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Contesting Extractivism through Amazonian Indigenous Artivism:

Decolonial Reflections on Possibilities for Crafting a Pluriverse from within

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Contesting Extractivism through Amazonian Indigenous Artivism: Decolonial Reflections on Possibilities for Crafting a Pluriverse from within

Abstract. This article provides an analysis of Amazonian Indigenous peoples' "artivism" – understood as artistic expressions with activist orientation. It approaches artivism within the context of the emergence of Contemporary Indigenous Art in Brazil and its significance in the resistance against the centuries-long oppression of native peoples, illustrated by the advancement of extractivism in the Amazon. We focus on the artworks by four prominent Indigenous artists: Jaider Esbell's critical engagements with art history; Denilson Baniwa's reanthropophagy movement; Daiara Tukano's critique of articide; and Emerson Pontes' transformation into Uýra, the Walking Tree. Altogether, the messages embedded in their artworks contest the dominant growth-oriented development narrative anchored on the pre-eminence of the human-nature ontological dualism, where Nature is reduced to economic resource, along with a view of development that positions western ways of knowing, being and living at the forefront of a civilizational continuum. We conclude by elucidating the central decolonizing role of Indigenous artivism and its potential to

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strengthen Indigenous' voices and agendas which include exercising self-determination, resisting extractivism, and crafting more plural and just worlds.

Keywords: contemporary art; decoloniality; reanthropophagy; socioenvironmental justice; sustainable development; indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o “ativismo” dos povos indígenas da Amazônia, entendido como expressões artísticas com orientação ativista. O ativismo é abordado no contexto da emergência da Arte Indígena Contemporânea no Brasil e sua importância na resistência contra a opressão secular dos povos indígenas, ilustrada pelo avanço do extrativismo na Amazônia. Concentramos nas obras de quatro artistas indígenas proeminentes: as abordagens críticas de Jaider Esbell à história da arte; o movimento de reantropofagia de Denilson Baniwa; a crítica de Daiara Tukano ao artícidio; e a transformação de Emerson Pontes em Uýra, a árvore que anda. Em conjunto, as mensagens integradas nas obras de arte analisadas contestam a narrativa dominante de desenvolvimento ancorada na preeminência do dualismo ontológico humano-natureza, onde a natureza é reduzida a recurso econômico, juntamente com uma visão de desenvolvimento que posiciona formas ocidentais de conhecer, ser e viver na vanguarda de um continuum civilizacional. Concluímos elucidando o papel central do ativismo indígena na decolonização e seu potencial para fortalecer as vozes e lutas dos povos nativos, que incluem o exercício da autodeterminação, a resistência ao extrativismo e a criação de mundos mais plurais e justos.

Palavras-chave: arte contemporânea; decolonialidade; reantropofagia; justiça socioambiental; desenvolvimento sustentável; epistemologias e ontologias indígenas.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza el “ativismo” de los pueblos indígenas de la Amazonía, entendido como expresiones artísticas con una orientación activista. Se aborda el activismo en el contexto del surgimiento del Arte Indígena Contemporáneo en Brasil y su importancia en la resistencia contra la opresión secular de los pueblos indígenas, ilustrada por el avance del extractivismo en la Amazonía. Nos centramos en las obras de cuatro destacados artistas indígenas: los compromisos críticos de Jaider Esbell con la historia del arte; el movimiento de reantropofagia de Denilson Baniwa; la crítica de Daiara Tukano al artícidio; y la transformación de Emerson Pontes en Uýra, el árbol que camina. En conjunto, los mensajes integrados en las obras de arte analizadas desafían la narrativa dominante del desarrollo anclada en la preeminencia del dualismo ontológico humano-naturaleza, donde la naturaleza se reduce a un recurso económico, junto con una visión del desarrollo que posiciona las formas occidentales de conocer, ser y vivir a la vanguardia de un continuo civilizacional. Concluimos dilucidando el papel central del activismo indígena en la

decolonización y su potencial para fortalecer las voces y luchas de los pueblos indígenas, que incluyen el ejercicio de la autodeterminación, la resistencia al extractivismo y la creación de mundos más plurales y justos.

Palabras clave: arte contemporáneo; decolonialidad; reantropofagia; justicia socioambiental; desenvolvimiento sustentable; epistemologías y ontologías indígenas.

Introduction

This article builds on a decolonial approach to expound on the everyday resistance of Indigenous peoples of the Brazilian Amazon that is exerted through their artwork. In recent years, the work of Indigenous artists, particularly through Indigenous Contemporary Art (Eshell 2018, 2020a), has gained momentum in Brazil. It has garnered significant national recognition and, to some extent, international acclaim, having an exponential impact on the programs within major art institutions (Goldstein, 2019; Pitman, 2021; Paiva, 2022). Notably, Contemporary Indigenous Art has energized research agendas committed to Indigenous epistemologies and environmental issues, profoundly influenced by the work of Brazilian Indigenous thinkers Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013; 2023) and Ailton Krenak (2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2022). Mounting socio-environmental concerns surrounding deforestation, extractivism, loss of biodiversity, and climate change seem to have added traction and thus opened spaces for the critique of mainstream views and practices informing “development” where economic growth is the uncontested pinnacle (Shiva, 1993; Escobar 1995; Mignolo and Escobar, 2013; Quijano, 2020). This critique, which has historically been conveyed by the oppressed voices of Indigenous peoples, is now finding expression through artistic forms that increasingly occupy prominent spaces within the very societies targeted by the Indigenous critique.

Art as an instrument for social contestation is however not new. The last century is rife with examples of the political and subversive character of artistic expressions (Aladro-Vico, Jivkova-Semova and Bailey, 2018). This type of art is widely understood as “art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate” (Mouffe, 2007, p. 4). Accordingly, although activism, a neologism that blends art and activism, relates to a range of socially defiant artistic expressions that do not constitute a new notion, it has been increasingly embraced specifically by historically marginalized groups who seek to countervail mainstream narratives and views, “hoping to invite the wider

public and institutions to acknowledge these communities' respective situations and prompt change" (Champion and Wax-Edwards, 2022, p. 360).

The functional role in driving social change lies at the core of activism. Coined in the late 1990s among Chicanos and Zapatistas in Los Angeles and Mexico (Gonzalez, 2020), activism has since been deployed in various struggles for social change under a shared understanding "that systems of power, no matter how pervasive, possess interstitial spaces where agency for youth of color [and of other oppressed groups] can be claimed and deployed" (Sandoval and Latorre, 2008, p. 88). While activism is recognized for its ability to mobilize collective views, studies also highlight its potential to engender alliances supportive of concerted actions among groups that share experiences of oppression and marginalization (Medrado, Rega and Paulla, 2022).

Recent research on activism includes various creative forms of expression such as music, dance, theatre, poetry, performance, visual arts, comics, etc., and not only in physical but increasingly also in digital forms (Moreno-Almeida, 2021; Weij and Berkers, 2022). A significant share of the studies on activism focus on gender struggles from feminist (Serra, Enríquez and Johnson, 2017; Moura and Cerdeira 2021; López, 2022) and/or queer perspectives (Ferreira, 2015; Ribeiro and de Moraes Franco, 2021). Available cases also comprise the use of activism as a tool for challenging State authoritarianism (Wang and Liu, 2020), for claiming social rights and public spaces (Bautès, 2010; Delgado 2013), and for strengthening environmental and sustainability agendas (Rodríguez-Labajos, 2022; Stammen and Meissner, 2022). Research relating activism to socio-environmental struggles in rural spaces will probably increase in the coming years following the recent launch of a new forum for publication on the theme – the Journal of Peasant Studies' "Activism Review Series" (Alonso-Fradejas, Barnes and Jacobs, 2022).

Despite the growing interest in the activism of marginalized groups, not only knowledge on activist practices in general is still rather limited (Stammen and Meissner, 2022), knowledge on activism been deployed within Indigenous struggles is particularly scarce (Frey, 2017; Bladow, 2019; Danner, Dorrico and Danner, 2020). Furthermore, while there has been an exponential surge in the production and exhibition of Indigenous Contemporary Art in Brazil in recent years, research on this topic has been noticeably lacking (Pitman, 2021). To address these empirical gaps, this study unravels the activism of self-identifying Indigenous artists from the Brazilian Amazon, particularly focusing on their expression through Contemporary Indigenous Art. This art movement is distinguished by the prominent role of Indigenous artists (Esbell 2018, 2020a), occurring within the larger context of a shift towards decolonization in the arts in Brazil (Paiva, 2022).

By positioning the emergence of Indigenous activism as informed by a commitment to decolonization, we intend to unravel its potentialities to contest ongoing colonial extractivisms. We should clarify, however, that we are not arguing for the primacy of activism in relation to other forms of activism. Instead, we view activism as constituent of wider Indigenous movements and claims for decolonization. We argue that Indigenous activism emerges in the general context of Indigenous resistance against systematic and centuries-long oppression, as illustrated by the advancement of extractivisms in the Amazon. Extractivism, characterized by the extraction of natural resources from countries colonized in the global South primarily for export as raw materials, has profoundly impacted Amazonian Indigenous communities, their territories, and livelihoods (Acosta, 2013; Gudynas, 2015; Kröger, 2022). The examination of extractivism within the framework of activism elucidates the ways in which Indigenous peoples navigate the intersections of extractive violence, environmental degradation, social injustice, and epistemic erasure, employing their creative expressions as catalysts for resistance.

Our goal is to analyse the activist expressions of a new generation of Indigenous artists from the Brazilian Amazon who have been consolidating Indigenous protagonism in the arts in recent years. These expressions encompass pieces ranging from large sculptures and murals to paintings, drawings, digital collages, performances, and photographs, that have been exhibited in physical and virtual spaces. The selected artists comprise two males, one female, and one non-binary individual – namely Jaider Esbell (1979–2021) of Makuxi ethnicity, from the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous territory; Denilson Baniwa (1984–) of Baniwa ethnicity, from the village of Darí in Rio Negro; Daiara Tukano (1982–) of the Tukano people of Alto Rio Negro; and Emerson Pontes (1991–) from Santarém in the state of Pará. We should highlight that, even though all the selected artists are from Amazonian ethnic groups, they comprise heterogeneous cultures and diverse histories, although with similar experiences of colonial oppression. Furthermore, despite the forms of expressions being different, content-wise (i.e., in terms of meaning) the critiques embedded in these artworks largely intersect and overlap. Thus, while acknowledging that the selected artworks do not encompass the entire portfolio and critique from Amazonian Indigenous peoples, we hold that our sample and analysis of their reinforcing content provide general perspectives on the meanings and critiques asserted by Indigenous activism.

To guide our analysis of the artworks, we draw inspiration from Margaret Kovach's (2009) framework for "conversation starters" within Indigenous research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) approach to decolonizing methodologies, and Ailton

Krenak's (2016) notion of "affective alliances" between humans and non-humans – be it a river, a forest, a bird, an artwork. Particularly, we view Indigenous activism as a conversation starter, playing a crucial role in creating a space where affective alliances can flourish and promoting an ethical commitment to Indigenous decolonizing agendas. Krenak's concept of affective alliances expands our comprehension of Indigenous activism by emphasizing its interconnected dimensions that transcend human-centred perspectives. By incorporating Kovach's framework, we emphasize the role of Indigenous activism as a catalyst for interethnic dialogues. Smith's decolonizing methodologies offer a critical lens through which we examine the artworks, aiming to overcome colonial biases that have historically shaped research practices. These methodological approaches not only acknowledge the significance of Indigenous knowledge, history, culture, and identity but also places them at the forefront of the dialogic sphere. In embracing these frameworks, our aim is to create an ethically grounded analysis that amplifies Indigenous voices and contributes to foster meaningful conversations.

To initiate these conversations, we delve into secondary material produced by the artists themselves, including the content available in their social media channels, videos and documentaries featuring their artwork, their published academic articles, interviews, and texts from their blogs. A central focus of our analysis is the careful consideration of their concepts, actions, and visual poetics. For instance, Esbell's notion of Contemporary Indigenous Art offers valuable insights into how Indigenous artists navigate and redefine the boundaries of contemporary art by contesting the dominant regime of art history (Esbell, 2018; 2020a). We also explore Baniwa's countermovement of reanthropophagy, which brings forth thought-provoking ideas about asserting Indigenous self-determination (Baniwa and Gadella, 2019). Tukano's concept of articide, a term that combines art and genocide, provides a powerful critique of the use of art as a colonial mechanism of cultural domination, oppression, and erasure (Goldstein, 2019, p. 90). Furthermore, Pontes's visual poetics of *Uýra*, the Walking Tree, unveils a performative perspective on the interconnectedness of all living beings and the intersectional struggles within the Indigenous diaspora (*Uýra: The Rising Forest*, 2022).

Based on the decolonial content of the analysed artworks, their central locations (i.e where they are exhibited), and how integral artwork is to Indigenous cultures (as highlighted by Krenak, 2016, p. 182), we stress the popular role and significance of Indigenous activism. This goes beyond simply giving visibility to Indigenous struggles, but also involves recognizing and promoting Indigenous epistemic-ontological systems at the core of our societies. Altogether, the messages embedded in the artworks bring to the forefront the injustices obliterated by the dominant structures and sparks debates about pressing issues – including

contributions to the ongoing dialogues surrounding the Pluriverse, which represents a decolonial political vision that embraces the coexistence of a multiplicity of worlds and knowledge systems (Escobar, 2018; Kothari et al., 2019); and the Anthropocene, recognizing the urgent need for transformative action to address the socio-ecological imbalances caused by human exploitative use of Nature as a “resource” (Parikka, 2014; Haraway, 2016; Moore, 2016; Armiero, 2021; Böschemeier, Quispe-Agnoli and Greco, 2021). Furthermore, as will be clarified, Indigenous activism resonates with the reasoning of other Indigenous scholars and, unsurprisingly, also of decolonial approaches. By undertaking this study, we aim to reiterate the role of art as a critical political tool that holds the potential to decolonize views and visual practices, or minds (knowledge) and praxis in societies marked by divisions that have been instrumental for the centuries-long oppression of racialized labour and cultures (Esbell, 2018; 2020a; Mignolo, 2019; Paiva, 2022).

This article is organized as follows. First, we present a selection of artworks created by the Indigenous artists under examination, together with an analysis of their conceptual underpinnings and activist practices. Next, we discuss 1) the overarching content of Indigenous activism taking stock of writings from Indigenous scholars and from non-Indigenous scholars with decolonial orientations; and 2) the relevance of acknowledging the messages conveyed through Indigenous activism as a matter of implementing justice and fostering collective action in response to pressing global issues. Lastly, we conclude by elucidating the pivotal role of Indigenous activism as part of wider Indigenous movements and struggles against the prevailing extractive and growth-oriented development model, which pragmatically underscores the potential for forging alliances to advance Indigenous agendas. By shedding light on Indigenous activism, we aim to foster collaborations within the academic realm and beyond that contribute to the creation of more plural and just worlds.

Artivism Originating in the Brazilian Amazon

The Artivism of Jaider Esbell: Contemporary Indigenous Art Bridging Words and Confronting Extractive Encounters

To be an Indigenous artist, from my perspective, is to claim through these four letters – ARTE [art] – everything that it connects us to in terms of possibilities and bridging, indeed, worlds. It is a very special condition that we have been able to attain to be able to make small fissures between worlds so that this communication, which academia has been handling for a very long time, may have more fluidity (Esbell, 2019).

Jaider Esbell (1979–2021) was an activist, curator, writer, and educator of Makuxi ethnicity from the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous territory in the state of Roraima. Through various artistic mediums, Esbell intertwined Indigenous mythologies, socio-environmental concerns, and a critique of dominant historical narratives. Notably, Esbell played a pivotal role in establishing and consolidating the field of *Arte Indígena Contemporânea* (Contemporary Indigenous Art) in Brazil (Esbell 2018, 2020a).

According to Esbell, the Contemporary Indigenous Art movement represents “a unique case of empowerment within the cosmological realm of thinking about humanity and the environment” (Esbell, 2018, p. 100, *our translation*). Its objective is to “fragmentate art history and expose how this type of temporal relationship is chronically denied in Brazil, as Indigenous intellectuals have been disregarded, whether in art or in thought” (Artishock, 2021, *our translation*). The incorporation of the term “Indigenous” into the concept of “Contemporary Art” thus arises from the systemic erasure of Indigenous voices from the epistemic regime of art history, thereby challenging the western-centric view of art. Simultaneously, it signifies the imperative to acknowledge Indigenous art as contemporary, indicating that it is not confined to a static backdrop but is continually evolving, responding to current issues in dynamic ways.

Additionally, Esbell suggests that Contemporary Indigenous Art may serve as a “trap to identify traps” (Esbell, 2020a), as it remains rooted in Indigenous cosmologies, while interacting with the language and institutions of the dominant art establishment. Accordingly, the movement is perceived as a political strategy to rectify historical injustices from within the art regime itself and legitimize Indigenous artists, reflecting the challenges and possibilities they encounter in “bridging worlds”. This encompasses not only navigating the art world but also the conventional education system, which largely disregards Indigenous languages and knowledge. Consequently, Contemporary Indigenous Art calls upon institutions to confront their colonial foundations and embrace a diverse range of artistic perspectives that offer alternative narratives, aesthetics, and ways of knowing.



Figure 1.1. *Entidades* [Entities] (2021) by Jaider Esbell at the 34th São Paulo Art Biennial. Photo: Levi Fanan / São Paulo Biennial Foundation. Source: <http://www.34.bienal.org.br/en/artistas/7538> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

Among Esbell's artwork is *Entidades* (Figure 1.1), an installation of two 17-meter-long and colourful inflatable serpents. In Makuxi cosmology, the snake is a force for healing, regeneration, and transformation (Scarparo, 2021). On the waters of Ibirapuera Park outside the 34th São Paulo Art Biennial, the snakes float in front of the sculpture of Pedro Álvares Cabral, located on the other side of the lake. Cabral was a Portuguese explorer who is generally credited with discovering Brazil in 1500. The snakes also dialogue with the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, the headquarters of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation designed by Oscar Niemeyer, a Brazilian architect who became known worldwide as one of the key figures in the development of Modernist architecture (Turner, 2022). In addition to *Entidades*' confrontational meaning – i.e., of challenging western praxis to hail own (or colonizer's) interpretation of history and appreciation of culture and art – Esbell also intended for his work to engage cosmologies and mythological figures outside the narrative of European Christianity, questioning the prominence of western religion in the contemporary world. According to Esbell, *Entidades* “is a reminder that all original peoples have their gigantic creatures, their importance, their semiotic signs, their entities that protect and care [for them]” (Artforum, 2021).



Figure 1.2 *Carta ao Velho Mundo* [Letter to the Old World] (2019) by Jaider Esbell at the 34th São Paulo Art Biennial. Photo: Levi Fanan / São Paulo Biennial Foundation. Source: <http://34.bienal.org.br/artistas/7339> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

Carta ao Velho Mundo (Figure 1.2) is another example of Esbell's critique of the power dynamics perpetuated by the colonial legacy of art history. Through his interventions onto the 396 pages of the book *Galeria Delta da Pintura Universal* (Valsecchi, 1972), an illustrated encyclopaedia of the western art history, Esbell shed light on the ongoing struggles faced by Indigenous communities. The showcased pages in Figure 1.2, exhibited at the 34th São Paulo Art Biennial, display Esbell's interventions on 17th century Italian Baroque paintings using acrylic markers. On Guido Reni's "Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist", Esbell drew a headdress and tribal markings. Adjacent to Salome's head, the text reads: "Violence is a long cycle. Old orders continue to echo and have now reached the world's last virgin forests. The order? Exterminate!". On Domenichino's "The Martyrdom of Saint Peter", Esbell intervened with small birds into the trees and the text: "There is genocide in the Amazon forests."

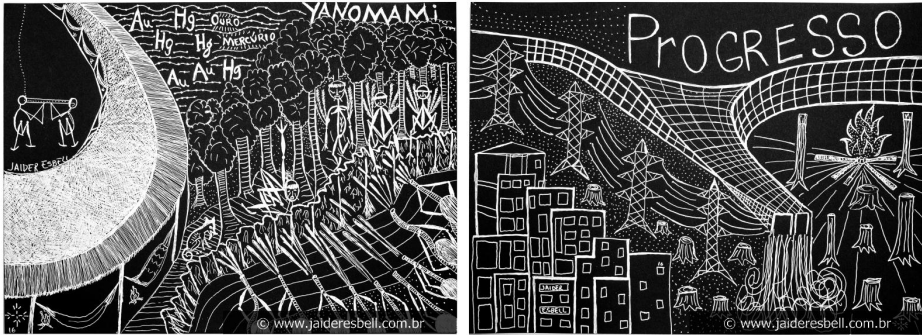


Figure 1.3. Series *It was Amazon* (2016) by Jaider Esbell. Source: <http://www.jaideresbell.com.br/site/2016/07/01/it-was-amazon/> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

In black and white colours, the series *It was Amazon* (Figure 1.3) depicts the ravaging of the Amazon in the form of felled trees, polluted rivers, dead animals (including humans) and armed conflict linked among other things to progress-driven development activities such as illegal land grabs, deforestation, mining, fishing, and animal trafficking, but also legal and concerted megaprojects – illustrated by the expansion of the agroindustry, roads, hydroelectric power dams, and mining. In Esbell’s words:

...the western world, the developed or the technological one, began to have in the material structure its guarantee of survival and so the quest to explore raw materials in distant lands was the engine for the failure of both, their world and ours. The careless approximation of different worlds, a non-consensual approach, therefore, delinquent and severely aggressive towards everyone, drastically affected the balance of existences (Esbell, 2020b, *our translation*).

The representation of the western world’s non-consensual approach exemplifies a core tenet of Contemporary Indigenous Art movement: the critique of the imbalances that emerge across various aspects of existence as a result of extractive encounters.

The Artivism of Daiara Tukano: Unraveling the Destructive Legacy of Articide

Daiara Tukano (1982–) is an activist, educator, and communicator belonging to the Eremiri Húusiro Parameri clan of the Yepá Mahsá people, also known as Tukano, from the Upper Rio Negro in the Brazilian Amazon. Through her artivism, Tukano brings attention to a concept she refers to as *articiídio* (articide), denoting the western

praxis of utilizing “art as a field of ethnocide, manipulation, and deception” (Goldstein, 2019, p. 90, *our translation*).

Articide, as described by Tukano, holds significant aesthetic-political power in shaping narratives and representations of Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, Tukano suggests that the perpetuation of violence in Indigenous territories can be largely attributed to the way Indigenous peoples are depicted in institutional spaces. In Tukano’s words, the consequences of articide are dire: “If [Indigenous] peoples are being murdered, it is because the art in the history book, in the school, in the museum, tells you that the only good Indian,⁴ is either a dead Indian or an Indian kneeling before a cross” (Mori, 2023, *our translation*). Through the predominant representation of Indigenous peoples in an exoticized manner, institutions reinforce harmful stereotypes, distorting Indigenous epistemologies, histories, and identities. Consequently, articide, according to Tukano, serves as a key mechanism through which colonial legacies persist, relegating Indigenous peoples to objects of curiosity.

Tukano made a significant mark in art history by becoming the first Indigenous female artist to have the largest urban art mural in the world (Nogueira, 2020). Titled *Selva Mãe do Rio Menino* (Figure 2.1), the mural spans an area of 1000 square meters and is displayed along a central avenue in the city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais State. The mural depicts an Indigenous woman holding a boy in her arms. The woman serves as a representation of the forest, whereas the boy represents the rivers. Their ties allude to interdependence but also affection within (through the personification of) the environment.

⁴ The European colonizers called the Brazilian native people *índios* (Indians), as they thought they had reached India when they arrived in the territory of current day Brazil.



Figure 2.1 *Selva Mãe do Rio Menino* [Mother Jungle and the River Boy] (2020), by Daíara Tukano. Part of the Urban Art Circuit (CURA), 2020. Source: <https://www.daiaratukano.com/en/arte> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

In this mural, Tukano incorporates distinct elements derived from various Indigenous ethnic groups: “The mother wears a Krenak face painting, Pataxó clothes, a Xacriabá body painting and holds a child who is the river boy because I have learned from the Krenak that Doce River is their grandfather”, Tukano elucidates (UOL, 2021, *our translation*). By integrating these elements, Tukano underscores the diversity of Indigenous traditions and their deep-rooted relationship with the environment. This juxtaposition is particularly striking as the mural is situated in a metropolitan setting, offering a contrasting backdrop that emphasizes the significance of Indigenous presence in a predominantly urban context.



Figure 2.2 *Morí' arenkato eseru' – Cantos para a vida* [*Morí' arenkato eseru' – Songs for life*] (2020), by Daiara Tukano and Jaider Esbell. Image of the performance during the exhibition *Véxoa: Nós sabemos* [*Véxoa: We know*] Source: Terena, 2020.

Morí' arenkato eseru' – Cantos para a vida (figure 2.2) is a performance by Daiara Tukano and Jaider Esbell presented during the exhibition *Véxoa: Nós sabemos*, which was an exhibition solely by Indigenous artists at the São Paulo Pinacoteca (Althoff, 2020). In this performance, the presence of a red feather cloak represents Tukano's interpretation of a sacred cloak belonging to the Tupinambá people, which has been stripped as an ethnographic object in the 17th century, ultimately ending up confined within European museums.

During the performance, Tukano adorned herself with her cloak, painted her body with genipap, carried a convex mirror, and played a *maracá* – an Indigenous percussion instrument often used in healing rituals. Together with Esbell, she walked through São Paulo Pinacoteca's permanent collection until they reached the room where the *Véxoa* exhibition was situated. There, they saluted the presence of Indigenous art in the museum through songs and prayers. In addition to offering a

critique of museum's exoticizing ethnographic relationship with sacred objects, the inclusion of a convex mirror serves not to prize art canons, but rather to diminish them:

For those who are Indigenous, entering a museum like Pinacoteca and seeing all that [paintings]... It's aggression after aggression, it's visual barbarism. So, entering this Living Museum through the front door wearing this cloak, and not saluting, but praying in front of all that History. That was the performance. [...] And the mirror on the face of the artwork was the kind that makes everything tiny. In front of all those artworks, it made them smaller because, for centuries, it was they who made us smaller (Medeiros, 2023, *our translation*).

The convex mirror, by visually reducing the size of objects, acts as a visual metaphor for the centuries-long history of colonial relationship of art institutions with Indigenous cultures, directly confronting the articide embedded within the museum's practices.

The Artivism of Denilson Baniwa: Reimagining Brazil's Colonial History through Reanthropophagy

Denilson Baniwa (1984–) is an activist native of the Baniwa Indigenous people from the Rio Negro in the Amazon. Baniwa uses canvas, installations, digital media, collages, and performances to illustrate the coming together of Baniwa cosmology with western visual references such as pop art, Hollywood, and pop culture, reverberating the contradictions in being Indigenous in the modern world.

The process of appropriation of western symbols explored by Baniwa's artwork emulates the logic of what Brazilian modernists termed "anthropophagism". In short, modernists sought to appropriate Indigenous cultures into Brazilian cultural production as a means of breaking away from European aesthetic norms (Andrade, 1928). However, paradoxically, the modernist movement provided no room for Indigenous self-expression, furthering stereotypes, and exoticization. While recognizing the historical importance of cultural appropriation in the context of Brazilian modernism, Baniwa places particular emphasis on the shifting dynamics of the present era. With Indigenous peoples asserting their agency and taking on central roles in shaping their own historical narratives, the act of appropriating Indigenous cultural expressions without actively engaging in reciprocal dialogue, can be regarded as deeply exploitative (Baniwa, da Silva, and Bogéa, 2023, p. 172).

Accordingly, in response to the historical appropriation of Indigenous culture in general (and their exploitation by dominant forces), Baniwa's artwork

intends to reproduce a similar process but the other way around, what he calls “reanthropophagy”, defined as “a Manifesto, a cry of urgency about the art produced by native peoples” (Caetano, 2022, p. 4). While cultural appropriation has historically served as a tool for the dominant culture to assimilate Indigenous cultures, reanthropophagy enables Indigenous artists to appropriate elements of the dominant culture. Baniwa contends that, akin to the historical significance of machetes, knives, and metal objects, art in the contemporary context holds a similar power that necessitates its taming in favour of Indigenous peoples (Baniwa, da Silva, and Bogéa, 2023, p. 170). This appropriation is approached as a strategic process of interethnic dialogue, facilitating Indigenous peoples to comprehend and engage with western tools, with the objective of asserting their own perspectives.

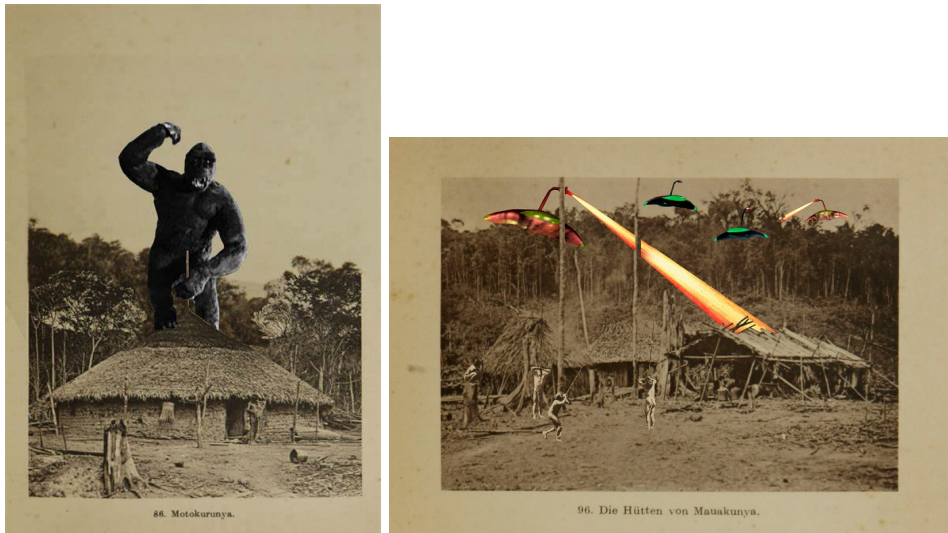


Figure 3.1 Series *Ficções Coloniais (ou finja que não estou aqui)* [Colonial Fictions (or pretend I am not here)] (2021), by Denilson Baniwa. On the left, King Kong. On the right, *Guerra dos Mundos* [The War of the Worlds]. Source: <https://www.behance.net/denilsonbaniwa> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

Among Baniwa’s artworks is *Ficções Coloniais (ou finja que não estou aqui)* (Figure 3.1), in which Baniwa makes interventions in photographs taken by the German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) featuring Indigenous peoples. Baniwa juxtaposes these images with pop culture icons, such as E.T., Alien, Godzilla, and King Kong to transform the colonial fiction of Brazil’s “discovery” into an alien invasion. In his words:

Indigenous means, by the dictionary, the one who is originally from the place, the native; its antonym is alien, one who is foreign to the place, outsider. [...]

Transforming the discovery of Brazil into an alien invasion was the way I found to describe the country’s colonial construction. [...] It is the theft of the theft, the pastiche, the satire where the “discoverer of Brazil” is the man who enslaves King Kong inside its own island and then takes it to exhibition as an aberration of the “New World”, as they did with the Tupinambá people in 1562⁵ (Folha de São Paulo, 2021, *our translation*).

As reflected in *Ficções Coloniais*, a central intention of Baniwa’s reanthropophagy is to appropriate the western visual language into Indigenous terms to “rewrite Brazil through art” (Sneed, 2021), contributing to the creation of a more diverse portrayal of national history.



Figure 3.2 *A Terra Envenenada e com Odor de Morte* [The Poisoned Earth with the Smell of Death] from the series *Terra Brasilis: o Agro não é pop!* [Terra Brasilis: Agro is not pop!] (2018) by Denilson Baniwa. Source: <https://www.behance.net/denilsonbaniwa> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

Baniwa’s series, *Terra Brasilis: o Agro não é pop!* (Figure 3.2), exemplifies his perspective on appropriation, manifested through a critical engagement with

⁵ Here, Baniwa refers to the Tupinambá people who were taken to Europe in 1562 to be shown to the King of France, Charles IX.

dominant narratives surrounding agribusiness in Brazil. Within this series, the painting titled *A Terra Envenenada e com Odor de Morte* portrays a soybean field with pesticides being dropped from a helicopter, resembling a destructive rain falling upon a devastated forest. However, upon closer inspection, the painting reveals the phrase *Agro é pop* (Agro is pop) alongside small crosses symbolizing the deaths caused by toxic exposure to pesticides.

“Agro is pop” refers to slogans from widely recognized advertising campaigns in Brazil, notably the slogan “Agro is tech, agro is pop, agro is everything” promoted by Rede Globo on national television (Globo, 2019). The campaign sought to present agribusiness as the country’s economic savior, employing an appealing narrative. By appropriating the slogan “Agro is pop,” Baniwa confronts the idealized image of agribusiness, drawing attention to its detrimental socio-ecological impacts.

The Artivism of Emerson Pontes: Reclaiming Ethnic Identity through Uýra, The Walking Tree



Figure 4.1 *Uýra Sodoma, Comer de Si Mesma e Fogo* [Eat from Yourself and Fire] (2018) by Emerson Pontes. Photo Matheus Belém. Source: <https://www.pipapriize.com/uyra/> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

I am human, but sometimes I turn into a tree. And she walks. This is Uýra, whom I affectionately like to call the Walking Tree. My spirit comprehends her as an entity, with whom I coexist. [...] She dresses herself with foliage and other organic materials, to tell the stories of living beings and their violations, [...] collectively

proposing healing for systemic colonial diseases (Pontes, 2022, p. 35, *our translation*).

Emerson Pontes (1991–) is an Indigenous activist, drag performer, biologist, and educator from Santarém in the state of Pará. Pontes explores the fusion of biological scientific knowledge with ancestral memories of plants through the alter ego Uýra, the Walking Tree. The artist's transformation into Uýra involves the collection of organic materials from the surrounding environment, which are then integrated into the artist's body, culminating in a complete embodiment of Uýra's persona. In addition to exploring the interconnectedness among living beings, Uýra embodies intersectional struggles among Indigenous persons – many of whom inhabit urban peripheries, and some of whom, like Pontes, are transgender. Pontes reflects on these complexities:

Cities swallow and mistreat certain groups. Often these groups won't naturally claim an identity or be proud or present themselves as they are. I see her [Uýra] as an artist with an intersected body. Because I'm also intersected, as someone from the periphery, Indigenous, LGBT. And I can't forget that. Brazil is the country that most kills environmentalists and trans people. I can't see my work without an agenda of war. (Uýra: The Rising Forest, 2022).

Within the Brazilian context, where marginalized groups face significant violence and discrimination, the exploration of identity assumes a crucial political role in Pontes' artistic practice. As an Indigenous person whose ancestral lineage has been erased due to the enduring impacts of colonization, Pontes represents a generation grappling with the effects of Indigenous diaspora (Pontes, 2022, p. 35). This quest for ethnic identity also resonates with Pontes' project, *Incenturita*, which involves collaboration with riverine youth (Fundação Amazônia Sustentável, 2018). Many of these youth initially struggle with low self-esteem due to structural racism, which leads them to suppress their ethnic identities (Pontes, 2022, p. 33). To tackle this challenge, Pontes empowers the youth to creatively engage with organic materials, facilitating a reconnection with their ancestral roots and a reclamation of their sense of self-worth, while underscoring the potential of art in fostering collective healing.



Figure 4.2 Series *Mil Quase Mortos*, “Boiúna” [Almost one thousand dead, “Boiúna”] (2019) by Emerson Pontes. Photo Matheus Belém. Source: <https://www.pipaprize.com/uyra/> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

Pontes’ transformation into Uýra is portrayed in the photo performance *Uýra Sodoma, Comer de Si Mesma e Fogo* (Figure 4.1), symbolizing a metamorphosis with the forest. Through the image of a human body merging with the forest, Pontes aims to raise awareness of the inseparability between humans and plants. In contrast, the photo performance *Mil Quase Mortos*, “Boiúna” (Almost one thousand dead, “Boiúna”) (Figure 4.2) explores the peripheries of polluted urban centres. The performance, which took place in 2019 along the Mindu *igarapé* (creek) in Manaus, features Uýra surrounded by a significant amount of garbage. By highlighting the pollution of the creeks that traverse the city, the artist brings up the debate on environmental degradation, drawing attention to how waste has become normalized and integrated into the everyday reality of urban peripheries.

Both artworks share a common theme of exploring the intricate interdependencies between living beings, shedding light on the impact of human actions on the environment. Through Uýra, Pontes delves into the context of Indigenous diaspora and the ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities in Brazil, symbolizing the quest for ethnic identity and the profound resonance with the colonial legacies that continue to shape Brazilian society.

Discussion

The Content of Indigenous Artwork: Rewriting History and Centring Indigenous Ontology by Occupying Colonial Spaces

In this section, we elaborate what we understand to be the core meanings and arguments conveyed by the artwork presented in this article, focusing on their shared themes. Notably, one prevailing thread among these artworks is the ongoing violent colonization initiated in the early 1500s. The process is denounced as multi-fold, working through the oppression of minds (and cultures) and the oppression and exploitation of bodies (human and non-human) (cf. Porsani et al., 2023). The denounced oppression is asserted to have taken several forms starting from the erasure of the Indigenous experience of being colonized from the official eurocentric history internalized by Brazilians themselves.⁶ This assertion is clear in Esbell's work through his interventions in *Carta ao Velho Mundo* (Figure 1.2), and through *Entidades* (Figure 1.1) depicting the serpents' confrontation with the dominant version of history and its subservient institutions; in Baniwa's *Ficções Coloniais* (Figure 3.1) portraying Brazil's colonial history through a metaphor of an alien invasion; in Tukano's *Mori' erenkato eseru' – Cantos para a vida* (figure 2.2) denouncing colonial ethnographic praxis of exoticizing Indigenous cultures; and Pontes' transformation into Uýra (figure 4.1) reclaiming ethnic identities in the context of Indigenous diaspora. Accordingly, Esbell's, Baniwa's, Tukano's, and Pontes' artworks equate Brazil's "discovery" to a foreign invasion – the invasion of a land that was the home of Indigenous peoples with their plurality of languages, cultures, and cosmovision.

Thus, if the hegemonic "discovery" version were to include this Indigenous version of history, the commander of the fleet, Pedro Álvares Cabral, would not feature as a traveling, civilizing hero who voyaged around the world, sharing the gift of civilization, bringing culture and knowledge to uncivilized people. Rather, as Contemporary Indigenous Art (Esbell, 2018) shows, the Portuguese arrival to the land today known as Brazil would be narrated as a tragic and violent invasion with catastrophic implications. During the first century of colonization, the wiping out of ninety percent of the Indigenous population who inhabited the territory of present South America illustrates some of these implications (Charny, 1999, p. 433). Unsurprisingly, Esbell's decrrial against dominant accounts that deny the right to history and memory to Indigenous peoples resonates with Tukano's accusation of

⁶ For a perspective on internal colonialism in Latin America, see: Cardoso de Oliveira (1966); González Casanova (2007).

western artifice, Baniwa's attempt to reanthropophagize art, and Pontes' quest to reconnect with ancestral roots.

The centring of Indigenous counter-narratives in the re-interpretation of history is, we claim, a central content of the contemporary artwork presented. Importantly, and taking stock of Baniwa's critique of the naivety and consequential harms of the Brazilian modernist attempt to break from European aesthetic norms, such re-centring must be articulated from within, or through Indigenous peoples' own endeavours, i.e., *by* or *with* Indigenous peoples, instead of *on* or *about* Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, all in all, these works can be understood through the logic of reclaiming the Indigenous right to act as agents *in* their history and cultural production, but also in the crafting of accounts that challenge hegemonic versions where Indigenous experiences are confined to peripheral or subaltern positions. However, in the contemporary colonial and increasingly globalized world, inevitably, these accounts include the Indigenous' views also of the non-Indigenous "others" – which as noted above, comprises denouncing the colonizers not as heroes but as invaders.

This review of character and roles of non-Indigenous others is clear in Esbell's series *It was Amazon* (Figure 1.3), but also in Baniwa's series *Terra Brasilis: o Agro não é pop!* (Figure 3.2) and Pontes' *Mil Quase Mortos* (Figure 4.2), where the questioning of a central tenet underpinning western societies takes shape – namely the dismantling of the progressive view of development that positions western ways of knowing, being, and living at the forefront of a civilizational continuum. Instead, these artists equate western-driven development with generalized destruction exemplified by deforestation, environmental pollution, the killing of human and non-human species, and the degrading mental and physical bodily consequences. This condemnation of extractive-driven development is extensively elaborated by some of great leaders of the Brazilian Indigenous movement, such as Ailton Krenak (Krenak, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2022) and Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013; 2023).

Krenak describes the Earth as being "devoured" by corporations whose view of humanity excludes a variety of sub-humanities, "those not even on the Humanity Club waiting list" (2020a, p. 17). In line with such understanding, Krenak stresses that the very idea of humanity has been instrumental to the perpetuation of colonial violence through the denial of full humanity to seemingly "primitive" populations in the global South. Thus, a key invention of the colonial project is claimed to be the conceptualization of savage, archaic, and barbaric to denote Indigenous peoples in need for "progress". As Krenak puts it:

The notion that white Europeans could jump in their ships and go colonizing the rest of the world was based on the premise that there was an enlightened humanity

that had to go in search of the benighted humanity and bring those savages into their incredible light (ibid., p. 13).

The Indigenous leader Davi Kopenawa, a Shaman and spokesperson for the Yanomami people, elaborates yet on another implication of mistaken industrial and economic progress for “development”. In his work, Kopenawa draws a parallel between the exploitation of natural resources to the emptying of the Earth which, in line with the Yanomami cosmovision, will lead to a human-ecological collapse – what he calls the “Falling Sky” (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013). Thus, Kopenawa’s apocalyptic presage corroborates the critique of mainstream development so clearly expressed in the artworks.

This critique against “development as progress” also resonates with the overarching critique raised by non-Indigenous scholars from Latin America and elsewhere, most markedly those with decolonial orientations (Escobar 1995; 2018; Mignolo and Escobar, 2013; Quijano, 2020). These works eloquently elaborate on the implications of such a view not only to the imposition of a hierarchy of ways of being and living but also of knowing (and making science). Accordingly, the idea of development encompasses the notion that the global South, underdeveloped, depends on the North to find the solutions to its problems. In addition to reinforcing hierarchies of knowing, the dominant perspective on development further consolidates the human-nature dualist ontology. It is within the context of challenging western dualism that the Indigenous artworks presented should also be interpreted.

Tukano’s *Selva Mãe do Rio Menino* (Figure 2.1) and Pontes’ *Uyra Sodoma, Comer de Si Mesma e Fogo* (Figure 4.1) contribute to convey this critique. Both pieces hail an ontology of relatedness and decry against the hegemonic ontology that have dissociated – or disembodied – humans from the rest of living beings. Although their general critique can be understood as overlapping, their work points to complementary messages. Whereas Pontes’ photo performances seem to stress the interconnectedness between all beings, i.e., a sense of *oneness*, Tukano’s painting clearly personifies non-human beings and adds a caring dimension to this integration – the forest and the river become mother and son.

Altogether, the critique conveyed particularly in Pontes’ and Tukano’s artworks is in line with Indigenous ontologies, as articulated by Indigenous leaders (though less so by critical western scholars). As expressed by Krenak:

This humanity refuses to recognize that the river, now in a coma, is also our grandfather [...] When we depersonalize the river, the mountain, when we strip them of their meaning – an attribute we hold to be the preserve of the human being – we

relegate these places to the level of mere resources for industry and extractivism. The result of our divorce from our integrations and interactions with Mother Earth is that she has left us orphans (2020a, p. 29).

Krenak not only condemns the dualist dominant view that posits humans beyond and above the rest of living beings, but also elaborates on key implications of such a view, namely, the rendering of the Earth as an exploitable economic resource ready to be devoured by the “Earth’s eaters” and “The People of Merchandise”, terms used by Kopenawa to describe those who persistently exploit Nature as resource (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013, pp. 261, 326). In line with Krenak’s explication, Pontes’ and Tukano’s artworks conceive Nature as a living being and as part of who we are, centring thereby Indigenous fundamental ontologies about life in the world in general.

Embracing Indigenous Artivism: Enhancing Justice and Engendering Other Worlds

The preceding analysis has provided a comprehensive examination on the central messages conveyed by the Indigenous artworks presented in this article, namely the assertion of colonization as a violent and ongoing process, the contestation of the idea of development as progress, and the centring of relatedness against a dualist ontology. But how can the consideration of these messages yield valuable perspectives for those who may not directly experience the injustices under scrutiny? This question deserves attention considering that the critique raised by Indigenous artwork – and resonated through the efforts of Indigenous movements and critical Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to different extents – disturb not only everyday beliefs and understandings that orient contemporary mainstream ways of living, but fundamentally also the ways in which societies are organized.

We propose at least two answers to the above question. First, the comprehension of Indigenous experiences and views is clearly a matter of implementing justice, not only in the sense that it may enable a critical examination of historical and ongoing colonial legacies, but also in the sense that it may contribute to combating ingrained norms and practices that sustain the denounced injustices. The latter necessarily comprises abiding to the Indigenous self-determination principle that allows for non-extractive and non-dualist ontologies to prevail in the organization of their territorial spaces. Thus, accepting the critique conveyed by Indigenous artivists can be interpreted as a matter of making past and present justice with the potential of directly affecting Indigenous peoples and their territories.

Our second part of the answer to the above-posed question is slightly more instrumental and refers not to redressing injustices but to addressing the most pressing challenges implied in living in the “Anthropocene” – namely surviving as a

species amidst climate change. The instrumentality of embracing Indigenous ontologies and views becomes clear as we understand that Indigenous rights are intimately connected with the rights of Nature. The extermination of Indigenous peoples has become synonymous with the destruction of forests, rivers, oceans, atmosphere, animals, and vice-versa – unsurprisingly more than eighty percent of the world’s remaining biodiversity is found within Indigenous lands (United Nations, 2021, p. 137). It follows that the destruction of Indigenous “worlds” involves the destruction of the “world” (its ecosystems with incommensurable values that include the regulation of climate).

Accordingly, ecocide and ethnocide are two sides of a destructive process whose impacts have been suffered directly by Indigenous peoples, but which are already resonating on other populations, among other ways, through climate change. In other words, the Anthropocene – or Colonialocene (Böschmeier, Quispe-Agnoli, and Greco, 2021), Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), Chthulucene (Haraway, 2016), Anthroscene (Parikka, 2014), Wasteocene (Armiero, 2021), to mention a few names given to our era – imply the timely need to explore possibilities of other ways of thinking beyond the unsustainable “modern”.

Concerning this second part of the answer, by aligning the destruction of biodiversity with the dismantling of native peoples and knowledges, Indigenous voices expressed through activism invite us to question: Is sustainability even possible in the modern world? What exactly is humanity trying to sustain? Krenak’s (2020a, p. 15) claim that “not even the Indigenous communities are sustainable today, because we can’t provide for all our needs in a way that is fully integrated with the land” is elucidating. How to be sustainable when rivers are being intoxicated, the forests are being cut down, and ores and minerals that keep the Earth strong are being viciously extracted? In the Krenak’s cosmovision, sustainability involves being fully integrated with the Earth and giving back what has been taken out from her. When rivers are turned into toxic mud, when the territories are invaded, Indigenous peoples are forced to enter the circle of unsustainability.

Rationale for avoiding ecological collapse also features in Indigenous mythologies. For example, in *The Falling Sky* (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013), Kopenawa tells how Omama, the demiurge of Yanomami mythology, hung the Sky. The Yanomami believe the Sky will collapse if their people and the minerals that provide strength to the Earth cease to exist, as they play a vital role in maintaining the balance between the Earth and the Sky. Kopenawa claims that we are seeing signs of the fall, manifested in the escalating encroachment of extractivism in Yanomami territories. This is epitomized by the government’s declaration of a medical

emergency on January 21, 2023 (Ministério da Saúde, 2023) and the resulting Yanomami humanitarian crisis largely attributed to mercury poisoning from illegal mining activities and worsened by the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil (Hutukara Associação Yanomami, 2022). By foregrounding the intrinsic brutality entailed in the act of extracting minerals from the Earth, the Yanomami ontology forms the bedrock for their persistent struggle and resistance against extractivism in Indigenous lands.

Now, imagine: What if one of the centres of the world was the Amazon rainforest? (Brum, 2021). The Amazon rainforest is the largest rainforest and the most biodiverse place on the planet, representing over half of the world's remaining rainforests, with nearly 60 percent located in Brazil, covering around 4.2 million square kilometres (Raftopoulos and Morley, 2020, p. 1629). In the last five centuries, it has been a space of socio-environmental destruction but also of resistance as Indigenous peoples “have been holding out for over five hundred years now” (Krenak, 2020a, p. 20).

In times of approaching ecological collapse, we find the above question not merely rhetorical since it invites us to recentre the world around the few places that have not been fully incorporated by colonial logics of sustaining an unsustainable world. As Indigenous activism demonstrates, these places are also spaces of resistance that have endured despite systematic violence. Placing these locations in the centre of sustainability discussions, and thus listening to the voices of people who live on the frontline of climate change, represents a fundamental epistemological turn. These recentrings around spaces and ontologies that challenge the dominant western, capitalist, patriarchal mainstream views have been considered critical for the making a pluriverse – a world where many worlds fit and share the respect for a multiplicity of ways of knowing, being and living (Escobar, 2018; Kothari et al., 2019).

Embracing the voices expressed by Indigenous peoples through activism is key in the engendering of such a pluriverse – and has consequences, as mentioned above, not only to Indigenous peoples and their territories, but also to human and other species increasingly threatened by climate change. In climate change discussions and praxis, sustainability is often sought after through “green” innovations toward more efficient use of natural resources (Mol, Spaargaren, and Sonnenfeld, 2013). However, as noticed by a range of scholars, these “solutions” often reproduce the hegemonic forms of extractive capitalism and fail thereby to acknowledge the conditions of violence and inequality forged by centuries of colonialism behind global environmental problems (Galeano, 1973; Shiva, 1993; Escobar, 1995; Moore, 2016). Accordingly, sustainable development features in scientific research, politics, and global initiatives as compatible with the “greener” of capitalist expansion, for example by substituting fossil fuels with biofuels.

Nonetheless, if we embrace the messages conveyed by Indigenous activism, we would be distrustful of expecting the climate crises to be solved (or mitigated) by the widespread use of biofuels, or likewise of resuming climate justice to opening “atmospheric space” for “developing” countries in industrialization processes that mimic western precepts of progress. Since the climate crisis is approached as a civilizational crisis, that of patriarchal western capitalism, justice from an Indigenous perspective enunciated in their artwork must involve challenging hegemonic rationality and its manifestations, e.g., of endless economic growth, capital accumulation, and ever-expanding extractive industrial progress. In other words, if not for the intrinsic sake of justice, for the instrumental sake of addressing root causes of climate change, embracing the ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies that challenge the tenets of the modern, western, civilizational model is a timely quest.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have scrutinized Indigenous activism as a prominent means of activism within the decolonizing process, specifically focusing on its role in resisting extractivism. In Brazil, we are witnessing a decolonial “turn” through Contemporary Indigenous Art, illustrated by the growing visibility that Indigenous artists have achieved in recent years (Paiva, 2022). Accordingly, Amazonian Indigenous activists are breaking centuries of oppression and cultural marginalization, bringing us an enormous renewal of combined aesthetic and activism. Esbell’s critical engagements with art history, Baniwa’s reanthropophagy movement, Tukano’s critique against artifice, and Pontes’s transformation into Uýra lay bare central messages that intersect each other, adding coherence to counter-hegemonic narratives, which could be summarized as follows: colonial domination has unfolded through the systematic exploitation of bodies and the oppression of cultures, instrumentalized through a progressive view of development and anchored on the pre-eminence of ontological dualism.

Bringing Indigenous ontologies and the Amazon rainforest to the centre of the analysis elucidates these conflicts between distinct rationales: that of Indigenous peoples, who conceive Nature as a living being and as part of who we are; and the dominating view of humanity, who conceives Nature as a market resource. The Indigenous activism examined in this study provides ontological foundations expressed in a non-dual notion of the interconnectedness between human and non-human worlds, serving as a conduit for Indigenous voices seeking to craft a pluriverse amidst pressing socioenvironmental concerns.

Reconnecting to our view of Indigenous activism as intertwined with broader Indigenous struggles, Krenak emphasizes the popular character of art among Indigenous peoples:

Everyone I know dances, sings, paints, draws, sculpts, does everything that the West attributes to a category of people, who are artists. But in some cases, they are called artisans, and their works are called handicrafts, but again, they are categories that discriminate between what is art, what is handicraft, what is an artist, what is a craftsman. Because art history is the art history of the West (Krenak, 2016, p. 182, *our translation*).

Krenak is not only defying disciplinary domains and criticizing the western reductionist and elitist approach to art (resonated also in the content of the artworks analysed here) but also highlighting the embeddedness of art in Indigenous cultures. Such embeddedness situates art as a rather popular means of expression among Indigenous peoples, i.e., as comprising everyday expressions that are not restricted to a specific group of individuals.

One may claim that any contemporary Indigenous-authored artwork occupying spaces in the colonial world represents a form of activism in the sense that it affirms Indigenous existence and resistance, and thus of a plural world. We do not oppose this understanding, but, particularly in consonance with Tukano's elucidation on how Indigenous peoples and art have been historically approached in colonial spaces (i.e., as exotic objects that appeal to western curiosity), it is appropriate to stress activism as conditioned by Indigenous artists' own terms. In other words, through activism, Indigenous art reoccupies the traditional colonial spaces – of museums and art galleries but also modern physical and virtual spaces such as urban centres and the internet – to contest and denounce the fundamentals of these spaces.

Accordingly, the occupation of spaces by Indigenous activism implies not only the possibility but the necessity of strong and critical agency within hegemonic structures. It is within, though against, coloniality that Indigenous activism emerges and unfolds. This relation indicates possibilities of alliances which, by supporting Indigenous artists, inevitably also support Indigenous movements and agendas, and vice-versa – which, as discussed above, are of incommensurable value not only to Indigenous peoples' "worlds" but to the "world" which we all share. As more Indigenous activists exercise the right to reclaim history, we can hope for a decolonized, reanthropophagized pluriverse. As Kopenawa epitomizes, "no forest, no history" (Dias and Marras, 2019), and Krenak (2022) powerfully anticipates: "The future is ancestral".

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