Technoshamanism and Wasted Ontologies

Interview with Fabiane M. Borges published on May 21, 2017[1]

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In a state of permanent warfare and fierce disputes over visions of the future, *technoshamanism* emerges as a resistance and as an endeavour to influence contemporary thinking, technological production, scientific questions, and everyday practices. This is how the Brazilian Ph.D. in clinical psychology, researcher and essayist *Fabiane M. Borges* presents this international network of collaboration which unites academics, activists, indigenous people and many more people who are interested in a search for ideas and practices which go beyond the instrumental logic of capital. In this interview with Em Rede, she elaborates her reflections on technoshamanism as platform for producing knowledge and indicates some of the experiences that were made in this context.

– At first, technology and shamanism seem like contradictory notions or at least difficult to combine. The first refers to the instrumental rationalism that underlies an unstoppable developmentalist project. The second makes you think of indigenous worldviews, healing rituals and altered states of consciousness. What is the result of this combination?

In a text that I wrote for the magazine *Geni[2]* in 2015, I said this: that techno + shamanism has three quite evident meanings:

1. The technology of shamanism (shamanism seen as a technology for the production of knowledge);

2. The shamanism of technology (the pursuit of shamanic powers through the use of technology);

3. The combination of these two fields of knowledge historically obstructed by the Church and later by science, especially in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Each of these meanings unfolds into many others, but here is an attempt to discuss each one:

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1   Source: Em Rede - http://www.em-rede.com/site/entrevista/fabiane-m-borges-tecnoxamanismo-como-meio-de-recuperar-e-reinventar-pontos-de-conex%C3%A3o (last saw 12/06/2017)

2   http://revistageni.org/10/tecnoxamanismos-etc/

1) When we perceive shamanism not as tribal religions or as the beliefs of archaic people (as is still very common) but as a technology of knowledge production, we radically change the perception of its meaning. The studies of e.g. ayahuasca shows that intensified states of consciousness produces a kind of experience which reshapes the state of the body, broadening the spectrum of sensation, affection, and perception. These "plants of power" are probably that which brings us closest to the "magical thinking" of native communities and consequently to the shamanic consciousness e– that is, to that alternative ontology, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro alerts us when he refers to the Amerindian ontology in his book *Cannibal Metaphysics*[3], or Davi Kopenawa with his shamanic education with *yakoana*, as described in *The Falling Sky*[4]. It is obviously not only through plants of power that we can access this ontology, but they are a portal which draws us singularly near this way of seeing the world, life itself. Here, we should consider the hypotheses of Jeremy Narby in his *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and origins of knowledge* where he explains that the indigenous knowledge of herbs, roots and medicine arises partly from dreams and from the effects of entheogens.

When I say that shamanism is a technology of knowledge production, it is because it has its own methods for constructing narratives, mythologies, medicine and healing as well as for collecting data and creating artifacts and modes of existence, among other things. So this is neither ancient history nor obsolete – it lives on, pervading our technological and mass media controlled societies and becoming gradually more appreciated, especially since the 1960s where ecological movements, contact with traditional communities and ways of life as well as with psychoactive substances all became popular, sometimes because of the struggles of these communities and sometimes because of an increased interest in mainstream society. A question arose: If we were to recuperate these wasted ontologies with the help of these surviving communities and of our own ruins of narratives and experiences, would we not be broadening the spectrum of technology itself to other issues and questions?

2) The shamanism of technology. It is said that such theories as parallel universes, string theory and quantum physics, among others, bring us closer to the shamanic ontology than to the theological/capitalist ontology which guides current technological production. But although this current technology is geared towards war, pervasive control and towards over-exploitation of human, terrestrial

3   Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics,* Univocal (2014), available here: https://hamtramckfreeschool.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/eduardo-viveiros-de-castro-cannibal-metaphysics-for-a-poststructural-anthropology.pdf
4   Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky*, Belknap Press (2013).

and extra-terrestrial resources, we still possess a speculative, curious and procedural technology which seeks to construct hypotheses and open interpretations which are not necessarily committed to the logic of capital (this is the meaning of the free software, DIY and open source movements in the late 20th and early 21st century).

We are very interested in this speculative technology, since in some ways it represents a link to the lost ancestral knowledge. This leads us directly to point 3) which is the conjunction of technology with shamanism. And here I am thinking of an archeology or anarcheology, since in the search for a historical connection between the two, many things may also be freely invented (hyperstition). As I have explained in other texts, such as the [Seminal Thoughts for a Possible Technoshamanism](#) or [Ancestrofuturism – Free Cosmogony – Rituals DIY](#), there was a Catholic theological effort against these ancestral knowledges, a historical inhibition that became more evident during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance with its inquisitions, bonfires, prisons, torture and demands for retraction. The technology which was originally a part of popular tradition and needs passed through a purification, a monotheist Christian refinement, and adhered to these precepts in order to survive.

In his book *La comunidad de los espectros[5]*, Fabián Ludueña Romandini discusses this link between science and Catholicism, culminating in a science that was structurally oriented towards becoming God, hence its tendency to omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. Its link to capital is widely discussed by Silvia Federici in her book *Caliban and the Witch[6]*, who states that the massacre against witches, healers, sorcerers, heretics and all who did not conform to the precepts of the church was performed in order to clear the way for the introduction of industrial society and capitalism. So two things must be taken into account here: first, that there has been a violent decimation of ancestral knowledge throughout Europe and its colonial extensions and secondly, that the relationship between science/technology and the wasted ontologies was sundered in favor of a Christian theological metaphysics.

Faced with this, techno + shamanism is an articulation which tries to consider this historical trauma, these lost yet not annihilated leftovers, and to recover (and reinvent) points of connection between technology and wasted ontologies, which in our case we call shamanism since it represents something

5 Fabián Ludueña, *La comunidad de los espectros: Antropotecnia*, Mino y Davila (2010).
6 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia (2004). Available here: https://libcom.org/files/Caliban%20and%20the%20Witch.pdf

preceding the construction of the monotheisms and because it is more connected to the processes of planet Earth, at least according to the readings that interest us. But there are several other networks and groups that use similar terms and allow other readings such as techno + magic, cyber + spirituality, techno + animism and gnoise (gnosis + noise), among others, all talking about more or less the same issues.

The result of this mixture is improbable. It functions as a resistance, an awakening, an attempt to influence contemporary thinking, technological practices, scientific questions as well as everyday practices. These are tension vectors that drive a change in the modes of existence and of relation to the Earth and the Cosmos, applied to the point where people are currently, causing them to associate with other communities with similar aspirations or desiring to expand their knowledge. These changes are gradually taking shape, whether with clay or silicium technology. But the thing is crazy, the process is slow and the enemy is enormous. Given the current level of political contention that we are currently experiencing in Brazil, associations and partnerships with traditional communities, be they indigenous, afro-Brazilian, Roma, aboriginal or activist settlements (the MST[7] and its mystique), seems to make perfect sense. It is a political renewal mixed with ancestorfuturist worldviews.

– You've pointed out that conceptually technoshamanism functions as a utopian, dystopian and entropic network of collaboration. What does this mean in practice?

Fundamentally, we find ourselves in a state of constant war, a fierce dispute between different visions of the future, between social and political ontologies and between nature and technology. In this sense, technoshamanism manifests itself as yet another contemporary network which tries to analyze, position itself with respect to and intervene in this context. It is configured as a utopian network because it harbors visionary germs of liberty, autonomy, equality of gender, ethnicity, class and people and of balance between the environment and society that have hitherto characterized revolutionary movements. It is dystopian because at the same time it includes a nihilistic and depressive vision which sees no way out of capitalism, is disillusioned by neoliberalism and feels itself trapped by the project of total, global control launched by the world's owners. It sees a nebulous future without freedom, with all of nature destroyed, more competition and poverty, privation and social oppression. And it is entropic because it inhabits this paradoxical set of forces and maintains an improbable noise – its

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7   MST, the "landless worker's movement" is a social movement in Brazil that fights for workers' access to land through demands for land reform and direct actions such as establishing settlements on occupied land.

perpetual noisecracy, its state of disorganization and insecurity is continuous and is constantly recombining itself. Its improbability is its dynamism. It is within this regime of utopia, dystopia and entropy that it promotes its ideas and practices, which are sometimes convergent and sometimes divergent.

In practice, this manifests itself in individual and collective projects, be they virtual or face-to-face and in the tendencies that are generated from these. Nobody *is* a network, people are in it from time to time according to necessities, desires, possibilities, etc.

– This network's meetings take place in different countries, mainly in South America and Europe. Can you give some examples of experiences and knowledge which were transferred between these territories?

Some examples: Tech people who come from the European countries to the tecnoshamanism festivals and return doing permaculture and uniting with groups in their own countries in order to create collective rituals very close to the indigenous ones or collective mobilization for construction, inspired by the indigenous *mutirão*. Installation of agroforestry in a basically extractivist indigenous territory organized by foreigners or non-indigenous Brazilians working together with indigenous people. The implementation of an intranet system (peer-to-peer network) within indigenous territory (Baobáxia). Confluence of various types of healing practices in healing tents created during encounters and festivals, ranging from indigenous to oriental practices, from afro-Brazilian to electronic rituals, from Buddhist meditation to the herb bath of Brazilian healers, all of this creating generative spontaneous states where knowledge is exhanged and is subsequently transferred to different places or countries. Indigenous and non-indigenous bioconstructor's knowledge of adobe, converging in collective construction work in MST's squatted lands (this project is for the next steps). Artistic media practices, performance, live cinema, projection, music, and so on, that are passed on to groups that know nothing about this. In the end, technoshamanism is an immersive and experiential platform for exchanging knowledge. All of this is very much derived from the experiences of other networks and movements such as tactical media, digital liberty, homeless movements, submediology, metareciclagem, LGBTQ, Bricolabs, and many others. In the technoshamanism book, published in 2016, there are several practices that can serve as a reference.

– Technoshamanism arose from networks linked to collaborative movements such as Free Software and Do It Yourself with the same demands for freedom and autonomy in relation to science and technology. To what extent has it proposed new interventions or new kinds of production in these fields? Can you give an example?

First is important to say that these movements of free software and DIY have changed. They have been mixed up with the neoliberal program, whether we're talking about corporate software or about the makers, even though both movements remain active and are still spaces of invention. In the encounters and festivals, we are going as far is possible, considers our precarious nature, lack of dedicated funding or support from economically stronger institutions, we rely mainly on the knowledge of the participants of the network, which come into action in the places. I also know of cases where the festivals inspired the formation of groups of people who returned to their cities and continued to do work related to technological issues, whether in the countryside, in computer technology, and in art as well. Technoshamanism serves to inspire and perhaps empower projects that already function, but which technoshamanism endorses and excites.

I think that a fairly representative example is the [agroforest](), the [Baobáxia system]() and the [web radio Aratu]() that we implemented with the Pataxó in the Pará village. It is an exhange and simultanously a resistance that points to the question of collaboration and autonomy, remembering that all the processes of this planet are interdependent and that autonomy is really a path, an ideal which only works pragmatically and to the extent that it's possible to practice it. So we're crawling in that direction. There are networks and processes much more advanced.

What we'd like to see is the Pataxó village Pará (home of the II International Festival of Technoshamanism), to take one example, with food autonomy and exuberant agroforests and wellsprings, with media and technological autonomy and very soon with autonomous energy. We'd like to see that not just for the Pataxó, but for all the groups in the network (at least). But that depends a lot on time, investment and financing, because these things may seem cheap, but they aren't. We should remember that corporations, entrepeneurs and land-owners are concentrating their forces on these indigenous villages and encouraging projects that go totally against all of this, that is, applying pressure in order to take their land, incorporate them in the corporate productive system and turn them into low-paid workers, etc.

In May 2017 we met with the Terra Vista Settlement in Arataca (Bahia, Brazil). They invited the leaders of the Pataxó village to become part of the Web of Peoples[8] which has this exact project of [technological and alimentary autonomy](#) and I see this as a kind of continuation of the proposals which were generated in community meetings in the Pará village during the preparations for the II International Festival of Technoshamanism. Everything depends on an insistent and frequent change in the more structural strata of desire. And when we understand that TV channels like the Globo network reach all these territories, we see the necessity of opening other channels of information and education.

– Do you believe that insurgent knowledge and anti-hegemonic epistemologies should gradually take up more space in the universities or is it better for them to remain in the margin?

In a conversation with Joelson, leader of the MST in the Terra Vista settlement he gave the following hint, which was decisive for me: "Technoshamanism is neither the beginning nor the end, it is a medium." His suggestion is that as a medium, technoshamanism possesses a space of articulation, which rather than answering questions of genesis and purpose functions as a space of interlocution, for making connections, uniting focal points, leveraging movements, expanding concepts and practices concerning itself and other movements – that is, it plays in the middle of the field and facilitates processes.

As yet another network in the "middle", it negotiates sometimes within institutions and sometimes outside them, sometimes inside academia and sometimes outside it. Since it consists of people from the most diverse areas, it manifests itself in the day to day life of its members. Some work in academia, some in healing, others in a pizzaria. That is, the network is everywhere where its participants are. I particularly like it when we do the festivals autonomously, deciding what to do and how to do it with the people who invite us and we don't have to do favours or do anything in return for the institutions. But this is not to say that it will always be like that. In fact, the expenses of those who organize the meetings are large and unsustainable. Sometimes the network will be more independent, sometimes more dependent. What it can't do is stagnate because of the lack of possibilities. Crowdfunding has been an interesting way out, but it's not enough. It's necessary sometimes to form partnerships with organizations such as universities so the thing can continue moving in a more consistent and prolonged

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8   Teia dos Povos, http://teiadospovos.redelivre.org.br/

form, because it's difficult to rely on people's good will alone – projects stagnate because they lack the ressources.