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# ‘On Our Own Terms’: Refusal, Masks, and Indigenous Counter-narratives in Santiago de Chile Public Space

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**Abstract:** The exhibition *MapsUrbe: The invisible City (December 2018 – January 2019)* staged the creations of young Mapuche artists and activists addressing the politics and history of the indigenous diaspora in Santiago (Chile). Engaging with urban space materiality and the trajectories shaped by displacement and endurance within the city, the exhibition explored subversive aesthetics and political imaginations, crafting alternative spatialities and temporalities. Building on two years of collaborative work with Mapuche artists and activists, and moving from an initial act of generative refusal, this paper explores a redefinition of curatorial practices within collective artistic projects that aim at opposing dominant historical narratives. By reflecting on an experience of collective co-curation, it shows how these practices challenge established and institutionalized narratives embedded in public spaces, resulting in creative appropriations and powerful counter-narratives ‘on our own terms.’

**Keywords:** Mapuche art, curation, refusal, collaborative research, counter-narratives

On the top of the San Cristóbal hill, the air was thick and wet. The sky over Santiago was a flat off-white. Fog covered the metropolitan region extending below: only a few taller towers surfaced; the rest was almost invisible. The city was hiding underneath winter clouds and smog. The geographer Raúl Molina, weaving his arm and pointing to different directions, was talking about what we would not be able to glimpse anyway: the Maipo valley how it was hundreds of years ago, before the founding of ‘Santiago de Nueva Extremadura’ by Pedro de Valdivia in 1541. We – a group of young indigenous Mapuche living in the Chilean capital, and myself, an Italian anthropologist – followed his words by imagining, rather than actually seeing, the reference points he mentioned: the city’s twenty-six hills; the Mapocho river cutting through the urban space; the Andean mountain

range. His body against the whiteness of the clouds, gesturing at the city below from one of the terraced view-points of the hill, Raúl’s expert eye found its bearings even in the fog.

Before – and contrary to the tale of conquest and ‘discovery’ – the Maipo valley was far from uninhabited, occupied by a diverse society and a crossroad for travelling routes and commercial exchanges between locals and groups coming from other areas. In the sixteenth century, the valley was under the political control of the Inca. At the time the Spanish arrived, it was occupied by the *Picun che* (‘people of the north’), part of the broader society inhabiting the central-south of Chile and Argentina, later to be denominated ‘Mapuche.’ The *Picun che* were annihilated and assimilated by the Spanish during the first decades of the *Conquista*, the survivors fleeing south to join what remained an independent indigenous territory until the end of 1800, recognized by the Spanish Crown.<sup>1</sup> Three centuries later – after the indigenous territory was occupied and reservations were created as a consequence of the so-called ‘Pacification of the Araucanía,’ a military campaign culminating in 1883 – began a massive migration along the same route, but in the opposite direction: from indigenous rural communities to the metropolitan city. Putting into relation different historical moments and showing us how the valley was shaped by old and more recent trajectories of displacement and mobility, Raúl referred to the toponymy of the metropolitan region. He explained how it was linked to local genealogies, in turn connected to social relationship and power, connections now lost in the everyday use of toponyms whose indigenous etymology was bent to Spanish writing and pronunciation.<sup>2</sup> What got lost was the power to

1 Pablo Marimán, Sergio Caniuqueo, José Millalén, and Levil Rodrigo, *Escucha Winka! Cuatro Ensayos de Historia Nacional Mapuche y un epílogo sobre el futuro* (Santiago: LOM, 2006).

2 The Mapuche and indigenous toponymy in the Metropolitan region is found in hills and rivers (e.g. Cerro Manquehue; Cerro Quilapilun; Cerro Chena; río Mapocho; río Maipo), municipalities (e.g. Vitacura; Peñalolén; Quilicura; Ñuñoa); towns (e.g. Chicureo; Colipeumo; Lipangué); streets and avenues (e.g. Avenida Apoquindo; Avenida Macul; Tobalaba; PucuroYungay; Caci que Caupolicán; Caci que Guacondo; Caci que Millacura; Los Picunches); and metro stations (e.g. Ñuble; Pudahuel; Plaza de Maipú).

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name places linked to lineages and families living in a certain area. Still a key feature of the Mapuche traditional way of greetings and introducing oneself (*chaliwún*), genealogical place-bounded memory, for most indigenous people living in urban contexts, has become blurred. Turning to one of the girls present, Raúl asked how far would she be able to go in tracing back her family lineage. Her mother, her grandmother – she answered. Not many of the youth present would be able to say otherwise and move along lines that had been violently severed by the loss of land and language, by migration, displacement, and the life at the margins of the metropolitan city. Family stories and personal trajectories are mixed and messed up by the unwelcoming and yet cherished urban landscape, complexly tied to identity and belonging. Standing on top of the San Cristóbal hill – whose indigenous name was *Tupahue* (quechua ‘place of God’), now the name of one of the two swimming pools on its top – the hidden city appears bounded to contradictions and ambiguities. Under the fog does not lie any smooth – genealogical or else – line but rather creative ways of facing and enduring the disruptions of indigenous urban diasporas.

In Latin American countries, cities are usually conceived as ‘white’ (or mestizo at the most), non-indigenous spaces. Urban contexts, characterized by ‘colonial durability,’<sup>3</sup> articulate codes and aesthetics resulting in built forms that materialize and often disguise spatial practices of ‘whitening.’<sup>4</sup> In Chile, the imaginary of the capital as ‘civilized’ is opposed to the indigenous territories in the south of the country. The need of being ‘pacified’ is embedded in the city’s materialities: in its highly segregated urban development; in its toponymy, monuments, and landmarks; and in its European-like architecture associated with national institutions (the city center), economic power (the so-called ‘Sanhattan’ district), and wealthier residential areas (the north-eastern sector).<sup>5</sup> In this context, while the image of a

racially homogenous ‘white nation’<sup>6</sup> has long been questioned by a historically strong indigenous movement, recent affirmations of urban indigenous cultural and artistic productions have challenged the very imaginaries of the city.<sup>7</sup> Especially during the last two decades, current indigenous generations inhabiting Santiago have been engaging with the space of the capital as a context that is “both a resource for the imagination and an impediment to action.”<sup>8</sup> Questioning hegemonic history and bringing to the fore what Hector Nahuelpán has defined as “the grey zones of Mapuche history and identity,” recent political and creative manifestations have triggered the powerful emergence of other ways of being indigenous, outside the spatially bounded image of rural communities.<sup>9</sup> As shown by scholars working with Mapuche youths in urban contexts both in Chile and Argentina, current identitarian re-elaborations and sense of belonging are broad enough to include “multiple experiences of being” and claims to the city.<sup>10</sup>

6 Gilda M. Waldman, “Chile: Indigenas y Mestizos Negados,” *Política y Cultura* 21 (2004): 97–110; Sarah Walsh, “‘One of the most uniform races of the entire world’: creole eugenics and the myth of Chilean racial homogeneity,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 48, no. 4 (2015): 613–39.

7 Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, *Mapurbekistán: ciudad, cuerpo y racismo*, *Diaspora Mapuche en Santiago, siglo XX* (Santiago: Pehuén, 2021); Olivia Casagrande, Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, and Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, eds., *Performing the Jumbled City. Subversive Aesthetics and Anticolonial Indigeneity in Santiago de Chile*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

8 Abdumaliq Simone, “City of Potentialities,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 7–8 (2016): 5–29, 6.

9 Hector Nahuelpán, “Las zonas grises de la historia mapuche,” *Revista de Historia Social y de las Mentalidades* 17, no. 1 (2013): 9–31. Chile is among the countries in which the urbanization of indigenous population is at a higher rate in the region (81%). 614,881 people self-identified as Mapuche in the Metropolitan region of Santiago in the 2017 census. For recent literature on urban Mapuche, see, for example, Aravena, *Mapuches en Santiago*; Antileo Baeza, *Reflexiones de organizaciones mapuche en torno a la problemática de la urbanidad*; Antileo Baeza, “Políticas Indígenas, Multiculturalismo y el Enfoque Estatal Indígena Urbano,” 133–59; Imilán, *Warriache*; Sepúlveda and Zuñiga “Geografías indígenas urbanas,” 127–49; Antileo and Alvarado Lincopi, *Santiago Waria Mew*; Alvarado Lincopi, *Mapurbekistán*. For recent studies focusing on the broader Latin American context, see, for example, Kendra McSweeney and Brad D. Jokisch, “Beyond Rainforests: Urbanisation and Emigration among Lowland Indigenous Societies in Latin America,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no. 2 (2007): 159–80; Miguel N. Alexiades and Daniela M. Peluso, “Introduction: Indigenous Urbanization in Lowland South America,” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2015): 1–12; Philip Horn, *Indigenous Rights to the City: Ethnicity and Urban Planning in Bolivia and Ecuador* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2019).

10 Sarah Warren, “Territorial dreaming: youth mapping the Mapuche cross-border nation,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2019): 116–37, 117; see also Briones, “‘Our Struggle Has Just Begun,’” 99–121.

3 Ann L. Stoler. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016).

4 Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls. Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000); Lea Geler, “Categorías raciales en Buenos Aires. Negritud, blanquitud, afrodescendencia y mestizaje en la blanca ciudad capital,” *Runa: Archivo para las ciencias del hombre*, 37, no. 1 (2016): 71–87; Melissa Valle, “The discursive detachment of race from gentrification in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no.7 (2017): 1–20; Philipp Horn, “Inclusive peoples, the city and inclusive urban development policies in Latin America: Lessons from Bolivia and Ecuador,” *Development Policy Review* 36, no. 4: 483–501.

5 Francesca Márquez, “Identidad y fronteras urbanas en Santiago de Chile,” *Psicología en Revista* 10, no. 14 (2003): 35–51; Felipe Link, Felipe Valenzuela, and Luis Fuentes, “Segregación, estructura y composición social del territorio metropolitano en Santiago de Chile,” *Revista de Geografía Norte Grande* 62 (2015): 151–68.

While this certainly plays a part in territorial struggles as it constitutes an intervention into the country's identity politics, what interests me here is the questioning of hegemonic narratives and iconographies through creative re-imaginings and art. A key concept for approaching the indigenous creative field in Santiago is the term 'Mapurbe,' coined by the poet David Añiñir at the beginning of the 2000s.<sup>11</sup> Playing with the word Mapu-che (*mapu* meaning 'land' and *che* meaning both 'person' and 'people' in *mapudungun*), Mapurbe signifies a re-positioning within a productive tension between different spatialities and temporalities: rural communities and the urban space; family origin and migration; renewed ties with the indigenous territory, ongoing mobilities between 'there' and 'here'; the vague memory of indigenous words. This results in new ways of relating to the city, negotiating collective belongings as well as personal life-projects. Rather than simply referring to one particular identity (i.e. being a Mapurbe), this term conveys the ways young Mapuche reposition themselves within city space, dwelling within multiple identities and engaging in practices that often defy the essentialism of a static 'indigenous tradition' as much as the neoliberal multiculturalism of the Chilean State. In the artistic field in particular, this term refers to creative practices playing with multiple narratives and aesthetics: mixing Mapuche symbols and language with western artforms; introducing *mapudungun* or indigenous musical traditions into rap and pop music; mobilizing indigeneity in feminist queer engaged art, creating *mapudungun* neologisms in poetry and prose; intervening urban infrastructures with graffiti. From this perspective, indigeneity is both a fluid and a strongly claimed concept, beyond clearly defined identifiers (such as name, family, ability of speaking *mapudungun*, links with a specific community of origin), and capable of inhabiting, rather than resolving, tensions. As "creative act of *poiesis*,"<sup>12</sup> recent urban indigenous artistic manifestations engage with the sensory experiences of the present, claiming an active emplacement within the city, but also and at the same time intervening in the narrative of the past. Through the appropriation of colonial history and its representations, they defy official forms of commemoration and remembrance, questioning the smooth narrative of conquest, pacification, and the whitening of the nation.

In this article, I engage with this creative context as social phenomenon producing both audiences and meanings. I address the production of alternative narratives, representations, and subjectivities through the central ideas proposed by

this special section: curation as a social practice; and the active production of counter-narratives in public space (see Introduction). To do this, I draw on an ethnographic experience of collective creation and art exhibition in the frame of the project "MapsUrbe. The Invisible City, Mapuche mapping of Santiago de Chile" (2017–2021).<sup>13</sup> The research was first conceived as a critical cartography project involving urban Mapuche youths in Santiago, and focusing on their experiences of migration, displacement, and placemaking through a methodology of digital storytelling and biographical and walking interviews. While from its start, the research was meant to be collaborative, I struggled with finding someone who actually was interested in collaborating. After a few failed attempts, I got in touch, through a common friend, with Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, Mapuche historian and social scientist, and Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, Mapuche director, performer, and writer. The beginning of our collaboration wasn't smooth either: after a few encounters and discussions, it became clear that as much as they were interested in what I was proposing – addressing the Mapuche diaspora from the perspective of indigenous youths by drawing on the concept of the 'Mapurbe,' something very much in line with their own work – they wanted to do it *on their own terms*. In what I define here as a first act of generative refusal, my research project was thus appropriated and deeply modified: interviews were cut off and the critical mapping element was reframed as a broader creative engagement with the city. The central claim made by Claudio and Roberto, and later by the other participants involved, was for them being explicitly acknowledged as active knowledge producers, rather than subjects of ethnographic description.<sup>14</sup>

The group that eventually took part in the project, contacted individually and through an open call on social media, was composed of fifteen young Mapuche artists and activists – university students, visual, theatre, or musical artists, and artisans – living in Santiago after their own or their families' migration. Also responding to the expertise of

<sup>13</sup> The project was part of my Marie Skłodowska Curie Individual Fellowship at the University of Manchester, funded by the EU Commission under the grant agreement MAPURBE 707537. The project's coordination team was formed by myself, Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, and Claudio Alvarado Lincopi. The project's participants were Antil, Marcela Bascuñán Madrid, Martín Llanccaman, Danitza Andrea Segura Licanqueo, Nicolás Cayuqueo, Rodrigo Huenchun Pardo, Simona Mayo, Tomás Melivilú Díaz, Puelpan, Dania Quezada Vidal, Cynthia Salgado Silva, Carlos Soto Quilan, Marco Soto Quilan, and Marie Juliette Urrutia Leiva. I am in debt to all the participants and my colleagues during the project for the shared reflections and rich debates from which the analysis proposed in this emerges.

<sup>14</sup> See also Olivia Casagrande, "Introduction: ethnographic scenario, emplaced imaginings and a political aesthetic," in *Performing the Jumbled City*, 2–36.

<sup>11</sup> David Añiñir, *Mapurbe* (Santiago: Pehuén, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Olivia Casagrande, "Towards a *tuwün wariache*?" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* 27 (2021): 949–75.

the participants involved, different disciplines and methods were mobilized in order to engage with the Mapuche history within the Chilean capital: from the visual arts to critical cartography and site-specific performance, to ethnography and archival research. The collective work was organized in weekly meetings and monthly on-site workshops, in previously individuated places within the city that were considered meaningful for the Mapuche relationship with the metropolitan area. There, issues that the group found compelling were addressed, such as spatial and social segregation, racialized work, colonialism, and neoliberal multiculturalism and its relationship with the city's materialities. Walking and narrating the city was central to the whole process, and the individuated sites acted as meaningful 'knots' condensing space, time, individual biographies, and collective histories. Using creative methods such as photographic recreation, drawing, mapping, and collage, Santiago was redrawn from the Mapuche point of view. The process culminated in an artistic exhibition and a final site-specific theater play between December 2018 and January 2019. In the following, I will focus on the exhibition, and more specifically on the creative motion leading to it and the ways in which it was constructed and framed, involving collective practices of curation that opened up new possibilities of meaning making.

Moving from this collaborative project and from the claim of doing things *on their own terms* by the Mapuche artists and activists involved from its very start, my take on practices that both counter and rethink curation is twofold. First, I approach it as a refusal. As we will see, my understanding of refusal owes much to Audra Simpson's theorization of "ethnographic refusal"<sup>15</sup> – an approach, which thinks of refusal not as plain rejection but as something generative. This brings me to the second way in which I approach practices of curation: creative acts of framing that allow the occupation of certain spaces and the opening up of intimate and broader dialogues. Following Thea Pitman's analysis of the curation of indigenous contemporary art in Brazil, the emergence of indigenous curatorial agency is built on the taking of spaces, (the claim for) alternative ways of performing indigeneity, and the weaving of networks and relationships.<sup>16</sup> In addition to flipping power hierarchies in terms of representation, frame, and audience, indigenous practices of curation are

often inherently collaborative, as in many of Pitman's examples and in my own experience with the MapsUrbe project, in line with recent experimental approaches between anthropology and curation.<sup>17</sup> It is then from my role as an ethnographer confronted with an initial withholding and then involved in the active production of alternative ways of producing meaning that I conceive these as particular acts of counter-curation: situated and engaged radical collaboration premised on the aforementioned generative refusal. In working with this concept, I treat it as a heuristic approach, rather than an established term. As discussed in the introduction of this special section, countering differs from anti precisely in its offering an alternative, rather than simply critically addressing or rejecting something. In the context analyzed in this article, existing representations of indigeneity, official history, and the iconographies of otherness were questioned. The creative manifestations resulting from this questioning offered alternatives, not only in terms of representation but also, moving a step forward, in terms of the claim for new subjectivities and their capability of occupying spaces usually denied to them. Additionally, the broader project in itself ended up constituting an internal and intimate dialogue with and within the indigenous community in Santiago, the main audience the artists and activists had in mind from the start of our collaboration. This highlights aspects of care and affectivity of the curatorial and how these are at the same time intimate and politically charged. It is building on this discussion and on the two main aspects highlighted above, that I ask how are creative and artistic acts of counter-curation affected by the political and aesthetic discourse? How are these countering acts articulated? What alternative do they stage through their gestures of refusal, what spaces and dialogues do they generate?

To address these questions, I start with the description of a first scene in which site-specific performative interventions, based on collective discussions and improvisations, led to both staged and spontaneous acts of countering official narratives embedded in Santiago's central square, the Plaza de Armas. From that scene, and the object at the center of it – Lautaro's Mask – alternative ways of thinking history, urban materialities, and belonging were triggered, mobilizing different aesthetics and creative (re)compositions. I then discuss one of the artworks developed for the MapsUrbe exhibition, "Cabeza

<sup>15</sup> Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (2007): 67–80; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Thea Pitman, *Decolonizing the Museum* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 9–11.

<sup>17</sup> See Roger Sansi, ed., *The Anthropologist as Curator* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). I discuss in depth my own role and positionality within the MapsUrbe project in other writings (see, for example, Casagrande, "Introduction").

de Indio” (Indian’s Head) by Antil, whose links with the square and the mask are particularly strong. I move on to describing the broader issues around this collective exhibition in terms of the space and the curatorship of its display, elaborating on collective practices of curation as acts of refusal and alternative framing, to which I go back briefly in the conclusions.

## 1 Creative Re-imaginings of the Colonial Urban Space

The project’s first workshop, in March 2018, took place in the Plaza de Armas, the main square at the heart of the city center. The place was chosen with the aim of addressing Chilean colonial history, for it constitutes the site of the first settlement built under Pedro de Valdivia in 1541 and is still the materialization of the national memory of the colonial and early republican years. Working in a space that during the workshop was defined as *el punto cero colonial* (‘the colonial ground zero’) was a way of defying the marginality of indigenous people and their history within a monumental space that only recently had been acknowledged as a key site for the former *Tawantinsuyu* (Inca Empire) – a ceremonial center from which departed an infrastructure of roads connecting the region with both southern and northern areas.<sup>18</sup> Under the Spanish rule, the square had become the administrative center of the local *Cabildo*, with markets all around it and the gallows in the middle. Renovated in 1850, following the European architectural canon and aesthetics with the installation of gardens and trees, the square was rebuilt again between 1998 and 2000, due to the construction of the metro station underneath. This last change implicated the curious peculiarity of Chilean palm trees shored up with metal posts: their roots cut short, they need to be kept in balance, as a striking metaphor of the materiality of the Plaza de Armas in itself. With its republican and national ideology built upon European references, the square seems to erase indigenous history and presence, constructing a narrative built on the Conquista and the Republic, and adorned with aesthetics such as the neoclassical Cathedral or the Monument to the American Freedom, respectively, by an Italian architect and sculptor. As if there was nothing ‘underneath’ or before that, the figure of the Conquistador Pedro de Valdivia dominates the place, mostly, but not only, through an imposing statue in front of the former Postal

<sup>18</sup> I am referring to archaeological studies realized between 2011 and 2012 under the guide of Rubén Stehberg, director of the archaeological branch of the Natural History Museum in Santiago, and the historian Gonzalo Sotomayor.

office, once his own house and now turned into a museum. To further contribute to the multi-layered and ambivalent character of the Plaza de Armas, the square is attended by different communities of Latin American migrants (mainly from Perú and Haiti), informal vendors, and tourists from Western countries. At night, it turns into a place for prostitution.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.1 Lautaro’s Mask

Located in the north-east corner of the square, and installed in 1992, there is the *Monumento en homenaje a los Pueblos Indígenas* (‘Monument in homage to the indigenous people’) by the Chilean sculptor Enrique Villalobos.<sup>20</sup> This was at the core of a performative improvisation realized during the workshop, a performance that eventually took a quite unexpected turn. Made of concrete and granite, the eight-meter-tall monument pictures a sprouting seed arising from the earth and an indigenous head suspended over the ground on its side. Intending to be a homage to the indigenous people of the country, the sculpture ends up producing a strange effect. Being placed as it is on the site where scenarios of colonial and later republican power were played out – with Pedro de Valdivia’s house, the gallows, the cathedral – the hanging head provokes an almost immediate parallel with a very specific episode of Mapuche history: the public display of the head of the famous Mapuche leader Lautaro in the Plaza de Armas, defeated after having killed Pedro de Valdivia, the *conquistador*. As the historian Claudio Alvarado Lincopi pointed out during the day we spent working in the square, it is almost impossible not thinking of Lautaro and other Mapuche war leaders whose heads were publicly displayed in the square as macabre evidence of the unlimited power of the Spanish crown. The declared romantic intention of the monument, represented through the seed of ‘indigenous re-birth’ as homage by the Chilean State to its indigenous roots, is defied by the violence silently embedded in the hanging head of stone. This is one of the reasons why the monument is often criticized and does not seem to hold the apparently intended meaning for the Mapuche community in Santiago. Yet at the same time, the site is a meeting point for Mapuche political demonstrations

<sup>19</sup> For more insights on the Plaza de Armas, see Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, ‘For subversive political aesthetics. Mestizo performances challenging monuments of whiteness in Santiago’s urban space’. *Darkmatters hub* (2021). Available at: <https://darkmatter-hub.pubpub.org/pub/vscvs7n1>.

<sup>20</sup> This section draws on the discussion of this monument in Casagrande, Alvarado, and Cayuqueo, *Performing the Jumbled City*, chapter 2.

within the city. This monument, in the overlapping between its intended representation, the implicit reference to an invisible history of subjugation, and yet its appropriation for political performances, thus reveals the contradictions and ambiguities of the relationship between the Chilean State, indigenous people, and the narrative and images of the Chilean nation.

Aiming at unveiling and challenging these contradictions, a group of participants decided to focus on the monument during the workshops. They crafted what they called ‘the head of Lautaro’: a painted mask with woolen hairs traversed by a wooden spear; and then proceeded to place it on the top of the sculpture (Figures 1 and 2). Through this gesture, a kind of mirror effect was produced. By placing violence directly and explicitly at the center of the smooth monumental space of the capital, the effect was that of a temporal entanglement: the colonial past and the postcolonial present were suddenly staring at each other. Both faces without bodies; masks with holes instead of eyes.

Notwithstanding the felt power of the gesture, nothing remarkable happened immediately afterward: people did not seem to notice, confirming the common joke that the sculpture is mostly used as a bench. What was noticed instead was another improvisation by part of the group, on another side of the square, this time focusing on the statue of Pedro de Valdivia, the conqueror, by hanging a list of questions at the feet of the statue’s horse. The police intervened almost immediately, asking who we were, what we were doing, and why, and insisting, even after we explained that this was an artistic project, that political actions in the area required special permits. They left after registering mine and Roberto’s details. The workshop ended shortly after the interruption of this improvisation. Lautaro’s head,



**Figure 1:** The assembling of Lautaro’s head during the site-specific workshop in the Plaza de Armas. © Olivia Casagrande.



**Figure 2:** Lautaro’s head placed on top of the *Monumento en homenaje a los Pueblos Indígenas* © Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez.

probably also as a consequence of the frustration and anger left by the incident, was left on the anonymous Indian’s head in the square. A few days later, some of the participants discovered that a friend, Martín Llacaman – who later joined us in the project – had a troubling encounter with the mask. The night after our workshop, he was walking through the Plaza de Armas. When he passed the monument, he suddenly saw the mask on it. Unaware of our activity of that afternoon, he got truly upset. He couldn’t believe that someone would make fun of the Mapuche past in this way or would fuel the hanging of Mapuche. What the workshop participants represented as a violent past, claiming its visibility in the very heart of the city center, exposing what lay underneath the smooth surface of the monumental space of the Plaza de Armas, he felt as yet another violence, the past suddenly present as a threat. Taking the previous and almost unnoticed performative improvisation a step beyond, Martín climbed on the statue, grabbed the mask, separated the spear from Lautaro’s face, and broke it. He then threw away the broken spear, but kept the mask, and brought it to the headquarters of a historical Mapuche organization in Santiago at the other side of the city. A few days later, we uploaded the photos of our workshop on Facebook, and Martín found out. When he sent us the picture of the mask from the place of its rescue, its features strangely seemed more relaxed, peaceful: as if resting (Figure 3).

## 1.2 The Indian’s Head

During the following creative stage of the project, the interrogation of the Plaza de Armas as the site of colonial history and national narratives was taken further, deepening



**Figure 3:** Lautaro's head rescued by Martín Llancaman. © Martín Llancaman.

the challenge of existing representations and accounts in a more consolidated way. One of the creations that strongly engaged with this monumental site was the visual artwork and installation “Cabeza de Indio” (Indian's Head) by Antil. The artist took pictures of the *Monumento* that he afterwards superimposed on portraits of young Mapuche, blending the statue's features with their faces (Figures 4 and 5). Printed in four very large pictures aligned on a wall, the portraits are accompanied by audio-recordings of conversations with the portrayed subjects about their perceptions of the Plaza de Armas, their own relationship with the *Monumento*, the awkwardness generated by its spatiality and materiality, and a discussion of colonial history. In the artist's own words, this work speaks of how “the symbols, and even the words that are being said about us, are like marks [...] these marks of identities are imposed, and leave us with what we could define a social wound.”<sup>21</sup>

Once again, this artwork is an intervention in the monumental space of the square, an appropriation that makes visible the history of violence hidden behind its stones. As advocated by Ann Stoler, objects and materialities “carry and convey” imperial histories, and the “tangibilities of colonial past and imperial present” still mark our lives,

collective trajectories, and the increasingly interconnected urban spaces we inhabit.<sup>22</sup> Monuments, far from being neutral urban decorations, are both representations of power and dominant narratives, put in place by political elites, and something that can be reinterpreted, challenged, and subverted.<sup>23</sup> This perspective is close to recent conceptualizations of places as nodes of relations and entangled trajectories.<sup>24</sup> Walter Benjamin's view of history as defined by fragmentation and multiplicity, constellation, and ruptures, rather than progressive linear time, comes to mind.<sup>25</sup> It is this non-linear coming together of time into space that interests me here. For working on the materiality of place, Antil's artwork brings to the fore the tensions that previously emerged with Lautaro's mask. In so doing, it allows subterranean narratives to emerge. The parabola of the mask, and more so the counter-narrative produced through the Indian's head artwork, speak of the multiple ways in which the city's spatialities are, or cannot be, inhabited: “the particular ways bodies, things and spaces – and the relations among them – *mutually compose themselves*.”<sup>26</sup> While, as emerged during the workshop, the square is not a space that is possible to ‘mapuchizar’ – turning it into one's own from an indigenous point of view, because it is too much linked with the celebration of colonial and republican history – it still is a scenario in which it is possible to confront and claim history, revealing the tensions and violence beneath its layered surface. This is what happened with the improvisation with Lautaro's mask, as well as with the one around the statue of Pedro de Valdivia that prompted the intervention of the police. In Antil's artwork, the staging of alternative narratives acquires a less improvisational and more organized form in the recording of the voices of Mapuche youths.

In confronting the *Monumento*, these thoughtful elaborations on the fraught relationship with it raise two points that seem particularly meaningful to me here. The first, an observation made by Nicolás Cayuqueo Ríos, notices how the very place in which the *Monumento* was erected is “saturated” by many different narratives exceeding “the univocal narrative that is being imposed.” This ‘single story’ does not hold and is repeatedly contested by the materiality

<sup>22</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Introduction ‘The Rot Remains’: From Ruins to Ruination,” in *Imperial Debris. On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Stoler (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013), 1–35, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico, “The meanings of monuments and memorials,” *Punctum* 2, no. 1 (2016): 28–46.

<sup>24</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005); see also Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* (Belknap Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Simone, “City of Potentialities,” 5, my emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> Antil, video-presentation of the artwork, available at: <https://www.mapsurbe.com/copia-di-esp-cabeza-de-indio>.





Figure 4: “Cabeza de Indio” by Antil, detail. © Nicola Mazzuia.



Figure 5: “Cabeza de Indio” by Antil, detail. © Nicola Mazzuia.

of the place and of the monument itself. Similarly, as noticed by Marie Juliette Urrutia Leiva, the very material features of the *Monumento* make it impossible to represent the “recomposition” it is deemed to convey as one figure resuming on itself diverse ways of being indigenous. In Marie Juliette’s words, the *Monumento* ends up doing exactly the opposite: reproposing a “fragmented Indian” traversed by many violent ruptures. The layering of features and materials evident in the final images elaborated by Antil responds to this idea of fragmentation and impossible recomposition, making visible the tensions traversing the monument and the square. Thinking with Jacques Rancière, in what the author has famously defined as “the distribution of the sensible,” this artwork actively participates in the redefinition of the relationship between what is visible, thinkable, and audible, and what is not.<sup>27</sup> Through the exploration of political aesthetics and imaginations, perceived elements of reality are shuffled and re-arranged in ways that reconfigure the very relationship between the possible and the impossible, crafting spatialities and temporalities that allow for the emergence of alternative narratives.

Lautaro’s mask and the Indian’s head speak of multiple and contemporaneous identifications, cutting through space and time, far from the static ambiguities of the *Monumento*. A craftwork – painted by hand, with woolen strings glued to it to imitate hairs, and a spear of wood stuck to it – and an

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006): 32.

artwork – employing photography, digital elaboration, and installation art, both objects stage an interplay between layers of meaning and work through the significance of urban landmarks as multiple, ambiguous, and polysemous. This is done through an operation of superimposition that leaves the compositional layers of these objects bare while it blends them. Claiming for emplacement within the city, the mask and the head put narratives in tension by unveiling subjugating violence and displaying re-existence.

The mask, conveying performative improvisations and interventions within the urban space, contributes to the emergence of Mapuche subjectivities within the urban space. For the mask is not simply an object, an artifact placed in an anonymous site: it becomes meaningful in the event of being emplaced, as a gesture of ‘reframing’, and ultimately an act that produces and claims counter-narratives in the public space. At first in the Plaza de Armas, and afterwards, rescued, in the Mapuche organization in the outskirts of Santiago. It is precisely the fact that Martín saw the mask hanging in the Plaza de Armas that made him think about violence, connecting it with both the colonial past and the post-colonial present, equally torn by domination and abuse. His taking down of the mask, intervening in this space of violence, is somehow symmetrical to placing it on the top of the *Monumento*: both gestures defy the monumental hegemonic narrative, scratching the surface of the city’s materiality.

Around the mask, different improvisations have taken place. Its construction and placement, as well as its rescuing, are spontaneous gestures triggered by the space of the square and an exercise of situated creation. From those improvisations and from an initial act of countering dominant narratives, more staged creations and artworks emerged, in the explicit attempt of producing meaning and knowledge. In the process, the actors involved had a specific audience in mind – fellow urban Mapuche, and, to a certain extent, Santiago’s citizens more broadly – and identified a path toward the representations they wanted to display. It is through the identification of an audience somehow intimate, that these acts resulted in what could be conceived as collective practice of counter-curating that entailed ‘taking care’ of while at the same time ‘countering’ the official historical narratives embedded in the square. These counter-narratives thus result in unsettling acts of ‘caring for’, opening up new possibilities of meaning making. I will unpack this further in the following section.

## 2 Countering Curation: The MapsUrbe Exhibition

The planning of an actual exhibition within the MapsUrbe project came gradually as a collective discussion within the

group. From site-specific exercises of improvisation and thinking-by-doing we had been carrying out, ten individual and collective art projects developed. The involved participants, not all of them professional artists, had been working on different artworks, from a Mapuche-pop video clip to *arpilleras*<sup>28</sup> and poetry, to adaptations of traditional jewelry in the context of the city. Each participant developed a project that was close to her personal trajectory, interests, and everyday life. The projects were collectively discussed regarding their progress during weekly meetings, and those among the participants who had useful technical skills provided guidance or concrete support (e.g., in the case of the art of Mapuche jewelry; or photographic/filming skills). My role, besides developing one artwork with Claudio and Roberto,<sup>29</sup> resembled that of the “theatrical producer”<sup>30</sup> and focused on organizing the meetings, following the needs of each participant in terms of materials and economic or other support. The three of us also moderated the discussion and took care of the four collective artworks that stemmed from some of the workshops. From the very start, the whole process was strongly collective. Even when the participants were creating their personal artworks, the discussions around those were lively among the group, and support and collaboration was ongoing during the whole creative phase of the project.

One of the main issues at the center of these collective discussions, especially when we got to the point of starting to plan the exhibition in more concrete terms, was the site in which to display the MapsUrbe creations. This was far from constituting a straightforward aspect. The question of the ‘where’, ‘how’, and ‘with whom’ (institutionally as well), was key. At first, we contacted one of the main venues for exhibitions in the city of Santiago. We were welcomed with enthusiastic interest and with an immediate proposal to be included in an already planned exhibition involving artists working with indigenous communities in the frame of “relational art.”<sup>31</sup> After some thoughts and discussions, we relaunched with the proposal of an independent exhibition,

28 Textile pictures made in Latin America, and in Chile in particular, by sewing together colorful scraps of fabric. During Pinochet’s dictatorship, *arpilleras* became a significant mode of expression and quiet political protest especially among working-class women.

29 ‘Antropofágias’ (Anthropophagies), is a photographic installation critically addressing the relationship between the anthropologist and the “indigenous subjects,” as characterized by tension, affect, and ambiguities.

30 Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

31 For a critical discussion of ‘relational art’ and of the overlapping and tensions between art, ethnography, and community engagement, see Roger Sansi, *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

but, after weeks of exchanging emails and waiting for promised phone calls and appointments that never arrived, we realized that we had to find a different solution. During those weeks of searching and considering different sites for display, the concern was twofold: on the one side, the group did not want their work to be displayed in an ethnographic fashion, as much as they did not want their work to be easily co-opted and ‘consumed’ within the art market, through the selling label of ‘indigenous art’. On the other side, they did not want to occupy marginal spaces either. From the start, they had been positioning themselves as knowledge producers, capable of creative expression and knowledge making *in their own terms*. This was, in itself, a gesture of appropriating space, framing their own narrative in an act to counter existing curatorial strategies described above. Precisely because of the involved power relationships, the choice of where to display the creations deriving from these processes of alternative meaning making was far from neutral.

After much debating, and negotiations with different institutions, the right site was identified as an old building within the Quinta Normal Park, owned by the “Centro de Extensión Balmaceda Arte Joven.” The park is particularly cherished not only by the participants, but also by the broader Mapuche community in Santiago. Back in the 1960s, during one of the periods of major inflow from the south of the country to the city by Mapuche migrants, it was the place where they used to meet during their free time on Sunday afternoons. Today, it is still one of the places in Santiago where indigenous Mapuche celebrate festivities and host gatherings. As the site where the political, cultural, social, and affective endurance of urban indigenous migrants ‘took place’, it felt perfect for displaying the artwork of a group of Mapuche youth addressing the capital city from their situated perspectives. At the same time, the characteristics of the site, an integral part but not ‘central’, nor particularly up-market within the circuit of Santiago artworld, and no doubt outside of the more ethnographic section of galleries and exhibitions, contributed to the right atmosphere. In the chosen context, the exhibition ended up being a dialogue with the space of the Quinta and with the Mapuche community in Santiago, fitting very well with the group’s chosen audience and the collective practice of curation as ‘taking care’ that was developed so far.

At that point, the question of the curatorship for the exhibition came up. After we had identified and secured the space, questioning how to occupy it and with what kind of narrative, structure, and frame was another dilemma to face. I remember particularly one meeting, in my living room in central Santiago, when I offered to contact a local professor and art critic whom I happened to know and who

seemed interested in the project. I thought it would be a good idea to have her perspective and maybe ask her for advice or even collaboration in terms of the curation of the exhibition as a whole. My proposal prompted tension. Some of the participants were strongly against any kind of possible curatorship from the outside, and pointed out how this would have ended up reproducing “the same old colonial relationships masked by the art market.” There was also a concern in terms of the aesthetics of the artworks: what was defined positively as their ‘naiveté’, spontaneity, and freshness was to be protected from any external intervention that would have bend them to canon and structure, or to some kind of overarching general narrative. The answer, after some deliberation, was a resolved ‘no’. This, as everyone was aware, also entailed taking a risk: the risk of ‘exposing’ themselves without any previous ‘authorization’ or any recognizable ‘signature’; the risk of being considered just another amateur and marginal exhibition. Yet, the risk of the opposite felt worst, and the final decision was that of simply going on working as we had during the previous year: collectively, spontaneously, hands on, and improvising.<sup>32</sup>

In her discussion of the curation of indigenous contemporary art in Brazil, Thea Pitman analyzes a range of practices, asking how decolonial curatorship can promote indigenous agency, regardless of the ethnicity of the curators involved. Her discussion draws extensively on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s seminal work on decolonizing methodologies, and argues for an Indigenous approach to the exhibition of their artwork in major galleries, involving Smith’s methodologies of “Connecting,” “Networking,” “Sharing,” “Claiming,” and “Celebrating survivance.”<sup>33</sup> Pitman’s analysis is fascinating, and much of what she highlights for the Brazilian indigenous art scene applies here, especially in terms of the construction of connections and claiming of spaces, representations, and narratives, central practices to any curation of indigenous contemporary art. However, what interests me here the most are rather her considerations about community-based and much less institutional exhibitions. These initiatives often originate from spontaneous and less organized creative practices. Pitman analyzes the pop-up exhibitions at Aldeia Maraka’na in April and

<sup>32</sup> From these discussions also resulted the choice of staging the site-specific play “Santiago Waria, Pueblo Grande de Winkas,” a city-tour with audio guide and live scenes staged on December 28 and 29, 2018 and from January 17–19, 2019. *Winka* is a Mapuche word that literally means ‘thief, invader’, but also ‘white, non-Mapuche’. *Waria* means ‘city’. For a detailed discussion of the play, see Casagrande and Cayuqueo, “Performing the Indigenous City,” 173–87; Casagrande, Alvarado, and Cayuqueo, *Performing the Jumbled City*.

<sup>33</sup> Pitman, *Decolonizing the Museum*, 39; see also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

November 2018, curated by community members working in dialogue with non-Indigenous artist Lucas Sargentelli, and taking place in an old colonial building and former Museo do Indio in Rio de Janeiro, today one of the sites of indigenous resistance within the city. The author notices the ‘improvisational’ character of the exhibition – dismantled and re-staged every day to avoid damage during the night – and a practice of curation that worked in dialogue with both the community and the occupied space, already adorned by indigenous graffiti, paintings, and other wall art. These dialogues were then extended to the audience through organized tours of the exhibitions, led by the community. What is even more interesting is how, to privilege these dialogues and the ideas and desires of the multi-ethnic indigenous community inhabiting the space, the pursuing of an overarching narrative of coherence was set aside. As Pitman underlines moving from this telling example, indigenous community-based exhibitions “tend to offer a much more significant degree of Indigenous agency with respect to their interpretation of the art on display.”<sup>34</sup> Pitman also observes how this particular process was “ongoing, evolving and collaborative,” opening up a space for fundamental reflections in terms of the critical ways in which curatorship could be rethought.<sup>35</sup>

My question goes in a slightly different direction, engaging closely with the ways in which these practices can be thought as acts of curation as social practice, set into motion by active refusal. The MapsUrbe exhibition is telling in this regard, having been shaped by multiple and intertwined ‘refusals’: first, of engaging with my research project as it was initially conceived; then of both invisibilization and hypervisibilization of indigeneity in symbols and iconographies such as the *Monumento*; and finally of an externally designed space of exhibition and curatorship. And yet, these acts of refusal did not simply constitute a rejection: they build up alternative ways of producing narratives, knowledge, and meanings, *in their own terms*. My use of ‘refusal’ then relates closely to the notion of ‘ethnographic refusal’ by Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson: the refusal to represent indigenous cultures in ways that could be at odds with Mohawk efforts to maintain political sovereignty. A move that involves “to think very seriously about needs and,

basically, involves a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in.”<sup>36</sup> Yet refusal, while arguing for silence – or ‘shutting off the tape recorder’ – can also be generative in opening up a space for dialogue and for alternative narratives to emerge simultaneously.

Going back to the specific processes analyzed here, I think of the mask as an object that while representing refusal, at the same time triggered different representations and alternative ways of thinking about history, memory, time, and belonging. All these aspects were then collectively and individually reworked, carved, and manipulated, becoming part of different artworks, of which Antil’s is probably the strongest example, and also shaping the final exhibition. These aesthetics counter other representations, such as ethnographic displays and institutional art galleries, and yet in their countering, offer an alternative that pursues an intimate dialogue with the (mostly but not only) indigenous audience and the (indigenized) space of the Quinta Normal Park.

### 3 Conclusion

The MapsUrbe exhibition (Figure 6), and especially its inauguration, was a success.<sup>37</sup> While the event never really reached the more institutional art scene, it still proved to mark its territory, reaching a status of recognition in the underground context of Santiago through attendance and diffusion in social media. With no ambition of telling any whole and coherent story, the exhibition was the opening of a space for intimate and broader dialogues. In the refusal of both invisibilization and hypervisibilization, that so often characterize indigenous people in Latin America, it went beyond representation: building on that same refusal, it was able to provide a stage for alternative narratives and subjectivities. The genealogical connections Raúl told us about looking down at the fog covering Santiago from the San Cristobál hill went irremediably lost in time and space, disrupted by the violence of displacement and migration. And yet, while rendered ‘bare’ by a hostile – or at least indifferent – context, indigenous people get their ‘bearings’ on the city. By actively “bringing things into association,” engaging with spaces and materialities, edges, and lines.<sup>38</sup> This is probably what the tale of the mask tells us: at stake

<sup>34</sup> Pitman, *Decolonizing the Museum*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Pitman’s introduction and first chapter are a very useful review of current works addressing issues of curation of indigenous contemporary art in Latin America and beyond. As the author notices, most scholarly analysis focuses on the British (post)colonial settler worlds, while the majority of reflections on critical curatorship engage only marginally with indigenous contemporary art (see Pitman, *Decolonizing the Museum*).

<sup>36</sup> Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal,” 72.

<sup>37</sup> We estimate that around 250 persons came to the inaugural night; and an additional 200 visited the exhibition during the following four weeks in which it was on, with hundreds of people starting to follow the MapsUrbe social media right after the inaugural night.

<sup>38</sup> Simone, “City of Potentialities,” 12–13.



**Figure 6:** The entrance to the MapsUrbe Exhibition. © Nicola Mazzuia.

was the possibility of getting some sort of grip on the urban space, and that was done through refusal and creative reframing, in what can be conceived as a meaningful act of countering curation and re-shaping it as collective social practice. Similarly, the artworks and the exhibition presented in this article engage with urban space materiality and indigenous trajectories shaped by displacement, migration, and (post)colonial ruptures. They somehow disrupt the linear unfolding of history, playing with connections and layering that allow other accounts to emerge. Articulating meaning through practices of curating that both

oppose dominant historical narratives and ‘take care’ of the colonial past in different ways, these artistic counter-narratives thus unsettle established and institutionalized modes of representation and remembrance, opening up space-times for the crafting of alternative meanings.

A *coda* to the account presented here is quite telling. Shortly before the MapsUrbe exhibition took place, Antil decided to participate in the third edition of the *Encuentro de las Culturas* in 2018 (“Meeting of Cultures”), an exhibition organized by the Department of Indigenous People of the Chilean Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage, with his installation “Cabeza de Indio.” The exhibition was held between October 25 and November 4 at the Pre-Columbian Art Museum in Santiago. When Antil’s work was selected and won the third price, we were about to display our own exhibition at the Quinta Normal. As a professional and emerging artist, this was no doubt an important opportunity for Antil, while at the same time meant engaging with the institutional space for ethnographic display *par excellence* in Santiago and Chile. His final choice was to only display parts of his artwork at the Pre-Columbian Art Museum, keeping the complete version for the MapsUrbe exhibition, thereby finding an interesting balance between the challenge of institutional spaces and the need of occupying those same spaces. While this might seem in contradiction with the discussion of the setting of the MapsUrbe exhibition elaborated above, I believe it does provide additional force to the argument around the generative potential of refusal, and the alternatives that open up through acts of countering existing curatorial practices. Antil’s artwork not only brought different representations and let voices literally break into a space in which indigenous people have been traditionally represented as silent figures and images, but it did so by retaining the power of deciding what to show and what not to show, opting for taking part in a controversial space instead of withholding from it, on his own terms.

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