Digital Masks: Reimagining Digital Media for Co-Presence with the Kogi

Jaroslava Šnajberková, Universidade Aberta, Portugal

José Bidarra, Universidade Aberta, Portugal

Mirian Tavares, Universidade do Algarve, Portugal

This paper presents arts-based research on digital media and indigenous communities. It departs from Kogi sacred masks to discuss community life and how digital media can serve as a relational, ethically attuned environment for engaging with indigenous communities in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia. Grounded in visual ethnography, autoethnography, and analogue photography, the project explores how image-making may shift from mere acts of capture to practices of co-presence, inner silence, and respectful withholding. The work draws from the story of two sacred ritual masks repatriated from Berlin to the Kogi in 2023, using them as both material artefacts and conceptual metaphors for opacity, sovereignty, and spiritual integrity. Through digital fragments, ambient sound, underexposed imagery, and poetic interruption, the digital arts project challenges conventional representation and contributes to a decolonial visual methodology rooted in care and attentiveness.

CCS CONCEPTS • Human-centred computing → Collaborative and social computing → Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing • Computing methodologies → Artificial intelligence → Philosophical/theoretical foundations of artificial intelligence • Applied computing → Arts and humanities → Media arts.

Additional Keywords and Phrases: Indigenous media, Digital ritual, Decolonial aesthetics, Visual sovereignty, Digital mask, Analogue photography, Kogi, Masks, Spiritual technology, Co-presence

ACM Reference Format:

\copyrightyear{2025}

\acmYear{2025}

\setcopyright{cc}

\setcctype{by}

\acmConference[ARTECH 2025]{12th International Conference on Digital and Interactive Arts: Media Art Cultures, Communities & Territories}{November 26--28, 2025}{Braga, Portugal}

\acmBooktitle{12th International Conference on Digital and Interactive Arts: Media Art Cultures, Communities &

Territories (ARTECH 2025), November 26--28, 2025, Braga, Portugal}

\acmPrice{}

\acmDOI{10.1145/3773699.3774710}

\acmISBN{979-8-4007-2001-7/25/11}

ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-2001-7/25/11

https://doi.org/10.1145/3773699.3774710

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on arts-based research involving the native Kággaba community (hereafter referred to as the Kogi), Ikʉ (also known as the Arhuaco), Wiwa (Saha), and Kankuamo (Kankwe) (Tayler, 1997), focusing especially on the Kogi people. It outlines the intersections of digital media, indigenous epistemologies, and artistic research through the case of the Kogi community of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In particular, the research emphasises the nuanced negotiation between traditional knowledge holders and the mediated spaces offered by digital tools, considering the implications of each intervention on communal trust and continuity. The project emerges from long-term artistic and ethnographic engagement in the region between 2019 and 2025 and is guided by a central question: How can digital arts and media function as a sensitive space for the representation and coexistence with the Kogi community while respecting their epistemologies and protocols?

The motivation is simultaneously academic, artistic, and personal, blending photography, theory, and ethics in response to the ongoing visual challenges posed by colonial histories of image-making. The multidimensional approach is intended to bridge theoretical reflection with lived experience, aiming to produce outcomes that are both intellectually rigorous and socially meaningful. As a photographer, mother, and researcher, I sought to observe and cohabit with complexity rather than explain it. This research is also a part of an ongoing digital arts doctoral project that merges visual practice with postcolonial reflection and decolonial methodologies grounded in relational ethics.

1.1 Context and Background

The Kogi can be considered the community with the most preserved customs and way of life according to the traditions of their ancestors. Their original name, Kággaba, means ‘human’. Since the development of technology is often put in context with humanity, it is appropriate to connect via digital media the themes of cultural traditions and current technologies. The Kággaba, or Kogi, are an indigenous community that has preserved much of its pre-Columbian knowledge and spiritual traditions (Ereira, 2008). Located in the highlands of the Sierra Nevada, an isolated mountain range in northern Colombia, their philosophy emphasises ecological balance and communication with ancestral spirits. The interrelation of ecological consciousness and digital exploration forms a key part of the methodological inquiry, allowing the study to extend ethical frameworks into contemporary technological contexts. They refer to themselves as "Elder Brothers", guardians of the Earth who observe the imbalance caused by Western societies, or "Younger Brothers".

In 2023, two ceremonial masks taken by ethnologist Konrad Preuss in the early 20th century (Koch & Kummels, 2016) were returned to the Kogi from the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. For them these masks are not simply artistic objects—they are animate vessels of ancestral presence. Their return raised questions about cultural restitution, the value

of sacredness, and the limits of visual access. The masks also serve as catalysts for dialogues surrounding memory, presence, and the ethics of digital replication, prompting reflection on what it means to translate spiritual objects into a digital form. These masks also became a conceptual axis for this project by raising questions such as, ‘What does it mean to see without showing? To listen without documenting? To interact digitally without extracting?’

Historical visual representations of indigenous peoples have often served colonial agendas. As noted by Mirzoeff (2011) and Mignolo (2011), the act of visualising the "other" has frequently coincided with control, classification, and silencing. For the Kogi, the notion of visibility is not neutral—images can reveal too much, endanger what is sacred, or distort what is relational. Hence, a core objective of the study is to balance visibility with ethical restraint, fostering a digital environment that respects indigenous autonomy. Thus, respecting the right to opacity (Glissant, 1997) and establishing protocols for what can ethically be made visible is central to the research.

1.2 **Research Design**

Our research was grounded in a multimodal, layered technique that incorporates arts-based research, in which art functions as a means of knowing rather than as an object of analysis; visual ethnography, which recognises images as situated, relational, and affective; and autoethnography, to acknowledge the researcher’s circumstances embedded in maternal, cultural, and ethical dimensions. The integrative approach allows for multiple voices, including those of community elders and collaborators, to influence the process of knowledge production.

Drawing inspiration from feminist and decolonial thinkers like Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), Haraway (2016), and Ruddick (1989), the researcher approaches knowledge as a relational, embodied, and contingent entity. In this context, photography and digital artefacts are means of encounter and mediators of relational engagement as opposed to being objective instruments. By embedding reflexivity at every stage, the project challenges conventional hierarchies of knowledge and foregrounds collaborative co-creation as a methodological principle. Research outputs based on the interaction with the Kogi include analogue negatives, visual diaries, recorded reflections, field notes, and digital compositions that resist linear narrative and embrace fragmentation.

In this study, reflexivity is the process by which the researcher continuously recognises and critically assesses her own role, presumptions, and influence on the research itself. This entails admitting that research is not an impartial or objective endeavour but rather is influenced by the researcher’s presence, methodology, relationships with subject matter experts, and subjective experiences. It also provides a space to interrogate the emotional and ethical dimensions of co-presence, fostering ongoing learning and adaptation.

Rather than attempting to "capture" indigenous life, the researcher engaged in practices that reflect the aesthetic values of silence, slowness, and ambiguity. This included underexposed and blurred photography, evoking absence and the impossibility of full representation; glitches and digital noise, suggesting instability, resistance to clarity, and the refusal of digital smoothness; ambient soundscapes, layered with still images, to create poetic affective atmospheres; and interactive maps that respond to presence and resist linear navigation.

Inspired by the ritual masks as liminal and sacred media, the photographic image becomes a form of mediation rather than documentation. A photograph can reveal how one relates to something even if it may fail to show what it is.

The project contributes to several fields: visual anthropology, by practising photographic restraint and ethical hesitation; digital humanities, by reimagining digital space as poetic, relational, and temporal; and decolonial aesthetics, through the refusal of extractive visuality and the embrace of opacity. These contributions are framed through an epistemology of care and attentiveness, rooted in indigenous cosmologies and posthuman perspectives.

It also engages with the concept of visual sovereignty—the right of communities to control how they are represented—and challenges romantic or exoticising tendencies often found in visual arts involving indigenous subjects. Rather than translate the Kogi cosmology into Western-readable forms, the aim is to create spaces for viewers to listen and wonder, without total access. The term ‘visual sovereignty’ here refers to the right of indigenous peoples and communities to determine how they are represented, to define the narratives and contexts in which their images appear, and to maintain agency over visual knowledge. It goes beyond authorship or representation, engaging instead with the ethics of visibility and the power of images to sustain or disrupt relationships.

Finally, the work is situated within environmental urgency. The melting glaciers of the Sierra Nevada are spiritually crucial to the Kogi. Their extinction has ontological and cosmological implications in addition to ecological ones. The silence embedded in this research—visual and acoustic—mirrors this loss. A digital fragment or blurred image becomes a mourning gesture, a trace of disappearance.

1.3 **Methodological Approach and Indicators**

The research combines long-term ethnographic fieldwork, artistic interventions, and collaborative practices with the Kogi community members. The methodologies include analogue and digital photography, interviews and experimental prototyping of digital artefacts such as 3D-printed masks and glitch-based visualisations. Additionally, participatory workshops were planned for the future where community members could interact with prototypes, offering direct feedback and influencing design decisions, thereby embedding co-authorship into the research process.

Indicators of success in this context are not quantitative metrics but instead relational and process-based. They include community feedback and participation – whether elders and participants recognise the interventions as respectful, meaningful, or aligned with their cosmology; emergence of dialogue – whether the artefact (photographic, digital, or material) generates new conversations within the community or between the community and external institutions; continuity of engagement – whether the collaboration results in further invitations, projects, or community-led initiatives; and affective resonance – whether the digital interventions (e.g., masks, glitch images) evoke responses that acknowledge their spiritual or symbolic dimensions. Further indicators include the extent to which the interventions facilitate shared reflection on heritage, memory, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, strengthening relational bonds within the community.

These indicators ensure that the methodology remains accountable not only to academic standards and to indigenous ethical frameworks and the relational nature of the Kogi worldviews. They also provide a model for future digital arts research involving other communities, emphasising that ethical engagement and co-presence should guide methodological planning.

The project unfolds through an emergent process that connects all phases of the work. Each step generates the next – the research is cyclical, self-renewing, and guided by intuition, attention and dialogue with the environment and people involved. The direction becomes clear through the practice itself—when forms, ideas, and relationships begin to reveal their own logic. This emergent, adaptive approach allows the project to remain sensitive to the needs and protocols of the community while fostering innovation in digital arts research. Success is not measured by predefined results but by the sense of coherence that gradually emerges as participation deepens, as new layers naturally align, and as the structure begins to articulate.

Practically speaking, the approaches discussed here are transformed into tangible artistic and cooperative endeavours, like community consultations, iterative field reflections, and the co-creation of digital and photographic artefacts. These methods give the theoretical framework a solid foundation in real-world interactions that can be seen, discussed, and expanded upon both inside and outside the community. Moreover, documenting these interactions allows for reflection on processual ethics, highlighting the tensions, compromises, and learning moments that define relational research.

2 **DIGITAL MEDIA AS A RITUAL SPACE**

Digital media, especially in their dominant institutional forms (social networks, data visualisation, and interface design), are often perceived as spaces of acceleration, transparency, and performativity. However, when reimagined through the lens of slow media, anti-interface theory, and speculative design, they open up possibilities for perceiving the digital as a muted, unfocused, temporally expanded space. By rethinking time, attention, and sensory engagement, the digital can function as a transitional zone that facilitates introspection, ritual, and social connection.

In the Sierra Nevada, time follows a different rhythm (CUSchooloftheArts, 2019). Daily life reflects slowness, storytelling, and repetition. This observation inspired the concept of "silent interactivity"—a bodily, intuitive, and symbolic relationship with the screen, where coexistence, not domination, is implied by touch. Silent interactivity can manifest itself, for example, in how a user slowly and attentively views a digital artefact without the need for quick

reactions or clicking, creating space for internal reflection and silent connection with the content. It encourages mindfulness and a sensory awareness that parallels the attentiveness required in Kogi ritual practices. In contrast to conventional interface design based on immediate feedback and predictability, silent interactivity values non-response, delay, looping, and subtle sensory engagement. It resonates with the temporalities of nature, ritual, and care.

Another way to think about the digital medium is as a ritual or spiritual space that is suspended, transformative, and transitional without being religious. This perspective draws from Vilém Flusser (2007), who described photography and technical images as new mythologies that shape our thinking and displace traditional narratives. The research initiative investigates how interactivity itself might become a ritualised practice by applying this viewpoint to digital media, where intentionality, presence, and attention define the medium as opposed to just the information. Thus, the digital becomes a transitional space where reality is symbolically re-encoded rather than represented.

Lev Manovich's (2002) distinction between narrative and database offers further depth. He proposes that databases, unlike stories, are cyclical, fragmented, and non-linear, aligning more closely with ritual structures than sequential logic. This insight supports the design of digital masks as non-linear environments where engagement is iterative, exploratory, and relational, echoing Kogi concepts of temporal continuity and ancestral memory. The digital medium becomes a field of potential, return, and pause—an unfinished search akin to an initiation rite.

According to Zylinska in her interview with Dewdney (2019), the concept of nonhuman photography reframes the digital as a medium of inhuman sensitivity, capable of recording traces beyond human perception. This implies that digital media's ethical strength comes from its capacity to preserve memories, intuition, and silence and not from portrayal (Zylinska & Dewdney, 2019). It also highlights the responsibility of the researcher to consider nonhuman agency, including the presence of ancestral spirits, ecological forces, and material traces in digital mediation.

These reflections on digital media as ritual spaces directly intersect with decolonial visual practices, where visibility, power, and relational ethics become central concerns in the encounter with the Kogi community. In accomplishing that, the study advances the field of media arts studies as well as current discussions around the morality of representation and technological co-presence in cross-cultural settings.

3 DECOLONIALITY AND VISUALITY

Decolonial thought, in this context, refers to critical approaches that challenge the colonial structures of knowledge and visuality, seeking to restore relational and plural ways of knowing. Similarly, posthumanist perspectives decentralise the human subject, recognising the agency of nonhuman entities, technologies, and environments in shaping meaning.

Based on the relationships established in the field and interviews conducted during the research, it follows that for the Kogi community, visual images—and especially photography and video—are a sensitive and often problematic matter. As British filmmaker and historian Alan Ereira pointed out during our conversation in 2024, the only possible way to depict this community is to become an instrument in the hands of its members. This principle became the starting point for the research approach, namely, to see digital media as a shared space of dialogue.

This also brings forth the deeper ethical challenge embedded in the act of representation itself. As Stuart Hall reminds us, representation is a process by which meaning is actively created instead of being a neutral reflection (Hall, 1997). It thus becomes a situation of struggle over who has the authority to define and circulate meanings. In the context of indigenous communities, this struggle is often asymmetrical, reflecting broader colonial histories and epistemic hierarchies. Visibility, often associated with empowerment, can also function as a form of control or exposure. Not all communities seek or benefit from visibility in the same way. Following Édouard Glissant's (1997) concept of the "right to opacity", some aspects of the Kogi life may resist representation altogether—not as a defence, however, but as a proactive measure of defence, authority, or moral rectitude.

The relationship between digital media and indigenous communities must therefore be approached through decolonial thinking. Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012) argue that digital media's engagement with indigenous communities must be approached via decolonial thinking, which challenges the colonial matrix of power embedded in Western visual regimes—by knowing, classifying, and enclosing non-Western worlds. Their concept of *delinking* from hegemonic

epistemologies supports a right not to be represented, affirming non-visibility, silence, fragmentation, glitching, noise, or absence as ethically and aesthetically significant strategies.

This is in line with Michelle Raheja's notions of visual sovereignty, developed in the context of Native North American communities. Raheja (2007) defines visual sovereignty as the strategic assertion of control over representation—including framing, content, and audience interpretation—through indigenous cinematic practices such as confronting viewers head-on or "laughing at the camera". She observes how these tactics extend into digital domains, creating "visual sovereignty on virtual reservations" of indigenous design. By applying this to digital masks, the work presents technological mediation as a type of co-sovereignty in which the community and the researcher negotiate visibility, access, and meaning. This concept is further extended into what is called digital sovereignty—that is, control over not just image content but also appearance, framing, accessibility, and the digital architecture itself. Such sovereignty demands awareness of how digital spaces may reproduce or disrupt colonial dynamics and how respect for cultural protocols, sacred knowledge, and invisibility must shape digital engagement. During fieldwork with the Kogi, this manifested as a concern for reciprocity, protection, and demarcation. As one interlocutor stated, "People come and take pictures, but nothing is returned" (CUSchooloftheArts, 2019).

In this light, the depiction of the Kogi is not merely an artistic or ethnographic task—it is a relational act shaped by trust, reciprocity, and attentiveness to what should not be shown. Digital media and photography are being repositioned as potential tools for co-presence, listening, and ethical hesitancy instead of just as tools for taking pictures.

4 PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MASK

Ritual masks are central to this research—both materially and metaphorically. In the Kogi cosmology, masks are not symbols of identity; they are instruments of transformation and communication. Created by the spirits (personal communication, 2024), they mediate contact with spiritual dimensions that cannot be approached directly. Similarly, photography is treated as a liminal tool, mediating between seen and unseen, human and nonhuman, and material and digital.

The duality—concealment and revelation—has a parallel in photography. The camera is a portal: it records, transmits, transforms, and interprets. Like the mask, it can blur, obscure, or filter. Photography becomes a representational tool but also a relational and ritual interface. While the digital medium serves here as an intangible, poetic, and temporal layer, the analogue image remains the body—the visceral, relational core of the research. The tension between analogue and digital mirrors the dialectic between presence and absence, material and abstract, and ritual and code. Photography, like the mask, is not a window; it is a threshold, a portal or a teleport gate. In this sense, photography as a mask is more than a metaphor—it is a method. It allows the image to serve not as a revelation but as a protection, silence, or offering. It challenges dominant photographic paradigms centred on transparency and opens space for a visuality rooted in spiritual and relational sovereignty.

Colonial interventions have long disrupted indigenous communities—transforming landscapes, appropriating sacred objects, and violating spiritual protocols. Yet the spiritual knowledge of the Kogi has endured, rooted in cosmological continuity rather than in material permanence. The return of two sacred masks from the Ethnological Museum in Berlin in 2023, facilitated by the Kogi Mámas and the Colombian president, was perceived as a political act and, moreover, as a restoration of spiritual balance. These masks are not artefacts in the Western museological sense—they are living entities, embodiments of ancestral presence, cosmological guardians, and tools of communication.

The Kogi emphasise the need to protect sacred knowledge from visual appropriation. "There are certain things we do not want to show," says a community member, "for example, rituals—they are intended only for us." (personal communication, 2020). The presence of photographs or video recordings of masked rituals is rare and often treated with ambivalence. Therefore, all interventions in this research prioritise ethical curation, selective visibility, and the intentional layering of access, echoing the mask's protective function. The appearance of one such video, showing a masked Máma dancing in a village ceremony, raises critical questions about visual sovereignty and digital ethics: Who controls the representation of indigenous rituals? What protocols should govern the circulation of sacred images in a networked world?

Photography and video are not neutral tools in the Kogi cosmology. As Máma José Shibulata explains, “They say they took a photo of the sun, and that image is a mask used to communicate with Jate Sé, the father of darkness.” (Chaparro, 2012). Here, photography becomes a ritual interface—a mask, a mediator between the seen and the unseen. Visual media are extensions of ancient instruments that are ingrained in cosmic history in lieu of contemporary intrusions.

The Kogi masks are thought to balance natural and spiritual energies. Their removal from the Sierra Nevada was believed to disturb the land itself, contributing to disasters and ecological imbalance. Efforts to restore these masks have been met with Western conservationist resistance. This conflict underscores a deeper tension between preservation as conservation and preservation as continuity of use. From this perspective, photography is analogous to the mask. Both serve as liminal objects—they conceal, reveal, mediate, and transform. The mask is not a symbol of identity, the way we often view it, but a portal of transformation, much like the camera mediates between visibility and invisibility. Photography becomes a form of spiritual negotiation—not documentation but reverence.

An artefact accompanying the arts-based research – digital masks – photographic, interactive, or immersive – can echo this function. One conceptual artefact envisions a series of 3D-printed masks derived from photographic portraits, placed in a gallery under veils. The veiling honours the Kogi protocol of invisibility. These veiled artefacts invite the viewer to imagine without accessing, to respect without seeing.

In other versions, the masks may become portals in virtual reality, allowing users to “visit” a Kogi-inspired space while remaining physically distant. Such projects must be guided by ethical engagement and consultation with community members, following the principles of reciprocal representation.

We may also ask: What is a digital object? If masks are spiritual technologies created by deities, and digital artefacts are governed by algorithmic abstraction, what ontological status do they share? Like masks, digital objects are structured by codes, designed for communication yet charged with symbolic power. They can preserve, distort, or activate cultural meaning depending on their use.

The ongoing research views masks and media as analogous mediators: both are ritual interfaces shaped by specific worldviews. Both demand ethical protocols. Both hold memory. And both—when handled with care—can offer paths of encounter rather than consumption. The artefacts discussed later in the case study section provide a physical representation of the digital mask's conceptual framing, as 3D-printed prototypes, immersive settings, and interactive works bring theoretical ideas to life.

5 CASE STUDY: DIGITAL AND MATERIAL INTERVENTIONS

5.1 **Artefact: Creating the World of the Kággaba (Audiovisual Immersion)**

This audiovisual installation builds upon the conceptual 3D masks, translating the principles of mediation, liminality, and ethical engagement into a layered, immersive digital-analogue environment. It further integrates participatory soundscapes, where the community contributes ambient voices, music, and environmental audio, embedding relational co-authorship into the installation itself. Combining black-and-white analogue photography with colour video, ambient soundscapes, and recordings of the Saga singing in the Kággaba Chibchan language, the work evokes cycles of creation, memory, and presence. Water, as a feminine element, appears in multiple forms, reflecting the Kággaba cosmology.

The image on white cotton, the fabric used to make traditional Kogi clothing, creates a dynamic, tactile space that encourages slow, attentive engagement. Takeaway photographs extend the experience, transforming viewers into custodians of the images and prompting reflection on ethical responsibility and co-presence. This artefact exemplifies the doctoral project’s aim to explore digital media as ritual, relational, and ethically attuned spaces, connecting back to the conceptual framework of 3D masks and materialised in various layers of digital and analogue media.

5.2 **Artefact: Family Map and Mask (Material Realisation)**

A concrete example of the methodologies can be found in the prototyping of a 3D-printed mask created from the portraits of the whole family line. By doing it the author honours the ancestors’ line which is important in the community teaching. The digital model would be intentionally hidden at the final presentation, which aligns with the Kogi understanding that masks are not inert objects but carriers of spiritual presence.

Building on the theoretical premise of the 3D masks, the Artefact Family Map and Mask represent the materialisation of these ideas. Inspired by Sally Mann's concept of "layers of unknown family history" (Mann, 2015), the project constructs a visual family map of the Kággaba community through a series of portraits. Each person is photographed against a neutral natural background with consistent focus on the face, emphasising individuality within continuity.
The portraits are layered in projection, gradually blending faces to generate a composite form—a prototype face—that will then be materialised into a sculptural mask. This mask becomes a symbolic synthesis of lineage and collective memory, referencing Kággaba cosmology, where family structures connect past, present, and future. The process resonates with ancestral presence and oral traditions, echoing the liminal, mediating role of ritual masks.

In parallel, the act evokes performative and contemplative dimensions similar to therapeutic family constellations, where participants embody family roles, experiencing emotional clarity and ancestral connection. This reinforces the mask as a threshold object—both aesthetic and ethical—mirroring the original theoretical 3D masks and linking analogue, digital, and material practices into a coherent methodological approach.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper reports on arts-based research related to digital media and Kággaba, with a focus on masks and people in community life. It argues that a shift is needed in how we think about digital tools in this context, namely, as ritual and poetic spaces that permit respectful co-presence with communities, cosmologies, and the non-human world, instead of being tools of spectacle or extraction. The research also demonstrates that ethical design, community consultation, and careful digital curation are essential for maintaining relational integrity and cultural sovereignty.

By embracing concepts related to absence, fragmentation, opacity, and symbolic ambiguity, this approach challenges dominant representational paradigms and offers a methodology of care—one that privileges listening over showing, attentiveness over display, and refusal over disclosure. Digital media are understood not as neutral containers; they function as shaping forces with ethical weight and spiritual potential.

In reframing photography and digital artefacts as masks, as thresholds, the study revealed new pathways for artistic research grounded in spiritual responsibility, decolonial ethics, and relationality. Its implications extend beyond the context of the Kogi community, speaking to broader artistic and anthropological practices that seek to work *with* rather than *on* the world. The approach has broader relevance across indigenous visual studies, contemporary media art, digital ethnography, and critical posthumanities, as it invites practitioners to reimagine the digital as a sacred, dialogical space of co-existence, resonance, and trace.

The project has fundamentally redefined the understanding of relationality and its forms, deepening the awareness of the topic's sensitivity and opening a wide field of creativity. Throughout the research, the knowledge of the communities, their histories, and the epistemologies of digital media has significantly expanded. Multilingualism—initially understood as a way of seeing and perceiving reality—has been enriched by the languages of the analogue and the digital. These insights will continue to evolve through future encounters, both personal and virtual, with the communities, where the artefacts will find their form through the process of realisation itself.

The study foregrounds the potential of digital media as spaces for ethical co-presence, highlighting that engagement can be relational, contemplative, and non-extractive. By integrating slow interactivity, iterative engagement, and ritualised digital encounters, these media offer pathways to co-experience without domination or objectification. The research also acknowledges the risks and limitations of digital mediation, including unintended circulation, loss of control, and potential misrepresentation, emphasising that ethical engagement requires continuous negotiation, reflexivity, and technological safeguards.

Explicit links between the Kogi cosmology and environmental concerns further reinforce the methodological significance: as glaciers and ecosystems in the Sierra Nevada face critical threats, digital artefacts become tools for reflection on ecological continuity and the spiritual-ecological balance central to the Kogi worldview. The study thus situates digital arts within pressing socio-environmental contexts, demonstrating how creative practice can engage with both cultural and ecological sustainability.

Finally, the paper distils practical methodological contributions that can guide future research: (1) privileging relational and process-based indicators of success; (2) centring community agency in the design, access, and dissemination of digital artefacts; (3) integrating analogue, digital, and material practices into layered, immersive, and reflective experiences; and (4) embracing absence, opacity, and ambiguity as ethical and aesthetic strategies. These points provide a transferable framework for artists, anthropologists, and technologists working in cross-cultural or sensitive contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep gratitude to the Kogi community for their trust, teaching, and generosity. Special thanks are extended to the elders and Mámas for their guidance, patience, and critical insights that shaped the research process. To my daughter, whose presence transformed my rhythms of work and my perception of knowledge itself. And to those who remain unnamed, whose silence, gestures, and relational presence guided this research. Thanks also to the Mámas for opening cosmological insight and to all collaborators—human and more-than-human—who made this work possible.

REFERENCES

CUSchooloftheArts. 2019. Discussion to film Ushui. Video. Retrieved June 15, 2025 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54ailMCnqt4

Ereira, Alan. 2008. The elder brothers' warning. London: Tairona Heritage Trust. (Original work published 1990).

Flusser, Vilém. 2007. Towards a philosophy of photography (P. Babka, Trans.). Prague: Hynek. (Original work published 1983).

Glissant, Édouard. 1997. Poetics of relation (B. Wing, Trans.). University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1990).

Hall, Stuart. 1997. Representation: Cultural representation and signifying practices. The Open University.

Haraway, Donna J. 2016. Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene. Duke University Press.

Chaparro, Amado Villafaña. 2012. Resistencia en la línea negra [Film]. Confederación indígena Tayrona, Organización Gonawindua Tayrona.

Koch, Gisela Cánepa & Kummels, Ingrid. 2016. Photography in Latin America: Images and identities across time and space. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Manovich, Lev. 2002. The language of new media. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mignolo, Walter D. 2011. The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options. Duke University Press.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2011. The right to look: A counterhistory of visuality. Duke University Press.

Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. 2017. Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds. University of Minnesota Press.

Raheja, Michelle H. 2007. Reading Nanook's smile: Visual sovereignty, Indigenous revisions of ethnography, and Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner). American Quarterly, 59(4), 1159–1185. Retrieved June 15, 2025 from https://methodsandresearch.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/michelle-h-raheja-22reading-nanooks-smile22.pdf

Ruddick, Sara. 1989. Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace. Beacon Press.

Tayler, Donald. 1997. The coming of the sun: A prologue to Ika sacred narrative. Pitt Rivers Museum.

Tlostanova, Madina Vladimirovna & Mignolo, Walter D. (2012). Learning to unlearn: Decolonial reflections from Eurasia and the Americas. Ohio State University Press.

Zylinska, Joanna & Dewdney, Andrew. 2019. Nonhuman Photography [Interview]. Unthinking Photography. Retrieved June 15, 2025 from https://unthinking.photography/stuff/Zylinska_Dewdney_Nonhuman_Photography.pdf