers in this work, but only interrogations to respond to (Ugarte, 1995: 94). Air is in this place the examination of the response. The questions posed to the wind are answered in the sculptures and rocks, dotted with foam when the surf breaks with force. We do not see the wind, but we see the ocean moving. Chillida's work challenges the materiality and sensorial essence of air. Air, dressed with an aroma representing the *genius loci*, is the origin of *The Comb of the Wind XV*; air, as itself, is the material object as well as the theme/subject and co-author of this artwork. Definitively, its author found new ways of giving a eulogy to the wind, which is the first thing that he took from the habitat, and the last thing he returned to it.

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NOTES

¹ The original text in Spanish is: '*Lo profundo es el aire.*'

² The author's translation is based on the Spanish translation of the original French made by Jorge Ferreiro Santana, which is as follows: '*Chillida quiere que el hierro [del Peine del Viento] nos revele realidades aéreas.*'

³ Here I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, who provided valuable suggestions regarding the meaning of aroma entailed in Chillida's writings.

⁴ The original title of the poetry in Spanish is *Guiado sólo por un aroma*; and the text is as follows:

Yo no entiendo casi nada, pero el espacio es hermoso, silencioso, perfecto. Yo no entiendo casi nada, pero comparto el azul, el amarillo y el viento. Guiado por un aroma cada obra un paso entre lo conocido y lo ignorado. La forma al principio es casi como un aroma indefinido que se impone a medida que va precisándose. Este preconocimiento o aroma es mi guía en lo desconocido, en lo deseado, en lo necesario. Nunca discuto con él a priori y nunca dejo de hacerlo a posteriori.

⁵ Below is the original text in Spanish:

Siempre conozco antes el espíritu de las obras que realizaré, pero nunca tengo una idea concreta de la forma. Tengo sólo un espíritu, un «aroma», como yo lo llamo... Yo conozco la obra antes de hacerla, pero no sé cómo va a ser y no quiero saberlo. Conozco su aroma.

⁶ The original text in Spanish says: 'El arte está ligado a lo que todavía no se crea.'

⁷ The original text in Spanish is: 'Esta obra la he hecho yo y no la he hecho yo. El viento, el mar, la roca, todo ello intervino de forma decisiva.'

⁸ The original text in Spanish is: 'Me atrevería a afirmar que para San Sebastián el Peine del viento es su lugar ya que el espacio que compacta define, en el más alto grado de permanencia, la naturaleza y vocación de la ciudad.'

⁹ The Spanish translation of the original French made by Jorge Ferreiro Santana is: '*Una antena de hierro que debe vibrar a todos los movimientos del viento.*'

¹⁰ The original text in Spanish is as follows:

'[El Peine del Viento] es una obra que tiene encima una vocación de interrogación, es una interrogación ante lo desconocido, ante el horizonte, ante el futuro.'

¹¹ Below is the original text in Spanish: Este lugar es el origen de todo... El verdadero autor de estas obras es él. Yo lo he hecho descubierto y le he hecho un homenaje... me enamoré de ese lugar mucho antes de saber que iba a hacer algo en él... antes de ser escultor... ni siquiera había terminado el bachiller... podría tener catorce años pensando de dónde vendrían las olas...

¹² The original text in Spanish is: 'La idea se me ocurrió hace tiempo para este lugar y esta roca. Querían que realizara una exposición con motivo del homenaje, pero no me pareció lo más indicado. Prefería algo que "quedase."'

¹³ Here is the original text in Spanish: '[Iturbi pregunta: ¿Pero qué es el Peine del Viento?] Construir un peine para conseguir que el viento entre peinando a mi pueblo.'

¹⁴ The original text in Spanish is: 'No vi el viento, vi moverse las nubes. No vi el tiempo, vi caerse las hojas.'

¹⁵ Below is the original text in Spanish:

Entendí que debía hacer un preámbulo a las esculturas en un lugar que es principio y fin de la ciudad... como un símbolo de unión de la ciudad con la naturaleza. De una ciudad que termina en un absoluto que es el mar...

¹⁶ The original text in Spanish is as follows:

Las formas de acero [del Peine del Viento] se mezclan con las fuerzas y los aspectos de la naturaleza dialogan con ellos, son preguntas y afirmaciones. Quizás están ahí para simbolizar a los vascos y a su país, situado entre dos extremos, el punto en el que acaban los Pirineos y empieza el océano.