

Remembering the Future: The End of the World Survivors and Contemporary Brazilian Imagination

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Abstract: This paper explores the connection between a contemporary global catastrophic imaginary and an imaginary of a Brazilian territory impregnated with the future. It attempts to shed light on the epistemological tie between current ecological, social, and political devastation, on the one hand, and a colonial, industrial, monumental, and extractivist order, on the other. A spatiotemporal imagination has emerged in contemporary aesthetics that questions the basic tenets of Western modern epistemology through survival and material remains. Focusing on the film *Serras da desordem* (2006), directed by Andrea Tonacci, and the novel *Dentes negros* (2011), by André de Leones, both centered on the figure of the survivor, I argue that this figure and the materiality of what remains after the “end of the world” enable an anachronic and nonbinary vision of time and space—the basis from which to refute the epistemological core of the modern and colonial project.

Keywords: Brazilian literature and cinema, new materialisms, posthumanism, Andrea Tonacci, André de Leones

One of the most persistent colonial imaginaries of the cultural history of Latin America envisions it as a blank, untouched space, a history with no past, a desert in which to construct a new civilization—sheer future—from scratch. That

supposedly empty place gave rise to an abundance of discourses that extends over the course of the twentieth century to relentlessly reaffirm a spatially and temporally uninterrupted vast plain, a place without a trace of a past.¹ In the mid-twentieth century—the second postwar period in Europe and a time of modernization and optimism in Latin America—that imaginary gained new strength. Before a ravaged Europe, Latin America was once again seen as an immaculate, young, and promising space; a territory capable of subverting the premises of a culture believed to be obsolete.

A lot of water has run under the bridge since then, of course, and the idea of a promising future, whether its techno-industrial developmentalist version or its revolutionary version, has been laid waste by an apocalyptic discourse that—as we all know and as it is shown in recent literature—exceeds the Latin American regional perspective.² In recent decades, the worldwide imaginary of a catastrophic future has spread so quickly that it is unquestionably one of the most visited tropes of contemporary culture. In *Há mundo por vir? Ensaio sobre os medos e os fins*, Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argue that though the end-of-the-world theme has formed part of all cultures and been imagined in many different ways throughout history, that imaginary took on new life starting in the 1990s. That was when scientific consensus was reached about climate change and environmental decay, and the planetary crisis they would inevitably usher in—something the pandemic has made patent. The plethora of images of catastrophe, often related to climate change or viral pandemics but also to extreme poverty and precarization, mass migration, genocides, femicides, technological acceleration, and the novel fascisms sprouting up across the globe have created what Ashley Dawson calls the “catastrophic affect”: “a visceral feeling that we are not just headed toward civilizational collapse but are already in the midst of it.” Those images have evidenced the ties between two orders (the political and the natural) that we once insisted on keeping separate. Today they are indistinguishable. There is no longer any doubt that the new climatic order in which we live ravishes that which we once called the political order and that the political order acts directly on the natural order: the distinction between them is no longer relevant, clear, or possible (Latour). The current planetary crisis makes no sense if it is envisioned

¹ See, among many others, Halperin Donghi; Foot Hardman; Holston; Rodríguez; Heffes.

² Both Schollhammer and Siskind analyze the global condition of national Latin American contemporary literatures.

on solely one of its levels—environmental, sanitary, social, economic, political—since what binds them inextricably is the constancy of an attack on different life forms. Before the evidence that humanity is a geological force that is at war with the world, a true world war (Serres), the planetary crisis attests not only to a failure of the promises of modernity and the twentieth century’s utopian dream (Buck-Morss), but also to the inability of modern Western epistemology to grasp the human. It is, then, a crisis of the humanities and their ability to define their object of study.

A number of contemporary thinkers have, in response to this state of affairs, asserted that modern Western reason and philosophy are no longer capable of asking questions or formulating ideas that would help us understand and solve today’s most pressing questions. Following a tradition of criticism of modernity—one that was, of course, forged within modernity, but that, in the contemporary context, takes on a different and renewed meaning—certain strains of thought have been salvaged.³ This new orientation constitutes clear evidence of the need to reformulate our relationship with the world and to question the conceptual apparatus we have inherited from modernity, both its humanism—questioned with more or less success throughout the twentieth century—and its anthropocentrism.

The place of Brazil in this context is crucial, not only because of its historical social and racial inequality, but also because it is home to the greatest natural reserve anywhere on the planet. It is, then, a key setting for discussion of the world environmental crisis and its dystopian figurations. In this work, I examine the conjunction of the contemporary catastrophic global imaginary and a classic but persistent, and constantly renewed, Brazilian narrative that envisions the country as steeped in future, a place with a monumental, modern, thriving, and developmentalist manifest destiny. From *Porque me ufano do meu país* (1901), the early-twentieth-century nationalistic classic by Afonso Celso, through the present, a fiction of national identity epitomized by the phrase “Brasil, país do futuro”—the title of the now-classic work by Stefan Zweig—has been reworked in different ways.⁴

³ See, for example, Toulmin.

⁴ From the resurgence of the world political-economic discourse to the famous cover of *The Economist* in 2009 with an image of the emblematic Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro shooting up into the sky like a spaceship under the headline “Brazil Takes Off”, by way of private YouTube videos promoting Jair Bolsonaro’s presidency asserting an image of Brazil with a manifest destiny (one that, with this “savior,” the country would stir from its lethargy to fulfill its fate).

A concept central to the construction and consolidation of that fiction of national identity is the idea of the monument. Francisco Foot Hardman (“Pontos extremos”) holds that the monumental vision of national identity and the concept of monument are a means to produce unifying and naturalizing collective illusions of power in Brazil. What he calls “fantasies of Brazil,” and the specific modernization projects that legitimized those fantasies, required a previous, statist, and colonial fiction. That fiction was based on the idea of a country of empty, deserted spaces and of national history as a teleological march toward progress. The construction of Brasília has a privileged place in that narrative. In its planning and construction, Brasília attempted to make a clean break from the city of the past and to usher in urban design based on logical principles that would provide a way out of underdevelopment. The city’s symbolic weight came from its animating utopian vision, its monumental architecture, and the idea that its construction would unify the national territory between the *sertão* and the coastline. Hence, as Adrián Gorelik asserts, “Brasília must be understood as one of modern culture’s densest moments” (*Das vanguardas* 154). Insofar as it is an exemplary embodiment of modernity’s aesthetic, political, and cultural agendas, the Brasília project can, arguably, be seen as a “monument to [Western] modernity” and as a colonial project (160). It is, then, a project highly representative of what Susan Buck-Morss calls the utopian dream of the twentieth century, namely the dream that industrial modernity would actually bring happiness to the masses—a dream that, despite undeniable advances, has, as Buck-Morss points out, turned into a nightmare.

In what follows, I attempt to shed light on the structural tie between the imaginary of current environmental and political devastation, on the one hand, and the imaginary that enabled a colonial, industrial, and extractivist order, on the other. I propose the emergence of a spatiotemporal imagination in contemporary aesthetics that enables a reversal of the modern and questions the basic tenets of Western modern epistemology through the place of survival and material remains. To that end, I focus my analysis on two works: the film *Serras da desordem*, directed by Andrea Tonacci, and the novel *Dentes negros*, by André de Leones. Both are tales of catastrophe that center on a key figure: the survivor. As I try to show, the figure of the survivor and of what remains after the supposed end of the world enable us to envision time anachronically and space in nonbinary terms. That, in turn, allows us to refute the epistemological bases on which the modern

and colonial project rested.

Serras of Temporal Disarray: The Survivors of the Future

Serras da desordem, a film halfway between documentary and fiction, tells the true story of Carapiru, a member of the Awá-Guajá ethnicity. Carapiru and his community were living in a region of the Amazon jungle in the state of Maranhão when, in 1977, their territory was invaded by a group of miners and peasants. Carapiru survived, but he was separated from his community. He wandered alone until the people of a nearby town took him in. He lived there with the local peasants for a time when Sydney, an anthropologist from the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI, the acronym in Portuguese) came upon him and decided to help him. Sydney took Carapiru to Brasília, where he first experienced city life. An interpreter was located, making it possible to communicate with Carapiru, to learn where he was from and take him back there. The tremendous coincidence, which—as Tonacci himself says—seems like something out of fiction, is that the person who ended up translating for him was his son. During the invasion that separated Carapiru from his community, his son had been saved—though stolen is a better word for it—by the owners of a ranch. Father and son were reunited and taken back to the jungle so that, ten years later, they could rejoin the members of the community who had not yet been exterminated. The situation was so remarkable that it was reported on the television news.⁵

The film reenacts that true story, but with the peculiarity that the actor playing Carapiru is Carapiru himself, reliving an episode of his life. The director explains that at the beginning he wanted to make a work of fiction, but then he asked Carapiru and the anthropologist who found him if they would be willing to reenact their story.⁶ Since they agreed, the film became a hybrid with some scenes acted and others taken from documentary footage and interviews; there are also some montages where archival material not part of Carapiru's story is inserted as a

⁵ França says of the coincidence: “Se essa história fosse inventada por um roteirista, seja de cinema ou de televisão, diríamos que é excessivamente melodramática, sensacionalista e nada provável. De fato, na época em que se promoveu o encontro de Carapiru com o jovem índio intérprete, o programa Globo Repórter da Rede Globo de Televisão registrou a cena, relatando em cadeia nacional o ocorrido e destacando especialmente sua dimensão fantástica e inusitada” (64).

⁶ In an interview, Tonacci recounts this anecdote about asking Carapiru if he would be willing to participate in the film: “O Carapiru me disse literalmente assim: ‘Andrea, você me traz de volta depois?’ Eu falei que sim, claro, e aí ele disse: ‘Então eu topo’” (Caetano 114).

supplement to the story or as a comment on it. These ambiguous scenes reinforce something that Tonacci makes clear when he talks about the film: though it tells a true story, the film knows itself to be the director's own personal narration. In other words, while the film is based on Carapiru's story, the director's point of view informs its fictitious narrative perspective. There is no pretense of offering an objective account.⁷

The reenactment of a true story produces an effect on the viewer, namely a certain confusion about the story's temporal axis. We often find ourselves wondering if what we are seeing is a reenactment or a "documentary" sequence: Are we seeing a fictionalized version of something that has already happened, or is it being filmed as it happens? Not until well into the film, as we have gradually managed to dismantle the superimposition of one moment in time on another, do we begin to understand the timeline of the narration and of Carapiru's story.

In the film's opening scene, we see, in a prolonged black-and-white shot, an Indian making a fire and placing leaves on the ground to lie down on. In its attempt to show the whole action without interruption, the shot—as Ismail Xavier has pointed out—recalls the scene in Robert Flaherty's classic documentary *Nanook of the North* when an Eskimo tries to survive in the snow with techniques entirely unknown to the viewer. The next scene in *Serras da desordem* is in color, an alteration that also confuses us about its temporal location. It shows that same man surrounded by people, a community of adults, children, and animals who live together in the jungle, now bathing in the river. The Indian leaves the river to go look for something among the trees; while he is gone, the invasion occurs. When he comes back, he can't find anything. He is alone, without his family or community.

After the white man's armed invasion of the jungle, we see Carapiru alone in the same river where everyone had been bathing before. He looks around for his people. Inserted in these images of the jungle that seem to form part of a traditional anthropological film is a series of montages that upsets that conclusion. The first interruption of the jungle scene where civilization appears not to have intervened with nature at all is a close-up, full-screen image of a train that juts out toward the

⁷ "Parece-me que o filme tem uma perspectiva que até hoje é uma questão para os antropólogos, que é o fato assumir o relato como uma narração. Não se trata da realidade do Carapiru, mas de uma recriação, uma encenação, com a participação dele próprio, mas assumindo que é um relato seu" (Caetano 106).

viewer threateningly. The interruption is effected by the sound as well: the loud noise of the train and its horn disturb the near absolute silence of the jungle. After that threatening and unsettling image, the film returns to black and white and what we understand to be the beginning of Carapiru's wandering (evidently, he has chosen to leave the place where he lived with his family). But the same interruption procedure is used again, and the Indian's incipient pilgrimage is cut off when he climbs through a wire fence, crossing a limit or boundary he is not permitted to cross.



Figure 1: Still from *Serras da desordem*.
Credit: Andrea Tonacci. Courtesy of Cristina Amaral.

Out of nowhere, the sound of a chainsaw cutting down a tree interrupts the Indian's silent walking. What follows is a series of archival images that show, among other things, scenes of the modernization and deforestation of the jungle spliced with other images—also archival—that represent clichés from Brazilian popular culture. The montage—clearly delimited with an interruption of the black and white and a sudden change in sound quality—makes use of images that date back to the military dictatorship (1964–1985). The quick pace of the chainsaw gives way to a fast and joyful samba in the background (nationalist and thriving, the sound is bound to the rhetoric of “Brasil, país do futuro”). Against that sound background are images of a range of activities related to industry and work: laborers at the Serra Pelada mines, and in factories and offices; the construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway and trees chopped down; dams; metallurgic and automobile industries; livestock-breeding farms, milking yards; ports, commerce, hydroelectric and oil plants. In addition to those scenes of an industrialized and extractivist future are others of something we could call “national and popular culture”: mass protests by, among others, trade union leaders—some of them violently broken up by the police (in one, we see a very young Lula); religious rites; soccer stadiums full to the brim and crowds cheering on the Brazilian national

team; postcards of the monumental natural landscapes of Rio de Janeiro, the Cristo Redentor, and people enjoying the beach and the sea, carnivals and street parties.

A double operation is at stake in the insertion of this montage in the middle of Carapiru's story and at the beginning of his meandering journey. First, it evidences the alliance between a national and popular culture—one that is apparently inclusive in both social and racial terms—and the developmentalist, extractivist, and capitalist rhetoric of work and industry. Second, this montage contrasts with the scenes we saw immediately before and the ones we see next, a contrast marked on the visual level with the change from black and white to color and on the sound level in a lovely and meaningful way: the samba beat turns into the sound of the running Indian's bare feet hitting the ground. That contrast shows not only what that state-driven and "civilizing" fiction excludes, but also what it destroys.



Figure 2: Still from *Serras da desordem*.
Credit: Andrea Tonacci. Courtesy of Cristina Amaral.

The juxtaposition between the barefoot steps of the Indian survivor, lost and alone, wrenched from his community and land, and the quick and chaotic images moving to the fast beat of "progress" evidences an opposition between two modes of time that cannot be reduced to a mere difference in speed (slow and fast). At stake, rather, are two ways of experiencing time and of relating to space: in one case, the pace of civilized and nation-state time, a time collective and popular, but where citizens' individualities are clumped together for a common purpose; a sequential, chronological, and teleological time underscored repeatedly by the film's images of train tracks and trains' noisy passage on them and of work, industry, and extractivism. In the other case, time is marked by the organic relationship of the body—the feet—and the earth, the repetition of the step sets the pace of advancement; a time in which we hear not only the sound of the man's weight

against the ground but also his breath; a temporality of detours, recurrences, and intermittenencies that break the linear and evolutionary succession to propose instead a winding path. This juxtaposition lays bare a political operation effected by the state whose ultimate aim is the extermination of the Indian, but that, in the meantime—as Viveiros de Castro explains—settles for his impoverishment and transformation into citizen and “national worker,” into someone subject to a regime of working hours, police surveillance, and temporal administration. The ultimate aim is to subject him to a process of “de-Indianization,” that is, to divorce him from that which constitutes him as Indigenous in the first place, namely his relationship to the land.

In an essay titled “Os involuntários da pátria,” Viveiros de Castro explains the difference between the concepts of “Indian” and “Indigenous.” If “Indians” are called that because of the famous mistake of the Spanish who thought they had reached India when they had, in fact, arrived in the Americas, to keep using that term today would be to further that mistake. The word “Indian” is used—appropriated even—to refer to peoples and communities who are aware of their historical relationship to the Indigenous persons who lived in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. The word “Indigenous,” on the other hand, means “generated in the land to which one belongs, native to the land where one lives”(3). The Indians are the first people indigenous to Brazil; their relationship to the land they inhabit is not one of property but of belonging. They belong to the land, not the other way around. And that belonging is what defines them as Indigenous.⁸

In the montage described above, the contrast between the scenes is a question not only of temporality, but also of belonging. In the sped-up images of the national and popular culture, the earth is an instrumental resource: water in dams, animals breeding, trees chopped down—scenes of an extractivist economy. In the scenes where Carapiru is walking, and in the earlier scenes where he is with his community bathing in the river, the image underscores coexistence with animals and with the jungle that later makes itself felt in Carapiru’s organic relationship to the act of walking.

The story of the massacre Carapiru endured—the film seems to tell us—is just a repetition of something that has been happening for over five hundred years and that begins—each and every time—with the Indian being separated from his land

⁸ This is why I use the term “Indian” and not “Indigenous”—that is, as an appropriation of the term and as an Indigenous person who lives in America.

and community: a colonization of the land that is also a colonization of the Indian's very body and time. As Viveiros de Castro says:

Separar os índios (e todos os demais indígenas) de sua relação orgânica, política, social, vital com a terra e com suas comunidades que vivem da terra—essa separação sempre foi vista como condição necessária para transformar o índio em cidadão. Em cidadão pobre, naturalmente Para isso, foi e é preciso antes de mais nada separá-lo de sua terra, da terra que o constitui como indígena A terra é o corpo dos índios, os índios são parte do corpo da Terra. A relação entre terra e corpo é crucial. A separação entre a comunidade e a terra tem como sua face paralela, sua sombra, a separação entre as pessoas e seus corpos, outra operação indispensável executada pelo Estado para criar populações administradas. (“Os involuntários” 5)

Administered populations, administered bodies, and administered times underscore the fact that Carapiru's story shows not only an ongoing extermination of entire populations from colonization through the present, but also an ongoing politics of extermination in our techno-capitalist societies. A relationship to the land based on belonging is replaced by an instrumental relationship to it, and from there to a policy to exterminate life. In the film, Carapiru's story is by no means represented as something from the past or as an inevitable and natural fate, the culmination of the path toward a supposedly more evolved society. It is presented, rather, as a collective future threat, turning around the direction of the narration and proposing a temporality where the future is something that can be remembered; it is like a *déjà vu*, an uncanny repetition of what has already happened.

After the translation scenes, the reencounter with his son in Brasília, and Carapiru's return to the jungle, the film shows that Carapiru is out of step with his people; he still feels alone and divided because of the distance and amount of time he has spent away. In a moment that seems to return to a romantic vision of the Indian, Carapiru takes off his clothes, picks up an arrow, and delves into the brush by himself. But what might be a return to nature as a site of purity, a pristine restoration of his earlier life as if nothing had happened, is shown to be impossible.

Waiting for Carapiru in the jungle is the director of the film, and we, as spectators, witness the shoot of what we only now realize to be the first scene in the film, the one where Carapiru is making a fire in the jungle. In other words, that scene at the beginning when we saw him alone was an effective artifice, but it is now revealed and the film shows its own making: the narrative structure circles us back to the beginning, to a repetition of the opening scene. We are duplicitously led back to the jungle, but this time it is full of cameras and film equipment; the whole scene is acted. What we had thought was a primary scene is a scene in the second degree, a reenactment of something that really happened. Only now do we understand that it was being acted out by the very person who experienced it. The film seems to tell us that a return to a pure and uncontaminated nature is not only not possible, but also not desirable: that understanding sees the natural as a receptacle, a resource, an instrument or passive place to be invaded, exploited, mined and extractivated, militarized and exterminated. Indeed, that way of understanding nature slips over into an understanding of the Indian—but also the Black, the poor, the female, the gay, the trans, the migrant (and the list goes on)—as subhuman or an extension of nature and, as such, exterminable.

At the same time, the film seems to say that that reenactment *as if it were* real, the placement of that fiction at the beginning as if it went there naturally only to then reveal the trick and show it is in fact a fiction, might be a form of resistance. In other words, the film's interest does not lie in how it alters time as a narrative trick, in how it puts the beginning at the end to speak of circularity or re-beginning.⁹ It lies, rather, in the revelation we experience in that scene when we see the Indian as an actor, a simulator, the Indian as “not natural.” Only by exposing nature as ideological apparatus—indeed, modernity's most powerful ideological apparatus, according to Serres—does the meaning of the temporal alteration the film produces go beyond the formal, beyond pure narrative procedure, to show the true dimension of the concepts and lived experiences of massacre and extermination. When he shows himself to be an actor, Carapiru leaves behind that “natural” subhumanity, as does the jungle when it is shown to be intervened. It is at that moment that identification is engaged: we are all now

⁹ Furtado reads this film in the context of narratives of contact and also makes an argument related to the mixing temporality of the film. He says that the scenes of reenactment are mixed with archival images in order to establish other connections between the past and the present (Furtado 24).

Indians, and the extermination of the Indian in the past is revealed as present and future—an argument taken further in yet another scene.

What we see after that fire scene is shown to be fictional is a prolonged close-up, a single take in which Carapiru, surrounded by vegetation, smiling and looking right at the camera, speaks in an unintelligible language with no caption.¹⁰ As with the scenes at the beginning, where Carapiru is walking alone, this scene is cut off, on both visual and sound levels, with a montage of images. What has seemed like a documentary register is infiltrated, threatened, with a fictional perspective: we start to hear the deafening sounds of turbine engines. Carapiru's words are drowned out while a shadow envelops the trees. The camera pans up and stops at the space between the branches where the nose of an airplane—a warplane, to be precise—bursts on the screen just as the train had in the earlier montage. The jarring—almost surreal—insertion of that military and industrial image in the middle of the jungle and a monologue in an unintelligible language can be read as either the continuation or the underside of those two scenes at the beginning—the one with the train and the montage of a modern, national, and popular Brazil, a progressive and extractivist Brazil of the worker and the citizen.



Figure 3: Still from *Serras da desordem*.
Credit: Andrea Tonacci. Courtesy of Cristina Amaral.

Regarding this scene, Tonacci comments:

Carapiru é um alter ego da minha leitura, como ser humano, das
ameaças que existem no mundo. E botei aquele aviãozinho no fim

¹⁰ In an article that compares the notion of landscape in this film and *La libertad*, directed by Lisandro Alonso, Edgardo Dieleke envisions this scene as part of a “politics of language” that gives voice to the subaltern. Jens Andermann also reads *Serras* in relation to a film by Alonso (*Los muertos*) and finds in this scene in which we, as spectators, don’t understand Carapiru’s language an invitation to pay attention to the world’s materiality and to the corporal interaction between Carapiru and his environment.

porque para nós não é diferente, está também na nossa cabeça,
talvez mais do que na dele. Somos uma ameaça para nós mesmos,
como para ele. (Caetano 129)

Thus, the invasion afflicted on Carapiru and his community returns to be inflicted, anachronically, on all of us. Massacre and eradication of Indigenous lands turn into a shared future threat: there is no break in the policy to exterminate life but rather its endless continuation. The film, by means of other nonevolutionary rhythms and temporalities (the rhythm of walking on the ground), reveals the structural relationship between current and future devastation and extermination, on the one hand, and past devastation and extermination, on the other. It shows us “um passado que não acaba de passar” (Viveiros de Castro, “Gostaria que o Museu”). Carapiru, then, is an allegory for a future humanity. The film tells us, incriminatingly, that we will be the survivors of our own civilization.

Black Teeth: A Bone Desert in the Heart of the Country

André de Leones’s novel *Dentes negros* takes place in a future close enough that we recognize it as contemporary. Read from the perspective of the COVID pandemic, the novel takes on an ominous tone: it occurs at some future moment after “The Calamity,” an epidemic that has infected the majority of the population of Brazil, has hit. The disease attacks the bones so quickly that death is almost instantaneous. The only visible sign of the affliction is on the teeth, which, with a cry of agony, turn black as the poison, in a flash, reaches the rest of the body.

The novel begins when the epidemic, after having done away with the population of entire states, has been brought under control by a vaccine. Its protagonists are the survivors, and it occurs at a time when what we might call “a new normal” has set in. The survivors go to cafés, restaurants, and museums but there is a water shortage. Their memories are spotty, perhaps a side effect of the vaccine or of the synthetic drugs they consume, or because the places where the experiences they remember no longer exist. The country is divided into free zones with no contagion and restricted areas that were afflicted. The novel is divided into three sections—“Bones,” “Bodies,” and “Spirits”—and those sections are divided into short chapters, each of which opens with a black-and-white image of a different barren landscape. The images, understood to be ruins of a world once

filled with life and people, show train tracks, wire fences, pedestrian crossings, playground parks with rides but no kids, abandoned construction sites with fenced-in concrete structures, electrical cables, lamp posts, antennae, and highways: pandemic pictures.



Figure 4: Photos by Livia Ramírez. Courtesy of André de Leones.

The point of view changes over the course of the novel, but from beginning to end we follow the story of two survivors, Hugo and Renata, from Goiás and Bahía—two states devastated by the epidemic—respectively. Both survived because they lived in São Paulo. In “Bones,” the book’s first section, we follow Renata and Hugo’s conversations about the effects of “The Calamity” and the course of their romantic relationship. The scenes in this section take place in the bar where they meet at the beginning of the novel, in Renata’s apartment, and in a museum dedicated to “The Calamity,” where objects, documents, and photos related to the traumatic event are on display—perhaps the same photos we see in the book. Hugo talks about a book titled “House between Vertebrae”—the only one that allows him to make some sense of “The Calamity.” In the second section, “Bodies,” the point of view changes to that of a soldier on guard at an army base in the middle of the state of Goiás. The soldier, Alexandre, is part of a “pacifying” force sent to control the unrest, looting, rapes, and murders that ensue after the disaster. The entire state has devolved into a war zone. Those not killed must clean up the corpse-filled cities and deal with the madness and violence that “The Calamity” has left in its wake. At his post in the barracks, Alexandre tends to a couple who has been machine-gunned. The man survives for a few days, but the woman dies on the spot. The soldier talks to the man before he dies and, toward the end of the conversation, we realize that it is Hugo, and the woman who died was Renata. We also learn that the government allowed inhabitants of the affected areas to travel or migrate to the free zones—“desde que cumpram com as exigências do governo (quarentena, exames, escaneamento total, mais exames)” —and those who live in the areas not affected but with relatives in the restricted areas to come to look for or bury their dead (Leones 38). Renata and Hugo drove to Goiás from São Paulo to see Hugo’s cousin, Ana María, the only survivor in the two families. Before he dies, Hugo gives Alexandre a package to give to her. The third section, “Spirits,” is told from the point of view of Ana María, whom Alexandre finds and gives the package to. In it is the book that, in the first section, Hugo had mentioned as the only one that had allowed him to understand “The Calamity.” Alexandre and Ana María go to her house; a romance appears about to ensue.

The novel explores the idea that “The Calamity” creates deserts in time and space. The event can be understood literally as an epidemic, but also—as the use of capital letters to refer to it suggests—allegorically as an exterminating force (the state, consumerism, even humanity itself). In any case, “The Calamity” creates a

time without memory or experience, and a space in which a territory can be restored to its previous, unpolluted state. The first night they sleep together, both Hugo and Renata dream about spaces entirely devoid of people. Hugo's dream takes place in a desert-laden Brazil:

Hugo sonha que sobrevoa São Paulo. A cidade esvaziada, deserta, abandonada. Hugo sobrevoa São Paulo e nada acontece lá embaixo. Nada se mexe, nada queima. Então, São Paulo se torna Goiânia . . . e a imagem é sempre a mesma, mudam as ruas, mas as ruas estão sempre desertas As Forças armadas sobrevoavam as cidades afetadas. Sobrevoavam as cidades e nada acontecia lá embaixo E tudo foi rápido demais, que é como devem ser as Calamidades do século XXI. (Leones 36)

The images in Hugo's dreams look like the images at the beginning of each chapter in the book. Regardless of whether actually seen or simply described, all the images in the book underscore that sense of lifelessness, that exterminating force that has created "um deserto no coração do país" (Leones 45).¹¹

Dentes negros inverts a temporal order, its scenario and a rhetoric of past massacres and invasions (the rhetoric of civil and colonial wars with its tropes like "pacifying forces") suggesting that it is also in the future. As in the film, the past becomes a future threat. Something similar takes place with memories. The novel begins with two concise phrases that affirm that the present modifies and annuls the very existence of the past: "Ninguém aqui teve infância, ela diz. E agora estamos envenenados até os ossos" (Leones 11). In other words, Renata holds that if those places where childhood experiences took place no longer exist, those experiences cannot be remembered and, hence, they cease to exist: "Goiás foi arrasado. Foi. Goiás foi arrasado. Não existe mais. O lugar da sua infância" (Leones 15). Memory has temporal gaps, deserts in time, and that enables further invasions.

¹¹ There is not much scholarship about this novel but, in general, the articles and reviews underline the desolation and abandonment of the national landscape (Lehnen), as well as the syntony between this void and the literary style of the novel: "a consonância entre a solidão do texto e o desamparo dos habitantes desse mundo agora doente" (Sá); "um livro de silêncios perpassando até mesmo os diálogos, um livro de paisagens vazias" (Adriana Lisboa, back cover blurb).

Following that argument, the novel asks what happens after the end of the world, what happens when territories that can be striated by power are created, when deserts are created: “O fim do mundo veio e foi embora. O que acontece depois do fim do mundo?” (Leones 65). And the novel answers that what happens after the end of the world is what has happened already: the end never ends. What follows in the text are scenes of war and violence, of rapes and murders: “Os mortos e os vivos se acotovelando diante do vazio. Os mortos e os vivos se acotovelando *dentro* do vazio. O vazio: uma boca aberta nas memórias de todos. Uma boca aberta, os dentes enegrecidos. Dentes negros” (Leones 65).

In other words, after the end (or during it) comes war, in seamless continuity with the past. War also takes the shape of commercial opportunism. Alexandre’s commander tells him how opportunists came to the desert, to the theater of war:

—Vão transformar essa coisa toda em uma porra de parque temático. Os idiotas curiosos vão pagar aos cretinos oportunistas pra fazer um tour pelas cidades fantasmas . . . Brasília está no topo da lista . . . Um bando de anormais passeando pelas cidades mortas. Se eu soubesse que a coisa ia virar um circo, teria sugerido que não recolhêssemos os corpos. Os defuntos iam dar um colorido todo especial à palhaçada.

—Não recolhemos todos, senhor. São corpos demais. (Leones 88)

This narrated tour of Brasília—now a ghost city brimming with the dead and, *at the same time*, an amusement park—encapsulates, in exemplary fashion, the complementary underside of the monumental imaginary of a future understood as progress. Seamless is the connection between a politics of extermination—a necropolitics (Mbembe)—and a capitalist and extractivist world economic order: they are two sides of the same coin.

However, *Dentes negros* contemplates a different temporal and spatial order. While it does not offer a solution, the novel, like *Serras da desordem*, does enable another form of imagination; a different epistemology. Beyond its anachronism, *Dentes negros* appeals to an immanence of the material and the natural that contrasts with the modern and colonial space-time epistemology; with a temporality conceived as evolution and a space conceived as a passive receptacle

ready to be conquered, dominated and transformed into a thematic park: into consumerism and war.

The subversion of this modern epistemology lies, in this novel, in the materiality of bones; bones are what make that turn possible.¹² While bones are organic, corporal, and natural, they also survive outside the body as independent objects. Insofar as they are living remains, bones are ontologically ambiguous: they cast doubt on the distinction between the living and the inert, the natural and the cultural, the passive and the active, and the subjective and the objective. Furthermore, bones disturb the temporal limits of the living and the spatial limits that separate the body from what lies outside it. That is why the only thing that allows Hugo to understand “The Calamity” is a book titled “A casa entre vertebras,” that is, a space between bones which is the interior of the interior and which, like this text itself, does not admit any border that might delimit its taxonomy: “Não é romance, não é poesia, e é todas essas coisas ao mesmo tempo Palavras que não diziam, presenças ausente, fraturas na e da própria linguagem, expostas no livro desde a sua estrutura” (Leones 49).

Like this book, bones suggest an *ex-timate* topology: they are the closest, the most intimate parts of us, our deepest layer of matter, and yet they are external, a foreign body. Hence, the way the disease in the novel operates—from bones and teeth outward to other parts of the body—confuses its cause: “The Calamity” does not fall like a meteorite from outer space, but comes from the depths of within, which is, at the same time, exterior. That idea is foretold in the opening epigraph, taken from Tolstoy: “Vocês não vão escapar de si mesmos”—a reaffirmation of what *Serras da desordem* asserts at the end with the scene of the warplane bursting into the jungle.

By complicating the spatial limits between inside and outside—or, as in Carapiru’s scene running barefoot, between ground and foot walking on it—*Dentes negros* complicates the boundary between nature and humanity. It exposes the structural (anthropocenic) tie between current and future environmental devastation and politics—a war, a politics of extermination of life—on the one hand, and, on the other, a colonial and modern order in which nature, and life in

¹² Schøllhammer states that the material remains of a lost sociability are part of the plot structure of recent Brazilian narrative, including *Dentes negros*: “las tramas se desarrollan a partir de los restos de una sociabilidad que se perdió, que se extinguió, pero cuya supervivencia está en los huesos, en el esqueleto, en la carcasa y en las vértebras” (213).

general, is understood as an external space or object, desert-like and unpolluted, there to be conquered, mined with extractivism, commercialized, as it is in *Serras da desordem*. The novel tells us that that is not the case: we are nature, we are “The Calamity.”

Only other rhythms and temporalities, those that—like the pace of the foot walking on the ground—are not evolutionary, are capable of making way for the anachronisms that reveal the structural relationship between current and future devastation and past devastation. Muddling the boundaries between what lies outside and what lies inside shows how enmeshed we—humans—are in the destruction of life, of our own world. Extending Viveiros de Castro’s argument that to govern Brazil is to build deserts (“Gostaria que o Museu”), it is possible to assert that both the movie and the novel “de-govern”—something like Benjamin’s going against the grain—because they fill those deserts with surviving remains to turn history around, providing an image of the future as past. They suggest we are all survivors, we are all Indians, we are all Carapiru. Indeed, in a text titled “Agora somos todos índios,” on the arrival of the coronavirus to a Yanomami village, anthropologist Bruce Albert writes:

Torna-se cada dia mais claro que o destino trágico que reservamos aos Yanomami—a todos os povos indígenas—terá sido apenas uma prefiguração do que estamos hoje nos infligindo a nós mesmos, desta vez, em escala planetária. Como Lévi-Strauss o anunciou profeticamente enquanto denunciava o “regime de envenenamento interno” no qual estamos nos afogando: doravante todos índios, estamos fazendo de nós mesmos o que fizemos deles.

Insofar as it shows that there was something, not emptiness, before invasion and military massacre, the figure of the survivor becomes—by virtue of its mere existence—a figure of resistance. And that resistance is immanent because by simply asserting its ontological condition as survivor it resists: it resists because it exists; *it re-exists* (Viveiros de Castro, “Os involuntários”). It would seem that the only prize the temporal and spatial imaginary based on a monumental, evolutionary, utopian, and humanist future has to offer is its complementary and metaphysical underside, that is, a tragic fate. The alternative imagination of the future proposed in this film and novel does not suggest a reversal of the “país do

futuro” or temporality of retreat. Instead, it posits a space and a time where foot and ground advance anachronically, one on top of the other, as if in a montage.

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