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## Reenactment and A-filiation in Andrea Tonacci's *Serras da Desordem*

This essay considers the dystopic dimension of post-*Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1984) reenactment cinema, closely reading the figuration of return, dislocation, and a-filiation in Andrea Tonacci's *Serras da Desordem* (2006).<sup>1</sup> An allegorical meditation on the audiovisual erasures and rewritings of National History, *Serras* tells the story of Carapiru, an isolated Indian from the Awá-Guajá tribe who reenacts events that took place twenty to thirty years earlier, mainly his first contact with non-indigenous Brazilians after an attack ordered by landowners disperses and kills members of his family group.

Carapiru wanders for eleven years and 600 km from the northeast of Maranhão to Bahia, and in 1988 he makes contact with some ranchers and stays with the Aires family until FUNAI, the Indian Services, bring him to Brasília and then back to Maranhão to join remnants of his community at the Caru reservation. When Sydney Possuelo, the person in charge of isolated groups, calls a translator for Carapiru, the young man who comes recognizes Carapiru as being his long lost father. The eventful discovery of a not-yet contacted Indian and the unexpected re-encounter of father and son after eleven years of separation lead to Carapiru's momentary celebrity status.

*Serras da Desordem* freely cuts news and television reportage of Carapiru's first encounter with non-Indian Brazilians into reconstructed and documentary scenes from 1988 and 2006; expeditionary films from the teens and twenties flit by interrupting Carapiru's reenacted present, and an extended montage of institutional newsreels and

films reference the period of Carapiru's wanderings (the "Brazilian miracle" period), turning the film momentarily into an ironic dictatorship-era synopsis. The film advances a radical de-originating agenda, from its inter-textual saturation to the classical self-reflexive staging of the filmmaker meeting Carapiru at the end of the film to "start" it. *Serras*'s hybrid texture, its unexpected temporal shifts, black and white to colour transitions, and various image grains, keep Carapiru constantly unanchored, lost in a forest of images.

This unmooring—real, enacted, and textually multiplied—is my object here. Carapiru's disengaged, incongruous presence among non-Indian Brazilians, his residual group, and the film's surface, is a result both of a violent history of eradication and the effect of a fracturing aesthetic involving recursive repetition and literal reenactment.

Carapiru agrees to replay his story on the condition that the director will bring him back to his reservation. While this anecdote pinpoints charged questions of Indian displacement, the film steadily engages the contradictions involved in mimetically reproducing a going-back in time and place. Deeply entangled with his personal and ethnic history as a survivor of one of the last not-fully contacted Tupi-Guarani tribes,<sup>2</sup> the paradoxes of retracing Carapiru's history of dislocation are many: what does it mean to re-present *first* encounters, to re-construct dispossession? How does one maintain the multiple registers of separation and encounter as we see Carapiru revisit the sites and people he met twenty years earlier?

The inherent belatedness of reenactment has been instrumental in the renewed engagement with the real appar-

1. Tonacci is part of the Brazilian Cinema Marginal movement. His first feature, *Bang Bang* (1970), is a spare, self-reflexive road movie. After that, he spent the late 1970s and 1980s working with indigenous tribes experimenting with testimonial and self-ethnographic forms (among many others, *Conversas no Maranhão*, 1978; *The Araras*, 1980-81). He had no illusions about indigenous groups living a pastoral reality.

2. The Guajá had to become nomadic foragers since the 1800s to escape decimation and are at present reduced to around three hundred and sixty members, sixty of whom live in a dwindling forest pressed by multiple corporate interests, in particular the mining company Vale do Rio Doce.



ent in contemporary tactical art and parafictional forms.<sup>3</sup> Critically stretching the reach of testimonials, revising history and registers of authenticity, many of these meta-fictional practices embed a redemptive promise into their re-creations, opening a biography to alternate possibilities (as in *Shulie*, Elizabeth Subrin’s 1997 “remake” of Shulamith Firestone’s life prior to her radical politics), or testing the activist reach of a political speech into different presents (as in Mark Tribe’s *The Port Huron Project*, 2006-2009).<sup>4</sup>

Dealing with Carapiru, an isolated Indian and the prime object of ethnography’s salvage paradigm, Tonacci’s take on the retroactive potential of reconstruction is necessarily questioning. Used to catch up with a missed event or gesture, reenactment is closely allied with cinema’s fictional machinery, with its desire to shape and tame contingency.<sup>5</sup> When deployed to represent the Indian, an entity subjected to constant patrol and territorializing pressure (when not downright extinction), reenactment becomes all-too-easily complicit with the ethnographic tendency to fixate an existing reality anchored in the past: to have the Indian become a piece of folklore relegated to the Nation’s past, to try to define an authentic Indian, is the discursive equivalent of policies that statistically count or genetically define the Indian, thus trying to close its case.

Provocatively stating that “In Brazil everyone is Indian except who isn’t,” anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro brings up the example of the isolated Indian— “the only one who can claim to be really an Indian”—to characterize the senselessness of the contested Indian-identity claims in current Brazilian politics:<sup>6</sup>

Let’s go back to the famous categories whose intentions to define temporal stages are evident: isolated, intermittent contact, permanent and integrated contact [Indians]...In whose face does the gate close? An integrated Indian is no longer an Indian...How frequent should the intermittency be that turns an ‘intermittent’ into an ‘integrated’ [Indian]. About the ‘isolated’ [Indian] no one dares to say *he is no longer an*

*Indian, especially because he is not even an Indian yet. He does not know he is an Indian.* (150)

Tonacci’s affinity with the performative identity and politics advocated by Viveiros de Castro shows in his approach: to have Carapiru’s unawareness count. His unconsciousness of what an Indian is safeguards a zone of silence around Carapiru, making him impervious to insertion in previous extrinsic hierarchies.

When asked about acting his own story, Carapiru told the director that he felt his story concerned no one but him. And yet, Tonacci states that he complied with all the filmmaking demands, lending his self “if solely as physical presence” (Tonacci 120). His description as inert prop raises core reenactment issues we address here: how does the return of a person as actor inflect the film’s testimonial impact, and what is the added meaning of this belated return?

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To what degree does the protagonist’s consciousness count in a filmed theatre, and what is transmitted once Carapiru’s self-expression is occluded, blocked even? What is the agency of the returning figure, of a figuration of return?

Literal reenactment films raise, above all, the question of agency. The casting simplicity of in-person reenactment—for what could be more obvious than playing one’s own story—is tempting for activist filmmakers. Presented in terms of its protagonist’s affect and subjective memory, self-performance is easily confused with a public reclamation of one’s self and voice, occluding the film’s voice and agenda.

Carapiru remains un-translated. The film dissociates in-person reenactment from authentic relay, suspending its protagonist in multiple—temporal, categorical, and expressive—fronts. Invalidating the consciousness-raising mission of classical neorealist reenactment<sup>7</sup> and documentary films, Carapiru is not introduced as a self-driven agent of his own history, and neither is cinema a transparent conduit for his voice nor for eventual onscreen self-awareness. Like other contemporary reenactment films discussed here, *Serras* stages a problematic agency: that Carapiru is there but strangely absent, that his presence is at odds with the present it refers to, is both a result of Tonacci’s targeted mobili-

7. For an extended treatment of neorealist conceptions of reenactment as a path to exemplarity, see Margulies 217-230.



zation of reenactment’s hesitant temporality and an allegory for an intractable alterity.

## Disrupted Transmission

Carapiru’s relay value is linked to recurring images of a firebrand. The film starts, in the manner of process-oriented ethnographies, with an Indian making a fire. We do not yet know that this is Carapiru. A dreamlike sequence prefiguring the attack dissolves into images of Indians choosing a place to setup camp, showing their convivial relationship with their kin and animals. An older native woman hands the firebrand to a child, a detail that gains significance when, later in the film, one of the men in charge of the Indians’ protection tells a parable for the film. He mentions an occasion when, concerned with their escape, he asked one of the Indians to put out his firebrand. When it was extinguished, he felt the Indian’s pride in carrying it was instantly deflated. The firebrand, a simple tool when compared to a lighter or match, becomes, in this anecdote, a figure for multiple losses and ruptures.

In “The Artifices of Fire” (2008), Ismail Xavier takes stock of this metaphor, pointing to Tonnaci’s articulation of cinema’s role in this break with tradition: “At the end of the film we return to its initial scene, the image of an Indian making fire. Only we now know this is Carapiru and

he comes to the woods to meet Tonacci and the camera” (23). In the last shot, Carapiru addresses the camera while a digitally inserted jet plane passes above him, “an even more inaccessible image of technology” (23).

Carapiru’s incomprehensible camera-address persists as the node of obstructed communication and ostensive reflexivity that guides the question of testimonial agency in literal reenactment: can reenactment, like the firebrand, animate any prospect of continuity with the past, or should it be seen instead as a mere prop lit up just for the film? The film oscillates between these options, insisting on a tableau of discrepancy to figure a reality “that cannot be entirely translated into the terms of modern homogeneous time” (Bliss Cua Lim 28). The meeting with Tonacci and cinema at the end of the film completes this rite of passage: Carapiru’s becoming-cinema.

This final image of technological super-imposition matches an equally significant parallel between Carapiru and National progress early in the film. Soon after the massacre of his group, Carapiru disappears into the forest. At this point, the scale of the film shifts to the grandiose, incorporating images of deforestation, the building of Transamazonica, Serra Pelada (a gigantic mining site)—large construction projects whose portent can only be measured by crane or aerial shots. An ironic samba scores a dissolve into contestation scenes between Indians and the FUNAI, and against the dictatorship. Collated from institutional films,

3. See Kahana for a compact and smart overview of the field of reenactment in cinema. On contemporary art’s interest in fictive biographies and archives, see Lambert-Beatty.

4. For trenchant views on the temporality of reenactment in performance, see Schneider.

5. See Doane 140-163.

6. At stake, precisely in 2006 when the film was made, is the statement by the FUNAI president that limits would have to be set by the judiciary system for the excessive claims for Indian territory (based on a number of whites claiming Indian ancestry). Viveiros de Castro compounds his argument, insisting that no third party can decide what an Indian is since the Indian identity is tautological: “the Indian represents his own self,” which has nothing to do with representativeness or identity, but with singularity (150-153).

newsreels, and documentaries,<sup>8</sup> this inflated montage gels as the prosthetic memory of the military era, ending on a deceptively simple scene—that of Carapiru running. A literal notation of the actual, the run conflates representation and act, a de-dramatized image of liminality. Apposed but of distinct referential densities, these two sequences—Carapiru’s enigmatic, inaccessible subjectivity and the grotesque digest

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of a National history of violence and spoliation—equate incommensurate images of Brazil. More than a synthesis of an era, this juxtaposition creates an imbalance between a single body and its testimonial burden, these constellations of meaning too dense to filter through an individual story.

Such allegorical pressure is constant in *Serras*. No image is allowed to appear naked, divested of its historical and filmic envelope. In one of the film’s most economic scenes, we observe how framing and duplication brackets Carapiru’s testimony. Leaning by a windowsill, Carapiru speaks for a long time in an unbroken, un-translated flow of Guajá. The camera tracks back to show he is alone in an expressive mimicry of transmission. Yet, this desolate image of an inaccessible self is instantly de-naturalized, echoed by a black and white photograph of Carapiru in 1998 from the exact same angle.

8. Among others, *Inacema, a Transa Amazonica* (Bodanzky & Senna, 1977), *Jango* (Tendler, 1984), *Linha de Montagem* (Tapajos, 1982), *Fê* (Dias, 1999), *Jornal do Sertão* (Sarno, 1970).

## “When is Carapiru”

“Where is Carapiru?” asks Ms. Aires, addressing Carapiru as a child in a game of self-recognition, pointing to a faded photo showing him and his host family. The recognition-ploy characterizes this as a revisitation to a prior 1988 stay among the Santa Luzia villagers. But *where Carapiru is* becomes the film’s silent, deeper refrain. We soon become unsure about the when of Carapiru’s actions, uncertain about how to think of him, what he himself thinks.

The narrative moves along two tensioned, temporal axes. One describes the linear sequence of Carapiru’s life up to his encounter with members of his tribe; the second, followed with greater interest, obfuscates linear chronology by injecting the film with a massive mediation, splitting every representation with the same oscillatory temporality that defines reenactment.

The film’s temporal ambiguity is not restricted to the replay of unique, discrete events in Carapiru’s life—like his first contact with the ranchers or when he is reluctantly taken away to Brasília. The repetition of departure scenes now replayed as theatre conveys a vague violence impossible to locate, to gauge. Rather, his performance registers as most jarring and eventful against the backdrop of banal, regular quotidian tasks.

Routine both absorbs and sets Carapiru’s return in relief. The habitual nature of daily rituals lends itself to generalized abbreviation, and yet, in conjunction with cinema’s pointed singularity, the reference to repetitive behaviour only increases the chronological confusion: like every other day, there is cooking and eating, but when? Scenes are chronologically unmarked, reminding us that cinema can serve as a record of pure contingency, and that without narrative intervention, the internal time of the image loses its links with factual, clock time. At times, a simple adverb mentioned in a line of dialogue—“before,” “then,” “now”—exposes how Carapiru’s figure wavers under a shaky tense. A single line such as “I don’t want him to leave, you won’t leave us will you?” refers to multiple departures. The meal scenes at the Aires family home and at Sidney Possuelo’s home in Brasília normalize Carapiru’s presence in the direct-time image, but a simple comment about how Carapiru does not fill his plate as much as he did when he first came to their house instantly forks the scene, making it count for then and now.

A masterfully edited kitchen scene construes Carapiru as a spectral visitor. In perfect continuity, black and white and colour shots succeed each other. We watch the rancher’s wife cooking with her back to us. Suddenly a shadow fills the image, Carapiru opens a door, and the film cuts to a colour shot of Robelia, the daughter, coming into the

same space. Yet, another monochromatic shot depicts Robelia in the very act of crossing Carapiru, who now enters the kitchen.

The unnecessarily intricate editing of different days with different clothes (or costumes) in such a simple scene foregrounds the cinematic medium along with Carapiru’s entrance with a haunting effect: he comes in to repeat for the camera what he may have done twenty years earlier when he stayed with the Aires family. The slight delay in the change of shots is all that is needed to spook the image. A simple cut or doorway entry suffices to register a doubt, a flash of a double take—this has happened multiple times before and now it happens once more.

Reenactment, cinema, and Carapiru are equated in this entrance. Carapiru, the inordinate visitor (both when he first made contact and when he returns with the film crew), becomes, against this staged normalcy, a marker of cinema, the very motor of its repetition and his visibility. We are left to ponder what distinguishes original happening from replay, routine from event, event from film take.

Carapiru is not the sole revenant in the film. With remarkable economy, Tonacci replicates reenactment’s strategy to have a single person (or scene) reappear in a new context, eliciting a retroactive foreshadowing, a set of correspondences across time.

The uncanny kinship between past and present is especially highlighted when it targets the circumscribed autonomy of indigenous populations. The second time the Indian community idyllically bathes by the river, it is shadowed by the threat of massacre that follows an Edenic scene in the same location. Similarly, when we first see train footage, it is ominously linked to annihilation: shots of armed men, a spoken line overheard (“the Indian is another humanity”), a man “shooting” with his hand at a sign demarcating indigenous land. Later in the film, the same shot of the train recurs, but a brief pan allows us to identify other passengers, in this case Carapiru chatting with his son as he is brought back from Brasília to the reservation. Those formerly seen as responsible for the attack (an old captain and his men) are now recognizable as Indian Service agents in charge of Carapiru’s well-being. This second view sets the first, partial one as artifice, and yet they torque each other in an impossible present. Fastened by cinema’s indexicality, the film and the characters split in meaning, creating a paradox: Carapiru, his son, and the old hired hand in charge of attacking the Awá-Guajá group, “victims and aggressors, inhabit a single scene” (De Oliveira 71).

Adding to the unease enforced through shared locations, bodies, and shots, Tonacci threads through the film an archival series that replicates his scenes in content and shape. The kitchen and meal scenes, already traversed by a

deep temporal crisis, are intercepted by a similarly framed 1920s kitchen and meal scene, featuring another family at the table. Edited in perfect match-on-action continuity, these inserts institute momentary but deep rifts in historical consciousness: “What connects the dish served here and the raised spoon there,” affirms Rodrigo de Oliveira, “is nothing less than the perception of a whole, the consciousness that National history is construed by having the image as an involuntary support of memory” (73).



Luis da Rocha Melo remarks that the film’s excerpts, derived mostly from exploration and travel documentaries, interweave and comment on Tonacci’s own gaze (34–42). A flickering archival image of native, uniformed children in a classroom surrounded by white-smocked men intercepts the reenactment of Possuelo’s “first” contact with Carapiru, who watches a rural elementary class for kids. An archival shot of a pig flitting by in a backyard crosses like a fugitive shadow a second shot where, in the present-tense of *Serras*, children run after another piglet. These short bursts of found footage corrupt the film’s neutral base—backyards, classrooms, and the kitchen are visited by someone else’s vision. In many cases, this vision corresponds to Major Luiz Thomaz Reis’ *Around Brazil* (*Ao Redor do Brasil*, 1932), a compilation of films by the cinematographer who accompanied Marshall Rondon’s Commission in his scientific explorations of the Brazilian interior.<sup>9</sup>

Complicating the finality of the salvage paradigm in fully determining the contours of ethnographic documentary, Catherine Russell has called for an experimental ethnography that “foreground[s] ‘the time machine’ of anthropological representation” (6), pointing to Walter Benjamin’s vision of allegory as an alternate historiographical model, one in which fragments of other histories bring into play a

9. In charge of surveying the land and laying out telegraph wiring, the Commission created the Service of Indian Protection in 1910 (initially called SPI and Localization of National Workers). This involved recording the integration of the Indian population into the national economy. See Tacca.

non-linear temporality. It is precisely this allegorical model that is embraced in Tonacci's jarring re-appropriation of other visual histories. Inserted with rhyme but with no apparent motive, these naturalized scenes of expeditionary zeal are snippets of gelled historicity. They reveal a visual pattern implicating cinema's complicity in a patronizing gaze that objectifies natives, children, wild landscapes, and animals. Forcing one series of images to be read through the other, they create a noise in Tonacci's "rescue" of Carapiru's story. Erupting as if from a historical unconscious, this interstitial commentary haunts the film's well-intentioned present.

Many of the criteria that grant coherence to a realist discourse—the flashback, memory, reference to a cycle, inherited family traits—all the staples of a shared diegetic world or a coherent psychology—are submitted to significant torques, filtered by Carapiru's opaque subjectivity as well as by the film's relentless fragmentation. Two sequences rehearse the protagonist's affiliation while showing its fitful contours and ruined history: Carapiru's encounter with his son and his dispersal amid other Indians at the reservation.

## A-filiation

It is especially regarding the question of kinship—which lineage can Carapiru claim? Where does he fit and what is the status of an isolated Indian in Brazil today?—that the film most clearly activates reenactment's "anachronic" quality, creating a speculative space to frame and keep Carapiru's apartness alive as a question.<sup>10</sup>

The retracing of Carapiru's loss and return to his group sets into play a continually deferred scenario of integration. The finding of Carapiru's lost son strikes us as momentous in its coincidence, a perfect melodramatic trope. It seems to emotionally set straight the displacements that inform both the reality of Carapiru's life and its textured telling. That against all odds they are indeed father and son, that Benvindo also escaped death in his youth, tinges their former separation with a tragic sense of fate. The real is *troumat-ic*—Lacan's pun pointing to the almost missed encounter; after all, another translator was scheduled to come.

Tellingly, the film deflates the recognition scene that could anchor Carapiru's elusive identity and, respecting the inscrutable tone of the actual encounter,<sup>11</sup> Possuelo simply

10. I borrow Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel's notion of the "anachronic," introduced as an alternative to the historicist description of a work of art as anachronistic. By contrast, to describe a work of art as "anachronic" is to say what the artwork does "qua art." "when it is late, when it repeats, when it hesitates, when it remembers, but also when it projects a future or an ideal" (14).

11. They could not reenact the encounter because Carapiru had an accident in Brasília and they had to interrupt the filming for six months.



explains what happened. Benvindo hears Carapiru's name and says in broken Portuguese, "This is my father's name... I recognizing his face... He *is* my father." The ultimate proof, an old bullet wound the son knew his father to bear on his back, is shown through a replay of a television reenactment of the encounter in 1988.

Carapiru's body is the screen for recurrent mediations and mis/recognitions. We see television images of American linguists unsuccessfully trying to map Carapiru's language onto a Tupi Guarani grid. We also register our own fantasies of adoption (Carapiru child-like passivity helps) sparked by the reconstituted encounters with benevolent families—the Aires who take Carapiru in and Sidney Possuelo's family with whom he stays in Brasília. Navigating a field of assumed genetic relatedness, the various encounters with normative orders sets in relief his position as outsider, relegating Carapiru to a second exile, to an *a-filiation*.

Possuelo reveals, for instance, that he at first thought Benvindo recognized Carapiru, not because he is his father, but because they are from the same ethnicity. Threading a risky line—whether an emphasis on ethnic origin and culture would betray or reinforce Carapiru's singularity—Tonacci steers clear of ethnographic explanations.

Loretta Cormier, a Guajá scholar, notes that "genealogies are neither meaningful nor appropriate for understanding the way the Guajá perceive kinship relations" (75). Their belief that they have more than one "biological fa-

See Tonacci, "Conversas na Desordem" 248.

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ther," since for them, "the amount of semen needed to create a child is more than one man alone would normally be able to produce" (xx), not only makes it difficult to consider their system patrilineal, but it weakens the role of paternity (65). The fact that they suffer from genealogical and even structural amnesia, which "refers not so much to the ability to recall but to the social significance of recalling or not recalling ancestors in creating certain types of kinship systems" (75), would also seriously interfere with non-Indian projections in relation to the father-son encounter. That in Guajá (as in the Tupi-Guarani language) one calls oneself "awá" (which means roughly "human") should also matter since that is what Carapiru calls himself; that they consider monkeys and in particular the howler monkey kin (they are literally called "former humans") (89), and that pet creation and adoption constitute a complex form of filiation<sup>12</sup>—all this information that could be harnessed in a traditional documentary to grasp Carapiru's alternate understanding

12. See Cormier chaps. 6-7.

of kinship, goes unmentioned. Signs scattered throughout the film are given in the form of ruin. Seen from an outsider's perspective, this corroded fabric confirms a radical disaffiliation.

Tonacci's representation of an a-filiated Carapiru bears parallel to Nancy Bentley's discussion of W. E. B. Du Bois' invention of a "counterfactual device to register an alternative space and time for those uncaptured by those keeping time" (283). African American writers, she argues, could not rely "on universalist languages of intimate familism or genetic descent," for in so doing, they "would erase the history most in need of representation—that of kinlessness" (a juridical and social condition imposed on non-whites by colonialist and slavery practices, extracting "their bodies, labor, and reproductive capacities...from the sphere of the familial") (276; 270-1). Rather than "bloodlines," the novel stages "the *coexistence* of a distinct zone of experience with a three dimensional world that remains oblivious to it" (281).

This is, of course, Tonacci's, and not Carapiru's, representation of a "distinct zone of experience" and "world obliviousness," and the particulars of Indigenous, African, and African American loss under colonial exploitation cannot be minimized. What interests me in this analogy, imperfect in many ways, is the sense that another dimension may be necessary to express the irreducible singularity of a *contemporary* Indian. In *Serras*, reenactment is appropriate as a tool to shake the naturalized assuredness of lineages and timelines, of familial models and a modern National present.

*Serras da Desordem's* flirtation with instances of recognition and return instantiates the perverse attraction exerted by the question of mimesis in contemporary reenactment cinema. Films like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1984), Abbas Kiarostami's *Close Up* (1990), and Zhang Yuan's *Sons* (1996) present a reflux, a regurgitation of the real in the form of repetitions that seem unconscious, accidental, and compulsive—reality is itself pervaded by uncanny coincidences, resilient prejudices, strange similarities, hereditary vices. In *Sons*, a family reenacts their ten-day ordeal prior to sending their alcoholic father to a mental asylum, and the film didactically promotes a direct causality between the father's affliction and the sons' violence and addiction. But it explicitly introduces heredity as an insufficient explanation, hinting at a cyclical problem, a national malaise without a clear genetic or social cause.

Exemplifying a trend in contemporary reenactment, these films make clear that there are no natural causes, no



genetic or social predispositions; there is only theatre, a claim enacted in and through repetition.

The juridical *mise-en-scène* and the prosecutorial impetus of post-Holocaust testimonials in *Shoah* and after have generated particularly effective dramaturgies out of the obfuscation of a clear and conscious protagonist’s agency. Discussing the need in contemporary art to supplement



documentary modes with fiction given the rare availability of witnesses, Ernst Alphen mentions Tadeusz Borowsky and Charlotte Delbo as writers who have tried to recreate an obsessive interiority through a purely descriptive acuity (206-220). These artists’ creation of a traumatic register for their art can be likened to the willed aesthetic sharpness of contemporary reenactment *mise-en-scène*. Crucial for both writers and filmmakers is the productive ambiguity generated by an intensified affective dimension.

This de-realizing aesthetic recommended by Lanzmann so as to ensure that testimonial transmission<sup>13</sup> will be powerful for the viewer, is predicated on a problematic, ambiguous agency, an interrupted causality. As Bill Nichols has noted apropos of Werner Herzog’s *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1998) and Patricio Guzmán’s *Chile Obstinate Memory*

13. See Lanzmann 44-45.

(1997), in-person reenactment invites a performance “confused” between demonstration and compulsive reliving. Addressing the discrepancy between its sensorial directness and a voided context in which it may be exercised, he notes how this denaturalized intensity takes on a fantasmatic dimension (83).

In *S21, The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), Rithy Panh stages a disjointed *semblant* of a juridical order, having culprits retrace their steps, officers tabulate records, and survivors make impassioned statements.<sup>14</sup> Khieu Ches, one of the Khmer Rouge’s ex-guards, unlocks, enters, exits, and locks the door to the cell five times. He “brings” a prisoner back from interrogation, yanks an imaginary shackle and chain, and moves a real bucket. Each imaginary prisoner gets an exclusive abuse, clubbed without the respite of a summary narrative; yet, in a sort of mad tautology, each gesture is doubled by a literal description, a present-tense commentary. Without anchorage in a precise past, these gestures set-off a proliferating iteration, compacting distinct repetitions: the hourly, daily routine, the protocol that disallows thinking, and finally the retracing of these acts in an imaginary time-space. Subsequent functions of the location—a public school turned prison camp turned memorial museum—unfold through this perverse theatre, while a resilient indoctrination is restated in an inescapable script.

*Serras* presents an equivalent sequence of stuck temporality. A cluster of scenes of daily life at the Guajá reservation reiterates contemporary reenactment’s propensity to blur present and past into indistinct stases. For fifteen minutes prior to the spectacular ending in which Carapiru takes off his clothes, dons his Indian costume, and heads to the forest to meet the filmmaker and address us under a digitally inserted image of a jet, we witness what is his “present condition.” He now appears intermittently and somewhat apart from the others. We witness the Guajá’s convivial relation with animals: their preparation of monkeys to barbeque. A fire with monkey bodies piled over it is isolated in a long, single take. Gradually, shots of small kids playing with pointy tools, sticks, and broken mirrors, aiming their bows in mock-battle, accumulate an undercurrent of violence and misery and we vaguely wish this reality were an effect of stylization.<sup>15</sup> An image of a pet animal—a coati tied to a pole—is shown twice circling around and around.

14. *S21* is part of a broad truth and reconciliation effort. The film anticipates the formation of the ECCC (Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia), an international UN court established to try the Khmer Rouge atrocities. See Panh for essential information. For other excellent analyses, see Boyle, Camhi, and Rachman.

15. Awá-Guajá scholar Uirá Felipe Garcia mentions that the village is exactly as Tonacci filmed it. For an extended analysis of the Guajá relation with monkeys, see Cormier chaps. 6-7.

This miniature captivity exposes a disturbing limbo, a banal yet unplaced sign of alterity.

These images of senseless mimesis, adumbrated in recurrent images of poorly dressed children in oversize logo-bearing t-shirts, repeatedly hitting and learning to hit, defending food and possessions, clinch the film’s intervention. As we watch, we enter a humanity circuit, linked to the Guajá as they are to the monkeys they believe to be kin. We are implicated in a shared sense of loss, in “another humanity.”<sup>16</sup>

This sequence forfeits the film’s earlier textual layering for a sparse aesthetic devoid of explanation or redemptive rhetoric. Minimal metonymical sliding maps a repetitive indigenous experience and a reduced horizon of expectation. Relying on recursive accumulation, bringing Carapiru (and other images) back through one more representational loop, one more cycle of dispossession, Tonnaci transforms his apparition. Carapiru’s bare, awkward presence can now be understood as an essential element for a critical historiography in the “accounting” of National histories of exclusion.

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16. The phrase, “the Indian is another humanity,” is repeated twice in *Serras*: the first, coloured by contempt; the second, by admiration.

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