



## BETWEEN DANCE AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE YAWANAWÁ WOMEN: CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS SPATIAL PRACTICES

**MARIA AYARA MENDO PÉREZ**

Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo /Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (FAU/UFRJ) - Reitoria- UFRJ, Cidade Universitária, CEP: 21941-901, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil. Telefone: +552138391665  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7074-7343>  
E-mail: [ayara.mendo@fau.ufrj.br](mailto:ayara.mendo@fau.ufrj.br)

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to observe different examples of transformation and endurance in the spatial practices of the Yawanawá indigenous population. The intention is thinking together with this people paths that can contribute to the study of their spatialities; therefore, to the affirmation of indigenous knowledge in the academic scope of architecture so that the spatial wisdom and techniques of Amerindian know-how are visualized and reconstituted. Yawanawá women, who are currently connected to global economic and political flows, think, dream and build new architectures in their territory. They materialize, on a daily basis, a form of transgression against the epistemic erasure of the indigenous people, when they circulate complex political strategies through their bodies and (re)existences, which mutate and adapt to capitalist flows and are based on their cosmology and shared values. In this text, it is a matter of claiming contemporary Yawanawá architecture as a locus for the production of knowledge of mutual implication between indigenous and not indigenous.

Keywords: Amazon Forest of Acre State. Rio Gregório Indigenous Territory. Yawanawá architecture. Yawanawá ancestral wisdom

### RESUMO

Este artigo visa observar transformações e permanências ocorridas nas práticas espaciais da população indígena Yawanawá. A intenção é pensar, junto com esse povo, caminhos que possam contribuir para o estudo das suas espacialidades e, assim, para a afirmação do saber indígena no âmbito acadêmico da arquitetura, de maneira que sejam visualizadas e reconstituídas as sabedorias e técnicas espaciais do saber-fazer ameríndio. As mulheres Yawanawá, que atualmente vivem conectadas aos fluxos econômicos e políticos de escala planetária, pensam, sonham e constroem arquiteturas contemporâneas no seu território. Elas materializam, cotidianamente, uma transgressão ao apagamento epistêmico do povo indígena, na medida em que circulam em seus corpos e ações estratégias políticas de (re)existência, de mutação e adaptação aos fluxos capitalistas, assentadas em sua cosmologia e em valores compartilhados entre si. Neste texto, trata-se de reivindicar a arquitetura contemporânea Yawanawá como locus de produção de saberes e conhecimentos de mútua implicação entre indígenas e não indígenas.

Palavras chave: Floresta Amazônica acreana. Terra Indígena Rio Gregório. Arquitetura Yawanawá. Saberes ancestrais Yawanawá.



## INTRODUCTION

*I think you should dream of the land, because it  
has a heart and breathes.*

*Davi Kopenawa*

*Interview with F. Watson (Survival International)  
Boa Vista, 1992*

From this starting point, this article proposes the following questions: Would it be possible to dream of an architecture that has a *heart* and *breathes*, in the sense that Yanomami shaman and leader Davi Kopenawa provokes us to experiment? What happens when we think *with* the Yawanawá indigenous women of ways to *dream* about architecture, so that *it has a heart and breathes*, to produce an effect of mutual knowledge?

The Yawanawá indigenous people<sup>1</sup> have inhabited the source of the Gregório River, located in the Brazilian Amazon Forest, since time immemorial, and I lived with them for a month in the Mutum village, due to my doctoral thesis research<sup>2</sup> (MENDO PÉREZ, 2018). Thus, the practical experience of thinking together (STENGERS, 2015; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2018) is the result of this convergence and cross<sup>3</sup> of architectural knowledge: my career as an architect with academic dedication and the ancestral architectural wisdom of the Yawanawá women who inhabit the Rio Gregório Indigenous Territory (TIRG), located in the state of Acre, Brazil<sup>4</sup>.

This text aims to observe the transformations and permanencies that occurred in the spatial constructions – constructive, material and symbolic practices – of this indigenous population, with the intention of weaving, together with this people, paths that can contribute to the perception of the Yawanawá spatiality. And thus, for the affirmation of indigenous knowledge in the academic context of contemporary architecture, so that the spatial practices of Amerindian architectural know-how are visualized and reconstituted. As the architect and professor Andreia Moassab proposes, we must demand within university education “a *reconstruction of architectural memory that includes a greater diversity of constructive practices of spatial occupation, of being-in-the-world, of symbolic representation*” (MOASSAB, 2019, p. 150).

The encounter with Yawanawá women originated due to my field research in urban planning, in which I aimed to understand issues of territorial scale. When I arrived at the Mutum village, located at the intersection of the Gregório River and the Mutum stream, I introduced myself as an architect and chief Yawanawá was greatly interested in my expertise and in the possibility of triggering an exchange of knowledge and techniques. Thus, the gateway to *dreaming*, creating and sewing new bonds was architecture. During my stay, I improved my listening skills and noticed that, in addition to visible transformations, there was ample permanence of spatial habits that recreated and/or reinvented ancestral wisdom, based on the oral and bodily memory of the Yawanawá collective.

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<sup>1</sup> The word Yawanawá is composed of two terms: yawa is the generic name for white-lipped peccaries (Tayassu pecari), and nawa refers to the people. The Yawanawá call themselves the people of the white-lipped peccary, to represent their form of social organization, “like the peccary, we always walk in groups”.

<sup>2</sup> The research, considered in anthropological terms as a pre-field, was carried out during the months of July and August 2016. The arrival in the village of Mutum of the indigenous territory was on July 29 and the departure on August 18. Going down the Gregório River, all the indigenous villages on the way were visited: Escondido, Tibúrcio and Sete Estrelas. On the 18th and 19th of August, I stayed in the Amparo village, and on the 20th we started the descent back to Cruzeiro do Sul, spending a few hours in the Matrinchá village.

<sup>3</sup> Term used in SIMAS; RUFINO, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The Rio Gregório Indigenous Territory was demarcated in 1983 and forms an area of 187,944.89 ha. According to the 2014 census (Siasi/Sesai), 813 Yawanawá live in the state of Acre. There are currently two political leaders at TIRG. Chief Tashka Yawanawá who resides in Rio Branco and has seven villages under his leadership: Mutum, Matrinchá, Sete Estrelas, Amparo, Yawarany, Escondido and Tibúrcio. The Nova Esperança village is headed by the leader Biraci Brasil Nixiwaka Yawanawá. Hunting and fishing are two of the main traditional economic activities of the Yawanawá. Nowadays, some of them are also involved in urban work dynamics due to partnerships with private companies and/or public institutions.

In the first days in the Mutum village, I noticed the diversity of architectural solutions implemented in the houses, demystifying the idea of temporal linearization in their constructions. The diversity of forms, materials and constructive practices produced to inhabit it manifests the juxtaposed layers of temporal, logical sequences and ways of being-in-the-world materialized in the built environment. In the past, the Yawanawá built large collective dwellings, called *shuhu*<sup>5</sup>, which underwent modifications after a few decades of contact with rubber tappers in the region (CARID NAVEIRA, 1999; MACIEL, 2005; VINNYA et al., 2007) and continue to transform themselves uninterruptedly in their formal and material dimensions.

The beginnings of contact between the Yawanawá people and non-indigenous people date back to the mid-19th century. The relationships were established in the beginning of the 20th century, based on two logics that traced the origin of the disarticulation and destabilization of the Yawanawá's ways of life. One was the foreign missionaries, with an interest in the "evangelization" of indigenous peoples, so that they would abandon their cultural and spiritual expressions, forms of knowledge and their relationship with the Forest. The other logic was inserted through the relationship with the rubber tappers – for decades the Yawanawá worked producing rubber in the Kaxinawa rubber plantation<sup>6</sup> – which inserted the indigenous population into an extractive capitalist productive system.

In the 1980s, after several internal conflicts in the struggle for territory and internal re-articulation, processes that culminated in the expulsion of the missionaries and rubber tappers, a new stage began

in the group's political organization and in the management of the territory's natural resources (CARID NAVEIRA, 1999; RIBEIRO, 2005; SOUZA, 2013). In 1983, TIRG was physically demarcated – serving the indigenous leaders of Acre as an example of the struggle for recognition of their territories – and homologated in 1991.

Currently, in the Rio Gregório Indigenous Territory, an urbanization process is crystallized that is not perceptible at first glance, although with the construction of the BR-364 highway<sup>7</sup> the impact caused by the flow of goods and the entry of visitors is visible. Several facts and conversations originated in the field research led me to the hypothesis that that place, apparently isolated and remote, is deeply interrelated to the process of the complete urbanization of society (LEFEBVRE, 1970; BRENNER; SCHMID, 2012). It is a set of economic, political and social relations produced between the Yawanawá group and external urban agents that repositioned the forms of sociability, alliance, (re)existence and (re)invention in the indigenous territory (MENDO PÉREZ, 2018).

Thus, Yawanawá women live connected to urban rhythms – cultural, political and economic movements on a global scale – and in this context they want to think, dream and reinvent their traditional architecture. In this way, they also materialize a reinvention of spatial knowledge from a Yawanawá cosmological perspective, which are manifested in the formal and material erasure of the traditional constructions to inhabit, the *shuhu*. The architectural "pre-projects" that we *thought of together* (STENGERS, 2015; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2018) in the Mutum village

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<sup>5</sup> As reported in conversations with the Yawanawá, *shuhu* refers to a very broad architectural term, originating from the definition of the Yawanawá habitat or traditional collective housing. The expression defines an oval or circular plan construction constructed with curved tree trunks and branches strung between them. The conical structure was covered with palm fronds, from the ridge to the ground, and there were two entrances.

<sup>6</sup> According to Aquino and Iglesias (1994) and Ribeiro (2005), in 1905, the Yawanawá officially made their first contact with Ângelo Ferreira da Silva, a mediating agent of the state power who organized the "catechesis" of the indigenous population of Acre to facilitate the extraction and circulation of the rubber in the region.

<sup>7</sup> The BR-364 and BR-317 highways are called together as the Interoceanic Highway or the Interoceanic Highway of the South, because they provide Brazil with an access route to the ports and commercial routes of the Pacific Ocean through Peru.

– among which, the chief's house and the proposal for a “Yawanawá School of Culture” – unfolded and created a relational bond that persists today<sup>8</sup>. In this sense, I call this *action-research as affect-research*, because affects are recognized and incorporated in a transforming practice of mutual meaning, several questions linked to this cross of learning.

The experience with Yawanawá women also led me to *bifurcate* epistemologically, which means a confrontation and a process of change in relation to the binary representation discourse of my field of knowledge. This uprooting process, explained in the words of the architect Paola Berenstein Jacques (2020), comprises “a permanent exercise of self-decolonization, of ceasing to be a self-colonialist” (JACQUES, 2020, p. 119). To bifurcate epistemologically also implies guiding a decolonial movement from another relational perspective, which is not necessarily restricted to articulating classic concepts from decolonial perspectives with the field of architecture. Thus, the biggest methodological challenge to build other worlds guided by the decolonization of our thinking comprises undoing the classic relationship between subject and object of knowledge, to start building an inter-knowledge (VIVEROS DE CASTRO, 2018), which, in this situation, takes place between me and the Yawanawá women.

To establish this inter-knowledge, it was necessary for me to imbue myself with constant movements guided by countless logics, activated in the daily habits of women in the villages, which provoke reinventions of an artistic, political or spiritual nature. Thus, this work is not about proposing an interpretation of the meanings of Yawanawá spaces, but rather experimenting with them by thinking about how these contemporary spatialities constitute a plurality of cosmological perspectives. Thus, I experienced confrontations and

contradictions that, reflected or materialized in the territory, engendered displacements and paths that can be analyzed in the decolonial epistemological movement (JACQUES, 2020; RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2010; SIMAS; RUFINO, 2018; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2018), as described below.

#### *Yawanawá women's artistic practices*

Since the first exchanges with the Yawanawá women leaders, I have experienced the creative character of their (re)existence, with the handling of the economic and political forces that impact their lives and how, from such a movement, they reposition the routines in the way of life within of the villages, valuing ancestral indigenous habits. The cognitive arsenal triggered by Yawanawá women can be *translated* as a process of (re) politicization, as they appropriate the temporalities and spatialities with which they relate to each other and affirm their own culture, language and spirituality – including idealizing and building architectural projects that mobilize the reinvention of their traditional spatial practices.

For example, they took advantage of the fertile ground offered by the interaction with urban flows connected to the indigenous territory – of a political, economic and cultural nature, as they have considerable support from regional and international institutions – to propose the construction of contemporary spatialities in the Amazon Forest. In this sense, they do not intend to reproduce traditional architecture or formally reconstruct the Yawanawá ancestral collective habitat, the *shubu*. The women leaders of the Mutum village designed contemporary, inventive and creative syncretic scenarios, with unpredictable effects, through their narratives and current indigenous subjectivities.

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<sup>8</sup> During the field research in 2016, I carried out several architectural “pre-projects” in the Mutum village. Among these, the house of the chief, which was later built by her between 2018-2019. The proposal of the Yawanawá School of Culture has not yet been carried out, but several partnerships have been articulated for its future feasibility. Another pre-projects thought out later in the meetings held in Rio de Janeiro, the Center for the Study of Medicinal Plants, was also built by them between 2018-2019. In this article, the parallel process to the development of the pre-projects will be addressed, with a focus on the reports and cultural practices experienced in field research in the TRIG.

The origin of this process dates back to the early 2000s, when two young Yawanawá sisters firmly insisted on their desire to start and finish the *rare muka* diet<sup>9</sup>, despite the conditions of extreme bodily austerity that tradition requires. After this display of female strength, they began a series of transformations or modifications of ancestral spiritual practices or techniques. Hushahu and Putany, active subjects of regulatory production itself, built a new status as shaman women within indigenous sociability, which suited the times and narratives of the urban logics of the *nawa*, thus enabling the creation of numerous alliances. In this way, they inaugurated a cosmological vision sensitive to certain traditional processes and symbols that still reverberates in the territory's artistic, spiritual and architectural production.

In the path of the shaman Hushahu, current female spiritual leader of the Mutum village, there are a series of essential stories to narrate the process of rewriting and struggle involved in her inventive spiritual action<sup>10</sup>. During the process of confinement during the various diets carried out by the shaman, she had access to her ancestral knowledge through revelations or imagery visions. Among these vision, one is very important, the image of the *awawena*<sup>11</sup> (butterfly), received as a gift from a *yuxim*<sup>12</sup> (spirit). The butterfly is an animal that, through a light and subtle dance in the air, manages to land in unique places in the Amazon Forest, such as on the head of the anaconda. This is how the power of its flight and its strategic landing symbolize the magnitude of female power (SOUZA, 2015). The *awawena* is also related to concepts linked to beauty, which are expressed in the Yawanawá language

as *rautihu*<sup>13</sup>. And Rautihu was the name chosen by the Yawanawá women to name the brand of products and objects that they make to beautify their bodies. Whose graphic symbol is a geometric combination between the design of the anaconda and the butterfly.

These (re)narratives are an essential part of the native conceptual repertoire that women use to build their own counter-colonial thinking and practices, in light of recent *yawa-nawa*<sup>14</sup> Relations. Many of the *kene*<sup>15</sup> (graphics) that Hushahu made are being reproduced by young women as a Yawanawá brand. They are painted on people's bodies with urucum and jenipapo, during rites, festivals or ceremonies in villages or cities. It should be clarified that, according to the Yawanawá narrative, the *kene* would have been (re) invented through the knowledge that was passed on to the Hushahu through diets. The shaman woman operated as a mediator between ancestral knowledge – alive and continuous, which was dormant – and the new understandings and techniques introduced in the current period of the resumption of customs.

This report on the mediation between ancestral concepts and the repositioning of artistic practices was given to me during my stay in Mutum village. A Yawanawá explained to me that Hushahu did not create the *kene*, that is, she recovered and this knowledge was forgotten through her diet. The *kene* already existed, but they were painted only on the bodies and on the paper: In her words: “it is like writing the name of a person who has not studied and writes it in a way. Anyone who went to the city and studied, will write the same name, but with a prettier handwriting”.

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<sup>9</sup> As the anthropologist Laura Pérez Gil (2001) explains, in the Yawanawá shamanic initiation process, apprentices must follow one or several diets. The diet requires reducing the amount of food that can be eaten, eliminating the consumption of sweet foods and allowing only sour drinks such as *caçuma*. There are several diets associated with the Yawanawá tradition, one of the best known is to drink a hallucinogenic drink made from a plant called *rare muka* (*rare runa waki*) (PÉREZ GIL, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Although Hushahu was not in the village during my field research, I understood that her figure is central, even in her physical absence, due to the speeches and reports made by the women during our conversations.

<sup>11</sup> The term refers to the butterfly, and its figure and representation is associated with *kenes*.

<sup>12</sup> Vital impulse that crosses all living beings and endows them with their own characteristics (PÉREZ GIL, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> According to Souza (2015), the term refers to “being dressed more beautifully”, being a term associated with adornments and body painting (*kene*).

<sup>14</sup> The term *nawa* means people and is used colloquially to refer to non-indigenous people.

<sup>15</sup> The *kene* are traditional paintings applied to the body and face, made with urucum (*Bixa orellana*) and jenipapo (*Genipa americana*), they operate as a protection system against evil spirits (VINNYA et al., 2007).

In the gradual process of building her leadership, “Hushahu wanted to do everything with a woman’s way” (SOUZA, 2015, p. 80) and the emphasis on the female universe permeates the works and artistic manifestations of her production. Currently, she leads numerous meetings of the new shamanic field, traveling constantly in Brazil and around the world, and building her own feminine and spiritual discursive matrix. In recent years, she has promoted experiences and meetings in the Mutum village with a focus on spiritual work, particularly with women’s groups. The arrival of visitors who value indigenous culture, cures and therapies also mobilizes the repositioning of indigenous knowledge, led by a generation of Yawanawá women. Who have experienced the impact of evangelical missions and who, today, are dedicated to rescuing their own language, chants, paintings, graphics, ceramics and all expressions of native art.

Other ornamental elements and artistic expressions have been recreated or reinvented in recent decades, such as the manual making of headdresses or *maiti*. As Professor Vinnya describes, during the period of contact with rubber tappers in the region, the Yawanawá reduced the daily elaboration of their art pieces: ornaments, basketwork, ceramics, weapons, bows and arrows, spears, among others. But from the moment they repositioned their cultural habits, in the early 1990s, they felt the need to reconstruct the artistic manifestations of material culture (VINNYA et al., 2007). The teacher from the village Mutum explained to me that a cousin of hers, among other people, resurrected the techniques of sewing and manual manufacturing of current *indigenous headdresses*. In this way, the possibility of (re)creating and reinventing countless elements or material objects of the Yawanawá culture was also extended to younger people.

Faced with the oppression of the legacy of the colonial period, which reproduces the cognitive dismantling and disorder of indigenous memories (SIMAS; RUFINO,

2018), movements for the reinvention of life appear in the Yawanawá population. As highlighted in the story of the shaman Hushahu, when exercising her power of access to ancestral spiritual foundations. These movements coexist with many everyday collective actions of female (re)existence linked, mainly, to the permanence and survival of the Yawanawá language and artistic material techniques – based on the knowledge of enchantment and cosmological experience and forged in the pain and suffering from times of oppression (VINNYA et al., 2007).

Producing these (re)narratives and counterattack practices against the colonial legacy implies revealing their capacity for resilience in the cosmological sphere, embodied in the existence of Amerindian peoples during the last five centuries, who, living “*in another world, a world of others, from their invaders and masters?*” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO; DANOWSKI, 2017 keep their worldview alive. The Yawanawá people, especially women, from their cultural routines and pulsating bodily knowledge, daily materialize a transgression to forms of spatial domination. As they elaborate complex political strategies of mutation and adaptation to the territorial dynamics of their habitat, based on their cosmology and circulating in their bodies and existences.

#### *Threads for thinking together the Yawanawá Architecture in contemporaneity*

At the beginning of the collective project process that implied *thinking together* the architectural spaces for the Mutum village, the women shared with me stories that reveal the oral memory of the traditional Yawanawá spatiality<sup>16</sup>. Understanding the gradual transformations of the original dwelling was essential for the idealization of contemporary architectures, and several Yawanawá voices spontaneously emerged that narrated their experiences and/or accounts of the traditional space.

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<sup>16</sup> The research's gender cutout also expresses the dialogues established during the field research. My communication was carried out through the mediation of the chief and a group of women who attended her house daily: her sister, sister-in-law and teacher Yawanawá from the kindergarten. The relationship with this small group and other women close to them was daily. The place where she made the models and drawings of the architectures was an open space built by the chief, which was configured as an extension of her own

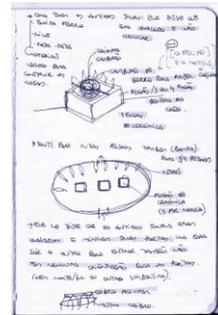
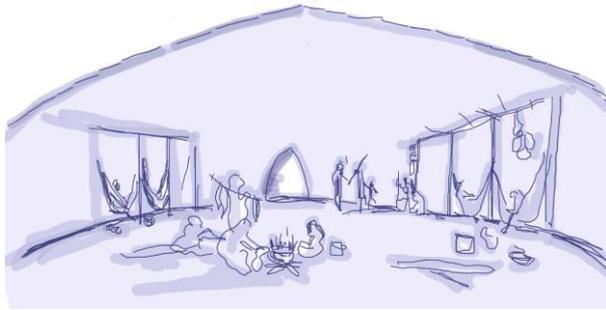


Figure 01: Drawings in the field notebook that record the conversation with teacher Yawanawá, drawing in plan of the shubu. Source: Own elaboration, 2016

Currently, in Mutum village, only two or three older people remember having lived in a traditional *shubu* when they were children. There are no graphic records prior to contact with groups of rubber tappers and oral transmission is the main source of spatial and epistemological reconstruction of the original dwelling. Therefore, the meeting and dialogue with the village elders, who kept the spatial conformation in their experiential memory, was configured as the essential exchange space in the constitution of inter-knowledge. Initially, the structure was built with flexible wood, which reached sufficient curvature to form the oval shape, until reaching the desired height of the ridge. Later, once the frame was completed, this carcass was completely covered with palm leaves, down to the ground.

Teacher Yawanawá from the village related to me the configuration of the interior space of the *shubu*, according to the drawings and notes taken together during our conversation in the field notebook (Figure 01). Fire is an essential element that configures the centrality of the interior space. In fact, in some traditional songs, the inner space of the *shubu* is described as a place of protection, according to the testimony of the female leader Yawanawá. Inside the shuhu, several ceramic stoves were built, where *caçuma*<sup>17</sup> and other foods were prepared. Everyone hung their hammocks and slept grouped together in

family nuclei. Thus, each group inhabited its space or microcosm within the *shubu*.

A relevant structural detail to study the possible shape of the *shubu* was revealed in the reports of the uncle of the chief Yawanawá, when he explained that “the length of the ridge was one meter and then the structure descended to the ground”. That is, in his words, “then it can be as big as you want to the ground”. As the ridge piece increases in size, the circle deforms and turns into an ellipse, enlarging the space of the *shubu* (CASTRO FARIA, 1951). This detail also reveals the sophistication of the *shubu*’s structural design, which could be built in different sizes, depending on the specific needs of the group.

Photographic records made at the time of the rubber plantations also contain other information about *shubu*, in this phase the gradual material and formal mutation of the collective space began. The images that show the constructions of the time (Figure 02) indicate that the *shubu* modification process was gradual and its transition does not follow a temporal linearity. The Yawanawá habitat is in constant displacement and one should not expect the narrative of linear time in the description of the Yawanawá constructions. They varied over time, including due to the group’s own desire to incorporate techniques and ways of living in its dwelling-building.

<sup>17</sup> *Caçuma* is a drink made with boiled and fermented cassava.



Figure 02: Drawing made on photographic record taken at the time of the rubber plantation.

Source: Own elaboration, 2020



Figure 03: Records of several houses built in Mutum village in 2016.

Source: Own elaboration, 2016

The diversity of formal and material spatial repertoires, manifested in the houses built in the Mutum village, as shown in Figure 03, express the cycles of wisdom that accumulate and cross techniques, logics and cosmologies. They claim contemporary indigenous architecture as a *locus* for the pulse of knowledge where ancestral eruditions survive and daily forms of life are reinvented. In contemporary times, Yawanawá architecture invokes a plurality of temporalities, spatialities and ways of being-in-the-world.

After the expulsion of the non-indigenous population that occupied and exploited the Yawanawá territory in the 1990s, the group began the construction of several architectural spaces linked to the resurgence of daily cultural habits in the Nova Esperança village<sup>18</sup> This initiative was subsequently expanded to other villages of the TIRG. Reviving the original spiritual and festive practices, called *mariris*<sup>19</sup>, also promoted the entry

of urban visitors into the village for short periods. Thus, the need arose to reinvent various architectures to accommodate festivities, ceremonies, and other ancestral spiritual celebrations. The repositioning of daily practices in the villages crossed by the *yawa-nawa* relationship instigated the formulation of spatialities built with the aim of receiving and allocating the *nawa*.

Currently, small celebrations, dances and songs are part of the routine in the villages, mainly in the afternoon and/or night. During my stay in Mutum village, I experienced two nightly *uni*<sup>20</sup> ceremonies. These *uni* celebrations were carried out spatially by means of concentric circles drawn by the bodies around the fire. The ritual allowed me to experience the collective dance around the fire, in which moving bodies shape the essence of the ceremonial space. The scene was arranged in three concentric spaces, from the inside out: 1) the fire; 2) the bodies holding hands, sing and

<sup>18</sup> Founded in 1991, Nova Esperança is located a few minutes by boat from Mutum village, up the Gregório River. After a period of internal political-social reorganization, the village formed the epicenter of the regrouping carried out by the Yawanawá in the 1990s.

<sup>19</sup> The term *mariri* is used to describe parties or events of different characteristics, which can mean a large event or party, or designate a sequence of smaller scale spontaneous parties, such as dances, songs and games performed daily. Since 2012, a festive event has been organized annually in the Mutum village, which is called “Festival Mariri Yawanawá”.

<sup>20</sup> Term that defines the ayahuasca drink. This is the cooking carried out with the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine and the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*, which, in Yawanawá, mean, respectively, *uni* and *kawa*.



Figure 04: Circular dance of the Yawanawá people  
Source: Own elaboration, 2020

dance in a circle; and 3) the seated bodies observe, sing and play instruments around them. The Yawanawá community collectively organized its moving space, defining the perimeter around the fire, marking temporal cycles in a continuous flow, without beginning or end.

In the present, in the resurgence of the *mariri* parties, the permanence of the ancestral spatiality is manifested as a way of being-in-the-world, in the circular dance of bodies. In other words, I observed a close morphological relationship between traditional indigenous dance and the conception of the traditional space, the *shubu*. During the festivities (Figure 04), the group forms a circular dance and performs a trajectory in circular motion, collectively pulsing, and the Yawanawá rewrite the native spatiality in the bodies' memory. Several studies have studied the relationship between circular dance, the symbolic properties of the circle and the expression of the trajectory of dancing bodies in their social sphere (TURNER, 1974; OSTETTO, 2014; WOSIEN, 2000). Both the dance performed during a ritual and the architectural space for the habitat are forms of interaction between living beings and the environment that manifest themselves in the physical environment. Thus, through dance guided by energy flows and concentric movements, the Yawanawá keep alive and reinvent the *shubu's* spatiality, linked to their ancestral cosmological vision.



Figure 05: Drawings in the field notebook that record my encounters with a Yawanawá family.  
Source: Own elaboration, 2016

In the Mutum village, I observed that, when a joint decision needed to be taken by the group, the circular spatial morphology was naturally drawn, with everyone sitting in a circle. Thus, in everyday situations, such as during the domestic meals I witnessed, families sit on the floor and share the meal in a circle (as shown in Figure05), in addition to religious celebrations or *mariris*. When the circumstance crossed a question of internal political, economic or festive organization, I experienced, in a synchronous way, the constitution of the circle as part of the yawa-nawa collective body.

In the experience of cultural routines in the daily life of the Mutum village, permanencies and reinventions of native spatial practices were revealed. The ancestral spatiality, materialized in *shubu*, pulses in the Yawanawá collective corporeality and remains in the contemporary practices of everyday life in the act of inhabiting the Forest. Bodies force, activate and build the powers to recreate and *dream* other possible times/spaces. Bodies support knowledge and memory, the locus of survival of ancestral spatial knowledge, which are currently reinventing their own ways of (re) existing in the Amazon Forest. Thus, the concentric environment of the *shubu* survived<sup>21</sup> and pulsates in the collective body of the Yawanawá, and their practices emerge as ways of knowing how to practice.

<sup>21</sup> Term used in SIMAS; RUFINO, 2018.



Figure 06: House built in the Center for Ceremonies and Healings of the Mutum village.  
Source: Own elaboration, 2016

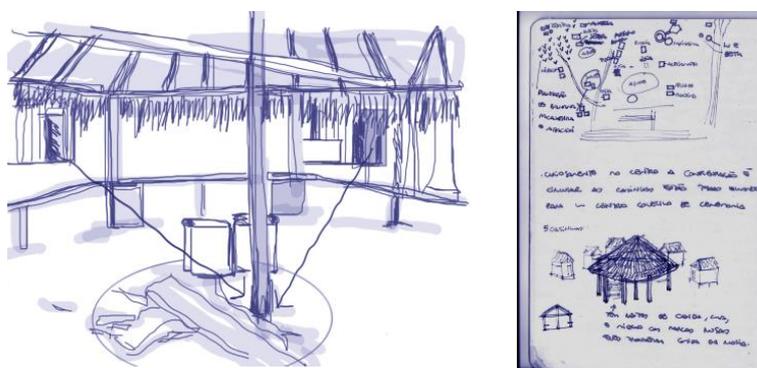


Figure 07: Drawings in the field notebook that register the tapiri and the small houses built in the Center for Ceremonies and Healings of the Mutum village.  
Source: Own elaboration, 2016

With the resurgence of ritualistic practices, the need arose to build a series of architectural projects that would express the wisdom based on the physical support of the body and that survive in rites, rhythms, voices and choreographies. In this sense, the idealization of the *Center for Ceremonies and Healings* in the village of Mutum was motivated, led by the shaman Hushahu. Between 2012 and 2013, she decided to build a space with the intention of housing those who visit the Forest during the experience of spiritual retreats or diets.

In spatial terms, the *Center for Ceremonies and Healings* is composed of diverse environments, all built exclusively with native raw materials. In these constructions, the techniques, sciences and constructive practices of indigenous know-how are visible. The wood used to lift the structures was without sawing, the knots and structural connections were made using vine fittings and moorings, and the palm leaves covered the roofs.

In a small house that I visited, for example, all the walls were sealed with palm fronds, as shown in Figure 06.

In the spatial configuration of the environments destined to the celebration of rituals, an organization in plan of concentric circles is also perceived. In the central space of this environment for ceremonies, a *tapiri* without a floor was built and, around the *tapiri*, a series of small houses. All these small houses had their doors open towards the central point of the *tapiri*<sup>22</sup>, where the remains of the bonfire from the last celebration of *uni* remained, as illustrated in the drawing in Figure 07. In this sense, I noticed the materialization of a morphology in three concentric spaces, similar to those constituted in the circular dance of the *uni* ceremony: the bonfire at the epicenter of space; the *tapiri* that forms a circular structure around the fire; and the small houses.

<sup>22</sup> Community architectures with a circular plan, without “walls” and vertical parameters, are commonly called *tapiris* in the TIRG, and are temporary structures originally erected during hunting and fishing camps.

The forms of reinvention of spatial practices led by Yawanawá women are understood as seeds that took root and emerged in the creation and construction of their own practice of counterattack against epistemic silencing, aiming at the permanence of indigenous values, which operates with its own cognitive arsenal – and provokes a “bifurcation of the nature of the other” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2002, p. 119). Bodily knowledge makes it possible to (re)locate the contemporary practices of the indigenous population, a *locus* of political, poetic and social intelligences that affirm the recognition and legitimacy of an ontology, with the possibility of dialogue with others. Dialogue that allows us *to think and wish together* to weave an agenda for contemporary Yawanawá Architecture.

*Final considerations: ways to constitute other worlds*

The Yawanawá collective body, after a century of contact with non-indigenous peoples – who imposed with different logics the disorder of indigenous memories – resurfaced from the epistemic erasure of their ancestral knowledge and spatial dynamics. This process was understood through an action of mutual involvement, which involves *thinking together* with the Yawanawá women, in the Mutum village, about possible current architectures. During the field research, I experienced a series of techniques, practices and environmental conformations that can be studied as an update of their repertoire of spatial (re)existence, as they embody the survival of their cosmological knowledge.

The concentric trajectory of collective circular dance reveals how Yawanawá bodies are supports of knowledge that remain alive and activated and reinvent the potencies of their practices in everyday life. In this way, it appears that the ritualistic, religious, festive and/or political Yawanawá social spatialities materialize, composing a common morphology. Therefore, this spatiality is not configured exclusively as a symbol or rite, but as a way of being-in-the-world together, of inhabiting the collective body and welcoming the space for multiplicity. This allows for

the polyrationality of voices and dialogues, woven into the countless logics established among the *nawa-yawa*.

Of course, the study of Yawanawá architecture is not limited to the expression of the traditional “architectural object”, the *shubu*; but it must dialogue with pulsating knowledge, which implies know-how, know-how-to-practice, know-how-to-dance, which continues to live in bodies and opens paths to *build other worlds and other architectures* in the academic sphere. In this sense, in the academic sphere, it is about claiming Yawanawá architecture in contemporaneity as a locus for the production of knowledge and for confrontations of mutual implication. Through the art of crossing knowledge, it is proposed to shift our own field of knowledge, assume its voids and propose an exercise in transit, which aims to redefine its place in the reproduction of a single monological vision.

This demand is urgent: *to think and build together* an agenda for decolonial studies in architecture, urbanism and art. After meeting the Yawanawá women, the aim here is to demand the construction of a theoretical-methodological basis in the art of the cross. Which, in the words of Simas and Rufino (2018), does not aim to replace the fundamentals and principles inherent to our field of knowledge, but aims to reframe, (re) narrate, question, make visible, untie places, making continuous displacements that allow us to redefine the locus of knowledge production.

In other words, it is about practicing gestures and movements in favor of a decolonizing action that (re)situate us in front of our interlocutors and their intelligences in a horizontal way. In this sense, the Bolivian activist and sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) proposes to think together about an indigenous intellectual base. Questioning how things are thought is an essential gesture in the process. Rivera Cusicanqui Rivera Cusicanqui suggests that we think together through the idea of *ch’ixi*, a concept originating in *Aimará* culture and epistemology. Which means the gray color, “formed from an infinity of black and white dots that are unified in perception, but also

remain pure and separate” (RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2018, p. 69). This does not imply a hybrid condition of *mestizaje*, as the dots blend in perception but do not blend completely. This indigenous concept can be *experimented* with to overcome the legacy of binary representational discourses or hybridization processes and understand the complexity of the permanent contradiction between indigenous and European subjectivity that make up Latin American bodies. Bodies in search of an exercise in permanent self-decolonization, which advance in the struggle for the *constitution of other worlds* in the academic sphere.

Returning to the initial question of this text, which operates from a Yanomami ontological perspective, it is intended to untie and reposition discourses rooted in the scope of architecture to advance in the *multiplication of our world*. For architecture to breathe, it is necessary to deepen the study of the stories that affirm the plurality of eruditions within the scope of Amerindian architectural culture. Which ranges from the recognition of the ways of life, existence and habits of residents of riverside, *caicara*, *quilombo* communities, etc. A wide range of practices and techniques so far built outside the canon of academic knowledge. Thus, by claiming that ancestral spatial knowledge prevails in bodies and are living sources of knowledge production, we are affirming the constitution of an architecture *that has a heart and breathes*.

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