

RIVERSIDE CINEMA: AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVES, MEMORY AND AGENCY IN THE LOWER TAPAJÓS RIVER

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ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5725-0778>

LIENDRIA MARLA MALCHER SILVA

Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05580-000 –
ppgas@usp.br

ABSTRACT

In this article, I develop the idea of *riverside cinema* by analyzing the documentary *Memórias de velho* (2020), by filmmaker Carlos Bandeira Júnior (2020), and its agency as an art object. The medium-length film gathers testimonials from the elderly living near the lower Tapajós river. After reflecting on the potential of landscapes in the featured oral narratives, I discuss the performativity of the filmmaker-anthropologist's gaze. Finally, I address experiences of the *cinema communities*, made up of those who appear on screen and others who connect to the film by sharing common memories with the filmed stories. In these narratives the river emerges as an important agent, a *person-character* recalled inside and outside the films; thus, I draw on the image of the riverbank to weave the metaphor of a *riverside cinema*, highlighting their potential to deepen the idea of the Amazon.

KEYWORDS

Audiovisual narratives;
Agency; Memory; Low
Tapajós; Audiovisual
anthropology.

The Tapajós, as the Arapiuns, is a calm, clean, old river whose memory is stored in its basin; it flows more slowly, stirs little. Its water is more crystalline because its sediments do not stay dispersed in the body of water. It is less dense, less turbid and warmer, because sunlight penetrates deeper. Its calmness creates beaches and sand crowns on its shores. Its neighbor, the Amazon River, in contrast, is a new and fierce river made of water mixed with clay that devours its islands by eroding its banks, which slide to the

bottom—*fallen lands*, as they say. *Edges of rivers are edges of the possible*. There are many meanings for *beira* (edge, side, bank, etc.), but the first image I want to evoke is that of the riverbank. Always relational, it exists while preceding the watercourse. It can dry up or overflow according to the seasonality of floods and ebb tides. It is a very particular border; its fixedness is displacement. If one cannot bathe in the same river twice, it is equally impossible to walk along the same bank. It presents itself in various forms, as stones, beach, cement barrier, among many others. For those who live in the Amazon the riverbank is a common image; the river, one of our most important references. This research was conducted in the micro-region of the lower Tapajós river, in western Pará, which borders the banks of the Tapajós, Arapiuns and Maró rivers, encompassing the municipalities of Santarém, Belterra, Aveiro, Itaituba and Rurópolis, where films, filmmakers, and characters live and narrate their stories.¹

In this article, I analyze the film *Memórias de velho*,² by Carlos Bandeira Júnior (2020). First, in its plastic space, presenting the film through a film analysis, reflecting on the oral narratives and landscapes featured in it. Next, I discuss the filmmaker's (who is also a photographer and anthropologist) trajectory, thinking about his *performance of the gaze* (MacDougall 2009), the relations woven by the audiovisual and, finally, the *cinema communities* (Guimarães 2015) engendered by the film. The documentary thematizes the phenomenon of memory, extending the discussion and the possibilities of remembering and forgetting beyond it. The river emerges as a key and constant agent in the narratives, a *person-character* recalled inside and outside the films. Thus, I draw on the elementary image of the riverbank to build the underlying metaphor of a *riverside cinema*.³ In this regard, the contours of this documentary are unpredictable and permeable: they are invaded by the life around them and overflow with it. Films, filmmakers, spectators, discourses and memories intersect and share common symbolic universes, which has interesting implications for how these films are produced and received by the communities in which their producers and their audience live.

1. In my dissertation, I analyzed a series of documentaries, in short and medium-length format, produced between 2007 and 2020 by filmmakers from the lower Tapajós river region, to reflect on the production, circulation and effects of these images. I especially follow three pioneer documentary filmmakers in the region: Clodoaldo Corrêa, Carlos Matos and Carlos Bandeira Júnior, who together have a filmography of 15 films. For more, see: Malcher (2021).

2. In English, "Memories of old people." The film is directed by Carlos Bandeira Júnior, produced by Barbara Caetano, with images by Carlos Matos, direct sound by Felipe Bandeira, editing by Ilgner Juan, LIBRAS translation by Kellen Garcia and illustration by Diego Godinho. Financed by the Department of Culture of Pará (Secult) via the 2020 Preamar Art and Culture Award. Available at: <http://bitly.ws/FmT8>.

3. The concept of *riverside cinema* is also inspired by other film circuits outside the mainstream, such as the *cinema de bordas* created by Bernadette Lyra (Lyra and Santana 2006) and the *cinema de quebrada* (Hikiji 2009).

The film apparatus is one among other objects of analysis that, according to Jacques Aumont (2002), gathers an ensemble of material and organizational data constituted by the relations between film and spectator. It has, briefly, three dimensions: spatial, temporal and ideological. The first, called *plastic space*, separates the spectator's space from the space of the image, and encompasses an ensemble of visual forms, "the surface of the image, the range of values, the range of colors, the graphic elements and the materiality of the image itself" (Aumont 2002, 136). The second dimension establishes the ways of seeing, as both image and spectator exist in time in various ways. Finally, the last dimension addresses the symbolic aspect, examining the relation between technology and ideology, and the apparatus as an instrument of representation within a specific cultural and social context. I would also like to propose thinking about film as an art object endowed with agency, referring to Alfred Gell's (2009) anthropology of art: "the theory is premised on the idea that the nature of the art object is a function of the social-relational in which it is embedded. It has no 'intrinsic' nature, independent of the relational context" (Gell 2009, 252).

Focused on action rather than symbolic interpretation, the art object, capable of mediating complex social relations, establishes a network created in the 'neighborhood of the object,' that is, in its relational context of production, circulation, and reception. Here, the notion of "technology of enchantment" also proves important. Gell argues that art should be considered as a technical system: "the power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology" (Gell 2005, 45). In this perspective, consider the documentary as a film object is part of the technical practices, of the very relationship between subject, camera and microphones—and later in post-production, with computers—, and, at the same time, of the conjectural ethical and aesthetics relationships with those being photographed/filmed. As these images undergo a series of choices in the language used (light, angle, distance, focus, what to show and what not to show), which are fundamental in elaborating a testimony of the real, the moment, apprehended as a sign in its materiality, becomes an active agent in the encounter with the spectator. From its sensorial dimension, the image possesses a capturing power, provoking emotions, affections, reactions and relations, what Roland Barthes called *punctum* in photography (Barthes 1984). Similarly, an important characteristic of the art object is the abductions of agency, which "are established through material indexes capable of producing asymmetrical relations between producers and recipients, powerful enough to capture people in social relations" (Cesarino 2017, 5). It is from this capacity that one can understand the effectiveness of an image, which is at the same time a self-image, an extension of the one who produced it:

Images, while creative products of one person, are also distributed persons (Gell 1998: ch. 7) and thus a theory of image-effects is possible. Person-images, imbued with human agency, can not only influence other people (as in the case of dominant references), but also transform those who create the images insofar as they represent self-images. (Dias 2010, 13, our translation).

Understanding that films can be perceived as cultural artifacts which agency complex networks of relations and intentions, I see some of its threads in the context of production, circulation, and reception of the documentary *Memórias de Velho*. Film analysis involved transcribing the characters' testimonies and detailed decoupage. Beyond the audiovisual narrative, the discussion includes the places in which the documentary was screened during its first weeks of release, providing three ethnographic sessions: two in person, in the Tipizal community and in the Santo André neighborhood, in Santarém, and a virtual release open to the public, on the *Google Meet* platform. I also conducted two semi-open online interviews with Carlos Bandeira Júnior. Mining and the migratory processes, themes addressed by the featurette, are associated with the filmmaker's childhood memories, permeated by the camera and by his relationship with his father (also a documentary filmmaker), factors that influence how he represent the world. While watching the film, we not only interrogate the images on screen, but we are also questioned by them—we reflect and are affected by stories that surround us and that can also be ours.

MEMÓRIAS DE VELHO: LANDSCAPES IN ORAL NARRATIVES

The documentary *Memórias de velho* presents the life stories of eleven elderly people between the ages of 60 and 99. We will meet, in order of appearance: Felizardo Freitas, also known as Seu Babi, Francisco Souza or Chico Zuza, Eunice Colares Vaz, Joana Andrade Dutra or Tia Luci, Napoleão Lopes, Antônio Joaquim or Seu Toim, Raimundo Pereira and Raimunda Oliveira or Vó Senhorinha.⁴ It was shot mostly in close-ups and American shots, with each person-character occupying most of the screen. Part of the interviews take place during the pandemic, through meetings compliant with social distancing. Others, however, come from previous recordings, family records kept by the filmmaker, and material produced

4. This article stems from chapter 4 in my master's dissertation, titled "Lugar de memórias: de velho às memórias de infância nos documentários de Carlos Bandeira Júnior." Here, in an effort to write a synthetic article, I will only describe some of the film scenes and characters. For the complete film analysis, see Malcher (2021).

in the research field, something we will better discuss later. Its main material and potential resides in the oral narratives it features.

FIGURE 1
Seu Babi. Frame
from *Memórias
de velho*. Source:
Bandeira Júnior
(2020).



We hear the sound of chicks in the background, and the first shot of the film appears: a black man with graying hair, wearing a yellow polo shirt, sitting on a plastic chair. In the background, we see his backyard: foliage, an aluminum bowl leaning against it, bricks arranged as a stove. This is Seu Babi, who immediately cue us on the unexpectedness of his adventures in the forest hunting jaguars, bobcats, giant otters, lowland pacas and armadillos. Born in the town of Frecheirinha, in the state of Ceará, he arrived in Pará in 1958 and started working as a *gateiro*.⁵ Wherever he went, his magic fame spread, as he had survived five or six snakebites without ever resorting to antidotes, which he proves by showing us the scars on his legs. He tells that one day, hunting aimlessly, he went up a river called Zarraia (today crossed by the PA-370 highway), went down the Curuá river, then the Xingu river, crossing the Baú Indigenous Land, where he navigated a large igarapé called Barracão Velho, until he arrived in Altamira, about 403km away from Santarém. He informs us of precise locations, contextualizes us about the economy and politics of the time, recalling the currency exchange rate, the market value of these products, and the subsequent prohibition of jaguar hunting under the military president Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969 to 1974). At the end, Seu Babi returns to comment on his nostalgia for living in the bush, concluding his passage with an emblematic reflection on his relationship with the

5. Hunters of felines, jaguars, and bobcats, whose goal is to obtain the animal's skin for sale (Bandeira Júnior 2019).

city, the bush, the animals, his fears, and his knowledge of others and of himself:

In the city I'm a faded man, I don't know, all shy. All my life I was afraid of other human beings, I feared their actions, you know? But the animal doesn't make a plan; it comes to attack you, but it didn't make a plan, "I'm going to catch him very soon," no! It didn't make that plan. When it appears before you, you already know what to do with it. But with people, if things go south, they wait for another day, right? No, I'm afraid of human beings, but I've never been afraid of jaguars. (Bandeira Júnior 2020, 46'22, our translation)



FIGURE 2
Eunice Vaz. Frame
from *Memórias de
velho*. Bandeira
Júnior (2020).

Eunice Vaz introduces herself as being from Tapajós, municipality of Aveiro, from the community of Pinhel. Her mother allowed her godmother to take her, at the age of 11, to live with her in Santarém. She spent her childhood caring for her godmother's children and attended until fifth grade at Frei Ambrósio school, the oldest in the city. Eunice remembers that, at the time, the means of transportation in the region were precarious, with slow boats and few *jeep* cars, which made it impossible for her to return to her studies. During this time, she lost contact with her family, returning only at the age of 18, when she started working as a teacher and got married in Pinhel. When her children grew up, she returned to Santarém to continue the children's schooling. She says that

she has a haunting relationship with the *boto*,⁶ who always finds her: “I’m afraid of the *boto* and he likes me.” There are countless encounters with the enchanted one, on the banks of the river, streams, and in the *casa do boto* passageway, which she recounts in the following dialog with a canoe rider:

You know, there is a hole over there which they call “house of the *boto*,” every time a canoe or a boat goes through, people hear a *boto* in agony, I say “oh, dear God”. [...] When we got there, he pointed to the passageway and we went through, the *boto* was *pua pua* [...] I was scared to death, until we got to the other side. Then he asked “Are you afraid of botos?”, “Oh, I am” – “Don’t be, botos don’t hurt anyone, they don’t do anything”. (Bandeira Júnior 2020, 41’40, our translation).



FIGURE 3
Tia Luci. Frame
from *Memórias
de velho*. Source:
Bandeira Júnior
(2020).

Tia Luci was born in the Madeira colony, near the Marajó river.⁷ Her family worked in the cassava plantation. In her childhood, she used to be very afraid of the river. Orphaned by her mother, she was raised by her father and brothers, married at 23, and in the following year gave birth to her first child. After nine years, her husband died of stingray sting, leaving her with four children born and one in gestation. Eight years later, in 1975, a new companion invited her to move to Santarém, a 13-day arduous canoe trip between rivers, which she remembers in detail: “Oh, it was hard, it was bad, it was rainy and windy, the *bajara* almost stalled, a man gave us *acari*⁸ and we cooked it on board, we sailed, and sailed, until we arrived, thanks Jesus.” She grieves the death of two of her children and, at the

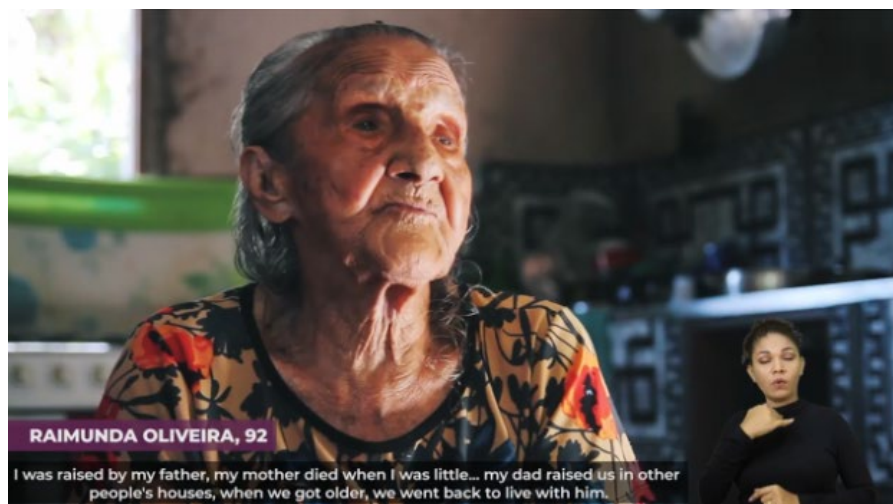
6. *Boto* is a species of river dolphin in the genus *Inia*. It is an animal considered enchanted in Amazonian popular culture. Regarding the notion of enchantment, see Vaz (2010).

7. The Marajó river is a tributary of the Amazon river. It is located in the municipality of Gurupá, in northeastern Pará, in the Marajó mesoregion.

8. A freshwater fish that inhabits the rivers and lakes of Central and South America.

end of the film, says that, when she feels needy due to the social isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, she calls relatives and acquaintances.

FIGURE 4
Raimunda Oliveira.
Frame from
Memórias de velho.
Source: Bandeira
Júnior (2020).



Raimunda Oliveira, also known as Vó Senhorinha, is also a motherless child. As a girl, she lived in relatives' houses until she returned to her father's home, in Gurupá, where she started working with firewood for ships, and later with rubber extraction, murumuru harvesting, and planting. She married, had seven children, and was abandoned by her partner. In old age, she retired and received care from her children. She reflects:

I fought hard, really hard. I worked a lot, through winter and summer, cutting rubber trees to give my children something to eat and raise them. I worked hard in my life, but I raised my children, thank God. (Bandeira Júnior 2020, 37'27, our translation)

According to José Roberto Pellini, landscapes are dynamic agents sensorially apprehended through practices, memories and contexts. The ways in which we experience are predetermined by sensory models articulated in discourses about materiality, are grounded in how the senses are structured, generating a "specific, particular and historically situated notion of the world, memory, identity and culture" (Pellini 2014, 88). Rafael Devos argues that landscapes evoked in oral narratives become dense to the extent that, besides offering a visual contemplation, they are practiced "in the gestures present in these narrators' daily practices, and in the many narrated actions of the 'elderly' in these spaces filled with sounds, colors, smells and, above all, temporal ruptures that confer name and

meaning to the alluded places” (Devos 2006, 40). Amidst a repertoire of memories, some come to mind because they were summoned by the interviewer, whose basic script contained work-related questions, while others are awakened by triggers, sensations, and latent feelings waiting to be recounted and relived. By taking analytical distance from these memories, the narrator can interpret them, question them, and give them coherence which allows them to situate this experience in relation to their own and other people’s:

The narrator draws on a knowledge shared by a “narrative community” (Langdon, 1999) to interpret his trajectory, insofar as life time is transformed into “thought time” (Bachelard, 1988), or rather, thought times, in the narrative action. (Devos 2006, 36, our translation)

The documentary, then, moves away from its predetermined script and follows the points raised by the interviewees, attentive to their unfoldings. Certain speech markings assemble symbolic chains that flow from their expression lines to how they walk. Gesticulating hands perform in front of the camera to make the invisible visible, the inaudible heard—all imagined by us listeners/spectators. If we focus our eyes and ears on these speakers, as the film proposes, we are taken by the hand and guided through forests, rivers, and roads; we compose a cartography of sense, tracing maps of places, of relationships with the milieu, with others, with memories and feelings, located in experiences that are expressed through their entire bodies. It is in their bodies that these stories are seized, because to tell them is to relive them once again from a very privileged and incommunicable place, and by clinging to this unstable matter of memory—that to be reached by language needs to be fictionalized—they describe them as a fable, as a “I swear to you it’s true” story, as Seu Babi says. We now move on to the other side of the image.

FROM THE COUNTERFIELD: MIGRATIONS, MINING AND PERFORMANCE OF THE GAZE

David MacDougall proposes thinking of films as a product of the body. Films and photographs are, above all, generated from an encounter, a physical experience. The gaze, although crossed by cultural and neural conditionings, projects itself onto meaning that reconfigures our perception, while this perception can reconfigure meaning, an ambiguous and integrated tension that takes place in the unconscious. As artifacts of this process, the resulting images are extensions of those who produced them; they are imbued with the intentions one seeks to communicate:

They are, in a sense, mirrors of our bodies, replicating the whole of the body's activity, with its physical movements, its shifting attention, and its conflicting impulses toward order and disorder. A complex construction such as a film or photograph has an animal origin. Corporeal images are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world. (MacDougall 2009, 63, our translation).

By introducing the camera as a mediator with the world, the images produced become fragments of the real, a clipping of something immeasurable that cannot be apprehended, the flow of life. The framing options are key to understand what the author wants to focus on or what escapes the scene. But in reality, what the filmmaker experiences in image-making goes beyond what they can capture through the camera's resources. Films (fictional or nonfictional) are ways of conveying meaning, producing visual knowledge, as other forms of sensory knowledge, providing us with "one of our primary means of comprehending the experience of other people" (MacDougall 2009, 66, our translation). The senses of these meanings, therefore, are not conditioned to the filmmaker's intention. Reason why written and spoken knowledge, with its potential for direct and conclusive discourse, is placed above image narratives or other kinds of sensory knowledge, considered as purely individual and abstract. But the act of filming requires looking, and looking goes beyond merely seeing, it is rather a *performance of the gaze* (MacDougall 2009, 71) which faces the challenge of transforming what is seen into a message, from a liminal place between seeing and thinking:

Our imitative faculties take precedence over judgment and categorization, preparing us for a different kind of knowledge. We learn to inhabit what we see. Conversely, thinking about what we see, projecting our ideas upon it, turns us back upon ourselves. (MacDougall 2009, 68, our translation).

I present the experience of watching the film together with one of its characters, a way to think about Carlos Bandeira Júnior's narrative form as a 'turn back' movement. We screened the film in the Tipizal community, about 40 minutes from Santarém proper, at kilometer 25 of the Santarém-Curuá-Una State Highway, where Seu Babi lives. He was waiting for us outside his house, together with his granddaughter, and had been instructed to invite only his relatives who live in the same house, avoiding crowds. The screening was held in an old commercial establishment he owned, which had recently been a butcher shop and was now closed due to the pandemic. We watched the movie with masks on and, between the sounds of cars and trucks passing by on the road, the

grandchildren recorded the grandfather's statements on their cell phones. At the end, some brief comments mentioned the importance of recording their father's and grandmother's stories as a family memory, which many were unaware of. After disassembling the space, back at Seu Babi's house, he sits down pensive, remembering well the time of the great drought in 1958, of his arrival in Pará. He shows me again the snake bite scars on his leg, reliving part of what he told for the documentary with new details:

At the time, there were a lot of people from Ceará coming here in those trains, like in Gonzagão's song, "eating firewood",⁹ how does the song goes? Something like, "Good morning, Caxias, dark land of Gonçalves Dias [...]" and [...] "Tell them in Maranhão, that I am very pressed, this time I won't stay." I listened to Gonzagão a lot in those days. All the people. Coming on the trains, on the roads. And he also talked a lot about us. No one can take this away from me. What was it like? "I crossed the Paranaíba, the Ceará people have just arrived." Everywhere there was drought, it was around '57, '58 when it got really bad, but it actually started in '55. There was another song, by Gonzagão, because he saw [...] he saw us and he talked, he sang [...] in that great dryness [...]. (Seu Babi, field notebook, 2020, our translation)

The 1950s were marked by intense droughts in the Northeast semi-arid,¹⁰ and the great northeastern migration movements motivated by work, associated with mining and agriculture in the Amazon, are issues evoked in the film and that we can also observe in the narratives of Chico Zuza, Seu Toim, and Napoleão, who came from Ceará, and Raimundo Pereira, who migrated from the state of Piauí. The first three were recorded in late 2017 and early 2018, for Carlos Bandeira Júnior's master's research "*Em busca do bamburro*": *memórias do trabalho, reciprocidade e a construção da masculinidade em garimpos amazônicos* (Bandeira Júnior 2019). Mining was a key trigger element for Carlos Bandeira Júnior to develop his research network for his dissertation and documentary. His starting point was his father, Carlos Matos, who referred him to other known former miners. He is also the first and main influence in the filmmaker's photography, who to this day says he finds it difficult to distinguish his photos from those of his father, which largely register daily work situations. Thus, the theme of mining was already part of his life and is intrinsically related

9. Song "De Teresina a São Luís". Performed by Luiz Gonzaga; composed by Helena Gonzaga and João do Vale.

10. Area that became known as the drought polygon, comprising parts of the states of Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba and Pernambuco. The 1950s began with a three-year period of intermittent drought between 1951 and 1953, but the bleakest scenarios are reported in the years 1955 and 1958 (Duarte 2003).

to his photographic work. At the beginning of his text, Bandeira Júnior talks about his beginnings in photography, a craft learned from his father:

In these meetings during photographic outings in the city of Santarém and in conversations with strangers, it was common for some story related to mining to come up. These stories reinforced my childhood curiosity, which I experienced through my father's memories. (Bandeira Júnior 2019, 21, our translation)

Evidently, the son builds a very different story, and this also emerges in his image-making. But it is also along this path that memory becomes the matter on which the filmmaker focuses. To reflect on his performative gaze is to think about how he has reflexively articulated his own memories and those of his family in an immense puzzle:



FIGURE 5
Carlos and the negative. Source: Field notebook 2021.

Memory is an intrinsic me, of questioning things, a fondness for hearing stories, photographing, recording, I think all my work has a relationship with memory, narratives, starting with Gambá de Pinhel which I recorded in 2014. I like it, it attracts me. [...] this smell, just now, reminded me of when I would flip through the albums with my dad, you know? All those negatives kept there, and also the chemistry of the paper, the chemistry of the negative which has a very specific smell [...] It's still part of it [...] it is also evoked! (Carlos Bandeira Júnior, field notebook, 2021, our translation)

“The ‘sketches’ of our childhood are probably the most important. They will one day be the labyrinths of our memory and the paths of our history”

(Samain 2003, 49, our translation). His trajectory started with image-making through photography at age 12, while his first contact with Anthropology occurred in 2011, when invited by his father to produce photographs for the book *Memória de trabalho: balateiros de Monte Alegre*, authored by Professor Luciana Carvalho, a faculty member of the Anthropology and Archeology Program at the Federal University of Western Pará (UFOPA). The following year, he joined the course. Examining the phenomenon of memory is also common to anthropological work. But in this case, the connections with the chosen themes are crossed by processes unique to the documentary filmmaker-anthropologist trajectory. Thus, the *performance* of the documentary filmmaker's gaze is informed by his various choices of improving his reflexive technique for materializing memory.

BETWEEN FILM, PHOTOS AND MEMORIES: SEEING BETWEEN THE GAPS OF THE VISIBLE



FIGURE 6
Memórias de velho
screening in Santo
André. Source:
Field notebook,
2020.

I propose that we now turn to the diffuse effects of a memory film in its relation with the spectators. Between affections and tensions, this documentary reaches unpredictable places. I follow these interactions and try to share them, as Georges Didi-Huberman proposes, from the *place where they burn*, that is, according to the ways in which different people experience different senses, feelings and displacements, discerning how these images affect them, inciting the latent disposition of images to provoke fires,

Because the image is something other than a simple cut in the world of visible appearances. It is a track, a trail, a visual trace not only of the time it sought to touch, but also of other supplementary times — fatally anachronistic and heterogeneous — which it cannot, as an art of memory, bind together. It is the mixed ashes of several braziers, some hotter, some cooler. (Didi-Huberman 2012, 214, our translation)

The second screening of *Memórias de velho* was held in the Santo André neighborhood, at Lamica Dutra's house, great-uncle of Carlos, son of Raimunda Oliveira—known as Vó Senhorinha. We spent a long time talking before the session, which was actually a family reunion. I get to know two of Lamica's daughters, dizygotic twins named Preta and Branca. They seem excited to see the film, especially to see Vó Senhorinha. Preta tells me that her grandmother came to Santarém in 2015 to say her last goodbyes to the grandchildren living there, because she felt that her departure was near. Later, in the audience, I heard other relatives commenting that this visit would have been a farewell. It was the only opportunity Carlos had to interview her, and this was the first recording of what would become this documentary. The Dutra family is large; their house is all made of wood, where about ten people live, including children, nephews, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. This screening gathered a greater number of spectators: besides the house residents, relatives, neighbors, and Carlos' daughter, wife and brother also came. Counting myself, we totaled 23 people. Many attentive eyes were waiting with their cell phones to record Vó Senhorinha's testimonial. The film ends with applause. Finding this record of his great-grandmother, Carlos says, was what motivated him to make the documentary. He then instigates a conversation about family history with his relatives. In particular, his dialogue with Lamica is key:

M: She connects a very important moment in our history [...] she became a rubber soldier, worked in rubber extraction. Grandpa also said so. This is a very important moment in our region too... At that time of Vó Senhorinha, did you work collecting firewood for ships or were you young?

L: I collected it, yeah [...] it was a tiring job, but what I really worked on was collecting murumuru, which we had to gather under the tree. Like seeds, long seeds [...]

M: And do you know what they did with those seeds?

L: Ah, no [...] they took them to Belém, they took everything to Belém

M: This was in Marajó, right? How many hours by boat is it from Marajó to Gurupá?

L: Look, at first it was six hours, now it seems that it is three hours. I haven't been to Marajó in about 20 years [...]

M: Today there is a strong açai economy there, right?

L: Yes [...] but before it was more for eating. Every day I used to drink açai with roasted fish, with game, which I killed a lot, and then this man that my mother married, he wanted to beat us [...]

M: Was he your stepfather?

L: He was. It is very difficult to live away from your mother, in other people's homes, the little ones stayed, but not me, I was already a kid [...] but he was a bad man. When I came back, I was already 16 [...] he had already left the house, but I wasn't used to being at home anymore. I would come home, spend a few days or a month, and come back. I traveled a lot! from here to Belém. I got to know 26 cities, many on the way to Anapu, I traveled around a lot. But it is not like one's home, one's mother. It is hard! (Field notebook 2021, our translation)

The film features sensitive and painful stories experienced as children. The narrators' performances create a kind of mirror in which their childhood images are reflected, sharing traumatic situations such as compulsory removals, as in the case of Eunice Vaz, or the orphanhood of Vó Senhorinha and Tia Luci, on their mother's side. Perhaps this is why the documentary makes room for the same movement in its spectators. Tia Luci is one of the matriarchs that make up the Dutra family tree, she is also Carlos' great-aunt on the maternal family's side. Her biography invites us to enter in these migratory paths from Marajó to Tapajós.

Tia Luci, for example, is a close person, she is Grandma's sister, she is also very strong. And the family stories, since I think this film is also a way of reflecting my family's history, is part of many others, of those who came migrated from other places. (Carlos Bandeira Júnior, field notebook, 2021, our translation)

The film also touched me in a surprising way. Every time I watched it, I was intrigued by the presence of Dona Eunice, as if I had an old memory with her, which I associate with the fact that I repeatedly watch *Memórias de velho* and another documentary in which she also participated, in 2018, *Festa de São Benedito*, by Carlos Matos. During conversations with Carlos Júnior and reading his dissertation, I observed how important the methodological use of photo albums was in for his research to trigger the memories of his interlocutors. Looking through mine I find this photo:



FIGURE 7
Jardim Santarém
neighborhood in
the 1990s. Source:
Personal collection.

We see my uncle Ademir playing dominoes, my aunt Graciete, and my maternal grandfather, Pedro Malcher, holding a newborn. According to my mother, the baby is my cousin Igor, so the photo must be from 1995. They are in front of my grandparents' house on Alameda Sete street in the Jardim Santarém neighborhood, the house where I lived with my parents until I was five years old. I take my time looking at it; I keep believing that I saw Dona Eunice in this landscape. Such a distant memory, it seemed so fragile to me. I am interested in photography as a tool to imagine the landscape of the Santarém of yesteryear. For Etienne Samain (2012), every image is a phenomenon, "something that comes to light," insofar as its appearance derives from a range of processes, such as the camera-related physical-chemical procedures, the external conditions to what it registers (light/shadow, environment, form, etc.), and a third moment, where they fulfill their sensitive function by interacting with the spectator. The photo, therefore, is the "place of a living process, it participates in a system of thought. The image is a thinking element" (Samain 2012, 158, our translation). And this thinking is not abstract, it is a continuous flow of meanings, with multiple outputs, necessarily depending on our participation, since the photo reports to the one who looks at it. If the image is affirmative as an icon, its meanings are unstable, always unfinished.

It is for this reason that the image can become a flash in a deep night, the apparition of a forgotten phantom species that suddenly unveils itself for a brief instant, reveals itself, reminds us of other times and other memories. The time of images is a bit like the time of rivers and clouds. It rolls,

flows, murmurs, when it is not silent. (Samain 2012, 158, our translation)

That photo told me something I couldn't understand. Just in case, I sent a message to Professor Florêncio Vaz—Dona Eunice's son and my professor in university—asking him if he remembered the address where she settled once in Santarém. He told me: "Mom lived near the mango trees in Barjonas, many years ago, she was your grandmother's neighbor." I sent him the photo, but he doesn't remember anyone and advised me to talk to his sister, Floracy. I then sent her a message with the same question. She answered me: "When she came to live in Santarém because of her children, who studied here, she lived at Barjonas de Miranda, between Borges Leal and Marechal Rondon." She said she remembers me as a child, but couldn't recognize me as an adult. While writing a thank-you message, she added: "Nowadays we live at Alameda Sete, where her mother used to live, since 1994." I forward the photo and she reacts: "Wow, my house is the one with this tree in front, with the stool, the wooden fence, but I don't remember that tree. Second house, passing your grandparents' house."

Some memories we remember little by little, as if we were stepping slowly, discovering a new place. One of the houses nearby was a kindergarten, I remembered. She confirmed that we had studied there, me and my cousins. Dona Eunice and Floracy were the educators. She tells me that Dona Eunice is still going strong and well. This makes the film even more special to me, since through it I recognize, even if in a fragmented manner, my first school and how Dona Eunice's trajectory intersects with mine. Back then we shared a daily life that was fundamental for me to be writing this text. I also understand a little more about the exercise of photography and memory, as a methodology employed by Carlos in the film. Certain provocations brought upon us by images—when we accept to embark on them—contribute to reflections about previous and future experiences, displacing us from situational and temporal contexts and amplifying cognitive processes grounded in our collective imaginary.

To discover the time of image, the time in the image. To speak of the plural time present in the image, in all images when, strong and firm, they place us in relation to them, when, human, they call for us to look at our history and our destiny as this heterogeneous time composed of past, present, and future. (Samain 2012, 153, our translation)

Samain thinks of this "work of memory" as analogous to the "work of the sea," as permanent waves, ebbing and flowing, but which also holds mysteries, secrets, stories and memories. He describes the archival role of photography, and I take license to include audiovisual: "the archive,

I think, is a latent memory, a sleeping memory, which, concealed, may tomorrow be discovered, re-opened” (Samain 2012, 160, our translation). Archives are not things of the past; rather, they are things of the future, they denounce their desire of becoming, of reconstruction, of resignification, of a knowledge without predictability. “They are our little refuges, the envelopes that hold our secrets. The little skins, the films, of our existence” (Samain 2012, 160, our translation).

The virtual release of *Memórias de velho* took place on December 2, 2020, accessed by Google Meet and broadcast live on YouTube. After its screening there was a cine-debate, first with comments by guest professors from UFOPA and the Federal University of Pará (UFPA): Raimundo Valdomiro de Sousa, Andrea Bittencourt, Rubens Elias, Luciana Carvalho and Florêncio Vaz. They focused on issues related to work in the Amazon, old age, childhood, the construction of memory, the narratives of women and mothers, among others—which I listened to attentively and which also came to influence my writing. Afterwards, the audience was invited to participate. Two spectators, Claudete and Silvio, called attention by the interweaving of their accounts with the stories told:

Claudete: It moved me a lot, because I saw my mother’s life story in their testimonials. From the countryside of Lago Grande, she worked hard in the fields to raise her children until a certain age, she had to come to the city so that her children could study, and since very young her children started to help, selling things in the streets [...] My father also went to the gold mines, during the famous gold rush, and left his family here, which is what caused their separation. She was left with five small children to raise, fighting, washing clothes outside. And my mother also taught in the countryside, like Frei Florêncio’s mother, she only had primary education, but she was a teacher in Lago Grande. I saw in this movie the story of many women who leave the countryside and come to the city to give their children a better future.

Silvio: [...] I remembered my father, who lived in this region of Altamira, of the Iriri river, Xingu river, at Baú. He also made this journey from the Altamira river to Castelo dos Sonhos by boat, and right here where I live in Santarém, I have a cat fur that my father himself killed in the bush.¹¹

11. Cine-debate and release of the film *Memórias de velho*, broadcast live on December 2, 2020. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3WhLqWs>.

According to César Guimarães, the cinema communities perceived here, both in person and virtually, result from the potential of documentaries to create bonds by sharing a common that is invented by the film's visibility. Communities are not defined by a space, such as a house or city, "a task too human for films" (Guimarães 2015, 50, our translation), rather they emerge as they constitute a *being-with* between viewers, *creators*, and people on screen. Which implies that the shared and split images are the same—it connects to subjectivizing situations and, at the same time, to reciprocity. The community is neither objectified (representative or homogenizing), nor individual and subjective; it stems from intersubjectivity, from the ties that connect without bridging distances, without suppressing the multiplicity of gazes. The possible place for this community is the image itself.

Without losing the distance that separates them, the image produces an effect on the real, placing itself on its edge, and becomes itself a space cohabited by the living and the dead, known and strangers (or foreigners), children and adults, the disappeared and survivors. But, in this movement, it less finds the common than delivers it to an uncertain destiny, in becoming, that interweaves, without closing, what is seen and what is unseen. Only in this way can images appeal to the community of spectators, gathered without fusion, preserving the distinct places from which each one sees, that "nook" of the world that escapes everyone, and that no one sees. (Guimarães 2015, 54, our translation)

In *Memórias de velho*, Carlos writes the history of his family, understanding that it reflects the story of several others, and explores the lived experiences of his relatives. It is interesting how those involved in these cinema communities are crossed by the triggers evoked. As the filmmaker proposes, audiovisual narratives flex common stories which are, essentially, materials of social memory. When discussing the myth of racial democracy and how it enjoyed wide acceptance, dissemination, and remains so alive to this day in the foundations of Brazilian culture, Lélia Gonzalez (1984) qualifies two concepts that I consider fundamental to think about these resonances of memories in the lower Tapajós: consciousness and memory. For Gonzalez, the myth's structure is dialectical: if, on the one hand, it presents a narrative and its characters, on the other, it conceals and makes invisible all the personas inhabiting its contrast. These myths are fictional narratives that define what is or is not knowledge, constituted through discursive forces. Deconstructing their foundations involves observing in the "lapses of consciousness" the presence of those neglected by the hegemonic narrative.

As consciousness we understand the place of ignorance, of concealment, of alienation, of oblivion, and even of knowledge. It is through this consciousness that ideological discourse makes itself present. As for memory, we consider it to be the not-knowing that knows, this place of inscription that restitutes an unwritten history, the place where truth emerges, this truth that is structured as fiction. Consciousness excludes what memory includes. Hence, as the place of rejection, consciousness expresses itself as the dominant discourse (or effects of this discourse) in a given culture, hiding memory, by imposing of what it affirms as the truth. But memory is a cunning thing: therefore, it speaks through the lapses of consciousness discourse. (Gonzalez 1984, 226, our translation)

The histories of those people who underwent violent colonization of their territories and mental landscapes, and which resisted by transmission via orality, bodies, dances, food—and which video, images, and writing, in art and in academia, also register—, are essentially made of memories activated in knowledge production. Image and film archives challenge us, and it is up to us to approach them and try to understand through their ardor what they tell us.

Finally, the image burns with *memory*, so that it still burning even when it is no more than ashes: a way of expressing its essential will to survival, *in spite everything*. But in order to know it, to feel it, one must dare, one must bring one's face close to the ashes. And blow gently so that the cinders down below once more emit their heat, their glow, their danger. As a voice issued forth from the gray image: "Can't you see I am burning?". (Didi-Huberman 2012, 216, our translation)

CONCLUSION

Audiovisual is a way to express narratives about how these filmmakers have been experiencing specific places, especially relationally, as bodies intertwined with the world and in their relationships with those who live in these places. Particularly when we deal with the documentary, a genre produced through the encounter and the responsibilities of dealing with image and with the lives of those captured in the imagery field. Nichols states that "the definition of 'documentary' is no easier than that of 'love' or 'culture'" (2005, 47), a vague concept for a genre that deals with the multiplicity of its manifestations. Commonly, the definition is based on its opposite—fictional films; but this fiction versus reality dichotomy in

cinematography has been undermined for some time now. Both genres converge in their forms of engagement with the world from the production of images and sounds, which results in a narrative about something or someone, as a subjective and social being. From this assumption, the documentary differs little from any other fictional film, and, in fact, this is not what we seek to achieve with this framing. Such nicknames are given by the filmmakers themselves, what remains is to know how they treat an rebellious reality and in which way they share it within narratives. On the other hand, Comolli (2008) points to a specificity proper to documentaries, they “are not only ‘open to the world’; they are crossed, pierced, transported by the world. They give themselves over to that which is stronger, which surpasses them and concomitantly grounds them” (Comolli 2008, 170, our translation). We speak, then, in different conditions of approach: while fiction scripts are usually well rounded, the documentary deals with the fissures of reality and the unpredictability of what it chooses to narrate.

Cinema, in its documentary version, brings back the real as that which, filmed, is not fully filmable, excess or lack, overflow or limit — gaps or contours that are soon given to us so that we feel, experience them, think them. To feel that which, in the world, is still beyond us. The narratives not yet written; the fictions not yet exhausted. At the same time that it surrenders itself, the material of documentary cinema escapes it. (Comolli 2008, 177, our translation)

As such, *Memórias de velho* contains lines of flight that go beyond the image matter. They are made by relationships that precede them and others that emerge in their making and reception, they are propositional to the connection with a certain group of people. Here we see how each story told is important, how it marks the lives of each of the characters, and how it connects to many other biographies. Sometimes we look at the diegetic field, sometimes we look at what surrounds the scene, in the neighborhood of the object, as Gell puts it, and we realize that there are qualitative uses for the camera, that the gaze is performative, that there are native theories about filmmaking and sociopolitical engagements in these images.


Moreover, the reach of image production technologies varies in each country and region, and their influence should be considered according to each case. In municipalities like Santarém, a medium-sized city in the countryside of the Amazon, the camera and image production technologies arrived late, having as references, for example, the first photography store

in the city, Foto Society, founded only in 1960,¹² and the first film, *Gambá de Pinhel*, by Clodoaldo Corrêa, made only in 2007. Even today, access to cameras and other ideal equipment and media for video production exists on a limited basis and at high cost. Recently—especially in the late 2010s with the spread of smartphones—more affordable possibilities for audiovisual production are emerging followed by a new and larger generation of filmmakers.¹³ Cinemas produced in the global north, which also extend to large productions made by the national film industry hubs located in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, with due exceptions, expressively aim to produce images of the *other* as exotic. In this regard, the Amazon was and still is portrayed as a pristine forest and the people who live there, when not ignored, are often represented as natives untouched by history. If we consider that cinema is an important artifact in shaping the imaginary about the “Amazon,” it is even more suspicious that there are so few filmmakers in the region and such a restricted film circuit.

Despite such adverse conditions, there are films made here and, with them, there are also ways of *making cinema* derived from the conceptions of these filmmakers and from a number of people involved in this network. Hence, as I tried to exemplify with *Memórias de velho*, I noticed that the river constantly appears as a convening agent in the stories. Riverside films, as well as the trajectories that make them, are above all a cinema made *on* the riverside—on the thresholds, on the borders, on the margins, on the edges of the river, of the plastic space, of the immanence of the filmmakers’ subjectivities in their productions, of the film industry, of the hegemonic memory regime. But the banks of these documentaries are not insurmountable limits. Rather, they are permeable zones, just like the sand on the beach, in which possible spaces of production and circulation are built. Permeability is a characteristic of each of these films. Reciprocally, the audiovisual is invaded by the life around it and allows itself to overflow with it. This is because the filmmakers, the films, and the viewers share symbolic universes with many common elements, what produces interesting results in how these films are produced and received. Making films on the edges point to a fertile space, inhabited places where people live, think, speak, exchange and produce. In the beginning, I had no idea how this research and the events experienced during fieldwork, which was conducted in the place where I was born, grew up, and live, would cross me. And not only because I saw myself in the research, in situations that brought about personal and family memories, but also due to the responsibility of thinking and writing about other people’s

12. For more, see Malcher (2021).

13. These notes are based on a survey I conducted for my dissertation on Amazonian audiovisual scenes from Belém, Manaus, and Macapá. For more, see Belo (2013), Lima, Pinho & Vasconcelos Neto (2014), Lins (2007) and Lopes (2017; 2018).



deep feelings. After all, this is what happens when these images touch the real: they burn in us.

Just like Claudete, when watching the film I also find myself compelled to tell the story of someone I was very close to: Maria Andina Moda Silva, my grandmother, born in 1933. She could be in this film. Or even my grandfather, Obir Silva, who worked in the mines and used to go months without giving any news. One day he went to the tavern and never came back. About 70 years ago, when her mother died, my grandmother came with her family from Aracuri, community located near the Lago Grande Settlement Project, to Santarém. Vó Andina raised her eleven children working as a janitor in the neighborhood church, as a washerwoman, and with the help of her sisters. Since her Alzheimer's progressed, and she was confined to her home, every day at six o'clock in the afternoon, used to pack her clothes in a bundle and say that she was going to catch the boat. It would be there at the riverbank, waiting to take her back to her true home on the other side of the river.

During field work, I visited my grandmother and suggested that we leaf through her albums together. I look them out and showed them to her, who seemed uninterested in most of the pictures. Among the pages, one made her smile. She asked to take it out of the plastic, she wanted to touch it. I put into her hands the photo of her with my father, Marcos, and my aunt, Cristina. She smiled again, was amazed, concentrated, remembered my father's graduation mass in mathematics. I registered the moment.



FIGURE 8
Maria Andina
revisiting her
photos. Source:
Personal
collection, 2020.

TRANSLATION
Oton Tássio Silva
Luna.

Finally, such images and sounds connect people, tell stories, trigger affections and knowledge, are cultural artifacts and memory documents. I hope to have explained how the documentary *Memórias de velho* creates new images about the Amazon, based on narratives produced by people who inhabit this place, and how we can think about landscapes constructed from the way we relate to space and temporality. These audiovisual narratives bring together a plurality of gazes and voices, and one must accompany their circularity as expressions of creative, aesthetic, political and cultural potentialities.

In memory of Maria Andina Moda Silva.

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Liendria Marla Malcher Silva is a PhD student in the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at University of São Paulo (PPGAS/USP). She has a master's in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Pará (PPGA/UFPA), and a bachelor's degree in Anthropology from the Federal University of Western Pará. She is also an independent documentary filmmaker. Member of the Visual Anthropology Group (Gravi/USP) and the Research Group in Musical Anthropology (PAM/USP), she has been conducting research with local filmmakers from Baixo Tapajós and their narratives since 2017.

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