

Introduction

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Confronting Museums:

Collaboration, Reception, and Experiment in “Tabuluja (Wake Up!)” and “New York, just another city”

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Key Words: collaboration, friction, indigenous films, African migration, reception

I. Introduction

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- 1 This section aims to showcase and discuss two recent Brazilian films produced by Laboratory of Image and Sound in Anthropology (LISA) at the University of São Paulo: *Tabuluja (Wake Up!)* by Rose Satiko Gitirana Hikiji, Jasper Chalcraft, and Shambuyi Wetu and *New York, just another city* by André Lopes and Joana Brandão. These two films were both filmed at museums, and within this context, the films take shape through improvisation, collaboration, and confrontation.
- 2 This short introduction is meant to be a curatorial text rather than an explanatory one: a provocative invitation to watch the audio-visual material that constitutes the main body of work presented here. The viewer is invited to look at both films as well as a recorded Zoom discussion between the authors and the protagonists. This new and exciting format is experimental but also serves as a methodological quest, by considering what happens to films after their relatively short

life of being presented at film festivals and academic events. Can we prolong their lives with attempts like this, beyond a simplistic, archivist ambition of placing films online? How can two different films, such as in this case, generate new meanings when considered together? Can this kind of interaction produce new anthropological meanings by interpreting films over time? Viewers are invited to respond to their own questions, as this webpage unfolds as a canvas of experimentation and a collaborative laboratory where films, anthropologists, and protagonists join in an online discussion to tell new stories about their own films. However, these new meanings also reflect the viewers, who are invited to forge new paths, follow up on reception stories, and entangle new meanings to the films.

- 3 These films were chosen based on curiosity, fascination, and the significance of encounters that the TRAJECTORIA project produced; further, these films offer an opportunity to exhibit the work of a very important school of anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking. LISA is an educational centre and a creative and innovative space for exchange between anthropologists, ethnologists, musicians, and artists from Brazil and abroad. In this environment, the filmmakers of both films learned how to leave space for improvisation, engage with collaborative methods, and deepen the anthropological reflection in their films. Consequently, both films are led by strong protagonists that together with the filmmakers/anthropologists are involved in collaborative and politically engaged practices. In *Tabuluja (Wake Up!)*, Shambuyi Wetu, a Congolese artist and performer living in São Paulo, is the co-author of the film, while in *New York, just another city*, Patrícia Ferreira Pará Yxapy, an indigenous leader and filmmaker herself, serves as the film's protagonist and an active collaborator. In both cases, the films are named by and after the main characters' political leanings. *New York, just another city* is Pará Yxapy's statement that New York is just a regular city created to the standards of the white man, whereas *Tabuluja* expresses Wetu's demand for people to 'wake up!' to the racism and colonialism he reacts to as he visits the Museu Afro Brasil.
- 4 Both protagonists guide their collaborators, the camera, and viewers to accompany them on a museum visit. Wetu was invited by Rose Satiko and Jasper Chalcraft to visit the Museu Afro Brasil located in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo, which houses the largest collection of African and Afro-Brazilian art and objects. The Congolese migrant produced two dazzling performances in response to his museum visit: one was performed outside the museum, which comprises an important part of the film's imagery, and the second was an improvised performance conducted in the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, INCERTEZA VIVA (Live Uncertainty). His performance became an organic form of protest and a manner of exercising his political art. Pará Yxapy, on the other hand, was invited to show her latest film at the Margaret Mead Film Festival 2018, which was held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Filmmakers and anthropologists André Lopes and Joana Brandão invited Pará Yxapy to film inside the museum, but when she entered the museum, Pará Yxapy felt very uncomfortable surrounded by sacred or 'stolen' items, as she confesses later on. Instead of filming, she chose to be filmed inside the museum, allowing her to confront the museum, many indigenous leaders like Pará Yxapy consider museums as cemeteries, that are situated in illegitimate places, and require serious re-evaluation.
- 5 We chose to consider both films together, not only for their common story, a confrontation between

the protagonists and the museums but also to provoke a discussion on the meaningful continuity of anthropological reflection that goes beyond the films. For instance, one of the rather surprising outcomes of the video discussion, came at the end of our Zoom meeting and made us consider the ‘spirited presences’ that both protagonists mentioned as being part of the film processes. The goal of our talk is not simply discussing the methods, the strategies, or a replay of traditional problems in anthropology. Instead, as we concluded, ethnographic filmmaking involves mediating different ontologies, considering the role of images and imagination, and examining how different cosmologies, including human and non-human entities, interplay in encounters that we anthropologists and protagonists provoke and confront in such a necessary way.

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