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Cosmopolitical technologies and the demarcation of screen space at Cine Kurumin: activating immersive shifts in imaginaries, representation, and politics

SARAH SHAMASH

Independent Media Artist and Doctoral Candidate, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of British Columbia.

ABSTRACT

"Our fight today is to demarcate our space on the screen, when we can no longer demarcate our lands." I cite Ailton Krenak, one of Brazil's most influential Indigenous leaders, at his keynote address at the opening of the Cine Kurumin film festival in Salvador, Brazil, to engage with cinematic languages on the margins of dominant media. I experience the festival as an active immersion into imaginaries that forward the process of "decoloniality" (Mignolo). As Sueli Maxakali articulated during a roundtable of Indigenous women filmmakers, the Shaman must dream in order to choose the name of the films made in her community. The production processes of these films were conceived outside the structures of any capitalist market economy; rather, the festival offered an alternate space to take a deliberate leap into expressive audio and oral visual experiences, cultures, languages, politics, and imaginaries resisting ongoing violence entrenched in capital and coloniality. Through a discussion of the festival curation, roundtable discussion, and through a film analysis, I elaborate how the sacred, spiritual, and social are constituent elements of cosmopolitical visions. I argue that film and video as cosmopolitical technologies are unsettling established conceptions of nature and culture, of politics and representation both on and off-screen. Witnessing the Cine Kurumin festival – the totality of the experience becomes an immersive and transformative space for decolonizing the imaginary while disturbing hegemonic political, conceptual, and representational agendas.



<u>Figure 1.</u> Production still from Tekoha, Sound of the Earth (2017) Dir. Rodrigo Arajeju, Valdelice Veron. Image courtesy of Rodrigo Arajeju.

INTRODUCTION

Wider fields of view and surround sounds, stereoscopic visuals, the gaming environment, and virtual realities, measured by the concept of being present in an enhanced mediated environment, have come to define our understanding of immersive technologies. I share a quote which poignantly articulates the power structures and spheres of influence behind our understanding of these dominant mediascapes, technological advances and conceptions of modernity to highlight the need for alternative paradigms. As Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, the Brazilian anthropologist, sums it up so well here: "Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Wall Street, NASA and the Pentagon are icons of a political economy based on production, dissemination and reproduction of images, high technology, financial capital and military power." [1] We can conceive of the above as "technologies of domination." [2] Today, I want to reflect on how subalternized forms of knowing are moving into virtual and screen spaces; how we can think of this knowledge as a cosmopolitical technology from an Indigenous subject position as witnessed in the Cine Kurumin Film Festival in Salvador, Brazil; and how it is providing a transformative and immersive space for decolonizing the imaginary.

In this spirit, I conceive of the Cine Kurumin film festival as an arena, a site, a conceptual space, an imagined Indigenous village (a point I return to later), and a process that is neither spectacular nor immediate, yet one that provides long-term impact on knowledge and ways of being that are challenging the production of coloniality. [3] My discussion elaborates how the sacred, spiritual, social, and quotidian, as presented in the films, are constituent elements of cosmopolitical visions; I argue that film and video as cosmopolitical technologies are unsettling established conceptions of

cinema, politics and representation. In this way, the logic and functioning of this space not only challenge western modernities but also warrant attention in understanding other media worlds that constitute less explored immersive experiences. Immersive technologies in the Global South, from an Indigenous centered cinema, thus make visible the power structures of economic inequalities and their intertwined relationships with history, the geopolitics of knowledge production, and cultural disempowerment. [4] In this way, Indigenous centered cinema's framework for defining immersive technology recontextualized the latter set of codes and protocols based in cultural politics, cosmopolitical practices, or "modernities of the Non-West" [5], thereby contributing to a media theory that addresses the inequalities of knowledge production, and geopolitical and economic power structures.

Ailton Krenak, one of Brazil's most influential Indigenous leaders, in a keynote address at the opening of the Cine Kurumin film festival, says, "Our fight today is to demarcate our space on the screen, when we can no longer demarcate our lands." [6] This demarcation of virtual land is part of a fight against colonization and imperialism, part of a movement "to decolonize the 'mind' (Thiongo) and the 'imaginary' (Gruzinski) – that is knowledge and being." [7] My discussion of shifting imaginaries through an Indigenous centric cinema honours the Indigenous struggle and Indigenous sovereignty in all of its forms. I use visual and representational sovereignty as overarching concepts to broaden an understanding of immersive media practices. Specifically, I look at three aspects of the festival: 1) the festival curation; 2) what emerged in the round table discussions and cinematic practices of Indigenous women filmmakers; 3) the cosmopolitics of representation in the case of the Guarani-Kaiowa's struggle to reclaim their land in Mato Grosso do Sul in the film *Tekoha, Sound of the Earth* (2017) Dir. Rodrigo Arareju, Valdelice Veron.

To better define sovereignty, I defer to Jolene Rickard, a visual historian, artist, curator, and director of the American Indian Program at Cornell University, who identifies herself as Haudenosaunee. She explains "I would still defend the position that the appropriation of the term sovereignty was and remains a critical source of self-determination for Indigenous peoples globally." [8] While the online Oxford dictionary's first definition of sovereignty is "Supreme power or authority: 'the sovereignty of Parliament'," [9] Indigenous sovereignty views power to the people and their land as indivisible: "our sovereignty is based on our spiritual relation with Mother Earth, whom we recognize as a point of meeting with the supreme creator and the source of life." [10] This Latin American articulation of Indigenous sovereignty in Abya Yala (the Panamanian Kuna people use this word for the Americas pre-contact) [11] echoes that of the First Peoples of Turtle Island as articulated by Rickard: "Haudenosaunee political structure may be the oldest continuously operating governmental system in the world and arises out of the consciousness that it is the renewable quality of the earth's ecosystems that sustains life." [12] This quote which highlights the earth's ecosystems as central to Indigenous life has entered dominant mediascapes and social consciousness over the last few decades.

Starting in the mid-80s, media savvy Kayapó leaders such as Paulo Payakan, Raoni, and Kube-i garnered wide media attention and coverage through the art of translating Indigenous cultural values into terms that outsiders could understand. "Like the Xavante [Mário Juruna], the Kayapó capitalized on Indigenous cultural elements such as elaborate body decorations and spectacular dances." [13] The visit by British rock star Sting to Kayapó villages accompanied by photographers from *Vogue* and *People* magazine, and the highly mediatized Altamira demonstration in April of 1989 generated international media attention and widespread foreign support.

In Brazil, in Latin America, and on a global scale, Indigenous media, mobilizations, and movements have drawn attention to expanding extractive industries, particularly mining and agro-industrial enterprises, and these enterprises' infringement on Indigenous territories, on Indigenous rights, and on the rights of other-than-human beings, or on the "Rights of Nature." [14] Briefly, the Rights of Nature recognize that nature, the trees, mountains, animals, and oceans have legal rights, just as us people do, to exist in a holistic understanding that all ecosystems on our planet are deeply intertwined. Using First Nations' notions of sovereignty, such as that of the Haudenosaunee, as a starting point, I apply the notion of Indigenous sovereignty to an Indigenous Latin American context, that of Abya Yala. In the context of the Cine Kurumin Festival, indigeneity is established in a cinematic space, in a mediated space that offers a highly immersive non-western epistemological modernity. By going from a macro view of the festival, i.e. its overarching curation, to the micro, i.e. a film analysis, my objective is to uncover the logic of mediated spheres in the festival through a geopoliticized lens that engages a Latin American centric, decolonial, and indigenized reading of immersive technology.

FESTIVAL CURATION

The festival's curatorial vision is centered on the organizational principles of this dictum: "From my village I see the world." The positionality of this phrase is directly tied to an insider's view of their universe, world, village, community, family. This phrase becomes a provocation to witness the multiplicity of perspectives and cosmovisions presented in an Indigenous centric cinema from across the Americas, and, internationally, from the Guajara people to the Pataxó, the Guarani Kaiowá to the Munduruku, Tupinambá, Guarani Mbya, Krahô, Cree, Kwakwaka'wakw, Maya, Xavante, Anishnaabe, Innu, Kuikuro, Navajo, Pankararu, Fulni-ô, Shiwiar, etc. This 6th edition of the festival also had thematic focuses on Indigenous women, the Indigenous Northeast of Brazil, and the Xingu river, park and, its people (Volta Grande do Xingu). [15] The festival was curated by Thaís Brito, Aline Frey, Naine Terena, and Ana Carvalho through a general call for films, as well as invitations to specific filmmakers and films.

Significantly, the 2017 6th Edition of Cine Kurumin was held in two locations in the state of Bahia in Brazil: first in Salvador, Bahia from July 12-16, and then in a Tupinambá village in Bahia from August 16-20. The festival's presence in the large city of Salvador brought many Indigenous filmmakers, leaders, and other allies committed to Indigenous cinema from all over Brazil and other parts of Latin America in a mediated sphere that aimed at reproducing the immersive intimacy of an Indigenous village through curated film projections and the festival's aesthetics and politics of conviviality and community. [16] Many of the Indigenous filmmakers were connected with each other through a familiar circuit of Indigenous film and video in Brazil and Latin America; many were also connected through family relations and through solidarity in a shared history of ongoing colonization, in a shared struggle for self-determination on and off screen that challenges and reimagines the superimposed colonial fantasies of Indigeneity, as reproduced in dominant media channels and mainstream white society. Indeed, the community of filmmakers and content creators at Cine Kurumin actively demarcated an expressive space within the framework of the festival through indigenized knowledge production.

As articulated by Mignolo:

Under the spell of neo-liberalism and the magic of the media promoting it, modernity and modernization, together with democracy, are being sold as a package trip to the promised land of happiness, a paradise where, for example, when you can no longer buy land because land itself is limited and not producible or monopolized by those who control the concentration of wealth, you can buy virtual land!! Yet, when people do not buy the package willingly or have other ideas of how economy and society should be organized, they become subject to all kinds of direct and indirect violence. [17]

Through a solidarity of resistance to the above ("neo-liberalism and the magic of media promoting it") and through the knowledge of a people who, indeed, "have other ideas of how economy and society should be organized", as well as those victims of violence, as expressed through the films, discussions, and roundtables, strong camaraderie was created throughout the space of the festival. In a book of essays by and interviews with Ailton Krenak, which was available for purchase at the festival, Krenak explains how over the last 500 years, different people have come into Indigenous territories and built an economy and culture of extractivism [18] completely at odds with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies.

Krenak's speech at the festival, consistent with his history as an Indigenous leader, scholar, activist, and spokesperson, clearly reinforces his ideas on the interconnected nature of Indigenous economies and organization arising from a relationship to the land and its ecosystems. As part of an interconnected, interdependent philosophy and world order, which places the land as central to survival, sovereignty, knowledge and being, the hosting of a film festival in an Indigenous village provides an immersive environment into the cosmopolitics articulated by Krenak and other age old Indigenous philosophies and claims. The curatorial vision of the festival: "From my village I see the world" becomes experiential, interactive, and participatory. The lived experience of a festival in an Indigenous Tupinambá village immerses both the village into a cinematic space and the cinematic community into the daily life of the village, thereby creating a third space. The context of the festival, through this constructed space and community, only tangible during the time of the festival, becomes a collective immersion into cinematic culture and Indigenous cultural politics; in effect, lines between culture, nature, technology, and politics are blurred as part of a cosmopolitics.



<u>Figure 3.</u> Roundtable discussion, "Amerindians, Cinema of Indigenous women." July 13th 2017. Photo taken by the author.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

I would like to turn my attention to one of the roundtable discussions at the festival to explore how it contributes to the above articulations of the festival as an immersive space of epistemic delinking. [19] The roundtable titled: "Amerindias: Cinema de mulheres Indigenas" or (Amerindians: Cinema of Indigenous women) featured four Brazilian Indigenous women: Graciela Guarani, Olinda Muniz, Patricia Ferreira and Sueli Maxacali.

Patricia Ferreira Yxapy, one of the filmmakers from the Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective, and a festival judge, explains, as echoed by her colleagues in this discussion, that when making a film, "we think about the struggles our leaderships are guiding, the demarcation of our lands, education, health - those things are informing our audiovisual work." She expresses that the gaze of Indigenous women is distinct, not only from non-Indigenous people, but from the men in her community; the Indigenized female gaze is turned more inward and toward the feminine which includes childcare and the holding of sacred knowledge. Although the participation of women in her community may be less visible in the struggle for Indigenous rights in an exogenous sphere, she explains that it is just as critical. She also discussed the collective nature of filmmaking in her community and within the Mbya Cinema collective, a collective she is the only female member of.



<u>Figure 2.</u> Patricia Ferreira Yxapy November 26th 2016, screenshot, video interview. With consent from Patricia Ferreira Yxapy.

When I interviewed her in 2016 in Olinda, Pernambuco, [20] she explained how she and her fellow filmmakers think of the camera itself as a Guarani person. By personifying the camera and reconceiving it as a Guarani entity, the filmmakers thus imbue it with sovereign cultural, spiritual, and social potential. To follow this logic, the embodiment of video technology as Guarani Mbya is to understand the filmmaking process as holistic, interconnected to community, nature and the cosmos. In this case, these Indigenous filmmakers are not shooting a subject matter outside of themselves; rather, they are working and creating within a collective, interdependent, and interconnected understanding of their world order, positioning video technology as immersed into their ecosystem.

FILM ANALYSIS - TEKOHA, SOUND OF THE EARTH [21]

This black-and-white film opens with a close-up of a small Guarani-Kaiowá girl sleeping. As the camera zooms out from her sleeping, dreaming face, we are immersed into her universe through sounds of waking animals, birds, and insects alive in the forest. Her eyes blink as she awakes; we cut to a hand held medium close-up of the young girl's back as we follow her movement through the forest. Sounds of the forest and girls' laughter and singing are our soundscape while the camera moves through the beauty of this land, through the POV of young girls discovering the magic of the forest, swinging in the trees, and splashing in the rivers.

As the film progresses, we move from this dreamlike atmosphere of the innocence, magic, and joy of a free childhood to an ominous tone where we see a grown woman asleep and dreaming after stoking her fire in the darkness of night. This dream starts in the same river where the young girls

were happily splashing; yet the non-diegetic sound is threatening and a wide shot reveals a giant pipeline running through the river where the girls are playing. Non-diegetic sound effectively alerts us to this woman's very real nightmare as the camera cuts from close-ups of her dreaming eyes to ghostly black and white images of what appears to be a soybean refinery plant. The next sequence shows our adult female protagonist walk through the forest to what seems like an abrupt end to her forested haven. The lush scenery is literally cut in half in a frame that shows the woman exit one landscape and enter another dry and clearcut land, descrated by commercially cultivated soybean and sugarcane plantations. A wide shot of the desolate landscape with a single cross standing suggests the death of both the land and a loved one.



<u>Figure 4.</u> Screen shot from Tekoha, Sound of the Earth (2017) Dir. Rodrigo Arajeju, Valdelice Veron. Image courtesy of Rodrigo Arajeju.

Several films in the festival spoke to the history and current reality of the Guarani Kaiowá in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul, "where the Guarani once occupied a homeland of forests and plains totaling some 350,000 square kilometers". [22] Today the Guarani Kaiowá live on small patches of land surrounded by cattle ranches and vast fields of soya and sugar cane as part of Brazil's highly developed biofuels industry as witnessed in this film. Many Guarani Kaiowá have no land at all and live camped on roadsides as witnessed in the film *Martírio* [23], also featured in the festival. The Guarani Kaiowá are constantly threatened by violent attacks against their communities; evicted at gunpoint from their lands, many Guarani leaders have been murdered by ranchers. Valdelice Verón, protagonist and co-author of *Tekoha, Sound of the Earth*, is an internationally respected and recognized Guarani Kaowá spokesperson and warrior fighting for her people's human and land rights. She is the daughter of the late Guarani Kaowá chief Marcos Verón, who was brutally murdered in a crime related to the agribusiness industry in 2003 in Mato Grosso do Sul. In *Tehoha, Sound of the Earth*, we see the struggle of the women in Valdelice's community who are mourning this genocide while showing their resilience and spiritual strength as Guarani Kaiowá.

Although this film blurs lines between a political documentary, a fiction film, an experimental film and a film essay, shots of the Brazilian flag and of the parliamentary buildings in Brasilia (part of a dream sequence) politicize this film and point to abuses and asymmetries of power. The voiceover accentuates the subject position: we hear Valdelice say: "This is how we live, awaiting the demarcation of our lands. This wait is killing the Kaiowá people. Our chiefs are murdered, our women raped. We wash the sacred land with our blood on the agribusiness plantations", while we see nocturnal images of a wide-shot of a machine spraying the fields with toxic agrichemicals. Another visual and metaphoric juxtaposition consists of images of the agribusiness industry, an industry based on commercial principals of using "advanced" technologies in agricultural production; age-old technologies arising from Indigenous women's knowledge of the forest are juxtaposed with the agribusiness images. We witness a matriarchy of spiritual guides known as the *nhandesys* in the Guarani language [24], as they move through their territories performing sacred and spiritual rites with their daughters and granddaughters. We hear Valdelice's voice-over: "we are the Kaiowá people, known as the woodlands people. The woodlands are our home, that's why they call us Kaiowá. The woodlands provide us with food, medicine and a home. ... This is the sacred life for the Kaiwá people."

Video technology is used in this film as a tool for decolonizing knowledge, yet as Freya Schiwy points out, such use:

raises questions about how it [video] engages or resists mainstream cinematic codes that have inscribed colonial and patriarchal forms of seeing. ... Both as discourse and labour product, film and video are tightly bound to the geopolitics of knowledge that comes into existence with the colonization of the Americas." [25]

Along with the advent of agribusiness, (a term coined in 1957 by Goldberg and Davis) when the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations [26] started promoting agribusiness in developing nations, the imperialist influence of cinema in Latin America has had profound effects on collective imaginaries. Hollywood cinema set the bar for notions of beauty, happiness, civilization, art, productivity, culture, nature, Indigeneity, blackness, so on *ad infinitum*.

Tekoha, Sound of the Earth is about returning to traditional territory, their "Tekoha," an important word in Guarani cosmology [27] related to the Guarani Kaiowá struggle for the demarcation of their ancestral lands. Ultimately, the film's audio-visual syntax leads to epistemic shifts in knowledge production through a cinema of sovereignty and resistance. In the film's voice over, we hear Valdelice say: "This land has an owner, us the Kaiowá people. ... I will stay here and, if necessary, I will also die for the land." This statement echoes the highly mediatized 2012 open letter by the Guarani Kaiowá tribe to the Government of Brazil stating that they would rather be killed and buried with their ancestors than expelled from their traditional territories. The letter, [28] which was widely disseminated on Twitter and Facebook, generated such a massive response and online mobilization that the government was forced to address the issue and suspended (at least temporarily) the operation to expel the Guarani-Kaiowá from their encampment.

The solution is precarious and comes with the cost of violence as expressed by Valdelice in this film. Yet, her cosmopolitics, her articulation of resistance to capitalist greed and neoliberal worldviews (also expressed in the above-mentioned letter) exemplifies Krenak's statement on the

demarcation of screen space. Indigenizing screen space was a frame of reference that pervaded the politics of the festival as a whole, with the aim of producing "other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics." [29] Cosmopolitics is elaborated here from an Indigenous "perspectivism" where Viveiros De Castro outlines how "classical categories of 'nature', 'culture' and 'supernature'" [30] are redefined from an Amerindian perspective. Thus, from an Indigenous subject position (as articulated by Viveiros De Castro) which is founded on "the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures... a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity" [31], the cosmopolitical expresses how Valdelice's viewpoint considers and connects the cosmological and political in relation to how humans and other than humans, (animals, spirits, oceans, mountains, rivers, trees, plants, and even technology) see and relate to each other.

I would add that taken together, the film screenings, festival curation, locations, roundtables, workshops, keynotes, etc., produce new queries in media theory and understandings of immersive technologies as sites of epistemic transformation and Indigenous sovereignty. The festival itself had an immersive power not only in producing representational sovereignty onscreen but also extending Indigenous sovereignty off screen. Beyond Foucault's Euro-western framework of his "technology of self", the cosmopolitical becomes a technology of being as part of a system of interconnected and inter-dependent multi-naturalisms. [32] In brief, free from the bounds of the space-time of cinematic universes and festivals, the *conscientizacão* [33] of knowledge systems and cosmopolitical technologies generated at Cine Kurumin are ultimately shifting imaginaries through gradual yet immersive technologies of decoloniality.

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ENDNOTES

1. Ribeiro, Gustavo Lins. "Post-imperialism: A Latin American Cosmopolitics," *Série Antropologia*, Brasília, v. 375, p.1-18, (2006): 9.

2. The term "technologies of dominance" is used here as expressed by Foucault. See Martin, Luther H., Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, and Michel Foucault. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock, (1988).

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5. Ibid., 70.

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11. Abya Yala is the Kuna people's word for the America's meaning "land in its fill maturity." Takir Mamani, the Bolivian Aymara leader, one of the founders of the Indigenous rights movement in Bolivia, argues for the term Abya Yala and for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous organizations to use the term in their official declarations to refer to the American continent. See Del Valle Escalante, Emilio. "Self-Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala." E-International Relations. May 20, 2014. Accessed Jan. 4, 2018. <u>https://www.e-</u>

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13. Conklin, Beth A., and Laura R. Graham. "The Shifting Middle-Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics." American Anthropologist, New Series, Vol. 97, No. 4 (Dec., 1995): 700.

14. For more on the "Rights of Nature" the book, *The Rights of Nature: The Case for the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*, provides an in-depth understanding of the above issues with writings by over 30 Indigenous and non-Indigenous earth activists.
15. See the festival catalogue for the 6th edition of the Cine Kurumin Indigenous International

15. See the festival catalogue for the 6th edition of the Cine Kurumin Indigenous International Film Festival for more detail.

16. The term conviviality is not used here in the usual English sense of being jovial, hearty, and festive, but rather, is used to mean co-existing and sharing and living together in harmony, a closer translation of the word "convivir" in Portuguese (Overing, Passes 2000). In the context of the festival, conviviality designates a shared experience of affirmation of and solidarity with Indigenous communities, culture, language, history, struggles and rights through cinema. For more on the aesthetics of conviviality see Overing, Joanna and Alan Passes. *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The aesthetics of conviviality in Native Amazonia.* NY: Routledge University Press, 2000.

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- 18. Krenak, Ailton, et al. Ailton Krenak. Beco do Azougue Editorial Ltda., (2015):52.
- 19. See Mignolo, Walter D. "Delinking." Cultural Studies, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, (2007): 449-514.

20. Patricia Ferreira Yxapy (Indigenous filmmaker and member of the Guarani Cinema Collective), interview by Sarah Shamash, November 26th, 2016, interview transcript.

21. *Tekoha, Som da Terra* (Eng. *Tekoha, Sound of the Earth*). Directed by Rodrigo Arajeju and Valdelice Veron. 7G Documenta Productions, 2017.

22. Survival International. "Guarani." Brazilian Indians - Survival International. Accessed Jan 2, 2018. <u>https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/guarani</u>.

23. Martírio. Directed by Vincent Carelli, Vídeo nas aldeias, 2016.

24. See Rodrigo Arajeju's text "Memorial Tekoha" in the Cine Kurumin Catalogue for more.

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27. See Cine Kurumin catalogue p. 85 "Memorial Tekoha" by Rodrigo Arajeju.

28. For more on the Guarani Kaiowá open letter to the Brazilian government see Moreira, Sara. "Brazil: The Cry of Resistance of the Guarani Kaiowá · Global Voices." Global Voices. October 26, 2012. Accessed May 28, 2018. <u>https://globalvoices.org/2012/10/25/brazil-guarani-kaiowa-indigenous-resistance/</u>.

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30. Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Pespectivism." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 4., No. 3 (Sept., 1998): 469.
31. Ibid, 471.

32. See Eduardo Viveiros De Castro and Peter Skafish. *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-structural Anthropology*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

33. Paulo Freire's theory of "conscientizacao" is used here to express the idea of a liberation from an oppressive system through a consciousness raising.

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AUTHOR BIO

Sarah Shamash lives on the unceded territories of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tseil-Watuth First Nations in Vancouver. She is a media artist and PhD candidate in the Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program at UBC. Her doctoral research is centered on an archive of Brazilian Indigenous films. She currently teaches film studies, programs films for the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, and creates media art works. Her work as an artist, researcher, educator, and programmer can be understood as interconnected and whole; they all revolve around a passion for cinema and its decolonial potential.