
Original Article

Eating one's worlds: On foods, metabolic writing and ethnographic humor

Cristóbal Bonelli

Anthropology of Health, Care and the Body, Amsterdam University,
Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, Amsterdam, 1018 WV, The Netherlands.
E-mail: C.R.Bonelli@uva.nl

Abstract What happens to our academic writing when we are invited by our interactants to realize that what is serious for a situated set of practices might not be as serious for another set of practices? In this article I explore such situations by considering the relations among eaters, ecologies and the circulation of different types of food in the context of ontological pluralism in Southern Chile. Inspired by debates on eating and subjectivities coming from empirical philosophy, as well as by theorizations on how to take others' worlds seriously offered by 'the ontological turn' in anthropology, I explore how ethnographic situations related to eating and to foods transform epistemological distances between subjects and objects. More specifically, I show how taking our interactants seriously may lead us to *eat our academic wor(l)ds*, making room for unexpected ethnographic transactions emerging beyond ethnographic theorization. *Subjectivity* (2015) 8, 181–200. doi:10.1057/sub.2015.7

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Introduction

In one of the stimulating articles published in the inaugural issue of this journal, the empirical philosopher and social theorist Annemarie Mol (2008) offered us some preliminary reflections on the relations between eating and subjectivity. Rather than offering a sort of 'modern', static definition of subjectivity, Mol has invited us to imagine what would happen if an actor were theorized as an eating self as well as to theorize subjectivities through metabolic metaphors. What would get altered in Western philosophical traditions if 'eating' were used as a model for philosophical reflection?

According to Mol's proposal, 'situations to do with eating' are indeed relevant for theorizing subjectivities as they have the capacity to transform the

ways in which Western philosophical traditions have privileged ‘the fantasy that the author, the subject of theory, is located outside the object of reflection’ (Mol, 2008, p. 32). Considering the impossibility of drawing a clear separation between the eater, as a subject, and the eaten food, as an object, Mol has suggested that such eating situations can offer thought-provoking models and metaphors to (re) theorize relations and epistemic engagements more broadly: What delineates subjectivity, Mol suggested, is eating as a transformative action that depends on how and what one eats. Or, to use the words of the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2012), Mol has posed subjectivity ‘as at once a question about a state of being and a question about the agent who takes action. To focus on “eating” dislocates the two, insofar as the eating self is not an agent in any obvious sense’ (Strathern, 2012, p. 3).

Strongly inspired by these ideas, in this article I will argue that, although a consideration of the subject as an eater has the potential to transform the ways in which Western philosophical traditions have privileged subject–object dualism, such a move is not sufficient for dealing with the ongoing challenge of escaping the modern dualism that is inherent in academic production. Here I am building on a thought-provoking article written by the philosopher of science Stengers (2008) and published in the same first issue of this journal. Stengers (2008, p. 39) fiercely warned us about how the critical modern opposition between objectivity and subjectivity is always ‘able to thrive on an ever-going process of capture’. In this article, I aim to show ethnographically how metabolic models and metaphors *per se* do not guarantee an escape from modern territory. As a possible way to escape such territory, I will offer an antidote against capture, consisting in reclaiming the peculiar force that certain ethnographic events have for disrupting academic theorization. More particularly, I will seriously consider how indigenous people in Southern Chile made fun of some of my own ethnographic theorizing, forcing me in this way to think about the risks of reductionism that we, as anthropologists in particular and social scientists in general, run when trying to fabricate bounded, coherent and essentializing ‘cosmologies’ through ethnographic writing. In this sense, my concern here resonates with the inquiry into ‘differential productions of subjectivity, linking those who theorize and those who are theorized’ (Stengers, 2008, p. 54). Following from this concern, this article might be considered an exercise in anti-cosmological writing, as it attempts to escape modern capture by problematizing the very existence of a cosmology as a ‘pure’, abstract and coherent object of investigation. Cosmology, for this reflection, can rather be considered a result of modern capture.

These words are offered with two audiences in mind. First, to my Pehuenche friends in Chile, I would like to be clear that I do not know anything about them that would allow me to speak on their behalf. This statement is not (only) grounded on a certain de-colonial political correctness toward the subaltern. Many years of interaction with different people in Southern Chile have taught me that there is much diversity among the Pehuenche people themselves, for which

reason I will try to avoid, or at least to be critical of, the powerful political rhetorical device of creating similarity among all Pehuenche people. Second, to my academic colleagues, I would like to call attention to the impression I have that what we know about other people is *too* little, and being aware of this will never be *enough*, as far as human relations are concerned. Awareness about this impossibility of achieving any kind of stability of difference as far as people are concerned has been extensively discussed among scholars associated with what has been called 'the anthropological turn' in anthropology (for example, Henare *et al*, 2007; Viveiros de Castro, 2011). Much ink has been spilled by these scholars in order to make room for *seriously* imagining the possibility of people living in multiple worlds. Such a seriousness has, in fact, been crystalized in explicit and insistent calls to 'take informants seriously' (see, for example, Viveiros de Castro, 2011).¹ This invitation, though, as Candea (2011) has already suggested, should not be misunderstood as a call merely to respect others' beliefs – what might sound like the historical *leif motiv* of anthropology – but rather as a call to refrain 'from actualizing the possible expressions of alien thought and deciding to sustain them as possibilities' (Viveiros de Castro, 2011, p. 137). To put it differently, 'taking seriously' others' worlds – and words – entails the desire to escape modern capture, or the decision to restrain oneself from explaining other worlds – and words – *excessively*. In fact, some people from Southern Chile with whom I have interacted over the past years have taught me that taking them 'seriously' entails precisely the need to not take my own partial actualizations of them too seriously. Conversing with the above debates, in this article I will suggest that scholars wanting to reinforce processes of ongoing learning about multiple realities (and willing to *escape capture* in ethnographic writing) might benefit from developing and protecting humoristic sensibilities. In a way, I will try to demonstrate that the very anthropological attitude of 'taking seriously' encompasses the possibility of/for cultivating an ethnographic attitude aimed at 'practices of humoristic freedom': The research subject *captured* by practices of subjection is also constituted by practices of liberation (see Foucault, 2001) and practices of humor. In what follows, I would like to suggest some potentially less serious ways in which one can liberate oneself of disciplinary practices that attempt to take seriously an 'other' that could always be actualized (or eaten and digested!) 'otherwise'.²

The Problem

Let us start by thinking about a serious problem brought up by one of my friends during my last visit to the district of Alto Bío Bío in southern Chile, where more than 80 per cent of the population is Pehuenche. The Pehuenche are indigenous people who are usually considered to be part of the Mapuche people, residing in

the mountains, even though the Pehuenche people did not originally belong to the Mapuche ethnic group.³ The last time I saw my friend *Ñanko* he was ill and unemployed, which surprised me considerably as I remembered him as a very dynamic and strong person, known as a successful employee in public Chilean institutions. *Ñanko* is my friend's Pehuenche name, but he is also known as *Sergio*, and this is the name that appears on his Chilean identity card. Sergio, or *Ñanko*, told me that the shaman had attributed his illness to the fact that his *püllü* was depressed and weak – vulnerable, perhaps. Later I will share with you my own version of what *püllü* might entail for the Pehuenche, but for now it can be roughly translated as *life spirit*. To help him, the shaman had given Sergio a few liters of medicinal herbs (Spanish, *remedios*; Chedungun, *lawen*) and strongly suggested eating food from the land (Ch. *iyael mapu*) – food that is cultivated or gathered by the Pehuenche themselves in their place of origin⁴ – rather than *winka* or white food. I was immediately seduced by this statement (as far as one can be seduced by a statement) as it touched upon several concerns that had already caught my attention throughout my academic career – namely, eating, health, illness, shamanism and bodies. Sergio did not give any indication that he was depressed in the sense understood by Western mental health workers, but rather he talked about suffering from an imbalance between his own force (Ch. *newen*) and that of the land. According to the shaman, Sergio's illness and 'weakness' involved an imbalance of forces that could be reversed through a process of *blood-cleansing*, induced by the ingestion of food and medicinal herbs from the land.

Sergio through the Shaman's eyes

In what follows, I wish to suggest that, among many possibilities, Sergio's problem may be related to a displacement of situated forces of the land of residence, and that eating food from the land entails feeding particular circuits of forces distributed ecologically. My aim in this section is to think about the link between *püllü*, force (Ch. *newen*) and food from the land, and to delineate some preliminary differences between this food and so-called white food, which is typically associated with rice and pasta.⁵ Why can rice and pasta not provide the force needed by Sergio's life spirit? Why, according to the shaman, does food from the land work as a seed of force for the *püllü*, a capacity with which other foods such as rice and pasta are not endowed?

By disentangling the shaman's analytics, I would like to suggest that food from the land and *winka* food are radically different items of consumption, the two main differences between them being the different *force* embedded in them and the circuits they travel (see Course, 2013). Furthermore, I will suggest that the Pehuenche eater is configured ecologically: The eater is not *in* a relationship of continuity with the landscape but rather *is* a relation of continuity with the

landscape, the eating subject being a sort of circuit of forces and differences rather than a bounded physical entity identical unto itself.

Püllü and Personal Composition

Before disentangling the relations between food, land and people's vital force, it is necessary to conceptualize what a *püllü* is and does. To make a long story short, *püllü* is frequently enacted as a very situated vital-relational force that enables particular agents to sustain the ecology of life. At the risk of being judged for providing univocal definitions, I have elsewhere written about the *püllü* as being a part of Pehuenche personhood, Pehuenche personhood being a particular composition of various capacities (Bonelli, 2012a,b). Most of the Pehuenche conceptualize themselves as having two spirits. For example, Francisco, an evangelical pastor in his sixties, once told me:

People have two spirits, one that is capable of going away, the little crazy one called *am*, and the other one which always stays close to people and which is the life spirit: the *püllü*.

A Pehuenche person can thus be envisaged as a composition of three different capacities or elements – namely, an *am*, a *püllü* and a corporeal support. The *am*, or the invisible double of the person, is always in the good company of a spirit called *püllü*. The word *püllü* is polysemic and often refers to the spirit of the earth, which does not belong to the person as it pre-dates and post-dates people's lives. In a nutshell, every person is in coexistence with a particular *püllü*, which under normal conditions is a part of their personal composition. When the intensity of the *püllü* is exceptionally strong, a person can actually deploy shamanic capacities. The difference between normal people and shamans boils down to a relational intensity (see Viveiros de Castro, 2007) rather than the accumulation of knowledge. This is the case for both evangelical pastors and traditional healers: They both share a relational ability to work with a particular *küme püllü* (see Bonelli, forthcoming). The *püllü* literally 'rises up' from the earth to protect and accompany people. I once naively asked my friends if I had a *püllü* too. Making fun of such an odd question, they said that, if I did not have a *püllü*, I could not be alive. Thus, in Alto Bío Bío, personhood seems to be a personal composition constructed multiply: The person, or *che*, is a convergent personal space consisting of an *am*, a *püllü* and a corporeal support.⁶

Descriptions of this personal composition seemed to me, at least at the very beginning of my fieldwork, to be contradictory. My thinking was probably shaped by particular ideas about the self, property and the body, associated with liberal premises embedded in the arguments proposed by John Locke, the English

philosopher regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment and considered to be the founder of classical liberalism. For Locke, a person is a ‘thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places’ (Locke, 1988, p. xxx).⁷ If we play around with this definition by thinking of the subject as an eater (see above), then an eater should be able to consider itself as itself, and to have a sort of liberal digestion in different times and places. This leads to a first conclusion: Locke would not have been able to deal with Sergio’s problem, as Sergio’s *püllü* was Sergio, but at the same time it was not Sergio.

Eating food from the land, as suggested by the shaman, means eating food from a very particular place far away from where rice is cultivated or where pasta is made. Furthermore, feeding someone with food from the land means feeding a person that cannot consider itself as itself. The *püllü* needs to be fed with food that belongs to the local land and that has been grown or gathered in the same place. This was made clear to me one day when, having prepared the animal blood we were about to eat after having killed a sheep, my friend Marta poured a spoonful of it out the window:

We always feed the *püllü* spirit, the land spirit. By doing so, the *püllü* will always help us by bringing food for the family. You will always have food if you feed the *püllü*.

Thus, the *püllü* is the person but is *not* the person. It is the self and the other at the same time, a particular ecological version of Rimbaud’s famous statement: ‘I is another’. I have said that the *püllü* belongs to the earth, but in many respects each person is and belongs to a different *püllü* as well. A clear illustration of this is the strong relation between Pehuenche personal names and the *püllü* (see Isla, 2005). Every person and *püllü* has a particular name, or *güi*. This name, for Sergio, is *Ñanko*. In Alto Bío Bío, two people who share a particular *püllü* and its names are known as *laku*. Among scholars studying the Mapuche, this is known as the *laku* model of kinship (see Foerster, 2010), which, in a nutshell, involves the unification of different people through the sharing of the name of a particular *püllü* and the sharing of the *püllü* itself. *Ñanko*, therefore, indexes a particular *püllü* that Sergio shares with others. Having said this, my friend’s depressed *püllü*, at least as understood through the shaman’s analytics, indexes at least two different sets of unbalanced relations – namely, the relation between a person’s force and the land-place he or she lives in, and the relations among different people living on or in the same land-place. Thus, food from the land – with land being understood as a singular and non-transportable place constituted by multiple forces – can reinforce the life spirit beyond individual digestion, so to speak, much more so than other foods that are alien to the local circuit within which food is produced, consumed and maintained.

Cosmo-Metabolism, or the Circuit of Force and Food

Relations among people, food and land are made apparent in the word *Pehuenche*. In their native language, Chedungun, *Pehuenche* means ‘the people of the *Pewen*’ (the monkey puzzle tree, or *araucania araucana*). The name refers to an eating–feeding relationship, as historically the *pewen* tree had been indispensable to their survival. The Pehuenche used to base their diet on the pine nuts (Sp. *pinones*) offered by the *pewen* tree, their most important sacred food provider. Today, however, an average family consumes about 50 kg of wheat flour per month (Sp. *quintal de harina*), mostly in the form of Pehuenche bread (Sp. *tortilla*, Ch. *kofke*). *Kofke* is now an essential food in Alto Bío Bío. During the summer, the *quintal de harina* is complemented with home-grown vegetables. Bread is not strictly considered food from the land, even though it has become a staple of the Pehuenche diet. Interesting to highlight when considering the shaman’s analytics is the importance of food that is cultivated or gathered by the Pehuenche themselves and that still circulates outside the markets of Chilean/*winka* people (see Course, 2013). What I would like to suggest is that food from the land circulates and is maintained through what I call the circuit of literal feedback, as this food has the force that enables the reproduction of food.

If you eat food from the land, or *iyael mapu*, simply translated as *comida natural* (natural food) in Spanish, you do not become sick, as such a diet helps to maintain a balance between your personal force, or *newen*, and the force of the land, *newenes*. One of the most common Chedungun idioms referring to food is *mognenwe*, literally meaning ‘the place of life’. *Mognenwe* refers to everything that is edible and all that allows life to be sustained. *Mognenwe* has the force (*newen*) needed for food to be maintained. The more you eat food from the land, the more you can cultivate or gather such food. As I mentioned previously, feeding oneself with food from the land also means feeding the life spirit, the *piüllü*, which belongs to the *mapu*, or land-earth. Feeding others with food from the land therefore entails feeding an ecological other, a circuit or a composition, if you like.

The vegetable garden, or *tukukan* (from *tukun*, the action of putting something into the land), is not only the place where carrots, onions, lettuce, pumpkins, chili and so on are grown, but it is also a place where different generations share their stories and concerns. It is important to mention here that the owner of the people, the deity *Ngenechen*, is the one who has provided all of the indispensable foods that afford life. This means that maintaining the place of life – or food – implies not only taking care of crops but also giving daily thanks to the provider every time you eat. Both in rituals and in daily life, *Ngenechen* is present while people cook on the fire: The smoke of the *kutralwe* is the medium through which words travel and are finally heard by *Ngenechen*. Thus, taking care of one’s words while eating is imperative, advice (Ch. *ngulam*) and good conversation (Ch. *kume nutram*) being the privileged and only permissible types of speech in situations of commensality. Moreover, the force, or *newen*, of the family lives in the fire.

Perhaps the most important source of joy for my herbalist friend Flora is participating in the *nguillatun* ritual because this is when she cooks a huge pot of vegetables and meat to share with the rest of the people in her community. She told me emphatically that on these occasions she wants to share everything and would never dream of keeping a piece of meat to herself. She wants to give everything away, simply because food travels around (Sp. *la comida anda, dando vueltas*, Ch. *Iyael dawoy*). ‘If you give everything, everything is going to come back’, she told me.⁸ This resonates with what Marta had told me when feeding the *püllü*: You will always have food if you feed the *püllü*. The act of sharing food is thus seen as a way of expressing care for others, or caressing (Sp. *hacer carino*. Ch. *pozewvn*) others. I once missed partaking in the meat that a friend of mine wanted to share with me on the final day of the *nguillatun* ritual because I had to leave for personal reasons. When he finally managed to find me, he told me with tears in his eyes that he was extremely sad as his family’s food was their most precious possession, and he had wanted to share it with me: ‘It makes the *piuke* (heart) feel good’. My friend Sergio’s *piuke* was sad and forceless, which explains why, at least according to the shaman’s analytics, he had to stop eating food from alien circuits.

Winka Food

Rice and pasta, and other products that can be bought at supermarkets, are referred to as merchandise (Sp. *mercaderias*) in the vernacular, and these are always thought of as somewhere or someone else’s food. ‘As you can see, we do not have factories here’, my host Pedro told me, adding that *winka* food was produced in mass rather than locally cultivated. ‘The youth find it easier to cook with those items, since they are easily accessible’, he told me, referring to non-Pehuenche (Ch. *winka*) food.

Within the shaman’s analytics, one of the main problems associated with the consumption of this merchandise is that these foods do not feed the *püllü*, the life spirit of both land and people, in the way *iyael mapu* does. Merchandise, in short, consists of items that remain alien to the circuit of local forces and its particular cosmo-metabolism of forces. Merchandise is part of a circuit of markets and can be obtained through the relations Pehuenche people establish with Chilean people through money, which is itself always obtained through state subsidies or individual salaries. Through the shaman’s analytics, these foods generate a sort of displacement of the force of the land and a progressive weakening of the circuit of forces associated with *püllü* spirits. I would like to suggest that the consumption of these items enacts an extensive deterritorialization of forces, separating the force of land from the force of the person.⁹ In Alto Bío Bío, the arrival of these foods began with the construction of a road connecting the nearest town Ralco to

the Pehuenche communities. This road was built in the 1980s during Pinochet's Dictatorship and in collaboration with Pehuenche people. My host Pedro, a man in his 80s, was astounded by the huge 'mess' (Sp. *trajino*) the construction of the road had caused. The mess he was referring to was the result of the arrival of many 'alien things' (Ch. *Ka yewum* Sp. *Cosas ajenas*).

What I would like to highlight here is that white foods index a set of practices and technologies that do not consider the relevance of the life spirit as a key ecological operator. I should have previously mentioned that Sergio lives in a city so that his children can attend school and because of the employment opportunities this affords him. As a guest in his house, I ate rice and pasta regularly. It is very likely that we were actually eating rice at the moment he told me that he should be eating more food from the land. For the shaman, eating food from the land means eating a world and its forces, its concepts, its presuppositions, its life.

The shaman's advice about eating food from the land should not be glossed over as a 'treatment' for a liberal eater with extensive boundaries, as understood by Western biomedical practices. If this is a treatment, it is a treatment designed for an ecological eater for whom *feeding is eating*. As a treatment, it also challenges capitalist transactions, forcing us to think about our own conceptions of relations, resources, land and people. As a treatment, it sheds light on the fact that *winka* food not only creates a relation of dependence that is not at all necessary in the logic of the circuit of literal feedback, but also generates an extensive distance between people and the land. *Winka* food somehow *creates* this distance as people and land are part of a continuum that needs to be fed in order to be maintained. It should not be surprising, then, that the life spirit loses its force (or *newen*) when people eat *landless* rice or pasta; and it should not be surprising to hear people complaining about the fact that many *püllü* spirits have decided to leave the area because of the 'mess' caused by the arrival of too many new commodities. The *püllüs'* withdrawal is at the core of Sergio's illness: It entails the emergence of a split between people and the land. Perhaps it also entails the reincarnation of Locke's liberal theories as a particular vulnerability – that is, the vulnerability of extensive eating.

Radical Shaman, Radical Difference, Radical Romanticism?

Allow me, for a moment, to consider the shaman's advice to eat food from the land on a more theoretical level, by establishing a partial connection with some theoretical reflections and ethnographic knowledge produced elsewhere in South America. Within the logics that regulate what I have called Pehuenche *cosmo-metabolism*, the balance and imbalance implied by Pehuenche eating practices evoke Amerindian anthropological reflections on kinship processes, particularly regarding practices of depotentialization of affinity and protection of similarity.

Theoretically speaking, the shaman's treatment might recall some of Lévi-Strauss' (1943) accounts regarding the model of affinity and relations with strangers in South America. Within this logic, and inspired by these thoughts, Viveiros de Castro (2001) has argued that in Amazonia, while affinity as the 'dimension of the cosmic relational matrix' is a given (p. 19), consanguinity needs to be constructed through human action and intention. As far as the shaman's analytics are concerned, on this continuum between identity-consanguinity and difference-affinity, eating food from the land might be regarded as a way to manage (the overdose of) difference and to reinforce similarity, whereas eating *winka* food or 'distant goods' (Course, 2013) entails the possibility of dealing with difference as well as actualizing affinity with non-Pehuenche people.¹⁰ In this token, one could argue that the shaman's advice to Sergio aims to reinforce similarity by managing difference.

Broadly conceived, this logic conceives of the other as being in a constitutive relation: The impossibility of achieving full similarity is due to the simple fact that difference precedes similarity (Surrallés, 2000; Viveiros de Castro, 2001; Taylor and Viveiros de Castro, 2006), the latter being a particular case of difference that does not exist for itself (Lévi-Strauss, 1971).¹¹ In other words, affinity as a particular relation 'is virtually eclipsed by consanguinity as part of the process of making kinship' (Viveiros de Castro, 2001, p. 24). Eating food from the land *eclipses* affinity, so to speak, by producing and reproducing the cosmo-metabolism described above, for which eating *is* or *equals* feeding an ecological eater constituted by self-difference rather than self-identity.

Among the Pehuenche, the internal-external other, understood as a constitutive part of kinship relations, is an ethnographic fact that is clearly evident when considering the term used to refer to one's maternal uncle, *weku*. *Weku* literally means 'outside' and is a metaphor also appearing in the word *wekuwe*, a generic term for 'evil spirit', which has been literally translated as 'outside person' (Hernandez, 2002). The suffix *-ve* is often used to refer to a subject that performs a particular action. Therefore, *wekuwe* could be literally translated as 'the one who performs the outside'. Lienlaf (in Sierra, 1992) has stated that *wekuwe* can also be translated as 'the one who is in charge of balance' (Sp. *equilibrador*) and 'the one who builds by destroying' (Sp. *el que compone echando a perder*). In Alto Bío Bío, the *wekuwe* entail a constant threat for people and are conceived as spirits that feed on Pehuenche blood (see Bonelli, 2014). Eating and sharing food from the land are regarded as essential practices to ensure protection from these constitutive, external evil spiritual forces that cause 'weakness' (Sp. *debilidad*). In a way, eating too much rice and pasta implies a *relational failure* of Pehuenche imaginaries about relatedness (see Stasch, 2009).

A complementary question, perhaps more focused on practices than on Pehuenche thought (see Mol's ideas on *praxiography*, 2002), is whether or not this treatment is something that can really be put in motion by Sergio himself in his daily life. I am afraid the answer is no. Unfortunately, Sergio does not have the

means to follow a diet based on food from the land because he lives in the city, where the mode of life described above is not a practical alternative. What I would like to suggest in what follows is that, when internal differences are taken seriously (Candea, 2011), the linear *failure* at stake is not homogenous, clear or definitive. Yet, before exploring this post-failure possibility too seriously, I invite the reader to take a break on *Facebook*, as many scholars do while writing academic papers.

Not Too Seriously!

Amsterdam, September 2013. While I was in the process of writing the first part of this article, which you have just read, I got an email from a friend of mine, Jaqueline Caniguan, a linguist of Mapuche heritage whom I had met in 2000, when we were both working for a Chilean foundation established to reinforce rural development in the poorest Chilean provinces. Since then, we have been in contact through email and, more recently, through Facebook. During the particular chat session I will present to you, she wrote to ask me for information about doctoral programs in the linguistics department of Leiden University, where I had recently done some teaching. When I received this Facebook message, I was reading Massey's (2003) critical interrogation of the space-time of 'fieldwork' as well as Whatmore's (2003) chapter entitled 'Generating materials' in the same book (Pryke *et al*, 2003). In this chapter, Whatmore invites researchers to adopt some ideas proposed by the philosopher of science Stengers about considering the world we study as one of *craft rather than discovery*. These readings forced me to radically question both the way I had conducted my doctoral research in anthropology and my previous understandings about ethnographic data as something that can be collected rather than *generated* and that requires the critical modern opposition between subject and object described in the introduction of this article. Whatmore also quotes Stengers' ideas about humor as a key tool to be used against scientific monopolies of truth. Humor means

learning to laugh at reductionist strategies which, in impressing research institutes and sponsors, turn the judgments they permit themselves into brutal facts; it also means learning to recount histories in which there are no defeated, to cherish truths that become entangled without denying each other.

(Stengers, 1997, p. 90)

With these ideas in mind, let's have that promised *Facebook* break. In this chat session (originally held in Spanish and then translated into English), I had given

my friend Jacqueline some information about the PhD programs she was curious about, but I then asked her to give me feedback about the core argument developed above regarding different foods and force.

Cristóbal: Could I ask you something about what I am writing at the moment?

Jaqueline: Yes, of course, ask me.

C: Well, I am writing about the difference between non-mapuche food, namely, *winka* food, and mapuche food or *iyael mapu*, since many people in Alto Bio Bio get weak when they change their diet, as if *winka* food had less force than Mapuche food. I am not sure exactly what my question is, but you live in a city. Does this difference make any sense to you?

J: I do think that a very strong change is at stake here. There are no academic papers about this subject, at least I do not know of any. But I have in mind the Pehuenche students who move to the city in order to study, and they suffer from stomach aches very often.

C: What I think is that *winka* food does not feed the *püllü*. That food is somehow outside the production circuit of the land, of the place; that food does not have force or *newen*, or its *newen* is alien to people; at least, this is the way people in Alto Bio Bio talk about these issues, but I am not sure if this is the case in urban scenarios.

J: Generally speaking, I think this is the case and I share your thoughts, especially because we need to remember that there are situations in which ‘food is blessed’ (Sp. *la comida está bendita*), to put it in simple words. For instance, what we eat at ceremonies is blessed food. In those moments food is protected. When one takes distance from that, you start losing that protection; people do not celebrate rituals as they used to for instance. I am not sure there are academic papers on this topic, but I can have a look and check if I find something for you at the university in Temuko.

C: That would be great. I would love to learn more about the force of food from the land ...

J: Well, you can always interview me! I could tell you about my childhood ... also my husband ... ☺ we are both ‘pure mapuche’ (Sp. *mapuches puros*) hehehehe, I am joking ... you know, we Mapuche people love making fun of everything, of ourselves too! Jejeje

C: Yes, I have a smile on my face ... I guess you are teasing me too! Aren’t you?

J: jajajaja ... It is always good to tease and laugh at anthropologists!

C: Thanks! Should I think that what I told you is stupid? I know many people who after having seen a shaman were told to eat more food from the land. But this might make little sense for those people who live in cities.

J: What you think is important. For instance, my mother always told me not to feed my son with yoghurt bought at the supermarket, because those foods are harmful. I ate yogurt for the first time when I was 10 years old, and I do think

that there is something important at stake; I do not know how to say differently what I told you about blessed food or holy food, but this is the way I feel about this.

C: Ok, thanks for sharing. Regarding your joke about the anthropologist, I should admit that I feel deep contradictions with having decided to do anthropology, and I feel trapped many times.

J: I can imagine. The good thing is that you feel trapped. I know many anthropologists who never ever problematize these kind of subjects. For this reason, it is good if you feel trapped; by doing so you give account of your heart. And that is very good! The heart must feel trapped, confused, because it expresses what it is feeling.

C: Yes, I am going through this monster that is academia ... and I am thinking about how to make sense of it.

J: Yes, I understand that very well. But it is good, it is good you are there now.

C: Sometimes I cannot see the point of being in academia but I will find out what the point is sooner or later!

J: Yes! At certain point one knows.

For another 11 minutes, my friend and I spoke about other things irrelevant to this paper, but towards the end of our chat, some interesting things came to the fore, particularly regarding a joke I made about the 'pure mapuche' and their alleged purity:

C: Good luck with everything!

J: Thanks!..!!!!!! And dream well!!

C: Thank you, you are the 'purest' Mapuche of all my Mapuche friends!

J: hehehehe then you should call me 're-mapuche' which in our language means 'true Mapuche' ... hehehehe¹²

C: Yes! You are re-re-re Mapuche! A real Mapuche person eventually from Leiden!

J: I have a captive ancestor. So my 'purity' got lost. That's why I have coloured cheeks, among all my cousins, I inherited the coloured cheeks! hehehehe, good bye!

C: Bye, it is always good to hear from you!

After this brief chat, I was reminded of various occasions in which my friends in Southern Chile had not taken what I was doing as an anthropologist very seriously. What was striking for me about this conversation was that Jaqueline, by reminding me of the importance of laughing at anthropologists, was teaching me something not only about learning to laugh at reductionist strategies but also about how to *escape capture*. Probably the most apparent reductionist strategy at stake here was taking as self-evident 'the line between those visions we ought to take seriously and those we ought not to' (Candea, 2011, p. 150). In this case, my own analysis of force, or rather the lack of it, in relation to different foods and

practices, considered *too seriously* only one particular shamanic statement and its possible radical difference. In those analytics, Sergio himself remains in the background; his less radical difference and nearness had led me to not consider him seriously. That exercise led me to write the cosmo-metabolic story I have just recounted, which in many rural places is still highly relevant. Yet, Sergio's position does not fit very well with the shaman's treatment, and this should also be taken seriously.

Heterogeneous digestions

Sergio lives in Santa Bárbara, the Chilean city nearest to Alto Bío Bío, situated 70 km from the Pehuenche communities of the Queuko Valley where I lived while conducting my long-term fieldwork.¹³ I met Sergio, or *Ñanko*, in 2009. He had been referred to me as someone who could teach me Chedungun, the Pehuenche language. At the time, he worked for the government's department for agricultural development (INDAP), and he was in charge of monitoring INDAP's agricultural projects in Alto Bío Bío. We started lessons in his house in Santa Bárbara. I met his wife, a Pehuenche woman from the community of Pitiril whom I will call Teresa and who worked at the Santa Bárbara hospital as a paramedic. She also helped me learn some basic notions in Chedungun. Their bright 8-year-old son was also always around while the lessons were being given. Every week I had to make the 2-hour trip from the community where I was living to Santa Bárbara. These brief trips were precious to me as I could have access to the Internet and could also eat certain types of food not normally available to me. After I finished my fieldwork, I kept in touch with Sergio through email, cultivating a friendly relationship.

Four years later, I wrote him an email announcing a short visit – part of my post-doctoral research. I explained to him that I only had a little time to spend in Chile, about 2 weeks, and asked him to collaborate in my activities while I was there. When I arrived in Santa Bárbara in February 2013, the first thing I did was to phone him. He asked me to join him at the main square of the city, where he was with his youngest son. He warmly invited me to his house to drink some *mate* tea. Before going to his home, we passed a small supermarket where we bought goat cheese, avocado and *winka* bread, all 'distant goods' according to the logic of radical difference developed above. Teresa was happy to see me, and she prepared some *merken* (chili pepper) that was to be eaten with the bread. Sergio boiled some water on the gas stove, and we sat down around the table in their very clean living room. Comfortable sofas, a good stereo and a modern television were all part of the scene. No hearth, no fire; no crops, no vegetable garden. In short, no *cosmo-metabolism*.

I was happy to share those few rounds of *mate* with them. We spoke about our lives, about my family in the Netherlands, my daughters, my work at the university. They gave me a brief summary of the political changes in Alto Bío

Bío, many due to a recent change in mayor, and provided updates about the people I had met during my fieldwork. We ate a plate of rice with chicken, cooked by Teresa, along with the food we had bought at the supermarket. The conversation was warm and friendly, and after a few hours they invited me to stay for the night. Teresa was on holiday and Sergio was unemployed, for which reason, they told me, we could have another *mate* the next day.

At breakfast the following day, Teresa spoke to me about Pitiril, the community she lived in before moving to Santa Bárbara more than 10 years ago. She was nostalgic and sad. The house where she and her family used to live in 'Los Perales' was empty, she said. She told us that a song on the radio a few days before had triggered some tears, a song she used to listen to during her childhood. 'It reminded me of when I spent my days in the vegetable garden (Sp. *huerta*), working the land and taking care of animals. I was 12 years old then. If it was not for the education of my children, I would go back to live there, a life of quietness, close to the animals'. As no one was taking care of her house in Pitiril, she had asked an elderly couple from Cauniku to stay there. The neighbors in Pitiril had not liked the presence of these people, however, seeing them as a threat – as squatters who would want to become owners of that piece of land without having the right to do so. The house was now empty again, and she was very concerned about this. 'We need to maintain what we have, but when my father dies, I am afraid everything is going to end. No one is going to care about that house anymore'.

One of the days we spent together in Pitiril, we met Teresa's father, a man in his 80s who was, according to my standards, in extremely good shape. That day, he had been drinking a little bit with some tourists, and he was in a melancholy mood. When he arrived at his son's house, where we were visiting, he immediately shared a few beers with us. Sergio did not partake in the drinking as he was undergoing treatment for his health. Teresa's father told us about his day: He had woken up in the house where he lives and where he is very happy, as his partner is a very good woman. She is a really good cook, she works in the garden even though she is very old, and she kept the house very clean all the time. He had spent part of the day working as a guide for tourists, and after that he had visited some friends. He said: 'When I visited one of my friends, I was offered a huge plate of pasta! But I could not eat that; I had to give it back, since I had eaten too much *chupilka* (red wine with flour) before'. He then started speaking about his house in Pitiril, which, as I knew, was empty. I understood that this was a delicate subject for them, and Teresa, who listened in silence, was obviously moved. Her father could not understand why his old house was empty. 'In that place', he said, 'there are potatoes and animals! There is everything one needs to live and make a living, so I cannot understand why none of my children live there!'

During my stay with him, Sergio told me that they would never live there, as they were already used to the *comfort* (Sp. *comodidad*) offered by urban life.

'Here we have hot water in winter time, a gas cooker, jobs, education for our children. We've gotten used to this comfort (Sp. *comodidad*)'.

During this brief trip to Chile, my focus was on learning more about the historical changes that had occurred in rural communities, particularly focusing on the incorporation of non-Pehuenche food into the diets of the residents of the Queuko Valley. I learnt that non-Pehuenche food had been arriving in Pehuenche communities since before the rural road constructed during Pinochet's administration in the 80s, but only in intermittent waves. My friend Manuel, recalling his childhood in the early 70s, told me that once a month his father would go to a Chilean city to sell an animal or two and would bring back Western commodities, and these were generally consumed within 2 weeks. When the items were gone, his family ate Pehuenche food until his father returned from the next trip. *A way to manage difference, one might want to argue.*

What is interesting to note here is that at the time I was *in situ*, I did not consider Sergio's story to be relevant in terms of 'data collection': I was indeed *captured* by my own ideas regarding cosmo-metabolism. In one way or another, I was not taking Sergio seriously, or at least not as seriously as I should have been, considering the motivations of my research project. While I worked with him, however, Sergio often made ironic, although not-unpleasant, comments about my research. I had the impression that he saw the questions I posed to people, and perhaps my decision to visit elderly people rather than people of my own age, as some kind of naïve academic tendency that was not to be taken *too seriously*. On one of the days in which we made visits to elderly people in order to learn something new about eating practices in the Queuko Valley, Sergio teased me a bit by saying: 'Ok, we have finished with this interview, so let's move on. Let's go see how my friend Renata cooks her bread in the ashes. Let's go see how she flips it ...' (Sp. *Vamos a ver a cómo esta señora da vuelta la tortilla*). The tone of this sentence was subtly ironic, making it clear that, in some way or another, my research was not something to be taken seriously.

Eating my worlds

Toward the end of my trip, we arranged to spend a Sunday with Teresa, Sergio and their children in the community of Cauñiku. Their family had a friendly relationship with my friend Flora, so we agreed to pay her a visit. That day, we ate food from the land, but once we were back at their house in Santa Bárbara, we all enjoyed a tasty plate of pasta. *Heterogeneous digestions* certainly sound better than a sort of cosmological failure.

I recently received good news from Sergio. He is feeling better. Teresa and the children are fine, and Sergio got a new job at the Santa Bárbara hospital. He is working as an intercultural facilitator through the hospital's intercultural health program. One of his responsibilities is to take Pehuenche patients to see the

shaman when needed, perhaps the same shaman who herself treated Sergio. In his last email, he invited me to join a Chilean campaign against Monsanto. He wrote:

In an abusive and hegemonic way, the Monsanto Law gives intellectual property rights to the companies that own patents for the diversity of vegetables. This law argues that Chile must respond to international agreements in order to become an agro-alimentary power. But this is not true. If you agree with the Monsanto Law, you agree with a new form of agricultural neocolonialism that will regulate our lives for at least 25 years. If you agree with that law, you agree with the privatization of our biodiversity in order to satisfy the commercial hunger of a few companies led by Monsanto. Their only target is to become owners of our biodiversity.

My response was:

Which kind of shamans do we need in order to stop with this kind of horrible Monsanto witchcraft?

I have yet to receive a response. Yet, while awaiting his response, I have come to understand that, in order to join such a political cause against Monsanto, I should try to escape the capture of a form of ethnographic writing that emerges from both a critical opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, and from 'the fantasy that the author, the subject of theory, is located outside the object of reflection' (Mol, 2008, p. 32). While awaiting his response, and in my attempt to avoid being captured by modern dualisms, I have realized that we, as anthropologists, need 'to take care of our own mental and collective ecologies (...), and this means reclaiming an ecology that gives situations we confront the power to have us thinking, feeling, imagining, and not theorizing about them' (Stengers, 2008, p. 57). In other words, while awaiting Sergio's response, I realized that I had to start by eating my worlds.

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About the Author

Cristóbal Bonelli is a postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam. He received his PhD from Edinburgh university in 2012 for a thesis on indigenous healing and visual practices. Since October 2012, he has been one of the members of ‘The Eating Body in Western Practice and Theory’ research team, led by Professor Annemarie Mol. Leading the team’s research line on ‘Practices of alterity-alterity of practices’, his research has focused on the relations and interferences existing between anthropological generic concepts and ethnographic materials concerning healing, seeing and eating practices. He also collaborates with the Interdisciplinary Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Studies (ICIIS) at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

Notes

- 1 For acute reflections about ‘taking the world of the other seriously’ as the quintessential anthropological move, see Viveiros de Castro (2003, 2011), and the contributions by Candea (2011) and Jensen (2011) in the symposium entitled ‘Comparative relativism’.
- 2 For a proposal of ethnography as an art of humorous seriousness, see Jensen (forthcoming).
- 3 This discussion is based on fieldwork I have carried out in Southern Chile within the district of Alto Bío Bío during the past 6 years. During the past 20 years, the multinational company ENDESA (National Energy Enterprise), a former state enterprise that was privatized during the military dictatorship and is currently owned by a Spanish-Italian corporation, built two hydroelectric dams, Pangué and Ralko, on the Bío Bío River with government approval. This involved the controversial displacement and resettlement of nearly 100 families from their ancestral lands, people who now live in extreme conditions of vulnerability and social exclusion (González-Parra and Simon, 2008).
- 4 For further elaboration of indigenous theories of emplacement in Southern Chile and the notion of *tuwun*, a term roughly translatable as place of origin, see Di Giminiani (2015).
- 5 For a general description of the relationship between eating good food and having good blood among the Mapuche, see Gonzalez Galvez (2012). For further accounts on the relevance that food from the land has for shamans, see Bacigalupo (2007).
- 6 My host Pedro used to joke about evangelical promises related to the salvation of the body as matter. He used to laugh and say that they were nonsensical statements, since there was no question that the *am* lives forever, whereas the *püllü* belongs to and remains in the earth.
- 7 Fausto (2008), from whom I took inspiration, has already analyzed this statement in relation to Amerindian notions of ownership.
- 8 For a classic anthropological reflection on food and reciprocity, see Sahlins (1974).
- 9 I am using the terms *intensive* and *extensive* in the sense of Deleuze’s (1994) conceptual distinction. Broadly speaking, extensive differences such as area, length or volume are intrinsically divisible. Conversely, intensive differences refer to properties such as pressure or temperature that cannot be divided as such. Intensive distance, then, is defined by an indivisible intensity rather than an extensive space prone to being measured in Euclidian terms.
- 10 I will take distance from these ideas proposed by Magnus Course in the next section of this article, as they might be considered part of the cosmological capture I will try to problematize.
- 11 For a philosophical analysis of this idea, see Deleuze (1994).
- 12 The prefix *-re* is usually used to point out the real status of something. In this context, the joke highlights the idea that Jaqueline is a ‘true Mapuche’.

- 13 There is no space here to tell the entire history of the communities of Alto Bío Bío, where I have worked over the past 6 years, but it should be noted that these communities have been decimated by, among other factors, the violent effects of the timber industry since the mid-twentieth century and, in more recent years, the construction of hydroelectric dams. The dams were built by energy companies that exploit the region's natural resources at high cost to the indigenous populations. During the construction of the dams, over 100 Mapuche families were displaced from their ancestral lands and resettled elsewhere. These families now live in conditions of extreme vulnerability and social exclusion (González-Parra and Simon, 2008).

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