Performing the jumbled city
Casagrande, Olivia

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Nütxam / A conversation

Olivia Casagrande, Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez
Olivia: It is not easy to recall it now. It was a tough moment. I remember when we met … Well, I was coming from attempts with an urban Mapuche organisation that had rejected me very decisively. I was looking for someone who wanted to participate in my project, and I naively thought that, as my idea was collaborative work, people would naturally want to collaborate. It was naïve of me to think that just coming up with something collaborative would be enough; so that was one of the first things that brought me back to the reality of relationships. At that point, it was the meeting with the Pilquil sisters that acted as a bridge, and I think there are two things I would like to comment on here. The first is that I got to know them through contacts I have with Mapuche exiles in the Netherlands. That’s what made it happen; when we discovered that we had friends in common, what acted as a bridge was this relationship with the Mapuche exile. Also, when we randomly met at an event at the Librería Le Monde Diplomatique in Santiago, it was Achille who caught Elizabeth’s attention. Ultimately, the fact of being with my son and being a mother, also changes the fate of what happens in the ‘field’. It was Monica who then made the contact with you, both Monica and Elizabeth.

My first encounter was with Claudio, who was giving a class on inter-cultural education to kindergarten teachers at the Kvme Felen Health Centre, run by Elizabeth Pilquil. What I remember very well is that you were calm and open to listening to me, and I could see that you were interested in the project and the issues it addressed, so I felt relieved. I was expecting to be rejected again, but I relaxed talking to you. Then, after I told you what I wanted to do, we took the bus together. We were both going to the centre of Santiago, but you were going to work and I was going home, something quite telling in terms of the geography of the city. There, on the bus, you went on a fifteen-minute tirade on mapuchógrafos. You never explicitly directed it at me specifically, but it touched a nerve with me personally, because obviously, even if you were not talking about me in particular, the whole diatribe was about the place I was occupying and what I was doing: a European anthropologist researching indigenous people in Latin America. What I felt was that I couldn’t disagree with what

1 During the civil–military dictatorship of Pinochet, the Pilquil Lizama family suffered political persecution and exile. They spent a few years in the Netherlands, where the Railaf Zuñiga family was also exiled, with which Olivia got in contact during her PhD research.

2 Mapuchógrafos: literally those who write about the Mapuche, and are mostly ‘white’ academics, often European. The use of this term is part of the critique of academic extractivismo, in which the produced knowledge ends up being instrumentally appropriated by only one of the actors participating in its construction.
you were saying. Your words made a strong impact on me, and I got off the bus thinking that you would probably never want to talk to me again. I assumed it was another refusal, but then I also thought, ‘You know what? Maybe I’ll contact him again, I’ll see.’ And the truth is, when I called you, we got together again and we talked and there was no rejection on your part. I expected a rejection, but there was never any, and I also had the impression that you didn’t expect me to contact you again either, but I don’t know about that, because that’s your part of the story …

_Claudio:_ Yes, I think, in a way, that – after my tirade about the mapuchógrafos, the political economy of knowledge, and how there is a tradition of the north studying the south, reiterating, therefore, forms of knowledge production that are profoundly colonial – by the time that you had gotten off the bus and then called me back, what then happened from my point of view was that I thought, ‘Let’s open up to this.’ After all, you wouldn’t have called me either if you hadn’t also been willing to cross the border, step outside your comfort zone and get muddy, and think about the tensions of roles and positions in the politics of knowledge production. All of this is quite uncomfortable for traditional views of anthropology.

Now, on the other hand, the truth is that I didn’t do it consciously either; I just went on a rant. It wasn’t a matter of tactics; there was no tactic or strategy at the time. It was simply a very visceral rage about the way knowledge is produced. It really had nothing to do with you, and never had, actually. However, it did have to do with the precariousness of my job at that time too; an attempt to get into the academic world but with a lot of precariousness. In short, all those kinds of things were also thrown into that bus. Now, all in all, I think that from the beginning it allowed us to permanent question ourselves and our position in the processes of knowledge construction, particularly in the indigenous world, in a city on the periphery of the world. It made it possible not to pretend this wasn’t an issue, but on the contrary, to ask ourselves the fundamental questions we had to ask ourselves when we were trying to produce knowledge from this place and to know, therefore, what role we had in this and how at the same time we generated tensions around these roles, which was a fundamental element of the project.

With Roberto, we had a previous process that had been fostered by a series of projects, and which asked questions very similar to those you raised, to do with the city and the Mapuche, and at the same time, with attempts at disciplinary crossovers, between theatre, history and urban cultural studies. Precisely, one day Roberto had invited me to his house through Dani Millaleo without us knowing each other and had said to me, ‘There’s a project I’d like to do about the Mapuche breadmakers in Santiago. It’s a site-specific performance.’ So, with Roberto, we had just done that work,
which was called *Panarife*, and suddenly this came along. I said, ‘It fits like a glove.’ It was perfect; like everything was on track, and well, when you asked me who else would be suitable, I immediately thought of Roberto, and then Roberto also joined the group.

*Roberto:* Well, after that Olivia arrived. We had an activity with Mapuche artists at the GAM, 3 I presented an extract from *Panarife* and then we chatted a little bit. She seemed a bit nervous; we were in a very noisy place and we couldn’t hear each other well. We agreed to meet up another day. I remember I was looking after a friend’s house, and Oli came to see me. I thought this interesting of an anthropologist, what she thought; first of all, to work with Mapuche in Santiago and, then, to think of theatre as a possibility, and specifically site-specific, as a possibility to lead a process that, it seemed, was more theoretical than artistic. Then the three of us started to get together, do you remember? We made the first field visit following the course of the Mapocho.

*Claudio:* From the very first moment, we were filled with tensions, and we have been elaborating on those tensions. Is *co-labor* possible with all these tensions crossing us? We interrogated this to the point that we eventually came up with concepts to try to resolve this dilemma between our subjective roles and the structures of knowledge production. We were permanently seeking to dissolve or to challenge them, which tells of how we dealt with that structure; how our agencies managed to, even if minimally, question those processes. That is why, as I was going to say, notions like ‘the producer’ emerge: rather than a role of leading the process, of directing it, this notion takes form of ‘producing’ moments and spaces for the sharing of reflections and concerns. Something else that came forward when we began to invite people, brothers and sisters to join the project, was the question of how were we going to consider them? Only as ‘witnesses’ or also as people who are reflecting and interpreting reality? That leap was always fundamental, including for thinking of the final products.

Ultimately, we were tensing ourselves, trying to create those shared moments and spaces, but at the same time, trying not to think that the *peñi* and *lamgen* who joined this project only had a role as ‘witnesses’, and that their words did not only describe a reality, but they were also interpreting it. Therefore, in that interpretation, there was also the production of knowledge to the point that they developed artworks themselves. In short, it was an attempt to disrupt the logic of *co-labor*. Towards what? I don’t know exactly, but at least interrogating some of its dynamics and above all, not playing dumb and not overlooking the fact that in the end there is still a structure.

3 Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Centre.
and a political economy of knowledge. This is very important because what often happens with the logic of *co-labor* is an attitude of ‘I am very well connected to the communities and there is no asymmetry.’ No, here we always foregrounded the role of power relations; power within our relations was always at the forefront. What we do with our power is a question that is not easily resolved, but having that primary intuition allowed us to try to find answers, at least.

_Olivia_: Yes, it’s a question that I don’t think is resolved. Besides the fact that we did not resolve it, it probably cannot be resolved, but I do believe that being in that question is fundamental. For me, from my position as an anthropologist, it changed my perspective because I came from work that, although not necessarily *co-labor* as understood in more radical terms, was still politically engaged, like testimony, the biographical, or community work; this idea of working in communion with people who want to tell their stories and to become an instrument of that is still something that has its own value, and that had its value in a particular historical period. I remember the exact moment when my perspective changed, though. I was proposing this idea of biographical interviews or digital storytelling – basically walking around the city and using video collaboratively to tell the participant’s life histories – and you, Claudio, said – I don’t remember what exactly but it was something like: ‘Look, no interviews.’ We were still in the planning phase of the project, so you gave me a very clear limit, saying, ‘I’m not up for interviews, and I’m not up for enabling you to interview other people. I’m not interested in that.’ So, that’s when I started to think about what that means, and what it means is that we are working with people, as you said now, who are not there to describe but to interpret, which is totally different. So, I think that this changed the approach a lot and that it wasn’t simply about the indigenous experience of the city anymore, which would have had a testimonial aspect, and for which interviews, observations, data, are needed to make that experience accessible. It was about a shared space for the construction of representations, interpretations as artworks, or performances. There, the work of interpretation can be mine, yours, or the artist’s; everyone does their own, but the artwork has different dimensions, not purely a testimonial one. In that sense, it changed my perspective a lot and I got over the anxiety of the interview and data collection. Obviously, for a while I was thinking, ‘What am I going to do without interviews?’ but then I let it go.

Another among the discussions we had a lot, was that, even if there were and are affective personal relationships, even if we did develop friendship, that was not necessarily going to change the power relations we are caught into, and how to navigate being in antagonistic positions in structural terms, so to say, but enjoying an affective relationship in personal terms. That was,
for me, at times, the most difficult thing. I think this is very much part of our work *Antropofágias* – and that’s why I insisted so much on it, which perhaps at some point you hated, but I felt that I needed to somehow find a way to represent the possibility of affectivity *within* antagonistic relations, and how both exist at the same time, and often the only thing one can do is to recognise it.

**How to produce knowledge?**

*Claudio:* I believe the reflection about *how* to produce knowledge – because it undoubtedly already came in the very gestation of the project – evolved necessarily because all these epistemological questions needed an action method. And that is also fascinating, that is, the question of how to overcome the boundaries of objectivity versus subjective notions also needed a way forward. One of the richnesses of the project was exploring methodologies and disciplinary crossovers. I feel that this is a very powerful possibility because it allows a diversity of people to come together in trying to ultimately produce knowledge but also criticism and challenge, which is something uncommon.⁴ At least in Chile, it is something quite uncommon. The possibility here of the crossover between theatre, anthropology, history and art is, in short, something that is almost non-existent in Chile, and it’s one of the richnesses of this process. I think Roberto’s role was fundamental here.

*Roberto:* Yes. Well, time allowed for all this. One thing we had in our favour was the time we had to build the process. In Chile, sometimes because of how cultural funds work, you do not have more than five months; six months is already a long time for the construction of a theatre piece, so having a creative process lasting more than a year was very much appreciated. In site-specific practices, of course, it’s common to work for a whole year, but given the reality of Chilean theatre, that’s not usually possible. That was important, as well as the time we had between workshops, too. We also had some breathing space; it wasn’t just the moment that we got together. Between one meeting and the next, time passed and ideas were being moulded. The group itself had time to elaborate and we gradually realised what we were looking at. In the beginning, when we got together with the other participants, each of us came with their own concerns but also not knowing exactly what we were coming for. For me, whenever a creation is approached, in a way, you know you’re going somewhere but you don’t know where, so I think that this vertigo was also part of the process. I remember the first time in the Plaza de Armas, when we tried to do a

⁴ The recent play *Trewa*, realised by Paula Gonzalez Siguel with the company Kimvn Teatro and in collaboration with Helene Risør is a notable exception.
decolonising exercise. We did a performative exercise, but then we felt uncomfortable with it. From our own emotional feelings we managed to grasp things and to interpret: in this case, Plaza de Armas was lost territory for us. It’s impossible to make it a Mapuche place and discomfort prevails there. The only possibility is of an anticolonial attitude or challenge.

Olivia: Yes, and I believe the contribution of theatre was also the possibility of reflecting on how one is always producer and performer. You have both roles at the same time, so you are working as a producer but you are also part of the performance, and that was something that materialised strongly for me when you asked me, ‘What do you want to do? Do you want to continue simply being an anthropologist or do you also want to be my assistant in the play?’ It was like going on and off stage all the time. I don’t know how to describe it. It was something that the three of us did in different ways but it was also part of the process.

Roberto: For me, it was pretty obvious but the subject of the assistant director was especially interesting because you have the method that being a researcher gives you and, in a way, that method helped us to organise the direction of the play as well. So, it was very pleasant to have you as my assistant, but I remember you asked me, ‘And what does the director’s assistant have to do?’ You were with your pencil and notebook waiting for me to say, ‘Well, number one …’, but I just said, ‘I don’t know. It’s to be by one’s side.’

Olivia: [laughing] Well, though being by one’s side seems simple, it’s not, but being by one’s side really is what it’s all about.

Roberto: Of course, and I also appreciated working with you: the analysis that you give, that mirror is thought-provoking. I remember when we were already working on the script, and at some point, we got lost. That’s where I think these transdisciplinary debates were critical. At the moment when we were working on the closing of the play, we wanted to close in a **ruka**. That was very natural but it was obvious, and we problematised that obviousness. We realised that our intention was not to represent the most widespread and official image of the Mapuche. In the project, we tried to deny folklore and common representations of the Mapuche and I believe that through the constant exchange and critique from the analysis that was made, the play achieved a very good condensation of the whole process, and those same questions were raised with particular vigour during the social uprising [in October 2019]. Well, eventually, when we were going to conclude in the **ruka**, Claudio said, ‘If we finish in the **ruka** in the periphery of the city, it almost ends up like a cliché Mapuche representation, but we are looking to generate a tension with the centre of the city.’ I always remember that
phrase. So we decided to close in the centre, and then it became ‘Let’s close on the Welen Hill’, which has always been a space of constant dispute as the hill of the colonial founding of Santiago. We know that they took that space away from us, but we are going to take it back until the hill is called Welen again.

Olivia: It’s also very significant that the Welen Hill was the one place that had always escaped us. During the entire research period, we were supposed to go and we couldn’t: first, because there was this super *cuica* gastronomic fair or something; then, we were supposed to go again but there were demonstrations because Camilo Catrillanca was killed. That is, there were maybe two or three times when we had to go and we couldn’t. Then, when we wanted to do a re-founding of the city on the hill, it was the group itself who said, ‘We’re not interested in doing any re-founding at all.’ Of course, that possibility alone has certain patriarchal and colonial meanings. In the end, it was such an important place for the closing of the play but until then it had escaped us …

‘What we did is CHAMPURRIA’

Claudio: At one point the question was of discovering something, an immutable truth about the city, but then became more than a discovery: it was a utopian exercise. There was a double dimension to it. It wasn’t just about looking for a Mapuche origin. For example, when we had the workshop on the San Cristóbal Hill. We climbed the hill and there Raúl Molina, the geographer, explained to us what this Mapuche territory must have been like before the arrival of the Spaniards. There, there was a possibility, which was to go and find out what life was like for the Mapuche before the colony, where they were located, what the most important hills were and what they meant. Yet, we were not so much interested in that; rather, it was the exercise of, as we said, ‘staining the city’ and the possibilities that the existence of Mapuche in a metropolitan city opens up. That is, not to look for the Mapuche origin before the metropolitan city, but on the contrary, how this metropolitan city changes as a result of the Mapuche inhabiting it. I think that there, in a way, we were asking ourselves what decolonising means. Does decolonising mean returning to an origin? Or does decolonising mean assuming the colonial condition and from that contradictory, impure, complex, variegated place, imagining new possibilities and creating new human beings?

There was also the imagining of spaces and cities that arise from the question of the colonial. I believe that what Roberto was saying, about going to the *ruka* or not, was, in a way, part of the debate about what it
means to decolonise and what decolonisation means. Did it mean ending up in the ruka to show and prove that we are still who we once were? Or, rather, do we end up on Santa Lucía Hill, marking it as Welen Hill with new bodies, from a new foreshadowing and a completely new scenario of these buildings that crowned this contemporary scenography, which our bodies managed to tense? In the end, what we have, once again, is a question about what kind of metropolis we inhabit on this continent. Is it possible to speak of modernity, or to speak of multiple modernities including Mapuche modernity as well? How does this Mapuche modernity defy this capitalist, white modernity?

It was a very good decision to conclude on top of the Santa Lucía or Welen Hill, and especially to close with the poetry of David Aniñir Guiltraro. If there is an origin, as regards to MapsUrbe, it is a poem written in Cerro Navia by David, a Mapurbe, a Santiago-born Mapuche, which is very contradictory. Therefore, if there is an origin, the origin is there, in that poetry, and it is very nice to think that our origin is in a poem. Indeed, Chile was founded on a poem; La Araucana is a founding poem of Chile. From the quill of Ercilla, Chile was born, and in some way, from David’s pen, we were born. We are human beings who do not want to define ourselves as Mapurbe, but who feel in that place a possibility to ask ourselves about our future and our identity. The idea of being born from a poem is fair. It is beautiful.

Olivia: And it is also looking to the future, because the last scene is set in the future. In a way, it’s situating that imagination in the future. Again, it returns to the utopia. That idea of staining the city is also relevant with poetry too. When David speaks to the Cauplicán – who is there, but who is not a Caupolicán either; he is, in fact, an indigenous person from another place, a Mohican – what does he say to him? David, in his genius, calls him ‘peñi’, and he sort of appropriates a false representation of the Mapuche in Santiago, as if saying, ‘It doesn’t matter if it’s false. It is still up here on the hill looking down at the city, so be it a Mapuche, and that’s it.’ It is as if his perspective allows that imagination of the future, with all the bodies that are there and concluding with memories but looking towards the future, because there is also Simona’s monologue as closure, and all that was possible because of the Welen.

Claudio: It’s a much more cannibalistic attitude; I think that’s where it is going. MapsUrbe had a cannibalistic flavour, with the logic of ‘you taught me your language and with it, I curse you’. That was the fundamental content of MapsUrbe from the beginning. From there, it was in dialogue

5 This is a free quote of Shakespeare’s The Tempest.
with a lot of other categories that were in the Mapuche world; the idea of champurria to think about identities, but also to think about forms of knowledge production. That is also something beautiful. That is to say, champurria was also the mixture between archive and artwork, to champurrear was also to construct a site-specific performance that contained other texts, cannibalised texts, with champurria also as a method. Ultimately, one of the things we were giving up was looking for essences, and that’s why it’s hard for us to say that Mapurbe is an identity. We don’t believe it. That was another of our discoveries. We don’t believe that Mapurbe exists as an identity, but rather as a poetic and political problem; champurria is not simply an identity but rather poses a problem, the question of form, not only about the content of things, but also about how they are made, or how they are gestated. I think that was very important in MapsUrbe and, for me at least, the question of method was enlightening: it is a question that always comes second as if it were easy to answer, and here it becomes fundamental.

Roberto: Yes, what we actually did was champurria in itself: this champurreado of anthropology; the champurreado of this group of people, you who come from Italy but work in Manchester, we as children of generations who were born in the south and who adapted here. The champurria is involved in the whole process, and well, the participants too; they were all champurreados. Champurria was the whole process and also the result of this work, and decolonising goes that way: perhaps a method to decolonise is to champurrear.

Olivia: Well, the same use you make of the site-specific always caught my attention. The site-specific is a Western method and you mix it with Mapuche storytelling – the epew – but at the same time, the epew are very much site-specific in themselves, even before the site-specific existed as a method and certainly independently of it. The perspective changes again. It’s not about using Western methods applied to indigenous traditions, but also the other way around.

Roberto: There is also something of a learning process in that process. I believe that identity and, for the same reason, champurria is never unique and defined. Identity is changing day by day, or you can construct it day by day. It’s not that my identity is this and that is it, which I think is also very twentieth century; it is about what is being built today. Perhaps we can’t have our past, but we can forge our future, and from there we can ‘stain’ our identities.
‘THE POETRY AND THE CHALLENGE OF CO-LABOR’

Roberto: This also has to do with that stubborn habit of having memory. It is the very story that we are constructing when we relate to a Mapuche group in the 80s that climbed the Welen Hill, and then we, with the audience, walk, thirty years later, up the same hill. Most likely, a Mapuche group will also try and climb that hill again in thirty years. I think it was also experiencing and listening to these voices that are not usually heard. One is more used to one’s own generation, and in this case, it was a very heterogeneous group, of different diversities – sexual diversities, diversities of territory, of trade and of generations – which allowed us to draw another map of what it is to be Mapuche today here in Santiago and the world. In the same way, by writing from afar or by having this Zoom meeting through digital formats, we are also bringing together other territories that we do not inhabit.

Claudio: We have tried to put all of this into the book. It has been a long process, but it has the same intention. How can multiple forms of knowledge production be expressed in a text? On the one hand, we made a play; that is to say, the play has this condition where mixture, playing with bodies, textualities, representations and sonorities give certain possibilities and much more in the public space. However, a book prioritises the textual, so we have tried to give shape to this diversity of formats, giving each of them the same hierarchy. That has been the most complicated part; in other words, not to think that now, at last, comes the moment of interpretation, or that the moment has now finally come to interpret reality after gathering information. No. The writing of the script, the images and the sonorities, which appear in a different format in the book, and the textual, as well as the articulated and collective process of interpretation, and then trying to give all of it a certain symmetry within a text has been challenging at the very least.

Olivia: Yes, because the play had an ephemeral dimension that is very difficult to reproduce in a text. Yet at the same time, we didn’t want to make a text that merely explained the process. We aimed for a text that could – with all its limitations but still – go back to that process conveying all the complexity of its layers: the visual and the sound, for example, or letting the visual have its own dimension, not only ornamentally but also epistemologically. Of course, it was a process that had limits – also, structural limits – due to being far away, regardless of the pandemic. Especially considering that most of the authors had concerns that came before the book because it is not their job, so some differences are there and are very difficult to overcome. As we once discussed, my grant was structured in such a way that in the third year, when you have to write, you have to ‘come back’.
Beyond being caught off-guard by the October uprising and afterwards by the pandemic, there is also the fact that we realised how trying to write collaboratively has to deal with, once again, the geopolitics of knowledge and power relations. The only way forward is probably to assume this and play with different levels of collective and individual authorship, which, I think, is also one of the interesting things about the book; how it tries to work with different perspectives and authorships at the same time. That, I believe, is the poetry and the challenge of co-labor: assuming the asymmetry but dreaming that it is still possible. That is the path we are on: to return to that bus as many times as necessary, to that discussion that is never resolved and never ends, and to learn how to be in it.