

PhD Abstract

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Tonales

The film-based research project Tonales is based on the phenomenon of the tono or tonal in the indigenous culture of Mexico: a spiritual double being of a human being.

The word tonal originally stems from the Nahuatl (native Mexican language) word tona or tonatl which means both spirit and sunlight. As a guardian spirit, it appears in various places in Mesoamerica and - depending on the community - can take on different shapes and guises, usually appearing in the form of an animal. The project is based in the community of Macehual in Puebla, Mexico. In the context of oral traditions, ritual acts, and other aesthetic practices, it explores the (in)visible existence and influence of tonales as non-human beings, and observes the interactions between local communities and their environment. To account for the liminal, relational mode of existence of tonales, who traverse ontological registers not least between humans and their material and animate environment, the world is understood as a relational assemblage of acting actors according to indigenous cosmologies, and as such is incorporated into the cinematographic practice of the research. The space in which the artistic research is embedded presents itself in an inescapable intertwining of human and non-human actors.

Collaborative production processes within communities result in experimental filmic fragments that are presented in the form of a spatial installation to allow for a non-linear and multi-perspective arrangement. Tonales is conceptualized and realized in collaboration with the Mexican artist Daniel Ulacia and in collaborative formats with local groups.