



UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS

Instituto de Geociências

ISABEL LAFUENTE MAZUECOS

MATTERING AFFECTS: EXPERIENCES IN “KINNOVATION”

MOBILIZANDO AFETOS: EXPERIÊNCIAS EM “KINOVAÇÃO”

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The Spanish philosopher Maria Zambrano says that to write is to defend the solitude within which one is, and that this is an action that only arises from an effective isolation, yet from a communicable isolation. In the context of this thesis, I would add, it has been as well a communicating solitude. As some sort of a vessel that has allowed me to connect with many people and places, even with many times, previous to this stage and also yet to come.

In the background but so close I can hardly separate them from myself, I recall here a man who showed me that the sky does not end in the blue, and a woman that made me aware of the body I am, by taking care of hers. The best proofs of their good affect are the presents they have handed down to me: my brother and my sister, Lola, Raul, a home, then two homes, loads of books, good music and paellas.

I came to Brazil with Nacho five years ago, without really knowing what this experience was going to hold. But a song that was new to me at the time and that he showed me, already sounded as a hunch “...a promessa de vida no meu coração...”. That riddle continues to work its magic today. I felt incredibly lucky of finding such a stimulating place among my colleagues and teachers of the Department of Science and Technology Policy at UNICAMP, and also incredibly privileged of having been supported by the CAPES fellowship (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento Pessoal de Nível Superior) during my doctorate.

I like to think of these years as my fully feminist becoming and I feel specially indebted to a series of women who have been of great inspiration along this process: Thais, Maira, Debora and Cinthia, who led my way into other brazils and introduced me to other people whose marks are in this thesis too: Claudio, Hilda, Débora, Bia, Beneto, Fernanda, Vero, Kim, Miho, Ananda, Carol, and a long etcetera that would like to be lengthen as one lengths a hug. The girls of Comoveras: Maira, Michele, Catarina, Leticia, Victoria, Carol, Catherine, with whom “to think” has proved to be a different verb. And another woman, Leda, to whom I am deeply grateful for so gently supporting me along this journey, always knowing how to walk me home, even before I myself knew where I was willing to go.

But there are also other women, perhaps not so directly concerned with this work, but who I have held strongly and recurrently in my thoughts throughout these years. Although they might remain totally unaware of it, I do want to remind myself here in the presence of whom I would like this thesis to speak, if it shall speak to anyone at all. I’m thinking of

women like my grandmother, Isabel, and also Rita's grandmother, Montse, whose thinking is always stained with the grease of pans and the smell of garlic (we love garlic in Spain) and would have never pretended that thinking could be something stripped of flesh. Also in the other mothers and friends, the ones I met while cradling our babies in the park, and those with whom I waited for Rita each day at the entrance of the CEI Claret, mistresses of noble witchcrafts, such as engaging demons in light talk and carving smiles from exhaustion. I also would like this thesis to speak in the presence of women like you, Irma, who make academic merit mean something more than papers and scores, by seeking ways of making this field worthy of our lives, always much more rich, more brutal and more beautiful.

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on fieldwork that took me from an indigenous cinema festival in the interior of Bahia, to a school lab in the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo, a riverine community in the state of Pará and a feminist encounter in the Serra da Mantiqueira, I look at what it is that connects these apparently variegated experiences. I do so through a rereading of Donna Haraway's notion of "kinnovation", which she defines as the ability to create ties not determined by birth or genealogy, but by kind affections across ideological and regional differences. Thus, I sustain that their resemblance has to do with a felt quality of the relational field from which they stem from and which they continue to mobilize and expand throughout time. This relational field is rooted on certain gestures and arrangements which help to shape their identity and makes for their singularity. More specifically I dwell on four features and then measure the projects in terms of how those features are expressed in them. These are: a disposition to inhabit uncertainty, a propensity to bodily attunement, an orientation towards becoming-with and a search for a bonding autonomy. The combination of these gestures creates a pattern which results in the unfolding of spaces and ways of being and doing things together that have a distinct quality, and a radical one, in that they make affects matter, in the double sense of making them worthy and visible.

**Keywords:** Affects. Pattern. Kinnovation.

## RESUMO

A partir de trabalho de campo que me levou de um festival de cinema indígena no interior do estado de Bahia, até um laboratório cidadão na área metropolitana de São Paulo, uma comunidade ribeirinha no estado de Pará e um encontro feminista na Serra da Mantiqueira, considero o que é que essas experiências têm em comum. Faço isso utilizando a noção de afetos, e argumento que a semelhança que têm entre eles tem a ver com uma qualidade sentida do campo relacional do que surgem, e que mobilizam e expandem no tempo. Esse campo relacionado tem como base certos gestos e arranjos que ajudam a modelar a sua identidade e conforma a sua singularidade. Mais especificamente, me debruço sobre quatro características e meço como cada uma delas é expressa em cada um dos projetos. Elas são: a disposição para habitar a incerteza, a propensão a afinar os corpos, uma orientação a virar-outro-com e uma busca de uma autonomia de ligação. A combinação desses gestos cria um padrão do que resulta um desdobramento de espaços e formas de ser e fazer coisas juntos que tem uma qualidade própria, uma qualidade radical, que materializa [matter] os afetos, no duplo sentido do termo “matter” em inglês, isto é, os faz visíveis e importantes.

**Palavras-chave:** Afeto. Padrão. Kinovação.

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## FOREWORD

### *The Unbearable Lightness of Facts*

Some years ago I read in a book the following story: A little girl is sitting at the table having dinner with her family when suddenly, out of the blue, one of the members, let's say the father, begins to levitate above his chair, gradually rising over the table. Everybody is struck with the scene, except for the girl who watches her dad hovering over the room with an amused expression on her face. This is, of course, the first time she sees her father -and in fact, any human being she has known so far- behaving that way, and yet she just sits there smiling, probably wondering at this new aspect of her father's apparently endless source of virtues.

I recalled this story recently, after I heard a colleague warning against defending affect as knowledge in a post-truth era. Since then a question has been buzzing in my head: How to speak on behalf of affect without naively blindfolding our eyes to the many spurious political drifts this may entail? Living in this age of so-called post-truth politics, we are day by day confronted with an exasperating barrage of presumed 'evidence' and 'data' which apparently no longer serve to settle arguments, neither to simplify the questions at stake. An appeal to evidence does not come with the promissory properties it used to and facts seem only too light to matter. And many of us are experiencing these times with a sense of loss, for it is not falsity and lies what we are led to fight against, it is rather the very possibility of truth what appears to be fading away. Anything goes as long as it is properly conveyed. Fake news and non-facts perform a mimic under which our worlds become shaded, as in those games in which the mime ends up eclipsing what is being mimicked. This is our provocation: post-truth politics carries within the unbearable lightness of facts. We cannot bear their lightness because we still expect them to weigh, thus providing us with an anchor. In the absence of this plumb we found ourselves floating around aimlessly.

In this scene a claim for affects is, above all, a claim for winning back our desire to be affected, to root ourselves in experience and from there, meet our worlds *again*. So the antidote against falling into this trap of non-facts, fake news and frauds is perhaps, not more facts, but more affects. Different from our feelings and emotions -which indeed can dangerously lead us to a pernicious solipsism- affects have a connective nature, they bind us to the ground, to experience, to others. From this point of view the question can be subverted, asking not anymore if affects can be considered as knowledge, but rather whether knowledge,

or the sort of awareness and understanding we name like that, is not always, ultimately, an affect, that is, something to which we are obliged to attune to, to become-with at the immediate time when it happens.

Now coming back to the story of the beginning, I wonder what exactly makes the girl smile at the view of her floating-father while everyone else freaks out. In this scene, everyone is actually affected by the view, though in a very different way. A tentative answer to this might be that while the adults probably somehow resist what they see, the girl receives it openly. Of course this is a fable not a plea for surrealism, but the point here is that she is able to laugh because she leaves room for the possibility of improvisation. So the ways in which we are open to be affected, also matter. How to turn this lightness from an unbearable deceit to the joyful quality of life that shall lift us (and our worlds) up? The plausible answer drawn up here is this: the unbearable lightness of facts may be only resisted by claiming our full capacity to affect and be affected; and this involves, as the little girl of the story does, an openness to be changed, come what may. This is the risk and the promise.

## INTRODUCTION

The following pages narrate how I came into contact with a series of people and projects across Brazil who practice a kind of activism with a common orientation towards autonomy and integration at various levels -between urban and rural contexts, between different forms of knowledge, between local interests and institutions, and between people and nature. I argue that they do so by playing up certain arrangements that give them a special quality. From April 2015 to September 2017 I got involved in several initiatives very different in terms of their focus, the actors engaged and the contexts where they took place. However, after taking part in them I realized they somehow resembled each other. The similarity was not actually based on a single common feature or specific generalized concepts under which subsume them all. The resemblance, so to speak, had more to do with an overlapping of similarities, where no one element was common to all of them, and yet there was a criss-crossing of gestures, traits and affects that showed up repeatedly. In practice this meant a similar felt quality of the relational field that they brought about. Or put in other words, a similar pattern regarding how they managed to build and sustain different ways of being together.

This story can be traced back to November 2012, long before I started this Ph.D. and long before I even knew I would settle in Brazil, in São Paulo, for the following years. That November, still based in Madrid, I decided to participate in a project called *Interactivos*, backed by Medialab-Prado<sup>1</sup>. The project was part of a larger research and production platform intended for educational uses of open hardware and software, that focused on collective creation and on hands-on work. The platform was launched in 2006, and since then many *Interactivos* events have been held all over the world. The one I will refer to here was held in a place called Nuvem; a rural station of art and technology located within the mountain range of Serra da Mantiqueira, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. This was the first time I set foot in Brazil. I left a gloomy autumn in Madrid for a flaming tropical spring within the mountain area of Visconde de Mauá, where Nuvem sits. For the following 20 days, I worked in several techno-artistic projects together with other participants from different countries. Along with all the learnings through the process of collaborative creation, I made good friendships with some people whose enthusiasm and ability to envision different worlds has been since then a source of ideas and inspiration to me. This was my first contact with a network of people who,

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<sup>1</sup> Medialab-Prado is a citizen laboratory of production and research that explores different forms of experimentation and collaborative learning, supported by the city of Madrid.

throughout the following years, would give me the opportunity to participate in different projects which eventually became the basis of this work.

The first one of these projects is *Cinema Kurumin*, an indigenous film festival organized by a collective called *Espalha Semente*. The association works with communication and digital technologies in indigenous communities since 2006. This film festival is one of the actions they organize every year in different communities, under the curatorship of Thais Brito. The one I attended, which I also describe in this work, happened in Aldeia Kiriri, in the interior of the state of Bahia in April 2015.

The second project is called *Neblinalab* and was conceived by Maira Begalli as a citizen lab inside a school in Taquacetuba, a neighborhood in Riacho Grande within the metropolitan area of São Paulo. The activities were carried out from February to May of 2016 and involved weekly visits to the lab to work with students from the school, neighbors of Taquacetuba and other participants, mainly Maira's friends, from outside the region.

The next project took me to Boa Vista do Acará, a riverine community<sup>2</sup> in the state of Pará. In August 2016, an experience of co-creative and hands-on design summit took place, which aimed at addressing some challenges faced by the people from the community. The initiative was led by Débora Leal, who had been in contact with people from the community for some time and the summit was part of an international innovation network sponsored by the D-Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Finally, the last case I describe is a feminist encounter in Serrinha do Alambari, within the region of Resende near the Serra da Mantiqueira, organized by an association called Silo, which I got to know through Cinthia Mendonça.

The evident disparities between these projects were gradually blurred by how they were carried out in practice and the traces they left behind. Informed by my own personal biography during the course of this PhD, gradually I found myself unable -and unwilling- to separate from these projects the knot of "affectively animated agencies" (Puig de la Bellacasa, M. 2011) they composed. Thus, I decided look at them through the notion of affects to try to account for this distinct felt quality.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "ribeirinho" which designates these communities in Portuguese, refers to groups that live along the rivers of Northern Brazil. Their characteristics as a group are directly related to their relationship with nature, and more specifically with the river. They make their living mostly out of natural resources available around them and so they are closely dependent upon dry and wet spells (Mariuzzo, 2018).

## AFFECTS

As a starting point for this approach I used Massumi's definition of affects, which he describes as "the capacity to affect and to be affected" (Massumi, 2015). This definition blurs the borders of a classification based on subjects and objects, as it places the locus in the *in-between*. This is because "to affect and to be affected" are not two separated operations, but a movement that always happens together, thus involving a transition. "*When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight*" (Massumi, 2015, p. 4). In this regard, it troubles the strict distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, for the definition points to a sort of middle zone in which bodies enter into a relation that provokes a transition from one state to another. The questioning itself begins in that space of passage, and does not carry within the customary polarity of pre-established categories such as subject-object.

At the same time, as Massumi argues, the concept of affect is "*not a thing. It's an event, or a dimension of every event*" (Massumi, 2015, p. 49). This means that thinking through affects is a way of focusing on *certain* aspects of experience, those that are in a state of emergence, in-forming experience itself and not yet fully determined. Another way of speaking about this state of emergency is through Anna Tsing's notion of 'latency' (Tsing, 2015). In her account of the 'latent commons', latency means undeveloped and elusive, yet ubiquitous. In this same spirit, this work intends to mobilize affects from within their latency to not only grant them an epistemological status, but also to try to unveil which alternative ways of action they make possible, and thus, how they can be endowed with a subversive political character. This mobilization is also different from an instrumentalization of affects for spurious purposes. What it aims to do instead, as Tsing herself suggests, is to incite other imaginaries, different from those of codes, systems, methods or instruments, and more akin to states of emergency, creativity, vibrations and magic.

In this regard, thinking through affects is also an approach that emphasizes the *more-than* of which experience is made up, or, as Erin Manning puts it, "*the ineffable felt experience of the more-than*" (Manning, 2016). Indeed, this has been one of the major queries guiding this work: how to give account for what escapes register in the recounting of the experiences. This goal has involved a two-fold difficulty: On one side, how to tackle the virtuality of affects -which is not to say their irreality, but rather their always still-in-act movement, their continuous in-folding within experiences, which makes them somehow

ungraspable; and on the other, how to re-counter those experiences from a position that is subjective to a certain extent, but not *just* subjective (Massumi, 2015).

For the first question, I followed the path opened by the Spinozian approach to affects and attend to them not in terms of ‘what they are’, but rather of ‘what they do’. This is the definition that leads this work: an affect is a felt transition between bodies in relation. That transition, which involves change in capacity, always leaves a trace. So there is an experience of a change that might be subjective, although the movement of transition *per se* cannot be reduced to emotion (Massumi, 2015, p. 4) because it always happens between bodies in relation. Indeed, that bodily experience cannot be fully expressed at any given point, precisely because it transcends the subjective. It is a relational experience, which means that it is never entirely personal. In this way, thinking through affects alludes to the connectedness of experience, for they always act upon the level of bodies coming together. Following through this idea, the purpose of this work has been to measure the projects in terms of how they managed to mobilize affects, and thus activate a potential for change. And because this capacity can only be measured through its effects, it does so by attending to the traces they trailed along as far as I felt them.

This connects to the second question mentioned above, that is, how to re-counter those experiences from my own position, that is subjective, but at the same time more than just subjective -as it can only be invoked from the relational field within which affects take place. In this regard, I conceive the notion of a body (and so, of course, of my own body) as “*a field of relation out of which and through which worldings occur and evolve*” (Manning, 2016, p. 191). So that the traces left in me, although housed in a singular body, reveal a relation. They are indeed a sign of the former presence and movements of the other bodies involved in the experiences recounted. This means that even though I narrate how a certain event registered personally at a given moment -and in that sense it can be called ‘subjective’ or even ‘partial’- it is not *just* subjective, for those experiences burst from embodied processes bond to other people and places, and so they point to something more-than-myself. Thus, this work explores an auto-ethnographic tone to offer one possible approach to affects; one that conceives them in terms of the transitions felt by a singular body in relation with others.

In this regard, my voice should be taken as a point of inflection and as the very condition for the world -or a certain world- to unfold and to manifest itself. Taking inspiration in Deleuze writings on the notion of a fold (2015)<sup>3</sup>, I view this point of inflection as being

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<sup>3</sup> I owe the finding of this affinity to Suely Kofes, who suggested this reading during my qualification exam, and greatly hit home with the questions of this research.

indeed singular, which is not the same as saying that it is subjective (in the sense of coming from a pre-constituted structure or one side of a subject-object polarity). A point of inflection constitutes in itself an affective region, a middle zone, an in-betweenness across different bodies in relation, which can only be accounted for from the felt transitions provoked on them. In the present narrative, my position embodies that point of inflection and, in that sense, it is mainly spoken in singular, although understanding this singular voice not as a thing apart from its relation to other bodies, but emerging from that in-betweenness, and carrying within itself the traces of the other beings involved.

## PATTERNS

But how to describe this interweaving, this criss-crossing of affects in which I found myself steeped and which somehow welded the projects into a single pattern? This was the question that came up soon. The image of a network and its satelliting figures of points, chains and connections didn't seem to capture the *more-than* of experience which I wanted to invoke. Other attempts to think relations, such as that of a meshwork, as introduced by Lefebvre (1991) and more recently expanded and defined by Tim Ingold (2015) as "a dense tangle of trails which are interwoven rather than interconnected", seemed much closer to the intimate realm of the affective. Instead of mere connectivity, which would be the defining attribute of a network, the notion of a meshwork alludes to the more errant and winding-through movements of affects. But at the same time, I felt that this notion, which uses the line as its main anthropological unit of measure, also failed to capture something about the enclosing dimension of affects. So I started to wonder whether there was a better way of describing the sort of interweaving and relations that affects bring about, with its inwardness, and intimacy and assemblage-like moves. That was how the language of patterns and creases entered this work.

Creases are lines made by folding, and a fold, differently from lines, always point to an interiority. Indeed, a crease pattern is modeled by a moving inward, that is, by the possibility of collapsing into a composition. Thus, the figure of an affective pattern turned out meaningful in a two-fold sense: first, it was consistent with the idea of attending to affects in terms of the marks left along their unfolding, that is, as creases; and second, it allowed to describe a movement of bending over, the formation of certain space, the assemblage of a composition (I am thinking here of the sort of spaces and ways of being together that were built around these projects). To follow through with this notion, for a crease pattern to

collapse into a figure it is first necessary to trace a plausible arrangement of lines that can be folded. In this sense, it is an image that conjures up compositional relations, for what it matters is the manner in which the folds relate to each other. In essence, a crease pattern constitutes not a distribution of points -as, for instance, networks do- but rather, an unfolding of a relational field that coalesces into a figure. As Deleuze describes, a fold entails a movement of caving in through which an inwardness is formed (Deleuze, 2015). Whereas networks spread along a plane in which the relations between the points are distributed, in a crease pattern what counts is the wrapping, and the enclosure which is created inside, an in-mixing/in-mixed entanglement of folds that create a composition, also a “com-post”. This concept was first used by Donna Haraway to criticize the widespread use of the term “Antropocene” which entails, according to her, a sort of hierarchic pre-eminence of the human species. Against this view, she acknowledges the necessary co-dependency between different species and living beings. “*We are all compost*” -she claims (Haraway, 2015)- reminding us, humans, that we are constituted as creatures that result from the interminglement of different species. In this same spirit, the sort of affective pattern figured here points to a composition, that it can be considered at the same time a compost: for affects, like compost, constitute a budding, heterogeneous in-mixing of different things, which calls to be looked at from the point of view of its potential (Massumi, 2015, p. 7). Besides, the notion of compost also carries something about the intimacy of an inwardness, in which things tightly, promiscuously stay together, touching and being touched by each other.

Another concept from Donna Haraway that has been inspiring for this work is her notion of ‘kinnovation’. Summarized in her slogan “Make Kin Not Babies”, Haraway’s point is that the very possibility of addressing the “systemic urgencies” of our times and recomposing our human-damaged environments, may depend on our ability to make kin. This is to create ties not determined by birth or genealogy, but by kind affections across ideological and regional differences and the unexpected others. Thus, her slogan is a proposal to experiment with other-than-natal kin, that is, to innovate enduring kin, and she calls this capacity “kinnovation”. Bringing together these ideas, I argue that the projects presented here *kinnovate* in how they generate new com-positions, that is, in how they creatively compose ways of being together that activate a potential for change. Thus, their virtue consists, not only in tracing and expanding the pattern of relations from which they stemmed of, but more importantly, in their capacity to modulate those linkages in a way that they don’t clash or destroy each other, but enabling them to coalesce into an assemblage that intensifies the potentials of existence of the bodies involved. Ultimately, this brings alternative ways of



doing things and being together, that have a politically radical character.

## MOTHERHOOD

Thus, the language of creases, traces and patterns pervades this narrative. The following text is presented as a self-reflexive look into the traces left on me, which, as pleats in a sheet of paper, retain the memory of their formation. In this passage, a preeminent mark was left by my experience of motherhood, which happened while I was in the second year of the PhD. For this reason, I have included a chapter about it, following the chronological order it occupied among the course of the other projects. However, analytically it can be considered seminal for its importance in shaping both the questions and the direction of this work.

Much has been written about how the emotional trajectories in our lives influence our work as researchers. For instance, Haraway (1988) has extensively defended “*a feminist version of objectivity*” (Haraway, 1988, p. 578) which is the exact opposite of the type of transcendent vision that (some versions in the history of science) have claimed for itself. As she claims “*feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges*” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581), which involves bringing back the bodily side of any representation and seeking for an objectivity that is founded on the particular and specific embodiments from where it is predicated.

With the storytelling of my own journey through these projects I have sought to make explicit my own position in relation to the things I recount and, as Abu-Lughod puts it, to better capture the qualities of “life as lived” (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 1). The awareness of how I was being myself affected by the people I met and the places I visited, which are the matter of this work, led me to gradually adopt my own embodied perspective in the writing. Interestingly, the personal voice I use has undergone a significant evolution throughout the process of writing this work. Stifled at the beginning, it went little by little unhidden -at first in small doses, as a timid license to experiment with textuality- until it became a decisive methodological move in order to approach the very topic under consideration. Thus, it is a move which involves an active engagement constructed a posteriori with the material I had and a very self-aware commitment to not forgetting the conditions and the circumstances under which it was forged.

In this regard, this work illustrates how my own biography and emotional circumstances as a PhD student forged a certain receptiveness to particular aspects of experience which conditioned my fieldwork and subsequent research practice. It also reveals

how in some cases, if not in all, personal life stories and research do not constitute two parallel worlds but, quite the on the contrary, they resonate and infuse each other.

## LANGUAGE

Another challenge that this work takes is how to make room for the affective in the description of the projects. It has been a methodological decision to present this text in a way in which theory and description are intermingled. The idea here has been to sustain within the narrative the tension between the two registers, a self-reflexive tone that brings forward a biographical account, and a theoretical dialogue that seeks engagement with the authors and conceptual frameworks to which this work is also indebted.

Such an attempt to render the affective in -or in spite of- words has led me to reflect and enter into dialogue with a longstanding conversation among social scientists around the tensions between fieldwork experience and academic writing. In *The Vulnerable Observer*, a passionate reflection on how to make ourselves, as researchers, present in our works and the meaning of such a gesture for the field, Ruth Behar (1996), referring to an hypothetical ethnographer provokes us with the following question: “*Who is this woman who is writing about others, making others vulnerable? (...) What, as she blithely goes about the privilege of doing research, is the story she isn’t willing to tell?*”. Although she raises the question for anthropologists and their ethnographies, it opens up a reflection about the meaning of such a gesture for academia, and academic writing, as a whole. This has also been a recurrent concern among authors recently brought together under the so-called “affective turn”. Because affects are precisely “*not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis*” (Stewart, 2007) the question of how to tackle with them in the writing becomes a prominent challenge. This is so because in trying to bring about the intensities and textures of affects as they happen in ordinary life, the very act of writing becomes a performative action. Not only writing, but even ethnographic attention necessarily shifts as well, for the very object of research is literally moving, layered and always obtusely experienced. In Deleuzian terms, this might involve meeting the world not as raw material for exploitation through symbolic representation but as a cartography of “*increases and decreases, brightenings and darkenings*” (Deleuze, 1997). Or, again in Stewart’s words (2007), “*effort is not to finally ‘know’ (...) but to fashion some form of addressing that is adequate*” to the more-than of experience.

In what follows I use a first-person voice and narrate this work as a personal journey.

The purpose of choosing this form has been, as Starhawk puts it (1982), to not remove the ideas from their contexts, that is, from the ongoing places, moments and circumstances from where they stemmed. In the process of writing, I have striven for a richer narrative and sought descriptions that would render salient affects. Regarding its structure, the text is divided into six sections, that correspond to each of the experiences I took part in. It follows a chronological order so that the first one refers to my trip to Aldeia Kiriri and recounts how I caught a glimpse of the sort of affective entanglements that tied the project together; in the next section I expand upon my experience of becoming a mother and how this was crucial in shaping the direction of this work; then comes the activities held at Neblinalab in the region of Riacho Grande. It is at this stage where I first evoked the idea of kinnovation in the context of the space that was built during the project. The following section narrates the trip to Boa Vista do Acará, and the series of attunements we underwent working in the co-creation of specific prototypes together with people from the community and it offers some insights on the intensifying and transformative potential of this process. The last part is Encontrada, in Serrinha do Alambari. In this section I describe both the event and Silo, the association that hosted it. In the context of this experience, I also discuss here the notion of bonding autonomy. Finally as a way of conclusion, I condense into a single image the different ways in which a pattern of affect was expressed across the different projects.

In the final chapter I also talk about an experience that has walked hand in hand with this work over the last year. In February 2017 I attended an academic workshop in the city of Montevideo<sup>4</sup>, which became a significant milestone of this work. As a direct output of this event, some of us decided to continue our discussions once the workshop was over and thus began to meet online once a month. Gradually it grew into a sort of writing group where we could share our texts and discuss our different ways of approaching the topic of affect. For its importance not only in enhancing many of the questions raised here but also in fueling and stimulating my own rambling along this way for the last months, I wanted to devote its own separate space to this experience. However, the fact of coming as an after-word should not led the reader astray, for in faith, their contributions traverse and permeate these pages from the beginning to the end.

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<sup>4</sup> The title of the workshop was “*How anthropology can contribute to affirmative action in South America in the fields of human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability.*” It was jointly organized by the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Brazil), and Universidad de la República (Uruguay).

## OTHER TRACES

Finally, an overarching question that winds through these pages has been how to give back affects an epistemological status from which it has been generally deprived in academic or theoretical circles. As Karen Barad puts it, I undertake here a “process of mattering” regarding affects (Barad, 2003, p. 817), as an attempt to bring affects come to matter in both senses of the term, making them visible and important. For the first goal, I have relied mainly on language and its evocativeness to express a felt potential. However, referring to this sort of vague feeling of potential and that something-that-is-not-yet-fully-formed, another concern that soon came up was the inadequation between language and experience. When recounting this story, I often felt that the force and the aliveness of my experiences were being curtailed. To tackle this issue, I decided to introduce other material, such as drawings, notes and photographs taken during fieldwork, in a way that sought to convey that surplus of experience, as well as to provoke other ways of engaging with the text.

This attempt draws inspiration from the Deleuzian notion of microperception and applies it to the use of images. *“Microperception is not smaller perception, it’s a perception of a qualitatively different kind. It’s something that is felt without registering consciously.”* (Massumi, 2015, p. 53). They register only as startles, as hits, before they become captured in consciousness or in meaning. And yet they are always embodied, for *“there is no (affect) without an accompanying movement in or of the body”* (Massumi, 2015, p. 54). Thus, each section goes with a series of images that seek to evoke the ongoing unlimited potential of experience which can never be grasped in its totality.

The way I have done this has been to intersperse the text with this alternative material and accompany it with a very short insight that comes in the form of a microperception, which on one side, justifies the choice to include it, and on the other, tries to encapsulate a particular quality of experience. Most of this material consists of photos that were taken by friends and colleagues who participated with me in the projects. There is also a collective drawing made together with the group whom I worked with in Boa Vista do Acara, as well as some sketches that I myself made at certain moments in time when I intensely felt I was groping around and at least momentarily helped me to come ashore.

Another attempt to render affects through images is presented in the final chapter of this work. Largely based on Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead’s work on Balinese culture (1942) in which they try to capture different aspects of it through photographs, I offer here an alternative way to attune to affects, through a specific visual arrangement. The idea here is to

present this material as a sort of performative device, which wants to bring about the intensities and textures of affects by means other than narrative. In doing so, I also aim to dislocate affects within a myriad of moments, in which some of their traces might emerge, and take shape momentarily, however ephemeral these moments of emergence might be.

As a final note to this introduction, I add that the very unfolding of this work is indeed the story of the affective entanglements I myself happened to be tied to since the first time I came to Brazil. Thus, it weaves in between biography, auto-ethnography and fieldwork. In this regard, it is also a personal testimony of how we are tied to the relational field of affects (or how they can tie us together); *tied to* not in the sense of constrained by them, but rather how they have proven to be vehicles for empowerment.

## CHAPTER 1 - ALDEIA KIRIRI

*Of how I started this PhD; and of my trip to Aldeia Kiriri; and how I first caught a glimpse of what affects might mean to this work.*

### 1.1 Beginnings

The initial project proposal I presented when I started this PhD course revolved around collaborative creation of knowledge. As I had been working for some years within a free software research group based at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos of Madrid I was interested in novel models of collaborative production -free software itself being one of the best examples. This kind of projects entailed practices and processes which had shown great success not just in terms of its quality or its technical strength but also as new models of development and organization (See for instance: Coleman, 2012; Kelty, 2008; Benkler, 2006). While working with this group my research was more focused on the technical infrastructure that sustained this sort of practices and I was now interested in looking at how collaborative arrangements for knowledge production might take different forms when inserted in other contexts.

But of course this is an ex-post reconstruction of what was that I was looking for when I embarked on this journey, bound to these questions. Surely, there was also a discontent with what had been my previous work environment in which daily life and relations were too mediated by technologies and a sense of having lost touch with something about the materiality of reality and the bodily experience of doing things together. Most probably there was also a deeply entrenched fascination for the fringes, an appeal for what remains in the peripheries, both geographically and metaphorically. And despite how blurry this might had been at the time, certainly it mattered for how I chose my first case study. I first heard about Thais and her work at Espalha Semente in a conversation with a friend we had in common, to whom I was asking for advice about which projects could be interesting to follow. I don't actually remember how I posed the question, but I am positive that terms such as collaboration, fringes and communities acted as important keywords in how this story began.

Rede Espalha Semente is an association that works with communication and digital production in different indigenous villages across Brazil. What first attracted me from these people was the fact that they used digital technologies as a means to articulate practices of

autonomy among indigenous communities, through different projects based on co-creation and horizontal relations. It seemed to fit well with the kind of community-based and collaborative way of doing things together I was searching for. At that moment they were organizing the fourth edition of the film festival “Cinema Kurumin”, which was going to be held some months later at the Aldeia Kiriri de Mirandela, in Ribeira de Pombal, a small city at around 300 kms from Salvador de Bahia. So I contacted by email Thais, one of the members of the association, who rapidly responded showing great interest in having external visitors during the festival.

In those first emails we exchanged to arrange my trip to the Aldeia Kiriri she told me that beside her work at Espalha Semente she was also doing her PhD at the Universidade Federal da Bahia around the topic of indigenous cinema. As part of her research she had already done fieldwork in the *Parque Indígena do Xingu* within the region of Mato Grosso. In one occasion she carried out an experience of image production among yawalapiti women. The aim was to encourage them to take pictures of themselves and also of Thais among them. Here is an excerpt of the field notebook she wrote during that trip:

Cheguei com a ideia de produzir pequenos postais, com imagens, grafias, histórias e mensagens sobre o Xingu, ou em torno das ameaças de destruição que vem com os grandes projetos como Belo Monte. Pretensão minha pensar no produto, quando o processo em torno desse contato tem gerado mais aprendizado e possibilidades... Essa ideia dos postais não deu certo, quebrando minhas expectativas. (Brito, 2015).

But yet in the following days, they found other ways of working together.

Ainda como parte da oficina, elas escolheram um lugar para fazer as imagens que seriam editadas. Com a máquina fotográfica na mão, seguiram para a margem esquerda do rio num porto onde as mulheres costumam se banhar (separado apenas por uma pequena mata de onde costumam mergulhar os homens). Achei que tinham a intenção de fotografar o rio, a floresta... mas chegando no rio, elas ficaram nuas e se atiraram na água. Não havia mais ninguém para mediar nossa linguagem, mas nos entendemos naquele instante. Numa experiência única de antropologia íntima, me despi e entrei na água com elas, mas parecia mais vestida que antes, pois só agora tínhamos as mesmas roupas. Foi então que a lente da câmera se voltou para mim. Naquele momento, senti que eu era o índio. (Brito, 2015).

These first conversations with her brought Thais as someone to whom I felt an affinity -a woman, PhD student, with one foot in academy and the other involved in the materialization of projects- and this contributed to raise my desire and my expectations

regarding the festival. However, when the time came to travel, my personal situation had drastically changed. In the interim before the trip, I got pregnant. This fact entirely disrupted my personal affective landscape. Like a huge mass that suddenly enters into a system, pregnancy and upcoming maternity came to center stage making everything else now revolve around it. Thus, what was meant to be my first experience of fieldwork, became a sort of glitch in my then affective circuit. I went to Bahia, but the adventurous spirit that dreamed with inroads into new places and new projects had faded away. The first consequence of this change of mood was the decision not to stay within the village together with Thais and the rest of the participants, but rather to book a room in a hostel in the city nearby, Ribeira de Pombal. Presumably this wouldn't be a big problem as the city was no more than ten to fifteen kilometers away from the village and a taxi could take me there. Nevertheless, in practice, this decision had a great effect on how I experienced this trip, although I only became aware of this afterwards.

Once I arrived to the hotel and asked the receptionist which was the best option to get to Aldeia Kiriri, I was discouraged by his answer, for apparently the ten kilometers that separated Ribeira from the village had to be done through a dirt road and not all taxi drivers were very keen on giving that drive. But what really surprised me was the reaction of anyone around the hotel to whom I told I wanted to get to Aldeia Kiriri. Without exception, they all seemed to find odd the fact that someone -specially a total foreigner as I was- would be interested in going there. "Why the hell do you want to go?" -asked me someone from the staff at some point. And when I told him there was a film festival going on he seemed rather astonished as he hadn't heard anything about it.

When I finally found a taxi driver willing to take me there, he asked for what it looked as a totally arbitrary and high prize given the distance, and I had to renegotiate until we reached an agreement. During the five days that lasted the festival I had to repeat this schema each time I asked for a ride.

It was already dark the first day I got to Aldeia Kiriri, and due to a shortage of electricity the whole village was almost completely in darkness. This population is part of the Mirandela's reserve, an area of around 12.300 hectares which is divided in eight communities. This area is one of the "misiones" established by the Jesuits, and then occupied by landowners after the Jesuits were expelled from Brazilian territory in the eighteenth century. Indigenous then started to fight for their land and in 1995 they recovered this territory and settled in the houses that had been built during the former settlement. Thus the village stands in small brick houses with basic infrastructure such as tap water and electric power.



I was received by Thais, who took me to the house that had been lent by the residents to accommodate the organization team as well as other participants during the festival. The house indeed looked rather shabby and it was empty, apart from the sleeping mats that had been scattered across the floor by the organizers and their own luggage. In all, there were around six people in the house. Four of them, including Thais, were members of Espalha Semente -Renata Lourenço, Sergio Melo and Purki -good old friends beside partners of the association, as I learned later. Among the other guests to the festival were two indigenous film producers, Takumã Kuikuro and Ariel Ortega (Guarani Mbya), that Thais knew from her ongoing work with indigenous cinema and whose films were going to be exhibited.

Takumã was 33 years old at the time I met him and had been working with cinema for more than 10 years already. Beside his work as a filmmaker, he had also carried out many initiatives to take audiovisual media to other indigenous villages, thus, serving as a bridge between different communities. He started tinkering with cinema together with a group of anthropologists that arrived to his village in the year 2000 to carried out a project with digital medial, but it was not until 2002 that his first film was launched with the project Video Nas Aldeias<sup>5</sup>. Ariel was born in Misiones, Argentina and lived in an indigenous community in Jacuí, Rio Grande do Sul, where he worked as a teacher. As a guarani he began to make films about his people, because, in his own words, he wanted to give a “true image” of his community, so he conceived himself as a sort of auto-etnographer. Interestingly, both of them told me different anecdotes about wanting to register certain moments and activities in their respective places and finding hesitation or even reluctance from other members of the community for finding it dangerous or risky. In this way they revealed the tensions created by a certain view of digital culture which embraces principles of access and democratization of information when entering into communities in which ways of mediation and transmission seemed much more restricted. In this regard, they both had to develop strategies to re-signify the use of audiovisual media and turn it meaningful within the values of the community. In the case of Takuma he did so by filming first his own relatives and then showing it to the rest of the people in order to gain their confidence, and in the case of Ariel he had tried to persuade others (specially the Cacique) by putting the emphasis on how that would allow them as a community to take control of their own image and be truthful about themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> The project Video Nas Aldeias started in 1986 under the umbrella of the NGO "Centro de Trabalho Indigenista". The goal was to offer technical and financial support to indigenous audiovisual production and also help in the dissemination of their works. Since then it has produced more than seventy films and it has strongly stimulated initiatives from indigenous people in the digital field.

Takumã and Thais had been in contact for some time already in relation to Takumã's new film, which he was working on at the time. The film revolved around the anthropologists that had visited and written about his community before, and Thais was interested in accompanying that process as part of her own research project. During the festival it was going to be exhibited the documentary *Itão Kuegü: As Hipermulheres*, directed by Takumã, together with the anthropologist Carlos Fausto and the technician Leonardo Sette. It had also been invited to the festival a film producer, Bernard Belisário, who was going to hold a workshop on video creation among the young people from the village to encourage them to produce their own material. He was then a post-graduate student at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) and had been involved for several years in different projects regarding audiovisual training. Within the indigenous context he had already carried out similar workshops to the one he would do in the Aldeia Kiriri within the Kuikuro, in the Alto Xingu (from which he knew Takuma) as well as within guarani communities in Mato Grosso do Sul. So apparently they all seemed to know each other well and for some time back before that occasion.

**Figure 1:** *Workshop, inside.*



Photographer: Purki.

**Figure 2:** Workshop, outside.



Photographer: Purki.

My initial impression was that everything looked quite informal, even precarious, far from the sort of more glittering atmosphere one might expect from a film festival. Some time later that same evening, the festival “officially” started with the screening of a short documentary shot by the children from the Ikpeng community from the Xingú telling to the world how was life in their community. The film was shown on a large white canvas that had been strung between two trees in the village square. Around thirty children from the village gathered in the floor staring at those other children in the screen that asked them who were they who were watching the film looking straightaway towards the camera.

When the film was over, Thais took the floor to open the event, introduce Takumã and Ariel as “special guests” and invite everyone to keep on coming to the screenings which would be shown every afternoon for the next nine days. After that, everyone just stuck around, chatting, sharing a drink or just hanging out with the neighbors while the heat of the day let off giving way to the softer temperatures of night.

I guess a sort of expectation of the first day must have been what brought many of the locals that night to the square. For the truth is that the rest of the sessions that were shown over the following days didn’t get much audience. Most of the times it was basically us -I



mean the organizers and other participants, including a couple of other students that arrived some days later interested in indigenous cinemas, and perhaps a few dwellers who passed by- that made up the public. And yet the climate among the organizers and the locals was pretty friendly and welcoming. In fact, I learned that Espalha Semente had already organized plenty of activities with Aldeia Kiriri over the past years, including another film exhibition and a community radio. During the day, people from the village kept on passing by the house were participants stayed and rapidly got involved in whatever was going on at the moment -getting things ready for the night screenings, helping with the workshop that Bernard was carrying out with some young ones that wanted to learn video production, or just jumping in a conversation.

**Figure 3:** Children at night.



Photographer: Purki.

*While watching the films, the hustle and bustle of children playing. Background or figure?*

**Figure 4:** Children playing.



Photograph: Purki.

Of course I just managed to grasp snippets of this climate as I was always just arriving or about to leave, given the repeated difficulties of my comings and goings between Ribeira and Aldeia Kiriri. Indeed I only became fully aware of the significance of my position during those days some time after I had come back from the journey. Back home I felt with frustration that the whole trip had been a failure and the experience a missed opportunity. In the weeks that followed after the festival I even tried to reach some of the people who had participated, including one of the indigenous filmmakers, trying to squeeze out something of value of that experience. To my discouragement, I had no reply from anyone. Little by little I gave up my efforts to try to harness something out of it and eventually I stored the whole case as useless.

However, telling this story as a journey allows me to think back about this trip with a more comprehensive look. Something that was evident for me since the beginning was the fact that the festival -and arguably also the rest of the activities that Espalha Semente led- ran over a knot of “affectively animated agencies”, to borrow an expression used by Puig de la Bellacasa (2011). This means that there was a fundamental grid of affective relationships -that had been built throughout time in different moments and through different settings- that

somehow sustained what was going on there at the time of the festival. Certainly this was the case for the four friends that formed the association, but also for the bonds between Thais and the filmmakers which also went back in time as a result of Thais own research interests, and even between them all as outsiders and the people from Aldeia Kiriri, with whom they had been doing things together for some years already. And more importantly, new affective bonds had stemmed from those days that lasted the festival, involving actors that were there for the first time, such as Bernard, and the teenagers that took part in the workshop, as well as the other students from the Ufba that attended the event. I, myself, had felt out of that relational field, of that flux of affections that was being mobilized there, precisely because of the fact of having placed myself as an external observer that wouldn't be involved in the daily rhythms of those days.

At this point of the journey I still was far from having formulated a research question in terms of affects, and potential, and relational fields, and yet I could feel a special quality although I lacked the words to designate it. This quality involved a particular way of relating, not only between the people, but rather with the place, the issues at stake, and ultimately, with the project itself. Some time later, back in Sao Paulo, in reading my field notes from those days I had the strong feeling that something had been left out, in the absence of which, it remained just a dull account of some activities and a sort of aftertaste of their futility.

## **1.2 Naming affects**

Under this frame of mind I started to look in the literature for some tool that would allow me to characterize this affective quality of my experience. My first attempt was through Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This approach draws from the redefinition Bruno Latour gave of the term "social" as an association between different entities whose only attribute is to have 'agency', that is, a capacity to affect and be affected by other elements in the network, which he calls 'actants' (Latour, 2005). This definition remains purposely agnostic in relation to pre-established sociological categories or essentialist divisions such as social/natural, human/non-human. For, in effect, 'agency' in this sense could be attributed to both humans and artifacts, thus, blurring the separation between them that other more dualistic models of thought presupposed.

In fact, the sociological program he proposed stands on a clear methodological mandate: "follow the actors" in order to track and describe the associations between them -in which the term "actor" refers to anything that modifies the action of other entities within an

assemblage. In this regard, ANT appeared to be a theoretical (and methodological) framework versatile enough to tackle with a wide range of objects, including affects.

However, in practice I bumped into the problem that affects are not the sort of things that can be subjected to a radical descriptivist empiricism. A similar issue had been addressed by Krarup & Blok (2011) when they pointed out the existence of certain forms of social phenomena (such as moral concerns, desires or beliefs) that would render themselves empirically obscure for the kind of analysis that ANT proposes, insofar as they erase their traces. That is, these authors argue that because they cannot be pursued, traced, mapped, in just the same way as other objects they remain invisible for such analysis. In my case, the limitation of ANT as an analytical tool to approach affects was not due to an empirical 'obscurity' -for indeed, they appeared to me as quite palpable since the beginning- but rather to their elusive quality, that is, to the difficulty in defining or describing them.

Thus, I went to search for a definition of affects somewhere else and I, thus, came across the so-called field of affect theory. Diving into this literature I soon found affects to be a central focus of analysis across different disciplines, and specially in the last years, it has been used as a critical perspective through which to approach a number of contemporary issues. For instance, Hardt (1999) has employed it to understand changes in the dominant forms of labor and production. He uses the term "affective labor" to bring together the corporeal and intellectual aspects of some forms of labor, such as health care workers, flight attendants or sex workers, just to mention some, in which the body and the mind are simultaneously engaged. In this regard, the perspective of affects somehow allows to bridge the divide between mind and body, reason and passion.

Affect theory has also been used in the analysis of the historical present, especially in moments of crisis or trauma -such as 9/11 in United States or diaspora movements- in an effort to attend to their embeddedness within a complex sensory and emotional experience, before they become 'fixed' as knowledge about an historical moment (Berlant, 2008; Cho, 2007). By moving away from structuralist readings of these events and also from analysis based on individual agency, they seek to track the affective disruption and the intuitive sense of an ongoing experience in its ordinariness. Taken together, these approaches, as Hemmings has argued (2005) stems from a three-fold dissatisfaction. On one side there is a sense that embodied experience somehow exceeds social subjection, and that it is precisely in that which cannot be subjected where the transformative potential of subjects lays. A second cause of discontent would revolve around the idea that many empirical approaches and analysis fall short in fully rendering account of our embodied experiences in the world. And third, because

analysis based on simple dichotomies and oppositional terms do not seem to grasp the intrinsic complexity of social and political processes. In the face of these concerns, an appeal to affects strongly bring us back to the singularity of experience, somehow adding another layer into the world, which is presented as a parcel of autonomy against dualistic ways of thinking and being.

Most of the current theoretical articulations around the notion of affects are based on Sedgwick's and Massumi's work on the subject, who themselves draw on ideas mainly from philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Nevertheless, Hardt argues that, in turn, these approaches can be tracked back to the work of Baruch Spinoza, whose philosophy can be considered as "the source, either directly or indirectly, of most of the contemporary work in this field" (Hardt, 2007).

One of the most important elements that this line of thought involved is the differentiation of affects from feelings or emotions. Although Spinoza already made explicit this distinction, subsequent philosophical derivations from Spinoza, mainly by Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and their translator Brian Massumi, emphasized more sharply the difference and explored its implications. As Massumi puts it, "An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity [...]. It is intensity owned and recognized" (Massumi, 2002, p. 28). On the contrary, affect, which in his account is equated with intensity, would be intensity *unqualified*. In talking about intensities, what these authors want to trouble are well-established sociological separations, such as body/mind, or individual/society. Indeed, placing affects within a vocabulary of intensities, resonances, potentialities and points of emergence, is a tactical attempt to move away from descriptions based on simplistic and dichotomic locations.

In the case of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, another oft-cited author in the literature around affects, she explicitly refers to the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins as her main influence and interlocutor (Sedgwick, 2003). Although less known than the philosophical sources cited by Massumi, Tomkins was the first to differentiate affects from drives in the field of psychology and to theorize them in their own singularity. The main difference between them, according to Tomkins, is that affects can be linked to a wide range of different objects in a way drives cannot, which makes them much more complex and adaptable than the latter. Another important element he introduces is a social dimension of affects in so far as they connect us to others in a sort of circuit of communication. Thus, Sedgwick finds in Tomkins a way out of the impasse that, in her view, cultural theory has come to by reducing everything



to structural prohibition. Under Tomkin's formulation, affects have a rather complex character, for they are free from the constraints that human drives do have (allowing thus for self-transformation), and at the same time they are 'connective' or contagious, insofar as such transformation always happens in relation to others. Against social determinism, she argues, thinking through affects allows us to consider other layers -or textures as she calls it- in experience beyond social structures, and thus imagine creative moves towards individuality -based on the freedom of affects- and towards community life -based on their connective character.

Thus, what most strongly stood with me of this line of thought was to treat affects as a substrate of potentialities and connectivity. For on one hand it allowed me to come to terms with the elusiveness of the object I was dealing with and on the other side, keeping affects distinct from individual emotions or mere bodily drives, allowed me to focus on their connective nature. And those were precisely the two elements I had grasped, although intuitively, while being at the Aldeia Kiriri, as an element that hovered over all the people there, a sort of connective tissue made out of different affective entanglements which unfolded back in time and forth into new possibilities.

### 1.3 Writing affects

Another thing I found very interesting about affect theory is that it involved a commitment to "thinking from the ground" (Stewart, 2017), that is, from where moving bodies and events are incessantly happening. This is another reason why affects seem to be so elusive and so easily slip from fix analytical definitions with which to catch them from a theoretical viewpoint. Interestingly, both Massumi and Sedwick, either from a Deleuzian or a Tomkintian perspective, use affect theory to recover a field of autonomy rooted in experience, beyond -or beside- what they consider to be an over-emphasized realm of power relations and social signification<sup>6</sup>. And yet, a turn to affects has been proposed, not in order to overplay the "agency" of affects- for indeed, the persistence of certain social formations like race or heteronormativity has not been overlooked by affect theorists themselves<sup>7</sup> - but rather to work out other registers of knowing. In this same spirit, another theorist of affects, Katie Stewart,

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<sup>6</sup> However, as Hemmings has argued (2005) this turn to embodiment and experience as grounds for political connectivity and social change is far from new. In this regard affect theory may be aligned to other critical perspectives such as feminist and postcolonial theory that have long been exploring counter-hegemonic forms of thought and action. Indeed, such a move has usually involved a turn to the body and to the question of the complex and multi-layered ways in which subjects experience their embodied nature.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Laurent Bergmann's blog: <https://supervalentthought.com/>.

has argued that addressing the intensities and impacts of affects on our lives allows us to move beyond “the tired, grinding oppositions of [...] structure/agency”. In her view, politics cannot be reduced to normative orders, conceptualized ideologies or violent powers. Instead, it lays within the myriad of human relationships and intimacies of our ordinary lives, in ways that do not come to consciousness neatly or even at all. It thus takes place as different kinds of intensities and in various registers, which other more structural or rationalist approaches could not possibly account for. Ultimately it is not to swept away the social forces identified by other more systematic or structural approaches, for these authors indeed acknowledge how real and pressing they can be, but rather to bring them into view in their immanence, their continual motion and in their point of emergence. It, thus, can be seen as a search for other ways of *naming* that forces.

In this regard, affect theory invites experiments with description. And indeed I soon realized that the topic I was dealing with demanded particular ways of relating to it, not only in the conceptual, but also in writing about it. In talking about care, Annemarie Mol acknowledged that the most difficult thing of writing about it “is not finding which words to use, but dealing with the very limits of using words at all” (Mol et al., 2010). The same can be said about affects (those close relatives of care), which also seem to overflow every attempt to codify them.

And yet attempts to put affects and emotions back into ethnography abound. One of the most cited work on this topic is Renato Rosaldo's work "Culture and Truth" on Ilongot's cultural practice of headhunting. There he talks about "the force of emotions" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 167) as the only way of explaining the impulse to headhunt among his subjects of study. This explanation of his informants behavior only became intelligible for him after losing her wife -who died in a fieldwork accident- and thus experiencing in his own flesh how it feels to lose a loved one. It was only through this tragic life experience that he was able to understand "the force of anger in grief" -which was exactly how his Ilongot's informants explained their desire to headhunt.

In this sense, I found some of Rosaldo's insights very pertinent to the discussion around affects, as well as to my own approach to this topic. Firstly, the notion of a force embedded in experience which is "irreducible in that nothing at a deeper level explains it" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 175). Although Rosaldo himself is never quite explicit on what this notion of force might mean, he does refer in some passage to a sort of “quality and intensity” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 172) in relation to Ilongot's behavior. Likewise my own experience of the affective dimension in the cases presented had more to do with an intuitively sensed

experience impinging on me in different moments and encounters than with a concrete abstractable category of analysis. I also found inspiring his notion of the "positioned subject" - which in his case takes the form of a "shock" after suffering himself a devastating loss- but again involves this idea of something which affects him so intensely (even physically) that turns his experience meaningful. Such a positioning of the subject implies a stronger involvement and it has less to do with a theoretical preparation than with an actual collocation of oneself within a "porous array of intersections where distinct processes criss-cross from within and beyond its borders" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 176).

Jackson gives a similar view: "It is because lived experience is never identical with the concepts we use to grasp and represent it that I want to insist [...] on its dialectical irreducibility". His definition of experience encompasses both "the rage for order and the impulse that drives us to unsettle or confound the fixed order of things" (Jackson, 1989). In this regard, it resists any attempt to be encapsulated in a theory or a concept. This resonates strongly with what Stewart has more recently claimed about dealing with affects in ethnography -and endeavor that, put in her words, entails "stepping outside the cold comfort zone of recognizing only self-identical objects" (Stewart, 2012). But this acknowledgement of the *forever more* that fringes our experience while continuously exceeds it, carries within a methodological difficulty which I myself soon encountered. For how to approach the elusive, emergent, and open-ended character of the affective through writing?

In my case, to account for such an all-encompassing conception of experience meant first of all recognizing myself not only within that flow of intersections, but necessarily in interplay with them. I also decided to attempt to show my own positionality from the angle of sensory experience, bringing at least some of the sensual aspects of fieldwork in writing. This is what Stoller referred to as a "sensualization" of the ethnographic approach, as well as of the prose through which it accounts for the field experience (Stoller, 1989). According to him such a "sensual turn" involves a sort of de-subjetivization, an "opening up" of oneself which resemble the kind of gestures which theorists of the affective turn now reclaim. This process refers not just to the ethnographer in the field but also to the ethnographer as a writer who, in a creative act, uses language to bring that life into the writing, thus, serving as an intermediary between the event and the readers. Representation, in this sense, is "an act which is fundamentally creative" (Stoller, 1989, p. 51). In another passage, citing Merleau-Ponty, he explains that "words carry the speaker and listener into a common universe by drawing both toward a new signification through their power to designate in excess of their accepted definition" (Stoller, 1989, p. 53).

Also the reading of Favret-Saada's work was very inspiring at this point, specially in how she uses the notion of "being affect" during fieldwork. As she puts it, letting oneself be affected entails an involvement which is different both from participant observation and from empathy. For her field experience, this meant "to stake the contours of my then existence in the process" (Favret-Saada, 2012, p. 440). She also remarks that this sort of technique -if it still makes any sense to use that term, insofar as its very success implies letting go any claim for control- has nothing to do with empathy. First, because experiencing the feelings or the thoughts of other through analogy already implies a distance that posits us somehow outside the reality of that other. And second, it does not entail the kind of 'identification' which is implied in the notion of empathy, for the way in which how somebody becomes affected by something, does not necessarily informs me about how others have been affected too. Considering all this, I opted for a sort of auto-ethnography or life story approach to locate my own positionality and attunements to the relational field of affects.

But it is now time to slow down. At this point of the story my daughter, Rita, was born and a different journey started.

## CHAPTER 2 - MOTHERHOOD

*Of how I garnered from the experience of motherhood a wider understanding of care and affects and how this shaped the direction of this work.*

**Figure 5:** Led by Rita's hand.



Photographer: Ignacio Amigo.

Rita was born in the middle of June of 2015, in the middle of the night, in the middle of my doctorate, in the middle of my everyday life as I knew it so far. Immediately after it started my maternity leave, that would officially last four months. During that time I put everything but parenting aside and, reasonably, this chapter of my PhD was meant to be bracketed out from the final account. Had I been asked at that time, I would certainly have described that period as a complete wasteland, in terms of intellectual or academic productivity. But reflecting on it afterwards with the benefit of time, I realized that something crucial happened then, not only at a personal level but also in relation to this thesis and how it

shifted its direction. For when I returned to work some months later after the maternity leave, I approached this whole research topic with a completely changed frame of mind.

Upon becoming a mother I certainly entered into a new field of relationships with my baby, with my own body and with my environment. It was not so much a feeling that things around me had changed but rather that I began to experience everything from a different dimension, as if things had bloomed in intensity. However, as Massumi points out (Massumi, 2015, p. 140), to affirm the relational intensities of life or of a certain experience is not merely to celebrate “good vibrations”. Indeed an intensifying experience such as the joy in motherhood is not attached only to positive emotions and, thus, it should not be idealized. In practice, this sort of experiences can actually bring a great amount of disorientation, even of pain. In this regard, joy here is not the opposite of unhappiness or disruption, and in fact in my experience of motherhood joy could not be predicated without affirming, at the same time, all the hardship it brought. There was, however, in the lived intensity of this period, “an affirmation, an assuming by the body of its potential” (Massumi, 2015, p. 44). The experience of motherhood bluntly placed me on a new relational field, which was affectively charged and which intensified my own potential to change. How this happened and what entailed that transition is a question that has haunted me since then.

Despite how abrupt and disorientating this was at the time, gradually I became aware that it happened as the result of a series of traits and bodily arrangements which became prominent in this period. It was as if a different dimension of life had come to the fore, provoking this sort of intensifying of experience. In an effort to apprehend what this felt transition involved, I distinguish some features that somehow account for its special quality.

First of all, there was this permanent feeling of **inhabiting uncertainty**. Of course when becoming a new mother many things are done for the first time, and there is a great amount of guesswork and unsteadiness in almost everything you do. But speaking about uncertainty I also refer to a disturbing sense of open-ending, a feeling that you can’t know in advance where the value of that experience resides.

Another thing that stroke me was the permanent feeling of **being bodily attuned**. The attunement to my daughter’s body involved a sense of blurring of my own body contours, as its pulsions, tendencies and tensions were continuously modulated by the movements of her body. Even physically we found ourselves sizing each other again and again in a continual process of adjusting our weights, sizes and moods.

In this sense the experience entailed a sustained joint motion towards an infinite series of attunements. As Vinciane Despret (2016) beautifully describes, the idea of ‘attunement’

differs from the notion of empathy in that, whereas the latter raises the question of how to be *like* the other, the first one is about how to be *with* the other. Making myself available for my daughter Rita involved allowing her to take part in my own articulation, and this had the potential to activate new identities in me. In this regard, the whole experience was **oriented towards becoming-other by a process of becoming-with**. Bellacasa argues that a caretaker is somebody not merely interested in the cared-for, but rather someone immersed in a relation of becoming-with. “*Adequate care requires knowledge and curiosity regarding the needs of an ‘other’ –human or not – and these become possible through relating, through refusing objectification*” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 98). This process, she adds, inevitably leads to the transformation of the being who are thus entangled.

Finally, at the time I was almost literally seized with my baby’s dependency on me. And this brought to the fore how I myself depended on others, an experience that became specially poignant since, except for my partner, the rest of our family, whose help would had been so valuable then, was away in Spain. So when things calmed down I started to reflect on the multiple ways in which we depend on others and the extent to which our own autonomy depends on connections, rather than on independence. This revealed a different notion of autonomy, one that had more to do with how we can connect to and rely on others, than with an ability to do things separately<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, it became evident that what you are able of doing is a set of potential connections. Put it differently, your own potential comes from the ways you may or may not connect to others. This idea of how **autonomy** (like affects) **is a bonding property** and can only be expresses through and together-with others was another endowment of motherhood.

Of course, all these questions came up through the experience of taking care of a baby. Prior to becoming a mother I would had never imagined how transformative this experience could be. Since then, the notion of care and its full significance has been seeping through my life, as much as through these pages.

Surprisingly, later on when I was back to work and started to dig in the literature trying to connect what I had learned about affects theory and the vast field of care studies, those two threads seemed to move along separately. I was a bit puzzled to find out that the supposed link between them, although more or less hinted, was rarely made explicit. I was particularly upset to see how the many works on affects would take me to a domain of rather

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<sup>8</sup> I have been influenced here by Vinciane Despret’s text “From Secret Agents to Interagency” (2013), where she introduces the notion of “pluri-hetero-nomy”, to explain how being an agent requires dependency upon many different beings).

abstract and intangible notions such as ‘forces’ and ‘intensities’ much in the slipstream of Deleuze and subsequent works, while following care studies led me to a much more materialistic type of literature, concerned with care work and its practicalities. Thus, I was faced with the puzzle of how to bring these two orientations closer. This involved, on one side reflecting more deeply on the philosophical implications of practices of care, and on the other, bringing affects to land and showing the bundle of material traces they leave in practice.

## 2.1 Care and affects

Despite not being a straightforward link between care and affect, there is a certain commonsense idea that the two of them go somehow together. For instance, Precarias (2005) argue that, even in the current landscape in which care labor is increasingly being absorbed by the market or in situations where loving bonds between the care giver and the care receiver are absent, affect still seems to flow, more or less precariously along tasks related to care. Likewise, Tronto (2013) sustains that a purely economic or instrumental perspective on care falls short of accounting for what caring activities imply. According to her, care involves both an activity and a disposition which implies taking into account what the care receiver needs. Thus, she is suggesting that practical care, to be effective, implies an affective element, otherwise it becomes “bad care”. However, Tronto herself bewares us of sentimentalizing care work as something that must involve love, for this would entail reestablishing traditional stereotypes that link care with “feminine” attributes. For this reason, some authors prefer to talk about “affective virtuosity”, as an element related to empathy and intersubjectivity that mediates every human relation, to break with this idea “that care happens because someone loves you” (Precarias, 2005).

Anyway, we see here in the field of care studies the same concern to move the notion of affects beyond the question of personal inclinations or feelings -a differentiation that is likewise sustained by theorists of the so-called affective turn. This distinction between feelings and affects troubles the very separation between self and others and, thus, goes hand in hand with the longstanding feminist defense of the relations of bodily interdependence in which we are necessarily enmeshed from birth. Under this view, care is not merely the specific set of tasks one undertakes in order to cater to something’s or someone’s need, but, first of all, “a way of relating” to the things in the world.

Bellacasa first introduced the term “matters of care” (Puig de Bellacasa, 2011) as a critical counterpoint to the knowledge politics derived from Latour’s notion of ‘matters of



concern”. As she explains, Latour renamed ‘matters of fact’ as ‘matters of concern’ based on the insight that techno-scientific objects should be rather described as assemblages of social and political interests. As it was later thoroughly described in the field of Social Science Studies (STS), the acknowledgment of how human agencies are integrated in the articulation of facts, opened the door to other ‘actors’ such as interest, concern, care and “other affectively animated forces” (Puig de Bellacasa, 2011, p. 87) in the construction of technoscience. According to her, this move involved three important gestures. First, it helped to de-objectify the products of science and technology by accounting for them as *embodied sociality*. Second, it entailed a thing-oriented politics in which objects themselves could also participate in public life and have a political voice. And third it served to counterbalance a seemingly disempowering effect of constructivism -at least in its initial formulations- derived from linking the construction of facts with relativism or disbelief. Conversely, the notion of *concern* introduced by Latour, summoned up a different relation with our objects of knowledge, one in which we are placed in a position of vulnerability that demands a different ethos for research and knowledge production.

It is in this same spirit that Bellacasa proposes the notion of matters of care. Yet now in using the word *care* instead of *concern* she wants to deepen the “affective and ethical connotations” and strengthen the “sense of attachment and commitment to something” (Puig de Bellacasa, 2011, p. 89). Besides she also wishes to highlight an ethico-political dimension of those attachments, which involve not just an affective state, but the *responsibility* to take care of, that is, to take action on it. Thus, under the notion of matters of care, caring practices are pictured here as more than well-intentioned and accessory attitudes, as they can be ethically and politically charged, implying ways of doing and engaging, with a transformative potential.

This idea of how affective entanglements oblige us in a way different both from structural constraint and rational decision became a very personal query during those first months of motherhood. The form of obligation I experienced had more to do with a sense of de-subjectivization, that is, of no longer, as a subject, belonging exclusively to myself than with a form of control or power-over something. A sort of belonging, thus, that intensified my own potential to change, as that activity involved a process of attunement that, as I discussed above, I experienced in the form of a becoming-with. If the notion of “matters of concern”, as Bellacasa explains, served to place the subject in a position of vulnerability with respect to the thing concerned about, in my experience, caring summoned a sense of empowerment, through the activation of a potential.

## 2.2 A quality of experience

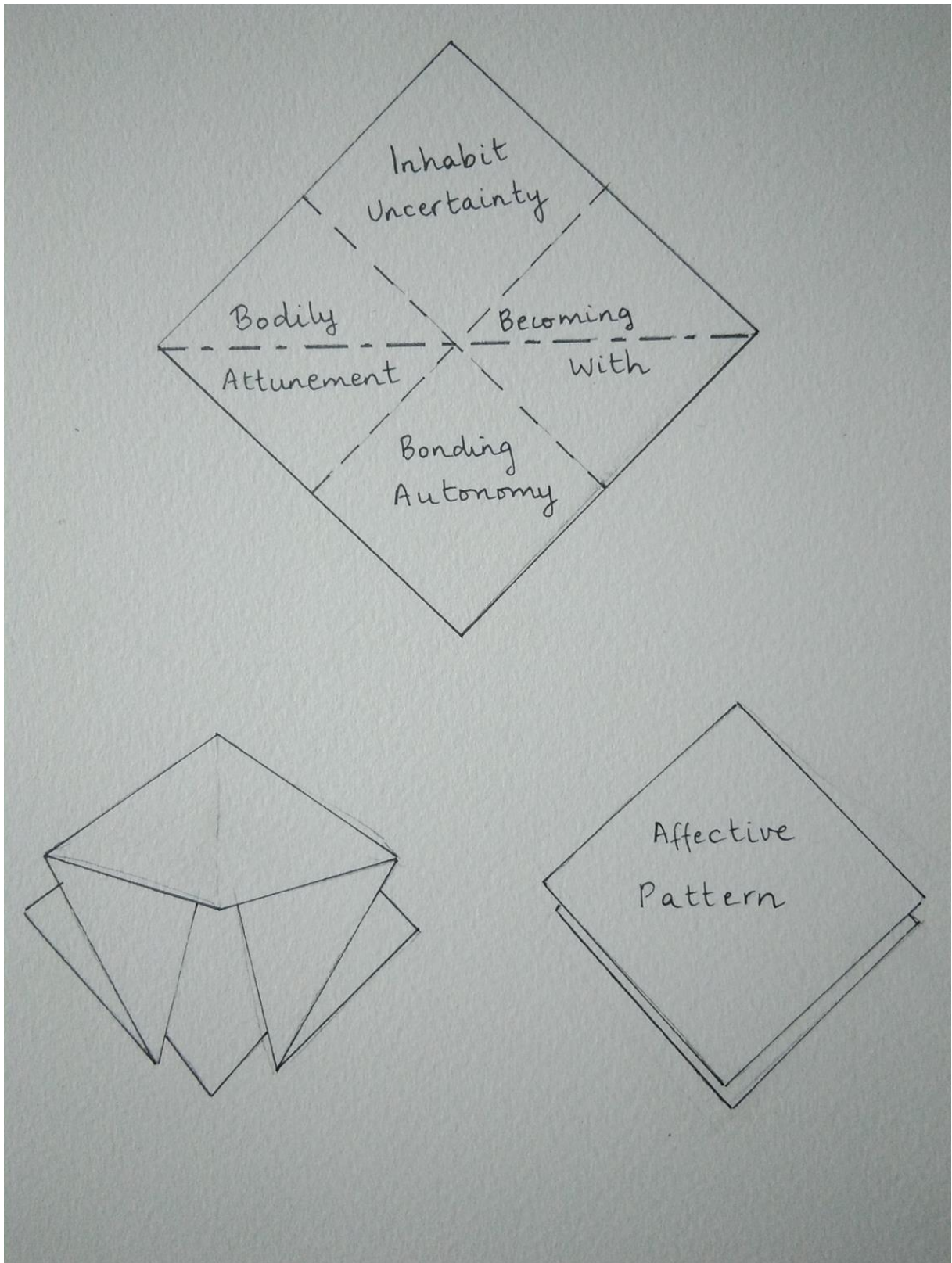
The new relational field in which I found myself engrossed involved an alternative ethos. With the word “ethos” I mean a certain arrangement of things and the particular embodied way of life within that arrangement. This arrangement involved placing myself in a milieu, in the sense given by Deleuze to this term, based on the double meaning of the French word: the milieu traverses and at the same time it confers the surroundings. Thus, meeting the world from the milieu creates a tension, the tension existing in the middle. Care derives from this tension, as a function both of your distance and relatedness toward things. Being in the middle implies that you are pulled in more than one direction at once, and caring involves letting that occasion shape yourself and the others as subjects. In this regard, **care** emerged as a sort of **quality of experience** itself. That is, not the content of human interiority based on a certain personal emotion, not even just a relationship between two separated beings, but rather a property emerging from a certain arrangement of things.

Of course I couldn't be aware of how transforming this activity was while nursing, for in practice I totally lacked the rest time necessary to realize all this. It was only later on that I grew to understand how this period triggered in me a certain receptiveness that afterwards has been essential in shaping this work. It was during this time that I first sensed an alternative way of meeting the world, that involved certain arrangements which (although I might have experienced them before to a certain degree) I only got to fully embrace during motherhood. Those arrangements were flexed through care and care practices and involved the sort of gestures and dispositions I describe above: inhabiting uncertainty, being bodily attuned, undergoing a process of becoming-other-with, and experiencing autonomy as essentially relational. The interweaving of these arrangements through care created what I call here an affective pattern, and which later appeared to a greater or lesser degree in different spheres of my life, including my fieldwork.

This is how my research inquiries were radically informed by the experience of motherhood. From then on, I couldn't *not* know how this pattern repeated itself among the projects I participated and so I decided to measure those by the extent they unfolded it. The insight here is that certain arrangements, which I consider to be central to an ethos based on care, draw an affective pattern which afterwards emerged across the different projects I took part in. It also maintains that these arrangements constitute an alternative way of doing things together which activates the potential of the projects themselves, as well as of the beings involved in them.

I chose to use the language of patterns to try to render account, firstly, to the non-scalable and latent nature of affects, and second to bring to the fore the compositional character of patterns. For it was this orientation towards composing worlds and ways of being together which made for the singularity of the projects presented.

**Figure 6:** Pattern of affect.



Illustrator: myself.

## CHAPTER 3 - RIACHO GRANDE

*How I moved from participant observation to involvement; and of Maira's project and the people of Riacho Grande. And of my personal reading of Haraway's notion of kininnovation.*

Some months later, when I finally returned to work after the maternity leave I was determined to, whatever the direction this journey would take (which was then still rather undefined), somehow bring care and affects into focus. Or put it differently, make those things matter, as I said earlier, in the double sense of giving them space, that is, making them *visible*, and rendering them *important*. It was also necessary to re-think the conditions of my approach in the cases I decided to follow. For it then seemed clear to me that my lack of involvement in the trip to Aldeia Kiriri, due to the fact of having remained distant (both physically and in terms of participation) had weakened considerably the extent to which I could make that experience worthy. So for the next case studies I wanted to experiment with different collaborative configurations, that would allow me to get more fully involved.

Certainly, this approach in anthropology is not new. Indeed, in recent years, a lot has been argued around the traditional forms of engagement between the anthropologists and their informants. In the classical picture, the researcher represents the reflexive subject that has control over the project, which thus entails entering an asymmetrical relation with another subject that simply responds to and cooperates with the anthropologist's aim. This approach has been thoroughly criticized to give way to other forms of engagement based on mutual collaboration. Actually such a depiction of ethnography has been called into question as a dubious account of what really goes on during fieldwork (Hockey & Forsey, 2012; Hannerz, 2010). In this regard, collaboration is one of the main notions that has been proposed as an alternative way of doing anthropology (Holmes & Marcus, 2005). Along these lines, I decided that my engagement in the next case studies would be, as far as possible, to take part in them as an active collaborator. Thus, I started to search among my acquaintances possible projects that could fit the (yet rather loose) premises of this work: projects related to knowledge production based on collaboration, something with a local or community-led basis and with a strong hands-on component, and now also open to external participants or collaborators. It happened that I already had an extended network of friends involved in projects of the like and it was not difficult to identify several initiatives that suit well. And

surely, being the one closest to home, in a moment when other more adventurous endeavours would have been rather difficult given my personal circumstances, was crucial in deciding to contact Maira on her project in Riacho Grande.

### 3.1 Homeland

Meu nome é Maira, nasci no século passado, em um mundo que não existe mais. Minha primeira residência foi no Riacho Grande. Passei minha infância em uma chácara, no bairro dos Fincos, com cães, pássaros e flores, presenciando a importância e a complexidade dos sistemas ecológicos. (Begalli, 2016).

This is an excerpt of Maira's thesis<sup>9</sup>. As a PhD student at the Universidade Federal do ABC (UFABC)<sup>10</sup>, she decided to undertake a study of the biodiversity and socio-ecological characteristics of her homeland. This involved a comprehensive work of documentation of the region of Riacho Grande which had not been done before. As she tells in her thesis:

É um olhar vivo de quem esteve lá, por toda vida, e presenciou as rupturas de muitas coisas. Minha maior dificuldade tem sido não encontrar referências anteriores. O que também é um privilégio e uma responsabilidade, já que estou escrevendo e documentando (com a "revisão" da população local), pelas vias da ciência, a história de um lugar pela primeira vez. (Begalli, 2016).

This work of characterization of Riacho Grande involved diving into the different government actions and legislation that have been launched in the region to deal with one of the main conflicts of the region regarding the large, irregular and precarious occupation of the land over the past years. Located in the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo, the district is within the Billings' Water Spring Protection Area (Área de Proteção de Manancial da Billings, APM-B), an action that involved the restriction of land use and occupation in order to protect the

<sup>9</sup> At the time I met Maira she was pursuing a PhD at the UFABC and these excerpt were taken from the initial version she presented to obtain her qualification, which she shared with me. She defended her final thesis in 2016.

<sup>10</sup> The Federal University of ABC (UFABC) was created in 2005, under Lula's presidency, and originally it was meant to spearhead the expansion of federal universities across the country. Its location was specially significant as Lula himself had been an active trade unionist in this region for many years before becoming president.

Its strong social dimension stands out since its inception. For instance, it was pioneer in implementing social inclusion policies within its campus, allocating 50 percent of its places to minorities (a measure that later became a legal requirement for all federal universities in Brazil). It has also focused on broadening its relation with local industry and population, through several extension actions. And it has also been very innovative in the curricular design and its departmental structure, with an emphasis on multidisciplinary instead of separate and airtight departments.

Billing's dam as a key water supplier for all the metropolitan region of Sao Paulo. For the rearrangement of land use in accordance with this legislation, some instruments were launched to engage citizen participation in the characterization of the territory and to align government interests with demands from the local population. However, when Maira interviewed some people from Riacho and asked about these intended participatory processes, she sensed a discontent for they hadn't seemed to bring a real involvement from the population. This is why, besides the work of characterization, her project involved the articulation of an experimental laboratory to provide experiences of collaborative management in one of the rural districts of Riacho Grande. She called this laboratory Neblinalab.

On the other hand she had already been involved in different experiences of collaborative action through the project Metareciclagem -a self-organized network of activists, artists and techies that seek social transformation through the appropriation of technologies. MetaReciclagem works as an open network spread in different parts of Brazil mainly, whose members carry out a variegated range of projects and actions in a decentralized fashion and involving participative methodologies. A guy that I met in Nuvem a few years back who had also been part of this network and whom I was still in contact with told me about Maira's project. At the time I first contacted her she was about to launch an open call through Neblinalab's site for collaborators wanting to somehow get involved in the activities. So the ingredients I was looking for seemed to be all there: it was about collaborative actions, it involved the dwellers and she was looking for external participants. Also of course also the fact of being in Sao Paulo was back then another reason to get interested, for that -I naively thought- would make much easier my displacements. I recall the look in Maira's eyes, a mix of mockery and gentleness, the day we met at a bar in Sao Paulo's city center to arrange my first visit to Taquacetuba, the place in Riacho where the activities were meant to take place. I asked which would be the better combination of public transport to get there- "It's not that easy" she warned. What do you mean?, I replied. "Nao tem nada lá. Só terra e mato (There's nothing there, just land and forest!)" -she joked.

Neblinalab's activities initiated on February 2016. On the first day I went there I met with Maira in a metro station in the southern part of Sao Paulo to take a drive to Riacho Grande. It was 11 a.m. and though she already had warned me that it take some time to get there, I still didn't actually grasp how this region is difficult to reach. After crossing Sao Paulo's metropolitan area we arrived to Fincos, one of the two urban areas of Riacho Grande (the other 10 districts that compose it are rural). There we headed to the quay where we would



pick Joao Basso's boat to the rural district where the project would happen. This region is informally called by local population 'pos-balsa' because access to it only happens by this boat that crosses the Billing's dam.

The boat has capacity for 22 vehicles and 240 people and takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete the round trip. However, as the only way for accessing the other side, this point creates a huge bottleneck for traffic. Not infrequently, once there you have to wait one or two boats before you can go in even during the time of the day with less traffic (according to what locals told us, the average waiting time during weekends or peak times can be between 2 and 3 hours). This waiting through which we had to sit in each of our visits to Riacho, gave me a small taste of the situation of geographical isolation that dwellers from the 'pos-balsa' region have been complaining over the years. For a long time now, they have been demanding a bridge linking the two sides, instead of the boat, but the government refuses to do it, according to locals, for fear that irregular land occupation would, thus, grow.

**Figure 7:** Taquacetuba.



Photographer: Suzane Melo.



*“Pos-balsa”: post is not after, it is outside; an outer Sao Paulo.*

**Figure 8:** Rio Grande.



Photographer: Suzane Melo.

That day, when we finally managed to cross the Billing’s dam, I was surprised to see how the landscape changed in this part of Riacho Grande, with predominantly rural characteristics and a well-preserved Atlantic Forest biome. There we took Rio Acima, the only road in the district that covers a lengthwise section of the region and was not paved until 2013. In Taquacetuba we abandoned the road and from there continued on a dirt track to the school Ítalo Damiani. It seemed that we were the only people around. The spatial layout of Taquacetuba certainly contributes to this feeling of wilderness. Dwellers live in small houses (chácaras) which are far between and there are hardly no road signs, no marking, apparently no gathering spots revealing human presence.

At this point it also became clear how access to the school could be severely hampered by weather conditions, as it indeed would happen to us at a later visit. Normally, after a rainstorm -which are quite common in the region specially during the summer- the path gets completely flooded and muddy and there is no way of reaching the school unless you have a proper vehicle. But that day we were lucky to get there as planned. After a long and clumsy

drive along the dirt road, bounded just by land and forest, the school finally showed up (it was almost 15 p.m, almost four hours after I had met Maira at the metro station). Its mere presence in a place like that defied the poor infrastructural conditions in which it stood. In contrast to the surroundings, across its brick walls, the lively bustle of everyday school life shimmered inside.

### **3.2 The re-appropriation of a school**

The specific location where the activities would take place was set together with the so-called Programa Cidade da Paz, a government's program that carries out different activities in high vulnerability areas from Sao Bernardo do Campo since 2009<sup>11</sup>. Several meetings were held with local stakeholders who helped to identify the main difficulties of the region and the best place to develop the project. Finally it was chosen the school EMEB Ítalo Damiani, located in the neighborhood of Taquacetuba within the 'pos-balsa' region -called like that because it falls into the other side of the Billings dam and thus can only be crossed by boat. There was already an internet lab at the school, which people from the neighbourhood regularly frequented. Considering that technological infrastructures in this part of Riacho Grande are quite precarious, it was believed that the school's lab, already a popular internet hotspot for the community, could be more easily re-appropriated for the purpose of the project.

The school works with 126 students of Elementary School, and has a sports field, a dining hall and an informatics lab with 18 devices with internet connection. Other than the students, the lab is also frequented by ex-students and other dwellers of Taquacetuba, which use it to access the internet. The school is head by Hilda Uema, a small, sympathetic woman on her late-forties who goes around with her two shinning, slanted eyes and a generous smile. She was born in Taquacetuba, but then left for many years to train as a teacher and later on

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<sup>11</sup> Sao Bernardo do Campo, also known as the 'Detroit of Brazil' is considered the industrial heartland of the country. Comprising an area of more than 2 million inhabitants in the Sao Paulo metropolitan region (also called the Greater ABC) it has been since the 1950s the center of the Brazilian automobile industry. Given this context, the Greater ABC region has also been the cradle of Brazil's workers' movement, especially with the development of the Metalworkers' Union, and the Trade Union Confederation, which was started with the strikes of the automobile workers during 1978 and 1979. These trade unions later played a substantive role in the fight against military dictatorship.

The region faces many infrastructural problems, mainly due to its enormous congestion. This problems involve an overloaded road system, water supply and drainage flaws and high levels of pollution (mainly caused by large firms). Beside, the growth of the whole metropolitan area has been done outside land-use and environmental regulations, thus presenting a rather chaotic urban deployment. In addition, they also face major challenges regarding school and health systems (Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney, 1999).

she returned to take the role of the school principal. But her position looked more like that of a general care taker than of a manager. Indeed, over the following weeks in each of my visits to the school I would find Hilda busy with the most varied kinds of tasks, which went from giving lessons, to office work, as well as cleaning jobs or even painting some walls from the school as I saw her doing in one occasion. She said she loved that place *to where she belonged*, despite all the problems she and her team had to face daily regarding poor conditions and lack of help and interest from the government.

The first they I got there with Maira she looked happy to receive us. With us came also Alberto, a friend of mine from Spain who was temporarily visiting me in Sao Paulo and decided to come with me that day, and Suzanne Melo, a graduate student from the UFABC who had also shown interest in collaborating with the project. Suzanne had learned about the project through Maira, whom she knew from University and had become interested because of the self-management component of the project. Although it had not been planned she insisted on taking us class by class to introduce us and tell everyone about the project. She argued that the childs would be delighted to hear from us, especially since two us were foreigners, which, she said, they are not used to seeing around. And so there we went group by group telling a bit about us and Neblinalab.

In the first classroom we entered, children four or five years old burst with excitement when we showed them in a map where our home country stood in relation to Taquacetuba. Everybody wanted to ask or to say something and spoke out at the same time. Among this hustle and bustle, one little boy sat bolt in his chair patiently raising his hand. When Hilda saw him, she went straight to his side and encourage him to speak loud. A hush fell over the room as the boy uttered something regarding the map we were looking at. We continue our presentation through the rest of the classrooms but I held this small episode and later on asked Hilda what had happened there. A contented expression appeared on her face while she told us that the boy was autistic and hardly never participated or interacted in the classroom. The fact that he himself had requested to say something on that occasion seemed to fill Hilda with joy and optimism regarding our presence there for the next months.

Then we were taken to Claudio, the person at the school in charge of the lab, who would accompany us in all our visits to Riacho Grande since that day, helping and facilitating the activities of Neblinalab. Claudio began to work as an educator for the city of Sao Bernardo do Campos in 1991. He started taking care of a nursery, but after a while he was asked to led the start up of the internet lab at the Ítalo Damiani. Initially he would be in charge of the project for two years, after which it was expected that the school would gain autonomy

to keep on with the project. However, after that time it was considered that his presence in the lab as a supervisor was necessary and so he ended up staying there. In the year 2009 he got involved in a initiative from the city of Sao Bernardo called “Programa Cidade de Paz” that aimed to foster participatory governance processes among local population in areas of high vulnerability. Claudio, as a member of that program, offers support to people in Taquacetuba on a wide range of tasks such as registration processes, elaboration and submission of CVs, as well as basic training in informatics. In the frame of this program meetings were held periodically among city representatives and local population. It was in one of these meetings that he met Maira, who was at the time following up closely this program in order to gather information for her thesis. There she told Claudio that she was willing to carry out the Neblinalab project at the school Italo Damiani and he got interested. As the project was backed by the UFABC, they thought that the city might agree to provide transportation to the school for the participants during the project. This requirement was denied and, indeed, the lack of transportation would become a handicap in the following weeks, but still they decided to go ahead together with the initiative.

### **3.3 A listening ear**

Conceived of as an experimental laboratory, Neblinalab involved two stages. First, the implementation of a website that would host all the documentation and resources produced throughout the activities -which in practice was mainly taken care of by Maira herself, and second, the enabling of a physical space where people from the district would interact in terms of collaboration and collective action. This approach was inspired by a previous experience, the LabCEUS (Laboratorios de Cidades Sensitivas) -undertaken by the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE) and the InCiti (Pesquisa e Inovação para as Cidades), together with the Ministério da Cultura (MinC) -aimed at fostering citizen empowerment through the critical use of technologies and the use of places for collaborative production. The program involved the occupation of public places equipped with multimedia and digital infrastructures and their transformation into collaborative places for the empowerment of dwellers.

For Neblinalab priority areas were outlined, based on the information Maira had gathered during the initial phase of her PhD research on the socio-ecological and activities were, thus, grouped into different areas of concern. But the specific content of the activities was rather opened at the outset, as the idea was to let the participants together with the locals

define the concrete goals these activities should address. Thus, us as external collaborators were expected not merely to take part in a pre-defined set of activities but to participate in the very definition and outlining of the project. One of the areas of concern was titled “Critical appropriation of technologies” and so I offered myself to talk them through the blog platform Wordpress, in which Neblinalab’s site is hosted, so that they can publish their own content. However the rather open format of the project itself entailed also a process of ongoing attunement between all of us in order to adjust our interests and expectations to one another.

In practice this meant that our time together in the lab never followed exactly a preset agenda. For instance, the day I was expected to led the Wordpress activity, ended up as a group talk among those that were present in which they shared with me some facts about the difficulties they faced in their daily lives in Taquacetuba regarding unemployment, public transport or violence. At some point the chat began to grow more intimate and personal. I was specially touched by Silvia’s story, a dweller present that day at the lab with her daughter. She told me how she got divorced from her husband after discovering that he had abused their daughter but then she found herself being harassed by her political family as the divorce was not well looked upon by her in-laws. She didn’t take her eyes off the girl while telling me this. ‘I fear that they could come and take her away if I am not around’ she said, her voice breaking. All throughout our talk, which lasted almost an hour, she spoke quite free and fearlessly, but at the moment I suggested to write something she liked from Taquacetuba at the website, she showed an obvious reluctance. In fact, none of the participants seemed to take much interest in the blog itself.

Fabio, another participant present that day, also told us about him and his motivations to be there that day. He is the cacique of the guarani community “Aldeia Brilho do Sol” located also in the “pos-balsa” region of Riacho Grande. At the time of this conversation thirty eight people lived in the community, including children. Before, they lived in the ‘Aldeia do Krukutu’, which is in a different district, but due to food scarcity and an increasing shortage of land, some of them moved to a different location and set a new village. However, as crops had yet bear no fruits, they still lived mainly on food donations and also on what they managed to fish in the Billings’ spring water. Although they had already been warned about the water pollution in that area, they kept on doing it, in Fabio’s words, ‘given the lack of other choices’. Thus, what had brought him to Neblinalab was actually an urgent need of help in a lot of urgent matters, such as food scarcity, access to drinkable water or children education. In the face of this, throughout the following weeks, Luiz, another collaborator and

friend of Maira, also a student from the UFABC, would coordinate several food drive campaigns through Facebook and Neblinalab's site to help the community with the situation of hardship they faced.

We met once a week at the internet lab for almost three months, although our visits had to be interrupted in several occasions due to weather conditions, holidays and so on. In our encounters, sometimes the space would turn into an improvised cinema set in which we had popcorn and video sessions with the students; other days we ended up having round-chair talks with people from the community, many of whom were already regular users of the lab. In other occasions more specific workshops were held by participants, mainly students from the UFABC, who in all the cases were previously friends of Maira. On one occasion it was Max, a filmmaker and student from the UFABC who came to give a workshop on how to make a documentary. Another day, Caio Dib presented his project "Caindo no Brasil"<sup>12</sup>, which arose from a trip he did some time ago through Brasil to seek innovative educational experiences around the country that could serve as an example and inspiration. The project grew to become a consultancy start-up aimed to foster projects based on a hands-on methodology. Also, in another occasion, Gabriela Juns, from the so-called "Escola de Ativismo"<sup>13</sup>, an autonomous and nonpartisan collective that exists since 2011 and works in different regions of Brazil, with the objective to promote learning processes and knowledge production to increase the political capacity of other organizations, movements and collectives. Gabriela gave a workshop on how to make "memes" so that the students and people from Taquacetuba learned a way of interacting more easily and in a playful way with some of the problems identified in their neighborhood.

The fact is that week after week a space was created where people knew they could come by to propose activities or just to spend some time together. Interestingly, the nature of the project itself underwent a transformation throughout this time. Initially it had been planned as a place for drawing up and experimenting with solutions for Taquacetuba through different activities, like creating a blog, making a collaborative documentary, or doing infrastructural interventions for livelihood improvement. However, this rather action-oriented purpose was gradually overlapped by a slightly different use of the space. In practice, participants seemed less interested in the specific outcomes of the activities proposed than in using the lab as a space for social convergence. Indeed, when asked about their assessment of the activities at the end of the project, most of them reported that they had found a 'listening

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.caindonobrasil.com.br/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://ativismo.org.br/>.

ear' which had given them 'hope'. Certainly, this may speak about the conditions of invisibility and vulnerability they deal with in the region, but it also involves a reflection upon how the project, and the space itself, were conceived of and what it is that they help bring about.

Neblinalab was built upon the idea that a key challenge for Riacho Grande is how to use local people's knowledge in order to map their problems or needs and how to foster collaborative actions to address those. But what I would like to highlight of this experience is how it involved the mobilization of affective entanglements. Indeed, although since its formulation the lab was committed to values of conviviality and social participation, in practice the affective quality of the project came to the fore quite notably and eventually stood out as an essential element in shaping its identity.

This quality involved receptiveness in that from the outset it was conceived of as a space open to anyone willing to participate and permeable to the suggestions and ideas that each of us brought. In fact, as I have described earlier, although there were some general themes that directed the lab's activities, the specific choices of what to do about them was left open as something to be specified in attunement with everyone involved, both from the school and Taquacetuba, and outside to the participation of external collaborators. In fact, the context of listening and learning was given more importance than the specific outcomes or results that might come from it, as it was later on acknowledged by participant in describing it as a "listening ear". This was done by creating a space in which people felt comfortable in showing their own fragility in terms of emotions, afflictions, affections as when Silvia shared her personal story with us or Fabio decided to tell us about the hardships they were facing at his community despite his initial reserves. This is not to argue in how a project of this kind can be turned into a support group, but to show how these projects are articulated around the ability to build, maintain and expand the network of affective entanglements that give them life -that is, that brought those people together in the first place.



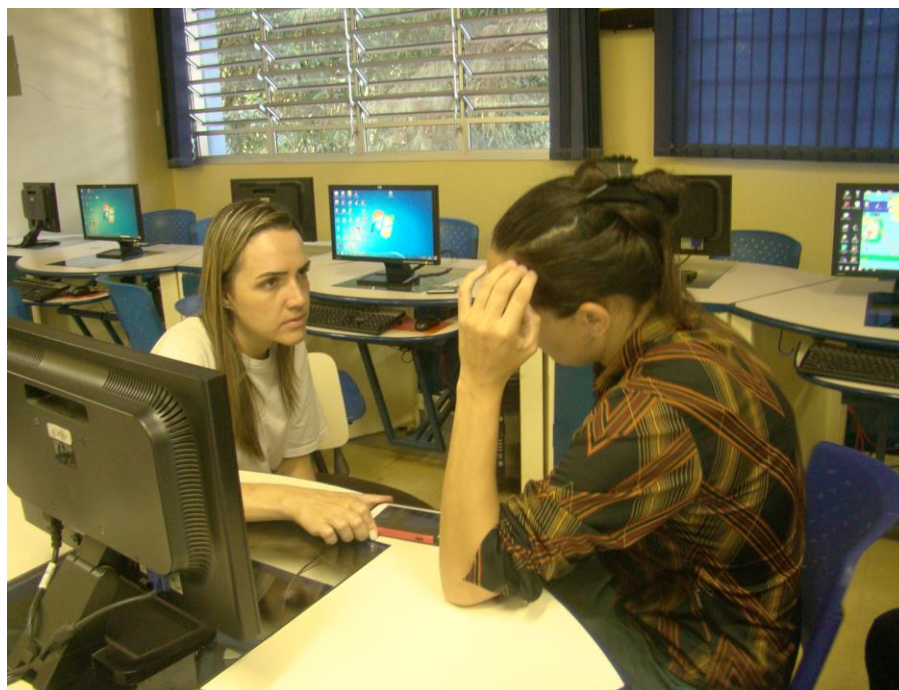
**Figure 9:** Students at the lab.



Photographer: Suzane Melo.

*Ductile spaces and different ways of listening.*

**Figure 10:** Maira and Silvia.



Photographer: Suzane Melo.



**Figure 11:** Finding Taquacetuba in the map



Photographer: Suzane Melo.

### 3.4 Insights from Riacho

We were waiting at the front of the school door for a car to pick us up and take us to the dock after the activities for that day at the lab. From where we stood, the only thing we could see was the thicket of plants and trees on the other side of the dirt road. The evening stillness of the place was only broken by a few cars passing by now and then. Anticipating our return to Sao Paulo, I made a comment about the tranquility that breathed there. Claudio looked at me and smiled. ‘That’s just what it seems to be!’.

My comment spur him into recounting anecdotes from the school and the people around, which pictured a Taquacetuba far from the peaceful and quiet image I had made myself of it. There was this woman that had been head of one of the biggest and more dangerous narcotraffic networks of Sao Paulo, who happened to be also mother of a couple of childs from the school. ‘Model students’, Claudio added, ‘Dedicated and polite’. And the story about a sentimental settling of scores, with bloodshed included, which had been unleashed just where we were sitting then. The stories were very vivid in his memory and he was such a good storyteller that he kept us amused like that for a while. ‘The entire history of

Taquacetuba fits into this school’, he observed. He also recounted many cases of incest and sexual violence among his students.

At that moment, a girl in her early teens came out from the school. She went straight to hug Claudio, who asked her who was picking her that day. She said she was walking home by herself, which clearly Claudio didn’t seem to like, although apparently she lived nearby. Ok, go on, I’ll be watching you from here all the way until you get out of my sight. The girl waved at us and started walking up the road. We remained quiet while she walked away. At some point she turned around and waved at Claudio with a big smile upon checking he was still escorting her with his gaze. We could see that he was touched by that smile, that he was somehow bound up with the girl, with that road, with the school behind.

It was not the first time I had sensed during those days in Taquacetuba that the atmosphere was charged, that there was something very real, however intangible it might be, that effected a movement and impinged on the people there, also on myself. Certainly, this felt quality of a relational charged was somehow latent in nature. For the sort of flux, of intensities moving through bodies, although felt in the traces they left, were not readily apparent at least in a representational sense. And yet, as Anna Tsing elaborates through her notion of “latent commons” they can be made common cause with other beings. Looking back to the experience with Neblinalab through these lens sheds new light on: Hilda’s affective attachments to Taquacetuba, Maira’s decision to do a thesis about her homeland, Fabio’s urgency to do something for his community, Silvia’s sorrow, Claudio’s caring about his students or the other external participants whose friendship with Maira led them to collaborate. Certainly this are just some of the stories I could use to tell the story of Neblinalab -and indeed tracing the geographies of something which is latent remains necessarily uncertain and open-ended. But each of them can be recounted as a mobilization of affects groping together to eventually converge and become entangled in a common field, which was Neblinalab. It is in this regard that I affects can also be described as a latent commons, “where unpredictable collaborative futures might emerge” (Sacco, 2017). The idea here is that with more or less awareness what was being articulated by Neblinalab was a living-space assemblage in which an affective pattern emerged and made possible a certain collaborative schema during the time it lasted.

Also Haraway’s notion of *kinnovation* served for inspiration to the idea that something significant and original laid in the capacity of projects such as the one I describe here to mobilize affects into a common cause through collaborative arrangements. In a recent text around the Anthropocene, Haraway proposes the slogan “Make Kin Not Babies” for the

current era, which she calls Chthulucene -an interwoven, non-hierarchical, symbiotic mode of living across species. She presents the Chthulucene as a call for multi-species action in a time when the illusion of the presumed exceptionalism of humans in the world can not be sustained anymore. With this name she wants to challenge other terms that are being used to designate our times, such as Anthropocene, by blurring the separation between humans and not humans, and emphasizing how we are in fact co-dependent and in an ongoing process of becoming-together (Haraway, 2015). In this scenery, kinnovation is presented as a tactic for resilience, for “ongoingness”, which is more than mere individual survival because it involves making with (what she calls “sympoiesis”). It is in this regard that she claims: “We need to make kin symchthonically, sympoetically. Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with — become-with, compose-with — the earth-bound (Haraway, 2016, p. 102). Thus, it is a call to make kin, that is, to build ties through kind affections, determined by other than birth or genealogy. This word game between *making kin* and *making kind* relations without genealogical ties that she herself stresses, reverberates again with the idea of care as *a quality of experience* that I discussed above. Neblinalab in that it articulated a living-space entanglement in which the relational field of affects indeed mattered.

## CHAPTER 4 - BOA VISTA DO ACARÁ

*Of my re-encounter with Débora; And my trip to Boa Vista do Acara and my affective immersion into the community, with the people and a more-than-human world.*

The next part of this journey takes me to a beautiful, small community in the state of Pará, in northern Brazil. As I had been for months soaking up the literature around affects, it is no surprise that I would find them glaringly around in all steps I took from there on. In the meantime I got an email from my friend Débora Leal, whom I had met back in Nuvem in 2012 on my first trip to Brazil, where she lured me to the new project she was involved at the time.

### 4.1 Re-encounters

I had been in touch with Débora through social networks ever once in a while since we first met during the Interactivos encounter. I knew that in the last years she had been immersed in different communities through a partnership with a network called International Development Design Summit (IDDS). This initiative offers a hands-on design experience to co-create low cost technologies to address specific challenges in different communities around the world. To do so they organize summits which are conceived of as a two to four week event held in the targeted community, and involve working closely with community dwellers in order to understand the challenges they face and develop innovative solutions in collaboration with them. Any member of the network can present a proposal for a summit and once it is accepted, there is an international open call for participants to take part in it. When a summit is over participants become part of the network which is sustained mainly through a newsletter that serves as a forum where resources, information and announcements regarding other events are shared. At the moment this was being written, the network already brought together up to eight hundred people from all over the world. Débora had already taken part in different summits in Uganda, Tanzania, India, and Brazil, but always as a participant.

After two years of volunteering at IDDS, in 2015, she moved to her parents house in Belem de Para, and it was then when she first met members of Association of Organic Producers of Boa Vista do Acara (APOBV). Their first contact was in a weekly fair in the city, where members of the community sell products. There she met Seu Ivan, and told him that

she was interested in visiting the community. Some days later they arranged her first visit. Her initial goal, as she explained on her first meeting with all the leaders from the APOBV was “to build bridges between people from the capital and the rural area” and learn throughout this process in order to share it with other communities. In the following months, she managed to find financial support to organize different activities in the community (like workshops on planting edible forest gardens, bio-construction, and food safety) for which she brought to Boa Vista friends and people she knew from Belem that wanted to get involved in these activities.

She also had personal motivations for her interest in immersing herself and getting to know more about these communities. In reflecting upon this experience a year later as a scholar at the Schumacher College in the UK, in her final dissertation she tells how this first started when her grandma told her about their indigenous ancestry. *“It was like finding a precious map of the past”*<sup>14</sup> -she wrote. Through her grandma she knew that the tribe Puris to which they belonged was among the first “indigenous” tribe to be decimated by Portuguese. And continues: *“My grandma waited 92 years to talk about her Indian grandma. She was ashamed for this blood origin and probably my great-grandmother too.”* Such revelations were like a spur to undertake this research.

My blood mix combination, made me think about every detail and behaviour pattern of my life. I finally could be proud of being a descendant of a native tribe in Brazil. However, I felt hurt to imagine that my ancestors were killed, and expelled from their land [...]. I had to go back to my roots and start a dialogue to people that lived in the same way as my grandparents (from my father's side) and my great-grandmother (from my mother's side).” Undergoing herself that process of self-awareness, she ends up with these words: “That perception and understanding gave me an opportunity to be grateful for what I have today and look for ways to contribute in the process of dialoguing in a regenerative way.

So this is the story of how, after an 18-month process of encounters and conversations between Debora and the APOBV, through which they got to better know each other, as well as their desires and expectations, she decided to organize herself a summit to be held at the community under the umbrella of IDDS. This long engagement and previous iterations with the community were crucial for understanding needs and articulating goals, as well as getting to know the place. Indeed, both the content and the approach of the summit, which were

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<sup>14</sup> This one and following quotes have been taken from her final dissertation. Some months after the Summit she enrolled in the MA in Economics for Transition at the Schumacher College - Plymouth University and presented this work in 2017, which is yet in course of publication.

designed in partnership with locals, were a direct result of this previous process of engagement.

The initiative was realized in partnership with the Organic Farmers Association of Boa Vista do Acará (APOBV), which works within the community as a crossbreed between a cooperative and a commune. The families involved share some land and divide their labors on it. They sell the harvest as a group and make group decisions but each household and family has an individual and small farming plot. Together with them, the summit was finally articulated around eight pillars (livelihood support, business and entrepreneurship, education, genre and community development) which seemed to gather their main concerns at that time, although it was presumed that these would work as starting points to be unraveled over the course of the summit. Thus, a total of thirty participants got there to work in small groups for the next twenty days around different projects addressing these issues. These participants, myself included, were mainly students coming from all over the world, some of them from the United States, several from South America (Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Argentina, Chile), one from Zimbabwe in Africa, another from Arusha in Tanzania and from Seoul in South Korea, and also from United Kingdom and Germany. Most of them came from the field of design, or had different engineering backgrounds, and a number of the participants were already involved in projects or professions related to permaculture, environmental issues or community mobilizing. Overall it was a group of highly motivated young people which to some extent shared a longing for social change and reconnection with nature.

There was also a group of five from Mundo Maker<sup>15</sup>, an association based in Sao Paulo, that organizes workshops and activities with children and educators in different parts of Brazil, using applied science technology through design thinking and other creative learning methodologies. One of their most popular actions is the so-called "Education Truck", with which they travel to various periphery and low-income villages to carry out the workshops. Débora Leal had invited them to participate in this IDDS Amazon and they decided to expand the trip into a three-month long excursion, that would stop in various towns and schools along the way. To raise funds for this, they organized a crowd-funding through which they gathered the budget to get new equipment for the truck and cover the logistical expenses for the trip. They had planned to make around twelve stops along their way, staying in each place between five or seven days, with a longer midway stop in Belem to participate in summit. Thus, they arrived at Boa Vista de Acará with a huge, vibrant green truck fully equipped with a 3D

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mundomaker.cc/>.

printer, laser cutter, computers, hardware and software, and stayed for over a week with us doing different activities with children from Boa Vista and other communities around, in parallel to the ongoing of the summit.

Once there, I joined a working group that was meant to work out solutions that could contribute to diversify the economic activities of the community and help in the enhancement of traditional cultural habits. What follows is the recounting of what went on during those days in Boa Vista do Acará. Two threads can be followed here: one tells the story of what we did and how we did it -focusing mainly in the activities of the working group I was involved in; and the other tries to recount how we were all done, or how we were affected throughout this process.

## **4.2 A vision**

Boa Vista do Acará is an extractive rural community of about 150 families. The village is part of Acará municipality, in Pará State. It is possible to arrive there by road or boat. Leaving from Belém, crossing the river Guamá, it is a 1-hour trip, very impressive because of the river's wide, bordered by forest and stilts houses. During the day the skyline of Belem is beautifully cut against the sky while the boat moves upriver into a smaller course and a wilder landscape.



**Figure 12:** Arriving at the community.



Photopragher: Diego Dalmaso.

*An image (above) and a semblance (under).*

**Figure 13:** A collective drawing of Boa Vista.



Various authors.



The day of my arrival it was already dark when we caught the boat. We left from a ramshackle harbor from the city in which a festive chaos reigned. I remember a lot of people, loud music coming from somewhere, loads of beer cans on the floor, a sweltering weather, and us rushing into the boat that would take us to the community. Also a certain feeling of danger, or inappropriateness as our hosts hurried us so that nobody would take notice that we were foreigners. When we finally reached Boa Vista I was received by Débora. Several years had passed since we had been together in Nuvem and yet I immediately felt her closeness. We spent some time catching up with each other's life and remembering our stay in Nuvem. It didn't go unnoticed for neither of us the fact that similar circumstances had brought us again together. Then I was taken to Beneto's house who would be my host for the following two weeks. The activities would began next day early in the morning at the APOBV.

The association had been traditionally dedicated to the raising of typical Amazonian crops such as açai, manioc, or Pará nut, as well as organic farming, along with harvesting the bounty of the forest and the river. However at the time of preparation of this project, herbal cropping -mainly of 'priprioca'- had become the main economic activity of the community, as they provided *Natura*, a national cosmetics company. Although this had served as a significant economic increase for them, they were concerned with the fact that this had entailed missing out attention to other local plants and fruits and flour production, which meant not only neglecting other traditional sources of income but also important practices regarding their cultural habits and identity. Along with this, in the last years the APOBV had been facing the issue of dealing with an excedent production of priprioca that the company didn't buy as they realized they had enough oil in storage. This had happened several times, and although the company paid the amount regarding the initial phases of production (planting and maintenance), they didn't for the harvest costs. As the producers did not find another buyer and did not have equipment to process the raw material, the exceeding priprioca went bad in the field.

Being so, one of the needs that was identified together with the association previous to the event, was to help them find solutions that could contribute to diversify their economic activities and assist in the preservation and enhancement of traditional cultural habits. Thus, the goal of our group was to focus on local herbal plants and investigate possible forms of oil extraction, distilling and bottling within the community to make their own perfumes or other cosmetics products, as a means to increase their autonomy with respect to external commissions. With this in mind, a team of five people, including myself, was formed at the

beginning of the summit to further explore and undertake the project. We worked together with two dwellers from the community: Débora Chagas and Bia.

The first time I saw Débora she was sitting on a bench in front of the APOVB chatting with someone else. The sight reminded me of that old frequent scene from the villages of southern Spain during the summer months, when people, mainly elderly women, take their chairs outside their front door in the evenings when the heat of the day finally comes to a standstill. In fact there was something about Débora that reminded me of a grandma, something that had to do with her warmth and a sort of peaceful, imperturbable self-possession. But indeed she was only in her late-twenties when I met her. She was one of the founder members of the APOVB and a very active one. In the following weeks she would become part of our working group and a key piece in the project, for she provided not just the knowledge about the community that we were lacking but also the link to other dwellers that helped us in making sense about our project. But above all she was a source of inspiration whenever we felt we were losing sight of our direction. Thus, as the project unfolded, she made us realize how narrow our initial interpretation of the community's challenges were.

As a matter of fact it was the powerful personal stories we heard from Débora and other people she introduced us to, what led us to think about the context of our project from a more fundamental level. At some point of the design process, when we were having a hard time to imagine the path we should take, we asked her what kind of Boa Vista do Acará she imagined for her son. This involved reflecting on her circumstances -and that of the community- on a much deeper level. She didn't reply at the moment, but then, a couple of days later, she approached our group bringing a piece of paper where she had written her personal vision for the future of Boa Vista. It was then that we found a motivation for moving forward, not seeking fast and neat solutions anymore, but rowing with her in the direction of such envisioned place:

The Community I want to leave for my son is a community where he has access to education and can learn with the forest; access to health care and heals with the herbs; where he can have a good house to live in and also knows that the whole Forest around him is his home. It is a place in which, when those we love are no longer with us we can remember them and the relationship they had with nature, and take pride in this; take pride in being of the country, being of the forest, being of Boa Vista do Acará. Because I work and take care that all children, young ones, and grown ups can have opportunities in this community, not having to leave it to get quality education, to transform the hearts of our visitors, and that every person from

here and every visitor can take a worthy example of unity and stewarding of our great mother, The Earth<sup>16</sup>.

### 4.3 Tuning in

For the summit we were encouraged to follow a specific methodology called 'ecological design process'. Such method aims to develop interventions, technologies or systems that create value and meet the needs of the community, as well its local ecosystem. Such interventions might solve specific problems but they might also help to release existing resources or use the community's wealth in a more sustainable way or as a possible yield. The design process also encourages to take advantage as much as possible of the existing resources within that ecosystem. Thus, we were expected to apply this collaborative process of ecological design process to a specific challenge. The word 'ecological' in this approach draws upon permaculture principles and design processes that seek to build integrated ecosystems based on an ethics of caring and sustainability. More specifically, this design process involved several stages. First, to understand needs and articulate goals; Second, to understand the existing conditions and the resources available around; Third, a conceptual development including schemas and detailed design; And finally, the building or implementation phase in which a specific prototype is tested and evaluated. However, this process does not have to be a linear one, and in fact the knowledge gained during the different stages of the process is likely to follow a spiral pattern, moving backward and forward along an iterative movement.

This was one of the ways in which the importance of attunement was addressed in this project. For indeed, the ecological design process followed in Boa Vista do Acará was largely iterative, which means that it proceeded in a spiral continuum where any output at a certain stage would be used both as input for the next one and as correcting feedback for the following iteration. In fact, my group and our final prototypes went through many stages and had to be modified several times during the project as a result of this getting attuned. As a matter of fact, it didn't take very long to realize that the initial frame of our project, focused mainly on oil extraction to bypass their financial dependence, was too narrow. It soon became apparent the enormous variety of local herbal plants, as well as the wealth of traditional knowledge around its cosmetics and medicinal uses. There was a feeling that all this knowledge around plants and herbs was somehow being lost. As rich as it was, in practice it

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<sup>16</sup> This text was written by Débora Chagas, dweller from Boa Vista do Acará (original in portuguese, my translation).

was scattered just among a few people from the community, usually the oldest, and no other means of being preserved. Some locals talked about the importance of connecting the old generations to the younger ones so that the latter could become familiarized with those practices. Others expressed their concern with how to make young people engage with this knowledge in new ways, as a means to resignify and revitalize traditions in which they seemed to be losing interest. The possibility of turning some of that wealth of knowledge into a product or service that would derive in possible economic yields for the community, thus, increasing their financial autonomy also came up in our conversations over those days. However, we realized that there might be other kinds of yields -cultural or bonding, for example, rather than financial- that could be brought out of it.

Thus, we soon became aware that there were three ideas that appeared regularly in our conversations with the locals: tradition -meaning all the longstanding practices and uses of herbal plants within the community which didn't constitute a systematic body of knowledge-, connection -for sustaining that traditions implied connecting people within the community, especially the old and the young generations-, and autonomy -as a general goal to be addressed in thinking about the community's sustainability. Based on this, we started to think on possible prototypes that could somehow address these challenges. The Summit's idea of working through prototypes instead of finished solutions was to facilitate local engagement and enable an innovation pipeline open to feedback, variations and flexibility during the whole co-creation process. In our case we had identified three main pillars. The first one was how to keep the traditional knowledge about the plants alive. The second one was how to connect young and old generations within the community -and then the community with people from outside. And finally, the question about how the community could keep its autonomy, not only in terms of economy, but mainly regarding its cultural and environmental sustainability. With this in mind, we decided to work on three different samples that would focus separately on different aspects of the project.

#### **4.4 A smell and a smile**

One afternoon, after an intense and not very productive group session trying to articulate our goals for the following days, Débora Chagas suggested to go for a walk to 'unwind' a bit. So we set off into the woods behind her and after a while stopped by Dona Celia's house to have a chat with her. She was about to hang out some cloths on a clothesline hanging between two trees but as soon as she saw us she dropped the clothes, and went into

the house to take some chairs and sit down with us. So we gathered in the yard making small talk about the Summit. Dona Célia is a small, good looking, elderly woman from the community. She grows her own garden which gives vegetables and herbs that she uses in her kitchen daily, saving her and her family on trips to market in the city. At some point I told her that I was amazed of how many herbal plants they had in the community and she readily approached her garden to show us the great variety she had in that small piece of land. She went on pointing to one another, telling us their names and uses. For the fragrant ones she would cut a little off the leaves and brought them close to our to have a taste of them.

The truth is that all the while being at her side had been a real enjoyment of the senses. It came from the vivacity she exuded, from her lively smile, her pleasant voice, but as regards my experience, it specially flowed out of her scent. I couldn't tell if it was her hair, her skin or her clothes were it came from, but it created a sort of enchanting atmosphere which kept me charmed for hours. When later on I said goodbye to Dona Celia with a hug, this pleasant smell reached out to me more intensely and I couldn't stop myself from asking where did it come from. This was the first time I heard about the "Banho de cheiro".

This traditional practice consists of a bath composed by more than 25 different native herbs cultivated in the surroundings of local residences, that people prepare and take mostly in special occasions (such as during Festas Juninas or Christmas). For some dwellers it only has a cosmetic purpose, for the fragrance of the scented bath remains in the skin for a while, but for many others this practice carries other meanings, more of a magical or spiritual nature. It is believed that taking a "banho de cheiro" frees the person from "bad energies" and purifies the soul; Or it may work as a lure to attract love from others according to some. Although it is still a common practice within the community, many people specially among the younger generations, have lost interest in it, and there is also an issue with religion, for some people brand it as a "superstition" that goes against Christian beliefs. This makes it something beloved -for it has a long tradition in the community- and at the same time, rejected, as for many it embodies the old or the esoteric.

The day I met Dona Célia, when I first heard about this practice, she had just taken a banho de cheiro, as she did everyday. When I asked her if other members of her family also did it, she said no, they didn't like it as much as she did, but she kept on giving "banhos de cheiro" to her grandkids "while they still allow me to", she laughed. I guess she was really pleased when I so enthusiastically praised her delicious fragrance. The next day I woke up with some cocks crowing at dawn. I got out of the hammock and head directly to the bathroom craving for a refreshing shower. Down in the shower tray laid a big black bowl

which was not there the night before. I came closer and gave a wary glance at the inside. The bowl was full of water and herbs, deliciously fragrant herbs, which somebody had left there for me.

**Figure 14:** Banho de cheiro.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

*A bucket of perfumed water (above) and a woman-banho-de-cheiro (under).*

**Figure 15:** Dona Célia.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

#### **4.5 Becoming fragile**

By far, getting to know the people we were working with, and tuning in as a group, was the most challenging and time-consuming part of the process. This involved a lot of discussions and conversations with people to try to understand their relationship with the place and their plants, as well as their main concerns regarding their present and future as a community. But most of the time these insights would not come up as straightforward answers or replies to questions during formal meetings or group discussions, but arouse precisely in the interstices of that communication, in a rather oblique -yet vivid- way. In this regard, during the summit several methods or tools were used in order to foster connections and relationships along with the development of the projects. One of this tools were morning circles.

The mornings began in the same way. Just after breakfast we gathered together in the large open area in front of the Association. Not everyone made it that early in the morning,

but usually all together, including foreign and local participants, we could be about 40 or 50 people sitting on the ground making a huge circle. Inside the circle, we all faced each other, no one exalted, no one hidden.

The purpose of this activity was to start the day interacting together as a group. Generally it was about sharing appreciations for how you felt towards your project, or the Summit or others, and listeners often offered empathetic feedback. There was usually also a brief group activity, such as singing or dancing or stretching exercises. Beside helping to foster a sense of group, it provided a space where empathy and intersubjectivity were built and taken care of.

I was skeptical about this kind of dynamic and I rather disliked the emotional mood it drifted into every morning. One day in one of this interactive exercises, I had to partner with a member of my group whom I was finding hard to get along with. I couldn't remember exactly when or why our disagreement had started but I was certain it had nothing to do with herbal plants or with project prototypes. It was not the kind of disagreement that would draw us into quarrels or open hostility but a more silent feeling of distance expressed in a stubborn reluctance to agree upon anything when discussing our project or a subtle but too readily inclination to find faults in whichever ideas or proposals the other one made. We had never spoken about it, although it certainly marked the trajectory of all our interactions. The exercise that morning consisted in looking into each other's' eyes during some minutes without saying anything. It was kind of discomfoting to sit down staring at her not able to say anything that might help divert attention from the fact that we didn't exactly fancy each other.

In the minutes that followed something weird happened. My initial discomfort turned into an evident nervousness and then into a feeling of sadness and huge desire to cry which, eventually, I couldn't hold back. I found myself quite shocked with the force of my emotions and the fact that I felt so incapable of doing anything about the course they had taken. Thankfully, it was a game 'rule' not to say anything during the exercise, which in that moment felt as a relief for I didn't have to give any kind of explanation. So I just allowed myself to sit there and cry in front of her. At some point she held my hand in hers and stood still until I calmed down. After that, when the time for the exercise ended, I looked around and saw very different scenes from the one I had just experienced with my partner. Some people were laughing, others seemed to be enjoying a quiet chat, a few couples were embracing each other.

This is just a brief excerpt of the kind of situations that happened during those morning circles, which were variegated and marked by disparate affects and intensities. What I would like to bring up in evoking that moment is the fact that I started to bear witness of



how this space became, morning after morning, a visible scenery of the affective dimension we were inhabiting those days together in Boa Vista. There were also other tools used to encourage group-attunement processes, mostly based on rounds. For instance, we made frequent brainstormings, as well as periodic rounds through the members of a project group to make sure that everyone took part in the discussions. This was a way of taking care of those whose voices tended to be unheard- perhaps because of a shyer character or maybe because of a language barrier. We also had a notice board in the wall intended to be used by those who needed something and those who could offer something, not necessarily in a one-to-one reciprocal exchange. Headed by the words ‘What do I need?’ people wrote down different needs that could be met by others and under ‘What can I offer?’ participants listed a wide range of tasks and activities, usually involving some personal skill, anything that could be geared to the wellbeing of others. This are the sort of practices I refer to as involving fragilization, which were expressly implemented and used not only as a tool to make visible affections but, more than this, as a way of nurturing it into the projects.

All these spaces and dynamics were purposely interwoven within the more practical or technical aspects of the design process and they helped me understand how misleading can be a clear-cut separation between a rational and an affective realm in our lives. As Berlant puts it (1997), ultimately, “there is no room to make a distinction among political, economic, and affective forms of existence, because the institutions of intimacy that constitute the everyday environments of the social are only viscerally distinct but actually, as we know, intricately and dynamically related to all sorts of institutional, economic, historical, and symbolic dynamics”. Indeed these practices made visible how our work there was conditioned also by an affective ecology shaped by all the encounters and intimacies that we were experiencing, and how those variegated affective entanglements formed the ground for the projects that were being developed. This was being not only acknowledged but also taken care of through this different kinds of devices. Thus, what at first might had seemed whimsical, turned out to be essential to the fabric of the summit, as when the direction of our project changed after listening to Débora’s dreams and powerful stories. The affective, as a flow of forces that obliges us as individuals, and at the same time exceeds and connects us in a circuit of forces has under this reading an essential creative character. As Precarias argue (2005): “what escapes the code situates us in that which is not yet said, opens the terrain of the thinkable and livable, it is that which creates relationships”.

**Figure 16:** Face to face.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 17:** Morning circle.



Photographer: Agnes Pynchla.

### *Meshes of affect*

**Figure 18:** Miho and Bia.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

## 4.6 More-than-human

So throughout the summit a space was built in which genuine connection and relationships were nurtured. But something that stroke me after some days in Boa Vista was the feeling that this sort of bodily engagement, active affection, even love were not only crucial parts of the human entanglements but were also essential to the attachment to the place in a broader and more-than-human sense.

Following the path opened up by 'posthuman' perspectives within anthropology over the past years, Marisol de la Cadena (2014) uses this notion of more-than-human together with the term "anthropo-not-seen" to refer to the process by which other worlds "that did not make themselves through the division between humans and nonhumans" are constraint into that framework while exceeding it. Using as examples the Quechua terms *tirakuna* and *runakuna* which have most commonly been translated as non-humans and humans respectively, she shows how such definitions fall short in grasping their meaning. Because, as she explains, *tirakuna* are not "simply non-humans". She herself, translates it as earth-beings. Likewise the term *runakuna* cannot be conflated with that of humans. This is so because both *runakuna* and *tirakuna* can only come into being in relation to each other. Together they form *ayllu* -a home place that emerges from that relation. In her own words: *In ayllu, earth-beings are with runa; removing the first (either through extirpation of idolatries or open-pit mining) would change the latter in a way that neither Christian baptism nor the salaries of development can provide an equivalent.*" They cannot, thus, be disentangled without ceasing to be what they are. That is, in the world of *ayllu*, *runakuna* and *tirakuna* always exceed what the terms human and nonhumans designate -a division that is, thus, ontologically insufficient. What it means to be *runakuna*-with-*tirakuna* and vice-versa (and the impossibility of being one without the other) is ontologically ungraspable by the world that produced the divide between human and non-humans. In this regard, she speaks in her work of worlds that are more-than-human, for they are populated by entities that are "not only human" and "not only nonhuman".

To think entities in our world as an assemblage that makes one with the others allows also to revisit the notion of agency not in terms of individual experiences and autonomous intention but as something much more dis-membered and plurivocal. Vinciane Despret (2013) has argued how, while the term agency emerged as a critique to structuralism by crediting individuals with a power (that is, with agency) to intervene and subvert social constraints, the notion still rests on a humanist and Christian tradition that conflates agency with

intentionality and rationality. However, when being involves being actively involved in another's existence, agency also becomes something that weaves itself into a web of relations, entanglements and belongings. Here the search for an individual subject ceases to make sense and what remains is a world "full of beings able to affect and be affected by others" (Despret, 2013, p. 35). In such a world the question of who acts or who is being acted upon is not relevant anymore. The question now, as she puts it, is that "each living being renders other creatures capable (of affecting and of being affected), and they are entangled in a myriad of rapports of forces, all which are "agencements" (Despret, 2013, p. 37). This term *agencement*, which she takes from Deleuze, refers to that flow of forces, to that incessant process of affections -of taking and being taken by- among beings in an animated world. At this point, affects and agency seemed to conflate, for agency is that affective flow that permeates an assemblage of entities, not as something external that could be infused into (or curtailed from) the assemblage, but as something that animates our world as it is enacted.

Although I was yet not familiar with this term, looking back to my days at Boa Vista I was caught by an "involutionary mode of attention", as Hustak & Myers define it (2012), that is, by a certain awareness of how every entity "effectuates a power to be affected" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Through the notion of "involutionary momentum" Hustak & Myers name a relational arrangement between different entities that become involved with each other giving way to an ecological scenario which infolds itself in an endless and intense move of mutual attunements. This alternative reading of ecology, mostly based on their work around pollination within plan/insect ecologies, aims to subvert "the reductive, mechanistic, and adaptationist logics" in the field. According to the authors, the concept of "involutionary momentum" constitutes "a feminist approach to interspecies relationality" (Hustak & Myers, 2012, p. 78), not only because it puts to the fore the relations of interdependency and mutual involvements that constitute our worlds -thus redeeming it from the disenchanted and disengaged account of technoscience - but also because it sets the contours of an "affective ecology" which calls for a sense of response-ability and a politics of care "required to transform the exploitative relations of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) that have prevailed so far.

Interestingly, focusing on Darwin's work on orchid pollination, the authors point out the importance of the scenario and the atmosphere where the study took place. Living at a place called Down House, in the English countryside, this setting became an "experimental laboratory", whose inhabitants -which included the plants, the pigeons, Darwin himself and his family, among many others- "formed an affective ecology" (Hustak & Myers, 2012, p.



83). This means that the place worked as an "experimental space" which provided the conditions that made possible the effectuation of a more-than-human affective ecology, where the sensory, the physiological and the careful interactions among species is reflected in the treatise on orchid pollination that came out of that study in 1862. In this same spirit, back in Boa Vista the experimental space created during the summit was animated by a flux of circulating affects through which we were becoming involved with one another and with the more-than-human community around us.

#### **4.7 Açaí lust**

We had been a couple of days without eating açaí in any of our meals, and that wasn't normal. The açaí palm is a species of palm tree native to Brazil and other regions in northern South America. The fruit is a round, black-purple drupe smaller than one centimeter. It looks similar to a black grape although the fleshy part is a very thin layer surrounding a shell. Beside making up a major component of their diets, they also mark the landscape in Boa Vista do Acara, for açaí palms are scattered all over the community. It has a long, elegant, dark shaft that ends in a bunch of drooping leaves giving the palm a nice and wispy silhouette. It also serves as a local playground for tree climbing.

The fruit pulp is obtained using a machine that separates by pressure the flesh from the seed, but the one they had in the community had been under repair and that was the reason for our 48-hours açaí fasting. Finally the machine was working again and we were waiting around the association to see it arrive. Some locals had suggested to take the occasion to show us how it worked. Apparently the news had ran quickly and there were many people waiting around. On its arrival everyone clapped happily. Two men brought a big bowl full of açaí fruits and put it in the machine, which started to make a buzzing noise. Soon after, the purplish juice started to come out and everyone wanted to dip their thumbs, for the coveted creamy juice coming out from the first stage of extraction was considered 'a delicacy'.

I don't know how it began. I guess someone imprinted an açaí-thumb in somebody else's face, and that somebody painted someone's lips and soon everyone had their faces dirty and açaí was dripping down the bucket and people were licking it from each others hands and our clothes were stained with the black-purple color of açaí and our mouths turned dark and everyone was inflamed with açaí-lust.

**Figure 19:** Açaí.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

*Black-handed, white-handed.*

**Figure 20:** Açaí juicer.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 21:** Mandioca sieve.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

### *Nos-otros*

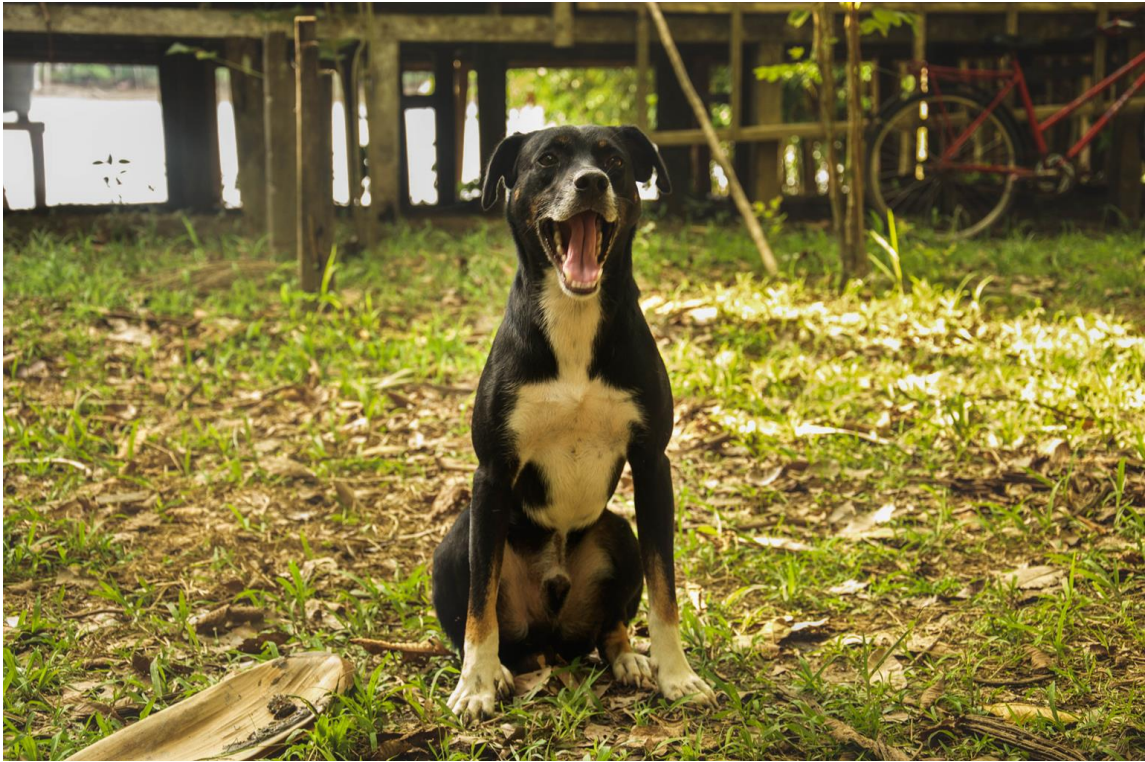
**Figure 22:** A chicken on a chair.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 23:** A dog.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

## 4.8 Prototyping

Finally in my group we decided to work on three different samples that would focus separately on different aspects of the project. Taking into account the existing conditions and the available resources, also in terms of time within the duration of the summit, we chose to carry out the following prototypes: a sensorial herbal trail, a library of medicinal recipes and sound memory and a home made distillator for priprioca oil extraction.

### *Sensorial herbal trail:*

The idea of an herbal trail came from one member of the community, as a way of harnessing an already existing initiative that was started some years ago by two tourism companies. As there is already a touristic trail to show to visitors some important places and activities of the community, we decided to take advantage of this fact to design a new trail focused on the local plants. An essential part of this project was to engage the community around the process of designing the trail, so that it would not imply just the capitalization of a resource -in the form of a service for outsiders. Community engagement was a goal in itself,

as a way of making them appraise their own wealth and also as a way of boosting connections and interactions within the community with regard to that knowledge. With this in mind, the trail was designed to pass through key points, along which dwellers would present the main herbs used to produce the smelly bath. At the same time, features from the local biodiversity would be presented, as well as some stories that are part of the community's folklore. At the end, participants would be invited to take a smelly bath with the herbs that they themselves would have collected during the trial.

Throughout this process of designing the trail, many locals showed interest in participating and sharing whatever they knew about the plants, sometimes related to their use, their harvest or their mythology. It was, thus, a collaborative design process for it involved the retrieving of different types of knowledge which was often scattered among different people from the community. As a result, we made a map of the final trail. Even if the actual test of the trail with real tourists was not done during the duration of the summit, its design did indeed serve as an opportunity to liven up traditional practices -such as the *banho de cheiro*- and, according to local participants, to regain confidence in those traditions as an important cultural asset.

#### *Library of medicinal recipes:*

Another thing that was identified during the initial stage of the project was the fact that there is a slew of traditional knowledge about medicinal uses of the local plants, but that this knowledge is scattered throughout the community mainly among the old people. Some of the young people we talked with were concerned with the possibility of losing this knowledge once the elders passed away. In this regard, they expressed an interest in retrieving all that information in a way that would ensure its preservation. So we decided to produce a first draft of a collection to document stories and recipes that so far have been transmitted orally among generations.

There was also an issue of how to connect old and young generations and specially how to encourage them to play an active part in the preservation of a cultural legacy of which they are also heirs. So it was decided that it would be the children from the community who would make this work of collecting and registering information about medical plants. The medical 'recipes' was presented as a 'natural medication box', also built and designed with the kids with materials from the forest -such a *miritu* wood and palm leaves- and it will be kept in the association library, available for anyone and as a prototype for further projects.

*Home made distiller for priprioca oil extraction:*

Our third prototype wanted to address the question of how to deal with the excedent of priprioca they had from the growing crops originally aimed at providing an external company. In many conversations locals expressed their concern regarding how to gain autonomy -in this case, mainly a financial autonomy- from external commissions. In those conversations, we became aware of their limitation as only raw material suppliers. Although they had plenty of resources within the community that could be exploited, so far they had only focused on those resources as raw material. We discussed the possibility of turning some of that resources into finished products which they could themselves capitalize. Thus, we came up with the idea of experimenting with oil extraction from certain plants which seem to be demanded. So we decided to prototype a homemade distiller to extract oil from priprioca, so that the community would have the possibility of making their own products from the raw materials they produce, and thus would serve to foster the self-management of local resources. The method used in order to extract essential compounds of priprioca was steam distillation. We used flour to seal the pot and funnel to avoid leaking steam. Then, we put priprioca on the tray and boiled water. Vaporised water and compounds came out through the tubes and were distilled by cooling. Finally, we collected the essential oil separated from water. However, steam was still escaping due to the lack of a proper sealing method, and even after 1.5 hours of experiment, the amount of oil obtained was very little. Within the duration of the summit, we didn't have time to test a better solution but we develop a list of recommendations for future experiments, such as: the need to provide better sealing, use flowing water instead of iced water for better energy efficiency and possibly use processed priprioca by, for example, dicing or crushing priprioca beforehand.

Certainly we were aware all through the development of these projects that the type of questions that were emerging could not possibly be addressed during the two weeks that lasted the summit, neither accounted for through a single prototype. However we worked on that basis to try to stick to the Summit's guidelines, and eventually the very process of thinking through prototypes -with the degree of experimentation and incompleteness they involved- helped to catalyze a specific collaborative arrangement which proved fruitful in itself. Hence, eventually we realized that all the time spent reaching an understanding and an agreement about our purpose was of value because it had given us a sense of closeness within the group and towards the people from the community. Indeed one of the main things we

learned as a group is how the practice of pursuing an understanding of the other, and bridging that otherness has emergent properties that are quite difficult to catalog and account for.

**Figure 24:** Drawing the trail.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 25:** Library of medicinal herbs.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 26:** Priprioca distiller.



Photographer: Miho Kitagawa.

## 4.9 Traces

On the last day of our stay in Boa Vista do Acará, we had sort of a farewell ceremony in which each of us was given the chance to express what the project had meant to us and what had it added up to our lives. Stormy clouds and a billowing breeze announced rain so we gathered in a circle underneath the bamboo shelter that had been home to most of our group activities during the Summit. The day was slipping into the evening and the light was growing dimmer, while we huddled together on the floor. The gloomy mood in us for knowing we were leaving the next day, was somehow allay by that moment of sheltered intimacy away from the rain. When at last a girl in the group began to speak, the storm around had already swelled to a tremendous, tropical choir. ‘I am just gonna say: thaaank you’, she uttered, lengthening the words like in a gentle caress. Then she handed over to the person sitting next to her, and the turn to speak thus kept passing around from person to person. Some gave a wordy speech, others preferred to remain silent and the tone was in turns cheerful, solemn and sad. There was a sort of intensity hovering over us, swelling and waning and then swelling again, drawing its charge from the words being said, but also from a momentary glance, a subtle smile, a myriad of little gestures surfacing our bodies, in a continuous flow in which we were rocked.

When the last person had spoken, and we were starting to stretch our slumbering senses as if waking from a daydream, someone suddenly suggested, “hey what about a hug?” And it sounded as the natural ending to that shared moment we had just experienced with the affective wave still resonating in our bodies. So a kind of bodily confusion began as everybody got up and strolled along the space hugging and being hugged by whoever stood in front, in a kind of slow and disordered dance.

At that moment I saw her, standing at the end of the floor. Big tears were rolling down her cheeks. Bia was a twelve-year old girl from Boa Vista and had been part of our project group since the beginning. Other children in the community had been wandering around all the time but none of them had actively taken part in the activities. Bia had. She was the first to arrive at the meetings early in the morning and the last one to go home. Always with her little notebook and pencil in hand. During these sessions she would literally bend over the pages of her notebook, thoughtfully writing things down. Sometimes I saw her making drawings, at other times she would take notes, always looking so focused and still in those moments... But I never had the chance to take a look at any of those things. She wouldn’t speak during our group meetings, not even when she was directly asked about something -at those moments

she would coyly look down, just shaking her head ‘no’ and eagerly return to her notebook. Many times I had wished to pierce her gentle modesty, to understand what made her be there every day, choosing to stay close to us instead of playing around with the other children. I would have loved to ask her what did the summit and everything that had happened there meant to her. But Bia was not the talkative type. And now she was standing there, crying so deeply, yet so still, her tears seemed beyond comfort. I went towards her, ‘hey Bia, you ok?’ To which she of course, didn’t answer and then I simply hold her quivering body around my arms.

#### **4.10 Insights from Boa Vista**

Toró is a very popular word in the paraense jargon. Literally it refers to a storm and heavy rains, which are quite common in the region during the whole year but specially in summer, when they can happen almost daily. We were told by some locals that its origin is onomatopoeic as it imitates the sound of a violent storm dumping. Beside this meaning, the word is used in many different situations, always to express something enormous, and it is now one of those words that are part of their linguistic idiosyncrasy.

The first time I heard this word we were in a boat going back to Boa Vista after a day off in Belem when we were caught in a toró. We had already noticed the black storm clouds back in the port but they seemed to be still far enough and we hoped we could get to the community before it began. It started with just a few big raindrops and almost immediately the whole sky was falling down on us. So now we were desperately seeking shelter from the pouring rain, inside the small wooden boat in the middle of the river. The boat driver didn’t seem very worried even though the storm was growing windier and we were already drenched despite our raincoats and our efforts to remain under the shabby shelter of the boat. To make things worse, we were carrying our cameras, and smartphones, and gopros and we were worried that the rain could potentially wreck it all.

As we approached the forest, where the water flow starts to narrow and the stilts houses become visible on the banks of the river, a different scene was taking place. There, spontaneous fun had erupted among a group of children who were jumping into the water, still wearing their clothes, bursting out a deep loud hearty laughter, as the heavy (yet warm) rain came down in buckets.

During the weeks following the IDDS Amazon, one of the project facilitator and organizers, Jorge, stayed in the community to help and give continuity to the projects and



prototypes yielded during the summit. The purpose of his continued presence was to give attention to try weaving the projects together and steering them towards a common goal, or ‘vision’, as the one that had been articulated by Débora. In practice, it meant deepening his relationship (and thus also IDIN's relationship) to the community of Boa Vista do Acará. As he stated in the final report he submitted after his stay at the community (See Appendix 3): *“Learning a community's language, being vulnerable, and human in the midst of our hosts and putting oneself at their service fully is life changing for the person who does it and can potentially yield benefits for the host community [...]”*. His further engagement over this period, also helped to map out next steps for the future of the some of the ideas outlined during the summit. Some of those regarded the specific projects and prototypes that were done together with the rest of participants and other to broader development issues explored during the summit. In the final report, he stated that the departure of the participants after the Summit left great feelings of “saudade” in Boa Vista, which he interpreted as a sign that a space was built “in which genuine connection and relationships were built and nurtured”.

The scene of Bia crying silently the last day of our stay in Boa Vista came back to my mind many times later. I recalled it when preparing the evaluation report for IDDS and realizing that the description of the three prototypes fell short of our goals, or when reading my field notes back in Sao Paulo and finding them so unrealistically dull. In both accounts that moment had been removed. Perhaps Bia was caught in a toró of affects that afternoon, just as somehow we all were. However I believe that being true to what happened in Boa Vista do Acará involved taking those tears into account. Surely, wrapping up the meaning of those tears or trying to characterize them once and for all is far beyond the scope of this text. But giving them space in this text is a way of making them matter. For indeed, those tears may matter in different ways; perhaps they speak to us about the embers of expectations and longings that the project left behind, or rather as a sign that something was aroused, in Bia, in me, in others, that might be clustered to a point of impact.

**Figure 27:** Toró.



Photographer: Diego Dalmaso.

*Signs of toró: A dark carpet and a briefly suspended silence*

## CHAPTER 5 - SERRINHA DO ALAMBARI

*The evolution of Nuvem into Silo; And a re-encounter with Cinthia, and some insights into autonomy.*

### 5.1 Moving clouds

Observo as nuvens no céu. Sabemos, são passageiras, lugar de trânsito entre um estado e outro das substâncias, entre a condensação e a precipitação, entre o céu e a terra. Mas um detalhe que às vezes nos escapa é que as nuvens estão sempre projetadas na terra, às vezes em forma de água ou vapor, outras em forma de sombra. Em forma de sombra, a nuvem, como uma mancha de contornos móveis desloca-se enquanto faz e desfaz formas comportando-se como território móvel. Impermanente, a sombra que a nuvem faz no chão, marca e desmarca territórios. Arisco dizer que as zonas autônomas temporárias, no campo, funcionam como as sombras que as nuvens fazem no chão, escaneando as estancias permanentes e dando a elas o fresco da efemeridade em forma de um nomadismo de ações e ideias. (Mendonça, 2015).

When I first met Cinthia, back in November 2012, as a participant in the project Interactivos, she was, together with her partner at that time, Bruno, in charge of Nuvem, an initiative set in the region of Visconde de Mauá to carry out research, experimentation and development of processes seeking autonomy. This autonomy was meant to be not only technical but also relative to other spheres, such as environment, culture, body or territory, to mention some. Its location on a rural setting was specifically intended as a proposal to re-appropriate the countryside in response to the exhaustion of cities and urban life. In practice, it worked as a house in which meetings and debates were held for the diffusion of open knowledge and autonomous culture, as well as a center for residencies for artists and project makers. It also acted as a telecenter and rural hacklab. A strong emphasis was given to reaching the local community through different activities, such as workshops with the population or the creation of content and tutorials involving different issues concerning life in the community. The main financial supporter of Nuvem was the Ford Foundation, a New York-headquartered organization that makes grants for projects regarding a variegated range of areas, like higher education, the arts, economic development, civil rights, the environment, among other. In this regard, the foundation served as a sort of “institutional umbrella”, in words of Graci Selaimen. She is program officer in the foundations’ Brazil office and during

Encontrada, in an informal conversation I had with her, she used this term to refer to the foundation's role as a facilitator for a group of smaller organizations.

Through the combination of artistic residencies, creative laboratories and activist's encounters, the space created with Nuvem promoted a sort of transdisciplinarity in which the focus was placed on the processes of creation rather than on the products. Indeed, to facilitate access to the different projects, a wiki was used to publish and edit any documentation generated during the activities. Another interesting initiative it hosted were the so-called "Mutirões de Mínimo Impacto Ambiental", collaborative "work parties" carried out together with dwellers to address specific needs of the community, such as the recovery of water sources, the growing of agroforestry systems and the creation of gardens and compost heaps, to mention some. These mutirões<sup>17</sup> were one of Nuvem's key actions, insofar as they involved other people from the community and the integration of different knowledges coming from an old generation of local farmers whose expertise is being lost due to the exodus of young people from rural to urban areas.

Interestingly, according to Cinthia, Nuvem aligned itself with other "rural communities" across Brazil and abroad conceived of as experimental spaces seeking autonomy and integration. In an article she published on this topic (Mendonça, 2015), where she describes other projects of the like, she acknowledges "a consciência de uma existência em rede, onde há conexão com demais áreas rurais ou periféricas de mesmo interesse". And adds, "essa conexão se dá tanto em relação a troca de práticas e ideias quanto a de mercadorias e tecnologias. O "saber fazer" onde se pode aprender como funcionam as coisas, como podemos produzi-las ou construí-las e agenciá-las.". In this regard, she considers this kind of spaces in which Nuvem is included, "contradispositivos", that is, devices that go against standardized structures and forms of power, in that they favor an encounter between the person and the world not necessarily mediated by consumption patterns.

However, after Cinthia and Bruno's separation, Nuvem also started to gradually break apart. But just as the clouds described in the excerpt of Cinthia's text some lines above (which are always transient and are a place of transit from one state to another), the endpoint of Nuvem was indeed its transformation into a new "territory". Probably this was what Cinthia meant when speaking about "mobile territories" and the sort of "nomadism of actions and ideas" that she wanted to invoke with the name "Nuvem". So although the project as I had

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<sup>17</sup> Mutirão is the Brazilian name given to a collective mobilization towards a specific goal, based on mutual support provided without an economic charge. Originally the term was used in the rural context for certain jobs from which many people benefited, such as the building of popular houses. Today it designates any collective initiative to perform a service without remuneration.

known it up in the mountains of Visconde de Mauá did not exist as such anymore, the knot of ideas, motivations and people that had formed part of it, had now turned into a new project. It was now called Silo and it was there where I re-encountered Cinthia (and some other people whom I had met at Nuvem) some years later.

After the dismantling of Nuvem, Cinthia had moved back to Serrinha do Alambari, a protected area from the region of Resende, in Rio de Janeiro, where her family had a house. From there she initiated some activities with some friends inspired by the same premises than Nuvem. At the time of requesting grants and funds to carry out the projects, she soon found out that establishing itself as a civil society association was a pragmatic way of accessing these resources, and so they decided to form an association. Thus, Silo was born in 2016 by bringing together a group of friends that had been involved for years in different projects regarding artistic production, technological experimentation, autonomy and collaborative convergence. At the time when this work was written it comprised eight members, besides Cinthia herself. Lina, an artist and freelance media consultant who manages an atelier in Sao Paulo directed to the creative and playful experiences with technologies. Anais, artist and stylist, creator of INA NIN<sup>18</sup>, a project in the intersection of art and fashion that experiments through performances, installations, and different objects bringing together Chinese and Brazilian traditions; Fernanda, product designer and carpentry teacher at the educational program from the Instituto Tomie Ohtake<sup>19</sup> in Sao Paulo; Itala, cultural producer and researcher from Bahia, co-funder of the Aceleradora Baiana Vale do Dendê<sup>20</sup>, a social holding aimed at fostering innovation among young afro-brazilian entrepreneurs; Mariana, a biologist from Rio de Janeiro, specialized in environmental education and organic agriculture; Sara, an electrical engineer from Minas Gerais involved in different initiatives regarding sound, movement and electronic arts; Vanessa, a member of Fundo ELAS<sup>21</sup> -an independent Social Investment Fund dedicated to foster and strengthen the prominence and leadership of women in Brazil; And Thiago, a computational engineer who works with digital culture, education and journalism and has participated in different projects related to art, technology and activism.

All of these people were old friends of Cinthia, with whom she had already worked with separately time and again in various initiatives. Despite their different backgrounds and experiences, they shared a common interest in trans-disciplinary exchanges between art and

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.inanin.com.br/>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.institutotomieohtake.org.br/>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.valedodende.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.fundosocialelas.org/>.

technology. In this regard, Silo was conceived of as a space to conduct initiatives experimenting with the intersection of different knowledges and stimulating both collaboration and autonomy, in relation not only to technologies but also to environmental sustainability, cultural production or the body (with a special emphasis on gender issues). In the same spirit as Nuvem, it also built upon the desire to promote a passage between rural and urban landscapes by subverting the rule that centralizes in urban settings the production of art, science and technology. Their activities, as with Nuvem, included artistic residencies, citizen laboratories, do-it-yourself workshops, mutiroes and also activities specifically geared toward women. Through this type of experiences, conceived of as short-term projects or interventions, the aim was to create a space for critical action and reflection, and to open a channel to foster a continuous transit of people and ideas between urban and rural areas.

At the time when I contacted Cinthia again, it was about to take place “Encontrada”, an annual event originally devised by Cinthia in 2012 which had been taking place since then (first under the umbrella of Nuvem, and now within Silo) aimed at women and transgender people in the sphere of feminist activism. That was the occasion I chose to meet Cinthia again and get to know more about her new project in Silo.

**Figure 28:** Nuvem.



Photographer: Cinthia Mendonça.



**Figure 29:** Working at Nuvem.



Photographer: Luciana Fleischman.

## 5.2 Encontrada

The first *Encontrada* took place in 2012 as part of Nuvem's programme. The idea stemmed from Cinthia's interest in articulating a network for connections and exchanges between women artists and activists. After that first experience, the format of the event has been changing in each of its editions. In 2013 the emphasis was given to the issue of feminist self-governance, drawing upon the experiences of *Korpus Krisis* (KK)<sup>22</sup>, an event celebrated in Brasilia on the holiday of Corpus Christi to gather people and organizations concerned with what they called "the crisis of bodies", that is, the place of bodies in politics and art from experiences of gender and sexual transgressions. That occasion, which was followed by several encounters among the people who had participated, served, according to Cinthia, to strengthen the network of affinities and affections that had grown out from the event. Indeed, the following edition in 2014 was completely self-managed, without institutional funding. The resources to make it possible were obtained through a "Bazar *Encontrada*", in which clothes that had been donated were sold in different events. In this new stage, the discussion around

<sup>22</sup> <http://kk2011.confabulando.org/index.php/Main/CorpusCrisis>.

gender gained relevance out of the desire to embrace other body categories that did not fit well under the term “woman”. This time the event happened in a farm in Resende within the district of Fumaça, a place much more isolated than Nuvem and without internet access. The program of the event was also left much more opened, almost undefined, which resulted in a greater flexibility regarding the unfolding of the activities during the encounter.

After a gap in 2015 in which the event was not celebrated, 2016’s edition came once again with a different format, this time organized around several workshops regarding different issues (technology and digital security, medicinal uses of plant, body health, etc) always from a feminist perspective and an emphasis on increasing autonomy. This was more or less the same schema followed in *Encontrada* 2017, the one I attended. The difference now was that alongside the workshops, it offered the possibility for participants to present their projects and have them commented and discussed by a group of mentors that had been invited to the event, all of them women working in different fields but linked to feminist politics in some way or another. There was also an open call for artists and researchers interested in using the event as an opportunity to develop, advance or simply reflect upon their own personal projects and trajectories in relation to feminism. I decided to participate as one of this residents and propose to undertake an activity of documentation of the whole event, from its affective dimension. The specific content of my proposal, which was out on their website, read as this:

A proposta visa documentar o encontro desde a perspectiva dos afetos, isto é, desde a sua capacidade de afetar(nos) e deixar-se afetar. Queremos pôr a ênfase não no “que foi feito” e no “como foi feito” - que seria o enfoque mais convencional do trabalho de documentação – mas no “que nos fez” e “como nos fez”. Olhar o encontro desde o meio, por onde as coisas transitam. Ou seja, compartilhar um relato do que nos aconteça durante o encontro que mostre como fomos afetadas pelo mundo criado durante esses dias. Um mundo que é mais do que humano, já que também envolve objetos, máquinas, outros animais e seres vivos, organismos, forças atmosféricas, forças espirituais... O espaço criado durante a *EncontrADA* será um território de afetividades na medida em que (nos) afete e seja afetável. Documentar aqui significa saber escutar esse processo de devir, devir entendido como algo que acontece entre duas coisas que se encontram e que pelo tanto é sempre um processo de devir-juntas. O documento final será esse conjunto de relatos parciais, comunicantes e desejáveis<sup>23</sup>.

Although I had thought of some things that could be done to work this out, I wanted to keep it vague enough so that other ideas might come up within all of us there. One of these

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<sup>23</sup> <http://encontrada.org/>.



initial ideas was to leave a blank notebook to circulate around the space we would be sharing those days, so that anybody could contribute something (a thought, a drawing, a poem, a word) describing its experience in relation to whatever she sensed or felt during the event. Another idea was to record the physical space where we would gather from the same angle during the three days that lasted the event, in order to get something about how the space itself, composed both of humans but also all the other non-human things interacting with us, was also subjected to the dynamics of affects, that is, to the ongoing movement of affects and affections moving through our bodies during the encounter. Of course, any of these activities was meant to work simply as an experiment, to help me think the question of how to register affects, which had been one of a recurring difficulty since I started this work. Indeed, describing affects came up from the beginning as one of my main challenges. So far I had attempted to do this through writing, following a storytelling approach, through which, on one side, I wanted to make visible my own transitions along these experiences, and at the same time, grasped some of the sensory aspects that such “being there” involved. In this attempt, I had experienced some limitations: the first one had to do with my own limits as a writer (and worse yet, writing in a language that is not my own). And a second limitation had to do with the very writing itself, and the question of whether other forms of codifying, such as images, sounds or artistic expression, would more effectively capture the affective. One author that has criticized the hegemony of writing in social sciences is the bolivian sociologist Silvia Cusicanqui.

She does this from a decolonialist perspective, denouncing a situation of “internal colonialism” in the very use of words, or in certain uses of written and spoken language by elites and official authorities with which the history of colonialism is littered (Cusicanqui, 2010). Talking about the situation in Bolivia during this period, she claims:

Las palabras no designan, sino encubren, y esto es particularmente evidente en la fase republicana, cuando se tuvieron que adoptar ideologías igualitarias y al mismo tiempo escamotear los derechos ciudadanos a una mayoría de la población. De este modo, las palabras se convirtieron en un registro ficcional, plagado de eufemismos que velan la realidad en lugar de designarla (Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 19).

Out of these reflections, she proposes a sociology of the image as a critique to Western hegemonic literacy, with which to explore alternative forms of knowledge in the understanding of the social, such as images and visual culture. Likewise, the experiments in the way of writing undertaken by theorists of affects have also been presented as having

political consequences in terms of cultural critique. For instance, for Stewart, writing *otherwise* is a way of avoiding “the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critiques” (Stewart, 2007, p. 7). In this same spirit, the idea of registering through visual means how affects flowed during *Encontrada* was an attempt to experiment with other ways of capturing affects, and thus, as Puig de la Bellacasa expresses it, to add a further layer to the understanding of how our worlds hold together (Puig de la Bellaca, 2011).

Usually Silo’s activities take place in Cinthia’s home in Serrinha do Alambari. About 4 kms before taking the road to Penedo, in the district of Resende, a small sign by the road shows the way to Serrinha. Once you pass the entrance to this area, the road, which climbs to the sierra of Mauá, turns rather rough and rugged, with big cottages scattered on both sides. Continuing by this steeply rising road, you arrived to Silo, a beautiful wooden-house lifted up from the ground slightly hidden amidst a dense vegetation. As regards the interior, the main room, which is at the same time the kitchen and the living room, has glass walls in all its sides, which gives a sense of continuous panoramic immersion into the massive greenery around. The house is well-prepared to host no more than six or seven people, so for activities involving more participants, although Silo still acts as the operational center, they usually rent a house nearby to accommodate everyone.

However, on this occasion, the number of women who had registered for the encounter had been unexpectedly high (up to 70), and not only had they needed to rent three other houses in the surroundings, but also the activities this time had to be distributed among the different spaces. This was for Silo’s team a reason of rejoice, as it reflected how large had it reached out, but also a cause of concern for they felt a bit shocked by the dimensions of the event, far beyond the scales they were used to handling. This fact also had an unsettling effect on me, because when I first thought of the idea of a collective field notebook between all the attendants during those days, or the recording of the space to see how it changed, I had in mind a very different and rather small scenery. Indeed, once there I gave up my plans and decided just to take part in the workshops and the activities as any other participant. These included workshops on self-defense, car mechanics, natural gynecology, vegan cooking, medicinal use of plants, carpentry, sewing, agroforestry and autonomous networks.

Beyond this diversity of topics, a feminist perspective was the common thread connecting them all. This perspective placed the emphasis on the notion of autonomy, and indeed all the workshops somehow addressed a specific skill to be developed or strengthened. Interestingly, this appeal to autonomy and self-empowerment went together with ideas of connection (whether to community or nature), bonding, care and cooperativeness. This

entailed an idea of autonomy not as an individual and private operation, but rather as a potency intermingled in a web of relations. Thus, they mobilized a claim to autonomy in which becoming an autonomous agent included recognizing us as vulnerable and interdependent. For me, this idea of autonomous agency involving dependency among many other beings was very inspiring and clearly resonated with my own personal story, specially since becoming a mother. Vinciane Despret (Despret, 2013) tells how the term “agency”, emerging in the 1970s, encapsulated a critique of structuralist analyses of culture which did not recognize the consciously counter-hegemonic actions of individuals.

This same refusal to reduce experience to a grid of power relations or a precoded effect of a social structure is also at the center of the affective turn, and indeed it may be considered a step further in this direction for it allows us to step away from equating autonomy with the idea of a rational, independent agent. In this regard, Despret (following Deleuze) reads “agency” as “agencements”, that is, as a myriad of rapports of force in which all beings are entangled, that is, in which beings affect and are affected by one another (Despret, 2013, p. 37). In this way, she brings to the front the affective dimension of any claim to agency, insofar as it is always enacted in experience, within a flow of forces and relations. Likewise, the sort of autonomy that was invoked during *Encontrada*, seemed to be concerned not with an ideal of an autonomous and self-sufficient human agent, but rather with the kind of agency one can acquire in conjunction with other beings, and enmeshed in a texture of social relationships.

In this regard, the event constituted an ideal place to foster a space for encounters and exchanges, beyond the more specific content of the workshops held. By living in a common space and sharing the daily tasks of cooking, cleaning, organizing and so on, the occasions for intersections abounded. Beside this, although the event was articulated around the different workshops mentioned before, it still allowed for a great degree of flexibility regarding proposals that might come up from the participants during those days. Thus, other initiatives such as informal round-table discussions, presentation of personal projects or musical encounters took place outside the “agenda” and in parallel to the rest of the activities. Indeed, it is within Silo’s key premises to offer a non-rigid structure in order to remain open to new possibilities, thus, encouraging the flow of ideas, associations and transformations, that may happen at different levels. In this regard, the initial proposal was itself nurtured and changed through the contributions of the participants involved. In the case of *Encontrada* such openness involved also some women from the community who were invited to take part in a workshop regarding local uses of medicinal plants. The aim here again was to integrate Silo’s

activities within the community where it is based, as well as bringing that knowledge coming from the rural context into an event in which the great majority of the participants came from the city.

**Figure 30:** Workshop with women.



Photographer: Silo.

**Figure 31:** Women from Serrinha.



Photographer: Silo.

*Daughters and granddaughters, listening from their shoulders.*

**Figure 32:** Conversation during EncontrADA 2017.



Photographer: Silo.



**Figure 33:** Workshop on autonomous networks.



Photographer: Silo.

**Figure 34:** Workshop on car mechanics.



Photographer: Silo.

**Figure 35:** Group photo.



Photographer: Silo.

*At Silo I didn't find women and men; I found the feminine and the masculine in infinite modulations and intensities.*

### 5.3 Coming full circle

There is a certain irony in the fact that this story, close to its end, led me on to encounter again the people I had met in the beginning. For it was through Cinthia that I first came to Brazil to take part in the Interactivos held at Nuvem in November 2012. Although I couldn't know it at that time, and despite the fact that it fell outside the scope of my PhD (at least in terms of the timing), that experience also helped to change the sort of questions that were at the outset of this research, in terms of how I had a first taste of a way of working and doing things together which I found greatly inspiring.

The originality of Interactivos methodology was, for me, like a trigger that activated a sense of how transformative a certain approach to projects can be. In theory, Interactivos defines itself as a research and production platform for the creative and educational uses of



technology, focused on collective creation using open hardware and open software. Under this approach, the events they organized are a sort of hybrid between an artistic residency, a production workshop, and a showcase. Project proposals are selected by an international open call, which is immediately followed by another call for collaborators once the projects have been selected. Then multidisciplinary working groups are formed and put together to work on the projects during a short period of time. For that time the groups get to collaborate on the evolution of the initial idea, and projects become bigger, more interesting and more complex over the course of the event, which usually goes from ten to twenty days. This process is open to the public from beginning to end.

What's interesting of this methodology is that it proposes an interactive learning model alternative to the typical hierarchical relation between professor/expert and student/amateur. Instead, participants group themselves around the projects they chose to, based solely on their enthusiasm -for no previous skills are required. Thus, people with very different backgrounds come together to work, share ideas and be involved in a process of collaborative creation, to which they bring not just hard work but specially that interest and enthusiasm, out of which comes a lot of creative contribution. Such enthusiasm for the project translates into great involvement, turning the relation of participants towards the project a "matter of care", borrowing Bellacasa's expression.

One of the most important implications that this experience had in my case, was that it enabled me to create bonds with people with similar vocations and interests and, thus, immerse myself in a network of people doing things under a common repertoire of gestures, vocabulary and motivations. These networks prove to be effective in terms of how they manage to carry out a variegated range of projects and interventions through time. Although the projects might be temporary and have a short lifetime, the knot of friends, comrades, companions, associates, that is, the affective entanglements they are part of and which brought them to life in the first place, is permanent, solid and enduring. In fact, the network turns out to be a place where people and ideas flow, and space of learning and exchange in itself.



## CHAPTER 6 - BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

I would prefer not to<sup>24</sup>. Like *Bartleby*, the character in Melville's story, I would rather not jump to conclusions, to final stops, since the end of a journey quite often comes not with answers but with more questions -at best, perhaps better articulated ones. So what I propose in this chapter is to offer some stopovers in the course of this journey. That is, some spots where the discussions and reflections around affects that this work mobilizes, may come to a halt or a pause, though a temporarily one.

There is a saying that everything comes in threes, so three would be the stopovers suggested here for this journey. The first one is a condensed discussion of how certain arrangements perceived during the projects influenced the relational field in which our experience there took place creating what I have called here an affective pattern. The second one is a visual narrative aimed to offer through photographs a different way to attune to the affective quality of the projects described. And the third one, presents *Comoveras*, a discussion group around affects which I belong to which was created during the course of my PhD, and has both motivated and nurtured this work since its formation. Although this part could have been included at the beginning for the seminal contributions that the group has had, I decided instead to bring it here, at the end, for what it has of promissory, that is, for what it affords as a basis for expectation. In a way the story of this group speaks to the past of this work, to the story of how it became articulated and to its wrapping up, but I think it is more significant how this group speaks to its future, considering the way it concerns us those who take part in it, like a seed taking root in our presents and shaping our becomings, both as women and academics.

### 6.1 Affective pattern

This work has looked at several projects through the notion of affects. Although the projects differ in many aspects, I have argued that there is a resemblance between them in terms of how they seek development and autonomy in various spheres, by playing up certain arrangements. This perception was informed by my own experience of motherhood during the course of my PhD, which shaped a very specific receptiveness to the way I approached the

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<sup>24</sup> "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" is a short story written by Herman Melville, in 1853. With the words "I would prefer not to", Bartleby, the main character, perpetually refuses to do any of the tasks required of him by his boss.

projects. However, although I am certainly aware of the deep biographical component of this thesis, it also launches the question of which alternative modes of living become possible under an approach based on affects.

To do so, it uses the figure of a crease pattern to conjure up the possibility of new compositions, that is, to help us imagine how certain arrangements can coalesce into new paths for being and doing things together. Gradually throughout these years a certain pattern emerged in very different spheres and situations -in the projects I took part in as much as in my own personal biography. This pattern was built upon certain arrangements which expressed themselves in different ways but shaped similarly the relational field of experience. I have called it an affective pattern for it is in that realm of embodied experience in which affects ramble and claimed for it an intrinsic political subversive character. As Massumi argues (Massumi, 2015, p. 58) “Just modulating a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility is an alter-accomplishment” and it can be considered, in itself, a political action. For if affects constitute a realm of potentialities - always open to a certain extent and thus always capable of re-instantiation- they harbor counter-tendencies that may be triggered and, in this regard, ought to be taken care of.

To follow through with this idea, this work also advances some insights on the different ways in which such arrangements may be expressed. In practice, they involve certain gestures or dispositions that enable to set a certain experience in place. However, the aim here is not to advance a series of guidelines or to set forth a definite program for the creation of a so-called affective pattern. Gestures and dispositions, differently from premises or characteristics, do not operate in the imperative or the normative mode, but in the exemplary (Massumi, 2015, p. 106). They are nor prescriptive, but promissory and, in this regard, they might serve to modulate differently the relational fields which are immanent to experience. By way of conclusion, I offer here a condensed summary:

*Bodily attunement:*

A process of attuning involves entering a relationship in which the elements have to work together in order to adjust to one another and in that process they become something different than what they were before. Thus, it involves a sort of co-constitutive movement. Such a process is always rooted in embodied experience, so that the importance of the body and how it becomes implicated is central to how this projects were carried out. The fact of entailing continual presence and cohabitation for a period of time was essential, as well as

sharing the daily tasks of cooking, cleaning or organizing. Indeed, taking care of the space and the people there, gave many and varied occasions for encounters and intersections through which movements of attunement took place, which involved a process of learning how to be (and to become) with the others.

Hands-on work and collaboration were also important in shaping their identity. At the same time, in the cases of Riacho and Boa Vista, they did put special emphasis in bringing our bodies, with their emotions, afflictions, affections and impressions back to the stage. This was evident in how Neblinalab turned out to become “a listening ear” to the view of the participants, or in the morning circles held in Boa Vista, an activity that had the potential not only to visibilize the felt traces of affects in our bodies during those days, but also to affectively attune the multiplicity of bodies that were present to what was happening. Through this sort of arrangements they composed spaces of exchanges and transformations, beyond the more specific goals or purposes they might had intended at the outset.

This sort of plasticity greatly favored exchanges not only between people but also between the people and the environment itself. Indeed, even the arrangement of things and furniture in the space was constantly attuned, and acquired different forms and configurations as the projects evolved, as if the setting itself learned through the process.

#### *Becoming-with:*

The sort of affective “ethos” I am pointing out here is not formed and sustained in isolation, but a way of being and becoming with others. Thus, these projects were greatly open to participation and oriented towards accommodating heterogeneity. Indeed they proved to be more interested in a kind of sociability, one that cared for the possible becomings and transformations of the project themselves as well as those of the actors involved, rather than focusing on fixed goals and cramming participants into a canned sets of rules and processes.

They also involved different mechanisms that allowed for self-correcting process of feedback, such as the design process followed at Boa Vista do Acara, or the mentorship offered during Encontrada for the several projects presented by participants, to mention two examples. Such context of learning and exchange was also evident in the great amount of documentation that the projects generated.

#### *Inhabit uncertainty:*

Not surprisingly, from the outset the projects lacked clear contours. Put differently, the projects remained underdetermined, in terms of the procedures they intended and of the goals they expected. In practice, this created the conditions for the emergence of more and unexpected articulations.

In the field of anthropology the rhetoric of incompleteness has been very common. It is quite common among anthropologists to start with an idea, and end up with a rather different one after doing fieldwork (Faubion & Marcus, 2009). It is therefore not expected that the initial questions remain stable during the empirical stages of the work and that openness is actually considered a characteristic inherent to the ethnographic method. From the field of natural sciences concepts such as “experimental systems” have been brought to explain how ethnographies might deal with complex and uncertain events. An experimental system works as a device that enables the emergence of unexpected events. In the words of Rheinberger, it is, thus, a “surprise generator” (Rheinberger, 1998) for the object of study is not stabilized from the outset. In this same spirit, the kind of projects presented here did not stand on certainty and did not seek docility, but instead, they made themselves available for more subjects to take part in their articulation. And again they expressed so in the fact that it was given more importance to the making process and to the context of learning than to the outcomes.

#### *Bonding autonomy:*

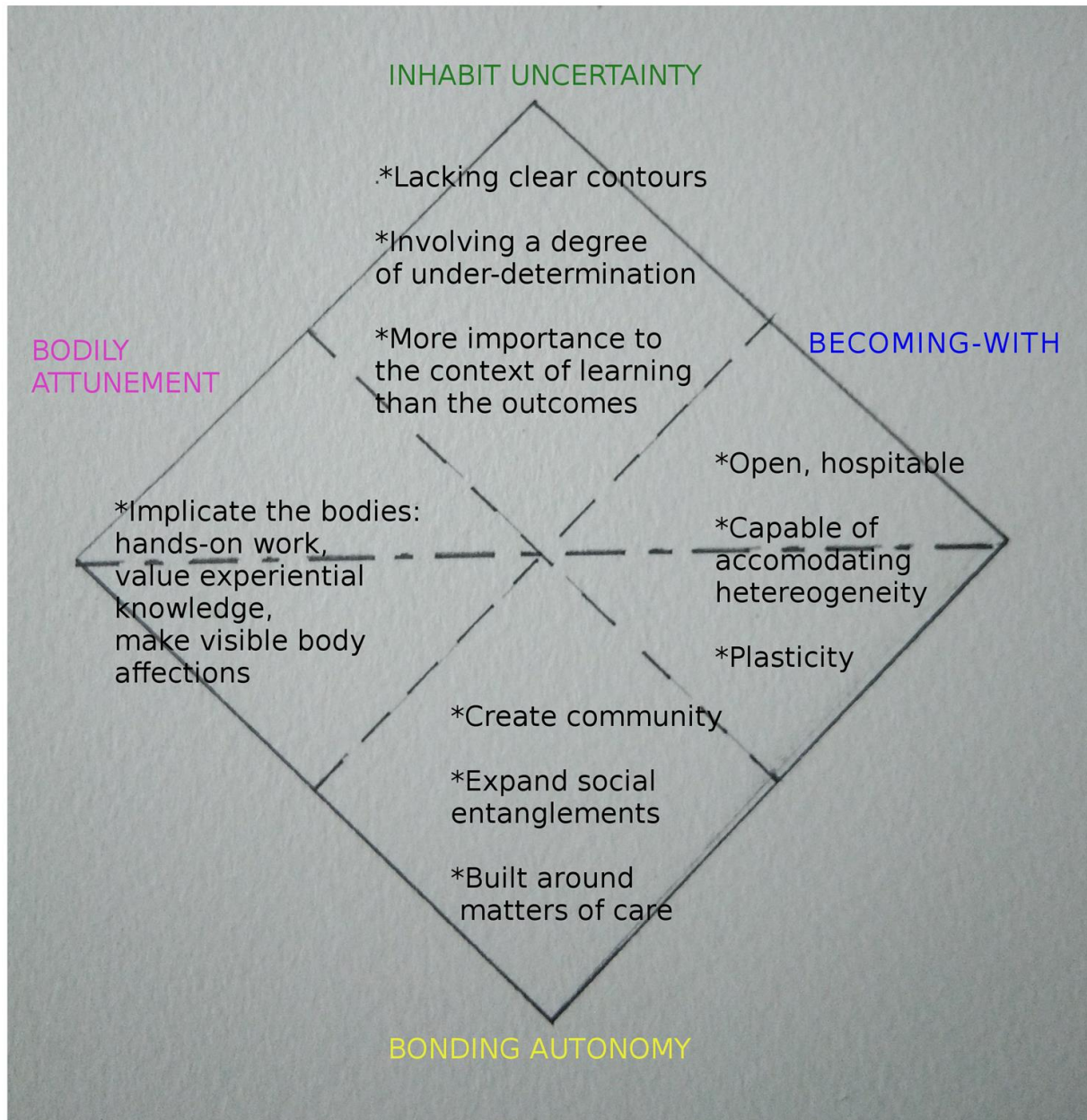
These experiences also brought to the fore a different dimension of the notion of autonomy. Instead of conceiving it as the degree of independence someone has from the others, autonomy acquired a connective dimension. For being strongly tied to practices of bonding, care and collaboration, it ceases to be a private operation from an individual, and becomes a potency rooted in a relational field. It's not anymore about how to better being apart, but about being in a situation of belonging and finding ways of multiplying and intensifying this interweavement in order to expand our potential to do and to change. In this regard they involved a sort of bonding of autonomy.

Summarized in her slogan “Make Kin Not Babies”, Haraway points out that the very possibility of addressing the “systemic urgencies” of our times and recomposing our human-damaged environments may depend on our ability to make kin. This is to create ties not determined by birth or genealogy, but by *kind* affections across ideological and regional differences and the unexpected others. Thus, her slogan is a proposal to experiment with

other-than-natal kin, to innovate *enduring kin*, or as she calls it, to practice “kinnovation”. In a certain way, the projects presented here can be said to *kinnovate*, for they succeed in assembling and expanding new arrangements and affective entanglements. Here again the image of the crease pattern serves us right, to argue that, if we are to avert the sort of planetary collapse Haraway (among others), alert us about, we ought to find new forms of collapsing, that is, new patterns for folding our worlds (and holding them together). New ways of creating spaces and articulating forms of being together capable of re-composing us. In this regard, the sort of gestures pointed out here constitute in themselves ways of acting upon the level of experience, of bodies in relation, and ultimately, of affects. Their politically radical character lays on the array of potentialities that our bodies carry forward, and on the creative and subversive power that this field of the under-determined involves.

To conclude, this work has sought to show that the politics of these experiences reside on how they activate our capacities differently, not only on a personal level, but also collectively. Their value, as far as I myself experience it, is vested precisely in their capacity for intensifying existence and our potential to change. Rooting ourselves on that relational level in which affects flow, through certain gestures and arrangements, allows to open up spaces in which a different way of meeting the world becomes possible. This work has also tried to capture this open field of affects in its own way, not by thickening description, but by making accessible something about the intensity of involvements as I myself felt them. In doing so, however, it does not negate the un-exhausting character of such a venture.

**Figure 36:** Pattern of affect expanded.



Author: mine.

## 6.2 More-than

The final pages of this work are devoted to a visual experiment aimed to conjure up through images the affective flow of one of the experiences described in this work. That is, to offer an alternative way to attune to that flow, beyond the grid of language. As I have already argued throughout these pages, affect theory troubles the customary separation between subjects and objects, and remaps bodies as currents of forces instead of objects of clear boundaries. In this spirit I attempt here to present the project as a cluster of processes within

which we were being carried away, rather than as a set of activities and outputs we were purportedly in charge of. I have chosen the project of Boa Vista do Acará, for it was the one of which I had the most extensive photo archive, and selected those images in which a certain threshold of this flow takes form. The selection of each of the photographs is intended, for they try to express this affective fluidity one by one, but their relation to the others and their coalescence into a composition, also seeks to capture this kaleidoscopic quality of experience which resists being individually excised.

Thus, I present a series of images which are temporarily and contextually different, and place them side by side to capture the affective quality of the project as a current of forces carrying -as well as being carried by- our bodies. While the wholeness of each of the photos is preserved individually, a cross-referencing is obtained by placing them together, and such composition and relational resonances can be as evocative as their individual content taken separately. Although a descriptive legend for each of them has been provided at the end, the photographs themselves are offered without an accompanying description, on the assumption that images can provide a different way of capturing meaning and, eventually, of making sense. This part is exploratory in nature and responds to the query of how to render affects within anthropological writing. It comes after the conclusion as an attempt to make room beyond the full stop, so that the interrogation may be held in abeyance.



**Figure 37:** Two women hugging each other.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 38:** A woman and a man talking.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 39:** Bodies running, moving, coming together.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 40:** Scenes of people dancing Carimbó, a traditional dance of Pará.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 41:** Scenes of people dancing Carimbó, a traditional dance of Pará.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 42:** Documentation and work-in-progress traces produced during the projects.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.



**Figure 43:** Two participants of the Summit helping to build a fish tank, hands-on work.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.

**Figure 44:** Sieving mandioca flour.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.



**Figure 45:** Trying freshly made açai juice.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.

**Figure 46:** People gathering at night around the fire.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.

**Figure 47:** Laughter 1.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.

**Figure 48:** Laughter 2.

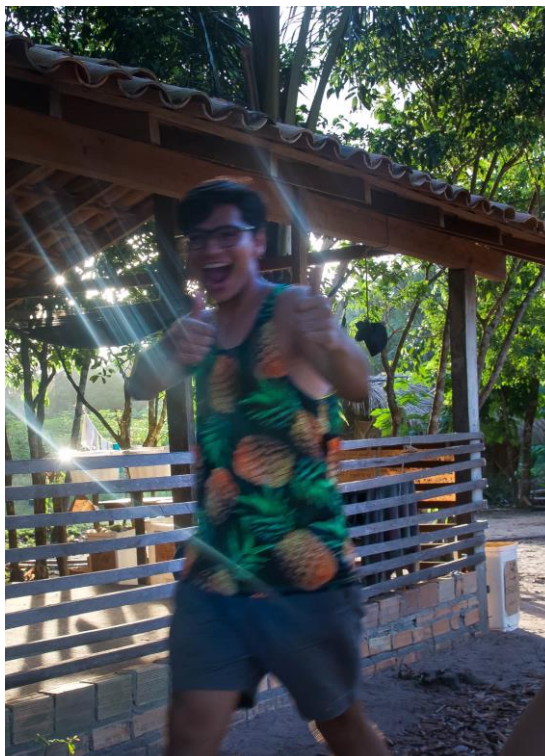


Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.



**Figure 49:** Feet on the mud.



Photo by Agnes Pynchla.

**Figure 50:** A man climbing up a tree using a technique common in the area which involves the use of a rope tied to the feet that helps to grip to the trunk.



Photo by Agnes Pynchla.

**Figure 51:** Two men staring at the fire.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 52:** A sky scene before the toró.



Photo by Max Krüger.



**Figure 53:** A scene inside the kitchen of the APOBV, where many discussions regarding the projects were held while making food for the group.



Photo by Max Krüger.

**Figure 54:** A woman watering a garden built on permaculture principles outside the APOBV.



Photo by Agnes Pyrchla.



**Figure 55:** A group scene, lying together on the ground.



Photo by Diego Dalmaso.

**Figure 56:** Traditional basket handicraft.

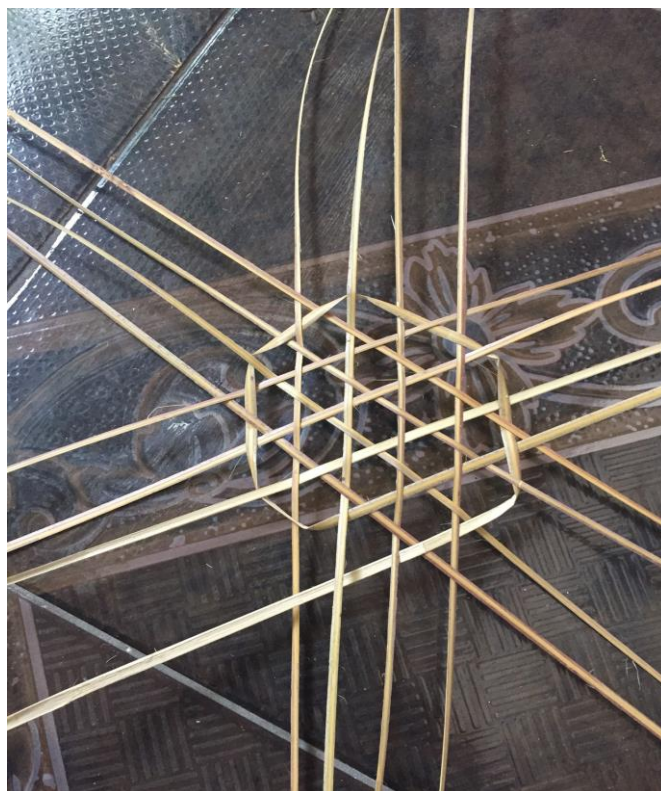


Photo by Juliana Sauaia.

### 6.3 Comoveras

In February 2017 I attended a workshop held in the city of Montevideo under the title *“How anthropology can contribute to affirmative action in South America in the fields of human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability.”* The workshop was jointly organized by the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Brazil), and Universidad de la República (Uruguay). During four days it gathered around fifty participants institutionally linked to Uruguay, Brazil and the United Kingdom, at different points of their research careers.

Given our different backgrounds and topics of research, the overarching question regarding affirmative action in South America was approached and discussed from multiple perspectives and under a wide range of field works and contexts. Some of the recurring and cross-cutting issues that appeared during these interactions had to do with how the production of knowledge within academia can be actually translated into effective affirmative action and lead to real social change, or how to wrap up the complexity found out during fieldwork under a limited set of public policies.

During the workshop, we divided ourselves into different groups of discussion according to our more specific questions and fields of interest. One of these groups revolved around the notion of affects. I mention here this episode because it became another essential milestone of this work, as it was the first time I began to think on the notion of affects as a plausible research question. Finding other colleagues questioning and hinting at this topic, somehow gave me confidence to forge ahead down this path. In the group during the workshop we grappled with the issue not only of how to deal with affects as they were encountered and experienced during fieldwork, but moreover, how to articulate those analytically and then how to bring them to our works. How can we turn the affective dimension involved in fieldwork into knowledge? How can we contest the dichotomy between the rational and the emotional in our analysis? Or how can we capture and portray affect through our writing? These were the sort of questions raised at the time.

The discussions we held brought the importance of attending to this dimension of experience home to me. Indeed affects mattered to all of us. The way it did so became apparent differently across our works and we realized that we had a long way to go in unraveling out what this meant in each case. But it was crucial to sense that we shared a similar quest and that we could walk this way together. For this purpose, we then decided to maintain our group on affect and continue to meet regularly once the workshop was over. We had to do this

virtually as we were scattered across different countries, so google hangouts became our meeting space in the following months.

We suggested one meeting per month and started with a rather loose ‘agenda’: the idea was to have a place where to share our texts and discuss how they got right or how they could be improved. Sometimes we also discussed published articles on this topic. But in any case, since the beginning we maintained a sort of soft structure in which no fixed rules or procedures were set. Each month one of us would volunteered to lead the session and another one to share an original text, normally an excerpt from our work-in-progress, to provoke dialogue and questions with the rest of the group.

Some months after this initiative started we sensed that it was time to try to define our expectations with regard to the group and also think about how it could be consolidated in terms of a name and an identity that might eventually be helpful to articulate a presence in academic circles, such as future workshops or conferences. Thus, we soon came up with a name: Comoveras. As proposed by Catherine, one of our colleagues, the name involved a sort of play on words (of “comover” and “como verás”), implying more than just seeing, for it combined a future orientation, a feminist connotation and also the idea of movement together. Another decision we then took was to create a website or blog to showcase some of what we were doing.

Having done that, Michele, another member, suggested to write and share a short piece or statement addressing what had motivated us so far to participate in the group. Here are some excerpts of the texts that were written to answer that question:

I have recently come to the perception that words do not suffice to express much of my experience as an ethnographer, especially when it comes to affect. Words, however, are my raw material, the only one I am familiar with. How, then, can I let affect contaminate my writing? I am still not sure if that would mean a move away from anthropology or perhaps just a way to reinvent (for myself) anthropology as a craft. (Catarina Morawska, Universidade Federal de São Carlos).

Este grupo de trabajo trata de uno de los desafíos más grandes que tenemos en antropología, a mi entender, el lugar de los afectos, los sentidos, las emociones en la investigación. [...] En otras investigaciones había explorado dar cuenta de ello, esta ventana a otras formas, de pasar de la sensibilidad oral y vivencial a la escrita, a través de la fotografía y el audiovisual. Sin embargo la búsqueda de la representación debiera dar cuenta del proceso y de “los afectos” que han sido como el aire de mi investigación, presente en todo momento, invisible al mismo tiempo. (Leticia D'Ambrosio, Universidad de la República).

O que significa dizer que afeto é conhecimento? [...] Significa que estamos interessadas também (ou mais) nos ecos que são produzidos entre nós; entre nós, pesquisadoras, e as pessoas com as quais fazemos campo; e, até entre nós mesmas, em como o campo nos afeta. Mesmo que não tenhamos conseguido, ainda, responder à pergunta, pensar nos ecos é importante porque o afeto aqui não é emoção, afetação.[...]Ele tem a ver com cheiros. Sons. Sabores. Têm a ver com aquilo que nos move, com aquilo que toca as pessoas com as quais trabalhamos. Com medo. Tensão. Com dor. Luto. Com engajamento. Indignação. Raiva. Com outros seres. Com um mundo composto por muito mais que palavras que buscam explicar algo. (Maira Cavalcanti Vale, Universidade Estadual de Campinas).

Recuerdo una intervención de Michelle en una de las conferencias sobre la importancia de las distintas formas de conocimiento y de cómo el *affecto* era una de esas tantas posibilidades. Me quedó resonando porque eran cosas que me estaba moviendo en mi trabajo de campo en ese momento en curso. El miedo, los sentidos, los olores, cómo dar cuenta de esas “cosas” que emergían como importantes en cierto nivel pero que ni yo misma terminaba de saber hasta qué punto. ¿eran importantes para mí? ¿para mí y para los otros? ¿podría llegar a ser importante en un sentido más amplio para una cierta “comunidad académica antropológica”? (Victoria Evia, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social de México).

Some things cannot be unseen, and yet are impossible to render with the regular tools of anthropological writing. How can we do justice to this excess of meaning? Justice is a key word here, social justice, for liberating ourselves from the strict corset of dispassionate rationality is akin to other forms of liberation. To liberate one, means having to liberate others. Yet freedom is not for free. Making space for the irrational, the affective, the unresolved exposes a writer's vulnerability. [...] Above all, being able to discuss my ideas and concerns with the affect writing group ladies has been a constant source of inspiration. They helped me to stop trying to always make sense. (Catherine Whittaker, University of Edinburgh).

The desire to share our writing, the feeling of the *more-than* exuding from our experiences and the willing to learn from one another, seemed to be core motivations for all of us. And this is how the group started and so far continues to ramble towards ways of answering these questions. In my case, the initial motivation to take part in this had a lot to do with the fact of being able, at least from time to time, to step out of the intimate -and sometimes suffocating- bubble between my computer and me, during the process of writing this thesis. I guess it just felt good to stay in the company of these women, albeit virtually - through our silent e-mail conversations and our softened presences during hangouts.

But then gradually I realized it was more than this. For there was also something about the way in which we talked and in which we stayed together that led me to join in every meeting. This something laid in the nuances of how our conversations unraveled; it had to do

with the atmosphere created, and it involved little things -big little things- like active listening, self-exposure, open-minded approaches or empathetic discussions. All of which helped to create a delicate space in which to share our works. I now wonder whether my motivations to continue in this group are anything different from the means we unfold to achieve it. There is something about the process, *how* things are done, instead of *what* it is that we do, that for me has proven to be an enormous source not only of creativity, but of politics also, for there are a number of little actions of dissent, contention, support, affirmation and so on lying in the intimacies of the relational field which make up our worlds.

And indeed the story of this work can also be recounted as the story of a process, the umpteen times in which it was pleated, and pleated again. Version after version, file upon file. It is the story of a repetition: returning to its content once again, each time as a new attempt to reach something (an effect, an idea, a thesis). Of course, repetition encodes difference, not just sameness, which lends an almost-but-not-the-same trace to anything it embraces. This means that in every reiteration -a repeated sequence, almost a working pattern for the last months (turn on the computer, look for the last file, open it, write, re-name it) it was revealed a somehow different version of itself. Of course, a lot has been already said about how learning, growing and change come through a process of repetition. So I ask myself: what do repetition has to do with affects? Is there something about affects that can be rendered to this gesture? A dedication to repetition is a focus on not perfecting. In the same way, a dedication to affects, that is, to our capacity to affect and be affected, involves also this aptness to un-perfection (not to be imperfect, but to mar the attractiveness of perfection). In this regard, this work pauses here, offering the last version of itself, but very aware of the still-in-act movements lying beneath. Like a pattern, which can be bent in multiple ways, this text lends itself to further folds.



## EPILOGUE

### *Affects and Post-truth*

In 1919, *The Nation* published a letter by Franz Boas, under the title “Scientists as Spies,” in which he denounced that four American anthropologists had conducted espionage in Central America during the First World War for the United States’ government. What was unbearable for Boas was the fact that the anthropologists had used their positions as scientists for spurious purposes. In his own words, he believed that they had “prostituted science by using it as a cover for their activities as spies.” Some days later the American Anthropological Association (AAA) voted to censure Boas and he was removed from the association’s council. Many has been written about the various factors that contributed to this decision (Berno de Almeida, 2018; Evans, 2010; Stocking, 2004), but it’s not without irony that Boas ended up being charged for the same reasons he himself had charged the American anthropologists for, that is, “abusing” his professional position for political ends and, thus, putting the very practice of other anthropologists in jeopardy. Thus the issue raised by this case is not about defending the truth by detaching it from its political entanglements, but about who (and how) decides under which conditions it is acceptable to produce truth; or put it differently, which are the right conditions for making a claim to truth.

In the field of anthropology, the figure of the researcher doing fieldwork has always been closely tied to the rhetoric of autonomy and commitment to truth. In (good) practice, this has always implied that the anthropologist should respect and defend the interests of the people studied. Over the course of the discipline’s history, there have been many ways of referring to this sort of commitment, such as “action anthropology” (Tax, 2010) or “engaged anthropology” (Low & Merry, 2010). In all cases the demand for autonomy is preached mainly with regard to governments and their institutions and it involves a strong engagement with the people whom the anthropologist studies. Indeed, Boas was implicitly condemning the four American anthropologists for betraying a principle of reciprocity expected in fieldwork - almost a sort of ethical code embedded in anthropology- which measures the work of an anthropologist to the extent that he is capable of entering in a flow of affections -of taking and being taken by- among the people studied and turning that experience into a sort of knowledge. What distinguishes ethnography from other research techniques and is most precious about an anthropologist work has to do with the ability of entering in a circuit of

connections immanent to fieldwork itself, that brings about a change for both parts. So, at the core of the controversy surrounding Boas' case, there is not a claim to de-politicizing the practices of knowledge production within anthropology, but, quite on the contrary, to reveal them as a highly critical and political work of resistance to *extraneous* pressures and influences.

I bring in this case to take up the discussion around post-truth in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) that is being currently held. The debate was recently reopened after Sergio Sismondo's editorial (2017) for the *Social Studies of Science Journal*, in which he defended STS against claims of having contributed to the emergence of post-truth politics. These claims revolve around the argument that an undeniable risk was taken by breaking the crystal box where science was kept, and taking it back to the mesh of social, political and economic entanglements from which it had never been apart. For this move opened a backdoor for subtle -and not so subtle- forms of relativism, with a poisonous effect upon anything they touched, including the very respected realm of scientific knowledge. By revealing the continuity between science and politics, STS have been blamed for opening Pandora's box (Collins et al., 2017), and risking the fall of science onto a muddy field in which it could get mixed up and confused with other auto-proclaimed regimes of truth. Since then, many attempts have been made among scholars to resist this rudderless drift, but without having to betray major ideas coming from STS.

Once this debate is open the question now is how the continuities between science and politics can be maintained while at the same time resisting the arrogation of knowledge and truth by populism and other forms of dubious politics. Some authors, under the headings of Studies of Expertise and Experience (SEE), have been doing this lately by invoking the notion of expertise and justifying its value over other knowledge-claims competing to inform public opinion (Collins et al., 2017). I propose here a different way to respond to post-truth debates, by introducing into this discussion the notion of affects, not in opposition to that of expertise, but as an experiment to see how these two concepts can be hold together.

An affect, as it has been theorized by Massumi, drawing on the work of Spinoza and Deleuze, refers to a capacity, that of affecting and being affected. Thus, affects are not defined in terms of what they are, but of what they make us (and others) do. This means that they are better grasped through their effects, through the traces they leave in the bodies they impinge upon, than by their actual content or form. Under this approach, affects somehow conflate with their effects and they can be recognized by the felt changes that they bring about.

Certainly, this theoretical field has also been a controversial one within debates on politics and post-truth. As a matter of fact, affects are suspiciously viewed any time they are mobilized as a form of knowledge, especially when this happens in the political arena. However, by adhering to a definition of affects as a capacity to be measured by the effects it produces, we can invert the question: Instead of wondering if affects are a form of knowledge, we may now ask whether knowledge is not always, ultimately, an affect, that is, something to which we are obliged to attune to, to become-with at the immediate time when it happens. If this is the case and scientific knowledge is to be considered as an affect, then it can be weighed out *against* post-truth precisely to the extent that it displays this capacity. Such an approach not only reinforces the continuity between science and politics, but it strengthens it by relocating and fleshing out this continuum along the flow of affections involved in the process of knowledge production.

Likewise, as said earlier, when anthropologists are urged towards autonomy, in practice this has more to do with the demand of being true to the rapport of forces in which they find themselves enmeshed during fieldwork, than with the need to remain independent and separated from any influence. So, at the core of an anthropologist's skills there is this capacity to affect and be affected. The very practice of anthropology -and not only when it comes to the final results or findings- is driven and marked by the traces of fieldwork, and it is upon these traces that its authority is prefigured. For traces may be blurred or even banished but they cannot be changed, or put in other words, they *cannot be otherwise*. In his defense of STS, Sismondo says: "Our arguments that 'it could be otherwise' ... are very rarely that 'it could easily be otherwise' (2017). Indeed, if STS have sent the message that scientific truth 'could be otherwise', it seems today more pressing than ever to make it clear what this *does not* mean, against the onslaughts of post-truth.

Returning to the argument, affects refer to forces that can only be experienced in their immanence and continual motion and can only be known through the traces they leave, traces that are precisely that which cannot be otherwise. In this regard, affect theory allows us to recover a field of autonomy marked not by disentanglement, but by a capacity strongly rooted in experience. It is an autonomy that depends on connections rather than on independence, that is, a property that can only be attained together with others and unfolds itself through the capacity to affect and be affected. In this scenario, a claim for autonomy and the sort of flow of affections it entails, is above all, a claim for winning back this capacity and affirming our necessary continuity with the world around us. From this view, the kind of things we need to make scientific truths accountable for change. It's not anymore a question of who (and why)

says what. A perspective from affects, leads us to ask different questions, such as the extent to which our truths hold together the communities that sustain them, how they multiply the connections between beings or how they intensify the potentialities immanent to experience. Those would be some of the conditions for making any claim to truth. Thus, the sort of autonomy that we may wish for knowledge production and the validation tools through which we may screen scientific truth, are now ones that strengthen the connections between knowledge and life. Our proposal is that post-truth may be resisted by claiming our full capacity to affect and be affected, as an antidote against falling into the trap of non-facts, fake news and frauds.

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