



ANIMISM AND THE MBYA-GUARANI CINEMA

RODRIGO LACERDA



Royal Anthropological Institute

# Anthropology & Art

A new open-access publication series edited by the RAI Anthropology of Art Committee. The series stems from the international conference Art, Materiality and Representation organized by the RAI in collaboration with the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2018. Its aims are to make available to a wide audience works that engage with the connections between visual, material, aural and other expressive human practices and the lived worlds in which they take place from an anthropologically informed perspective.

We solicit new contributions from anthropologists and others – such as archaeologists, art historians and practitioners – that will enhance and expand our collective understanding and appreciation of this important area of social life.

## **Guidelines for submission:**

Texts should be of maximum 8,000 words (including endnotes and references). We welcome original works that explore the meaningfulness of images, artefacts, sounds and performances and engage with anthropological approaches and/or analysis. There are no restrictions regarding the emphasis on the visual and textual aspects of the contributions and authors are welcome to discuss their proposed submission with the editor (paolo.fortis@durham.ac.uk).

Authors will be responsible for clearing all image permissions and rights to publication for both their and other's images. Manuscripts should be submitted to: admin@therai.org.uk.

## Editorial Committee

Editor: Paolo Fortis (Durham University)

Editorial Assistant: Amanda Vinson (Royal Anthropological Institute)

Iside Carbone (Royal Anthropological Institute)

Max Carocci (Royal Anthropological Institute)

Charles Gore (SOAS)

Ian Herbertson (University of the Arts)

Michael Liversidge (University of Bristol)

Susanne Kuchler (University College London)

Sarah Walpole (Royal Anthropological Institute)

**Volume 1** *Stories in the making: What artists made of the 2018 RAI Art, Materiality and Representation conference*

Angela Brew and Gemma Aallah

**Volume 2** *Moulding quilombola identities and ethnic politics: Understandings and Practices Around 'Quilombo Heritage' In Brazil*

Katerina Hatzikidi

**Volume 3** *Animism and the Mbya-Guarani Cinema*

Rodrigo Lacerda

## Forthcoming

*'Such intimate relations': on the process of collecting string figures and the paradigm of participant observation fieldwork*

Robin McKenzie

*Art, ethnography and the possible fate of hidden remains*

Teresa Fradique

*Some ethical implications of de- and re-materializing artefacts, using taonga pūoro (Māori musical instruments) as a case study*

Jennifer Cattermole

*Redefining Curatorship as skilled practice*

Carine Ayélé Durand

*Socio-Creativity and the Neolithic*

Eloise Govier

ANIMISM AND THE MBYA-GUARANI CINEMA

RODRIGO LACERDA



Royal Anthropological Institute

***Anthropology & Art No. 3***

First published 2021

*Cover image: The mother of the Mbya-Guarani filmmaker Patrícia Ferreira filmed by her other son, Aldo Ferreira..*

ISSN 2634-8004

ISBN 978-0-900632-58-7

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, due to a combination of different factors, the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) in Brazil launched the National Intangible Heritage Programme together with the Mbya-Guarani, who sell handicrafts in the ruins of the former Jesuit-Guarani mission<sup>1</sup> in São Miguel das Missões, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Lacerda 2018b, 2019). During this process, some Mbya expressed an interest in receiving training in filmmaking. In order to meet this demand, IPHAN contracted the NGO *Vídeo nas Aldeias* (VNA), which has been developing audio-visual collaborative work with indigenous peoples since the mid 1980s and has organized training workshops for filmmakers in indigenous villages since 1997 (Lacerda 2018a).<sup>2</sup>

The first Mbya-Guarani workshop took place in 2007 in Tekoa Anhenteguá, near Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and in Tekoa Koenju, located thirty kilometres from São Miguel das Missões. This intensive experience produced more than one hundred hours of footage, resulting in the film *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá, Two Villages, One Walk* (2008). The documentary was distributed to schools in the region and screened at national and international festivals, winning the ‘Best Film’ award at ForumDoc.BH. After this successful experience, the Mbya Cinema Collective went on to produce *Bicycles of Nhanderu* (2011), *The Guarani Exile* (2011), *Tava, The House of Stone* (2012), *MbyaMirim* (2013) and *On the Road with Mario* (2014), in collaboration



Figure 1 Mariano arriving with handicrafts at the ruins of the Jesuit-Guarani mission of São Miguel in *Two Villages, One Walk, 45'15"*.

with the VNA. Currently, two more films are in the post-production phase, one of which, entitled *Para Reté*, is about the mother of the filmmaker Patrícia Ferreira.

The traditional Guarani territory<sup>3</sup> extends over a wide area of South America, onto which the borders of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia have been superimposed. However, the indigenous lands currently demarcated by the Brazilian government have been reduced in size and number, and many Guarani are resisting by setting up temporary encampments (Ladeira 2008). In this sense, *Two Villages, One Walk* is mainly a political film (an example of a talk or shoot back – Ginsburg 2016) that aims to present to the *jurua* (non-indigenous people) their situation: the reduction in demarcated land, under siege from agribusinesses that prevent

1 In Western historiography the ruins of São Miguel are part of the thirty Jesuit-Guarani missions built by the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the southern cone of America (then the territory of the Spanish crown), comprising an area which nowadays includes part of Paraguay, Argentina and the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul (Ganson 2003).

2 [www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009](http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009) (accessed 7 April 2019).

3 Currently the Guarani living in Brazil are divided into three groups: the Kaiowá, Nandeva and Mbya. This classification was proposed by Schaden (1974), based on linguistic and cultural differences, but is also recognized by the Guarani, although the use of ethnonyms may differ, as is common in the case of native classifications (Viveiros de Castro 2002).

them from leading their traditional way of life; the tense relationship with tourists, who haggle over the price of handicrafts which are the main means of support for this people due to the loss of land; and the dispute over the history of the Jesuit-Guarani missions.

After the first film, which focused more on the frictions with colonial society, their second feature film, *Bicycles of Nhanderu*, concentrated on Guarani spirituality; although, as we will see, it is not possible to completely separate these two themes. According to the filmmaker Ariel Kuruay Ortega, the main proponent of the idea for this film, 'I think Guarani cinema is a bit mixed: it is a documentary of political struggle and, at the same time, it is spiritual. There is always a very strong mix. And joyful, too.'<sup>4</sup>

Considering this statement, other data obtained during my fieldwork<sup>5</sup> and an analysis of the films, this article examines how cinematography finds productive resonances with Mbya-Guarani spirituality, transforming cinema into a political, but also a cosmopolitical instrument. However, it is important to note that despite Ariel's assertion in Portuguese, there is no Guarani word for the Western term 'spirituality', and that this 'equivocation' (Viveiros de Castro 2004b) is used in inter-ethnic communication to define a set of aesthetic-ethical practices



Figure 2 Mbya-Guarani selling handicrafts at the mission in *Two Villages, One Walk*, 53' 40".

central to the Mbya *nhande reko* (way of life) that focus on well-being and the perfection of the body (*aguyje*) (see below). In order to develop comparative studies, this article will analyse Mbya-Guarani cinema within the framework of animism.

### **Animism, Amerindian perspectivism and shamanism**

The term animism is as old as anthropology itself. Tylor (1871) used it to refer to cultures which attribute life and personality to animals, plants, minerals and invisible elements. He had initially wanted to use the word spiritualism, but was afraid it might be confused with the religion of the same name, which was quite famous at the time. His and Ariel's ideas of spiritualism are different, but it is interesting to note how this word and animism are historically entangled. The development of animism during the time of the evolutionist paradigm condemned it to near oblivion in anthropological theory. It was not until the late twentieth century that the concept was reprised and reimagined by ethnologists working in Amazonia and the subarctic region, who were challenging the modern dichotomies

4 Interview in Portuguese with Ariel Kuruay Ortega, 26 March 2015, my translation.

5 This research is based on my PhD (NOVA FCSH and ISCTE-IUL [Portugal]) on the connections between indigenous cinema in Brazil and heritage. In relation to the Mbya-Guarani films, I followed part of the process of filming and translating *Para Reté* and was responsible for editing a short version of it. In 2016 I returned to Koenju for a month to develop certain issues. During this process, I met Ariel and Patrícia on various occasions, including a two-day meeting at IPHAN, at the ForumDoc.BH and at the Amerindian Film Screening – Paths of Indigenous Cinema in Brazil (Portugal).

of nature and culture, the individual and society, and persons and things within new frameworks, such as post-structuralism and cultural phenomenology (Århem 1993; Descola 1992; Ingold 2000; Stolze Lima 1999; Viveiros de Castro 1998).

Descola (2013) has argued that the divide between nature and culture is not universal, but rather exclusively modern. As an alternative, he proposed an analysis of ontological regimes based on the dichotomy between humans and non-humans defined by notions of interiority and physicality. This equation allows for limited combinations, giving rise to four basic ontologies: animism, naturalism, totemism and analogism. Thus, moderns (naturalistic ontology) consider that humans and non-humans are different in terms of interiority (the latter have no soul, spirit or mind) but share the same physicality (atoms, DNA, cells etc.). On the other hand, animists, such as the Amerindian peoples, believe that humans and (some) non-humans share interiority (a soul, a subjectivity), but have different bodies, i.e. different physicalities.

In the context of the South American lowlands, Viveiros de Castro (1998) has argued that animism establishes a metaphysical continuity between humans and non-humans, whereas Amerindian perspectivism leads to physical discontinuity.<sup>6</sup> The cosmologies of these indigenous peoples share the idea of a mythical

time, when several species had a common human essence. Certain events led to the present world in which the species are differentiated in bodily terms but still maintain a human perspective; even if, as Viveiros de Castro (2014:63) recently warned, 'When everything is human, the human becomes a wholly other thing.' Thus, for example, the jaguar, a predatory spirit, sees itself as human and sees humans as prey; while other animals hunted by indigenous people also have a human perspective but see humans as jaguars or predatory spirits. Shamans would be the only people capable of travelling between these various perspectives without losing their point of view.

Hence, the body is the site of differentiation in Amerindian ontologies, where the body is not understood in terms of morphology but as an 'assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*' (Viveiros de Castro 1998:478) in a permanent state of liminality (Overing and Passes 2000; Seeger, Matta and Viveiros de Castro 2019) that conceals a human perspective (a soul, spirit or subjectivity) usually only visible to the species it belongs to or to shamans. Consequently, the body needs to be constantly produced by its kin through practices of commensality, conviviality and corporality, in order to, on the one hand, particularize a body that is still too generic and, on the other hand, prevent it from losing the human perspective.

Pierrri (2018) has re-examined Mbya-Guarani ethnography in the light of these theories. He has demonstrated that their cosmology is organized according to the sensible categories of perishable (*marã*) and imperishable (*marãe'ỹ*). The latter defines the bodies, abodes and things of the deities, while the former describes the *tekoaxy* (perishable and mortal) condition of the Guarani. Moreover, everything that exists on earth is first created as imperishable in the divine spheres

---

6 The new animism of the South American lowlands has been developed through a productive discussion between Descola and Viveiros de Castro, even though they retain some differences. While Descola (1992) initially defined animist systems as 'schemes of praxis', Viveiros de Castro (1998) argued that animism is not a way of knowing (an epistemology) but a way of being (ontology). Even though Descola (2013) now agrees with Viveiros de Castro on this matter, he still questions whether Amerindian perspectivism can be extended to all Amazonian people, much less to all animist collectives.

and is therefore a (perishable) image or double of the latter. However, the Guarani can become *aguyje* (imperishable and therefore immortal) beings through aesthetic-ethical practices of conviviality, commensality and corporeality that enable their bodies to mature and allow them to reach the *Yvy Mara êy* (Land-without-Evil) without experiencing death, even if this is almost impossible on this second earth, not least because of the impacts of colonization. Hence, movement towards the Land-without-Evil is not a prophetic march towards a certain geographic location, as proposed by Nimuendajú (1987) and Clastres (1995), but a process of maturation of the body.<sup>7</sup> The term spiritualism, used by Ariel and many Guarani, is therefore related to the knowledge of the gods that may make them imperishable beings. In sum, the human condition of the Guarani body is understood as an unstable condition situated between two extremes of transformation: the animal (*ojepota*) and the divine (*aguyje*).

One important consequence of Amerindian perspectivism is that the universe is one hundred percent relational. Not only are humans and non-humans engaged in social relations, but these relations are perspectival, i.e. the identities of people, animals and things are not defined by their physical or biological attributes but perceived through their position within a network of social relations. For this reason, Viveiros de Castro (2004a:474) has argued that the nouns for peoples, animals and things are better understood as enunciative markers or relational pointers: 'Amerindian thought proposes [...] a representational or phenomenological unity that is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently

applied to a radically objective diversity. One culture, multiple natures – one epistemology, multiple ontologies.'

Animism, at least of the perspectivist kind, is therefore an unstable ontology,<sup>8</sup> as 'identity is a daily ontological puzzle' (Storrie 2006:226): signs in the cosmos waver between the visible and the invisible according to the affects of the perceiver; the identities of persons and things cannot be known from their appearance; bodies and things must be constantly produced through actions and relationships. In this context, shamanism is better understood as way of knowing, i.e. of revealing the multiple perspectives, subjectivities and agencies present in the world, and of manipulating the 'ontological puzzle'. In stark contrast to modern objectivism, shamanism is about communication, since 'It is necessary to know how to personify non-humans, and it is necessary to personify them in order to know' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a:469). Consequently, whereas in modern ontology a subject is an under-analysed object, in Amerindian animistic cosmology an object is an incompletely interpreted subject. As a corollary, an object is either expanded into a complete subject or understood in relation to a subject.

*The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian theories of materiality and personhood*, edited by Santos-Granero (2009), explores these questions in greater ethnographic detail and diversity. Santos-Granero argues that in the South American lowlands there are many ways of being a thing – in this context understood as an object but also as songs, names, natural phenomena etc. As we will see, in the case of the Mbya, words may also be added to the list. The author proposes that there are five types of artefacts:

7 Pierrri (2018) notes that the expression *Yvy Mara êy* is not commonly used by the Mbya, although the idea of *aguyje* is frequently emphasized, and my ethnographic experience supports this observation.

8 The notion of animism as an unstable ontology was proposed to me by Sergio Baptista da Silva, professor at the Rio Grande do Sul University. Any inappropriate development of this idea is entirely my responsibility.

objects without animistic properties (therefore shamanically insignificant); objects that have originated through self-transformation; objects made by metamorphosis; objects produced by mimesis; and objects transformed by ensoulment. In the latter case, the anthropologist refers to the widespread native Amazonian notion that things become subjectivized through direct contact with the soul, vitality or affects of humans or non-humans. Therefore, subjectivity does not presuppose the existence of a soul, and not all agency has intentionality.

Conversely, subjects can be turned into objects through craftsmanship, ritual action or de-subjectivation. The former refers to the production of artefacts that are expressions of the makers' knowledge and skills, and therefore retain some of their subjectivity. This understanding establishes a parallel, found in several ethnographies (McCallum 2001; Velthem 2003; for Mbya, see Assis 2006), between the production of objects and children. Both are considered not only to belong to their parents/makers but also to be the product of their substance and affects, and consequently extensions of their bodies. On the other hand, de-subjectivation refers to the transformation of subjectivized things into inanimate, i.e. non-relational, objects. These processes occur when personal or ritual objects are transferred to those who are neither kin nor affines, for example, or when people die.

### **Image and death: the de-subjectification of objects**

When someone dies, their belongings are usually buried or burned so that they are not trapped on earth and can travel to the world of the dead. In the specific case of the Mbya, a person has a dual soul (Cadogan 1997) or multiple souls (Pierri 2018), one of divine origin (*nhe'ëporã*) and

the other(s) terrestrial. After death, the former returns to the heavenly abodes, and according to some authors, if the funeral precepts are fulfilled, so does the latter, though others claim that they always remain on earth. After the terrestrial soul is separated from the body it becomes an *angue*, a kind of ghost that tries to occupy the bodies (that is, the perspectives) of other people, causing disease and antisocial actions.

Binding a photographic or cinematographic image of a person to a durable physical medium therefore poses dilemmas, as it will remain after the individual dies. However, people's views on these issues are not dogmatic and this can lead to discussions about their validity or how to circumvent them, especially when collectives recognize the political relevance of cinema. For example, the Enawenê-nawê, who were only officially 'contacted' in 1974 and introduced to cinema by the VNA in 1987, considered that images of the dead could be shown to non-indigenous people and non-Enawenê natives. However, the relatives of the deceased considered that such images should not be shown within the community, whereas others wanted to see them. According to Valadão (1999), the solution found at the time was not to show the images of the dead until the spirit had had time to leave the world of the living; after this, it was up to each individual to decide whether they wanted to see them or not. Nevertheless, funeral rites began to include the burning of video tapes, which was allowed by other Enawenê because there were copies in the VNA archive. The Xavante filmmaker Caimi Waiassé of the Indigenous Land Pimentel Barbosa describes a similar process:

*Acceptance [of video technology] was difficult at first because when someone dies, all of their belongings go with them, no traces are left. There were many years of questions. But after we began*

*to hold exchanges with other indigenous groups and other Xavante, the community realized the importance of seeing others and being seen. (Carvalho, Carvalho and Carelli 2011: 206)*

In the case of the Mbya, filmmaker Patrícia Ferreira recalls that when she was a girl and lived in Kunhã Piru (Misiones Province, Argentina), the death of an old man from the village resulted in the destruction of an old photograph of him. Similarly, the anthropologist Assis (2006) mentions that when she began her fieldwork in 1995, only children and young men consented to be photographed. Older people did not allow their body or even everyday objects to be recorded, with the sole exception of the handicrafts produced for colonial society. However, the author also acknowledges that this concern has diminished in recent years, and that nowadays the Guarani themselves ask to be photographed. Currently, the Facebook and Instagram profiles of the Mbya are full of selfies and family photos.

When the Mbya Cinema Collective began filming in Koenju there were still some doubts surrounding this issue. *Karai* (shaman) Solano, one of the main characters in the second film, feared that his memory, preserved in video, would lead him to unintentionally harm his loved ones after death. As in the cases mentioned above, internal discussions about the importance of cinema for the community and for communicating with the *jurua* led to the development of shamanic strategies to make film production viable (see below).

One incident associated with this dilemma occurred because of the film *Tava*, which begins with a funeral, even though the image of the deceased does not appear. The images were recorded by the filmmaker Jorge Morinico at the request of his father, Jose Cirilo Morinico, the *cacique* (political leader) of Anhetenguá,

and considered by some the *cacique* (*mburuvixá tenondé*) of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. However, he only saw the final edit during a screening at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), and was shocked by their inclusion. As he explained to me:

*It does not exist, inside the community. You do not show it, within our culture, within our spirituality. [...] It's as if you do not even respect death, let's say. Of course, many times we have shown goodwill... We want to show the white people. To have respect, you will never be respected. That is why today, it is 500 years since we lost our territory, and now we have to show all of death? When we talk about the demarcation of land, it is the same thing. To be demarcated, someone has to die first so that we have a bone from the people to prove it. (interview in Portuguese with José Cirilo Morinico, 7 April 2016, my translation)*

This speech establishes a parallel between the use of cinema as an instrument to present the situation to the *jurua* and the need to provide evidence, such as the bones of ancestors, to demarcate the territory, one of the main problems of the Mbya. The burden of proof always lies with the subaltern. In addition, the interview indicates that Cirilo considers that images can indeed attract the spirit of the dead person (*angue*), although the Mbya filmmakers disagree. Patrícia told me that she had thought about this, but that the relatives of the deceased had already seen the film and had not said anything about it. Ariel explored the issue in greater depth, distinguishing between an 'earthly' sorrow that can attract the *angue*, and a 'spiritual' sorrow that is directed towards the Nhanderu gods and therefore understands the existence of a higher plane of existence to which the *nhe'ẽ* has travelled:



Figure 3 Camera, the opy (house of prayer) and the petỹ (smoke) in *Two Villages, One Walk*, 0' 48".

No, I do not think [there is a danger of attracting the angue]. I have respect, but... Yes, because it speaks of death... It speaks of death, but it speaks of respecting death. It says that if it comes, it arrives when we are old and not very sad, too, when someone dies. Sad, but this sadness is not so earthly. This sadness is more spiritual. Of telling Nhanderu. I think we are more worried about that. Because we know there is a better place.

(interview with Ariel Kuruay Ortega in Portuguese, 30 March 2016, my translation)

### The subjectivation of the camera

According to Patrícia, the reluctance to film in the village was overcome through the 'transformation of the camera into a Guarani'. In fact, in this Mbya cinema, the operator and the camera are not different elements. Moreover, this approach is not related to the reflective cinema of modernity (MacDougall 1998), but to the fact that the camera participates in the day-to-day life



Figure 4 Group of Guarani playing mbaraka (guitar) and rave (fiddle) to make the salute (aguyjevete) in *Two Villages, One Walk*, 2' 15".

in the village, entering into the xondaro<sup>9</sup> dances or conversations (Brasil 2012). In this respect, the body of the camera is moulded like other bodies, through aesthetic-ethical practices of commensality, conviviality and corporality.

One example of this process can be found at the beginning of *Two Villages, One Walk*. Ariel, the filmmaker and main character, appears with the camera in his hand, puts it on a chair and enters the opy (house of prayer). Then, from a different angle, the camera on the chair and the opy are superimposed, bringing cinema and spirituality together. This relationship is enhanced by a close-up of the petỹ (smoke), the Mbya purification element, coming out of the opy chimney. In the next shot, Ariel films several Mbya leaving the opy and others arriving from another part of the village. The karai Juancito asks those who follow him to make the salute (aguyjevete) and asks if they woke up well, a frequent question in everyday Mbya, which indicates the importance of living well

9 Xondaro is a polysemic term which describes a form of dance that produces well-being and makes the nhe'ẽ remember what they learned in the divine abodes, but is also the name of those that protect the village (CTI 2013).

(Pissolato 2007). *Aguyjevete* is a way of thanking someone, but also a way of greeting relatives who arrive in the village (*tekoa*), expressing joy at meeting them. In this sense, the film uses a Guarani manner of greeting and welcoming the other – the camera and the viewer.

On the other hand, for Ariel the shamanic act performed on the camera does not necessarily transform it into a person, and its animistic potential is dependent on specific relations. Ariel's grandfather, who died shortly after my last stay in Koenju, was a political and spiritual leader greatly respected by the Mbya and a very important reference for the director, frequently cited in our informal talks. For this reason, I asked him if he felt any difference between when he was with his grandfather with and without the camera:

*I think the camera wakes me up a bit. What maybe was sleeping inside me, like, maybe. [...] I see my grandfather, right? I talk to my grandfather. Without the camera. And then I talk to my grandfather with the camera and maybe that moment is not so important but it becomes more important when I see the material and feel a greater need to talk with him again. I think somehow the camera succeeds... Although it's a machine, right? A tool, a machine, has no soul, has nothing. But somehow, I think the camera stores a little bit of the spirit that wakes you up. And more and more it seems that I feel the need to be with my grandfather, to film him, to talk with him. This is important. That the camera is not just a tool, a machine. No. When the camera is with me, when I am filming my grandfather, it becomes something else, it becomes a being too, a being... Maybe. When my grandfather is saying something powerful about spirituality, the camera also becomes a spiritual being.*

*(interview in Portuguese with Ariel Kuruay Ortega, 10 March 2016, my translation)*

At first, the director recognizes that the camera has agency (it 'wakes me up a bit [...] What maybe was sleeping inside me') and relates the act of filming to other catalysts of good Guarani science (such as meditation, walking and *xondaro*) that seek to understand the knowledge sent by Nhanderu through the *nhe'ẽ* (hence it is 'inside me') or through other signs in the world. However, a little later the filmmaker declares that this is not possible because the camera has no subjectivity ('no soul'). Yet the more he reflects on the subject, the more he is forced to admit that in certain special circumstances, 'the camera also becomes a spiritual being'. In the context of this conversation, these conditions are related to the grandfather and, more broadly, to occasions when the theme is spirituality (i.e. knowledge from the gods). In this sense, the camera does not become a complete subject, but rather a related object between two subjects experiencing a process of ensoulment (Santos-Granero 2009), i.e. influenced by the circulation of the vital principle (beautiful knowledge) between two complete subjects. This act does not seem to be a final transformation, but a relational process that needs to be constantly rebuilt.<sup>10</sup>

Not many studies focus on objects in the Mbya ethnography (Assis 2006), although an example from *Bicycles of Nhanderu* may help to illustrate how they are connected with spirituality. During the filming, a tree was struck by lightning, an event which led to a lot of discussion in the village and became one of the plot lines of the film. Whereas in Western cinematography such events usually represent sadness or anticipate disaster, for the Guarani they indicate the presence of the god Tupã (or his children), and even the proximity of the Land-without-Evil. The

<sup>10</sup> See Dias and Demarchi 2013 for a different understanding of the connection between camera and body in Mebêngôkre-Kayapó cinema.

fact that Tupã had touched a tree led to a desire to obtain a piece of the wood that now possessed divine power. One of the Guarani mentions that he wanted to take a piece for his son, and a woman also expressed an interest in making necklaces with it for relatives. In the middle of the film the director Jorge Morinico exits a house and shows the camera a necklace that his grandmother has just made from the wood struck by the lightning. The divine potential seems to be accessible even through vision. When a cameraman visits the site, he zooms in, almost peering at the spot where Tupã cut the tree. In another shot, a Guarani looks carefully and quietly at a piece of the tree scorched by the spirits.

Although Patricia and Ariel's statements about the animist character of the camera may seem different, a remark by another director, Vhera Poty, bridges the two. According to him, the camera is like a child.<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, the production of objects and children are considered similar processes. In the case of the Mbya-Guarani, in the first years of life the child is in a constant state of liminality because his *nhe'ẽ* has not yet decided whether he is joyful in this land, i.e. if he will stay, and needs to be constantly nourished by the food and affection of his kin. It is only when the child begins to walk and talk that the *nhe'ẽ* is considered to have settled in the body. Consequently, we can argue that the camera becomes a Guarani (as Patricia claims) in a liminal state before the *nhe'ẽ* settles, and is therefore in constant need of the transmission of Mbya spirituality (as Ariel affirms) in order to be transformed into a good, beautiful and joyful being. Hence, even though the camera may look like a finished object, the practice of filmmaking seems to be better understood as craftsmanship/child-rearing than as the use of an instrument.

11 *The Beings of the Forest and their Life as People*, 4' 40".

## Cine-meditation

The life of the Mbya on earth is governed by the *arandu porã* (beautiful knowledge) that Ariel explained as the 'understanding of the day' through meditation (*japychaka*), which is part of Mbya shamanism (Pissolato 2007). Living means trying to understand the world according to the knowledge obtained from the elders, Nhanderu and the *nhe'ẽ* sent from the divine abodes. As can be seen in the following conversation between Ariel and the film teacher Ernesto Carvalho from the VNA, the former believes that cinema also promotes the Mbya science of living well in the community, and may lead to the Land-without-Evil (in this case, named 'a plane without a plane'):

*Ariel: Our work with video is deepening. I know this is going to be very important for my people. Today I'm startled when I see the children here playing. 'Wow, so many children!' It's all for them. Not for me. Each time we discover more things and their importance.*

*Ernesto: When you say 'it's not for me,' you're translating that Guarani expression used when offering special thanks for something, aren't you?*

*Ariel: Yes. Korupi guaraĩ ko (it's not for me), haeveté (thank you): Korupi guaraiko. That's it. This work kovaeté mbya po korupi guaraiko. It's not for me, it's not for this plane.*

*Ernesto: So you think the video work isn't for this plane?*

*Ariel: Another plane exists. A plane without a name. Neither a wide plane (plano geral: long shot) or a close plane (plano fechado: close-up). It's a plane without a plane.<sup>12</sup>*

*(Carvalho, Carvalho and Carelli 2011:154, my emphasis)*

12 This sentence loses some of its polysemic potential in translation into English. In Portuguese 'plano' means both a cinematic shot and a level of existence.

For the Guarani, spiritual knowledge can be obtained horizontally or vertically.<sup>13</sup> One of the sources of horizontal knowledge are the *karai* and *kunha* (female) *karai*, older Mbya shamans who have meditated for a long time and followed the aesthetic-ethical practices of conviviality, commensality and corporality determined by the gods (Cadogan 1997). For this reason, the filming of the testimonies of the *karai* should not be understood as a mere record of oral history, but as the transmission of spiritual knowledge obtained from the gods by the *nhe'ẽ* in the celestial dwellings and by the body as a whole on earth.

On the other hand, knowledge can also be obtained vertically, that is, directly from the gods. This process occurs through aesthetic-ethical practices such as diet, meditation, dreams and beautiful walking (*guata porã*). Although meditation (*japychaka*) in a strict sense should take place in the *opy* (house of prayer), according to Ariel,

*There is no rule, no pattern of meditation. I think I meditate sometimes... Like when I stay home or work. When the planting season comes and I clean the farm. Then reap and not let the bush take over. I think this, for me, is a way of meditating. And with that, I'm learning. I go fishing, I collect some firewood. Make a physical effort. It elevates me spiritually. For example, I sleep early and then my dreams change. I pay more attention to dreams. Everything is more beautiful and then you begin to admire the children more, to see the world... I think this is a form of meditation. Of course, there is a time when you have to go to the opy more often. That is when you are evolving. It is important, but meditation does not necessarily have to be in the opy. You do not need to have a house of prayer to*

*sing the sacred songs. This is our house of prayer, here, under the tree.*

*(interview in Portuguese with Ariel Kuruaq Ortega, 10 March 2016, my translation)*

Considering this statement, it is possible to argue that there is a productive resonance between the practice of direct cinema (the main form of cinematography for this collective) and the search for the knowledge of the gods in this imperfect land, as when an individual holds a film camera in their hand, their concentration is similar to that which is required to attain spiritual knowledge. Even when the operator is standing, during an interview for example, the camera is not left on top of a tripod but requires constant attention (and muscle tension) in order to obtain a stable frame. In short, the act of filming finds parallels with the practices for obtaining knowledge and well-being, such as walking, the *xondaro* dance and even, according to the above quote from Ariel, other forms of 'physical effort' that the director considered to be types of meditation. In this sense, instead of 'ciné-transe' (Rouch 2003), it can be argued that Mbya-Guarani filmography is based on 'cine-meditation'.<sup>14</sup>

### **The visible and the invisible**

In addition to the above-mentioned aesthetic-ethical practices, obtaining this knowledge by horizontal and vertical means requires special care associated with the Guarani ethos. In the

<sup>14</sup> Costa (2018) proposes the idea of 'cine-xamanism' for the indigenous cinema of the South American lowlands. As we have seen, this could also apply to the Mbya-Guarani. However, Ariel and Patrícia never mentioned shamanism in this context, perhaps because the term includes other practices, some of which are exclusive to specialist shamans, or because it is an ambivalent activity that may include bad practices such as witchcraft (Pissolato 2007; see also Hugh-Jones 1994; Whitehead and Wright 2004).

<sup>13</sup> I am not referring here to horizontal and vertical shamanism, as proposed by Hugh-Jones (1994), but to the meanings adopted by Pissolato (2007) and Pierri (2018).

Figure 5 Ariel filming xeramõi Adolfo in Tava, *The House of Stone*, 23' 02".



book *Xondaro Mbaraete: The Xondaro force*, based on research into this form of dance and supervised by the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista (CTI) and Guarani researchers, the latter emphasize their alternative methodological approach, offering some clues with regard to this issue:

*The method we used to do the interviews was different from what the jurua usually use, because they follow rules, such as asking specific questions and having a set time. But we Guarani have our way of doing an interview: for example, we arrive cautiously and do not ask a direct question; first we put the person well at ease, we offer petyngua (pipe smoking) or ka'ay (yerba-maté) so that the person feels comfortable. We let the conversation flow so that the person talks about his life, his experiences, and then we start developing the interview.*

*(CTI 2013:14, my translation)*

While discussing the production of the film *Bicycles of Nhanderu*, which focuses on Guarani spirituality, Ariel defended a similar approach, but developed this further:

*To reach this invisible dimension in the film [Bicycles of Nhanderu] and make it visible, it's necessary to remain silent. For the Guarani, silence is sacred. I didn't understand this as a child. I would go with my grandfather to another distant village where another very important spiritual leader resided. He would go to visit him. When he arrived in the village, they didn't greet each other or shake hands. [...] They remained in silence for about half an hour. My grandfather knew, obviously. Afterwards the karai left with another pipe and he stayed a while longer. They didn't keep looking at each other, they stayed like Solano, smoking a pipe, only turning to face each other later. First the owner of the house enquires with beautiful words, without punctuation, it's almost like a song. It's a greeting that asks about everything, everything that has happened recently, but very quickly. It's as though he enters into a trance, he pronounces the words, all the beautiful poetic words, and I think that's where I understood the importance of silence. Whenever you arrive someplace, you should remain silent. Hear the sound of silence. This silence is important to the film too.*

*(Carvalho, Carvalho and Carelli 2011:230)*

Thus, according to Ariel, silence is needed to make the invisible visible (Brasil 2012, 2016). Only by waiting can we hear ‘the noise of the silence’, which can be interpreted more broadly as the signs of Nhanderu that waver between the visible and the invisible and are dependent on the body of the perceiver. In other words, the ‘physical effort’ of meditation and silence are transformative processes for the body (and cinema?) that enable us to see what was previously not visible.

But how does Nhanderu convey knowledge? Is it seen, heard or felt in a different way? In fact, despite the explosion of studies on Amerindian perspectivism, there is still little reflection on the different categories of senses in this context (but see Neto 2002; Seeger 2015). In the Mbya mythic narratives collected by Cadogan (1997), knowledge is associated with vision and is, apparently, secondary to hearing. At the beginning of the world, there was still no sun, only darkness, and the reflection of the divine wisdom of the first and true father, Ñande Ru Papa Tenonde, came from the organs of sight and hearing that served to enlighten him. According to Rattes (2014:183, my translation), ‘The divine wisdom is linked to a corporeal notion that extends, unfolding in the world and, in so doing, engenders it.’ Hence, darkness and wisdom are extensions of the First Father’s body, understood as multiple, in which sight and hearing are a reflection of his wisdom.

The Mbya-Guarani films and my own ethnographic experience provide some data in this respect. Firstly, the description of dreams seems to be mainly visual. In *Bicycles of Nhanderu*, Ariel describes a dream in which he and Patrícia are in a bar with *jurua*, who serve them sandwiches with knives. Patrícia also mentioned that seeing precious stones in dreams, which often happens to Ariel, was a sign of the *nhe’ẽ* inclination towards

the spiritual life. On the other hand, in the films *Para Reté* and *Tava*, hearing (beautiful words, advice, myths, songs etc.) appears to be the primordial vector. On this level, Pissolato (2007) associates the notion of wisdom with hearing, through expressions such as *endu* (listening), *ayvu* (speaking) and *mongeta* (counselling). It is important to listen to the elders and it is important to listen (or be open to listening) to Nhanderu. Nevertheless, seeing and hearing also appear combined, as explained in a testimony from the old *xeramõi* (wise man) Adolfo on the reasons for the Guarani spiritual walk (*guata porã*), collected during the research for the *Tava* film: ‘I will tell it. Because whites do not understand. [...] Since they are filming, I will tell the truth. I do this walk. I try to see something, a sign from Nhanderu. I want to hear his words. I come in search of this [...].’ In other words, communication with Nhanderu may occur through synaesthesia, without making a clearer distinction between the senses, as the ‘moderns’ desire. A conversation between Ariel and the *karai* Solano at the beginning of *Bicycles of Nhanderu* takes this proposition further:

*Ariel: And how do these beings speak? Do you only listen or can you see them?*

*Solano: The spirits?*

*Ariel: Yes!*

*Solano: These things ... when the gods speak, you do not see or hear them. What Tupã talks about, what happens in meditation, is inexplicable. Without realizing it, words come and are spoken by you. We are a bicycle of the gods. Truth. Nothing more than that.*

This speech gave the film its name – *Bicycles of Nhanderu* – and raises two partially overlapping questions. First, the Guarani not only idealize following the way of life of the gods, but also



Figure 6 Karai Solano in *Bicycles of Nhanderu*, 0' 52".

consider that their life is largely determined by them (Schaden 1974). More importantly, there is a bodily and spiritual connection between Nhanderu and the Guarani through the *nhe'ẽ* that are sent from the divine abodes. In this sense, knowledge is not necessarily visual or auditory but corporeal, as Rattes (2014) notes in the context of mythical narratives. Similarly, Pissolato (2008:43) argues that dreams and, in a broader sense, knowledge can also be a 'physical-emotional impression'.

Some conversations with Patricia and Ariel point in the same direction. After watching *Tava* together, Patricia stated that she sometimes goes to the ruins and tries to understand what happened to her ancestors during the Jesuit-Guarani missions. When I asked her if she was referring to studying books and documents, she immediately said no, adding that it was just being and feeling. A few days after this conversation, still a little unclear, I asked Ariel if the Guarani went to the ruins of the missions to meditate. Ariel replied, 'No, not to meditate... But to see, try to feel some spirit, something, yes. Some connection, but not meditation.' In this sense, the



Figure 7 Karai Solano talking about *Tupã* in *Bicycles of Nhanderu*, 1' 47".

word 'feel' is perhaps the best translation of how the Guarani acquire the knowledge of Nhanderu.

However, this knowledge is open to interpretation because animism is an unstable ontology and shamanism is therefore a radically subjective (or, more appropriately, personal) epistemology. For example, during breakfast, the Mbya gather around the fire and discuss the dreams they have had in order to try to understand their meaning. Thus, parallels can again be found with cinematographic production, since the filming and viewing of images leads to internal discussions and reflections that can be understood in social and political as well as spiritual terms.

### **Aesthetics-ethics**

The word 'beautiful' often came up in informal conversations with the filmmakers. At first, I interpreted it in Western terms, but then could not identify a common denominator. However, as I began to consider the ethical and spiritual dimensions inherent in the Guarani aesthetic (Overing and Passes 2000), I began to understand

how beauty is revealed in the Mbya-Guarani cinema.<sup>15</sup>

The Guarani word for beautiful is *porã*. In a restricted sense, *porã* can be translated as ‘pretty’ or ‘nice’, and Pissolato (2008) recognizes this use as adjective in, for example, the phrase for a well-made basket (*ajaka porã*). In a broader sense, the term is associated with the Guarani ethos of well-being. Cadogan (1997) translated *arandu porã* and *arandu vai*, respectively, as the good and bad science of living, and Pissolato (2008) mentions that it is used to affirm that one is happy (*orovy’a porã*) or fine (*iko porã*). Still from this perspective, ‘doing good/beautiful things’ (*japo porã*) identifies the correct Guarani way of living, as opposed to *japo vai* (‘doing bad/ugly things’), which is associated with insults and witchcraft. Thus, the beautiful is both the product and producer of the good Guarani way of living. As Ariel mentions in the earlier quote about meditation: ‘For example, I arrive, I sleep early, and then my dreams change. I pay more attention to dreams. *Everything is more beautiful and then you start to admire the children more, see the world...*’

More interestingly, in closer association with the deities, Pierri (2018) notes the equivalence between this word and *marãe’y* (imperishable), and the fact that it is used to identify food left by the gods for the Guarani (*tembi’u porã*), the path (*tape porã*) prescribed by them to overcome the condition of *tekoaxy*, and, above all, ‘beautiful words’ (*ayvu porã*). The term ‘beautiful words’ refers to an archaic, poetic form of Mbya speech only mastered by some *xeramõi*, which, according to Pierri’s fieldwork, is the language

used by the Nhanderu in their dwellings. Ariel, Patricia and other filmmakers told me that they only understood some of this vocabulary, and for this reason had difficulty translating some expressions in the film *Tava*. At the same time, they also showed a great willingness to learn them, since they have agency and spiritual knowledge. In short, the beautiful is the aesthetic-ethical way of life of the gods, and therefore constitutes the ideal for the Guarani.

As previously mentioned, parallels can be found between cinema and this search for the beautiful. Firstly, there is a common concern in the indigenous cinema of the South American lowlands to ‘do well’, just as one makes a basket well. It is difficult to explain this, but both my experience as a teacher and my conversations with other non-indigenous teachers and indigenous filmmakers show that there is an element of care, namely an aesthetic-ethical concern with the profilmic (that which is in front of the camera). Of course, it does not apply to everyone, but it is certainly superior to what can be found in the Western world.

A second aspect is associated with the relational nature of animist ontologies. The Mbya film relationships, above all else (Costa 2018): relationships with the mother, children, the *karai*. Thus, beautiful images are those that are full of subject(ivity), and what creates the film is the relationship between the operator and the profilmic. For example, during the shooting of *Para Reté* it was necessary to hire a non-indigenous cameraman because one of the Mbya filmmakers had to work in town. The difference between the two gazes is striking. Both look for a certain idea of beauty, but the former seeks pleasant, stable frames with good lighting, while the latter prefers to be as close as possible to the mother and other relatives, even if the use of the wide-angle lens distorts the image. Moreover, as

15 The idea of beauty as an aesthetic-ethical concept frequently appears in ethnographies of the indigenous people of the lowlands of South America (Gordon 2011; Lagrou 2007; McCallum 2001; Velthem 2003; see Dias and Demarchi 2013 for beauty in Mebêngôkre-Kayapó cinema).



Figure 8 The Mbya-Guarani reviewing the footage in *Two Villages, One Walk*, 15' 10".



Figure 9 The Mbya-Guarani laughing and trying to see signs from Nhanderu while smoking a petyngua (smoke pipe) in *Two Villages, One Walk*, 15' 37".

Ariel mentions in the first quote in this article, Mbya cinema is political and spiritual, but it is also joyful, reflecting the Guarani ethos of living well. In this sense, beautiful images are those that possess and produce joy.

The final aspect of the importance of the beautiful has already been emphasized: cinema is a political weapon, but also a means of attaining divine wisdom. Thus, beautiful images are those that reveal what was previously not visible and are part of the spiritual walk of the Guarani.

### **Touching the hearts of the *jurua* through cinema**

During my fieldwork I sometimes came across the expression 'touch the heart of the *jurua*'. For example, when Patrícia travelled to Portugal to present one of the films at an indigenous film festival, her mother told her to go to 'soften the hearts of the *jurua*' (*'emokangy jurua kuery py'a'*). Similarly, during the presentation of some scenes from her future film *Para Reté* at the ForumDoc.BH festival in 2015, Patrícia stated in Portuguese that:

*For the Guarani, dreams and words are very important. The word has to touch people's hearts. I would like to have this gift. My mother says that only a few people have this gift of words that can touch the heart. I want to film more to include the role of the word in the transformation of [my daughter] Géssica into a woman by her grandmother.*

*(my translation)*

The expression 'touching the heart' is an equivocation that the Mbya understood to be effective in inter-ethnic relations. At first the phrase seems to indicate an intention to influence the *jurua* emotionally, as the brain has been considered the organ of rational thought and the heart the organ of emotions since the Great Divide of modernity. However, 'heart' is a mistranslation of the Mbya word which designates the interior of the ribcage (*py'a*), where, according to this people, knowledge is located (and where there is no division between the rational and the emotional or the earthly and the divine). 'Heart' is therefore knowledge and 'touching the heart of the *jurua*' means changing their knowledge

and consequently their body and perspective. As Viveiros de Castro (2004a:476) has argued, 'Bodily metamorphosis is the Amerindian counterpart to the European theme of spiritual conversion.'

In another account also collected by Ariel and Patrícia for the film *Tava*, the *xeramõi* Avelino Gimenez expands on some of the functions of this knowledge (including 'touching the heart' of the whites) and underlines the deterministic mission conferred by Nhanderu on the *nhe'ẽ* that come to earth:

*When Nhanderu sent you here on earth, he gave you the gift of speaking. Each has a gift that he has given us. [...] There are some who know what others do not know because Nhanderu made us so. And there are some who came just to live in our culture and want nothing to do with white people. [...] For example, if I come from the home of Tupã, I will only know of the things that Tupã wants me to know... Because Nhanderu did so. We are what Nhanderu wants us to be. It's no use just knowing how to talk. Nhanderu has to make you talk and for that Nhanderu has to give you that gift. Some came with this gift of knowing how to speak to white people. Some do not know how to talk to them. Others know how to touch their hearts.*

*(my translation)*

In this speech, as in Patricia's earlier statement, the ability to touch the heart is not considered universal and depends on the origin of the *nhe'ẽ*. A child is born because *nhe'ẽ* are sent to earth with certain tasks (helping an uncle, bringing joy to the family, defending the Guarani from non-indigenous people etc.). The gods who send the *nhe'ẽ* are Nhamandu, Karai, Jakaira and Tupã, and their dwellings are located at the cardinal points. Each one has a set of knowledge

and characteristics that are passed on to the *nhe'ẽ*.

The Mbya name of Ariel Ortega is Kuruay Poty, which can be translated as 'rays of sun', indicating that his *nhe'ẽ* came from Nhamandu, the god of the sun and wisdom. During his research for the film *Tava*, his grandfather highlighted this fact and mentioned that perhaps that was the reason why he was making films. In fact, while other Mbya filmmakers are shy about talking to older people and prefer to point the camera at relatives and children, the young Ariel is mainly interested in listening to the knowledge of the *xeramõi* and, as previously noted, knows he must wait for the words to be inspired. On the other hand, Ariel is also a charismatic communicator in inter-ethnic contexts, captivating the *jurua* with his speech and sense of humour. Thus, according to the Mbya cosmological framework, Ariel is an inter-ethnic mediator because of the origin of his *nhe'ẽ*.

However, it is important to emphasize that not all Mbya knowledge must be transmitted to the *jurua*, a matter which causes tensions and discussions within the communities. This concern exists on two levels. Firstly, one of the reasons why the Guarani resisted colonial violence for more than 500 years was their cultural invisibility, which led to many classifying them as 'acculturated' (Schaden 1974). This invisibility enabled them to avoid certain more direct confrontations with the *jurua*, while they continued their *aguyje* walk. Only since the 1990s has the change in the political context in Brazil transformed cultural visibility into a relevant political instrument in the struggle for indigenous rights (Cunha 2008), even though recent changes in the government are dangerously reversing this situation.

On the other hand, there are certain shamanic elements, such as the sacred chants received from

Nhanderu, which the Mbya consider dangerous to record and disclose to the *jurua* because of their agency. However, these boundaries are fluid, constantly under negotiation and change from village to village, or even from Mbya to Mbya. For example, in Rio Grande do Sul and Argentina it is forbidden to film inside the *opy*, while in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro it is allowed, as long as the sacred songs are not recorded. At this level, some Mbya and *karai* are more zealous about restricting the dissemination of knowledge, and others, like Ariel, have a perspective that could be described as multicultural. Yet even in Ariel's case, he says his grandfather advised him that not everything should be explained to non-indigenous people.

Nevertheless, the gods sometimes impose their will. One morning, Patrícia recorded a song that her mother chanted during breakfast. At the end, she said that the song was for them only and not for the *jurua*. When the team reviewed the footage, they discovered that the camera had only begun recording at the end of the song. However, the sound equipment had recorded it and, during the translation phase, Patrícia and the non-indigenous Ana Carvalho of VNA decided to try to translate it. Surprisingly, during the process the hard drive stopped working and only the backup survived. Faced with this, Patrícia and VNA felt it was best not to try to translate the song, which, as her mother had explained, was not for the *jurua*.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that contact with the *jurua* is dangerous for the Mbya. Political work involves interacting with non-indigenous people with whom they have no affinity, spending time in cities, worrying, feeling agitated and becoming angry. This work removes the Mbya from the path traced by Nhanderu and many leaders complain about the heavy personal burden. If, on the one hand,

Ariel, Patrícia and other Mbya filmmakers are extremely curious and like to travel, meet other people, try sushi etc., there were also frequent complaints about the polluted air of the cities (understood in a Guarani cosmological sense) and feeling homesick. Cinema therefore has an interesting prophylactic capacity. Films embody the Mbya way of life, travel around the world and, hopefully, enchant (Gell 1998) or touch the heart of the Western world, but do not require constant interaction between the Guarani and the *jurua*.

### Conclusion

The concept of animism, even in its new trappings, has been criticized for being too generic or for encouraging essentialist tendencies – the 'isms' that anthropology has rightly denounced and deconstructed in recent decades. I have argued that animism is not a dogmatic ontology due to its intrinsic instability, and that the concept may be useful for comparative studies, at least in the South American lowlands context, where the intersection with Amerindian perspectivism has already led to productive debates. However, as we have seen, animism cannot be understood in isolation from cosmology, and it is therefore necessary to extend beyond a study based solely on ontology to a broader metaphysical analysis. Nevertheless, I consider that ontological questions (concerning Guarani bodies and things, for example) are still important as 'first questions' and that they have to be answered before moving on to metaphysical inquiries.

In terms of indigenous cinema, most research has focused on its political importance as a way of talking or shooting back (Ginsburg 2016), including via the objectivation of 'culture' (Cunha 2008). Other recent studies in Brazil have linked film studies and Amerindian ethnology in extremely original ways (Brasil 2012, 2016;

Brasil and Belissário 2016; Caixeta de Queiroz 2008). Although few exist, analyses that focus on filmmaking as practice, as in this pamphlet, would appear to be promising in terms of understanding the resonances between cinema and other indigenous practices and metaphysics, specifically in terms of the ontology of bodies and things, shamanism and aesthetics-ethics (Costa 2018; Dias and Demarchi 2013). On this level, filmmaking may be closer to craftsmanship (the production of good, beautiful and joyful people, things and communities) than to aesthetic or political categories (Fortis 2013).

On the other hand, comparative studies are also interesting as a means of exploring dissimilarities, in addition to similarities. As we have seen, the Mbya are mainly concerned with following the gods' way of life, and therefore living well, creating beautiful and joyful people and ultimately attaining the state of *aguyje*, even though this is almost impossible nowadays. In this sense, while in other collectives the animistic principle is the soul or a vital energy, in the case of the Mbya what seems to animate the filmmaking practice is beautiful knowledge, i.e. the perfect and imperishable knowledge of the gods found in signs in the world and in beautiful words, which ensouls the camera and transforms the bodies of the Guarani and even of the *juruá*.

Finally, Guarani filmmaking also produces interesting equivocations with Western cinema, especially documentary films. Both, for example, seek (beautiful) knowledge, yet knowledge (and beauty) are different things. Although 'uncontrolled' equivocations can be useful in inter-ethnic relations as a kind of shorthand and even as a way of creating empathy, we need to go further in order to decolonize thought. Following Viveiros de Castro's (2014) proposal to employ anthropology as a theory/practice for decolonization, as I have attempted to do in

this pamphlet, we need to take our interlocutors seriously, exploring the differences in the 'controlled equivocations' (Viveiros de Castro 2004b) and consequently expanding and multiplying the world(s) in which we live (Cadena 2010). Other ways of living imply other ways of being, knowing and filmmaking.

### Acknowledgments

Rodrigo Lacerda is employed by the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (NOVA FCSH) and the Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia (CRIA).

This work was supported by the FCT (Portugal) with a PhD grant (PD/BD/52265/2013) obtained through the PhD program in Anthropology: Politics and Practices of Culture and Museology (NOVA FCSH, ISCTE-IUL [Portugal]; 2013–19). Earlier versions were presented at the In Digital Latin America Conference II (Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 2017) and the Art, Materiality and Representation conference (RAI, British Museum, SOAS; London, 2018). I would like to thank Sergio Baptista da Silva, Susana de Matos Viegas and the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback. Any shortcomings remain my responsibility.

### Bibliography

- Århem, K. 1993. Ecosofia Makuna. In F. Correa (ed.), *La Selva Humanizada: Ecología alternativa en el Trópico*, pp. 105–22. Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología.
- Assis, V.S. 2006. *Dádiva, Mercadoria e Pessoa: As trocas na constituição do mundo social Mbyá-Guarani*. PhD Thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.
- Brasil, A. 2012. Bicicletas de Nhanderu: lascas do extracampo. *Devires* 9(1):98–117.

- 2016. Ver por meio do invisível: o cinema como tradução xamânica. *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 35(3):125–46.
- Brasil, A. and Belisário, B. 2016. Desmanchar o cinema: variações do fora-de-campo em filmes indígenas. *Sociologia & Antropologia* 6(3):601–34.
- Cadena, M. 2010. Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: conceptual reflections beyond ‘politics’. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2):334–70.
- Cadogan, L. 1997 [1959]. *Ayvu Rapyta: Textos míticos de los Mbyá-Guarani del Guairá*. Asunción: Biblioteca Paraguaya de Antropología.
- Caixeta de Queiroz, R. 2008. Cineastas indígenas e pensamento selvagem. *Devires* 5(2):98–125.
- Carvalho, A. Carvalho, E.I. and Carelli, V. 2011. *Vídeo nas Aldeias: 25 Anos*. Olinda: Vídeonas Aldeias.
- Clastres, H. 1995 [1975]. *The Land-without-Evil: Tupí-Guaraní Prophetism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Costa, A.C.E. 2018. Continuidade, rupturas, desdobramentos: conexões entre cinema indígena, pensamento e xamanismo. *Iluminuras* 19(46):99–134.
- CTI. 2013. *XondaroMbaraete: A força do Xondaro*. São Paulo: CTI.
- Cunha, M.C. 2008. ‘Culture’ and Culture: Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Rights. Cambridge: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Descola, P. 1992. Societies of nature and the nature of society. In A. Kuper (ed.), *Conceptualizing Society*, pp. 107–26. London: Routledge.
- 2013 [2005]. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dias, D.M. and Demarchi, A. 2013. A imagem cronicamente imperfeita: o corpo e a câmera entre os Mebêngôkre-Kayapó. *Espaço Ameríndio* 7(2):147–71.
- Fortis, P. 2013. *Kuna Art and Shamanism: An Ethnographic Approach*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ganson, B. 2003. *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gell, A. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropology Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ginsburg, F. 2016. Indigenous media from u-matic to youtube: media sovereignty in the digital age. *Sociologia & Antropologia* 6(3):581–99.
- Gordon, C. 2011. Em nome do belo: o valor das coisas xikrin-mebêngôkre. In F.A. Silva and C. Gordon(eds.), *Xikrin: Uma coleção etnográfica*, pp. 207–62. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Hugh-Jones, S. 1994. Shamans, prophets, priests and pastors. In N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (eds.), *Shamanism, History, and the State*, pp. 32–75. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- Lacerda, R. 2018a. The collaborative indigenous cinema of Vídeonas Aldeias and the intangible cultural heritage. *Memoriamedia* 3:1–11.
- 2018b. O plano, o contraplano e o ‘plano sem plano’: imagens ocidentais e Mbya Guarani das ruínas de São Miguel. *Iluminuras* 19(46):135–68.
- 2019. Participation and intangible cultural heritage: a case study of ‘Tava, place of reference for the Guarani people’. *Comunicação e Sociedade* 36:143–62.
- Ladeira, M.I. 2008. *Espaço Geográfico Guarani-Mbya: Significado, Constituição e Uso*. Maringá: Eduem.
- Lagrou, E. 2007. *A Fluidez da Forma: Arte, Alteridade e Agência em uma Sociedade Amazônica (Kaxinawa, Acre)*. Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks.
- MacDougall, D. 1998. *Transcultural Cinema*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- McCallum, C. 2001. *Gender and Sociality: How Real People Are Made*. Oxford: Berg.
- Neto, A.B. 2002. *A Arte dos Sonhos: Uma Iconografia Ameríndia*. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, Museu Nacional de Etnologia.

- Nimuendajú, C.U. 1987 [1914]. *As Lendas da Criação e Destruição do Mundo Como Fundamento da Religião dos Apapocúva-Guarani*. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Overing, J. and Passes, A. (eds.) 2000. *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*. London: Routledge.
- Pierri, D. 2018. *O Perecível e o Imperecível: Reflexões Guarani Mbya Sobre a Existência*. São Paulo: Elefante.
- Pissolato, E. 2007. *A Duração da Pessoa: Mobilidade, Parentesco e Xamanismo Mbya (Guarani)*. São Paulo: Editora da Unesp.
- 2008. Dimensões do bonito: cotidiano e arte vocal Mbya-Guarani. *Espaço Ameríndio* 2(2):35–51.
- Rattes, K. 2014. *O Itinerário das Aparições: Ayvu Rapyta e a palavra de León Cadogan*. PhD Thesis. Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
- Rouch, J. 2003. The camera and man. In S. Feld (ed.), *Ciné-Ethnography*, pp. 29–46. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Santos-Granero, F. 2009. *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Schaden, E. 1974. *Aspectos Fundamentais da Cultura Guarani*. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade USP.
- Seeger, A. 2015. *Por Que Cantam os Kisêdjê*. São Paulo: CosacNaify.
- Seeger, A., Matta, R. and Viveiros de Castro, E. 2019 [1979]. The construction of the person in indigenous Brazilian societies. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 9(3):694–703.
- Stolze Lima, T. 1999. The two and its many: reflections on perspectivism in a Tupi cosmology. *Ethnos* 64(1):107–31.
- Storrie, R. 2006. The politics of shamanism and the limits of fear. *Tipiti* 4(1&2):223–46.
- Tylor, E.B. 1871. *Primitive Culture*. London: John Murray.
- Valadão, V. 1999. O processo de trabalho do vídeo Yakwã: O Banquete dos Espíritos. In C. Eckert, P. Monte-mor (eds.), *Imagem em Foco: Novas perspectivas em antropologia*, pp. 161–75. Porto Alegre: UFRS.
- Velthem, L.H. 2003. *O Belo é a Fera: A Estética da Produção e da Predação entre os Wayana*. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, Museu Nacional de Etnologia.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. 1998. Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3):469–88.
- 2002. *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem e Outros Ensaios de Antropologia*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- 2004a. Exchanging perspectives: the transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10(3):463–84.
- 2004b. Perspectival anthropology and the method of controlled equivocation. *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 2(1):3–20.
- 2014 [2009]. *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing.
- Whitehead, N.L. and Wright, R. 2004. *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

## Filmography

- Bicycles of Nhanduru*. Dir. P. Ferreira and A.D. Ortega. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil, 2011. 48’.
- The Guarani Exile*. Dir. P. Ferreira and A.D. Ortega. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil, 2011. 38’.
- Mbya Mirim*. Dir. P. Ferreira and A.D. Ortega. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil, 2013. 22’.
- Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá, Two Villages, One Walk*. Dir. J. Ramos, Morinico, G. Beñites, A.D. Ortega. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil, 2008. 63’.
- On the Road with Mario*. Dir. Coletivo Mbya-Guarani de Cinema. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil, 2014. 21’.

*Para Reté*[in production]. Dir. P. Ferreira in collaboration with A. Carvalho, F. Ancil and T. Almeida. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brazil.

*Tava, The House of Stone*. Dir. P. Ferreira, A.D. Ortega, E.I. de Carvalho and V. Carelli. Vídeo nas Aldeias. Brasil, 2012. 78'.

*The Beings of the Forest and their Life as People*. Dir. R. Devos. Ocuspocus Imagens. Brazil, 27'.

# Anthropology & Art

A new open-access publication series edited by the RAI Anthropology of Art Committee. The series stems from the international conference Art, Materiality and Representation organized by the RAI in collaboration with the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2018. Its aims are to make available to a wide audience works that engage with the connections between visual, material, aural and other expressive human practices and the lived worlds in which they take place from an anthropologically informed perspective.

We solicit new contributions from anthropologists and others – such as archaeologists, art historians and practitioners – that will enhance and expand our collective understanding and appreciation of this important area of social life.

## **Guidelines for submission:**

Texts should be of maximum 8,000 words (including endnotes and references). We welcome original works that explore the meaningfulness of images, artefacts, sounds and performances and engage with anthropological approaches and/or analysis. There are no restrictions regarding the emphasis on the visual and textual aspects of the contributions and authors are welcome to discuss their proposed submission with the editor (paolo.fortis@durham.ac.uk).

Authors will be responsible for clearing all image permissions and rights to publication for both their and other's images. Manuscripts should be submitted to: admin@therai.org.uk.

## **Editorial Committee**

*Editor: Paolo Fortis (Durham University)*

*Editorial Assistant: Amanda Vinson (Royal Anthropological Institute)*

*Iside Carbone (Royal Anthropological Institute)*

*Max Carocci (Royal Anthropological Institute)*

*Charles Gore (SOAS)*

*Ian Herbertson (University of the Arts)*

*Michael Liversidge (University of Bristol)*

*Susanne Kuchler (University College London)*

*Sarah Walpole (Royal Anthropological Institute)*

**Volume 1** *Stories in the making: What artists made of the 2018 RAI Art, Materiality and Representation conference*  
Angela Brew and Gemma Aallah

**Volume 2** *Moulding quilombola identities and ethnic politics: Understandings and Practices Around 'Quilombo Heritage' In Brazil*  
Katerina Hatzikidi

**Volume 3** *Animism and the Mbya-Guarani Cinema*  
Rodrigo Lacerda

## **Forthcoming**

*'Such intimate relations': on the process of collecting string figures and the paradigm of participant observation fieldwork*

Robin McKenzie

*Art, ethnography and the possible fate of hidden remains*

Teresa Fradique

*Some ethical implications of de- and re-materializing artefacts, using taonga pūoro (Māori musical instruments) as a case study*

Jennifer Cattermole

*Redefining Curatorship as skilled practice*

Carine Ayélé Durand

*Socio-Creativity and the Neolithic*

Eloise Govier

ISSN 2634-8004

ISBN 978-0-900632-58-7

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.