



## INDIGENOUS COSMOPOLITICS IN THE ANDES: Conceptual Reflections beyond “Politics”

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It's inconceivable that in the 21st century, God still has to be defined according to the European standards. . . . We think the life of Jesus is the Great Light coming from Inti Yaya (Paternal and Maternal Light that supports it all), whose aim is to deter anything that doesn't let us live in justice and brotherhood among human beings and in harmony with Mother Nature. . . . The Pope should note that our religions NEVER DIED, we learned how to merge our beliefs and symbols with the ones of the invaders and oppressors.

—Humberto Cholango, May 2007<sup>1</sup>

How can we present a proposal intended, not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke thought, a proposal that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to “slow down” reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us?

—Isabelle Stengers, 2005

The political reconfiguration that is currently taking place in Latin America may mark epochal changes in the continent. Electoral results in Bolivia and Ecuador have led international and national analysts to interpret these changes as a (sub) continental re-turn to the left, but what is unprecedented is the presence of regional indigenous social movements as a constituent element of these transformations.

Their demands tend to disturb political agendas and conceptual settlements, progressive and conservative alike.

Take the first quote above, excerpted from a letter that Humberto Cholango, the President of Ecuarrunari—an indigenous political organization from Ecuador—wrote to Pope Benedict XVI in May 2007. At a meeting in Brazil, the Pope had said that at the time of the Conquest Indians had already been longing for their conversion, which had been nonviolent; Cholango’s letter protested those declarations. A complex political document, the letter denounced, made alliances, and also proposed a distinct agenda. Cholango denounced the more than 500 years of colonization by the dominant Catholic Church, as well as the neoimperial stance of George W. Bush, then President of the United States. They coincide in their genocidal consequences vis-à-vis indigenous ways of living in Latin America, the document said. Against these consequences, Ecuarrunari made alliances with ecumenical liberation theologians and so-called leftist presidents in the region. Significantly, the document alerted everybody that, against the will of colonizers, indigenous practices have always been there; they remain strong and currently guide the political project in Abya Ayala, the name with which indigenous social movements refer to Latin America.

The practices Cholango mentioned may be identified as religious (in fact, he so does); yet the letter changes the problem by lifting religious practices from an exclusive concern with the sacred or spiritual, and placing them within historical, earthly, and political concerns of cohabitation between Catholic and non-Catholic, indigenous and nonindigenous institutions. Changing the problem, the letter moves the conversation from transcendental religious beliefs to a plane of immanence and historical ontology entangled with organized indigenous politics. Significantly, the analytical problem that the letter reveals is that indigenous politics may exceed politics as we know them. Established politicians find it difficult to accept, for example, that “Jesus the Great Light coming from Inti Yaya” has tangible connections both with “Mother Nature” and with human beings. Moreover, Inti Yaya and Mother Nature, until recently foreign to politics, can be summoned into it and even make their way into the most official of all state documents. Surprising many, Chapter 7 of the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, reads: “Nature or *Pachamama*, where life becomes real and reproduces itself, has the right to be integrally respected in its existence, and to the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structures, functions, and evolutionary processes” (my emphasis).<sup>2</sup> That nature has rights may be (sort of) understood in environmentalist grammar.

But what is Pachamama and what happened that allowed such an entity a presence in the constitution?

Clearly annoyed, Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador and at times antineoliberal, blamed an “infantile” coalition of environmentalists, leftists, and indigenists for the intrusion of Pachamama–Nature in the Constitution. Wrapping up his accusation, he added that the coalition was the worst danger for the Ecuadoran political process (Ospina 2008).<sup>3</sup> The reaction is not unusual among politicians like Correa: modern, urban, and self-identified as nonindigenous, they dismiss the excess as residual (or infantile in this case) and hope that it will gradually disappear. But, as Cholango insists, what he calls their “beliefs and symbols” have not disappeared in 500 years. Summoning those strange actors may indeed be a political strategy to interpellate indigenous subjectivities. But can the strategy itself have an ontological explanation of its own? Can we think about these presences as political actors—or as an issue in politics, at the very least—instead of brushing them away as excessive, residual or infantile? How do we do that? These questions seem unusual; they disrupt conceptual comfort zones. They arise from the conceptual challenge posed by the equally unusual presences, not of indigenous politicians, but of the entities (which I call “earth-beings”) they conjure to the political sphere.

The appearance of earth-beings in social protests may evince a moment of rupture of modern politics and an emergent indigeneity.<sup>4</sup> I do not mean a new mode of being indigenous. I mean an insurgence of indigenous forces and practices with the capacity to significantly disrupt prevalent political formations, and reshuffle hegemonic antagonisms, first and foremost by rendering illegitimate (and, thus, denaturalizing) the exclusion of indigenous practices from nation-state institutions. Although it can be reabsorbed into a new political hegemony, the current moment represents a unique historical conjuncture. Emerging through a deep, expansive, and simultaneous crisis of colonialism and neoliberalism (Blaser 2007)—converging in its ecological, economic, and political fronts—the public presence of unusual actors in politics is at least thought provoking. It may represent an epistemic occasion to “slow down reasoning”—as in Stengers’s quote above—and, rather than asserting, adopt an intellectual attitude that proposes and thus creates possibilities for new interpretations. Taking my cue from Stengers, I intend this ethnographically inspired essay as an invitation to take seriously (perhaps literally) the presence in politics of those actors, which, being other than human, the dominant disciplines assigned either to the sphere of nature (where they were to be known by science) or to the metaphysical and symbolic fields of knowledge (Williams 1977:125).

*Pampamisayoq.* My insights into the relations between humans and earth-beings come from two Quechua individuals, Mariano Turpo and his son Nazario. They lived in a remote village in Peru called Pacchanta, located more than 15,000 feet above the sea level, to the southeast of the city of Cuzco. Mariano was close to 90 when I met him in 2002; he died of old age two years after. Nazario and I continued working together until a car accident tragically ended his life in July 2007. They were both *pampamisayoq* (usually translated as “ritual specialists”) and politicians. (A literal translation of *pampamisayoq* would be “the one with the *misa* or table” and, therefore, enabled to interact with the *pampa*, or what we call landscape.) They were not isolated traditionalists; rather, both were seasoned travelers and local innovators. When younger, Mariano’s activism took him to Lima, where he met state functionaries, even the Peruvian president. Nazario traveled farther—to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., where he was a curator of the Andean exhibit. He also participated in meetings in Ecuador and Bolivia organized by the indigenous social movement regional network. Through them, Peru remains my ethnographic focus, although I also draw from events in Bolivia and Ecuador. Rather than a nationally bounded event, the current political emergence of indigeneity takes place through regional networks of activism and everyday practice.

### “EXCESSIVE PRACTICES” PROLIFERATE AND DISRUPT “POLITICS AS USUAL”

As the 21st century unfolds, earth-beings and human interactions with them—what Penelope Harvey (2007) calls “earth-practices”—have been increasingly frequent presences on political stages in the Andes. In Bolivia, “offerings to Pachamama” (known as *pagos*, *despachos*, or *misas*)<sup>5</sup> became public during the political mobilizations known as Guerra del Agua and Guerra del Gas that occurred in 2000 and 2003, respectively, that precipitated the fall of two consecutive neoliberal regimes in Bolivia. On January 21, 2006, a day before Evo Morales’s inauguration as the new President of Bolivia, a group of Aymara elders recognized him as their leader in a public ceremony that summoned the surrounding landscape.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, similar practices—libations to the earth before a political conversation, for example—have made their way into the main quarters of the Bolivian State, even attracting international attention. A July 2006 story in the *Wall Street Journal* (Córdoba and Luhnnow 2006) titled “A Dash of Mysticism: Governing Bolivia the Aymara Way” reported that David Choquehuanca, Bolivia’s foreign minister, had introduced Andean “beliefs” into his function. We may be tempted to interpret the frequency of these practices as an expression of momentous (some would wish ephemeral) “organized ethnic politics” in Bolivia. However, the same reasoning does not apply in Ecuador, for both Cholango’s letter to the Pope, as

well as the inscription of “Nature or Pachamama” in the Constitution occurred despite the electoral defeat of Luis Macas, the 2006 indigenous candidate to the Ecuadoran Presidency. Moreover, that similar practices have appeared on political stages in Peru—exceptional among Andean countries because ethnic politics have little political traction—suggests a composition more complex than organized politics (leftist or ethnic) articulating their emergence. I came to this realization after attending the political demonstration I describe below.

In early December 2006, more than 1,000 peasants gathered in Cuzco’s main square, the *Plaza de Armas*. They had traveled from their villages located at the foot of a mountain named Ausangate, well known in Cuzco as a powerful earth-being, the source of life and death, of wealth and misery; obtaining a favorable outcome requires maintaining proper relationships with it and its surroundings (other mountains, lesser sentient entities). In the Plaza de Armas, the peasants joined other demonstrators: hundreds of devotees of the Sanctuary of Coyllur Rit’i and the members of the Catholic brotherhoods that guard the place. They were all there to protest the prospective concession of a mine located in the Sinakara, one of the peaks in the mountain chain to which Ausangate belongs and that also houses Coyllur Rit’i. Visited annually by thousands of pilgrims from all over Cuzco, the sanctuary commemorates the apparition of a divine shepherd and a miraculous cross. Not unusual in grassroots demonstrations in Cuzco, the Plaza was replete with people wearing the distinctively indigenous *chullos* (multicolored woolen hats) and ponchos. Also as usual, there were banners; some displayed cultural-environmental slogans appropriate for the occasion: “We will defend our cultural patrimony with our lives: No to the mine!!” But there were also unusual banners, of the kind carried by standard bearers in the pilgrimage to Coyllur Rit’i itself. Also intriguing, this time, among the demonstrators were *ukukos*, ritual dancers and central characters in the pilgrimage. Ritual dancers, rural and urban religious brotherhoods, participating as such in a political demonstration. . . . I had not seen anything similar in this Plaza where I have attended countless and assorted political demonstrations over many years.

Yet the degree to which this demonstration was different was brought home to me by my friend Nazario, whose village, Pacchanta, is at the foot of the Ausangate. He was there to protest the mining project—in fact he had called to let me know about the event. Initially, while we were demonstrating, I thought we shared a single view against the mine; however, once we debriefed about the meeting, and how it could influence future events, I realized that our shared view was also more than one. My reason for opposing the mine was that it would destroy the

pastures that families depend on to earn their living grazing alpacas and sheep, and selling their wool and meat. Nazario agreed with me, but said it would be worse: Ausangate would not allow the mine in Sinakara, a mountain over which it presided. Ausangate would get mad, could even kill people. To prevent that killing, the mine should not happen. I could not agree more, and although I could not bring myself to think that Ausangate would kill, I found it impossible to consider it a metaphor. Preventing Ausangate's ire was Nazario's motivation to participate in the demonstration and therefore it had political import.

Days later and back in the countryside, I realized that in one way or another many shared his view. Among them some were peasants, others merchants; some self-identified as indigenous, others did not. The local notables (the mayor, justice of peace, teachers, merchants) were divided—not on the sentiency of Ausangate, but, rather, on the potential dangers of Ausangate's reaction, including landslides, epidemics, and droughts, and how to negotiate and deal with it. When in 2008 I visited Pacchanta, Nazario Turpo's village, rumor had it that the project for the mine had been cancelled. Perhaps it would not have been a successful venture, the buzz went, and Ausangate had receded from the regional political stage. During this visit, I also talked to Graciano Mandura, the newly elected mayor of Ocongate—the district that houses the complex Coyllur Rit'I-Sinakara-Ausangate. Born like Nazario in Pacchanta, Graciano is a native Quechua speaker who learned Spanish in elementary school, holds a degree in animal husbandry from the University of Cuzco and was working for a local NGO when he decided to run for Mayor. As a candidate, Graciano joined the effort against the mine that threatened the sanctuary and the mountain chain; in our conversation, I asked why he had joined the antimining effort, and he explained that the mine would deter tourism, an activity that was generating income in the region. This was a response I was expecting. But then he added that he knew from experience that the mountains, which he called by their name, demand respect. Otherwise inexplicable accidents happen—it has always been so. Wouldn't it be his responsibility as Mayor to prevent those accidents, whatever their reason? Now, this response—and more specifically its formulation through the logic of a responsible state official—confirmed that there was more than politics as usual in this locality. Slowing down reasoning was ethnographically called for.

Ausangate and the sanctuary of Coyllur Rit'i are not the only earth-beings to have become public politically. In northern Peru, a coalition of peasants and environmentalists made Cerro Quilish public as a "sacred mountain" and enlisted it in the fight against Yanacocha, the largest gold mine in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> I resume

a brief discussion of this event later. For now, suffice it to say, that although not each of the mining conflicts proliferating in Peru articulates the presence of earth-beings, the few that did become public were influential enough to disturb Peruvian President Alan García. Sacred mountains, he said, were an invention of “old anti-capitalist communists of the nineteenth century who changed into protectionists in the twentieth century and have again changed into environmentalists in the twenty first century.”<sup>8</sup> Those places, he continued, were nothing but *tierras ociosas*—idle lands, whose “owners do not have any formation, or economic resources, therefore their property is not real.” Although leftist pundits have responded to many of García’s neoliberalizing points, they have not said anything about sacred mountains. Perhaps they think the president is right in that respect; sacred sites are nonsense, a curiosity hoped to disappear soon. If I want to contest García’s position (and convince at least some of my leftist friends in the process), where do I look for a way into a discussion that has some possibility to bear fruit?

Political economy and cultural politics certainly offer entry points. There is no denying that neoliberalism is an important player in the game; free market policies, global mineral prices, and mining activities in Peru have all increased dramatically. Between 1990 and 2000, mining investment grew fivefold; between 1990 and 2003, mineral exports increased from \$1,447 million to \$4,554 million. In 2002, Peru was the leading producer of gold in Latin America and the world’s sixth largest producer. Mining concessions mushroomed, growing 77.4 percent between 2002 and 2007, from 7,045,000 has to 13,224,000 has. Many new concessions have been granted in territories where mining has historically not occurred and that are often occupied by indigenous communities.<sup>9</sup> These numbers are spectacular enough to explain the escalation of antimining protests. One feels tempted to interpret these events within the parameters of political economy and the analytical vocabulary it makes available. I could, for example, see the antimining demonstrations as indigenous responses to the neoliberal expropriation of their land, or the result of something like “environmental consciousness.” This perspective would be compatible with an ethnographic analysis of cultural politics that takes distance with an earlier Andeanist ethnographic record that, as Orin Starn commented many years ago, has been habitually rich in ritual and symbolic analysis and oblivious to politics (1991).<sup>10</sup> Analyzing the copresence of both—Andean rituals confronting dominant property politics, for example—would amount to a scholarly contribution.

Another analytical temptation: I could see these events as indigenous challenges to the secularization of the state reminding us that “the religion of the ruler is not

the religion of the subjects” (Asad 2005), and that they instead forge an indigenous counter public sphere (Fraser 1997; for Bolivia see Albro 2006; Stephenson 2002). Such interpretations would not be inaccurate—they could be a response of sorts to positions like García’s, the Peruvian President. Yet, what is accurate is not necessarily sufficient (cf. Chakrabarty 2000) and questions remain. What kinds of publics are being mobilized into the political sphere—and why do they disrupt it? Answers to these questions using ideology as analytics seem short: the difference between Rafael Correa, the president from Ecuador, and Humberto Cholango, the spokesperson for Ecuarrunari seems to be more than ideological; important differences persist between the two even when the President, at least sometimes, seems to make left-leaning gestures. Measuring these differences in “degrees of leftism” would be, I think, if not spurious, at least a waste of time. Similarly, ideology does not explain the difference between Peruvian President Alan García, a neoliberal modernizer, and Nazario Turpo, who does not ascribe to a political ideology in a definitive way. Moreover, how do we explain the coincidence between the adamant neoliberal President García and the (so far) antineoliberal President Correa, both irate at the presence of, let’s say “excessive” actors on their national political stages? What follows is an attempt to denaturalize that excess by proposing a historical understanding of the epistemic-political processes that made it such.

### **THE POLITICAL THEORY THAT BANNED EARTH-BEINGS FROM POLITICS**

The political world is a pluriverse, not a universe

—Schmitt, 1996

Politics is not made up of power relations; it is made up of relations among worlds

—Rancière, 1999

A reading of the Andean ethnographic record along epistemic lines shows that earth-practices are relations for which the dominant ontological distinction between humans and nature does not work.<sup>11</sup> Earth-practices enact the respect and affect necessary to maintain the relational condition between humans and other-than-human beings that makes life in (many parts of) the Andes. Other-than-humans include animals, plants, and the landscape. The latter, the most frequently summoned to politics these days, is composed of a constellation of sentient entities known as *tirakuna*, or earth-beings with individual physiognomies more or less



known by individuals involved in interactions with them.<sup>12</sup> The “things” that indigenous movements are currently “making public” (cf. Latour 2005) in politics are not simply nonhumans, they are also sentient entities whose material existence—and that of the worlds to which they belong—is currently threatened by the neoliberal wedding of capital and the state. Thus, when mountains—say Quilish or Ausangate—break into political stages, they do so also as earth-beings, “contentious objects whose mode of presentation is not homogenous with the ordinary mode of existence of the objects thereby identified” (Rancière 1999:99). Borrowing from the history of science to trace the history of politics (for the latter as much as the former was invented) I propose that these objects are contentious because their presence in politics disavows the separation between “Nature” and “Humanity,” on which the political theory our world abides by was historically funded.<sup>13</sup>

According to the modern order of things science and politics are to each other like water and oil: They do not mix. The first stands for objective representation of nature, while the second is the negotiation of power to represent people vis-à-vis the state. This distinction, historians of science Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer explain, resulted from the quarrel between Hobbes, author of *Leviathan*, and Robert Boyle, champion of the “experiment” as scientific method and architect of the new field of experimental science and its social institutions (Shapin and Schaffer 1985). They propose that this quarrel (in which Hobbes denied the truth of Boyle’s experiment because of its private nature, and Boyle insisted that experiments could not have the public aspect that should characterize politics) was one important historical moment in the invention of the language that lifted “politics” from “science” and in the consequent formulation of the boundaries between epistemology and the forces of society. Bruno Latour (1993) builds on this analysis to develop his argument about the creation of what he calls the modern constitution: the regime of life that created a single natural order and separated it from the social by creating an ontological distinction between things and humans that it purported universal. He suggests that, rather than creating two separate spheres—Boyle science and Hobbes politics—what they did together (through their quarrel) was to create “our modern world, a world in which the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract” (Latour 1993:27). Hobbes and Boyle were, thus, “like a pair of Founding Fathers, acting in concert to promote one and the same innovation in political theory: the representation of nonhumans belongs to science, but science is not allowed to appeal to politics; the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation

to the nonhumans produced and mobilized by science and technology” (Latour 1993:28).

The presence of earth-beings in social protests invites us to slow down reasoning because it may evince an intriguing moment of epistemic rupture with this theory of politics. Their public emergence contends—to use Rancière’s word—with both science and politics; it may house the capacity to upset the locus of enunciation of what “politics” is about—who can be a politician or what can be considered a political issue, and thus reshuffle the hegemonic antagonisms that for more than 500 years organized the political field in the Andes, and that gradually articulated through modern scientific paradigms, banned earth-beings from politics. Here I borrowed Chantal Mouffe’s distinction between politics and the political—for which she, in turn, builds on Carl Schmitt (Mouffe 2000). Antagonism separates “friends” from “enemies” in such a way that “the adversary intends to negate the other’s way of life . . . in order to preserve one’s forms of existence” (Schmitt 1996:27). The political enemy is “the other, a stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in an especially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (Schmitt 1996:27). Antagonism is not good or evil, ugly or beautiful, profitable or unprofitable, for all these distinctions belong to other specific fields—ethics, aesthetics, and economics respectively—to which the political cannot be reduced. The problem with liberalism and particularly with liberal democracy, says Schmitt, is that having tied the political to the ethical, it negates conflict and, thus, the political itself.

Mouffe takes up this point and builds on Gramsci’s notion of hegemony to define politics as the field that makes antagonism livable, curbs or even cancels its warlike potential, without ever canceling the conflict it entails. Politics are, she explains, those practices through which the antagonistic differences between friends and enemies are tamed, dealt with (ideologically and institutionally) and transformed into the agonisms—the relationships among adversaries—that characterize hegemonic orders, with their inclusions and exclusions (Mouffe 2000).<sup>14</sup>

Yet, I must add to Mouffe, hegemony does not act only on the sphere of politics. Hegemonic biopower—wielded by both socialism and liberalism alike—transformed the political into an accepted battlefield for life. In such battlefield decisions are taken about who the enemies are, but as important, about who, not withstanding the antagonism, are not even worthy of enemy status. On occasions they are not even worth killing; they can be left to die because, although included in the concept of “Humanity,” they do not count—at all, for they are too close to

“Nature.” If liberalism, as Schmitt and Mouffe suggest, tied the political to ethics and, thus, negated conflict, the birth of the modern political field, we learn from science scholars, was tied to the denial of the state of “Nature.” Sustaining the notion of the political that eventually became hegemonic was the ontological distinction between “Humanity” and “Nature,” the creation of the “natural Man,” his sentence to inevitable extinction along with his other-than-human beings, and the occlusion of this antagonism through the notion of an adamantly inclusive and hierarchically organized “Humanity.” Only the fully humans engaged in antagonisms, and only they could transform their enmities into adversarial relations—that is, engage in politics.

Initially, the antagonism between European and local other-than-human entities was visible. In Spanish America, the Catholic Church considered them as diabolic enemies, and practices with earth-beings were idolatries condemned to extirpation. In British America, Locke authorized war against natives—their closeness to nature made them unproductive, land had to be incorporated to civilization via the agricultural work of the white man. The antagonism must have been silenced gradually as reason gained ground and eventually prevailed over faith as a knowledge/power regime, and monopolized politics for those who knew through science. Interaction with things through nonrepresentational practices—the absence of the distinction between signifier and signified that allowed modern scientific practice and politics alike—was deemed equivalent to the absence of reason, and more specifically of political reason.

Hegel’s musings about Africa may serve to illustrate the point. In Africa, he wrote, “natural forces as well as the sun, moon, trees, animals are recognized as powers in their own right, they are not seen as having an eternal law or providence behind them, or as forming part of a universal and permanent natural order” (Hegel 1997:130). There “the kings have ministers and priests—and sometimes a fully organized hierarchy of officials—whose task is to practice sorcery, to command the powers of nature, and to determine the weather” (Hegel 1997:130). Pages later we learn that the African’s lack of understanding of “Nature’s Laws” was only compatible with a political organization based on the “arbitrariness of the autocrat” subjecting “men of equally savage temper” (Hegel 1997:137, 138). This reasoning should not be simplified as racism—it was enabled by the antagonistic relationship articulating the ontological distinction between humans and nature. Race (as a modern tool to rank “Humanity” along a “Civilization”—“Nature” continuum) was also enabled by this distinction and therefore already included the overarching idea that the representation of “Nature” in politics was to be necessarily mediated

**The discrimination that enabled race (and racism).** A hegemonic notion of the political built on the silenced antagonism between nature and humanity either legitimized or occluded the war between the world of modern colonizers and those of the colonized—and in neither case allowed for politics between them. Their view as enemies displaced, the potential of an adversarial relationship, a rightful struggle for a hegemonic project, between them was stifled. It gave way to a center-periphery biopolitics of benevolent and inevitable inclusion in progress and civilization. This produced a regime of visibility (Rancière 1999) that prevented the uncouneted to appear as such; the denial of their difference (amounting to their exclusion from the possibility of equality) translated into ranked inclusion in Western humanity: an offer that “the inferior” could not refuse. The object of policies of improvement, only through a process of transformation (e.g., through which they should deny the social relations they held with plants, rivers, or mountains) could “the naturals” gain active and legitimate access to politics. Until then, they were a threat (but not quite an enemy) from which society, if it wanted to live a healthy life, had to be defended (cf. Foucault). The political field was in discursive proximity with the science of race and the state could scarcely function without becoming involved in racism (Foucault 2003:255). Although race has gone through constant theoretical and historical denaturalization since World War II, the discrimination between who can be considered enemies and who are not worthy of such status, and between those who can govern and those who cannot, continues to be legitimate. Undoing this discrimination requires undoing the political and politics as we know it—a task that requires more than the most radical multiculturalism welcoming to politics those previously evicted by racist politics. I would like to suggest that denouncing racism—even undoing it—may address the inferiority in question, but it does not address the epistemic roots of the antagonism between those entitled to rule and those destined to be ruled. What needs to be addressed is the epistemic maneuver that organized the political deciding what could be brought into politics and what belonged to a different managerial sphere. If embedded in the political was the silence about the antagonistic exclusion of “naturals,” the elimination of “Nature” from the same sphere completed the hegemony.

by science. Hegel shared with his modern peers this belief—then and now; its underpinning runs deeper than racism alone.

The political field we currently recognize as such was shaped not only by distinguishing friends from enemies among humans but also by the antithetical separation of “Humanity” and “Nature.” Together these two antitheses—between humanity and nature, and between allegedly superior and inferior humans—declared the gradual extinction of other-than-human beings and the worlds in which they existed. The pluriverse, the multiple worlds that Schmitt deemed crucial to the possibility of the political, disappeared.<sup>15</sup> Instead a single world made its appearance, inhabited by many peoples (now we call them cultures) more or less distanced from a single “Nature” (Descola 1996; Haraway 1991; Latour 1993; Viveiros de Castro 2004). Nonscientific relations with other-than-humans were reduced to

belief, a far cry from a method to ascertain truth, yet perhaps worthy of preservation as long as they did not claim their right to define reality. The relation among worlds was one of silent antagonism, with the Western world defining for history (and with “History”) its superbly hegemonic role as civilizational, and as a consequence accruing power to organize the homogenous life that it strived to expand. Politics as a relation of disagreement among worlds—as the “meeting of the heterogeneous,” in Rancière’s words (1999:32)—disappeared, or rarely happened.

Nonrepresentational, affective interactions with other-than-humans continued all over the world, also in the Andes.<sup>16</sup> The current appearance of Andean indigeneity—the presence of earth-beings demanding a place in politics—may imply the insurgence of those proscribed practices disputing the monopoly of science to define “Nature” and, thus, provincializing its alleged universal ontology as specific to the West: one world (even if perhaps the most powerful one) in a pluriverse. This appearance of indigeneities may inaugurate a different politics, plural not because they are enacted by bodies marked by gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality demanding rights, or by environmentalists representing nature, but because they bring earth-beings to the political, and force into visibility the antagonism that proscribed their worlds. Most important, this may transform the war that has ruled so far silently through a singular biopolitics of improvement, into what Isabelle Stengers calls a cosmopolitics: a politics where “cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulation of which they would eventually be capable” (Stengers 2005:995). In creating this articulation, indigenous movements may meet those—scientists, environmentalists, feminists, egalitarians of different stripes—also committed to a different politics of nature, one that includes disagreement on the definition of nature itself.

**Antagonism, multiculturalism, multinaturalism.** In Latin America, the antagonism with indigeneity and earth-beings is located in the image, rhetoric, institutions, and practices of “the lettered city,” a well-known concept in Latin American studies initially discussed by Uruguayan literary critic Angel Rama in *La Ciudad Letrada* (1960). (An English version was published in 1996; see Rama 1996.) The term described the power of literacy in Latin American societies, and the central role of cities in deploying and reproducing it. More specifically, from the urban headquarters literacy emerges as a benevolent technology of improvement, the historical thrust of which has been to programmatically let Indians die: *Indio leído, Indio perdido* (a literate Indian is a lost Indian) says a very old and widespread adage in Spanish-speaking Latin America, reflecting the belief that for better or worse, literacy instills reason and, thus, in line with Captain Pratt’s belief, it “kills the Indian and saves

the Man.” Letting Indians die was necessary to achieve progress; moreover, it was achieved through cultural technologies, via *alfabetización* and *urbanización*. Presented as literacy and urbanization, the death of Indians was, in fact, their birth as mestizos and, only as such, citizens of the nation. The same belief holds for Portuguese speaking Latin America. According to Azelene Kangiã, an indigenous sociologist from Brazil, in her country, “the state tells the Indian: if you are incapable and live in the forest then I protect you, if you get your education and live in the city, then you become Brazilian, and do not have a right to your culture or territory anymore” (Oliart 2002). What from an indigenous viewpoint expresses a denial of ontological difference, the state phrases as progress, protection, and cultural improvement. “Letting Indians die” was not recognized as antagonistic until very recently, when indigenous movements utilizing the possibilities of recognitions offered in the terms of the state—namely, rights to cultural difference—transformed the antagonism into a political conflict to be negotiated, and raised claims to a plurinational state. According to the proposal this essay develops, this plurality does not stop at multiculturalism, but is a project for multinaturalism. (On the antagonistic relation between indigeneity and the state, see also Aparicio and Blaser 2008.)

### INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS: POLITICS THROUGH PARTIAL CONNECTIONS

Latin American Indians (and indigeneity as a field of life) are not a usual “enemy” or “adversary”—for although, indeed, radically different they are not the complete others, the total strangers that Schmitt holds enemies to be. Having emerged through collaborative friction (Tsing 2005) with practices and institutions other to itself, and, thus, including those practices, indigeneity as a historical formation is “partially connected” with and participates in Andean nation-state institutions. These institutions deny the ontological difference of indigeneity albeit through practices of inclusion that usually enact a partial connection with the ontological difference that they are set to deny. “Partial connection,” a concept I borrow from Marilyn Strathern, refers to a relationship composing an aggregate that is “neither singular nor plural, neither one nor many, a circuit of connections rather than joint parts” (2004:54). Partial connections create no single entity; the entity that results is more than one, yet less than two.

Through the lens of partial connections, indigeneity in the Andes—and I would venture in Latin America—can be conceptualized as a complex formation, a historic-political articulation of more than one, but less than two, socionatural worlds. As a historical formation, Andean indigeneity did not disappear into Christianity first, or citizenship (through *mestizaje*) later; but (as Cholango wrote in his letter to the Pope) it was not impervious to them either, for doing so would

have meant to be impervious to history. Neither indigenous nor mestizo, it is an indigenous-mestizo aggregate that we are talking about: less than two, not the sum of its parts (therefore not the “third” result of a mixture) and indeed not one—let alone a pure one (de la Cadena 2000). Without closure, you can also call it “mestizo-indigenous” for the order has no teleology. Moreover, its naming may change, for its shape is fractal: as fragments with no clear edge, “indigenous-mestizos” are always a part of the other, their separation is impossible. Thus seen, albeit hard to our logic, indigeneity has always been part of modernity and also different, therefore never modernist.<sup>17</sup> Partially connected indigenous-mestizos are, like fractals, self-similar even though, depending on how you look at them, they also appear to be different (Green 2005; Wagner 1991).

Graciano Mandura (Major of Ocongate, bilingual in Quechua and Spanish, holding a university degree) and Nazario Turpo (pampamisayoq in Ocongate, monolingual Quechua speaker, and not knowing how to read or write) participate in indigeneity from two different positions—one more capable through literacy, the other better able to interact with other-than-human beings—but both connected to the worlds that their lives make less than two. And it is precisely this partial connection that has allowed Andean indigeneity a presence on regional and national political public stages: connected to the historically shaped discourses through which they appear (class, ethnicity, and the current confrontation with neoliberalism) and exceeding them at the same time. What is going on, I purport, is not a paradigmatic shift in the history of indigenous resistance; the excess has always been present. The extraordinary event is its public visibility; the shift it may provoke would be epistemic, and thus encompass our analyses.

During the Cold War, Andean indigenous politicians articulated a peasant–worker voice to manifest the conflict with the nation-state through the analytics of class and the demands that it allowed. The few ethnographies of the period produced by U.S. scholars that worked within the same analytics identified the excess, but contained it within interpretations of solidarity, rebellion, and struggle.<sup>18</sup> Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall—a symbol of the downfall of socialist states and the decline of Marxist political organizations—indigenous leaders continued their quest as political adversaries through demands for cultural rights. Voiced through “ethnicity,” political claims of this period marked what some have identified as “return of the Indian” (Albó 1991) publicly led by activists of indigenous descent, who rejected the lettered city’s offer to assimilate. Instead they self-identified publicly as indigenous intellectuals, an oxymoronic label of the 1970s intended to implode the idea that educated Indians were not Indians. At least

bilingual—Quechua and Spanish, for example—and many with an academic degree, the broad national public consider these politicians as spokespersons of indigeneity. Notwithstanding their activism, the foundational modernity of politics has rendered this indigenous presence at least partial, with modern politicians—the Presidents of Ecuador and Peru, for example—engaging in what they understand and ignoring what they cannot. Phrases like “The rivers, fish, and forest call out for help, but the government does not know how to listen” speak both of the impossibility that underpins the relation between Indians and modern political institutions as well as of the partial connection that makes the same relation possible.<sup>19</sup> Frequently, to be recognized as legitimate adversaries (cf. Mouffe), indigenous leaders speak in modern terms, translating their practices into a politically acceptable speech, and leaving “the unacceptable” behind without necessarily abandoning it (Cruikshank 2005; Graham 2002)—a point to which I will return. The political presence of indigeneity has had as a precondition its subordination to the lettered city. “Be other so that we do not ossify, but be in such a way that we are not undone, that is make yourself doable to us”: such is according to Povinelli (2001:329) what liberalism demands from indigeneity.

Yet what “cannot be undone” is modern politics; therefore the political left extends analogous requirements to indigenous politicians. The *indio permitido*, to use Silvia Rivera’s words (cf. Hale 2004), is not the only one who thinks the ideology that the new liberal state permits; leftist politicians also impose conditions to accept Indians (e.g., to articulate their demands with the vocabulary of gender, ethnic, economic, territorial, or environmental struggle). Wielding these concepts “Indians” can get recognition and access to resources; through leftist agendas indigenous struggles have been fought and won indeed. However, class, ethnicity, race, or culture (the categories that both indigenous politicians and scholars use to, respectively, participate and examine indigenous politics) work within the nature–culture divide that the presence of Ausangate, Quilish—or any other earth-being for that matter—in a political demonstration epistemically disturbs. Hence the categories may be insufficient if we want to inspect the disturbance. Containing the presence of earth-beings in politics as manifestations of “ethnic difference,” we may step into the contemporary stronghold where the hegemony of the modern denial of indigenous difference is renewed. “Ethnic politics” demanding “cultural rights” may open a discussion, and even articulate the need to include the indigenous in politics—but this inclusion has clear limits: earth-beings as actors in the controversies are “beliefs” honored only when they do not express an epistemic alternative to scientific paradigms (ecological and economic) and their cognate policies,



working toward the production of the common good (productive efficiency, economic growth, even sustainable development) designed to satisfy a homogenous humanity benefiting from an also homogenous nature. These are the nonnegotiable limits of the Modern Constitution (cf. Latour) and indeed of the modern state. Not surprisingly then, these were the limits from where neoliberal Peruvian President Alan García dismissed “sacred mountains” as an invention—and that prevented leftist pundits in the same country from arguing anything but ideological discrepancies.

And yet, are these really the limits of the processes that individuals like Humberto Cholango or Nazario Turpo assert? Would indigenous politicians be so naive as to make demands only to the limits of “rights” assigned to them by a Constitution that does not allow their lived difference a chance? I would argue that this is where the political (as the field where antagonisms transpire) starts: before culture, and before politics emerge as exclusively human fields. Nature—what it is, what it does—is not an “apolitical” entity as we have learned to think. Rather, its constitution as ontologically distinct is at the heart of the antagonism that continues to exclude “indigenous beliefs” from conventional politics—with the idea of “beliefs” working to occlude the exclusion, or setting the internal limits (cf. Povinelli 1995) to the ontological construction of politics. What I call “indigenous–mestizo” is not only an ethnic identity. Partially connected with Andean nation-states, it is a vital socionatural formation that encompasses other-than-humans as well as their definition as nature and their distinction from humans.<sup>20</sup> And, thus, when indigenous movements summon “culture” this notion has the capacity to include (what we call) nature also as other-than-human beings that are not allowed a voice in the established political language. The new Ecuadoran constitution, composed with robust participation of indigenous politicians, is intriguing in this respect: it declares that “Nature” or Pachamama (Source of Life) has rights. This phrase composes a culture–nature entity that, more complex than it seems at first sight, may belong to more than one and less than two worlds.

As used by indigenous movements “culture” or “nature” do not necessarily correspond to our meanings of the terms. Instead, emerging in modern politics, they may be sites of relations of equivocation occurring in the interval between two (or more) different language situations. Equivocation, according to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, is not a simple failure to understand, but “a failure to understand that understandings are necessarily not the same, and that they *are not related* to imaginary ways of ‘seeing the world’ *but to the real worlds that are being seen*” (Viveiros de Castro 2004:11, emphasis added). As mode of communication, equivocations emerge

when different perspectival positions—views from different worlds, rather than perspectives about the same world—use homonymical terms to refer to things that are not the same. Equivocations cannot be “corrected,” let alone avoided; they can however be controlled. This requires paying attention to the process of translation itself—the terms and the respective differences—“so that the referential alterity between the [different] positions is acknowledged and *inserted into the conversation* in such a way that rather than different views of a single world (which would be the equivalent to cultural relativism) a *view of different worlds becomes apparent*” (Viveiros de Castro 2004:5, emphases added). An example may be necessary.

At the demonstration against the mining concession in the mountain chain over which Ausangate presides, banners that read “We will defend our cultural patrimony with our lives. No to the Mine!!” called my attention. “Cultural patrimony” is frequently used to refer to Machu Picchu—an icon of international tourism. Thinking that perhaps such usage had influenced the demonstrators’ decision to use it, and referring to both sites as tourist attractions and icons of regional cultural heritage, I asked Nazario: “Is Ausangate the same as Machu Picchu?” His response: “No, they are different. I know Ausangate much better; I know what he likes, he knows me too. I sort of know Machu Picchu because I am going there with tourists now. I am beginning to know him. But I am not sure what he likes, so I do my best to please him.” Nazario had not failed to understand my question; I had to take into account the equivocation. We were clearly talking about the same “things”—Machu Picchu and Ausangate. In my world they were mountains; in Nazario’s they were beings. Participating in our partially connected worlds, each was more than one but less than two entities. The “ethnic” and “environmental” issues that were included in the protest did not complete their significance. The defense of the Sanctuary of Coyllur Rit’i (and of Ausangate) convened an event that belonged to more than one world: one concerned with pollution and culture, and the other concerned with Ausangate’s reaction and, for some, both were inseparable, yet distinct.

Thinking about Andean “mountains” (labeled or not “sacred”) as sites of equivocation that enable circuits between partially connected worlds without creating a unified system of activism, can build awareness of the also partially connected alliances between environmentalists and indigenous politicians in Andean countries, allowing for more than their definition as movements for cultural or environmental rights. Equivocations, if controlled, may be analogous to the form of disagreement that Jacques Rancière identifies as central to his notion of politics: the understanding that the interlocutors both understand and do not understand the same thing by the same words (Rancière 1999:xi); yet exceeding political economy

this disagreement could potentially bring issues of political ontology to the fore (see Blaser 2009). When awareness of “mountains” (or any other entity whose meaning we do not doubt) as equivocations does not exist, the partial connection that underpinned the political event (and even made it possible) disappears, and the dispute—for example the defense of Ausangate—is interpreted as a “problem between two cultures,” instead of a controversy nested within more than one and less than many socionatural worlds. Then the fate of mountains is easily defined by the one culture, which, claiming universal principles, can extend its reason beyond the surrounding families, even beyond the region where the mountain lives, and into the country. This culture, living up to social responsibility, would also provide solutions to avoid potential local deaths, their definition as “contamination,” or “accidents,” and their cause as “neglect.” The problem would then be settled from one perspective alone, that of universal nature. Every potential danger accounted for if not controlled, razing mountains to mine them for metals while ignoring the other socionatural world to which the mountains also belong would not be a political conflict—and one of political ontology at that—but the cultural problem modernity has “always” shrugged shoulders at with hegemonic complaisance and a resigned sigh. For a different result, the problem has to be taken to a different plane: to the political moment that created the ontological divide between humans and nature, extended the divide to rank other socionatural worlds accordingly, and created politics as a human affair different from nature, which was assigned to scientific representation. Seen from this different historical plane—revealing the epistemic politics of modern politics—the conflict would potentially change: rather than a cultural problem between universal progress and local beliefs, the fate of other-than-human beings—Ausangate for example—would emerge as a political conflict among worlds, one of them demanding symmetrical disagreement. At this point, politics would not be only composed of power relations and silenced antagonisms—it would be “made up of relationships between worlds” (Rancière 1999:42).

### “LAND” AND THE “ENVIRONMENT” AS EQUIVOCATIONS

It is a matter of imbuing political voices with the feeling that they do not master the situation they discuss, that the political arena is peopled with shadows of that which does not have a political voice, cannot have or does not want to have one.

—Isabelle Stengers, 2005

Participating in more than one and less than two socionatural worlds, indigenous politicians are inevitably hybrid, usually shamelessly so. Relations with other-than-human beings take place along with activities such as participating in judiciary trials, organizing a workers union, participating in environmental NGOs, even working for a capitalist organization. As I have already said, this is not new; the novelty is the visibility of this hybridity leading to potential awareness of our analytical categories as equivocations. The activities of Mariano Turpo (Nazario's father, and like him monolingual in Quechua) in the 1950s and 1960s against the local hacienda owner provide a good example; social science scholarship would describe them as a "local peasant movement to recover communal lands."<sup>21</sup> Yes, there was that—but there was also more.

Physically distant from national centers, Pacchanta—the village where Mariano and Nazario lived—is currently a place barely imagined by most Peruvian intellectuals. Things were different in the 1960s, when Marxist leftist organizations confronted the then-prevalent hacienda system by successfully organizing peasant unions. Mariano Turpo was among the most well-known "peasant leaders" in Cuzco. Through him, Pacchanta became a political epicenter where modern, urban activists converged to discuss peasant support for their regional and national political agendas. As a union organizer, Turpo was an ubiquitous activist, indefatigably moving between city and countryside—he organized the celebration of May 1, Labor Day in Peru, collected quotas from other peasants whom he called *compañeros* (partners in struggle), physically confronted the hacienda men, hiding from them in caves inside Ausangate and other mountains, attended and even spoke in demonstrations in the *Plaza de Armas del Cuzco*—the same place where, 40 years later, Nazario and I participated in the demonstration to defend Ausangate.

Along with his political activism Mariano continued his practices as a *pam-pamisayoq*, interacting with the earth-beings that surrounded Pacchanta. Moreover, both pursuits were not separable. They unfolded through relations that ignored the distinction between natural and social worlds for he conceived of power as forces connected to the surrounding socionatural landscape, transpiring both from earth-beings—willful mountains, lakes, winds—and from social institutions and individuals: state representatives, peasants, local merchants, and politicians. Mariano wanted "to recover land" for his *ayllu*. But this phrase exceeded the terms of his alliance with leftist activists. *Ayllu* is a Quechua word that elicits the relations of humans and other-than-human beings that interact in a given territory marking it as a specific place.<sup>22</sup> Justo Oxa, an elementary school teacher whose birth language is Quechua and self-identifies as indigenous writes:

The community, the *ayllu*, is not only a territory where a group of people live; it is more than that. It is a dynamic space where the whole community of beings that exist in the world lives; this includes humans, plants, animals, the mountains, the rivers, the rain, etc. All are related like a family. It is important to remember that this place [the community] is not where we are from, *it is who we are*. For example, I am not *from* Huantura, I *am* Huantura. [Oxa 2004:239, emphasis added]

The land that the hacienda had taken over was the *ayllu* (not *of* the *ayllu*) “since the time of the Incas” (as Mariano and others would explain) and this impinged on all the beings that composed the place. “The sheep were dying, we did not have pastures, we could not raise them—potatoes would not grow in the soil we had been left with. Both, the soil and the seeds were sad. Our children were sad. Nobody could eat—we were living a dying life. Ausangate ignored us because we did not care about him or our life—to be able care again, to be able to raise the animals, our children, and each other and also respect Ausangate, we had to be brave and confront the hacendado,” Mariano remembered. In the shadow of the “peasant movement to recover lands” and sustaining it, was the entanglement of relationships among humans and heterogeneous other-than-humans that made life possible in the territory that the hacienda also occupied, in ways that negated those practices. In Quechua, those practices are known as *uyway*, a word that dictionaries, translate into Spanish as “criar hijos, hacer crecer las plantas y los animales” [to raise children, to make plants and animals grow] (Itier n.d.). Embedded in everyday practices, *uyway* refers to mutual relations of care among humans and also with other-than-human beings. Once again Justo Oxa writes,

respect and care are a fundamental part of life in the Andes; they are not a concept or an explanation. To care and be respectful means to want to be nurtured and nurture other, and this implies not only humans but all world beings . . . nurturing or *uyway* colors all of Andean life. Pachamama nurtures us, the Apus nurture us, they care for us. We nurture our kids and they will nurture us when we get old. We nurture the seeds, the animals and plants, and they also nurture us. [Oxa 2004:239]

The possibility of recovering caring practices among humans and other-than-human beings also motivated Mariano’s fight against the hacienda. “By feeding the mountain spirit, peasant producers also ensure that the mountain spirit will feed them,” wrote Michael Taussig after reading many ethnographic works about the Andes (Taussig 1980:144). But for Mariano’s 1960s allies, modern leftist

politicians, to consider these ideas seriously was unthinkable. Ethnographic works were precisely where these practices belonged—not in politics. Mariano was aware of the feelings of his leftist partners, but he collaborated political practices with them and this made the combined classist–indigenous endeavor “to recover land” a success. But “land” was an equivocation. It was the homonymical term that allowed two partially connected worlds to fight jointly for the same territory. The feat became publicly known as the end of the hacienda system and the beginning of the Agrarian Reform. That Mariano’s world had recovered the ayllu—in its relational significance—remained unknown, in the shadows from where such world had made the historical event possible.

Under his father’s guidance, Nazario also became a pampamisayoq. In this role he was (among other things) a supporter of the grassroots efforts to protect the surrounding earth-beings against the prospective mine. I am not saying that Nazario acted as a guardian of untouched traditions. Although we never talked about it, I do not think he was against the market economy either: he worked for a successful tourist agency with whose aid he was translating his practices into “Andean Shamanism” a burgeoning new field for tourists’ consumption and a new source of income for peasants and herders like him. If anything, Nazario was, like his father, an innovator: a local cosmopolitan articulating other worlds, and new practices, into their own, and finding terms of alliance that could enhance their lives. It was not mining itself that he and the rest of people I talked to opposed. Mining, as an economic activity, has been part of Andean peasants’ lives ever since the Conquest and those from the area that surrounds Ausangate are familiar with gold panning in Madre de Dios, a lowland region of infamous working conditions. However, there is an important difference between earlier mining technologies and the ones used by corporations currently prospecting the region that Ausangate presides. The first followed the mineral veins by blowing solid rock with dynamite and perforating tunnels inside the mountains. At present, corporations are known for their open-sky mining technologies, which literally destroy mountains in a very short time—sometimes less than a year. These differences are consequential: while digging tunnels allows for the continuation of relations with earth-beings, the open-sky mining destroys earth-beings themselves.<sup>23</sup> Nazario was concerned with the type of relations that could unfold between Ausangate (the earth-being) and the mine. As lived from his world corporate mining ventures do not just encroach on peasant land and pollute the environment; they also destroy a socionatural world.

In Mariano and Nazario Turpo’s world political skills include the relations between human beings and other-than-human beings that together make place:

mountains, rivers, crops, seeds, sheep, alpacas, llamas, pastures, plots, rocks—even dogs and hens.<sup>24</sup> And as the new liberal state (unable to see these relations) dismisses this place, abstracts it, and legally reterritorializes it (e.g., by declaring it “empty” or “unproductive” space) to make room for mining and the economic benefits it would potentially generate, people like Nazario and Graciano concerned about the destruction of their place, bring their concern to politics. Obviously, *uyway*—mutual relations of care among human and other-than-human beings—are not the only type of relations mobilized into politics. Along with his worries about Ausangate’s ire, Graciano Mandura mentioned pollution as a problem, and the potential harm to tourism that mining could therefore cause in the area. Nazario shared this concern, for tourism was a key source of his monetary income. Caring about earth-beings and place is, of course, not at odds with a desire for economic well-being. Moreover, among peasants there are those who side with the mine—perhaps even *pampamisayoq do* (although I have not run into one yet). There is no simple glue for any movement, and not even mighty mountains provide it. But analogous to how “land” as equivocation enabled the alliance between leftist politicians and indigenous peasants while at the same time occluding relations of care between mountains—animals—crops—humans, when it comes to the antimining struggle in the region of Ausangate (and elsewhere) there is more than the defense of nature in the environmental movement. Also an equivocation, the “environment” encompasses earth-beings; however, different than in the confrontation with the hacienda when earth-beings were only a local matter of concern, they currently appear in national and even international political stages.

The incursion of capitalist mining ventures into geographical areas that corporations or the state deemed remote, unproductive, or even empty has made earth-beings more public than ever in the last half century—a consequence that neoliberalism did not foresee. In her doctoral dissertation, Fabiana Li (2009) analyzed the process through which a mountain in the northern Peruvian Andes, the Cerro Quilish, became the protagonist in a controversy that pitted peasants and the environmentalist NGO that backed them against the transnational mining company that owned Yanacocha, the largest gold mine in Latin America and among the biggest in the world. A main issue in the controversy was the ontology of Cerro Quilish. For the mining company the mountain was mainly a repository of gold—four million ounces of it; for the environmentalists and many farmers that opposed the mine, Quilish represented a source of water for local agriculture. A local priest, who had lived in the area for a long time and was aware of the peasants’

relationship with the mountain as an earth-being, translated it as a “sacred mountain.” Many among the mine’s opponents took distance from such a definition, and emphasized the importance of the mountain as an aquifer; however the “sacred” aspect of Quilish, joined its already appealing natural qualities. Transformed into a robust nature–cultural entity, the Quilish called the attention of environmentalists in the United States and Europe and fortified the already strong national opposition to the Yanacocha mining company.

A completely coeval phenomenon—and by no means a revivalist or millenarian resurgence—the appearance of earth-beings in politics directly confronts technologies that threaten to destroy places that until the current technological surge and after the 19th-century mining expansion had remained relatively marginal to capital. Confronting corporate capital, the neoliberal state, and their entwined world-making consequences, the public presence of earth-beings in politics are part-and-parcel of the global processes that have provoked scholarly discussions about “emergent forms of life” (Fischer 2003) and “global assemblages” (Ong and Collier 2005). Digging a mountain to open a mine, drilling into the subsoil to find oil, and razing trees for timber may produce more than sheer environmental damage or economic growth. These activities may translate into the violation of networks of emplacement that make life locally possible—and even into the destruction of place. In such cases they have met a capacious and at times surprisingly successful opposition that has opened a dispute (still unthinkable to modern minds) between local earth-beings and universal “Nature,” and has sometimes enrolled environmentalists in the negotiation. Thus, current political conflicts are out of the ordinary. In some cases, the label “war” (initially used to refer to the confrontations around water and gas in Bolivia in 2000) is perhaps appropriate to designate some of the recent confrontations.

**May 2008. Sucre, Bolivia.** A large group of indigenous citizens, who had arrived in a long march from the countryside to meet Evo Morales, the Aymara President of the country, and to celebrate a national anniversary, were attacked by a group of urban residents who, impervious to the many cameras that documented the event, insulted the indigenous marchers as animals, stripped them of their clothing and emblems, and, once naked, forced them to declare their allegiance to the nonindigenous nation-state imagined by these urbanites (*El Correo del Sur* [Sucre], May 25, 2008). The violence of the episode was frightening—physically and conceptually. It suggested a moment when, refusing to accept the end of the racist biopolitics that had ruled the country until recently, the regional dominant classes decided to overtly kill Indians, viewed as usurpers of the power the elites had wielded for centuries. But as I have suggested earlier, it was not only intolerance toward humans and



their bodies that motivated these actions. Months earlier, the following comment appeared in a local newspaper:

The government of MAS, all of it, its ministers, representatives to the parliament and to the constitutional assembly, talk like mummies . . . its wise men cut llamas' throat, burn coca, and they burn sacred fire in the central room of the Gubernatorial Palace. Then, when all is silence, and only the sound of the pututo (conch horn) is heard, they make their rituals to their gods, for Evo Morales to become immortal. [Manfredo Kempff Suárez, "writer and diplomat" signed as author, *La Razón* (La Paz), October 2, 2007]

Conceptually, the event expressed more than racism; there are many relevant political reasons for the violence that looms obvious in Bolivia, but central among those is that indigenous worlds are making a claim from the very heart of the state, and thus revealing the biopolitical antagonism that ruled Bolivia until 2006, and, what is worse, possibly transforming it into adversarial relations. The silenced war can become politics and this cannot be tolerated—"rather explicit war than politics" is the apparent response of a not-so-small elite group.

### AN OPEN-ENDED FINALE: PLURAL POLITICS IN A POLITICAL PLURIVERSE

The point is not that scientists have to accept whatever those empowered people tell them, the point is that learning from them is their chance to put their preconceived ideas at risk.

—Isabelle Stengers, 2002

I do not want to be misunderstood. Being an "engaged intellectual"—*una intelectual comprometida*—was the way I lived in Peru and it continues to mark my scholarly work. In fact, my networks tangled with those of Mariano Turpo because of his role in modern politics—an unknown activist in the movement that produced one of the most important changes in contemporary Peru. Hence my discussion here is not intended to subtract from engaged activism but to add to it. Similarly, I hope not to be interpreted as an advocate of "indigenous peoples" singular or pristine condition. What I have tried to do here is follow Isabelle Stengers's proposal to "slow down reasoning," to let the composition of that which does not have a political voice (or, in some cases, does not want to have one) affect my analysis and, as she suggests in the above quote, put my preconceived ideas at risk to make anthropology say something different—or open it up beyond our world, to an anthropology of worlds. Working with Mariano and his son

Nazario, I learned of the coloniality of politics and the many and complex features from which it derives its hegemony. An obvious one is the lettered quality of politics, shaped by the role of the city and its intellectual legacy. All too naturally the better educated rank higher in the scale of politics; the exceptions—those who do not have a university degree, like Bolivian President Evo Morales—are regarded as anomalies and the object of scandals. In the best of cases, we tend to think that the scandal (and the “deficiency” it connotes) may be easy to overcome, perhaps through alliances with the better educated. Again Bolivia comes to mind, and we think of Alvaro García Linera, the current Vice President of that country and a sociologist, as the gray matter behind the President, the organic intellectual working in horizontal collaboration with intellectuals of all paths of life, disregarding “rank.” An illustration of contemporary Gramscian practice, we may even feel proud of it.

The problem, however, emerges when such collaboration forgets that politics (as a category and a practice) was historically disabled to work in symmetry with the radical difference that modernity itself produced among the many worlds that inhabit the planet. Politics emerged (with science) to make a livable *universe*, to control conflict among a single if culturally diversified humanity living in a single scientifically knowable nature. The consequence is not just that politics is lettered; the problem is that it can only allow humans in its quarters—period. Analogous to dominant science, which does not allow its objects to speak, hegemonic politics tells its subjects what they can bring into politics and what be should be left to scientists, magicians, priests, or healers—or, as I have been arguing, left to dwell in the shadows of politics.<sup>25</sup> Because mountains cannot be brought to politics (other than through science), Nazario’s partnership with Ausangate is all but folklore, beliefs that belong to another “culture,” that can be happily commodified as tourist attraction, but in no case can it be considered in politics. This exclusion is not just racism; it expresses the consensual agreement foundational to politics. The exclusions that result from it are disabled from their translation as political disagreement because they do not count—at all. Implemented with the aid of History, interrupting this agreement to make the exclusions count as such seems an impossible anachronistic task (Chakrabarty 2000). After all modern politics offers inclusion . . . in its own terms.

Refusing this inclusion, not wanting to have the voice that politics offers them while at the same time intervening in politics, is what local leaders like Mariano have frequently and invisibly done for some time. Currently, however, earth-beings are becoming more visible in politics, and many times in their own terms. If we

slow down, suspend our assumptions and the ideas that they would lead to, we may perceive how this emergence alters the terms of the political; it disrupts the consensus that barred indigenous practices from politics, assigned them to religion or ritual, and occluded this exclusion. We may use this historical opportunity to put our preconceived ideas at risk and renew our analytical toolkit, vocabulary, and framework alike.

Yet this opportunity exists only if we are willing to give up two old answers (and fears), which mirror each other: (1) indigenous politics are traditional and archaic and therefore dangerous as they can evolve into antidemocratic fundamentalism (the specter of “Balkanization”—and as of recent “Bolivianization”—haunting gentlemen and ladies steeped in liberalism), or from the other end of the spectrum, (2) indigenous politics are essentially good, and we have to side with it (the ghost of the good savage troubling the naively principled).

I have proposed that the current emergence of Andean indigeneity could force the ontological pluralization of politics and the reconfiguration of the political. There are several things, however, that this phrase does not mean.<sup>26</sup> First, it does not refer to ideological, gender, ethnic, racial, or even religious plurality; nor does it refer to the incorporation or inclusion of marked differences into a multiculturally “better” sociality. Second, it is not a strategy to win hegemony or to be a dominant majority—let alone an indigenous majority. My proposal to think through the pluralization of politics is not intended to mend flaws within already existing politics—or “politics as usual.” Rather, it aims at transforming the concept from one that conceives politics as power disputes within a singular world, to another one that includes the possibility of adversarial relations among worlds: a pluriversal politics.

Toward that end, I build both on Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political as a pluriverse and Jacques Rancière’s concept of politics as disagreements among worlds. Borrowing from Viveiros de Castro (2004) and Strathern (2004), I think of the pluriverse as partially connected heterogeneous socionatural worlds negotiating their ontological disagreements politically—that would entail major conflict, the political importance of the discussion would be superlative, but it would replace the current unacknowledged war, and its occasional public eruptions. The idea of a pluriverse is utopian indeed: not because other socionatural formations and their earth-practices do not take place, but because we have learned to ignore their occurrence, considering it a thing of the past or, what is the same, a matter of ignorance and superstition. Thus, rather than utopian, my proposal is, in Stengers’s (2005) words, an idiotic project: My aim is not to induce to action but, once again,

to slow down reasoning and provoke the kind of thinking that would enable us to undo, or more accurately, unlearn, the single ontology of politics.

This would require two steps in the reconceptualization of (what Mouffe calls) the political before pluriversal politics could start. The first step is to recognize that the world is more than one socionatural formation; the second is to interconnect such plurality without making the diverse worlds commensurable. The utopian process is, thus, the redefinition of the baseline of the political, from one where politics started with a hegemonic definition that housed the superiority of the socionatural formation of the West and its practices, to one that starts with a symmetric understanding of plural worlds, their socionatural formations and their practices. From the prior baseline (or, rather, the one we are used to) politics appeared as an affair among humans after denying the ontological copresence of other socionatural formations and its practices and translating the denial, with the use of universal history, from an antagonistic maneuver—a declaration of war against worlds deemed inferior—into a necessary condition for one good, livable world order. The new baseline is precisely the breaking of the silence, making the antagonism public to enable its transformation into agonism. At this point, rather than the biopolitical war that both liberalism and socialism waged against its alleged “others,” a new pluriversal political configuration—perhaps a cosmopolitics, in Stengers’s terms—would connect different worlds with its socionatural formations—all with the possibility of becoming legitimate adversaries not only within nation-states but also across the world.

At a more concrete level a pluriversal politics (or a cosmopolitics) would accept what we call nature as multiplicity and allow for the conflicting views about that multiplicity into argumentative forums. This is, I think, what Ecuadorian leader Humberto Cholango proposed in his letter to the Pope: He first denounced the antagonism between modernist institutions and indigenous relations with other-than-human beings, and then translated this antagonism into a political conflict with the capacity to interpellate indigenous and nonindigenous actors. In the more specific case of the mine that threatened Ausangate, a pluriversal political order, competently fluent in multiplicity, would take seriously (by which I mean literally, rather than metaphorically) both Nazario Turpo’s relationship with Ausangate as a willful entity as well as its definition as nature and a potential repository of gold. The different worlds in which Ausangate exists would be publicly allowed without being put into equivalence of any sort, and then, politics—bitter discrepancies among different, perhaps irreconcilable ideological, economic, cultural, or interests of any other sort—would start. Some would side with Nazario, others would

oppose him. Rather than dismissed as superstition, or “respected” as culture, with pluriversal politics the question of Ausangate as a being would count. Included in the disagreement, it could then contend (or perhaps agree) with, for example, proposals for economic growth and development, or with issues of social justice and equality. Set free from its exclusive representation as “Nature,” the mountain’s multiple and heterogeneous ontologies (incl. its possibility as a repository of mineral wealth) would weigh in also heterogeneous political projects without necessarily tilting them to the left or right.

Pluriversal politics add a dimension of conflict and they do not have guarantees—ideological or ethnic (cf. Hall 1996). People—indigenous or not, and perhaps ethnically unlabeled—could side with the mine, choosing jobs and money over Ausangate, either because they doubt or even publicly deny its being a willful mountain or because they are willing to risk its ire for a different living. Ausangate’s willfulness could be defeated in the political process—some would embrace it, others would not—but its being other than a mountain would not be silently denied anymore for a pluriversal politics would be able to recognize the conflict as emerging among partially connected worlds. And although I would not be able to translate myself into Nazario’s ontology, nor know with him that Ausangate’s ire is dangerous, I would side with him because I want what he wants, to be considered on a par with the rest, to denounce the abandonment the state has relegated people like him—while at the same time threatening with assimilation—to denounce the mining ventures that do not care about local life; in a nutshell to defend in his way, in my way and in the way that may emerge as ours the place where Nazario lives.

**A last-minute postscript.** On June 5, 2009, at dawn, a violent confrontation took place between police forces and a large group of Peruvian citizens, self-identified as belonging to the Awajún-Huambisa indigenous group. The police’s objective was to break up a blockade at a major highway, near the town of Bagua in the Amazonian lowlands, northern Peru. The Awajún-Huambisa had taken control of the highway as part of a general strike, which started on April 9, organized by several Amazonian indigenous groups. The clash yielded many deaths—the official count yielded 23 policemen and 10 Awajún-Huambisa individuals. According to the local count the number of deaths amounts to hundreds, most of them indigenous.

The conflict began a year earlier. Between May and June 2008, Alan García issued 101 law decrees intended to ease the concession of Amazonian territories to oil, timber, and hydroelectric corporations. A successful indigenous strike in August 2008 forced the National Congress to ask the Peruvian President to cancel the decrees. He ignored the

decision—the indigenous protest began anew the following year. This time the protest reached international audiences as indigenous politicians accused the President of violating ILO Convention 169, which requires states to consult indigenous peoples on all changes occurring on the lands they inhabit. The consultation had not taken place, the Peruvian government had breached an agreement boasting constitutional status, so the decrees had to be annulled. If consulted, this political group, which the president had identified as leftist, would refuse the decrees. Yet the reasons are not ideological only:

We speak of our brothers who quench our thirst, who bathe us, those who protect our needs—this [brother] is what we call the river. We do not use the river for our sewage; a brother cannot stab another brother. We do not stab our brothers. If the transnational corporations would care about our soil like we have cared for it for millennia, we would gladly give them room so that they could work here—but all they care is their economic benefit, to fill their coffers with wealth. We do not understand why the government wants to raze our lives with those decrees. [Los Sucesos de Bagua, <http://www.servindi.org/producciones/videos/13083>, accessed June, 20 2009]

Leni, a young Awajun leader—his face painted in red and black, a bandana around his head—spoke the above words in the midst of the strike. His world, where rivers and humans are brothers is indeed completely coeval with that of corporations. But the latter kill rivers; to prevent this killing, indigenous politicians mobilized against the legislative decrees (those that wanted to raze indigenous life according to Lenny) and turned the antagonism into an open political conflict; “if the government cancels the decrees today, we leave the area,” said another interviewee about the duration of the strike (<http://www.servindi.org/producciones/videos/13083>, accessed June, 20 2009). The government rejected the political conflict, and instead, sent the police forces to crush the movement. The result was the June 5 bloody confrontation between civilians and police forces, the news of which quickly traveled the world. On June 19, the congress cancelled the decrees, but indigenous leaders had to go into hiding—it seems that at long last the antagonism is not silent anymore. Whether the indigenous leadership will succeed at turning the defense of their world and its beings into a political issue, an agonistic adversarial relationship with the hegemonic world, is uncertain. A fundamentally transformative event, it would defy universal politics indeed.

## ABSTRACT

*In Latin America indigenous politics has been branded as “ethnic politics.” Its activism is interpreted as a quest to make cultural rights prevail. Yet, what if “culture” is insufficient, even an inadequate notion, to think the challenge that indigenous politics represents? Drawing inspiration from recent political events in Peru—and to a lesser extent in Ecuador and Bolivia—where the indigenous–popular movement has conjured sentient entities (mountains, water, and soil—what we call “nature”) into the public political arena, the argument in this essay is threefold. First, indigeneity, as a historical*

*formation, exceeds the notion of politics as usual, that is, an arena populated by rational human beings disputing the power to represent others vis-à-vis the state. Second, indigeneity's current political emergence—in oppositional antimining movements in Peru and Ecuador, but also in celebratory events in Bolivia—challenges the separation of nature and culture that underpins the prevalent notion of politics and its according social contract. Third, beyond “ethnic politics” current indigenous movements, propose a different political practice, plural not because of its enactment by bodies marked by gender, race, ethnicity or sexuality (as multiculturalism would have it), but because they conjure nonhumans as actors in the political arena.*

**Keywords:** nature–culture, indigenous politics, antimining movements, cosmopolitics, pluriverse, Andes, Latin America.

## NOTES

*Acknowledgments.* Although I am signing as this essay's author, the ideas that I use have been colabored with several friends. Mario Blaser, Arturo Escobar, Penny Harvey, Nazario Turpo, and Margaret Wiener are my silent coauthors. Fabiana Li shared with me her dissertation when it was still in progress; I draw from it from most of what I know about Cerro Quilish. Conversations with María Puig della Bellacasa confirmed the value of Isabelle Stengers's work beyond science studies. Orin Starn has been a constant critical presence even if he does not know it. Finally, many have read this essay. I owe special thanks to Claudia Briones, Paulo Drinot, Joe Dumit, Cristiana Giordano, Gillian Goslinga, Gregg Hetherington, Suad Joseph, Caren Kaplan, Alan Klima, Kristina Lyons, Rossio Motta, Hortensia Muñoz, Bettina Ng'weno, Deborah Poole, Dana Powell, Magali Rabasa, Bruno Revesz, Justin Richland, Steve Rubenstein, Guillermo Salas, Mike Savage, Suzana Sawyer, Isabelle Stengers, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Earlier versions were presented at the University of Manchester; Duke University; University of California, Davis, Cultural Studies Program; University of California, Irvine; and the University of Oregon at Eugene. And to Kim Fortun and Mike Fortun: your integral care has been essential to this essay.

1. Posición de la confederación de pueblos de la nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador frente a las declaraciones emitidas por Benedicto XVI en la V conferencia de obispos de América latina y el Caribe (Celam), en mayo del 2007 en Brasil. Electronic document, <http://www.altercom.org/article148222.html>, accessed March 1, 2010 (English translation taken from <http://www.tlaxcala.es/pp.asp?reference=2805&lg=en>).
2. See <http://www.eluniverso.com/2008/07/24/1212/1217/E8C064BD52EF420CAECDB65555BF60C.html>, accessed March 1, 2010.
3. I thank Eduardo Gudynas for referring me to this document.
4. I have borrowed the idea from Michael Fischer's notion of “emergent forms of life,” which he uses to discuss new work in the biological sciences and empirical, theoretical, ethical, and political realistic resulting from them. My borrowing of the notion makes explicit emphasis on the historical copresence, and even global intertwinement between current scientific practices and indigenous habitations of the world.
5. These are small bundles of food presented, through their burning, to the surrounding landscape.
6. See *La Razón*, [http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20060122\\_005429/nota\\_244\\_240548.htm](http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20060122_005429/nota_244_240548.htm), accessed March 2, 2010.
7. Yanacocha is owned by Newmont Mining Corporation (based in Denver, CO), the Peruvian owned Minas Buena Ventura Company, and the International Finance Corporation (the Financial arm of the World Bank) (Li 2009).
8. See *El Comercio*, October 28, 2007: A4.
9. See Bebbington and Burneo (2008) and Hilson and Haslip (2004).

10. Starn's comments provoked a strong reaction from the Andeanists he criticized. Their responses emphasized his narrow understanding of the political relevance of their work (see, e.g., Mayer 1991). In my view, both the works Starn criticized and his critique worked within the division between "nature" and "culture" that this essay works against. In the Andeanist record that Starn criticized, earth-beings and relations with them were "cultural interpretations" of "nature." Within this formulation Ausangate appears as a mountain—there is no room for the political discussion of its ontology as an other-than-human being. Both sides would, back then, have agreed on that point. Another agreement between the sides in dispute: Starn framed his concern about the lack of ethnographic studies of subaltern politics through a notion of politics "as usual," those he criticized argued for the political relevance of their work—for the defense of cultural rights, for example—deploying the same notion.
11. Many scholars have written about sentient other-than-human-beings; see, for example, Abercrombie (1998), Allen (2002), Earls (1969), Flores-Ochoa (1977), Gose (1994), Harris (2000), Harvey (2007), Nash (1993), Platt (1997), Ricard-Lanatta (2007), Sallnow (1987), Taussig (1988), Valderrama-Escalante (1988). However, although some of these authors discuss the participation of earth-beings in local politics, and human negotiations with them (e.g., Nash 1993; Platt 1997; Taussig 1988), none of these studies consider these beings potential actors in national politics, let alone their different ontology disrupting the conceptual field of politics. Other-than-human beings belong in the ethnographic record as "indigenous culture" not as a potential disagreement to take place in the field of what Mario Blaser (2009) calls political ontology. This essay builds on that rich ethnographic record, while at the same time questioning the ontological politics that enabled it and contained it as culture. Its hegemony is hard to undo; our disciplinary attachment to culture runs affectively deep—I certainly include myself in the comment.
12. *Tirakuna* is the Quechua-ized plural for the Spanish word *tierra*, earth. For a nuanced analysis of the relationship between *tirakuna* and people, see Allen (2002).
13. Anthropological explanations of earth-beings through Western metaphysics, or religion (e.g., animism) belong to the same political theory. Accordingly, earth-beings are possible as spirits, but spirits do not belong in politics.
14. Just as not all relations of antagonism find its expression through politics, not every society organizes antagonisms politically either. This is the case of the Achuar with whom Philippe Descola has lived and worked for many years (Descola 2005).
15. Obviously Schmitt was also thinking through a modern notion of politics; therefore, he did not have other-than-human actors in mind. When he wrote "every theory of the state is pluralistic" (1996:53), what he had in mind was a constitutional plurality of states, political entities "other" among themselves, and therefore possible enemies. Also drawing from Schmitt, Latour (2004:278, 281) discusses the enemy quality of humans vis-à-vis nonhumans, which he treats rather indistinctly as "things." Possibly a consequence of his interest in laboratories and representation through scientific practice (and, ultimately, modern life) he disregards relations with other-other-than human beings (which he seemingly translates as things) as well as nonrepresentational practices.
16. The disciplines, however benevolently, segregated them from reality through categories—superstition, belief, animism, myth and ritual, savage thought or indigenous religiosity—that on professing their anachronism, lifted the practices thus described from modern politics.
17. Bruno Latour would perhaps identify indigeneity as a nonmodern formation. He writes "a non modern is anyone who takes simultaneously into account the modern's constitution and the populations of hybrids that that Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate" (Latour 1993:47). Nonmodern, however, suggests "oneness" thus jarring with the fractal historicity of indigeneity.
18. For example, in her ethnography about the Bolivian mines, June Nash (1993) writes "the earth-warming ceremonies prepare the people for a time when they can shape their own destiny" they "keep alive the sentiment of rebellion until a historically appropriate moment, [and] may reinforce political movements" (1993:169). Similarly rituals are moments "for discussing problems and the struggles of workers" (1993:319). I am not disputing the accuracy of this analysis. My point is that the analytics of class, workers solidarity, and social rebellion



- do not include as a matter of politics the ontological difference that relations with earth-beings bring to the fore.
19. In a letter by Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa “to all peoples of earth,” August 31, 1989 (Graham 2002:181).
  20. Indigenous–mestizo can coincide with the notion of *plurinacional*, the nation-building project that indigenous social movements in Ecuador and Bolivia propose for their respective countries.
  21. Among the earliest analyses of “peasant struggle for land,” see Wilson Reategui (1977); among the latest, see Renique (2004).
  22. The notion of ayllu as including other-than-humans is ubiquitous the Andean ethnographic record. See especially Allen (2002), Harris (2000), and Ricard-Lanatta (2007). However, in official documents or newspapers, the word is usually translated either as kindred, territory, and at best as the juxtaposition of both.
  23. Relations with Ttio, that devil-like being that inhabits Bolivian mines, illustrate the point (see Nash 1993; Taussig 1980).
  24. Borrowing from Ingold (2000) these relations can be said to be “dwelling skills”: interactions among humans and nonhumans in which both are with each other and life is conceived relationally. See also Feld and Basso (1996). Mariano and Nazario Turpo’s dwelling skills included partial connections with modern political activities and institutions.
  25. Bruno Latour (1997).
  26. I owe this phrase to Mario Blaser, one of my cothinkers.

*Editors Note:* *Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of essays focused specifically on indigeneity in Latin America. See, for example, Charles Hale’s “Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology” (2006); Ana María Alonso’s “Conforming Disconformity: ‘Mestizaje,’ Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism” (2004); Diane Nelson’s “Stumped Identities: Body Image, Bodies Politic, and the Mujer Maya as Prosthetic” (2001); David W. Dinwoodie’s “Authorizing Voices: Going Public in an Indigenous Language” (1998); and Jean Jackson’s “Preserving Indian Culture: Shaman Schools and Ethno-Education in the Vaupes, Colombia” (1995).

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