

FILE AND IMAGES: HEURISTIC AND VISUAL ISSUES ON THE DISCLOSURE OF ETIENNE SAMAIN'S KAMAYURÁ FILE

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ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2826-4628>

FABIANA BRUNO

L'AGRIMA, Universidade Estadual de Campinas,
Campinas, SP, Brazil, 13083-896
lagrimaifch@yahoo.com.br

ABSTRACT

This article aims to present some considerations on the methodological results, as well as the results from a visual experiment developed during an anthropological research, which was presented with the ontological challenge of opening a 500 photographs file that was asleep for almost four decades. The file with images portraying Kamayurá indigenous persons from Alto Xingu, belonging to the personal file of the anthropologist Etienne Samain, was inquired in light of its own condition of silence and the imperative of privileging, in the first place, the act of looking and listening to the images. In this article, the reader will be able to know the methodological course traced, following part of its results from a double experience carried out with this photographic file – the researcher's and the image producer's himself. Thence, it is possible to examine the visual experimentation of the *Images Poetic Charts*, the construct of an experience of visual assemblage with the file photos.

KEYWORDS

File; photographs;
methodology; experimentation;
anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

In the first section of the article, I will present the methodological work experience established throughout a research¹ based on the anthropological field that aims to reflect on the act of opening and visually investigate the life of a photographs file. Specifically, I was facing materials belonging to the anthropologist Etienne Samain², which were obtained after his expedition with the Kamayurá people from Alto Xingu (1977) and filed for almost four decades in its author's library³.

As we have established an original protocol for the task of opening the file, anchored in a double gaze – the researcher's and the file producer's –, the methodological course began with the analysis of about 500 photographs and concluded with the selection of seven series (32 photos and seven double collections of texts). The researcher and the file producer then commented and exchanged the series. There, the research was spreading its roots and firming itself to live with the slumbering images, trying to unveil what they had to say, as they were now revisited and invited to a pact of double inquiry by the researcher and the producer.

As pursuing this methodological line, the reader will learn the experiment of the assemblage operation constituted to this course, which we have called *Images Poetic Charts*. The categorization of the letters is inspired by the analysis of the selected image series and by the considerations on the challenge of inquiring and making a file to think – trusting the experience of finding the lonely and silent questions of the images, what is harbored in between, in the posthumous gaps and aspiring to store treasures of meanings –, conceived from the unfolding of those series of images selected and set as content of observation and consideration.

1. I refer to the post-doctoral research entitled *Poéticas das imagens desdobradas*. Ante a abertura do acervo fotográfico indígena de Etienne Samain [Poetics of unfolded images. Facing the disclosure of the indigenous photographic file of Etienne Samain], under the supervision of Professor Eduardo Peñuela Cañizal, supported by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP n° 2011/11958-5), based on ECA-USP, 2011-2013.

2. Etienne Samain – theologian and anthropologist – was born in Belgium. He lives in Brazil since 1973, and works as a professor at the Art Institute of the Graduate Program in Multimedia at Unicamp. He lived among Kamayurá Indigenous communities in the Alto Xingu, (MT), in 1977, and Urubu-Kaapor (MA) in 1980-1981, and thenceforth is working on the study of mythical narratives, coming close to the anthropology of communication and art, especially interested in understanding human communication. Samain is the author of *Moroneta Kamayurá* (1991), organizer of *O Fotográfico* (2005) and *Como Pensam as Imagens* (2012). After dwelling with indigenous communities and being fascinated with the nature of myths, Samain became deeply interest in images. In his most contemporary reflections, resulting from a consolidated knowledge engendered by long years of studying image issues, Etienne Samain insists on the importance of rediscovering not only the heuristic functionalities of images, but also their use value in human society.

3. In this article, Etienne Samain is mentioned as a *producer* referring to a category given to the one who produced and stored the images with intent to – although in an unpretentiously way, as he puts it – review his production in a non-specified future.

If, on the one hand, to explore the logic of one who visits a file and un-covers its images may open the possibility of *imagining in order to know*, without previous knowledge; on the other hand, to follow the logic of re-visiting a file based on the producer's gaze, in this case the author of the photographs, has unfolded the experience of a living memory, with its dynamics of remembering and forgetting, as guided by the singularity of a methodology working with images and its intermittencies.

THE FILE CONTEXT

To trust that a file is a living system is to offer an attentive listening to a whole sensorial body, a confidence that, beyond its materiality in a file and its "Saturn rings," there will be a layer of elements that are not codable at first. An atmosphere of issues that dialogues with the considerations proposed by authors such as Elizabeth Edwards (2009), who, while studying photographic surveys in England between 1885 and 1918, based on the work of amateur photographers⁴, had registered her experiences around the meaning of material practices of photograph and its filing. Edwards (2009) claims that photographs should not be understood only through the content analysis, but also as objects that constitute material performances capable of evincing values of an affective historical imagination. She considers that, in methodological terms, it is necessary to engage a "material hermeneutics," which implies, as she explains, "paying attention to things and practices, and moving the analysis of photographs from questions of representation to questions of material practice, so that we can actually comprehend the role of photography in the discipline of history" (Ibid., 150).

If the mysteries of images are saved in another capsule, as a pearl protected by the oyster, and the file – as a living system – also harbors noises inaudible to a movement of recognition, my remaining option was to regard and inquire this file in the light of its own silence, which meant to approach it as something covered in an atmosphere of expressions and meanings challenged by this interpretation. I was aware that I walked through ways of tension, which required efforts to propose suited questions and methodology, considering the ethnographic practices, I could continue seeking dialogues.

It was necessary to consider, as Cunha (2004, 292) advises, that:

Despite the familiarity of the anthropology with the files, the relation between both was subject to different appropriations. The identification of the file research with anthropological practices, among them the fieldwork and the

4. The research concerns photos produced by a social array of amateur photographers: hobby photographers, members of local camera clubs and photo shooting sessions by natural history, archeological and antiquarian societies, which produce visual registers of matters of "historical interest" to the benefit of future generations.

production of ethnographies, is still a focus of tension. It has been associated with the impossibility of *being there* and the secondary forms of contact between observers and “natives” mediated by impenetrable and contaminated layers of interpretation.⁵

Cunha proposes fundamental considerations as she raises questions such as “what does it mean when anthropologists turn themselves to the files as a *field* from which they intend to observe and reflect on the practice of their peers and the perspectives that inform (or have informed it)?” (Ibid., 294). Also “after all, what are the borders that outline and the criteria that define what I have been calling *ethnographic files*?” (Ibid., 295).

The author considers that there is no clear distinction between what the archivists define as being “personal” and “professional,” for *personal* domains occasionally inform those managed as *professionals* and vice-versa:

Such as other scientific files, those that held written, visual and iconographic documents gathered, produced and/or collected by anthropologists during his or her professional and personal trajectory are characterized by its fragmentary, diversified and, paradoxically, extremely subjective structure. The ethnographic files and their double, the *personal files*, are cultural constructions whose comprehension is fundamental to understand how certain professional narratives are produced and how the *invention* results from an intense dialogue involving imagination and intellectual authority. (Ibid., 295-296)

Concerning the images from Etienne Samain’s file, I knew that they were produced, gathered and stored – together with sets of documents and objects about the Kamayurá people, from Alto Xingu – after two anthropological expeditions⁶ and the publishing of a book on myths. I could even recognize some of them, as I have read the *Moroneta Kamayurá*, the book on the Kamayurá myths, a volume with precisely 40 images in its first part.

5. The excerpt from Cunha’s works here quoted were freely translated.

6. In January 1977, Etienne Samain was preparing himself to carry on the first anthropological expedition in Alto Xingu, Mato Grosso do Norte. He would carry out his fieldworks among the Kamayurá people, a non-literate society, which at the time had around 200 people. In the first expedition, Etienne Samain had the company of the linguist Marcio Pereira da Silva. A list helped him organize and, among his research materials, there was a recorder, cassette tapes, (6 or 7) 36 mm colored rolls of film, a second-hand Minolta photo camera, bought from a French editor who had come several times to Brazil. The first expedition lasted almost two months, and Etienne Samain had worked in the period mostly writing his field journals, notebooks with handwriting notes in French, in a tiny calligraphy, about the myths, which he had also recorded in order to transcribe and translate, along other daily notes. At that time, he was starting his master’s thesis in Social Anthropology, which he would present later, in November 1980, at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro. Months later, in August 5 of the same year, the second expedition to the Kamayura took place. The second expedition would end on October 16, 1977.

Those photographs, alongside with hundreds of other filed images, were in a precious library belonging to their author, the anthropologist Etienne Samain, who gave the images he considered to be a suitable keeping place, a personal assortment that led to the storage of this material. Everything that belonged to this Kamayurá collection – which includes field journals, letters, documents, items and objects, feather crafts – inhabited and coexisting at the daily work office, the space set as a library since his anthropological expeditions.

Before this research, the producer had not resumed, *re-looked*, his indigenous photographs with other intentions of work aftermaths. Despite being a judicious researcher-anthropologist, he had organized and placed in his collection several notes, references and text observations over the collected material.

The file, consisting of folders and boxes, was a little *cosmos*, a living organism, in this case, the “living world” of a rich library⁷. The library space⁸ was also the epicenter of work meanings, keeping part of Etienne Samain’s memories, consisting of books and thoughts, objects and affections; things and words; desires and images, character, beings magnetized by the processing chemistry of some image lab. The sensible notes in the atmosphere of this small cosmos were precisely an accomplice silence. Everything seemed to be tacitly resting.

To carry on the mechanical operations that implied the necessity to handle the file opening and reach the photographic devices to open a closet, close the trellis door, so it would be possible to face the cardboard boxes and find the labels: “Kamayurá Field Journals,” “Kamayurá and Alto Xingu Documentation,” among others, of similar nature, about the Urubu-Kaapor. It would be necessary to spot, in the right side of the same closet, shelves full of yellow and blue folders with other information: “Kamayurá and Alto Xingu – Kaapor Photos”; and then open another closet, a bigger one, with large doors, just as a “small cave.” To every object touched there were impregnated traces of time and its uncolored, inodorous and imperative dust, faced by the senses and the visit of a present researcher peering its corners and secrets, which were undeniable to describe.

7. In humankind’s history, a library space always kept many enchantments and mysteries. Just remember the spectacular library of Aby Warburg, a *Mnemosyne*, or the extraordinary image of a library to Jorge Luís Borges, who regarded it as a kind of paradise.

8. Etienne Samain’s library, comprising his 2,4 books, has “travelled” – as he defines his donation – in December 2018 to the Octávio Ianni Library, Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH), Unicamp. With the donation, the collection created a new line of research based on the Anthropology of Image.

The folders, the colors, the shapes of the boxes and closets, the shelves, the topics of the other files, while neighbor elements of several compositions, coming from a sensed and rationally untouchable world, were sleeping. All of this merged with the light, the layers of dust, cosmic polymers coming from times and constellations that our rational boldness simply could not define.

This preliminary observation, of a *recognition* nature, supported the decision of probe the notion of “file life,” or, in other words, of a “living file.”⁹ Even if the photos produced by the anthropologist¹⁰ were not taken to a determinate ethnographic production, without directly discussing issues related to the anthropological character of this file, it was not possible to totally ignore the fact that the images had being registered during Etienne Samain’s fieldwork.

At first, the photos, even if not embedded in an anthropological-ethnographic intention, kept their place in the biographical space of the producer¹¹ and became indispensable to compose an intellectual and anthropological trajectory of their author. A file of images that live and engage in the life of who had produced it.

METHODOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

As my goal is not to exhaust the approaches and interpretations of a photo image file, I will present the fundamental methodological strategies adopted as a work protocol to make the file “to think,” aiming to reflect on the questions the images themselves raised when I had proposed to open this file.

It is noteworthy that the protocol of this study resisted to the mediation of the words between the researcher and the producer to avoid “wrapping an experience” beforehand in favor of the observation, the vision, the feeling and other experiences of the senses. As we have made this initial pact, we turn it into a defining proposition. Thenceforth, we

9. Recalling the definition offered by Aby Warburg (2010), in order to think the sets as “living files” and “cultural survivals (the image as dynamic and a fold in time).”

10. The almost 500 Kamayurá photos by Etienne Samain were part of the results of both anthropological expeditions, but curiously, their producer made them without any anthropological intention. Etienne Samain intended to study the myths, to write about “those ideological and existential grounds of non-literate societies,” to turn into words those utterances that, as he described, were “full of images and sounds.” However, he came back with images and wrote a book called *Moroneta*. A Kamayurá designation for the “figurative mediations of archetypes, the copies and the living memories that relate to an original, usually out of human reach, and whose decisive function is to transmit, to recall and to reinforce, among the community, what are its ideal values, its individual and community behavior norms” (Samain 2007, 65) [The excerpt from Samain’s works here quoted were freely translated].

11. The negative films and contact prints of the Etienne Samain’s Kamayurá File are preserved with a digital edition carried out by Françoise Biernaux, under the supervision of the anthropologist and producer of the images, Etienne Samain.

chose to experience at the same time, on the one hand, the action of the *researcher that visits and opens the file*, without questioning beforehand the producer or talk to him about the images and, on the other hand, the voluntary action of the *producer that revisits and reopens* his file four decades later. Seven series of photos, 32 photos and 7 double collections of texts were born from that experience. The methodological cadency was developed using an operation that we had structured in *five acts: To Discover, To Open, To Choose, To Unveil, and To Conjugate*.

TO OPEN THE FILE

The act of opening the file required the exam, together with Etienne Samain, of boxes and folders, which kept everything that might refer to the photographic file: negative films, contact prints, slides, different format photo enlargements, test copies. The photographic file – represented by about 500 photos, taken in 35 mm colored films, ISO 100, mostly displayed in contact prints – consists of a small part registered in black and white and about 50 slides (used for lectures about indigenous peoples, given in schools). A fraction of the photographic production was enlarged in photographic paper of different formats, such as 8x5 cm; 10x15 cm; 13x18 cm; 20x25 cm, and 30x40 cm; as well as several enlargements testing colors, contrast, kept in envelopes.

All the negative films of the Kamayurá file, consisting of 10 dailies, and Kaapor were found in a red folder, along with contact prints. The images kept, therefore, the numerical sequence of the registers and could, eventually, reconstitute – supported by markings on their back, made by the producer – a possible order, a sequence of the register, chronologically recomposing the photographic course (which was actually done, with the assistance of the producer, during this study). While the field journals, in turn, were organized by date with notes (generally) in French, many pages related to episodes that could eventually be found in the photo shoots.

Naturally, we notice that this process could soon detect, through the producer – and many times in my own domains – the photos that were more recognized and activated, while others, the least handled ones so far, were almost vanishing. However, in order to avoid establishing a hasty criteria to choose the images. The producer, herein, has stated the desire to review all images, to travel, in his pace, through the photos with an approach uncommitted to an objective task, led only by the desire to wander through the images, meeting them again, to reanimate, after 36 years to the date the study was carried out, the experience, finding what would rise – not only pointing to what he knew with plenty of details, but also to the dailies on which he had no longer totally clear memories –, before he reviewed and reread his journals.

In the same way, but in a position distinguished from the producer, as I did not know the details of the context and the memory of those photos, I had decided to awake my gaze to those file photos unknown to me, with the purpose of thinking which would be the categories of inquiry the images would trigger. What kind of questions the dailies rise and what were the relevant questions to ask to the file? The intention was to allow the images to act.

So we – researcher and producer – decided to *take the time to see the images*, each one in their own silence. We made copies of all the photos, using the contact prints, and some detached portions, and engaged in a lonely and introspective experience of *seeing*. This was the initial challenge: to find out how the file photos would open questions about the Kamayurá people in the sense of what the file made me desire to know and imagine through sensibility. The attempt, thus, was to *see*, to *inquiry* and to *unfold the sight* of an image file.

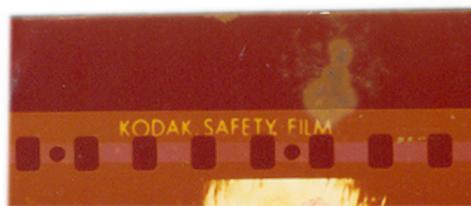
DISCOVER THE IMAGES

I have started simply by looking at the photos, one by one, contact after contact, allusively to when we decide to look at a photo album, which compels us to follow a sequence, page after page, with no concern but to let the images act and make us dream about the future.

Certainly, those 10 contact prints with which I was dwelling at that moment already had in their materiality traces of time, of operational techniques and choices made by the producer – in terms of light, repetition, visual elements – in a shooting order.

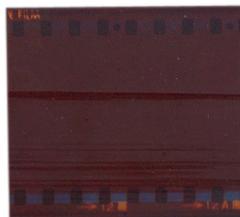
The Kamayurá photographic file had a distinct feature, with the strong presence of portraits, short planes, closes of faces and characters with whom Etienne Samain shared time. It was possible to recognize, for instance:

FIGURE 1
Fragments of
negative film printed
in the dailies from
Etienne Samain's
collection.



The dated **historical materiality** of the photographic technical processes expressed by the label of the films: colored Kodak Safety 35 mm 36 exposure film, besides the traces of development and fixation of the negative films on photographic paper, marked on the borders of the contact paper.

FIGURE 2
Fragments of negative
film printed in the
dailies belonging to
Etienne Samain's
collection.



The **frame numbers**, which allow us to follow, in a certain sequence, the visual intention (the thematic choices of the producer) of each exposure, including the choice to repeat or not a photo for each topic to recognize, thus, those who were not sensitized, for some reason.

FIGURES 3A, 3B, 3C
Fragments of negative
films printed in the
dailies belonging to
Etienne Samain's
collection.



The **cutting marks of edition in the photos**, outlining the possibility of knowing the first choices and previous interests attributed to some of the photos. In this case, those 40 images or so were chosen from the book *Moroneta Kamayurá*.

However, it was impossible to hide a certain apprehension generated by everything the frames and the sequence did not allow me to see. A sensation close to what Didi-Huberman (2012, 111) described in this quote:

One is therefore disappointed because a photograph remains an image, a big piece of film limited by its own material. But, if we look at it in spite of all a little more attentively, then those grains are interesting [...]; in other words, photography can disrupt our perception of the real, of history, and of existence.

Beyond the technical and historical traces, some photos, for no apparent reason, affected me deeper than others. Suddenly, a portrait clicked: a child smiles, shyly, holding a green and yellow balloon, which she tries to fill. In other daily, a certain image of a baby with a green bird sitting on his head moves me. Without seeking other reasons to explain, I kept trying to see. Limited by the pact made with the image's producer to avoid raising questions, it was necessary to stress the *seeing*.

I notice, clearly, as Didi-Huberman writes, that "image is made of *everything*: it as an amalgam nature, impure, of visible things mixed with

confusing things, of deceitful things mixed with revealing things, of visual forms mixed with thought in action” (Ibid., 89). And, even if I was affected by blockages and vertigos from *confusing things*, I pursued the *revealing things*. I have noted what the *photograph could give me to see and to question*. I accepted that the photographs of a file in this stage offered me more questions than visual answers on the Kamayurá people, even when the notes seemed to be insufficient, superficial and primary.

Etienne Samain, regarding the invitation to review his photographs and participate in this study, was confessing a desire, revealing, in his process of dwelling with and revisiting his own file, other important questions on the life of a file and its possible problematizations, almost 40 years later. Samain (2011) offers a long written report about his procedure and the period of dwelling with his photographs:

to “see again” the (approximately) 500 photographs and the journal of the two expeditions carried out among the Kamayurá people (1977-1978), I let myself be guided by a need, a kind of imperative that I will not try to clarify right now. I did not want, as I examined 36 years later, a verbal-visual material concerning an important past, to let myself be swallowed by the precision of writing. I wish to retake an “imaginary” trip. Clearly, not a trip that has not been done or an adventure in which I would seek ghosts. I wish, actually, to let myself be captured and captivated by those unordered movements of images. I aimed to see again at a distance, from other lenses and angles, what I could not or was not able to see at the time. To let the estrangement inhabit me again, with curiosity and without commitments. My adventure did not require any pretext.

In a red colored folder I had kept the film negatives and, fortunately, the “dailies,” the 9 contact sheets (of 24 and, mostly, of 36 slides, 3x4, colored). I will later find a hundred slides through those sheets that I carried on my visual journey. No rush. I have spent two weeks peering, one after another, through those sheets and the tiny images on them, all of the same shape, ordered by time, succeeding each other in the horizontal plate. I looked at the sheet for a long time, it offered not only a perspective of the set, but allowed me to make the most diverse paths. I rediscovered a passed time, a lived time, a time shared with people, places, cultures, emotions, expectations, discoveries, passions and thousands of other human “colors.” However, to see again those sheets and photos had not caused the impression of going towards mere remembrances. On the photos, there were “recollections,” “evocations” and “reminiscences,” but mostly buried “memories,” somehow shrunk and asleep (like some animals during hibernation) that, slowly, woke up, reborn and resurfaced.

As a nomadic and funambulist, I was travelling in my memory. With no other plan, I transcribed files, impressions, questions, reflections that those successive dives on the sheets raised. Those notes perhaps will help me

discover how to problematize a file comprised of “portraits of a (great) human family.”

This first work allowed me, by means of small leads, to order the sheets in the temporality of both expeditions.

It has sharpened a double imperative. On the one hand, to review all photographs, enlarged at this time, in order to take a closer look. On the other hand, to contextualize them with the maximum of precision, which would imply, as I will tell soon, a return to the field journals.

At first, and by necessity, I had observed most of the almost 500 photographs taken among the Kamayurá using the contact sheets. I had contemplated those figures almost as if looking at a constellation, with its array of stars. I ran among the stars in all directions.

Soon after I carried out the reading of the journals by other necessity. This time, I needed to give some grounds to the work of imagination. As I was entering the writings, the words concision, the enunciative capacities, I felt that the images were abandoning me or, better said, that I could go on without them. The journal, with its relentless chronology, could recreate precise episodes from my adventure from a blind hole facts and situations,.

Little by little, along the pages, the name of a person, a festival cry, the narrative of a liana fishing occasion or the description of the construction of an *oca* retook the image's path, transfiguration into small movies, mostly films with fluid outlines. Transient, evanescent images, emerging from the words themselves.

Underneath the words there were images piercing the words that had stopped them. Among texts and images, the complicity and the reciprocity were notorious, necessary and crucial. I was partially discovering the grammars and how the verbal and the visual declined their conjugations.

I was now facing the chronologically ordered set of almost all of the photos taken during the two expeditions among the Kamayurá. Now enlarged, they offered other perspectives to my gaze. I wish to see again those images, one by one. I wish to open them, to unfold them, to question them, to let them think among them and with me.

To avoid multiplying the themes that were potentially present on those photographs and holding a background of a theme index developed by the texts in the journal, I thought that it would be worth to establish a list of keywords previously, through which I would progressively sort small sections of the related photographs. There was the risk, of course, that the classifications would be too anthropological or closed, which would enclose and silence the photographs within small boxes, taking from them their inherent dialogue. I was aware of the risk.

The keywords were, at the beginning: “Couples”; “Children”; “Feminine”; Gestures and emotions”; “Spaces and dwellings”; “Indians, animals, nature”; “Indians x white people”; “Masculine”; “Myths”; “Shamanism”; “To think”; “Persons (names of)”; “Rituals and festivals”; “Fieldwork.”

The number of keywords did not increase. They only unfolded, sometimes, in sub items, such as “Children” [3 sub items: Girls and boys; Games; Faces]; “Masculine” [04 sub items: “Male activities”; “Beauty-bodily painting”; “Yìrìp-Companions”; “Man and child”] etc. in a way that the same photograph could be under several keywords.

THE SELECTION AND THE ASSEMBLE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES

Resuming the double work logic of the investigation of the file and following the pact of not previously using words, both researcher and producer had worked, each on their own way and individually, on the selection of the photographs they could propose as a dialogue through images.

I was convincing myself that in order to inquiry the file it was necessary to choose, to abandon the idea of a “full image” of the file and essentially assume the condition of a “lacunary image,”¹² as small pieces, remains and losses that every file naturally presupposes in relation to the premises of truth.

Due to those reasons, our work began by separating series of photos from the file, as possible questions (not followed, in the first moment, by words) to be proposed to the producer arose and, soon after, it was the producer’s turn to separate two series, freely, and submit them to the researcher. In both situations, the participants in this study – researcher and producer – aimed to write beforehand, without revealing, what made them choose certain series, their reflections, questions and thoughts. Later those comments could be exchanged.

At first, five series of images were silently sent to the producer who set them, as they were “pawns on a game board,” scattered on his desk. Moving from producer to interpreter, without knowing my questions, he was invited to see his own photos again, in another order, one assembled and proposed by me – different from the order suggested by the contact prints. The producer would then take the time to think over them, comment them and return them, being entitled to the right of choosing the series of photos that would be similarly submitted to the researcher before revealing his motives.

Based on those experiences that have constituted a double movement and a double inquiry in attempt to unveil an image file (and the operations that are comprised in such act) it has also clarified the “gap that an image file can represent,” when there is the assumption that the images can suppose the place of representation and mere explanation.

12. The concept engaged by Didi Huberman alludes to the lessons of Bataille and Lacan, for whom the real, being impossible, does not exist if not manifested as pieces, remains, partial objects.

In the file, the relief gets organized, if you just know how to read it and realize that there is a production of meaning in this place, even when the lives collide with the power without choosing it. It is necessary to patiently sort those situations brought to light by this sudden chock, outline the discontinuities and distances (...). You can examine it without rush and meticulously dissect it, but something still remains, something with no name and that the scientific experience cannot explain. Actually, it does not even consider its role to explain it, even if it is facing it. It is, clearly, this life surplus that overflows the file and instigate readers in their deeper intimacy. The file is an excess of meaning when the one who reads it feels the beauty, the astonishment and some emotional impact. This is a secret and different place for everyone. (Farge 2009, 35-37)¹³

Thus, we collected – along with the series – a double set of words around the same file photos. This double path we built drew the feature of an epistemological and heuristic work, interested in approaching the knowledge of the images themselves, questioning them in their multiple readings. The comments, expressed in words, even if not providing a complete password, allow us to see and read better, as well as the series photos, making us imagine what the words aim *to make us see*.

We now present two examples, which refer to the choices by the researcher and by the producer:

A SERIES – RESEARCHER’S SELECTION



FIGURE 4
Photos: Etienne Samain (image processing and digitalization by Françoise Biernaux).

RESEARCHER’S COMMENT:

In the file, most photos are portraits. I am interested in them: they are beautiful, technically well produced, they question me, they move me. The portraits do not represent only a formal issue. The photos reveal a kind of acquaintanceship the producer was trying to establish with the Indians. An affectionate and grateful relation, somehow translated with amusement with the Kamayurá people. I noticed, however, the existence of a sort of *recurrence, or affinity, both aesthetic and emotional*, between them. A regular element was the smile, which has a strong link to the photographic culture itself (or with what is expected to find on it; nowadays, there are small cameras with a smile detector) and the idea – the illusion that every photo offers – of a “real” moment of happiness, it was an element present in many portraits. Smiling children climbing trees, bathing in the lake; happy young man carrying a hunted

13. The excerpt from Farges’s works here quoted were freely translated.

monkey; a very happy young mother holding her baby or the shy young woman with a punctual smile; two young companions (brothers?) and the composition of “a family,” a couple and their child. I have tried to choose them and put them in a sequence, with few intentions, but the way they make me wish to *know more about the process* of producing those photos and the *memories of the producer at those moments that seemed to have spread happiness*. When did he shoot? How did he approach the Indians with the camera? What did he aim to show on those photographic registers of the Kamayurá people? Does he remember the moment he saw the results of those developed photos for the first time? And how do those images refresh the producer’s memory today? Is there a photo that affects him more than others?

PRODUCER’S COMMENT

I remember that when she submitted this first series of 07 photos (all in landscape format), Fabiana made her choice’s motive clear. All pictures had a mark of a smile or even laughter. The Kamayurá people smile, sing and dance, but alone, they cry. They do not shout. They do not kiss in public, and a man and a woman will never dance face to face. Seeing again those photos, I found that they are not reports, they are even less aesthetic struggles. I did not go to Kamayurá to take photos, but to gather mythical narratives. I had little film available and used the photo camera only ten days after I arrived at their place. I am moved by all this plainness that emanates from the photos, even if the camera and I were their accomplices. The photos bear marks of empathy, a tacit reciprocity. The laughter and smiles hide a deal, a connivance. They are blinks.

1) One of the three boys climbing the tree is clearly making his spectacle.

2) The sandy margin of Ipavu (“Large Waters”) lake that identify and outline the Kamayurá territory, a girl and her friends were using my presence to dispute a soap bar that, when offered, would disappear in no time between screams and laughter.

3) During the rainy season, in times of food absence, this Kamayurá person returned, wet and cold, at sunset with his shotgun and a monkey. The Kamayurá people do not eat any mammal except for this famine period, when they seek this kind of animal, the closest to mankind.

I have asked him to strike a pose to register his achievement. At night, the monkey (which was not even gutted) was placed over the ashes and slowly cooked inside the *maloca*. The smell of the fur messed with my stomach and to see it becoming more and more similar to us, killed my appetite. It was shared, none of us knew if we were eating a very hard piece of meat or a piece of coal. I did not appreciate the meal.

4) Auto'um knew she was being photographed. She laughs and seems nervous, reserved, shy and happy. Mayuru, her first son, is clearly astonished or scarred.

5) Still Auto'um, beautiful, simply happy.

6) Kotok (Auto'um's husband, the current chief of Kamayurá) and his companion (Yìrìp). I asked if I could take their picture.

7) Coming back from the lake (at sunset) I was walking towards this couple that just had their bath with their child. I asked if I could take their picture. They smiled because the pose suggested is not really the most Xinguan one.

N SERIES – PRODUCER'S SELECTION



FIGURE 5
Photos: Etienne
Samain (image
processing and
digitalization by
Françoise Biernaux).

RESEARCHER'S COMMENT

A common topic seems to interconnect the six photos selected: the Kamayurá (especially the children) and the coexistence with nature (especially the animals). A revelation highlighted, doubtless, by the strength of a sequential set of photos that, in a kind of affinity, bond, and insistence – from one photo to the next – reinforces the ideation of the existence of something such as a full harmony in the Kamayurá relation with nature. Something that nurtures itself from the expressive intimacy of the indigenous children with animals. The reading comprises a sequence of four pictures: two horizontal medium shots, two vertical full shots: A, B, C and E). Following the order presented, I dare to say that the series reveals scenes composed by a monkey cub on a Kamayurá girl's arms (being tended, it has a splint tied to its leg); two parakeets sitting on the hand of another Kamayurá child, receiving a kiss that resembles a hug; a parrot leaning on the small hand of a Kamayurá baby, opens its wings as if trying to protect the child or invite her to fly; two small birds affectuously held by a small Indian girl.

One the other hand, two other photos (a sequence of a close-up followed by an open medium shot: D and F), not necessarily connected by an affinity link, but almost by a disjunction regarding the previous ones (the absence of the animal element), called our attention to the marks of this indigenous culture expressed on the body (back and face), summon

me to probe the idea, the thought and the conviction of a very intimate Kamayurá relation with the nature, the animals and the rituals of this indigenous society.

The first photo (D), Kamayurá painting, allows me to partially see the traces and dots made with urucum (the natural dye extracted from a fruit, the urucum), which makes me think about an animal camouflage to, right after, in a more complex photo (F), find part of the same painting endorsed with an important and revealing complement of a face mark symbolizing a fish. However, it is still necessary to unveil the symbolic and ritual meanings of these marks. As an exercise, in the role of interpreter facing those pictures offered by the producer, I tried to see the series again and find out other starting points to figure out more. This time, I discovered things by retaking the register shots, the visual aesthetic kept by the images and the possible arguments and intentions of the producer.

I have discovered that each one of the six images had a Kamayurá gestural presence that revealed a relation, a cultural handling connected to the animals. If we tried to abstract the characters, with no other elements in each image, and preserved only the Kamayurá people on the photos, we would certainly find the juxtaposition of gestures and expressions (position of arms, hands, face, eyes, mouth). From those gestures, I saw a culture emerging – given only by visuality – revealing the relation Kamayurá x nature. *The photos A and B*, registered with almost the same framing and medium shot, visually uncover *the gesture of the detail of nestling the animals* (a kind of pedagogical approach on how to hold, live and coexist, get close, be together); while photos C and E, vertical full shots, shown by the bodily posture, in a wider framing, *how to nestle with the arms while endorsing with eyes, by contemplation and by the face expression*. Gestures of a relation with the animals as *expressed by the body*, but also *imprinted on the body* (photos D and F) by the Kamayurá painting art.

PRODUCER'S COMMENT

There are 27 photos under the keywords “Indians, animals and nature”. I chose 6 of them, numbered from A to F.

The coexistence of man and (aquatic, terrestrial, flying) animals with nature (and its spirits [from the water, the forest and the celestial village, where “everything is beautiful and nothing rots”]).

To live with the animals and, at the same time, to distinguish them.

Thus: “Being childless is very sad but having too many children is also

not good.” There is only one energy that men and animals have to share in such a way that the father of a numerous family will return “pane-ma” (with nothing) after fishing. The fish will hide from them.

Thus: Besides the hair, the Kamayurá people (men and women) do not have any fur on their whole body. “Animals have fur and we are not animals.”

Thus: If twins are born, mother and father hide themselves; they get very sad. One of them will be suffocated with dust, because “only animals have cubs.”

Nature and culture commune: all myths speak about this togetherness, this interaction, this struggle for balance.

Thus: a man can become an animal as well as an alligator, meeting his girlfriends, it can “be like people,” a very handsome man.

A) Apumi with a monkey cub with a broken arm.

B) Yarua giving manioc to a couple of parakeets.

C) According to Kotok, father of his first son at that time, Mayuru, you only have to dream with a baby bird or look at a (fertilizing) root and, soon, the woman gets a baby in her belly.”

D) Most (male) bodily paintings summon animals with which the Kamayurá people dwell. There are fish drawings (pacu, tukunaré, fish ‘spines’ or “teeth’), serpents (boa, sukuri), mammals (jaguar, anteater, armadillo, turtle), birds (macaw, heron, seagull, vulture). The point is not only to mark on the body the relations between man and nature but also incorporate the virtues of those stylized animals, painted with [red] urucu, jenipapo, [black] coal, ashes or grinded rock dust, over the torso, back, legs, face and head.

A young man with jaguar patterns can be “stronger, more agile and faster.”

An older man will allow to be painted on the back with turtle patterns.

E) Zipi tends Pakôe, the seagull. Manioc is, like fish, the basic meal of the Kamayurá diet. A Kamayurá person will never kill a seagull, because Pakôe is the one “who got the manioc for us.” The myth adds “Long ago we did not eat, not even manioc, only stick roots. Then Pakôe went to another village to get married. He was the one who got manioc for us.

That is why people go to other tribes and, when they have women, they marry there.”

F) Kavé, with his eyes outlined in the shape of a fish.

VISUAL EXPERIMENT: IMAGES POETIC CHARTS

With those *elements resulting from the chosen series set* we have dared to make a *visual experiment* as the visual form of *Images Poetic Charts*¹⁴, which aimed to visually expose those results, whether proposed by the researcher or by the producer.

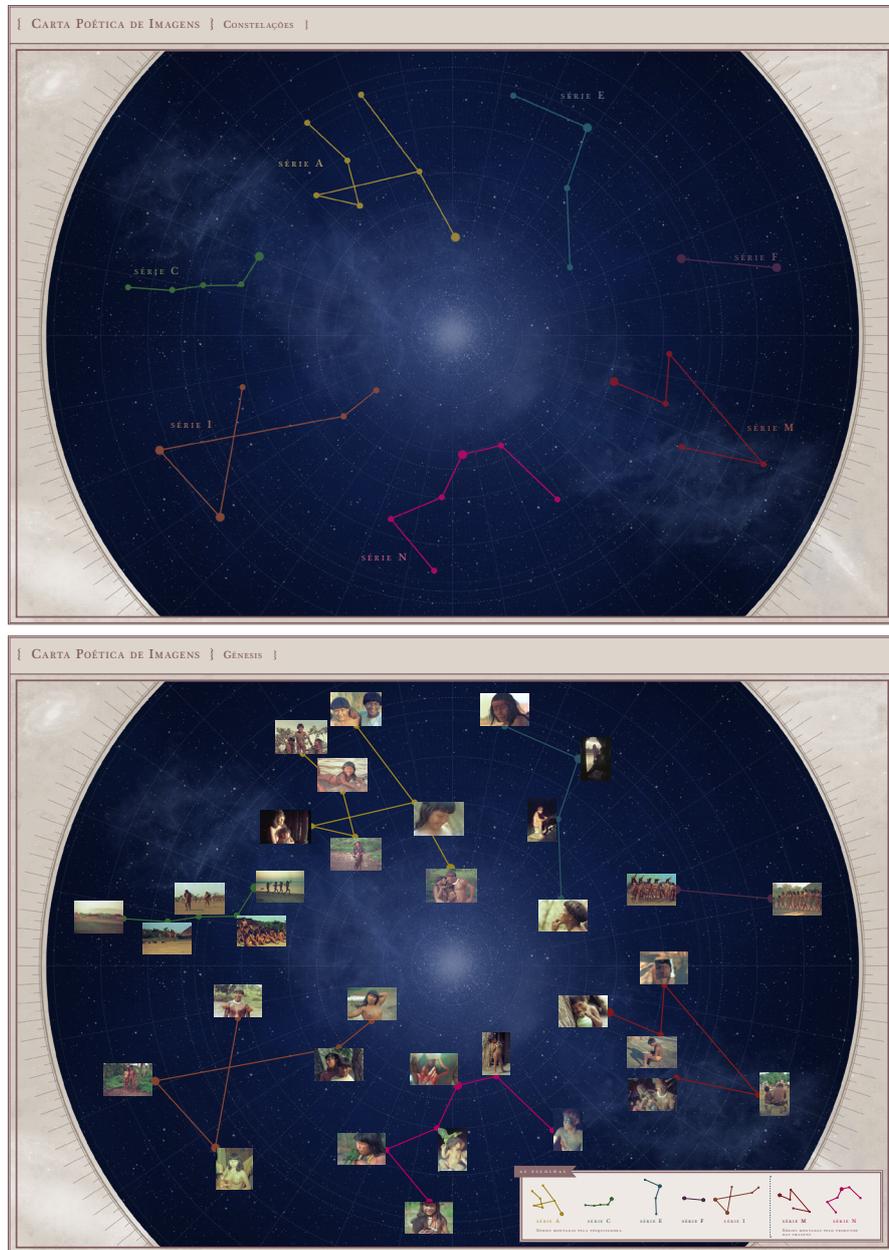
The Charts express an attempt to enhance the images life to its deepest, most enigmatic and incandescent point in this research, which is, trying to highlight what we have discovered by questioning them. They expose the problematics and the interrogations of a file, starting with the phenomena of getting closer or farther to the images, keeping a sensible, multiple and heterogeneous dimension (of the whole assemblage) when the purpose was to propose a non-conclusive reading.

The tension and intermittency points around the inquiring of the chosen file images, followed by their unveiling, motivate us to experiment the creation of an instrument and a seeing device. In this plate configured space, such as in great charts or cartographies, “those poetics of the images” unfold – 30 images arranged, as if they were ‘pieces,’ scattered visual fragments on this file, previously asleep, now awaken – using a poetic appeal to make the coexistence of two poles (the choices of producer and researcher) visible, which, only through the images, in discontinuity, from one series to the other – by the magnetic power existing between them –, could break other silences in between their discourses, as utterances shouted.

Organized in a set of six big-sized plates, which are presented here, the *Images Poetic Charts* are cuts (file cuts), points of observation (points of view of the images) and evocations from multiple readings and experiences of a file and its potency to make us glimpse other stories. Stories set in several coexisting surfaces and capable of other assemblages, always in an unfinished way, enabling recombined readings.

14. The term *Images Poetic Charts* was inspired by the constellation and celestial charting creation universe.

CHARTS I AND II



FIGURES 6 and 7
Poetic Images
Charts I and
II: author's
concept, from
the photographic
series of Etienne
Samain's
files. Graphic
development:
Fabio Messias.

Charts I and II allude to the formation of the seven visually constructed constellations, based on a free construction, derived from the ancient pictorial inscriptions of the celestial cartographies. In the charts, the images are a metaphor, objects of free status, such as the stars that have different shining intensities (which does not mean they are necessarily closer to the Earth), the reason why they are classified in different levels of magnitude.

Each of the series has images visually identified as “ternary-images” (Didi-Huberman 2013)¹⁵, outlining those that, for some reason, motivated choices in the context of a set. Those are images that arouse, by the connection of their pulsing points (such as the heart, the head, the hands) a course, a track, which resulted in the shape and the name of its constellation-series. This shape also establishes a guideline, which allows us to present the sequence of the elected photos in the act of choosing, whether by the producer or by the researcher.

CHARTS III

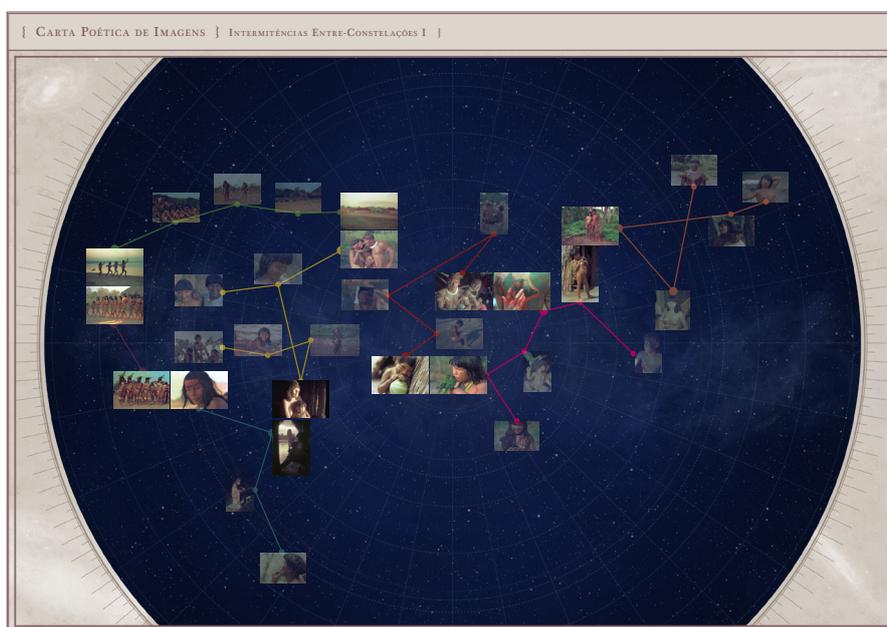


FIGURE 8

The *Intermittent Images Poetic Charts*, in turn, aim to evince shapes, colors, shouts, silences, memories, stories within the images and between the images. The images are seen as constellations and, later, as stars, as they get closer to each other they become brighter, while other star structures get dimmer. In movement, images bring constellation to a relation of closeness and distance, proposing intersections and seeking in the gaps everything that is not clearly outlined, whether in verbal or visual discourse.

15. It is a term inspired by Aby Warburg's conception, based on the reflections of Georges Didi-Huberman, in his book “The surviving image” (2013), in which he compares all oscillatory phenomena (in both senses that can only rise between two times of a scansion, a rhythmic syncope, whether in the articulation of a sentence, whether in the continuum of an image) to the heart beat (which only remains with this interval time that constitutes the “nothing” of silence, the suspense of life). The heart beats are not binary (strong beat, weak beat), but ternary (strong beat, weak beat, silence). “The nothing has to count at least as much as the beat; and perhaps even more, for without the nothing there would be no beat” (Didi-Huberman 2013, 421) [The excerpt from Didi-Huberman's works here quoted were freely translated].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The set of images selected during this study works – by the conception of a file life – through the producer’s and the researcher’s memory and imagination. As the reader may follow, this is noticeable by the images chosen and words unveiled with the narrative of power exemplified in this article. The place of memory and images in this research is developed in an impure and inexhaustible way, whether by the shapes invoking other photos (sometimes belonging to several dailies from different expeditions), whether raising again characters marked by an experience and many times triggering isolates events, filled by a gap of other experiences from anachronical times.

The *Image Poetic Charts* aimed to probe visually those intermittencies by their conjugation, in an attempt to offer to the demanding exercise of *seeing images*, the certainty that “image issues” could blend, survive and cross distinct times. Along with a poetic conception, I have aimed to pursuit, by proposing the Poetic Charts, a way to *think through image*, introduced by the *Mnemosyne Atlas* by Aby Warburg (2010) and reconsidered by Didi-Huberman (2011) ever since.

The opening of thinking brought by the father of iconology, art historian and anthropologist Aby Warburg, in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, created between 1924 and 1929 (year of his death) and unfinished, had completely renewed the way to understand images. In this “Atlas,” Didi-Huberman (2011,20) argues, Aby Warburg states “a fundamental complexity, in anthropological order, that was not treated or synthetized (in a unifying concept) or to describe exhaustively (in an integral file), nor to classify the A to Z (a dictionary).”

According to Didi-Huberman, the *Atlas* is also an “object of contemplation” and introduces a “fundamental impurity.” Namely, according to the author, to characterize the diverse, the multiple, the lacunary, “summoning the dimension of the sensible, creating links to explore interstitial zones, gaps, answering to a knowledge exposed by the danger of the sensible and the imagination.” With the images sorted in the *Images Poetic Charts*, the challenge was to discover how the images reflect, question, address, “peel,” reveal, appear, hatch and refresh the file.

The image files are incomplete, a fragment of rescued territories, although, as Didi-Huberman would say, it is necessary to deal, in a theoretical way, with the image as we deal with the language, although is easier with the latter. The methodological orchestrations in *Five Acts* and *Poetic Charts* held a correlation of inquiries ruled by the experience of opening a file, together with the producer, orchestrations of how those questions might reflect on the inquiries of any image file.

With this anthropological and poetic study, the challenge was to give the researcher and the producer and author of the images, and the readers themselves, the opportunity to make questions not addressed to the file, such as those connected to emotions, to sensible thinking, particular doubts, sometimes hidden, sometimes on the images. Similarly, through well-articulated certainty and experimentation, the wish to make other inquiries, which would be impossible to evoke merely by words, as they belong to the life of images last as “cultural survivals” (Warburg; Didi-Huberman). Thus, those inquiries could only arise and live in the operation with the living memory itself, which cannot be previously programed as a pre-conceived method to inquire, open and un-cover the images of a file.

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FABIANA BRUNO is PhD in Multimeios (IA-Unicamp) and researcher accredited by the Department of Anthropology-IFCH of Unicamp, institution where she completed her post-doctoral degree in Anthropology Social. Co-founder and researcher of LA’GRIMA IFCH/Unicamp (Anthropological Laboratory of Image and Graphic). Capes Award for Best Thesis in the area of Applied Social Sciences (2010) with the research Photobiography: For a Methodology of Aesthetics in Anthropology, oriented by Professor Etienne Samain. Expertise in curatorial actions and organization of exhibitions and photo books in partnership with Ateliê Fotô and Fotô Editorial, in São Paulo. E-mail: fabybruno@uol.com.br.

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