This book presents an artistic and inter-epistemic investigation into modes of territorial thinking from the Andean-Amazon region in Colombia. Combining artist's films and participatory research, the works documented here seek to reveal the territory as a system of life-enabling relations across obscured layers of occupation and governance above, across, and below the ground. While this vertical territory remains a site of struggle, it is also here where a silent effort towards biocultural peacebuilding is re-emerging.

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FELIPE CASTELBLANCO

CARTOGRAPHIES OF THE UNSEEN

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To Patrice and Luciano

CARTOGRAPHIES OF THE UNSEEN

Felipe Castelblanco

Basel. June, 2023

Map of Colombia. Source: Agustin Codazi Institute

Abstract

Cartographies of The Unseen is a practice-based artistic research project -2018 - 2021) that investigates modes of territorial thinking from the Global South. Combining artists films and socially engaged art practices, it seeks to reveal the landscape as a system of life-enabling relations across obscured layers of occupation and governance above, over, and below the ground. The central case study is a contested Indigenous territory in the Southwest of Colombian, located in a highly diverse ecoregion that acts as a transition zone between the Andes and the Amazon.

For centuries this area has been the epicenter of ecological and epistemic violence, enacted along the vertical axis of space, connecting visible and subvisible layers across the landscape. Therefore, the project unfolds as an exploration of this vertical axis understood as layers of biocultural relations, revealing clashing historical, political, and aesthetic trajectories space cognition and modes of perception. This project embraces creative co-production and decolonial sensibilities by accompanying an ongoing process of biocultural peacebuilding and self-determination, spearheaded by Indigenous leaders and land protectors from the region.

Therefore, drawing upon Indigenous territorial thinking and aesthetics from the Southwest of Colombia, particularly among the Inga, Kamnesta, Quillacinga, and Siona communities, and using participatory research methods, this practice-based inestigation aims to formulate: 1) an inter-epistemic dialogue around notions of territoriality; 2) support the co-presence of Indigenous aesthetics in the global spheres of knowledge and cultural production; 3) and finally to co-create immersive experiences which can contribute to recalibrate western approaches to territorial thinking, spatial aesthetics, and modes of belonging to the planet.

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Navigating This Book:

This book combines three tracks of content and it can be read in various ways:

1. The white sections, Chapter 1 to 5, present analysis, historical and theoretical context, as well as reflections on the process against the background of cultural studies, political ecology, and aesthetic inquiry.

2. The blue sections include three stories derived from field notes, which combine facts and fiction to create a universe where the ideas that have challenged me speak back to the reader in a literary style. These include A) the paradoxes of territorial production, B) the vertical gaze of the colonial mindset vis-à-vis the multidimensionality of the Andean-Amazon landscapes, and the last one, C) explores the process of communication with the territory as a sentient being and through ancestral knowledge.

3. Gathering the outcomes of the research, the black sections act as a type of catalog for the films, artworks, and installations produced during the course of this project. Each one of these sections has a QR code that leads to a URL where the films, website or related works can be accessed.

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Prelude:

A Story of Folly, Mirages, and Great Terrible Ideas

Deep in the mangroves that extend across the Colombian Pacific coast, if lucky, one might stumble upon various Indigenous and afro Colombian villages caught up in a continuous row between the river and the ocean, the soils, the soul, dreams, and facts, the sweet and salty.

Between 2000 and 2008, I lived in Bogotá, but I also traveled constantly to remote territories along the Colombian Pacific coast. I went there year after year, always searching for a spot where I could set up camp and build a house using the driftwood gifted to me by the tides. I also wanted to dance Currulao and coexist with other living forms that existed as in-between definitions, just as I had always done in Colombia. Here, or indeed there, several fugitives from the violent social machine that we call 'development' meet: Afro-Colombians dreaming quietly of post-slavery, free nations; Indigenous communities, mostly Emberas, guarding the last unexplored stretch of the Darien Gap; rebel groups still fighting for long-lost utopian egalitarian worlds; and even dangerous smugglers living on the legacies of defunct Caribbean pirates. Along these shores, there are also magical fish just waiting to be caught. They pull on the line and drag the fishermen into the deep to swallow them. Insects, snakes, and all kinds of tiny animals waiting for sweet and naïve blood and all the better if it is blood from ill-prepared European researchers working for pharma companies, sent to take — without permission and without returning — the secrets of sacred plants from the depths of the jungle.

If there is a place where time becomes a walking being, sometimes moving backward, sideways, and in circles, then this place is called Las Bocas del San Juan. Here, the river San Juan dresses, acts, and sounds like a sea and eventually becomes the ocean. One even feels that life itself would settle here to take it easy and watch everything pass by. This point marks a confluence of time and space, beginning and end, the seen and unseen, done and undone. In the early 2000s, guerrilla and paramilitary groups controlled this region. They learned that neglecting to carry a spare pair of thick and dry socks was a major risk. Indeed, socks were the most precious currency among the zombie-like rebel armies (ELN, FARC, EP, AUC, PPC, etc.)

that walked up and down the dense, wet, and vast Darien Gap. For me, this area never felt synchronized with any familiar form of living: time, for example, was sometimes dominated by a loss of time due to confrontations between the armed groups. People planned their lives around periods of downtime in the conflict. In other instances, any sense of the passing of time was absent, as the towns prepared for the unexpected and unforgiving state of "nothing happens." Like a web of secret routes, alternative paths shaped the territory of this part of the continent and enabled the locals to evade one another. Here, the ocean mixes secretly with the many rivers that end in that region, creating an intricate system of channels that change direction from daytime to nighttime. One can't tell where the country ends or begins.

Many times, I witnessed how the waves of the Pacific Ocean granted the towns new land, massive stretches of land, as the water changed its path. A few minutes later, the ocean had taken away the main square or the only named street in the towns, as if it were a fair price to pay. The people living in such locations were constantly on the move, constructing and deconstructing their own spatial referents, forming territories that stretched far into the water and deep into the heart. Entire towns became islands in a day. People swapped houses every once in a while, motivated by the orientation they preferred to live in or would help cure some mystical disease.

It was there, near Las Bocas del San Juan, that I had the brilliant and terrible idea of buying a piece of land. I was told that every man needed to carve out a piece of space for himself to cling to and rule as his own nation, where the glare of a civilized way of life, like the Global North, could shine on the doorstep. The faceless voices from the city inferred that this way of life would keep pushing the frontiers of reason, order, and human law into the dark corners of our undomesticated country. And I listened. Year after year, I traveled with a little pile of easy money that I had made in the city and slowly but surely convinced the only greedy man I could find there to sell me a piece of his true no man's land.

While touring the site, awed by the thickness of its green and the smell of its soil, I became committed to buying a piece of land from him. This man, Mr. Panama, took a yearly mortgage payment, built a fence around the site, and, for a little extra, kept an eye on my little dreamland. Things moved smoothly for the first few years, and the plans grew bigger and bigger, so I arranged a surprise trip to bring the rest of the money and finally build something. After the usual difficulties of reaching the region (floods, storms, and a queasy stomach), I managed to reach Mr. Panama's doorstep. He was somewhat hard to find initially, and I realized that I was a stranger in strange territory. His house was a bit further southwest, a bit higher, and slightly narrower than I remembered. Also, the originally flat ground now felt like a rolling hill. After a few beers and many stories about his constant battle with the Pacific Ocean, Mr. Panama finally took me to see my site. We walked and walked, getting closer to the beach until the waves washed our feet. With an apologetic but serene voice, Mr. Panama asked me to stare at the ocean.

Suddenly we saw the waves retreat and, for a split second, they revealed hundreds of meters of beach covered in shiny black sand. The tropical light reflected so strongly on the sand that it was hard to see where the sky and the ocean met. With every wave, we walked further and further while he kept pointing towards the horizon. He finally confessed that after the new 'big waves,' he had surrendered to the Pacific Ocean. When we finally couldn't walk anymore, this former fisherman turned landlord pulled a wet piece of paper out of his pocket and laid it flat on the water. I stared at the paper floating between us and I could see the note he had written for me. This was a simple contract between two men, but all of a sudden, it had become a contract between us and this immensity: this little note described how Mr. Panama had once sold me a piece of the Pacific Ocean.

Introduction

Landing

In many ways, I embarked on a practice-based Ph.D. by embracing a concern I share with many geographers and other social scientists, all trying to understand parallel epistemic trajectories of spatial cognition, which yield conflicting notions of territory across traditions and hemisphere. Often described in human geography as a unit of space under the control of a particular human group, the territory is a construct that communicates claims to space through the exercise of power (Antonsich 2017). These often follow the erasure of localized knowledge and spatial practices in favor of more totalizing models for land management, enclosure, representation, and attunement to the planet.

However, in the process, one mode of producing and representing space overlaps onto another, creating a complex earthly geography that, I argue, far exceeds the geometries and planar views upon which western visual culture creates the territorial imaginary. Instead, facing power as it acts on the earth's volumes and creates layered spatial relations below, across, and above the terrain, this project seeks new signifiers for the territory and ways of seeing the landscape past the horizontal paradigm that divides soils and skies, still common in western aesthetic traditions. Therefore, it is precisely in the overlaps, the entangled layers of power, but most importantly, in the vertical axis that enables relations between culture, nature, and non-human beings where I situate this investigation. Not only conducting research but also performing as a para-academic1 researcher, I borrow from ethnography, geography, and political ecology to weave together an interdisciplinary inquiry supported by the practice of socially engaged art.

Furthermore, I align with those trying to pick up the pieces laid by Deleuze and Guattari when they began to interrogate the transformation of earthly domains through a process of territorialization as one

1 By operating from "the position of the 'para' [the 'beside'], a position of intimate exteriority, or exterior intimacy" (Joy 2013) to academic disciplines, I enact a relation to knowledge that allows me to seek it indistinctively from an array of disciplines, resources and voices to create a personal intellectual context without being accountable to the conceptual boundaries of the discipline.

of constant transformation (Elden 2009). First, Deleuze and Guattari not only differentiated between the idea of deterritorialization as the consequence of the subjectivation of life under neoliberal regimes but recognized a sort of reterritorialization process that immediately follows. Second, they noticed the renewal of long-fought battles for space and its uses, as well as the production of competing earth-bound and redistributed identities (ibid). Through this framework, earth, as a finite milieu for humankind, is once again put at the center of power disputes that are taking place at various spatial scales and locales (Mickey 2015). From deep-sea mining and large-scale agroindustry to carbon capture from the atmosphere, mining, or even constant armed conflicts in resource-rich regions, the process of claiming, erasing, transforming, monetizing, or terraforming earth is taking unprecedented turns and operating at unusual sections across the vertical axis. And while a future in which humans will no longer be earth-bound is still a faint idea, countless processes of land-grabbing, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization are morphing into more sophisticated ways to recolonize earthly space and erase numerous kinds of spatial practices based on ancestral traditions.

Often, reterritorialization comes hand-in-hand with violence against people living in resource-rich regions, once considered remote and disconnected from global consumption and trade but embedded within the supply chains for industry (i.e., the Amazon's natural rubber reserve), as well as the destruction of their environments. Today, reterritorialization drives clashing dynamics of spatial administration that take on new scales and dimensions far beyond land claims. For example, this trend is most evident in relatively young nations such as Colombia, where the colonial territorial process, which works through genocide, land grabbing, property-law, and spatial enclosure, now propels harsh economic policies serving extractive industries or unrealistic environmental targets that divorce ancestral communities and environments (Lyons 2018). As such, the old battle for land that drove Europeans to seek a New World across the planet's oceans has now transformed into an internal struggle between factions of the free State, sparring over access to resources, networks, or ecosystems not previously accounted for by the colonial powers that once ruled. These factions still use violence, intimidation and legitimize their demands by maintaining a political class based on models for territorial governance that put property rights

and economic development above all. In other words, the process of reterritorialization in Colombia, but also across the Global South, still follows the deployment of neocolonial land-use models based on one-sided extractive and divisive spatial practices inherited from elsewhere.

Moreover, while presented as purely internal political and armed conflict quietly fueled by foreign interest, the violence that drives colonial and neocolonial models deployed across the Andean-Amazon region is now redirected towards the landscape. Dressed as advanced extractivism, apparently necessary for economic prosperity in the region, these models lead to the destruction of entire ecosystems and severe forms of ecocide. In addition, these violent models threaten the fundamental rights of ancestral communities to exist in their territories and deploy in them their culture, languages and spatial practices, making then subject of aggressive cultural cleansing and ethnocide.

One after the other, the struggles 'in' and 'for' space, add to a mounting planetary crisis at the level of meaning, resources, knowledge and the coordination of mitigation tactics. In the process, retaining the disappearance of ancestral spatial practices, ways of seeing and knowing, as well as reinstating some kind of agency to territory (as if it had rights, voice and resolve) then becomes ever so much more urgent. Moreover, to seek remedy to an already ill territorial model passed down through western epistemic traditions, it is imperative to consider carefully what role visual culture has played on rendering earth as a collection of separate segments of space, while enabling a tendency towards deterritorialization and detachment from place-bound identities. From landscape painting to map making, and early scientific illustrations to remote sensing, Euro-American visual culture has tried to fit a vast world into the limited and often two-dimensional planes of representations it once established. What is left out of this image is perhaps an equally vast but yet untraceable segment of space relations that are hard to grasp through the same Euro-American spatial measuring techniques (from geometry and cartography to biosensing and satellite imaging), which by design ignore the unmeasurable. Inevitably, this makes me ponder on what kinds of subvisible biocultural relations are still holding together remote environments, while producing unbound, volumetric and

self-ruling territories that escape measurement and keep resisting appropriation?

As result of a globalizing culture that constantly seeks global symbolism, even if they come only from a tiny segment of the world like, media cultures today celebrate peripatetic identities capable of locating themselves on a map, anywhere and at any time. The same goes for legitimizing the design of flattening interphases that are supposed to help us to navigate volumetric earth-bound places; the spread of deceiving 'cloud' metaphors for technology; and more concerning, greening imaginaries that today rendered remote landscapes such as the Amazon rainforest as flat, bucolic or uncomplicated terrains, while failing to address the damaging and violent interventions taking place below and above the idealized layer of green biomass. While confronting these imaginaries, plenty of sub questions have emerged along the process, some seeking evidence, others propelling speculative thinking but also instigating new alliances with unlikely communities through aesthetic practices and practice-based research.

- *How can a vertical study of a territory forge a path for inter-epistemic modes of spatial thinking, landscape interpretation and territorial knowledge?*

- *Is there a way to converse with a landscape and co-create media with it?*

- *How can aesthetic practices support peacebuilding strategies and back the struggle of endangered ethnic groups (also protecting endangered ecosystems) without perpetuating cultural extraction or appropriating oppressed people's battles for self-determination?*

As already hinted by the questions above, I cannot deny an underlying sense of urgency embedded in this project, which reveals my growing concerns around endangered environments in the Andean and Amazon forests. After all, I was born in Colombia, a nation that is the living testament of a colonial project that was nothing more than a delusional attempt at reorganizing space through the imposition of law, power and transplanted models of territorialization. While

the colonial effort didn't succeed at organizing and fully monetizing the conquered territories, it did create wounds that still today drive the conflicts for power and space in Colombia. Therefore, early in this project I decided to channel my energy, interests and questions through the study of an entangled and complex place, which lies between the Colombian Andes and the Lower Amazon. Nevertheless, coming from the angle of socially engaged art practices, where visuality has become of secondary order while the dialogic, sensorial and even collaborative dimension of art making have been opened for critical engagement, I did not intend to tackle the problems alone.

On the contrary, I was eager to initiate an investigation driven by participatory forms of research, meaning a collective process of questioning, learning and collecting knowledge with communities living in far off places and with peers. One of my contributions to the field of artistic research is precisely the points of contact I established with communities and Indigenous collaborators and invited artists along the process. Drawing on Participatory-Action-Research (PAR) methods put forth by Colombian social sociologist Orlando Fals Borda in the 1980s', the researcher here becomes an external animator that works along with internal actors/animators to gather experiences (vivencias) and creatively produce socio-political thought with which oppressed communities can identify (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991). Therefore, the process implies "the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct or countervail power" (ibid). PAR is not only a quest for knowledge but the process of reconciliation between different rationales, some relying on experience and others on information, which come together through practice. Therefore, I situate myself as an undisciplined researcher/artist that embeds himself, mingles with the context and affects social realities while rejecting the assumed objective position of the ethnographer or social scientist to deconstruct the "asymmetric power relations between the researcher and the researched" (ibid 2). It goes without saying that in this project knowledge is collected, translated and addressed in a two-way street. On the one hand, this project collects audiovisual material to assemble a body of work for audiences elsewhere, even if from a justified place of ignorance on the current debacle disturbing the Andean-Amazon. I see the process as type of Planetary literacy 2, a process through which remote communities can relate and

2 I first encounter the term through the writing of the art and architecture collective Territorial Agency: www.territorialagency.com. Today, Planetary Literacy

establish a dialogue around the complex conditions that still support violence and abuse in the Andean-Amazon. On the other hand, for my Indigenous collaborators and peers, the knowledge compiled and shared in this process is entirely operational and geared towards restoring, voicing and devising strategies for epistemic justice, self-determination and state-building.

Therefore, I seek to address place-based relations that cannot always be measured scientifically, captured or annotated via traditional ethnography or rendered visible through traditional cartographic tools like topographic mappings or land surveys. In the following chapters I will elaborate on numerous examples that reveal clashing notions of territory and give evidence of oblique spatial epistemologies in the Colombian Andean-Amazon. Through these examples I build a case to interrogate why aesthetic practices are fundamental mediators in the quest for more convivial modes of reterritorialization that encompass multiple dimensions of space beyond the graspable or measurable.

Cartographies of the Unseen:

This practice-based research project investigates contested eco-social relations that play a huge role in shaping the earthly space, from land-use to landscape interpretation, while seeking avenues for inter-epistemic territorial thinking. By documenting knowledge and spatial practices that stand at the edges -or obscured zones- of modernity, I have attempted to dialogue between distant aesthetic language and modes of territorial production. Therefore, by re-reading the landscape across its volumes, histories and scales, I explore how both localized and broadly distributed forms of power, compete for control across a vertical axis of spatial relations, from the underground to the exosphere. In the process, I observe how the geometries, ecologies and forms of life that inter-exist in the landscape, far exceed its assumed territorial boundaries or traditional representation methods. Often, such a landscape collapses onto itself and becomes a system of overlapped political, aesthetic and even spiritual traces that yield tangential modes of attunement, place-bound experiences and territorial production.

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has gained traction as a term describing a kind of reckoning of the extend to which globalized societies mutually depend on one another.

The project unfolds through a main case study developed through fieldwork, as well as a body of artistic work and collaboration with Indigenous communities from the Colombian Pan-Amazon region (between the high Andes and the lower Amazon). In this region, the Colombian government, extractive industries and Indigenous state-building efforts still compete for control across many layers of an entangled landscape. As a result, the region has been fragmented due to contested territorial claims from opposing powers, among them the Colombian State, Indigenous nations and illegal armed actors, all of which ultimately produce overlapping sovereignties and divide the landscape in all directions; below, over and above the ground. As a consequence of constant dispute and aggressive extractive economic policies, these ecosystems have been severely disturbed by continuous forms of violence inflicted over the soils, forests, rivers, sky, as a well as a kind of epistemic violence against ancestral communities and land-protectors.

The ongoing process of colonization in the Pan-Amazon region (which also resulted in a one-sided form of development where profit prevails over life) has succeeded at suppressing or negating ancestral knowledge, Indigenous spatial practices and forms of assembly that today are at risk of disappearing. Against this background, the Pan-Amazon territories are also home to diverse forms of resistance, territoriality, and non/human inter-existence. Today, Indigenous nations living in the Andean-Amazon resist the confinement imposed by borders and economic zoning, while relating to the territory as a multispecies and inter-scalar home.
Designed from the onset as a three-year process (2018 – 2021), this project evolved through research but also fundraising, training, co-creation and strategic partnerships both local, regional and international. Therefore, the outcome of this practice-based research is a large body of creative works that includes artists films and participatory documentaries, installations, photography, an artist book, media archives compiled on a web platform and finally, a participatory process for Media production created in collaboration with Indigenous leaders and project partners. Therefore, approaching practice as a form of knowing has enabled me to A) produce ‘Filmic Cartographies’ documenting layers of sub-visible and eco-social relations across the Pan-Amazon landscape and B) co-create an Indigenous Me-

dia Collective (Ñambi Rimai) that uses Media to support efforts of self-governance among Indigenous nations, facilitate cross-regional exchange inside and outside the Pan-Amazon region, and to reveal modes of inter-existence across ancestral territories and beyond. Drawing upon Indigenous spatial-practices and aesthetics form the Inga, Kamnëstá, Quillacinga and Siona nations, this practice-based research aims to formulate: 1) an inter-epistemic dialogue around land-use, territorial production and spatial-representation; 2) support the presence of Indigenous aesthetics in the global spheres of knowledge, governance and cultural production; 3) and finally to co-develop immersive experiences and participatory Media, which can contribute to reorient western approaches to territorial thinking, spatial aesthetics and inter-existence at a planetary scale.

This project documents, learns from, and dialogues with ancestral communities across the Pan-Amazon region, in order to reveal nuanced forms of belonging, territorial thinking and situated knowledge. Combined, these strategies amount to an artistic and research-driven process that seeks to become operational and reciprocal, paying special attention to actual knowledge transfers between the 'researcher' and those being 'researched'. Therefore, it is important to mention that this project has been developed in close consultation with leaders from five Indigenous nations, aligning with local governance and sharing decolonial sensibilities. Together, we have gathered evidence and used media to translate entangled dynamics like resource extraction, epistemic violence and strategies for conservation, which today make the Pan-Amazon region a disputed territory with planetary relevance. Several parallel activities including support in political campaigning, fundraising, networking, mentoring and support in the front lines of territorial defense protests are part of the process but will not be documented in this dissertation.

As much as an academic and artistic undertaking leading towards a Doctoral degree, this project also aligns with the priorities of Indigenous communities undergoing a process of state-building, epistemic re-calibration and self defense.

Chapter 1: The Journey as a Practice

Part 1: In Search of Planetary Landscapes

Adrift:

Between May 2015 and December 2016, I 'traveled for work' to more than 19 countries. The previous year I had moved from New York to London, while somehow managing to produce parallel art projects across three US States and two coasts. In these 19 months, I not only had exhibitions but also lectures, screenings and workshops in places as far as Manila, St. Petersburgh and San Francisco, all of them essential, if not critical, to keep my fragile finances afloat. By that point, I had fully embraced a peripatetic life with storage units in at least three cities, one long distance relationship and a handful of airline miles, Ryanair vouchers or friends' couches lined up for in-between events.

Ever since 2015, I officially didn't travel for work but on the contrary, traveling had become my work, like flight attendants or pilots but also thousands of other artists, curators and academics who had been increasing their mobility at unprecedented speeds, up until the 2020 pandemic. But as nomadic careers had become more popular amid a precarious economy and networked institutional arts landscapes, such itinerant lifestyles also promised to fulfill the desire to feel visible or validated in a competitive international art and cultural scene. Without a doubt, a new paradigm of cultural circulation had emerged, one that did not only rely on the movement and display of artworks but the movement and public presence of those making them. By late 2015, I not only had given up my studio in London, but my entire art practice had dislocated from fixed fabrication sites or exhibition spaces. Instead, these were replaced by museum art handlers that produced entire artworks based on my instructions, a network of art residencies and international conference stages.

In the essay The Wrong Place published almost 20 years ago, writer and art historian Miwon Kown had already raised questions around the fact that the more we (arts workers) traveled for work to provide institutions with our presence and services, "the more we gave into the logic of nomadism." In other words, if even for a brief period, when the success and viability of one's work is measured by the accumulation of frequent flyer miles and constant engagements elsewhere, these expectations forced practitioners to constantly endure being out of place, or as she called it, in the "wrong place" (Kwon 2002). Relating this 'being at work' with 'being out of place' has become a dangerous trend in the cultural and academic spheres, where aspiring jet setters (artists, curators and academics alike) that used to move swiftly from biennial to biennial or conference to conference, not only develop oil-fueled careers but also contribute to the undifferentiation of various locales. Too often, nomadic cultural practitioners like myself have become the instrument of a lethargic modernist project that sought to erase particularities, force translations and assimilation of cultural codes, cast a veil of universality and ultimately reduce difference between one place and another (Ibid). However, for decades cultural critics have elaborated on how the modernist approach to space relies on homogeneity and reproduces the same type of space relations, in what otherwise would be a complex and multifaceted landscape of spatial practices, stemming from cultures that through different codes, produce different spaces (Lefebvre 1991 p. 52).

As we all know by now, globalization was possible through the standardization of processes, infrastructures and spatial configurations: from ports and shipping industries to containers, to airports and shopping malls to one-click purchases. As such, Global economies not only relied on the promise of constant supply, class mobility and networked life but they also ushered in a period of dramatic remoteness and disembodied relations 'in' and 'to' space. For many of us living in locations well integrated in the supply and demand network (mostly the Global North), the world still seems within reach via products, cheap travel options and multicultural experiences. However, a world that shrinks and seems apprehensible is just a one-sided version of the story of

economic growth and progress. On the flip side of this narrative, there is a long and complex history of colonial expansion, extraction and violence that have contributed to obfuscating the struggles, radical difference and to some degree, the incommensurable character of one place vs. another.

Through the assimilation of a nomadic practice, one that for me has not only been a choice but also the consequence of migration and cultural uprooting, I finally became suspicious of the contradictory relations I was establishing with contexts, places and remote communities through my work and position as an artist. My rapid transition from a site-responsive creative practice towards more dislocated, networked, itinerant or simply nomadic style, and with all the attention it brought me from institutions and peers, became symptomatic of my participation in a culture that favors detachment, undifferentiation and stagnant deterritorialization. In fact, this is the paradox which contemporary western societies still seem trapped in: on the one hand they rely on place-bound resources (minerals, foods, hydropower, etc.) to support their economic prosperity. On the other hand, these societies produce cultural codes, technologies and aesthetics that favor a systemic overshadowing of such dependencies (fast fashion, Amazon Prime's speedy services, cloud storage, Ryanair, etc.) which ultimately conceal the disparities that exists between resource-rich places (often rural or endangered natural environments) and high consumption-hubs (mostly urbanized centers and industrialized societies). This model propels the individual into a double binding role where she becomes symbolically detached from the land, turning into what I would call an unearthly terrestrial.

For many of you this is no news. The more evident the paradox gets, the more complacent our globalized societies appear. My concern is not to pin down when or how the relation with place became distorted but what can be done to heal this rupture. More than speculating around answers, for a while I was determined to embody the question. In other words, as an artist I have been drawn to investigate the tensions between place, belonging and detachment through aesthetic practices capable of offering new landing experiences, translating locales, restituting difference, seeing the unseen and ultimately, remediating an ill-fated epis-

Image: Driftless Installation Shot. Quebec Biennial, 2019. Photo by Ricardo Savard

temic trajectory of spatial practices that detach place from body and body from earth.

Aside from searching for steady income and public engagement through my artistic practice, one of the main motivations to move constantly across locations was to produce an artist film, on which I worked for more than six years. Back 2012, after spending part of my summer at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine (USA) as part of an artist residency, I attempted to move my art studio to a nearby lake, which was a sort of non-site, the wrong place, and officially outside of the grounds of the school. For several weeks I tested numerous buoyant and unlikely materials on which I could 'perform' my artistic practice while being inside and outside the context of the residency at once. As a result, I made a tiny makeshift raft but more importantly, I developed a long-lasting relationship with an entire new context defined entirely by the fluidity and constant flux of water.

The work born out of this practice-based investigation is Driftless, a 12 minutes artist film built around a performance in which the artist (myself) confronts large bodies of water on board a pre-

carious raft, measuring less than one meter on either side. This project quickly became a way to explore unlikely sites such as lakes, rivers and oceans using a precarious, hand-made buoyant platform built out of insulating Styrofoam boards, tension straps and a wobbly wooden chair. This performance/film started in lake Wesserunsett in Maine (North East of the USA) in 2012 and in the following years was restaged in places like the Pacific Coast of Colombia, Mazunte beach Mexico, Bournemouth UK, Lofoten in Norway, Stockholm, Sydney, Bacolod city in the Philippines, Quebec City, San Francisco CA and Columbus Ohio in the USA. The piece was finally completed in 2019 and premiered at the Quebec Biennial, half-way through this PhD.

Seamless transitions and parallel montage techniques connected distant locations, temporalities and visual culture references, ranging from journalistic reports on migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea to epic scenes depicted by romantic painters of the likes of Caspar David Friedrich, whose images depict vast and powerful landscapes confronted by the smallness of a human presence. Conceptually, Driftless explores the notion of nation-border as a form of contemporary confinement, while embracing the ocean as a platform for engagement, and a dense cultural network ripe for artistic interventions.

Through a fictional journey enlarged by a continuous visual narrative that echoes human and non-human migratory paths, the film reflects on the poetics of border crossing and radical seafaring. As a consequence of this project, I sustained a direct engagement

Figure 2 Driftless, still image from the film (2012 - 2019)

with large bodies of water that informed parallel projects taking place in, on and within waterscapes. Also, confronting an earthly body like the world's oceans, the questions with which I landed into this PhD in 2017 became more urgent. Over the course of

the six years that took me to complete the film, and after all the traveling involved in the production, I began to look at water as a manifestation of a kind of vast public space, or a common stage of planetary scales that enables eco-social encounters. As such, this enhanced sphere of publicness became for me a new frontier for performance, interventions and artistic engagement. With a new lens through which I could look at the context where my work was operating, my focus started to shift. From engaging with landscape representation to actually unsettling the public's understanding of the very notion of publicness, by means of landscape reinterpretation, I wanted to explore an all-encompassing site of planetary reach and multiple scales. Water, rendered as fluid but permanent 'terrain' connecting remote landscapes, livelihoods, markets, nation states and unregulated circulation, prevails as an all-encompassing, physical, symbolic and multiscale dimension of a shared (perhaps public) sphere where humans, infrastructures, more-than-human communities and natural environments interact.

In fact, water is perhaps the most radical form of space, either as a drop or an ocean, it is always a continuum that spreads, condenses or evaporates without losing its qualities of container, even if contained into a basin. At large and microscopic scales, water is often a carrier and enabler of life. Water circumvents the planet, shapes the landscape, draws natural border zones and produces territories where multispecies communities live and thrive. However, while water exists in constant flow, its capacity to change states often renders its presence or influence invisible to the eye. During its cycle of transformations, water is rain, mud, plant, mist, clouds and back again.

And if water is a host too, it opens the possibility of thinking about other categories of space that host life, like place, soils and ultimately territory through the conceptual affordances of water. Throughout human history the oceans have been contested places, sometimes described as negative, void, lawless, unbound (Terra Nullius) or simply a space in-between. And while oceans enabled the colonization of far-off lands, today they make possible the unwanted migration of the colonized and disposed to centers of power. Ultimately, water is the backdrop –or better, the

backbone– of human history and ironically, as the seas rise and pose risks to the built environment, water becomes the only agent capable of disrupting all that we have achieved through decades of industrial progress. That is why, waterscapes have not only been sites for contemplation, where the smallness of the human is measured against the planet, but they are the epitome of a contradictory territorialization process that seeks to drawn lines in unstable surfaces, contain uncontainable places and project property and law onto a common and all-encompassing entity.

Midway through the project I was confronted with nuanced contradictions that exemplify society's relation with waterscapes as spaces that resist control via containment or regulation. It was in Columbus Ohio (U.S.) where the project took an unexpected turn once. I decided to perform in the city's river and by doing so, unexpectedly calling the attention of the Police forces who overreacted to an otherwise unintrusive action. It was December 30th, 2013 and the cold temperatures of previous weeks had become milder, the stream of the Scioto River was as calm as it could get and the water level was slightly high, making it rather safer for an unlikely traveler to float downstream. I walked my raft and paddle across downtown, placed a camera crew alongside the waterfront and without second guessing my moves, I jumped on board of my raft ready to cruise across downtown propelled by the river's current. Minutes later, police sirens could be heard in the background, a helicopter started to hover in the area and there were several police and firefighters throwing ropes at me as if they were trying to catch and immobilize a scared horse. Eventually, my raft got entangled in the ropes, I fell into the freezing water and I was dragged out and handcuffed by uniformed police. The first question they asked me was Are you legal? At the moment this made no sense to me, since I was in a Midwestern city, thousands of miles away from the nearest coastal border but then, I realized that my Latino accent probably made them think I had paddled across the U.S from who knows where.

Through a cinematic work like Driftless, depicting a surreal and yet precarious journey, I attempted to reveal the magnitude and relational potential of a vast waterscape that, as part of a complex sphere of culture and ecologies, contrasts a wide range of

transient human activities with timeless non-human forces. The documentation of the performance takes its own cinematic form in order to reconstruct the journey across national borders, where performance and the space become characters constrained by an abstract form of power that only becomes clear once the police arrest takes place. As such, this journey is not just through space but through layers of meaning that question the contrast between the land as territory from waterscapes as relatable, sites from non-sites and even between publics from publicness. In this work the journey is both the material and the form, reflecting also

Image: Timeline of Projects and Poster. The Para-Site School. More at: parasiteshcool.org

on today's artistic mobility vis-á-vis migration, the complexities of landscape representations and the paradoxical search for sublime imagery in today's volatile cultural, political and environmental crisis of detachment.

Alongside this project, over the last 10 years I have developed numerous works that investigate water as the material embodiment of an emerging and vast form of public realm that presents itself as planetary landscapes. As such, this type of landscape is an immense context that sustains relations and interactions across scales, from global commerce and migration to war or resource extraction. However, these planetary landscapes are rarely understood or cared for like the kind of shared spaces we are so enchanted with in today's urbanized culture, namely urban public space. For example, because of their magnitude, as well as constant change, the oceans can never be fully grasped or recognized by policy, infrastructure or even critical interpretation. There is of course a complex thread around water policy and how many groups around the world are trying to develop or introduce new legal frameworks to make water a subject of rights. I must clarify that the issues around water rights, or the rights of bodies of water are not the focus for this research. Instead, it is by looking at the relations between water and territory, and how one transforms the other across cycles and fluctuation, where I seek an opening to creatively unsettle culturally oppressive spatial logics that conceived the territory as a planar section of space. These logics often try to render sites and landscapes as fixed and easy to contain through various forms of representation, such as cartographic or pictorial imaging traditions. I will come back to this idea in chapter 2 where I provide context to one of the films produced within this PhD project.

Participation as Social Action:

It is more than 15 years since I began working actively and engaging society actively as an artist. Ever since I was a B.A Student in Bogota around 2007, I was active in a network of emerging artists and art collectives, including the team behind The Venice Biennial of Bogota. I went from being an assistant to the co-director of this festival which, by mirroring the Venice Biennial in Italy,

transformed a working-class neighborhood in Bogotá also called Venice into a large-scale venue for national and international artists to present their work and engage with audiences locally. Throughout my artistic practice, I have orchestrated encounters that connected unlikely audiences across distances and through a myriad of cultural contexts: from galleries, museums, academic institutions, artists-run platforms and urban space to even unlikely sites for artistic interventions such as storefronts, community centers, rivers, seas and more recently the Amazon region.

Growing up in Bogotá throughout the 90s' and early 2000s' meant that I was confronted with the challenge of having to position my artistic practice in a context not conditioned by the art market or a defined gallery system. Instead, I was trained to speak to alternative cultural circuits, such as small art festivals in working-class neighborhoods, independent art spaces run by peers or public institutions, such as the central library or modern art museum. It is in this hybrid context between art infrastructures and public life, where art and non-art professionals, voluntary and involuntary audiences coexist where my work is often situated.

While my practice oscillates between mediums and from institutional to public contexts, as an artist I often take on numerous roles, best exemplified by the diagram proposed by Suzannne Lacy in 1994. In Lacy's diagram the artist is presented with various forms of engagement, ranging from the reflexive and personal, to a more operational or politically driven practice ("Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art" 1994).
Moving constantly along the spectrum and between galleries and public spaces through my multidisciplinary practice, my artistic

work often develops in proximity to participatory, durational and time-based experiences across performance, film, photography, installation, public and socially engaged art. Likewise, in several projects I operate as the subjective ethnographer reporting on other people's experience, while establishing relations with participants that lead to community-building and site-oriented interven-

tions. In other instances, I perform and enact institutional forms that produce small-scale transformations through social action. Even during my three years of M.F.A studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (USA), I developed a number of projects outside the university, mostly designed as public art interventions into the very social fabric of the city and the region. This included the art collective The Drift (2012-2013), which curated and produced artworks that used the city's rivers as space for artistic intervention. In that period, I also established The Para-Site School (2011 – 2021) which emerged out of collaborations with undocumented Latino youth living in the USA and seeking access to higher education as well as immigration reform.

Borderless TV. Public Performance and film session.Cologne, Germany. 2016 borderlesstv.eu

The Para-Site School takes place at the intersection between art education and participatory art, regarding the classroom as a relational space and the university as a political arena. Therefore, by operating from inside the university in a parasitical way, the logic behind the project was to appropriate the university's resources (faculty, classrooms, labs, equipment, researchers, etc.) in order to create alternative opportunities for minorities, undocumented migrants, underserved students in remote areas and artists-nomads facing immigration issues or legal impediments to attend college and access higher education in the USA and Europe. Meanwhile, The School itself serves as a platform for artists/educators to investigate forms of experimental pedagogy, participatory research and create social interventions in the public sphere as a form of artistic practice and social action. Moreover, the School's intent has been to become an elastic (and sometimes antagonistic) space for thinking, making and implementing alternative models where artistic practice and education engage underrepresented populations, without the conditional support of traditional institutions (museums, universities or similar cultural enterprises), which often perpetuate systemically fractured government policies with both immigration and education. Thematically, the project has tapped into complex issues, ranging from migration and legality to questions around undocumented labor and the challenges of cultural assimilation and integration.

Since 2010, The Para-Site School held (sometimes in secrecy) bilingual extracurricular classes at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, USA) and later at The Ohio State University (Columbus, USA) for young Latino activists, some of whom remain undocumented and advocate for the immigration reform in the USA. The project has also served students in places like Portland, Oregon (USA); Havana and Camagüey (Cuba); and Tehran (Iran), London (U.K) and Cologne (Germany). After every intervention and collaboration with students we have been able to produce outcomes that range from participatory films and exhibitions to residencies, talks and screenings. This project has evolved into a kind of practice that involves collaboration, research and the deployment of a set of strategies I have come across, making The Para-Site School more and more a logic and a mode of working than a durational project. For every iteration of the project, there has been a phase of research and practice, which

involves building community relations, deep learning from primary sources (in most cases the participants of the project) and setting common agendas in regard to a spatial and temporal context where we as a collective seek to operate.

Over time, The Para-Site School has become one of the most informing, as well as challenging, processes I have ever dealt with due to its necessity for counter-visibility. In other words, I have become aware of the risk of cultural appropriation and extraction posed when artists and institutions seek to integrate or 'make visible' already oppressed or underserved communities without any sense of reciprocity, exchange or shared agendas. For example, between 2011 and 2012 the project operated in secrecy due to the risk of deportation of several of my collaborators, which meant that as an artist, I couldn't justify this effort by simply designing an exhibition or event but instead, I had to find sensible and alternative avenues to make public the work we were doing. This is how I became interested in using my experience as a mediator, producer and artist/teacher to share my skills and organize the groups around their own urgent agendas establishing artistic collectives and co-productions.

This is how I created Borderless TV (2016 – present), a storytelling and media collective, established with Syrian refugees living in Cologne. This project was developed during an artist residency at CAT Cologne (run by German curator Julia Haarmann) and supported by Akademie of the Arts of the World, which confronted me once again with the inequalities of transnational movement and Europe's border mentality.

Paradoxically, while artists like myself have been granted free movement through saturated cultural networks that overlap tense geopolitical landscapes defined by borders, it is the same borders which condition movement based on cultural difference. 2016 made this reality more palpable as I was welcomed by curators at Cologne's Central train station, a place that just weeks before was the epicenter of social unrest from local far-right groups, as well as celebration from those migrants that had found a safe home. As Homi Bhabah once said "The world shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or the disposed, the migrant or the refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across

borders and frontiers."[3]
After arriving in Cologne, I quickly met a group of Syrian refugees who, like myself, lack proficiency in German and were eager to learn as quickly as possible by attending community centers offering free language training. Once again, embedding myself in a context and intuitively setting the stage for what would become a four-year long participatory project whereby I trained a number of migrants and refugees in filmmaking and storytelling techniques, right at the heart of Germany's Media city. Together we established a media collective called Borderless TV in an attempt to counterbalance the outpouring of clips and stories coming from established Media networks in Cologne, which in many degrees misrepresented the voices and views of the migrant community. Instead, we used Borderless TV (BTV henceforth) as a platform to create and disseminate content that reflected various sides of the struggle for integration, recognition and equality among newcomers in Germany.

Right after the hype of the migration crisis that overwhelmed Europe in 2015, refugees were frequently portrayed on TV as voiceless victims that must speak from a certain position or remain silent and invisible. In other words, they were usually in front of the camera but rarely ever behind it. This condition was symptomatic of a complex and long-established system of oppression (and epistemological violence) that keeps suppressing voices, cultures and ways of life of those coming from "somewhere" else to the Global North. For example, many of my collaborators (refugees in their mid 20s' and 30s', some coming fresh out of universities in Aleppo) had professions, degrees, experiences and knowledge that were simply not acknowledged in German societies and as a result, many had to repeat their university or vocational training. Others had to wait for months, unable to work or care for themselves, until the bureaucratic systems could provide jobs and housing placements, as well as language classes in remote areas across the region. This once again, threatens the fragile tissue of community support that many refugees found among each other and that is why BTV started to also functions as refugee-run community hub.

As a media collective, BTV was built on the logic of the Para-Site

3 Homi K. Bhabha, "Double Visions," Artforum (January 1992): 88.

School, being self-critical of the invitation I had received from a well-funded organization. After all, I had come as a guest to the city at the same time as other creatives with far less cultural capital and recognition were arriving there too. Therefore, I used my residency to redirect resources and give access to refugees to a cultural platform often used for self-representation (like we often do as artists). By collaborating with a community of young migrants on a number of films and enactments in public space, also using the excuse of filming a movie to involve Cologne residents as actors/participants and thus reverse power relations between locals and migrants, we made the most of the unrestricted time we had in our hands. Ultimately, BTV started as a performative organization that had not been established, as a brand without a product, and as a film without images. Like its umbrella project, The Para-Site School, BTV enacted a reality that soon materialized as the collective became consistent and the platform projects gave a sense of continuity. Since the beginning I considered this project a type of co-creation between myself, the refugee community and the art space managing the funding.

Part 2: Encountering the Field (The Pan-Amazon)

In the summer of 2018, swiss artist Ursula Biemann, filmmaker Lydia Zimmermann and myself embarked on a research trip that would take us to the Southwest regions of Colombia, between the Andes and the lower Amazon. Following an invitation from the chief curator at the museum from the National University, Maria Belen Saenz, we made preparations for what would be a four-week research trip between June and July of 2018.

A few months before I met Ursula through an email exchange I had initiated, full of questions and provocations. Back then, I was consumed in several essays where the artist discusses at length her approach to fieldwork, artistic research and how knowledge production might relate to artistic production through projects like Forest Law (Biemann and Tavares 2014). Somewhat new to me at the time, the idea of fieldwork felt like a forced translation of methods from the social sciences to the arts and therefore, up un-

til then I did not consider my engagement with sites and contexts as fieldwork for my creative research.

However, in the early stages of this PhD I was also eager to think through various methodologies and borrow from other fields, or definitions, in order to broaden my understanding of research and how it might play with artistic practices. Obviously, this was not the first time I would embark on a journey in order to develop a creative research, but it was certainly the first time I was preparing such a trip within the frame of a research project that had to speak to various spheres, including academics. My aim throughout the journey was to observe not only the site but pay attention to how it would transform me, as well as how my presence in the site could transform relations and "construct the field" (Mattern 2016). Aware of the influence of ethnographic methods across design and artistic research in recent decades, my goal was not to only to perform the role of participant-observer with which most anthropologist approach fieldwork, but to use the opportunity to experience the place and to develop strong and long-lasing connections that could open the field to several kinds of embedded, prefigurative and strategic interventions.

In the months before the journey, Ursula and I complied a bilingual reading list on the Andean-Amazon region, plotted various routes on maps of Colombia's Southwest and reached out to many potential contacts in the region. Being familiar with the language and the context, I quickly took on the role of film producer and investigator, building a knowledge base on the Putumayo and Lower Cauca regions through environmental reports, historical documents and ethnographic accounts from celebrated scientists, writers and anthropologists[4]. Unlike Ursula, I was not coming on this trip with the mission of conducting fieldwork to produce and deliver a commissioned artwork for an art institution. Instead, the journey alone was already a fundamental piece of my methodology and therefore, I was able to slowly learn, collect, parse and appropriate findings, videos and sounds to weave

4 The list of well-known scientists, writers and explorers traveling to the region includes Alexander Von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, industrialist and former Colombian president Rafael Reyes, ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes, writer William Burroughs, anthropologists Wade Davis and Michael Taussig among many others.

into my research process. For me, the very route we plotted on the map already represented an index for a text, in this case the territory, which I would read and be transformed by throughout the journey. Therefore, in my case the "field did not pre-exist" the trip or the conceptual space I entered (Ibid), but it was by moving my body-mind through the territory, engaging and "working" (Katz 1994) my way along the social fabric, the mud, river passes and Yagé (Ayahuasca) ceremonies with Indigenous leaders, that the fieldwork of this research finally took shape.

From the onset I was thrilled to finally visit the region, which up until 2017 had been extremely violent due to armed conflict. Being a non-Indigenous person, born and raised as a male in Bogota by a non-Indigenous and middle-class family, having attended a boys-only catholic primary school and a then a more liberal mixed high school, my only contact with Putumayo had been through a famous Colombian novel[5] one had to read in 9th grade. Therefore, up until my late 20s' when I started to awaken to a rich history of Indigenous Colombian cinema, I was as ignorant about this region of my own country as the many tourists who avoid it while passing nearby.

However, with Colombia's new peace deal signed between FARC guerrillas and the president Juan Manuel Santo's government (2016), there was a rare window of opportunity to finally pay a visit. If anything, this trip was meant to be an exploratory visit and unfold without a very clear agenda, other than becoming acquainted with the territory and to meet several leaders who welcomed us with both distrust and interest. After all, the Putumayo has been severely researched for centuries by a number of explorers eager to uncover the well protected secrets of this portion of the Amazon and Andean forests, so I had to choose carefully my position to avoid falling in the trap of knowledge seekers, or explorers who ultimately become instruments of the same epistemic regime that has suppressed and sacked Indigenous cultures and knowledges across the region. Therefore, early in the process I approached the field trip like I had done with numerous site-oriented artistic projects in which my first move was to read the contexts, turn off the cameras and to listen to the quiet moments.

5 La Vorágine by José Esustacio Rivera. 1924

While Ursula and Lydia worked their way through countless meetings we had arranged for interviews, for which I served as a translator, what had finally caught my attention was a series of subtle moments where the forests opened to the senses and called for a different type of observation. From rare smells of machinery and oil that seemed disconnected from the lavish vegetation, or the stories of how trees attract clouds and rain as if they were a blanket to wrap the over, to how certain flowers locally known as Borrachero (or Datura) released aromas that kept away intruders to the territory. For me, what was being revealed on top of the dire political and social calamity that had kept Indigenous communities under siege inside their own territories, was a layer of meaning and attentive relations that Indigenous people had established with their environments. For example, Javier (bodyguard of the Inga Chief Taita Hernando Chindoy) doubling as guide, protector and driver during the trip, kept pointing towards many trees that according to him, one could see breathing in plain sight. Many times, I climbed small hills and stared for a long time to tree-tops while trying to see changes with my naked eyes, which proved impossible. I rationalized Javier's comment and assumed that what he referred to is the process of evapotranspiration, through which plants and soils release humidity into the air. However, what was surprising to me was that Javier repeatedly saw it, even while driving while I couldn't, except when using my camera to capture time-lapse videos of the event. In other words, it was as if Javier could see the landscape in slow-motion or compress longer chunks of time in his mind to piece together an image of the forest moving and living. As days went on, my awareness of the surroundings was starting to awaken.

The travel itinerary of this first trip spread over four weeks, landing on June 26th at the Puerto Asis Airport. From there, we were picked by Taita Chindoy and Javier, and swiftly made our way to Mocoa, the Capital of Putumayo State. In Mocoa we met Agroecologist and farmer Heraldo Vallejo, with whom I would later establish an ongoing exchange following numerous visits and countless calls for consultation. Since we were traveling right after the much-anticipated presidential election in Colombia, this made the trip even more challenging due to high risks of combat between paramilitary, ex-FARC guerrillas and soldier forces still active in the area.

From Mocoa, we visited the reserve of the Taita Paulino and his family in Lower Cauca, right across the Caquetá River. This first encounter with Taita Paulino and the Mojomboy family proved crucial, since I would come back many times during follow up trips, including a 20-day stay during a training session I would organize later on for Indigenous young leaders from across the region. Days later, Taita Chindoy and Javier took us across muddy roads and into the onto Oso Cocha reserve near Yunguillo, where we met and interviewed Taita Ernesto Evanjuanoy, president of the association of Amazon Shamans and Healers UMIYAC, working to create certification process and directives for those practicing ancestral medicine. From Oso Cocha we

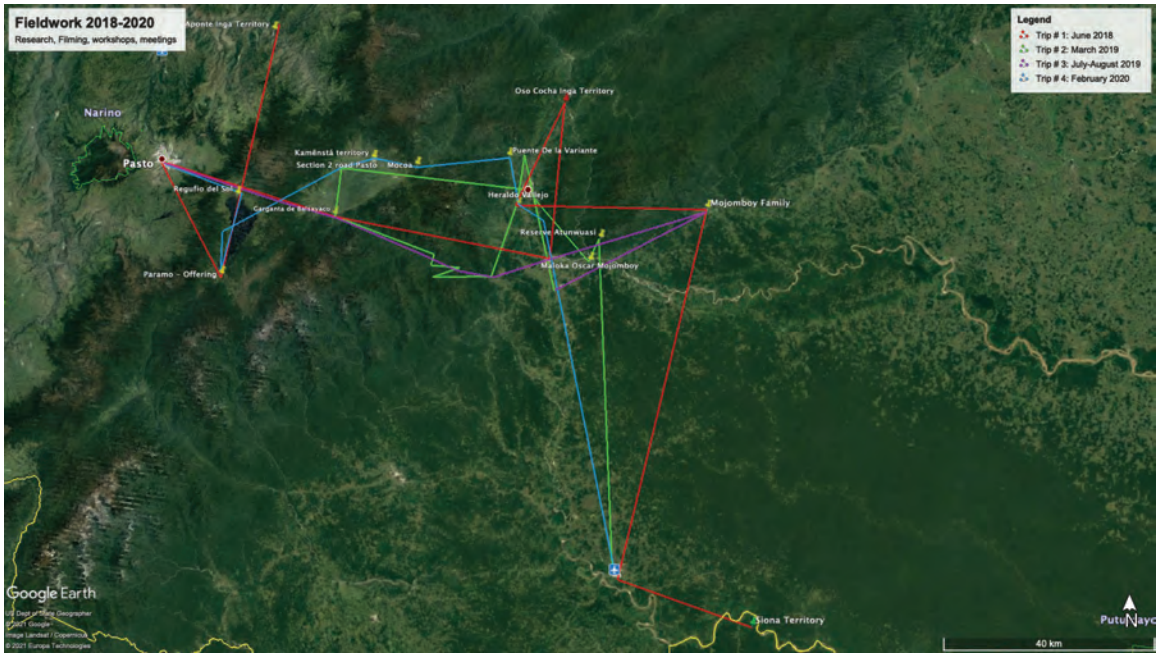


Image: Routes taken during each my field visit to the Pan-Amazon region from July 2018 to March 2020

made our way down to Puerto Asis, where we embarked on a boat and headed downstream the Putumayo River and towards the Siona reserve in Buena Vista, across the Ecuadorian border. Being deep in the Amazon jungle, no border guard or check point was seen, except the paramilitary convoy that had intercepted us seeking information on the travelers before embarking on the boat. It was there in Siona territory where the elders Taita Humberto and Pablo awaited us in order to take part in a Yagé cere-

mony, deemed by the community of extreme importance before welcoming us into their territories. Both Lydia and I embraced the invitation and participated in two consecutive ceremonies, each one taking an entire night, accompanied by members from the Indigenous peace guards (La Guardia Indígena) who had come to meet the shamans from all corners of the territory as part of a training session. The morning after the second Yagé ceremony, a council meeting was held in the community where it was decided to carry out an improvised excursion across the territory to monitor the recently planted landmines (anti-personnel mines) planted by FARC guerrillas right after signing off the peace deal with the government. I was kindly invited to join the excursion but feeling debilitated by the aftereffects of the medicine and fearing for my life, I could not bring myself on two feet to join the guards. Days later we departed, knowing that this would be my last visit for a long time to Siona territory due to the extreme pressure from armed groups under which the Siona still live.

From the depths of Putumayo, we made our way to the upper Andes along the infamous road called the Trampoline of Death. This road cuts across the foothills that rise sharply from Mocoa to the Sibundoy Valley. The trip quickly takes you from the tropical jungles of Putumayo to the Andean subtropical climate of the valley, making this section of the landscape an important transition zone that I would visit and study constantly over the next two years. After a restful couple of days in Pasto and the nearby lake of La Cocha we reached El Tablón de Gomez, where we found a tiny town called Aponte, where Javier and Taita Chindoy were born, providing an important context to their leadership role in the entire region. What had brought us to Aponte was for me perhaps the most surprising part of the journey. A number of shamans, many of whom we had visited just days or weeks before, were gathering in Aponte as part of a yearly celebration in which large numbers of residents, including children and elders, participated in a Yagé ceremony. These rituals were meant to reconnect the community with their ancestral tradition and were offered by the municipal house (Cabildo) and as part of the governance strategy of the Inga authorities. After all, for Indigenous people across the Pan-Amazon region, their sacred Yagé medicine does not represent only a hallucinogenic substance, but it is a plant teacher,

capable of strengthening their spirits to cope with the outside pressure and the impending loss of their lives, lands and cultures.

Right before leaving Aponte, our last stop in the journey across the Putumayo and Nariño; Ursula, Lydia and myself had an improvised meeting with Taita Hernando, the highest authority for the Ingas people in Colombia. During this meeting he laid out ongoing strategies and projects his community needed support with, among them economic empowerment (support for entrepreneurial projects), education (through the creation of an Indigenous university) and communication (assisting with much needed training, securing equipment and organizing). Excited with the invitation, all of us left the region thinking how we could pay back the Ingas hospitality with support for their causes. At this early stage, the terms and scope of a temporary collaboration with Ursula were still unclear, but for over a year (between March 2018 and April 2019) we shared networks, brainstormed and devised plans to support the creation of the Indigenous university. However, throughout the process my research remained independent to the dialogue and exchange I maintained with Ursula Biemann but soon we would encounter strong methodological differences, related to her claim for co-authorship over a project that was initiated well before our initial visit (the Pan-Amazon Indigenous University[6]). In distancing myself from this ongoing effort around the university, I was able to put my focus on what felt closer to my instincts, abilities and research interests such as the task of contributing toward a communication strategy for the Inga and other Indigenous communities of the Pan-Amazon region. What was there to be communicated turned out to be a very enriching set of ideas that connect ancestral philosophies like Suma Kausai[7],

6 Initiated around 2008, the project seeks to establish an Indigenous University between Lower Cauca and Putumayo, serving members from several Indigenous nations from the Pan-Amazon region. This initiative emerged inside the Inga Reserve of Piemonte, under the leadership of the Taita Paulino and the Mojomboy Family and has since been spearheaded by Inga Governor Taita Hernando Chindoy and other Inga leaders from the upper Putumayo. Ursula Biemman has become a supporter of the project, along with other international partners, researchers, artists and cultural institutions.

7 In Quecha Sumak Kawsay (Suma Kausai in Inga) is the Inga/Inca version of el Buen Vivir (Good living principles), a philosophy of life that defends harmony with oneself (identity), with society (equity) and with nature (sustainability). El Buen Vivir is a step towards self-determination and the resurgence of Andean identities as a cultural driver of conservation of Andean and Amazon biocultural territories. It is also a key element of Ecuador's 2008 constitution,

territorial processes and spiritual practices surrounding ancestral medicine and Shamanic tradition, all in synchronicity with territorial governance and defense of life across the Pan-Amazon region.

During this first journey, I was taken by the incredible efforts of the local communities to fight back drug cartels and mining consortiums which only see their territories as sources of prime materials, serving industries and global trade. While most people in these communities have never visited a large global city, or hardly ever visit Bogotá, they coexist with, inform themselves about, and very often push back against economic policies that serve markets but harm the ecosystems on which their cultures thrive. Without being global citizens, Indigenous people across the Pan-Amazon region resist the immense pressure and demands coming from globalized societies, which is never subtle in these territories. For example, the Ingas of Aponte have succeeded at freeing close to 17,000 hectares from the control of illegal armed groups forcing the Indigenous farmers to plant poppy fields for heroin production. They have achieved this with a carefully designed conservation plan that includes readapting their economy to favor barter and free trade of seeds and produce; the substitution of illegal crops for organic coffee; the commercialization of their coffee and other products under their own brand (Wuasikamas); as well as handing back vast portions of land to non-human inhabitants (among them various animal species) as part of a self-managed reserve they have established in their territory[8].

Indigenous communities in this area have developed a complex understanding of their territories, which become as diverse as the languages spoken in the region. For Inga for example, the territory manifests in different scales, from the small components of life (particles, insects, fungi, rocks, plants, leaves) to massive landscapes far beyond, under and around the lands they occupy (rivers, sky, wind, mountaintops, etc). By their very nature, ancestral spatial practices constantly confront non-Indigenous and state-driven forms of territorial policy, which serve extractive

written in consultation with representatives from various sectors of society including Indigenous leaders from several ancestral nations living under Ecuador's national territory (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2018).

8 Hernando Chindoy Guardián de la Tierra by Edinson Bolaños, in El Espectador. Dic. 02, 2018 - Colombian Newspaper: https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/hernando-chindoy-guardian-de-la-tierra-articulo-857432/

agendas in Putumayo and the Cauca foothills contributing to the expansion of oil-drilling, mining and coca farming, as well as government operated natural reserves set on top of sovereign Indigenous territory.

As a parallel trajectory of spatial epistemologies to the western tradition, Indigenous communities in this area have developed a complex understanding of their territories away from the dictum of the State. By claiming territorial rights across scales and dimensions far beyond simple land disputes, Indigenous governance also brings into questions a type of gaze that often looks at the forests from a distant perspective, celebrating the abundance of trees and animal species but hardly ever reflecting on the actual conditions that make a lush forest thrive. This being a set of delicate relations between policy, land-use and culture lived and practiced through gardening or birth rituals, among many traditions, where the human inter-exists with other beings in the territory as part of the same cycle of life. For example, when a baby is born then the mother's placenta is buried under the family's home, often under three rocks that serve to keep the fire contained and where most meals are prepared, to which the Inga call La Tulpa. This act of burying the placenta, which is the baby's direct connector to the mother's body and therefore a life-enabling organ, can be read as reconnecting the individual's life supply system back to the soil, or in other words, planting the baby into the territory through a new vital link with earth as mothering entity. That is why, the struggle of the Indigenous communities I met and collaborated throughout this project is not only about preserving land-rights, but it is about protecting life-enabling relations that render the territory as a sentient body and host of a multiscale and multidimensional environment.

Over the next two years I would conduct three other field trips to the region, one in March 2019, another in July 2019 and the last one in late January 2020 before the global pandemic. During the second, third and fourth visit to the Pan-Amazon region I conducted workshops, hosted collaborators and traveled in the company of Indigenous leaders to numerous corners of the territory to meet with leaders, become acquainted with local initiatives, as well as to document various processes affecting these communities.
During this research project, the 2016 peace accord signed be-

tween FARC guerrillas and the government was being implemented throughout Colombia. Considered one of the most elaborate and inclusive peace agreements by the media at the time[9], making President Santos the winner of the 2016 Peace Nobel prize, the peace accord was a historic opportunity for an entire generation of Colombians, including myself, who had never experienced living in a country not at war. With over 60 years in combat, FARC guerrillas had managed to topple the State's presence on several territories including Nariño, Putumayo, Lower Cauca and Caqueta, all part of the Pan-Amazon ecoregion. What the peace accord meant for these regions was not only a to halt any form of armed conflict, but a series of reparation measures that included giving land back to victims, displaced farmers and Indigenous communities, cancelling aerial fumigation programs against coca farming, supporting local development programs, investing in education and many other important steps to remediate the systemic failures of the State and the inequalities that drove the conflict in the first place. As part of the implementation of the post-conflict programs, ex-combatants gathered in small peace communities and quickly joined training, farming and reintegration initiatives. By 2017, several community leaders and activists were once again emerging form the shadows, among them Taita Hernando Chindoy, the Mojomboy Family, Taia Humberto and his Siona family, Taita Camilo R. Quispe Quillacinga and young Kamënstá leaders, as many others acting as human rights advocates and land-protectors.

However, time would prove that the assumed stability introduced in by the peace accord would not last much longer. With the arrival of the new right-wing government of President Duque in 2018, himself an ardent follower of the main detractor of the peace accord, former President Alvaro Uribe (2002 – 2010), the Colombia government started to dismantle all the progress made in recent years. By 2018, a cruel campaign of extermination had started, targeting FARC ex-combatants now reinserted into civil life, community leaders raising their voice to demand justice or denounce violations, land-protectors working on environmental protection and conservation, and most recently, schoolteachers in remote and impoverished rural areas. The perpetrators of such crimes

9 For example: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/24/colombia-signs-historic-peace-deal-with-farc-rebels

are hard to identify because they belong to new gangs made of paramilitary, drug cartels, FARC dissidents and as always, obscure factions of the State that support extreme violence as a way to maintain power (among these, former president Uribe and his associates have been accused and prosecuted for association with several paramilitary groups). According to the estimates of the Human Rights Watch, the number of social leaders assassinated in Colombia by these groups is close to 400 and counting (Parisi 2021).

With violence escalating so quickly, I started to experience the conflict closer and closer every time I went to the region. For example, while traveling with Taita Chindoy in 2018, I witnessed constant intimidation via text messages he received, telling him that every move we made while touring the territory with us was being observed by paramilitary soldiers. While closely following several Indigenous protests in Upper Putumayo during the 2019 national workers strike, and right before heading down to Puerto Limon deep in loser Putumayo, my travel plans had to be readjusted due to a recent massacre of local farmers involved in the same protests I had just witnessed a few kilometers away. And finally, during my last trip in 2020 with Lydia Zimmermann, this time working as my collaborator in a new film, we had to abandon visiting several locations in Upper Putumayo and find refuge among the Quillacinga people up in the Andes due to an armed strike by ELN guerrillas, who had declared as a target any vehicle that circulated the roads in Colombia's East and Southeast regions. The strike lasted almost 5 days and several vehicles were burned on roads we had just been filming days before. In such a context, not only the initial framework but also the urgency, security measures and pressure surrounding this project led me to remain attentive, to follow the subtle changes and adapt constantly in order to ensure the safety of my collaborators and myself.

Aside from fieldwork, my engagement with Indigenous collaborators has been maintained through frequent phone calls, messaging groups, video conference calls and a spontaneous meeting in Giron, Spain during an international conference to which three members of UMIYAK (Union of Healers and Traditional Doctors) were invited as presenters to the Ayahuasca International Confer-

ence organized by ICEERS, June 2019. This conference was far from uncomplicated, providing a key moment to collect important insights into how important it is for Indigenous leaders from the Pan-Amazon region to gain access to international platforms, develop networks and diplomacy of their own. The opposite means leaving it to chance for the international community to one day notice the dire situation under which most Indigenous groups of the Pan-Amazon exist today.

Therefore, in addition to hosting an exhibition in Basel featuring numerous films produced in the territories, I fundraised for my Indigenous collaborators to travel to Basel as part of a series of networking and public engagement activities in Europe, which I deemed important for the project and the research. However, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic all traveling plans within the region were postponed until the fall of 2021.

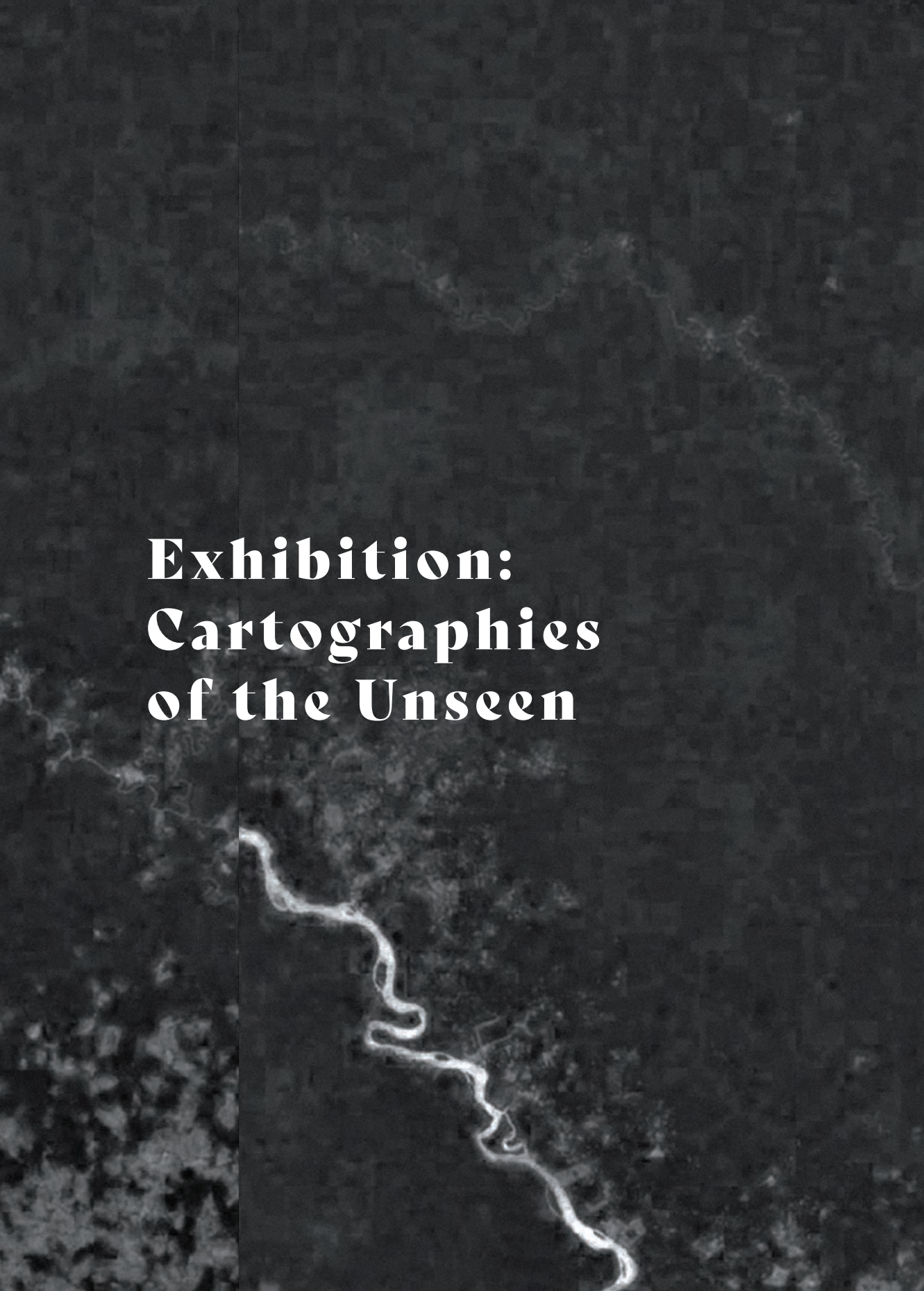
Still pending for implementation, the goal of this phase of the project is to network with Swiss non-profit organization supporting territorial restitutions programs, like Nouvelle Planet or Human Rights like the UN or Amnesty International. Since 2020 we had the support from the Colombian ambassador to Switzerland Ms. Sofia Gaviria to support with contacts and diplomatic relations. The initial idea is to invite two to three young local leaders from the Inga, Kamënstá and Siona nations to Basel with funding from SüdkulturFonds, which proved impossible due to sustained border closures during the global pandemic. In parallel to this, a tour of screenings in Indigenous reserves throughout Putumayo and lower Cauca has been designed and implemented since 2020 but suspended due to Covid-19.

For all the reasons listed above, I sought to conduct a kind of artistic research capable of delivering a body of creative work that manifests itself as an aesthetic, reciprocal and operational practice. That is why this project is entirely driven by practice, meaning that the creation of artistic works like films, installation and participatory situations are the basis of the contribution to a field of knowledge. However, this field of knowledge is not neutral or universal but instead, it is situated in the global south and struggle for epistemic justice. In that regard, this is a practice-based

research with methods of its own, as opposed to a research that tries to understand or study a practice from the margins (Candy and Edmonds 2018). Finally, I invite the reader to not only read this text but also to read the filmic work, installations and images as a kind of parallel meta text, to embrace the political and historical context I describe, and to tilt your heads every once in a while, to appreciate the volumes of the territories that surround all of us.

Taita Herando Chindoy (Governor of the Inga People) and Javier Chindoy (Director of Ñambi Rimai Pan Amazon Media Collective, also bodyguard of Taita Chinody) at the entrance to the Inga reserve of Oso Cocha, north of Mocoa.

Opposite page: Inga member and local farmer chopping wood to repair Taita Paulino Mojomboy's Maloca in Piamonte.



Exhibition: Cartographies of the Unseen

Research in the Making or The Making of Research

Cartographies of the Unseen presents a body of work that stems from fieldwork and practice-based research in the Colombian Andean-Amazon region. The project was conceived in 2018 by Felipe Castelblanco and designed as an evolving platform for collaboration among Indigenous leaders, institutions and artists. While the project draws from ethnography and Participatory Action Research, as artists seeking new methods that enable cross-regional aesthetic experiences, we also build on collaboration and participatory filmmaking to foster reciprocal dialogues, recognize various forms of knowing, and ultimately, to support biocultural peace-building efforts inside and outside of ancestral territories.

Over the course of three years, the project developed through two parallel strategies that aim to see beyond the visible, devise paths for inter-epistemic dialogue, and enact a practice of knowing used among ancestral communities of the Andean-Amazon region: "*hacer tejido al andar con el conocimiento"* (to sew the world's fabric by walking with the knowledges). Shared among the Inga, Quillacinga and Kamëntsá people of Colombian's Southeast region, this expression refers to a kind of attuning to, and learning from, the territory that occurs when people navigate and experience it while walking along ancestral trails. Moreover, it is an act of moving through, or meandering across various spatial, cultural and spiritual dimensions that enable and sustain a fabric of inter-relations, knowledge and convivial practices between Indigenous communities and the territory.

Therefore, one of the strategies of this project was to navigate *(andar or recorrer)* the territory in order to produce Cinematic Cartographies, or a kind of multimodal rendering of these biocultural landscapes, which combine sensorial awakening, counter-map-

ping, film and participatory-research. These methods are used to document clashing territorial models deployed across a vertical axis of spatial relations that result in land-rights, economic zoning, resource extraction and sovereignty below, over and high above the forest. The second strategy was the creation of an Indigenous media collective through which the artist-researchers and Indigenous leaders have been able to support a group of land-protectors or *Wuasikamas* (earth's guardians in Inga language) providing training, networking, film production and fundraising support. As a result of this research and cooperation, *Ñambi Rimai Media Collective* was established in 2019 as the first Pan-Amazon communications collective with active members from five Indigenous nations living across the states of Putumayo, Lower Cauca and Nariño, in what is considered the Colombian Pan-Amazon region. In late 2020, this research project and collaboration took the form of a multichannel video installation at *Ausstellungsraum Klingental* in Basel, combining various films, textile works, objects and research material collected over two years.

The exhibition unfolds as an inquiry into modes of territorial thinking across the Pan-Amazon region, which reveal various forms of land-use and inter-existence between cultures and non/human worlds. For more than five centuries, the foothills in the South of Colombia have witnessed many forms of ecological violence and genocide. Indigenous communities have been, and still are, trapped in between multi-layered conflicts that have killed thousands and suppressed entire Pre-Hispanic cultures. Ever since the first colonial expeditions surveying the Colombian territory in the 16th century to today's war on drugs and territorial disputes over mining and oil-drilling licenses, the Andean-Amazon biocultural landscapes premised in the project have been sites of constant struggle and erasure of Indigenous territorial practices. For example, the unassuming Indigenous gardens *(chagras)* often scattered around the forest, are sites for knowledge sharing, living archives, bastions for medicine and food sovereignty. Archeological research carried along the Amazon basin is finally providing evidence on how this millenary gardening practice has been crucial for the expansion of the Amazon forest and its increased diversity (1). However, because these gardens resist the orderly, segregated and production-oriented style of imported

agricultural models, Indigenous gardens have been considered inferior by western agricultural education (centered on monoculture and the cultivation of non-endemic crops), thus forcing these communities to give up land to make way for mining projects or poorly managed national parks across Putumayo.

The Putumayo is a border state, with an area roughly half the size of Switzerland, located between the upper Andes and the lower Amazon. The region is home to the Awá, Inga, Kamënstá, Kofán, Quillacinga, Pastos and Siona Indigenous nations, as well as Afro Colombians and colono settlers. This is probably one of the most diverse areas in terms of population, reaffirming Colombia's status as a pluri-ethnic nation. It is also an area of incredible biodiversity and where two of the major tributaries to the Amazon River are born (the Putumayo and Caqueta Rivers). However, despite its diverse ecosystems, in recent decades the Colombian government designated the Putumayo as an area of special economic interests.

Colombia's conflict exists across several temporalities and speeds, some of which move so slow that they become, arguably, untraceable due to the lack of lasting evidence. Its wounds go as deep as 3 km underground (the depth of current mining operations in the Amazon basin) or as high as 10 km into the air (Putumayo's contested airspace is occupied by clashing radio signals, fumigation airplanes, low orbit satellites (2), spirits and ancestors). This is why the Colombian Pan-Amazon region becomes a complex landscape that reveals tense power dynamics that can only be traced along a vertical axis of relations, interacting below and above the ground.

At one end, the Putumayo region reaches 3000 m.ASL and is host to a unique bog environment called Paramo (a Tundra-like ecosystem unique to the Andean region). This is where unique plants called Frailejones (big monks) capture humidity from the air and transfer it to souterrain water deposits, thus feeding numerous creeks that give birth to lakes and rivers that run down the Andes and across the forest. The midlands of the Putumayo are areas of incredible importance for the stability of the entire Amazon ecosystem, creating a buffer zone between the colder Andean highlands

1. In his essay "The Political Nature of the Forest: A Botanic Archeology of Genocide" Paulo Tavares employs satellite imaging to relate tree distribution and recently discovered vestiges of pre-Columbian Settlements. In "Intercalations" 4, edited by Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin and published by Haus Der Kulturen der Welt HKW Berlin.

2. In 2018, the Colombian Air Force launched Colombia's first low orbit satellite called FACSAT, equipped with standard imaging and environmental sensing technologies to assist with various tasks of territorial, environmental and military monitoring.

and the warm Amazonian Jungles. This is where vast amounts of water elevate from underground passing through roots, tree barks and branches all the way up to the leaves, which then release water vapor through fine pores, producing dense mist and increasing humidity. As a direct consequence of the constant upward movement of water, a process called evapotranspiration, the skies of the Putumayo contain more water than the entire Amazon River.

At the other end, (around 300 m.A.S.L) the Putumayo region extends several hundred kilometers into the Amazon basin, bordering Ecuador and Peru. The lower Putumayo is an area of incredible natural wealth, with plenty of oil, gold, molybdenum and other mineral deposits, as well as vast amounts of commercially viable plants including rubber trees, Coca and the Ayahuasca vine. In lower Putumayo the tropical rainforests flourishes and it becomes the place where Siona shamans are actively fomenting a biopolitical process. Through their medicine and spiritual guidance, the shamans bring the territory and other beings into direct conversation with human inhabitants, thus giving political agency to the forest as an active participant in local governance and in the creation of new Indigenous institution (from hospitals and peacekeeping Indigenous guards, to even a university in the middle of the forest).

According to ancestral tradition, the forest is held together by the sacred Yagé (Ayahuasca) medicine and various plant spirits who often emerge from within the body of the patient (3), triggered by powerful biochemical reactions that transport the human consciousness into a sensorial realm that allows the perception of other beings coexisting in time and space deep in the forest. In this moment, the shaman becomes the translator, the guide, or a guardian of sorts, supporting the nuanced and fragile relations established between beings and across dimensions within the territory.

3. Based on Interviews with Siona Shamans, Taita (chief) Pablo and Taita Humberto. July 2018

Against this background, the Putumayo has become in recent decades a strategic asset for an extractive model on which Colombia's economic system and dozens of international investment conglomerates heavily depend. However, this might well be the culmination of a slow process of occupation and dispossession

that spans more than five centuries. Ever since the European invasion in the 1500s'; the border clashes and eventual war between Colombia and Peru in the 1900s'; Colombia's internal conflict between the army, guerrillas (FARC and ELN) paramilitaries of the early 2000s'; and more recently, the post peace-accord conflicts between FARC dissidents and drug cartels (2017- present), the Putumayo has been a battleground for a war against disobedient and life-breeding territories. From rubber plantations, oil extraction and mining to today's Ayahuasca tourism and coca farming, the colonial mind has permeated these territories and attempted to turn every inch of space, every plant and soon every drop of water into an extractable commodity to take elsewhere.

Countering the type of colonial gaze that cuts across the landscape, only seeking access to prime materials and profit, *Cartographies of the Unseen* presents an alternative point of entry to explore the Pan-Amazon region. This time, the territories are approached as a multidimensional and entangled volumetric landscape sustained by fragile biocultural relations and ancestral spatial practices. Right at the intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous definitions, this project looks critically at the core ideas that shape, define and render territory visible. Therefore, using recorridos (Indigenous-led expeditions), filmmaking as a type of enactment, offerings and forms of participatory research via co-creation, this project yields modes of listening and conversing with a vertical territory that calls for agency.

As water travels down from the Andes across riverbeds and up into the sky via humidity and mist, the river becomes the main connector across species, cultures and altitudes. The most ambitious work in this exhibition is the film "AYÊNAN" (a Kamnëstá term meaning smallest space in the universe where life begins), which renders the water cycle across these complex territories and through Indigenous spatial knowledges. Using video and performance, this piece enacts a counter-expedition that seeks nothing but the reestablishing of Indigenous ways of territorial production, using rituals that converse with earth as a subject. From asking permission to concealment, the ancestral modes of territoriality referenced in these works recognize self-determination and the right to exist in the landscape itself.

Together, artists, Indigenous members from the media collective and the territory have collaborated to devise a performative ceremony taking place in a sacred landscape in the high Andes. Our aim was to plant water back into the mountain and return a long-lost treasure. Asking permission from the clouds, the lake, soils and trees is a fundamental part of the ritual, which hands agency back to the landscape and rekindles not one but many forms of belonging, of becoming Indigenous, to a common planet.

At the opposite end of the gallery was a unique bird's nest, which was retrieved in the Inga-Kamënstá territory during one of the trips and later reconstructed in Basel. Its architect, a bird known across the Pan-Amazon region as Mochilero or Crested Oropendola (Psarocolius decumanus) left it abandoned near the infamous road known as Trampoline of Death, which connects the high Andes with the Amazon. Inspired by the Mochilero's nest, several Kamënstá artisans from the Sibundoy Valley created the seven hand-woven (hammock-like) nests that hang in the gallery. These nests were used by visitors for resting or momentarily inhabiting during their visit to the gallery, while complying with the social distance measures imposed globally during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ultimately, the works included in this show investigate various forms of resistance, occupation and spirituality that connect the underground, soils, trees and the sky across altitudes. On the one hand, the exhibition serves to raise questions around how representational techniques, artistic research, participatory media and co-creation can dialogue with a landscape that exists beyond the realm of measure, zoning and visibility. One the other hand, the exhibition aims to bring a remote and layered biocultural landscape into the foreground, while establishing a dialogue around entangled political ecologies that place the Pan-Amazon region at the center of neocolonial and climate change debates.

The exhibition provides an opportunity for both aesthetic encounters and experiences via film essays and documentary, 360 video and installation, as well as concrete steps towards cross-regional cooperation by linking art and research with a practice of institution making as a kind of statecraft. Aside from producing

numerous films, archive and research material over the course of three years, the funding for this project has been used to provide much-needed training, video and sound equipment to the media collectives. In addition, we have been able to assist with the gathering of evidence (as video and interviews) to support the Inga and Kamënstá governments in land-retribution claims against the Colombian government and secure international aid by the U.N. Finally, a portion of the funds from the project are set to cover the travel costs for Indigenous leaders and members of Ñambi Rimai to come to Europe (postponed to September 2021 due to Covid-19 travel ban), in order to network with international Climate and Human Rights organizations based in Switzerland, as well as to voice their own struggle and find support for their territorial defense strategies.

Image:
Artist Book produced in parallel to the exhibition.

Installation View at Marres Art Center, Maasticht NL. 2021

About the Works:

IACHACHIDUR / El Maestro

(Participatory Documentary) 11:00 min. HD, 2019.
A film by Ñambi Rimai

This film portraits Taita Paulino Mojomboy, an Inga elder, a shaman and a central figure of the entire Inga Nation. Taita Paulino is a healer as well as a spiritual and political leader who has used ancestral medicines to support a process of cultural restoration, self-determination and revival of Indigenous knowledge among his community. He is a fierce land protector and a biopolitical mediator between the territory, the sacred plants and the spirits sharing the multidimensional forest in which the Inga live.

Norelly

(Participatory Documentary) 18:00 min. HD, 2019
A film by Ñambi Rimai

Norelly is a young Inga Leader and the granddaughter of Taita Paulino. She grew up during one of the most violent periods of Colombia's recent history and has seen how much her family has sacrificed over time to protect their ancestral heritage, their land and medicinal knowledge. Like many other Indigenous teenagers, Norelly is caught up between two cultures and ways of life. Due to the lack of Indigenous schools and the constant influence from western societies, Norelly needs to choose to either abandon her culture and the values for which her family has fought, or assimilate further the non-Indigenous values as she continues her path into adulthood.

Rio Arriba (Up River)

14:00 min. HD, 2018 – 2020.
A film by Felipe Castelblanco

Upriver is a two-channel film that follows a journey up the Putumayo River in the Colombian Pan-Amazon region revealing a vertical landscape with planetary resonance where Indigenous resistance, trees, soils, clouds, light and shadow inter-exist. Departing

from the Siona territory in the lower Amazon at 300 M.A.S.L to the Quillacinga territory in the highlands of the Colombian Andes at 3000 M.A.S.L, this film takes the viewer along a meandering river that cuts across territories in dispute. It is here where overlapping sovereignties emerge and where extractive industries clash with human and non-human communities resisting violence across this vertical axis of power and occupation.

AYÊNAN

(Multichannel Video Installation) 2020.
A film by Felipe Castelblanco and Lydia Zimmermann,
with Ñambi Rimai Media Collective

This film documents a counter-expedition that follows the upward movement of water throughout its natural cycle, going from the Andean-Amazon foothills to the Atlantic Ocean in the coast of Colombia. Along the way, this journey reveals the traces of a long-forgotten expedition in search of El Dorado but this time, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers come to request permission from the territory and to harmonize with it.

Climbing up from a river in the lower Amazon to a lake in the upper Andes, members of Ñambi Rimai Media Collective come to a sacred landscape in order to plant water back into the mountain and return a long-lost treasure. Together they create an offering, a ritual, which embodies situated forms of biocultural peace-building between regions, cultures and non-human worlds. Ultimately, the film explores how representational techniques like film can dialogue with a landscape that exists beyond the realm of visibility. In doing so, it opens an aesthetic path to explore the connection between Indigenous ways of seeing, territorial thinking, mutual acknowledging and much-needed acts of reciprocity.


For us, each idea has a name, a purpose

Map of the Exhibition:

1. Ñambi Rimai Media Collective
   360 Video, Loop. Spanish with English Subtitles.

2. Film El Maestro (The Teacher)
   11 minutes, 2019. Spanish with English Subtitles.

3. Film Norelly
   18 minutes, 2019. Spanish with English Subtitles

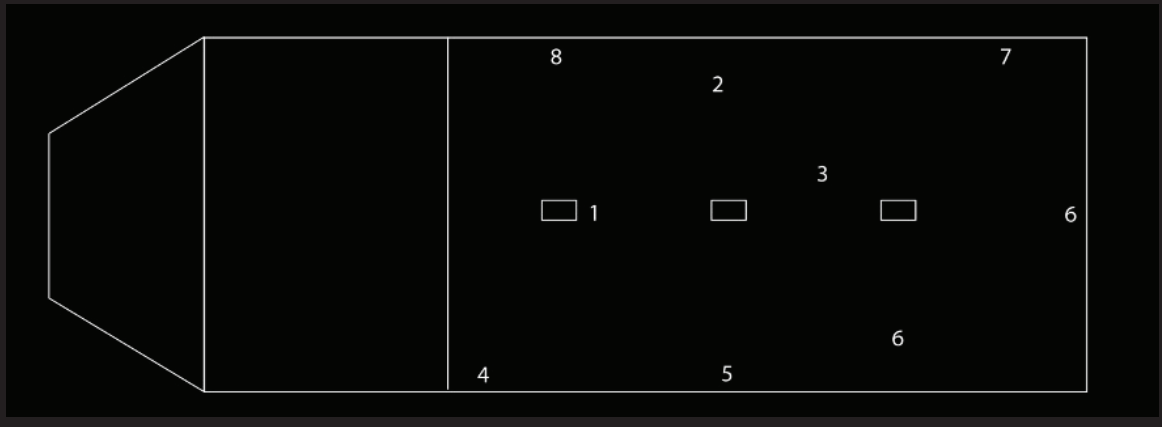
4. Rio Arriva (Upriver). Film Essay
   14 minutes, 2020. Spanish with English Subtitles

5. Vertical Territory
   Video, Loop. Spanish with English Subtitles

6. AYÊNAN (Part 1 and 2)
   Combined, running time: 34 minutes. Spanish
   with English Subtitles

7. Mochilero's Nest
   Natural Fibers.

8. Amazon Library
   Silkscreen and fluorescent Inks
   46.5cm X 59.5cm



Biographies

Lead Artist, Producer and Researcher:

FELIPE CASTELBLANCO is a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of socially engaged and Media Art. His work creates platforms for inter-epistemic dialogue and ventures out into new frontiers of publicness. Recent shows include the 2019 Quebec Biennial, Seasons of Media at ZKM in Karlsruhe and the Queens Museum in New York, among others. Felipe holds an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University (USA) and is currently completing a PhD at the ECAM Graduate School at the HGK Basel and University of the Arts, Linz. His doctoral project titled Cartographies of the Unseen explores avenues for biocultural peace-building and territorial rights in the Colombian Pan-Amazon region. This exhibition is the result of Felipe's research and therefore, it has been conceived, produced and developed entirely as a practice-based exploration leading towards a PhD (2018 - 2020).

Collaborators:

LYDIA ZIMMERMANN has directed fiction films, TV movies, film essays and documentaries since 1994. She has filmed in Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Mexico, Haiti, Burkina Faso and Colombia, exploring cinematic genres, non-linear narratives and expanded cinema. She holds a MA in Transdisciplinary Studies from the ZHdK and is the founder of Kunstruktur, a south/north platform for artistic research and human kindness. Currently she lives between Barcelona and Zurich developing film projects for Artisan Films (Switzerland), Principal Films (Spain) and Ralda World (Catalonia).

ÑAMBI RIMAI is an Indigenous Media Collective operating in the Southwest of Colombia between the High Andes and the Lower Amazon. Its mission is to support processes of self-governance, cultural preservation and communication across Indigenous territories and beyond through film, radio and multimedia productions. Today, the collective is made of 10 Indigenous leaders from the Awa, Inga, Kamënstá, Quillacinga, Nasa and Siona nations living

between the states of Nariño, lower Cauca and Putumayo. This initiative emerged in 2019 as a collaboration between Taita (Inga Chief) Hernando Chindoy and Felipe Castelblanco, with support from Camilo Pachón (Ambulante Mas Allá - AMA) and The Para-Site School. Through numerous workshops, exchanges and field trips to neighbouring reservations, members from Ñambi Rimai have gained audio-visual, media and networking skills. Guest instructors include Hannah Mezaros-Martin (Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths University, London), Emiliano Altuna (Filmmaker, Mexico), Monica Bustamante (Bogotá), Numael Mendez (Bogotá) and Lydia Zimmermann (Artisan Films, Zurich and Barcelona). In 2019, Ñambi Rimai produced two participatory documentaries featured in this show.

CAMILO PACHÓN (Director of Ambulante Más Allá) is a visual artist and filmmaker based in Bogotá, Colombia. He has exhibited his work in Colombia since 2006 and in other countries such as Germany, United States and Spain. His work is an anthropological exploration of contemplative, characterized proposals, in which the viewer is immersed in a universe that goes beyond the image, full of recurring themes, rituals and spiritual characters. With Ambulante Mas Allá, Camilo has hosted several filmmaking workshops and community-driven documentary films in remote and rural areas of Colombia.

Support from: Pro Helvetia COINCIDENCIA, Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst Basel, Colombian Ministry of Culture, Foundation, Gilberto Alzate Avendaño Bogotá and SUdKulturFonds.

Below and next pages: Still Image Ayênan. 2020

Chapter 2: Altitudes of Dispossession

"In the world of prisons, as in the world of dogs, the vertical axis is not one of the dimensions of space, it is the dimension of power"[1]

-Michael Foucault

Part 1: Overlapping Sovereignties

A Nation-body Below and Over

Colombia is a nation divided into diverse climatic regions that correspond to varying altitudes, spreading from the top of the Andean Mountain range to the immensity of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as the Amazon floodplains. These altitudes are distributed across three long walls of the mountain range that divide the country into adjacent, but different ecoregions. Each flank of the cordillera (ridges) produces landscapes of almost every possible climate, from alpine glaciers to deserts. Located at the northwestern edge of the South American tectonic plate, the country's geomorphology has been shaped by clashing forces, pushing from the west– through the gigantic Pacific plate– and from the north– through the Caribbean tectonic plate. These forces accumulate a vast amount of potential energy, which pushes the elevation of land masses to impressive altitudes and pushes up magma from the earth's crust through dormant and active volcanoes (Navas Camacho 2002).

As geologist Julio Fierro points out, various sections along the Andean mountain range, particularly in the Southwest across Putumayo and lower Cauca, are areas with latent 'potential' energy

1 Foucault, M. (2007 [1973]). The force of flight (G. Moore, Trans.). In J. W. Crampton, & S. Elden (Eds.), Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography (pp. 169e172). Aldershot: Ashgate.

one should not awaken. This means that incredibly powerful yet entrapped geological forces still pushing from earth's crust await to escape and rip further open the Andean landscape. The eastern flank of the Andean mountain range is prone to landslides due to unpredictable volcanic activity, deforestation, and both large and small-scale mining operations. Seismic activity is therefore constant and, in some sections along the foothills that connect the Andes with the Amazon plains, the mountains have been moving as much as six centimeters per year, as if walking towards the east (Ibid).

As a result of the rugged topography and varying altitudes, Colombia's climate is as diverse as the kinds of life that emerge in such conditions: Ecuadorian climate helps tropical rainforests to populate the Southern foothills on either side of the mountain range; a Mediterranean climate is found in regions known today for the proliferation of coffee farming, stretching across the Magdalena depression between the Central and Western Cordilleras; Tundra-like climates are found across the Andean highlands, with constant temperatures below the 10 degrees Celsius and heavy mist, which contributes to the formation of large swamps and important Paramos (high altitude Andean wetlands); Polar temperatures concentrate in the highest peaks of the Andes at altitudes above 4500 m.ASL. where snow accumulates all year-round (referred to as Nieves Perpetuas, or perpetual snow).

This complex geomorphology has shaped not only Colombia's environment, but also the development of infrastructure. To some extent, it has even shaped the course of Colombia's economic growth. For example, up until the late 1990s', there was a lack of efficient cross-regional transport infrastructures between the capital, Bogotá, and nearby provinces. The railroad system from the early twentieth century eventually succumbed to the neglectful governments of the late 1970s, until it collapsed in the 1990 and the tracks were swallowed by the tropical forests. For the most part, the national road and highway system was built over old colonial roads. These colonial roads were themselves built over ancient Indigenous trails, never designed to transport anything bigger than a few loads by foot, or after the arrival of the Spaniards, on horseback or the backs of enslaved Indigenous people.

Up until the 1980s', air travel between Bogotá and other regions of Colombia was either too expensive for most Colombians or too dangerous for pilots due to the difficult meteorological conditions of the upper Andes and the rudimentary radars and navigation systems of the time. In contrast, river transportation was the only viable way to move people and merchandise across the nation, or the only way to access the naturally formed Andean fortress. With its capital Bogotá located in the very middle of the central cordillera, travelers and merchants still had a long day's journey from the nearest port along the main channels of the Magdalena River. Actually, Colombia's transport network was so backward that even as late as the 1950s' it was more expensive to transport a sack of coffee from Medellín to Bogotá, than from Medellín to London's exchange markets (Feiling 2012).

In one way or another, for a city situated in the high Andes with poor access roads, Bogota has remained shielded from several issues affecting the rest of Colombia, like the ongoing conflicts between guerrillas, paramilitary armies, and the state, which have made international headlines for decades. Nonetheless, such geographical particularities not only prompted isolation, they have also generated a kind of cultural myopia (Uribe 2017), making Bogotá an insular city that has either ignored other regions of the country, or refused to see cultural value beyond its colonial history. Hence, the astonishing ignorance of most city dwellers when it comes to knowing Indigenous history, geography, or even botany of other regions of the country. This ignorance is matched with a well-trained reflex to welcome and assimilate foreign influence, making the entire nation the perfect receptacle for the globalizing process started by colonialism. Still today, if you find yourself in Bogota's traditionally upper-class neighborhoods like Chico and glance at the architecture, you might feel like walking through Clapham in the west of London. But if you were to walk south into the booming commercial areas, you either end up in a Miami-style mall or in neighborhoods where Mexican music adds to the intense background noise of the city.

Located in the middle of the country, Bogota is the administrative, economic and political center. To leave the city in any direction means descending in altitude, as well as traversing levels of the

social pyramid where the lower regions often enjoy less and less economic prosperity, due to the progressive lack of presence from the state. In fact, it is as if the nation was designed to resemble a hierarchical system of power that imitates the human body standing upright, with most of the energy invested in sustaining the upper organs. This pyramidal, or even vertical state-design, is perhaps one of the cognitive biases that most vividly exemplifies how the colonial project in Colombia has relied on altitude to exercise control. Relating the design of the nation to an anthropocentric image, with the capital at the very top, also means to think pictorially as probably the early colonial settlers did when looking at this entirely new landscape.

At 2600 mASL, and much closer to the heavens, Bogotá acts like the brain, or the control room, where most decisions are made by a political class that coordinates the function of all other organs of the nation-body. In the highest hill, right above the colonial neighborhood (Candelaria) where the highest power resides (the presidential place), is the church of Señor de Monserrate and in a hill nearby, but not as high as the church is a poorly maintained statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The city itself is divided based on this vertical model, with the most expensive real estate located in the eastern hills, where the higher you go the more you pay. It is not rare that upper-class Bogotanos live in hard-to-access or gated communities branded with terms that related to altitude (i.e. Altos or Colinas words for high and hills). Paradoxically, this tendency is also seen in extremely poor areas of the city, where illegal settlements pop up in the southwestern hills, (obviously never as high as the eastern hills) but in this case, altitude comes with the cost of constant lack of basic services like water, sewage, and public transport. As much as altitude supports opulence in Bogota, it also supports segregation and the ill-fated desire of the poor to literally climb up the social pyramid which the very design of the city represents.

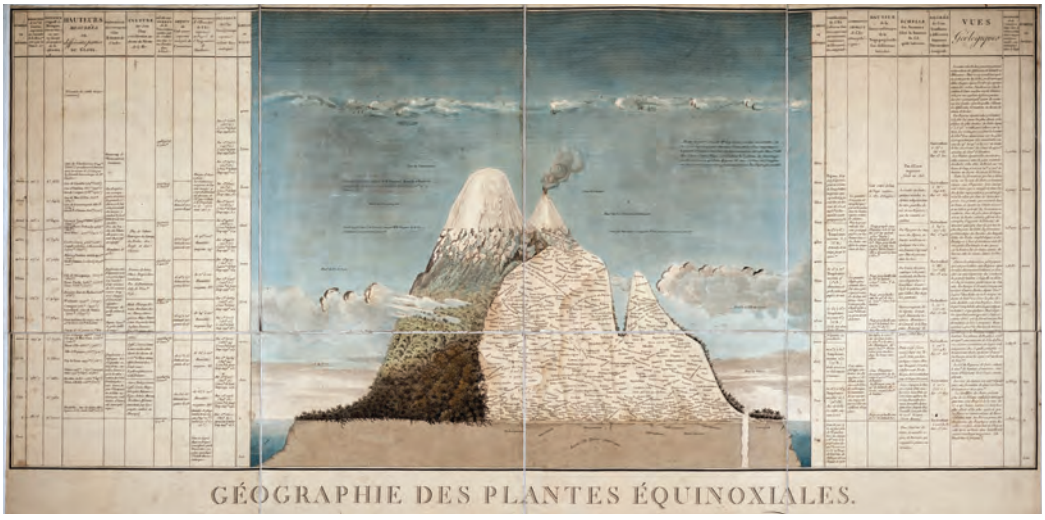
At around 1500 mASL, in the milder and more predictable climates of the Andean mountains are the most prosperous agricultural and industrial zones, working as if they were a digestive system. States like Boyaca, Quindio, upper Antioquia and Santander take bigger chunks of the national budget as infrastructural in-

vestment, financial support for agricultural development and are a high priority for national security. In return, these 'productive' zones provide nutrients to the national economy, in the form of prosperous agricultural industries (like coffee, potatoes, and oil palm plantations). With more stable climates that share some similarities with Mediterranean regions, these areas also benefit from a balanced ratio between seasonal rains, daily sunlight, and dry seasons, thus adapting more efficiently than lower regions to the agricultural development models imported from the global north.

Like in a body, each organ works autonomously and contributes to the overall system but also consumes or produces energy in various degrees. The brain coordinates functions, but if left alone it cannot survive. Therefore, below 700 mASL, the body-nation rests on limbs that provide stability and economic dynamism on which the heavyweight of the brain and upper organs rest. Colombia's lower regions have the most natural resources, such as oil, mineral deposits, vast grazing lands, and huge levels of biodiversity. With the exception of a modern highway system being built since the late 1990s' to move resources to the nearest ports, states like Guajira, Choco, Cauca, Lower Nariño, Putumayo, Amazonas, and the whole eastern plains of Llanos Orientales, are disproportionately underserved by national investment and security compared to the upper lands. Not surprisingly, Colombia's most underserved and violated communities also live at sea-level across the Pacific and Atlantic littoral, as well as in tropical rainforest like the Darien-Gap and the Colombian Amazon, which are all resource-rich regions where opposing powers (the state, guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug cartels) seek to exercise territorial control. For the political elites ruling from the top of the pyramidal system in Bogotá, maintaining the unity of the nation-body, or a highly diverse and contested territory, has been a similar struggle like it was for the former colonial powers controlling the nation from afar.

During the conquest process of what is now Colombia, early European explorers confronted a landscape that, like its inhabitants, needed to be "tamed" with Western forms of spatial ordering. Thus, in the early days of the colonial campaign (the 1530s'), Crown armies lead by the Quesada brothers entered the Andes through the Magdalena river and destroyed Indigenous towns along the

way, displacing and kidnapping thousands of locals, some of whom were later forced to settle in remote regions. Such a familiar type of "divide and conquer" strategy unsurprisingly debilitated Indigenous communities and caused a complete reordering of the ethnic landscape of the country. Another territorial model imposed on the New Kingdom of Granada was based on a feudal-like system, known as 'Encomiendas' (missions), which gave vast portions of lands to generals loyal to the Spanish crown, who collected taxes from local indigenous inhabitants in the form of agricultural products or labor (Bonilla 2006).



Alexander von Humboldt. Géographie des plantes equinoxiales. Essai sur la géographie des plantes, accompagné d'un tableau physique des régions équinoxiales. Paris: chez Fr. Schoell; Tübingen: chez J. G. Cotta 1805/7

Part 2: On Humboldt's Eye and the Tradition of Seeing: Cutting across the Landscape

In both the early colonial era as well as during clashes for Colombian independence from Spain in the early 19th century, map-making and various forms of visual renderings of the territory became an important tool, not only to record entirely unknown landscapes but to visually locate resources and domesticate them. In 1783, the Spanish king Carlos III commissioned what would be one of the most ambitious scientific research projects ever carried out in the New Kingdom of Granada. Orchestrated by the Spanish priest and botanist José Celestino Mutis (1732 – 1808), the Botanical

Expedition would be responsible for surveying vast territories under Spanish rule, documenting large numbers of plants and animal species in what is today Colombia, Ecuador and part of Venezuela. As expected, the expedition uncovered many of the natural secrets of the New World, traversing the Andean mountains all the way to the Amazon Jungles between 1783 to 1816. The enterprise was also responsible for instilling a sudden interest among the world's top scientists in the Andean region, including Alexander Von Humboldt (1769 – 1859) and his travel companion Aimé Bonpland (1773 – 1858).

In 1801 a serendipity of events, ranging from illness and forced detours due to inclement weather in and around the Antilles, Humboldt was forced to deviate from the initially plotted route of his expedition. That is why in March of 1801, the travelers found themselves at the port of Cartagena de Indias, in what is still one of the busiest ports on the Atlantic coast of Colombia. It was there where Humboldt was persuaded by José Ignacio Pombo, a local politician, to travel up the Andes all the way to Santa Fé de Bogotá, in order to meet the ongoing expedition commanded by Mutis. In no time, Humboldt and Bonpland embarked on a three-month journey towards Bogota, navigating upstream the Magdalena river to the port of Honda at the top of the Andean hills, and from there, they continued the ascent to the capital on foot. Undoubtedly, along this particular route, the travelers would become acquainted with the progressive change in vegetation as they gained altitude, moving from tropical to a sub-tropical Andean climate, where jungles morphed into cloud forests, and later these transitioned into humid Paramos at the highest altitudes. Once in Bogotá, Mutis welcomed the travelers in July of 1801, offering them enormous support and the opportunity to explore neighboring regions around Bogotá's savannas before continuing their journey towards Ecuador in September of that year. Before heading towards Ecuador that September, Humboldt and Bonpland explored several mountain tops, salt mines and became familiar with the chain of volcanoes that extends along the Andean ridge and down to Peru, along what was then known as Cordillera Real (the entire upper part of the Andean mountain range).

It was this particular section of the journey that would inform Humboldt's observations and help him to produce his celebrated plant collections, analysis on the varying distribution of plants and oxygen

across altitudes (Piedrahita Diaz 2000). These observations were rendered in numerous drawings and annotated diagrams made by Humboldt in the field, which were later recreated by numerous artists he commissioned in Berlin, Rome and Paris to reinterpret and improve the visual system he already had established (Ibid). Among these diagrams is the celebrated Tableau Physique des Andes et Pays Voisins, depicting a cross-section of a mountain associated with the Chimborazo volcano, used as a model to locate various plant species in correlation to the altitude at which they are found.

The importance of Humboldt's drawings and diagrams is paramount, as they informed two divergent schools of landscape interpretation. On the one hand, Humboldt's enormous contribution to visual culture can be traced in numerous publication that followed, including subsequent landscape paintings he commissioned for his publications from Italian artists like Christian Gottlieb (1776-1812) and Jacques Luis David (1748-1825), or the Austrian Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839). As volumes of his botanical treaties and atlases circulated widely in Europe and the Americas, his illustrations also influenced several South American landscape painters, many of whom have been associated with a persistent Humboldtian painting tradition in Colombian, according to the art historian Beatriz Gonzalez (Badawi 2017). Humboldt's visual sys-

Páramo de las Papas. Anonymous 86,3 x 116 cm Oil on Canvas ca. 1840 Colombia's Museum of the Bank of the Republic Collection.

tem of correlation between ecosystems and climates is still a relevant method of depiction for the Andean-Amazon territories, as well as to inform the artistic and scientific Western imaginary in relation to the geomorphology of a vastly unknown region while providing the location of various resources placed across altitudinal zones, which would eventually make the concept of tropical diversity a bit easier to grasp for the foreign mind.
During his time in the Bogotá of the early 1800s', Humboldt quickly made an imprint in the cultural life of a still provincial city, which was headed towards independence from Colonial power only a few years later. Throughout the 19th century, artists of the Andean region took on the role of naturalists leaving behind landscape paintings that depicted everything from volcanoes to important rivers and mountain passes. (These works have been attributed to anonymous local artists and are now preserved at Colombia's National Museum and the Bank of the Republic's art collection). And while there was not an established Humboldtian painting school, these artists borrowed iconography and styles from European pictorial tradition, while interpreting the landscape based on second-hand accounts and drawings collected from travelers (Ibid).

Most of these artworks often project a bucolic desire onto the landscape, aided by vast panoramic views of pastoral scenery, which visually domesticates and erases the life-threatening, lush abundance and biological complexities of the Andean-Amazon forests.

On the other hand, Humboldt's cross-section drawings present the Andean landscape as a densely packed environment that changes based on the fluctuations in altitude. However, while plant distribution is attributed to altitudinal conditions, from the lush tropical rainforest at sea level, all the way to more the barren landscapes in the upper Andes, what these renderings actually depict is an entire set of ecological indicators based on the region's temperature and proximity to earth's core. Therefore, in contrast to the more traditional landscape paintings mentioned above, which fix the elements, separate land from the sky, or ignore airborne and underground life forms, what Humboldt's groundbreaking cross-section images capture is the climate. An otherwise hard-to-grasp natural phenomenon that delivers an earthly system of volumes, temperatures, air chemistry and even dictates the conditions for life's

adaptability along a vertical axis of atmospheric relations. And not only did Humboldt develop these visual methods to represent elevation, he also perfected the process of measuring these very same atmospheric conditions across altitudes, using barometers among an array of novel scientific instruments for his time (Humboldt and Bonpland 1805). However, let's not forget that some of the training based on which Humboldt's gaze, and knowledge, had developed came from the disciplines of geology and volcanology. Most certainly, Humboldt was familiar with various analytical depiction systems, such as cross-section drawings, used to represent the formation of terrains, as well human activity below the earth's surface. As early as 1556, in Georgius Agricola's landmark treatise De Re Metallica, cross-section woodcut drawings were used to illustrate how mining operations could be deployed on a landscape, thus revealing a concrete step-by-step process for the extraction and appropriation of earth's minerals. Particular to these strategies is the capacity to represent landscapes as both operational sites ready for human intervention, as well as repositories of untapped resources.

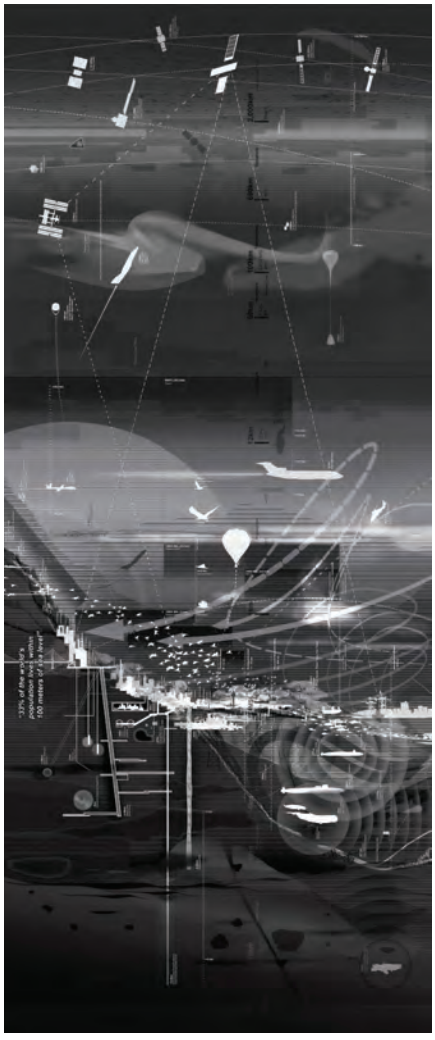
One could argue that over time, Humboldt's cross-section drawings became instrumental for the Colombian government (and the colono-settler's imaginary) to lay out land-management plans based on altitudinal distributions. Therefore, the state implemented large-scale agricultural programs across the territory based solely on what could grow where, as opposed to the conservation of fragile environments distributed across the very same altitudes. For example, throughout the twentieth century, Colombia's agricultural funds supported the propagation of coffee plantations across very diverse ecoregions of the country all above the 1000 mASL without paying much consideration to the specific environmental risks this could pose. As a result, farmers mobilized across the country but always sought the milder climates of the Andean foothills, between 1000 and 1500 mASL. The cost of such disproportionate distribution of land meant that important natural corridors that connect the high Andes with lower lands have become severely disrupted all across the country. Animals like jaguars, tapirs, and bears, among many others, which used to move up and down along the mountains have mostly disappeared.

Even today, Colombia (as many other countries across the global south) is a nation that grapples with intense spatial disputes, inherited from a colonial past laid over a complex terrain with unique heights. Accordingly, the actual operational dimension of the power struggle occurs below, across, and over the ground. In other words, while those in power seemed preoccupied with dominating the territory, and even ordering it through law and knowledge, the actual battle for control of the so called New World has been one of vertical trajectories across altitudinal relations.

The territory as Volume

In a seminal paper titled Introduction to the Politics of Verticality, the architect and theorist Eyal Weizmann argued that "geopolitics is a flat discourse" (Weizman 2002). This results in spatial imaginaries that ignore the vertical dimension and fail to render visible power relations across volumes. Such logics have been inherited from the military and the modern state, which exercise control over places, zones, and borders rendered through a flat system of representation based on the cartographic view of the earth. As a result, "territorial claims marked on maps assume that [such] claims are applicable simultaneously above them and below" (Ibid). In fact, the earth's volumes are contested dimensions of spaces that are often quietly ignored by traditional maps, themselves two-dimensional instruments.

Along a vertical (Z) axis that extends from the underground, cuts through cities and reaches far into the atmosphere, space has always been fragmented and claimed by ideologies of power. Indeed, many religions across the world structure their theological and moral pillars along a vertical axis, like Christianity with its heavenly paradise hovering above the clouds and the deadly and sinful inferno buried well below the earth's surface. In fact, humanity's spatial imaginaries, even if built on very diverse epistemological grounds, cultural practices, and histories, tend towards some kind of distribution that places the divine, the reasonable, and the positive above, while reserving the spaces below to the abject, the sinful, the tragic and the unreasonable. As obvious as it sounds, these analogies also point back to the human body and its tendency towards a vertical standing, with the eyes and



Seeing from the side: altitudinal section showing depths of extraction with underground urbanization to the deepest hole in the ground at 10,781 m below sea level to atmospheric urbanization with satellite revolutions at 380,000 km in high earth orbit. Diagram by Pierre Bélanger and OPSYS

brain much closer to skies and somewhat removed from the constant engagement of the feet with the terrestrial ground. With generally vertical-able bodies (unless impaired by illness or disability), our perpetual struggle as humans is to raise up and gain distance from the ground, even if it means only lifting our heads a few inches to properly swallow and maintain bodily functions.

Therefore, as Stephen Graham warns us, it is important to remain cautious and unpack the various metaphors that equate power with direct access to height or elevation while relating death, defeat, or vulnerability with a "lower bodily stature or the ground itself" (Graham n.d.). Even in the English language, we express being happy with "up" and sadden or depressed with "down". Experiencing success also implies a type of "rising" while failure becomes a sort of "fall" back onto the ground. Class relations also become a sort of "upper" or "lower" positions or categorized as "super" (from the Latin 'super' or above), like a supervisor or superior, or "sub" (from the Latin 'sub' or under) like the subordinate or the subaltern (Ibid). Together, these metaphors for 'social orientation' as Graham describes them, also express a tense relation between power as the capacity to resist the gravity that constantly pulls the body, and its heavy head, towards the ground. However, in the exercise of power from above, gravity becomes an ally as it enables one body or entity to smash, oppress, overlap, and even bring down another one (Ibid 2). That is why, in observing the trajectories of power deployed to space, both volume and the vertical trajectory become the most crucial arena.

The technologies used to exercise control are deployed along the vertical axis. Whether used for surveillance, intimidation, or the imminent destruction of an enemy target, altitude is always a privileged position. In many ways, the actual military race of today is

a desperate attempt to get higher than the enemy, for example, cell phone towers, high-frequency telecommunications, flight exclusion zones, drone surveillance technology, satellite positioning systems, high orbit satellites, and so forth. However, along the same vertical axis what lies below is also of incredible importance to the maintenance of power. At times it can also fuel the same vertical race for unique resources on a subterranean level. It becomes thus another way to exercise power through cultivating access to and exclusive control of mineral deposits, as well as developing secret and highly lucrative underground infrastructures. Weizmann continues with his argument by declaring that "the departure from a planar division of a territory to the creation of three-dimensional boundaries across sovereign bulks redefines the relationship between sovereignty and space." (Weizman 2002). These new associations between volumetric space and power claims, also call for new methods of observation, prompting a revision of the cartographic techniques widely used to represent space. In Weizmann's view, we require "an Escher-like representation of space" (Ibid) beyond the two-dimensional surface that becomes capable of rendering power-fueled distortions, extrusions, and sophisticated acts enclosing the territory and across its three-dimensional volumes (Ibid 2).

Perhaps, this new system of representation starts with dislocating the panoramic view from its horizontality, as if tilting our head sideways and using the widest angle of human vision to appreciate the earth's depth and heights. American polymath Buckminster Fuller was an early proponent of the idea of seeing sideways but also of moving urbanism up into the skies using floating architectures and numerous infrastructures that maximized altitudinal distribution of modern life across the vertical axis. Although his designs and prototypes did not gain much traction beyond the speculative design sphere or the science fiction world, we would soon realize that indeed, modern life is more so reliant on the Z-axis than in any other time in human history.

A more recent example of cross-section diagrams that attempt to correlate altitudinal zones with human infrastructures is the Altitudes of Urbanization Map created by the architect and theorist Pierre Bélanger and MIT architecture students. More than

rendering a specific location, this map makes visible the technological race for occupying the vertical axis, in this case, manifested through various transport, military, and resource extraction technologies. This cross-section diagram, or vertical mapping of various technologies, renders earthly space as an infrastructural landscape with activity as deep as 10,000 below sea level (deep-sea mining) or as high as 30,000 mASL, the current position of high-altitude satellites (Belanger 2017). Like Humboldt's maps, this depiction of altitudinal zones attempts to capture something that otherwise escapes human perception, and therefore, what is revealed is both the relations in spaces, as well the need for a new type of gaze capable of piecing together a completely different type of landscape. This time, the panoramic view must be tilted and the horizon line diffused to see how various elements located deep below the ground now correlate to others positioned somewhere else, even high above. These types of renderings also enable a unique perspective that collapses focal points in order to compose multilayered, asynchronous, and even multidimensional landscape representations.

Illustration from De Re Metallica, Georgius Agricola, 1556

However, helped by the illustrious minds of the late 1700s' like those of Mutis and Humboldt, the relevance of the horizon-reliant landscape imaginary started to lose traction and perhaps those in power might have noticed. In other words, while it appears that the spatial model of colonial expansion responds to a flat perspective, which seeks to replicate power structures through exploration, mapping, and forceful claims to a portion of the earth's surface (Graham n.d.), this is only one side of the story. On the flip side, is the fact that the colonial model quickly adopted the vertical gaze, enabling their armies to deploy strategically in order to control and make land claims over areas filled with abundant natural resources. Let's not forget that after Humboldt's studies at the Bergakademie in Freiberg, he worked as a mining official in Franco-

nia and during his expedition across the New World he supported local investors and officials by producing numerous mining assessments and land surveys, like the Zipaquira Salt mine near Bogotá in 1801 (Piedrahita Diaz 2000).

Part 3: The Pan-Amazon as a Vertical Landscape

"Geology is a mode of accumulation, on one hand, and of dispossession, on the other, depending on which side of the geologic color line you end up on." [2]

Throughout my practice-based investigation, issues around landscape interpretation became even more present. One of them challenged me to seek aesthetic pathways to deal with the added complexities of the volumetric and vertical dimension of the territory, and this became an opportunity to employ and re-adapt a methodology described as Cinematic Cartographies, which I will develop further in the third part of this chapter.

Soon after returning to my studio in Basel, I began to sort through many hours of video footage I recorded during my first trip in the field. This is how I started to piece together a new 'altitudinal study' of the Pan-Amazon region. As a continually disputed landscape fragmented into several climates, I observed how two apparently distinct modes of space cognition have more in common when addressing territorial sovereignty. I am referring specifically to Indigenous spatial practices and those of non-indigenous groups, represented mainly by the Colombian state.

Both sides uphold territorial claims that go beyond the surface of the terrain and deem the airspace or the underground as highly operational and strategic areas, although with very different interests in mind. While each group relies on different observational processes and techniques, like remote sensing or shamanic visions, the spaces they produce and seek to defend are entirely not dissimilar from one another. For example, while the Inga elders condemned the placement of telecommunication antennas

2 Yusoff, Kathryn. A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None (Forerunners: Ideas First) (p. 3). University of Minnesota Press. Kindle Edition.

in their territories, arguing these invade the homes of birds and spirits and also disrupt important energetic pathways, they also recognize the potency of the electromagnetic spectrum. For the telecommunication industry, these are vital infrastructures that extend the monopoly of the state over the Putumayo air space, while supporting the advancement of mining, military, and industrial sectors across the Andes and Amazon regions. As a result, several Indigenous and amateur radio stations, as well as radio communication systems used by illegal groups and Indigenous peace guards, have been shut down. Even the radio stations have been attacked, burned[3] or their license suspended after the pressure from regulators, industry, or violent actors. Meanwhile, ecologists from the National Parks Department and environmental groups have detected decreasing numbers of migratory birds and diminished populations of local bird species like the Crested Oropendola, especially in areas where radio antennas have been placed[4]. Without a doubt, either through spirits, animals or community-run activities, the skies of Putumayo were already busy spaces of vibrant communication and interaction.

By now, it is clear to us all that upon the arrival of Europeans to South America, or Abya Yala as many local leaders would prefer to call it[5], colonization was legitimized first and foremost by a total denial of preexisting rights to land, culture, and knowledge of Indigenous people. However, it might not be obvious that through this process, entire Indigenous nations were made invisible and their territories, like with the rest of nature, were only rendered in the colonizer gaze as a kind of terra Nullis (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). Therefore–with today's rapid reconfiguration of the Pan-Amazon territory through the incursion of new extractive mod-

3 Just a few months before my first visit, one of the community radio stations in Sibundoy Valley was burned down. The report can be found online [Spanish only]: https://flip.org.co/index.php/es/informacion/pronunciamientos/item/2205-queman-transmisores-de-emisora-comunitaria-en-el-norte-de-putumayo

4 To my knowledge, no official reports have been published but this issue has come up in several conversations with local experts, some of them recorded as part of interviews and accessible through the Story Map that accompanies this project. https://research.felipecastelblanco.com/territory/

5 Abya Yala is the ancestral name believed to have been used by the Guna people in today's Panamá and Eastern Colombia to refer to the continent. It translates to Tierra de Sangre Vital (o Lan of Vital Blood) and today is widely used among decolonial scholars, activists and ancestral authorities to denote the continent.

els, from militarization, large agroindustry, and proposed drone operated fumigation programs against illicit coca plantations, numerous radio antennas, or hydroelectric power plants– the risk of seeing the volumes of these territories as empty domains waiting to be intervened is more present now than ever. As Macarena Gomez-Barris argues "if settler colonialism and extractive capitalism reorganized space and time, then vertical seeing normalized violent removal… [these] colonial visual regimes normalized an extractive planetary view that continues to facilitate capitalist expansion, especially upon resource-rich Indigenous territories."[6] If for some readers it might feel like colonization in the region ended with the departure of European rulers after Colombia gained independence in 1819, then let's call the current process extractive neocolonialism. In my view, neocolonialism is still an attack on life but it goes even further. It is a systematic disarticulation of life-enabling relations that support vital spaces in areas such as the Pan-Amazon region. Today, the neocolonial model gains ground through armed conflict which divides and displaces communities; coca farming and cocaine production which leads to deforestation, the molecular breaking of the coca leave (and its spirit) followed by the use of harmful chemicals like sulfuric acid, Diesel or sodium permanganate that later get dumped on the forests after making the drug in makeshift labs; and even nuanced forms of mineral extraction helped by remote sensing and aerial land-surveys across geologically fragile sites.

As an emergent model, neocolonialism is a threat to the very survival of ancestral communities, their spatial practices, and the entire eco-systemic balance of the natural corridors they so fiercely protect in the Andean-Amazon. Ultimately, Indigenous governance is not only a human practice but a process of communication with the land, spirits, and animals that inhabit the volumes of the territory. That is why, conducting an altitudinal study of these landscapes today, and responding as an artist to the complex biocultural developments unique to the region, implies careful articulation of the stories, visual evidence, and local narratives unfolding alongside the neocolonial resurgence across Putumayo.

6 Gómez-Barris, Macarena. The Extractive Zone (Dissident Acts) (p. 6). Duke University Press. Kindle Edition.

Instead of this being just a clash between local Indigenous communities and a national government, or between irreconcilable modes of land-use, the issue at stake for me is how to critically (and even aesthetically) address the process through which neo colonial powers seek to dominate volume. During my field trips, I was drawn to the Putumayo skies and decided to center one of the films around the presence of various kinds of clouds (both natural and human-made), precisely because it became a way to trace an ongoing struggle for sovereignty of earth's volumes vis-a-vis the preservation of vital relations that occur in it. In a place like the Pan-Amazon region, the notion of volumetric territories acquires a new level of complexity once we recognize that what Indigenous communities fight for is actually the vertical layers that make up the whole of their reserves and not merely in the terrains. This mode of ancestral spatial practice is based upon the caring for relations that happen in space (Ulloa 2003), as opposed to the geometries that define the territory. Unfortunately, for states, only the former is valid, especially when translated as borderlines, the GPS coordinates of the legality of land titles.

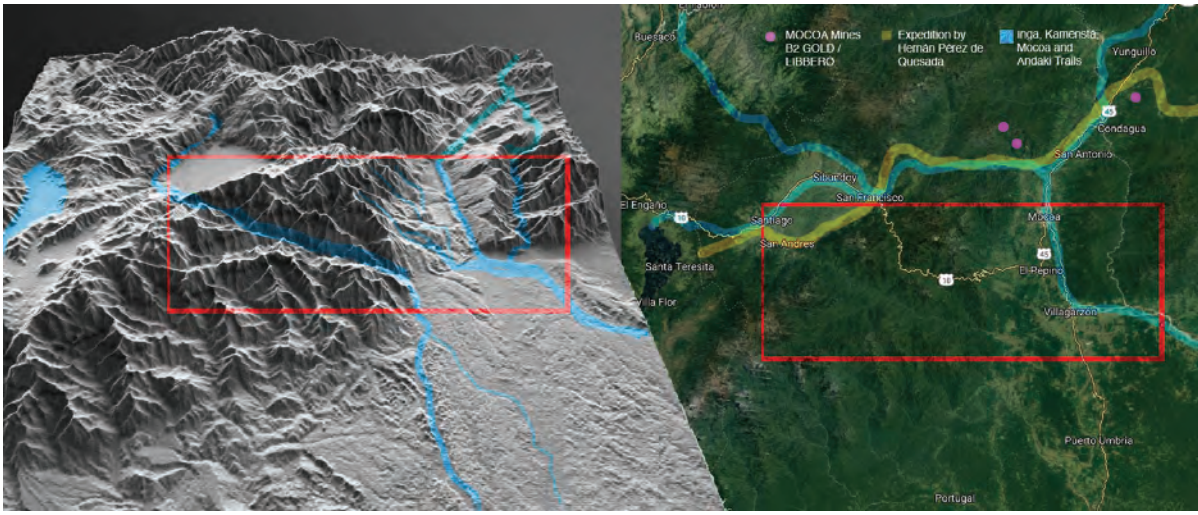
Below: In Search for El Dorado

> *"God placed the greatest abundance of mines… [in such remote places] so that this would invite men to seek those lands and hold them, and in this way to communicate their religion of the true God to those who did not know them… A father with an ugly daughter gives her a large dowry to marry her; and this is what God did with that difficult land, giving it much wealth in mines so that by this means we would find someone who wanted it"*
>
> *-José de Acosta, Jesuit Naturalist. 1535*

For centuries, in the Andean-Amazon foothills in the South of Colombia, violence has been used as an instrument of territorial control, targeting humans and nature alike. In the colonial imagination of countless explorers, these regions were twofold: either places of incredible wealth and hidden mysteries to be uncovered, or a rotting, undeveloped, and diabolic jungle that had to be dominated

(Wylie 2013). Countless chronicles left for posterity speak loudly about the abusive mentality through which the Amazon has been rendered as an extractable asset in the colonizer's eye.

Trapped in the winds of history and the global industrious mindset, the Putumayo has become the recipient and the testing grounds of a set of spatial practices that expand and claim space along the vertical trajectories. First, this territorialization model overlaps



Andean foothills in Putumayo. This area is known as the "Recharge Zone" and is the Eastern flank of the Colombian mountain range where the Trade winds first meet the Andes. The image locates the rough position of B2Gol/ Libbero Mines, the route of El Dorado expedition and ancestral trails next to a relief displaying the elevation and geomorphology of the region. Google Maps Image and CNC Wood Carving based on elevation data from NASA.

one history, a set of laws and values, onto another. Second, it deploys fragmenting land-use policies where economic zoning, indigenous reserves and nature reserves become scattered, one next to the other in relatively small fractions of land until they eventually overlap or trespass one another. This leads to confrontation, and it turns local farming and Indigenous communities against each other. Meanwhile, the state asserts territorial control by force, most often siding with sectors that support economic growth through extractive industries and harassing communities devoted to conservation.

As a result, economic zones always prevail and often expand, while Indigenous or nature reserves tend to reduce in size. Of course, we are talking about delicate ecosystems that take generations to restore if disturbed, which paradoxically becomes another argument to push further the exploitation into patches of forest already spoiled, once again benefiting the same extractive industries. Today, this tendency is the main driver of human-in-

duced fires across the Pan-Amazon region, often at the hands of local mining workers and landowners seeking to extract even more profit from lands already damaged. Third, this territorialization model negates other spatial configurations that place life over profit, like those supported by Indigenous and farmer communities creating small networks for seed trading, small-scale organic farming, or food sovereignty programs.

Early on, with the first colonial expeditions across Putumayo led by Hernan Perez de Quesada in 1541-43 (who searched in vain for a mythical land abundant in gold) the colonial gaze has rendered the Andean-Amazon as layered territory. Through this lens, one layer is simply an obstacle to access the next. One by one, each section of these overlapped and incredibly rich ecosystems becomes disputed, drained, or diminished by the very extractive economic model that drove the conquistadores in the first place. Hence, throughout this text, I reiterate the relevance of the El Dorado expedition due to its lasting impacts on the territorial formation of Colombia and particularly, the spatial imaginaries that still collude in the Putumayo region to further advance the grip of extractive industries on the region.

Several Expeditions led by prominent colonial generals and explorers scavenged the Putumayo, Caquetá, and lower Amazon forests in the mid-1500s' all searching for a legendary region where it was believed that gold grew better, due to the proximity of the Equator and the relatively sunnier days compared to the cloudy and pale light of the southern part of the continent (Hemming 1978). The search for El Dorado deep in the Amazon regions begins with a shipwreck in 1530 when Spanish explorer Diego de Ordás and his men found themselves stranded along the banks of the Orinoco River. During the ordeal, they reported meeting hospitable Indigenous tribes whose bodies were decorated with elaborate golden accessories which had been traded with another tribe further up into the forests.

The sheer promise of discovering gold and silver mines was one of the main drivers of most colonial expeditions across the Americas, and so the quest for unlimited sources of gold became the engine that propelled most expeditions across inhospitable jun-

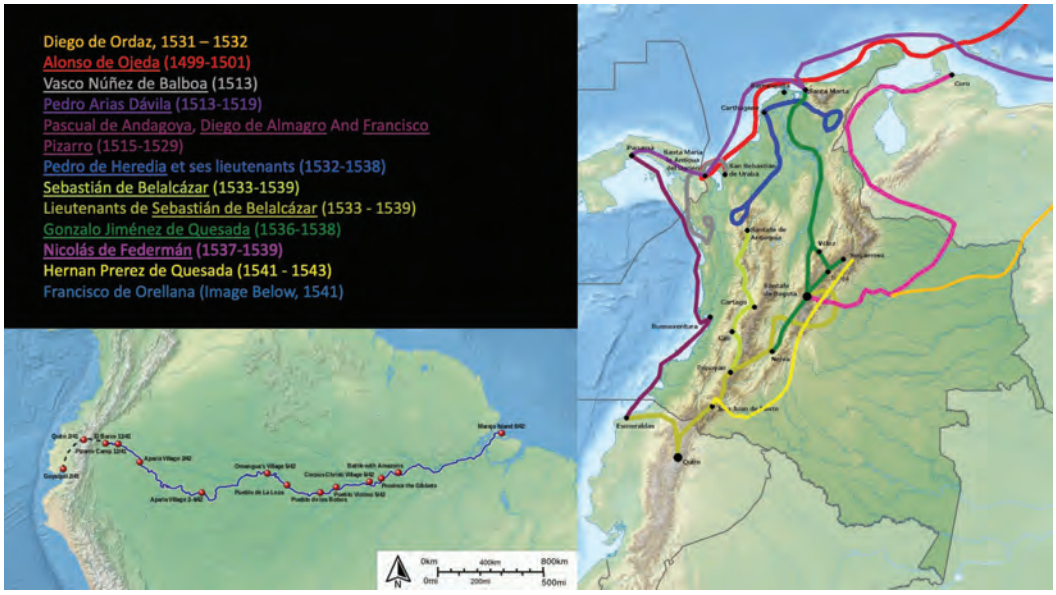
gles. And while nearly all of the leading colonial explorers like Cortes, Pizarro, or Jimenez de Quesada had the blessing of the Spanish Crown to roam around and make claims to newly discovered territories, their generals too were dispersed across vast region in a race to find riches, among them Benalcazar, Orellana and Ordás himself. Ironically, as the race to find and take possession of lands with mineral deposits or suitable soils for settlements created a hugely competitive environment and as the expeditions kept moving, so too did El Dorado. Like gossip, the news of each expedition traveled faster than the travelers and new coordinates for a potential location of El Dorado was all the explorers were successful at finding. Perhaps the sheer desire to find a constant supply of wealth like El Dorado was nothing more than a result of the very conquest, and as such, a way to justify the expeditions and their search for meaning, since no other reason could justify such a harsh adventure across these incredibly arduous and deadly trails (Ibid).

In 1541, Hernán Pérez de Quesada (brother of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, Founder of Bogotá in 1538) marched from Sogamoso a city near Tunja and heading down to the lowlands through the eastern flank of the Andean cordillera. Perez de Quesada was accompanied by 260 men, 200 horses, and close to 6000 enslaved Indigenous people from the Upper regions of north of Bogotá (Ibid 2). The expedition would become so difficult that not a single Indigenous man or woman survived the journey. De Quesada's target was to reach the Andean-Amazon foothills further past the settlements of the Waipis Indians, where new rumors located the city El Dorado. Surrounding the eastern flank of the cordillera through the lower lands of Meta and Caquetá, the men intended to enter back into the forests to reach the Cauca highlands, not before raiding countless Indigenous villages and causing much devastation along their way. In a matter of days and without noticing, Perez de Quesada reached the Cinnamon region, a section of forest packed full of the hard to grow but financially viable wild cinnamon tree, which was one of Benalcazar and Pizzaro's targets before learning about the legend of El Dorado.

Crossing the Caquetá River, Pérez de Quesada's army marched towards the upper lands in what is today Putumayo, assuming that

like with Incas or the Aztecs cities, El Dorado would be well hidden in the hilltops (Ibid 3). After reaching the delta of the Caquetá, from where the Mocoa River can be reached by foot, the Spaniards were met with fierce resistance by the Mocoa tribes, who had been already displaced from the highlands, near La Cocha Lake, after the arrival of Benalcazar's generals Ampudía y Añasco (Bonilla 2006). Running away from the Mocoa people, Perez de Quesada's band climbed the hills towards the east, upon receiving directions from two captured Kamënstá Indigenous warriors about a wealthy land only three days-walk up the mountain and towards the cordillera. Totally defeated and with just a handful of men alive, Perez de Quesada reached Sibundoy Valley in 1542.

Ironically, after reaching Sibundoy and without his army or any treasures, Perez de Quesada discovered that these territories had been already sacked and conquered by Benalcazar seven years earlier. Defeated and bankrupt, Perez de Quesada continued towards Quito where he joined his brother Francisco de Quesada and returned to Bogota, where he faced trial for the murder of several Indigenous chiefs and his increasing debts. In 1544 the Quesada brothers perished at sea during a storm near Cabo de la Vela on the Colombian north coast.



Various El Dorado Expeditions across Colombia. The paths have been drawn by various contributors on Wkipedia. I have addres the Yellow path connected to Hernán Pérez de Quesada. Rights: CC. Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hernán_Pérez_de_Quesada#/media/File:Conquest_of_Colombia.png

Image: Discovery of the Sibunody Valley. Diagram prepared by Victor Bonilla, 1960.

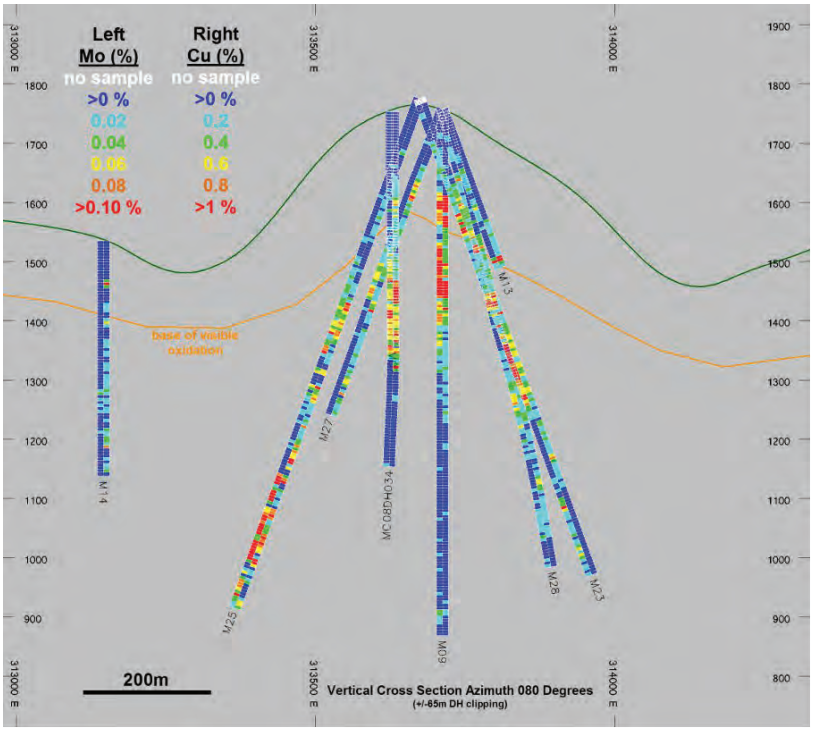
The importance of this expedition is paramount because it marks the moment when the Putumayo was uncovered by the colonial gaze (rather than "discovered") and finally annexed into the so-called New World. Not long after Quesada's failed expedition, another model of the spatial organization was quickly introduced: this time not seeking to discover riches but to deploy an epistemic structure that soon would render Amerindian religions, knowledge, and values forbidden. The Capuchin missions followed the paths opened by Perez de Quesada, establishing there the first enclave of Capuchin missionaries in 1547 (Bonilla 2006). The missionaries built several tiny churches around Sibundoy, enforcing the Spanish language all across the valley and Piedmont and punishing the practice of Indigenous medicine.

Four centuries later came the regime of terror installed by Julio César Arana and the Rubber Barons of the late 1800s', as part of the British-owned Peruvian Amazon Company. Managers of the company imposed a cruel economic system based on the exploitation and enslavement of rubber collectors, who were mainly Inga and Huitoto people living in the mid and lower Putumayo. While natural rubber remained a crucial material for industry–

Image: Mocoa Ventures is the Colombian version of the multinational mining company known as Anglo American, based in Johannesburg and London.

with its only source located in the Colombian and Peruvian Putumayo–the devastation caused by this practice preempted the damage caused by today's agro-industrial and extractive models deployed in Putumayo. As the first European explorer to report on Aran's crimes, Walter Hardenburgh commented that in order "to obtain rubber so that the luxurious-tired motorcars of civilization might multiply in the cities of Christendom, the dismal forests of the Amazon have echoed with the cries of despairing and tortured Indian aborigine" (Hardenburg 1912). The landmark legal case and investigation pursued by Sir Roger Casement against the Peruvian Amazon Company in the courts of London shows that for the twelve years between 1900 to 1911 the Putumayo produced up to 4,000 tons of rubber, with a cost of nearly 30,000 lives (Ibid).

Although Putumayo was designated as a protected eco-region in the 1950s', in the early 2000s' the Colombian government labeled it "an area of special economic interests" (Lyons 2016). This move in policy ushered in a new wave of development programs, industry, and capital investment in the region backed by its untapped potential as a resource-rich eco-region. In the 1970s' the UN development Taskforce sponsored geological studies and mining exploration via controlled explosions along the foothills first traversed by Perez de Quesada. These mining explorations along the Andean piedmont, known for being geologically unstable areas only 10 kilometers north of the city of Mocoa, eventually delivered important copper and molybdenum mines. The studies also



Vertical Cross Section Showing Drilling in Centre of Mocoa Deposit. Source: SIM Geological, 2016.

reported gold deposits near the vicinities of Santiago and Condagua, not far from Mocoa. As if guessed by Perez de Quesada's original route, a belt of important mineral reserves had been finally discovered along the track of this peculiar El Dorado expedition, even if it took more than 400 years to locate them.

In the Early 2000s, the Colombian government granted mining rights for the Mocoa molybdenum and copper mines to the Canadia conglomerate B2Gold and a local subsidiary of the UK based Anglo-American known as Mocoa Ventures. In 2016, the mine was again traded in the international stock market, with a successful purchase by the Canadian Libbero Copper in 2018, with B2Gold still retaining the majority of shares for equity gains (Brepsant, Sim, and Davis 2016). Although numerous excavations and studies have been conducted, detailing the concentration of resources in this mine and speculating over the potential gains, the project hit a complete dead end in 2017. On March 30th of that year, the city of Mocoa experienced a devastating natural event, which the Colombian News classified wrongly as landslides. In

fact, intense rains flooded nearby creeks, dragging heavy rocks and rubbles from those earlier mining excavations downhill, also pushing hundreds of cubic meters of mud along, which whipped out three neighborhoods of Mocoa7. The mountain had been worn down by drilling activity and its soils debilitated by the systematic deforestation, apparently necessary to open up space for the construction of a modern road to eventually serve the mines.

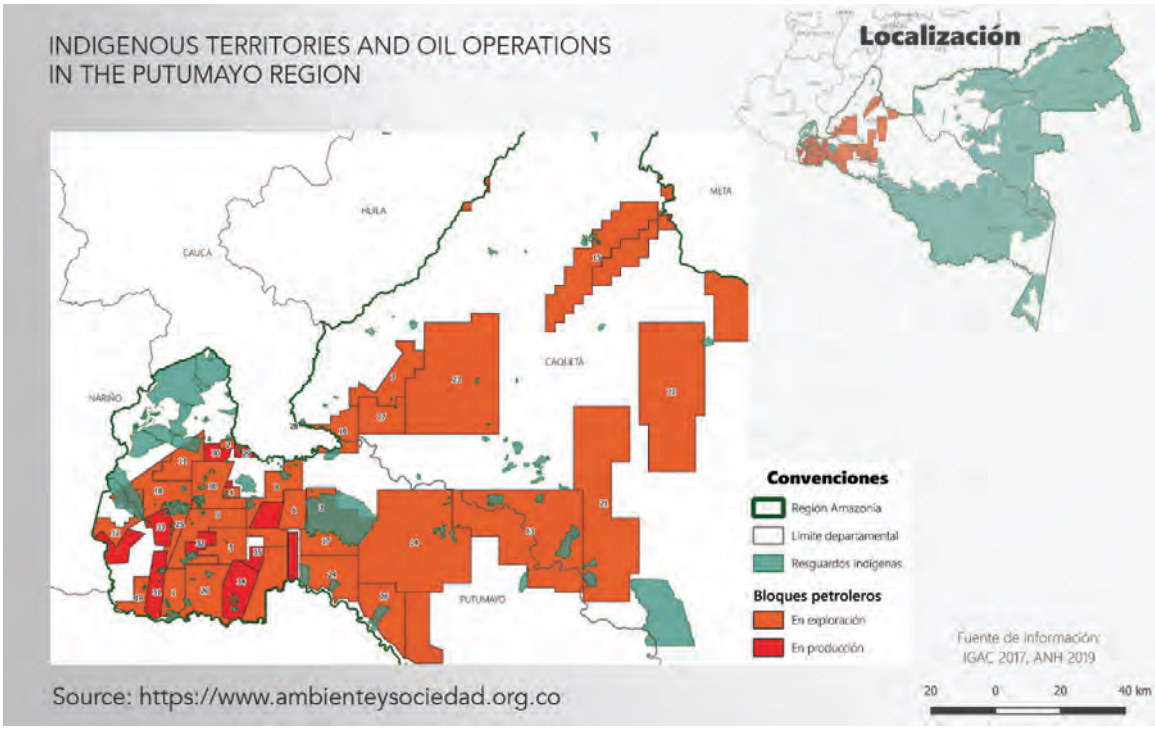
Finally, the Mocoa mines bring another important cross-section map of the Pan-Amazon region, this time produced as part of a valuation report by a team of geologists working for B2Gold in 2016 (Ibid). It is important to mention that even though small amounts of minerals have been extracted, the site has been used to mine Geodata and to produce models of profit forecast, in similar ways to the earlier colonizers when searching for the original El Dorado. In this last example of cross-section renderings, the geology of the territory is represented as a stratification of ground layers at various depths until reaching the idealized mineral sources.

Above: Between Air, Poison, and Spirits

Colombia's internal armed conflict has turned the Putumayo into an intense battlefield, where various factions fight for control over prosperous lands for coca cultivation, as well as large agro-industrial operations that spread over more than 24,000 square kilometers and every possible altitudinal zone up to 3000 m.A.S.L. Along the Putumayo River– which spans 1,600 km from the Colombian Andes to the Brazilian jungles and connects crucial Amazonian eco-regions– these forms of aggression manifest also high over the forest.

As a border state between the upper Andes and the lower Amazon, the territories along the Putumayo mid-lands are a massive buffer zone for environmental, atmospheric, and political destabilizing factors. With its complex geomorphology paired with the abundance of water, trees, and medicinal plants, the Putumayo is both a source of resources and also an impending obstacle for

7 Versions of this disaster by local witnesses I interviewed also describe seeing heavy machinery from the mine misplaced several kilometers downhill. These testimonies also disputed the official body count of victims, many locals argue that the offical number is only a fraction.



Map depicting the overlaps between Indigenous reserves, oil drilling and coca fumigation sites. Source: Ambiente y Sociedad. 2017

development. For example, while the infamous road that connects the city of Mocoa and Pasto, known as The Trampoline of Death (el Trampoline de la Muerte), claims hundreds of lives annually in terrible accidents. This road also blocks the advancement of extractive projects and Ayahuasca tourism to lower Putumayo by slowing the transport of cargo and the influx of outside visitors from Pasto. The Trampoline of Death is a single-lane, unpaved, and barrier-free rudimentary road carved out straight from the dense mountain rocks. Built by the Capuchin missionaries between 1917 and 1920, this road is yet another piece of the delusional dream of many industrious explorers and politicians that have tried to open up the Putumayo.

Before the creation of this road, the only way to travel from Pasto city or the highlands to the lower Putumayo was through the same ancestral trails once traversed by Perez de Quesada. These were Inga and Kamënstá commercial routes that connected communities in the mountain with those deeper in the Amazon Forest and were often used to exchange medicine and products. However, by the time the colonial authorities gained control of the region,

Illustration of human carrier in the Andean region. Date and author unkonw.

very few dared to hike the arduous trails on their own, so a tradition of human carriers was swiftly introduced. It consisted basically of using strong Indigenous men with wooden chairs strapped to their backs, in order to transport anything, from noblemen and women and pretty much any non-indigenous person who could pay the price and hold their nerves, to even merchandise and animals.

This practice lasted until the late XIX century and was common throughout the Americas. When it comes to Putumayo, Michael Taussig argues that for the colonial imagination the relation between the lower and the upper lands was similar to Dante Algieri's descend through layers of the inferno, until climbing up into the heavens on the very back of the devil (Taussig 1991). As the Indigenous men descended across difficult passes, facing gorges and cliffs, the person being carried suffered terrible panics and punishment, as if being dragged to the very same infernos. After all, the lower Putumayo has always been characterized as a more inhospitable, hellish, and unruly environment. On the way up, the Indigenous men became associated with angels or martyrs, whose incredible physical effort and suffering enabled others to reach the safety and milder weathers of the upper lands. For the longest time, the Putumayo has been a landscape defined by vertical associations like heaven and hell, with the midlands being the threshold between the wicked and the divine.

Being a somewhat inaccessible region for most colonial settlers until the early twentieth century, the Putumayo has historically been a disputed territory among remote powers that seek to exercise control at a distance. Historically, the Putumayo was a region left almost ungoverned or cared for by the political elites in charge of policy and national development in Bogota throughout the ma-

jority of the 20th century. Both Perú and Colombia claimed what is today known as Putumayo as part of their national territory, leading finally to a war between the two young nations between 1931-1932. Although the war was more the performance of sovereignty than an actual conflict, Colombia claimed victory in the war against Peru only by setting up a military base in the remote town of Puerto Leguizamo, along the Putumayo River. Packed with a handful of soldiers sent to protect Colombia's sovereign territories against the invasion of foreign armies but mostly abandoned such in such remote areas, these soldiers later became protectors of Peruvian Rubber barons (Wylie 2013). This early form of territorial control was perhaps effective only because territorial expansion was only possible on a horizontal plane, but as more strategic altitudes became accessible, the government had to keep up with its territorial expansion across the newly conquered frontiers of Putumayo, particularly the air space.

An important case of territorial expansion along the vertical axis across Putumayo occurred in the early 2000s' when aerial fumigation with Glyphosate (commercially known as Roundup) was introduced to control coca farming during President Uribe's first term in office. As a result of the US-sponsored plan, Colombia– which itself cemented the ongoing war on drugs as a central state policy– channeled vast amounts of financial and military support to the Colombian army in order to disrupt cocaine networks affecting American interests. While aerial fumigation extended the reach of the state to the air space across Putumayo, this practice also extruded the ongoing violence to new depths and altitudes.

Glyphosate was weaponized by the US army in the 1970s' during the US-Vietnam war. Back then classified as the defoliant substance called Agent Orange and used widely to decimate patches of forests hiding resistance forces (Martin 2018). Dispersed through the air and over large portions of the forest, Glyphosate's active components block the production of amino acids, preventing plant growth and forcing dehydration (Ibid). Without any accuracy, aerial fumigation not only targets coca plants but entire environments, as well as local residents whose homes, supplies enter into contact with the deadly chemical. Meanwhile, as a result of defoliation large sections of forest gradually open up as native vegetation dwindles, thus making more room for grazing, monocultures, and mining activity. Therefore,

this kind of violence directed from the sky does not only target illegal coca farming but a host of delicate relations that maintain the forests and the propagation of life across the Amazon. After all, as much as the war on drugs feeds from a narrative that renders the coca plant as the enemy that must be reduced via chemical annihilation, this narrative succeeds in criminalizing nature and the territory that supports it. On the contrary, very little is ever done at the government level to curb the import and circulation of the necessary chemicals to turn coca leaves into cocaine paste, among them Diesel fuel, industrial acids, and even Colgate toothpaste. Meanwhile, for numerous Indigenous groups along the Putumayo coca plants hold a special role in their medicine and spiritual practices. Even the Colombian constitution grants these communities the right to cultivate coca plans for personal and cultural uses. Ingesting coca leaves, either as an infusion or as Mambe[8] is known for its anticoagulant and stimulant benefits.

There has been a heated debate across political spectrums in regard to the legality, hazards, and even effectiveness of this fumigation method. And if defoliation is indeed still used as a military strategy, as it was used by the US army, then we have to ask what the real motives and geometries of the battle are. Aerial fumigation was suspended in Colombia in 2015 as one of the key points of the peace accord signed between President Santos and the FARC guerrillas. Ever since there has been a constant push from the political parties opposing the peace agreement to reintroduce aerial fumigation as standard practice to combat the proliferation of coca fields. Moreover, as a way to address one of the flaws of the aerial fumigation tactic the Colombian army developed a more targeted fumigation strategy using drones hovering just a few meters above each plant and operated by short-range radio controllers. This meant that in order to fumigate, an operator had to stand inside the coca field while heavily armed military convoys offered protection, assuming the operation was carried in zones prone to armed confrontation with illegal forces. This is how the idea was presented to the public in July of 2018 when Colombia's defense ministry held a large PR event inside an undisclosed military compound to unveil the newly devised fumigation strategy based on drone technology. Ironically, this was a short-lived idea

8 The Amazonian Mambe, most common among the Huitoto people is made out of roasted and powdered coca leaf and yarumo ashes.

that either proved too complex to deploy in the field or instead, it was a way to ratify a state narrative in which the airspace re-emerges as space unilaterally controlled by the government.

One of the areas where aerial fumigation has the largest effect is in the midlands of the Putumayo (between 600 m.A.S.L to 2000 m.A.S.L.), which are of incredible importance for the stability of the entire Amazon ecosystem. These areas are not only part of the ancestral territories of the Inga and Kamënstá, from the edge of the Churumbelos National Park to the Guamuez River, but they also are a transition zone between the colder and dry climate of the highlands and the warm and humid climate of the lower Amazon. The fast-rising mountains located between Mocoa and Sibundoy, densely covered with Andean subtropical vegetation form the recharge zone, a wall of very diverse vegetation that makes the piedmont into a strategic territory for ecological and cultural conservation. These hills are also the exact point where the Trade Winds coming from the Atlantic Ocean and moving all the way across the jungle, finally meet the Andean cordillera before bouncing back over the jungle. Forming a loop cycle, warmer wind currents elevate until meeting colder winds, which in turn push the newly formed clouds eastward and over the Amazon. These new clouds bring large quantities of rain back into the lower lands, creating a kind of microclimate that helps to trap humidity and filter the intense sunlight of the Tropics, in such a particular way that enables plant transpiration and water retention throughout the Amazon.

At this altitude, plants play a huge role in the production and the circulation of water, transported from the soil and upwards into the atmosphere. Leaves release water vapor from small pores in a process called transpiration but, in the Amazon, this process has very specific purposes, almost as if plants were capable of designing their own weather (Loomis 2017). Across the recharge zone, a veil of mist sits low, just above the trees, emerging at various points throughout the day with more intensity two or three months before the rainy season begins (Ibid). Up until 2017, scientists did not know where the vapor came from, but they soon were able to correlate the presence of vapor with dense patches of green along the Andean-Amazon foothills based on satellite

analysis. What they discovered is that vapor released from the ocean is lighter than vapor release from plants because the latter are capable of moving molecules with heavier isotopic composition (Wright et al. 2017), which means their atoms have more neutrons and protons, as well as salt crystals that help to seed clouds and triggering rain (Perkins 2012). As the rain comes, changes in temperature force air to move and push these plant-made clouds further into the forests. Perhaps, this is why Indigenous believe that coca plants attract, or in this case produce clouds, which for them represent spiritual forces that come to shield the plant against satellite monitoring and harm coming from the sky. Therefore, it goes without saying that while defoliation is meant to combat illicit coca farming, its wide implementation across the Pan-Amazon threatens fragile relations in the ecosystem that go beyond the reduction of a single plant species.

Although the political implications of Aerial fumigation are not the main focus of this work, it is important to mention that numerous attempts at reactivating the fumigation program with Glyphosate have been on the agenda of President Duque since 2018. Up until now, the government's efforts have been legally challenged by fierce resistance groups made of human rights, environmental, community leaders, and opposition. However, this added advantage of directing attacks on other territorial actors from on high, as well as rendering visible the complex politics of Putumayo's air and airspace, have been a trigger for my artistic work.

Among the pieces where these questions are manifested is the film essay Rio Arriba [Upriver], a short film Titled the Smell of the Forest, as well as the story map and online media archive. By focusing on aerial fumigation, I interrogate the tension between enacting state sovereignty across territorial volumes vis-a-vis human and non-human resistance in the Pan-Amazon region, against the vertical trajectories of occupation and violence. For me, these pieces provide different resolutions to an issue that manifests across scales and temporalities and also, they gather evidence that supports the work of local indigenous leaders. For example, the film essay Rio Arriba operates as an artist film for an exhibition or media context, but also it has been used by Inga leaders as evidentiary material to support community negotiations with government and environmental organizations, as well as to support large funding applications and request

for logistic contributions from the UN to the Inga people of Putumayo.

Despite its remote and apparent disconnection from international economic and industrial hubs, this region has played a crucial role in all sorts of material exchanges across the globe. By providing source materials for industry, and the base knowledge for game-changing biochemical and manufacturing developments, the Putumayo has been an involuntary agent in the cultural, industrial, and economic transformation that enabled the global north to gain control of entirely new scales of life, such as the cellular, the global and even the temporal. For example, a powerful poison used by Amazonian Indigenous hunters called curare later provided the active ingredients and methods to develop modern muscle relaxants and nervous inhibitors like anesthesia (Davis 1997); ancestral latex-collection techniques developed by Indigenous groups long before the European discovery of the rubber tree, which would eventually offer numerous solutions to the automobile and space industry, providing the source material for pneumatic tires and airtight instruments; or even the alkaloids stored in coca plants, commonly used by Amerindian communities for pain, hunger, calcium deficiency or stress-releasing treatments (Ibid), today fuel the global illegal drug trade. In no uncertain terms, the Putumayo has been and still is a territory with vast planetary resonance where clashing epistemic models deployed to think and affect earth coexist. If nothing, these territories have become cosmopolitical spheres where knowledge and cultures compete for preservations. That is why, in the following chapters I will expand on more localized notions of territorial thinking, resorting to non-western terminology, images, and cognitive processes that play a role in ancestral modes of land-use and worlding.

Ultimately, my intention throughout this practice-based research rests in addressing the entangled modes of occupation and resistance conjoined in these territories, most of which go beyond that which can only be measured with scientific instruments and rendered through cartographic or data-driven models. Therefore, it is of extreme importance to fully grasp the vertical as one of power relations, obfuscation, violent occupation and also the life-enabling relations

Image: Coca field near the Churumbelos National Park. Photo: Felipe Castelblanco, 2019

belonging to various spiritual, epistemic, and cultural realms.

Part 4: Cinematic Cartographies

In the previous sections, I have developed several arguments to consider more critically the function of cross-section diagrams and their influence in territorial thinking, as well as Euro-American visual culture. However, neither visual analysis nor an updated version of the cross-section diagram can deliver a complete rendering of the Putumayo as a vertical landscape. Instead, this requires a broader set of imaging, translation, and conceptual tools to begin searching for ways to answer Weizmann's call for an "Escher-like" model of the territory.

In doing so, I see an opening to delve into the cracks that separate Indigenous and non-indigenous modes of gazing at the landscape and thus, exploring new modes of rendering the volumes

of the territory. Working loosely with the notion of the Film Essay[9] as well as participatory documentary and multimodal visual narratives (a web-based story map, an artist book, and photographic installations for gallery spaces), I sought to tilt the panoramic model sideways and visually and sensorially investigate the territory as an overlapped system of contested biocultural relations.

Throughout this project, I also searched for a method that brings together fieldwork, participatory Media, sensorial ethnographic, artist films, and parallel montage techniques to make visible a range of sub-visible phenomena that escape scientific measure. The relations I explore expand various dimensions, shapes, and scales of the territory, from the atmospheric to the cultural and the political to the spiritual. As Such, I present a body of works wherein each piece seeks a different entry point to a highly entangled space. These works follow the course of the Putumayo River as a narrative connector, while tracing its transformations from river to soil, plant to mist, cloud to rain and back again. I also documented aerial fumigation operations, which were briefly reintroduced two months after I had initiated the project. In a similar way, I produced numerous interviews with academics and local Indigenous leaders, explored image archives, and composed maps that addresses various forms of intrusions by the extractive industries and across a vertical trajectory. As a result, this body of works serves as a compendium of experiences and knowledge gained and gathered through practice-based research techniques, making it possible to engage with its outcomes as complementary art or investigative pieces or as standalone artworks.

An important method during the project has been to use the video camera as an embodiment for the foreign gaze traversing these

9 The label of Essay Film or Video Essay is often attributed to audiovisual works that escape generic classification, existing in between the space of documentary film and video art. Today, most of these works (if not all) are produced with video equipment and employ digital cinema techniques and therefore, differentiating between 'film' or 'video' essay becomes irrelevant for this project as well as mapping out their historical or referential underpinnings. However, an important distinction is that such works are often regarded as "too experimental, self-reflexive and subjective" for the more traditional documentary exhibition circuits and film industry, or they distance from more traditional video art for being "socially engaged or politically explicit" (Biemann 2003). I personally built on the dichotomy to produce filmic works that weave together various sources of knowledge as well as present evidence, produce a historical record of time and space, as well as to engage audiences inside and outside the exhibition context.

territories while seeking understanding. In other words, the camera is both a witness but also a participant, grasping moments, seeking angles, and questioning motives with the naïveté of a first-time visitor or a wanderer, aware that they do not know the exact way forward. And in joining one video sequence after the other through parallel montage (meaning two narratives unfolding simultaneously) without the climactic moments of fiction or the referential style of documentary film, my videos slowly retrace historical colonial and ancestral trails, survey the landscape, re-render and trespass contested territorial lines and landmarks that divide the Pan-amazon region.

In many ways, the films that make the bulk of this project act as cartographic documents that help the viewer to navigate a multilayered landscape. In other ways, these works use the affordances of the video as a medium (duration, camera movements, sound, montage, and digital compositions) to gather visual evidence that supports an ontological exploration of a biocultural territory that extends far beyond the limits of representability. Therefore, more than using video or photography to reduce the landscape into mere images for contemplation, I actively seek to counter the distant gaze through which the Pan-Amazon region is often put into a single frame and presented as an uncomplicated patch of green forest. Instead, my videos enter the jungle to look from within and up close, they look upwards to reveal the drone used to record a landscape full of subvisible phenomena that the camera alone cannot capture, like the smell of cocaine labs hidden inside the forest.

Instead of locating or reducing the territory to a coordinate, a line, or an image, the films seek to trace expansive relations that resist capturing. In conventional two-dimensional maps that abstract the terrain using lines that bound land or represent elevation, today's digital panoramic images exaggerate the horizon beyond the human angle of vision, only to appear later in a tiny screen as a flattened image of spheric surroundings. In doing so, two-dimensional maps and panoramic views alike tend to dehumanize the landscape by removing the dimensionality and volumetric conditions that enable life and trigger the human body. In both maps and panoramic images, the depths of soils are rarely depicted,

The image shows cloud coverage over the perimeter of the Inga reserve of Piamonte / Puerto Limón, at the border of Cauca and Putumayo. Three photographs of the same area show what is concealed by cloud coverage in the satellite images publicly available. Oil pipes run overground, while oil-drilling by the companies *Gran Tierra, Energy Colombia, Ecopetrol y Confipetrol company* expands. Meanwhile illegal loggers have entered Indigenous reserves. They mark trees in the forest to cut and clear the land. This pressures Indigenous leaders to allow the companies to expand their oil-drilling operations in exchange for security or financial help to replant their crops.

skies are blatantly chopped off the image or never rendered at all. As philosopher Peter Sloterdijk argued (as cited in Curran 2019):

> *No circumstance characterizes more the cartographical act of the Modern Age – and its way of thinking –than the fact that no globe we have ever seen shows the earth's atmosphere. Two-dimensional maps likewise provide views of airless territories. All older models of the earth neglect the atmospheric element as naturally as if there was a permanent agreement that only the solid merits depiction.*

In Sloterdijk's argument, the cartographic thinking is therefore fundamentally deficient and incomplete, even though it celebrates totality. Therefore, in dealing with a volumetric territory, and especially through a cinematic and artistic approach, the skies gain incredible relevance as political spaces that cannot be assumed empty, absent, or devoid of conceptual challenges. With this in mind, I set out to confront the Pan-Amazon sky and explore it as a key layer of this contested biocultural vertical territory. Never uncomplicated,

the airspace of Putumayo alone is not only occupied by fumigation airplanes and drones but plenty of satellite activity that supports both military and mining industries via surveillance and remote sensing[10]. In fact, the Putumayo is subject to constant data and satellite image gathering, even with a low orbit satellite launched by the Colombian air force in 2018 called FACSAT-1, almost entirely dedicated to supporting coca eradication and monitoring in areas prone to conflicts like Nariño, Putumayo and Cauca (Quiroga 2019).

Nevertheless, the Pan-Amazon is one of the few regions of the world that appears in public access platforms for geospatial analysis and visualization (Google Earth, Bing Maps, Map box, and the like) as permanently concealed by clouds, low-resolution or outdated images. Actually, cloud coverage in Putumayo or Lower Cauca is so constant across satellite imaging services, that these maps can be read as involuntary maps of clouds and wind patterns. Otherwise, like when movies construct a sense of landscape out of unrelated locations or film sets while hiding massive film crews and productions behind the camera, the aerial images of the Pan-Amazon accessible to the public are also constructed images that deliberately hide the violence and political tensions beneath the very same clouds.

Always efficient when it comes to maximizing the potential of the screen, cinematic styles have influenced modern mapmaking and image geolocation platforms, like the Google Earth platform or even popular social media to the point that one could see correlations between cinematic renderings of maps with today's cartographic visualization. While the topic of maps in cinema has been widely researched and is not the focus of this project, an important mention is how cinema quickly gave movement to maps. For example, by zooming in, panning, gaining depth, or simply navigating the features of maps with close up shots to help locate the viewer, movies have contributed to free cartographic renderings and their implicit way of representing space from the motionless and limited scale afforded by the two-dimensional plane[11] (Caquard and Taylor 2009).

10 A common definition of Remote Sensing describes it as the acquisition of information about an object or phenomenon without making physical contact with the object. Currently, the term also refers to the use of satellite or aircraft-based sensor technologies to detect and classify objects on Earth, particularly in dangerous or inaccessible areas.

11 A key example of this jump in cartographic rendering and maps in cinema is the 1978 film Power of Ten by directors Ray Eames and Charles Eames. Conceived as a scientific film essay, this piece represents a multi-scale landscape that dives into

In fact, since the early days of cinema[12] The camera has become a cartographic tool used to tell all sorts of geospatial stories, while the filmmaker is seen as a collector, a surveyor, or even a reporter that selects various elements of the world (Castro 2009). However, the dimensionality of cinema differs from traditional cartography in the way that the emotional, the temporal, and even the manipulation of optical perspectives play a role in narrating the world via moving images and sound (Ibid). This is more evident in film genres such as Film Noir, which scholars have considered a form of mapping events in time and space but most importantly, a way to locate and address the trauma of war (Conley 2007). It is then, how cinematic techniques and geospatial technologies amplify one another through either the narrative, sensory stimulation, or even by framing events in temporal and spatial configurations that produce intermediary territories between fiction, sensation, and the real world. Therefore, it is in these in-between territories where I set out to create cinematic cartographies, or a process of reconstituting the sensorial, disputed, fictional, and even ancestral layers of a landscape that expands in all directions vis-a-vis the limitations of the colonial and technological gaze. In doing so, my work takes issue with providing a sense of location, witnessing and trauma across various altitudes and scales of the territories biocultural relations that escape representability. A film that thoroughly surveys the landscape across altitudes, while exlporing layers of nature-culture relationships is Noaboba (2016)[13], directed by Arhuaco Filmmaker Amado Villafañia with the Indigenous Media Collective Yoskokwi. This film follows several Indigenous healers from Colombia's Sierra Nevada as make they an offering to water at both ocean level, as well as in a receding glacier at the top of the mountain. Another "on the move" film that explores a landscape across a vertical axis and elevation is Inca Lights (1972)[14], made by filmmaker and aviator Robert Fulton. This film takes the viewer from the coast of Lima to the clouds above Machu Picchu, in wat is a visual celebration of the Andean skies.]

As we have seen, the term cinematic cartographies, or in other words

and comes out of a fixed map of a city, region, continent planet and cosmos.

12 Films like Les Archives de la Planete from Albert Kahn (1912) are some early examples of the use of film to report on places through film.

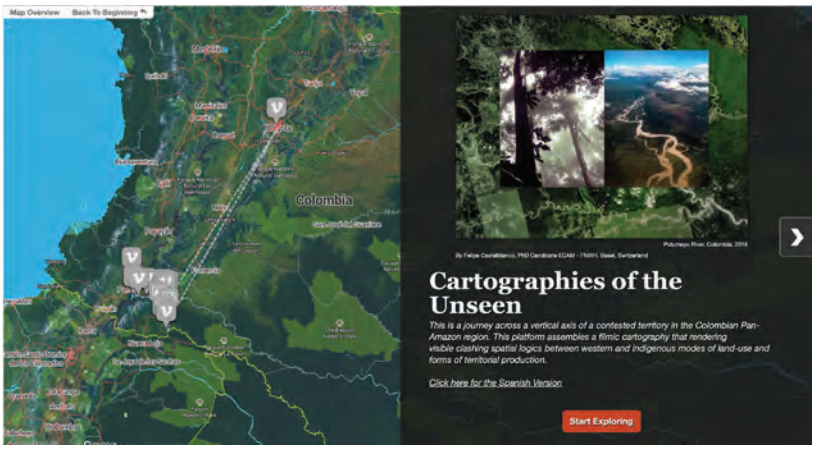
13 Naboba on Mubi: https://mubi.com/films/naboba

14 Inca Lights on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ATOJ6m4MPs

Image Below: Interphase of Web video archive / Story Map. Accessible via QR code.

Opposite page: Fire near Gas stationplaced near drinking water sources. Sibundoy Valley, 2020

the possibility for a film to become a map is not itself new. Going as far back as Walter Benjamin's proposition of reading the early films of Paris as a map of Paris, the cinematic cartography has as often been theorized by film scholars in connection to this relation between maps and cinema and a quest for correlation between film and place. However, I appropriate the notion of cinematic cartography as a mode of inquiry and practice, which allows me to investigate the 'wrong' places[15] or spaces not yet determined by the lines of traditional maps, particularly along the vertical trajectories of the entangled, volumetric, and even multidimensional territories that I elucidate throughout this practice-based project. This is most evident in the film Rio Arriba, which presents itself as an altitudinal study of the Pan-Amazon region where the landscape is confronted as volumetric space and the narrative structures across altitudinal zones. Conceived as a film essay, this piece brings together various kinds of gaze directed towards the territory, in order to reveal entanglements between localized and vastly global power dynamics, as well as epistemic forms of resistance and engagement with several layers of the territory.



15 The "wrong place" in the sense that art historian Miwon Kwon frames the discussion, already referenced in Chapter 1.


RIO
ARRIBA

[Upriver]

Rio Arriba is a 14:00 minute, two-channel experimental film. Establishing a diptych with videos side by side, from start to end, the film loosely follows the path of the Putumayo River from the Amazon floodplains at 300 mASL, near the border between Colombia and Ecuador all the way to its headwaters in the Nariño mountains near La Cocha Lake. Reaching up to 3,000 mASL in the Andean region and traversing various ecoregions shaped by climate and altitudinal zones, Rio Arriba explores the Putumayo River as political hydrology, or a complex body of water, which cuts across an entangled and contested territory in Colombia's Southwest.

This film essay moves along a spectrum of Media practices, between a forensic and a poetic investigation, to catalog complex interactions between human groups and natural occurrences like cloud formation or Indigenous spiritual resistance and endurance. Each minute of the film moves the viewer several kilometers across the Pan-Amazon territory, revealing a complex biocultural landscape that extends from the jungle to the high Andes. Where Indigenous thought, trees, soils, temperature, light, and shadow bring new aesthetics, agency, and forms of epistemic disobedience.

The journey depicted in the film quickly turns into a vertical expedition of sorts, helped by aerial shots and satellite imaging, as well as ground-level images that witness how localized and remote extractive practices interact with the landscape. By exposing more-than-human power disputes that send shockwaves across the under and upper worlds, from mining conflicts, struggles for sovereignty, aerial fumigation, or even how clouds conceal the landscape from the extractive gaze, Rio Arriba proposes an unusual reading of the landscape. It moves the viewer across a vertical axis of spatial relations rather than staying with the panoramic view confined within the horizontality of western visual culture. Borrowing from altitudinal studies of the Andean region, drafted long ago by explorers of the likes of Alexander Von Humboldt, Rio Arriba explores a territory made of volumes, relations, and

Opposite:
Puerto Limón, 2019

Photo: Felipe Castelblanco

various forms of occupation along a vertical trajectory of territorial production.

Moreover, the film seeks to unpack the complex power dynamics that intervene in the production of the territory across the Pan-Amazon region. Rather than dealing with the landscape as flat terrain, a space whose imaginary borders can only be drawn on a two-dimensional plane, the film approaches the forest as a volumetric space that resists enclosure. In this piece, the Andean-Amazon skies become objects of contemplation. The camera often looks up from within the forest. It rises gently through tree barks as if seeking a clearing to relocate the viewer midair, like the airplanes used to fumigate against illicit coca plantations or the many spirits which, along with wind currents, circulate above the jungle.

Rio Arriba also mixes original footage collected during various field trips with archive material from Colombian newscasts depicting aerial fumigation and oil-drilling activity. These images are used as tools to render visible the struggle for control of the Andean-Amazon landscape, which ultimately reveals two very different modes of spatial practices singled out throughout the film. On the one hand, those on the side of the extractive industries or the government fight for access to the underground or airspace as if they are naturally devoid of other occupants. On the other hand, ancestral communities like the Ingas, Siona, or Kamënstás defend Indigenous territories that far exceed the reserves designated by the government. Instead, these ancestral territories escape measure or containment because they are not just land but volumetric space drawn out based on relations sustained by the natural, animal, and spectral beings that live all along the vertical axis connecting the soils, forests, and forests and the skies.

For decades, the Nariño and Putumayo in the Southwest of Colombia have become the focus of government-supported mining and oil drilling programs, counterinsurgency, and coca-eradication operations that take full advantage of technologies dispersed across a vertical axis. From novel fumigation drones or radio telecommunication to underground oil pipes running below the forest, power in this region operates by overlapping modes of territo-

riality and infrastructural development. Since 2015, regions like the lower Putumayo have been at the center of a heated debate around whether or not aerial fumigation with glyphosate is harmful to environments and humans. Most often, coca producers are impoverished farmers pressured by armed groups to turn their agricultural activities towards the cultivation of coca fields and the production of cocaine paste in makeshift labs built deep in the rain forests. Not far from coca fields and labs, plenty of oil-drilling operations use heavy machinery and armies of international engineers, all transported by helicopter to the remoteness of the forest. For instance, just across the Caqueta River, a few miles from the town of Piamonte, one can stumble upon hidden coca labs where the smell of the Diesel (used to wash the coca leaves after being chopped up and mixed with Sodium Permanganate) combines with the fumes of trucks and diggers used in the government-supported oil-drilling sites.

While several Indigenous reserves sit right on top of vast and unexplored oil deposits or just below the path of fumigation airplanes, the Colombian state holds absolute control of the underground and airspace, like any other modern state. That is why, without verbalizing it, a simple question resonates throughout the film. Where does Indigenous sovereignty start or end, particularly along the vertical axis that bounds together economic interests, Indigenous autonomy, and political power?

Staying with the contradictions of its own mediated form while attempting to transport the viewer to a remote landscape extruded on a vertical trajectory, the film also questions whether moving image as a medium can converse with the spectral figures that also inhabit the landscape. That is why natural and human-made clouds are the central character that drives this intentionally scattered story while seeking to listen to what clouds might say from on high.

r no la selva
los aires sobre

Recharge Zone

Antenas

EL DORADO

Fumigation

ANDAKIES

MOCOA

Deforestation.

P. ASIS

LANDSLIDES

Mining

- cooper
- Moliberno
- Gold

Oil.

otras culturas de manejo de tierra

educación de la tierra

Humildad


DVC 03C

Video Installation / Kunsthaus Baselland. 2021

Rio Arriba [Upriver]
Screening Poster. 2020
Two Channel Video
14 Minutes.
HD, Color
Stereo Sound

Directed and Produced
by Felipe Castelblanco
2018 - 2020

Original text in Spanish
Male Voice Narrator

Oepning scene: Aerial view of water with reflections of clouds

(V.O.)

What do clouds see
when they look at us from
the sky?

Or what do they think
after seeing their own
reflection on the land?

As if the river was
a mirror of the sky
there are many types of
clouds along the Putumayo
streams.

There are clouds made of
mist. Other clouds are
made of trees when turned
into smoke after the
sweeping fires.

But there are other clouds
made of policies as a
result from the
Colombian war on drugs.

We're embarking on a
journey through a vast
territory connected by a
river, which flows from
the Andean mountains to
the jungles in the lower
Amazon.

This river is one of the
biggest serpents living in
the Amazon.

connecting endangered

territories and vital ecosystems.

Our journey upstream of the Putumayo River starts at an altitude of 300 m.A.S.L

At the Siona ancestral territory located at the border between Colombia and Ecuador

In the middle of the war on drugs, excessive mining and the Colombian failed peace process, Indigenous nations struggle to preserve the environments connected through this hydrological and living body.

300 mASL

For centuries, he banks of the Putumayo River have been the epicentre of
extreme forms of violence and disappearing knowledges

Oil companies operating in the region bring aggressive geopolitical practices that blur the lines between the legal and the criminal.

In order to constantly pump oil from source to market across the Putumayo, this industry finances armed groups and violate the rights of the Siona people.

While oil drilling

companies build underground pipelines that cut across the river the Siona shamans brew the
sacred medicines that give spiritual strength to brave land-protectors in their territories and in the upper lands.

To this day, ancestral communities govern their lives with and through nature.

The river is also a drop of oil, a coca plant and a cloud of herbicides moving through the sky.

[Interview with Inga Chief Taita Pailno]

- Taita Paulino: The illness of the lands, the air, nature and everything, is due to the machine.

- Because the airplanes used to come to fumigate the crops

- But we didn’t even grow coca here, but because our neighbours grow coca, then the airplanes passed through here.

- And the chemicals ended up everywhere, including our lands, and that affects all environments, nature and everything
- Because we all here

live off of nature

[End of interview]

Throughout the region coca farming and clashes between armed groups threaten the environmental stability of the territories through which the Putumayo River flows.

While sacred coca plants are the target of the policies of the war on drugs, the smell of Diesel, used to wash the leaves in the makeshift cocaine labs moves gently through the jungle with the morning breeze.

Oil pits, pipelines, cocaine labs, pesticides falling from the sky.

As a political landscape, the Putumayo extends across vertical layers of occupation and violence.

The Putumayo is also a flying river

In the midlands, at around 2000 mASL, the river travels through plants up into the air, and the trees breath out clouds.

In the transpiration process trees release water vapor from small pores on the underside of their leaves.

This veil of mist forms dense clouds that travel east, helping to maintain temperatures and humidity levels across the Amazon.

Somehow, this natural process becomes a self-preserving mechanism that secures the biosphere's own survival.

From on high, clouds become an obstacle that obscure the forests.

They cast irregular shadows on the land, which some satellites mistake for lakes, hollow sites or impenetrable forest

Still today, not all satellites have the necessary instruments to see through thick clouds so these become natural shields for the Amazon gainst this permanent surveillance.

This is why, parts of the Putumayo remain invisible to the technologies that inspect the land from the skies, searching for minerals, Coca fields and various forms of political resistance.

From the ground, Indigenous communities understand the territory not just as land but as a living body and web of life that goes deep into the earth and reaches far

2000 mASL

3000 mASL

into the sky.

For many decades, the Inga and Kamënstá first nations are fighting to reclaim their now fractured territories from colonial settlers.

Moved by ancestral principles, these communities are called to protect vast areas of rainforest threatened by mining projects and unsustainable farming.

In a few years, a hydroelectric dam will be built in this section of the Putumayo River, altering the flow of water and life that travels from the Andes to the lower Amazon.

This is another reason why communities gather here to protest and momentarily halt the flow of traffic, the flow of commerce and the fast pace on which exploitive industries are based.

Their demand is for us to acknowledge their ways of thinking, feeling, seeing and governing their territories.

They fight to reclaim collective autonomy, and safeguard the rights of nature.

At this altitude, the river manifests as dense layers of mist that builds up in the Andean skies.

Our journey ends at altitude of almost 3,000 mASL in the Andean Paramos that surround La Cocha lake.

From here, the Quillacinga people rediscover their cultural heritage as guardians of sacred waters with the spiritual guidance of the Siona.

But the extractive model used here, doesn't chase minerals but oxygen. In the mid 20th century, the rainbow trout was introduce to this lake by releasing hundreds of fish from the air.

Today, large fish farms produce waste that contaminates the water and sediments that slowly dry up the lake.

This is the birth place of the Guamuez river, the main tributary of the great Putumayo River.

From the Paramos that surround the lake, every day, unique plants absorb water from the air.

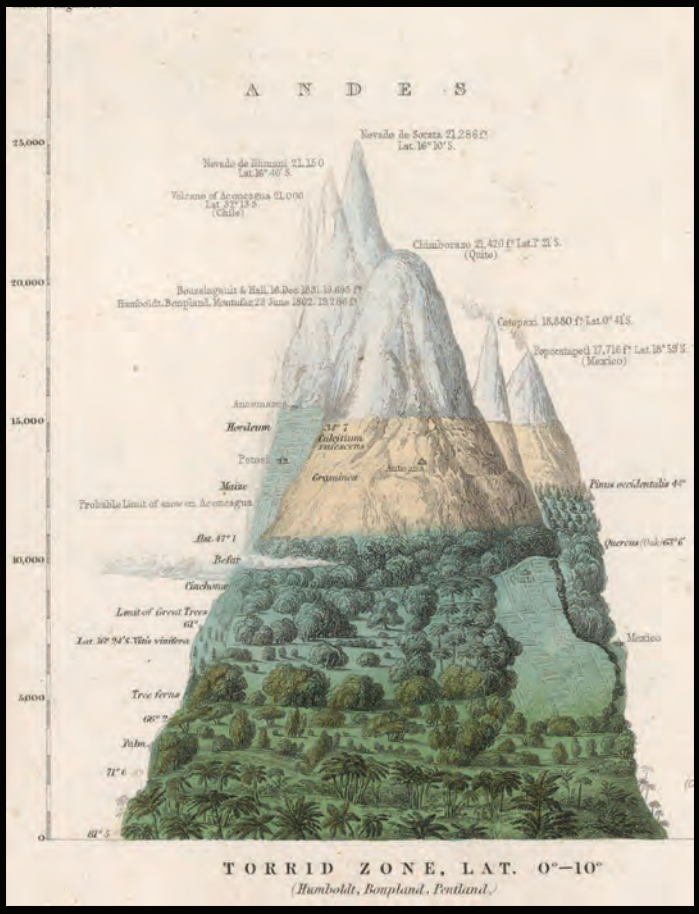
At night, they flood the land.

Droplets of water fall

from their leaves, forming swamps and creeks a lake and then a river that in darkness merges with the big snake.

And once again, the clouds of Putumayo flood the landscape and hide these sacred territories from the foreign gaze.

The clouds remind us that sometimes, not everything exists to be known or to be consumed.
[End]



Distribution of Natural Phenomena Embracing I Geology. II Hydrography. III Meteorology. IV Natural History.

By Alexander Keith Johnston, F.R.G.S., F.G.S. Geographer At Edinburgh To Her Majesty; Honorary Member Of The Geographical Society, Berlin. William Blackwood & Sons London. 1850.

Opposeite Page: CNC Carvign of Putumayo's elevation map and print during ECAM Research Colloquium at HGK, 2019

Next Pages: Still Images from the film Rio Arriba 2018 - 2020

Despite a three-year legal battle between victims, health experts, environmental activists and the state, in July of 2018 the Colombian government resumed the aerial fumigation program against illicit coca farming.

Performing aerial fumigation is a demand from the U.S government in exchange for financial aid for the Colombian military. Currently, fumigation is done with drones and small aircrafts that hover just above the forests, leaving behing another formless cloud made of toxic mist.

A pesar de una batalla legal de tres años entre víctimas, expertos de la salud, activistas y el estado, en julio de 2018 el gobierno colombiano reanudó el programa de fumigación aérea contra cultivos ilícitos de coca.

Realizar fumigación aérea es una condición del gobierno de USA a cambio de ayuda financiera para el ejercito colombiano. Actualmente, la fumigación se realiza con drones y avionetas que flotan justo por encima de los cultivos, dejando detrás suyo otra clase de nube, esta vez tóxica.


Minga Idígena / Indigenous Protests. Sibundoy - 2019

Chapter 3:

Ver La Selva Con Ojos Para Ella / To See the Jungle With Eyes for Her

In July of 2018, I met and initiated a continuous exchange with Mocoa-based agroecologist Heraldo Vallejo. He is a 57-year-old farmer, teacher, and local scientist engaged in a number of local initiatives around food sovereignty and knowledge sharing between local farmers. Vallejo has devoted his life to a complex task, making his farm an independent site for agroecological research, an independent farming school, and a living archive for ancestral farming practices.

He calls his two hectares farm *La Jungla del Hombre Amazonico* (the Jungle of the Amazonia Man). He has been implementing agricultural approaches that might seem rare for today's agro-industrial standards. From preparing organic fertilizers with forest debris to charcoal activators for soils, or even cultivating rare Amazonia vegetables and developing recipes to encourage consumption, his is a project of constant epistemic resistance against the erasure and negation of local knowledge. In just a decade, *La Jungla del Hombre Amazonico* went from being a barren field for cattle grassing to an oasis of lush Amazon Forest from the piedmont ecoregion within the perimeter of Mocoa city.

The methods used and taught by Vallejo were widely popular in precolonial times and among various native groups. His farming methods include the cultivation of mutually beneficial plants side by side resembling the *Chagra* (Indigenous gardens), the maintenance of disorderly but highly diverse native crops, and the nourishment of soils via the accumulation of natural waste generated by the same forest. For Vallejo, what is fundamental is to recognize the rare properties of the soil in and around the Amazon region. These possess unique chemistry that must be understood and amplified through organic additives like charcoal and decomposed leaves, rather than through all the synthetic pesticides and

nutrients recommended by central environmental offices in Bogotá (Lyons 2016). This chemistry is in itself the territory. It entails complex relations between minerals like phosphorus and other minerals brought from the Sahara Desert by seasonal rains[1], decomposition processes that allow the slow absorption of these minerals, and the unique meteorological conditions of this region. These components allow the slow growth of potent plants and trees, such as rubber and chinchona, coca, tobacco, wild beans, and several medicinal plants that have fueled global development.

Vallejo argues that enough autonomous knowledge already exists in the territory, even if it escapes us. This knowledge is stored in every relationship there is in the very functioning of these ecosystems. For example, plants already know how to flourish in what some humans would consider deficient soils for productive agriculture. Therefore, the process of attaining such knowledge requires a special attunement and a new sensorial disposition, which he refers to as "Ver la Selva con Ojos Para Ella" (to observe the jungle from within and with eyes for her). His approach suggests attentive listening and observation of the subtle relations in space without imposing or mapping foreign knowledge, measurement, or economic desires onto the jungle. His approach as a farmer and scientist is cautious. He constantly links Indigenous practices with western science in order to avoid analyzing the forest only through a subtractive gaze that tends to isolate elements, section off space, or map divisive lines onto the jungle, which in itself he considers already continuous territory that extends from the high Andes all the way to the Atlantic Ocean.

However, one of the fractures that places local and indigenous spatial practices at opposite ends, particularly those enacted by the Colombian state, armed actors, and industry, is perhaps the very definition of territory. As a term, the territory is perhaps one of the words most used when discussing any of the current political, environmental, and cultural challenges faced by contemporary societies. However, it becomes even more relevant when addressing the Pan-Amazon region. The military speaks about defending the territory; politicians commit to managing the territory and every form of culture dispute

1 Described by scientists as the Bodélé-Amazonia Link, this is a vast nutrient-supply channel through which the wind that blows over the Sahara Desert lifts clouds of sand dust that carry important minerals lacking in the Amazonian soils. This reveals a vast planetary connection between seemingly distant continents and radically different ecosystems.

and claim a portion of the territory to deploy their ways of life and traditions. Therefore, it is worth asking whether or not each sector of society speaks from an equal symbolic, aesthetic, and even epistemic standing when addressing the territory.

Part 1: Clashing Territorial Visions

The territory as Enclosure:

We all know that space is not an abstract or a distant concept, at times reserved only for ontological or astronomical reflection. Instead, space is present, functional, and felt. Life needs space and thrives in space, either as the cosmos or the room inside an organism where cells develop and multiply. Both animals and humans appropriate space through a broad set of practices or behaviors, from smells and biological marks to signs and symbols used to show others a pre-existing claim over the land (space) or its resources. The very nature of these spatial practices from individuals and communities can become indivisible from the concept of space itself. Nevertheless, when space is claimed, occupied, or even enclosed, it is also produced. Thus, space can be considered a social construct with various societies producing space through their own economic, symbolic and representational forms (Lefebvre 1991). Space is also a social phenomenon that responds to the specific events or conditions affecting groups of individuals, or, as both Harvey and Lefebvre put it, space is both a framework where things happen and a historical concept full of overlapping and entangled histories (cited in Velasco 2015).

Over the centuries, forms of space appropriation have evolved into more sophisticated types of enclosure and occupation by various human groups, whose spatial practices correlate to the political, economic, spiritual, and even cosmological structuring of their societies. The act of enclosing space goes hand in hand with the use of 'enclosing instruments' of both symbolic, material, and technological order. These enclosing techniques manifest the agency of power deployed on space: starting with precarious fences across agricultural fields or the massive walls made of stone used to protect early settlements, all the way to modern technologies for border surveillance

like biometrics, infrared scanning systems at airports, or the very use of passports, cross-border checkpoints and border policing. As a result of these spatial claims, the territory emerges. In other words, the territory can be defined as: "bounded space under the control of a group of people, usually a state" (Elden 2010). However, the defintion of territory cannot be reduced to a practice of enclosure. Instead, we must interrogate competing concepts of territoriality, suggesting that the practice of claiming, enclosing or caring for spaces delivers political-economic and political-strategic relations that are essential to understanding 'territory' beyond the property-driven model celebrated by western tradition.

Territories, and the voluminous relations they enable, need to be understood also beyond the calculative dependent on measuring techniques. Ultimately this requires rethinking what at first seems like unproblematic definitions of territory as a 'bounded space' or the state as a 'bordered power container', because both positions presuppose the stability two concepts that are never one-sided: space and boundaries. Boundaries, are not only the distinction between place and space, or between terrain and territory, but they are also demarcation tools to excercise of power over land. Therefore, boundaries carry within a second-order problem founded upon a particular sense of calculation and concomitant grasp of space. Thus, if boundaries define a territory, the later can be understood as a political technology: it comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain, and measure and control – the technical and the legal – must be thought alongside the economic and strategic (Elden 2010) that claims a special privilege to regulate various human activities over space. The first part of the definition is most common to the Anglo-speaking world, relating territory to the act of enclosing space. In some ways, this idea puts the territory as a political and institutional construct, closely related to the state and the emergence of sovereignty. Nevertheless, among Indigenous groups across the Pan-Amazon region, particularly the Kamnëstá, Inga, and Siona, territorial practices operate under different premises, for which the notion of enclosure as the defining acto of 'territory-making' does not hold.

Even though we still use the terminology territory widely in western societies, we cannot ignore that the omnipresence of the term is only possible thanks to the expansion of European knowledge, languages, and culture across continents. As a term originating from the Latin

territorium, the territory denoted the lands dedicated for agricultural and grazing activity surrounding a human settlement. Later on, the term reflected the process in which organized groups of property owners eventually gathered around shared interests to form a political body (Antonsich 2017). Around the 15th century, the term became associated with the modern European state as the process of land ownership embodied a more robust system of laws, out of which the state had the monopoly through political and institutional powers (ibid).

However, the term territory can be misleading. The etymology shows connections with Latin words such as *Terre* (earth, land) and *Orium* (place). However, alternative etymologies suggest another root from Latin *Terrere* (to frighten), which also forms the English word terror or the French word *Aterrir,* to terrify. Therefore, territory as a term perhaps has more to do with the process of inflicting terror on others in order to demarcate or make a claim over the land (Elden 2009) than simply demarcating a place on earth. For example, starting in the 1500s, the territorialization process across the Pan-Amazon region was, if nothing else, a land-grabbing project. A project that relied on terror and the physical and cultural extermination of native groups and their forms of knowing. Today in Colombia, where a cruel internal war for territory between Colombia's military and illegal armed groups dictates control over the land, defining the territory as a space of terror feels current.

In *The Nomos of The Earth,* Carl Schmitt associates the early modes of enclosure to the emergence of political institutions. In his view, the *Nomos* is the relation between the concreteness of the ground and the construction of a given political order. Furthermore, the relationship between land and political ordering was developed through land-appropriation, leading to the formation of any geopolitical institution, such as communities, cities *(Ubrs),* and eventually the state. The *Nomos* also manifested in the process of land-delimitation and, as the first mode of partition and classification of space, provides orientation *(Ortung)* and order *(Ordnung)* to those living in the given space (Antonsich 2017).

A helpful example of the process in which land-partition and political ordering work in tandem is the film *Aguirre the Wrath of God* (1972). Written and directed by Werner Herzog, the film explores two tra-

jectories of the Spanish conquest of the Peruvian Amazon propelled by one of the expeditions in search of El Dorado. On the surface, the film reenacts a historical event where early European explorers suffered the vicissitudes of the colonial campaign. However, the film also depicts the ruthless crusade of land-appropriation carried by Spanish conquistadores Pedro de Ursua, Lope de Aguirre, and the nobleman Fernando de Guzmán during their epic journey of 1561 across the Amazon. Mixing two separate expeditions across the Amazon basin (one led by Pizzaro in 1540 and the second led by Ursua in 1566), Herzog reconstructs the historical events that led to the first encounter between Europeans and Amerindian communities. However, more importantly, the film reveals the mechanisms which colonial powers deployed across the 'new world.'

Midway through the film, after Aguirre defies Ursua's authority and soldiers capture him, as the second-highest in rank among the gang, Guzman is chosen to be the new leader of the expedition. Even though all men are hungry, sick, and lost in the immensity of the rainforest, Guzman proclaims himself emperor of a new republic he calls *El Dorado*, a place not yet discovered. Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, the only priest among the lost expedition, acting as the messenger between the divine, the mortals, and the Spanish Crown, recalls passages from the bible and writes down detailed accounts of the events, ratifying Guzman's coronation as the emperor of a kingdom not yet conquered. Stuck at the riverbanks and unable to continue the journey, the men find themselves stranded in an inhospitable and foreign place, sieged by indigenous warriors who have been killing the invaders one by one.

Aguirre takes charge as the military commander, coercing the soldiers to continue the expedition deep into the jungle. Commanded by Guzman and Aguirre, the men fabricate a precarious raft that will carry them across the Marañon and Amazon River and through this apparently "empty" landscape. Guzman records the landscape with random notes on a few scraps of paper as they get further into the Amazon floodplains and lays claim to the vast portions of land they encounter, as far as his eye can see, all while sitting in the throne of his makeshift floating fort.

The mastery of this scene is precisely how the film depicts the unfolding of the colonial territorial process, in which space is all of a

sudden re-rendered visible by the cultural and political constructs of a particular human group and in denial of any pre-existing spatial law. In this case, writing is the effective tool that produces the territory, compressed as a written record and framed into a limited and foreign, symbolic system such as Spanish law.

Still unable to enclose these vast jungles through walls or fences, Guzman legitimizes his claims through the act of naming, calculating rough sizes, jotting down random distance, and coordinates that locate the newly conquered sites in relation to other, far away territories. Spanish legal records, written in a foreign tongue, meant

Film Stills, Aguirre, the Wrath of God Dr. Werner Herzog. 1972

nothing to the original local inhabitants; an example of one type of spatial practice of enclosure, along with its entire epistemological apparatus, overlapping onto another. In this case, Guzman declares his kingdom of El Dorado with a few scribbles on scraps of paper and idiotic ceremonial fanfare.

In this film, Herzog deconstructs the entire colonial project and, in inconspicuous ways, reveals how law and God became a mere illusion imported to an entirely new context by parodic criminals. Without any justification or actual capacity to raise a fence around the rainforest, violence was the only mechanism that gave the Spaniards any advantage and legitimacy over ancestral communities. Thus, inflicting terror became a direct - and perhaps the only viable - way of producing territory in former colonial times. Moreover, overlapping one system of knowing and seeing the territory onto another relied almost entirely on the suppression, negation, and eventual erasure of the previous one. Therefore, while Lafevbre's triad of space productions calls for A) the production of collective space to inhabit, B) ways to represent such space, and C) representational spaces, such

as institutions (Lefebvre 1991), I would argue that in the Anglo-European tradition a territory is produced not only as a consequence of enclosure but also through acts of violent erasure of what already exists in the space.

A testament to this argument is Colombia's ongoing conflict, which in many ways is the shadow of extraction, dogma, and dispossession manifested across multiple layers of physical and cultural space. This conflict also occupies several temporalities and speeds, some of which move so slow that they become, arguably, untraceable due to the lack of lasting evidence and the continuous removal of people and their unique modes of space production and knowledge.

Territory As a Web of Life:

At the receiving end of colonial and neocolonial developments are the indigenous communities that live in these vastly diverse territories. Still today, these communities struggle and resist a process of cultural suppression that has permeated not only their territories but also their institutions, forms of assembly, and ways of deploying their cultures within that space. Again, the issue at stake in this analysis is the fact that in overlapping one territorial mode onto another, a system of invisible divisions that negate, dismantle, or obscure pre-existing forms of territorial production takes shape. Bonaventura de Sousa Santos offers a helpful framework called *abyssal thinking*. Within this framework, he recognizes a kind of space of invisibility into which those in power often throw the knowledge and cultural practices of the oppressed and the destitute. In his words:

> *Modern Western thinking has been abyssal thinking. It consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones [...] What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence (Santos 2007)*

As history has not been fair with those pushed to the abyss, resisting the brutality through which the colonizer set up an epistemic regime in areas like the Pan-Amazon also means documenting, recognizing, and learning from ancestral knowledge to eventually awaken those standing on the safe side of the *abyssal line*. As Santos argues, western thinking celebrates itself as global, it defines the global, although it vastly ignores knowledge found at the peripheries or outside its own neatly kept margins. In other words, he defends that the understanding of the world should "exceed the western understanding of the world" (ibid).

When it comes to critically addressing the territory, I sense multiple cracks and blind spots, or worse, an *abyssal line* drawn by geographers and cultural critics that render the territory as only a precondition for statehood (Halvorsen 2019). This position favors a notion of territory based on the premise of property law, militarization as a path for sovereignty, and the monopoly of the state over its resources. Meanwhile, these positions leave out of the discussion parallel trajectories of spatial practices found among ancestral communities (from gardening or spirituality to public assembly) that produce and sustain territory. These definitions also disregard non-western languages and alternative terminologies that afford other meanings and symbolism. These also ignore the work of artists, filmmakers, and outsiders of the academic discourse who engage with other manifestations of the territory in the field.

As a reaction, my efforts go toward recognizing the incompleteness and limitations of the western epistemic regime deployed across the *New World* or *Abya Yala* and the societies that emerged from it. In doing so, I resort to other knowledge, stories, and ways of rendering the territory in order to shake the aesthetic apparatus still sheltered under a western epistemic veil. After all, the world is richer and far more diverse than only that which a few languages, still drunken on Latin etymology, are capable of describing or what Anglo-European intellectuals and western epistemologies dictate. Santos himself reminds us that "ignorance is only a disqualifying condition when what is being learned is more valuable than what is being forgotten" (ibid 2). Therefore, as a self-declared ignorant on 'territorial matters' it is one of my goals to resist the tendency to only look for definitions in the works of those already published or to quote art histories already

kept on lavish collections, dusty archives, or hung on the walls of selective cultural institutions modeled by western cultural values. Instead, throughout this project, I decided to look for other sources and find my references, cases, and mentors across the Pan-Amazon region while listening attentively to other definitions of the territory. As a result, in my video work, I composed a type of glossary of indigenous terms relating to the territory, as well as to document a wide range of ancestral spatial practices that today are at risk of disappearing, like massive rituals of forgiveness and celebrations of collective labor *(Mingas)*[2]. Below I will describe some of the common understanding of the territory held by the Inga, Kamënstá, and Siona people, all collected during fieldwork and conversations with elders and local collaborators.

First of all, even though each community has its own language and sovereign lands, they all share an overarching definition of the spatial extent of territory. For them, the forest is a common home that encompasses all living forms. Without clear borders dividing one indigenous reserve from the next, these territories are porous and interconnect. These porous territories support the circulation of people, animals, and plants, unlike the European border mentality that made incredible efforts to segment the landscape through *Encomiendas* (missions), *Cabildos* (municipalities), and economic zoning. For example, as neighboring Indigenous nations, the Inga and Kamënstá of Sibundoy Valley share a territory that has no borderlines or fences to divide them. However, instead, it connects both nations through landscape features like monoliths or creeks, also sacred for both communities. These landmarks are points of gathering as opposed to divisive lines.

Currently, the Inga and Kamënstá share efforts to expand their reserves to co-manage the Andean-Amazon foothills, or the ecoregion previously described as the *Recharge Zone,* and where the planned highway and copper mines are threatening fragile environments. However, there have been tensions inside these communities in recent years. A sense of shared responsibility has been overshadowed by competition for state subsidies and the privatization of formerly

2 A web-based video archive is accessible through the main web platform documenting the project. Among them are *El Carnaval del Perdón* (Fogginess Carnival) and community offerings to celebrate the territory as a spirit to whom we must ask permission before entering in it: https://research.felipecastelblanco.com

collective lands. Like all Indigenous communities across the Pan-Amazon region, a cruel economic model that monetizes all relationships adds pressure to the Inga and Kamënstá communities. It also drives a consistent syncretism towards non-indigenous land-use models that protect private property rights over collective ownership. While these imported models erode ancestral values, I should clarify that I am aware of the contradiction in romanticizing ancestral cultures or projecting a kind of purity to Indigenous values. Like any other society, they too reveal inequalities and contradictory positions, especially when it comes to mobilizing together as a cohesive political force and finding consensus among their leaders.

However, indigenous views around territorial organization seem very different from those practiced among non-indigenous groups, and so, the terms of their languages and symbolic realities afford other conceptual possibilities. For example, sharing roots with Quechua, the Inga language translates the term territory as *Kaugsay Suyu* (place of life). For them, it means that each one of us coexists with the same weight in the same sphere of life (Jacanamijoy Tisoy 2001). Within this sphere of life, every being performs a vital task in order to maintain planetary harmony, and therefore, the territory manifests in the life-enabling relations held between all kinds of beings that inter-exist in the same environment.

The Ingas consider themselves descendants of the Ayahuasca vine, also known as *Yagé,* or the sacred remedy *Samai* (Inga for the breath of spirits), passed down by the forest spirits to the *Yachas* (Inga for Knowledgeable people) or shamans. The *Yachas* can be either men or women who have special powers gifted by the *Samai* to guard the wisdom of the plants and the places where wisdom generates, in other words, the forest or *Samai Suyo* (Inga for sacred place). It follows that Ingas describe the territory as a sacred source of knowledge or *Kaugsay Suyu Yuyay (*a place of life and thought) where there is an open channel for spiritual communication between all beings sharing the forest (ibid).

Ultimately, for the Inga, the territory is reconfigured as a place for exchanging knowledge. This place is not fixed to a set point, but it can manifest in various locales or dimensions, so long there is permanent communication and coexistence. Unlike the acts of enclosing that

yield European modes of territorial organization, Inga territories are interwoven biosocial fabrics that expand as more individuals weave through shared knowledge, labor, and care. Hence, it is through celebrations of collectivity and knowledge exchange that territory is best embodied.

Once a baby is born, the Ingas bury the mother's placenta along with the baby's umbilical under *la Tulpa,* which consists of three rocks placed in the middle of the house or the gardens where ceremonies, cooking, and gathering happens. Like with a tree, each new life is planted back in the land, thus creating a powerful connection with the earth and the cosmos. *La Tulpa* is the *Suyu Kallarij (*Inga for the place from where everything begins), and it resembles the mother's womb (in Inga *Uigsa Uarmi*), which is the very same territory or first home (ibid 2). *La Tulpa* is often depicted with diamond shapes in Inga and Kamëstá textiles called *Chumbe,* or a handwoven ribbon that narrates the story of the community. Each corner of the diamond refers to a cardinal direction (North, South, East, and West), and as such, this symbol establishes the connection with larger communities across the volumes of the territory. Therefore, visible or not, the *Kaugsay Suyu i*s a space of relations that manifest at various scales that together establish a vast *web of life* where nothing is independent or disconnected.

Handwoven Chumbe and Nest made by Kamënstá artisans. The designs of the ribbon depict the stroy of the Sibundoy Valley and were conceived by the artisans and Ayênan Quinchoa

Generally, the cosmologies of various Amerindian groups, including the ones I have worked with, support the notion that objects do not exist as independent or autonomous. Instead, they are the consequence of relations that pre-exists them. In this way, indigenous spatial practices are entirely relational (Escobar 2013). Therefore, their spatial practices produce relational territories and modes of governance where the focus is not only the political organization of space (as it might be for western societies) but the administration of the life-enabling relations that constitute the entirety of the territory. And while indigenous groups today

frequently use the Spanish word *Territorio, t*he same term in their own languages has completely different affordances, which proves that there is a lack of attentiveness to the nuances of Indigenous cultures by those enacting and directing 'territorial policy' across the Pan-Amazon region, including the state, conservation groups, and various NGOs. This point reminds me of Heraldo Vallejo's call for a type of unique gaze to see the jungle *con ojos para ella*.

There are other words in the local cultures that embody alternative ways of seeing the forest and grasping modes of territoriality that most western languages do not consider. A term that resonates throughout this project and the title of the most ambitious film I have produced to date is *Ayênán.*

Ayênán is a Kamëstá word that means *the beginning of every form of life*. This word does not denote a thing, but instead, it is the smallest space in between things, from where the universe emerges. Undoubtedly, Ayênan is another quantum field known by many long before being discovered by those few working in underground laboratories to catalog atomic particles, including Switzerland's very own CERN.

The Kamënstá also have what some might consider an unusual myth of origin that combines tales of interplanetary travel, having landed in the Sibundoy Valley long before their Inga neighbors. Traveling from a remote start, onboard of wild bean seeds, the Kamënstá arrived on earth after a stellar explosion that dispersed various living forms all over the cosmos. As if rebutting Heidegger's affirmation that humans are a species grappling with existential homelessness that gives rise to a planetary rule of human technology (Volpi 2003), the Kamënstá embody the opposite dilemma. After landing on earth from a distant star, they vowed to preserve the fragile environments of this, their host planet and final home to subsist in it indefinitely (*para pervivir en el tiempo y en el espacio*) [3]. As a result, the Kamënstá became *Inyënang* (Kamënstá for guardians) dedicated to defending both the

3 This story was shared by my Kamënstá collaborator Ayênan Quinchoa Juajibioy when I asked for the meaning of his name. Aside from participating in my filmmaking workshops, Ayênán and I traveled together throughout the territory, and he even became the main character for the experimental document I have produced with Lydia Zimmermann and Ñambi Rimai Media Collective, also called Ayênán (2020).

territories and vital biocultural relations that connect the high Andes with the lower Amazon.

This myth of origin depicts an entirely different vertical trajectory to the space race, which today keeps wealthier nations like China or the U.S busy. Instead of attempting to leave earth through new geospatial technology, the Kamënstá made the wild beans an important crop of the Valley and shielded aquifers and headwaters in the highlands from outside settlers. They sought to establish a connection with their 'new' home by attuning to the already existing knowledge and potent tools they found in the territory. Today, Kamënstá ancestral medicine is widely celebrated, and their shaman (or Taitas) are guardians of vast medicinal knowledge in imminent risk of disappearance. Like the Ingas, the Kamënstá also practice Ayahuasca ceremonies in community spaces they call Malocas, ceremonial spaces tucked away in the forest and surrounded by medicinal plants and spirits.

The Kamnëstá understand the territory as a gathering and a type of cosmic vessel that flows on streams of harmonious energy instead of a fixed site bound by the fence. Like the term *Ayênán,* this culture has been capable of recognizing and addressing multiscale relations that hold the territory together, even at molecular levels or as potent energies that bind the cosmos together. For them, cells and atoms are known elements they often see during shamanic rituals with Ayahuasca and other medicinal plants. Accordingly, the definition of the territory as a connector or energy that flows between things opens an entirely new scope of aesthetic possibilities, traceable across volumetric landscapes. Here, the territory is presented as a medium that moves through objects and spaces. This view even renders the human body as a host to microscopic forms of life and a node within a larger network of dependencies and connections across the cosmos. In this case, the modes of enclosure imported from Europe are overwritten by weaving, connecting, and sustaining parallel territories.

Finally, my call is for examining indigenous territories more broadly as multidimensional forms of space production that manifest in relationships and aesthetics that escape measurement and are not bound to the terrain. However, a shift on terminology alone cannot reconcile this disjunctive because what is needed is other forms of

representation and mediation, rooted in intermediary aesthetics and bifocal ways of looking.

For years, scholars across Anglo-European discourse have been echoing more nuanced definitions of the *territory* based on terminology, such as introducing the concept of *territoriality.* Territoriality is a cultural and behavioral phenomenon that describes territory formation as the product of networked socio-technical practices (Painter 2010). It is a practice that reconciles two sides of the problem, linking society and space in terms of identity, spatial traditions, and even the exclusion of undesirable outsiders (Antonsich 2017). Another concept worth mentioning this the notion of *Dissident Territories* coined by Santos, which are insurgent spaces for experiments in alternative economic, social and political relations (Halvorsen 2019). As a consequence of social behavior, various modes of territoriality can overlap one another or exist in parallel timelines, even within the confines of regional or national borders like in the Pan-Amazon region.

These terms might appease those seeking more specificity when it comes to recognizing how cultural practices transform space and produce alternative territories. Nonetheless, suppose non-indigenous cultural producers, institutions, academics, politicians, and the like fail to grasp the full spectrum of ancestral modes of territorial thinking. In that case, the gap will keep getting bigger, and the calls for coordinated action and cultural revindication ever more distorted. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues, there cannot be global justice without cognitive justice (Santos 2014). Therefore, the impetus behind this project also sets on opening bilateral channels for communication and aesthetics that allow reciprocal cognitive shifts, especially around territorial thinking. In finding new alignments and paths for exchange, I firmly believe in the power of crafting art experiences through versatile tools like film, performance, and participatory research, which can mediate this dialogue and fill in the gaps so far left open by discursive practices and theory.

Part 2 Biocultural Territories: A Conversation with Taita Hernando Chindoy

As a child, Taita (that is, *chief* in the Inga language) Hernando Chindoy was told that he was impoverished because his community had little money and lived in a remote Indigenous village in the Andean hills. Over the years, he learned to doubt the wisdom of those who would relate wealth to money or the proximity to urban centers constituted mainly of non-Indigenous inhabitants. These doubts and genuine questions would make him a tenacious Indigenous leader whose fight has focused, through many endeavors, on realigning the epistemic compass of a disappearing Inga culture.

Today, Taita Hernando Chindoy is the chief and legal representative of the Inga Nation in Colombia. A well-connected organizer, a land defender, and a father, he was born at the top of the Colombian Andes in Aponte (Tablón de Gomez), nearly 80 km north of the city of Pasto. Hernando learned Spanish at the age of 12 while working for the *colono* farmers who had, in turn, arrived in the area in the mid-1980s to plant poppy fields for heroin production. Learning the language quickly, he became the first member of his family to attend university when he enrolled as a student at the University of Nariño (UNDEAR) in Pasto while simultaneously seeking knowledge about his own culture and roots. During his time at UNDEAR, Taita Chindoy discovered the vast systemic repression of his Inga culture. Within the Western-Style education curriculum, he found a total absence and denial of ancestral knowledge and history of the Inga culture and nearly every other Indigenous culture across Colombia.

Direct descendants of the Incas, the Inga people have lived since the 1500s across radically diverse territories that stretch from the top of the Andes, near the city of Pasto, at nearly 3000 meters above sea level, all the way to the lower Amazon, in the states of Putumayo, Cauca, and Caquetá, in the Southwest of Colombia. Occupying the northern edge of the Inca territory known as *Tihuantinsuyo,* the Inga hold that their mandate has long been to protect strategic territories through which the Andean foothills give birth to the tropical jungles of the Amazon. These are crucial corridors for diverse plant and animal species, including tapirs, deer, Andean bears, serpents, and

jaguars. The mountains where Hernando was born are known as Colombia's fluvial star. They host the headwaters of three important rivers—the Patía, Caquetá, and Putumayo—two of which flow across the jungle and feed the great Amazon River. The region near Aponte is surrounded by *Paramos*, tundra-like ecosystems that cover the mountains and feed subterranean water deposits and lakes while conversing daily with the passing clouds.

For centuries, the stretch of land between the high Andes and the Amazonian plains that is home to the Inga has been the epicenter of complex colonial disputes and violence in many forms. From European *colonos* and their armies of entrepreneurs chasing gold, copper, rubber, oil, and natural resources for pharmaceutical supplies; to the Colombian landlords and mestizo settlers claiming vast portions of land for agricultural production; to, finally, in recent decades, the drug cartels and armed rebels involved in cocaine and heroin production and traffic. The Inga have had to face and fight a myriad of actors and forms of violence to preserve their culture, territories, and lives. Despite constant pressure from a negligent republic that has failed to secure the most basic rights for its Indigenous population, the Ingas have persisted in the face of incredible hardship.

The early 1990s, for example, saw the arrival of ELN guerrillas to Aponte; paramilitary groups followed a decade later. With these arrivals and incursions, the Ingas became prisoners in their own territory, forced to turn nearly every field into poppy plantations for heroin production. Despite having fertile and prosperous lands for farming during this violent regime, the Inga began to experience extreme poverty and even malnutrition due to the enforced monocultures. As a result, their population numbers dwindled, and their youth were forced to join the lower ranks of the same illegal armies forcing the Inga community into the drug trade. In 2004, Colombia's highest constitutional court declared the Inga people at high risk of cultural and physical disappearance. Nevertheless, the same government maintained the economic, political, and environmental policies that are causing this very vanishing of Indigenous lives, worlds, and traditions.

Within this set of conditions, Taita Hernando began his life of service, first as a local coordinator of the *Cabildo*, the Indigenous municipal house, in 2001, and then as Aponte's governor—that is, its Inga

chief—for nine years. During his tenure, Taita Hernando worked to expel the ELN guerrillas and paramilitaries from Aponte, who retaliated with assassination attempts and constant intimidation directed at his community and family. In this tumultuous moment, Taita Hernando resorted to the nuances of a disappearing language, rescuing life-enabling principles long established among the Ingas, which set the stage for the emergence of *Wuasikamas,* or *guardians of the earth* in the Inga language.

Wuasikamas is an embodied epistemology and a practice centered on a profound respect for life, both human and nonhuman, which allowed the Inga to initiate a process of territorial defense, conservation practices, and autonomous governance. The principles of *Wuasikamas* also helped to introduce a model for the voluntary substitution of illicit crops that fueled drug traffic. In its wake, the Inga re-established their traditional *chagras,* or Indigenous gardens filled with medicinal and edible plants, in which conservation, learning, and spirituality are practiced within each family. By 2010, the initiative became a social enterprise centered on the production and commercialization of high-altitude coffee, through which the Ingas of Aponte Nariño, in the high Andes, were finally able to expel armed rebels and drug lords from their territories and fund the conservation of the fragile natural ecosystems that surround them. In 2015, *Wuasikamas r*eceived the Ecuadorian Prize, awarded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for their contribution to social, economic, and environmental development, a stunning achievement.

In 2018 Taita Chindoy and I embarked on a meandering path of conversations that would lead to various forms of collaboration between Inga, Colombian, and Swiss institutions in the following years. First, in July of that year, during a long car ride along the narrow, infamous road known as the *Trampoline of Death*, which connects the high Andes with the lower Amazon, we spoke in person about Indigenous governance and its commitment to defend a fragile fabric of life-enabling relations. Later, due to the pandemic and the enforced distance between us, we would continue the conversation transcribed here in November 2020 by speaking online. Covering issues ranging from biocultural governance to conservation in the Pan-Amazon region, we also spoke about the Inga's long-term strategies to develop new institutions for Indigenous thought in Inga territory itself.

The conversation transcribed below was commissioned by the editorial team of *Culturescapes Festival: Amazonia 2021*[4]. t has been complemented with notes from an online conversation we held for *El Chopo Museum* at the Autonomous University of Mexico UNAM and curated by Francisco Carballo in January 2021[5]. Video documentation from both interviews can be accessed online.

We Feel the Jungle Like We Feel Our Skin: An interview with Chief Taita Hernando Chindoy, Governor of the Inga People of Colombia

FELIPE CASTELBLANCO: *According to Inga principles, what role does the Amazon play in the vast scope of life forms that coexist on this planet?*

TAITA HERNANDO CHINDOY: *Earth is a living and sentient being and nature is like a vast fabric that wraps around us. Each place, even if remote, is a stitch of this fabric. From one place to another, nature's fabric holds tension and allows the folds and seams to hold together. If the tension is right, the fabric is in shape, but if some threads are pulled too hard, our fabric wrinkles, loses shape, or rips apart. As humans, we also have the responsibility of keeping the fabric in nice shape and caring for it as our finest attire. Trees are like the finely woven clothes that earth wears, and we, too, have to keep her clothes in good condition. Similar to how the Ingas see it, Pope Francis has recently acknowledged that earth is humanity's common house. Therefore, we people all over the world have a shared responsibility, which is to listen to the earth and procure its well-being, not only in the Amazon but in the broadest sense of the global. However, it seems like today's responsibility for conservation falls mostly on the shoulders of us, Indigenous peoples, but what is really needed is a collective effort. After all, life depends on that. We need coordinated action, not only to protect the Amazon but also the Andean*

4 https://www.culturescapes.ch/amazonas

5 https://www.chopo.unam.mx/01ESPECIAL/pens-cont/arte-politica-y-contraculturaVIDEOS.html

ecosystems, the mangroves along the coast, and every natural site that hosts life. The important part of this is to remember that earth is neatly woven tissue and no matter if you are in Europe or in South America, there are always the same colors in the rainbow.

FC: *Why is the presence of Indigenous communities in the Amazon so important for the equilibrium and preservation of the Amazonia forest?*

THC: *Without Indigenous peoples, the Amazon would not really exist today. Our Indigenous bodies have bonded together with the Amazon as a single body, and we feel the jungle like we feel our skin. Just remember that historically, Europe also had huge biodiversity, but it is now diminished, and so it is all these imported practices that undermine the stability of the jungle. The proof is the devastation caused around the city of Florencia [the biggest urban settlement in the state of Caquetá], extending all the way to the banks of the Caquetá river, where the lands have been turned into grazing fields. Even there, you can still see that the only small patches of green, or the areas that are well preserved, are where ancestral communities still live. In other words, our Indigenous reserves have been like containment walls, but the fear is that, little by little, they start to look more like small and disconnected islands of green. As long as people continue to fight for the life of the Amazon as our extended body, the jungle can still flourish. But like when the skin is wounded and cut open, making it easy for many external agents to penetrate the body and bring illness or death, we have to protect the Amazon as a fragile tissue in the same way that one cares for the skin.*

FC: *If one of the strategies of the colonial process has been the negation -or erasure- of ancestral cultures and knowledge, then what are the practices that still remain and that support indigenous resistance?*

THC: *Right now, our Indigenous cultures are debilitated and frankly, we are quite fragile. For example, Nukak [a traditionally nomadic community living in the jungles of Guaviare] only 25 or 30 years ago lived as uncontacted people deep in the Amazon jungles. However, once they were contacted and lured little by little into a supposedly civilized world, their population started to decrease at very fast rates. If 30 years ago their population amounted to around 10,000 people,*

today only 3,000 Nukak survive. Currently, they live with tremendous adversity because they are no longer able to roam the Amazon as an extension of their body but, instead, are confined to enclosed reserves and spaces, like we all are in the urban context. As a result, their language has debilitated, they started to suffer from malnutrition, and recent reports show that young Nukak boys and girls are struggling with drug addiction. So, if we think about it, it is very likely that in the next 50 years, the Nukak will disappear.

In contrast, there are other communities like the Inga who have been able to resist while adapting to the always-changing conditions. We, the Ingas, remain current and we still recognize ourselves as a unique culture, despite the many struggles we face in our territories. What keeps us alive is our music, arts, our medicine, and spiritual traditions.

The problem is that the territories don't get bigger, but populations keep growing. For example, we maintain that our ancestral territory extends to 1,200.000 hectares, but this number does not align with the version of government. Even though the traces of our ancestors in these territories are self-evident and you still see them throughout archeological sites or reflected in the names of rivers or villages, according to the Colombian government, we are only entitled to 130,000 ha. for our reserves. What this means is that we have lost, or been denied, almost 90% of our ancestral territories. And all while these lands have been in the hands of non-indigenous populations. This is why it becomes imperative that we take back control on issues like Indigenous land reform, education, and governance. We need to close the cycle in which our rights are decided by others and, instead, put Indigenous administrators in charge. In areas like education, if 99% of what is being taught is also imposed and doesn't reflect our culture, as Ingas, we are still dying little by little. So, even if we have to borrow skills and knowledge, for now, the idea is that soon we can have control over the administration of our own knowledge. But I insist, the problem today is that we have zero control over matters that radically affect our communities.

FC: *What was the actual trigger that kickstarted this dream of creating an Indigenous university?*

THC: *Well, it is exactly the lack of paths available to learn about ourselves and our own indigenous history. For example, in my case, when I went to the university outside [a non-Indigenous university in the city of Pasto], I didn't have any chance to learn about my culture or a chance to connect the concepts that I was learning with the teachings from my father of other elders back in Aponte.*

Back then, I was seeking more ways to learn about our own Inga history, about how we got here and how. Most Inga elders only know our history up to the 1700s, when Taita Carlos Tamabioy was alive and helped the community defend and secure our territory from the Spaniards by producing a legal testament. This document used colonial laws to leave a record of our presence in the region and give us rights over these territories through inheritance. We still know very little about how this emblematic Inga leader arrived here or what life was like before his time.

This is why in my own educational journey, I ended up learning from the work of non-Indigenous researchers and experts who had more information about us than we do. This is how I started to learn about my Indigenous heritage, and quite sadly, this is what most of us experience as Indigenous people. However, we see that there are other ways to reclaim our own confidence and ways of learning. Many universities today are enabling a different transfer of knowledge, which aside from teaching historical or technical topics, allow you to learn about ancestral medicines and spirituality.

One important difference is that for us, knowledge is felt. Or for me, at least, knowledge is a feeling. It Is like being submerged in the knowing. Meanwhile, in the Western university, the professor guides the student as she learns, provides books, and introduces methods until eventually, the students hold knowledge like holding a rock in her hand. But in that case, there is only a material relation with knowing, in which we strive to make knowledge palpable. That's when the students start to know the rock as a solid, heavy, and material object. That is an external kind of knowing. Instead, knowing for us is a feeling: it is as if every cell of one's body responds to, and becomes familiar with, the nature of something. In that place, one sees all colors or features, but one cannot hold the rock, weigh or measure it. Instead, the rock becomes like a surrounding or skin that one comes

in contact with and which envelops one's mind. At that moment, a rock tells you about itself.

And definitely, knowledge opens doors, but which kinds of doors? While the Western model of the university opens doors through books, making one fluent in everything that the human mind has produced, nature has its own doors. These doors can also be opened with sacred plants, which eventually nourish not your mind but your way of being.

So, if we look at ancestral medicine, the Kofán [a neighboring tribe], for example, have their own formulas to heal the body. The Kofán doctor heals the sick not by killing that other being that causes illness, like a virus, but by conversing with it and connecting to that energy to adjust one's balance. That's why singing is used in ancestral medicine because it is through songs that the doctor speaks with the illness.

FC: *How would you categorize Inga science?*

THC: *Perhaps Indigenous medicine should not be categorized as science in the Western sense. What is important to recognize is that there are different ways to access knowledge and through many different paths. There are as many ways to access knowledge—for example, to treat the flu—as there are cultures in the world. In Colombia, you have 115 Indigenous communities, in addition to Afro-Colombians and the majoritarian society [of colonos/whites], which means that there are 117 plus ways to know something. Each way should be valid in its own context, and, ideally, anyone could explore one or more of these approaches in the process of getting to know the world.*

However, to try to explain Indigenous knowledge through the lens of science or by equating it with science is not right because they are different paths to reach knowledge. Instead, today's challenge is to foment respect for each path as unique and irreplaceable. But the knowledge around the medicine of our elders is still deemed inferior or archaic compared to the practices of Western doctors. This is precisely one of the challenges that we have to address through an Indigenous university.

FC: *How does one create a university that does not force translations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and that doesn't simply replicate the model of the urban university in the Amazon?*

THC: *What we need to do is to conceive the university as a fabric weaved from fibers coming from various epistemic traditions, processes, and various forms of knowing. This university also has to become a connector between the highlands [of the Andean region] and the lower Amazon. The challenge increases if we Indigenous communities do not draw a clear path and rely only on the solidarity of external agents.*

There has to be an internal push to strengthen our governance and the unity of our communities, our social bond, in order to confront the pressure. After more than 500 years of pressure, we sometimes don't even think it is possible to rebuild a sense of cooperation among various Indigenous nations or to see ourselves as part of the same community. Because of that same history of denial and abuse of our cultures, we lose confidence and doubt that new social bonds can function according to our own history. That is a part of the big task of decolonization, where we have revived by ourselves in the present our own ancestral imaginaries.

But as we deepen our connection with the territory, trust more in our Inga heritage, and restore our sense of ownership, we will continue this deep connection with the environments and contexts we inhabit. Only then can we rewire and unlearn many concepts, like being poor, like living far away, and all that instills a sense of inferiority among Indigenous people.

In the case of building a university in our territories, it is a real challenge for the imagination. For example, if we choose to build it in a village, we risk reproducing all the damage that has been done to environments through brick-and-mortar architecture. Instead, if we build the university in the forest, it can reflect other ways of building and creating space in accordance with our ways of seeing the world.

For example, in the cartoon of the three pigs in which each one builds a house, we learned that the weakest house is the one made of wood. However, wood is all we have available in our territories. So

that is exactly how a dominant culture teaches us how to not valorize our own cultural practices and resources. Therefore, the architecture of the university has to reflect our cultural codes and reinvent the ways in which we build not just a structure but an entire education model. One of the opportunities of the university is to show the world another way to relate to and inhabit the territory. Over time, the project will impact several areas, and there is a clear path to unlearn or dump a lot of ideas that we have learned through outside influence, so it will be like washing away stains that we don't know we have. But, of course, these are tiny actions compared to all that humanity has to do. And again, it should not be only the responsibility of Indigenous people to unlearn.

FC: *As I understand it now, the Indigenous university is actually an exercise in world-making. Or at least, it seems like a direct path to redefine priorities and practices across many fronts. For example, how might we relate to an endangered territory, how we build and profit from this territory, how knowledges are transferred, and so on. In order to achieve this new mindset, it seems as though a certain type of institution is needed, one that offers the tools and context and passing on of Indigenous knowledge to reinvent an entire Indigenous nation, thereby delivering a clear model for others to follow. Am I right?*

THC: *That is why Wuasikamas [being a guardian for the earth] is the support, or backbone, of all the processes that we are developing. This is a new model for thinking, but not only for the Inga. It is one that can be shared in a pluriversal, plural culture, or whatever visions and configuration of the world we end up with. What I want to leave behind, for my community, my children, my siblings, is a solid foundation based on our ancestral principles, through which many of us can seek answers not from the outside but instead are allowed to go deep and seek inside. But likewise, that duality between inside and outside of our consciousness, our bodies, and our societies need to be reconfigured. For example, we think that the moon is outside, but it affects mothers giving birth or reproductive cycles, so it is not outside. Instead, it is already a connection that starts deep in the body. Or like when one takes medicine [Ayahuasca] and sees infinite lights only to realize that we're not alone in the cosmos. As one elder said, "I know that no matter where I end up going, I will also be in the home of my community. And in order to get there, I'll have to cross a labyrinth. But once I find it, even though this home*

will seem far away, that home is still connected to this one." So, there is a real connection with the larger universe, but we have forgotten how to see and navigate those paths. In the present, we cannot learn how to see these connections, so it is a matter of returning or remembering, with dignity and confidence, knowing that all these other conceptions of life and of knowing are possible.

FC: *Are there possibilities of becoming Indigenous, or awakening as non-Indigenous people, and attuning to these ancestral ways of being?*

THC: *The challenge here is for humanity to see itself again as a family and that we don't separate through all the barriers we have built. Would it be possible that one day as humans, we could live on earth as a single family? Ultimately, what is going to happen eventually, is that if we cannot come together as a family, there will be other groups that will try to remove the Indigenous from their territories in violent ways. And there would be two alternatives, that the Indigenous concede or choose collective suicide and die alongside the territory. We already see the second scenario coming in relation to the lack of concerted efforts to protect the water. We live in areas with plenty of water, but when water scarcity begins and bigger powers start to fight for it, we are going to be pressured in ways that you cannot imagine.*

But unlike big geopolitical players, the Indigenous approach is always more concerted or shared. It is more about familiarity and not about imposing. And this sense of sharing is something we all have to embrace. But we must be aware of the limits of these exchanges and how much can be shared. For example, it's about knowing how much the Swiss want to be influenced by the Indigenous or how much the Indigenous want to be influenced by the Swiss. I don't know how we can develop more reciprocal relations, but perhaps the path is to form and strengthen mutual trust. That's when it becomes necessary to learn mutual communication codes and pay attention to what already happens all across the Amazon, where each Indigenous nation speaks their own language, but anyone can easily speak four or more languages, so they all can communicate. Perhaps this is one of the successful strategies that have kept these nations safe, which is the fact that they can communicate and embrace one another.

It is not about canceling differences; otherwise, we risk falling into the trap of homogenizing and imposing what one group thinks is right onto another. That's why in our tradition, we plant the umbilical cord in the chagra [Indigenous medicinal and food gardens], which celebrates our connection with the earth. So that chagra is the territory, the common home. It's a place where it's possible to connect with the sun and with the heart of the earth. And it is a place inhabited by other beings, like deer, jaguars, bears, and serpents. That is the place where several dimensions in that territory meet because each being that lives there also has other conceptions of territory. One doesn't negate the other.

Part 3: Territorial Bilingualism

For the Inga, the light was born out of the spirit of the *Yagé,* or Ayahuasca vine, and with it our ability to see. At the beginning of time, the world was dark, and when the early *Yachas* (shamans) walked the forest, they had to avoid stepping on a plant or upset a dormant spirit. One day, a group of *Yachas* found a root on the ground that did not belong to any other plant. They cut it into three pieces and gave one to the women, who, after eating it, started to menstruate. The men ate another piece and immediately could see colors despite the darkness. They also saw how the last part of the root began to twirl and lift from the ground. Moving like a serpent and hugging the trees, the root reached the top of the forest, pollinating a large flower in the top of the tree, which grew even taller and brighter. Once in the sky, this flower turned into the sun (Jacanamijoy Tisoy 2001). This is how the root created a start, which sent light and color all across the forest, so other men could see and locate themselves in it.

It seems like the story of Putumayo is a constant effort to locate treasures, plants, passages, property and to trace knowledge across this territory. So far, we have seen this pattern from the colonizer's side through expeditions, land surveys, or mapping, but what about indigenous forms of georeferencing and location?

First, through my fieldwork, I became acquainted with the notion of *Recorridos* (Spanish for journeys or treks), which are a kind of indigenous-led expedition where knowledge and territory bind. On the one hand, *Recorridos* are a way of territorial monitoring, practiced via extended walks across the region where community members gather to

witness various forms of aggressive intervention from outside forces. During each journey, they keep stock of the trees, creeks, animals, and event forbidden settlements found in the reserves. On the other hand, *Recorridos* are intergenerational excursions where elders lead the young across ancestral trails, share knowledge about plants and healing practices, or connect oral history to various features and sections of the territory. It is in these *Recorridos* where two types of gazing are practiced and enacted: one observes and records the terrain via contact, action, and movement to locate oneself while the other trains the body to develop the required attentiveness to sense quiet animals, energy fields, sacred sites, and plant spirits.

Often, the *Recorridos* include the intake of medicinal plants to endure long walks, shield or cleanse oneself from bad intentions, and ask

Two signs found along the Trampoline of Death. One is from the municipal governments of the Kamënstá and Inga locating self-managed and sovereign natural reserve, while the other, placed by Colombian's Meteorological Institute IDEAM, tells of the presence of weather sensors. Both signs are meant to be warnings for the traveler about competing forms of land use within the same area.

permission from the forest spirits before entering their realms. These indigenous-led expeditions are today one of the most basic forms of territorial control and often yield evidence for technical reports, legal procedures, and demands from the community against municipal and national authorities.

Second, when it comes to the Pan-Amazon region, the case of Taita Carlos Tamabioy is an important historical example of georeferencing. However, this historical event still fuels controversy depending on which side of the *abyssal line* you stand. Taita Tamabioy was an Inga chief that lived in the Sibundoy Valley in the 1700s. Although he maintained a cordial relation with the colonos, his leadership among the Kamënstá and Inga communities of the high Andes was undisputed. Two years before his death, Taita Carlos Tamabioy decided to prepare a testament transferring legal ownership of his lands to the indigenous families living in the Valley and beyond. Endorsed by two noblemen from Pasto and legalized according to the directives of the Spanish Crown, in this document Taita Tamabioy listed and located various sections of ancestral lands belonging to the Ingas and Kamënstá, covering a total of approximately 12,000 hectares from Aponte in Nariño down to Putumayo midlands (Bonilla 2006). Apart from using the colonial legal framework to record the location of ancestral lands, this testament challenged the placement of several *Encomiendas* (lands under the control of Colonial Generals and belonging to the Crown). It also left a clear directive to entire generations of indigenous people born in the region, urging them to protect these territories from future invasions.

> *I leave these lands to my native Indians of the town of Santiago and to those of the people of Sibundoy Grande, which is my will that they enjoy them and defend them if there is any concern of any ill-intentioned person. [Spanish: Estas tales tierras las dejo a mis indios naturales del pueblo de Santiago y a los del pueblo de Sibundoy Grande, que es mi voluntad que las gocen y defiendan si hubiere alguna inquietud de alguna persona mal intencionada.] (Bonilla 2006 p.53)*
>
> *-Carlos Tamabioy, Cacique de Sibundoy.*
> *March 15, 1700*

Ever since, the Inga people celebrate Taita Carlos Tamabioy as a hero and temporal marker in Inga history. Also, numerous legends describe him as a spirit that, once a year, travels from the Paramos in the high Andes, where the headwaters of vital rivers originate, to the Inga territories in the lower Amazon where the Putumayo River gains width and speed. This correlation between the spirit of Taita Tamabioy and waterways is fundamental because this is one of the most impactful aspects of his legacy. In creating legal cartography of the territory, he strategically positioned indigenous families along regions not defined by landmass but by water flows. In other words, by georeferencing and cementing indigenous lands nearby wetlands, aquifers, paramos, and creeks, this testament was a map for future conservation plans for the rivers that flow from the high Andes to the Amazon.

Sadly, while there are still several copies of the testament in the archives of Aponte, the original document has been lost. Nowadays, non-indigenous groups and regional authorities challenge the veracity of the testament and take advantage of the Inga stories and traditions to paint Taita Tamabioy as a fictional character and a folk symbol.

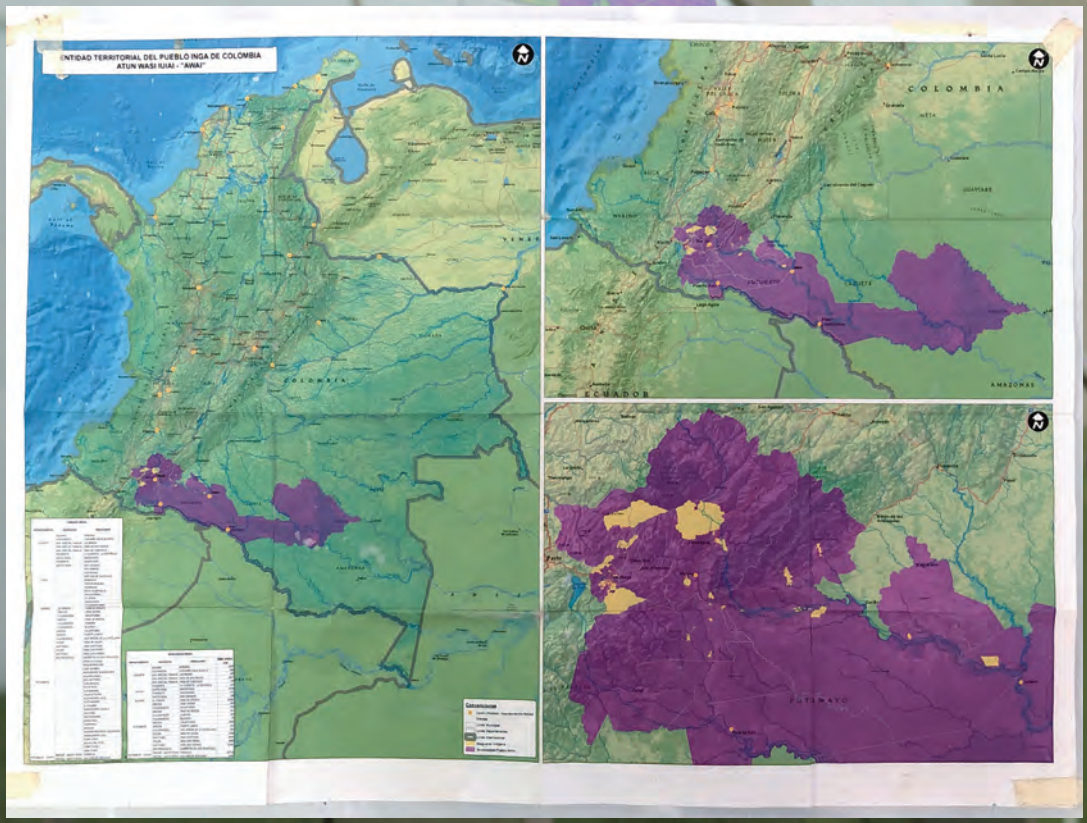
However, something crucial in this story is how two distinctive practices of territorial production converge into a single epistemic tool. On the one hand, the testament enables the bounding of property via law, which secures rights and sovereignty across time. On the other hand, the same testament serves to designate cultural actors to protect relations that support environments and provide the conditions for dignifying life across these territories in the long run. If anything, articulating such strategic gestures implies a skill that I call territorial bilingualism, which is the capacity *to see* a path to walk back and forth between knowledges, *abyssal lines,* and dimensions of the territory.

Mastering the skills of territorial bilingualism implies acknowledging diverse forms of spatial practices. Most importantly, it is the recognition of the unlimited ways in which cultures spatialize life, opening a new door for indigenous and non-indigenous groups to interrogate the territory through a multiplicity of angles while not always remaining in the dimension of the tangible or the measurable. However difficult this might seem, we have come a long way in Latin America through

various art, indigenous, and campesino movements pushing for alternative ontologies of the territory. From *Inyënang* and *Wasikamas* to campesino schools, indigenous universities, clinics, and community-led food sovereignty initiatives, these groups organize themselves around the territory as a web of life *(an entramado de vida)*.

These groups reject the dualism that divides culture and nature, where the subject is often seen as a self-sufficient unit that can manipulate self-sufficient objects (Escobar 2013). Instead, these movements develop relational ontologies through which the territories become a spatial-temporal category for vital interrelation with the world (ibid). Therefore, it becomes possible to resist the neoliberal reterritorialization process (ibid 2), which today threatens biocultural peace and life all around the Pan-Amazon region. After all, the struggle for upholding the multidimensionality of the territory is a struggle for protecting the multiplicity of life forms that make it. Still grappling with the risks of environmental debacle and ethnocide in these regions, the stakes are very high. Therefore, the task of achieving some level of justice starts by creating a space where two or more modes of cognition, or in this case territorial thinking, can converse with one another from an equal standing. For this, aesthetic practices that can reveal two or more ways of seeing the forest, from within and through the gaze of several cultural actors, are valuable mediation mechanisms and another argument for the film work I have produced.

Ultimately, embracing comprehensive territorial bilingualism through whatever aesthetic tools we can deply is how non-indigenous groups can also challenge the assumed 'universal' order (capitalist, neoliberal and secular) that get exported from our Angloeuropean societies towards the remotest regions of the planet. And like indigenous communities, Campesinos, and their allies who are actively seeking a transition into the 'pluriverse' (Escobar 2018) model, we too can make the jump towards a world full of alternatives to the alternative we were once offered.



Taita Hernando Chindoy during a Workshop with Ñambi Rimai. The purple area is the ancestral Inga Territory, while the yellow spots are the current legalized Inga lands. Piamonte, Lower Cacua. 2019

Intermission: The Eye and the Serpent

On the evening of July 18th 2019, I drove across the swampy state of Florida, from the depth of the Everglades to the Orlando International Airport. For weeks I had been staying at Robert Rauschenberg's last studio and residence in Captiva, Florida, absorbing majestic ocean views from the artist's former bedroom window. His fish-house, a structure supported by stilts buried deep in the water, started to feel sticky and impersonal, always reminding me that I was there only as a guest artist and that soon, I too had to carry on with my work.

That evening I was traveling to Putumayo; but first, I had to make a very quick stop in Bogotá where I would meet with my travel companions for the new stage of my research. This was a group of filmmakers coming from Mexico D.F., Lisbon and Bogotá, lured into this project with the help of my old university friend and collaborator Camilo. The plan was to arrive, fully equipped with film gear and lesson plans, in the Inga territory in the lower Cauca region of Piamonte and present a 20-day workshop. Our mission was to offer basic filmmaking training to a group of 12 Indigenous youth coming from nearby reserves and to meet with Taita [Shaman] Paulino who is the spiritual leader of the Ingas living across the Caqueta river, just a few kilometers outside the limits of the Putumayo State.

The Orlando Airport felt as inhospitable and hot as the Villa Garzon Airport in Putumayo. Once on the tarmac, temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius and intense humidity made every surface feel sticky and every movement slow. Sweat ran down every face and moisture penetrated every device we carried with us. Upon arrival, the airport staff rushed to carry our bags, heavy with video equipment and contradiction. Our cameras could buy a year's worth of food for any of the local residents, while our tripods were likely made with steel and aluminum alloys extracted from mines located between Florida and Putumayo. We kindly denied the offer with a hint of distrust, and I led the team to the transport I had arranged to bring us to the port by the Caquetá River.

One hour later, after passing through a very scary stretch of land between Villa Garzon and Puerto Limon -where only days before, the cowardly paramilitary Gaitanista forces had murdered two Campesino human rights activists- we made it into the port by the Caquetá river. The driver kept calling it a miraculous journey because we were not intercepted by either a military, guerrilla or paramilitary patrol, or an illegal check point. After many trips, I had learned one thing: after midday, the sun and humidity of the jungle are so strong that no body, not even a cruel or clueless paramilitary soldier, is capable of holding a gun or patrolling this road. In this area, the oil pipes that come from the Ecuadorian border and lower Putumayo near San Miguel run above ground. Because of the heat and frequent rain, they look like a serpent, steaming and ready to burn - or kill - you at the slightest touch. These exposed oil pipelines are not only a target for the rebels, but to the government and oil companies these are precious resource, like a vein or a vault that must be protected.

Once at the river, we hauled bags, gear and people onto boats that struggled to keep course in the overflooded Caquetá stream. The fastest of all major rivers that feed the great Amazon, the Caquetá is one of the most unpredictable bodies of water in the entire Amazon basin. Starting in the high Andes in what is called the Colombian Fluvial Star, the altitude of the mountain range quickly drops more than 2700m in just a few kilometers, giving the waters of the Caquetá River not only speed but also a terrifying power and reputation. Many of the early Colonial explorers perished in their quest to penetrate the territories along the Caquetá River, dragged here by any one of their delusional enterprises. If they weren't seeking the mythical El Dorado, then they were trying to claim the lands of the Andaki tribes, who inhabited these territories.

In part, because of the rapid streams of the Caquetá River, the Andaki were one of the last Indigenous groups to surrender to the colonizing wave that devastated the Colombian Amazon in the 16th century. Their territories over-

lapped with what is today part of Taita Paulino Mojomboy's Reserve, the place to which we were traveling that hot and humid afternoon.

Many stories are told about the Andakies, but according to most people in the area, the tribe never actually conceded to the Spanish conquest. Instead, they simply moved to a parallel dimension in the forest, becoming invisible to those who did not belong in these lands. Invisibility conceals not only their bodies but all the treasures of their territory, including unknown species of animals and sacred plants. The only way to know that one is approaching Andaki territory is from the way that the clouds and mist descend and conceal everything around you. By then, you are blind and lost in who knows which dimension of the vast Caquetá jungles.

Today, oil drilling sites, Molybdenum mines and countless coca fields tucked away in the forest have reduced the ancestral Andaki territory to a mere extractive zone that extends from Churumbelos National Park to the town of Timaná. From time to time, reports emerge of Andaki villages sighted by helicopter or satellite that suddenly disappear when search teams try to reach them by land.

After crossing the Caquetá River, we were informed that three creeks between us and Taita Paulino's home had all flooded and damaged the main road. We would need to load and unload all the luggage and equipment from one canoe to another in order to cross. Almost six hours later, on the evening of August 19th, we finally arrived in Inga territory, and so did the 12 Indigenous youth we were eager to finally meet. Some had joined us at different points along the way, while others had had to embark on long trips from the depths of the Caquetá and Putumayo jungles. In the past, it had been very difficult to bring together members from the five Indigenous Nations of the Pan-Amazon Region but there we were, finally under the same roof. By that point, it was getting dark, and since none of us had energy to start a fire, we decided to get acquainted using only our voices. We would have to wait until the next day to see each other's faces.

A few days went by while Camilo, Emiliano (our guest Film Director and Instructor), Monica (our Editing Instructor), Numael (Sound Instructor), the rest of the team and I conducted different filmmaking workshops. By then, we were more settled on the farm; we had fallen in and out of love with our hammocks, but more importantly, we all had embraced the rhythms of the place. Time was what mattered most because we had only twenty days to both train the youth team and also produce a documentary piece.

At first, this looked like any one of the countless workshops we had given in our professional lives. However, not long after we initiated the process, a more solemn ceremony was scheduled in our rather packed calendar. My mentor Taita Hernando Chindoy, the President of the Inga Nation, had scheduled a visit to join us on the day of this ceremony, which would formalize the creation of the Media Collective we had envisioned together a year before. This was a critical time because the Inga, Siona, Awa, Quillacinga, Nasa and Kaëmnstá people had just recently finalized a long process of policy design in which they sought to strengthen a number of initiatives—including communication and biocultural peace-building —with non-Indigenous societies. This would be nothing like the political inauguration or ribbon-cutting ceremonies we perform in the Western World. The Inga were planning to inaugurate the Media Collective with a Yagé [Ayahuasca] ceremony meant to last an entire night.

I was somewhat familiar with the local tradition, and understood in principle the need for this type of celebration. As it turns out, they had taken a big step in allowing us, our cameras, curious eyes and representational techniques to be part of the quiet but steady process of nation-building and cooperation initiated by the Pan-Amazon nations of Putumayo, Cauca, Caquetá and Nariño. Cooperation requires us to understand more deeply each other's intentions, including those of the territory with whom we were also in direct contact. We would start by listening and confronting the fears, desires and blind spots of our human-designed proposition to the priorities of the people but also the plans,

animals, soil, rivers and air that make the whole of Taita Pualino's territory. Built into the multi-species governance model of the Ingas, and specifically through the biopolitical proposals of Taita Paulino, the territory had to be consulted to determine whether or not it wanted to collaborate with us and our cameras. We had to request permission, to travel in time and better understand a complex history. For this, we needed to surrender to the Yagé's influence, to be guided by the sacred planter remedy, in order to fully grasp the magnitude of the task.

Taita Paulino sustains an ongoing dialogue with the territory through the sacred Yagé plants he cares for or cultivates in the reserve. Some of them grow on their own, while others have been planted by him, forming a very diverse collection of what western science classify as Banisteriopsis Caapi specimens. Taita Paulino is an elder and a respected traditional doctor, possibly one of the last Inga Shamans that was raised speaking, seeing and knowing the land under Inga principles before coming into contact with Colonos. His family arrived in the territories near the Churmbelos National reserve in the early 1900s, around the time when the war between the Colombian and Peruvian Armies broke out along the southern border. In addition to the influx of Colono settlers, new trading posts, military bases and rubber plantations south of Villa Garzon, the war pushed the Ingas deeper and further across the Caquetá River in search of safer areas.

Back in the maloca, the preparations for the Yagé ritual had started. Unlike other Indigenous groups south of the Colombian border, the Ingas do not follow a very strict diet before taking Yagé, but instead, they enjoy a final meal (high in carbs but low on animal protein) around midday. This gives their bodies almost 12 hours of fasting and preparation before taking the sacred medicine, always prepared by Taita Paulino himself. The rest of the Mojomboy family has followed in the spiritual tradition, and two of his sons have become well-known healers. One of them has even provided treatment and counsel to a sitting Colombian President, or

so I was told by the Mojomboy brothers Oscar and Freider, who described the sophistication of their family's medicinal knowledge. It's true that in recent years, a lot of populist politicians in Colombia have begun surrounding themselves with Indigenous shamans during campaign season, as they try to build a message of unity in a pluri-ethnic nation like Colombia. Once elections end, the same politicians send military and paramilitary forces to pressure Indigenous communities into surrendering their territories to a number of extractive projects. Without publicity, during one election cycle, these politicians sell mining, drilling and logging rights to their mega donors. The later have four years to make decent returns on their investment before siding with another 'promsing' political leader.

Unlike her brothers, Paulino's daughter Rubiela has chosen the community service path, while maintaining a close connection with the Yagé medicine. Rubiela, who herself has been a victim of military, paramilitary and guerrilla crimes, has also continued the leadership role of her family, and in particular, the legacy of her late mother. Her mother, along with Taita Paulino, fought hard to make their lands part of a recognized Inga reserve (known locally as Atun-Wuasi) and a safe home for the Yagé plant. In contrast with her brothers, Rubiela has been cautious when it comes to letting the powerful appropriate the message and ancestral practice of the sacred Yagé.

Knowing all of this, I saw the Mojomboy family, a household of political leaders, knowledgeable shamans, doctors and chemists, as not only guardians of Inga traditions, but also as the gatekeepers to an entirely different dimension within the territories. This dimension starts on their land and quickly brings you to the home of the mythical Andakies.

The sun finally had set at 6:30 PM, but the heavy clouds covering the sky all day made it feel like it had never been bright outside. The darkness of the night had taken us by surprise. There was not even a candle lit inside the maloca, the medicine house built by Taita Paulino and his wife years

ago. Everything was set for the ceremony. Rows of hammocks hung from the uneven wooden columns, and the usual separation between men and women divided the space in two. At one end of the maloca, Taita Paulino sat and waited patiently, humming the songs he learned long ago from his mentors. At the other end, a tiny, framed picture hung on the wall, surrounded by beautiful exotic flowers. The photograph was too tiny and faded to know whose portrait it was, but judging by the careful arrangement of the flowers, one could only assume that this person's memory still lived in the space and deep in the hearts of the family.

Hours went by, and just before midnight, Taita Paulino asked us to get ready. One by one, we each took a mouthful of his sacred, home brewed Yagésito. This wasn't my first time taking his medicine, but this was the most bitter I had ever tasted. The muscles in my skull cramped and my jaw dropped open. For the next few minutes, I couldn't even close my mouth or take a mouthful of air, but I kept it together and dragged myself to my hammock like the rest of the crew. As expected, around 45 minutes after taking the medicine, an explosion of color and sensations overtook my consciousness and led me down the usual path of hallucinations, shivering and despair. At the same time, the sky broke open and powerful rain and wind forced all of us to cocoon in the hammocks, despite the need to vomit and the impulse to escape this intense experience.

Lying paralyzed in the exact point where the trade winds meet the Andes, where clouds bring unimaginable amounts of water from the Atlantic Ocean to clash against the mountains, all I could think about was whether I had hung my hammock high enough. Flooding is constant in these regions; the rivers are the actual rulers of the land. They could easily, instantly, flood the maloca. As the sound of rain on the thatch roof became a solid wall of noise, a second familiar, but terrifying, presence entered my consciousness. A glossy green serpent, big enough to wrap herself around my neck a few times, was climbing the pillars of the maloca and getting extremely close to my hammock. Not knowing if this

was a vision or an actual snake, I gave her the honor of making the first move. I felt so weak and drowsy; if she was real, I was already determined to surrender.

Many people who have taken Ayahuasca attest to this vision of a snake moving somewhere in the room. I knew about the research around it, especially Jeremy Narby's analysis relating the snake to the twisted shape of the Yagé vine and even to the helix of DNA strings formed by chains of proteins. But in this moment, the only reassuring feeling I had was that the snake in front of me seemed too graceful, patient and alluring to be the real thing.

The more I looked at the snake, the more I felt a strong desire to run into the forest, as if there was a powerful magnetic force emitting from the trees that pulled me towards them. I couldn't hold the vomit any longer and had to run outside to get rid of everything I had in my stomach. This left me with a slight sense of relief, but also more vulnerable to the magnetic force of the dark forest. The one thing that most shamans tell you in preparation for the ceremony is to stay near the maloca and avoid, at all costs, walking into the jungle. In the jungle, you would be exposed to all kinds of real and bizarre dangers, and they would not be able to protect you. I crouched motionless in the downpour, literally sinking in the mud and for several minutes before gathering strength to resist the dangerous call from the trees. Instead, I dragged myself to a tiny stool next to Taita Paulino inside the maloca. His singing always has the promise of protection and healing, and in my current state, I desperately needed someone stronger to keep an eye on me.

The visions intensified, moving from memories of my recent past (people, words, mangroves, ocean, airplanes, tropical storms, films) to random associations between the architecture of the maloca and the body of the snake, which had already wrapped around my legs and chest a few times. Often, the shamans relate the presence of snakes to the particular Banisteriopsis Caapi vine from which they brew the medicine. Depending on the recipe, the type and behavior of the snake can be deciphered. Shamans like Paulino live in constant dia-

logue with plants and animals, from which they have learned the chemistry of the jungle and are capable of creating medicine to cure most diseases in the forest, even a poisonous snake bite. Unsure if I was hallucinating or not, staying near Taita Paulino felt reassuring.

The tight grip of the snake on my body felt threatening, but it also gave me a strange sense of comfort, even empowerment. Inga Shamans often tell you that, like the venom of snakes, sacred plants work to heal you through a painful intoxication and eventually a cleanse. However, while the Yagé unleashes a potent biochemical reaction in the body, it is the Shaman who leads you through the experience. Out of the darkness of the long night, the Shaman brings healing, not just to the body but to the spirit. At sunrise, once the effects of the Yagé have almost disappeared, the Shaman carries out a ritual to purify the body and welcome you into the day. It feels like you've won your life back after an excruciating fight. Contrary to what most Ayahuasca tourist come to believe, for the several Indigenous communities of the Colombian Pan-Amazon, the transformational power of Yagé is not only the hallucinogenic phase, but the path that an individual walks along with her shaman, bounding together the spirit, body and territory.

In my grogginess, I was clutching the stool tightly, and holding my head in the only direction where it was possible to hear the singing of Taita Paulino. Song after song, his voice transformed into a cry that slowly pierced into my mind. I started walking towards a table where two people were sitting face to face. From afar, I could see the silhouette of Taita Paulino's feather crown, but I wasn't sure who the other person was. Still weak from the medicine, it took me a long time to reach the couple, but I eventually grabbed the edge of the table and dropped the entire weight of my body onto the bench where my Shaman was sitting. His watery eyes were fixed on the woman sitting in front of him, who remained motionless in the shadow, in spite of my presence. She spoke softly, responding to Taita Paulino with long sentences in the Inga language. Aside from a few wrinkles on her hands and colorful bracelets around her wrists, I wasn't really able to tell her age. The three of us sat

quietly for a few seconds before I became impatient and leaned over to take a good look at her.

As she turned her head towards me, I noticed that she had no eyes and instead, leaves and branches were coming out of her eye sockets. Blood ran across the table, and I noticed that she held her eyes gently in her hands. I naïvely asked: How can you see us without your eyes?

She replied: *This is the problem, those like you only seek to discover with the eyes and you forget to stare at life with the gaze of your spirit. Real seeing is seeing with the heart.*

Our short conversation ended abruptly as the urge to vomit again woke me up. Still holding the stool in my hand, I ran out of the maloca. At that point, my visions were more vivid. I could see the entire ground covered with snakes that crawled around my feet. Once again, the desire to run into the forest was extremely difficult to resist. My gaze was fixed on a point between the trees where I could see a tiny glimpse of light. After several minutes I stood in the mud, letting the rain wash the vomit from my clothes. The woman's words were still resonating in my head. Seeing with the heart was something that, of course, I had never considered possible but nonetheless seemed 'reasonable' within these 'unreasonable' circumstances. After vomiting again and taking a few deep breaths, I came back to the maloca and tried in vain to scan the room for emotions, and to see other people's hearts with my own. At this moment, new visions formed in my head. Some rendered the forest as a bright and colorful place full of strange animals, but others, loaded with angst or panic, related stories of displacement, murder, grief and crimes against these lands. Overwhelmed with emotions, I had no choice but to run into the trees that had been calling me the entire night.

Unable to see a thing in the pitch-black forest, I was somehow able to walk confidently among the trees. Somehow, I never stumbled or tripped over the dead branches or vines that covered the jungle floor but perhaps it was because the forest became more a sensation than an image. I walked, crawled

and dragged my heavy limbs across all sorts of surfaces, from mud and tree bark, to thick layers of dead leaves. I felt that every plant radiated light that, even if not visible, transferred assurance, vitality and warmth. It was as if each plant had a different character, but as a whole, they were an army with a single mission.

I must have walked several kilometers before I felt the need to stop and lay flat on my back. Meanwhile the words Seeing with the heart resonated stronger than ever. All I could find to lay down on was a small clearing in the forest with a massive rock. It felt odd and flat, but I could throw my body down and surrender to the final stage of my Yagé trip. Drowsy and still hallucinating, I watched the snakes come and go, the old woman passed by to say hello, and the subvisible light from the plants flickered on and off.

I must have slept for several hours because I woke up with the sun shining across the treetops. My clothes were almost dry, and the mud had become hard soil again. Immediately after I opened my eyes, I saw a cross fully covered in jungle moss. I noticed that the surface I was sleeping on had sharp edges, a flat top, and, on the sides, it was decorated with blue ceramic tiles. More than a rock, this was actually a massive cement platform with artificial and fresh flowers carefully planted at the base of the cross. There was a faded, tiny picture protected by a rusted metal frame. It was embedded in the cement right next to the place where my head had been resting for the last few hours.

It took me several minutes to realize that I had been sleeping directly on top of someone's grave. I felt everything, from terror and sadness to respect for whomever was resting in such a peaceful place. I decided to put myself together and leave before disturbing the place any further. Completely disoriented, I had to walk back through a thick patch of forest, and it took me more than an hour to find my way to the maloca. At that point, my body had fully recovered from the effect of the Yagé, my stomach was desperate for some food and my mind was feeling both relaxed and sharp. Typically the day after a Yagé

ceremony is joyful and serene. It makes you want to embrace the world again with open arms. The mood is positive, glowing, thankful for having earned back yet another day of the life you have.

After reaching the maloca I decided to continue in silence and let my thoughts settle for a while. I was indeed very confused from all the things I had seen or heard the night before, so instead of over-thinking, I let my eyes wander around the room. Still curious about the rare architecture, faded murals and placement of objects on the walls, I fixed my gaze on the tiny picture hanging at the opposite side of the room. I still couldn't tell for sure who the person on the picture was, but I was already convinced that this was the same person I had found on the grave. Rubiela brought some food, and the two of us started talking about my experience of the night before. She had not been in the ceremony and, while I felt tired and disoriented, she was articulate and also very interested in my vision. I told her about my encounter with snakes and my sudden discovery of the grave, which at first she responded to with a hint of disbelief. She tested me, asking for details about the old lady I saw and the place I had slept, before finally revealing what she was thinking: The sacred Yagé had guided me to her mother's grave, which the family had built in a discrete spot deep inside the jungle.

I could not figure out how the lady of my vision had anything to do with Rubiela's mother, so I started to ask questions about what had happened to her. After some hesitation and a deep sadness, Rubiela shared the story:

A few years ago, around the time that the oil company started laying the pipeline along the newly built road between Villa Garzon and Piamonte, both Taita Paulino's land and the entire Inga territory nearby was severely disturbed. Engineers, workers and machinery suddenly landed in helicopters, and large portions of forest were cleared for the pipeline, the roads and the oil drilling sites.

The Mojomboy family had to act quickly. They rushed to move

their maloca and medicinal gardens deeper into the forest in the foothills of the Churumbelos Park, leaving behind years of hard work nurturing Yagé and other important medicinals closer to the banks of the Caquetá River. As they rushed to reconstruct the maloca, Rubiela's mother ventured alone into the forest in order to collect wood. That day she was bitten by a rare snake, fell severely ill and lost consciousness on the spot. Hours later she was found covered in mud.

Rubiela's mother was taken home to be treated for the snake bite by Taita Paulino. He struggled for days, using Yagé ceremonies to first identify the type of snake, and then to come up with the right medicine to treat his ill wife. Reading the trees, leaves and shapes of various kinds of Yagé vines, Taita Paulino finally came up with a potent remedy that had to be carefully managed. According to Inga medicine, during the treatment, Rubiela's mother was not to be seen by anyone other than Taita Paulino. As a doctor, he was the only person protected by the sacred Yagé against the powerful energies unleashed by the unknown snake's venom. Several weeks went by, and Rubiela's mother was starting to recover, but she remained in a small ceremonial house away from all other family members.

As things started to settle down and her health continued to improve, Taita Paulino and his children went back to finishing the reconstruction of the maloca and the gardens. This being the only medicine house of the Inga community in Piamonte, the task had to be finished quickly and a several Inga families and neighbors came to help. Some of the non-Indigenous visitors that often came from nearby cities to be treated by Paulino had also showed up to help, among them several workers from the same oil companies that had pushed the family off their land.

Busy days followed as people came in and out of the building site, which was tucked away in the forest and connected by a path of wooden pallets built to protect people from the mud, and to protect the Inga reserve from their footsteps. Perhaps out of curiosity, and when the family wasn't looking, one of the pipeline workers-turned-volunteers left the clearly demarcated

path and, unaware of what was happening elsewhere in the reserve, found himself in front of a wooden house. He decided to go in. Without remorse, the unwanted visitor pushed the door wide open, and found Paulino's wife resting in bed. The sound of the door cracking open woke her from her deep, induced sleep, and they stared into each other's eyes for a long minute.

Despite all the careful planning that Taita went through to protect his wife from a foreign gaze, this man had pushed his way in. Rubiela insisted: as he stood with his gaze fixed into the woman's eyes, the snake's venom was revived and seconds later she passed away.

As soon as Rubiela finished her story, I noticed that I too, had almost unconsciously grabbed my camera to point it at her. I felt embarrassed so decided to just listen and embrace the contradiction of my mindless gesture. I was too, seeing without noticing. It took me a while to shake off my confusion and finally understand how the Mojomboy family had lost massive portions of their reserve as well as their loved one. It surely was intruder's gaze that killed Rubiela's mother, but not only the man that carelessly had waked into the wooden house. That same year, the Colombian Airforce had launched a satellite, the FACSAT-1, to survey the Andaki territory and help plot the route of the pipeline. It was meant to pass oil beneath the Putumayo and Caquetá Rivers, and to cut across the Inga reserve, only to connect remote oil drilling sites, from Piamonte to Puerto Asis.

Perhaps this pipeline, with its rare ways of moving through the land helped by far reaching gaze of lenses, sensors and satellites, was the unknown lethal snake that Taita Paulino tried to contain. To this day, I still wonder if it was this kind of *seeing only as a way of seeking*, instead of surrendering to the unseen, while *seeing with one's heart*, what Rubiela's mother meant when she spoke to me from her side of the forest?

Opposite page:
Taita Paulino Mojomboy R.I.P
Piamonte, Cauca. July 2018
Photo: Lydia Zimmermann

AYÊNAN

Ayênan: Territories of Waters

A film by Felipe Castelblanco and Lydia Zimmermann
With Ñambi Rimai Pan-Amazon Media Collective.

Ayênan is the smallest space in the universe where life begins. It is also the name of a young Kamësntá land protector, Ayênan Quinchoa, whom I met in Mocoa in 2019. In this first encounter, we traveled for three days to reach the mouth of the Putumayo River, a place known as la Garganta de Balsayaco (Balsayaco's throat). Here, the river is channeled through a narrow canyon where it gains incredible speed, but soon, a new hydroelectric powerplant built here will intercept the watercourse. For the Kamënstá, this infrastructural project posits enormous challenges, one of them being the risk of flooding the Sibundoy Valley and killing thousands like it did centuries before. We might not understand how, but the Kamënstá know that the river does not only travel downwards from the Andes to the Amazon, but if it wishes, it can move upwards like a snake or the Ayahuasca vine climbing up a tree.

While in Quechua, the word Putumayo translates as water vessel ("Putu" is a bowl and "Mayu" is a river), the word originally comes from the Kamënstá language, meaning drinking water, or water that gives life. For them, these are not territories made of land but of water. Paradoxically, when foreign travelers come in contact with the Putumayo landscape, we are often misled into reading it based on how its terrain changes from a mountain into flood plains while thinking of the river only as a waterway to move through. Instead, the Putumayo River the actual architect of the territory and all the possible relations it can hold.

With this concept in mind, Lydia Zimmermann, Ayênan Quinchoa, and I traveled across the Putumayo region, following the upward movement of water in a meandering path that would take us from the Andean-Amazon foothills to the Atlantic Ocean in the coast of Colombia. We referred to this journey as a counter-expedition. A journey in which we were not seeking to insulate or extract ele-

ments from the landscape but instead to reconnect various sites, bodies of water, communities, and narratives through cinematic cartography. As a result, we produced a film that, like a river, meanders through landscapes, histories, ancestral knowledge, and geographies held together entirely by water

The film is constructed through parallel narratives that explore the three states of a body of water as it cycles across the earth, from Ice to liquid and then to vapor. As the state of water, the film is threefold and exists between genres. It is a documentary, a travel journal, and video documentation of a participatory performance in a remote landscape in the high Andes.

One of the storylines in the film depicts the journey of young Indigenous leaders, also members of Ñambi Rimai Media Collective, as they travel from the low Amazon to a sacred landscape in a Paramo near La Cocha Lake. Our collaborator, Ayênan Quinchoa, is the guide of the journey, which reveals ancestral Inga trails and retraces the course of a long-forgotten expedition in search of El Dorado. Today, these areas are where massive mining, agricultural and infrastructural projects put at risk the environments of the Upper Andes and the lower Amazon, also connected by the river.

A second storyline revolves around ancestral philosophies and how they relate the properties of water to the formation and sustenance of territory. One of the key characters appearing in the film is Amado Villafaña Chaparro, an Ahruaco Indigenous leader from the Sierra Nevada near the northern coast of Colombia. He is a significant figure in Indigenous filmmaking and Media in the Americas, a spiritual leader and a land defender. His voice and ideas weaver together various threads of the film centered on Indigenous territorial thinking. He describes core ancestral principles that drive a current process of epistemic recentering in modes of territoriality shared among Indigenous cultures co Colombia. One of these is the understanding of the landscape as a being with whom we can converse. This leads to the third story running across the film, in which the territory appears as a character embodied by water, plants, clouds, and air. The presence of this character becomes more evident as the travelers move through it as if moving across a body. Also, several visual metaphors are

used in the film to connect these simultaneous stories, one of them being the counter-expedition that leads the Indigenous group to the treasure of El Dorado. They do so through a collective performative ritual that connects various altitudes, scales, and beings sharing the territory.

As the travelers reach the scared Paramo of La Cocha lake, they carry a solid rock of gold encased in a block of Ice. Practicing a kind of reversed alchemy that turns gold into tiny particles that enable life, the travelers come to this remote place to plant water back into the mountain and thus return a long-lost treasure once uncovered by the El Dorado myth. However, before they cross the threshold that connects two parallel dimensions of the territory, they must ask for permission from the elements that give life to the landscape they seek to move across, such as plants, soils, and skies. To do so, they present an offering that aims to harmonize or align one's intentions with those of the territory and restore a relation based on mutual acknowledgment.

Lydia and I developed portions of this film as a participatory media workshop and enactments of a new ritual created with Awa, Inga, Kamënstá, Quillacinga, Nasa, and Siona youth. As a result, we choreographed the offering as a performance created collectively behind the scenes. And once in the Paramo, the entire team of the Media Collective, the Taitas, boat drivers, Lydia, and I rehearsed the performance for the camera. These scenes help the film break away from the reporting style of documentary film and bring it closer to a more experimental and participatory filmmaking style. That is why our film folds inside out, revealing the cameras and the film crew traveling across the territory. This follows my interest in the act of filmmaking as a relational practice and moment for community-making. Nonetheless, this participatory process has a special significance in the region, as it drives collective co-creation and local aesthetics, stories, and priorities to come to the foreground.

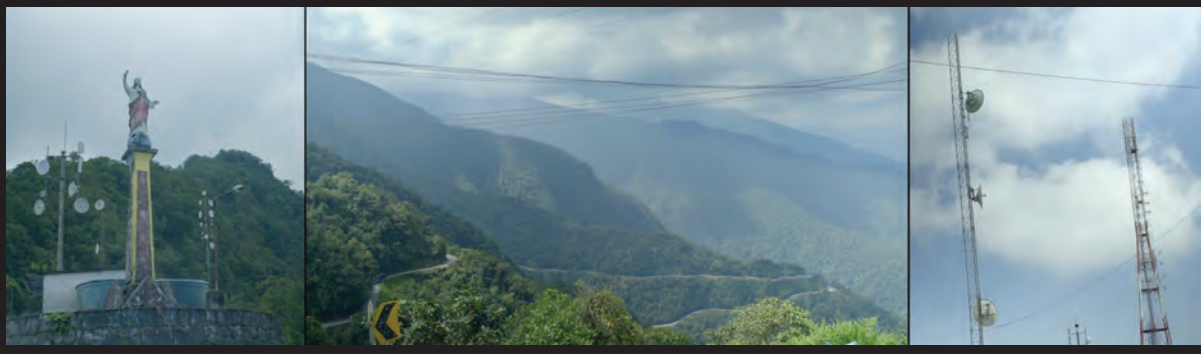
Many, if not all of the young Indigenous filmmakers joining in the trip do not speak their ancestral languages and yearn for rituals lost before their time. Therefore, some underlying questions running across the process confront us with restoring a connection

with the territory. In other words, how can we orient ourselves in a multinational territory through Indigenous modes of thinking and feeling the water, clouds, trees, and soil?

The film does not seek to answer the question as much it seeks to reframe it. Ultimately, for this project, Lydia and I explored a type of filmmaking challenges representational techniques and how these can dialogue with a landscape that expands beyond the realm of visibility. In doing so, we found an aesthetic path to explore the connection between Indigenous ways of seeing, territorial thinking, mutual acknowledging, and much-needed acts of reciprocity with human and non-human worlds.

Below:
Still Images
Ayênan. 2020

Next pages:
Still Images
Ayênan, 2020




AYÊNAN
TERRITORIOS DE AGUA

Ayênan (34:00)
Co-directed by
Felipe Castelanco and
Lydia Zimmermann
2020

Photo:
Simón Yama, member of
Ñambi Rimai Media
Collective at the Paramo
near La Cocha lake,
Nariño - Colombia

Film Dialogues:
Ayênan

- Ayênan Quinchoa:
There are several words in Kamënstá that have profound meanings and explain the universal connection between all living beings

For example, there is a beautiful word which is "Ayênán." It means the initial particle of any kind of matter and the smallest space in between things that exist in the universe from which life begins

- Amado Villafañia:
We interpret nature as a masculine and feminine being,as a father and mother

We interpret water as a woman but we also interpret it as the veins of mother Earth

For us, water represents the life of the human being the life of that which exists in the planet

- Mildrey Paz Piaguaje:
For us, the territory is life, origine, energy, experience and knowledge

In our language we say "Majihá"

- Taita Hernando Chindoy:

For us, the territory is anchored in five points

A central point is “La Tulpa” which for us is an umbilical chord, our connection as human beings with the heart of the Earth or what is known as cardinal points”

front, back left and right

- Amado Villafañia:
The territory for us, does not represent capital or an economic asset. It represents a mother where everything exists but I think that we started to claim it as private property even among us because it was the way to defend it

We have lost a connection with the earth

The raison d’être of Indigenous people is to be consistent with the spiritual commitment which is here in the territory

The connection is here

Each other’s placentas are here

These are different values. Other interpretations

To remove Indigenous people from their territory
is like taking the fish out of the water

- Ayênan Quinchoa:
El Dorado that was sought after by people back in the days was material

And they searched for it to obtain wealth but only material wealth, which can lead to conflicts and wars that divide humans and nature

- Amado Villafañia:
The white man is rushing and forgets that his is a fleeting presence but he destroys everything before leaving

Wealth accumulation is above life

We always say that if our little brothers [Colonos] had not arrived, we wouldn’t have had the need to learn Spanish

But it becomes necessary in order to defend the territory

As long as the white man creates, we also need to domesticate him and his inventions in order defend the territory and our culture

We have to do it ourselves and it is our responsability

Of course, we would be much better had they not arrived

- Ayênan Quinchoa:
This road runs on top of 'Tanguabenatch' Our ancestral path

Nowadays, they are retracing it not for cultural or cosmological purposes but only for commercial interest

This path has spiritual relevance for our Kamënstá and Inga community too, because across millennia it has been a contact zone between the families of the [Andean] mountains and the families of the lower Amazon.

These are paths that our ancestors and elders have protected and walked on for millennia

They have discovered so many plants with healing properties, foods, animals they have found a way to communicate with the mountain and with nature

We have here a space reserved for future generations. Our ways of life have shown us a path to reflect on how we want to live in the future

Biodiversity, water resources and human talents, plus all the oxygen and clean air that comes out of this great territory

All these natural resources combined make this land worth more than El Dorado

But today, the ambition of foreign corporations is to come after all this wealth

Our ancestors made clear which path to follow their way of life was simply to preserve what is already here. But what other human groups do is to transform and disrupt natural cycles and that makes all people, all of us, groggy [entundados], we get lost and divided. Our thoughts break apart and become scatter so we lack a common process to make sure all fellow humans can survive much longer

- Heraldo Vallejo:
When you go to the forest there are smells and there can be narcotics in the smells when one breathes them, one crosses to another dimension

So people say 'se entundó' [you got lost]. La Tunda [the plant spirit] is in the forest. It protects them it makes you groggy and you get lost but when you wake up, you see the path right in front

- Amado Villafañia:
Water is born in the

highlands. Some waters come out of natural springs. Others come from lakes.

For us, each lake has a name, a purpose and is mother of something
It can be mother of foods, mother of rains and it's accompanied by little frogs.

- Mildrey Paz Piaguaje:
It has been said that we are people of water

In our territory we say "Si Haja Oko" [Siona Language], which means river water

Therefore, we practice care and conservation of both the personal and the collective

And water is a being, it is a spirit. Then, we need to honour and enrich it

-Edith Nascuas:
In order to admit any stranger into our territory we first have to consider what their intentions are. What are they coming here for?

Our authorities inform us about the stranger's proposals for the community and based on that we decide whether or not to grant permission to enter the reserve because we are protectors of water and the mountains, and we wouldn't allow strangers to linger without permission

To ask permission is to show respect.

It is care. It shows to others that we come here with good intentions

In order to enter into a sacred territory, we first need to ask for permission from Mother Earth, ask permission from the ancestral spirits, ask permission from the air, the water and everything that surrounds us

It is also about giving ourselves the opportunity to learn and to enter in peace then, for you to enter in this equilibrium you first need to develop spiritual harmony

And to achieve spiritual harmony, you need the permission from the energies and from ancestral spirits in order to establish a connection with the place

Voices Repeat:
[Amado]

The white man is rushing

He forgets that his is a fleeting presence but he destroys everything before leaving

- Javier Chinody:
It is like an act of magic
how water flows, drop after
drop

from the foams that form
high up in the mountain
range

[Amado] Water represents
the life of the human being
and the life of that which
exists in the planet

[Mildrey] It is life,
origine, energy, experience
and knowledge

[Amado] The raison d'être
of Indigenous people is
to be consistent with the
spiritual commitment here
in the territory

The connection is here

[Mildrey] Permission is
respect

It is care

Ask permission from the
air, water and everything
that surrounds us.

[Ayênan]
Ayênan is the initial
particle that ignites
existence

Opposite Page: Offering at the Paramo. Still Image

Offering at the Paramo of La Cocha, 2020

Paramo near La Cocha Lake.

Ayênan Quinchoa operating drone during film production, 2020

Chapter 4: Communication As a Practice of Survival

"Words without actions are empty. Actions without words are blind. Words and actions outside the spirit of the community are deadly"
-Ancestral Principle of the Nasa People of Colombia

Part 1: The Counter-Explorer: Art as Anthropology?

Since its emergence as a discipline, anthropology seemed aware of the impossibility of studying a culture objectively and without a dose of self-reflexivity (Narby 1999). On the contrary, artistic practices are premised on self-expression, reflexivity, and subjectivity. But what happens when artists perform the role of the anthropologist, embedding themselves into communities to observe and affect social interactions, even in the process of research?

For anthropologists deployed to the field, it quickly became apparent that no matter how objectively a culture was observed, the observer would always be entangled in the reality and phenomena she observes (ibid). This dilemma would become one of the biggest paradoxes of a discipline continuously reconfiguring its methodologies. Meanwhile, as an artist attempting to perform artistic research in the field, I often shared the tools of anthropologists, one of them being ethnography. However, the assumed subjectivity of my position as an artist and my para-academic methodologies dwarfs the response-ability1 of my research work. And so, the type of research that I pursue also becomes the search for adequate analogies for artistic inquiry rooted in research enactments, decolonial sensibilities, participatory Media, and socially

1 Long ago, I stumbled upon the term in the work of Stephen Covey who described it as the ability to take control of how we respond to external stimuli. In other words, to be mindful of conditioning factors, in order to provide effective responses to numerous challenges. In the case of this research such factors included: the safety of my team, the coherence between intention, activities and funding, as well as to identify self-critique methods to review my work and avoid knowledge appropriation, victimization and cultural extraction of ancestral communities.

engaged art. Therefore, the duality between ethnography and art, or art as a form of ethnography, deserves discussion.

In 1995, Hal Foster explored the dissonances that arise when artists embrace the tools of anthropology, such as ethnography. He saw a double projection between art and anthropology that becomes problematic. This happens when anthropologists romanticize the more liberated and subjective position that artists assume when addressing the other and when artists uncritically embrace the assumptions and power imbalances of anthropology, especially in their quest for knowledge and understanding of the other's culture (Foster 1995). As Foster argues, "anthropology is premised as the science of alterity," but, throughout the 20th century, "art passed into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey" (Ibid. p. 306). And so, these two disciplines cross-pollinated but also might have reproduced their biases. For example, the early ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski proposed the idea of 'Participant Observer' to defend a mode of inquiry in which researchers could observe people from above while also participating in the action at their side (Narby 1999). However, as more anthropologists immersed themselves in the field, these ideas proved to be short-sighted, especially as researchers became aware that there is no real outside or a well-insulated 'above' that doesn't mirror arbitrary hierarchies and inequalities.

In contrast, Pierre Bourdieu warned aspiring ethnographers that "objectivism fails to objectify its objectifying relationship" (Ibid). Likewise, for many artists embracing ethnographic methods to address community or alterity, the risk is to assume that the subjective analysis is not enabled by privilege or that artistic institutions at the heart of cities are neutral recipients for cultural expression from elsewhere. Instead, if ethnographic tools are to be useful in the field of artistic practice, they should help us to decenter the artist from the higher position, repurpose their privileged access to cultural circuits, platforms, and funding, or address the self-fashioning that cultural capital affords (Foster 1995).

When artists embedded in communities and pursuing ethnographic research through art are singled out by the art institution, the

art market, or even the international networked cultural contexts, their collaborators do not often gain access to these platforms. In these cases, the artists risk engaging back with the art world from an elevated or hierarchical position while their collaborators remain seen as study subjects. In other words, when artists take on the role of explorers or ethnographers eagerly reporting on the other's culture and ways of life, they continuously walk a fine line that divides cultural appropriation from cultural restitution. What is really problematic here is how the artist-as-ethnographer, at any time, can become a driver of cultural negation and epistemic violence, especially when their work is channeled through self-serving artistic circuits that aim to highlight the struggles of the oppressed but without true collaboration or reciprocity. In this case, authorship, knowledge, and cultural capital become disputed assets, sometimes rendered as extractable resources that leave those already marginalized at a disadvantage2.

Nonetheless, during the initial phase of networking, I also found room to play with roles, labels and meaning when trying to frame my work and communicate what I do to various scholars, Indigenous leaders, and collaborators. In doing so, I found it easier to borrow the role of the ethnographer, even if what I was attempting to do was closer to a sensory ethnography of biocultural landscapes, as opposed to a more focused study on Indigenous cultures. In this process, I also found myself conversing with the practice of other Latin American artists, many of whom have worked closely with Indigenous groups in the Andean-Amazon regions since the 1970s. Among them, artists like Maria Teresa Alves, Juan Downey, Pablo Mora, Paulo Tavares, Ernesto Neto, and Barbara Santos. As a whole, their work is characterized by building on sustained research and exchanges with Indigenous people, who perform the role of co-producers or active participants in the production of lens-based work, performances, and situations.

2 This exemplifies some of the methodological discrepancies I encountered during the first year of exchanges and collaboration with Swiss artists and ETH researchers. In my opinion, they sought to instrumentalize and derive professional gains by appropriating without transparency or true reciprocity several community-led initiatives in Putumayo, such as the Inga University. As a result, the first phase of project mobilized large funding and resources, only to cover researcher fees, field trips and support to those already privileged by historical colonialism.

One of the first artists to carry out an extended project in the Amazon region, and to whom I owe acknowledgment as an influential reference during my artistic education, is Juan Downey. Born in Chile in 1940 and trained as an architect, Downey worked across mediums, geographical latitudes, and epistemic divides until his death in New York in 1993.

Image: Juan Downey, Yanomami jugando con CCTV, 1976–77. Courtesy the Estate of Juan Downey and Marilys B. Downey

In the early 1970s, Downey left his home in New York to embark on a decade-long exploration of Amerindian cosmologies and aesthetics through artistic research. One of his best-known works from this period is *Video Trans Americas* (1973 – 1976) and is composed of a series of experimental films that document his journeys from New York to the rain forests of South America. Influenced by cult movies like Easy Rider and Kerouac's writing, his films mirror road trip films but are an early version of the cinematic cartography. Created with non-linear montage techniques, the films were often presented as multichannel video installations with several screens playing in sync. Downey often traveled with other artists, writers, and photographers in these journeys who also responded creatively to the contexts they moved through while establishing an intimate context and resonances.

In 1977, Downey embedded himself in the Yanomami community, a tribe living deep in the Brazilian Amazon. More than ap-

proaching them as study subjects, Downey deployed a kind of participatory program, bringing cameras and recording devices he handed over to the Yanomami. Welcoming their playfulness, self-expression, and depictions of everyday moments important to them, the artists and communities found an unlikely method for collaboration. In this second phase of research in the Amazon, Downey produced the series *The Thinking Eye* (1975 – 1990). He experimented with video circuits, accidental images, and a type of participatory filmmaking with the Yanomami and other groups. What was at stake in these projects was the reformulation of subjectivities of both Downey and the Yanomami and the renegotiation of power relations between the explorer and those being explored (Gonzalez 2014). Indeed, his work was a calculated intervention and a critique of the very foundations of anthropology and the epistemic contradictions it reproduces. As Downey put it, the intention was to produce "Fake Anthropology. To develop a program of fantasy, fat lies, gross (sic.) exaggerations, chiefly inspired by the writings of Napoleon [Chagnon]: on revolting Indians, instant chocolate in the Amazon jungle, and other food disappointments…" (Ibid. p. 201).

Like Downey, I misuse anthropology's methods as a way to subvert the power relations they often reproduce. I also have tried to take his approach a step further. I not only handed the camera to Indigenous communities but also used video and communication tools to support the creation of Indigenous institutions and community-generated content with a life outside the artistic circuit.

Part 2: Inter-epistemic Tools for Biocultural Peacebuilding

Aware of the contradictions around ethnographic methods and fieldwork as paths for artmaking, I have tried to approach this project by looking for methodologies and research outputs and seeking to destabilize my epistemic axis and further developing my research ethics. In doing so, I embarked on a project that would, instead of conforming to ethnographic methods, seek ways out of them in order to establish reciprocal exchanges and direct involvement; support ongoing territorial defense process-

es spearheaded by Indigenous leaders, and embrace aesthetic practices already in use in the Pan-Amazon region as recipes for artmaking. Over time, my efforts went towards not only producing research outcomes but also contributing to a subtle form of political resistance. This process is premised on the restitution of ancestral territories, the creation of parallel channels for inter-nation diplomacy (among Indigenous nations and between the Colombian state), and the preservation of Indigenous knowledge, languages, and spatial practices.

Seeking to learn from the unique perspective of the Inga and Kamënstá and how they use it to read the territory, it became clear to me how colonial legacy operates through cultural denial. First, the denial of ingenious land rights, and second, the rejection of Indigenous spatial practices and territorial thinking as drivers of prosperity, although not expressed in economic terms. The root of this denial is an epistemic apparatus that puts Indigenous philosophies below western values, which includes favoring property and capital accumulation over collective ownership of land or crops or coopting ancestral principles that uphold the right to live a dignifying life and in harmony with nature. The latter are key concepts of El Buen Vivir, which today is a cornerstone of campesino and Indigenous resistance movements across Latin American governments. Nevertheless, for local and regional elected officials in the Ecuadorian and Colombian Amazon, most of whom (if not all) identify as non-Indigenous, El Buen Vivir has become a concept associated with increased economic prosperity and the justification for attracting more mining and oil-drilling projects to the region, instead of blocking them (Gómez-Barris 2017). That is how the epistemic apparatus left in place by the colonizers long ago still today finds a way to crumble even the most resilient principles of ancestral philosophies. Therefore, to contain the damage still piercing through fragile ecologies and social structures across the Pan-Amazon region also means dismantling the very same western epistemic system that promotes the forest's monetization as the only way to sustain it. Hence, this project does not only seek to explore the visual and sensorial dimensions of the territory, but it engages directly with ongoing strategies for total resignification of the Pan-Amazon landscape. As Santos points, epistemic defiance breeds forms of political resistance:

> *"Political resistance thus needs to be premised on epistemological resistance […] it means that the critical task ahead cannot be limited to generating alternatives. Indeed, it requires an alternative thinking of alternatives" (Santos 2007)*

Therefore, during the course of the project, I established an ongoing exchange with the communities that welcomed me, which would go even further than purely knowledge exchange. During each trip, I participated actively in several political and spiritual gatherings both as a guest and a dynamic proponent. These community gatherings included several Yagé rituals, as well as recorridos with Indigenous peace forces (Wuasikamas and Inyënang). I also supported local leaders to gather historical evidence through research, supplied logistics and video documentation during peaceful demonstrations, or documented at various points during the three-year construction of a small hydroelectric in Balsayaco (Sinundoy). In one of these exchanges, Taita Hernando Chindoy and I envision a way to cement our collaboration through a series of Media workshops that would eventually lead to the creation of an Indigenous Media Collective.

One of the lessons I had learned from Taita Chindoy is that as neocolonial forces gain ground, the survival of his community is at risk. As a result, the entire eco-systemic balance of the natural corridors they so fiercely protect between the Andes and the Amazon will also be endangered. For this reason, Indigenous governance is not only a human affair but a biocultural enterprise that seeks to mediate between human and non-human worlds. So, unless these broad communities can gain power and representation in the face of the modern state and achieve a more tactical use of western-aesthetic tools to cast their message in and beyond their territories, their battle will be lost.

After all, the struggle for territorial sovereignty and self-governance from Indigenous groups across the region is fueled by ancestral principles that put humans, animals, and earth as co-participants within a frame of cosmic interactions. Acknowledging and protecting these relations produces a type of ethno-territory

(Escobar 2013), or a sphere of life where beings inter-exist. In these territories, culture and nature fuse to create indivisible bio-cultural landscapes, which deserve alternative methods of depiction, perception, and investigation.

However, in order to mediate with, or even challenge, overlapping spatial practices that fracture and instrumentalize the landscape to varying degrees, an effective inter-epistemic apparatus is needed. This tool must be used to embody and render visible that which cannot be abstracted or grasped by dominant modes of visual representation that negate Indigenous knowledge and ways of seeing. Moreover, what is needed is not a novel type of hardware but an assemblage of tactics, skills, and networks, all gathered into an adaptable working group of local and guest communicators.

Today, extractivism and the modern state depend on sophisticated enclosure technologies that facilitate remote territorial control using aerial photogrammetry, satellite, and remote sensing. Such types of representation produce hyper-focalized images of the territory as a fragmented space, leaving out of the frame not only the volumes but other forms of territorial occupation not yet graspable by the electronic sensor. Most often, Indigenous territories are multilayered, far-reaching, and consistently escape measurement, and that is how they keep being reduced, invaded, or segmented for lack of coordinates, focalization, or accurate renderings.

On the flipside, ancestral spatial practices rely on governance that is inherently biopolitical and focuses on communication with the land, with the spirits and beings that coexist in the forest as opposed to accounting for them. In practice, this mode of governance is only achieved by communing with the territory through plant medicine in more-than-human assemblies. For instance, the Inga, Siona, Quillacinga, and Kamësntá hold massive Ayahuasca rituals for all members of the community, including children, elders, and even young soldiers or police officers deployed to these remote regions. Aside from the well-known hallucinogenic properties, Yagé medicine unravels a poorly documented and complex path for multispecies communication that turns Indige-

nous territories into rich political arenas. In these arenas, space and the defense of life above profit gain political agency. Although the individual's experience with Yagé does not translate well to verbal communication, and even less to the terms offered by the Spanish language, it is a potent mediating tool with the non-human world. The interactions and communication between Indigenous communities and the territory under the effects of Yagé medicine rely on chemistry, sensorial stimulation, ritual, devotion, and magic. Here, Shamans are the messenger, and the medicine is the encoding instrument (Narby 1999).

It is so complicated to discuss all that is communicated across bodies and environments through Yagé rituals. Those of us outside the frame of reference, especially non-Indigenous seeking to explain the phenomenon without the experience, are simply not equipped to decode the messages but cannot dismiss them. In other words, by seeking to grasp and analyze these kinds of culture and nature relations, Yagé makes us all dance in a circle around a communication paradox. The more we try to communicate what it does, the more communication fails to address it.

However, Yagé rituals are essential components of the steady push for epistemic recalibration throughout the Pan-Amazon region. For example, through the teachings of the sacred Yagé plant, the Siona Shamans in the Lower Putumayo train La Guardia Indigena of the Upper Putumayo, among them the Quillacinga, who live and defend La Choca Lake, which is the headwaters of the Putumayo River. These are coordinated actions between small nations that seek to procure sovereignty through mutual support for territorial resistance across several dimensions of life. Like dignitaries joining the G-7 or UN security council meetings elsewhere, the leaders of these Indigenous nations constantly travel across Putumayo, passing through each other's cabildos (municipal houses) and sharing medicine in the local Malocas, or houses of government.

However, unlike western parliaments, Indigenous political affairs are handled at night, during Yagé ceremonies, and with the presence of the territory as an equal participant, embodied in the sacred medicine derived from the vine. Perhaps one of the most telling experiences I had during such nights is how the Taitas converse with one another about political matters still under the effects of the biochemical reactions unleashed in the body by the Yagé. The Taitas argue that

this is how they counsel the soils, plants, and spirits on how to solve issues related to housing, infrastructure interventions, or even mutual defense strategies against illegal forces. Shamans also travel far distances in their visions, surveying several layers and unseen spaces within their ancestral territories and beyond, guided by the sacred medicine. And rightly so, since no high-resolution satellite image of the Amazon could ever render these nature-culture interstices.

The mode of biocultural governance practiced by these Indigenous groups yields other forms of human communication that resist intelligibility and representability through conventional imaging techniques. These suggest that instead of relying solely on hyper-focalized images of the territory, like those produced by countless botanical expeditions, land surveys, and satellites, there is a way to engage with Indigenous aesthetics by embracing a de-focalized type of gaze (Narby 1999). This mode of gazing contrasts the tendency to hyper-focalization of the western sciences while bringing several scales, dimensions, and territorial relationships into our field of view. The new aesthetic paradigm that emerges from the intentional blur is nothing other than an inter-epistemic mode of knowing, seeing, investigating, and communicating the volumes of the landscape.

Two-Eye Seeing: Participatory Media

While addressing the biocultural relations that lie beyond the hyper-focalized sights of the territory is imperative, it cannot result in more framings, mappings, or renderings coming only from the usual subject (the trained scientists, ethnographer, filmmaker, etc.) Instead, the process invokes de-linking observation from analysis, knowledge from abstraction, and even artwork from authorship. In other words, questioning not only how something is known but also looking critically at the position of the knower (Mignolo 2009) and their intentions is how we can resist the subtractive tendency of representation or artistic research when enacted on the Pan-Amazon landscape. It is here where the decolonial effort takes precedent. Therefore, inverting the logic and seeking novel forms of collaboration between local Indigenous leaders as investigators and outside researchers like myself as supporters, learners, cross-cultural mediators, and communicators is crucial.

However, even if deficient, cross-cultural mediation has always been practiced across the Andean and Amazon regions between all kinds of groups, especially during the accidental encounters that resulted in centuries of colonial occupation in the 1500s. Ever since, Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups have had to deploy some kind of communication strategy, intentional or not, to engage with the other side. Whether or not there has been an effective exchange of messages and reciprocal understanding also depends on how each group has equipped itself to perceive and engage with the world views of its counterpart.

Nevertheless, recalling Santos' analogy of abyssal thinking, a zone of invisibility, or abyss, has been created by the global north. That is precisely where ancestral ontologies, spatial practices, and aesthetics have been placed (Santos 2018)\" in which he outlines a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical framework for challenging the dominance of Eurocentric thought. As a collection of knowledges born of and anchored in the experiences of marginalized peoples who actively resist capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, epistemologies of the South represent those forms of knowledge that are generally discredited, erased, and ignored by dominant cultures of the global North. Noting the declining efficacy of established social and political solutions to combat inequality and discrimination, Santos suggests that global justice can only come about through an epistemological shift that guarantees cognitive justice. Such a shift would create new, alternative strategies for political mobilization and activism and give oppressed social groups the means through which to represent the world as their own and in their own terms (Santos 2018). Therefore, overcoming the boundaries that divide and obscure knowledges implies dismantling the processes that lead to this kind of epistemic violence. Such processes often operate through a lack of mechanisms for self-representation or platforms for reciprocal exchange and the celebration of one-sided modes of space production-based representational technologies like maps, zoning, fragmented sovereignties, aerial views, and so on so forth. But yet, here are many of us working to blur the abyssal lines, often repurposing the tools that enable focalizing views of the forests.

While Indigenous people have been rarely considered active players in the evolution of the Amazon as a balanced ecosystem, new archeological evidence is starting to reveal that in Pre-Hispanic times, the Amazon Rainforest was home to millions of people and spatial legacies from that time are still present in the landscape (Tavares 2017). Examples such as the Chagras[3] or agricultural practices using Terra Preta or Ojarasca[4] might be responsible for helping the Amazon jungle to expand into areas that were otherwise desertic or unfit for tree growth.

But while many Amerindian groups vanished from the Amazon, leaving no trace behind, other groups that organized and resisted the oppressing forces for generations via languages and communication apparatuses that survive up to today, although at constant risks of disappearing. Not surprisingly, the popular saying still holds in the context of Pan-Amazon societies:

> *Those who cannot communicate [or occupy a position within the network of dialogues across social groups] sooner or later cease to exist.*

Through years of anthropological and ethnobotanical research, we have learned that Indigenous nations across the Andean-Amazon region have developed a vast understanding of the eco-systemic relations of these territories. More recently, non-Indigenous societies have bestowed upon Indigenous nations the difficult task of protecting the rainforests (while resisting their own extinction) by fighting climate change at the frontlines. Even our most sensible green ambitions do not come without us, first projecting our own environmental biases and limited knowledge of Indigenous societies (Ulloa 2003) or engaging in a truly reciprocal dialogue.

What I find astonishing is that non-Indigenous societies are often ignorant about the ways in which Indigenous groups assemble themselves in space, labor, or struggle to defend the Andean-Amazon. This unapologetic ignorance or curiosity is also how the abyssal line operates. Another way is the monopolization of aesthetic values,

3 Indigenous gardens that maintain the seemingly random and dispersed positioning of crops in the jungle.

4 Soil regeneration strategies that capture nutrients via accumulation of charcoal, dead leaves or jungle waste forming a layered and mineral-rich soils.

communication channels, and modes of human expression, from mass media to artistic production. The lack of mutual acknowledging places tremendous obstacles that hinder the flow of bilateral communication across cultures.

But how can we open a pathway for new communication flows? Or how can Indigenous knowers instigate a dialogue through mechanisms that we, non-Indigenous learners, can relate to, bearing in mind our limited access to their vast knowledge of nature and our reliance on mediation, dialectics, and abstraction?

More than a rhetorical question, Taita Hernando Chindoy and I were eager to seek answers. In late 2018, I initiated fundraising for the production of a new film in Inga territory. However, I did not intend to produce one single piece this time but to articulate a training process that would deliver several short documentaries, experimental and participatory films made with Indigenous youth. In the meantime, Taita Chindoy assembled a team of young Indigenous land-protectors from across the Pan-Amazon territories. IN March 2019, we launched a series of workshops involving a wide range of experts in film and Media, from guest documentarians to academic researchers. Five months later, the first Pan-Amazon Media Collective was born as Ñambi Rimai (Inga for Voices). This was also the result of a regional effort with young leaders from the Awá, Inga, Kamënstá, Nasa, Quillacinga, and Siona nations, which I describe in more detail following section of this book.

There is a long history of Indigenous Media spanning seven continents and at least five decades, which I cannot encapsulate within this work for brevity's sake. However, some important collectives to acknowledge are Karrabing Film Collective in Australia, ISUMA Collective in North America, or the MISAK Communication Collective and Zhigoneshi Collective of the Abya Yala. The massive contribution of these groups has been to offer an insight into alternative modes of authorship, aesthetics, and film production. Also, to challenge the assumption that Indigenous communities had to gain a voice through media. Instead, these communities always had a voice, and rich cultural signifiers, except these, did not circulate in the circuits of non-Indigenous

spectatorship. More than producing mainstream film and media content as documentary, fiction, or entertainment, Indigenous Media Collectives often pursue video invoking sovereignty. In other words, Indigenous Media becomes a way to bring up issues of territorial control, dispossession, or abuse under colonization. They are also a path to explore cultural distinctiveness and ancestral knowledge (Wilson and Stewart 2008). As the anthropologist Harald E. Prince argues, Indigenous media can also be seen as an "intervention that paralleled the postcolonial move to 'write back' […] the colonial gaze by constructing their own visual media, telling their stories on their own terms." (Ibid. p 18-19).

Therefore, creating a Media Collective that gathered youth leaders from the High Andes and the Lower Amazon was a concrete effort to redirect the epistemic compass that has distorted the intercultural dialogues across the Pan-Amazon for so long. This effort enables the coming together of heterogeneous modes of spatial practice, ways of seeing and governing life into a negotiation space configured as the pluriverse, or a world of many worlds (Escobar 2018). Unlike the one-world model put forward through modernity, this emergent space is formed through clashes, divergent perspectives, or what Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser have also describe as the *uncommons*: "an event whose vocation is not to be final because it remembers that the uncommons is its constant starting point (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018 p. 19).

In addition, Taita Chindoy and I see the use of media as a way to convey the dimensionality of Indigenous territories and preserve languages and knowledge, which together contain the current risk of ethnocide. Several members of the Media Collective have experienced directly the armed conflict that has affected the Putumayo, Lower Cauca, and Nariño for decades. Their stories, like those of their families and communities, needed to be told. However, from the position of the artist and researcher, I do not seek to represent or speak for Indigenous groups. On the contrary, I strive to make this research and my skill applicable and useful in their struggle.

There is an undeniable urgency driving this effort as a more social leader, and land-protectors in Colombia died at the hands of far-

right para-statal forces. Therefore, it becomes critical to use all available instruments to render visible the struggles, modes of resistance, and the unique forms of territorial thinking for those inside and outside Pan-Amazon Indigenous reserves. This also calls for the creation of Indigenous media archives capable of transcending temporal-spatial barriers. Likewise, it encourages my collaborators and me to speak fluently the languages of space production and control used by the oppressing forces threatening Indigenous ways of life (i.e., hyper-focalized and extractive modes of gazing through mapping, data processing, and Georeferencing).

Ultimately, what the Media Collective seeks to provide is a type of bifocal epistemic device that allows confronting the territory at simultaneous focal distances, moving swiftly between hyper-focalized to de-focalized renderings of the landscape. This is what the Mi'kmaw elder calls for Albert Marshaled called Two-Eyed Seeing, describing a way to:

> *"see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing…and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all"*[5].

Looking back to the first stage of my process, I noticed that searching for other forms of rendering the landscape has instead delivered an alternative mode of gazing that is situated, bifocal, and embodied. On the one hand, the cinematic cartographies became the entry point for the project, helping to establish an inter-epistemic dialogue with Indigenous territories conceived as volumes extending across a vertical axis. On the other hand, the activation of the Indigenous Media Collective creates a platform to investigate and actively reenact in various contexts the spatial practices that produce living territories, biocultural governance, and the unique types of relational aesthetic-thinking that Indigenous communities have developed.

5 Description Taken from: http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/


Canon

A Pan-Amazon Media Collective for Biocultural Peacebuilding

Ñambi Rimai is an Indigenous communications and media collective established in July of 2019 and operating in the Southwest of Colombia, between the High Andes and the Lower Amazon. Its mission is to support Indigenous groups across the Pan Amazon region to pursue self-governance, territorial rights, inter-nation diplomacy, and biocultural peacebuilding. We use documentary film, radio, social media outlets and provide media literacy workshops to promote communication between indigenous communities and beyond.

This initiative emerged with a series of workshops on filmmaking and participatory research conceived and produced by artist Felipe Castelblanco through his ongoing project The Para-Site School. The training phase of the project included mentors and teachers from an international network of colleagues and Felipe's long-time collaborators. Among them was the London-based artist/filmmaker and researcher Hannah Mezaros-Martin from Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths; Zurich-based artist and filmmaker Lydia Zimmerman from the non-profit Kunstructur and production company Artisan Films; Bogotá-based artist and Director of AMA (Ambulante Colombia) Camilo Pachón; the Mexican documentary film director Emiliano Altuna; Bogotá-based editor and Colorist Monica Bustamante and Sound designer Numael Mendez.

The collective gathers together indigenous youth leaders from the Awa, Inga, Kamënstá, Quillasinga, and Siona nations, whose territories are situated between the states of Nariño, La Bota Caucana, and Upper and Lower Putumayo. This initiative is the result of a co-creation effort stemming from a three-year-long practice-based research project, ongoing fieldwork in the Pan Amazon region, and sustained collaboration with the Inga people. The

entire project developed in close cooperation with Taita Hernando Chindoy, president of the Inga Nation and the organizations Ambulate Colombia, Suma Kawsay, and Wuasikamas. In 2019, the project received the generous support from the Colombian Ministry of Culture, Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst Basel, Prohelvetia and logistical support from the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst (HGK) FHNW Basel.

Ñambi Rimai's films have been presented 2020 Manifesta Biennial in Marseille, the festival FICAMAZONIA in Mocoa City, and art galleries like Austellungsraum Klingental in Basel and Wild-Palms in Düsseldorf.

The project was born out of the need to communicate how Indigenous modes of territorial thinking, governance, and peacebuilding support endangered biocultural environments. Central to this effort is the revival of ancestral traditions, languages, Indigenous history, and knowledge to resist cultural erasure and ethnocide. The project is framed as complementary training for members of the peaceful Indigenous civic armies, called La Guardia Indigena (The Indigenous Guard). Among them are the Wuasikamas (guardians of the earth) and Inyënang (A Kamënstá word for Vigilants).

Generally, most members of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous communities at one point or another serve in La Guardia, regardless of their gender or age, so long as every individual belongs to the social fabric that binds these communities together. Cooperation among Indigenous nations and between contingencies of the Indigenous Guard spread over the territory has become a priority for most leaders. These efforts have led to sharing tactics, training, and a growing critical mass of Indigenous and non-indigenous land defenders. Even as an outsider, I was invited to join spiritual sessions with the Inga and Siona, deemed a form of necessary training for members of the guard. Some of the duties of these peaceful and unarmed guards include territorial control via civic patrolling, collective work, and rapid response to natural disasters or the pressure from belligerent forces. Above all, their mission is to protect the lives of community members, including non-human co-inhabitants and non-indigenous groups, even in regions outside their territories.

Over time, the Indigenous guard has become the recognized authority inside Indigenous territories. However, in the process of indigenous state-building, there are many challenges related to the conservation of traditions, languages, and tools through which these communities can reaffirm their territorial sovereignty. On top of this, deploying adequate governance methods over a territory that is cultural, spiritual, and filled with life requires methods capable of negotiating various ways of seeing, sensing, and addressing their territory. That is why Indigenous media collectives have become key instruments for governance through mechanisms for self-representation, platforms for community relations, and even Indigenous research. From Media reports and community radio to indigenous-led land surveys that expose damaging land-use practices, media tools have become epistemic tools for translation.

Numerous Indigenous Media collectives are operating in the Pan Amazon region, and a vast history of these practices in South, North and Central America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Ñambi Rimai builds on these experiences to offer a new space of action. However, it also makes unique contributions to the development of Indigenous Media and processes of community organizing within the Pan Amazon context. Firstly, it was formed in close dialogue with the "Plan de Vida" (Plan for Life), an Indigenous governance directive that articulates various social processes among the Ingas and other communities, fighting for territorial and epistemic justice. Crucial to this plan is the notion of Indigenous education and institution-building, through which our collective is a pillar of skill-sharing and cross-regional cooperation. Secondly, Ñambi Rimai emerges as the official communications branch of the Inga government, supporting its quest for state-building and the promotion of a pluri-ethnic model within the Colombian state. And thirdly, the Media Collective is in itself an important gesture of diplomacy between various Indigenous nations and the world beyond. Through the activities of our collective, young land-protectors from five different ethnic groups from the Andean-Amazon region have gathered together to share experiences. They have traveled for the first time to remote parts of the country and helped one another bring visibility to various issues affecting each other's communities and share the pursuit of a common goal.

kite Mapping workshop with guest artist Hannah Meszaros Martin
March, 2019

Opposite page:
Film crew at EL Salado natural hot Springs.
Sibundoy Vallery.
2020

As a research and training process, Ñambi Rimai is informed by Socially engaged art and Participation Action Research. Therefore, it focuses on 1) training indigenous youth to use Media tools such as cameras, editing software, mapping tools, sound, and video production; 2) supporting the production of original media content (mapping, documentaries, and video reports); and 3) cooperating in the design of suitable media strategies that can be strategically deployed inside and outside their territories. Thanks to numerous fundraising efforts in early 2020, we had the chance to invite members of the collective to travel to Switzerland in order to exhibit their work, conduct networking, research, and film productions in Europe in the same way that outside artists and researchers have always traveled to their territories. However, due to the Global Pandemic, the trip to Switzerland has been postponed until the fall of 2021. This visit will also be an opportunity to expand the inter-nation diplomacy efforts embodied in the Media Collective.

ÑAMBI RIMAI

Pan Amazon Media Collective for Biocultural Peace-building


a / Kamënstá
ndoy
Ayenán Quinchoa
Resguardo Inga / Kamënstá
Tabanoc Sinundoy
Elkin Chindoy
Resguardo Inga
Yunguillo, Putumayo
Luis Burbano
Resguardo Inga
Caquetá
Leimer Mojomboy
Resguardo Inga
Piamonte, Bota Caucana
Mayerly Pacheco
Resguardo Nasa
Piamonte Bota caucana
Río Caquetá
Río Putumayo
Mildrey Paz Piaguaje
Resguardo Siona Buenavista
Bajo Putumayo

Film Poster and Documentary Premiere. Bogotá, Colombia. 2019

Norelly and Rubiela Mojomboy, Photo: Lydia Zimmernann. 2020

Aesthetic Practice Lab Expanded Cinema Series:

Cosmopolitical Territories

Participatory Filmmaking in the Colombian Amazon

December 13, 2019
18.00–20.00 hrs

Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst FHNW
Freilagerplatz 1 CH-4002, Basel

AePLab: Hochhaus 2nd Floor

SPEAKERS:
Camilo Pachón (Ambulante Colombia)
Director of Ambulante Más Allá
Artist and Filmmaker

Felipe Castelblanco (ECAM - HGK)
Artist, Reserecher and Mentor of
Ñambi Rimai Indigenous
Media Collective

FILM SCREENING:
El Maestro (2019)
Norelly (2019)

INSTALLATION:
Natalia Peralta
Felipe Castelblanco

Apero by IAeP

University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland
Academy of Art and Design

Institute of Aesthetic Practice and Theory

El futuro es de todos

Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst

Closing Act: Conversing with Clouds

We landed in the middle of the night. This time, I was coming with the premonition that it could be the last visit in a long time. It was February 2nd, 2020, and Lydia, a Swiss filmmaker and artist was my only companion. We had become good friends in that first trip crossing the Putumayo River, sharing the struggle and weakness we felt from all the Yagé medicine and the whippings with bunches of ivy plants that we received from the Siona shamans two years earlier. From day one, Lydia and I wanted to collaborate and deepen our shared connection with the Putumayo River by making a new film together.

The itinerary of our trip included a brief stay in Puerto Asis, where a boat would take us upstream to a natural reserve nearby. This place was literally the end of the world, or El Fin del Mundo, the name that local farmers gave to the community-run natural park they established in the mid-2000s deep in the Putumayo jungles. El Fin del Mundo is a majestic reserve crossed by numerous Inca trails and streams of water that merge to form a potent waterway that turns quickly into an 80-meter waterfall. The trails carved directly on the stone lead exactly to the edge of the cliff. The waterfall hits the rocks so hard at the bottom that it breaks into a thick veil of mist that travels up and east, covering large sections of the forests. The haze created by the waterfall stretches up another 80 meters, propelled by a stream of air that forms in the canyon, and in no time, the river flies and becomes yet another cloud.

For this visit, we had chosen to follow a route that would take us from El fin del Mundo and through its numerous Inca trails, recently dug out by the farmers, until the very beginning of the story of the Putumayo, as I knew it. We called this trip a counter-expedition, a meditative and meandering trip, following the path of water back and upwards, as it moved from the potent rivers in the lower Amazon to their headwaters in the upper Andes. At various points along the journey, several Indigenous collaborators and members of the Pan-Amazon Media Collective (Ñambi Rimai), would join the excursion until the team would be complete when reaching La Cocha Lake in the high Andes.

From El Fin del Mundo, Lydia, Ayênan, and Myldrey (our new companions, one member from the Kamënsta tribe and the other from the Siona people) and I hiked and hauled our gear across the reserve until reaching the nearest road. From there we would head north, towards the copper mines near Mocoa but first, we needed a vehicle. Of all the people we could have found, we ended up hiring a driver that doubled as a party clown. His artistic name, Katarrito (an idiom used to describe a child's flu symptoms) came to our attention when he handed us his business card. On one side, he advertised his services as clown, animator and comedy man, on the flip side, he promoted his political campaign chasing a seat in the municipal council of Pasto City. The surprising part was that of course, for both sides of his business card, there was a picture of Mr. Katarrito wearing his best clownish attire and a comical painted face. Once in the car, the Indigenous leaders, the filmmaker, the clown and me, the artists performing as a researcher, finally headed to the place where the Putumayo's Colonial history began.

An hour later we reached Mocoa, a small and hectic city, also the administrative capital of Putumayo. Leaving 'downtown' faster than it took us to reach it, we made our way through the ruins of several neighborhoods that in 2017 were wiped out by landslides and colossal rocks rolling downhill from the same mountain that we were heading towards. The causes of this tragedy are still a matter of public debate, but those living in the area know well that ever since the UN-sponsored exploration of copper deposits and the controlled explosions carried out from the 1970s onwards, tremendous forces once trapped inside the mountain had been released. This tragedy was neither a surprise, nor the forces of nature were believed to be acting on their own. Many people waited patiently for this tragedy until late one night it took everyone by surprise, even the many workers of the copper mines resting between shifts.

Quickly approaching the apparent end of the road, we followed a series of detours to what otherwise looked like a dead end. However, before the trip I carefully had plotted a route that would take us to an unfinished road in the middle of the jun-

gle, designed to bypass the, by now, infamous Trampolin of Death, a road that connects Mocoa with the Upper Putumayo. Therefore, nothing at this point seemed to me like a surprise, although our driver had stopped making his clownish jokes while making it obvious that he was driving us against his best judgment. There is nothing more obvious than a clown pissed at the people he performs for. A few motorcycles appeared all of the sudden and drove past us, glancing suspiciously through the window at the unusual group of travelers stuck in such an unfortunate place. Meanwhile, the vegetation became thicker and the road narrower, until we lost sight of the entire path. After a few moments of hesitation, the crew decided to continue on foot, and the person organizing all logistics, I asked Katarrito to wait for an hour and to go find help if we didn't return after that amount of time. If nothing, I was worried that we would meet the guys in the motorcycle further down and really anything could happen in such a remote place.

The now rough path was interrupted by a fence placed in the middle of the faint trail, which was the clear sign that we were on the right course to our destination. After skipping the fence, we found a rather desolate landscape made of abandoned construction machinery and patches of built-containing walls merely holding a massive hillside about to collapse onto itself at any time. This place felt almost haunted by the ghosts of a complex engineering project designed to carve out a chunk of the Andes to make way for a new road connecting two major cities but most importantly, to provide access to new molybdenum, copper, and gold mine. For several years, the Mocoa mines have been a point of tension between a local farmer and Indigenous communities, fighting against the government-supported plan of conducting extensive excavation on the extremely fragile hillsides of the Capucana and Condagua vicinities, just north of Mocoa. The area had been first surveyed by geologists sent by the United Nations development program in the 70s'. Two decades later, after the sluggish Colombian plutocracy had finally added it to its growing portfolio of holdings to be sold to international conglomerates, it was bought by B2Gold and its subsidiary the AngloGold Ashanti in 2015. The latter waited, produced one study after another, and

for years speculated on the potential of the mine in the international exchange markets. Meanwhile, lobbyists acted locally by intimidating leaders and buying off corrupt politicians who eventually diverted funds from social programs to pay for bigger roads and the necessary infrastructure to finally gain full access to the treasures hidden underground.

Many important reasons had brought me and the team to this point, one of them being the fascination we felt for a story I had been piecing together for months in my remote study room back in Basel. As it turns out, the Mocoa mine was one of the most important drivers of the Colonization of Putumayo from the start, even if the first European expeditions did not recognize the ancestral metallurgy technologies of the locals. Engorged by legends and encrusted in the Andean-Amazon foothills, this mine was one of the many El Dorado treasures that Europeans sought after since their arrival to what is now Colombia, in the first decades of the 16th century. And while plenty of expeditions searched in vain across various sections of the Amazon, from Pizzaro and Orellana to Sebastian de Belalcazar and Walter Raleigh, all looking for a mythical land where gold grew from trees like the local papayas or starfruits, one that had caught my attention was the expedition led by Hernán Perez de Quesada in 1541-1543. Many things were particular about this expedition, but an obvious one for us was the fact that centuries before, exhausted and sick, the men lead by Perez de Quesada had walked over the same trails where we found ourselves that day.

Descending from the Southern hills of Cauca and veering North through Mocoa, where the now disappeared Indigenous community with the same name provided the Spaniards with hospitality, before being raided and murdered by their guests, Quesada's army had landed unintentionally on a serendipitous path that connected many worlds. According to numerous historians, among them the very same chronist of Quesada's legion Cieza De León, the Mocoa people had provided precise instructions to the Spaniards in how to reach a land of various treasures that also grew straight form, or out of plants. This area was referred to as Achibichi, which in the local Indige-

nous languages denoted “the wealthy lands from above.” With their extreme ignorance of the geopolitical landscape of the region, the Spaniards were oblivious to the fact that the Mocoas had most likely used them to settle an internal dispute they had with the communities living high up in the mountains. As expected, the story follows with the struggles that the Quesada’s army would encounter along the way, while climbing the steep mountains that connect Mocoa with the Sibundoy valley.

Weeks passed and many soldiers and enslaved Indigenous people lost their lives while crossing difficult mountain passes in the middle of the most inclement weather. The Putumayo region often goes through an intense rainy season, close to a monsoon, between May and August where the soaring temperatures create turbulent wind currents that drive insane precipitation to the area. Around those months, heat and humidity become so intense that every liquid, even one’s sweat evaporates and mixes with the surrounding mist. Lost and desperate, the Spaniards found themselves in the harsh Putumayo hills, seeking noticeable riches and treasures that only their own hallucinations could make up. Meanwhile, with every step they took they uncovered one of the most secretive trading routes that local Indigenous communities had been using from time immemorial. These paths connected the Kamënstá and Inga with the enigmatic tribe of the Andakies, which were regarded as the most powerful healers and shamans of the entire Amazon. A curious detail about the Andakies is that they never surrendered to the Colonial armies and their territories, deep in the Caqueta forests remained unexplored for centuries, except for other Indigenous tribes who visited to trade, receive shamanic training or healing. The Andakies were powerful warriors and made enemies of those who offered hospitality to the European invaders, like the Mocoas or the Ingas living in the foothills along the Putumayo. However, one day the Andakies simply vanished and for decades, it was assumed they had been pushed deeper into the forests by expanding colonization of the Andean-Amazon region.

Empty-handed, Quesada’s army eventually reached the vast Sibundoy valley and its neighboring Paramos. An ostensibly

prosperous pre-Columbian nation, the Kamësntá people of Sibundoy had little gold but yet, abundant wild beans and corn plantations, a unique and highly developed language, lush gardens surrounding their small homes, and were a peaceful people. They welcomed the travelers and fed them for weeks, unaware of the tragic fate the visitors would soon bring upon them. Still recovering from malnutrition and exhaustion, Perez de Quesada received the news of yet another expedition in search of El Dorado lead by Pizarro. This expedition was approaching the city of Pasto through the west, only 50 kilometers from Sibundoy and right across the Paramo's wetlands. In a badly calculated military maneuver, the Quesada's diminished army tried to seize control of the valley but soon it had no option but to surrender their conquest to Pizarro's army.

Paradoxically, to save his life Perez de Quesada had to pay Pizarro's generals a ransom with the few jewelry pieces and gold coins he had brought from the family's outpost in Santa Fé de Bogotá. That is why, no monument, street name, or lasting memory remains of Perez de Quesada in the valley. However, perhaps the biggest achievement of Hernan Perez de Quesada's expedition was exactly that of traversing the Putumayo forests and uncovering an important ancestral trail that connected the lower Amazon with the high Andes.

Along the way, they spotted numerous cinnamon trees, plenty of creeks that carried tiny gold pellets, small trees with fur in their leaves that turn air into water, as well as prosperous lands for farming and cattle grazing. Although Achibichi was not exactly what they thought of, a magical kingdom filled with so much gold that one could simply grab it like a fruit hanging from a tree, there was one more hidden element that the Conquistadores uncovered, thankfully without knowing.

That stretch of land in the Andean foothills, through which the early European explorers walked and dreamed of material wealth, is also a vital connector between the Amazon jungle and the Andean subtropics. As such, this region is home to incredible plants with potent medicinal qualities that flourish in the same spot where we had come with Lydia and Ayênan.

Among these plants is the Ayahuasca vine, the dangerous Borrachero, plenty of wild tobacco and rubber trees, but also a mystic plant known by various Indigenous names but hard to spot. Nobody can point exactly to it because apparently the moment you find it, you become immediately lost. We will refer to this plant as La Tunda, like my farmer and Agroecologist friend Heraldo Vallejo once explained. According to Heraldo, the forests carry aromas released by this plant, which are packed with natural alkaloids. Once a person breathes the scents and its molecules reach the brain, passing through the nose, lungs, and bloodstream, the person loses consciousness. Once people meet La Tunda they get lost and misdirected by their senses. There are very few witnesses to the powers of the plant, as most victims often lose their coordinates, get beaten up by angry forest spirits, and wander for days or weeks until they become easy prey for numerous animals roaming through the jungle, among them jaguars or big snakes. Those who get to know La Tunda and survive to tell the tale, describe it as sudden grogginess that takes over and disorients oneself from the desired path, in both the jungle and in life, but no one dares to describe the plant that causes it. The effects apparently become recurrent and can last for years.

Our second reason to come to this surreal point, in time and space, was to witness the process through which Ayênan's community, the Ingas and Kamënstá of the Sibundoy valley, had managed to pressure the engineering consortium building the road. Following a lengthy legal process, Indigenous leaders forced the army of engineers to meet a series of environmental regulations designed to protect the fragile ecosystems being carved out by the road. Eventually, the new designs failed to meet the targets and the project ran out of money and political support. Around 2017 this mega project was abandoned, leaving behind several half-built bridges hanging in the middle of the jungle. That is how we found ourselves walking across one of these precarious bridges that awkwardly bypass a huge precipice and how we would end up staring at a wall of green and lush forest about five meters away while standing on the edge of an asphalt road leading nowhere but to a deadly drop of at least 70 meters.

It was around 5:00 pm, and before losing the last bit of daylight we started to prepare our cameras to interview Ayênan, who had become not only a collaborator but the main character in the film that Lydia and I were meant to produce during this trip. Even though we had found the right angle, the breeze was rather quiet and Ayênan had finally overcome his stage fright, the heat was still unbearable. To make things worse, gentle rain started to fall over us making it impossible to focus the cameras or the eye.

Raindrops mixed with sweat dripped from my face onto the ground. The asphalt of the half-built bridge was as hot as it can get, making the tiny drops of sweat and rain melt even before they touched the ground. The stream of water running at the bottom of the precipice suddenly felt like elevating, as a dense layer of mist climbed up, quickly reaching the same height of the bridge. In a matter of minutes, the three of us were surrounded by dense haze, so thick it was hard to see the precarious railings of the bridge, or even the right path to walk through and reach safety. Slightly afraid of heights, Lydia bent and sat on the boiling asphalt while I tried to reach our gear and point my camera towards the hillside to capture the amazing view of mist quickly flooding the scenery. Ayênan instead, kept quiet and moving very gently as if calculating every move to avoid upsetting a dormant beast.

In a matter of minutes, the three of us were surrounded by a dense cloud and we didn't know exactly how to walk back to the car. Perhaps ten minutes went by and still in the awkward bridge, my camera had stopped recording, or even turning on, so I assumed the water had reached inside the waterproof housing. Our smartphones had run out of battery and Ayênan's old-fashioned phone did not have reception, credit for calls, or even a flashlight. Since all we could see was only about two meters ahead of us, we decided to follow the asphalt path until it could lead us back into the trail and from there to the car. Meter after meter we walked with anticipation. The safest thing was to follow the curve shape of the bridge while avoiding falling through one of the several unpatched sections

that led straight to the abyss. Abruptly, the ground turned into mud, and we felt the strange sensation that we had set foot on solid but unfamiliar ground. We all had lost track of time during the ordeal, and since the sun sets shortly after 6:00 PM in this region, it was obvious that we were running out of time to find our way back to Katarrito.

As the mud led us to a thick bush, we were sure the bridge was no longer a concern. Still, the visibility was very limited, and the dull light filtered through the haze didn't help. A passing figure suddenly surprised us, and without being sure if this was an animal or a person, Ayênan started to hum a song to send a warning that we too were roaming. Seconds later, we heard a whisper and then a whistle, but since it was hard to distinguish where it was coming from, we stopped entirely for a long minute. In my head, all I could think of was the motorcycles that had obviously come to check on us earlier that afternoon, so knowing that this area had plenty of ugly drugs and illegal mining activity, I was really hoping not to cross paths with the wrong person at the wrong time. I quickly bent down searching to grab a wooden stick or anything that could be used as a tool in case we were attacked but moving my hand through the mud all I could grab was a rock the size of my fist. However, as the whistle became clearer, we noticed that they were coming from various angles and some even sounded melodic. For a minute I entertained the possibility of birds or crickets but again, a presence that felt more like a person was moving around us.

By this point Ayênan had stopped answering our questions, humming, or even looking at us. His eyes were shut, and his hands pressed against his chest with the uttermost sign of respect. For a second, he glanced at us indicating to follow him in staying in silence and lowering the guard. Evidently, he was onto something else but being him the only local in the team, Lydia and I dutifully followed what he instructed. We stayed in complete silence while the whistles became louder, sometimes sounding like melody and but other times very random. More like the sound of wind moving through a tight corner, it felt like traveling in between and all around us at once. However, that wasn't the only sensorial distraction, because while

it was still raining, I did not feel like splashes of water coming from the sky but all the opposite, tiny drops lifting from the ground. "Raining upwards like when the river turns into a cloud" Ayênan whispered to me so I could more or less attune to what he too was feeling. By that time, I could see clearly with my eyes still closed and according to my visions, we were much higher up in the mountain, perhaps closer to a paramo and surrounded by tiny trees and other people standing far in the line with the horizon. Both the trees and the people were all around us and motionless. I still could not make sense of the figures, or the situation but all I knew was that if I opened my eyes, we were back into the thickest cloud I had ever encountered in my years traveling up and down the Putumayo. At this time, Ayênan asked Lydia and me to hold his hand and follow him, which of course I felt like the right move except that after opening my eyes, I noticed he still had his shut closed. With one hand I followed him and with the other I press harder on the rock I was already holding, ready to kick anyone or anything that got in our way.

Since my shoes were now covered in mud and the feeling that we were standing on solid ground felt more reassuring than ever, so I let myself be guided by my friend's best judgment. Opening my eyes here and there I only saw the haze, but every time I closed them, I saw something different and more surprising. It was as if we were crossing rustic villages, forests, deserts, rivers, beaches, cities, offices, vaults, and two or three dark and tiny spaces with oscillating lights, like dance clubs or the guts of electronics. I was overwhelmed with visions since I saw one place for every step we took as if we were the very clouds passing and circling the world. At this point, we were all humming Ayênan's song, which he turned into utterances every once in a while. The language was clearly not Spanish or something I could understand so I kept following along without passing many remarks.

Slowly, we reached a point that felt like a steep descent, and at that point, I couldn't trust to walk with my eyes closed so I glanced at the ground and then to the sky. It was then when I noticed the cloud slowly dissipating and revealing the land-

scape that surrounded us. As the sky opened, the golden light of Colombia's sunset hour pierced through the haze until it was bright again. I grabbed my camera bag, dropped the rock inside an easy access pocket, and made sure I still had my film gear with me, which obviously felt a bit useless after all I had been 'seeing while not seeing'.

It was obvious that somehow, we had finally reached the stable ground away from the bridge. We were surely in a safer position than standing on that precarious structure and facing a deadly abyss. However, to our surprise, instead of being on the side of the dirt road and the trail that led us there in the first place, we were descending the mountain at the opposite side of the precipice, along the same unreachable hillside we had been staring at minutes before. Surely, none of us can explain how we crossed the gap of the bridge or how we ended up walking across the opposite mountain, but there we were all muddy, in shock, and somehow alive.

Extremely confused and exhausted, given that it took a lot of effort to make our way down to the stream at the bottom of the bridge and from there, to climb up back to the trail, complete silence was an additional companion for the rest of the way. After what felt like the longest and most enduring part of our journey so far, we met Katarrito. Like a good clown and a promising politician, he did not take me seriously when I had asked him to go seek help in case it took a lot longer for us to come back. By then, it was dark, and the cool breeze of the night had finally set in. He was not even interested in listening to what we had been through, the only thing he cared for was how to make fun of distressed looks. Katarrito's innocent and joyful jokes kept us company the rest of the way to Heraldo's home, back in Mocoa.

Later that night and after a good meal and a tea of Guayusa, a medicinal plant widely used by shamans and healers in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Lydia, Ayênan and I had finally more energy to share each other's version of the story with Heraldo. Too scared to listen to spooky tales or too self-absorbed to invest time to listen to us, Katarrito retired early. One by one, we

related more or less the same experience of disorientation, of fear, and the fact that we were all blinded by the haze. At times, Lydia even saw herself reflected on the cloud that blinded us, like in the Brocken specter where one sees a shadow projected on clouds and surrounded by a rainbow, but this time Lydia saw not only hers but tens of people with different bodies shapes and heights encircling us. We both also told Heraldo how we heard noises, felt ghostly figures walking between us, and how we each traversed remote landscapes at high speeds. Ayênan's visions were the soberest of us all, or at least he kept the details to himself, while still handling the event with impressive respect and caution.

Heraldo's take on the story was a bit dismissive, or at least it made me feel a bit naïve. He said that it was nothing but a harsh Tunda, or an appalling lesson we were given by the forest, most certainly because we had dared to approach so close one of the mountains still believed to be inhabited by the mysterious, and according to Heraldo, multidimensional Andakies. Still, his pseudo logical analysis did not explain how we transferred from one side of the mountain to the other, how we skipped precipice or why the clouds had surrounded us in the first place.

Off to sleep, we went. My head was spinning with both the surreal experience we had gone through and with the gentle swing of my hammock. Half sleep I heard Ayênan still humming his song and I remembered that of all the things we spoke and related to Heraldo, we never said much about the song.

- What was the song about Ayênan, I softly asked him?

To which he answered:

- It was nothing more than me asking the clouds and water spirits that had come to visit us for forgiveness because we had entered their territory and walked past them without asking either one for their permission.

At that moment I had the solid realization that the only eyes we had upon us in that bridge, were those of whom I never thought could be looking. Ultimately, that bridge led to nowhere, it instead was left there pointing straight to the realms of many other beings that like clouds, the rain, or the mud, still sharing with us these territories.

Too tired to get out of my hammock, I stretched my hand as far as I could and pulled all my bags closer to me, and without looking, I searched for pen and paper to jot down some thoughts. That is when I noticed the rock still inside the pocket of my camera bag and the mud that covered it, still felt a bit fresh. My plan of writing was spoiled, so my attention turned towards the rock. As I pulled the rock out of the bag, my headtorch lit it brightly but what I saw then brought me back to the awful experience we just a few hours had earlier. Under the dirt and fresh mud, there was a gold nugget the size of my fist. Too tired and confused to make sense of any of it, I decided to put the night to rest and passed out while cocooning in my hammock.

The next morning, we left Heraldo's home very early and made our way up to La Chocha Lake in the high Andes, near the sacred Paramos where the Conquistadores, blinded by foreign dreams, fought their own imported battles. After all, in these very Paramos is where the Putumayo River and its many tributaries, like gold, emerge from the underground. No wonder why the Spaniards didn't ever notice what Achibichi actually meant. Thankfully back then, there wasn't a way for the Conquistadores to see what really lays below, above, or across these territories, but clumsy and lucky as they were, they still stumbled upon many portals to vastly rich worlds and invertedly, without ever entering left their doors half-opened.

This time around, it was our turn to reach the end of this counter-expedition and perhaps deal with one of the open threads that the Quesada's army left hanging loose, along with every other expedition that followed ever since chasing gold, oil, copper, and lately oxygen. Instead of coming to the Paramo to extract riches out of these lands, we had to deposit a treasure

back into the grounds. For this, we had to go to the last stop of this failed and long-forgotten El Dorado expedition to hand back power to the skies, the plant, and water spirits. That is why, on February 19th, we gathered all the members of the media collective, Taita Camilo Quispe, the Quillacinga chief, and traveled to the outermost edge of the former Achibichi nation to ask directly to the clouds to let us into what has been, for much longer than for any human inhabitant, their very own territory.

That day we sailed across La Cocha lake with powerful winds, and despite the intense storm that welcomed us, we respectfully entered the sacred paramo to plant a rock of gold, encased in solid water, back into the ground. For a solid minute, we all stood in silence, asked permission and forgiveness, while the haze once again encircled us, and our eyes could see without looking.

Conclusions

If anything, this project has been a long journey that gives shape to a practice of aesthetic inquiry. What is unique is that such practice is itself the act of journeying. Through the films, installations, short stories, images, concepts, and reflections that I have collected here, you and I have come a long way. We have traversed biocultural landscapes that challenge ways of seeing and representing the forest by engaging with and rendering visible the entanglements across its volumes. From looking up to the Amazonian skies and tracing violence in this contested airspace to connecting layers of history and modes of extractivism across Putumayo to render visible the vertical gaze of the colonial mindset, this research urgently calls for critical engagement with the vertical axis of power and life-enabling relations.

Journeying, or the Indigenous notion of "recorrido" becomes an aesthetic tool that shows us a way forward to exploring altitudinal relations as narrative connectors between the volumes of the landscape. As aesthetic devices, recorridos also imply movement, contact, and exchange with the territory as a sentient, responsive, and self-determined body whose geometries extend across scales, horizontal and vertical trajectories, as well as unseen dimensions. Engaging, noticing, and attuning to such territories enables alternative modes of space cognition, which I refer to as Territorial Thinking.

Incorporating Territorial Thinking into aesthetic practices and cultural spheres lead to acknowledging the overlaps, maintaining the porosity, and resisting external and violent forms of reterritorialization within your own territory. Today, this violence already threatens the Andean-Amazon forests and the cultural practices that make these a dense web of life. However, anywhere you look, the dangers of the neo-colonial and extractive mindset are also expanding. Therefore, I defend that the process and methods I

used can be deployed in various contexts to gather knowledge, support governance, and organize communities towards co-creation research collaborations and epistemic resistance.

What follows is the search for adequate modes of addressing the dimensionality of the territories, which we all inhabit but cannot be fully contained within the digit, the data point, or the framing of the image. That is why I propose to use artistic research and participatory filmmaking as a de-focalizing method, able to surround and defend biocultural territories by casting a new veil of indeterminacy, blur, and paradox. With it, it is possible to deter those seeking to fracture, erase, or tear apart the territory with their hyper-focalized tools for abstraction and dispossession.

The search for de-focalizing tools is not only a search for methods or novel hardware. Instead, it searches for broader modes of thinking that allow co-creation, co-authorship, and participatory ways of knowledge gathering with knowledgeable communities. In that sense, I have used the frame of this artistic research as thinking time and space to decolonize my gaze and embrace reciprocity. I have also put my production, fundraising, and communication skills to establish a Media Collective, which in itself is an inter-epistemic, a bifocal gazing instrument, and a resonant space that welcomes Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies working together to resist ethnocide, which results in ecocide.

Therefore, our immediate goal is to deploy media, artistic research, and cultural mediation skills to support biocultural peace-building across the Pan-Amazon region. This process entails the creation of bilateral communication channels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and other beings inter-existing in these territories. Addressing the dimensionality of these landscapes also prompts the recognition and defense of other forms of life manifesting across many scales.

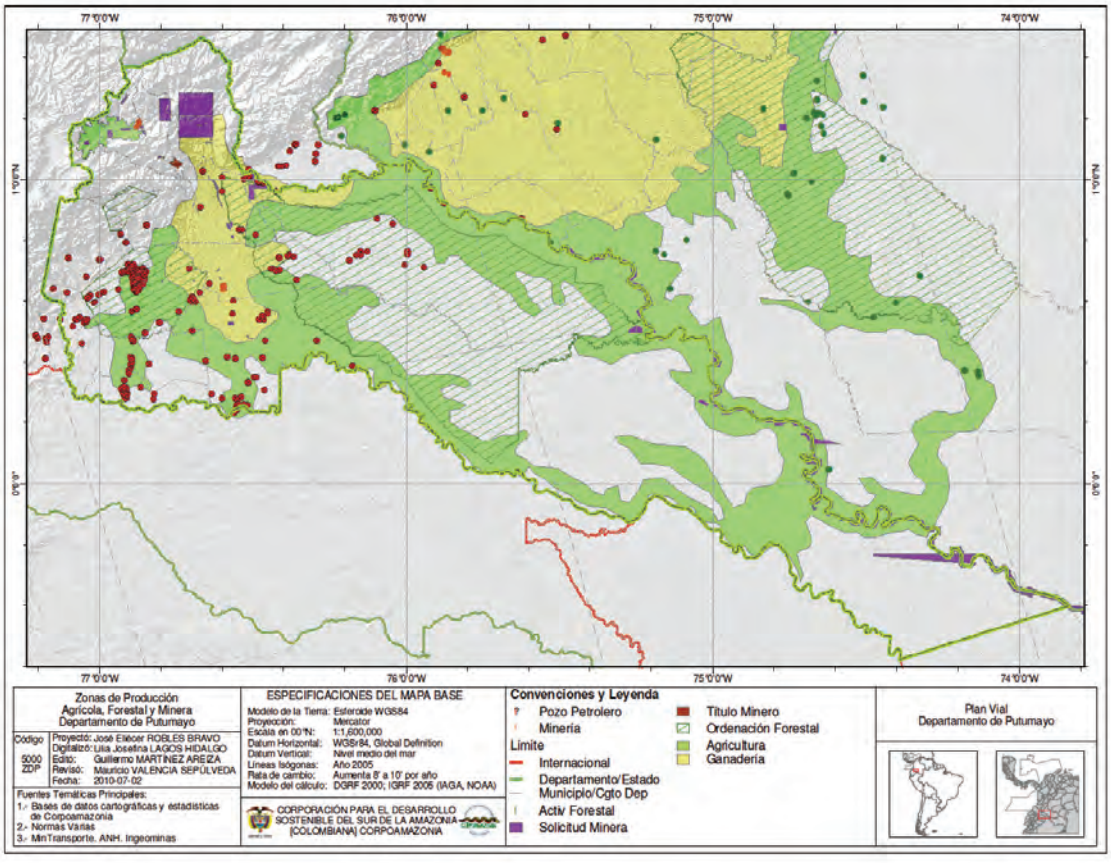
In the early days of this research, I looked up the definition of the word Indigenous. It means to originate from a place. After three years, this word finally makes sense to me when I see it through the lens of the Ingas. Like a widespread Tulpa, where they plant the baby's umbilical cords, the Putumayo has become an unlikely

familiar space that feels vital even if I was not born there. I have also witnessed how my collaborators, viewers, readers, and partners eventually relate to it as extended home through the stories and images we produced, which provoke connection in a landscape with planetary resonance.

Perhaps, these territories invite all of us to replant ourselves back into the planet as a common home. After all, our life begins and ends in this all-encompassing space, the earth, for which we are all Indigenous earth beings. Embracing and expanding this notion of indigeneity will be a continuing effort.

Apendix A

Current Uses of the Soils in Putumayo State



Source: CORPOAMAZONIA www.corpoamazonia.gov.co

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Image: members of Ñambi Rimai Medial Collective, Felipe Castelblanco, Lydia Zimmermann, Taita Camilo Quispe, and friends. In memory of the Paramos of La Cocha Lake, burned on November 28th of 2020 by outsiders to clear the way for cattle and farming.