

Apiyemiekî?

*these drawings
eaten by mold and time
are a living trace
of a ghost that never sleeps*

In the early ethnographic film *Path to Extinction* (1961) by British filmmaker Adrian Cowell, helicopter images of the extensive forests of Mato Grosso (center-west of Brazil) seem particularly ominous, as if the helicopter's point of view already signaled the forest's demise. These images are later juxtaposed with monumental images of the monument-cities: São Paulo, Goiânia, and finally the modernist Brasília at the dawn of its inauguration. As we see the first images of the iconic plates of the National Congress, a voice-of-God narrator reads:

Brasília is another symbol exploding in concrete, hiding the earth beneath the asphalt. "Each piece of this soil is sacred," said the indigenous. "Even the dust that rises from your constructions recognizes more our steps than yours, because the dust is drenched in the blood of our ancestors." Why cover the earth with stones? The plantations don't grow and the children don't play. These metallic giants [the two figures that make up the sculpture

Os Dois Candangos by Bruno Giorgi that features in the opening sequence of *Apiyemiekî?*] represent white warriors. For the indigenous, they are terrible destroyers of peoples. Brasília emerges as a symbol of progress, while below it, the highways run towards the hinterlands, tearing the vast frontier of the advancing agribusiness.

Path to Extinction is one of the rare films kept at the IGPA (Institute of Pre-History and Anthropology of Goiás), one of the largest audiovisual archives in Brazil documenting the advancement of "civilization" towards the Amazon region. The archive portrays in a disconcerting way the contradictions and design of settler mentality whilst unraveling with great intimacy the strategies of the "first contact" missions.

I was researching the early ethnographic films shot between the center and the north of Brazil, trying to mend pieces of broken histories connecting the center, particularly my native Brasília, to the north of the country, where the vast meanderings of the Amazon forest are to be found. In my previous films *A Idade da Pedra* (2013), *Há Terra!* (2016) and *Olhe bem as montanhas* (2018),

the center-west territories around Brasília are conjured through a slow archeology of in/visible traces through chance meetings, ephemeral archives, oral histories, and sonic resonances. With *Apiyemiyekî?* (2019), this archeology of the in/visible took me further into a territory that seems critically connected with where I began the digging.

The building of Brasília was part of a national strategy to connect and integrate a country historically colonized from the coast. *A Marcha Oeste* (“The Westward March”) was the self-assured title, evocative of a Western, of this national project. The city’s central position drew a precise axis of connection between the interior and the coast through a vast infrastructure of highways. Developed during the 1970s, these infrastructural projects characterized the harshest years of the Military Dictatorship in its “civilizing” extractivist march.

It was within this political context that the construction of the BR-174 highway—the core of *Apiyemiyekî?*—became an important epicenter of a silenced military-led crusade against the resilient Waimiri-Atroari peoples. The highway was designed to traverse the lands of the Waimiri-Atroari from north to south, restricting their autonomy over their territory and damaging their environment whilst invading their lands in an effort to access a major mining site.

Almost ten years after the silenced conflicts between the military and the Waimiri-Atroari, indigenous rights militants and educators Doroti Alice Müller Schwade and

Egydio Schwade were invited by the FUNAI (National Foundation for the Indigenous) to develop a pedagogical project with them in their lands. They fulfilled a request by the Waimiri-Atroari by initiating their first encounter with literacy, in both Portuguese and Kiña, their native language.

Based on Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, the literacy experience began through the means of simple drawings made collectively on the school’s chalkboard. Firstly, the students would draw fauna, flora, the human body, and their myths and lands; eventually the drawings became a means to interrogate the teachers about the violences they were submitted to during the construction of the highway: military hats, knives, rifles, helicopters, cars, white powder, and armed belts illustrate a cohesive semiotics of their encounter with Kamña (“civilised man”). The students would often bring these drawings to the teachers and ask: “Why did Kamña kill Kiña (Waimiri-Atroari)? *Apiyemiyekî?* (Why?).”

Almost thirty years later, Egydio Schwade still remembers the weight of the recurrent question posed by the Kiña and has kept the 3,000 drawings produced during this radical literacy experience. The simplicity and dignity of their question still silences today.

Apiyemiyekî? is an effort to make their question reverberate, looking for the sites in which these drawings were made in order to bring them to life: taking a drawing of the highway into the highway, a drawing

of the river close to the river, and trusting these locations as witnesses in the same way that the drawings are. The film becomes a layered portrait of this unearthing of sights, echoes, and visions based on the past-future-present of these drawings that resist passing.

It is essential to note that this film is part of a larger collective gesture made for the survey exhibition *Meta-Archive 1964-1985: Space for listening and reading on the histories of the Military Dictatorship in Brazil* led by researcher and curator Ana Pato. The exhibition was presented and commissioned by SESC São Paulo and enabled nine new artistic works that spell a critical constellation of the Military and Civil Dictatorship through polyphonic and deeply situated perspectives.

My first encounter with these drawings was through the *1st Report of the State Committee of Truth: The Genocide of the Waimiri-Atroari Peoples* (“1º Relatório do Comitê Estadual da Verdade O Genocídio do Povo Waimiri-Atroari”). The report thoroughly documents the violent tactics used by the military against the Waimiri-Atroari during the construction of the BR-174 highway. The drawings were annexed to the report and testify in simple, inventive, and concrete ways to the atrocities they had suffered, whilst also providing a critical and indigenous perspective on the Kamña (the “civilized”). They also radically transform what may be deemed forensic evidence according to Western legislation by offering “warm” rather than “cold” evidence. Further, they attest to the potency of collective thought, critical education, and the necessity of a deep and conscious examination

of the specters of the past in order to situate the present. Such confrontation seems essential to prevent this traumatic historical loop from its own playback by inserting fractures, new chapters, resonances that may transform the tape, the books, the statues.

In a contrary movement to most archival work produced according to a line of reasoning that has become common through its imposition by Western modernity, it seemed vital that this archive remained alive. That these drawings kept in the Amazon forest and so often prey to numerous forms of mold, mite infestation, and humidity need to remain alive as food for parasites, unmasterable, difficult to narrate, resisting the classification or order that are the true perpetrators of a dying spell.

In one of the final reflections of *Path to Extinction*, we see images of a rubber refinery followed by a narration that states: “the success of the industrial man signifies the end of the first peoples.” Yet, as the industrial man also collapses, what will be left? As the earth itself perishes, as the air becomes unbreathable, as huge metropolises suffer from their own poisoning, as the hinterlands suffer from land exhaustion, what will remain? Such greed and such sophisticated machines—what for? *Apiyemiyekî?*

—Ana Vaz, February 2020

Apuyemiyekî?, 2019

An archive of drawings made by the Waimiri-Atroari during their first literacy experience build a collective visual memory from their learning process, perspective and territory while documenting their encounter with “civilized man”.

16mm transferred to 2K, sound, color and black white, 27min.
Brazil/France/Netherlands/Portugal

a film by
Ana Vaz

made with the generous support of
Egydio Schwade

drawings
Escola Yawara, comunidade
Waimiri-Atroari

sound, image and edit
Ana Vaz

sound design
Ana Vaz + Nuno da Luz

sound mix
Miguel Martins

line producers
Keila Serruya, Rafael Moretti

co-produced by
Ana Vaz
Anze Perzin - Stenar Projects
Olivier Marboeuf - Spectre Productions
Annemiek van Gorp & Rene Goossens
- De Productie

commissioned by
Sesc Belenzinho, São Paulo
for the exhibition

Meta-Archive 1964-1985:
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are underpinned by experimental
collages of images and sounds, dis-
covered and produced, to reflect
upon situations and contexts which
are historically and geographically
marked by narratives of violence
and repression.