Performing the Indigenous City: collaborative ethnography, site specific performance and political imagination in Santiago, Chile.

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**Keywords**: Mapuche, site-specific performance, imagination, place, collaborative ethnography


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Abstract
‘Santiago Waria, pueblo grande de Winkas’ is a site-specific performance elaborated during 2018 in Santiago de Chile, following the invisible memories and paths of the indigenous Mapuche diaspora through the urban landscape. Engaging with fiction, political imagination and collective memory, this article elaborates on the articulation of meanings within the shared spaces of this collectively constructed performance. Driving on the emergent interest on the imaginative, sensorial and performative dimensions of lived experience and experimental ethnographic practices (e.g. Crapanzano 2004; Pink 2009; Irving 2011 and 2013), this piece undertakes the challenge of a possible redefinition of the ethical-epistemological, political and poetical horizons of ethnographic knowledge and its contexts of production and reproduction. Moreover, working at the intersection of the materiality of urban spaces and lived experiences, and according equal weight to place and the built environment in establishing an understanding of people lives, we argue that the re-telling of an event in location generates certain forms of knowledge or experiences that would be less likely to emerge in another kind of methodological approach. As such, disrupting the linear unfolding of stories, we allow place to defy chronological order, enabling both different representations and modes of knowledge production, playing with connections, multiplicities, routings and imaginations.
Take your seat and watch the images on the screen in front of you. Flashes and cuts introduce you to Santiago. A voice starts talking:

Welcome to this journey in Santiago Waria. This is a site specific performance. Which means that this play has been created for you to visit the specific sites where we have been addressing Mapuche urban displacement in Santiago during ten months. In order to do this, we have been travelling through different places; following the trail of the people who preceded us. Yet also searching for their future trajectories: past is pregnant with future (pause). This voice, coming from the past, is stored in an MP3 file, and reaches your ears through the amplification equipment of this room. In your hands you have a device with headphones that you will wear in a moment, and that you will use during the whole journey. You need to be attentive to the track’s numbers. If you get lost, in front of you there will be a flag indicating the track number you have to listen to... Yes, something quite similar to a tour in a museum. When you hear the kul kul, you will have to pause and take off the headphones. The kul kul sounds like this (sound of the kul kul). Just look in front of you now. Olivia is standing there (pause). Olivia is the woman raising her hand (Olivia raises her hand). Do you see her? (pause). If you see her, raise your hand. Come on, do not be shy (pause). Excellent. At her side, there is Roberto (Roberto raises his hand). Roberto is the man who raises his hand, do you see him now? (pause) If you see him, move your head up and down.

Olivia and Roberto will accompany you on this trip through time, and whatever you need, get close to them. There are more people here that the ones you can see. They are the rest of the MapsUrbe group. Not seeing them does not mean they do not exist. For example: their presences are in the pieces of art you saw in this place, and some of them are actually spread around in this building, others in the Quinta Normal Park, in the Plaza de Arma Square, in Providencia, and in the Cerro Welen. All scattered throughout Santiago. Their presence is here together with ours, they are in the non-being. Although I am not a person, I am a recorded voice that comes from a person who in a present moment of her life recorded this audio in the past, I am nonetheless present because you are listening to me. We are full of presences that we do not see. And we are also full of absences. But that, of absences and presences, is something we will discover during the journey. If you could travel through time, would you change something of your past to improve your present and your future? Time runs for everyone. Have you thought that the past keeps repeating itself? Now we will travel to the past. […] Now put on the headphones. Press track 1 when instructions are given to you.¹

Raising a hand, our way of communicating movement and pauses during the journey through the city, has probably characterised the whole process that has taken us to the staging of the performance ‘Santiago Waria, pueblo grande de Winkas’.² A political

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gesture – hands raised during demonstrations, as when the young Camillo Catrillanca was killed by the police, on the 15th of November 2018 – and a kind of ritual gesture, for a hand was raised when someone wanted to speak during roundtables and brainstorming meetings, inspired by the mapuche núttram (conversation). But we ‘raised hands’ as well, in a more figurative way, when it came to our roles definition and collective work: we surrendered and we claimed. We surrendered, as project’s coordinators and especially as anthropologist, for we gave up former defined roles, accepted questions to be reformulated, and the very research grounds to be re-discussed.³ As our colleague Claudio used to say, we engaged in a hard yet meaningful process of soltar: break free, let loose (Alvarado Lincopi, personal communication). At the same time, ‘raising hands’ was a claim for creation and active interpretation by the project’s participants, refusing the role of describing informants or mere interpreters. The demand was for poiesis, hands up communicating movement and pauses.

Following this gesture, and considering ethnographic knowledge as a situated and relational construction, we explored innovative methodological possibilities driving on the emergent interest on the imaginative, sensorial and performative dimensions of lived experience and experimental ethnographic practices (e.g. Crapanzano, 2004; Pink, 2009; Irving, 2011 and 2013). This article engages with the articulation of meanings within the shared space of a site-specific performance we collectively elaborated, seeking for the production of decolonized knowledge and forms of representation. This is particularly important in a socio-political context in which the anthropological (and other) disciplines have long been characterized by practices that fall under the label of ‘extractivismo’, marked by social, racial and political hierarchies forged by colonialism (Nahuelpán, 2013). There is a clear need for different methodologies and ethical-political engagement, and this piece is a step in this direction. With Kazubowski-Houston (2017, 210), we ask ‘how might we re-envision a collaborative, deeply reflexive and engaged interventionist anthropology?’.

The ‘collective nature of performance’ allows for more collaborative research relationships, for the ethnographer and her interlocutors not only co-create the research process and the performance itself (Kazubowski-Houston, 2017, 212), but also engage in co-theorization (Rappaport, 2008) and in the setting of shared aims and research questions. Thinking of performance as liminality, construction as well as struggle, intervention, breaking and re-making (Denzin, 2003), this piece undertakes the challenge of a possible redefinition of the ethical-epistemological, political and poetical horizons of ethnographic knowledge and its contexts of production and reproduction.

Moreover, engaging with and making visible indigenous invisibility within the capital concerns both the social and the material aspects of urban environment, and suggests how these are deeply intertwined. Exploring the relationship between landscape, memory and imagination through the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope as ‘points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse’ (Basso, 1996, 62), we address how personal and collective pasts are reworked, and how personal horizons and collective futures are imagined. We worked at the intersection of the materiality of urban spaces and the lived experiences of the project’s participants, accord-
ing equal weight to place and the built environment in establishing an understanding of people lives. As such, we argue that the re-telling of an event in location generates certain forms of knowledge or experiences that would be less likely to emerge in another kind of methodological approach. What is at stake here is not a conceptual and abstract issue, but a practical issue that needs to be engaged with persons in place. And place, disrupting the linear unfolding of stories, allows a simultaneity that defies chronological order, enabling not only different representations, but also different modes of knowledge production. As we will see in what follows, it allows seeing and playing with connections, multiple belongings, routings and imaginations.

Place, critical cartography and site specific performance

‘Santiago Waria’ is a site-specific performance elaborated during 2018 in Santiago de Chile, and staged between December 2018 and January 2019, following the invisible memories and paths of the indigenous Mapuche diaspora through the urban landscape. Engaging with fiction, political imagination and collective memory, this site-specific-performance moved from the participant’s personal biographies and theoretical interpretations of their relationship with the city, claiming for a different emplacement within Santiago’s urban space.

During 2018, we explored the city together with a group of fifteen young Mapuche living in Santiago after theirs or their families’ migration (university students, visual, theatre or musical artists and artisans). The same group would later form the cast of the performance. This collective research was organised in almost weekly meetings and monthly in-site workshops addressing a number of issues that the group found compelling, engaging with the urban environment, and developing a sort of ‘critical mapping’ of the Chilean capital. We analyzed historical documents and maps, issues of segregation and migration, racialized work, colonialism, contemporary forms of multiculturalism and its relationship with the city’s materialities. Calling into question hegemonic representations of Santiago metropolitan city, we developed alternative mapping practices, including walking, drawing and in-site brainstorming. As underlined by the critical cartography debate, ‘mapping is itself a political act’ and constitutes a political process, involving issues of representation, knowledge and power (Crampton, 2010), and practices of ‘counter-mapping’ can act as a decolonization of mapping processes (Wood, 2010). Moving from an understanding of mapping as contingent and relational, an inherently imaginative practice (Dodge, Kitchin, Perkins 2009), we conceived the city space as ‘a simultaneity of stories-so far’, a ‘meeting up of stories’ better understood as time-space, a never-ending and always in motion ‘sphere in which different trajectories coexist’ (Massey, 2005, 9). In our in-site collective reflections or in our moving through the urban space, we conceived mapping not as a final product or material artifact, rather as something dynamic, a ‘process of re-territorialization’ (Hirt, 2012).

As such, walking and narrating the city has been central to the successive staging of the performance, allowing the emergence of emotional, political and historical issues, starting from which we individuated meaningful sites that acted as sort of ‘knots’
condensing space (the urban landscape), time (memories, imaginations) individual biographies and collective history. This creative process resulted in the active redrawing of Santiago from the Mapuche point of view - what we defined an act of ‘mapuchización’ - leading to the ephemeral yet meaningful performative co-construction of ‘Santiago Waria’. According to what was emerging during our meetings, we individuated four points in the city that account for the Mapuche presence and that in turn generate a tension with it. They were later on defined the four main ‘stations’ of our tour: Quinta Normal Park, Plaza de Armas, Plaza Pedro de Valdivia and Cerro Santa Lucia/Huelén.

As outlined above, the choice of staging ‘Santiago Waria’ came after almost one year of working the city, as a form of representation of the shared meanings and routes we have been travelling through. Moving from previous experiences with site-specific theatre of one of the authors, the director Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, we found important connections between this particular approach, critical cartography and storytelling. More importantly, we felt that it allowed us to conceive space as the core of our work, something that has clear links with both Mapuche traditional storytelling (epew) and the ethnographic practice in establishing a sense of place.⁵

Coming from visual arts and originating as a critique against museum art, the site-specific methodology calls for a particular site to become the starting point of artistic creation. In theatre and performative arts it has been a way of escaping the theatrical room, opening up other scenarios and hence other reflections on the staging and the performative process. As such, it brought into the field interesting debates about the scenic space, with an avant-gardist methodological exploration by many contemporary groups: it is the case of the well-known company Rimini Protokoll in Germany (https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/) or the Teatro da Vertigem in Brazil (https://www.teatrodavertigem.com.br/), developing different site-specific theatre approaches (see Pearson 2010).

Following and expanding this tradition, in staging ‘Santiago Waria’ we refused the enclosure of materials and stories emerged during the research process in the traditional ‘Italian box’,⁶ and we felt we needed to set the performance in the city space, unfolding a spectrum of creative possibilities. This reversed the regular process of taking a text and bringing it to stage, usually addressing space only as a receiver, a passive container of theatrical montage. Rather, sites correspond to texts that are performed and reproduced in a new light or optic (Lehmann, 1999). Space makes its own appearance, becoming a co-interpreter. It does not have a fixed or pre-defined meaning, as it becomes visible in a peculiar way in that particular performance. Santiago became one of the protagonists, taking part to the creative and rehearsal process, for every scene was thought and designed in loco. Even if we obviously had writing sessions in our houses, the creative process was mostly taken forward in the places we individuated as performance locations, previously defined during the year of collective research. We addressed the city space not only as a background scenario, but we engaged with its materialities as being active part of the performance. At the same time, this approach modifies the engagement of both performers and audience, inviting the public to get involved, not just as passive observer of a representation, but as part of the setting, generating a sense of community between performers and spectators. They
are guests of the same space, connected through that particular site simultaneously evoking other places, linked to personal biographical trajectories or communities' history. Following the traces of the Mapuche (in)visible presence in the Chilean capital, the very title of our performance was an explicit reference to the 1987 documentary ‘Santiago Pueblo Grande de Huincas’ recounting the life of Mapuche migrants under the military dictatorship, and showing fragments of a llelipun (prayer) realized in the Santa Lucia/Huelén hill. This documentary constituted a fundamental antecedent to the performance, developed as an urban tour traversing specific points of Santiago and culminating in the Santa Lucia/Huelén hill. Given its performative nature, its being an ‘event’ more than a thing, ‘Santiago Waria’ thus constituted a receptor and articulator between places, their pasts and their current presents. It made visible the interrelation between particular sites and what happened there until the moment of representation:

Performance recontextualises such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their material traces and histories – are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop…The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another. (Pearson, Shanks, 2001, 23)

In playing with the city and its materiality while at the same time relating it with history, political imaginations and personal trajectories, we engaged in the ‘most recent occupation of a place’ (MacAuley, 2003, 78). We did not seek to depict the site in its entirety, because the site will still exist and change and be interrogated by different gestures after our intervention. Its specificity will always be displaced and its future is not attainable in the setting itself, although it can be marked through the social-theatrical event generated and the traces it leaves behind.

‘Santiago waria, pueblo grande de winkas’

**Figure 1**

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Station 1: Parque Quinta Normal, 1960
Marking the beginning of the performance, the Quinta Normal Park is one of the oldest in Chile, being inaugurated in 1841. Close to the Central Train Station, this place was where young Mapuche migrating from the rural south used to meet during their free time. Especially during the 1950s and 1960s, it came to constitute the scenario of friendships, loves and leisure. Here, the audience was introduced to the site-specific experience, receiving headphones and mp3 equipment. After the prologue reported above, they were invited to take part in a llellipun (prayer) for the offspring of a young couple recently arrived in the city in 1960, working as baker and housemaid. In homage to the past generations of the Mapuche diaspora and to the first one born in Santiago, the interpreters and the audience walked to two pewen (araucaria pine tree characteristic of the Mapuche territory), performing the traditional prayer. Afterwards, led by the ‘Comandante boliviano’, a young Mapuche woman crossing the whole performance as a silent and almost invisible yet constant presence, the audience takes the Metro to the Plaza de Armas.

Figure 2

Figure 3
Station 2: Plaza de Armas, 2018

Recent studies on the Plaza de Armas reveal that it was an Inca settlement that the conquistador Pedro de Valdivia grabs hold of to found the city of Santiago. The square was the scenario of the first Mapuche uprising against Spanish Conquest, led by Michimalongko: on the 11th of September of 1541 the colonial settlement was attacked and set on fire. The materiality of the site clearly points toward Chilean colonial history: the statue of Pedro de Valdivia, his former house and now Central Post Office building, the Cathedral, the Palacio de la Real Audiencia, and the first maps of the city. Through two characters that receive the audience and play antagonistic point of views over the very meaning of the Plaza de Armas – a Mapuche guide and an upper class old lady interrupting his tour – colonial history and post-colonial times are addressed as strictly related moments. After this station, the audience reaches the upper class neighbourhood with a ‘micro amarilla’ (yellow bus), the popular transport system in Santiago from the ‘80s until 2006.
Station 3: Providencia - Plaza Pedro de Valdivia, 1960

Providencia is one of the upper class districts of the city, where many Mapuche women worked as private housemaids. During the late 1950s, they got organised in a Trade Union publishing the magazine Surge. In the magazine, new members were welcomed and their names and addresses published, allowing us to map the silent and almost invisible presence of Mapuche women within this upper class space. In the Pedro de Valdivia Square they used to walk the children and the elderly people they looked after, and today you could still run into some of them wearing their traditional apron. Here we addressed their underground memories and forgotten paths, led by the silent Comandante Boliviano.
Interlude: Micro Amarilla, 1990
Once again on board the 'micro amarilla', the audience receives two characters getting on the bus unexpectedly: two bakers heading towards the well-known Mapuche occupation of the S. Francisco Church, protesting against the visit of the king of Spain. The two bakers discuss about the planned action.

Station 4: Cerro Welen/Santa Lucia, 1987-2005 - 2018 - Future
Named Santa Lucía first by Pedro de Valdivia, it is an iconic place, apparently the exact point where the city was founded. Yet the hill has also been the site where many Mapuche groups have met during the last decades, taking part in different political, spiritual and artistic initiatives. Climbing the hill as the final moment of the performance repeated and celebrated a gesture many Mapuche have done before, while at the same time re-elaborating its meaning. After listening to an audio recalling this history, the audience meets the poetry of David Añinir. Finally, the whole group of performers stands in the hill's terrace, showing themselves as bodies against the city landscape seen
from above, claiming for an utopic future. The ‘Comandante Boliviano’ talks for the very first time, in a monologue about hers and many other Mapuche women stories before and after.

Dis-locate: performing the indigenous city

‘Santiago Waria’ plays with space and time. Its narrative does not follow a strictly chronological order: it jumps back and forward, drawing connections between sites, stories and characters. Space materialities constitute the most important reference point, or better said the core of the performance. Objects such as Pedro de Valdivia statue in the Plaza de Armas, the pewen in the Quinta Normal Park, the Santa Lucía/Huén hill, or Pedro de Valdivia Square in the Providencia municipality stand as nodal points and multi-linear connections of the urban path we designed. The way these materialities were chosen and collectively defined went through non-obvious connections and a practice of collage and bricolage. The exercise of constantly changing our point of view by moving through the spaces we were analysing went hand to hand with narrative construction: writing was not a detached and isolated exercise, yet it went through the active movement of the body in place and through places.

‘Santiago Waria’ also plays with fiction. In the tradition of the site-specific theatre approach addressed above, we investigated the site in depth and we also extensively consulted historical and audio-visual documentation about the Mapuche presence (or absence, or absent-presence) in the capital. At the same time, we blend the data we were able to collect with the personal experiences of the project participants and of ourselves. Yet, while this performance certainly and clearly engages with all these elements, we mixed the collected data with fiction. Hence, how can we think of a narrative in which history, memory, biography and fiction are not clearly distinguishable anymore, or, as Vincent Crapanzano (2004, 15) would put it, where ‘the paradoxical ways in which the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real of the reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary’?

Following Johannes Sjöberg, ‘fiction refers to the human necessity to speculate, to fill the blank canvas of uncertainty with imagined utopias and dystopias’, proposing a close link between fiction, everyday life and present and past experiences interpretation (Sjöberg, 2017, 174). During our writing and playing sessions, we used fiction to set these relations in motion and to elaborate on the connections – imagined and real at the same time – with particular places. Fiction was used for imagining a possible future, as in the Huelén/Santa Lucía hill, but also for intervening the past, as in the metro journey between the Quinta Normal and Plaza de Armas. There, allowed by the underground route, we imagined an overlap between Pedro de Valdivia, conqueror of Chile, and Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the military dictator, by shifting from one 11th of September to the other, and by mixing the audio of Pinochet’s first proclaim and a half historical and half fictional letter from Pedro de Valdivia to the Spanish king in 1541. This surrealist and provocative linking nevertheless has a deep connection with present day Mapuche reality in Chile, where neoliberalism, first implemented through the terror of the dictatorship and more recently through contemporary multiculturalism,
follows the path first drawn by colonial rule. Another use of fiction was more straightforwardly related to the way we adapted biographical experience to the script narrative. Both Quinta Normal and Providencia municipality had a clear biographical connection with the family histories of some of the participants. In both cases, we blend explicit testimonies and fictionalized parts, respecting the willingness of anonymity and often ‘resuming’ in one character or scene different and interconnected stories.

Starting to reflect on this just finished intense process, we propose not only that the stories, imaginations and fictions we worked through ‘provide insights into (the) lived experience(s) and embodied understandings of the world’ (Sjoberg, 2017, 178) of the participants, but also that, as proposed by Alexadra d’Onofrio following Ricoeur (2017, 205) ‘lies, fiction and imagination have the potentiality of creating something ‘anew’, which takes us safely beyond an uncomfortable, and often unethical research of truth claims’. Questioning expected habitus and claiming for the power of ‘natality’ (Arendt, 1958), we ‘raised our hands’ and walked through real an imaginative paths throughout the city, following other’s steps, making new one’s, playing with detours and well-known itineraries.

A space of remembrance in which it is possible to do memory without commemoration (Stewart 2004), ‘Santiago Waria, pueblo grande de winkas’, challenges norms and reworks the past, constituting as an ‘empowering process of creative action’ (Bright 2014, 99). Both memory and imagination provided the ground for the co-construction of the theatrical narrative, where spaces’ materialities were in dialectical relation with people’s biographies and routes. The fact that the project participants were not professional actors (a part from three of them) was key to this: they were embodying their own story, or that of their family, or that of another participant, enactment and embodiment being the key gesture more than acting. What materialized was thus an intersubjective and affective engagement with a deeply felt reality, ‘experience converted into theatrical expression’ (Kazubowski-Houston, 2017, 221).

Moreover, movement, the transit between different spaces was a fundamental aspect of the whole performance: while in every site we staged a scene introduced by a recorded audio describing the place, the route between them was usually dedicated to listening to testimonies, letters and songs. In this active re-drawing of trajectories throughout the city, movement thus contributed to the generation of ‘complex amalgamations and juxtapositions’ (Irving 2013, 292). Accompanied by sound and voices, movement through spaces provided us with a sort of red line linking the different stations. Allowing the interplay between materiality and the abstract space of individual and collective desire, experiences and affectivities, our itinerary was characterised by what Guattari (1995, 23-24) defines as ‘transversality’: the active creation of a new path taking ‘unconventional routes between systems’. A way of ‘setting into motion’ alternative and dissenting imaginations (Escobar quoted in Flynn and Tinius, 2015, 10), the performative act of ‘transversing’ that characterizes ‘Santiago Waria’ is an active gesture of poiesis through displacement, coming to terms with discrimination, intercultural appropriation, and re-elaboration of memory, ‘tradition’ and possible futures. Replacing discourses of authenticity with those of belonging.

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and connection (Bright 2014), this performance distances itself from but also re-elaborate the static identities proposed by both institutional policies and an ‘essentialist’ conception of indigenous tradition and being. In the seriousness of this play, we followed the unpredictable paths of stories and places through the urban space of the Chilean capital. Positioning our bodies against and within the urban space, we felt that, rephrasing Schneider (2011, 135), in this routing an affective stain passed through bodies, time and place, claiming for a gesture that, as stated by our colleague Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, is ‘anthropophagical by essence, ontologically in movement’.

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**Notes**

[1] The performance begins in a theatre inside Balmaceda Arte Joven, where we also staged the project final art exhibition, within the Quinta Normal Park. Waria is the mapuche word for ‘city’. The kul kul is a Mapuche musical instrument. The voice-over is by Catalina Osorio. All the recordings and sound editing are by Beatmachine.

[2] Winka or huinca is the mapuche word for addressing a non-mapuche person. It often has a negative connotation, being linked to the historical occupation of the mapuche territory and to more recent land usurpations.

[3] The coordination team was formed by Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, Mapuche theatre director and writer; Olivia, Italian anthropologist and director’s assistant; and our colleague Claudio Alvarado Lincopi, Mapuche historian and writer. The participants to the project and co-authors of the performance are: Arturo Ahumada, Antil, Marcela Bascuñán Madrid, Martín Ernesto Cárdenas Llanccaman, Nicolás Cayuqueo, Rodrigo Huenchun Pardo, Simona Mayo, Tomás Melivilú Díaz, Puelpan, Dania Quezada Vidal, Cynthia Salgado Silva, Carlos Soto Quilan, Marco Soto Quilan, Marie Julieette Urrutia Leiva.

[4] This work was realized within the project ‘MapsUrbe: The invisible City, Mapuche mapping of Santiago, Chile’, (Marie Curie Individual Fellowship, GF - The University of Manchester, UK; Pontificia Universidad Católica, Chile; 2017-2020), a collaborative research process with young Mapuche artists and intellectuals in the urban context of Santiago.

[5] While it is not possible to address it here, we will certainly elaborate more on this in future works.

[6] The ‘Italian box’ refers to enclosed theatre structure inspired to the Italian opera houses in the XV century, a model for subsequent theatres throughout Europe.

[7] All the photographs are by Nicola Mazzuia, a part of figure 9, by Eric Mayo.


[9] This quote refers to the text Claudio wrote as the opening of the MapsUrbe art exhibition.

**References**


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