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YWY, VISIONS

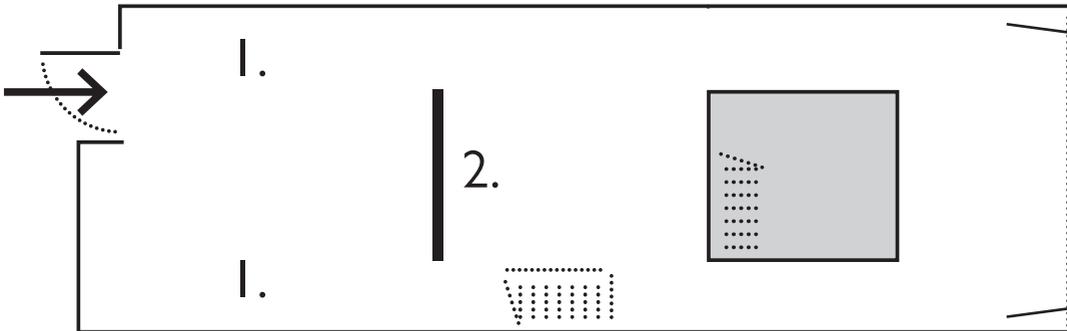
PEDRO NEVES MARQUES
AND ZAHY GUAJAJARA
IN CONVERSATION WITH
ROSA LLÉO

TITLES.

1.
YWY, VISIONS – Hekepe
Zahy Guajajara and Beto Lemos
7'56", stereo sound installation
voice by Zahy Guajajara
musical execution by Beto Lemos
2020
2.
*YWY, Searching for a Character
Between East and West*
Pedro Neves Marques and Hetamoé
6'30", digital drawings, monitor, no sound
2020
3.
YWY, Visions
Pedro Neves Marques
7'40" loop, video, sound, color
2017
4.
Android Loop # 1
Pedro Neves Marques
vinyl lettering on wall
2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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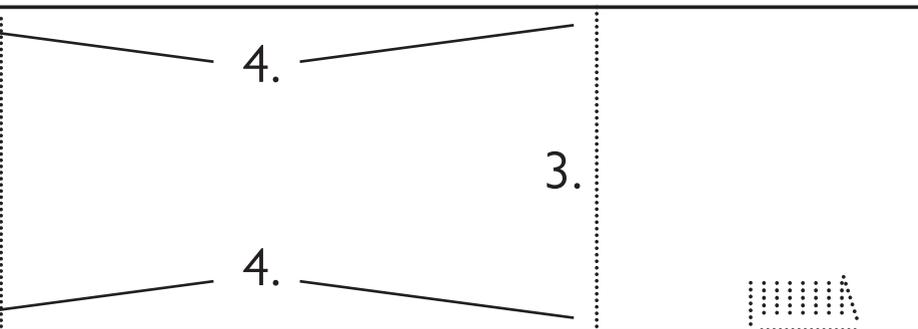


SOUND PIECE.

The sound piece *YWY, VISIONS – Hekepe*, by Zahy Guajajara with a musical composition by composer Beto Lemos, is a provocation based on the artist's doubts about the emergence of the world / universe through a short story, from the point of view of native populations. It also dialogues with others religions and sciences, based on the experience of an indigenous woman, native, colonized but nevertheless *decolonial*.

The history is told in a sequence of three moments: the beginning / birth / appearance; the evolution / transgression; and the arrival to the future / the end / the present. It is an encounter between the artist's two worlds: her ancestral one versus the 'civilized'. An encounter that clearly provokes a clash and that 'ends' swallowed by machines, industries, cities, capitalism, and a 'civilization' where man and machine fuse into a single body, or a lonely body... In the end, this clash culminates in different opinions and questions... Does the end exist? Is the end what we have today? Is the end what we become? Is our colonized education really what we can call 'civilized'? Anyway, the end is just a cycle, a passage to start again.

The language spoken is Ze'eg eté, language of the Tentehar-Guajajara native people, who inhabit the northern region of the state of Maranhão. People to which the artist belongs, whose thought is about how uninteresting it is to translate an original language, starting from the point that a translation never really translates properly the experience of another culture. This provocation is really meant to cause discomfort regarding the literal incapacity to understand the piece's content. The artist wishes the audience to feel and travel through unknown sounds, words, and emotions, and from there to create their own experience. Is there an absolute truth?



ROSA LLEÓ: Recently you, Pedro, gave me a copy of your recent poetry book *Sex as Care and Other Viral Poems*, a reading that I definitely recommend. Some of those words come from a very specific moment in Brazil, with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, when a very frightening climate of violence and racism became normalized by the state. Many of us were perplexed, perhaps so much so that the only way to try to apprehend it was through science fiction, or even poetry. Was that moment also the beginning of films and artworks that deal with the fictional figure of YWY?

PEDRO NEVES MARQUES: The invention of YWY came from just before all of that political collapse in Brazil, despite the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff already being palpable. In 2016 I arrived in Brazil with this character in my hands, an indigenous android, but I didn't know how to activate it. It was then that I met Zahy, through a video sent by a friend in Rio de Janeiro in which she spoke against the eviction of the Maracanã Indigenous Village, a community living in the original Indian Museum built in the mid nineteenth century. I immediately realized that Zahy would be YWY; I just couldn't imagine how important this character would become to me, the questions that she would ask. Back then I was already interested in looking at the Brazilian landscape and cultural dynamics through science fiction. On the one hand, it's not easy to find science fiction in Brazil, and I wondered why? On the other, I grew up reading a lot of science fiction, first *hard* and later the new *soft* wave from the 1960s onwards, more sociological and intimate. With that in mind, I wondered how science fiction answered to the uses of technology in Brazil, technologies historically aimed at resource extraction

and landscape transformation, its 'terraforming' to use a science fiction term—from the colonial cataloguing of plants to experimentation with different species—but also how it, interestingly, seemed to mirror Amerindian mythologies. I can talk a little more about that.

ROSA LLEÓ: Yes, please try to explain better what this relationship means to you. Between science fiction and colonialism, but also with other non-Western cosmologies. Perhaps in the end science fiction has to do with extractivist countries and colonial power rather than the other way around. I also recall this beautiful quote from Sônia Guajajara, the Indigenous activist and spokesperson, that you used in a text published in April 2019 for e-flux journal:

“How could I practice poetry when I hear the provisional government say that indigenous people are undeserving of a bridge to the future? What can I say? I'll tell them: We don't need that bridge; we don't want that bridge. We want to walk the way of the water. We want to walk the way of the rivers.”

PEDRO NEVES MARQUES: Actually, in another recent article, I wrote about the notion of futurity as the philosophy of science fiction and that of alterity as its anthropology. If so, then science fiction is, in fact, a speculative tool for thinking and articulating not only the entanglements between different cosmologies, but also legacies and expectations about them. When I started to work with this YWY character, expectations were precisely what I brought with me to Brazil: on the one hand, expectations

about technologies from a Western point of view, a certain horizon and imaginary I was raised with, that is, a relationship between the future and technological development, and on the other hand, expectations about the political potential of Amerindian animism. I didn't understand that right away, but with the development of the character, and in particular its incorporation by Zahy, I began to understand that this was what the character seemed to highlight.

When I say that we seem to find little evidence of science fiction in Brazil—note, there are wonderful examples of science fiction in the region, including about androids as placeholders for serf relations, I'm not denying that—of course I'm thinking of an idea of science fiction as an invention of European modernity, which has its origin in a sublimation of colonial and imperialist tensions, in a hierarchy towards the 'other' or even towards other lands. In this sense, science fiction is part of the colonial process and not a mere mirror of it. I think this is an important consideration.

Alternatively, however, if we think about science fiction anthropologically, that is, as a way of contrasting, comparing, and correlating futures, and even other forms of conceiving what a future means, as well as relations with otherness (the human and nonhuman, and so on), then maybe we will encounter such indigenous myths along the way, with their apparent fantasies and relationships with the world, with animals, with plants and the stars, for example. The danger here, of course, is to project an external model on indigenous cosmopolitics, which would be nothing short of colonization; that's not what I'm talking about. I'm saying that we must learn to compare these different modalities and see how they respond to our different relationships with the world. Still, I wonder if YWY not only

compares, but also interweaves it all. If YWY is a meeting between me, Portuguese, and Zahy, Guajajara, it seems unavoidable that something wild will happen.

ROSA LLEÓ: It is very important this idea that YWY is an intertwinement, still in process but already able to talk about several contemporary issues, such as colonial power or capitalist enslavement, but also feminism and reproduction. There's this beautiful moment, both in the animation by Hetamoé as in the films, where YWY is 'charging' on solar energy. It's one of the images I like the most! As an android, she doesn't feed, nor does she reproduce. It makes me think of a passage by Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* where she explains how African slave women, knowing their position as suppliers of labor for the future, tried to control reproduction and become infertile to break with that exploitation system. Also, this image also introduces another question, that of vision and the eyes, which I would ask you to elaborate on.

PEDRO NEVES MARQUES: The issue of reproduction or replication is central to many of my works and perhaps it was YWY who made me better understand this. Reproduction is transversal to a historiography of robotics and artificial intelligence. In the 1921 play *R.U.R.*, by Karel Capek, curiously the androids are flesh and blood instead of wire and metal, and their uprising against humans comes from exactly this questioning: "All we want is to reproduce, like you humans." It's the same in *Blade Runner* and even more so in its sequel. We find this also in Alan Turing's thinking about computing, in the genetic algorithms of artificial life, and even all the way back with Descartes. In the film *YWY, The Android* there is an obvious association between that control

of who can reproduce—both a world and a legacy, of course—and genetically modified seeds, the so-called Terminator Seeds, which last a single generation only. When YWY speaks, I think she talks about this attack against the reproduction of indigenous worlds and other relations both with nature and with technology. Don't forget that what we see in the film is, on the one hand, a highly colonial image—an indigenous woman in a 'pure' relationship with nature—superimposed on a neocolonial image, a robot and GMO. In that film, which somehow introduces the character, we understand that she doesn't eat like humans ("food people"); instead, she draws energy from biodiesel, certainly from modified soya or corn. There's a cannibal and anthropophagic side to it, if plants are family, sisters as she says in the film; this is something that I remember talking about with Zahy so as to try and understand it from an animistic Amerindian point of view that only she could explain. More recently, when writing a new text about the character and thinking about this animation with Hetamoé, I changed that intake to solar energy, as a reference both to environmentalism and the sci-fi genre of Solar Punk. To eat with one's whole body, through the skin.

In the animation with Hetamoé there's this sequence in which YWY changes eyes, referencing *Blade Runner* and *Minority Report*, where it's necessary to change eyes so as not to be detected by the police, by forces that do not allow other lives outside the norms to thrive, but also to the previous YWY films. This idea came from Zahy's desire to film her mother's blindness in her indigenous village in Maranhão. That's when we started planning a new film, a prequel or sequel of sorts. Zahy will be able to talk more about it. But hearing her speak made me think of the notion of vision, *visions*, and non-visual images so to speak, as well as

the cinematic image, of course. And other visions of the future, which not all of us can see.

ZAHY GUAJAJARA: The desire to film my mother's blindness started with the fact that I already identified myself with non-vision. Both my parents went blind and I always wondered what they saw beyond sight, especially my mother, a shaman who used her knowledge, hands and songs a lot to heal. Hence, I've always asked myself about human vision, but also that of animals and plants... Why not?

I always wanted to see beyond the eyes, to search for reasons to see beyond what's given to me. I don't like the idea of seeing only what the eyes see; it makes humans increasingly superficial and limited, since the eyes are used to see what suits them, what is appropriate for them. Would we be able to see outside our axis? Is what we see what really moves us? What's superficial about that? Is there a lack of dialogue with the other senses that compose us? Is vision what rules us? Are the eyes 'machines' of desire? We only desire what we see and this is where the image industries enter, making millions and billions to stagnate our gazes and desires into consumer products.

We see the world from the machine's perspective. Humanity has been less and less able to expand its primary and imaginary vision, leading it to accept, or even to desire, a domesticated vision by a robotic civilization. All of this makes me wonder what we will be able to see twenty years from now. Will we still have our own particular vision?

I'm very interested in meeting and filming those who no longer have vision. I strongly believe that they have a lot to teach us about how to see beyond the eyes. What do they see? What do they think? And

what is it like to live without 'vision'? I believe that non-vision offers us a sign of healing for humanity about what it is to actually SEE. It's not about blindfolding, but how to expand a unique and personal vision, a vision of visions full of imaginaries about a new future.

What makes me feel the need to register through visual images what is not visual is a great challenge, and challenges instigate me. I have a latent need to find solutions and provocations for what seems obvious. Meeting Pedro, who is Portuguese, during my journey as an artist makes me think that our conversation is a very long one. We have many pending issues to resolve in the face of a scenario of 'war' between colonized and colonizer. Our conversation comes through art; if it is a reconciliation or reparation we still don't know. My only certainty is that dialoguing, speaking, and making oneself heard by both sides offers me the idea that we are on the path to a new world, a world guided through dialogue, a kind of dialogue that isn't just verbal. The dialogue continues.

ROSA LLEÓ: Yes indeed, I would say that this working process is our dialogue. Pedro, first *YWY, Visions* was thought to be a third film within the saga of *Exterminator Seed* and *YWY the Android*, both from 2017, centered on the figure of YWY, as well as the sharing of the character with several authors. It's important to mention that there's a parallel book to this. The exhibition at 1646 was conceived as a first step in this process, showing previous works together with new pieces. The current crisis has led us to rethink the whole project again because of the impossibility of filming in Brazil, let alone at an indigenous village. It was necessary to postpone the exhibition in CA2M

until June and also to better consider the notion of fiction. Hence the short animation, *YWY Searching for a Character Between East and West*. How is the exchange with these authors working and what is their purpose in the project?

PEDRO NEVES MARQUES: Since the other films, Zahy and I feel there's much more to say about this character. At a certain point Zahy invited me to visit her native land, the village of Cana Brava, in the indigenous territory of the Guajajara, and challenged me to film together there. And so the idea of making a new YWY film was born. While looking for funding I wrote a short story called *YWY, Searching for a Character In-Between East and West*, published by the Guangdong Times Museum. I had traveled through China and Hong Kong and that Cantonese landscape reminded me a lot of Rio de Janeiro. From there to speculating on the commercial relations between Brazil and China—formerly gold and silver, today soya—and on the figure of the android was only a short jump. The digital drawings conceived by the illustrator and artist Hetamoé, in a bastard Japanese Manga style, came from an invitation that I made to her with this story as a basis.

For me, more than any film or artwork, the invention of the character YWY and the stories and confusions between expectations that she sets in motion is the true work of art. The challenge, then, is to share the character with different authors, including several indigenous people, to appropriate it and respond to it. The book *YWY, Searching for a Character Between Future Worlds*, to be edited by Sternberg Press and CA2M, will be the heart of this sharing, including authors such as Grace Dillon, New Red Order, Eliane Potiguara and Pedro Niemeyer Cesarino, among others.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET.

The artists invited to realize a project at 1646 are asked to engage in conversation with a correspondent via email or DM, be it someone previously unknown to them or whom they're already familiar with.

This conversation spans the period before an exhibition is completed. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this exchange to ask questions so they may be guided through the artist's decision-making process and how their initial ideas develop toward completion. It provides insight into the artist's body of work and is intended to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices that constitute the artist's practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Pedro Neves Marques and Zahy Guajajara, *YWY, Visions*, on view from November 28th, 2020 until January 17th, 2021 at 1646.

This artist

Pedro Neves Marques and Zahy Guajajara

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