IRACEMA, UMA TRANSA AMAZÔNICA
Iracema

Regie Jorge Bodanzky, Orlando Senna

Brasilien, BRD | 1975
96 Min. | Portugiesisch mit englischen Untertiteln

Buch Orlando Senna. **Kamera** Jorge Bodanzky. **Montage** Eva Grundmann, Jorge Bodanzky. **Musik** Jorge Bodanzky. **Sound Design** Achim Tappen. **Szenenbild** Wolf Gauer, Achim Tappen, Malu Bodanzky. **Kostüm** Conceição Senna. **Produzent*innen** Wolf Gauer, Jorge Bodanzky. **Produktionsfirmen** Stop Film, ZDF (Mainz, Deutschland). **Mit** Edna de Cássia, Paulo César Pereio, Lúcio dos Santos, Conceição Senna, Elma Martins, Orlando Senna.

Weltvertrieb Gullane+

Synopse

Iracema, eine indigene Teenagerin, hat ihre Familie verlassen und schlägt sich in der Stadt Belém do Pará mit Prostitution durch. Sie trifft auf den ebenso großmäuligen wie skrupellosen Lastwagenfahrer Tião Brasil Grande, einen Apologeten des brasilianischen Wirtschaftswunders und der Militärdiktatur, und doch ein kleiner Fisch. Er ist auf dem neu gebauten Trans-Amazonian Highway unterwegs und macht sein Geld mit illegalen Edelhölzern. Und er nimmt Iracema zunächst mit, um sie dann ihrem brutalen Schicksal zu überlassen.
Dieses Glanzstück des Cinema Novo ist ein dokumentarisch-fiktionales Roadmovie, das konsequent entlang der Verwüstungen des extraktiven Kapitalismus neokolonialer Färbung erzählt. Entstanden ist der Film in einem Gebiet des Amazonas, das damals eine nationale Sicherheitszone unter strenger militärischer Kontrolle war. **IRACEMA** ist eine einschneidende Guerillafilmreise durch eine Realität, die bis heute gilt: Landvertreibung, Waldbrände, Abholzung, Sklavenarbeit und Kinderprostitution. Die Leidtragenden waren und sind in erster Linie die indigene Bevölkerung, Mädchen und Frauen. Weltpremiere der von Montanha Russa Cinematográfica restaurierten Fassung.
(Gaby Babić)

Jorge Bodanzky, geboren 1942 in Brasilien, studierte am Institut für Filmgestaltung der HfG Ulm in Deutschland. Er begann seine Karriere als Fotograf und debütierte 1971 als Kameramann und Regisseur im Kino. **IRACEMA** (1975) initiierte seine auf das Amazonas-Gebiet fokussierten Filme, die er weiterhin produziert. Bis heute führte er bei mehr als 60 Spielfilmen Regie.

Orlando Senna, geboren 1940 in Bahia in Brasilien, schrieb und realisierte über 30 Filme. Er begann als Journalist, drehte Dokumentarfilme, arbeitete am Theater, leitete die Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV in Havanna, Kuba, das Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica in Mexiko und den brasilianischen öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunksender EBC. Er hatte auch das Amt des Ministers für Audiovisuelles in Brasilien inne.

Filme:
Jorge Bodanzky: 1971: Caminhos de Valderez / Paths of Valderez (Koregie Hermano Penna). 1975: Iracema (Koregie Orlando Senna). 1973: Gitirana (Koregie Orlando Senna). 1979: Jari. 1980: O Terceiro Milênio / The Third Millenium. 2020: Utopia/Distopia. 2024: As cores e amores de Lore / The Colors and Lovers of Lore.

Orlando Senna: 1969: A construção da morte / The Construction of Death. 1975: Iracema (Koregie Jorge Bodanzky). 1976: Gitirana (Koregie Jorge Bodanzky). 1977: Diamante bruto. 1987: Brascuba (Koregie Santiago Álvarez). 2018: A Idade da Água. 2020: Longe do Paraís / Far from Paradise

Kommentar der Regisseure

Ein Amazonas, das nicht mehr existiert und nicht vergessen werden darf

Der Filmkritiker Inácio Araújo schrieb kürzlich: „Nach 50 Jahren restauriert, ist IRACEMA der zeitgenössischste Film des Landes.“ Ich kann ihm nur zustimmen. Die Restaurierung enthüllt Nuancen und Details, die die Stärke und Komplexität des Films unterstrichen. Edna ist eine außergewöhnliche Schauspielerin, die uns durch ein Amazonas führt, das nicht mehr existiert und nicht vergessen werden darf.

Orlando Senna

Den Trans-Amazonian Highway im Jahr 1974 realistisch zu zeigen, stellte ein großes Risiko dar. Die Folgen waren jahrelange Zensur und ein unaufhörlicher Kampf, den Film zum Publikum zu bringen, für das er immer bestimmt war. **IRACEMA** zeigt heute eine Realität, die genauso dringlich ist, wenn nicht gar mehr als sie es seinerzeit war, als die Fernstraße noch den Traum von einem „großen Brasilien“ symbolisierte.

Jorge Bodanzky

Essay

Orlando Senna über die Entstehung von IRACEMA

Ursprünglich veröffentlicht in Revista Piauí. *Anais da Sétima Arte 180*, September 2021 als “Cinema e Guerrilha. Uma biografía incompleta do filme *Iracema—Uma transa amazônica*.”

Englische Übersetzung von Matt J. Losada, veröffentlicht in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 108 (January 2024).

Wiederabdruck mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Orlando Senna und Matthew J. Losada. Dank Abel Muñoz-Hénonin.

In a few years it will be a half century since the making of **IRACEMA – UMA TRANSA AMAZÔNICA**, a film I made with Jorge Bodanzky and an extraordinary crew in 1974. With him, we dove into the realities and secrets of the forest to demystify the

military dictatorship's "economic miracle." It was a heartrending adventure, one that changed our lives. For the spectators (who, due to censorship were only able see it in 1980), the film was an irrefutable denunciation of the environmental crimes committed in the Amazon – the world would see the huge fires that persist and increase even today – and of crimes and cruelty toward human beings, who were expelled from their lands, culturally dismembered or killed.

I believe each member of the crew took away a different memory of the thirty days of continuous filming and of the series of revelations, artistic experiences and exposure to obvious and hidden dangers. In my memory, very clear scenes and situations of filming coexist with gaps in memory that I can't fill. Thinking back to those days I have the impression (ever more distanced) that the fact that we survived the filming was a true miracle.

In mid-1973, Jorge Bodanzky first mentioned to me the possibility of making a documentary on the Trans-Amazonian Highway, the BR-230, which was then under construction (and still is, 47 years later) and was presented by the dictatorship as the maximum example of the "economic miracle" they claimed was taking place in Brazil. The highway was central to the regime's official propaganda. In the military's plans, it would be eight thousand kilometres long, slicing through the Northeast and the North, from Cabeledo, in Paraíba, to Lábrea, in Amazonas, and from there to Peru and Ecuador. Thousands of workers, *garimpeiros* (gold prospectors), merchants, squatters, wood smugglers, prostitutes from all over, not to mention the soldiers, whose presence was evident everywhere, came to the places where it would be constructed, in particular the Amazon region.

Jorge was from São Paulo and, like me, was 30. He worked at *Realidade*, a magazine launched in 1966 that revolutionized Brazilian journalism and was already becoming the extraordinary photographer he continues to be today. The idea of a documentary on the Trans-Amazonian had been in his head since he reported on another road, the Belém-Brasilia (BR-153), which was being asphalted and where there was already an intense circulation of workers, adventurers and military troops.

Coming from Bahia, I moved provisionally to São Paulo with my wife, the actress Conceição Senna, since we were planning to move to Rio de Janeiro, where it might be possible for me to return to work as a journalist. My objective in life, in truth, was to make films. But it was a difficult undertaking, since the military had me in their sights. In Bahia I had made some shorts and a feature-length film, *69 – A Construção da Morte* (*69, The Construction of Death*), which the censors destroyed, as they had also done with a documentary on the Ligas Camponesas (Peasant Unions) I made with the director Geraldo Sarno; destruction in the material sense: a soldier cut up the copies of that film while he threatened with me prison "or something worse." In São Paulo, Conceição and I met up with other Bahianos who had left their homeland and we formed a group to make theatre, music and whatever else appeared. Jorge was married at the time to a Bahiana and was part of that group.

That same year, 1973, I managed to get transferred to Rio. One day Jorge appeared at our place and announced that ZDF, a German public television station, was interested in producing a film on the Trans-Amazonian Highway, and he invited Conceição and me to participate in the adventure. Right away we started to plan, or pre-plan, the film.

Jorge soon mentioned that there was a high number of women named Iracema circulating on the Belém-Brasilia (the same was true of the capital of Pará state, Belém, and on the Trans-Amazonian, as we later found out). I was very enthusiastic about his suggestion to look for an actress with Indigenous Amazon characteristics, like an indigenous or an acculturated indigenous woman, or even maybe a Mestiza. But, if we were talking about an "actress," then this wouldn't be a simple documentary. The idea that the film mixed fiction with documentary scenes made me even more enthusiastic and brought me back to Bertolt Brecht.

I had studied German Theatre at the Bahia Theatre School, in Salvador, and I was interested in their method of the distancing effect, a resource to make the spectator conscious of the illusion present in all stagecraft and bring them back to reality. It was Brecht's influence that led me to use, in *69 – A Construção da Morte*, several authentic reports from a Bahian newspaper whose reporters accompanied us in the coverage of crimes and accidents. Some of that method could be adapted for the film on the Trans-Amazonian.

Jorge also suggested that the character of indigenous origin have the name Iracema, creating a link (and a contrast) with the famous protagonist of the novel by José de Alencar and the idealized vision of the Brazilian past formulated by the major author of our Romanticism. I loved the proposed name, all the more because, different from what seems, Iracema is not an indigenous term, but rather an anagram created by Alencar from the word "America."

The Germans were in a hurry so we quickly organized a research trip to Amazonia, with the costs covered by ZDF and Stop Films, the production company owned by Jorge and his German friend Wolf Gauer. In a white Fusca (a Volkswagen Beetle), we three covered thousands of kilometres from São Paulo to the Federal Capital (Brasilia, inaugurated 14 years before), then on the Belém-Brasilia to the capital of Pará state, from where we continued on the Trans-Amazonian, traveling the long section that was then being opened in Pará.

The social upheaval on the new highway was much worse than we had seen on the asphalted Belém-Brasilia, and much more violent. We started to pay full attention to the dusty road, with its hundreds of huge machines, traffic of army vehicles, giant trees being fallen, enormous fires happening everywhere, traffic in wood (despite military controls), dirty hotels, truckers' restaurants, bars with lots of girl-prostitutes and pimps, in addition to the innumerable adventurers who fought over small strips of land along the edges of the roadway despite the warnings that these were not to be occupied. We travelled slowly, stopping in places for hours to talk to people. We also navigated through the Amazon and its narrow forest streams.

For the first filming and audio recordings, both the camera and sound equipment was small, which permitted us to be discreet. But, to our surprise, most of the people we encountered didn't even glance at Jorge's Super-8 camera. They just wanted to chat, to talk about the difficulty of life, the evil of the rich, and, lowering their voices, the government's abuses as it expelled the settlers from the edges of the highway. The few who noticed our equipment, among them some of the military police, merely asked if we were from TV Globo.

We had been travelling for several days on the road that cut through the heart of the forest when we realized that we hadn't seen a sole wild animal. The fauna had fled from the human being, from his incessant noise, his weapons. It's like that in the film, images without animals.

The research trip lasted almost a month, I think, during which we learned how to relate to the locals and the migrants. We learned to listen to them attentively, showing full confidence in the feelings they expressed, and also to laugh with them, creating intimacy. Jorge was always photographing or filming, while I taped the interviews and conversations with a hidden recorder. Wolf took care of production. Meanwhile we searched for locations that seemed interesting.

On the roads, police barricades were frequent, and they always asked us what we were doing there. We would pull

out a document obtained by the production team stating that Volkswagen authorized us to carry out tests on their cars. The police would let us through and advise us not to make contact with the people who were circulating on the margins of the road, "those lost souls," as they would say. It was true that the lost souls were moving about a lot. After building their precarious houses in one place, they would have to move elsewhere when the police destroyed their shacks. This cycle of construction and destruction continued without end.

To confirm locations, we returned to Belém. We centred our attention on the city's nightlife and underworld, which would take on great importance in the film. We went to the brothels, to the so-called "Plaza of Sin," on the edge of town, where there was a great concentration of prostitutes living in houses built on stilts over the water. We also made contact with amateur or semi-professional theatre groups in Belém and with musicians and street acrobats. Some of those people would later act in improvised scenes.

One day by chance (or not) on a street in Belém, I ran into a friend from my teen years who invited me to lunch. The owner of brothels in Salvador, Bahia, he had become an adventuring businessman. He arrived at the restaurant in a luxury car, and as soon as we sat down he said: "My filmmaker friend, man of ideas, I have a proposal for you." I discretely turned on the recorder as he continued:

"It's all about being brave. This place is an open-pit goldmine. I talk to any big shot, any authority, any military officer. I enter, give some tips and take the cash. I know where the money is and who it's with. Ideas: that where it's at. I formed a company in São Paulo in less than three hours. In that jungle! Imagine in this desert. I'm gonna open a trading company with American capital and know-how, the biggest of its kind in Latin America. There isn't a single trading company here. It's all primitive navigation. The biggest granary in the world, the biggest government project on the planet and they import everything. You gotta export, man! Export, make, construct, put those Indians to work. The cheapest labour force in the country. When they saw that the people here weren't weak and lazy, but pure beasts of burden without a future, without ideas, they wanted to turn the Amazon into a lake. Lake, my ass! If they flood this place I'm all over it, with three hundred ferry boats connecting the Pacific to the Atlantic. Look at Acre there, Acre is Eldorado. Brazil has to get a way out through the Pacific, and we could represent all that transport, and right away. Have no fear, don't be stupid. All that 'let's see, I gotta think about it' kind of business and all that, that's a waste of time. If I gotta rob, I'll rob with a signed document, an incorporated company. You gotta trust the business, not the person. Here they're all crooks. If you're not gonna trust in the business, you won't do anything. First you gotta get your foot in the door, and that's exactly what I'm offering you, to get your foot in the door to the world."

I asked if he'd like to be a character in the film. He looked at me distrustfully: "What character?" I said, "Yourself". He smiled: "Count me in." That character (or that person) is in **IRACEMA** and is sufficient for us to understand the world we're entering when we watch the film, with which kind of businessmen we're dealing with in this "open-pit goldmine" where anything can be found, as long as you have "balls."

At that point we had already sketched out in our minds another character that the Trans-Amazonian constantly suggested to us: a trucker named Tião Brasil Grande. "Brasil Grande," or Great Brazil, was one of the dictatorship's slogans, along with "Brazil, love it or leave it," and others. All that was missing was a great actor for the role. It didn't take long for us to decide on Paulo César Peréio, a friend of ours and actor recognized for his talent playing streetwise crooks, bringing to them a particular tone of cynical sarcasm. When filming **IRACEMA**, I asked Peréio to bring that attitude to an extreme.

We still needed, however, a person who would play the main character, Iracema. As the research trip was winding down the search for her had turned into an obsession. With only two or three days before returning to São Paulo and Rio, someone suggested it might be worth going to see the try-outs for radio programs in Belém, in which adolescent girls usually participated. We went to one. When we arrived, we came across young people dancing on a stage. After a few minutes Jorge and I noticed, at the same time, a charming girl, the liveliest of all, the most smiling, the most playful.

We went to talk to her right there at the radio station. We told her about our project and invited her to participate. She responded saying that she had never even seen a film, but she knew how to clown around. After a half hour of conversation, Edna Cerejo (that was her name) was completely at ease with us and, laughing a lot, said she'd like to act in the film, but first she'd have to ask her mother's permission. Jorge invited her to take some photos in the Ver-o-Peso Market, close by. As we were taking the photos an indigenous woman came up, speaking loudly. It was Edna's mother, reprimanding her for, instead of being in school, going around "loose on the streets."

Once the research was done and we had found the main actress, we returned to our base in the Southeast. Jorge and Wolf went to São Paulo to take care of preparations for the film, and I went to Rio and began writing the script, or something like that. I first wrote a 35-page synopsis with this simple plot: a girl prostitute is taken from Belém to the Trans-Amazonian by a trucker and abandoned out in the infernal confines of the roadway under construction.

After a few meetings with Jorge, I finished the script, which was now ninety pages long. But it was an open script, for a documentary, subject to modifications according to events during the filming. My work sprang from the junction of two lists. The first consisted of situations or behaviours we had experienced during the research with prostitutes, truckers, wood traffickers, soldiers, vendors, peasants in absolute misery, and the general human fauna of the road. Those situations would be recreated or would serve as inspiration for the scenes we would do with non-actors, the common people willing to interact with our crew (and there was much willingness on the part of both sides).

The second list consisted of scenes that were organized more from the dramatic point of view and were more complex, which formed the axis of the story to be told. With this, we prevented the film from getting lost in the infinity of situations into which we would immerse ourselves.

We already had the dramatic nucleus and its actors: Edna Cerejo, from Pará, would play the main character, while the gaúcho.[1] Paulo César Peréio was the trucker Tião Brasil Grande, and the Bahiana, Conceição Senna, played Tereza, a prostitute who brings Iracema further into the forest. The open script was merely a guide for them, and they read it only once.

This single reading had to do with the style we were after. We wanted to film reality itself, allowing the actors to improvise according to their confrontation with real situations, instead of following a predetermined plan. The central idea was that the fiction part would serve at certain moments as a wedge or lever inserted into the real event, if only to underline, to call attention to certain aspects of that same reality, without undoing its condition as a real event.

The producer and the sound technician also had copies of the script, so they could make the notes needed for preparations and recording. The rest would be based on conversations, with both the crew and with the actors and non-actors.

That method produced such a special relationship within the group that after a few days of filming we were working smoothly,

communicating intensely through mere glances and gestures. It was as if we were guessing what the other wanted, designing imaginary storyboards on the road's surface. With the freedom allowed by the precarious script and the quantity of stimuli coming from the Trans-Amazonian, we improvised most of the time. And we were constantly surprised by the talkativeness of the people of the highway, who had a will or need to talk. The strategy of recurring to fiction only as a lever for the description of reality was added to the fact that these people fully believed that Edna was the prostitute Iracema and Peréio was in fact a *gaúcho* trucker named Tião Brasil Grande.

Edna took her place at the centre of this carrousel, not only for her work as principal actress, but, surprisingly, due to her contagious happiness, which was interrupted by moments of sadness and crying. She made up nicknames for everyone on the team. She called the camera "The Generous One," for supplying her a salary, hotels, restaurants, cars and other comforts that until then she had not known. After a few days Edna was helping the film crew, pointing out continuity errors or telling them when someone's makeup wasn't finished.

The first thing Edna told us when we arrived to Belém to begin filming was: "I saw three films." She also knew what a stage name was and had decided to drop her last name (Cerejo) in favour of a new name: Edna de Cássia. Edna's mother authorized us to take her daughter, who was about 14 or 15, to a region in turmoil with great social tensions and "shootouts every day," under a sole condition: that the actress Conceição Senna, my wife, be responsible for bringing her back to her family safe, healthy, and "whole" (a virgin). Two documents were signed: one official, by the mother, authorizing her daughter's trip, and one private, signed by Conceição, committing to take care of Edna. And that's what happened. The only two women on the team adopted one another, looking out for each other, and began an everlasting friendship.

Our crew had nine members. Seven travelled in a Kombi (a Volkswagen van) with the latest generation equipment we had. Behind came a truck (the vehicle used in the scenes with the trucker) with two people inside. They were Peréio and the driver, Lúcio, who was also his double, since the actor was just learning how to drive during the filming. Some of us had more than one function, inspired by the musketeer philosophy of all for one and one for all. Jorge was at the same time director, photographer and cameraman. I was director, scriptwriter and responsible for the work of the non-actors. Achim Tappen took care of the sound, and Wolf, the production. Francisco "Mou" Carneiro, from Belém, worked as general assistant. Conceição, in addition to playing Tereza, worked as art director and took care of Edna.

We began filming in Belém in 1974, during the religious procession of the Círio de Nazaré.[2] Acting as Iracema, Edna circulated among the thousands of faithful who accompanied that event, still celebrated in Pará on the second Sunday in October. We spent a few more days filming in brothels in the city before leaving for the Trans-Amazonian, where we soon learned to use the nicknames of the road under construction: Transamargura (Trans-Embittered) and Transmiseriana (Trans-Miserable).

Our vehicles were stopped every half hour by military patrols who unloaded everything that was inside and, after meticulous searches, read the document from Volkswagen authorizing us to circulate in the Kombi, asked a few questions and went away, leaving our things on the roadway. One of us, I think it was Achim, had a box of disposable plastic cigarette lighters, which were then a novelty. We discovered that by giving these to the commanding officers of the patrols we could considerably diminish the time of the searches. Sometimes the news that the "Germans" had modern lighters arrived at the blockades before we did, and the soldiers would approach us smiling, asking about the little lighters. With the soldiers smiling or not, the nervous and threatening atmosphere seemed to heighten as we penetrated further along the road. My impression was that there was a mystery involving that region, a secret.

Once, as we were searching for a herd of cows to film, we were taken prisoner by the owner of a large ranch. The captivity consisted of not letting us leave the seat of the ranch until the owner, communicating with a shortwave radio operator, found out for sure who we were and what we were after. Suddenly he reappeared calm and smiling, offered us whiskey and beer, apologized for the delay, and authorized us to film his herd. We didn't film. We made up some explanation, promised to come back another day, and left relieved.

We were soon taken prisoner again, this time by an army lieutenant and his followers: a half dozen uniformed soldiers and a few armed civilians. The day before, Jorge had filmed the same lieutenant playing roulette in a public plaza, which was prohibited. After showing us a crumpled cigarette and accusing us of smoking marijuana, the lieutenant ordered us to get in the Kombi and follow a trail into the forest, until we came to an unfinished construction with a rusty sign reading "Precinct."

We tried to appear calm, but were afraid, taken by a sensation of abandonment accentuated by not knowing where we were nor what to do faced with so many weapons. Inside the "precinct" we were lined up in front of the lieutenant, who said to one of the armed civilians: "Can you tell me who was smoking marijuana at the plaza?" The man pointed to me, and I asked right back if he'd seen me smoking marijuana. He was surprised by my attitude and replied, "Well, I didn't see it, but I smelled it." The "I didn't see it" infuriated the lieutenant. This set off a discussion between him and our crew. "What kind of accusation is that? How can you say 'I smelled it'? The forest has a thousand smells, there are fires near here," we argued.

Suddenly we heard the sound of a car parking. Two men appeared wearing bullet-proof vests and revolvers on their belts. One of them was greeted by the lieutenant as a "Federal." The lieutenant told the story of the marijuana, the "Federal" examined our documents. I said we were working for Volkswagen, that we were filmmakers. The "Federal" asked the man who had arrived with him to take down our names, pushed the lieutenant into a corner and they spoke for a while, whispering. Then, addressing us with a half-smile, he said that we could go free, but we had to report to him when back in Belém. We never did, but we found out in Belém that the "Federal" was corrupt, involved in drug trafficking.

There were no animals along the roads, nor were there indigenous people, except for a few acculturated guys with mirrored shades we saw eating in a restaurant in the first days of filming. We asked Edna/Iracema to bring them some plates of food and start up a conversation with them. She said she didn't want to approach those men, that it's not a good idea to mix with Indians. Conceição talked to her, emphasizing that it would be Iracema who was approaching them, not Edna. She started to cry but understood. She brought a plate to the table, in silence. Then she went into the corner and cried again (this image is in the film). That night we talked about it. She said she was being stupid. She didn't want to be confused with the indigenous, since they're persecuted and are those who suffer the most "in the world."

In the first days of the shooting, Edna wouldn't approach the prostitutes. She said she felt sorry for them, that she didn't know what to talk about with them and that she'd never be like them: "I'd rather die." A few days later she had changed her attitude, thanks without a doubt to the influence of Conceição, who had a good relationship with the prostitutes, very close and very strong. In the first few days we were in a miserable brothel for a while, and as we were leaving several prostitutes ran after our Kombi crying and screaming "Take me with you, Conceição!"

This provoked a huge commotion among us: Conceição and Edna broke down in tears, while the men wiped or hid theirs. After that, Edna managed to get completely into character and approach the prostitutes, all of whom were about her age.

The moving scene of "Take me with you, Conceição" was repeated several times during the filming, always accompanied by crying, outside and inside the Kombi. Those emotional moments needed to be controlled, since reality called us to work on the film. There were also moments of laughter, like those provoked by Conceição when she performed the "hygienization" of the hotel bathrooms. The curtains and plastic chairs were removed, she would pour alcohol all over the bathroom and set it on fire. This would result in a quick fire that then went out. Conceição thought that after this pyrotechnic cleaning the bathroom was free of all microbes and ready for use. One day, though, the fire spread more than planned and we had to act quickly to put it out. After a bit of desperation and lots of shouting, we all burst out laughing.

Nature presented us with beautiful scenes during the trip. The sunsets are stuck in my memory, when various colours would spread across the horizon and the sun would paint the sky with red streaks. The most impressive spectacle happened on a long flat stretch of road, as we were watching a soft rain falling in the distance. We came closer and crossed the band of rain, then came out the other side, where the landscape was dry again. It was as if we had crossed three different temporal dimensions. But when the rain fell hard we lived the other side of the coin, because on that unpaved road storms always brought problems, kilometres of mud and lots of work to get out of the bogs.

Our work meetings took place in late afternoon, from when we stopped filming until dinnertime. We would discuss the work we had done and make a list of possibilities for the following day. These were usually quick, since we were in the grip of fatigue, but it was during these meetings that we became aware, after the second week of filming, that we were constructing a hybrid language in which reality and fiction were melded, transforming into a third form of expression. I called this new process the *quina*, or edge, that is, between the two sides of the coin, as they say in the Northeast. It was also during these afternoons that I realized the film could help deconstruct the myth propagated by the dictatorship around the Trans-Amazonian.

At one of those quick sunset meetings we discussed and resolved, for example, the problem of how to film slave labour. Filming slave laborers at work was impossible, and the kind of interviews we got with those who managed to escape or were freed were already common in the press. They usually didn't talk much because they were still imprisoned by fear. One day we found out that between twenty and thirty persons had been freed by the police, and it was with them that we filmed the sequence about slave labour in Iracema. Only that instead of having them talk about being set free, we showed the inverse process, in the film they are shown being sold by a gato, which is what traffickers in humans are called in the Amazon. We did the scene in reverse, that is, the workers are not leaving slavery but entering into it.

The violence against migrants, prostitutes, truckers or drunks, which could be seen or felt on a large scale, at times came close to our team, like the two times we were taken prisoner. But the most dangerous situation occurred in a brothel where were filming as the prostitutes woke up. It was a spacious house, with rooms surrounding a long patio. The only bathroom was in the centre, protected by partitions that left visible the face and legs of whoever was bathing.

There was a pretty girl in there, very white, and naked, singing. Suddenly a civil guard appeared, barged into the bathroom and started hitting the girl. She reacted with fierce punches and the other prostitutes began to shout, "Respect his uniform, don't do that!" I tried to interfere, but one of the women said, "Don't get involved, he's crazy!" The cop came out of the bathroom all wet and holding a revolver and ordered everyone out of the patio. "Blood's gonna be spilled!," he shouted.

The crew, which was on the patio preparing to film, left by the only exit door. I went toward the man and asked him to calm down, saying we were leaving. He came up, pointing the gun at my head and yelled, "Get out now, now!" His body was tense and his hand with the gun trembled in front of my face. I looked at the door, someone said they had all gone out, and I also left. The shouts began again, with sounds of slaps and blows in the bathroom. Before leaving I saw the man pitilessly punching the woman in the face as he said, "I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" We left, without finding out how the dispute ended.

We got in the Kombi and were ready to leave when we realized that Conceição wasn't with us. We went back into the brothel. There were no longer any shouts, but the man could be heard saying something, like he was giving a speech. An older prostitute was waiting at the door and she took me to one of the rooms, where Conceição was surrounded by several girls, protected by them. We left, legs trembling.

Once inside the Kombi and Lúcio's truck, the crew headed for Marabá, in the southeast of Pará. There the police barricades were more frequent than on other parts of the road. The search method was still the same: the police or soldiers would take everything out of the vehicles and empty the baggage out on the roadway, making us pack it all up again. But now the interrogations were more meticulous, our personal documents and authorizations were more closely examined. The strong sensation that something was happening of which we were unaware had returned.

In Marabá we were escorted the whole time by a lieutenant, who didn't impede our work nor our ability to circulate, though he was always nearby, watching. We asked a few people at a lunch counter about the situation, and a white-bearded man told us we were in "guerrilla territory." He also said that the Army had announced a few days earlier that it had finished off the guerrilla, but that this was a lie, since they were still hearing occasional shots and explosions of napalm in the area. In fact, the army would exterminate the guerrilla in October 1974.

Before filming, while still in Rio, I heard at the offices of the paper where I worked, Última Hora, commentaries on what was happening with the guerrilla struggle in the North. But I figured they might have just been rumours, and didn't give them any more thought. In truth, the censorship of news on the guerrilla question was so complete that practically no one, not even journalists, knew what was happening in the interior of Brazil. Only the inhabitants of the region in turmoil were able to find out anything. It was then that the recurring sensation, that of something happening since we had left the Belém-Brasilia and turned onto the Trans-Embittered, became clearer. This entire time we had been on the edge of a guerrilla zone, and it seemed that upon entering Marabá, in Pará, we had penetrated into its epicentre. I tried to get more information from the locals, but no one wanted to talk. They just said, "It looks like it's over," or "I know nothing." More often they would act like they had no idea, as they pointed with their eyes to the lieutenant who was shadowing us.

I only found out more when I returned to Rio. What was happening since our research trip in 1973 was the Guerrilha do Araguaia, a revolutionary campaign formed by the Brazilian Communist Party. The guerrillas operated all along the Araguaia River (which also flowed through Marabá), often with the help of peasants and river-dwellers. Beginning in 1972, the dictatorship decided to act against the guerrilla and sent the armed forces to the region. The battle lasted almost three years. In 1974, the guerrillas were defeated and submitted to cruel tortures and

summary executions. Even today it is not known how many people were killed, between guerrillas and locals.

It was in the shadow of that war and horror that, without knowing about them, we made the film.

Endnotes:

---

[1] The term *gaúcho*, in this context, refers to those from the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

[2] This is one of the largest Catholic processions in the world, attended by over a million people, in which an image of the Virgin of Nazaré is carried through Belém.