

Living and researching between university and *terreiro*: cosmopolitics of encounter, contamination and care with Oropouche

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ABSTRACT

A group of professors, students and members of a *Candomblé* house were infected by the Oropouche virus during fieldwork at the *Ilê Axé Omin Ota Odara*, located in the countryside of the state of Rio de Janeiro. This experience led us to theorize the cosmopolitics of encounter, contamination and care in composition with the virus. More than an unforeseen event, the virus presents itself as a presence that reconfigures our bodies and the research practices and collaborations in which we engage. Based on this radical crossing, we discuss how meshworks of care, traditional knowledge and multispecies relations compose an ecology of cosmopolitical practices that challenge the paradigms of control and development. As researchers collaborating with the community of a *Candomblé* house, we all found ourselves transformed into objects of clinical research in infectology. In this work, we consider how this experience calls us to cultivate ethical and responsive commitments to life and to research, in worlds undergoing violent transformations.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Care and Contamination, Oropouche Fever, Making-with, Design, Architecture.

FIRST MOVEMENT: MAKING AND INHABITING BEYOND DEVELOPMENT

This article recounts a field research experience and its unfoldings, as lived by a group of faculty and students in a course within the “Design, Territorialities, and Anthropocene”, research track offered by the Graduate Program in Design at the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial, Rio de Janeiro State University (PPDESDI–ESDI/Uerj). Writing collectively, we intentionally alternate voices throughout the text: the first-person plural predominates to mark the collective body traversed by the experience; while the first-person singular is adopted for emphasizing individual perspectives. This collective body includes three professors — Zoy Anastassakis, Paula de Oliveira Camargo and Julia Sá Earp —, thirteen graduate students in design and architecture, *Ialorixá* Marlene de Oxalufã and the *Ilê* community. The *Ialorixá* heads the *Candomblé terreiro Ilê Axé Omin Ota Odara*, in Cachoeiras de Macacu, a city located in the countryside of the state of Rio de Janeiro¹. She is also a central

collaborator in the research laboratory in which the proposal for this fieldwork-based course originated.

Entitled “Making and Inhabiting Beyond Development”, the course approaches design research through its confluence with anthropology (Anastassakis, 2024), problematizing Eurocentric paradigms of progress and development where making and knowing are often separated.

During four days, the work at the *Ilê* combined field notebook workshops, readings, writing, group discussions and a design and architecture project studio. We aimed to identify design issues relevant to the house, which were subsequently addressed in biweekly meetings with the *Ialorixá* and members of the *Ilê* community throughout the following semester.

In recounting this experience, we describe events of our fieldwork while reflecting on how we were implicated by the relationships established locally — with the *Ilê*, the *Ialorixá* and the other human and non-human beings. Oropouche, as a viral presence, becomes a conceptual operator, dissolving boundaries between the biological and the political, care and contamination, research and life.

Thus, this article is an exercise in situated knowledge (Haraway, 2009), emerging from direct involvement with fieldwork. It is also part of an attempt to inhabit and narrate the intersections that challenge established notions, such as design and development, opening space for other ways of living, researching, inhabiting, composing, and making-with.

1. OROPOUCHE AND/WITHIN US: “INVOLVEMENT” AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Field immersion is embedded within the methodological propositions of the Design and Anthropology Laboratory (LaDA) at ESDI. Rather than thinking of design as a participatory practice, we choose to understand our practices as movement, creating associations, alliances, and correspondences (Anastassakis & Szaniecki, 2023, p. 54). From Malinowski’s classic field notebooks to the pressing need to conduct research committed to the “arts of noticing” (Tsing, 2015), we understand the body in the field as a method of sensing, beyond merely observing, the multiplicity of interactions between humans and non-humans, moving away from linear narratives of capitalist progress and embracing collaborative survival. In this sense, we take field methodologies seriously as possibilities for organizing a design research practice in dialogue with anthropology (Anastassakis, 2024).

Our intention in creating a pedagogical practice through moments of field immersion was to open pathways for alliances and correspondences to emerge both collectively and individually, while providing a didactic opportunity to engage with immersion as a second field — the field of ethnographic writing (Strathern, 2017) — where we elaborate the unpredictabilities and ruptures of expectation that are recurrent in research processes premised on contact and mutual contamination between the field and the researchers. As Strathern argues, social anthropology grounds its practice in what we might call “the unpredictability of initial conditions”, and ethnography advances the idea that, at the outset of an investigation, it is impossible to foresee the direction it will take or what will ultimately prove significant for its exposition.

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At this point, we confront the complex relationship between worlds, making an effort to engage with the moment when these two fields meet. The collective act of writing resonates as the result of reflecting upon the frictions of temporalities and the effects generated through fieldwork. This is what Marilyn Strathern conceptualizes as the “ethnographic moment”: the effect of bringing together two fields, observation and analysis. According to the author, every ethnographic moment — which is simultaneously a moment of knowledge and discernment — denotes a relationship between immersion and movement (Strathern, 2017, p. 317).

Thus, unlike approaches grounded in assumptions of data collection or colonizing practices, this research begins from a premise of involvement and correspondence, allowing us to move from a micro-scale to a macro-scale.

Anna Tsing (2015, p.27) asks us “how does a gathering become a ‘happening,’ that is, greater than a sum of its parts?”. Field encounters are not neutral: they contaminate and transform us. For Tsing (2015), contamination is not a choice, but a condition of life. We carry our histories of contamination, and the idea of any kind of “purity” dissolves when we understand that human survival depends, precisely, on adaptation to circumstances, which are often contingent on encounters with other existences. This permanent interweaving (De la Cadena, 2015) challenges binomials such as nature and culture, human and non-human, living and non-living, placing us face-to-face with the “strange”, just like one of the characters in this story: the virus (Povinelli, 2023).

Our contamination by *maruins* (biting midges) gives shape to an unimaginable “string figure,” a storytelling device (Haraway, 2016) to map narratives of encounters, contaminations and disturbances. This trajectory spans from 1955 in Trinidad and Tobago to 2025 in Cachoeiras de Macacu, Brazil. These encounters unite beings, times and spaces, connecting affections and plots in the composition of ways of doing and inhabiting the world amid an environmental catastrophe that looms ever more intrusively (Stengers, 2015). Consequently, contamination, as a concept and practice, traverses and resituates fieldwork, outlining new perspectives on life and research.

1.1. Reception at Ilê: roçaii, river, and shared field

On February 10, 2025, our collective journey began as we departed from Lapa, in downtown Rio de Janeiro, crossing the Baía de Guanabara (Guanabara Bay), towards Cachoeiras de Macacu. The RJ-116 highway took us through a plain shaped by the Guapi-Macacu River and by flows that predate the asphalt. As the terrain ascended, the vegetation grew denser, and green became the predominant color. Our journey ran counter to the hydrological course that supplies the metropolis with its vital water system.

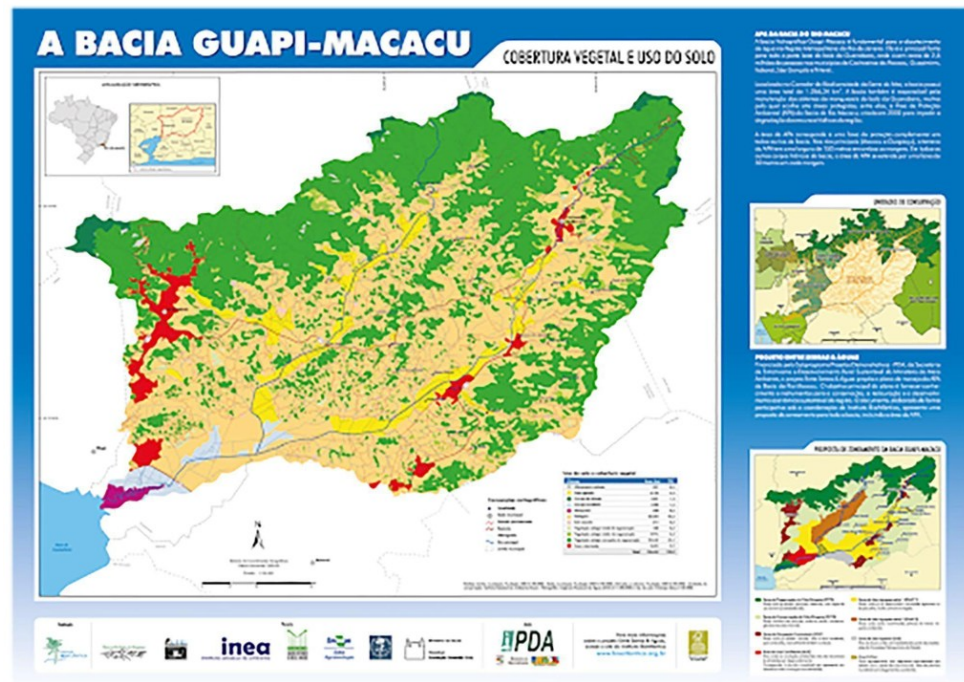


Figure 1. Map of the Guapi-Macacu basin. (EMBRAPA, n.d.).

We arrived at the *roça*ⁱⁱ under the same intense heat we had just left behind. The welcome was warm; *Ialorixá* Marlene guided us to the house where we would stay. This gesture marked our arrival, and our first inscription within the space. Following her footsteps and her voice, we crossed the *roça* listening to stories that displaced the present: stories of the place, its uses, beings, and enchantments. Between house and river, a narrative and embodied journey took shape. Marlene recalled that the waters of the Boa Vista River, running below the land, were rich with shrimp. As we walked, the narrative, the landscape and Marlene's presence permeated us.

At the table, glances crossed with curiosity, attention, tiredness, and joy. Meal after meal, this scene would repeat itself: bodies gathered around the table, eating and recognizing each other. In addition to granting sight, these glances also configured ways of listening, approaching, and caring.



Figure 2. Entrance to *Ilê Axé Omin Ota Odara*. (Authors' personal collection).

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Figure 3. Introduction of the *lalorixá*. (Authors' personal collection).

Before starting to work, we entered the river, our bodies still bearing the weight of the hot days and the long journey. The cold waters of Cachoeiras de Macacu brought immediate relief. We soon gathered in the river, enchanted to be together in such a setting. Some members of the group saw shrimp shells floating in the water, confirming what Marlene had said before.



Figure 4. Bathing in the Boa Vista River. (Authors' personal collection).

Rainfall in this region is intense, a characteristic associated with the local geographical configuration. Combined with the presence of waterlogged soils and the accumulation of organic matter, the region provides a favorable environment for various arboviruses. With climate change, small changes in temperature patterns reorder interactions between species

and the environment on a small scale, in a sensitive and endemic way, altering patterns of coexistence and their frequencies. The hotter it gets, the more it rains, leading to further reconfigurations of life. The biting midge (*Culicoides paraensis*), locally known as *maruim* or *mosquito-pólvora* (gunpowder-mosquito), was not historically noticeable in the region, as the *lalarixá* had told us. With climate change shaped by excessive heat, the pitu shrimp, a native species, became scarce, while the incidence of the *maruim* and the dengue-transmitting mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) became increasingly noticeable, according to her. The *maruim* is very small and difficult to see, but we felt it on our skin through countless bites as soon as we arrived, especially near the river.

On the second day, amid conversation circles, shared meals, river baths, and lots of insect repellent, one of the group members reported fever and severe headaches. She had previously been to the *Ilê* and experienced symptoms similar to dengue fever, but previous tests had been inconclusive. Some of us went with her to the municipal hospital in Cachoeiras de Macacu. After a long wait in a crowded reception area, blood tests, and a CT scan, we heard, for the first time, a word that sounded almost unpronounceable: Oropouche. A doctor explained that the overcrowding in the emergency department was related to an outbreak of this arboviral disease called Oropouche fever, with symptoms similar to dengue, but for which specific tests and protocols were not available yet.

The group, then, split. After spending a day in the emergency department, three of us returned to Rio de Janeiro, seeking specialized care. The others remained at the *Ilê* on a readjusted three-day schedule. On our last day at the *Ilê*, one of the students woke up experiencing similar symptoms (like fever and fatigue), raising concerns during the return trip. In the following days, thirteen persons in our group manifested symptoms, and only four remained asymptomatic.

Back home, we discovered that in the first three months of 2025, Oropouche fever cases in Rio de Janeiro had surged by 402% (CBN, 2025). The municipality we visited led the occurrences. A virus previously confined to the Amazon had reached the Atlantic Forest. We also learned, as confirmed by the Ministry of Health, that the first two deaths from the disease had occurred in 2024 (G1, 2024).

Affected by a virus poorly understood in our urban area, we were led to seek more information about its origins, spread and the networks that make it visible or invisible. Next, we revisit this journey, reviewing the trajectory of the Oropouche virus and the ways in which it is being narrated and inscribed in public policies and scientific knowledge, and how, as we were affected by this contamination, our encounter acquired a new meaning.

1.2. Open Veins of the Anthropocene: Rivers, Railways, Highways

Named after the Oropouche River, a historic colonial exploration route in Trinidad and Tobago, the virus was first isolated in 1955 from the blood of a forest worker. In 1960, it was identified in Brazil, from the blood of a sloth captured in the Amazon during the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway (Silva *et al.*, 2025).

Mid-20th-century, the virus learned to move faster. Each road opened, each rail laid, each waterway overridden by iron or asphalt, expanded its circulation. It thrived in contact zones where wild and urban environments, organic matter and human waste converged. Its flow, no longer orchestrated solely by hydrological cycles, became entangled with logistical routes to

expand access to remote areas, facilitate extractivism, and transport the goods that feed capitalism. The virus's ferality (Tsing, 2024) followed the path, producing effects that configure "unintentional designs" amid large-scale developmental interventions.

The Belém-Brasília highway project exemplified this dynamic. As part of President Juscelino Kubitschek's development acceleration plan (1956-1961), known by the slogan "50 years in 5", a narrative of accelerated modernization through large scale infrastructure projects, industrialization, and consequent urbanization. The automotive industry was prioritized and, in less than three years (1958-1960), approximately 2,000 kilometers were paved, cutting through the Cerrado and the Amazon rainforest. "Bulldoze through the jungle and unite the country from North to South", was the President's challenge to the agronomist Bernardo Sayão (Ministry of Agriculture), who led the southern front of the first mega-highway project built in the Amazon region.

Under the motto of "overcoming the forest", the construction of this highway cut through the region's biodiversity and communities, which were deemed "obstacles" to progress and national integration. Viral contact and contamination emerged in response. In 1961, the year following the highway's inauguration, a major Oropouche fever epidemic struck the city of Belém, infecting circa 11,000 people.

In 1960, Brasília was inaugurated alongside the Belém-Brasília highway — a new capital whose architectural plan resembles an airplane, built alongside a road that, as the airplane and the car, accelerated displacement far beyond the pace of river travel, opening new routes toward humanity's so-called "progress". Ailton Krenak, the Brazilian Indigenous thinker and activist, calls this a "civilizational abstraction" that paves the way for the idea of progress by separating humanity from nature, viewed as a "resource". He also criticizes the very notion of "sustainable development". What needs to be sustained? The idea of us, as human beings, detaching ourselves from the earth and living in this abstraction, is absurd. It suppresses diversity, denies the plurality of life forms, modes of existence, and habits. It offers the same menu, the same wardrobe, and if possible, the same language for everyone (Krenak, 2020, p.22-23).

1.3. Ferality in routes and veins

The routes opened by capitalist impulses of territorial expansion for exploitation produce "ferality", a concept suggested by Tsing (2024) to describe a state in which more-than-human beings produce unexpected and inappropriate effects (Haraway, 2013) when placed in abrupt relation with human technologies and infrastructures. In this condition, the expected outcomes of these interactions transcend previously conceived human intentions. "Ferality" is a deviation, an uncontrolled and unexpected action that unsettles the wild/domesticated dichotomy; it does not necessarily indicate positive or negative effects in this interaction, but is frequently perceived and characterized as "inappropriate".

Elizabeth Povinelli suggests that as we are captured by conflicting "precarious natures and entangled existences" (Povinelli, 2016, p. 15), new models, figures, and conceptual tactics proliferate in a "wild" manner, displacing the conceptual figures and tactics of both biopolitics and necropolitics (Povinelli, 2016, p. 15). The virus, Povinelli argues, involves the imaginary of the Terrorist:

it is the figure for that which seeks to disrupt the current arrangements of Life and Nonlife by claiming that it is a difference that makes no difference not because all is alive, vital,

It ignores and uses this distinction in favor of divergences in the energies of existential arrangements — copying, duplicating, lying dormant, while continuously molding itself to circumstances and testing ways of being-with other existences. The virus thus constitutes an internal and political alterity, meaning that “to live in the vicinity of the Virus is to dwell in an existential crisis” (Povinelli, 2016, p. 19).

Although the Oropouche virus was already part of complex more-than-human ecologies among insects, mammals, bodies of water, and organic matter, it was only upon entering human bodies linked to developmentalist enterprises that it came to be investigated, observed, and named. Its biological and historical agency (Tsing, 2024) preexisted its naming, but entered a regime of visibility only when it forced human systems to mobilize resources, discourses, and technologies to deal with its presence, unintentionally coordinating pre-existing arrangements. It becomes an agent that potentially disrupts flows essential to “development,” challenging the “colonial inhabitation” (Ferdinand, 2022).

The *maruim* and the Oropouche virus, besides positioning themselves as disturbances (Tsing, 2015) to the development model of “order and progress,” also came to operate with us, forging strange kinships in “sympoiesis” (Haraway, 2016), making-world-with our research group and the *Ilê* community. The virus and its vector are more-than-human beings that ended up co-writing our fieldwork journey, becoming actors who imposed themselves as protagonists (Tsing, 2024) of our story, shifting our positions from researchers to research subjects at the Evandro Chagas National Institute of Infectious Diseases (INI/Fiocruz). Thus, from contamination onward, we came to “be-with” (De la Cadena, 2015) Oropouche as something else — “not-only” or “much-more-than” (De la Cadena, 2015) a research group doing fieldwork in collaboration with a *Candomblé terreiro* community.

1.4. Researching from Involvement: Back to the *Ilê*

The *Ilê Axé Omin Ota Odara* is a space of learning and practice for “political ecology” resistance (Ferdinand, 2021) by forging, in its construction and inhabitation, modes of involvement that contradict the developmentalist logics typical of modernity. The house's history begins in 2005, when the *Ialorixá's Pai de Santo* (spiritual father), concerned about the need for a proper space for his sacred objects, proposed that she seek land. The search began with the guidance that the location should be in Cachoeiras de Macacu and should maintain a direct relationship with a watercourse — a river. In 2006, Marlene found the land. Thus began her journey of structuring the site, which involved planning a water supply system and building a septic tank and drainage pit. Each detail of this process, according to her, is intrinsically related to memory and the sacralization of space.

The house, designed under her *Pai de Santo's* guidance, came into being through careful planning. Although originally envisioned with two floors, only one was built, given the slow pace that characterizes the work. At the *Ilê*, the project is not restricted to architecture but is, first and foremost, a landscape project — or rather, a territorial project. The vegetation surrounding the house includes plants such as *acocô*, genipap, and Ogun's palm tree, which are seen as more-than-natural elements: they are components of a sacred balance that transcends the logic of designed landscapes. “All green is sacred”, the *Ialorixá* reminds us. This care for the environment reflects an entangled relationship with the territory. Environment

and memory intertwine, pointing to a mode of inhabitation and living grounded not in linear development and progress but in attention (Ingold, 2000), maintenance and care (Mattern, 2018), memory and thick time (Haraway, 2016).

The river running at the back of the property stands as a vital element in this web of involvements. The local topography, with its slope, ensures that its waters do not overflow toward the house, even during flood seasons — a careful construction decision that diverges from the urgencies and protocols that often define urban planning practices. Over the years, the *Ilê* has become a place of encounter and exchange, not only among people but also between humans and more-than-humans, in a dynamic of mutual respect and continuous learning.

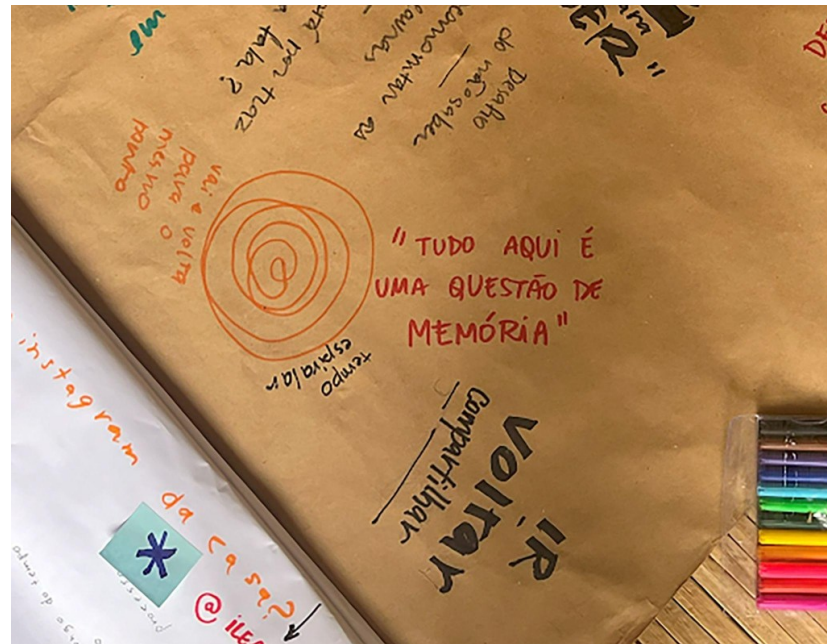


Figure 5. Collective sketches during conversation at the *Ilê*. (Authors' personal collection).

Visiting the *Ilê*, one encounters not only its physical structure but the histories infused in every corner. The *Ialorixá* tells us that everything there “is a matter of memory” (Figure 4). According to her, the space comes into being through the process of “enchantment”, which happens through speech, touch, and gestures. It is what transforms the house's everyday life, making it a space of care and belonging. Attention to food, listening between elders and youth, and daily ritual practices constitute a mode of coexistence that escapes the logic of efficiency and production, offering a territory of resistance and adaptation. Care becomes the foundation for creating a world of shared experiences. Rather than a project based on a vision of a distant future, the *Ilê* is shaped in the present.

2. CONTAMINATION AND CARE

After several group members began presenting similar symptoms, our messaging app group — initially created for practical course logistics — became a network of monitoring and care. What was this? Where did it come from? How could we care for ourselves? While the first to fall ill sought regular emergency care, we recalled the advice of health professionals in Cachoeiras de Macacu — the first place we had heard the name “Oropouche” — who had directed us to the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), Brazil's leading institution for infectious disease research, located in Rio de Janeiro. One group member contacted her sister, who works there, and was directed to the “malaria hotline”. This connected us to the Evandro

Chagas National Institute of Infectious Diseases (INI/Fiocruz), marking the beginning of an unexpected new stage of fieldwork. Living and researching with “involvement” took on a deeper meaning as symptoms slowly manifested in each of us, transforming the nature of our encounter from an academic and pedagogical collaborative exercise into a cosmopolitical practice of collective care.



Figure 6. Screenshots of our group chat that became a knowledge-sharing hub about the then-unknown virus, our lived symptom experiences, and a space of collective care. (Assembled by authors).

Understanding that our personal and collective experiences became intertwined with the theoretical framework presented in this article, we gathered short testimonies from our group members following their contamination:

Testimony 1

On the last day, I woke up weak with severe body aches, and a fever that wouldn't stop rising despite taking medicine. I anxiously awaited our departure. The journey began and was supposed to last about two hours. I felt my breath burning and my body limp. I already had a fever of 40°C (104°F), even after taking two different medications. I felt increasingly worse. I saw an Emergency Room and thought about asking to stop. I didn't know if it was real or a hallucination. When we arrived in Rio, I went to the Botafogo Emergency Care Unit (UPA). I explained the symptoms and mentioned the suspicion of Oropouche fever. The doctor was unfamiliar with the disease but ordered a blood test. I received IV saline and fever medication. After waiting for some time, I brought the blood test results to the doctor — who was now a

different one. She had also never heard of Oropouche. I was discharged and went home. I felt better for a few hours. Only the next day would the group start receiving care at Fiocruz.

Testimony 2

After we returned to Rio, with the rest of the group presenting the same symptoms, we coordinated contact with Fiocruz. We filled a form prior to our in-person medical consultations, describing the symptoms' timing, intensity, and details. We arrived as a group and were treated as such throughout the rooms and corridors of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, from triage through to the medical consultation rooms to the sample collection laboratories.

While repeating my symptom history in detail to yet another person, I was struck by the word “researcher” on their badge. I was surprised but still didn't grasp the full extent of the inversion taking place. We received containers for urine and saliva and waited to be called for blood collection. We sat in the waiting area holding the small containers full of our urine and saliva — a somewhat comical situation with our bodily fluids in hand and on display.

Within days, the Oropouche had affected nearly the entire group, folding forms, medical appointments, visits to Fiocruz, lab tests and bodily fluid collection into our daily routines. From a research group, we became a group of patients and research subjects. We found ourselves attending daily to the care needs of each group member, the central focus of our interactions in the weeks that followed. For Ingold (2020), care is tied to the attunement of attention and the ability to respond. Caring, then, entails the responsibility to attend and correspond (Ingold, 2020, p. 49) — a responsibility that broadened the scope of our interactions. We became a collective not only of research and teaching, but also of care, with its own pedagogical dimensions. We were led into a “practice of exposure and attention” (Ingold, 2018, p. 60) that forged other modalities of attunement and learning among us and in our relationship with the territories of the *Ilê*, the university, and Fiocruz.

Practicing participant observation is itself an educational process that implies our correspondence with those with whom we study. This includes the *Ilê*, its human and more-than-human community, and also the unanticipated Oropouche arbovirus carried by the *maruim*. “Never in control of the situation, not knowing what any day will bring, the anthropological participant observer is vulnerable, largely at the mercy of unfolding events, and ever reliant on improvisation” (Ingold, 2018, p. 60). Exposed to the virus, we practiced a participant observation radically altered by its imposition on our bodies. If education is about attention — if the purpose of education is to draw us into correspondence with the world around us (Ingold, 2018, p. 30) — then the ferality (Tsing, 2024) imposed by the *maruim* vectoring Oropouche fever in Cachoeiras de Macacu forced us to deal with our surroundings in an entirely different way.

With the “ferality” (Tsing, 2024) and “sympoiesis” (Haraway, 2016) imposed by the “new” virus that had entered us, our bodies became territories of research and care. Filling test tubes with blood, checking blood pressure — veins, rivers, and routes of the Anthropocene — everything suddenly converged. Our fieldwork expanded to Rio de Janeiro, though in an inverted way. Visits to Mangueiras, at the INI, became part of the group's routine. “Hi, I'm another person from the group that was in Cachoeiras de Macacu. I'd like to be tested for Oropouche”. The attentive receptionist would direct each arriving person to the triage queue for vital signs checks, then to the laboratory. “Could you fill these two urine containers, two

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saliva ones?" We would sit near our colleagues holding the small containers, waiting for the nurse to call us for more rounds of consultations, tests and investigations.

By traversing our bodies, the virus not only forced us to suspend our academic productivity agenda but also brought about a shared existential crisis, exposing both the fragility and potency of the ways of life we insist on composing. Above all, we became a group *with* the virus. Thus, a community of relations was forged among worlds that, until our stay at the *Ilê*, seemed to have nothing in common but that from that week onward, came to accommodate each other's presence: we, researchers and students of a graduate design program, the community of a *Candomblé terreiro*, the arbovirus, and the medical team at INI/Fiocruz.

This contact zone placed us on "uncommon ground" (De la Cadena, 2015, p. 283). An event that "allows those who have nothing in common, nevertheless, to welcome each other's presence, to attend and respond to each other and, in doing so, form a community of relations" (Ingold, 2020, p. 60) constitutes what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call the "undercommons". This is a zone subject to tremors, where we are led to feel we have lost our way, that we have strayed from the path, a zone where "everything seems strangely out of the ordinary" (Ingold, 2020, p. 61). From this perspective, the field "is none other than an undercommons" (Ingold, 2020, p. 88): "a kind of comportment or ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism" (Moten, Harney, 2013, p. 112). After all, the undercommons forges a kind of opening in which we come to be affected, dispossessed, and possessed by others.

3. OVERCOMING THE ANTHROPOCENE?

Oropouche fever was not just an inconvenient and unforeseen side effect of our journey. It served as a manifestation of what Stengers (2015) calls the "Gaia intrusion," or what Ferdinand (2021) calls the "Ayiti intrusion," a type of event that forces us to confront the consequences of the Anthropocene. For Ferdinand, the "Ayiti hypothesis" proposes the Earth as "the basis for a world where its physico-chemical systems, its geological strata, its oceans, its ecosystems, and its atmosphere are in intrinsic relationships with the colonial, racial, and misogynistic dominations of humans and non-humans, as well as the struggles against them" (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 182).

If Gaia or Ayiti can be thought of as assemblages of material, dynamic, and interconnected processes, their intrusions demand that they intrude on our practices.. They remind us of the intensity of the relationships between humans and more-than-humans, requiring us to question our response-ability (the ability to respond, as Haraway [2016] proposes) in the face of unforeseen and often uncontrollable effects.

In the face of such a crisis, Ayiti confronts us not as a living or mythological entity, but as an intrusive event that requires us to stop and think: about the consequences of human action and to rethink the constitution of this cosmopolitical "we" that compels us to pay attention and respond to what affects and alters "us". This experience radically affected our bodies and, consequently, our research and co-laboring (De la Cadena, 2015) with the *Ilê*. In February 2025, upon entering the *Ilê's* territory for research and collaboration, we were bitten by *maruins*. We fell ill, with symptoms persisting for weeks. Countless appointments and lab tests followed. We became not only subjects of field research, but also objects of medical research, affected by multiple layers of contagion and contamination.

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What we lived was a radical experience of the effects that these theoretical propositions and continuous contradictions describe. The *Ilê* is understood by its people as a space for healing and care, a territory where relationships between bodies, plants, elements, and forces that sustain life operate. However, it is also a space directly affected by the dynamics of the Anthropocene, manifest in subtle and persistent ways.

The guava tree at the house, of symbolic, ritual, and medicinal significance, reveals this tension: its fallen fruits attract the female *maruim*, which lays eggs in moist organic matter (Instituto Oswaldo Cruz, 2024). However, the *lalorixá* informs that the tree cannot simply be removed: it participates in the cycles of the *Ilê*, provides wood for the *aguidavis*^{iv} used in ceremonies, and must be pruned according to the lunar calendar and local traditions. Even when it loses its leaves in response to the death of someone close, it does not die: it remains in suspension, like the *Ilê* itself, between care and risk, healing and contamination.

Faced with impasses such as this, prophylaxis cannot be understood solely as a technical action, restricted to the protection of human bodies. It involves listening to the rhythms of the territory and maintaining the bonds between the species that make the *Ilê* an expanded organism. The application of oils that prevent *maruim* bites, for example, is a palliative solution that does not address the complexity of the problem. These impasses require considering the functions of plants as biological agents, and as cosmopolitical agents (Stengers, 2018).

What are our possibilities as human beings willing to take attentive and responsive stances, accompanied by proposals for interspecies relationships (Haraway, 2016), assemblages (Tsing, 2015) and gestures of confluence (Santos, 2023) that enable regenerative ways of not only “inhabiting the world” or “being on the world,” but of “being world”? These possible modes of association cannot be considered a promise of “overcoming,” but rather a refuge for coexistence amid difference, for involvement with the processes that, being world, we inflict as a species. There is no human centrality, or promise of consensus, but rather an ethical commitment to what may still emerge in a damaged world.

These perspectives resonate with Antônio Bispo dos Santos’s (2023) frontier thinking, which breaks with monism and dualities by proposing relationships grounded in respect and flexible boundaries. Extending this shared concern with coexistence in damaged worlds, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2014) argue that the Anthropocene will not end with us. To live in it (Moulin *et al.*, 2022) is to acknowledge its contradictions without relying on totalizing solutions. Our experience with Oropouche shows that its effects are material and concrete: fevers, diagnostic uncertainties, and improvised care networks reveal the entanglements of humans, viruses, forests, and infrastructures.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

What developments and consequences might this process have for design research? Ingold (2020) reminds us that learning is, to a large extent, contamination. Contrasting the generic idea of education as the transmission of content, the author advocates a pedagogy of involvement, understanding contamination as an inevitable (and desirable) effect of being in relationships: getting involved, affecting and being affected, and setting aside any assumed neutrality.

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By experiencing the fieldwork so intensely as part of the course “Making and Inhabiting Beyond Development”, we moved beyond the proposal for collaboration between spaces of knowledge production that have historically been understood as distant — the university and the *Ilê* — to go further, finding ourselves radically entangled with the multiple dimensions of this experience marked by notions of contamination, care, and involvement. This same contamination, both by the virus and the collective experience of fieldwork, produced a radical alteration in our bodies, forced to slow down and collaborate through care, being affected by intermittent symptoms for at least two months. Furthermore, it impacted the entire dynamics of the research group. From researchers in design and anthropology, we came to collaborate within a large infectiology research protocol — now as objects of study.

In this scenario, design entered not as a vehicle for innovation or solutions, but as another practice of attention, support, and sharing. Based on this experience, the perspective of “design-making” blends with the needs of the *Ilê*, where we went with the intention of collaborating. Observing, living, and understanding the temporality, potentialities, and project constraints imposed by more-than-human entities present in the *terreiro* become a way of thinking that seeks, rather than bringing solutions, to integrate with the differentiated space-time that constitutes the place of worship. Doing design research then becomes “being-with” and “composing”. At the same time, it is also “making-with” — and no longer “making-for” or “making-from” — the demands that come from the *Ilê*, and also from Ayiti, which presents itself as intrusive, relentless, and strangely engaging.

ENDNOTES

1. In this paper, we retain the original Portuguese terms “*Ilê*,” “*terreiro*,” and “*Ialorixá*,” because they name specific roles, spaces, and forms of organization in Afro-Brazilian religious traditions that have no direct English equivalents. Using the original terms preserves their cultural and relational meanings. “*Ilê*” and “*terreiro*” refer to the religious house and its broader ritual and social space, encompassing both a physical site and a collective spiritual organization. Finally, “*Ialorixá*” designates the female religious leader.
2. *Roças* are traditional smallholder agroecosystems based on polyculture, low external inputs, and local ecological knowledge. Here, the term is used more broadly to include peri-urban areas between city and forest where such practices and subsistence ways of life have been concentrated. It may also refer to specific family homes within these territories, reflecting its wider spatial and cultural meaning.
3. Translation from “[Vamos] arrombar a selva e unir o país de norte a sul” in: Bojunga, C. (2001).
4. *Aguidavis* are sticks used to play the *atabaques* in *Candomblé*.

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