

Notes on the making of the exhibition:
**“DESTIEMPO: Dynamogram of Puerto Casado”,
for a chronically unstable anthropological knowledge**

(Text presented at the GIDEST seminar at the New School, NY, March 2017)

INTRODUCTION

**On the precariousness of the matter of history and the eventfulness of doing research
or/and**

In what ways does the content of history change when changing the matter of analysis?

When I got to Puerto Casado, in the summer 2016, I immediately looked for the old tannin factory and the abandoned administrative archive that I was supposed to rescue and write about. The last time I visited the archive was in August 2008, and it took me about eight years to write a project on the history of the company town and have it funded by a European Union research program. The archive contained the employee files of thousands of Paraguayans who had worked there from the beginning to the end of the 20th century. A golden mine for historians.

In the year 2000 the factory, half of the company town and the surrounding 550.000 hectares of land had been sold to the Korean Association for the Unification of World Christianity, a global religious movement whose headquarters are currently located in The New Yorker building, in Manhattan. In 2006, though, a cooperative of ex-workers had occupied the factory and was trying to develop an economy based on small artisanal activities. But by 2016, when I finally returned to Puerto Casado, the Unification Church had re-taken control over it. Reverend Moon, the founding father, had died, and one of his Harvard educated sons had taken control over the local assets. Victoria Paraguay S.A. was the name of the new company owned by the Church. A North-American builder, hired to renovate the factory and transform it into a sawmill, had burnt down the archive containing the employee files a few months earlier. Victoria Paraguay S.A. was planning new economic activities and they needed to make space. Unlike the iron scrap accumulated in the back of the factory, the economic value of paper was equal to zero, and getting rid of the archive was an efficient economic decision. Moreover, paper burns very easily. Differently from the police “archives of terror” that have endured beyond the falling of dictatorships in several Latin-American countries, the labour archive of Puerto Casado had been wiped out by the neoliberal capitalist logic of creating more storage space for future productions.

Upon my arrival, even though the archive had disappeared, Don Albino Ortega was still alive. He had been the “human resources manager” of the factory for more than thirty years and was ninety-six years old. In the few months that passed in between my arrival and his son’s visit (who would bring him away to

die in his *valle*, his place of origin) I had the opportunity to interview him in his house located right in front of the iron scrap deposit of the crumbling factory. There were train engines, water tanks, lathes and other half destroyed machines. Don Ortega could not speak anymore, and he asked his caregiver to show me two cardboard boxes containing pictures, notebooks and other documents: his own factory archive. They're not private diaries but a long sequence of formulas to be filled with dates and names. Some of them are for hiring people and others for firing them, but some are also to congratulate the workers for specific events of their everyday life. *"The union between man and woman is a blessing of God aimed at carrying on his redemptive and creative work, in the pursuing of happiness. For this happy decision of yours, I wish you eternal happiness in God's presence."* Differently from the pictures that other workers shared with me during the course of the investigation, carefully selected amongst other pictures and documents, his archive was complete. Don Ortega could barely move by the time of our encounter, and the rigidity of his body had forced him to choose between two options: either he would share with me the whole content of his boxes, or nothing at all. As for the use of words, on the other hand, I could feel the effort contained in each of the sounds he pronounced: "It is silent now in Casado," he told me, and after a while he asked his caregiver to hand me the boxes.

The new archive was different from the one that had motivated the research. Instead of telling the history from the point of view of an institution (the tannin company Carlos Casado S.A.), it had been shaped by the events and affects that belonged to the life of one single individual. Even by getting access to several personal archives, I felt I would have missed an important dimension. I wanted to be able to sustain a change in scale that would not be filtered by the containing effect of single individuals' life-shaping affects. Not an impersonal or objective point of view, but a disembodied one. Although much could be said about the integrity of the self as a philosophical concept, I wanted to go beyond the body and its limitations, its rigidity and private affects. My gaze moved from the boxes to the door, and then to the road beyond, then to the factory fence and beyond it, to the iron scrap. The whole town was an archive, whose order and structure had been decided by human beings but not only, that could be expanded rather than described. And adding elements to the archive, rather than describing the already existing ones or creating new concepts, might have been the way to deal with silences, fractures, and hidden connections. An expanded archive as a platform for storytelling, always changing while traveling through space and time, always unstable and unfinished.

On the mimetic faculty as a way of knowing: the form and the content

What is the difference between the training of attention of the artistic discipline and that of social anthropology? The way I used memory and attention on fieldwork - the things I focused on in quite a literal sense - responded to a specific set of analytical categories. I didn't abstract forms but relationships. I looked for analogies. When I saw the Paraguayan workers using derogatory terms to describe their north-american boss right in front of him, I decided to select and remember that particular moment amongst hundreds of others, as it resonated with my concept of an everyday form of resistance. I recognized a similarity between the workers' attitude and the gondoliers in Venice singing obscene songs

to romantic Japanese couples in Italian. In Puerto Casado I began to interview ex-workers and ask them to tell me about their life in and out of the factory. I walked with them through the village, paid attention to what they paid attention to. I gave meaning to places and details according to their own experience.

Building on a definition by Walter Benjamin, Michael Taussig describes the mimetic faculty as a sensuous “way of knowing” (Taussig 1993), and more specifically as “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other” (Taussig 1993: xiii). The final part of the definition, “the ability to yield into and become Other”, has often been used to describe the anthropologist’s way of being in the field. As Willerslev (2007) has argued, though, it is in the double movement of yielding into and taking distance through the sense of sight that knowledge is produced. Not the sensuous vision described by Ingold in “The perception of the Environment”; not the eye which sees light, but that which sees “things” (Ingold 2000). But here goes the question again: what are we, as social anthropologists, trained to see and remember? What about forms and the ability - going back to Taussig’s definition - to “copy, imitate and make models”? Despite a growing attention towards the use of drawing in fieldwork diaries (see: Taussig 2011), they are rarely incorporated in the written body of the research outcomes, except for methodology or material culture books. As it gets evident when I try to make the copy of a drawing, the ability to see and remember forms too requires training and skills, and the ability of gaining knowledge while doing this too.

When I decided to work with artists and urban designers I was not interested in the conceptual categories that they would use to describe the history of Puerto Casado (although I ended up adopting some of them), but on the contrary in what they would “see”, remember and visualize once there. When talking about the relationship between shamans and what are usually referred to as their auxiliary spirits, indigenous people of the Paraguayan Chaco describe such beings as the shaman’s “capabilities” (*apmovana* in Angaité; cf. Bonifacio & Villagra 2016) or [*Jásenneykha*, a term derived from the verb “to tell someone to do something” and which means, literally, ‘those one tells what to do’ (Ibid.). In fact, since the first encounter the auxiliary spirits may be willing to help their human partners to master the “things” and “powers” they themselves master. Rene Ramirez, for example, my Maskoy *compadre*, would often tell me how shamans could “see” at a distance or even inside people through the help of auxiliary beings. When I imagined my relationship with the artists I couldn’t avoid thinking that they could act as my auxiliary spirits. Like shamans, I told them what to do and I didn’t let them to investigate on their own, at least at the beginning: I told them my version of the story of Puerto Casado, a story saturated with fractures, betrayals and humiliations. On the other hand, I hoped they had abilities that I didn’t have, that they would look for aspects of the local history in their own way. I hoped they could find traces where I couldn’t. Eventually, their ability to see forms and to make unthought connections confirmed that this was the case.

Lia Colombino, the co-director of the Museo del Barro in Asuncion, accepted to organize the artistic residency and the exhibitions with me. She came with us to Puerto Casado and she added a further perspective to our collective quest. Like me, she was used to writing, but she immediately directed her

attention to the production of images. In the text that framed the first exhibition in Paraguay she wrote: "By allowing the artists to get into her discipline, she (Valentina) makes it (anthropology) stagger in the displacement. The image they captured after becoming familiar with her investigation, captured by another eye - one which has been crossed by the tectonic movement that art can sometimes be - starts saying different things; the image appears in front of a new witness and returns a different petition". I started to wonder what images appeared in front a new witnesses, what are the images she was referring to. She might be referring to the objects and family pictures that I shared with the artists in our first encounters. Or maybe to the images I created for them through my storytelling, such as the feral cows coming out crying from the woods because two helicopters of the Casado company were shooting fireworks at them. Or else to the blurred faces of those who were held in Stroessner's prison camp (Peña Hermosa), but didn't want to be identified. Can all knowledge be reduced to a montage? Lia's use of analytical tools that she took from Didi-Huberman in his interpretation of Abi-Warburg (2002), her "reducing" (from my point of view) the exhibition to a combination of images, sometimes unsettled and worried me. Not because she seemed to put aside the tactile, olfactory and aural qualities of the images she was referring to, but because her analytical concepts were escaping my anthropological categories.

After my first period of fieldwork I began to think about the project as the "radiography of a town", building on the idea that while a biography is more directly linked to its inhabitants and their stories (not those that can't be told, but those that can be recorded in an interview), and to their direct agency in the storytelling process, a radiography would have been able to focus on fractures and infrastructures. When we started to plan the residency with Lia Colombino, we switched to the term "genealogy" to underline the historical dimension of the project, and we used Foucault's text (1971) as a point of departure during the seminar that took place in Asuncion prior to the trip to Puerto Casado. "Genealogies: Puerto Casado" is the name we gave to our facebook fan page. Just before setting up the exhibition in Asuncion, though, Lia texted me that it might be a good idea to call the exhibition "Dynamogram". I checked on my smartphone: "in petroleum production, a graph of the load change at the point of suspension of pump crossbars in relation to their displacement during subsurface oil well pumping operations". But then she said I had to look at Abi-Warburg.

DYNAMOGRAM, Puerto Casado

In June 2016, a group of eleven people arrived in Puerto Casado to begin an artistic residency. We self-identified ourselves as one social anthropologist, a writer/curator, five artists, a biologist, a graphic designer and two urban/communication designers who joined us after one week. As I was the official gatekeeper, I decided the best thing to do would be to walk around the town and meet and talk to people. I expected the group to take notes and discuss them at night. I asked them to keep a fieldwork diary. I wanted them to behave as I would have behaved, and I ended up feeling deceived and confused. They rarely took notes, distorted (according to me) most of what they heard and didn't seem to be that interested in talking to people, at least not in a systematic way. One of them was even bothered by the

presence of curious locals around him, while he was spending the whole day around the old wooden dock. I didn't understand them and got frustrated. I was impatient.

On the very first day of our stay we went to see the cemetery. Unlike others I knew, it looked very heterogeneous and disordered. It had the capacity to bring the factory back to life through the amount of red bricks and dismissed railway tracks that were used to build the graves. It looked abandoned but it wasn't. New graves were interposed to the old ones, as if it was the cemetery of a town where people only went to die, and no one was there to take care of the dead. The vegetation grew disorderly, but what seemed to me the result of years of abandonment had actually happened in a few weeks of rain. One of the artists, Luvier, decided to visit the cemetery once again on his own, and to use the technique of "frottage" on some of the graves. Amongst the hundreds of graves, he came back with a copy of two of them. He made his choice based on a purely formal similitude.

The juxtaposition surprised me. Narciso Corvalan was an old company administrator, and he was remembered for robbing and ordering the assassination of the company workers through hired killers after giving them the monthly pay, and for raping their wives when they were sent to work in the woods. Corvalan's grave is maybe the only one from the 1910s in the cemetery, and probably the oldest one. While I knew about Corvalan's gravestone because someone had pointed it to me, the presence of Fred Engen was a complete surprise. Born in Norway, Fred Engen had migrated to the United States in his youth where he began to work for the banker and pacifist General McRoberts. Of strong pacifist convictions himself, he guided the first Mennonite migration from Canada to Paraguay in the 1920s, and died of cancer in Puerto Casado. Separated by 15 years, the two gravestones keep the same typographic character, the same proportions in between letters and symbols. They were probably made by the same artisan, or at least came from the same place. Unlike the vast majority of the old graves, they both tenaciously resisted time. Should the two men's histories be told together? No one ever mentioned both their names in the interviews I made. They belong to different histories, different genealogies. And yet there they are, formally speaking, nearly identical. The only two identical gravestones in the cemetery of Puerto Casado.

Luvier also came with hearts, copies of hearts, from the cemetery. "There's lots love in Casado", he told me a few days later, in one of our nightly sessions, maybe to contrast my pessimistic view of the present. He looked for the artisan who made the hearts for the graves and they introduced him to Don Romero, an ex-worker of the tannin factory.

While the factory had been occupied by the ex-workers' cooperative, before the Unification Church regained control over it, Don Romero had brought pieces of a lathe machine to his house and reassembled them to create his own workshop. The slow subtraction of materials from the ex-factory for private use during the occupation of the factory had been criticized by many in town, but no one knew for how long the conquered common good would have stayed in the cooperative's hands. Those who didn't trust it would last, the president of the cooperative amongst them, ended up being right. While looking at

Don Romero's newly assembled machines, I thought how stupid I had been to leave all those documents in the factory. He took profit of those machines. He made the hearts with stainless steel, one of the main materials that were used in the factory. Most people knew in Casado how to recognize if a certain sheet of stainless steel was good or not, which codes had to be associated to it. In the cemetery, even when the wooden-made crosses start deteriorating, the hearts remain integer and impeccable. If not stolen, they could very easily resist time.

Luvier asked Don Romero to engrave images of wild animals instead of mourning words on the stainless steel hearts. The idea of the animals came from Rene Ramirez's stories, who told us about the appearance of wild animals in Puerto Casado just before the closing of the factory. Lia too wrote about it in her text for the exhibition in Asuncion: "Rene told us how certain animals began to appear in the house of the owners and its surroundings, and in the factory itself. They were not the kind of animals that one would expect to find in a town: they were wild animals, such as tapirs, snakes, armadillos and monkeys. [...] While talking to us he pointed his finger to the exact point where the animals appeared, and always speaking in present tense he would say: "Here is the snake! Here is the monkey!" The animals got engraved, but after commissioning stainless steel hearts with monkeys, snakes, crocodiles and also a bird, Luvier didn't know what to do with them. They were not done for mourning, they were not recalling dead beings either. The animals seemed to have taken possession of the steel, rather than just having been engraved upon it, just like Rene Ramirez's story possessed and haunted us all; me in the first place, around eight years ago, while I was filming him inside the factory for my documentary and he told me about it for the first time. Him too, as he gets older, seems to go back to that moment again and again, shaping his storytelling around it. I was careful not to bring out the topic this time, but it was his first memory he told the artists about. Maybe he knew they would have liked it. In 2008, he told me about it only one year after I met him for the first time.

Luvier finally took the hearts and he engraved them on his fieldwork diary.

Talking about the idea of the phantasmal in Didi-Huberman (who's thinking about Abi-Warburg), Lia writes that: "something which shouldn't have been there appears, and not only it appears, but it never ceases to disappear". Such was, for sure, the image of wild animals in the factory and in the house of the owners for us all. But I wonder if the same can be said of the presence of indigenous people in the factory in the non-indigenous memories of the place. Paraguayans, the non-indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Casado, only remember their presence when explicitly interrogated. "Yes, they were there too", they answer. "Yes, they were doing the harder jobs, carrying bags with 40 to 50 kilos of tannin on their shoulder from the warehouse to the dock." Marcos Benitez, one of the artists, used a picture that the photographer Luke Holland took in the factory in the 1980s - the portrait of a group of indigenous people carrying bags on their shoulders - and printed it on an old tannin bag of the Casado company, maybe from the 1980s too. He got the bag from inside the ex-factory, that is now a sawmill. Victoria Paraguay S.A., the company of the Unification Church that is now owning the factory, is recycling those bags and filling them up with coal or with *palo santo* [*bursera graveolens*] chipboard, an endangered tree from the Chaco region.

Apparently, you can get special permits from the Ministry of the Environment to do anything you want in the Chaco, if you know how to.

In Puerto Casado, Marcos spent days sitting on the abandoned wooden dock. The dock - now falling apart - had been built with quebracho trees [*schinopsis balansae*], the same that were once being grounded with steel knives to produce tannin in the factory. On the last day he bought a few pieces of fabric from the local shop and glued them to the dock. He left them there the whole night and then collected them the following morning. They carried a wood print on their surface. To me, to my christian imaginary, they looked like a holy shroud, but not to him. He tried to engage me in a conversation about which types of fabric would be better working with the glue and the wood, something I considered not so relevant. I had to constantly repress my impulse to ask why, why making a print of the wooden dock, as I knew he would reply: "I don't know". As if his body and his hands could take a decision on their own, without the need to justify. Therefore, I've decided to give an answer myself. I know the dock will be soon destroyed and rebuilt by the Unification Church, I know we could one day take his wood-prints and use them to mourn for the end of the Chaco, for the end of its woods as a common good. All its trees will sold on the free market where the price of a log from the Chaco region can be less than five dollars, and this includes the value of work. "Timber in the city", recites a leaflet I often saw while walking through Parson's corridor in New York, "a student competition exploring wood as an innovative building material". But where does the wood in the city come from? It might be coming from the Chaco, maybe from Puerto Casado, from the shipments that Victoria Paraguay S.A. sends every year abroad. A friend was working in a UN "reforestation" project in Paraguay, planting eucalyptus trees where everything else had been clearcut to make space for cattle.

Local people call the lines of quebracho trees in the woods "veins". Some people say they will never finish, that even after cutting all the trees in a certain vein they start growing again after a few years. They talk about them as lines running underground through the deep of the woods, always finding a way to turn around obstacles and raise again. But if I look at a google map today, I do not see lines but squares, which is the shape that deforestation and "rational cattle grazing" takes, in its ability to override water streams and other serpentine beings.

In front of an image we shouldn't only be asking which history it documents and of which history it is contemporary of, but also which memory it sediments and which repressed memory it brings to light.

[George Didi-Huberman, "La condizione delle immagini", p.65; personal translation]

The artists generated inscriptions on the objects I found, and images from the notes I wrote. I gave Fredi Casco the few documents that I had rescued from the abandoned factory archive in 2008. It was my last visit to Puerto Casado during the PhD fieldwork. I took from the archive the few documents that would fit in my suitcase and travelled back to Asuncion, by boat, in one and a half days. I left the documents to

Adelina Pussineri, the director of the only anthropological museum of Asuncion, the Andres Barbero museum, without giving any instruction. She took care of them and there they remained, for more than seven years. When I discovered that the rest of the archive had been burnt down, in 2015, I asked Adelina if I could have them back. I started to wonder how to make them speak. Relying on the suggestion of a recent anthropology book (Hetherington 2011), I looked at stamps and hand-written notations to go beyond the dry language of the bureaucratic machine and to discover the pathways of power. The official correspondence of the Carlos Casado company moved in between big men. The requests were handed in not to anonymous secretaries, most of the times, but to congressmen (most of them Generals and Colonels), or to Abdo Benitez, Stroessner's private secretary and future heir. Despite this, they were dull and mostly silent to me. Their survival seemed out of place: no one had tried to rescue them, and no one had found them interesting. Was I going to quote them in my book and make them interesting to a handful of academics? According to what stated in my research grant, I had to rescue them and store them in a safe place. For whom, though? My supervisor, a trained historian, deemed me responsible for them in front of the academic community. But I wanted them to be the connecting points of a different network, I wanted to interrogate them in a different way.

Fredi Casco has been making artistic interventions on historical documents throughout most of his career. He often mentioned to me how documents that would be considered worth to be preserved for most European countries enter a phantasmal life in Paraguay. They are neither destroyed nor preserved by any official institutions. They circulate in private transactions and flea markets, tenaciously resisting time in some forgotten storage room. Asuncion is famous for its private archives. In "The return of the sorcerers" Fedi takes old pictures from Stroessner's epoch and modifies them. In one of my favorite ones, General Stroessner [the ex dictator of Paraguay] shakes hands with a foreign ambassador while at the same time looking at him shaking hands with the foreign ambassador from the corner of the picture. It generates abstraction through repetition, and in this movement transforms pain into laughter. Without this displacement, without "the return of the sorcerer", it might be harder to look at the picture for people with strong anti-Stroessner feelings.

At the end of my fieldwork I created a "community album" with some of the pictures that I collected during the interviews, and some of them came from the family albums of Tarcisio Sostoa. He had been president of the *colorado* party in Puerto Casado at the time of the dictatorship, and later on governor and congressman in the 1990s, during democracy. Sostoa was the *mandama* of the small town, the one man taking all political decision. In the community album, that became part of the first exhibition in Puerto Casado, I alternated pictures of the factory with family portraits and pictures of *colorado* politicians. When I showed it to the ex-workers, every time the figure of Augusto Montanaro (Stoessner's Minister of Internal Affairs) appeared they had strong reactions: they first insulted him, then asked me why did I place him there, and then turned the page quickly and with rage. Similar to what happened with other persons and events, they didn't want Montanaro to be part of their history. History was less about "truth" than about creating a form of storytelling where people could proudly identify, something they could be remembered

for. By exploring shadows and contradictions, our project started to take the characteristics of an anti-community project. For whom we were writing the history of the place became more and more blurry.

During the artistic residency we interviewed Sostoa in his house in Puerto Casado, and we were all captured by his intelligence and charisma. Despite being prepared to look at him as the local version of Strossner we were very impressed by his humble attitude and lucid analysis of the situation.

Luvier and Alfredo decided to visit him again a few days later.

In the impossibility to get access to the intimate spheres of power, to the informal encounters where decisions are taken and only lately formalized, we need to find other forms to talk about power and the role of elites in the making of history. Luvier came back from Sostoa's house with a collection of frames. In Puerto Casado, I tried to establish relationships with the functionaries of Victoria S.A. At the beginning they seemed to be friendly to me. Then they started to close doors. One of them told me that they had CCTV cameras in their house, the ex-house of the Casado Sastre family, and that "they" didn't want them to talk to the people anymore. In the web site of Victoria Paraguay S.A., the stock picture of a group of white smily faces of wealthy people in their thirties and forties are placed there to depict its management board. Just like the devil in the Bolivian mines, they materialize the spirit of capitalism in the form of a bit torrent file taking possession of the net. They are in fact used by hundreds of financial companies all around the world. They are smily, wealthy and white.

When I interviewed Don Vasquez, an old ex-company worker, he suggested to me that one of the members of the Casado family was against the selling of the factory. "They didn't all think the same", he told me. But when I asked him for more details he interrupted me with a severe face: "I can't tell you. This is their own business". Twenty years later, Don Vasquez is still loyal to his bosses, to the blurry line distinguishing the public domain, the selling of a factory that gave jobs to an entire town, from their private lives, the disagreement amongst family members. When I asked him what was the most notable thing he saw while working for the company, he described Laino and Wasmosi - opponents in the first presidential elections of the 1990s - getting off a private plane at night in Puerto Casado, hugging each other and drunk. He said he never talked about it with anybody.

I ask Luis how Maskoy people call the spirits from the wood in Guarani, and he answers : "bicho ra'anga", which means: "image of an animal". Somethings that looks like an animal but is not.

[Fieldwork notes, 20th of February 2007]

Fredi takes a phrase from my old field notes to name his work for the exhibition. *Bicho ra'anga*. In Casado, he asked me and Sigrid (the biologist) to go out with him at night in the periphery of the town, where all is dark because there are no homes. He wanted to emulate with his polaroid the intermittent light of a firefly, and he wanted me to film it. In a book on Pasolini and Agamben that he had read, Didi-Huberman asked which instruments could help us seeing the fireflies in the overexposed, ferocious, too-

bright space of our present history. I think of a gesture as simple as closing the eyes, and of Fredi's silhouettes of politicians as that which would stay on the retina after staring at their picture for a while.

Matters of accountability

We act as if the present had no memory, and the past had no influence on the present.

[George Didi-Huberman, "La condizione delle immagini", p.65; personal translation]

After producing a photographic documentation of the few documents that I had rescued from the factory in 2008, I gave them to Fredi and told him that he could use them at his own will. Intervening historical documents is a firmly rejected practice amongst trained historians. A written source is considered a shared common good that any researcher should be able to consult if they need to. In most cases, finding a document doesn't mean to fully possess it, as it already belongs to humanity. Taking a picture is not enough. There might be a detail only visible to the eye, a matter of texture and temporality that the digital copy erases forever. Intervening historical documents always involves some kind of destruction. To whom are we accountable for it? In his book "Rubble" (2014), Gaston Gordillo describes his wandering through the remoteness of the Argentinean Chaco. At some point, one of his local guides shows to him the ruins of an old jesuit church which has been used over the years for other kinds of celebrations. In order to stress the precariousness of the building, the guide repeatedly punches the wall provoking small erosions in the structure. Ruins suddenly show themselves as rubble. Gordillo is paralyzed in between his reverent attitude to the historic site and the dismissive one of his interlocutor.

Little by little, while the factory in Casado was still occupied, the ex-lathe machine operator Liberato Amarilla had brought pieces of an old machine to his house. But just before he could get hold of the main body, a big chunk of iron, the Unification Church had taken possession of the factory again. The repossession had happened ambiguously, and with a poisonous twist. The local Municipality had granted permission to the Korean company to decontaminate the place against dengue with the agreement that at least half of the cooperative workers would receive a salary to do the job. No one questioned that there were no cases of dengue in Puerto Casado. The decontamination never finished to happen, and the Unification Church became the new owner again. Both the archive I had to rescue and Liberato Amarilla's lathe machine got trapped into the place, into the violent ambiguity of local politics. The archive was burnt down, and the iron bulk was left in the patio awaiting to be sold per kilo. The neoliberal logic of free market ruled over everything now. But when we got permission to visit the ex-factory, Luvier took an imprint of the lathe machine. And while he did it, all the government functionaries who had come with us, and also the new company workers, they were all looking at him and time slowed down, and everyone began talking after a while about all the iron scrap that was surrounding us: how was it called, where was it placed before, who had built or named it.

Fredi said he chose the documents to intervene not based on their content but on their texture. And yet, what he paints often holds a parallel with the content of the documents. There is a letter amongst the one he chose addressed to “Your Excellence, the President of the Republic of Paraguay, General of the Army Don Alfredo Stroessner”. On the top, typewritten, it says: “Handed in the 09/05/80 at 7.30 in the hands of Mr. Abdo Benitez [Stroessner private secretary and Sostoa’s close friend].” The letter contains a negotiation with the government, and six figures appear on its surface. Some of them have the *colorado party* scarf tied up around their neck, as its supporters used to do until the end of the dictatorship. They have the rigid posture of politicians posing for an official picture. Two of them wear the long hat of the Guarani carnival, the *arete guasu*, where the spirits of the dead are called into presence through disguises, and people dance in round circles until dawn. Even though the inhabitants of Puerto Casado don’t like to talk about it, the *arete guasu* was still performed there until the 1960s, when the last descendants of the Guarani workers either left the town or they decided to hide amongst Paraguayans and deny their identity for the benefit of future generations. But instead of compelling the group into dancing, the two men with the long *arete guasu* hats in Fredi’s inscription mimic the politicians who keep talking to them unaware. *Bicho ra’anga*. The appearance of something which is not what it seems. In order to keep its factory going, the Casado company established close relationship ties with elements of the army, with the Generals that ruled over the Chaco army barracks. These close ties allowed the company to confront the local political powers that were directly connected to Stroessner, such as Sostoa. General Britez-Borges is one of the soldiers who received land from the company. His cattle farm, *estancia Adelina*, is known by everyone in Casado and it bordered with the western part of the tannin company territory. His sons played with some of the sons of the workers I interviewed. There is a picture of Britez-Borges in Sostoa’s album. He looks like an old man trapped in his own dark thoughts.

On another document, it is not the dead but human-animal figures to appear on the surface. The untamed appearing on the tamed word of documents, on the ordered surface of the factory life. The wild animals that began to appear in the factory just before its closure. Rene Ramirez never really explained why. Their presence is what they mean and form doesn’t always need to be explained. But when Fredi interprets them as *bicho ra’anga*, images of animals, he can’t avoid transforming them into human-animal figures, as if to make their true nature visible to us. They are creatures coming from Rene’s storytelling and Fredi’s ontological categories. For Fredi, the animal behind the image of an animal cannot be another animal but rather an anthropomorphic being.

Let’s go back to the form of things how they appears to us, to the imprint they leave on a paper sheet, but also to the forms that relationships take [fractals, analogies, lines, circles]. Aristoteles hypothesized a distinction between form and matter, and it easy to visualize it. But if we focus on it, matter becomes a very mysterious thing indeed, shapeless and elusive. Not the atom, that we learned to decompose at school, not even the nucleus, consisting of protons and neutrons. Trying to think about Aristoteles’ matter achieves its opposite, leading to the thought that there is only form in this world, that forms are charged with meanings and affects on their own. In a similar way, Warburg’s image-symptoms are forms described as pathos formulas - gestures charged with affects - that have the ability to move through space and time.

They refuse to be deciphered and can only be interpreted. They emerge unconsciously and they don't respect the linearity of time. "If memory is unconscious", asks Didi-Huberman, "how can we create its archive?" (Didi-Huberman 2012: 289; *personal translation*). In the archive we contributed to create, the archive of the last one hundred years of the history of Casado, the human element is a phantasmal presence. People emerge as form. They emerge through specific configurations of power and affects that they share with animals and other beings, of which domestication might be the most powerful. I wanted to organize an exhibition on tannin, on the production and distribution of tannin over a period of one hundred years, but I ended up trapped in thinking about cows and the domestication of men.

TABLE 1: SAGUA'A AND THE REVERSIBILITY OF TIME

On the domestication of cows

There were plenty of feral cows [sagua'a] in those times. You had to rope them with a lasso, and then tie them to a pole [tambear]. They were angry and you had to tame them. You had to put them on a boat and send them to Asuncion, to the slaughter house. This was our job before.

They were healthy animals, they didn't have any vaccination. Nothing. And their meat was really good.

There was a white bull, a feral one [sagua'a], he was at least five years old. He was beautiful, with big horns. [...] There was a poison that we injected to make them quiet, until the effect disappeared and they didn't care if you were a liberal or a colorado [i.e. they got furious]. [...] We injected the bull with the poison and he stayed dumb, but then he suddenly woke up again and stabbed the horses with his horns. The horses got wounded, he gutted them and ran away, towards the anthills. I ran after him with an indian [un indio] and shouted him to fight the bull. He fought the bull like a dog and won. When the bull was tired enough I took him by the neck and tied him to a tree. We tied him several times to a tree and left him there [...] Doctor Fretes [the boss] gave me half of a heifer in reward.

[Interview with Don Ortiz and Don Arce, 2016]

There were pregnant heifers [in the cattle ranch in km 11]. Beautiful animals. You could sit on them while they laid down on the ground. They were tamed, tamed, since they were little they tamed them. You flirted with them a bit, you call them by their name and they come to you. If they wanted to listened to the radio they would smell it to make you understand to turn it on. That's how is was. If the bull doesn't want to work you put him one of those spirited musics he likes and that's it [he makes the gesture of mounting a cow]. They were so not serious in Km 11! They wanted to teach me how to inseminate a cow but I said:

"No! I'm too hothead [tie'y] my master, I'm not the right person here!". [He laughs loudly] I've been so happy in km 11 [daba gusto en 11].

[Interview with Don Arce, 2016]

The wild boars, the tapirs, all the animals came out running from the wood, and the indians [los indios] behind them. I sent forty Indians into the wood, while we were waiting on the other side of the plain. Forty Indians were there, and Paraguayans too. The helicopter flew very close to the trees, while it was shooting fireworks into the wood. All the animals were crying. The wild boars were crying and the peccari were falling down on the ground. [...] It was an incredible spectacle, the noise of the helicopters and the fireworks. [...] The Indians waited for the animals on the other side in order to kill them. They made a barbecue [asado], and ate. It was pure happiness, and nothing was missing.

[Interview with Don Arce, 2016]

On the domestication of men

“How do you tame people? [Como se puede amansar a la gente?]”, asks Don Ramon, an Ishir man, while telling me about the arrival of Cristobal Colon in Paraguay. “You bring lots of bread,” he replies. Along the Paraguay River, the division between tamed and angry Indians (*indios mansos* and *bravos*) has been used by travelers and white people to navigate through local geographies since the 19th century (see: Boggiani). In Don Ramon’s story, indigenous people have been tamed through trickery, through the false promise of a never ending provision of food, the same kind of relationship that men have with domesticated animals. But it’s not only indigenous people who have been tamed by other people. According to an ex-employee of the Casado company, the whole town had undergone a process of domestication. “Casado domesticated us (*Casado nos domesticó*)”, he told me, and he explained how: the company did everything for the workers in exchange for their work. For example, it didn’t allow them to change a light bulb, as there was someone in charge of doing it, and it didn’t allow them to raise small animals, as the company provided them with cow meat. Don Solano explains this to me with pain and regret. Nevertheless, it is not domestication what he denounces, but the abrupt and undesired end of it. The fact that the company sold the factory and the land to a new boss, who came with its own domesticated beings and didn’t need them anymore. Similarly to what Willerslev argues about domesticated reindeers in Siberia, it was a relationship based on trust rather than domination, at least starting from the 1960s. In one of Alfredo Quiroz’s videos for the exhibition there’s the audio of a negotiation from the 1980s, during Stroessner’s dictatorship. It takes place amongst representatives of the Casado company, two governmental delegates, and a few company workers. “Paraguayans can’t live without meat”, says one of the delegates, “human flesh and also cattle” (*los paraguayos no pueden vivir sin carne; la carne humana, y la res*). A strange choice of words, where cows are a whole being and workers are primarily their flesh.

There is a curious picture in Don Ortega’s boxes. It says on its back: “The rector of the Salesian order talking to the black indian (*indio moro*) already tamed. - Puerto Casado. - Father Dotto. Federico Britez. Jose. Renato Sigoti (?), fifth successor of Don Bosco” They’re all smiling in the picture, even Jose Iquebi, the Ayoreo man standing still and rigid - like the silhouettes of *colorado* politicians in Fredi’s drawings - in between the two salesian priests. Father Dotto, in an interview about the genocide of indigenous people in Paraguay, says about him that in 1961 he acted as a *señuelo* for the priests (Escobar & Vysocolan

1988). Dotto is an Italian priest but he uses local categories with great ease. According to Enrique Maas, whose father had a cattle ranch in the Chaco at that time, *señuelos* are a particular kind of ox which has been trained to guide feral cows to the corral. Cows trust him more than they would trust humans. Don Maas says *señuelos* received a name and they were treated as any other human worker in the ranch (*es como si fueran un personal más*). As a form of gratitude for their service, they were allowed to die a natural death in the ranch. Although coming from a domesticated breed, they learnt to do their job by being beaten in their early youth. Don Maas has two skulls of *señuelos* hanging on the wall of his house. One of them, named Cuello, died of a tragic death. He died suffocated, because the workers did not use the *cambón*, a rotating tool, in order to tie him to the feral cow.

Señuelos only exist because of their opposite, the *sagua'a* or feral cow. *Sagua'a* are feared and respected. Some of them are the descendants of the first cows who managed to run away from the corral and hide in the woods, when the properties were too big in the Chaco and people still didn't practice "rational cattle farming" (*ganadería racional*), a form of organizing farms where nothing is left to chance and the profit is maximized. People say that *sagua'a* are stronger and more beautiful than ordinary cows, just like they say of indigenous people that they looked healthier and stronger before settling down and becoming "civilized". The Casado company had several teams of men whose only task was to hunt down the *sagua'a*. The existence of feral cows provide a new answer to Don Ramon's question on the taming of people. In order to tame them, indeed, the *sagua'a* were tied to a pole by their horn, so that every time they tried to move and escape they felt pain. After one day tied to the pole or to a tree, made dull through the experience of pain, they were ready to follow the *señuelo* all the way to the corral, where they were finally slaughtered. *Señuelos* too played with trickery and deception, leading their peers to death.

Señuelos also play an important role in the political arena. One of the key figures in the way the liberal and colorado parties are structured in Paraguay is in fact the *puntero*, an Argentinean term to designate the *señuelo*. *Punteros* are the people in charge of convincing another group of people to vote for a certain political party. They speak Guaraní, they usually have a loud voice and give out not bread but money. A Maskoy friend for instance had a dream in 2007, just before the elections. The congressman Chamorro was desperately looking for her in her house in Pueblito, the indigenous neighborhood of Puerto Casado. On the third day, he finally found her and he expressed to her his esteem and respect. "You are a very important person", he said in the dream. The following day, after waking up, she discovered that Chamorro had announced his candidacy for the following elections. They became political partners. While talking to me, she was holding in her house around 230 ID cards of Maskoy people, that she had received in exchange for money. But Chamorro never went to visit her in her house, as he only sent the money through a middleman, and that hurt a bit.



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