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The birth of the word
Language, force, and Mapuche ritual authority

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This paper seeks to employ rural Mapuche ideas about language to cast new light on the nature of agency and authority in lowland South America and elsewhere. Through ethnographic analysis, I demonstrate the need to account for the roles of priest, chief, and shaman—all present in the Mapuche *ngillatun* fertility ritual—from the perspective of their differential modes of relating through language. For language, as understood by rural Mapuche, emerges not solely from the intentions of individual speakers, but equally from the force—*newen*—constitutive of all being. Priests, chiefs, and shamans all seek to align themselves through speech to this force which instantiates itself through them. Such an observation forms the basis of a critique of both Clastres' understanding of the relationship between chiefs and language, and of the recent post-humanist rejection of the so-called "linguistic turn."

Keywords: language, ritual, authority, Mapuche, Amerindian

Language speaks, not Man
Martin Heidegger

Why does careless speech run the risk of "tempting fate"? What is it about voicing an utterance, which makes that utterance flee from us, irrevocably lost? Why should the mention of tenuous hopes or fears lead us to seek reassurance through "touching wood"? These minor practices of everyday caution, so minor as to be barely perceptible to consciousness, suggest an implicit recognition of what could be called an "excess force" of language, of our control of language being somewhat less complete than is often assumed to be the case.[1] Such practices of caution remain, for the most part, peripheral to the language ideologies dominant in the Western world, running contrary to an overwhelming emphasis on language as the unproblematic encoding of a speaker's intention. Yet among rural Mapuche people in southern Chile this emphasis is at least partially reversed; utterances are but tenuously connected to the intentionality of their speakers, and are understood

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1   This "excess force" differs from both "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" forces in its autonomy from a speaker's intention (Austin 1962).

to be equally saturated with an autonomous force of their own, a force which is continuous with an ontology of force constitutive of the Mapuche world.

In this essay, I seek to explore this "excess force" of language, its connection with a Mapuche ontology of force, and its fundamental role in the constitution of ritual authority in an otherwise staunchly egalitarian society. In doing so, I will turn again to the debates sparked by Clastres' famous arguments about chiefs without power, to analytical distinctions between shamans and priests, and finally, to current anthropological concerns with post-humanism and the agency of non-humans. Put simply, my argument is that a very particular understanding of speech as an "actant" (cf. Latour 1993) is mobilized metalinguistically to describe the relation between the ritual priest, the "Master of the Word," and the immanent force of the world (*newen*), manifest in the "word" (*dungu*), which flows through him. For in the Mapuche context, the excess or potentiality of language is of a kind, or continuous with, the essential force of which all things are instances. For such an argument to make sense, we must rethink and relocate both the force of language and the force of authority, and in so doing I hope to cast new light on the relationship between the two.

In the Mapuche context, both language and authority are underpinned by, and emergent from, what local people describe as "force" (*newen*), a force constitutive of all beings. The concept of "force" in the Western tradition has a long and particularly complex intellectual genealogy going back to Aristotle, but much of its use in more recent continental philosophy has its roots in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Much of the thought initiated by Nietzsche's initial reflections on a world composed of forces seems to have subsequently bifurcated into discussions of, on the one hand, oppressive "power," and on the other, redemptive "agency." Indeed, anthropology as a discipline has frequently understood itself to be in the business of critiquing the former through locating the latter, framed by an "unspoken ethic that stresses the value of human self-determination" (Keane 2003: 224).[2] Thus one of the chief diagnostics in anthropological attempts to locate "power" has been through identifying agentive resistance (Abu Lughod 1990). Yet recently a growing number of writers have, either explicitly or implicitly, been drawing the previously opposed categories of power and agency back together, to explore the ways agency can be understood as much as an alignment to power as resistance to it. The assumption of resistance as key or even sole indicator of agency seems to be inapplicable to many societies and belies its roots in a firmly Christian genealogy of the liberatory self. As Saba Mahmood has pointed out, agency may just as likely be manifest in a controlled and willed submission to power rather than resistance to it (Mahmood 2001). Force, both in its theoretical dimension and as locally understood by Mapuche people, cannot be reduced to either power or agency; it is rather the very stuff from which both emerge.

My intention in this essay is neither to review these debates nor, directly, to try to provide an account of what "agency" or "authority" might be from a Mapuche perspective, but rather to explore how language may serve as an alternative means of asking precisely such questions. Studies of the relation between language and agency have a long genealogy, but of particular importance for the approach I take

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2 A key question is whether such "self-determination" is understood as being individual or collective (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2003).

here is Michelle Rosaldo's critique of the assumption of individual intentionality as the root of every utterance, and her insistence that "the understanding of linguistic action always, and necessarily, demands much more than an account of what it is that individuals intend to say" (1982: 229). This challenge, of accounting for what Du Bois has called "meaning without intention," is central to my argument here (1992: 48).[3] I begin the essay with an account of the great *ngillatun* fertility ritual and the organizational structure from which it emerges. Through a subsequent exploration of both Mapuche language ideology and the ontology of force in which it is rooted, I utilize the force of language as a diagnostic for the different kinds of authority wielded by the figures of priest, shaman, and chief. In doing so, I seek to expand on Clastres' fundamental insights through extending his sociological analysis to one which takes Amerindian metaphysics into account.

Ngillatun at Panku

For rural Mapuche people living in isolated homesteads between the Pacific Ocean and Lago Budi in southern Chile, the great *ngillatun* ritual held every two years is one of very few instances in which they appear to one another as members of anything that white Chileans (*winka*) might recognize as "society," as being purposefully aligned with their fellow *che* or "true people" in a particular relation to the world. It is perhaps for this reason that outside observers have, for at least five centuries, been insistent about the importance of *ngillatun* to continued Mapuche autonomy.[4] While early colonial chroniclers were divided between seeing *ngillatun* as a form of devil worship or as a form of latent Christianity, all agreed that *ngillatun* offered one possible solution to the problem of how an acephalous and egalitarian people could nevertheless achieve a level of coordinated integration sufficient to inflict a humiliating military defeat on the Spanish and remain independent for a further three centuries. Contemporary anthropological accounts, too, give *ngillatun* a central role, thus according to Foerster, "in Mapuche society, it is rituals alone which are capable of structuring wider social aggregates" (1993: 112). The literal meaning of the term *ngillatun* is "to request," but it is used almost exclusively to refer to the ritual in which people offer their thanks to the supreme deity Ngenechen for past providence and request continued providence for the future. However, any understanding of *ngillatun* which limits itself to ritual practice omits much of what is most important about *ngillatun*, for its

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3   See also Duranti (1992) and Ochs (1988) for further critiques of intention-based theories of meaning. The problem is not with the idea of intention per se, but with the implication that it underlies *all* instances of language use (cf. Du Bois 1992). See Kockelman (2007) for a different approach to a similar problem.

4   Colonial accounts include Valdivia ([1606] 1887); González de Nájera ([1614] 1889); Núñez de Pineda ([1673] 2003); Rosales ([1674] 1989); and Quiroga ([1690] 1979). Ethnohistorical accounts based on these sources include Bengoa (2002); Boccara (1998); Zavala (2000); Dillehay (2007); Foerster (1996); and Zapater (1998). Anthropological analyses of *ngillatun* start in the early twentieth century and include Guevara (1908); Robles ([1910] 1942); Augusta ([1910] 1991); Latcham (1924); Titiev (1951); Hassler (1979); Faron (1964); Casamiquela (1964); Dowling (1971); Alonqueo (1979); Barreto (1992); Foerster (1993); Pereda and Perrotta (1994); Schindler (2006); Bacigalupo (2007); and Dillehay (2007).

relevance must be sought as much in Mapuche ideas concerning the organization of the ritual as in the ritual itself.

Perhaps not surprisingly for a ritual complex which stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Argentine pampas, there is a great deal of diversity in the forms which *ngillatun* takes, not least in the name by which it is known: in Argentina it is more commonly referred to as *kamarikun*, while in Chile the terms *rewetun*, *kawin*, and *llellipun* are all used, although *ngillatun* is by far the most common. *Ngillatun* vary in terms of scale, from several thousand participants in the communities near Temuco in southern Chile, to less than thirty in the Pewenche communities of the high Cordillera. The form of the ritual also varies widely: in most cases it is framed as a meeting between "host" and "guest" congregations, in smaller *ngillatun* however, there is no such distinction. In content, too, *ngillatun* varies greatly. In some cases, the "Ostrich dance" (*choyke pürün*) is central to the ritual, while in others it is completely unknown. One of the most significant variations, and one to which we shall return, is that in some places shamans (*machi*) are the primary officiants of the ritual, while in others they are completely absent or even prohibited from the ritual grounds.

Nevertheless, despite this diversity of scale, form, and content, there are certain key features which allow us to speak of a single ritual complex: firstly, *ngillatun* is always described by participants as being directed primarily as an act of thanks towards Ngenechen; secondly, this communicative act is always expressed through ritual prayers of specialized orators; thirdly, *ngillatun* always involves a sacrifice of some sort which takes place at a central altar; and finally, the space around the altar is always purified through *awün* ritual circuits often on horseback, but sometimes on foot. Mapuche people themselves are aware of this diversity of *ngillatun*, as even the ritual held in neighboring congregations may differ from their own in important regards. Nevertheless, people insist that despite the diversity of forms taken by *ngillatun* across Mapuche territory, it always amounts to much the same thing: the establishment of a relation with Ngenechen. It is in this light that I want to suggest that although the specific ethnographic data I present here are valid only for the *ngillatun* at Panku, the broader arguments I seek to make about the relationship between language, force, and hierarchy have relevance throughout Mapuche territory and beyond.[5]

The ritual itself

My focus in this paper is not on the *ngillatun* ritual itself, but rather on the organizational structure from which it emerges. Nevertheless, a brief account of the ritual is necessary to highlight certain continuities and discontinuities between its organizational stage and its realization.[6] Each *ngillatun* is held by a ritual congregation known as a *rewe*. This congregation is defined primarily by residence, although at the boundary between *rewe* some overlap allows for personal choice.

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5   The congregation of Panku is composed of the communities of Piedra Alta and Isla Huapi in Chile's Novena Región where I carried out a total of twenty eight months fieldwork, from 2001–2003, 2007, 2009, and 2010.

6   The description provided here is based upon my participation as a host in the *ngillatun* at Panku, the congregation in which I lived, and also on observations made as a guest at *ngillatun* held in Malahue, Huillio, and Romopulli. A more complete analysis of the ritual itself can be found in Course (2011).

The term *rewe* also refers to the ritual field itself as well as the primary altar in the centre of the field. The congregation which encompasses Piedra Alta and Huapi is known as Panku, a name shared by people, place, and the huge rock in the sea which overlooks the ritual field. Each congregation is twinned with a neighboring congregation, and the two alternate between occupying the roles of hosts and obligatory guests (*mütrüm*, literally "called ones") for each other. Thus when *ngillatun* is held at Panku, the people of the neighboring congregation of Weycha serve as obligatory guests, while the following year when the *ngillatun* is held at Weycha, the congregation of Panku will fulfill this role. Most people in attendance at a *ngillatun* will be neither hosts nor obligatory guests, but rather *koye*, "uninvited guests" from other neighboring areas.

Strictly speaking, the term *ngillatun* refers solely to the explicitly ceremonial part of a wider event which local people refer to as *kawin*, meaning simply "celebration." *Kawin* encompasses both the exchanges of hospitality between hosts and guests around the periphery of the ritual field, as well as the prayers, dances, and sacrifices offered to Ngenechen in the centre of the ritual field, which constitute the *ngillatun* proper. Upon arrival at the field, each participating host family sets up a small shelter in which to offer hospitality to guests. The shelters combine to form a U-shape facing westward towards the rock of Panku in the Pacific Ocean, although a space is also left open towards the East, the direction in which the prayers to Ngenechen are offered. For the entirety of the day, hosts will be attending to guests in their shelters, occasionally taking time to participate in the ceremonial dancing and prayer which forms *ngillatun* itself. The events of *ngillatun* itself are basically a series of parallel exchanges between hosts and guests, who then come together to act as one with regards to Ngenechen. Thus an initial set of dancing, greeting, and sacrifice is offered to the *mütrüm* obligatory guests, before hosts and guests combined offer their dancing, greeting, and sacrifice to Ngenechen. These various stages of *ngillatun* are too complex to provide anything more than the briefest of overviews here, however a key point relevant to the argument I wish to advance in this essay is that the central stages of the ritual—greeting, sacrifice, and reciprocation—are isomorphic with the elaboration of social relations in everyday non-ritual contexts, and in the hospitality proffered in the *kawin* celebration surrounding *ngillatun*. A host will approach his guest, greet him, offer him a plate of meat which is explicitly referred to as a "sacrifice," and then leave in the expectation that this act of provident hospitality will be reciprocated the following year. In this sense, *ngillatun* is fractal: the same structure is repeated at different levels of scale.

The birth of the word

The need for a *ngillatun* to be held is made apparent through a series of events which lead the two chief ritual organizers or priests (*ñidol ngenpin*) to meet and put in motion a particular chain of communicative events. This emergence of a will to hold *ngillatun* is referred to as the "birth of the word," referred to in local Spanish as *el nascimiento de la palabra,* and what is being transmitted in these communicative acts is known simply as the "word" (*dungu*). *Dungu* is a highly polysemic term which can also mean "thing" or "event." I translate it here as "word" as in this context, local people translate it with the Spanish term *palabra*.[7]

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7   See Golluscio (2006) for further discussion.

The term *ngenpin* means literally "the Master of the Word," although as we shall see further on, the term "master" (*ngen*) bears very different connotations to what we might expect. Both *pin* and *dungu* mean "word," and in some areas *ngenpin* are indeed referred to as *ngendungu* (Alonqueo 1979: 28). The events which lead to the birth of the word are multiple, but include dreams, visions, and the bellowing of a great black bull (*kürü torü*) emerging from a heavy sea fog (*madkan*). The subsequent passage of the word is envisaged as a huge circle which encompasses the entirety of the ritual congregation. While one "Master of the Word" sets off in a southeasterly direction, the other sets off towards the North. The word is then conveyed to *inalechi ngenpin* or "subordinate Masters of the Word" who are frequently the same men who occupy the role of *lonko* or "chiefs" for extended patrilineally-based families sometimes referred to as *lof*. These men in turn convey the word to further *inalechi ngenpin* as it continues its circuit around the spatial bounds of the ritual congregation. Eventually the two paths of the word meet at Maiai, the most easterly point of the congregation of Panku, and the word has thus completed its circle. The word has now emerged fully, and all of the relevant organizational structures and relationships of *ngillatun* have been activated.

It is important to point out that the word cannot be reduced to a specific utterance. The semantic content being passed along the chain—the date of *ngillatun*—is already common knowledge, as it is the same every year. Furthermore, in most cases, it is neither the primary nor subordinate Masters of the Word who actually convey the word but rather a messenger (*werken*), usually a man's eldest son. In other words, there is nothing immediately or obviously "linguistic" about the word. This begs the question of whether language should be an appropriate idiom with which to describe this word circulating between *ngenpin* priests and thereby constituting Mapuche ritual hierarchy. What control over the word do priests have to justify being called its "masters"? Does the relation between Master and word correspond to that between speaker and utterance? To answer any of these questions, we must begin by exploring Mapuche ideas about language.

Mapuche language ideology and the "force" of language

In rural Mapuche life, language constitutes one of the principal means through which one can come to know others. A variety of formal speech genres such as *chalintun* (greeting), *pentukun* (statements about the health of one's kin), and *nutramtun* (reciting of life history and genealogy) allow speakers to locate themselves in social space and position themselves vis-à-vis their interlocutors. These discursive techniques of transmitting knowledge about persons continue even after death in the *amulpüllün* biographical funeral discourses which serve to "complete" (*dewman*) knowledge of the deceased and allow their spirit to move on (Course 2007). Yet despite (or perhaps because of) the central role accorded to language in coming to know others, there is a high degree of skepticism and anxiety about both the possibility of ever truly knowing another person and about the reliability of language in achieving this goal. These two issues—the possibility of knowing others and the nature of language—are distinct, but closely related problems in Mapuche life.

The opacity of others

The limits to fully knowing others are often expressed by rural Mapuche people in statements to the effect that only a person themselves has full access to their thoughts and thus to the proper course of action in any given situation. This "opacity of other minds" (Robbins & Rumsey 2008) leads to a general reluctance to speculate on the intentions of others, and even to give advice (*ngülam*) to others as "it is one alone who knows" (cf. Golluscio 2006). When advice is sought, it is usually requested from close patrilineal relatives who are understood to constitute more of a known entity due to being of *kiñe küpal* ("one descent"), a form of knowledge premised neither on thought nor language, but rather on corporeal similarity.[8] Even self-knowledge is seen in certain contexts as problematic. Thought (*rakiduam*) is often described as having an existence apart from the self, thus it is common to hear people say not only, "*ñi rakiduam pienew . . .*" ("my thought said to me . . .") but also, "*ñi rakiduam koylatuenew . . .*" ("my thought lied to me . . .").

These doubts about the possibility of fully knowing others, and the question of why this might be a problem, have to be understood in the context of the highly atomistic and individualistic nature of rural Mapuche life.[9] People live in widely-dispersed homesteads, and collective activities (of which *ngillatun* is by far the most important) are few and far between. The extent of this spatial dispersion maps on to a Mapuche understanding of the relation between person and 'society' (cf. Stasch 2009). What have previously been described as social aggregates or corporate groups in Mapuche society are, I would argue, locally understood as simply the effects of individual social action (Course 2011). Furthermore, the Mapuche conceptualization of what it means to be a "true person" (*che*) emphasizes a continual project of centrifugal self-creation through the establishment of relations with non-consanguineal others, a process which leads to continually increasing differentiation, even from one's own consanguineal kin. Thus, paradoxically, the more social relations one enters into, the greater the possibility of a certain solipsism as one becomes increasingly singular and differentiated.[10]

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8   It is perhaps worth noting that while for the Melanesians described in Robbins and Rumsey's collection, the problem appears primarily to be one of knowing others' *minds*, for Amerindians the problem is as much, if not more so, one of knowing others' *bodies*. As an increasingly influential body of work on Amerindian "perspectivism" has sought to establish, what is shared across all entities is "culture" of which "mind" is one manifestation, while it is the "body" which differentiates and thus constitutes the location of the epistemological problem. See for example Viveiros de Castro (1998) and Vilaça (2005).

9   By describing rural Mapuche society as "individualistic," I am certainly not seeking to locate it within Western "individualism," an ideology with a quite different historical genealogy (Dumont 1985, Mauss [1938] 1985). Rather, I am suggesting simply that groups are effects of persons rather than the other way around, an argument I have advanced at length elsewhere (Course 2011).

10 This "solipsism," the attempt to connect across subjectivities is, in some contexts, encompassed by the inverse problem, that of avoiding relations perceived as already given. People thus worry about mistakenly entering into discourses with beings which turn out to be other than "true people". Rural Mapuche thus face both what Viveiros de Castro has described as the "Western problem" of connecting and the "Amerindian problem" of separating, simultaneously (2004: 476). See Course (forthcoming) for an elaboration of this point.

The otherness of language as "force"

Language, along with conviviality and commensality, is one of the means by which Mapuche people seek to address this specter of solipsism inherent in their view of person and society, and thus come to understand and create relations with others while simultaneously becoming ever more different from them. This occurs through the formal speech genres mentioned above, but also through the sociability of everyday conversation (*nutramkan*) in both Mapudungun and Spanish. Yet language itself is simultaneously understood to be an intrinsically problematic phenomenon, not just because people are prone to misrepresent the discourse of others through lying (*koylatun*), but more importantly because, as I shall go on to explore, speech itself is understood to be saturated with an excess of force (*newen*) which ultimately distances every utterance from the control of its speaker. My intention here is certainly not to argue that rural Mapuche people have a wholly negative or fatalistic attitude towards language. In addition to the positively valued establishment of social relations afforded by the formal speech genres mentioned above, people take great pleasure in the aesthetic and creative potential of language: jokes, riddles, stories, and songs are all central to the richness of rural Mapuche life. An example which I have explored in detail elsewhere is that of personal song (*ül*) in which the iterability of language allows for a virtual iterability of subjectivity, as singers come to revive the subjectivities of long dead composers through singing their songs (Course 2009). The key point is that Mapuche ideas about language place people in a paradoxical situation in which one must create oneself through language, while at the same time understanding language as characterized by an excess of force only ever partially within one's control. It is to this excess "force" of language that I now turn.

Like many, if not most, places in the world rural Mapuche life is rife with gossip and rumor. Both men and women may be participants in, and victims of, these discourses, but women in particular are prone to be victims of malicious gossip due to the virilocal norm which means they live away from their consanguineal kin among strangers. Much gossip concerns things somebody might or might not have said, greetings avoided, slights perceived or intended, and so on. It is often not long before such perceived slights are reformulated in an idiom of witchcraft (*kalkutun*). This possibility leads people to be especially aware of the iterability of every utterance, and the distinct possibility that subsequent iterations will bear little resemblance to the intent of the original speaker.[11] In short, people are hyperconscious of the fact that what is meant plays only a small role in what is understood. This disparity or "gap" between the two—the "excess" or "superabundance" of semiotic potential in language—is partly located in the ill-will of others to misrepresent for their own ends, but is also understood to be an endemic quality of speech itself.[12] For even without purposeful misrepresentation by others,

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11 The unreliability of speech is itself encoded metalinguistically in the frequent use of the evidential suffix—*ürke*—to mark events which the speaker knows only through speech, rather than having witnessed firsthand. This evidential distances the speaker from any commitment to the reported event's veracity and thus places its epistemological status in question. When speaking Spanish too, speakers premise such events with the ubiquitous "*Se dice que . . .*" ("It is said that . . ."). See Hill and Irvine (1992).

12 While what could be described as the fundamental otherness of language central to Mapuche language ideology is at odds with Western folk theories of language, and

language bears a force beyond that of a speaker's intent. As my comadre María cautioned me frequently, "speech has force" ("*dungu niey newen*"), and this force is distinct from the speaker and frequently beyond his or her control.

According to Mapuche people, language has the capacity to effect results irrespective of the speaker's intent, thus simply to voice an undesirable outcome can bring it into being. The ill and the young are particularly vulnerable to this kind of careless speech, in which voiced concerns may very easily become realized through their very vocalization. Thus one should never mention the possibility of death with regards to a seriously ill person, nor should one mention any possible defect or abnormality with regards to a newborn child. To do so would run the risk of effecting the unwanted result. This conceptualization of the "force" (*newen*) of language is not restricted to accidental use, but forms an integral part of ideas about what could be called "magical" speech: curses, blessings, requests for permission to spirits, and so on (cf. Tambiah 1968). Language is neither personified, nor is its excess force understood to originate in some other agent; rather, it is itself understood as a process manifesting "nonconscious intentionality," an idea which will become clearer as we further explore Mapuche notions of force. From a Mapuche perspective then, language is something upon which speakers have at best a tenuous grasp. Their intended meanings are frequently subject to the malicious misrepresentations of others, but more significant than this is the "force" perceived to be intrinsic to language itself.[13] To speak (*dungun*) is to try and align this force to one's communicative or pragmatic intentions, while bearing in mind that any alignment of what is intended with the ultimate consequences of each utterance is at best contingent and partial.

Newen and the "will to power"

This understanding of language as force is central to the argument I wish to advance in this essay, so a necessary step is to explore more thoroughly what the term *newen* (or *fuerza* when speaking Spanish) means, and why it is considered by Mapuche people an appropriate term with which to describe the excess force of language. Although the term is frequently used in everyday conversation to refer to the physical force of a person or animal, it is also used extensively to refer to a volitional multiplicity of forces inherent within and constitutive of the world (*mapu*)

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indeed the mainstream of Western philosophy of language, it nevertheless resonates with certain attempts within Western philosophy and linguistics. Key examples are Saussure's distinction between *langue* as social and *parole* as individual, Jakobson's corrective to this, Bakthin's opposition of dialogical and monological forces in language, Derrida's insistence the centrality of iterability to language, Ricoeur's focus on the excess of meaning, and contemporary linguistic anthropological interest in entextualization and recontextualization, can all be understood as different points of entry into the central fact of the social nature of language, and hence its instantiation of otherness. See Hastings and Manning (2004) for an important reflection on the fundamental alterity of language.

13 We could say that Mapuche ideas about language emphasize its "indexical" rather than "symbolic" aspects. Such an understanding resonates with other studies of Amerindian "indexical" language ideologies, such as Witherspoon's classic work on Navajo language ideology (1977).

itself.[14] This force is a continuous, albeit fluctuating, presence of which places, spirits, animals, illnesses, harvests, deformities, triumphs, and defeats may all be exemplars. As my friend Ramón once told me, "everywhere is force" (*kom püle newengey mew*). Force is conceived as both singular and multiple; a particular place may be said to instantiate a particular *newen*, a force which may become further instantiated across a variety of forms: the productivity of the land, the spirit masters (*ngen* or *püllü*) resident in that place, any qualities good or bad inherent in the people born there, and so on. It is important to add here that there is no sense of a hierarchy of manifestations; a child's deformity is not simply the result of a local spirit, nor is a spirit simply the result of the qualities of the people living in that place: all are equally manifestations of *newen*, a force which has no identity other than through its manifestations. To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the doing—the doing is everything" ([1887] 2008: xiii).

That language is said to have its own "force" is neither to personify it, nor to deny that it can serve the intentions of a speaker. Rather, it is to suggest that the excess or potentiality of language is of a kind, or continuous with, the essential force of which all things are instances. Both the farmer sowing his crops and the speaker enunciating utterances seek to engage with, utilize, and channel the "force" of things, of the earth and of semiotic potential, while remaining aware that neither the fertility of the earth nor the meaning of speech is ever fully within their control. I should make clear at this point that my understanding of these issues is far from complete, and many contemporary Mapuche people, too, claim that a full understanding of *newen* and its relation to *ngillatun* are beyond the scope of human understanding. As Feliciano Ñancucheo, one of the subordinate Masters of the Word at Panku said to me: "Those old-time people [*kuyfikecheyem*] lived to be 130 or 140 years old. Only at the very ends of their lives did they come to fully understand what *newen* and *ngillatun* meant. What hope have we who only live to sixty or seventy? No, nobody today understands."

By far the most striking manifestations or concretizations of *newen* are those emergent in the birth of the word described above. These manifestations include the word (*dungu*) itself, the dreams (*pewma*) which announce the will for *ngillatun*, the visions (*perimontun*) experienced by visiting shamans, the illnesses (*kutran*) visited upon recalcitrant priests, the bellowing of *kürü toro*, the great black bull, the success or failure of a harvest: all of these are the "becomings" or instantiations of *newen*. Everything from the song of birds, to the ocean fog, to one's dreams lead inexorably to the reaffirmation of the world through *ngillatun*. As I hope to have made clear, *newen* is irreducible to any fixed or stable entity, or to any fixed or stable form of being; it is rather a series of emergent points in a process of becoming. Yet despite the multiplicity and heterogeneity of these instantiations, they can nevertheless be said to be unified by a singular directionality, for the manifestations of *newen* are neither random nor contradictory, but marked by a uniformity of purpose: the holding of a *ngillatun* ritual. In this sense, the

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14 Although in shamanic discourse there are multiple "worlds"—*wenu mapu* (upper world), *nag mapu* (lower world), *miñche mapu* (underworld)—in everyday discourse, *mapu* refers simply to the cosmos as a whole. See Bacigalupo (2007) and Dillehay (2007).

multiplicity of instantiations of *newen* are unified by what we could call a "will to power."[15] *Newen* can be characterized by at least four features: firstly, it has no existence beyond the forces through which it is instantiated; secondly, its striving towards a goal is as much a part of its essence as reaching that goal; thirdly, it incorporates or unifies a multiplicity of diverse forces without stripping them of their autonomy; and fourthly, it is fractal, in the sense that it can be identified at any of a variety of levels, from the bellowing of bull to the essence of the world (*mapu*) itself.

If, then, *newen* is best understood as a multiplicity of forces unified by a will to power, a volitional directionality, we must ask how this will is conceptualized, and most importantly, what is the relation between it and Ngenechen, the deity to whom *ngillatun* is addressed. Could it not be argued that the various manifestations of *newen* are simply 'acts of God' and that the 'will' motivating them is thus Ngenechen itself, in which case our use of the 'will to power' is both deeply misleading and inaccurate? A provisional answer, however, is that *newen* cannot be reduced to the will of Ngenechen, but reflects a distinct conceptualization of agency and being, and one could even argue, a distinct ontology. There is a high degree of compartmentalization of the contexts in which people discuss and attribute meanings to *newen* and those in which they discuss Ngenechen or "God."[16] General discussions about the world tend to give primacy to *newen*, and if Ngenechen is mentioned in these contexts it is as one among many *ngen* (masters), all of which can be understood as instantiations of *newen*.[17] It is only really in discussions of *ngillatun* itself, or in responses to claims that Mapuche beliefs are "not Christian," that Ngenechen as God is given ontological primacy.[18]

I hope by now to have established a relationship of continuity between overlapping yet different conceptualizations of force in Mapuche thought: the "force" of

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15 I borrow this phrase from Nietzsche not because I or my Mapuche friends have any commitment to Nietzschean philosophy, but simply because I think it helps explicate a highly complex idea. The "will to power" is one of the concepts around which Nietzsche scholars have achieved least consensus, partly because much of what he has to say appears in *The will to power*, a volume whose status is debatable. My understanding is based especially on readings by Deleuze (1983) and Richardson (1996).

16 Crocker notes that Amerindian religious practices are frequently characterized by a "surreal movement between 'high' and 'low' domains that contain antithetical cosmological principles" (1985: 313).

17 Ngenechen is derived from *ngen* "master/owner" and *che* "true person," thus an alternative translation to "God" would be "Master of true people," a translation which would bring it in to line with the notion of "spirit masters" widespread throughout the Americas.

18 This discussion barely scrapes the surface of a very complex issue. Suffice to say that much of the apparent incongruity in Mapuche religion between a multiple concept of non-human agency and a singular omnipotent deity clearly has its basis in the history of Christian missionization and the influence of Christian ideas. See Bacigalupo (1997) for a discussion of the Christian origin of *Ngenechen*, and Bacigalupo (2010); Foerster (1993, 1996); and Schindler (2006) for more general discussions of Christianity within Mapuche religion.

the excess of language, the "force" of the word circulating between its owners, and the "force" constitutive of the world itself. In each instance force emerges from an unspecified and indeterminate plane to both effect and affect the people and places through which it becomes determined. This understanding of force reverses the conventional understanding of the relationship between human agency and semiotic process, for people find themselves constituted by forces, and then transformed and created as new forces, rather than in any sense wielding force. As we shall go on to explore, all of the participants in the *ngillatun* organizational structure—*ngenpin* priests, *machi* shamans, and *lonko* chiefs—are effects of forces as much as they are forces that effect. The task I wish to address in the remainder of this essay is that of describing how this inverted relation of force and person as manifest in language casts new light upon the classic anthropological problem of the constitution of hierarchy and authority among the Mapuche and elsewhere in lowland South America.

The enigma of the chiefs without power

Although anthropologists have for several decades been pointing out the glaring errors and omissions in Clastres' famous essay *On the philosophy of the Indian chieftainship*, his central problematic refuses to go away: "what needs to be understood is the bizarre persistence of a 'power' that is practically powerless, of a chieftainship without authority, of a function operating in a void" ([1974] 1987: 29). [19] Throughout lowland South America certain people within indigenous societies are recognized as "chiefs," yet as Clastres and many subsequent ethnographers have made clear, "the most notable characteristic of the Indian chief consists of his almost complete lack of authority" ([1974] 1987: 28). This of course begs the question of why chiefs exist at all if their power is truly powerless? The answer provided by Clastres is that power, understood as the threat of hierarchical domination, can be kept at bay by confining it to the figure of a chief made quite literally nonsensical through his immersion in a series of one-sided exchanges. Against a social background constituted through the reciprocal exchange of women, goods, and words, the exchanges of the chief stand out by virtue of their unreciprocal and asymmetrical nature. As a polygynous man, he receives more women than he gives; as a necessarily generous man, he gives far more goods than he receives; and as an orator, he speaks far more than he listens. Thus, "the one called chief is the man in whom the exchange of women, words, and goods shatters" ([1974] 1987: 45). The figure of the chief, then, is the living embodiment of what Clastres likes to call the State—coercive hierarchical organization—and through marginalizing its embodiment, the State, too, is marginalized.

At first sight, Mapuche chiefs (*lonko*) seem to be exemplars par excellence of Clastres' ideal Indian chief: they are usually polygynous; they engage in long,

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[19] The three major lines of critique have focused primarily on errors of omission: firstly, that Clastres completely overlooks gender inequality (Lorrain 2000), secondly, that Clastres was unaware of historical and archaeological evidence of state-like formations in many parts of lowland South America (Heckenberger 2005), and thirdly, that Clastres ignores the role of chiefs in the ritual reproduction of society, which can ultimately be understood as a form of economic control (Santos Granero 1986). While all of these critiques are valid to a greater or lesser degree, none of them seem to me to invalidate Clastres' central observation. See Barbosa (2004) for a robust defense.

drawn-out discourses to which few people listen; they are materially no better off than anyone else; and most importantly, they have little or no authority in the usual sense of the term.[20] Many times I was shocked and quietly impressed by the humility and resignation with which the *lonko* of the community in which I lived would allow himself to be vociferously berated by other people. Much the same can be said of *ngenpin* priests, the ritual counterparts of the chief: they, too, are indistinguishable from everybody else in terms of wealth, prestige, and authority. Despite gender inequality, and to a lesser degree, generational inequality, Mapuche society remains assertively egalitarian: even young children declare proudly in Spanish that "*nadie me manda a mi*" ("nobody orders me"). The classic Clastrean question thus arises: what is the nature of chiefs in an egalitarian society? What is actually "hierarchical" about the ritual hierarchy of "primary" and "subordinate" priests, the Masters of the Word? How does this ritual hierarchy relate to the secular hierarchy of the chiefs without power? To provide an answer to this question we will need to return to the concept of "force" and to explore further its complex relationship to both authority and language. But firstly we will need to further our understanding of the relation between chiefs and *ngenpin*, between what could be glossed as "secular" and "ritual" forms of authority.

The nature of authority in Mapuche society

The primary role of chiefs in contemporary rural Mapuche society is to organize a consensus for the realization of two collective events: funerals (*eluwün*) and games of *palin*, a ritual sport resembling field hockey.[21] Most bureaucratic issues involving relations with the Chilean state are dealt with by community presidents who are themselves rarely, if ever, chiefs. What is recognized by white people as the "authority" of a chief is located by Mapuche not so much in the person of the chief himself, but rather in his particular relation to two sources of "force" beyond him: firstly, the consensus of the people, and secondly, the "way of the world" (*admapu*). Consensus is achieved through meetings (*trawun*) attended by most adult men and women. People are under no obligation to attend, and converts to Evangelical Christianity rarely do. The chief usually gives a speech about the moral obligations of community members to either respond to a challenge from another community to play the ritual sport of *palin*, or to arrange a funeral for a deceased community member. At no stage does the chief take any executive decision nor does he attempt to impose his will on others or coerce their behavior: as the "face" (*ad*) of consensus, he is simply the channel for the will of the people. In his speeches at the beginnings of meetings, the chief makes frequent reference to *admapu*, a term whose literal meaning is "the face/aspect/way of the world." My understanding is that the term relates to the proper alignment of people's behavior with the force of the world (*newen*) through adherence to specific cultural practices

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20 *Lonko* means literally "head" and the term could equally be translated as "headman." In using the term "chief," I am following local people's translation of *lonko* with the Spanish term *cacique*.

21 See Course (2007) for an account of funerals, and Course (2008) for an account of *palin*.

of which funerals, *palin*, and *ngillatun* are exemplars par excellence.[22] In his gathering of consensus and in his appeals to *admapu*, the chief is thus a conduit for two distinct but interlinked instantiations of the force of the world, of *newen*.

The primary responsibility of the *ngenpin* priest is the organization of the *ngillatun* ritual as has been described in detail above. Like the chief, the "authority" of the priest is located beyond his person in the force (*newen*) which manifest as word (*dungu*) emerges through him. He serves simply as a channel for the force of the world and, like the chief, takes no executive decisions nor has the ability to impose his will on others. Both chief and priest are roles inherited patrilineally, although not necessarily through primogeniture. In some cases, a man's brother's son will succeed him. To become either chief or priest one needs both "descent" (*küpal*) and a particular set of qualities necessary to carry out that role; he must be: *norche* (a "straight" [honest] person), *kimche* (a wise person), *kümeche* (a "good" [generous] person), and *newenche* (a forceful person).

The nature of a priest's submission to force is seen especially clearly in their narratives about their reluctance to take on the role. One of the two current *ñidol ngenpin*, Fabio, told me at length how he had persistently refused to take up his father's position as *ñidol ngenpin* despite the insistence of his family and neighbors. He cited his youth, lack of experience, and lack of knowledge to fulfill his duties. However, a series of dreams and his father's worsening health made him eventually concede, and he took up the role. Behind his decision was also an awareness that those who refuse to take up the mantle of priest will eventually fall ill and die, killed by the force which seeks to instantiate itself through their actions. Thus for priests, control of force in its instantiation as word is simultaneously submission to force, to allow oneself to be aligned with *newen* in its broadest sense. If we take this point seriously, we realize that the *ngenpin* priest's "control" of *ngillatun*, of what Santos Granero would call "the mystical means of production," is very far from straightforward (1986: 658).

Several people told me of a priest of Panku who in the 1960s converted to Evangelical Christianity. As a result, he refused to make the call for a *ngillatun*, to allow the Word to be born. The first year in which no *ngillatun* was held, crops failed, animals died, and the *ngenpin* fell seriously ill. The bellowing of a great black bull emerging from the sea fog started to drive people insane. The following year, the *ngenpin* died, his successor immediately issued a call for a *ngillatun*, and providence returned. In this sense, then, it is *ngillatun* and the force of which it is the ultimate instantiation, which control the priest, rather than other way around. A successful priest is one who is fully receptive and submissive to the word, sensitive to the fluctuation of *newen*. Likewise, chiefs who try to exert their own will above and against the force instantiated in both community consensus and the "way of the world" (*admapu*), find people turning quickly against them. The continual reorganization of community boundaries testifies to attempts by ambitious chiefs to exert an authority of which their own volition, rather than an alignment with force, is the source.

What characterizes both the chief and the priest, then, is not so much authority in any Weberian sense, but rather a particular alignment to *newen*, to the force of the world. Indeed, it is when these people try to assert their own will against the

22 The term *admapu* is occasionally glossed into local Spanish as *tradición* (tradition), but its full meaning goes beyond this.

force of the world that they lose what external observers understand as their "authority," the public recognition of their alignment with *newen* institutionalized in specific roles. Although chiefs and *ngenpin* share a similar position of authority through submission vis-à-vis the ontology of force in which they are situated, the realms of action proper to each are well defined and circumscribed. Chiefs cannot and should not initiate *ngillatun*, nor should priests attempt to become involved in the organization of funerals or games of *palin*. Despite this separation of what could be called "secular" and "religious" roles in Mapuche society, priests and chiefs are in a relation of mutual dependency. As mentioned above, it is chiefs, or chief-like heads of extended patrilineal families, who are those who serve as *inalechi ngenpin*, as "subordinate Masters of the Word" who receive the word from the *ñidol ngenpin*, the head priests, and pass it along the chain. Without utilizing these secular relationships, the Word cannot complete its circuit of the congregation and thus *ngillatun* cannot be held, leaving the *ñidol ngenpin* to face a very real risk of death. Likewise, if no *ngillatun* is held, the ensuing disasters and chaos make the chief's alignment to his community's consensus and to the "way of the world" (*admapu*) redundant. The exception to this interdependency proves the rule: politically-ambitious chiefs seeking to assert their own authority frequently do so through taking control of *ngillatun*, appointing their own *ngenpin* priests, or even in extreme cases, carrying out *ngillatun* themselves. [23] This relation of simultaneous dependency and tension between chiefs and priests must be understood in the light of a third key form of alignment to *newen*: shamanism.

Chiefs, priests, and shamans

Unlike both chiefs and priests who inherit their roles patrilineally, shamans (*machi*) usually inherit their role (in the form of inheriting a particular shamanic spirit, *püllü*) matrilineally. Furthermore, whereas chiefs and *ngenpin* are understood to be exemplars of morally upstanding people, shamans are morally ambiguous and frequently suspected of engaging in witchcraft. This moral ambiguity goes hand in hand with an ambiguous gender identity: while chiefs and priests are nearly always men, shamans are both men and women. Male shamans practice ritual transvestitism, while female shamans are frequently said to be hermaphrodites (*püñün domo*, literally "penis woman"). [24] While there are no practicing shamans within the ritual congregation of Panku, most Mapuche people

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23 This article does not address the highly complex historical question of how and why certain Mapuche chiefs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to be incredibly powerful and a nascent social hierarchy of "nobles" (*ülmen*) and "common people" (*kona*) started to emerge. Two points, however, are perhaps worth pointing out: firstly, that even at the heights of their power, the role of chiefs was primarily as organizers of a consensus achieved through meetings, rather than decision takers per se. The exception to this was periods of warfare during which their authority grew, and certain chiefs became recognized as *toki* (war chiefs). Secondly, their rise to power went hand in hand with increased control, even monopolization, of *ngillatun* (cf. Dillehay 2007; Schindler 2006). See also Perrone-Moisés & Sztutman (2010) for accounts of the complex relationship between chiefly "power" and warfare elsewhere in lowland South America.

24 See the work of Ana Mariella Bacigalupo for detailed accounts of shamans' gendered identity (2004*a*, 2007), and its historical genealogy (2004*b*).

living there do utilize the services of shamans when they fall seriously ill, traveling to visit shamans in neighboring areas or in local towns.

Just as a degree of tension marks the relationship between chief and priest, a similar tension exists between priest and shaman, a tension which has its roots as much in the similarities between them as in the differences.[25] At first glance, Stephen Hugh-Jones' elaboration of Jonathan Hill's 1984 distinction between "vertical" and "horizontal" forms of shamanism would seem to be an accurate way of conceptualizing the difference between *ngenpin* and shaman (1996). Horizontal shamanism frequently involves the use of hallucinogenics, emphasizes "doing" as opposed to "saying," and occurs most commonly in societies where secular power is separated from sacred power, and shamans are thus "only peripherally involved in the ritual reproduction of society" (1996: 33). Vertical shamanism, on the other hand, utilizes neither trance nor possession, but rather the control of esoteric knowledge which is frequently transmitted patrilineally. Vertical shamans play a central role in the ritual reproduction of society and as such are morally unambiguous. Whereas in many societies only shamans of one type or another are present, in many other societies these two roles co-exist and frequently become distinguished analytically as "priests" (vertical shamans) and "shamans" (horizontal shamans). When such co-existence does occur, it is not complementary but rather "appears to contain an element of contradiction and political tension that is interwoven with more complementary, abstract cosmological principles" (1996: 33). The Mapuche case would seem to correspond to this widespread Amerindian duality of religious roles: *ngenpin* priests are morally upstanding; they engage in neither trance, possession, nor hallucinogenics; they transmit their role patrilineally; and they seem to be primarily involved in "saying" rather than "doing." *Machi* shamans, on the other hand, are morally ambiguous; their practice is based upon possession, trance, and occasional use of hallucinogenics; their role tends to be transmitted matrilineally; and their practice is based primarily on "doing" rather than "saying."

In rethinking this material, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argues that differential modes of relating through "sacrifice" form one axis of difference between "vertical" and "horizontal" shamanisms, between "priests" and "shamans" (Viveiros de Castro 2007) Following Lévi-Strauss, Viveiros de Castro suggests that while totemism postulates a homology between two discontinuous series, sacrifice postulates a movement along or within a single continuous series. Understood within the context of Amerindian perspectivism, in which all beings share a continuous perspective on discontinuous worlds, sacrifice constitutes a form of forceful, or predatory, movement between perspectives. While sacrifice as conventionally understood is absent from most lowland societies, Viveiros de Castro suggests that the horizontal shaman's transformative capacity to exchange perspectives can be understood as constituting a form of self-sacrifice, a means of relating across a heterogenous though continuous ontology through transformation: "the shaman is at once 'sacrificer' and 'victim.' It is in him or her that the 'deficit of contiguity' is realized" (2007: 12). The pivotal difference between shamanic (horizontal) and

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25 See Bacigalupo (1995*b*) for an important account of tensions between priests and shamans, and of the increasing role of shamans in *ngillatun* in many regions of the south.

priestly (vertical) functions in lowland South America is that while the former relate across a continuous series through a sacrifice of the self, the latter sacrifice others, thus "we are on the threshold of another sociocosmological regime when the shaman becomes the sacrificer of another: when he becomes, for example, the executor of human victims, the administrator of alien sacrifices, the sanctioner of movements that he merely supervises rather than executes. This strikes me as the diacritical difference between the figures of the shaman and the priest" (2007: 13). Again, the Mapuche case would seem to correspond to Viveiros de Castro's opposition between priests who sacrifice, and shamans whose transformations into other ontological planes may be understood as self-sacrifice: in those communities where both priests and shamans are involved in *ngillatun*, a shaman may be seen to be entering trance, to be "sacrificing" her own body to instantiate relations across the heterogenous flows of *newen*, while literally a few yards away, priests can be observed sacrificing a horse or lamb, in order to likewise draw a connection between points of force, to forge a relation through, with, and between *newen*.

Perhaps not surprisingly, *ngillatun* rituals remain a site of significant tension between *ngenpin* priests and shamans. Such tension is clearly evident in the open hostility of many priests towards shamans and the fact that in many congregations, shamans have been excluded from participation in *ngillatun* altogether. Even in those communities where priests and shamans carry out *ngillatun* together, there is frequently a history of struggle for the right to take responsibility for the local *ngillatun* (cf. Bacigalupo 2010). The current *ñidol ngenpin* or "head priest" of Panku acknowledged that one of the reasons there are no longer any shamans within the communities comprising the congregation is that previous *ngenpin*, along with the support of the local chiefs and the Catholic Church, drove them away in the 1940s and 50s. The last shaman in Piedra Alta was burnt to death by her own son in the 1960s. Much of this tension would seem to have its roots in the fact that despite key points of difference, there are also certain points of overlap between them. Firstly, there is a sense in which the *ñidol ngenpin,* the head priests, are themselves understood to be half "shamanic." Of the two *ñidol ngenpin*, the two head Masters of the Word, one is always said to descend from "chiefly" descent (*lonko küpal*), while the other is said to be of "shamanic" descent (*machi küpal*). These two "roots" (*folil*) of descent are said to be always represented in the figures of the two *ñidol ngenpin*, no matter who the actual individuals occupying those roles might be. A further significant similarity between *ngenpin* and shamans is one which they also both share with chiefs: authority through submission to *newen*. Just as *ngenpin* regard themselves as unwilling conduits resigned to submit to a force which is channeled through them, shamanic novices, too, are plagued by dreams, visions, and deteriorating health until they submit to the force of the spirit (*püllü*) which seeks to possess them, or alternatively, they must find another shaman powerful enough to persuade the force of the spirit to go elsewhere (cf. Bacigalupo 1995). For both priests and shamans, and indeed for chiefs, control of force is simultaneously submission to force, to allow oneself to be aligned with *newen* in its broadest sense.

There is a lot more to Viveiros de Castro and Hugh-Jones' arguments than I have presented here; my purpose is simply to follow their lead in highlighting the fact that the roles of chiefs, priests, and shamans can be analytically differentiated throughout lowland South America on the basis of differential forms of relating. Thus when an Amerindian ontology, such as that described by Mapuche people

through the concept of *newen*, corresponds to "an immanent dynamic multiplicity in a state of continuous variation, rather than the manifestation of constant or transcendent principles" (Viveiros de Castro 2007: 2), then shamanic, chiefly, and priestly roles can be understood as distinct modes of forging relations within and across a continuous series. In the remainder of this essay, I want to return to the Mapuche idea of language as force described earlier in order to argue that a closer focus on alignment with force through different kinds of language may prove a productive supplementary line of ethnographic inquiry, that the differential attitudes of chiefs, priests, and shamans towards language serve as a key diagnostic of their differential relations to force, and thus their simultaneous submission to and enactment of different forms of authority.

Language, force, and authority

I start this final section by returning to the question with which we began our investigation: why should language be an appropriate idiom with which to describe the *ngenpin* priest's relationship to force? I explored above the way in which the roles of priest, chief, and shaman, are all in one way or another constituted through a submission to, and alignment with, *newen*, with this force constitutive of the Mapuche cosmos. Yet if the *ngenpin* is in a relationship of subordination to the force manifest in the Word, why is he described as its master? To answer this question, we need a more nuanced understanding of the term *ngen* than is suggested by its usual translation as "master" or "owner." On its own, the term *ngen* refers to the various spirits inherent in the landscape, spirits which can be understood as continuous with the force immanent in the world. However, as is common throughout the Americas, many *ngen* are further specified by being related to specific animal or plant species, or other natural phenomena (cf. Grebe 1993). Thus there are *ngen challwa* "master of fish," *ngen triwe* "master of laurel trees," and so on. Yet the phrasing of these relationships in terms of a Western idiom of "mastery" is perhaps misleading, for it is not a relationship of domination between two distinct things, but rather a relationship of mutual constitution between things which are to some degree continuous. A more prosaic example would be that of the use of the terms *ngen futa* "master of husband" and *ngen kure* "master of wife" as synonyms for wife (*kure*) and husband (*futa*) respectively; one term has no meaning without the other, each gives the other its meaning and in this sense is its "master." It is this sense of mutual dependence and mutual constitution, rather than a relation of domination, which seems to be at the heart of relationship between priest and word. Such a relationship between "priests" and language is common throughout indigenous South America, and is frequently phrased in the idiom of ownership or mastery: among the Piaroa, shamans are the "owners of prayers" (Overing 1975), among the Wakuénai Baniwa, priests are the "owners of chants" (Wright 1992).

A related question is that of whether or not the concept of the word corresponds to actual speech acts, either in the organization of *ngillatun*, or in the ritual itself. My sense is that it does not. As mentioned previously, the word which emerges through the *ñidol ngenpin* and is then circulated around the various subordinate *inalechi ngenpin* cannot be reduced to a specific linguistic utterance. It seems rather to involve a metalinguistic pronouncement along the lines of "the word has now arrived with you" (*dungu mülepayeyu*), along with the date of the

ngillatun, a date already common knowledge. This transmission of the word is frequently carried out by messengers (*werken*) rather than by the *ngenpin* themselves. A further problematization of any straightforward link between the word and any specific speech act is that in many cases it is not priests themselves who carry out the ritual prayers (*llellipun*) during *ngillatun*, but rather *ngillatufe* (literally, "requesters"). Those who act as *ngillatufe* may include both priests and chiefs, and anybody else who knows how to carry out these orations. It would seem, then, that the relationship of *ngenpin* to word is not reducible to a relation to specific linguistic acts, but rather to language as conceived of in more abstract and opaque way as continuous with, and indexical of, the force of the world. Indeed, what I want to suggest is that language is understood as a fitting idiom in which to describe the ritual organization of *ngillatun*, not because of any direct or straightforward link to language itself, but because the relationship between *ngenpin* and word reconstitutes at a meta-level the relationship between speaker and utterance as locally understood. Tambiah once phrased a similar point in different terms: "Since words exist and are in a sense agents themselves which establish connection and relations between both man and man, and man and the world, and are capable of "acting" upon them, they are one of the most realistic representations we have of the concept of force which is either not directly observable or is a metaphysical notion which we find necessary to use" (1968: 184).

Mapuche society is at least partially constituted through language; it is through language that people are revealed to one another and thus through which social relationships are made possible. Yet, as we have seen, this language is not fully under any speaker's control, for as much as it emerges from a speaker's intention, it is equally emergent from the force of the world itself. To speak properly is thus to correctly align one's submission to the force of language with one's intended meanings and effects.[26] To fulfill the role of *ngenpin* properly is to align one's submission to *newen* with one's intentions, intentions which are themselves part of *newen*. The relationship of Master of the Word to word is thus homologous with that between speaker and utterance, but at a meta-level removed. Just as specific linguistic acts become encompassed by the metalinguistic word, so too do all speakers become encompassed by the meta-speaker, the Master of the Word, with all of the reversed subordination and mutual constitution that that term implies. As Roy Rappaport noted in his monumental work on ritual, "If the world is to have any words at all it may be necessary to establish *The Word*–the *True Word*–to stand against the dissolvant power of lying words and many words, to stand against falsehood and Babel" (1999: 21).

Ngenpin are aligned with force in its most abstract and unspecified form, hence their association with language occurs in its most abstract and unspecified form, identified simply as the word with no semantic content attached. In other words, the root of their authority is metalinguistic, rather than linguistic. Shamans' engagement with *newen* occurs primarily through relationships with *püllü* spirits, *newen* personified and objectified in its most radically alter form. Thus shamans' language is correspondingly marked with radical alterity, unintelligible to all but their *dungumachife*, "ritual translators" who bring the shamans' discourses into the

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26 As Charles Taylor puts it in an essay on Heidegger's philosophy of language, "it couldn't happen without us, but it is not our doing" (1995: 121).

register of this world, Mapudungun. Yet chiefs are primarily aligned with *newen* as manifest in the affairs of *che*, of "true people," and hence their association is with speech itself which when spoken correctly stands for the consensus of the community, and for *admapu*, proper human behavior aligned with *newen*.

The "authority" of the chief, then, as Clastres noted long ago, is at least partially rooted in language. Clastres was also correct in noting that the value of chiefly speech was not derived from its semantic content. His error, it seems to me, was to see language as something amenable to a simple model of exchange between actors. Such a model presupposes an understanding of language as primarily "symbolic" and in which speech is firmly rooted in its speaker's intention, a model rooted in Western, not Amerindian, language ideology. There is no room for a Mapuche understanding of speech as excess force, as being an "actant" in its own right, within Clastres' schema. This is a crucial oversight, for it is precisely in their alignment through different kinds of speech to a force which is always beyond them, that chiefs, priests, and shamans establish the basis of their "authority."

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested that language serves as a powerful analytical diagnostic for the constitution of authority in Mapuche society, an argument which I believe also has relevance to other lowland South American societies. In coming to this conclusion I have had to radically realign what is meant by the term "authority" in order to align it with a Mapuche ontology of force. In such a context, authority can no longer be understood simply as a relation between people, but equally as something which flows through people, and whose ultimate origins always lie beyond people. Likewise, we have had to reconsider the implications of the term "language" which continues to be understood by many scholars as primarily "symbolic" and therefore necessarily concerned with representation and thus exemplifying a fundamental relation of discontinuity between signifier and signified. What the material I have presented here suggests is that for Mapuche people language is better understood as primarily indexical and non-arbitrary, as an "intensive relation," a heterogenous means through which new relations are forged and new entities brought into being. In conclusion I would like to highlight some of the ways these understandings might cast new light on current debates about agency and language in contemporary anthropology and philosophy.

Many of the arguments for a renewed focus on non-human agency, for a radical "post-humanism," have been framed as a reaction against the so-called "linguistic" or "semiotic turn." For these writers language is the exemplar par excellence of a thoroughly human activity and preoccupation, one that is nothing but representational and unproblematically tied to human agency (Latour 2005; Barad 2007). But to my mind it is a rather naïve and simplistic view of language which understands it as unproblematically "human," as yet another example of humanity's narcissistic anthropocentrism. Semiotic processes in general are by no means limited to human agency, and linguistic process, even when understood as the sole property of humans, is, as I have sought to demonstrate here, not reducible to human agency (Kockelman 2007). Post-humanist writers such as Karen Barad (2007: 132) can only get away with claiming that "language has been granted too much power," because in reality *language as an actant in its own right* has been

accorded none. We seem to have thrown out the linguistic baby with the discursive bathwater.

To include language wholly and unproblematically in arguments against representation is to mistakenly understand language as nothing but representational. In their railings against the linguistic turn, many of the writers concerned with developing a post-humanistic approach, are in fact revealing a particularly Western language ideology, one which positions language as wholly within the realm of human agency, as "what identifies 'the subject' and differentiates him or her from other entities" (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 9). It seems to me, however, that if we take alternative ideologies of language like that of the Mapuche described above seriously, that language is a process with an "excess agency" necessarily beyond human intentionality, then language can, rather than being an obstacle which needs to be overcome, be yet still further ammunition for the argument such post-humanist writers wish to put forward: the intrinsic inter-connectedness of agents, both human and non-human, both entity and process.

In an Amerindian world constituted by continuity of subjectivity, of "humanity", then knowledge proceeds on the basis of understanding what is "human" about things which at first sight appear to be other than human, other than subjectivities (Viveiros de Castro 2004). In this essay I have tried to follow Mapuche people in extending this kind of analysis beyond material entities such as animals, rocks, and plants, to the very process of language itself, to understand the ways in which in certain contexts language comes to be seen as its own force, continuous with the other forces of which the cosmos is composed. To understand why language itself might be understood by Mapuche people as an "agential" process moves the debate about "agency" a step further away from our Western predilection for "entities" and other static forms of being and towards an understanding of agency appropriate to the ontologies of becoming so central in the Americas and elsewhere.

Acknowledgments

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La naissance de la parole: la langue, la force et l'autorité rituelle Mapuche

Résumé : Cet article vise, à partir de la manière dont les Mapuche ruraux considèrent le langage, à jeter un nouvel éclairage sur la nature de l'agentivité et de l'autorité dans les basses terres d'Amérique du Sud et ailleurs. Grâce à l'analyse ethnographique, je démontre la nécessité de tenir compte des rôles de prêtre, de chef, et de chamane — tous présents dans le *ngillatun*, un rituel de fertilité mapuche — du point de vue de leurs modes différentiels de mise en relation à travers le langage. Car le langage, tel que les Mapuche ruraux l'envisagent, émerge non seulement des intentions de locuteurs individuels, mais également de la force (*newen*) constitutive de tout être. Les prêtres, les chefs, et les chamans cherchent tous à se rallier par le discours à cette force qui s'instancie à travers eux. Une telle observation constitue le fondement d'une critique de l'interprétation par Clastres de la relation entre les chefs et le langage d'une part, et du récent rejet post-humaniste du soi-disant « tournant linguistique » d'autre part.

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