

# RITUAL PHOTOGRAPHY: AN EXPERIENCE WITH THE HUNI KUIN PEOPLE

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"THE FIRST TIME AN ASHANINKA told me that the medicinal properties of plants were learned by ingesting a hallucinogenic preparation, I thought he was just making fun of me. We were in the middle of the forest, crouched down, talking, and he explained that the leaves on a bush beside us could heal the bite of a deadly snake.

- By drinking ayahuasca we learn these things – he said and, after all, he wasn't mocking." (Narby 2018)

I had already been in contact with Ayahuasca, but from that experience on, it would be different. It was January 2017, in the reserve region of the city of Cotia (Greater São Paulo), I was introduced to the indigenist Txai Macedo and we were waiting in the backyard for the arrival of the four Huni Kuin who would spend that time with us. Pajé Ninawá, Txuã, Bixku and Yakã, the only woman in the group, married to Bixku, who was a student of Pajé (the study of pajelança takes place through diets and monitoring by an elder to the young man who will become a healer in his community); Txuã, who had already been the chief of his village, and Pajé Ninawá, an elderly healer who knew mysteries. The Huni Kuin people are found in the territory they call Brazil, predominantly in the state of Acre (linguistic backbone: Pano); of complex immateriality, in this culture, contact with enchanted beings is the basis of their living experience, a reality not only for the shamans, but for the entire community - coming from the Middle Envira River region, self-organized by CCEFYY (Yurabaka Naibai Center Yuxibu Baibu) and self-represented by FEPHAC (Federation of the Huni Kuin People in Acre), with their three-month stay in São Paulo, sought to exchange and strengthen the support



network that makes it possible to carry out community projects independently from the State. pyromaniac. We spent this time dedicated to the practice of healing... I was particularly attentive to the experience of the immersive process as a cure, and to the practice, above all, of poetry, through photography. I experienced a few dozen rituals in the end of subsequent weeks, where, from the use of Amazonian power plants (snuff, sananga, ayahuasca) I produced the work that I have been showing as an essay with these words that seek to welcome the viewer in the [counting] particular of my experience, which gave rise to the master's project I have been developing, "Ritual Photography".

I seek to synthesize a form capable of reverberating to the viewer the glimpse of healing as an action, which expands beyond its own moment. Would it be possible to create sensory aspects similar to my feelings of remembrance to those who were not in these situations? In no way would the solitary image be able to reconstitute a scene in its entirety. Sounds can bring me images... as well as images can bring me sounds, however, based on the necessary choice, I believe that this work could be developed in other ways, using other languages as regards its intention. But as I can only do it being myself, photography, the creation of the luminous image, is what fits. I am immersed, after getting lost, what would be the path to the meeting. A meeting that has no name, no end, and perhaps not even a meaning. The questions that sew my thinking are guided by the idea of the rite as a photographable object, and of photography itself as a rite based on the performative gesture of photographing. Being the immersion experience, a fundamental part of this creative process; Relational practice, as a creator of spaces where such intimate realization becomes possible.

Next, I present records made during the experience with the Huni Kuin people in 2017. Preceding the ceremony, body painting is already part of the rite, a preparation:







“[...] They carry exclusive paintings on their bodies: each one presents itself as a representation of the spirit of nature (animal or otherwise) that protects it and transmits magical teachings that give it the power of healing and premonition [...]. The Xerente body painting system constitutes an active language, strictly linked to the social structure and which is taken as a reference in the definition of roles and social relations. [...] Once painted, however, bodies express a classification that it is clan (and consequently, of moieties) and unequivocal. In this sense, body painting says something fundamental about this society and corresponds to a perspective that illuminates aspects of Xerente's social life, making them evident.” (Vidal 2000).









Above, a series of snuff-like images: tobacco ground with ash and leaf husks blown into the nostrils with an instrument called a tepi; whose primary physical function is to decongest the airways, this sacred medicine has in recent years been increasingly used in large cities, being used even in the treatment of drug addicts. The chants of prayer are called the “spirits of the forest”, and healing is done to the ethereal planes. Among my motivations for carrying out this work is undoubtedly to contribute in a way, if we do not extinguish, at least we can alleviate the aura of misunderstanding and prejudice about the millenary use of the aforementioned power plants. Below, some more records of the specific

circumstances I investigate, ritual photography in ritual situations with the use of ayahuasca.

“The use of drink is a means of learning, which is part of the training needed to acquire courage, skill in hunting and warfare, see the spirits, and learn to know the world, travel and see the things that exist beyond the village. It is also used by the shaman to obtain information about the cause of an illness, to evoke the spirits and beings of the forest for the cure of physical and spiritual ailments.

It is used by 72 indigenous groups in the Amazon Basin and is known by some 42 different names. It is also used by the Brazilian religions of Santo Daime, Barquinha and União do Vegetal.”. (Ika Muru et al 2014)

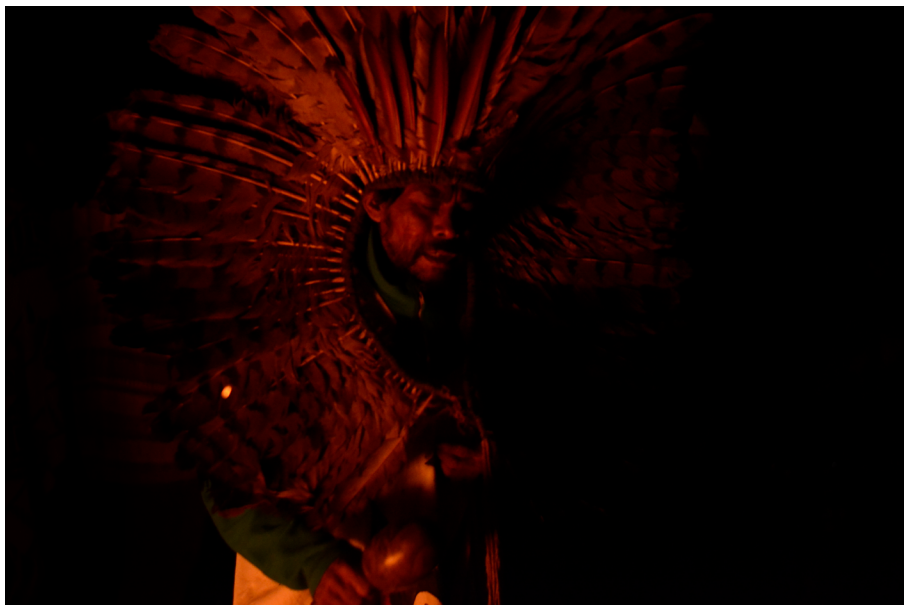






“[...] These mirrors cover the forest for the first time, and the spirits move over them without stopping, playing, dancing or fighting. It was in these mirrors that they came into existence and it is from them that they descend towards us. It is also in them that we deposit our image when they make us shamans.”. (Kopewana and Albert 2015)







To end this presentation, an excerpt from the text “The photography of Claudia Andujar” in *The Vulnerability of Being/Inner Territories*:

[...] “from the perception, the photographer intuits that its duration has essentially the power to reveal other durations, to encompass others and to encompass itself to infinity, as described by Deleuze.

In the last photographs of this exhibition, we access the Unique Duration, which Bergson spoke about. Because, as we read in Lapoujade. And now we need to repeat: “only intuition can put me in contact with durations other than mine, because it reveals to me that I am not only interior duration, but also élan vital and material movement or the effort of the entire universe to paradoxically resume it in a monism that attests to the prodigious plasticity of the spirit and the extension of its circuits of recognition.”. (Garcia dos Santos 2005)

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## ABSTRACT

The investigation of the ritual as a photographable object and photography itself as a ritual based on the performative gesture of photographing are the guidelines of this work. Fruit of an immersion experience with the Huni Kuin people in 2017, and the development of a photographic work carried out in ceremonial circumstances using Amazonian power plants, the text/story “Ritual Photography: An experience with the Huni Kuin people”.

### KEYWORDS

Photography;  
Ritual; Ayahuasca,  
Huni Kuin;  
Experience.

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