Performing the jumbled city
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Prologue

Enrique Antileo Baeza
MapsUrbe captivated me the first time I had the opportunity to look at their work. A heterogeneous Collective mounting an exhibition in the Quinta Normal to address Mapuche trajectories in the city of Santiago through sound, visual materials and montages, their work moved the spectator, connecting with their own experience, or those of their mothers, fathers and elders. To me, MapsUrbe’s work defied definition but in a good way. It was art with archival work. It was an aesthetic proposal coupled or perhaps entangled with political dialogue, with the clear intention of shaking (us) up.

This work makes up a mosaic that goes beyond the book you have in your hands. It is a journey through the individual experiences of what we could call mapuchidad santiaguina and is interwoven with a critical dialogue on the history and the future of Mapuche migrants to the metropolitan capital, once a colonial city and then a capitalist and segregated one. In this dialogical impulse, the geographical disintegration of the Mapuche people in the most populated region of the country is reviewed. It is cartography, not only of the position of landmarks or places on a map, but also an emotional geography and a spatio-temporal connection with lived experiences.

In that mapping, places and territories were discovered that were flooded with meanings from the Mapuche perspective. Some of these spaces probably mean nothing to the Chilean people, though some other may have a shared significance. All are points on the Mapuche Urban Map that acquired importance over the course of their lives. Most of this invisible geography is constituted from the Mapuche post-reservation diasporic process; that is, after the exodus produced by the Chilean military colonisation and the subsequent usurpation of land by large settler-landowners. The rest comes from long ago and is interwoven with resignifications of the present.

Among the sites which still resonate in my memory after viewing MapsUrbe’s work is the Welen Hill. As the peak from which the Spanish colonisers symbolised the image of the territory they were to conquer, several centuries later it became a central point of Mapuche resistance in Santiago during their mobilisations. Hundreds of Mapuche climbed that hill on foot to repudiate centuries of massacres. Another example is the Quinta Normal Park, a construction for urban leisure that was silently occupied by Mapuche for almost the entire twentieth century as a place for meeting fellow countrymen and countrywomen. A large part of the migrant Mapuche community was articulated there. As a watercourse that organised the ancient lof of this mapu and that today reminds us of segregation and racism, the Mapocho River was also an icon of this work, as was Cerro Navia, a municipality where hundreds of Mapuche families have been living since the time of the land seizures; families who have cast aside the veil of invisibility and made their presence felt between nika and ngillatuwe. Especially
noteworthy was the work MapsUrbe did in mapping the upper-class residences where so many Mapuche women worked as domestic servants. These were mainly areas of the elite: territories where, on 25 October 2020, the privileges conferred to them by the tyrant’s constitution were defended tooth and nail. In those ‘little houses in the upper quarter’, as Victor Jara sang, many Mapuche stories circulated, which MapsUrbe somehow tries to recall.

This book, born of an initial impulse coordinated by Olivia Casagrande, is also a powerful experimental methodological exercise. Colectivo MapsUrbe, whose names are listed throughout the book, succeeds in bringing a collaborative perspective to their work. This time, the extractivismo typical of the insensitive academicism is left behind, and critical energy is positioned and managed to transform an investigation into creation. What you will see in the book and hear in the audios is the result of a sort of reflexive ethnography, very engaged and mixed (champurreada) with photography, music, cartography, theatrical work, and acts of walking or traversing. It is a complex mosaic that leaves us speechless, wondering, and inevitably sensing. Feeling.

The performative power of this project and this book is undoubtedly a fundamental element that permeates all of its materials and representations. The Collective managed to develop interventions, reconstructions of images from the 1960s, theatrical experiments in the site-specific mode, and alterations in the geographical imaginary of the eastern metropolitan uptown that is Chile’s own Upper East Side, as well as videos and remarkable pop creations. Once again, the stimuli generated by the creative power of all the people who make up the group set this particular ethnographic work on a different and counter-hegemonic path in terms of methodological practices.

It is difficult to locate the heart of the project, or rather, a single heart. MapsUrbe is a network of heartbeats that addresses the Mapuche migrant and diasporic question from different fronts. In this line, and to conclude, I would like to highlight the engagement with the history and emotional memory of Mapuche experiences that resonate in the present and connect us with our kinsfolk. All the works in the book are tinged with this memory. On the other hand, this initiative takes aim at the notion of a static and folklorised Mapuche identity. The Collective, by tensing the ‘imaginary of the Mapuche’ defended by a broad spectrum of subjects and institutions, disputes it without denying it, rather expanding it. It positions itself from an ontologically open possibility of being Mapuche, where otherness, shaped by being a diverse people, is not a face and a stamp. There, the champurria emerges as a vindication of our being more than a list of attributes or an expectation. There, it upholds the fact that life in the diaspora is also part of the history of our people.