

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

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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 Some knew their colleagues' material beforehand, and some excerpts were from recent unpublished work; the reactions in all cases gave shape to the following discussion.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 in 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 Villafañá

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 Süküjula 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 Süküjula 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 in 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 Domínguez'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 transposes 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 chiaroscuro 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

case, I wanted to do it about the mola and about women, because most of the stories [in the series] were based on men.

I even thought about doing a story about a *cacique* [wiseman], but then I asked myself, Why do I have to tell a story about another man if we know that the ones who take care of the earth are us women, like my grandmothers and my aunts? I decided that I wanted to tell the story of weaving from the perspective of three generations: the grandmother, the daughter, and the granddaughter. Although the mola is not ancient, because it was made after the arrival of the Spaniards, the geometric figures and the symbolism come from the ancestral creation of the Gunadule people. The excerpt starts in black, but then we see a time-lapse of the stars. The Gunadule are children of the stars. A dreamworld woman came down to Earth, traveled through different layers of wisdom, and was able to see those geometric figures. The woman transmitted these symbols to all women, and they started to paint them on their skin. Of course, after the arrival of the Spaniards came the cloth and the needle, and the capes began to really take shape in cloth.

Returning to the theme of weaving as a metaphor, I say that it is not a metaphor as Pablo indicated, and I agree with Mile and Laura that it goes further. It is part of the discourse that I have crafted—I do not produce films but audiovisual molas. Why do I say that I produce audiovisual molas? Because [the mola] is a textile composition, and every textile has a process. In this case, the molas are layered. The molas can have up to ten layers of fabric, and I see those layers as the stages of the audiovisual. After completing all the stages, the result is a textile composition, and I notice that each element is a creative part of a production team. A

mola cannot be made without a needle, a mola cannot be made without thread . . . it really cannot be made without many small elements. The same occurs with an audiovisual production. I learned to weave molas, but I don't really make them. Our culture has it that women are to weave the molas, and since I don't do it, it concerned me to the point that I thought, OK, I don't know how to weave molas into fabric, but I know how to make audiovisual molas, I know how to tell our stories with images. That is my idea.

In *Galo Dugbis*, the mola worn by the girl, the mola worn by the grandmother, and the mola worn by the mother all have a meaning. They weren't made only for the shoot. Everything was thought out from the start. The molas that the three generations of women are weaving carry with them an important symbolism for our culture: circularity. As is often the case with Indigenous cultures, both weaving and thinking have a circular motion, they always end up where they began. And the basket in which they carry the materials from generation to generation is, let's say, a basket of wisdom to be transmitted. But we don't leave out men: the song in this short film was composed by a man. Really, these songs are only composed by Gunadule caciques because they know these stories well. Women do not sing these stories, but they do weave; they tell this story of the origin of the mola and the importance of caring for Earth through weaving.

Most of my films are also very intimate, because I only do them with my grandmother. I feel somewhat guilty for showing who my grandmother is in Colombia and in other countries. But my premise when telling or making these audiovisual productions comes from the law of origin. Why do I do it like this? Because that is how we Indigenous

peoples think; because my parents have also instilled it in me. Additionally, as David said, the audiovisual production made me understand myself, recognize myself, value myself as a woman, as an Indigenous person, and as an Indigenous female filmmaker.

In my town it is very difficult for a woman to leave for the purpose of studying. There are still very few women who are professionals; we are only a total of four women from the Gunadule community here in Colombia. It is a different story for the Gunadule of Panama; they have more opportunities there. That is why I decided to focus my stories on a feminine perspective and to narrate from my point of view as a woman, to bring dignity to Indigenous women. As Mile says, I am also far from telling stories that are not very close to me. It is respect toward the Other. I can tell stories that I know and that I feel from my heart, but if the day comes when I must tell a story about another Indigenous group, I would do it, but only from that trust that Mile refers to with the Kamentzá brothers.

PM

I want to highlight something about this work that, let's not forget, was part of a television series. It is a good way to start talking about a term that hopefully does not lose its original meaning: *decolonization*. What do I mean by it? This is a television series that has some conventions, let's put it that way. Television content programmers have a certain way of regarding narratives and controlling them, not through direct censorship, but always by insisting on what is valid and what is not valid for the medium. And among the things that were discussed in this series was an almost compelling pressure to write in three acts a dramatic

structure and to report on events. The television series had to expose the Indigenous world by informing the audience about that world. And this is precisely what Olowaili did not do, and that is [her film's] great merit, its great value: it is not an informative short film, in the sense that it does not convey data about culture, but rather it confronts us with a different lived experience and with other narrative forms. The film's resolution consists of two or three songs, without anyone telling us what they are. I think that, on a micro level of decoloniality, there is a great resistance to programming's impositions. Olowaili imposes a personal narrative on a system, the television industry, that generally prevents these personal narratives. And [her film] also allows us to experience through music, through singing, which is another way of opposing the television-driven information compulsion.

MOD

Yes, that's really cool. When I saw the series, the Olo segment did leave behind those characteristics derived from the formalities of television. And it reminds me of an anecdote about my first documentary, *Mu Drua*. I applied for a call to show it on the public channel Señal Colombia, and they replied, "No, you can't." Why? "Because it's slow, the shots are long, there's no clear common thread, and the runtime doesn't fit either." Then one is left with a "what?!" In a way, the Olo thing was a cool and replicable strategy that was also achieved in the next season of the series with the work *Pishik (Agüita)* [2020], by Misak director Luis Tróchez. I think that venturing into that territory and staking resistance in it is a very valid challenge. Venturing into the television ecosystem like this, subtly so, as Olo and Luis Tróchez did, is quite good.

A different matter is if [one's film] were destined for a YouTube channel, or something like that. But this is national public television, and, in fact, they are the ones who are accountable for generating content like this. We can acknowledge their efforts with funding opportunities they put out. However, there are still some parameters that they do not negotiate with Indigenous groups. It is impossible to access commercial television. Hopefully, someone from our towns can enter that universe in the near future. I really feel that we are in a stage of being born and reborn. There is still a gap between those of us who started—who are still here—and the newcomers. More little seeds are needed that catch one's pace and increase the experience one has had and take it to other contexts and other ways of understanding the audiovisual in our towns.

DHP

In this matter of revaluing the metaphor, the Indigenous proposition, the "little seed" that Mileidy mentions, there is an issue that goes beyond the idea of systematizing experiences and goes through writing and quoting us, recognizing us in the trade, knowing who is doing what. Not everyone knows the cinematography of one or the other, so I think there is also a coresponsibility to make the works available.

It is said that the cinematographic documentary was born with Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* [1922], but we have other Indigenous references for Inuit, such as [the films of] Zacharias Kunuk. His animated film [*Angakusa-jaujuq*]: *The Shaman's Apprentice* [2021] was shortlisted for the Oscars and is being proposed as a counternarrative to Adam McKay's *Don't Look Up* [2021]. I find it very nice that an animated short film, directed in an Indigenous language, is

the counterpart of a production that has all the privileges, all the funds, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Meryl Streep.

LHM

In the frame of discourses and questions surrounding the hybridity between documentary, fiction, and docufiction, what is real and what is staged, there is something in Olowaili's short that really catches my attention, and that is the porosity between planes in two dimensions and elements that pass into three dimensions, between the mola and what is being woven, which is seen, cinematographically, quite flat, then suddenly the bodies create volume. The molas are placed on the bodies, allowing them to transcend to another dimensionality. I feel that there is something with which many young people of this generation can identify—that those borders between documentary and fiction, between virtual and real, are completely blurred. Olowaili, can you tell us a little bit about how you conceive these cinematographic spaces? How do you work with those differences or those proximities between 2D and 3D space?

OG

For me, a mola is a story and it is a person; the mola is a form of protection for women, specifically. When I started thinking about the script for the short film I said, "We have to show three generations, we have to show the mola in three stages: the beginning, the middle, and the end." And the end is what the girl has on, which is the [mola] that carries the knowledge that the grandmother transmitted to the mother and the mother to the girl. At that moment I thought, What I want to do, when we are in the mola, is an overhead shot, from above, a look that is not human but spiritual, omnipotent like our gods or our goddesses, who are the ones transmit-

ting that knowledge to the grandmother, the mother, and, lastly, the girl.

The 3D part is very dreamlike because this story, like all the stories of the Gunadule people, is very dreamlike. I wanted to give it that dreamlike feeling because, as I said, historically it was in dreams that women saw the symbols. That's why I tried to show it as it really was. People who have gone to the Museo de la Mola [MUMO], which is in Panama, have seen these symbols in three dimensions; they can even make you dizzy. The molas are protective, they ward off bad energies. And what they do is to put you in a state of confusion, make you dizzy so that those energies leave, go away, and don't enter your body.

The original molas are only geometric. You can see molas today with figures of little birds, but those molas are not original, but recreations of the contemporary world. So that's why I decided to do [that sequence] in 3D. In Bogotá I met with the editor and told him that I wanted it to look like a kaleidoscope. "What do you mean *kaleidoscope*?" he asked me. I told him a little about the history. I had to show him something from that museum of the mola because really that part is like when the layer arrives to the original woman, and she sees all those symbols that are told in the history of our people. I decided to do it in 3D to make it a little more dreamlike. I don't know if it looked like that, originally.

I received a lot of feedback when the series aired. The [other films in the series] were very informative shorts, had very static camerawork, with interviewees looking at the camera. I don't know, I think I've always been very rebellious—my parents say so—and I've never liked having an interviewee on camera or looking directly, no. That which I do, as Mile says, is from the heart.

LHM

It is precisely that richness of interlocking layers of visual regimes that you employ, the different types of images that are intertwined, that interests me, not only formally but at the level of the audiovisual language that you propose—a hybrid language, almost like a collage. And it's also interesting that you don't present the layers as something different; rather, they are presented in a coherent space in which you go from the body to the representation of the mola.

DIALOGUE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

LHM

The other topic we would like to tackle is *ecology*. Hopefully, little by little we can unite and destroy the dichotomy or the separation between the technological and the ecological, and rather try to think of both things together.

PM

In that context that Laura describes, a missing line is that of *animism*. I am not a big fan of that word to describe the spiritual world in Indigenous cultures. They are owners of nature, spiritual fathers and mothers with whom humans dialogue. That is why it is said that the Indigenous people communicate with the stars, with animals, with the wind, with fire. This is a very complex issue and particular to each culture. We are not trying to propose a kind of homogeneous vision of the Indigenous world on this subject, but it would be good to think about it: What is this dialogue like between the visible world and the invisible world, and what does technology have to do with it? Is audiovisual technology able to record or represent these dialogues between the human and nonhuman worlds?

LHM

Yes, *animism* is not the right word. I think [what we are talking about] are the processes of vision or communication with a world that can be sensitive or infrasensitive, that does not necessarily reveal itself to vision as such, but rather needs rites of passage or rituals of communication to become manifest. It would be very pertinent to address that topic.

AV

By speaking and writing Spanish and communicating through the audiovisual, we respond to a need to dialogue with neighbors who are not Indigenous. It is part of our principles and strategies to defend the territory and culture. As for nature, we approach it as a living being, with rights. Nature has spirits. We speak for those who have no voice.

DHP

What Amado mentions is the fundamental pattern that each town has in its ways of determining topics, what a camera means when it enters an Indigenous territory and what service it provides for us. There are protocols in each town.

On the other hand, cinema has allowed me to think about ecology beyond saying that we must defend animals and defend the territory. We Indigenous peoples call the defense of our territory *ecology*, but through cinema another knowledge is revealed. How can we defend the territory if we do not know which are the endemic species of our territories? How do we present them within the narrative construction of cinema? In other words, if when constructing narratively the hours of the afternoon I record the songs of a bird that sings at six in the afternoon and assemble it as a sonorous sequence, I am already constructing, in sonic and

aesthetic terms, from what my territory provides me with. In the same manner, montage can also include other patterns of nature, so to speak, that determine hours, tones, moods, environments.

MOD

Audiovisual production has been quite good [for me], because while I was in the city I felt somewhat anesthetized. There was a large, sensible gap between the territorial physical space of urban areas and the territorial physical space in which I had lived my early childhood.

After many years of experience, I have come to several reflections. The first is [the need] to demystify that nature has no voice; I believe the notion it has no voice reflects more on humanity than on the environment. Nature, its landscapes, all its ecosystems have been speaking to us from the beginning of the universe about sustainability, about tremendous reciprocity. They are telling us of connections and relationships founded long before our personal arrival in this universe.

In 2012 I was given the opportunity to attend a workshop at the International Film and Television School [EICTV] in Cuba. The documentary lecturer told us that to craft a story one must know how it ends. This surprised me a lot, because I generally know where I start but rarely know where my story will end. This theory drove me crazy, and in the second documentary I produced, which is called *Truambi* [2019], I scripted the ending first: “This is the story of a girl who goes and plants her navel. The documentary is going to end with a ritual of grounding the navel in the territory.” And how surprised was I when I went in with the whole team to shoot and I heard the territory telling me, “No, it’s not the time. We’re not going to allow you to make the film. You want to come here to record a

ritual with the girl, but you are not doing things right. You already have your end, but you have not heard ours.” When we went to do the final scene that was going to finish off the documentary, nature managed to prevent it. Everything was ethically prepared with very professional people, and everything went very well in an intimate atmosphere. When we went to watch the footage there was nothing, nothing at all.

I think about the territory’s voices. For example, when it starts to rain in the context of a film shoot, everything stops. One of the things I like to challenge the most is the idea that rain is a mess for shooting. “No, it can’t be—one day of filming is ruined.” But when one knows how to take advantage of and accurately portray those moments and those states of nature, one delves deeper into their daily life and their language—for example, when the birds that belong to the location sing, I feel like those moments are missing in cinematography. I think what we’ve done so far is still very much focused on humanity and not on the grievances, so to speak, of nature.

To talk about this relationship with ecology, I also learned something about the rituals of filming, what one exercises in the territory. One must take care of knowing how much to disclose.

(The group watches an excerpt from Mileidy Orozco Domínguez’s Truambi)

We recognize the role of nature, of what is around, through the practices and experiences that we learn cohabitating with our territorial surroundings. In the excerpt we see the initiation of a girl who is in a relationship of recognition of her territory, while looking around, picking flowers.

Often when we film paths or routes there is no pause or break to make passing

through a place more significant. It caught my attention when my mother, who was tired of carrying my niece, stopped and unloaded her. She taught me something I did not know, about how to resolve one’s needs in the territory. In a different context, [the action] is simply, “Take a glass and drink some water.” But here what my beautiful mother does is contribute in a very natural way some of the ancestral wisdom that she knows. She was never instructed [by me] to do anything. In the documentary genre, or at least in the form that I have adopted, one of the things I dislike the most is duplicating shots, repeating actions that have already happened.

So she takes a nearby leaf, makes a tumbler, and teaches the girl; the girl, as she is very receptive, follows the action, making her best effort, and they finally resolve that physical need to quench thirst.

NK

In my case, as an Indigenous communicator I come from the heart of the jungle. I grew up there, barefoot, with a very close relationship with nature. My whole life took place in our territory, directly linked to nature. The stories of origin, the cures, the rituals—including evil things, such as illnesses—are also related to ecology, to the natural world. My dad says that when an elder or someone who lives in the territory knows how to interpret nature, they predict when a disease is coming. They can prevent it through their knowledge of nature, and later that benefits us.

The audiovisual content I produce is directly related to the territory. Everything that we do is part of the territory. We learn our language in the environment, and we also learn culture, the ancestral knowledge, through that relationship with nature.

The short film I made for the *El Buen Vivir* series is called *Raã*, *Plantas de sabiduría para armonizar el mundo* [*Plants of Wisdom to Harmonize the World*, 2020]. *Raã* means something that one wants very much, a very valuable thing. From our origin on planet Earth, we were given the coca plant, a medicinal plant of orientation. It is a plant that cools, that sweetens so that we can understand one another and coexist with one another and with nature, so that we do not harm one another. According to our origin myth, before [us] there was another world with other beings. The plants were poisonous, the animals were gigantic, and men were more evil than now. That world was destroyed by our Father, the creator. In this new world we still retain that essence of evil, of destroying what is around us. Precisely so that this does not occur, we were given coca and tobacco by the previous world, which represent the feminine and the masculine principles.

My short talks about these medicine plants and their relationship with human beings. Every time we do something like hunting, fishing, working on the *chagra* [small plot of farm land], procuring caraná leaves to build a *maloca* [communal dwelling], we ask for permission. And when this relationship of respect between man and nature—what I call *ecology*—is broken, the conflict arises that is already historically traced by our origin tales. I am not going to talk about climate change, because I believe that when we talk about climate change we are talking about what white people want to hear. Major Eliseo says that [nature] is precisely our mother, who feels exhausted and starts to react. Every mother is sweet, patient, but at some point, she reacts. That's what I think is happening in the world right now. There is a weariness due to the misuse, the mistreatment of our environment, our mother.

My short is closely related to traditional songs, because for us rituals are the way to align the earth, the environment, so that we don't have spiritual problems, health problems, issues of every sort. When this spiritual world or spiritual womb is opened during rituals, what we do is summon, through the songs, the spirits for the healing of the earth. That is why in my work I always use many of my own songs and my own instruments. Since we speak different languages, it is important to know what the songs are saying [through subtitles].

Often the question of opening up to the world worries and wearies me. When this new audiovisual content emerges, with its own narratives, we are also exposing ourselves to other people wanting to take our narratives and speak for us.

PM

Thank you, Nelly. You have addressed a very important point, which is to question the mediation of non-Indigenous authors who speak for the Indigenous. In this sense, I invite Amado to enlighten us a bit about the *marunzama* and the *bunkei*, the instruments of power used by the mamos to communicate with spiritual fathers and mothers. It is not that they speak with the elements of nature, but with the spirits of nature. I think that this also reinforces, as Nelly said, the issue of Indigenous sovereignty in the transmission of knowledge, in this case the *kunsamu*, or traditional Arhuaco knowledge.

AV

Even though we come from four different Indigenous groups, which share a territorial mission but speak different languages, our mamos or spiritual authorities agree that we're left with one

thought, one language, a territory, a way of seeing and growing in the world, with a responsibility to take care of nature. I value these spaces of sharing between brothers and sisters, knowing that we all have a different vision, and we do not intend to say that our vision is the one you must adopt. It is more about exchanging thoughts and about how we uphold our identity.

Communication has an origin before the birth of light, before the world materialized. It is different from communication through the tools we adopt. Communication for us is, for example, deciphering dreams, understanding the movement of the air, of the earth through tremors, the song of birds, the movement of different parts of the body. The elements of power that endow mamos to communicate spiritually are received through training. Then, when the apprentice knows the function of all the elements of nature, knows the root of diseases, he receives a *marunzama*, which is not only an object but an element that represents the daughter of nature. It is through that daughter Marunzama that the mamos can communicate with the spiritual parents and have answers to different problems.

PM

So who holds the ability to interpret the communication with that spiritual or invisible world? Will it be only the mamos, the wise, the *payés*, the shamans, who can mediate in that world? And do the rest just listen and try to understand?

AV

When you're old, even if you're not a mamo, you still learn things, about the interpretation of dreams, for one. The dream is not the same for everyone, even among the members of the same group. If I dream of an overflowing river,

the interpretation for someone else will be different. It is not a formula, so to speak. The interpretation of the song of birds, the wind, or a dream can be done by anyone who understands that these signs are warning about something—for instance, that something is going to disrupt the family's balance, such as an illness or bankruptcy. But the mamos do have direct control of these problems; they are the ones who can say, "This has been a failure in the spiritual world. We have to restore the balance, then we have to recompense so that this problem does not reoccur."

NK

I agree. As a living being in a territory, one interprets and learns with the passing of time. In our culture there are young people—future leaders—who have learned to interpret the signs of nature since they were children; they have sat down with the most knowledgeable. Anyone can interpret what we all know: if the rains come, if wind comes, if a bird sings. All of this is known by almost the entire community, because we learn it from childhood.

I am going to share an anecdote from 2020. Although we are already familiar with video devices in our territory, a non-Indigenous colleague, Pedro Samper, made a television series called *Originarios* with our support. The story about the sacred coca plant took us to La Chorrera, to my father's *maloca*. My father received us at the *mambeadero*. He sat with the team of non-Indigenous filmmakers, oriented them, gave them *ambil*, and had them *mambear* [chew coca]. At one in the morning a very strong storm broke out. I heard my dad arrive at the center of the *maloca*, and he began to communicate with the spirits. The spirits demanded to know why my father wanted to tell

the whole story about the sacred plant, about mambe. It seemed strange to them that non-Indigenous people sat in the mambearo, since it wasn't their space. My dad explained to [the spirits] why he needed to narrate the sacred origin of the plant. It wasn't that they needed to mambear for mambear's sake. It was a way to guide these people through our culture. As soon as my father finished speaking, the thunder, lightning, and rain subsided.

What I want to say is that, in that sense, I would not be the one who was going to sit in the middle of the maloca to talk to the spirits and say, "This is what we need to do." I don't have that power; no young person does, not just anyone. The true communicators are those men and women prepared with much sacrifice to face the profound knowledge of the world and its law of origin.

WORDS, THINGS, AND IMAGES

PM
Nelly, I am going to piggyback on what you said about songs and music to establish here a relationship between the word and the landscape or the natural world, however we want to call it, in audiovisual production. You mention that it is good to also subtitle the songs, because they have meanings; those words are communicating things to us, they're not just melodies.

NK
Yes, of course, they are also part of the narrative. In fact, we say that the traditional spaces, the spiritual house or maloca is a feminine womb, a womb where the word is born, guided by the spirit of the creator Father through the masculine and the feminine that are symbolized by the tobacco and the coca.

PM
When Amado said, "We are communicating with the world of the stars, the water, the earth, and giving a voice to those who have no voice," and, on the other hand, when Mile stated that nature has a voice and is communicating, it is a purely semantic matter. Both are related in their notion that the natural world, of which men and women are part, speaks not in the sense of words but in another way; it communicates in another way.

NK
Yes, Pablo, it is good to clarify what "they have no voice" means. Not all Indigenous people have that connection that traditional elders have. The grandparents, the elders, the wise are very important because they are the ones who know how to connect with and interpret nature. And when our colleague Mileidy says that the natural world has a voice, it is obviously through these essential people in our communities that nature communicates. We know when it is going to rain, when it is going to thunder, when someone is in danger, when someone is going to die, because the herald bird is singing. We know what is going to happen when dogs cry at night. Different animals bring different messages. Our struggle in the audiovisual realm is precisely to create a conduit for the voice of these traditional leaders. [The audiovisual] is a tool of strength, visibility, and political struggle.

Because we are among colleagues, I am going to tell you about a work in progress. Through illustrations we want to interpret what education was like within the mother's womb—the different ways of eating, the complete diet, how men or women who became leaders or traditional elders were educated from the very womb of their own mother. In the current education of schools, we are disconnected from

that part of ourselves, and, in fact, our forest is losing its voice. My impression of the audiovisual is that it is a form of resistance, of political, cultural, and social struggle.

PM
I think it is a huge challenge for Indigenous filmmakers to express that communication from the natural world [to non-Indigenous people]. Of course, you hear the song of a bird, you hear the wind, or you see a cloud and you know what they mean because you are close to elders who guide you. But for those of us who did not partake in that learning, how to understand that communication?

NK
You are right. We must think and rethink all this and also be careful with what we tell. We cannot communicate everything through these means. From our spiritual basket of resistance not everything can be shared, because, as the grandparents say, then we are left empty.

PM
That's why I think it's worth thinking about the word, the spoken word, in Indigenous audiovisual productions.

MOD
I have also thought about these issues. When I watch movies, from time to time there are things I don't understand, and yet I watch the movie. I think there are several positions. There is the position of autonomy saying, "This is very specific to my territory, and it is okay that it is not fully understood." Another position on communication says, to the contrary, that it is a priority to inform, that the message needs to be clear.

But about those symbols, icons, codes, aesthetics, and sonic resources that are

our own and are intelligible to those that belong to the territory, we can also state, "You can take what you can from it." In addition, each work is subject to all kinds of subjective interpretations. There is also the other challenge, which I think is what most of us have immersed ourselves in, which is that of interculturality, having those privileged spaces to talk, explain, and share what is happening in our work. The truth is, my priority in films is directed toward the inside, to my family and my community, even if [the films] have reached an outside, with other interpretations. Obviously, there are people who do not belong to our territory who want to share our cultural understanding and would like to know everything. But that is also a path. It is like when someone who is preparing to be a *jaibaná* [spiritual healer] must follow a learning curve. We do not have to shorten messages for outside interests or strip ourselves completely naked in our audiovisual works.

DHP
The cinema of our Sierra Nevada colleagues has had a global audience, has managed to be very persuasive; and although [their films are] generally oriented toward a conversation about climate change, it is a conversation to which we are not invited as representatives of Indigenous groups. In that agenda, there is a narrative that green-party representatives use to tell audiences about responsible mining, and so on. Indigenous peoples have their own narratives with which they articulate what is going on with the climate crisis. For example, the Wayuu people announce a climate crisis when recognizing the effects of coal exploitation. But especially during the pandemic we see many narratives from women elders, from

Indigenous grandmothers, about how life should be managed or about placing life at the center of knowing how to heal Earth in the face of, precisely, the climate crisis.

The other thing I would like to point out is the exploration of what Indigenous futurism proposes as a narrative possibility—that is, a way for people to manage hope [for the future] through foundational tales. Those myths of origin are the basis for determining what I am going to tell, how to narrate, and what genre I am going to use, whether it is science fiction or not. I will give a small example that I have discussed with friends of how to explore new narratives: Starting from a Wayuu origin story, a film can be shot in Japan, spoken in Wayuunaiki, and have no humans in it, only cyborgs that question the notion that humanity is a part of nature. I think that this is valid insofar as our origin stories are also very futuristic and have intensified aesthetics. Those are the things that come to my mind when listening to foundational myths.

KA+ JANA UAI, THE VOICE OF OUR IMAGE

LHM

Thank you, David. I also wanted to ask Nelly if she could tell us about the school of Indigenous communication that she created in the Amazon. Here, in fact, the theme of the voice comes up again, since [the school] is called—forgive my pronunciation—Ka+ Jana Uai, “the voice of our image.”

NK

If you search on Google you will find that a lot of outlets have given exposure to the work we did with the *El Buen Vivir* series and other work we have done in the school. These works draw the attention

of people who are looking for stories to tell and come to our territory. They do not seek to strengthen communities or build the capacity of Indigenous youth or leaders themselves to tell their own stories; instead we end up being once again the objects of cinema and the audiovisual industry. There are many risks that must be analyzed thoroughly. I have called on colleagues to be very careful. This is also a way of resisting. When we tell our own story, we have to protect it in the same way that our grandparents and our ancestors have been protecting knowledge. We cannot open ourselves to that world, because we are going to end up the same as we did during the rubber industry era.

Precisely, the school is born from that fear and the need to make Indigenous peoples visible. It's something that has concerned me since I was very little. Like my father, I have always been a person who has not been very open to going to forums to talk about our culture and to say that I am a leader. Or to put my feathers on so that they can recognize me as Indigenous. No, I'm not one of those, but there are colleagues who do lend themselves to [these activities]. At first I was alone at the school, winning over the youth and speaking about the importance of being able to communicate our own perspective, everything that occurs in our territory. I started with a small camera and with—as people say—“warming up the ears” of our leaders. Then two colleagues joined me, and we started taking pictures, going to meetings, going to other communities, and raising awareness through our networks. But then we said, “No, things shouldn't be this way; we not only need technical training, but to think on our own, so that we can be the carriers of our word, make it be heard with these tools in the best way.”

I have always fought against those people who come to misconstrue our territory and our culture and produce content that folklorizes us. The school was born in 2000, and in 2012 we started as a collective, which is also called Ka+ Jana Uai, a consensual space where there are all kinds of classmates, not only from the Murui people, but also Ticunas, Yaguas, Cocamas, Letuamas, Mirañas, Boras, Ocainas, and Winanes. It was named in honor of a Murui companion who founded the collective. We said, “Let's name it in the Murui language.” And with several elders, including the abuelo Bolívar, the deceased protagonist of the film *Embrace of the Serpent* [2015], we picked out several names. Ka+ Jana Uai is “the voice of our image,” because that is how the elders interpreted it. It is your image, even though it is you who are speaking; it is already in a future tense. The elderly you leaves, and the image continues to speak.

At school we train in our own forms of communication and [teach] the political implications of [these forms]. We tell the kids what's behind all this: The media doesn't communicate just for the sake of communicating, people don't create content just for the sake of it; it is necessary to carry a message and guide politically. The school is itinerant and does not depend specifically on whether there are financial resources available or not. For me, school and this communication thing is not a specific project, but a process. And things within the territories must be processes; they are not about making money. Surely, the day I'm gone there will be aware young people who can continue this fight.

THE WORLD OF ARTISTS AND INDIGENOUS CREATION

LHM

Thank you very much, Nelly. I would like to pose one last question that brings us back to the issue of audiovisual sovereignty: How do you feel about the art world's growing interest in practices that come from the frontlines of Indigenous resistance that you have been addressing? Do you feel included in these spaces, or is it, once more, a way to extract creations and knowledge from places that have historically been subject to so much violence?

MOD

I feel that there are two valuable ways to think of participation with the art world, with people who do not directly belong to any Indigenous community: there are *collaborative* and *protagonist* forms. Why both at the same time? Because sometimes people say, “Come on, help me.” And, in the end, the one who was from the [Indigenous] community and participated was not even named. Or [the people from the art world] do not hold due respect to characters, wisemen and -women who make themselves available, who share the ancient memories they guard.

For a long time, we have been objectified, both in human relations and in misrepresentations of what occurs within our territory. I feel that it is possible to collaborate with people who are not from our communities based on respect and active participation. Perhaps our community does not have the same storytelling capabilities or cannot match the technical or creative knowledge of external production crews. We are generally the ones who have a wider scope in the content of stories, because we grew up immersed in these stories. So it takes an appropriate

disposition, sensitivity, humility, and language to achieve a fluid and collaborative dialogue.

Here the concept of cocreation is key. It is not about avoiding working with people who are not from the community, but about having a mutual project. It is not a question of prohibition. But it needs to come from our own storytelling efforts to create beautiful thoughts that also speak of cultural respect.

NK

I think that we are well oriented at this moment because, for the first time, as a people and as communicators, we are taking the reins. We already have a public policy worked out by us, and we have a television plan. Therefore, at this moment, despite the fact that we are only starting, although the struggles have been going on for quite some time, I think that we are on a good path. I am not closed to the possibility of doing work with non-Indigenous people, but precisely one of my tasks is to guide them. If we are going to work with non-Indigenous peoples, let coparticipation or mutual participation be real and true. Not someone from outside speaking on behalf of the people from the territory, which is why I always criticized the movie *The Path of the Anaconda* [Wade Davis, 2019]. It seems to me that such films are still very colonialist. It is always the white anthropologist interpreting what the abuelo says. No, we communicate better the word as it is, articulate what our elders are saying.

I think that just as we create schools of communication, intercultural schools can be created (I don't know what else to call them) tackling education, the environment, languages—both our own and Spanish, and perhaps other languages. All of this strengthens us as peoples. We do not need to close the door to Western knowledge but ask it to respect who we are.

AV

When we started walking this path, we found an appealing way of interpreting Indigenous thought and adapting it for the likes of an external public. We have also been working in a space called the National Commission for Indigenous Communication, in which the five national Indigenous organizations in Colombia participate.

In that space we have made it clear that communication from Indigenous peoples must be direct, without intermediation. That is why even in the Sierra Nevada we Arhuacos cannot speak for the Koguis or for the Wiwas, because everyone has the obligation and the right to represent themselves. If we work with outsiders, we use a document which is signed to ensure that the resulting product becomes collective property; it's not even [the property of] the filmmaking collective we are part of. If we follow this procedure, we won't feel that they are squeezing us to later keep our knowledge, because everything that has to do with the image and with our own thinking is tied to this document. The public we are targeting is not Indigenous, but there are two ways [we make a film]. On the inside it serves as an archive, deposited in the territory for future generations; and on the outside, we need them to know how we are, how we think. Development for us is to stay as we are, strengthening our roots.

Some friends tell me, "Amado, you are an artist." And I answer, "No, I'm not an artist. I'm a scared Indian who wants to continue being the way I am." I have never been able to nest the word *artist* in my vocabulary. My intent consists in transmitting the concerns of the mamos to the outside world. And so I feel that the youth who are here with us should follow this path of sharing, because we see the need for our "little brother" (non-Indigenous peoples) to change their attitude toward nature.

Endnotes

- 1 *Mambeadero*: a reunion site built in domestic or collective spaces with spiritual purposes. Men initiated to the spiritual uses of the coca plant and the mambe (a green powder made with coca plants and other leaves) gather there on a daily basis to discuss individual and collective issues, and to communicate with more-than-human beings.