

“A CHUVA NUNCA FOI O PROBLEMA”: MEMORY, INDIGENEITY, AND DECOLONIALITY THROUGH UÝRA

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Introduction

“A tree that walks” is how biologist, educator, and indigenous visual artist Emerson Munduruku often describes themselves as they embody Uýra Sodoma [uw-’i-rə so-’do-mə], an entity that muddies the taxonomic distinction between human, plant, and animal. In the Brazilian city of Manaus, Munduruku (who is trans and identifies as nonbinary) created Uýra, a being that manifests as many things and many people in and on Munduruku’s body. When Munduruku speaks of Uýra in interviews or on social media platforms, they use the first name and feminine pronoun “ela.” In this article, I will refer to Munduruku as a visual artist and Uýra as an embodied expression of stories, thoughts, affective positions, and politics. I hope that using different pronouns in reference to the two will minimize the confusion of different voices. When Uýra inhabits Munduruku, she offers a unique response to the mandate that indigenous people remain immobilized in time. As well as this, she calls on those who see and hear her to notice other forms in a way analogous to anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s formulation of perspectivism and multinaturalism. As Munduruku says of these forms, “Cada presença tem uma maquiagem, uma completa presença de diferença” (Sodoma, “Arte Indígena” 8:11-8:20). These rather abstract concepts materialize artistically in the photographs and video performances of which Uýra is the protagonist. However, Uýra is not only a rupture with an anthropocentric model of modernity that has come

to characterize many cities, discourses, and imaginaries since the consolidation of settler colonial states like Brazil. She is also an unmasking of this very condition, a petition to envision the possibility of being other than what we are, or have become, by making visible a dwelling in otherness that the city of Manaus itself conceals.

In this article, I draw on Uýra’s video-performance “Manaus: Uma cidade na aldeia” to argue that Uýra is an alter-political (Hage), and therefore decolonial (Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*; Mignolo and Walsh) response to what Suzy Zepeda calls detribalization, “the process of Indigenous peoples’ loss of identification with their lineages, spiritual practices, and land-based connection and culture due to the harm of colonization” (7). I will examine the performance and insert analysis throughout. Then, I will discuss it through the framework of alter-politics, a response to writings against the “capitalist-colonialist-domesticating world order” (Hage 9) that end up privileging an oppositional, anti-, politics. In response to the anti-, alter-politics finds value in searching for alternative ways of inhabiting the earth that aren’t necessarily predicated on adversarial schemas. With this framework, I will ultimately demonstrate that the video-performance does not reify the questions of resistance arising from colonial dominance’s legacies. Instead, it brings to the fore an oft-hidden interrelationality between the colonial city on the one hand and the necessarily allied forms of human, animal, and plant, and river on the other. With this relationship in mind, the piece therefore fashions a speculative and decolonial outcome that bypasses a dialectic of social antagonism and “[heals] through remembering” (Zepeda 7).

Born in Mojuí dos Campos, a small town outside Brazil's capital's northern state of Pará, Munduruku moved to Manaus, Amazonas, at five years old. To this day, they still inhabit the peripheral neighborhoods of the two million-strong capital of the rainforest. In fact, in an episode of "Arte Indígena Contemporânea," a Brazilian series released in March 2022, Munduruku happily states that "as periferias são a minha aldeia" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 1:13). This statement may be understood as a reclaiming through exclusion. In fact, indigenous people were not officially granted status as Brazilians with a political voice until the Constitution of 1988, and as Devine Guzmán reminds us, "indigenous Brazilians are still situated mostly outside the polis, both in theory (law) and in practice" (51). This establishes the tone of the rest of the interview and introduces how, in the performance "Manaus: Cidade na aldeia," Uýra's body and affections become the "site and instrument of ontological differentiation and referential disjunction" (Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology" 6). Indeed, this is precisely how Uýra was born. Munduruku tells us in their interview with Instituto Cultural Vale that "a Uýra nasce do momento quando [era] criança aos dois, três, quatro anos. Comecei a brincar com essas coisas, a andar pelo mato, a ver bichos e a experimentar com folhas no meu cabelo, no meu rosto, [e] col[á-las] com barro na minha pele ... Ao juntar meu corpo com uma folha, nós viramos uma" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 4:55-5:42). Not only does the body's prominence here denaturalize the space between nature and society, it also turns on its head the notion that theoretical and conceptual frameworks necessarily precede praxis (Mignolo and Walsh 19). Uýra tells us that doing is thinking, and that thinking has never only been for those with a quill or a printing press.



Engaging a More-than-Human Environment through Memory, History, and the Body

Filmed and produced in November of 2020 and released the following month, the six-minute video-performance "retrata uma forma documental meio fi-

ccional a história dessa cidade [Manaus]" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 12:33-12:41). Being "somewhat fictional" in this sense alludes to the themes of history and memory. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's treatment of such compliments Zepeda's analysis of remembering as a decolonizing methodology (Zepeda 1). In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot critiques the "storage model of memory-history," which assumes that "memories are discrete representations stored in a cabinet, the contents of which are generally accurate and accessible at will" (14). Both Trouillot and Uýra invalidate the notion that history has an independent, fixed existence in the past, and that memory is the mere retrieval of that substance. Past and present are relational and necessarily co-constituted. If one's constitution as subject goes hand-in-hand with the creation of the past, and if in cases where a collective subject (in this case Brazilian indigenous people) did not exist at the time of events they claim to remember, then these collective subjects "do not succeed such a past: they are its contemporaries" (Trouillot 16). Giorgio Agamben also comments on the contemporary. In his formulation, "All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping his pen in the obscurity of the present" (44). In this temporal and situational elasticity, therefore, Uýra toys with the past, the present, the colonial city, and decolonial ideas of indigeneity in order to "conta[r] as histórias das plantas, dos bichos, dos processos, das outras entidades (o rio, a água, a terra)" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 7:05-7:32). In playing with notions of past and present, fiction and history, Uýra brings to the fore how "tradições indígenas consideram a história dessa natureza [como] parte de tudo que se entende da cultura indígena" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 7:36-7:48). She also blurs these very distinctions, thereby renouncing long-held oppositions (nature/culture, human/nonhuman) so that radical interrelationality may bloom in the face of the West's pre-established editorial voice, a voice that has for centuries sought to naturalize its own universality.

In lieu of a traditional plot, the performance is composed of four acts and portrays Uýra in various locations around the city of Manaus.

The accompanying audio is an account, in Uýra's voice, of the bleak history of the colonization of the Amazon and its indigenous people. The performance opens with the first act: "Pra Memória Guardar - Nasceu de Costas." We see Uýra standing with her back to the viewer facing the Rio Negro, the Amazon's largest tributary (Figure 1).¹

The river is "uma entidade ancestral afetada pelas ações que a gente vem tomando" (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 7:55-7:59), one entity among many whose story deserves to be told. The sky is overcast, the water still, and the sandy banks littered with trash contrasted only by sparse and scraggy vegetation.



Figure 1

We hear, "Para meus presentes ...por em nome das noites de fome por causa de nossa língua ... pedaços de nossos corpos entregues como troféu. Por isso nasci de costas" (Sodoma, "Programa Convida 0:22-0:43). Being born with her back turned is a reference to the physical architecture and structural organization of the city of Manaus, which treats the river as a convenient means for waste removal. Uýra wears only a pair of black shorts, and her body is painted to resemble reptilian scales. She wears a beaded headdress which completely obscures her face—in fact, we don't see Uýra's face until the very end of the video-performance. Uýra begins to walk backward toward the viewer, and the frame jostles rapidly, displacing Uýra's location on the screen.

Accompanying the visuals are some rather discordant phonics: A revving engine, perhaps of a moto-taxi, gives way to the sharp call of a bird, which yields to a guttural, almost haunting growl. These sounds continue throughout and produce an affective sensibility in the viewer that harmonizes with Uýra's narration. Already in the first minute of the performance, we begin to see how, along with the visual performance, vocal narration, and overlaid sound effects, the editing of the video itself suggests a clash. The chaotic back-and-forth movement of the frame displays Uýra's "corporeal morphology" (Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* 72), and the sounds, both of the city and of the other-than-human life of the Amazon, contribute to understanding the ontological politics of the performance itself.

Uýra is both here and there, as well as not necessarily or only human, as Munduruku tells us:

Quando a Uýra me habita ela me indica não somente o meu corpo mas também os outros corpos. A Uýra é um monte de gente, uma legião de reindivicações. E dentro dessas reindivicações é o corpo, mas não somente o corpo humano porque me interessa romper com esse antropocentrismo em que somente o corpo humano vale a pena; gosto de virar outras coisas—um sapo, uma coruja, uma planta, uma árvore que anda—pra nos lembrar que também essas outras criaturas são pouquinho diferente que a gente. Não estão tão distantes. (Sodoma, “Arte Indígena” 14:52-15:34)

This continues when next the performance cuts to Uýra still walking backwards, however now in front of the Palace of Liberty Museum in the center of Manaus. The viewer is asked, “Bonito prédio né? Uma beleza arquitetônica” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 1:06-1:12). The viewer is told that “o clássico cobriu o natural...ali dentro, exibidas em sala como objeto estão os funerários de meus parentes que lá são chamados de ‘povos nativos pré-colombianos’” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 1:28-1:51). As Uýra is seen descending the front steps of the museum on all fours, an additional clip is overlaid, again suggesting multiple engagements with the environment and a unique mimetic faculty (Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*; Willerslev 9-13, 96-97) (Figure 2).



Figure 2

The reference to the “classic covering the natural” alludes to the baroque style that dominates downtown Manaus. Particularly notable is the Teatro Amazonas opera house, constructed in the late nineteenth century and financed by the riches of the rubber boom. Uýra’s narration continues: “Onde pisa estavam 256 vestígios arqueológicos, pedaços nossos, indígenas. 133 anos depois a cidade descobriu o que cobriu: gente originária, nossas culturas e conhecimentos cobertos por pisos telhados, reboco, concreto e escadas metálicas. Abandonaram a memória da terra e [estamos] também abandonadas” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 2:01–2:37). Here it is explicit that the tensions between forgetting and remembering are paramount to Uýra’s project. Not only does remembering heal in Zepeda’s sense, but Uýra’s healing is both “guided by inner wisdom and aligned [with] connection to ancestors and elders” (Zepeda 7) as well as contemporary with them (Trouillot).

The question of memory is clearly at the heart of “Manaus: Cidade na aldeia.” To analyze it appropriately, I turn in part to the book *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas*. In it, Suzy Zepeda discusses how visual art and cultural production in response to epistemic violence can be understood as a decolonial heuristic. Through archival research and analysis, participant observation, and interviews, her intention is to highlight and disentangle the intertwined histories of heteropatriarchy, nation, and non-Western forms of knowledge by means of developing a queer Xicana² Indígena methodology of remembering. That is, by recognizing that “decolonization requires recovering, excavating, or breathing life back into knowledges that have been hidden, lost, or silenced” (Zepeda 86), Indigenous-centered visual narratives and performances are not only transformative but make visible that which has been paved over, literally, as Uýra makes clear, by colonial violence. But healing through remembering is not solely an act of unveiling past traumas; it is simultaneously and necessarily a fecund landscape of creation and politics. By this, Zepeda means that the work of remembering “makes it possible to piece together...representations that engage the complexities of difference and the interconnections of local and global relations of power” (21–22). It should be noted that in this article, I treat “representation” in a way analogous to Eduardo Kohn. In *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*,

Kohn vigorously engages with Charles Peirce’s triadic semiology to argue that all sign processes “do things” in the world and that what we refer to as the mind or the self is itself a product of semiosis (Kohn 34). In brief, Kohn’s work with the *runa puma* of Ecuador’s Upper Amazon leads him to theorize that not *only* humans find themselves in the participation and production of open-ended relational processes of signification but that this is precisely how humans and other-than-humans interact. Representation, then, is not just a means to connect to global and historical relations of power but also to the affective elements of ongoing selfhood, transcorporeality, and dwelling in the Other.

Although she deals with Xicana/x and Latina/x identities, Zepeda’s framework and methodology can surely be extended to the Brazilian context. Whereas Zepeda treats visual art forms themselves as a mode of forging new representations that challenge colonial logics, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s theory of multinaturalism tells us that Amerindian cosmology proposes not a plurality of *representations*, which he takes as properties of the mind, but a multiplicity of *bodily modes of engagement* with varying realities. Therefore, Amerindian perspectivism “is not a representation because representations are properties of mind, whereas a *point of view is in the body* (Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* 72, italics original). Kohn, however, points out that Viveiros de Castro assumes that paying attention to bodies may allow us to dodge the issue of representation itself. This problematic is at the crux of how Uýra engages with the world, and more specifically, with Manaus. Uýra’s attention is both on the body and the broader representational practices of which the body is only one component.

A great deal of what Uýra displays to the viewer in this video-performance resonates with Viveiros de Castro’s analysis of Amerindian cosmology. The reference above to a multiplicity of bodily modes of engagements points to how “the common point of reference for all beings of nature is not humans as a species but rather humanity as a condition” (Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis” 472). This is an ascription of humanity to all living beings. Yet if one of Uýra’s goals is to break with anthropocentrism, we must assume that she believes that plants, animals, and all living beings have and are worthy of life in their own right, not merely because they are an extension

of humanity, as Viveiros de Castro posits. This is in line with other recent studies of the more-than-human which privilege political, economic, scientific, and cultural entanglements with what has, in the West, been thought of as a definite, independent, and ontologically inferior “nature” (De la Cadena; Govindrajani; Helmreich; Lien and Law; Paxson; Povinelli; Tsing, for example).³ Despite theoretical problem of a blanket ascription of humanity to all, there is a useful point of analysis in Viveiros de Castro’s metaphysics: the body. Uýra’s project is to “contar outras histórias” by physically becoming something else, her body serving as the immanent/imminent site of perspectival differentiation. If things and beings are the points of view themselves (Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectival Anthropology” 11), then becoming another form of life, understood as the “affects, dispositions or capacities which render the body of every different species unique” (Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis” 478), is for Uýra a source of embodied power. In his article “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” Viveiros de Castro tells us:

It is not so much that the body is a clothing but rather that clothing is a body. We are dealing with societies which inscribe efficacious meanings onto the skin, and which use animal masks (or at least know their principle) endowed with the power metaphysically to transform the identities of those who wear them, if used in the appropriate ritual context. To put on mask-clothing is not so much to conceal a human essence beneath an animal appearance, but rather to activate the powers of a different body. (482)

With Uýra’s headdress and painted scales, she does exactly this. Uýra exposes the power of things taken for granted—rivers that have been polluted, trees that have been felled, cosmologies that have been disregarded—by representing and becoming them. However, whereas in other performances Uýra’s assumption of another body or form is clear, in the video-performance discussed here, her form is more ambiguous. This is one way she expresses the equivocacy of interpretations and embodiments of the

Enlightenment-era dichotomies of memory/history, nature/culture, body/mind: For Uýra, ambiguity annuls antithesis, at least partially.



Indigeneity, Alter-Politics, and Decoloniality

Yet another parallel project emerges in Uýra’s performance, one of what anthropologist Ghassan Hage terms “alter-politics,” which posits the assumption of our existence in multiple, simultaneous realities, realities that modernity has actively obscured. A response to oppositional or anti-politics, alter-politics lies within the anthropological reminder that “enables us to reflexively move outside ourselves” (Hage 42) and, therefore, it seeks to provide an alternative to the political order rather than solely critique it. Hage’s book moves beyond the tradition of a critical mode of unmasking the workings of power to propose that humans are continuously living multiple realities. A point of differentiation must be made: Hage prefers to speak of multiple realities rather than multiple natures, like Viveiros de Castro, “because the very idea of ‘nature’ emerges out of the very specific reality that requires of us humans to delineate a world of ‘nature.’ It is therefore preferable not to reintroduce it in a multiplicity of other realities where it has no referent” (Hage 54). Whereas perspectivism and multinaturalism remain at least partly confined by established binaries and ontological oppositions, the multiple realities allowed by alter-politics permits an analysis of power and domination as not only a struggle within a reality but also a struggle *between* different realities (Hage 57). This is exactly the intention of “Manaus: Uma cidade na aldeia.” Uýra undoubtedly tells a story of indigenous struggle in a colonial city, but she also privileges the story of “água que não parou de se mover, de ... peixes que estão ali existindo, resistindo” (Sodoma, “Arte Indígena” 16:55–17:05). Although Uýra’s anti-colonial politics of Manaus as a city are clear, she relies more heavily on the alter-political dimensions and memory of indigeneity to suppose path forward.

As I just mentioned, Uýra critiques the city's colonial architecture as a whole. In their episode of "Arte Indígena Contemporânea," Munduruku cites the idea that because Amazonian cities use the river for sewage disposal, the city itself turns its back to the river. Munduruku remembers how when it rained when they were young, their house would flood with sewage-filled water. However, they insist on believing that the rain was never the problem but rather the construction of a city that permeabilizes the soil and actively worsens, if not creates, the flooding that afflicts houses near the river. Despite the contaminated water bringing sewage and trash, it also brought animals—especially frogs—and life (Sodoma, "Arte Indígena" 3:10–3:56). Birthed from a city with its back toward the river, then, is an entity, Uýra, with its back to the insistence that this is to remain the naturalized condition.

The second act, "Vovó Presente - Cadê Vovó? - Estranha Vovó" begins, and the remainder of the performance is set in the heart of Manaus. Uýra walks through the streets, silently engages with people, and "reads" a gargantuan book made of glued-together leaves. The verdant volume she reads itself metaphorizes the immensity of indigenous knowledge production, but its construction of leaves and lack of written text renders it null and void to Western eyes: Uýra tells us, "Me incomoda em faz falar não o que está aqui em real sendo visto. Mas o que está aqui é real; o que sempre esteve, estará aqui, e não é vista" (Sodoma, "Programa Convida" 2:40–2:54). This act also centers around personal and national identity. Uýra's voiceover asks, "Tô índio, né? Mas tô índio de verdade? Mas tô índio de verdade?" (Sodoma, "Programa Convida" 2:55–3:04) several times. The choice of verb, content of the phrase, and the repetition of the question reveals a profound poetic effect. First, the use of the verb "estar," which denotes temporary conditions, instead of "ser," which references a permanent state of being, invokes Uýra's transcendence of bodily forms.⁴ Uýra makes the fact that she can temporarily transform into something else evident not only in the content of what she says but also in the grammatical conjugation of her speech. Again, bodies and clothes *do* rather than conceal (Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis" 482). Second, Uýra questions what it means to be indigenous in Brazil today. She remembers how her ancestors said that one day indigenous people

would be reduced to myth: "Parece que o teatro de Anchieta funcionou. Esse dia chegou. As páginas brancas abertas ensinam que ficamos no século XVI, que o índio não existe mais. Por isso, de novo, no vírus, e o governo brasileiro, enterraram meus presentes como não indígenas e dessa vez eu vi" (Sodoma, "Programa Convida" 3:28–3:57). The "theater of Anchieta" refers to José de Anchieta, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary who was among the first Europeans to set foot in Brazil after its initial *achamento* ("discovery"). He wrote a detailed linguistic analysis of Tupi, one of the most common indigenous languages in Brazil, and is often credited, through his early writings of/about Brazil, as the "founder" of the Brazilian corpus, both historically and literarily, although this latter claim is contested among Brazilian literary critics.⁵ Wasserman notes that the Jesuit writings "provided continuity between the new Portuguese colonies and European civilization while effecting the adaptation of the latter to the former that came to define a Brazilian national character" (72).

Indeed, the idea of a national identity in Brazil has always at least partially centered around indigenous people. In literary and cultural thought since Brazilian independence in 1822 and through the rest of the nineteenth century, Anchieta's work, and the idea of an Amerindian past more broadly, figured prominently in the thinkers of the time who charged themselves with co-opting a national identity (Wasserman 80). This is evident from the period of Romantic literature through the formulation of a uniquely Brazilian *mestiçagem* or "Brazilian race" in the 20th century.⁶ Yet while indigenous thought and practice contest the endorsement of nation-based homogeneity, indigenous discourse didn't overcome racialized essentialisms (Devine Guzmán 131). If this does not seem clear, it is because indigeneity as an idea in Brazil has been held in paradoxical tension with both national discourse and the state itself. Devine Guzmán traces two periods of *mestiçagem*. The first half of the 20th century was marked by assimilation, acculturation, and transculturation, which promoted "Indian" assimilation into national discourses and society as inevitable but always incomplete. The second half of the century is characterized by heterogeneity, hybridity, multiculturalism, and interculturality, which understood *mestiçagem* as a doubling-down of margi-

nalization for indigenous forms of being and knowing (Devine Guzmán 132). In other words, there is a move from viewing indigeneity as a positive marker of difference to an erasure because “we’re all partly *índio*; we’re all *mestiço*; we’re all Brazilian,” meanwhile leaving behind the minority indigenous population who were reduced to “pregiven subject[s] to whom experience happens” (Das et al. 5). All this Uýra condenses in a few lines of speech.

The third act “O Globo se Perdeu,” continues along these lines by focusing on a municipal statue (Figure 3). Uýra looks through a gate at two men. The viewer is asked another question, “Você conhece a história do homem primitivo e o homem moderno?” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 4:00–4:00).

Commissioned by the state in 1964, the beginning of a military dictatorship that would last until 1985, the statue depicts a stereotypically racialized indigenous man looking at a “modern” man. Uýra tells us that the “pre-historic” man symbolizes a primitive Amazon that looks toward its future: the “modern” man, who points outward toward the conquest of the entire globe. “Mais uma vez,” Uýra tells us, “parece cobrir a memória em nome de uma identidade nacional. Era mais apagamento indígena” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 4:15–4:24). Indexing the turbulent history of *mestiçagem* and its links to collective memory and history, Uýra challenges the simplicity of a narrative that simultaneously attempts to minimize and hyperbolize some in the name of an idealized national unity.



Figure 3



Funnily, we are told, the modern man originally held a globe, symbolizing his conquest of such, but the globe was lost in the process of moving the statue many times. Uýra says, “O globo está se perdendo enquanto o moderno só se aponta para um futuro que não existe” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 5:01–5:07). This gets to the heart of the video-performance: in their interview, Munduruku tells us that: Quando digo Manaus é uma cidade na aldeia é porque a cidade vive com a aldeia, mas hoje ela insiste em estar *sobre* a aldeia. Manaus é uma cidade de ocupação colonial com toda a arquitetura e com todo o mundo imaginário que ocupam um território e cobre as identidades...tá acontecendo tudo isso ao mesmo tempo (Sodoma, “Arte Indígena” 12:59–13:46).

The alter-politics of Uýra’s project become clearer. Although alter-politics suggests that “we are continuously shadowed by realities in which we are dwelling (Hage 56), we may not be fully aware of these other realities. But this is precisely what Uýra does; she “induces in us a vague feeling, or a sense of their presence” (Hage 56) by embodying other forms of life and the attention that they beckon. In act three of the video-performance, Uýra accomplishes this through a reflection on a statue that ostensibly points toward a convergent future, one of modernity and a post-ethnoracial *mestiçagem*. Yet the “alter” of her politics points out that this future doesn’t yet exist and is in fact in need of a formulation that relies not necessarily on a dialectic synthesis that reflects the “whole reality of a people” (Devine Guzmán 157). Rather, her very transformation into something else is a response to detribalization and represents a search for other ways of inhabiting Manaus as an individual, the earth as a collective of indigenous people, and socio-political spaces beyond the mere human.

In the last act, “Recomeçou a Cheia – o Rio Volta a Encher,” Uýra returns to the river to claim that “o que brota de território indígena é brota indígena. Se Manaus começou de costas para o rio, para a vóvó e para quem é de verdade, essa é a época do ano quando as águas voltam encher. As águas trazem nas águas reais passos de liberdade” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 5:33–5:51). The tone shifts from a lugubrious reflection on the violence inflicted on indigenous people past and present to an auspicious expression of the strength found in imagining another tomorrow.

Uýra at last removes the headdress adorned throughout the performance, ruffles her hair, and looks directly at the viewer. She tells that “somente em Manaus, reexistam mais que 45 povos indígenas de diversas origens, identificadas ou não” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 5:52–6:01). By revealing her face and bringing attention to the many groups of indigenous people that inhabit Manaus, Uýra makes it clear that despite being a frog or a tree that walks, *she is also still a person*. This may seem an obvious point, but it calls on the viewer to recognize that a living being, whether human or not, is never singular or plural, never the product of the universal or the particular, never extant in just one nature/culture; these categories always “overlap and exceed each other” (De la Cadena 5).

It is now appropriate to discuss the video-performance as a decolonial act. Conceptualizing modernity and coloniality as two sides of the same coin, Mignolo and Walsh attempt to “undo,” “disobey,” and “delink” from the colonial matrix of power, which has its origins in the sixteenth century yet continues to today (Mignolo and Walsh 4). Decoloniality is at once a standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis (5), and, importantly, any engagement against Western overconfidence must go beyond the human: “No living organism at this point in time is immune to coloniality” (Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* 3). Mignolo proposes that modernity/rationality/coloniality have, since the eighteenth century, colonized aesthetics. Therefore, a delinked aesthesis, which Mignolo tells us includes “sensing, being, [and] emotioning” (*The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* 8, 24) can heal colonial wounds. Uýra’s relevance is not only theoretical, aesthetic, and onto-epistemic; her use of visual media itself is decolonial. Critics of both postcolonial and decolonial theory point to the fact that an academic book on the subject is not the most suitable format to disseminate and think through the claims of such theories. However, in Moya Bailey’s article on online media production by queer women of color, she states, “The creation of media by minoritarian subjects about themselves and for themselves can be a liberatory act. These acts of image redefinition actually engender different outcomes for marginalized groups, and the processes by which they are created build networks of resilience that far out lives the relevant content” (82).

Uýra, then, achieves something more than a book about decoloniality or a film about oneself: She produces something that can be more widely distributed and more accessible than a book, and the subject of her artistic creations are not solely herself or for herself—they are for the rivers, the frogs, and the trees, as well as for the indigenous communities within and beyond Brazil.



Transforming, Appropriating, and Taking Back

At the end of the fourth act of the performance, Uýra sits at the Feira da Banana, overlooking the river and reading her leafy book, and then finally removes her headdress to face the viewer and say, “Eu não pedi para estar aqui—eu vou aprender a viver nesse encontro de mundos. Pra onde a gente for, a gente vai ser indígena” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 6:02–6:10). Moving beyond ethnoracial essentialism and mononaturalism, Uýra tells us that “cada maquiagem tem uma presença” (Sodoma, “Arte Indígena” 8:11–8:20). As a philosopher herself, although perhaps not by arbitrary Western standards, Uýra points to memory and its inherent ambiguities to reveal how colonial architecture (the city of Manaus) and political dominance (indigenous genocide and political erasure) conceal a multiplicity of realities, realities in which we all partake in different times and places and to varying degrees. What we might call Uýra’s “march toward pluriversality” (Mignolo, “Foreword” ix)⁷ calls into question the insistence of the West’s self-ascribed and other-prescribed universality, both in epistemological and metaphysical terms.

Uýra not only “segue andando, se transformando, se apropriando, retomando” (Sodoma, “Programa Convida” 5:21–5:28), as she tells us in the last minute of the video-performance; she also produces theory through her praxis: “It is in this concrete making and doing, in embodied practice, that theory is crafted and that theorizations are continually made.

Moreover, it is also in this concrete making and doing...that decoloniality is constructed and unfolds” (Mignolo and Walsh 35). Weaving together a project of politics and praxis with a kaleidoscope of inter- and intra-relationality, “Manaus: Uma cidade na aldeia” finds a re-enchantment of nature (Taussig, *Mastery of Non-Mastery*) through staying with the trouble (Haraway), be this trouble memorious/historical, political, and/or onto-epistemic. By presenting herself as something simultaneously human and more-than-human, by remembering a past of colonial violence through questioning what it means to be in the “past,” “present,” or “future,” and by encouraging the viewer to listen to other forms and other realities in which we all to some extent dwell, Uýra’s performance posits a new type of relation heading forward, one that might finally face the river.



Notes

- [1] All images in this article were taken as screenshots from the video-performance on this [YouTube Link](#).
- [2] Xicana/x is an attempt to encompass various signifiers within studies of Spanish-speaking people, including but not limited to latin@, latinx, chican@, chicanx, Latin American and Hispanic. With a nod to indigeneity and decolonial thinking, as well in recognition of the ambiguities of identity caused by borders, migration, the gender binary, and U.S. cultural and academic hegemony, the term xicana/x moves beyond superficial representations of “latinidad.” For further reading on the history and creation of the terms mentioned in this note, see: Alberto; Hooker; Morales; Oboler.
- [3] For a more comprehensive review on multispecies/more-than-human anthropology, see: De la Cadena and Blaser; Kirksey and Helmreich; Ogden et al.
- [4] For example: *Em um momento, ela pode estar índio; em outro momento, ela pode estar um sapo, ou uma árvore.*

[5] Some consider “A carta de Pêro Vaz de Caminha,” written to Dom Manuel I of Portugal, as the first instantiation of a Brazilian literature, despite the fact that Pedro Álvares Cabral’s fleet remained in Brazil for only ten days. For more on the debate surrounding the genesis of Brazilian literature, see: Cândido; Coutinho; Goldberg; González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker.

[6] José de Alencar’s *O guarani* and *Iracema*, José Gonçalves de Magalhães’s *Suspiros poéticos e saudades*, and Antônio Gonçalves Teixeira e Sousa’s *O filho do pescador* are among the more notable examples of Brazilian Romantic literature.

[7] See also: Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*; Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*.



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