Performing the jumbled city

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PART I

Santiago Waria
The (post)colonial city
Proscenium

Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez
Santiago Waria: Pueblo Grande de Wigka is a site-specific theatre play that was realised in the context of interdisciplinary research in which history, anthropology and urban cultural studies were articulated, eventually developing a montage about Mapuche life in the city of Santiago. The term ‘site-specific’ is used in the arts for works that are created in, for and through a specific place, most often the same in which they are then exhibited. During the creative process, both aesthetic and ethical decisions are taken around the materiality of the site and its history, transforming a particular territory or place into the protagonist and catalyst for creation. Places are conceived as narratives and events performed and reproduced in a new light, recontextualised through the layers of their previous occupations (Pearson, Shanks 2001). This way of working defies common patterns of scenic or theatrical representations. Just as site-specific art was born as a movement that challenges the museum, site-specific theatre challenges the theatre building and black or ‘Italian’ box, bringing to the forefront debates about the scenic space (see Lehmann 1999; Pearson, Shanks 2001; Pearson 2010). On this subject, Hans Ties Lehmann affirms that ‘theatre […] sets off in search of a spatial architecture or another location […] it is not much more than the term ‘site-specific’ suggests: the space or ‘site’ corresponds to a text that is ‘showed’ and cast in a new light or optic through theatre’ (Lehmann 1999: 86). It is this ‘new optical light’ that interests us in the exercise of site-specific theatre. Through the lens of the gazes of young Mapuche living in metropolitan Santiago, we seek to display the history of a native people, in creative tension with what was and continues to be the ‘colonial ground zero’ in these southern lands of South America. In this exercise, the play Santiago Waria constitutes a performance in the perspective proposed by Diana Taylor as ‘vital acts of transference, transmitting social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through repeated actions’ (2016: 22). This definition crosses over into the field of the performative and brings our theatre play closer to actions such as gathering on commemorative dates in the Santa Lucía/Welen Hill, acts that contain elements of theatricality, even if these are not their main objective. Along these lines, Ericka Fischer-Lichte points out that a characteristic of the performative is ‘its capacity to destabilise dichotomous conceptual constructions’ (2004: 50), so that the performative/performance relationship is not necessarily the same as that of subject/object, creator/spectator, blurring the boundaries of these pairs/opposites. Fischer-Lichte invites us to understand the ‘performative’ as a driving force that may or may not generate performance, for it does not seek to be the presentation of ‘something’ but rather works and operates to generate that

1 The definition of performance and performative also changes over time and depends on socio-historical contexts. For example, neither in Spanish nor in Portuguese there is a word that captures all the dimensions of the English ‘performance’ (see Taylor 2016).
‘something’. In this sense, performative acts do not express a preconceived identity: they generate identity, for identities, as embodied and social realities, are always constituted through performative acts (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 55; see also Butler 1993). The performative, being constitutive of reality, is thus what nourishes, mobilises and drives a ‘performance’, as a social act occurring in a given space and time, with a beginning and an end.

**Making site-specific theatre, a brief history**

Site-specific approaches to theatre and performance have been taken forward in different contexts, making of each chosen site a particular version of history, culture and local identity. Each experimental creation is somehow ephemeral and unrepeatable. In Latin America, research is scarce concerning site-specific theatre, although the book *El archivo y el repertorio. La memoria cultural performática en las américa*s by Diana Taylor probably allows us to delve deeply into our continental specificity and addresses the profound relations between performance art and Latin American political life. In the blurring of the line between performance and performativity, as outlined above, Taylor states that in this socio-political context, we need to understand practices such as civic disobedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity and sexual identity, *as performance*, observing how they are ‘rehearsed and carried out daily in the public sphere’ (Taylor 2015: 35). To understand them as performance is to see and recognise how performance also acts as an epistemology. Occurrences in which subaltern political practices emerge in public life through rehearsed and repeated bodily tasks are innumerable in our continent, especially in urban settings. The demand for justice emerges thus as performative and ritualised, such as in the most renowned political practices of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the hoods of the Zapatistas or recently, *Las Tesis* of Chilean feminism.2 The performativity of these practices needs to be understood as the embodiment and enactment of a political culture, strongly related to historical contingency and broader social meanings, and also operating as an epistemology: ‘performative acts’, or what Richard Schechner calls ‘twice-behaved behaviour’ (1985: 36).

Another key issue of site-specific theatre is, as mentioned in the Introduction, the relationship between body and place. In this regard, the elaboration

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2 The collective Las Tesis is a feminist collective founded in Valparaíso in 2019 that created the performance *Un violador en tu camino* (‘A rapist in your path’), an adaptation and choreographing of an extract of the *Carabineros* (police) anthem as a claim against femicide and sexual abuse, and the complicity of the patriarchal powers of the state, the police and the judiciary. After two presentations in Chile in the midst of feminist protests, the performance became viral on social networks. It was translated and adapted by various feminist collectives around the world.
around the notion of place by Natalia Sarli and Gustavo Radice provides some important insights:

In the analysis of theatre practice, a definition of the complex nature of the space/body link includes taking the following into account: 1. That theatrical space is constituted of a series of relations of proportion, route and distance codified by cultural experience. In short: theatrical space is, like any space, a perceptual-symbolic construction. 2. That in any analysis of space, the body is present: spatiality is constructed and organised from a mobile reference point. It is the subject who defines spatial relations from his or her own physical and symbolic frame. 3. That there is perceived space (related to the senses); experiential space (related to the affective); and symbolic space (associated with imaginaries and social practices); at the intersection of the three is the notion of place, understood as the series of spaces where action is meaningfully articulated. Ultimately, place is the intersection of space/time. (Radice and Sarli 2009: 2)

It is from this perspective that we need to think about performativity in public spaces, taking into account the entanglement of the body (in our case, the Mapuche body) and place, as well as how they are in turn related to layers of temporalities. Santiago, with its different sites, traverses the history of the Mapuche diaspora, turning the urban space into a stage shaped by the orally transmitted memories and family stories of the children and grandchildren of migration. We are gathered amid evocations that today constitute precious references in our walking through the city. In this relationship with orality, site-specific performance significantly intersects with the epeu, the Mapuche ancestral story. These are place-bound narratives always embedded in specific sites, elaborating on the features of the environments and making sense of particular landscapes and natural events, whether seasonal or sudden and unexpected, such as earthquakes and tsunamis (see Cayuqueo Martínez 2017). These stories are modes of intergenerational communication, in the richness of the transference and sharing of knowledge crucial for Mapuche oral tradition. Orality, in turn, needs gestures and actions, transforming those whispers into, again, ‘performative acts’.

As such, the methodology through which Santiago Waria was constructed and staged arose from the dialogue and tensions between site-specific theatre, Mapuche storytelling, and ethnographic practices. These approaches were drawn together by their common endeavour of establishing a sense of place in a negotiation that reworked the links between ‘tradition’ and contemporary times, resulting in decolonial representations of indigeneity as a theatrical way of resisting imperial ideologies (Fawzia Afzal-Khan 1997). The entanglement between narrative, performativity, place and the construction and sharing of social meanings is thus key when we think of the Mapuche context. Ceremonial rituals (gillatun, mitxam, txawwin); the history and tensions related to specific places (Santiago as the capital del Reyno) and
its sites (Plaza de Armas, Quinta Normal, Providencia and the Welen Santa Lucía Hill); and traditional practices of storytelling are all key elements for the creative process of construction of a performance. This makes emplaced social knowledge a protagonist for theatrical practices, where memory is sedimented in staged spaces to represent the Mapuche experiences of violence and dignity in the Chilean metropolis.

Before going into details about the process of constructing Santiago Waria, a mention of the few companies and theatre projects that engage with site-specific theatre and performance in the Latin American context and that have inspired our own work is called for. The Brazilian director Antonio Araujo has staged several productions focusing on cities, particular neighbourhoods, and rivers with his company Teatro da Vertigem, created in 1992. Araujo’s work gained international recognition for its audacity and originality, based on in-depth historical and cultural analysis of the city, from which creative possibilities are articulated. This theatre company has recently adapted one of its works for the international festival Santiago a Mil: Patronato 999 metros was staged in an intercultural neighbourhood of Santiago, recasting Bom Retiro, originally realised in São Paulo.

Another adaptation recently brought to Chile is the Argentinian play Un Hueco, reproduced in 2012 for the dressing rooms of the Estadio Nacional, a place of detention, torture and death during Pinochet’s civil-military dictatorship. A similar work was performed by the Swedish company Poste Restante, which toured part of Barrio Italia with the production Closing Time in 2013. Along the same line, even if with a very different theme and style, the German company Rimini Protokoll developed Remote Santiago in 2014. More recently, locally developed theatrical proposals linked to the notion of site-specific theatre have increased, with works such as Correo by Paula Aros in 2016, taking place in the Chilean Post Office building on the corner of the Plaza de Armas where Pedro de Valdivia’s house was located at the beginning of the 17th century, and Vitrina HD, performed in commercial shop windows in the city of Valparaíso by the company La Peste.

All of these performative representations contributed to bringing the site-specific into the Chilean theatrical context, at the same time introducing the possibility of adaptations beyond the sites where the theatre works were originally created – especially concerning the work of Teatro da Vertigem and Rimini Protokoll. This opens up challenges and opportunities for the further development of this methodology, closely related to the play Santiago Waria and this book: is it possible to adapt the story of the migration of a racialised and colonised people to any metropolitan experience in the world? What material elements would convey the possibility of reproducing similar connections such as the monuments to colonisers, the precariousness of labour and the subterranean memories of the city?
While we do not have any definitive answer in this regard, we note that site-specific theatre is as much about place as it is about the links between different sites and stories; it is about ephemerality and repetition at the same time, similarly to any other oral narrative or enacted performance. In this regard, our own creative process needs to acknowledge a strong reference to the work of Samoan choreographer Lemi Ponifasio, staged with the company *Mau Mapuche*, of which he is the director and founder. Formed by a multidisciplinary group of Mapuche artists, this company presented the piece ‘Ceremonia Performativa’ on the Santa Lucía/Welen Hill in January 2015, on the Caupolicán terrace. As we will see in what follows, the terrace was named after the *toqui* Kalfú Licán, an important Mapuche leader fighting Spanish colonisation. A sculpture, supposedly depicting this warrior but actually inspired by the Muhhekumneuw or Mohican people, makes it the perfect place for interrogating imaginaries of indigenous otherness (see Chapter 4). *Ceremonia Performativa* was intended for this particular site in the city as a symbolic attempt at territorial and spiritual recovery, simultaneously addressing images and imaginations of Mapuche in the capital city.

In *Santiago Waria: Pueblo Grande de Wigka* we created a different and yet strongly related version of this same site. Digging deeper into how other Mapuche before us had engaged with it, we found the documentary that inspires the title of the theatre play, *Santiago, pueblo grande de Huínca*, in which a group of Mapuche people in Santiago climbed the same hill in 1986, in the midst of the dictatorship, to hold a traditional ceremony for the planting of a cinnamon tree. The choice of our own title as an almost literal quote sought to honour the historical significance of the hill, a site from where both the past and the present can be defied.

**SANTIAGO WARIA: PUEBLO GRANDE DE WIGKA: THE PROCESS**

Concluding the MapsUrbe project with a site-specific performance was not always part of the plan, and was rather elaborated during the course of the research. Nevertheless, when looking at it from today’s perspective, we can trace the process as somehow inevitably leading to the construction of *Santiago Waria*. First of all, as in any site-specific project, the interdisciplinary team proved essential. Not only were actors and creators needed, but other professionals significantly permeated the creative process — from designers to linguists to anthropologists and historians — reading the site in its different layers. The MapsUrbe project provided all the necessary elements, not only for creating a site-specific experience but also for nurturing it during an

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3 I was also part of the company as the assistant director to Lemi Ponifasio.
in-depth research process. It was thus fundamental that the group was made up of young Mapuche with a family and collective history of rural-urban migration, withholding memories of domination and endurance in the context of the Chilean state. In the relationship between the community and the site, Santiago is not just any kind of space, and this is the ‘optical lens’ through which we looked at the city and its spaces.

Moving from this crucial node, we might retrospectively say that the creative process was carried out in four parts: pre-production, production, creation and display. During pre-production, the broader research project was designed by myself, Claudio and Olivia, reading Santiago as a sort of map and trying to discover the script behind the urban and social fabric. Various sites in the capital were selected as belonging to the Mapuche trajectories of the city, from peripheral settlements to more affluent neighbourhoods. During our preliminary wandering throughout the city, we first followed the Mapocho River. In its journey, the ‘stream that thinks of itself as a river’, as Pedro Lemebel would put it, goes from the upper-class neighbourhood of Lo Barnachea to the peripheral municipality of Cerro Navia. In both areas, Mapuche names can be found: in the former, generally in luxurious gated communities named with Mapuche words in a folkloristic and appropriative gesture; in Cerro Navia, in poblaciones and neighbourhoods where many of the residents are Mapuche. Cerro Navia is also where the poet David Anínir Guiltraro – whose verses inspired this project in the first place – was born, raised, and still lives.

After approaching the map of the city through the Mapocho, we selected key points of the Mapuche historiography in the city and involved a group of young Mapuche in the project. During a process lasting several months, we visited different sites within the city, locating the paths and traces of Mapuche in Santiago. Each site we visited challenged or welcomed us – sometimes both – in unveiling words, images, sounds and silences. In some places we wrote, in others, we improvised and played with different methods, and in yet others, we collected reactions of passers-by or the police (as we will see in Chapters 2 and 3) to be incorporated into the final script, shaping it significantly. This brings us back to the ‘power’ of place and how different sites within the city became part of the theatre script as if they were ‘texts’ themselves. As such, the structure of the narrative and the final route of the site-specific performance were deeply entangled. The path taking the audience through Mapuche history in the city of Santiago was composed of a selection of the places we had been engaging with during the prior research process, those that were most significant for the group, or those generating frictions

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4 This is a strong example of how, with site-specific methodologies, the relationship with the spectator is one in which not only the final exhibition but also the very creative process leading up to it is shared and ‘showed’ by bringing the audience into the site in which and through which the theatre piece was first conceived and then scripted.
and affections. Even if not all the places addressed during the previous research stage ended up being part of the final performance, the creative work developed during each workshop was key for the construction of Santiago Waría. Here, I briefly outline the most meaningful aspects of this process.

The first workshop was held in the Plaza de Armas, the central square in downtown Santiago, a material expression of colonial history and its continuities. The monumentality of the space – surrounded by the Cathedral, the National History Museum and the former house of Pedro de Valdivia (the conquistador of Chile) – allowed for a reflection on the past and the recursivity of coloniality, as well as a broader focus on socio-political relationships between the Mapuche and the dominant state. On a different level, the first workshop also envisaged the sharing of the research participants’ personal experiences and memories of their own relationship with the Chilean capital. The second workshop took place in Cerro Navia, one of the more densely populated municipalities on the outskirts of Santiago, that is home to indigenous Mapuche mixing with the Chilean working class and pobladores. The workshop was organised in a local Mapuche ceremonial centre, with the peculiarity of having its ruka (traditional house) burned down and never re-built due to a lack of funding. The Mapuche urban poet David Aniñir Guiltraro, who lives in Cerro Navia, discussed with us the ‘archaeology of the Mapurbe’ and further re-elaborations of the concept – key for young urban Mapuche since the early 2000s (see Introduction). Issues of urban indigeneity, gender and sexuality, and feminist and queer epistemologies emerged during the session. In the third workshop, we worked on the San Cristóbal Hill to observe the city from above and read the landscape of the valley along which the metropolitan region has expanded. The geographer Raúl Molina (expert in pre-colonial settlements in the area) accompanied us, illustrating ancient indigenous occupations and territories. These were then juxtaposed with the present-day experiences of the participants, beginning with pictures of places in the city that felt meaningful to them. From this session, two research participants, Marie-Juliette and Marcela, proposed and led another workshop focusing more closely on collective cartography, from which a map of everyday and biographical trajectories emerged, accompanied by a fundamental discussion about the meaning and possible re-elaboration of the tuwün (‘place of origin’ in the Mapuche tradition) within the city. Our fourth workshop was held in the upper-class sector of Providencia, where Mapuche women had been employed as live-in housemaids. Indeed, this was the case of many of our mothers and/or grandmothers: our own memories guided the design of the performative intervention in the area, entangling family stories with the broader Mapuche history of migration. Somehow complementary to this place is the Quinta Normal Park, where we contemplated indigenous urban life and its
representation in the 1961 ethnographic work of the anthropologist Carlos Munizaga. The Quinta Normal was – and still is – the place where many Mapuche living in the city used to meet, sharing moments of leisure, speaking their own language, and cultivating friendship and love.

Later, in the play, the Quinta also was the tour’s first station, where the audience was summoned and given an Mp3 device containing the audios that would guide them during the tour. The ‘rules of the game’ were explained, as Olivia and I introduced ourselves as their guides on the tour. We invited the audience to take a journey through the times and spaces of Santiago, discovering and following Mapuche paths through it from before it became the city they know today, or ‘before cement, there was earth’, as the voiceover says. Guiding the audience to imagine, play and travel through time, from there we moved through the city, just like the Mapocho, until our final destination on the Santa Lucía/Welen Hill. As already accounted in the Introduction, the hill, no matter how much we tried, was never a place for one of our workshops. As the site where the play concludes, it was nonetheless a place of many rehearsals, finally turning previous distances into gestures of tenderness, playfulness, and subversion.