

Second Movement

Imperceptible

Rhizomatic Motions

Claudia Huenchuleo Paquien 2022

San Francisco State University/ Fine Arts Gallery

SECOND MOVEMENT: IMPERCEPTIBLE RHIZOMATIC MOTIONS

I was born and raised in Concepcion, the second largest city in south of Chile, as a daughter of a Mapuche man and Chilean woman. My education was based on assimilation to Chilean culture and erasing any sign of indigeneity in my story. As a child I was exposed to a violent history of Chile that portrayed indigenous as subhuman or recalcitrant warriors who deserved punishment. My last name Huenchuleo, a Mapuche name, was the only connector to my indigenous history. I was never fully recognized as Chilean nor Mapuche. This situation of in-betweenness is part of the Mapuche diasporic identity both to cities within Chile and outside its borders.

My life at home was also based on silence and suppression of my indigenous roots. My family had a confusing strategy to cope with the racial discrimination that I faced in the school. My father also experienced similar discrimination from a young age. His family had to migrate after a violent episode in 1928, when their land was stolen by settler Chileans protected by the state of Chile. Between 1883-1929, Chile promulgated a law of “Territorial Establishment and Reduccion” for indigenous people marking a profound process of deterritorialization with cultural, political and economic consequences for the Mapuche people. My experience was thus embedded with this history of colonization and cycle of discrimination that continues to define Chile’s social life.

Over the years, I developed a sense of being an outsider in my own city. These feelings increased even more after working in rural areas with Mapuche communities because I did not speak the Mapudungun language and my family was not rooted in the Mapuche cultural traditions. The unsettling position of being in-between, the “I am” but “I am not,” is the experience that I share with many other Mapuche people, whose families migrated to the cities, and conformed the Mapuche diaspora. Urban Mapuche people or *champurria* are in an intense process of space resignification in new geographical locations, and cultural recuperation of language and traditions.

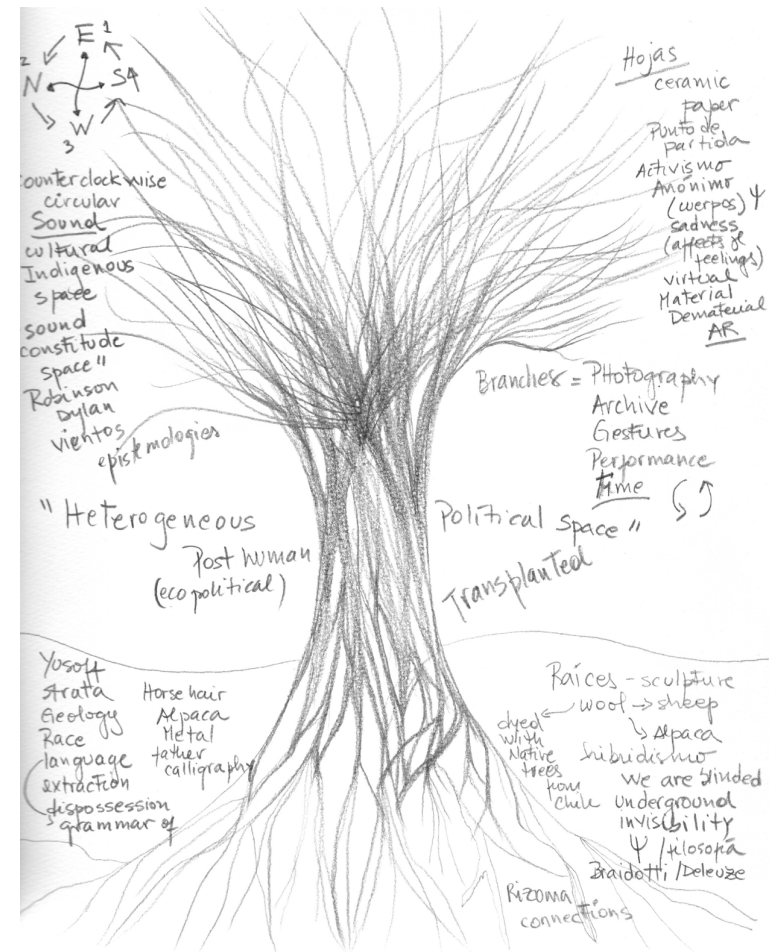


Made to Move in my studio at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California

Made to Move as part of my project *Lof in Transit*, ties the ideas of place and culture to a condition of perpetual movement. My work is greatly inspired by American Indigenous academic Jodi Byrd, who talks about the movement of people, plants and animals across territories as a result of imperial strategies. In their book *The Transit of Empire, Indigenous Critique of Colonialism*, Byrd explains how indigenous subjectivities have been constructed by their movements, by being in transit.

What it means to be in transit, then, is to be in motion, to exist liminally in the ungrievable spaces of suspicion and unintelligibility. To be in transit is to be made to move. —Jodi Byrd

As in my photography series *Embodied Resistance*, I created *Made to Move* inspired by the metaphor of the tree and the rhizome that connects the tree to its surroundings considering its imperceptible rhizomatic motions. The rhizome as a conceptual frame helps me to contest Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad, which they misinterpreted as an indigenous practice of people who naturally tend to be deterritorialized and unstructured.



Journal Notes

Lof in Transit contests the diminished value of place in Deleuzian nomadic thought that constructed indigenous subjectivity defined by a condition of constant movement. As Australian indigenous academics Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney unfold the problem:

“What is at stake politically when Indigenous way are conceived erroneously as unstructured and deterritorializing, when (Western) subjectivities are constructed as ‘nomad’ but nomadism is no longer marked as a mode of existence special to Indigenous humanity, and when (Western) subjective transformation is construed as a process of ‘becoming-autochthonous that erases the specificity of ‘the Autochthon’ and results in her self-alienation?’”¹

Historically, the deterritorialization of indigenous people is the result of an imperial strategy to steal ancestral land by claiming that indigenous homeland is *terra nullius*,² owned by nobody and free for taking. Politically, a nomadic subjectivity is constructed without sovereignty, law, and governing institutions, a notion that completely depoliticized indigenous subjectivities. Dominant current narratives about indigeneity relegates indigenous presences to the spectral or presences of the past.

Made to Move is one of my favorite pieces in *Lof in Transit*. For a long time, I have been working with the idea of roots or trees uprooted in movement and floating. This imagery is present in some of my collages from 2017. I had the concept and decided to experiment with 3D sculpting sheep wool that I brought from Chile more than fifteen years ago. I made this piece in a laborious and intensive process of more than six months using wet and needle felting.

¹ Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney, “Indigeneity, Posthumanism and Nomad Thought,” in *Posthuman Ecologies*, ed. Rosi Braidotti and Simone Bignall (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2019), 160.

² Latin expression meaning nobody’s land.

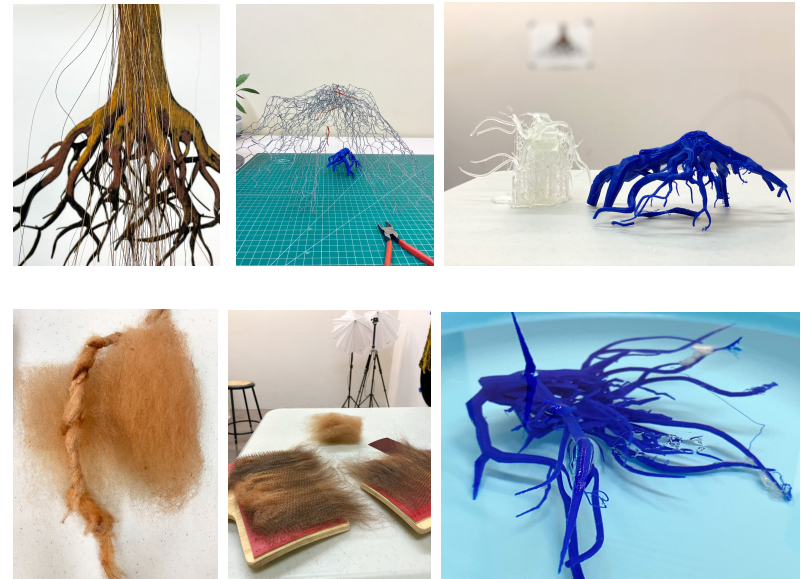


Petrified Beauty, hand cut collage, 12” x 9”, 2017



Prodigal Daughter, hand cut collage, 9" x 14", 2017

The process of making *Made to Move* was emotionally comforting. It was a kinesthetic and sensorial experience: I enjoyed the tension of working with rough fibers; the smells brought me happy memories from home, landscapes, clothes, and places of familiarity and comfort. The wool came from the same region as a wool blanket that I carried from Chile that comforted me during many sleepless nights. It is the same wool used to make warm clothes for the rainy weather in southern Chile, Wallmapu.



Made to Move is a hybrid object made of animal hair. It includes plant pigment made of Chilean native flora intertwined with the human gesture materialized in a suitcase handle.



Fine Arts Gallery at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California

Beheaded like the native trees, replaced for plantations of pines and eucalyptus in Mapuche territory, *Made to Move* is a reminder that indigeneity is constituted by forced movement. Like involuntary nomads we have been made to move. However, living in diaspora, we hold a space of constant identity redefinition linked to our hybrid subjectivities. Byrd opens a door to see agency and the opportunity to stay with the displacement, instead of suppressing or romanticizing it as nomadic.



“To be in transit is to be active presence in a world of relational movements and countermovements. To be in transit is to exist relationally and multiply.” Judi Byrd



Traditionally seen as “rooted and static, located in a discrete place,”³ indigeneity, however, entails motion and transmotion. I like to believe in the vision of Gerald Vizenor, who understands transmotion as a “sense of native motion and an active presence [that] is sui generis sovereignty. Native transmotion is survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty. Native stories of survivance are the creases of transmotion and sovereignty.”

³ Byrd, Introduction “Indigenous Critical Theory and the Diminishing Returns of Civilization” to *The Transit of Empire*, xvi.