Sovereignties, Activisms, and Audiovisual Spiritualities of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia

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For the full, media-rich version of this essay, see worldrecordsjournal.org/sovereignty-activism-part-01/

Text translated from Spanish by Alejandro Jaramillo

This is the written version of a virtual conversation that lasted more than eight hours over the course of three sessions in February 2022. At Laura's invitation, I took on the responsibility to choose our guests for a conversation we provisionally framed as "Technological Ecologies, Decolonizing the Encounter." This conversation came with a set of challenges, and the isolation measures that public health authorities ordered during the COVID-19 pandemic added to our lack of access to online communication, as most of us live far away from the big cities, and some of us have to travel simply to access an internet connection. Collectively, we decided to organize our conversation around excerpts and documents related to our audiovisual practices. Some knew their colleagues' material beforehand, and some excerpts were from recent unpublished work; the reactions in all cases gave shape to the following discussion.

Olowaili Green from the Gunadule people in Urabá, Antioquia, participated from Medellín; David Hernández Palmar belongs to the Wayuu people of Colombia and Venezuela in the north of the South American continent, but lives far away from there in La Jagua, Department of Huila; Laura Huertas Millán, Colombian filmmaker and curator, resides in Paris, France; Nelly Kuiru, from the Murui-Muina people of La Chorrera, tuned in from Leticia, Amazonas; Mileidy Orozco Domicó, an Emberá Eyabida from the forests of Antioquia who migrated to the Kamentzá territory, attended from the Department of Putumayo; Amado Villafaña is an inhabitant of Ikarwa, in the Arhuaco territory of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; and I, Pablo Mora, anthropologist and filmmaker, live in La Calera in the Andean highlands of central Colombia.

The recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim by Clara López Gómez and totaled a little over eighty pages, which I was then responsible for adapting into the present text. Without deviating from the ideas expressed orally, I transformed what was said with the goal of discursive coherence according to criteria of lexical selection, syntactic organization, grammatical rules, conventions for spelling, and punctuation for textual structures in Spanish. Of course, such a transformation of orality has all the dangers of a betrayal imposed by the technology of writing. For this reason, the final written version was returned to all the authors for their comments and authorizations. By mutual agreement, the text is collective property and we are all authors under equal conditions. This shared authorship also means that we all accept the text's dissemination in *World Records*, which provided underwriting for our gathering, and that the circulation of the text is free of restraints and at no cost.

—Pablo Mora

INTRODUCTION

Pablo Mora
We would like to propose some starting topics. The first is technology, or the technical. How do some people *cannibalize* Western technology and appropriate it, and what is at stake in this *domestication*? From the point of view of each [Indigenous] group, and not discounting the personal trajectory of each one of you, it is certain that there are different understandings of what audiovisual technologies entail. What dangers and what advantages do these technologies have for the political and aesthetic agendas of Indigenous peoples?

Laura Huertas Millán
On this point, it would be interesting to try to formulate other continuities in the history of cinema. The classic version tells us that cinema was invented in Europe and then spread to other places. Yet, what if we imagine a history with a contrary temporality—in other words, that cinema was the result of processes of vision or knowledge already in place, that were already there, and that cinema was finally a continuation of those processes. It's not, then, a matter of [Indigenous peoples] appropriating or legitimizing the technology [of cinema]. Its language was known in some way, perhaps through another technique or technology; there was already a system of communication and vision present.

The excerpt from Amado's film *Resistencia en la línea negra* [Resistance on the Black Line, 2011] around the "baptism" of the cameras makes a lot of sense to start our conversation.

(The group watches an excerpt from Resistencia en la línea negra*)*

OF ARHUACO BAPTISMS AND WORDS TO HEAL

Amado Villafaña
All the films we have made as a group, whether they are by [the film collective] Zhigoneshi or Yosokwi, articulate concerns by *mamos* [Arhuaco, Kogi, and Wiwa male spiritual leaders]. They are issues that live in us, they are there, and it is only a matter of reliving and expressing them. What the excerpt deals with is that everything not belonging to the territory is an unknown element; then, when it enters, either to be consumed or used as a work tool, it is necessary to adopt it within this spiritual plane and direct it to the protection of the territory and to the knowledge we call *kunsamu*, or rule of life.

We speak of "baptism" but, in the spiritual sense, it means adopting elements foreign to the territory, registering in the spiritual world something that is foreign, that has not been there before. If that registration does not happen, there will be more harm than good. Objects that are unknown to the territory must be adopted so that they are useful in the defense of the territory and of culture. And the people in charge of carrying out this audiovisual activity [of making a film], since they are going to tread in sacred territory, must be registered in the spiritual world to carry out that activity. It is like having a visa to enter the United States.

The mamos prepare these people so that they can reach these sacred sites, taking care that they don't accumulate a debt with the spiritual world, which is then exacted in the form of illnesses or other issues. The recorded activity [of baptism] was done at the sacred site of Domingueka, in Kogui territory. I also want to clarify that the adoption, the baptism, or the preparation to do the activity is the same with the Wiwa, the Kogui, and the Arhuaco. There is no difference even though we have different languages.

PM
In addition to the work on Domingueka, Mamo Jacinto, who has already left this earth, did the same with the equipment in the Zhigoneshi editing room in Santa Marta. At that time, I understood the work of the mamo as a protection, so that the films about to be completed would not be misused, but rather would add to the defense of the territory, in this case Gonawindúa Tayrona.

Amado, to help decenter the dominant historical chronology you affirm that the spiritual fathers of the images that shine—mirrors, cameras, video screens—exist in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and that the request to authorize the audiovisual equipment in use was addressed to them. In another excerpt, a Kogui mamo says that "this technology does not belong to the *bonachis* [whites]; this technology belongs to us." This is also a way to legitimize its use.

Nelly Kuiru
Each [Indigenous] group has its way of "baptizing," and I agree with Amado that for Indigenous peoples it doesn't matter if they are over there in the Sierra or in the Guajira or in the Amazon; there are certain similarities even if we do it in different ways. In our case, regarding the tools that arrived in the Amazonian territories—for example, the axe—we consider that they were brought simply to colonize us. In the time of the rubber barons, our labor and products changed. For us, rubber was something traditional that was taken to make a ball and to use, precisely, in the ritual of the ball. With the exploitation of rubber for industrial purposes, they introduced us to certain tools. What our elders did was heal them, "cure" them, appease them, because they were fire tools that came from elsewhere. You must cool them, we say, not so much as baptize them, and orient them so that there are no inconveniences when using them at work.

It is the same with cameras, and similar technologies. They are something new to our territories and obviously we must heal them, we must sweeten them, we must cool them down so that they serve us as a transmission tool, for them to be part of our struggle and the strengthening of the communities

themselves. The adoption is done in *mambeadero* spaces using diverse traditional plants.[1] Every night different tools are cured. People receive guidance so that they do not have accidents in daily life [using these tools].

David Hernández Palmar
[Returning to Amado's earlier work], *Palabras mayores* [2009] seems to me to be a foundational film not only because it was made by an Indigenous film collective, but also because of the story it tells. Seeing this excerpt [from *Resistencia*] surprises me—perhaps it did not come to my attention before because the spiritual is far from the quotidian. It has to do with semantics, with spirituality, and how technology comes in to serve Indigenous legacies. It also perplexes me that cinema is part of the narrative, that the protagonists interrogate the craft of cinema or the camera itself. On my radar there is little Indigenous cinematography in which you witness that. These peculiarities fascinate me, and I think that this is also true of other Indigenous people from the Sierra Nevada, like our colleague Rafael Mojica Gil of the Wiwa people.

Mileidy Orozco Domicó
At first, one manages to feel a bit of the foreignness of this gear. In the shot with the mamos gathered on a rock, I look at the devices below them as something very extraneous, something that does not belong. This is very significant. It also strikes me that the mamos refer to the image as a *mother*. It becomes a *mother of all pictures* approach. It would be great if Amado or Pablo addressed that link with the female figure. Why is the image a mother? Is it because the article for camera is feminine [*la cámara*], or is there something more to it?

All this makes me think that the film collective surrounding Amado shaped a new imaginary. From what I have seen, at least in the country, there are no other depictions that come close. The notion that these technological devices need to be baptized is new. I was also wondering why Amado speaks partly about this subject in Spanish, as if he were addressing someone from outside. It feels somewhat strange because it seems like he's talking to someone who does not belong to his community, as if he was being interviewed.

PM
Unfortunately, Amado cannot answer because he lost the [internet] connection. There are many things to say in that respect. The first is that Amado is speaking to the non-Indigenous viewer. That is evident in all Zhigoneshi's films. Unlike other communication strategies—such as that of the Nasa, for example, who speak to themselves—Amado is speaking to the non-Indigenous world, so they can understand Arhuaco culture. That is a very conscious position he is enunciating from.

I cannot remove myself from witnessing the baptism experience next to them. What is at stake is not only to baptize in the Catholic sense, but to legitimize and appropriate technology. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this was not simply staged for some audience that is curious about Indigenous affairs. Rather, it was done in order to show that long before the documentary was made, the spiritual fathers and mothers of the image had already been named.

We made many trips with Amado to remote places, and some mamos explained, "Here live, at the mouth of this river, the spiritual fathers and mothers of the things that the white man, the bonachi, the little brother, has invented: trains, airplanes, cameras, all the technology that exists." Which means that these technological developments are not alien to them. And that is precisely what seems relevant to me. Other mamos have specified who those fathers and mothers are, those who own the things that shine, mirrors, and the sun. Mamo Shibulata himself, the protagonist of the documentary, associated the world of images to certain gold masks that represent the god Mukueke, the sun god. There is, then, an outstanding interrelation between the sun, brightness, light, and the image. They are connections that one should try to understand, but often this understanding falls short. Of course, there were many mamos who had not seen cameras before who regarded them with suspicion and distrusted the Indigenous people who used them. Amado told me that some mamos saw his filmmaking as a small child's activity. But they gradually realized that it was useful.

Olowaili Green
There is something very particular that I like about Amado's work, which is that he always shows the behind the scenes, how he makes his documentaries. It seems to me that it is a characteristic of Amado that not all of us have. Amado's seal in his documentaries is lovely to me. He is a great reference for us in a younger generation, and we all consider him the father of the Indigenous documentary in Colombia. The words that come to mind when I see that clip are *resistance, respect*, and *wisdom*.

If I have learned anything, it is that every time we go to record we must check if we are in sacred places, surrounded by elders. We can study outside the territory, in the city, and have undergraduate, postgraduate, or doctoral degrees, but every time we return to our communities they don't see us as, "Oh, the studied one." No, you are one more member of the community, and in the community our wisemen and wisewomen, the *caciques* and *cacicas*, the council, the governor are more important. We must show respect toward our land because it is like our body. I don't like it when someone I barely know touches my face. The same occurs with some spaces on this earth: they are sacred places from which we must first ask permission to be able to carry out the action we intend.

PM
Not only do the authors incorporate video technologies as protagonists, but they also talk about how the film is made, known in scholarly terminology as a *reflexive documentary*, or one that puts a mirror to the very exercise of filmmaking. That's a hook that distinguishes Zhigoneshi's films.

Later, many well-known non-Indigenous people in the field told us, "We don't want to see more Indigenous people with cameras." They criticized the idea of exoticizing Indigenous people holding a camera, as if it were something extraordinary. In 2013, the Cinemateca de Bogotá published the catalog we prepared for the 5th Film and Video Exhibition of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, Daupará. Many photos of Indigenous people recording, holding cameras, circulated in that catalog: Rafael Mojica of the Wiwa, Leiqui Uriana of the Wayuu, our Nasa colleagues at Cineminga, among many others. Having seen the photos, the editorial coordinator of the cinematheque exclaimed, "We're fed up with showing those images!" And she was right up to a point. But I think that at that time [these images were] a response to the argument that Indigenous worlds were incapable of

mastering audiovisual and filmmaking technologies. And in the history of cinema that argument has had a place—for example, the first cameras that the Papuan Indigenous people of New Guinea see with astonishment in the documentary *First Contact* [1983], by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson; or, without going too far, the surprised face of the Emberá people in *Luz en la selva* [Light in the Jungle, 1959], by Enoc Roldán. I have always seen as false the representation of Indigenous people's first understanding of cinema.

LHM
This is a thrilling conversation. What strikes me as revolutionary in this excerpt is that there is a vindication of the essence of cinema as already present and expressed in other materialities. It is not that this technology came from outside and Indigenous peoples have to catch up, but rather that it already belongs to the sphere of their knowledge, to their ecosystems. That seems very impactful to me. Another thing that strikes me is that there is a moment when the cameras are placed on the ground, in direct connection with the earth. There I see something very suggestive of a living interaction between ecology and technology, in which there is no separation but a close dialogue between them.

PM
The ground where Zhigoneshi's team put the devices is made of stone, and it's not just any ground. Those stones were chosen by those who did the spiritual operation, because it is from those stones that communication is established with the *nonvisible world*, let's call it that. Not just any stone has that connectivity; they are stones that connect with those spiritual worlds.

Another important thing to point out is that *Resistencia en la línea negra* took five years to produce; it was not a two-or-three-months documentary. That also gives us a notion of the Arhuaco times of producing films. There is resistance to the imposition of industrial modes of audiovisual production. And some of those who appear in the film have already died; nowadays they are ghosts onscreen, like the mamos Bernardo Moscote, Jacinto Salabata, and José Romero. They did not live to watch the result, the complete film.

MOD
Although I have increased the speed of my latest productions, I also have that same conflict—I think all of us who are present do—regarding the timelines and ways of producing work. To make films, people generally must sit down with the authorities of their territory to tell them what they intend to do, and they must wait for councils to decide whether it is allowed or not, if they like it, and the type of support they'll provide for the production.

PLANIMETRY OF INTIMACY

(The group watches an excerpt from David Hernández Palmar's Sũkũjula Tei, *2022)*

DHP
This is an exercise that was initially conceived as a reportage, but which ended up being a staged fiction with a lot of documentary influences.

MOD
I think that both scenes profoundly explore the relationships between siblings. I think [the excerpt] speaks to separations and relationships within the family itself. It is like a parenthesis between a younger generation and an older generation.

DHP
We Wayuu are often represented as very dry but also dramatic. When the sister says to them, "Oh, I thought you had forgotten," it may seem like a reproach, but in a Wayuu context it is a poem: "I thought you had forgotten me." The sister's embrace is a dialogue, one equivalent to reciprocity. I did not know if the word *reciprocity* existed in the Wayuu language, so I asked my mother—she is the woman with the painted face in the clip—and she shared a memory, which is what we staged.

Now, dialogues are not only a matter of close or far shots, but also a matter of what you place in the shot. I was not aware of the metaphor that these are two generations of siblings; I didn't get it.

MOD
That catches my attention because little has been told about what we have achieved at a national level. Generally, narratives are about relationships built by a single person or, on the contrary, by a collective entity. In the two scenes that I saw, the intimacy between peers, between siblings, is very noticeable. It is a very interesting intimacy because beyond the camera and aesthetics, it is an intimacy in daily dialogue that allows us to understand what daily life is like, with its conflicts in familial relationships.

DHP
I am very happy about this conversation because it is the first time that I have shared the film widely. Let me show you the ending.

(The group watches the final scene of Sũkũjula Tei*)*

MOD
How nice.

DHP
This resolves, somewhat, the things I propose.

PM
What criteria do you employ to build the scene with images: wide shots, close-ups, full shots, far away, camera on the shoulder, or camera with a tripod? It seems to me that these decisions give a singularity to narratives, otherwise they would resemble cookie-cutter industrial packages. Here you see something else.

DHP
I always wanted the shots to be quite wide. When I make documentaries, the decisions lean toward the politically consensual, more collectively resolved, but when I am controlling a narrative film, I get a bit intimidated. In fact, it's the first time I've created a script by myself. I felt that I needed someone who could grasp my work from a cinematographic point of view, so I brought in Duiren Wagua, a Gunadule friend from Panama. I had a chat with him and showed him references for how I would like the camerawork to feel. I was debating with myself whether or not Duiren would shoot handheld; not that my aunt and my mom would care too much about this, but I felt that handheld was less cumbersome in terms of approaching the set and lighting the scene. In La Guajira, controlling the light is impossible, and that is why I only recorded two hours in the morning. If you can turn these hours to your advantage, fine; if not, it was time to record again at four in the afternoon. I knew exactly what I wanted to see, where I wanted the camera; I planned everything two weeks before arriving on set. And I think that I was able to tell a story, no matter how simple it may seem, while respecting family intimacy. My mother

was satisfied; the movie was good enough for her. And two people told me, "This is a Wayuu story." It was the best compliment I've received in terms of how my film resembles Wayuu narration. I like that it is described like this: like a short Wayuu story.

I wasn't looking to propose something like, "This is David's viewpoint." But I was nervous about whether or not the story corresponded to what my mom told me. Also, it was not easy to direct my mother, because my mother is a retired teacher used to leading three hundred people. She wrote the theater script and sent me off, in front of everyone, to record things. I would tell her, "Mom, I am the one directing. I invited you to produce with me but you're scolding me in front of others."

(laughter)

PM
Being scolded by your mother on set is the ultimate proof that there is intimacy, that there is familiarity and trust. What risk is there in exposing family intimacy? That issue is also present in Olowaili's and Mileidy's films.

DHP
I also found it funny that some producers or financiers to whom we presented the project told us that we were very dry: "Those hugs look like you're beating a drum." At one point I replied, "You are not from that culture. Of course, we are affectionate. But, for example, we don't say *please*, but rather *go and make coffee*, and that's it."

MOD
I also feel it with my people. We are not as syrupy as other cultures are.

OG
That's why we Indigenous peoples have also been criticized nationally. Because we don't seem loving. If you have had partners from the culture and partners who are not Indigenous, then you notice these differences a lot. I have not been able to understand why we are so dry. I don't consider myself dry, but my aunts and my sisters don't hug each other. They just say hello. They visit each other, talk, eat, have coffee, and leave, but they hug very little.

AUDIOVISUAL SOVEREIGNTY

LHM
David, having read your theoretical writing and your reflections on audiovisual sovereignty, I have a question: How is your theoretical work interwoven or linked with your cinematographic work? Or, rather, how does the work of writing or theoretical work inform your filmmaking practice?

DHP
Audiovisual sovereignty is being built when Indigenous filmmakers decide who their audience is or what direction they want to take, whether it is for the community itself or to speak to the world, as in the case of Amado. I feel that all of Amado's works are manifestos directed at humanity; they belong in the stratosphere.

Now we are going through a moment in which there is a need to see sovereignty in production setups, and that need is being met, above all, by Indigenous filmmaker sisters who are analyzing whether there are dynamics of extraction or of contribution in non-Indigenous projects. It does not suffice to hire someone Indigenous as field producer. When it comes to recording stories, there must be recognition in production, coproduction, directing, and codirecting. If it doesn't *necessarily* mean that non-Indigenous people can't tell our stories, what does it mean concretely? We need to keep having these discussions in public forums.

I think the key questions for non-Indigenous authors are, one, Why do you think you have the right to tell this story?; and two, Do you or don't you know someone from my culture who can tell that same story? These are interrogations regarding what can be built with audiovisual sovereignty.

OG
As an Indigenous person, you may not have to tell stories about your people, and that is also fine. Being Indigenous doesn't mean we have to tell stories about our peoples. They see us as Indigenous filmmakers and they remark that we only tell stories about our peoples. I do not agree with praising us just because we are Indigenous. We are human beings; we simply have a different culture, other languages, and other thoughts.

DHP
When I first started I really enjoyed the thought, The market is worth nothing to me, and since we are already talking to one another and there are others around, I don't have to convince anyone anymore. At that moment in time, we would proudly say, "We are not going to participate [in the market]." However, there is a growing necessity that everything we build politically we also oversee in the market. Some are using the term *Indigenous cinema* to refer to people who use Indigenous culture as a narrative substrate. But they are not proposing anything new; we continue living in inequality and have a very narrow field for coproductions.

I'm not saying that this is the formula for everyone, because there are audiovisual sovereignties that simply put the works on YouTube, that make them available on the internet. It is a way of affirming, "It is urgent to denounce this, or to simply show that we are alive." But I do believe that we are witnessing a time when sovereignty is being exercised with Indigenous quotas in national grants. In these quotas, community aesthetics should not chip away at what we deserve economically. For example, the solidarity between Indigenous peoples is used as an excuse to reduce budgets for logistics and catering. The fact that we are accustomed to sharing yucca and cheese for pleasure should not become an argument against a robust budget. If another film project is the beneficiary of a good budget, I deserve it too. I am saying that there should not be a distinction between some "superfilmmakers" and others who do not have the same recognition for their career or professional trajectory. Audiovisual sovereignty is also being built with these reflections.

FILM WRITING AND WEAVING

LHM
I was wondering, seeing David's film (but it is a question that can be extended to Olowaili and Mileidy), can weaving as a technology influence cinematographic language, either formally or spiritually?

OG
It is not that it *can* influence, but that it *really* influences our practices. When we talk about technology, I feel that we Indigenous peoples have had ancestral technology since we came to life. Weaving has been part of our education since we were little girls; since birth we have seen our grandmothers, our aunts, our

mothers weaving, whatever the weave. In my case it is the *mola* [textile art], in the case of Mile [Mileidy] it is the *chaquiras* [beads] and shirts, and in the Wayuu case it is the *chinchorros* [hammocks] and *mochilas* [backpacks]. All the productions that I have been able to carry out are linked to fabric production; it has been an inspiration.

My first short was about the mola. If Amado's hallmark is the cinema within the cinema, in my case it is that I tell stories from their origin, no matter the theme. I always talk about the law of origin, because in my town to tell stories you trace back to the beginning. Just as David was told that his short film is Wayuu, in my case my narratives are very Gunadule, because they reflect how we are.

The fabric has a great influence because it is our essence, it is what we show, it is who we are, and it is really our writing. A mola could be a script and a movie, just as a chaquira is a story. You can't dissociate that way of being, that fabric from the productions made in our territories or within our contexts.

MOD
Obviously, there is a lot of diversity in the way we do things. There is a teacher I follow closely, Miguel Rocha, with whom I have a process called *mingas de la imagen*, in which we talk about *oralitegrafías*. They are, basically, all those writing and knowledge systems that we have as Indigenous peoples and that go beyond alphabetic writings—for example, dance, music, and weaving. In this regard, I want to share some images.

(The group looks at a still frame from Mileidy Orozco Domicó's Bania*, 2015)*

This image is of a character named Caragabí, an adaptation of God in my community. Caragabí was originally a figure brought by Christian evangelists, but we, with actions and narration, still reproduce that same conception of a Son of God who comes to Earth. I weaved a black-and-white bracelet that he has in his right hand and that, in our ancestral vision, represents the organization or the community. In the scene he raises his hands, and in one of them you can see the beads with his symbology. Although the beads are out of context—because we are narrating that it is the origin of the world and the beads are already industrialized objects—I did not want to dissociate this technique or this form from what identifies us as Emberá. These are minor languages that only we can understand, because we belong to that context.

And the symbology of the other character represented, the girl, is related to an ant. Above her is a blue bead that symbolizes a drop of water. The story narrates the origin of the conga ants, which are the ones with a drop of water on the tip of their nose. Personally, I always try to spread awareness regarding all these ways that make us Emberá. It is my nonterrestrial bond with my community. It's like an ancestral heritage. And if I'm asked if there is something that my work resembles, I say that it resembles a fabric, because it is also something I've been taught since I was little. So for me it is much easier to relate the stages of bead weaving with the stages of audiovisual production. The relationship between weaving and cinema goes beyond a metaphor between our craft practices and audiovisual practices, because in weaving one finds cycles that repeat themselves, that return to the same point. So there are other ways of narrating and writing those stories; there are also chromatics and uses of colors, such as the ones Olo [Olowaili] has experimented with in her films.

DHP
Weaving is a point of reference for Indigenous cinema. Two years ago I found out that, in 1985, the filmmaker Luis Lupone promoted the first Indigenous Film Workshop in Mexico, which was assisted by eight women from the community of San Mateo del Mar in Oaxaca, including Teófila Palafox from the Ikoot people, considered the first Indigenous filmmaker from Mexico. Teófila was a midwife, healer, and weaver. During the workshop the women said, "The theme of [our] script is very violent, and, furthermore, why should we write in the first place?" So they wove the script, literally speaking. Each scene was woven, so that in the end the script was a collection of various knitted patches. This is how they were able to structure in their minds what came first, what came second; it became a matter of stitches: "What is the next stitch we are threading?" I found that fascinating. Teófila spoke about how important it was to make films at that time, because extractivist economies were displacing people in her territory. Now there is nothing.

LHM
I like to think that cinema as we know it today, as a speculative matter of thinking, of understanding the world, has a lot to do with weaving in its most intellectual aspect. In the West there is a tendency to reduce artisanal weaving to something that does not involve thinking. But the histories of weaving across latitudes have shown us the opposite: it is an extremely mathematical action in its precision, and it involves a very active memory. In fact, a digital camera and a loom are both based on a binary system of zeros and ones. There are technological connections between looms and cameras. The loom is an anticipation or precursor of the digital camera.

PM
I think that it is worth establishing an equivalence between weaving and weaving images. It is in the process of montage, the interlacing of images to tell a story, that one would find that connection.

LHM
I also think of all those women editors in the history of cinema from different geographies who have been the seamstresses of films, who have glued images together. Women editors have been around since the origins of cinema, so it is time to tear cinema from the virile myth of the rifle and claim other analogies.

But the equivalence is not only found in the editing stage. Since the dawn of cinema, women have made films. In Alice Guy's cinema, for example, the film is edited in camera. The camera itself is a device for montage. It is a way of thinking, a visualization mechanism, a narrative technology. All of that is analogous to weaving. It is not just the montage; it is the experience and the way of creating cinematic perception that is similar in many aspects to weaving—as Mileidy rightly indicated when speaking of the circular time of weaving and the incidence of it in her cinematographic writing. The ontology of weaving and that of cinema share more than a simple montage analogy. It is vision, it is time, it is embodiment, it is story, it is abstract thought. In many latitudes other than the West, women have described the equivalence of the loom and the cinematographic camera, or that of making movies and weaving in modern and contemporary practices.

WRITING AND THE VOICE OF THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSES

MOD
When we talk about the origins of cinema, I want to echo what they say in the north [of Colombia, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta]—those mamos that say that the mother and father of the image were in place long before. I feel that among us it is in the same way, from oral traditions, even from the womb itself, that you find the origin for this notion of narration. Information is transmitted not only through beads, songs, dances, and music, but through other formats and in different manners.

What I want us to see is that the narratives in our community are a technique; they have their own order.

(The group watches an excerpt from Mileidy Orozco Domicó's Mu Drua*, 2011)*

This is a narrated, sung story composed by my grandmother as a representation of what she saw in nature. Within our community, we call these songs *truambis*. These songs are partly inspired by everyday life. So what my grandmother did was compose a song for the family memory for when she will have passed away. She makes an allegory, "They brought her in like a *guagua*," which is an animal from our territory. And she begins to delve into a lot of elements that link humans with the territory, with nature.

OG
Mile and I have always shared communication spaces, meetings; I have also accompanied her to weave some of her productions. Mile has always struck me as a woman who, although she is still very young, has a mentality or an intelligence that is mature beyond her age. I don't know what goes on with the Emberá generally, but I feel that they are very mature, really very aware of what they do. Mile has that particularity; and, of course, she was in the academy and studied at the university, but without leaving aside her culture. She does everything very respectfully, shot by shot, as she wills. She is levelheaded when crafting stories, careful when carrying out productions and deciding which shots fit. Her stories have been screened in many parts of the world and here in Colombia as well. She is one of the women who started this audiovisual trend, at least here in Antioquia. Everything I've seen of Mile's, I've liked. Every time she or any of us tells a story we are opening ourselves to the world, we are making ourselves known intimately. Every time I watch one of Mile's films I feel like I'm getting to know Keratuma more—not Mileidy but Keratuma.

DHP
What I feel about Mileidy's cinematography is that through her projects she is healing and connecting things, which I am also doing in a certain way. For me, cinema has been the way to connect—less tacitly, since it is already a given for me in my homeland—with my parents, both Wayuu and Wayuunaiki speakers. As I said at the beginning, I enjoy the films of my brothers and sisters because with them I am also healing, connecting things, understanding others, and finding opportunities not only to understand the world, but to resolve curiosities and my own questions. The field is very different because of our Indigenous condition. And there are many questions that one must resolve, like whether one is rural or from the city. Today, when people ask me why I make the films I do, I answer, "Because I like it, because I feel like it, because I want to, and also because my ancestors worked three thousand years ago so that I could do this." Simple as that, no more.

PM
The entirety of *Mu Drua* is dominated by a personal tone that is very captivating. It is in the first person, which is a characteristic of Mileidy's work, and which resonates a lot in the context of Western cinemas that have the family as their starting point. It is the cinema of the first person. This subjective turn has also allowed her work to have a great reception among the non-Indigenous public. That condition also seems to me stimulating for Indigenous communication, for Indigenous audiovisual production. There is always a tension between the individual self and the collective self among the peoples.

To put it another way: When Amado made *Nabusímake, memorias de una independencia* [2010], with his children and himself as protagonists, he was criticized by some members of his town for making a family film. They didn't say it nicely, but in a cynical way: "It's a film about Amado's family." In other words, it is not as important as a film about the community. There are then some interesting tensions between the *I* and the *us*, regarding the artistic or intellectual productions of Indigenous directors.

DHP
I think that reaffirming oneself as Indigenous transverses collective issues, without ignoring that we also have the individual capacity to see things, to do things that don't compromise the collective, that do not compromise being political. That's something I'm taking on now. I was accustomed to not take into account sites for community organizing, until I had a conversation with Sister Luna Marandemi, where she told me, "We are already there [working in community], but due to conditions of precarity and inequity in our communities, we project that into our own interpretations and filmmaking." We need to reinforce positions that can be individual—not individualistic—or collective individualities that have a storytelling capacity. In this respect, indeed, Olowaili and Mileidy have a longer trajectory than me.

MOD
Regarding this matter of communities and personal stakes, what I have thought, what I feel, is that I do not have the right to speak for others, because I do not know them. For this reason, in some way, the stories that I have managed to transmit by audiovisual means were all done in confidence, with the sincerity and understanding of those around me. It is strange to talk about what one does not understand, what one does not know.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY AND THE STAGING OF THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

MOD
I go back to what Laura said about how this technology is an extension of one's gaze, of one's movement. I have a principle in almost all my works—the works that are true works, because I also produce less heartfelt institutional videos, which are the productions that pay me. In those that come from hunches [*corazonadas*], I feel that the relationship with technology is an organic one. I'm terrified of tripods in my audiovisual works. I don't like to see things static, because it is very similar to the gaze of physics and biology. I want to see something more artisanal, that moves, that

makes you feel that the camera is there, that someone is there, so that you feel the closeness of human relations.

For example, for the documentary *Mu Drua*, when I shared my parameters with my director of photography, he replied, "What do you mean without a tripod? A handheld camera? What about the focus?" He had always worked with a tripod, so he opposed [using handheld]. That decision is part of the challenge. I have to try to ensure that my sounds and images are not merely what I can perceive with my biological eye and ear. Rather, I have to take advantage of this technology that can get closer, that is more sensitive to sounds, that can highlight more details, allowing us to feel movement and presence in space-time.

LHM
I want to ask Mileidy about that nocturnal space in the sequence she shared with us, which left me stunned. Those images have stayed in my head, evoking a bit of the connection between cinema and spiritual worlds. I wonder if that nocturnal space has a force that invites us to a world beyond the visible, to a world that exists in other ways and that cinematographic practice can summon, listen to, and contemplate.

MOD
Even though an entire universe takes place at night, there is generally little that the night tells us in audiovisual productions, because physically the night brings many limitations in terms of lighting, sound, and other technicalities. That scene was beautiful because it transformed the script. What happened was that it rained, and as it was raining—and more so at night—there were plenty of fish. So it became a very enjoyable and abundant day for fishing. Later, while editing, we saw that that scene of fishing at night was closely linked, as a small metaphor, to the narration that my grandmother sang about departing as if she were a *guagua*. The documentary ends with another very nice scene after sunset, in which we sit around the firepit to tell stories, to talk.

LHM
Édouard Glissant, a Caribbean writer, talks a lot about opacity and how coming from a colonially misrepresented place you can use the power of images or narratives outwardly. There is also, from his perspective, great political value in opacity, in not making oneself known in a transparent or didactic way, but preserving those spaces of mystery, those nocturnal spaces, as a way of politically expressing the irreducibility of identity. So in Mileidy's images of the night I project these other reflections around the limits of visibility, and I also find there a very strong cinematographic gesture, as the audience is placed at the limit of what can and cannot be seen.

PM
But let's also consider extrafilmic gestures, in the sense of taking invisibility to its ultimate consequences: not allowing oneself to be filmed, not to be accessed [by the camera]. It is not about representing opacity in the cinema but about not making cinema [at all], not letting oneself be seen. In the Amazon there is a great power of the invisible in many ways, not only in the obvious sense of what we do not know and cannot see, but that of the uncontacted tribes and their reluctance toward photography and film. This a tremendously powerful position in a world that is dominated by images: not wanting to be violently exposed to the spectacle of intimacy.

LHM
I also feel it in the way you film, Mileidy, with very tight close-ups, in which there is little contextualization; this is an opacity that is very poetic, very evocative, and at the same time it preserves, protects, and cares.

DHP
I really like what Édouard Glissant proposes regarding the right to opacity. For me, this right to opacity or the issue of clarity involves a strong political commitment. The uncontacted Indigenous groups face the problem that their survival is tied to making themselves invisible. This is something great to reflect on for their counterparts, for us, the Indigenous people who work in cinema to tell their stories.

I remember an obituary I wrote after Óscar Catacora's death. I once told him that wide shots predominated in his film *Wiñaypacha* [2017]. And he gave me a spiritual explanation of why nature had always been very generous with him. But he also said that his references were the soap opera *Pasión de gavilanes* [2003–4, 2022–] for directing, *Dragon Ball Z* [1989–96] for cinematography, as well as Akira Kurosawa. I thought, You have to be either Indigenous or schizophrenic to put all those things together and say, "These are my guidelines for looking, directing; and these are the colors I want for my images." Another thing that impacted me was his position as a filmmaker. He said, "I don't want to be remembered for having made a relevant film; I want to be remembered as a good filmmaker." That's what the obituary I wrote is about.

I see the issue of opacity more in what is and what is not narrated, beyond chiaroscuros or fades to black. It amounts to the decision of what will appear in the shot, no matter how dark it is. My mother once told me, "Do not dare record any skulls at a second Wayuu funeral ever in your life. Because the skull is where the thoughts of that being and of that family are lodged; it is the dignity of that family, and it is the first thing that comes out when you go to a second funeral. If you record it, you are defacing and disrespecting that family." It pains me when I see other Indigenous and non-Indigenous brothers and sisters recording a Wayuu second burial. That is my interpretation of what goes on camera and what is not recorded, what the right to opacity is.

One must deal with these sorts of things, and I say this not because I am bitter or angry. In the world of documentaries, in the world of ethnography, people seek to provide the greatest contextual detail, so an audience can be amazed and say, "Oh, look, they confront death like this or like that." Where and when can you stop recording to avoid extractivism? At what point do representations cease to be relevant, and instead become a disservice to Indigenous people? Because if one allows it, when [non-Indigenous] others recount these events as their references, what authority is left for you [as an Indigenous person] to counter their claims?

GALO DUGBIS, OR HOW TO RESIST CONVENTIONS

(The group watches an excerpt from Olawaili Green's Galo Dugbis, *2020)*

OG
This short film is part of the television series *El Buen Vivir* [2019–], a production of the National Commission for Indigenous Communication [CONCIP]. The episode it aired in had "Caring for Earth" as its theme. The commission gave us the freedom to create what we wanted. In my