

*Cracking up an Alligator
Ethnography, Juan Downey's Videos, and Irony*

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As part of his *Video Trans Americas* project in the 1970s, artist Juan Downey made ethnographic videos among Indian populations of southern Venezuela. I focus on three videos, two from among Yanomami peoples and one about Guahibo. Only one comes across as a conventional ethnographic documentary, while the others have some surrealist aspects that may have led to the general neglect of these videos by anthropologists. But taking the three videos together suggests how Downey changed his approach to Indians, their contexts, and issues of ethnographic representation. He moved from scientific type-casting through ethnic labels toward an engagement with ominous political context, and finally, to role-switching and other plays on scientific authority which had rendered particular peoples inherently mute and accessible only through the expert mediation of anthropology. Downey's videos, dismissed by some anthropologists as "exploitation for the sake of art," instead suggest that professional ethnography's typecasting of authentic pre-contact peoples and cultures imported a license to scientific appropriation, in the name of teaching educated U.S. Americans about cultural difference.

In three videos that were shot among Indian populations of southern Venezuela in 1976 and 1977 and then completed in New York between 1977 and 1979, artist Juan Downey engaged with the grounds of ethnographic representation. Seen together, the videos suggest a compelling change in comprehension and perspective, from echoing anthropological expertise that created an absolute gap between the worlds of scholarship and Indians' social life, to bafflement combined with awareness of authoritarian and violent political contexts, and toward creative

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and collaborative play on the borderlands of ethnography and its chosen peoples. In the second of three videos, there is repeated footage of Downey's feet near or in rivers, interspersed with, among other scenes, an official visit by a political dignitary. The Guahibo Indians that are the focus of the video never emerge as a coherent ethnographic subject, quite unlike the Yanomami in the two others.¹ Instead, the narrative is more anchored to frustrations regarding official reluctance to allow Downey's visit to Indian communities and a lingering sense of political violence. *The Laughing Alligator* (1979), the final of the three, is a hilarious and profound engagement with the ethnographic representation of Yanomami Indians and with the authority of anthropological knowledge.

The Laughing Alligator has recently had some favorable recognition by anthropologists.² While I agree that this particular video is compelling, the three videos together make a unique display of changing ethnographic attention, one that perhaps is not as easily conveyed through text. One of the striking moments shows a man speaking in Spanish and then switching to his indigenous language which Downey does not understand, but he lets the camera continue to roll. Such loss of comprehension, control, and authority may have unsettled the anthropological audience, which may have found greater comfort in choosing between Napoleon Chagnon's view of Yanomami life as inherently violent and Jacques Lizot's "soft science" depiction of its prosaic and peaceful quality.³

Both scholars came under scathing criticism in the so-called Yanomami controversy that emerged with a journalist's allegation that scientists had not taken enough measures to prevent a measles epidemic, and that anthropologist Chagnon had contributed significantly to the violence that he attributed to the Yanomamo people.⁴ While the controversy brought out some important matters, the crisis atmosphere may simply have led to the dismissal of particular scholarship and the attendant side-stepping of serious ethical issues within ethnographic representation.⁵ Downey's videos offer three different takes on the questions of who are the peoples of the Amazon region, what is their reality, how are governments in the picture, and what are the roles of anthropology and violence in fashioning these worlds. These issues are also at the center of Brazilian director José Padilha's recent documentary on the Yanomami and the troubling history of scientific research among them, *Secrets of the Tribe*.⁶

The videos prefigure and project the representational crisis in anthropology that is generally dated to the mid-1980s, which for the most part was addressed as a matter of textual strategies.⁷ In the three videos, there is a clear shift from textual authority to representational confusion and perhaps despair, and finally, to serious play with various actors, that together—but without lecturing—render

academic authority an enormous conceit but one which should allow for some fun and role-switching. While the videos were primarily shown at art venues, they were also screened at a Visual Anthropology Conference in 1978 that was organized by Jay Ruby. They were also included at a conference on Yanomami films that Jean Rouch organized in Paris in the same year. Rouch assembled a dozen film makers to screen and discuss their divergent depictions of the Yanomami peoples. With a hundred people in attendance, the three-day seminar inspired a “spirited debate,” which was followed by complete silence on the issue: no one has written any analysis or commentary on the varied film portrayals of the Yanomami by US American, Canadian, Japanese, British, Yugoslavian, and French filmmakers that were screened at this event.⁸

Since the making of Downey’s three videos in the late 1970s, the rise of indigenous media—particularly in Australia, Canada, and in Latin America—has undermined the once-authoritative status of “classical” ethnographic documentaries.⁹ Meanwhile, the level of fickle and often naïve sincerity with which educated westerners currently connect to eco-politics and indigenous peoples may have banished all playful creativity surrounding the representation of Amazonian Indians through film.¹⁰ Downey’s videos offer a glimpse of a world that can no longer be captured and conveyed—not in the sense of Indian villages and ways of life that are not a reality anymore, but in terms of what ethnographic art can offer in mediating different worlds. The playful creativity of his three videos exposes—without lecturing—how certain science appropriated “native” worlds in ways that left the natives mute, how the quest for authentic Indians erased all traces of complex, changing, and sometimes violent national realities, and how anthropology and art can avert the appropriation only by meeting people on roughly equal grounds. Without a degree of trust and intimacy, any representation across difference risks exploitation.

Juan Downey (1940-1993) was a multimedia, visual and conceptual artist who also trained as an architect. He was born in Santiago, Chile, but then lived and worked in Madrid and Barcelona, Spain, and in Paris, France, before settling in the United States in 1965, first in Washington DC and then in New York City, where he held academic positions in art and architecture.¹¹ Downey’s videos from Indian regions of southern Venezuela were part of his project *Video Trans Americas* in which the artist visited various parts of the continent between 1973 and 1979. The three videos that I focus on here were shot during a one-year period in 1976-77 and then completed in New York City. The videos, *The Abandoned Shabono* (1977), *Guabibos* (1978), and *The Laughing Alligator* (1979), are squarely in communication with anthropology and exoticism, but anthropologists’ silence or dismissal of the videos is curious. My main concern is to draw out from the three videos Downey’s changing

perception of Indians of the Amazon, through which anthropology's tendency of treating ethnic groups as specimens becomes apparent. The discomfort with that realization, which Downey underscores, is the most likely reason for the negative reception in anthropology.

To situate myself: I am an anthropologist of Southeast Asia, and have worked mostly with ethnic minority Mien people in Thailand, and the Mien from Laos who resettled in the U.S. after the Second Indochina War (the "Vietnam War"). I have no research experience in Latin America and came to the topic by chance—I was asked by a museum curator to talk about anthropology and the representation of indigenous peoples. My engagement with Downey's work is personal and political. The videos allow me to explore, with Juan Downey as some imaginary friend or fellow-traveler, epistemological and ethical issues of visual and other ethnographic representation that concern equally my own work over time and the history of anthropology; but in what follows, I am primarily concerned with Downey's visual reconstitutions of previous anthropological framings of Amazonian Indians.

Anthropology's Silence

There are various reasons for the anthropological neglect of Juan Downey's videos. One is that the Yanomami are among the most studied and filmed people of the ethnographic record. In a preface to the English translation of Jacques Lizot's ethnography, *Tales of the Yanomami*, filmmaker Timothy Asch relates:

In 1978 Jean Rouch organized a unique ethnographic film conference in Paris in order to bring together filmmakers and anthropologists who had worked with the Yanomami. Films by Japanese, American, French, Italian, and British filmmakers were shown and discussed by anthropologists from different countries. It became clear that the Yanomami had been used as a mirror for presenting themes central to the foreigners – filmmakers and anthropologists alike – who had worked among them. These works ... reveal considerable differences in perspective.¹²

Asch contrasts the written work of American anthropologist Chagnon, for whom Asch was the cameraman and editor, with that of the Frenchman Lizot. Chagnon aims to reveal "principles of social organization [and] he overtly characterizes the Yanomami as aggressive and warlike [while Lizot, more prosaic,] recounts numerous specific interactions between particular [peoples] and leaves it to his readers to abstract structural principles."¹³ Asch does not offer any sense of how

the films shown in Paris revealed Italian, Japanese, British, or other perspectives, and there is no indication that Juan Downey was at Jean Rouch's conference. But Asch mentions that Chagnon's ethnography, *Yanomamo: The Fierce People*, was a staple of American undergraduate teaching, and that the two of them had made "thirty-seven ethnographic films together."

As a filmmaker and editor, Timothy Asch (1932-1994) had worked on many Bushmen films before joining Chagnon in Venezuela with the Yanomami.¹⁴ He often expressed the difference between himself and Chagnon. Chagnon wanted to capture and reveal their fierceness and to explain it with kinship structures and male competition—such as in the film *The Ax Fight*—whereas Asch did many shorter films that revealed everyday activities and the gentler side of life. Examples include *A Father Washes his Children*, *A Man and his Wife Weave a Hammock*, *Children's Evening Play at Patanowa-teri*, and *Children Playing in the Rain*.¹⁵ These films generally have no narration, and while they offer an alternative to Chagnon's portrayal they still preserve the distance between Yanomami, the film maker, and the viewers.

In the nearly forty ethnographic films of Chagnon and Asch, the divide between the audience and the Yanomamo subjects, mediated by Chagnon's scholarly authority, is both firm and clear.¹⁶ In contrast, Downey's *The Laughing Alligator* leaves profoundly uncertain the make up of scientific authority, and the video does not play to western notions of primitivism. Instead it is Downey who occasionally appears in face-paint, sometimes in a suit, wishing he would be devoured by the Indians. Furthermore, the camera and its role as a mediator are not persistently out of sight. That is, Downey's videos expose the artifice of western scholarly authority and subject it to some serious playfulness. This, I imagine, may have made the videos subversive to academic authority in colleges across the United States.

Timothy Asch participated in a Yanomami land-rights conference in Venezuela in 1991. His screening of the old films was met with alarm by the Yanomami present—as hopelessly out of date, and likely to bias national attitudes against them. He writes, "I would like them to make a film which they think represents who they are and how they live today, and when I suggested as much to the Yanomami at the conference, they were enthusiastic. In fact, I had been planning to teach the Yanomami how to use video for several years. [Compared to] the Kayapo and Yanomami in Brazil, [there] is not yet an emergency with the Yanomami in Venezuela. There is still time for the Yanomami to tell us who they are and what they know."¹⁷

These remarks are particularly striking because Asch discusses how "we can do anthropology [with films made by a culture's insiders]", and gives the example of Ruth Benedict using "Japanese narrative feature films as the basis of her study of

Japanese character for the purpose of making recommendations to the United States government about how to govern Japan in the impending occupation period.”¹⁸ In that context, the implications of Asch’s interest in helping train and equip Yanomami so they can “tell us who they are and what they know” are quite frightening, evoking the rhetoric of how anthropology had served the interest of indirect rule in the colonial era.¹⁹

In my reading, Asch still views the Yanomami as a specimen that can be revealed through film. He only changed his mind on who should do the filming, editing, and narration—from thinking that cultural insiders were incapable of saying anything interesting about their culture to thinking that with some training and equipment, a culture could become self-revealing, for the edification of a liberal western audience that desires reaffirming lessons in cultural diversity.²⁰ In an interview with Jay Ruby in 1993, Asch declared: “It’s a fascinating world out there—I mean, the most beautiful thing that humankind has created is culture. Then why the hell are we not learning more about other cultures and sharing them and enjoying them?”²¹

According to Jay Ruby, the explicit goal of the Asch/Chagnon films is to enable and enhance the teaching of anthropology to American undergraduates, with Yanomami serving as an example of a horticultural society. Ruby maintains that the subtext of the best known films “*The Ax Fight* and *The Feast*, is one of cultural relativism, squarely in the best humanist anthropological tradition of seeking to foster tolerance and understanding for other cultures.”²² But in my view, these films project on the Yanomami a particular U.S. American common-sense view of human nature as masculine, combative, competitive, and violent.²³ One study among undergraduates—conducted by a student of Asch’s—showed that the viewers of these films, who were taking an anthropology class at the time, “retain[ed] their ethnocentric and racist assumptions in spite of, and perhaps because of, the films they saw.”²⁴

Timothy Asch and Jay Ruby played major roles in establishing the credibility and importance of ethnographic film within anthropology and more generally. It is therefore telling that Ruby is adamant about professional boundaries: “ethnographic film is too serious a thing to be left to filmmakers.” He insists that:

Anthropologists [with professional graduate training] are qualified to be ethnographers and filmmakers are not. The central issue for the ethnographic filmmaker is to be able to find culture in filmable behavior, and then to generalize from the specific, to make concrete the abstract, and yet to retain the humanity and individuality of those portrayed while still making a statement about a culture. In other words, ethnographers should strive to make ethnographically thick films.²⁵

Indians and Anthropologists

Searching for some indication of the Yanomami film conference in Paris, I found no record of it in a very thorough inventory of Jean Rouch's career up to and including 1979.²⁶ Nor is there any discussion or even a mention in two recent books devoted to Rouch's work and influence.²⁷ The only trace of the other conference, the 1978 Conference on Visual Anthropology that was held at Temple University, is in Eric Michaels' account of his collaboration with Juan Downey, one that started after Downey's videos were screened there. To Michaels, the videos were "provocative, intelligent, and visually unlike most of what I had previously seen of the documentary genre."²⁸ Jay Ruby, long the leader of the ethnographic film program at Temple University, mentions Downey in passing in his study of the history of ethnographic film: "When Juan Downey produced tapes about the Yanomami Indians of Venezuela, some audiences became quite upset about the 'exploitation' of the subjects for the sake of art."²⁹ He cites Michaels's article for this view, where there is no indication of this understanding.

After Michaels and Downey met at this conference, the latter suggested collaboration. Eric Michaels (1948-1988) then worked "for twelve months ... with videotape and transmission in nearly all aspects of production," but there is no indication whether this resulted in any of Downey's videos. Michaels mentions Downey's critics, in the context of how his films lead some viewers to "confuse the serious and the ludic" where these are not sufficiently distinct or cued.³⁰ That is all I could find regarding the critique of Downey's ethnographic videos. I think that Ruby expresses the view of anthropologists who felt threatened by an outsider who exposed fundamental cracks in ethnographies that insisted that the Yanomami were inherently a type—fierce and violent (Chagnon), or gentle and amorous (Lizot) horticultural people.

The problem that anthropology insisted on keeping under the rug concerns the ethnographic status of peoples like the Yanomami, which was in many ways a product of their ethnographers' preoccupations but was also productive of ethnographers' authority; they could speak about the Yanomami as if they were a particular type. Western science has an inherent potential for appropriation. If peoples like the Yanomami are plotted as essentially a specimen for scholars or artists to signify and claim, then they are always and only Others, denied basic rights to their identity, image, voice, and specificity, and even at times their very contemporary lives. If relations and equality are not built into representations of people, then scholars, poets, museum curators, and filmmakers have an expert's license and a free rein to exploit their likenesses.

Mary L. Pratt identifies and contextualizes the “planetary consciousness” that accompanied colonial-era scientific discoveries and exploration.³¹ Naming was claiming and dispossession in the same move. Giving plants Latin names made this dynamic seem distinct from the rivalries of various European nations that competed for prominence and glory through their conquests-as-discoveries. There are various slippages between the universalism of a planetary consciousness and exclusive ownership by colonial-era nation states. In the worldview that informed the quest for discoveries for science and nation, certain peoples became specimens, and as such, in themselves, mute. *The Abandoned Shabono* expresses this bifurcated world of the doomed primitives who busily express their cosmology in the things they do, while they are consistently spoken of and for by the experts in the studio.

Speaking of and for humanity or a portion thereof is a political act, and in this there is no difference between the discipline of anthropology or such mediums as poetry or video. The scope of Downey’s *Video Trans Americas*—from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska—is analogous to another Chilean artist’s project from forty years earlier, the poet Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General (de America)*. Neruda initially intended his poem to be a *Canto General de Chile*, but shifting to the American continent offered a different narrative framework within which certain identities, relationships, and values took shape that enabled the poet such notions as “the same ancestral earth,” “the American community,” and “our own treasures.”³²

Poems, like videos, narratives, and scientific accounts, are modes of communication that assume perspective and ontology in any of their parts. They present as real what they have classified, while the artifice of their classification tends to disappear into the structure of their own making. This leaves the representations with their semblance of reality that others then can encounter and engage with as particular things, peoples, identities, or dramas.

Neruda, perhaps, hardly even notices – when he says “I come to speak through your dead mouths” – that his enablement as a poet arises out of the enforced silence of the Indian, an enforcement in which he cannot help participating as a non-Indian. Indians have to have been oppressed, enslaved, and killed in order that he can speak. As with the rest of us, a useful Indian, alas, is a dead Indian. Or, perhaps, one who has disappeared into the faceless masses: if not genocide, then ethnocide. [It] is not because the non-Indian lives on an Indian continent that he can appropriate Indianness. [I] am not arguing here, need I say it, that not being an Indian makes one an Indian-killer [but] that we need to be perpetually on our guard in what we say

about the Indian.³³

Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Ramos draws out various images of the Yanomami in the works of anthropologists Chagnon, Lizot, and Bruce Albert.³⁴ Between 1968 and 1985, Ramos herself conducted considerable research among different Yanomami subgroups of Brazil—Sanuma, Shiriana, and Yanomam—and as both a woman and a Brazilian, she brought a different sensibility to her research and its ethical and political implications than had the western men. Coming to know different peoples in different places, she views them as all equally Yanomami: “If there is such a thing as a Yanomami mode of being, such a field of ‘Yanomaminess’ is so vast that many pictures can be made of it, each one the unique result of the combination of particular Indians with particular ethnographers in particular situations.”³⁵

It is likely that this diversity was on view at the Yanomami film conference in Paris, and that any claim to the naturalness of the ethnic-Other subject thereby collapsed, as Asch obliquely indicates in his brief mention of that assembly. On this borderland of art and ethnography, perhaps a decent analogy for the revelation of Jean Rouch’s conference—that no one appears to have written about or publicly reflected on—is from the realm of World Music, where producers often take the liberty to sample the sounds, words, and identities of various ethnic-Others for their own projects, which the music industry can then tout as “a celebration of sharing.”³⁶

Ramos discusses how the notion of Yanomami as fierce serves the interests of various civilizers: “In a world that sees Amazonia as one of the last frontiers to be tapped for its mineral and floral riches, there is little room for tolerance of quaint, unpalatable primitiveness [and the easier] it is to justify their subjugation.” She also relates that doing anthropology in Brazil “is already in itself a political act,” and that anthropologists there commonly work in indigenous affairs: “We might say that the trademark of Brazilian ethnography has been its focus on interethnic contact with its ramifications in the historical, dialectical, and political components of the fundamental asymmetry that characterizes Indian-white relations.”³⁷ Representing Indians, then, comes across as a practical matter of national configurations. It is not a question of determining who the Yanomami are, but how they relate within a larger field that includes resources, land rights, and also the ability to represent people within this field of political negotiation.

Napoleon Chagnon’s ethnography on *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (1968) was enormously successful on the American college market, and its popularity was enhanced by many accompanying ethnographic films. The textbook is said to have “sold over one million copies—according to Chagnon, more than any other

ethnography,”³⁸ and his ethnographic films with Asch have been “seen by countless college students who are supposed to become enthralled by the view set forth of primitive man as genetically beset with a killing instinct in order to procreate.”³⁹ This is a particular U.S. American view about humans in a state of nature, which can make western civilization and modernity be felt viscerally and with relief through the implied contrast.⁴⁰ That is, while the filmic focus is explicitly and exclusively on “them,” the Yanomami, the images may instead leave an impression of “us,” the western audience, and reinforce among that group particular understandings of humanity and its differences.

A western college audience had a choice between the Yanomami as fierce and as gentle. This was in a Cold War context of French suppression of independence movements in their colonies, U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia and Latin America, and the brutal suppression of civil rights- and anti-war activism at home. “In the late 1960s, when Asch went to the Venezuelan Amazon, the Yanomamo were seen as ‘one of the relatively large and unacculturated Indian tribes left in South America.’”⁴¹ As rendered by Terence Turner, who started research among Brazil’s Kayapo in 1962:

The anthropological interest in the situation thus seemed to lie in discovering the authentic Kayapo social and cultural system beneath the corrosive overlay of imposed political, social, and ideological forms constituting the situation of contact, and in analyzing how this system might work, or might have worked, in its own terms. From this point of view, anthropology, like Kayapo culture itself, defined itself in abstraction from the “situation of contact,” as the antithesis of “change” and the enemy of “history.”⁴²

French anthropologist Pierre Clastres writes at the conclusion of his *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* that “they and all the other tribes are condemned [to extinction].” He continues:

The whole enterprise that began in the fifteenth century is now coming to an end; an entire continent will soon be rid of its first inhabitants, and this part of the globe will truly be able to proclaim itself a “New World.” “So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many peoples cut down by the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world overthrown for the sake of pearls and pepper. Mechanical victories.” So [French sixteenth-

century author] Montaigne hailed the conquest of America by Western civilization.⁴³

But what a French scholar recycles as a lament over Western Civilization's destructive force needs to be contextualized as primarily Spanish and Portuguese projects through which French readers could come to view themselves as innocent of the effort, and not implicated. In *Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss maintained that "[Europeans] bear responsibility for the crime of [the New World's] destruction." But in the same paragraph, he also brushes aside all difference and responsibility with a sense of shared humanity through which "we" the western readers "may even discover a pristine freshness [in the human lessons learned from the poorest tribe]."⁴⁴

The French and U.S. American quest for authentic pre-contact societies and cultures comes together in the prospecting for pure ethnic elements that produced mimetic delights of otherness for an educated western audience. This quest registers no indication that scholarship was in the same field as military violence and resource exploitation, or that ethnographic description was in many ways the denial of long and interconnected histories, as well as a denial of the need for political negotiation within national realms. On this front, Brazilian scholars such as Ramos could not pretend to look the other way; Yanomami and other Indian populations are fellow-nationals and neighbors, and there was no way to ignore the impact of exoticizing ethnic stereotypes. Ethnic labels that suggest types have been a license for ethnographic authority and, in some ways, an invitation to exploitation in the name of edifying lessons, for a French or a U.S. American audience, about culture and difference.⁴⁵

Downey's Three Videos

In *The Abandoned Shabono* (a *shabono* is a circular village-house), Juan Downey juxtaposes Yanomami village life with his studio interview of French anthropologist Jacques Lizot on the subject of Yanomami society, culture, and cosmology. He introduces Lizot as associated with the *Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale* at the *Collège de France*, and thus by implication, in a position of international scholarly eminence. It is a nostalgic film, and the two men appear to agree on a fundamental division between industrial civilization and peoples such as Amazonian Indians. They talk about "the wisdom of these Indians; they do not pollute and do not alter the harmony of the rainforest." Downey asks his questions in English and Lizot answers in French; Downey renders the description and commentary in English for the audience. Meanwhile, most of the footage shows Yanomami at work or play, busily expressing



Fig. 1. Juan Downey and Jacques Lizot in the studio. Video still from *The Abandoned Shabono*, 1977. 27 min., color, sound. © 1977 Juan Downey Estate, New York City



Fig. 2. Yanomami man makes a roof for a house. Video still from *The Abandoned Shabono* © 1977 Juan Downey Estate, New York City

the cosmology that the outsiders can extract from their (implicitly mute) actions.

Lizot asks: “upon what has industrial civilization been built?” He answers himself: “on the destruction of indigenous and tribal peoples.” Downey asks back: “what can be done to protect the Indians?” to which Lizot replies that it is “no longer possible to isolate people who have already been contacted.” Then Juan Downey asks him if he is the prophet of the Indians’ death. Lizot replies: “I am not only the prophet of the Indian death but of our own death as well.” The video ends on scenes of the impact of exploitation and ostensible civilization – indigenous or mestizo people drunkenly taking liquor from the bottle in what may be a logging camp, a marching military regiment, and comments about the greed for resources. This sense of impending destruction sits awkwardly with the romance of decay, such as when Downey declares that while an occupied village-structure is beautiful, “it is a more striking beauty to discover an abandoned *shabono* [that reasserts] the harmony of the rainforest.”⁴⁶

The Indians’ flexible buildings show how their “architecture participates with the forest’s energy flow. The roof is like the skin of the community, that selectively allows the external world to enter or leave.” Downey’s opening narrative comments on cosmic harmony, where both water and the sun rise in the east and disappear in the west, and more conflicted relations between humans and the spirit worlds above and below. Disease is brought on people by a vengeful snake demon on the rainbow, and shamans throw the diseases to the underworld where spirits live who in return try to snatch people’s souls. If people fall ill because of these underworld spirits then shamans must travel to release them—which they do in a hallucinogen-induced trance—to the humid, putrid underworld.

In stark contrast to the ostensible ethnographic realism of *The Abandoned Shabono, Guabibos* opens with a black and white still photo of a man, a stately image that suggests that he may have been a governor or president. The image is not explained, and then the camera shows Downey’s feet, from many angles, standing in water. He narrates: “I have been looking for my own self in South America. I have been looking for some very pure Indians in South America. I have been looking for some primitive minds in South America. They are very hard to find this time.” Bureaucrats kept demanding a government permit to visit the Indians, they kept stalling the process, and all seemed impossible.⁴⁷

The narration is accompanied by footage of river travel interspersed with a close-up of a woman’s slowly dripping breast. “The deeper you go the darker it gets,” notes the commentary. This is a very different realm from that of the *Abandoned Shabono*, where there is a clear sense of who the Indians are, and the conviction and authority with which they were spoken of. Downey declares that the Indians keep

inviting him to visit them upriver but that this is repeatedly precluded by government officials. As the narration continues—“I have been looking for some primitive minds in South America. In the middle of the jungle, I have been drawing one spiral per day. Oh, pure Indian blood, complex Indian nature, let’s talk”⁴⁸—the video shows people wearing non-distinct clothing: pants and shirts, dresses, or skirts and blouses that do not imply Indian identity to the viewer. They dance and sing in a circular formation, and the view shifts between the dancers and a flowing river. Then the imagery shifts to an airplane that is met with a military honor guard, a marching band playing music, and an official reception for the First Lady Blanca de Perez, as the subtitle declares. There follows black and white footage of a reception at an official building, and then the view offers river scenes, village scenes, and food preparation.

In a scene that looks staged, a man comes to a house and asks the commissioner for help. A girl had dislocated two fingers and her family has no money to get her treated at a hospital in town. We don’t see the commissioner, though the video is shot inside the house; but we hear him say that the only option is to cut off the fingers, to amputate. People voice concern regarding infection, but the matter fades as the camera goes around the community. In contrast to *The Abandoned Shabono*, *Guahibos* is openly reflexive. Downey remarks while reviewing the footage, and notices that only one person was looking at the camera; he gives her name and notes that she was a prostitute, the only one in her community. The viewer is then abruptly situated in the midst of disorienting politics as Downey declares, “today I was arrested,” but that it became hard for him to distinguish imprisonment from freedom. He was interrogated and asked if he had attended a cultural festival among the Amazonian Indians: “Not only had I attended but I had also shot a videotape.”⁴⁹

During this segment, the footage shows a singer with an acoustic guitar. Subtitles provide his lyrics, about military brutality and a promise to a fallen brother that his death will be avenged. I thought the imagery was perhaps of Chilean singer Victor Jara, who was tortured and killed during the military coup of 1973 identified with General Pinochet. Jara’s fingers were broken before he was killed, so he could not play his guitar; as I watched I thought that the episode with the commissioner—insisting a girl could not be helped and her fingers must be chopped off—suggested mimetic equivalence that is left undeclared. The screen shifts between the singer and a flowing river, but suddenly there is a white head lying on the ground, as if from a broken marble statue. When the camera pans out, this turns out to be the head of a plastic doll. We then hear children laughing and running, and one of them kicks the head—they were playing soccer. Jara and many others were tortured and killed at a soccer stadium in Santiago.

Here I may be reading too many associations into the imagery, but I was left

with the impression that for Downey, play and political violence had become blurred beyond distinction. It turns out that the concert footage is of:

Ali Primera, an activist/singer whose best-friend was apprehended, tortured, and decapitated by government officials. Though it was a concert backed by the [Venezuelan] government and Juan [Downey] was asked by [government officials] to film it, Juan was detained for several hours in jail because of the political implications of some of the images filmed in relation to the words in the song.⁵⁰

At the end of *Guahibos*, Downey (out of the frame) is with his camera and a young couple who sit by a riverbank. The man says his wife is Guahibo, and that her father was Creole. Their marriage is across ethnic lines (she smiles a little awkwardly and turns slightly away), and he goes on to talk about an emerging interethnic union of the Indians of the Amazon. He was speaking in Spanish but then he continues enthusiastically in his own indigenous Maquiritari language; Downey's subtitles declare that now he has understood nothing.

In *The Laughing Alligator*, Downey is no longer alone with the Indians. He is accompanied by his wife Marilys and her daughter Elizabeth (Titi) during his over-eight-month sojourn to the Yanomami.⁵¹ The two women play an important role in the narration, with teenaged Titi offering personal reflections and Marilys voicing scientific authority to sometimes very comic effect. Together they suspend scientific authority and ethnographic disconnect, but in many ways the film is still movingly ethnographic. The film opens with a headshot of Titi declaring that she lived with the Yanomami for eight months, and that they are a very primitive people. There follow video clips of the music scene and street life in New York City, with Juan Downey's voiceover, narrating that he got bored filming people there. He wanted to leave and be eaten by Indians of the Amazon. He states that he had ritualized his encounter with the Indians; there follows a shot where he kisses the lips of his own image on a television screen. He moves away but then the figure on the screen calls out, "hey, let me out of here, I want to be free."

The video then shows a Yanomami shaman dance and chant on the village grounds inside the circular house-structure. Downey is then shown at home in the studio, wearing a suit, and relating his journey to the village. Two Yanomami accompanied him on the ninety-minute trek through the jungle. The two were armed, one with a double-barrel shotgun and the other with a bow and arrows. Somewhere midway, the two guides turn and aim their weapons at him rather menacingly; he is pinned between them. This is enacted for the video camera, and

where all three men hold their shooting pose briefly. Narrating this standoff, Juan Downey likens the video camera to a weapon, and talks about his activity as shooting people.

There follows a village scene of a girl speaking in Yanomami; subtitles translate her words as “the foreigner was afraid.” The girl laughs as she finishes the story. Following some village scenes, Juan Downey states that the Yanomami are not cannibals, but that after a person dies, they cremate the body and grind some of the ashes. These people consume the ashes—mixed with banana soup—because they love the departed person. Juan Downey mentions that one Yanomami man told him he loved him so much that he wanted to eat him if he died of malaria. Downey then asks if this is “the ultimate funerary architecture?” Marilyns then tells a story, and declares the title with considerable seriousness: “The Man with the Pregnant Leg.” It is an origin myth where there were only two men in the world; one made love to the other’s foot (between the toes, but the fetal growth was at his thigh), and later a daughter was born. She married her father—well, they were both her father—and gave birth to a daughter whom the other man married. As she concludes, there is a shot of Juan Downey in the studio, this time shirtless and with Yanomami-style bodypaint; he turns off what seems to be a replica of a tape-recorder.

Lazy village scenes follow, and people laugh as they lounge in their hammocks. Titi tells of the shamanic cure of an eleven-year old girl that she witnessed and which was instantly successful; Downey shows us the smiling face of a young girl in her hammock. Titi continues about courtship among the Yanomami, which involves the gift of food and constraints on communication between the young people: “If you talk to a young man, you are egging him on, teasing him.” Her nostalgia for particular real people is unlike that of Juan Downey and Jacques Lizot in *The Abandoned Shabobo*, about the absolutely pure and absolutely vulnerable natives. Multiple displacements are productive, in the sense that Downey no longer views the Yanomami with lament. But he narrates at one point: “Either I am a traveler in ancient times or I am a traveler in my own day, hastening the search for a vanishing reality. Either way I am a loser.”

This is Juan Downey’s quest, and it is no longer the Yanomami or other peoples of Latin America who are doomed. This liberates Downey to chase creatively after the hallucinogenic visions of shamans, which he renders by playing with the colors of the film. Marilyns narrates like a scientist that the Yanomami prepare hallucinogenic drugs from the bark of one tree mixed with the seeds of another. She recites the plants’ Latin names and offers intricate detail on the mixing, and how exchange among settlements makes the material available all across Yanomami territory, explaining, “The Indians claim that in this drug-induced state



Fig. 3. Mock photo of woman and alligator. Video still from Juan Downey, *The Laughing Alligator*, 27 min, black and white, color, sound. © 1979 Juan Downey Estate, New York City



Fig. 4. Juan Downey in the studio. Video still from Juan Downey, *The Laughing Alligator* © 1979 Juan Downey Estate, New York City

they are able to contact other worlds.” The film changes colors for a while and then returns to show a shaman in a trance—crawling, growling, and eventually, he appears to be flying.

Juan Downey narrates the other story, “The Origin of Fire.” In the old days people only ate raw things, but the alligator had fire that it hid in its mouth. Some children became intrigued when they found fragments of burnt leaves and cooked worms. They fooled around in order to make the alligator crack up. They succeeded after antics that involved relieving themselves in plain sight of the alligator. A bird flew into the alligator’s open mouth and stole the fire: “The bird sat in a tree, and the tree gives us fire.” Since then the Yanomami have used sticks of wood to make fire, and there follows a video shot of someone’s hands starting a fire with sticks. The video continues with an image of Juan Downey in Yanomami face paint in his New York studio; Yanomami people wielding the camera in the village; and comes to an end with Downey telling of a mute woman in the Yanomami village who asked him to film her singing. She could not really sing but made some sounds, and the resulting video became a favorite in the village.

The fact that Juan Downey’s video never declared who the Guahibos were, and that he went from Lizot-inspired nostalgia to playful collaboration regarding the Yanomami (putting scientific representation and ethnographic film on the spot), may explain why Timothy Asch never mentions Downey’s work while he acknowledges that filmmakers had obviously made the Yanomami into whatever suited their (national) fancy. Ethnographic representation of types, such as in *The Abandoned Shabono*, is in the same realm as the ethnic indeterminacy, bureaucratic obstruction, and ominous violence of *Guahibos*. And these are of a set with the role-switching that playfully undermines scientific authority in *The Laughing Alligator*. Viewing the videos together offers a perspective on the production of ethnographic knowledge and how it rests on the configuration of pure ethnic types, which were only imaginable by excluding the long histories of contact, interactions, internal diversity, and the particularity, of national and historical conditions in Venezuela, Brazil, and elsewhere.

It’s Not Over Until the Mute Lady Sings

James Clifford’s engagement with ethnographic Surrealism suggests that it belongs to a historical moment in Paris when there was considerable free exchange between the realms of art and ethnography, but that this had come to an end by 1937. Clifford calls attention to “a disruptive and creative play of human categories and differences, an activity that does not simply display and comprehend the diversity of cultural orders but openly expects, allows, indeed desires its own disorientation.”⁵²

Downey's videos suggest a variant of this, a search for pure Indian nature as an antidote to his urban New York reality. Either strategy insists on absolute difference, and at the same time, on mimetic equivalence through which the modern self can be reasserted—as it is enhanced by the “pristine freshness” that anthropology offered through books, film, and museums.

The humor in *The Laughing Alligator* subverts academic pretense and western urbanites' reinvigoration through images of Indians that deny them their contemporary realities. This may have occasioned anthropologists' negative reaction. To learn something from Downey's videos we have to be prepared to laugh at ourselves, not because things are funny, but because the alternative has frightening implications: the refusal to recognize contemporary realities among peoples of the Amazon region. Among the Amazonian Indians who became globally known in the 1980s and '90s was a Yanomami leader, Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, who spoke to “all the peoples of the earth” about his people's plight. In the western scientific and popular media anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon lashed out at him as a fraud, since he spoke in Portuguese in public, and anchored his talks to western environmentalism, unlike the ostensibly real Yanomami whom Chagnon knew and mediated, and who were squarely local.⁵³

The Laughing Alligator makes a play of Juan Downey's vulnerability when the two Yanomami men aim their weapons at him in the forest. The clear moral binary of *The Abandoned Shabono* is absent from the two later videos, and both take issue with anthropology's certainty about its peoples and its authority to speak of and for them. But in terms of the story of the alligator which kept fire to himself and refused to share, perhaps the video episode in the forest is a variant on a cosmographic Yanomami story: here was the western filmmaker with his prized tool for imagery and communication, and the locals, engaged in transgressive play to get him to share it. If the alligator story somehow captures Juan Downey's position in relation to the Yanomami, perhaps it can also suggest anthropology's potential. We can claim the world for ourselves and insist that various others share their things with us on our terms, or we can learn to share, negotiate, and play with others. I cannot help thinking that *The Laughing Alligator* is Juan Downey's response to the 1978 conference on Yanomami films and the implied naturalism of the Yanomami subject of ethnography.

Downey's video footage of the singing mute may encapsulate a reality that more mainstream views on ethnographically thick film could not see or tried to deny—that even the apparently voiceless had plenty to communicate to an appreciative audience, once the filmmaker had relaxed his/her control and engaged with people on more equal terms. Seen from this angle, Downey's ethnographic

videos became more rather than less realist over time. He abandoned the scientific veneer of ethnography that gave anthropologists and filmmakers free rein to signify other people as types, paid attention to political landscapes and violence, and portrayed people in a way that exposed the conceit of ethnographic typecasting. What seems on first viewing to be Surrealism may be the exact opposite – here my sense of Surrealism in relation to anthropology draws on Clifford’s discussion of “the disruptive and creative play on human categories and differences that does not simply display and comprehend the diversity of cultural orders but openly expects, allows, indeed desires its own disorientation.”⁵⁴ Like some of French Surrealism it constituted a protest, through art, of national ethnography as normal science.⁵⁵ Given the political climate at the time, perhaps because western science was blind to its own abuses or complicity—as suggested by Padilha’s *Secrets of the Tribe*—this left only realism’s opposites as avenues for voicing alternative perspectives.

As Juan Downey became more familiar with peoples and places of the Amazon region, his narrative and visual angles shifted away from ethnographic authority and toward more reflexive ethnographic possibility, but in a manner that opened video to situating peoples in the contemporary political climate. His creative license was not one of art for art’s sake. Rather, it is an artist’s ethnographic offering that by all accounts seems to never have been received. He shared his work with the Yanomami, who are said to have particularly appreciated the video of the singing mute. As an ethnographic video, *Guabibos* is inconclusive. It shows signs of cultures in contact where the Indians do not look distinct from other Venezuelans; they intermarry among themselves and with Creoles; and they are forming an interethnic and transnational political action group. This is framed by governmental control that impedes Downey’s plans to visit their communities, even when some Indians expressly invite him. The First Lady visits the region, people dance and sing, children play and do laundry; this is infused with a growing sense of marginalization, discrimination, and political violence.

But the violence is not along predictable ethnological lines, as in the earlier contrast between industrial civilization and indigenous peoples. Instead it is confusing, as in the statement that freedom and imprisonment were hard to distinguish, and when a doll’s dismembered head is kicked as children play soccer. The quest for generic Indian types has somehow disappeared, while Downey declares that this is precisely what he was after. The video’s tone is rather ironic, in the sense of highlighting disjuncture and a mismatch between expectations and social life. Downey comes across as baffled, frustrated, sometimes frightened, but curious and able to convey segments of contemporary realities that implicitly declare the old ethnographic expectations bankrupt. Conventional anthropology was

incapable of recognizing the world that Indian peoples inhabited, in its promises, pleasures, and creativity, as much as in its marginalization and structural violence. Irony draws on misalignments between experience and expectations, and it works in the videos because Downey and the Yanomami had come to a sense of each other and learned to share some things. Without relations and a degree of trust, the irony might simply express distance and appropriation.⁵⁶

When video or shamanism are no longer alien and intriguing but everyday, like fire, the question shifts away from whether people have it and toward what they want to create, share, or where they can or wish to go with particular other people. Juan Downey's transformation over his three videos from 1977 to 1979 is an offspring of his time with the Yanomami and the Guahibo, during which he gave up some of his artistic and narrative control as he abandoned his earlier fatalism about indigenous peoples of the Amazon. It is a funny offspring, like the girl born of the union of a man with another's foot. That unlikely thing was the start of new life. I would rather hear out the story than insist on my full understanding of every word and image.

Juan Downey has left us the image of kissing goodbye his former self that was stuck inside the screen, and could not reach the world of contact, desire, pleasure, confusion, compromise, live fire, and the recognition that a video camera offered a way to shoot people. Using video to convey this message is, I think, ironic. The joke dies as soon as it is treated with reverence as some final truth, or as a method that the rest of us can emulate as the path to our own relevance. Insisting, as did the anthropologist critics of Downey's videos, on clearly demarcated lines between the serious and the ludic, is to ask for certainty about the Yanomami and ourselves in the same move. In different ways, such ontological confidence was available in the works of Chagnon and Lizot, and it informed *The Abandoned Shabono*.

My understanding of Downey's videos is probably somewhat particular to my own engagements with the worlds of anthropology and its peoples. But the three works together seem to break the spell of ethnological typecasting that had turned Indians into the manifestation of anthropological insight, as it enabled certainty about our own place in the world—as free to enjoy the “pristine freshness” without any involvement, and having a choice between the fierce and the domestic. The complaint that the serious and the ludic are not sufficiently cued for the viewer of Downey's videos comes across as a do-not-disturb sign, an indication of how all of anthropology helped keep attention away from the conditions of knowledge-production about life in the Amazonian forests.

Videography

Juan Downey, *The Abandoned Shabono*, 1977. 27 min, color, sound. New York: Juan Downey Estate.

Juan Downey, *Guabibos*, 1978. 25:10 min, color, black and white, sound. New York: Juan Downey Estate.

Juan Downey, *The Laughing Alligator*, 1979. 27 min, black and white, color, sound. New York: Juan Downey Estate.



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1 A note on spelling: I opt for Yanomami over the more common Yanomamo. Both are simplifications for the same indigenous term that Napoleon Chagnon renders as Yanomamö and Jacques Lizot as Yanomami.

2 Arnd Schneider, “Three Modes of Experimentation with Art and Ethnography,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): 171-94; Michael Taussig, “A Lesson in Looking and Laughter: Juan Downey’s Amazing Yanomami Video, *The Laughing Alligator*,” in *Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect* ed. Valerie Smith (Boston: MIT Visual Arts Center, with the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2011), 41-52.

3 Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968); Jacques Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami: Daily Life in the Venezuelan*

Rainforest, trans. Earnest Simon, trans (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

4 Patrick Tierney, *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (New York: Norton, 2002), Robert Borofsky, with Bruce Albert, Raymond Hames, Kim Hill, Leda Leitao Martins, John Peters, and Terence Turner, *Yanomami: The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn From It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

5 Steven Nugent, "The Yanomami: Anthropological Discourses and Ethics," in *The Ethics of Anthropology*, ed. Pat Caplan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 77-95; Peter Pels, "'Where There Are No Ten Commandments': Redefining Ethics During the *Darkness in El Dorado* Scandal," in *Embedding Ethics*, eds. Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (New York: Berg, 2005), 69-99.

6 The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 2010, and was then distributed by BBC and HBO.

7 James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

8 The information about the seminar and the debate comes from a brief mention in a 1979 newsletter from the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication: Emilie de Brigard (1979) International Committee on Films on Man Hosts Yanomamo Seminar in Paris. *SAVICOM Newsletter* 7, 2: 16.

9 Eric Michaels, *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia, 1982-1985* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), and Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6, 1 (1991): 92-112; Ginsburg, "Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, eds. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 39-57.

10 Beth Conklin and Laura Graham, "The Shifting Middle Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-politics," *American Anthropologist* 97, 4 (1995): 695-710.

11 See Valerie Smith, ed., *Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect*.

12 Timothy Asch, "Foreword," in Jacques Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami*, ix.

13 Asch, "Foreword," ix.

14 See Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations in Film & Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 115-20; Wilton Martinez, "The Challenges of a Pioneer: Tim Asch, Otherness, and Film Reception," *Visual Anthropology Review* 11, 1 (1995): 53-81.

- 15 See Karl Heider and Carol Hermer, *Films for Anthropological Teaching*, 8th ed (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1995), 285-88; Timothy Asch and Gary Seaman, *Yanomamo: Film Study Guide* (Los Angeles: Ethnographic Press, 1993).
- 16 Martinez, "The Challenges of a Pioneer."
- 17 Timothy Asch, with Jesus Ignacio Cardozo, Hortensia Cabellero, and Jose Botoli, "The Story We Now Want to Hear Is Not Ours to Tell: Relinquishing Control over Representation: Toward Sharing Visual Communication Skills with the Yanomami," *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, 2 (1991): 102, 106.
- 18 Asch et al, "The Story We Now Want to Hear," 103.
- 19 Talal Asad, ed. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973).
- 20 See Asch et al. "The Story We Now Want to Hear," 102-103. There is an intriguing parallel in Hal Foster's discussion of a French artists' project from 1993, of a "facilitated self-representation" by the inhabitants of an urban housing estate. See Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 308.
- 21 Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations in Film & Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135.
- 22 Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 133-34.
- 23 For how this particular commonsense view is presented as science, in sociobiology and cultural materialism, see Davydd J. Greenwood, *The Taming of Evolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 148-99.
- 24 Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 133-34, citing Wilton Martinez 1991; see Martinez, "The Challenges of a Pioneer."
- 25 Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 39, 281, 243.
- 26 Mick Eaton, ed. *Anthropology, Reality, Cinema: The Films of Jean Rouch* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).
- 27 Joram Ten Brink, ed. *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007); Paul Henley, *The Adventure of the Real: Jean Rouch and the Craft of Ethnographic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- 28 Eric Michaels, "How to Look at Us Looking at the Yanomami Looking at Us," in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 135.
- 29 Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 144.
- 30 Michaels, "How to look at us," 135, 141-42.
- 31 Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15-37.

- 32 Nathaniel Tarn, *The Embattled Lyric: Essays and Conversations in Poetics and Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 66.
- 33 Tarn, *The Embattled Lyric*, 65.
- 34 Alcida R. Ramos, "Reflecting on the Yanomami: Ethnographic Images and the Pursuit of the Exotic." *Cultural Anthropology* 2, 3 (1987): 284-304.
- 35 Ramos, "Reflecting on the Yanomami," 285. See also the historical contextualization in Brian Ferguson, *Yanomami Warfare* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1995), that completely undermines the alternative one-dimensional and history-less portraits by Chagnon and Lizot.
- 36 Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 213.
- 37 Ramos, "Reflecting," 299-300.
- 38 Timothy Asch, "Bias in Ethnographic Reporting and Using the Yanomamo Films in Teaching," in *Yanomamo: Film Study Guide*, eds. Timothy Asch and Gary Seaman (Los Angeles: Ethnographic Press, 1993), 1-12.
- 39 Michael Taussig, "A Lesson in Looking and Laughter," 43.
- 40 Martinez, "The Challenges of a Pioneer."
- 41 Martinez, "The Challenges of a Pioneer," 58.
- 42 Terence Turner, "Representing, Resisting, Rethinking: Historical Transformations of Kayapo Culture and Anthropological Consciousness," in *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 292.
- 43 Pierre Clastres, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, trans. Paul Auster, (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 345-46.
- 44 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 448. The contrast between French and US American views is rather illusory; in both places there was a range of views about so-called primitives as "our contemporary ancestors" and there was scholarly traffic between the countries. Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stern (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 14, cites Marshall Sahlins' "The Original Affluent Society" (that appeared in both French and English in 1968) for the view that prior to states and agriculture, people lived lives of abundance with very little work. In *The Abandoned Shabono*, Lizot states this as a plain fact, that "the Indians have to work only three or four hours a day" to feed themselves.
- 45 Hal Foster draws out a clear parallel in how artists have moved into the realm of ethnic and other difference, as "ideological patrons" of the Other (Foster, "The artist as ethnographer," 302-07).
- 46 From *The Abandoned Shabono* (Juan Downey, 1977).

- 47 From *Guahibos* (Juan Downey, 1978).
- 48 From *Guahibos* (Juan Downey, 1978).
- 49 From *Guahibos* (Juan Downey, 1978).
- 50 Marilys Downey, personal communication, December 12, 2011.
- 51 The three were “in the Amazon rainforest for 11 ½ months, of which [they] spent the final 8 ½ months with the Yanomami, and the balance with the Piaroas, Guahibos, and Maquiritari” (Marilys Downey, personal communication, December 12, 2011).
- 52 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 140.
- 53 Laura Graham, “How Should an Indian Speak? Amazonian Indians and the Symbolic Politics of Language in the Global Public Sphere,” in *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America*, eds. Kay Warren and Jean Jackson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 183-205.
- 54 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 140.
- 55 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 137.
- 56 See, on different kinds of irony and their political implications, James Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber “Introduction: The anthropology of irony,” in *Irony in Action: Anthropology, Practice, and the Moral Imagination*, eds. James Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 21-23.