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The Mark of Survival: Claudia Andujar's Marcados

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Abstract This work analyzes Claudia Andujar's Marcados (1981-1983) series by exploring the tension between the archival form and colonial failure. Composed of portraits of Yanomami people wearing numbered tags, this study demonstrates how Andujar transforms these instruments of state control into a strategic "counter-archive." While numerical identification is traditionally a colonial instrument of surveillance, this project highlights the failure of the Western archive to categorize the fluid sociality of the Yanomami. For the Yanomami, the preservation of images (utupë) represents a spiritual risk; however, they accepted this sacrifice as a survival tactic. A central point is Andujar's background as a Holocaust survivor. Having seen her family "marked" for extermination, she redefines the number, shifting it from a sign of erasure to a prerequisite for the demarcation of the urihi (forest land). By subverting the colonial gaze, the "marked" subjects transcend administrative "death" to achieve a state of political flourishing, thereby ensuring the vitality of their culture in the face of contemporary genocidal threats.

Résumé Ce travail analyse la série Marcados (1981-1983) de Claudia Andujar en explorant la tension entre la forme archivistique et l'échec colonial. Composée de portraits de Yanomami portant des plaques numérotées, cette étude démontre comment Andujar transforme ces outils de contrôle étatique en un « contre-archive » stratégique. Alors que l'identification numérique est traditionnellement un instrument colonial de surveillance, ce projet souligne l'échec de l'archive occidentale à catégoriser la socialité fluide des Yanomami. Pour les Yanomami, la préservation des images (utupë) représente un risque spirituel; cependant, ils ont accepté ce sacrifice comme tactique de survie. Un point central est l'histoire d'Andujar, survivante de l'Holocauste. Ayant vu sa famille « marquée » pour l'extermination, elle redéfinit le numéro, passant d'un signe d'effacement à une condition préalable à la démarcation de l'urihi. En subvertissant le regard colonial, les sujets « marqués » dépassent la « mort » administrative pour atteindre un état de épanouissement politique, assurant ainsi la vitalité de leur culture face aux menaces génocidaires contemporaines.

Keywords Claudia Andujar; counter-archive; Yanomami; photography; archive.

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Claudia Andujar's photographic series, Marcados (1981–1983) (fig.1), functions as a strategic counter-archive that weaponizes the bureaucratic gaze against its own genocidal threat. The series consists of a massive archival collection of thousands of black-and-white portraits of Yanomami subjects holding numbered identification tags, taken during the mass vaccination campaign as part of a required sanitary registry. By reframing the colonial-settler practice of identification through her personal and communal trauma, Andujar's photographic series—and its complex institutional circulation—becomes a double-edged sword: a necessary visual denunciation that both violates the Yanomami cosmovision and secures the physical existence required to protect the urihi (Kopenawa and Albert 2013).

The Yanomami, a large Indigenous group of approximately 32,000 to 45,000 people residing in the Amazonian borderlands of Brazil and Venezuela, live[1] within a framework known as the urihi. To the Yanomami, the urihi is not merely "land" or "territory"; it is a living, integral entity that encompasses the forest, the ancestors, and the xapiri (ancestral spirits). The health of the urihi is the health of the world, and its destruction by the napë pë (outsiders, "image people" or "commodities people") signals the Queda do Céu (The Falling Sky)—a cosmic collapse[2] (Kopenawa and Albert 2013).[3]

The current crisis, marked by mercury poisoning, disease, and violence, intensified in the early 1970s with the construction of the Perimetral Norte highway. Part of the military dictatorship's National Integration Plan (PIN), this infrastructure project ruptured the urihi and introduced devastating diseases like measles and influenza against which the Yanomami had no immunological defense (Pereira 2015). Today, the threat is intensified by thousands of illegal gold miners (garimpeiros), whom the Yanomami call either napë worëri pë (the outsider peccary spirits) or urihi wapo pë (the earth eaters) (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 263).

[1] While advocacy organizations like Survival International estimate the total Yanomami population across the Brazil–Venezuela border at around 45,000, official Brazilian governmental sources report approximately 32,000 inhabitants strictly within the boundaries of the demarcated Yanomami Indigenous Territory (Terra Indígena Yanomami—TIY) on the Brazilian side. See "Yanomami," Survival International, accessed October 20, 2026, https://www.survivalinternational.org/peoples/yanomami; and "Terra Indígena Yanomami," Casa de Governo no Estado de Roraima, Governo do Brasil, accessed October 20, 2026, https://www.gov.br/casacivil/pt-br/casa-de-governo-yanomami/ti-yanomami

[2] The book is the result of Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa telling his life story, cosmology and political prophecy to French anthropologist Bruce Albert, who transcribed and edited the narrative over many years. This co-authored work provides the definitive Yanomami perspective on the threat posed by the napë pë (outsiders) to the urihi (land-forest). It was initially published in French (La Chute du Ciel 2010), followed by the English (2013) and Portuguese (2015) editions.

[3] For a detailed discussion of Yanomami terminology and its translation, see Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, "Notes," in The Falling Sky: Words of a Shaman, trans. Nicholas Elliott and Alison Dundy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 489–573. The terms referenced here are drawn specifically from the subsection "Words Given" (pp. 489–501). For further context on Yanomami cosmologic terms as mobilized in cultural and political analysis, see also Ana Maria Machado and Claudia Antunes, "Understanding the Yanomami in Salgueiro's Samba School Parade," trans. Diane Whitty, Sumaúma, January 30, 2024, https://sumauma.com/en/para-entender-os-yanomami-na-sapucai/.

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Claudia Andujar stepped into this landscape. Born Claudine Hass, a Holocaust survivor, whose personal experience with displacement and state-sanctioned violence profoundly shaped her advocacy. After settling in Brazil in 1955, she became deeply integrated with the Yanomami following her first encounters in 1971.[4]

Her dedication shifted her role from photographer to activist. Andujar's photographic approach moved beyond experimental efforts to capture the ethereal xapiri to prioritizing urgent political documentation. Crucially, Andujar was never interested only in the ethnographic project of documenting how the subjects worked or dressed. Instead, as she stated in the interview "Claudia Andujar: In Her Words", her driving curiosity was "how they thought"—a profound focus on their interiority and cosmology rather than their material culture. This interest aligned with her rejection of the static, singular portrait, noting: "It's impossible through one gesture to relate to what is . . . it's sequences that interests me" (Andujar, Barbican Centre 2021), foreshadowing the sequential, archival nature of Marcados. By seeking to capture thought and sequence, Andujar moved her practice beyond passive recording and toward what Ariella Azoulay defines in The Civil Contract of Photography (2008), that the photographic encounter establishes a form of shared citizenship between the photographed subjects, the photographer, and the spectator. In this civil space, the images function not as neutral records, but as an active political platform that demands the spectator recognize the subjects' rights and intervene against the violence inflicted upon them, thus transforming the clinical record into a powerful, ethical instrument of counter-archival resistance.[5]

By 1978, the situation had reached a breaking point. Having been expelled from the territory by the military government in 1977 due to her activism, Andujar co-founded the Pro-Yanomami Commission (CCPY). The CCPY was established to organize a systematic defense, focusing on both territorial demarcation and crucial medical intervention. The vaccination campaign (1981–1983) was the CCPY's primary front-line operation. Andujar entered the territory to function as a health worker, administering vaccines and documenting a population rapidly disappearing (Pereira 2015). However, this Western intervention

[4] Barbican Centre, "Claudia Andujar: The Yanomami Struggle," press release, June 2021, https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/claudia-andujar-the-yanomami-struggle.

[5] Though I will not elaborate here on the broader intricacies of archival problematics, by "counter-archive" I refer to an animating process that contests institutional fixation and "constituent violence"—a term Azoulay adapts from Walter Benjamin to describe the foundational violence that institutes a legal order and neutralizes its own origins. In Azoulay's framework, official archives perpetuate constituent violence by fixing political trauma under neutral administrative labels. Counter-archival resistance re-animates these restricted or "unshowable" documents into active civil encounters in the present. See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Different Ways Not to Say Deportation: Unshowable Photographs (Vancouver: Fillip Editions, 2012); and Ariella Azoulay and Elle Flanders, The Right to Share the Public Archive, Fillip, no. 16 (Spring 2012): 60–69.

immediately ran into a profound metaphysical conflict with Yanomami sociality. The Western medical system requires a "truth apparatus" based on individual identification to track dosages and follow-ups.

Yanomami sociality, as described by Viveiros de Castro (1996), did not utilize permanent, individual names that could be easily recorded in a ledger; names were often taboo, changed throughout a person's life, or tied to fluid kinship relations.

To bridge this gap between the Indigenous world and the bureaucratic system of the state, the health workers implemented a numbering system. Each Yanomami person was briefly isolated from their communal group, assigned a numerical identifier, and photographed with a tag around their neck to create a visual medical record.

This identification campaign initiated a process of specimenization, derived from the Latin specĕre ("to look at") (Post 2023, 38). The photographs were intended to live inside a filing cabinet, serving as clinical evidence of a body that had been "processed" and categorized by the health system—the very logic of state surveillance and control (Sekula, 1986). This practice is a colonial tool, reducing the complex, relational Yanomami person into a quantifiable, administrable object, thereby creating the governable subject required by the modern state archive. However, as the garimpeiro invasion intensified and the state continued to drag its feet on land rights, Andujar realized that these "specimens" held a different, urgent power. By documenting the Yanomami as a numbered, legible population, she was providing the napë pë (the "image people," or outsiders) the only kind of proof they respected: a counted and cataloged humanity. The campaign thus evolved from a medical necessity into a strategic "counter-archive," deliberately using the very tools of colonial surveillance and administration to demand the legal protection of the urihi.

To understand the profound ethical and political weight of these images, one must engage with the most widely known research by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro on the theory of Amerindian perspectivism (1996), which fundamentally challenges the Western colonial notion of the individual subject and provides the theoretical basis for the Yanomami's resistance to the numbered tag. The Western archive demands a person be a "single being," defined by a fixed, permanent identity that can be tracked across time—hallmarks of "possessive individualism" (Moten 2017) imposed by Western sociality. Amazonian thought, conversely, is "multinatural" (one culture/spirit, many natures/bodies), inherently resisting this singularity. The Marcados records (fig.2) directly expose this conflict. Because the Yanomami did not recognize themselves as isolated individuals, the sanitary records often failed, listing

multiple names for a single subject. This fluidity reflected communal ties and the constant “transformation" of kinship rather than a static identity (Rocha 2017). This refusal of the autonomous subject is a direct challenge to the Western “body and the archive” logic.

Fred Moten’s concept of “consent not to be a single being” (Moten 2017) suggests a radical mode of existence that resists the individualizing structure of Western archive; while it demands the possessive individual of fixed and isolated identity, Amazonian thought operates in an irreducibly collective and relational existence. The Yanomami’s communal vitality—their insistence on existing in the in-betweenness of the community—is a radical political stance. The numbering system, therefore, attempts to impose the structure of the autonomous colonial subject onto a shamanic sociality, but the failure of the archive to neatly categorize the Yanomami is precisely where its power is subverted; it exposes the inability of the state to contain the collective urihi.

The concept of the utupë (image, reflection, or spiritual double) is the source of the deepest ethical conflict for any photograph taken of the Yanomami, pitting their cosmovision directly against the demands of the modern world. The utupë is a vital, active constituent part of the living person. Spiritual law mandates that any image or name be erased upon death to allow the spirit (pore) to complete its journey to hutu mosi (celestial realm); a preserved image traps the spirit on Earth, causing spiritual disorder (Limulja 2023). The Yanomami, through a tactical acceptance as a group, made a profound sacrifice to endure this spiritual jeopardy in exchange for physical and communal survival. These powerful images circulate in the napë pë world, where, as Kopenawa notes, people only believe what they can see. Thus, the images became a double-edged sword—a necessary weapon of denunciation in the global struggle, which harms the deceased but is required to save the living.

A haunting and critical layer of the Marcados series is its intersection with Andujar’s personal history, which radically inverts the meaning of the identification mark. Andujar’s father and most of her paternal family were murdered in the Holocaust, having been “marked" with numbers in concentration camps—a marking that facilitated their industrial disappearance. While Andujar was immediately aware of the tags’ resonance, her public framing of the numbered neck as a profound trauma reflected back at her, just happened around 2002–2003. However, in the Amazonian context, Andujar was using the “mark" to ensure the Yanomami would not disappear. This is a radical inversion of the archive. In the Nazi archive, the number was a precursor to erasure; in Andujar’s “counter-archive,” the number was a prerequisite for medical care and territorial demarcation (Pereira 2015). She was using the tools of the napë pë—the very tools that had destroyed her own family—to build a protective

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wall of evidence around the people that adopted her. This transforms Marcados into a bid for vitality, ensuring that the “marked" would live. This inversion is the essence of what Melissa Rocha (2017) calls “shamanic reverse anthropology.” A shaman is a translator who travels between realms to restore balance. By taking the administrative “death-tags" of the vaccination campaign and moving them into the “life-giving" space of global activism and art, Andujar performs a shamanic act of transformation. The counter-archive intervenes in the present, forcing the Brazilian state to recognize the Yanomami not as “specimens" of a vanishing past, but as political actors.

This political strategy is rooted in the lineage of Brazilian institutional critique, paralleling the work of Anna Bella Geiger’s Brasil Nativo/Brasil Alienígena (1977) (fig.3). Where Geiger uses parody to expose the “Native" label as a colonial fiction, Andujar uses the weight of historical trauma and the bureaucratic archive itself to demand recognition for the living.

The visual power of the Marcados series is thus rooted in its ability to harness the language of institutional control while simultaneously subverting it. Andujar employs the visual codes of specimenization—the direct gaze and the numerical tag—to achieve bureaucratic legibility, yet she sabotages the required clinical neutrality through aesthetic choices that emphasize the immediacy of the encounter:

- Non-uniform backgrounds (rejecting standardization and hinting at the surrounding urihi).
- The use of natural, stark light which, when paired with the high-contrast printing, creates a direct, unmediated visual intensity. This raw visual language transcends mere documentation, introducing a poetic dimension (Pereira 2015).
- The overall photographic feel refuses the laboratory aesthetic of a sterile clinical record, grounding the encounter in the specific Amazonian location.

The subject’s expression, often a direct and unperformed stare, functions as both a powerful collective resistance to the colonial gaze and a reflection of the profound relational trust established between the Yanomami and Andujar. The images, therefore, refuse to submit to the logic of the archive as purely isolated, possessable specimens. Geiger utilized mass-produced postcards of Indigenous people—images designed to satisfy the napë pë desire for the “exotic" and “primitive"—and juxtaposed them with self-portraits in identical, stylized poses within her own domestic, urban environment. Using parody and mimicry to expose the absurdity of the “native" label, Geiger revealed that the “savage" image was merely a

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colonial fiction imposed upon the real Brazilian subject. Rocha describes Geiger's work as an "inventory of absences," recording the life the state refused to acknowledge.

Like Geiger, Andujar's Marcados works with a "found" or "imposed" format—the bureaucratic identification portrait. However, where Geiger uses mimicry, Andujar uses the weight of historical trauma. They present an opaque surface that reflects the viewer's own colonial gaze back at them, thereby protecting the interiority necessary for political and spiritual survival. Marcados is thus visually and conceptually aligned with the artistic lineage of post-dictatorship Brazilian institutional critique, demonstrating that resistance is found not just in protest, but in the calculated refusal to perform legibility for the colonizer.

By taking the vaccination tags—symbols of a state that had previously ignored or actively sought to displace the Yanomami—and turning them into a global exhibition, Andujar and the Yanomami perform a reverse anthropology. They use the napë pë's own obsession with "images" and "documentation" to force a political recognition of the urihi. The "mark" that was meant to track a biological specimen becomes a mark of political autodetermination. The power of the counter-archive, as Rocha suggests, is seen in how it subverts the tools of the oppressor, transforming the instruments of categorization into instruments of collective vitality.

The exhibition history, detailed by Vera Lúcia Pereira (2015), confirms the series' migration from a health record to a political installation:

The first installation, "Marked for Life, Marked for Death," premiered around 2005 in London, transforming the original, enlarged, and untouched health record photos into a conceptual piece. The series gained critical national attention at the 27ª Bienal Internacional de São Paulo (2006), where it was framed under the theme "How to Live Together".

This calculated presentation demonstrated Andujar's aim to "flee from traditional patterns," solidifying the work's role as a conceptual intervention designed to question bureaucratic labeling and intervene in the political status quo (Pereira 2015).

A significant paradox exists in the contemporary display of Marcados. Andujar's work is frequently exhibited in institutions like Fondation Cartier and Inhotim—the latter notably founded by a mining tycoon whose industry directly poisons the urihi.

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In The Spectacle and Its Others, Angela Dimitrakaki frames the art institution not as a neutral sphere, but as part of the capitalist spectacle. Artist engagement with these spaces is thus a tactic of infiltration: occupying the spectacle to expose the hidden conditions of labor and class conflict upon which global capital relies.

When Marcados enters these institutions, the museum accepts the work for its aesthetic value, but once inside, the utupë of the Yanomami acts as a spiritual witness. This forces the "commodities people" to confront the human cost of the extractive capitalism that funds the "white cube." This is a form of labor in the field of visibility, weaponizing the archive to protect the urihi.

Indigenous thinker and activist Ailton Krenak articulated in his book Ideas to Postpone the End of the World that the destruction of Indigenous lands is synonymous with the "end of the world"—a spiritual and ecological collapse driven by Western over-consumption. For Krenak (2020), the deepest form of resistance is "delaying the end of the world" —not through utopian solutions, but by clinging to life, community, and memory against the forces of erasure. The spiritual sacrifice of the utupë in Marcados is the price paid for this necessary political platform, which provides the crucial time and visibility required for the Yanomami to continue their cosmological mission and sustain the urihi.

Claudia Andujar's Marcados is a vital reading into the paradoxes of the colonial-settler condition, revealing a world where survival demands negotiating with the very systems designed to destroy the urihi. The photographs are not merely documents of a medical campaign; they are the result of a profound tactical sacrifice by the Yanomami, who risked cosmic disorder (the capture of the utupë) to ensure physical persistence against an immediate, genocidal threat.

The persistent institutional paradox underscores the enduring price of visibility. As Hanna Limulja (2023) notes, the digital dissemination of the images permanently jeopardizes the spiritual journey of the deceased. Yet, this necessary compromise is the condition of existence in a world where the "image people" only believe what they can see. This strategic visibility achieved a powerful new dimension in 2024, when the Samba School Salgueiro dedicated its Carnival parade to a major homage to the Yanomami. The samba-enredo —the thematic anthem—that defines the entire competitive parade of a Samba School at Carnival, was Hutukara which means something like "the part of the sky from which the earth was born," a term that underscores the cosmic and existential nature of the Yanomami struggle. The parade, which prominently featured Yanomami leaders and themes, presented

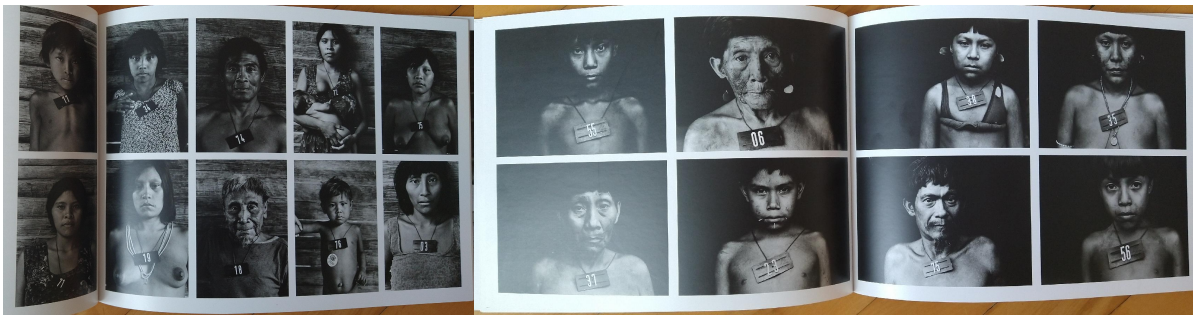
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the people's history of struggle and their cosmology to a global audience, transforming the Sambódromo[6] into a vast, temporary platform for Indigenous sovereignty. This massive public spectacle further cemented the political success of the counter-archive. The collective recognition of the Yanomami in the heart of Brazil's national festival underscores the cultural shift driven by decades of activism, art, and the difficult, strategic choice to allow the images to be taken. This visibility ensures that the stories and spiritual laws, including the importance of protecting the yã temi xoa—a phrase that powerfully translates to "I am still alive"—are constantly renewed in the public consciousness, even amidst the digital fray.

The presence of the Marcados series in the global spotlight, validated by this immense cultural resonance, is the price paid to "delay the end of the world" (Krenak 2020). The photographs are a persistent, glowing testimony that holds up the sky, echoing the warning of the Falling Sky while simultaneously demonstrating a formidable, collective refusal to be suppressed by a number, a tag, or an archive. The struggle for land and the struggle for the right to exist are, for the Yanomami, one and the same, and the strategy of the counter-archive embedded in Marcados is a powerful tool in this ongoing fight.

Appendix

Fig.1 - Claudia Andujar, Marcados, Vertical 11 and Horizontal 1, 1981-1983.

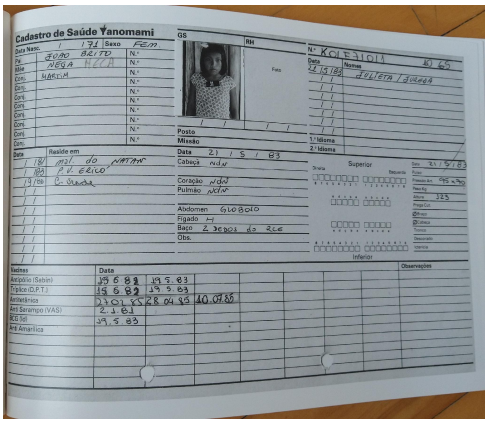


Source: Catalog Claudia Andujar – Marcados, MALBA, 2016.

[6] The Sambadrome (or officially, the Sambódromo da Marquês de Sapucaí) is a purpose-built, permanent parade ground in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer and inaugurated in 1984, it is a structure consisting of parallel rows of spectator grandstands flanking a long, paved runway. It serves as the main venue for the annual Rio Carnival parades, where the major Samba Schools compete, and is a potent symbol of Brazilian cultural spectacle and organized civic celebration.

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Fig. 2 – Claudia Andujar, Marcados, Sanitary record No. 37



Source: Catalog Claudia Andujar – Marcados, MALBA, 2016.

Fig.3 Anna Bella Geiger, Brasil Nativo/ Brasil Alienígena (Native Brazil/ Alien Brazil), 1977



Source: http://asombradofuturo.org/images/c/ce/Annabella.jpg Accessed on May 9, 2017.

Acknowledgements This research is informed by the political leadership of the Yanomami people, by poetics of re-existence and the extensive cosmopolitics still available to sustain alternative modes of seeing/being.

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