

El arte de la palabra/The art of the word

One of the more abhorrent crimes of Christianity and Western civilisation consists in convincing the masses that words are only signifiers. – Roque Dalton¹

Democracy is a work of art. It is not a fixed state. It is something that is constructed in the day by day coexistence and at the same time is an opposition and negation of the state, because it breaks up with hierarchic systems. It is based in mutual respect. – Humberto Maturana²

Poetry is not isolated from the world. It does not belong to a specialist domain. Poetry is a reflexive exercise, not just entertainment. Poetry allows us to follow the flux of our embodied thoughts; embodied because without our bodies we do not exist. Hence poetry is reflexion. Keeping this in mind, the poetry in this anthology allows readers to acknowledge and reflect upon the values that are important in the construction of a global world with its emphasis on a utopian neo-liberal economy. If you are patient with me I would like to introduce this anthology in two parts: an extended first section, in which I shall explore the relationship between European Modernity and its periphery; and a second section, in which I will make some points about the Mapuche nation and their art of the word.

The consequences of European Modernity in its periphery.

Mapuche people are people exiled in their own territory. Any engagement with Indigenous nations of the planet needs to deal with the fact that Western civilisation has reduced their power, epistemologies, identities and cultural practices to something

¹ Roque Dalton, *Poesia*. San Salvador: Editorial Universitaria, s/f, p.180. My translation.

² Humberto Maturana R., *La democracia es una obra de arte*. Colombia: Cooperativa Editorial Magisterio, no publication date. My translation.

backward and in need of purging. On the other hand, the Western world privileges rationality and its scientific and technological advancements. This anthology celebrates the extent to which poetry has always been firmly engaged with the flux of orality³ – an art that the West has captured in the written word as an art of the book. The poetry of the world of the South, based on the *ül*⁴, gives testimony to the struggle of the Mapuche people against forgetting their heritage, and brings forth their voices, cultural complexities and sometimes contradictions. Paulo Huirimilla evokes this clearly in ‘Warrior Song’, where the poet says that his is a ‘stuttering’ voice.

The Chilean state occupation of Mapuche territory continues up until this day through the expansion of neo-liberal economic practices into Mapuche communities. New territories are required to satisfy the ever-growing need for resources to sustain this blind economic ideology, which gives rise to a selfish and ultimately self-destructive community. Humans are consuming their future in the worst plague that the planet has seen⁵. The sense of loss this long process of colonisation produces in Mapuche subjectivities is clear in many of the poems by Roxana Miranda Rupailaf, Paulo Huirimilla and Maribel Mora Curriao. In particular, Curriao’s poems ‘Our Songs Remained Behind’ and ‘Dreams in the Valley’ convey the poet’s struggle to communicate with her ancestral past, having lost her Mapudungun language. The loss of language breaks the bond with the Earth, the stories that web that bond and her Mapuche

³ See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen & Co., 1982.

⁴ The *ül* is the song and poetry and it is part of the *Mapuche* art of the word involving subgenres relating to the use of it in many cultural practices such as those related to healing, *rogativas/praying*, warrior songs and others.

⁵ Flannery, Timothy, *The Future Eaters. An Ecological History of Australia*. Port Melbourne: Reed Press 1994. The important question here is related to the velocity the development of technologies brought forth by the present detached way of seeing our place in the biosphere is producing changes in the capacity living systems have to reproduce themselves. The actual consuming velocity is increasing in such a way that in all areas of our lives we are exhausting and destroying the living systems that allow us to exist. In other words, we are structurally de-coupling in relation to our natural niches and environments, risking the biosphere’s life.

lineage. Hers is a gaze that wants to recover its origins – a nostalgic gaze toward the ancestral valleys. When I say ancestral I do not imply long past, but passing now ancestral, because its epistemology, which has lasted for millenia without destroying the environment, is today being confronted with the destructive intrusion into Mapuche communities of the neo-liberal mindset.

Mapuche cultural practices and ways of living continue to be dismantled and assimilated into a homogeneous nation state. Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile experimented with and adapted the neo-liberal ideology before exporting it back to the United States and England, where it originated. In the process, the Mapuche people have been reduced to second-class citizens and dependant clients of a state in the continual throes of privatisation. Chile is a state that conceives itself as a mediator in the two-fold process of expanding and privatising itself: the state as war machine in a never-ending process of re-territorialisation. Vernacular modes of living are destroyed to pave the way for modernity – the institutions, companies and subjectivities that are seen as integral to the colonial project. Mapuche people are reduced to the condition of clients and competitors in a world in which everything is up for sale. It is in the context of war against nature and its custodians – the Indigenous populations of Chile – that the poetry in this anthology comes forth and opens up for *winka*/foreigner readers new domains of existence to observe, reflect and learn from,⁶ so we can open our eyes and

⁶ In general in Latin America "intercultural" educational programmes are seen and promoted as the key to overcome the present isolation of Indigenous cultures. In Chile there are some programmes that pursue intercultural objectives, but are always seen as from the perspective of the white populations, i.e., the Mapuche are to become intercultural to survive. The point must be that the general Chilean society learn/live about the Mapuche ways so as to be able to critically question the inertia of the general status quo and be able to survive the destruction brought forth by neo-liberal economic policies. This is not an idealism, but a profound form of realism as Humberto Maturana has clearly stated in an interview in which he says that the Mapuche "considered themselves part of the dynamic of nature. Mapuches and Pehuenches considered themselves as part of the world", concluding that "I do not think that Indigenous people are particularly virtuous but they had a different view of the natural world, a view that is negated by us because we do not have it. We are

demand that democracy be democratised.

Mapudungun: the Language of the Earth.

The neo-liberal economic expansion into Mapuche communities ruptures the connection human beings have with the Earth. What we have instead is a floating national identity, sustained by the destruction of Indigenous populations, characteristic of colonial nation-states around the world. A soldier mentality is at play in an imaginary domain where there are no roots or firm ground to stand upon. All that remains is a permanent state of war for new markets, territories, clients, resources and citizens. These floating mythologies of national identity (which this migrant 'I' knows only too well) are sustained by the violence of the grand narratives of progress and capitalism. The colonial project is dressed up as the civilisation and democratisation of primitive society, a linear evolution from barbarianism to enlightenment and the spoils of modernity. However, the freedom that the West speaks of is not practised in those countries that are situated within the borders of modernity/coloniality⁷. While the Western concept of parliamentary democracy is privileged, other forms of democracy are suppressed. The relationship with the Earth becomes the focus of the violence of the dark side of the colonial dream. And so it is that Indigenous populations today are suffering a low intensity 4th World War⁸.

not people of the Earth. We belong to a culture that has separated human beings from the world and has placed the natural world, the animal world, and the vegetal world at its service. We are the kings of nature, and to be kings implies being blind about our servants." In Marcelo Mendoza's *Todos queríamos ser verdes. Chile en la crisis ambiental*. Santiago: Planeta, 1994, pp. 49-50. My translation.

⁷ Modernity/coloniality is a concept created by Walter D. Mignolo to explain the double sided shaping of European Modernity in the Americas. See his *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000. Also see Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America", *Neplanta: Views from the South* 1.3, 2000, Duke University Press: 533-580.

⁸ Subcomandante Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon. Selected Writings*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2001.

Chile is celebrating two hundred years since its independence from Spain. One must ask, what is being celebrated? What kind of country is being brought forth? What sort of a nation is imagined? Is there a dialogue between cultures⁹ toward a common view of the world we all want to live in, of citizenship and our place in it? How are different views about the relationship with the Earth, self, and community seen and allowed legitimate existence? Has there been any questioning of the current liberal idea of the state? What do we have to say about the state that has ruled up until now? Has it been comprehensive? Need it be changed? Does it have the plasticity to allow all cultural differences to be part of it? Does it have something to learn from other cultural and Indigenous experiences? All of these questions are intimately related to the value we give to the spoken word.

AdMapu/El rostro de la tierra/The face of the Earth.

The Mapuche poets in this anthology produce a voice that allows us, readers/listeners, to bring forth a more coherent and balanced conception of the word. The word is not out there but comes into existence through our word-actions. We bring the world into being when we speak it and live it. The word in the Mapuche world reveals a totally different view of the role human societies play in relation to their place on the Earth. Mapuche culture is centred in the word¹⁰. Language has a strong social value in Mapuche culture: Mapudungun, the language of the Earth. The use and value of the word has a powerful communal sense. The very name of the community shows the vinculum between the Earth and its people: Mapuche, people (*che*) of the Earth (*Mapu*). Elicura Chihuailaf

⁹ At present, after some intents by previous post-dictatorship governments to solve the problems that impede the relation, the Chilean state has, under the pressure of the Chilean right, applied the Antiterrorist Laws, written down and established during Pinochet years, to the Mapuche populations fighting for their lands. This criminalisation undoes all possibilities to establish any meaningful conversation and it is in this sense that I speak of a low intensity war between that State and the Mapuche people.

¹⁰ Lucía Golluscio, *El pueblo Mapuche. Poéticas de pertenencia y devenir*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006.

teaches us that Mapuche culture is sustained by the *Itro Fil Mogen*, a totality without exclusion in which all living beings, *lo viviente*, take part. And because time is circular, Mapuche people leave tracks, in their walking through life, that reach the past as well as the future¹¹.

Leonel Lienlaf¹², a Mapuche poet whose work is not in this anthology, says that ‘when you are a habitant of a space, you live that hill because the hill allows you to do so and you embrace that hill as your own.’ In other words, in interacting, the hill and you bring forth a common history, which is the product of the structural coupling¹³ taking place between them. Lienlaf explains:

everything is interrelated. The community is not only the people that live the territory and place but also the sacred elements, the cosmic, the ancestors. This is the reason you cannot make a community anywhere, because the communities are built in ancestral places.

This structural coupling between humans and nature brings into question the conceptualisation of self as something encapsulated and closed off from everything else; a self that does not take responsibility for the consequences of its own actions. Isn't this what we hear from the most recalcitrant right wing ideology? That our behaviour is not responsible for the destruction of the environment? That it is nature which destroys itself? We can see now the threat Mapuche and all other Indigenous nations in the world today pose to the expansion of Capitalism. Hence the current application by the Chilean Government of antiterrorist laws, created by Pinochet, to the Mapuche people.

The Earth has a power, force and energy in the poems in this

¹¹ Elicura Chihuailaf, “Introducción. En el azul de la palabra”, in Sebastián Quepul Quintremil, José Santos Lincomán Inaicheo, Anselmo Raguileo Lincopil, *Poesía Mapuche. Las raíces azules de los antepasados*. Temuco: Universidad de la Frontera, 2003, p. 16.

¹² Patricia Junge (1999), “Leonel Lienlaf: los Mapuches somos el pueblo que más dialoga”, *Plaza pública. Revista de política y ciudadanía*, No 8, Octubre-noviembre 1999.

¹³ Structural coupling is a concept that describes the interdependence between living systems. See Humberto Maturana Ro. & Gerda Verden-Zoller, *The Origins of Humanness in the Biology of Love*. UK: Imprint-Academic, 2008.

anthology that does not exist in narrow and detached Western views of the world. In the Mapuche world the powerful bond between people and place takes the shape of three main forms of cultural knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation through stories and conversations around the fire, *el fogón*, in the *ruka*/house. The three forms are: the *Geb*; *perrimontun*; and *pewma*. An overview of each of these fundamental concepts in Mapuche culture is provided below.

Firstly, the *Geb* are immaterial beings who are the custodians of the different places shaping the Mapuche territory. It is in this sense that the Earth, the Mapu, is sacred, full of life energy and populated by immaterial beings that we must respect as they are the custodians of the rivers, hills, mountains and all places. In other words, the Mapuche people are not alone, but are structurally coupled to the Earth and its places. In 'A Child in the Path of his Dream', by Omar Huenqueo Huaiquinao, this sacred, respectful dimension of life is realised in the figure of a child who converses with the world around him. The child lives in a world where he is not alone, where there is no solitude because everything is meaningful and alive. The poem demonstrates the important role conversation plays in maintaining the balance between the dualities that form this world. In the Western world, where nothing is sacred, this side of life becomes a horror movie, a dangerous, feared and dark side that must be conquered or destroyed, or rapidly dismissed as backward. All of the poets included in this anthology give testimony to this structural coupling, for example, in María Isabel Lara Millaipán's poem 'Mangín', where 'the rain says what I think'. But this sacred balance or vinculum is at risk, as is the case in the beautifully dark poem 'Rauquemo Piwkan/Cisnes de Rauquemó/Rauquemó Swans', by Jaime Huenún, bringing forth a non-idealistic Mapuche world. Places have a sacred dimension because *Geb* have a tutelary function; they protect the Mapu.

Secondly, these spirits communicate with the living through *perrimontun*, which are apparitions of beings in real life (animals, especially birds and snakes) that have a supernatural quality that allows them to cross natural frontiers or become invisible/visible. Their apparition announces something which may affect individuals

or the community, therefore the *perrimontun* needs to be carefully interpreted. This presence emerges in full in Omar Huenuqueo Huaiquinao's poems in which poetry is a mirror of nature bringing forth happiness and life so every living system (animals, especially birds – the turtledove and thrush), objects (a chair), and atmospheric phenomena (a breeze) are expressive of the continuity of the dance of life. Two poems by Maribel Mora Curriao, the first, 'Song for my Mother', testifies to the above when she says that '*Perrimontun*/ is nothing more than that/ a brief sojourn/ in the sky' and, the second, '*Perrimontun*', which refers to the supernatural experiences a Machi/shaman receives when being initiated by her mother.

Thirdly, these apparitions manifest themselves through *pewma*/ dreams in which deceased family members are dreamed as having a normal life, in dialogue or giving up a message that is pertinent to the dreamer or his/her community. The knowledge of deceased family members is brought to life in these conversations, where dead and living members of the family come together conversing in a natural way. The separation between the dead and the living is, in *pewma*, overcome so that ancestral knowledge is passed down through the generations. Mapuche culture is thus maintained and passed through circular time into new generations. The emphasis is on the connection between ancestry and new generations instead of the lineal separation lived in the West. Such is the creativity and plasticity of Mapuche ways of thinking and doing, capable of solving a problem Western thought is unable to confront in an affirmative way. The Mapu/Earth is a shared space, *espacio compartido*, full of force and power. In Mapuche culture there is no construction of temples because the Mapu/Earth itself is the temple. This is the case in María Isabel Lara Millaipán's poem 'Relmu', where the present is open to the past because the memory of the past is inscribed in place. But this shared space can be broken as is clear in Maribel Mora Curriao's poem 'Dreams in the Valley'.

Sin miedo/Without fear.

Mapuche poetry is not simply entertainment, it cannot be, but is an epistemic tool in which a language domain is open so that these Mapuche poets observe themselves and reflect about the actual configuration of their self and its relation to the world they are structurally coupled to. Mapuche poetry expands consciousness and enlarges the reflective space Mapuche poets need to explore the relationship between self and other (Mapuche and Chilean), between self and the world (the Chilean state, the Mapuche traditions), between self and nature (the Earth). The poems are rich in cultural references, and sometimes travel from as far as Mexico, through popular music, as is the case of Paulo Huirimilla's uses of '*el corrido*'. Huenún makes intertextual references to German and Chinese poetry, and Maribel Mora Curriao quotes T.S. Eliot. Mapuche poetry is a domain open in writing in which the poet explores their own complexities and contradictions, product of their double, happy and painful, intercultural status, as well as the contradicting behaviours and desires coming out of this fact. But this expansion of consciousness applies also to *winka* readers, because it touches the inner-most self, one that is beyond neo-liberal ideologies, in which our deepest desire, to live a life in balance with the earth, emerges strongly. This is why poetry is not simply another commodity, to use and discard, for the neo-liberal world market, but a more profound epistemic dispositive which allows Mapuche, Chileans and all *winka* readers to engage in a way of living that is as complex as well as problematic as any other when true to itself.

I hope, as a *winka* reader, that all readers of this anthology are willing to open themselves up and learn the art of conversation which these poems invite. It is in this way that the first epigraph to this introduction should be understood. Words are not only signifiers, floating signifiers as Jacques Derrida would have us believe, but also they are the tools and the body itself that they carve and, as such, they are Mapuche embodied experiences. The second epigraph reminds us that democracy is not just a representative parliamentary voting system, but a long and empowering art of conversation, or art of the word, inclusive of those whom our certainties blind us to

see. This inclusiveness is nothing less than what we call listening, something which is scarcely practised in world politics. Democracy is brought to hand as part of the art of listening. If you accept that the above arguments make sense, then I can say that they are the flesh of the conversations they make possible. This is the reason why speaking is an art, an ancient art, which implies the need to listen to those who have been able to master this art if we want to produce a truly coherent and democratic global society. Theirs is the true word. Do we want to take up this opportunity and begin, leaving behind our certainties, to open up ourselves and listen to the conversation we are allowing ourselves to participate in?

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