

## Acauã and the Ghost

*It was December 2018. We were in a ghostly state with the result of the presidential election. The exhibition took over a year to happen. On the eve of its opening, social isolation started due to the pandemic.*

*I would like to thank Rivane and Zé for this meeting. To Rica, for providing it with such passion and involvement. Ilê, always together. Cinthia, who put 'The Falling Sky' in my hands. And to all who offer their perspectives in this search for another path: Davi Kopenawa, Bruce Albert, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Christian Dunker, Ailton Krenak, Nurit Bensusan, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, Vladimir Safatle, Els Lagrou, Jeremy Narby, Cicero Constantino, Thiago Barbalho, Clarice Lispector and so many others. From their words I created this text.*

*Shut up acauã<sup>1</sup>*  
*So the rain comes back soon*  
*The stream starts the flood*  
*Someone cries out of fear*

José Bezerra, 2020

*It would be related with the repetition thing*  
*It would be the shadow*  
*It would be related to fantasy*  
*It would be under all layers of the unconscious*  
*It would be what comes back*  
*Precisely what is behind, there, bothering, haunting us*  
*We don't always have a name for the ghost*

Rivane Neuenschwander, 2020

The language that reflects things we live, our real language, a language that is depth-form. Two images, acauã and the ghost. Two stories in an exchange relationship. One of the themes that brings the two together is the theme of the return, if you like.

It's kind of a strange diegesis, (perhaps) a 'bizarre enunciative agency'. In fact, of course, it is always a way of speaking. The ways of speaking are often involved in these becoming, acauã in the sung word, in the dead trunk that turns into a bird, as well as the ghost in the written word, on the other side of the veiled glass, scraped in so many ways. Different temporalities, but (hardly) metamorphoses. We can think of ritual practices as the desire to live.

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<sup>1</sup> Acauã is a medium-sized bird of prey in the falcon family. Its scientific name *Herpetotheres cachinnans* means "Laughing snake hunter": from the Greek, *herpeton* = snake, snake, reptile; and *\_thēras* = hunter; and from Latin, *cachinnans*, *cahinnare* = laughing, to laugh, the one who laughs. In some regions, it is considered an ominous bird.

## ACT I - The beginning



*It was Omama who created the land and the forest, the wind that shakes its leaves, and the rivers whose water we drink. It is he who gave us life and made us many. Our elders have made us hear his name from the beginning. In the beginning, Omama and his brother Yoasi first came into existence alone. They did not have a father or a mother. Before them, in the beginning of time, only the people we call yarori existed. These ancestors were human with animal names. They constantly metamorphosed. Gradually, they became the game we hunt and eat today. Then it was Omama's turn to come into being and to recreate the forest, for the one that existed before was fragile. It constantly became other, until finally the sky fell on it. Its inhabitants were pushed underground, and became the meat-hungry ancestors we call aõpatari.*

*This is why Omama had to create a new, more solid forest, whose name is Hutukara. Omama set the image of this new land and carefully extended it little by little, like when one spreads clay to make a plate to bake a mahe cassava bread.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> KOPENAWA, Davi, ALBERT, Bruce. *A queda do céu – palavras de um xamã yanomami. (The Falling Sky – Words of a Yanomami Shaman)*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015. p.81.

## ACT II - The Encounter

– Around 1pm?

– Agreed! Send a message when you arrive, I'll go down and we'll have lunch first, then we'll go up to the studio, ok?

We ate in a Japanese restaurant next to the studio, then we went upstairs. The studio is on the top floor of a building. After coffee, Rivane showed us two of the tapestries that were ready for her next exhibition in New York. She unfolded it carefully, as Omama spread the image of the new land, and what we saw was good for the soul. The pieces were being manufactured by Uruguayan artist Jorge Soto, who learned the technique from master Ernesto Aroztegui. She also spoke of Elke Hülse and Magali Sánchez Vera, two other weavers who were collaborating in the manufacturing of the pieces. There are several techniques of these artifacts, the result is that each body of work has a different aesthetic.

We sat around the computer, and she showed us the images of the series *Caça ao Fantasma* (2018), a set of five polyptychs formed by six parts. The series shows attempts to reveal the word “ghost” on maps hidden by a white paint coat. Here also happens the participation and reception of the other. Imaginary cartographies were created from maps made by children, where each drew a place for their “ghost”. Six people were then invited to scrape the paint off until the encounter with the signifier. As a “scratch-off”, we see the register of different sensibilities in the access of something veiled, which brings us to the psychoanalytical experience, to the idea of naming in an attempt to dispel what has no name, something that haunts our spirits and our behaviors. And the different paths taken by each one in this process, the return, this repetition that creates almost a community of exchanges between subjectivities captured in this network of sliding effects. There's a piece of the other that's inside you.

That same afternoon we saw the selection of images of Zé Bezerra's sculptures. She commented on the sharp cuts he makes in the wood.

We booked our flights to Recife. Four hours on the road to Buíque. A small town in the countryside of Pernambuco. There we had another encounter. Cícero, a friend of Zé



Bezerra, took us to his place in Vale do Catimbau, between the *agreste* and the *sertão*. The Kapinawás live there, as well as the Xukurus and Fulni-ôs. Cícero explained that “Catimbau” in Tupi has three meanings - “witchcraft practice, small old pipe and ridiculous man.” In the landscape, rock formations of sandstones of different colors that date back more than 100 million years. The twisted trunks of the *caatinga*, tinamous crossing the road and flocks of yellow butterflies. We were on our way to meet Zé.

We arrived at dusk. He was waiting for us in the middle of many wooden beings in the yard. He introduced us one by one - the “first snake in the world”, the “jawbone with a pipe”, the “dawn haunt”, the “anteater”, so many and other stories. “They are family, and the detail is clear. I feel beauty, for me everyone is alive there.” The light started to fall. Still in the twilight, Zé took the berimbau, made with two aluminum kettles and a string, and sang to celebrate the meeting.

*Make us a coffee, will you  
Make us a coffee, will you  
Say I'm Zé Bezerra  
That will always give you pleasure  
I'm the dust the ground doesn't have  
Tell someone, I say it's gone  
I rang you, I'm ringing here  
I spend the night thinking  
aaaauããã aaaauããã  
Acauã singing  
aaaauããã aaaauããã  
I don't fool myself  
I take the wood  
The trunk of the same trunk  
I keep singing  
I keep drawing  
The whole night  
Tell me boy, where are you going to sleep  
Tell me, where will you live  
I know Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo,  
Maceió and Ceará  
I sing here, or anywhere  
Dawn prints the forehead  
Nobody sucks*

Say!  
And I, caboclo, all life making trunks  
But this is life  
I made this berimbau  
Singing I learned from it  
aaaauããã aaaauããã  
Acauã singing  
Under the umbu  
auáá aaauáá

The song, producing visions, guide us to see what we are looking for. *I'm the dust that the ground doesn't have*, sings Zé.

It dawned in Buíque, the “place of the snakes”. Many pastel colors, the windows still closed, two donkeys on the street. The author of *Vidas Secas*<sup>3</sup> grew up in this place, the eternal return of life in the *sertão*. Before meeting Zé again, we made a trail in the heat of the sun to one of the several rupestrian paintings in the valley. A scene of hunting or war, ocher, blood and fat. A group of men, erect sticks, choreographed movement in the ritual of life.

Zé welcomed us in the shade of his studio made of adobe and straw. “I arrived in the valley at 11 years old, my grandfather already lived here. He was a great hunter of animals in the woods, he planted potatoes, manioc, he built a flour house, and I, still a boy, very young, started to see his style.” He says that his grandfather was a *cangaceiro*, and his grandmother an indigenous, who used to hold the snakes in her hands. “So I got older up, I walked with a slingshot around here. I got married several times, had several families, made eight adobe houses around here. I thought that hunting was better than farming. If rained, there was crop. No rain, no crop. To drink water, I used to carry some ‘gourds’, fetching water from far to survive. Also hunting in the bushes. So I decided to set up a hammock. I left the house, set up a two-stick hammock. And that was when I had a dream, that a very tall person was born, the figure had a scarf on her head and talked to me while I slept in the hammock, it was a vision. “You were born an artist and will live from nature. The dead will feed the living beings”. I later understood those words, seeking in the woods. So I kept walking, kept

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<sup>3</sup> Translated into English as *Barren Lives*, *Vidas Secas* is a novel by twentieth-century Brazilian writer Graciliano Ramos, written in 1938. The book is written in cyclical manner, making it possible to read the first chapter as a continuation of the last chapter, reflecting the cycle of poverty and desolation in the Sertão.

walking, and dreaming, and waking up. Entering the bushes, I started to see things, snake-like roots, deer, everything. This is the story. The wood is dead in the middle of the caatinga. When it goes to the hands of an artist, it becomes alive”.

Zé Bezerra is an artist-shaman, he sees in the trunks, branches and roots images of animals he ate. “The alligator, the chameleon, the possum, the anteater, the cat are the ones we killed and ate. The snake that we killed, time brings it back in wood.” The hunt in the Amerindian shamanic ontology releases a double when it loses its body<sup>4</sup>. I asked him about this relationship. “The indigenous people are more like animals than people. Their rituals are different from our dance. My grandmother had a samba circle that I couldn’t understand. So many times I saw her swinging, a can filled with stones inside – there was no other maracaiá – and all that women singing together hei hei hei hei haaa ...” His feet dance on the ground to the grandmother's rhythm. Before we left, he still took the berimbau.

*Passing in every corner of the land  
I heard a noisy wind  
I heard a singing acauã  
I don't know if it was in the present  
Or even if it was in the past  
There I was watching  
That time that stopped me  
And said listen a little more  
This is the singing of a beautiful animal  
Acauãããã cauãããã  
Auáá aaauáá*

What makes an encounter? Two ways as to unveiling or disclosure. In the *Caça ao Fantasma* series, the essence of the word is to manifest what is hidden. And in this *pathos* of knowledge, it controls the visible, collects the signs of the social world, traveling through the labyrinths of the desiring self. Through the various shortcuts of interpretation, Rivane Neuenschwander invites us to circulate around the imaginary and symbolic becomings of this phantasmatic cartography. In Zé Bezerra’s sculptures, it is the visible that occurs, as in

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<sup>4</sup> “From there, the shaman sees the world through the eyes of the anaconda, Yube, who has the power to transform forms, he will be able to see the spirits of the hunt that are doing him harm. This “doing harm” that hunting does is because the hunt in Amerindian shamanistic ontology in general, in our case Kaxinawa, releases a double when it loses its body. So there is a spirit that has an agency, that is people, that knows how to reveal themselves as people. In this ritual of the vine, the pairs of these beings who were once people in mythical time, come to avenge themselves, as in a war, what I call an 'aesthetic battle'. " See *Entre xamãs e artistas: entrevista com Els Lagrou*. <https://bit.ly/2Vjn9S0>

an apparition. The acauã, the wild cat, the mocó appear on the wood for the artist, who has in mind the pregnant moment of the action. A perspective where the human extends to all existing beings. Bezerra sings the sayings of the *jurutê* - indigenous name for *peroba*. Through these sensitivities, the show presents two modes of being in this world, its external and internal distances, its variations that relate, its differences that reveal the multiple views of the point.

ACT III - Becoming is the process of desire, desire is the production of the real<sup>5</sup>

We had only received *Caça ao Fantasma II*, the others were still in the storage. It arrived in a box, a wrapper of many layers, almost a cocoon. The vulnerable texture of the white coat on the glass that covers the drawing, the ghost as an articulator of the real. The great Other<sup>6</sup> as a symbolic field, that kind of intelligence, where the unconscious is structured like a language. The message leaves the subject, reaches the other imaginary and, in this relationship, I also position myself in an imaginary way, the other to whom I address myself is a symmetrical mirror of myself. Understanding is an imaginary relationship. As we get closer, differences appear, and as we distend, similarities that were not noticeable appear. This production process in the encounter between subjects in the context of language is where the unconscious is shown as an affection, a set of effects of an ethical nature. Every language deviates and travels, there is never a direct meaning. The white walls were painted gray, the same shade as the ghost drawing<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Production and becoming: two different movements, then. Both involve nature, both are intensive and pre-representative; in a sense, they are two names of a single movement, since becoming is the process of desire, desire is the production of reality, becoming and multiplicity are one, becoming is a rhizome, and the rhizome is the production process of the unconscious. But in another sense they are definitely not the same movement: between production and becoming, "the path is not the same in both directions". Production is a process in which the identity of man and nature is realized, in which nature reveals itself as a production process. On the contrary, it is an "unnatural" participation (contra-nature) between man and nature; it is an instantaneous movement of capture, symbiosis, transversal connection between heterogeneous. VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *Metafísicas Canibais, Elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, n-1 edições, p.88.

<sup>6</sup> In seminar 11, Lacan affirms: "Other is the place where the chain of signifier is located, which controls everything that will be able to become present in the subject, it is the field of that living where the subject has to appear". LACAN, J. "O sujeito e o outro (I): a alienação". LACAN, J. O sujeito e o outro (I): a alienação. In: *O SEMINÁRIO — Livro 11: os quatro conceitos fundamentais da psicanálise*. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 1979b. Cap.XVI, p.193-4.

<sup>7</sup> Lacan seeks to account for the opacity of the real by introducing it within the field of psychoanalysis, as a necessary and non-eliminable conceptual element. His work is oriented towards "a theory that includes a lack, to be found at all levels, inscribing itself here as indeterminacy, there as certainty and forming the knot of the uninterpretable." See LACAN, Jacques. (1966 / 1998). "A ciência e a verdade". In: *Escritos*. Translation Vera Ribeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 1998, p. 338

We humans are composed of the same matter, the same chemistry, the same carbon, the same star dust, the energetic material that crosses the universe, *the dust that the ground does not have*. In Amerindian cosmology, the human species is not a separate species. The indigenous people conceive of every form of existence as having a human dimension. We, children of modern cosmology, understand that what is common between men and animals is the animality of men. From the indigenous point of view, it is the humanity of animals, that is, the fact that in the beginning of time all beings were human type. The myths describe a world in which all beings manifest the capacity for conscience, volition and intentionality. The cosmic radiation background of this universe is human. The myths are speciation stories of this primordial continuum that was essentially human. An infinite density of humanity that explodes. In this perspective, all beings see the world in the same way. Subjectivity is a collective issue. Jaguars, vultures see the world exactly as we see it. The worlds of these species also include the dead, who see the living as specters, and see themselves as alive.

Shamans can see the worlds on both sides, discern the difference and translate. If all species see the world in the same way, the only thing that may be changing is the world, not the way of seeing it. That's the view of the point. One perspective on several worlds, different bodies. The jaguar sees blood as wine because it has the body of a jaguar. There are a number of correlations between terms. "The problem is the mistake, you think of wine, when it comes to blood.<sup>8</sup>"

Zé's work arrived in late afternoon. They were placed in the room, directly on the floor, the light was dimming. Night fell, and the animals were moving, talking, regrouping. This is how the set up happened.

The other morning, we received the others *Caça ao Fantasma*. On the eve of the opening, the *Dawn Haunt* and the *First Snake in The World* arrived from Buíque.

That same day, the social isolation initiated in the city.

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<sup>8</sup> VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. Lecture on Amazonian Indigenous Thought in the Departamento de Antropologia do Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, on 16/06/2009 (<https://bit.ly/2KS3x1p>)

## ACT IV - The Code and the Snake

We took *Pangaea's Diaries* out of the can, a film that Rivane made in 2008, where ants interact with a world map of thin slices of meat in the form of the supercontinent, which existed 300 million years ago. The format is 16mm, for decades the most used gauge in experimental films and documentaries of direct cinema. She says she made this film in the kitchen between maternal care for her young children. There are several stills on the drift of tectonic plates in the transition from the Paleozoic to Mesozoic era. Creating variations of the shapes of the earth's crust in fine meat, she then waited till the ants would take over the landscape on the white china dish. A work of repetition and waiting, in proximity to the cyclical temporality of life. Beings in search of resources to survive. The projection of these images with the sound of the mechanical gear of the projector in looping reminds us that the Anthropocene is simply one of the ages of the Earth.

At the beginning of its existence, around 4.5 billion years ago, planet Earth was an inhospitable environment for life. Like a lava ball, its surface was radioactive, the water existed only in the form of vapor, and its atmosphere had no breathable oxygen, only poisonous gases. Approximately 3.9 billion years ago, the earth's surface cooled enough to form a crust on the surface above the lava. Life and therefore DNA appeared shortly after that. During 2.5 billion years of life on Earth, the planet was inhabited only by an anaerobic bacterium that lived in the water. Perhaps it should be borne in mind that "the myth proposes an ontological regime commanded by a fluent intensive difference, which focuses on each point of a heterogeneous continuum, where the transformation precedes the form, the relationship is superior to the terms, and the interval is interior to be. Each mythical being, being pure virtuality, "was before" what "would be later", and for this reason it is not, as it does not remain, nothing currently determined."<sup>9</sup> In these 4 billion years, DNA has multiplied in an incalculable number of species, but it has always remained the same. Its double helix structure is the master of the code of life and its transformation, very close to the shape of the mystical serpent that appears in the shamanic experiences of people from different corners of the earth. The *First Snake in The World*. Back to the image of the valley with its rock formations. "Catimbau" comes from the term "catimbó", a ritual performed by

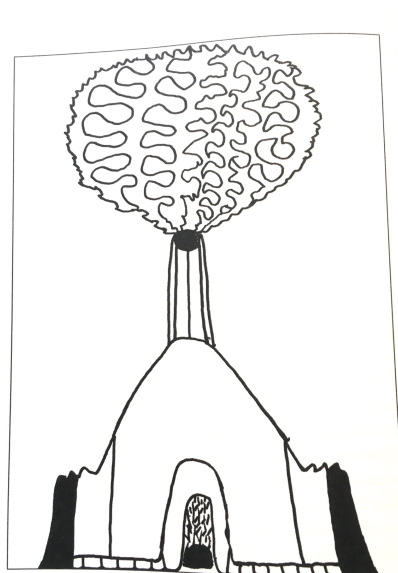
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<sup>9</sup> VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *Metafísicas Canibais, Elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, n-1 edições, p.30.

indigenous shamans with dances and prayers to cure diseases of the body and spirit. The indigenous peoples have other ways of inhabiting time.

## ACT V - Dark and Tangled Trail

*In the beginning, the land of the ancient whites was similar to ours. [...] But their thoughts became more and more lost in a dark and tangled trail. His wisest ancestors, those whom Omama created and to whom he gave words, died. After them, their children and grandchildren had many children. They began to reject the words of their ancients as if they were lies and gradually forgot about them. They cleared the entire forest of their land to make bigger and bigger swiddens. Omama had taught his parents to use some metal tools. But they were no longer satisfied with that. They desired more solid and sharper metal, which he had hidden under the earth and water. There they began to pluck the ore from the earth with voracity. They built factories to cook them and manufacture goods in large quantities. Then their thoughts stuck with them and they fell in love with these objects as if they were beautiful women. This made them forget the beauty of the forests.<sup>10</sup>*



Drawing by Davi Kopenawa

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<sup>10</sup> KOPENAWA, Davi, ALBERT, Bruce. *A queda do céu – palavras de um xamã yanomami. (The Falling Sky – Words of a Yanomami Shaman)*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015. p.407.

## ACT VI – The Empty

Here between four walls.

The therapeutic function of the real. The collapse of the image of the world that guides our desires. Anguish, the resizing of the field of experience. The crossing of the ghost.

The empty.

The space itself is, in some way, a being.

We were the center, and we became the periphery, with its royal miseries and epidemics, brought from overseas. Labor and pain arose. Something about this living structure makes us feel each unfolding of this transition. “Very difficult amalgamation will be the alloy of so much heterogeneous metal in a solid and political body”, wrote the mineralogist in a letter to the Portuguese ambassador in England<sup>11</sup>. More than thousand people lived in this place, where everything became too little for the taste of visitors.

Then the media noises haunt us in the dark and tangled trails of this network that is placed on the horizon of the relationships between the subjects. Thought inevitably becomes a commodity and language is at its disposal. Narcissism takes on a certain protagonism in this paranoid and symptomatic anguish. Perhaps we have built a way of life that brutally prevents us from having another experience.

But from time to time, art still leads us to this encounter, a kind of explosion of language, where everything looks at everything, everything lives the other. “Beings exist for others as ways of seeing themselves. There are several ways that mean seeing. One looking at the other without seeing her, one having the other, one eating the other, one just being in a corner and the other being there too. All of this also means seeing. In that desert, things know things.”<sup>12</sup>

It may be that, in your land, the stones are lifeless. Here they grow and are therefore alive. And some still dance to suspend the sky.

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<sup>11</sup> José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva wrote the passage to the Portuguese ambassador to England, Dom Domingos de Sousa Coutinho, in 1813.

<sup>12</sup> LISPECTOR, Clarice. *A paixão segundo G.H.* Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2009.



The idea of the encounter is a promise.

The eternal return of the encounter.<sup>13</sup>

## ACT VII, or Epilogue

*Well then. The “Indians” were and are the first Un-Volunteers of the Fatherland<sup>14</sup>. The indigenous people saw falling on their heads a “Fatherland”, which they did not ask for, and which only brought them death, disease, humiliation, slavery, and dispossession. Here we feel like the “Indians”, like all the indigenous people in Brazil: as forming the huge contingent of Un-Volunteers of the Fatherland. The un-volunteers of a fatherland we don't want, of a government (or misgovernment) that doesn't represent us and has never represented us. No one has ever represented them, those who feel indigenous. Only we, ourselves, can represent us, or perhaps, only we can say that we represent the land - this land. Not “our land”, but the land where we are from, to which we belong. We are The Un-Volunteers of the Fatherland. Because another is our will. Un-Volunteers of all Fatherlands, desert them!<sup>15</sup>*

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

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<sup>13</sup> KRENAK, Ailton. “Eterno retorno do encontro”, published in: Novaes, Adauto (org.), *A Outra Margem do Ocidente*, Minc-Funarte/Companhia Das Letras, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> In original, “Involuntários da Pátria”.

<sup>15</sup> Public lecture held during the April Indigenous Act, Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro 20/04/2016.