

Genealogy
of the shape

**GABRIEL
GABRIEL**

GABRIEL

Genealogía de la forma
[Genealogy of the shape]

*I believe in the power
the power we confer on things
and the power bestowed upon ourselves.
we are nothing but the strength of other people's wishes
and nothing less than the strength we have.*

There's power¹

I pursue songs in the landscape.
Further and further away.
I enter places I can't name
because names
out of the blue
become unknowable.

I walk around my neighbourhood
I dwell on some shapes
and silently roam them.
The river lies hidden
although maps reveal its nearness.
I get to the top floor
and then climb the stairs up to my bed
there's a circular window that shows a long way
but the river can't be seen.

I go a bit further
drawing my traces with coal.
I pay rent with speeches.
My name slowly transforms
so does my hair,
my reflection and the way I move.
I pray memories from Villa Muñecas
of small dogs looking at me
flowery tablecloths covered with crumbs
siblings that come and go

meditation naps on the floor
talks with my mother while she kneads
the town's cybercafe
the stark-naked cumbia and the chants of the church
out on the street
taking the streets.

Only yesterday I began to remember something
something that, in fact,
I never knew how to define.
I want to compose a poem
with clay wood metal.
With a watchtower
a gold leaf gilding plane
a silo storing nothing
a fierce face
an improvised antenna
a machine that doesn't produce
an open piano that's never played.

I chase visibility
as if I were the light of a moving spotlight.
Now
that you are looking
I feel I should say something that is not about me
but to be true
everything has to do with me
and at the same time
it doesn't.

What if an autobiography is just
the story of others
passing through us?

My job is to stoke the fire
heat the water
look animals in the eye
be an animal's eyes.
"An act of concentration and faith"
as our song goes.

I am like my father
who protested without signs
just marching with his tools held high.
I am like that press that no longer grinds
that no one rolls anymore.
I am the wheel of a toy in a display case.

How to tailor the character I represent now
with these traces of memories
that I have collected?

I walk through the Museum's door
to study the surviving shapes
the translations of the incisions now erased.
I give shape to these sensations I have
of what my world represents
and the way things are brought together there.
I demand from materials a miraculous behaviour.
My manifesto is an over-life of shapes.

Who do these portraits represent?

I imagine a story about weakness
a story not about struggle but about power.
My skin bears stories of romantic injustices.
Stories that are not mine
but that I make mine.
My eyes are brimming with tears
thinking about something as wide as the sea
about waves passing through me
about the sky flooding my heart.
I still remember when I woke up
without a past.
My territory has no surface.
They talk about darkness, but I am dazzled.

Am I being a shadow?

My mother is a blazing totem.
I build my community

through formal correspondences
through similarity in gestures and traits.
I have carried a bag of corn on my back.
I know what it is to endure.
I know what it is to endure.

Art allows me to be what I was not.

Estoy re vos

We are only the sum and the prolongation of our ancestors².

Filippo T. Marinetti

(...) "human" is not the name of a substance but of a relationship, of a certain position in relation to the other possible positions. "Human" is always the position of the subject, in the linguistic sense of the word, it is whoever says "I"³.

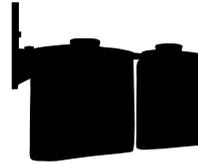
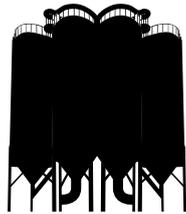
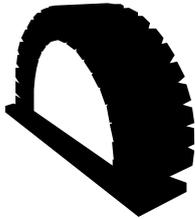
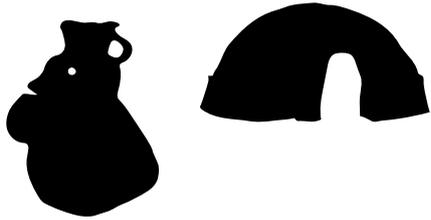
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

In the hill, or nearby, native communities conceive the winds as the voices of their ancestors. They state that, when they feel lost, the way to "find themselves" is to return to their ancestors. To return is to look for them in the winds, which arise from different substances. They can be perceived as songs that move, that hide, that surround different lives (not only human). Songs can have words; that's when poems appear, which can also take the shape of prayers and manifestos. To chase songs in the landscape is to seek oneself as a presence that overflows life in a given body, and to seize memories that exceed the individual conscious experience. This establishes the certainty that beings from all times are living in what we understand as present-space. Thus, the chance of loneliness disappears. You think and feel in the plural.

The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit⁴.

Conversations about spirituality, soup kitchens, drug use or desire; on the bank of a muddy river in the semiarid Chaco forest or in a neighbourhood of the capital city of the southernmost country in the continent. Where you can find humanity, you can see the repetition of concerns about what's perceptible and the construction of senses and functions. We build a sense of being a body. How to be (or to feel) part of a family, a community, a system or a circuit. The *Genealogy of the Shape* that Gabriel Chaile proposes is eager to present itself as the construction of a poem, with representative materials from diverse cultural histories that converge, subjugate, and with the multiple paradoxes that make up the human experience (modern, contemporary). This community of pieces, sculptures presented as verses, encapsulates a chronicle of sense and function mutations. At the same time, this poem/community is an exhibition of what survives still unrecognizable in relation to what it was visible.

The genealogy is the reunion with different parts of events that played different roles; as well as the points of absence, what couldn't happen⁵.



To Gabriel, *it's about understanding the process through which the surfaces of things adopt certain shapes through time, and how they continue to mutate under a genealogical line*⁶. The strength of the blows and the strength of the material that takes them varies, the shapes are consequences. To subtract, add, model, as actions to “give shape”.

To narrate a story of his community, a story that concatenates at once the memories of many other communities, a Wichi⁷ master and chief from northwest Argentina (where diverse people, nations, beings and landscapes coexist juxtaposed), tells: *our community has a long history, a history of struggle, change and suffering in which we have survived thanks to Mother Nature, God and the Winds that have accompanied us from the beginning of time. (...) Where there's native history, there was once culture and organization. After the time of many deaths, there were a few survivors, and reality was very sad*⁸. After this time, the survivors keep alive the memory that makes them part of a communal, native history, a memory that does not end with the current sadness. The remains are found by scientists who are faced with quietness, and they misrepresent them as information. These “remains” are kept in display cases, detached from their original landscape. These remains allow us to imagine the time in which magic, life, relationships and distribution of physical and moral goods were different.

Gabriel retrieves in his poem *the possibility of transposing mystery (and death) with the aid of some grammatical forms*.⁹ Through imagination, he aims to restore what has been “mutilated”¹⁰.

In several conversations and interviews, Gabriel has stated that he is interested in archaeology and anthropology. He goes to ethnographic, archaeological, and natural science museums to learn about the surviving shapes of what was washed away in the north of what is now Argentina. About archaeology, he has always liked the idea of making a hypothesis or an interpretation of a community through shapes, like a vase or any other object that triggers¹¹ the possibility of reconstruction of the absent. But even though the morphology he chooses may refer to remains of a lost and imaginary civilization¹², when he builds his “portraits” as clay ovens or as artisanal references to containers or industrial machines, he is giving visibility, precisely, to what has survived. The shapes that appear in our faces, the pronounced cheekbones, the lips, the outline of our noses and the darkness of our eyes. The languages that are still spoken in the hill, the forest, the mountains, where the aim is to avoid the creation of another gated community, another winery, another soy field, another hotel that prevents us from growing our own food in the fertile soil; from making a thank offering to the “Pachamama”; from letting the carnival run wild,

thus keeping us from transforming (be theriomorphic) and forget about the contracts. We want to walk for hours through the trees, searching for firewood to roast the fish we caught in the river or the stingless bee honey to sweeten our infusions. *The different perspectives are fighting forces; more than "visions of the world", they are sided views or expressions of the unified world from an absolute point of view: God, Nature.* Native communities, like other marginalized communities or minorities, are faced with the threat of being captured by a foreign perspective, thus losing their own humanity, to the benefit of others.¹³ In the cities, it is harder to find winds that whisper ancient voices: the machines monopolize the sound with their functional pounding.

*(...) They disappeared from the table: the bread, the tortillas, the sugar, the flowers were all gone. I had left them there, I was certain. Nothing stranger (...) if only they had vanished, but that wasn't the case, a part of them was still there, present. Like proof that something happened.*¹⁴ Thereby, the pre-Columbian objects, found and loved *with all the hypocrisy of nostalgia*¹⁵, they are there, something remains, they are still part of the present, but their meaning changes constantly. When do things die? Is it when we forget about them? When they are no longer useful? Art endows new meanings to objects once they become obsolete, or simply transforms their utility to create

a new occurrence that bursts in the social flow. The surface of things gets modified because its meaning also changes. *The relationship shape/content plunges into crisis*¹⁶.

I live in a city that resembles many small Argentine cities surrounded by green hills and tropical fruits growing on sidewalks and gardens. We coexist with the eco of what was once a hill and the recent rebellion that reminds of the ancient call. A developmental model stepped forward, mountain animals left, trees were sold. There was labour with the promise of well-being, state-owned oil wells and extensive farming. But that promise was broken, and among the ruins of what was possible there was a road blockade, desperation transformed into joint action: cut off circulation, halt operation. Like zombie-voices, you can still hear on the streets (that become mud if it rains): "there were animals that were one family with humans, there were no churches and no paper money", "we lived like one with the hill", "we were happy." Now, we are divided between "whites" and "natives." Natives are the ones who need help, the ones who have the task of defending their culture, and not try to be anything but poor. We, the whites, are the employees, the students, the vendors, what defines us is what we consume (we defend that: the possibility to consume), what we consume is the immediate consequence of what we produce as part of a system.

The poem Gabriel composes emerges from a search that begins in front of a mirror, looking for ancient voices in shapes, and it gives visibility to the voices that come together in a choir, like helpers in a ritual, the different withstanding world views that aim to produce meanings.

*(...) We will never live again
it will take better care of them
our eyes
hope
our steps
our streets
our days
our purpose
in the desert
the breath
won't return
to its shadow
remember
our water
the firewood
to us
have died with our lives
the youth
left their songs
for that
for that
but you
forever
you will forget about us
forever¹⁷.*

Notes

- 1 Text based on Gabriel Chaile's writings and conversations with the artist.
- 2 *Manifiesto of Futurism* (1909) Translation into Spanish by Ramón Gómez de la Serna.
- 3 "If everything's human, then everything is dangerous", published interview in "La mirada del jaguar: introducción al perspectivismo amerindio" [The jaguar's perspective: introduction to the Amerindian perspectivism"] (2013)
- 4 John 3:8. *The Bible*.
- 5 Based on a quote by Foucault, a conversation with Mariana Ortega (2019).
- 6 Text about the concept "genealogy of the shape", by Gabriel Chaile (2018).
- 7 Name that refers to native people from northern Argentina. In the homonymous language, "Wichí" means: "people, nation". The 2010 national population census in Argentina revealed the existence of 50,419 self-identified Wichí communities throughout the country.
- 8 Juan de Dios López in "Las cuatro voces del viento. Historias del monte wichí" [The four voices of the wind. Stories of the Wichí Mount], compilation of stories by Leda Kantor, unpublished (2019).

- 9 Anthropophagic Manifiesto. Oswald de Andrade (1928).
- 10 Conversation with Pablo Semán (2019).
- 11 Chat with Gabriel Chaile (2019)
- 12 "Variaciones del sincretismo" [Variations of Syncretism], Laura Isola (2017).
- 13 "El perspectivismo retoma la antropofagia oswaldiana en nuevos términos" ["Perspectivism reclaims the Oswaldian anthropophagy in new terms"]. Interview to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2007).
- 14 "Ya no somos más los dueños" ["We are no longer the owners"], unpublished text by Gabriel Chaile (2013).
- 15 Anthropophagic Manifiesto. Oswald de Andrade (1928).
- 16 Ingeniería de la necesidad [Necessity Engineering] (2018).
- 17 Outline of biblical texts and others. Gabriel Chaile, unpublished (2010/2011)

Genealogía de la forma Gabriel Chaile

Curator: Andrea Fernández

—

Text: Andrea Fernández

Translation: Montserrat Callao Escalada

Design: Laura Escobar

Illustration: Gabriela Escobar

© Barro, 2019

June—July 2019
Barro#20
www.barro.cc