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RIVER REMEMORIES
ECOLOGIES OF GRIEF IN THE WORK OF UÝRA SODOMA

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the work of Brazilian artist and performer Uýra Sodoma through the lens of ecological grief, rememory, and decolonial aesthetics. Centering water as both material and symbolic medium, the study analyzes two key performances—*Mil quase mortos* (2019) and *Manaus: uma cidade, uma aldeia* (2020)—to argue that Uýra's practice transforms Amazonian waterways into sites of mourning, resistance, and relationality. Drawing on theories of rememory (Toni Morrison; Viviane Saleh-Hanna), hauntology (Jacques Derrida; Avery Gordon), and viscosity (Nancy Tuana), the essay conceptualizes environmental damage as an ongoing, embodied archive of colonial violence. Uýra's hybrid figure—*bicha e planta*—functions as a decolonial strategy that disrupts taxonomic and social classifications, queering the boundaries between human and nonhuman, nature and culture. Through mimicry, camouflage, and dissident embodiment, the performances reclaim the igarapé as a haunted ecological space where invisibilized histories resurface. Engaging Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory and Mary Louise Pratt's "imperial eyes," the essay further situates Manaus as a fragmented, Baroque landscape shaped by extractivist modernity. Ultimately, the article argues that Uýra's work advances a queer, Indigenous ecology in which grief becomes a collective, interspecies practice—an ethical and political response to environmental devastation and historical erasure.

KEYWORDS

Uýra Sodoma, Ecological Grief, Decolonial Aesthetics, Environmental Humanities.

BECOMING ONE WITH THE RIVER

The work of Uýra Sodoma—Indigenous activist, drag performer, biologist, and educator—sits at the intersection of scientific knowledge and ancestral cosmology. Uýra belongs to a generation of Indigenous artists shaped by diaspora and cultural reclamation, and has expanded this ecological framework to include queer, Black, and other peripheral lives, insisting that the defense of the forest is inseparable from the defense of bodies historically rendered disposable.[1] Based in Manaus, the origins of Uýra's artistic practice date from 2016, at the height of Brazil's political crisis. The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the subsequent rise of Bolsonarism brought with it a systematic dismantling of environmental protections and an escalation of violence against Indigenous communities and LGBTQIA+ people.[2] The artist responded to this climate by creating Uýra Sodoma, a figure that fuses drag aesthetics and Indigenous cosmology and is a tool of political resistance.[3] This transformation is inseparable from the practice of body painting, which in Indigenous Amazonian communities has long functioned not as decoration but ritual metamorphosis. For the artist, body painting is the mechanism through which drag becomes ecological: layer by layer, pigment, mud, and forest debris remake the human body into the creatures of the Amazon—the black serpent, the reptile, the river itself—enacting the species-crossing that lies at the heart of Uýra's political and cosmological project.[4]

In an interview, Uýra describes herself as a hybrid, a body made of *bicha e planta*: "In the Flesh of Bicha e Planta. For me, *me montar* (transforming myself) is a constant journey of recognizing the body I inhabit. I think we deceive ourselves when we say we already know everything about our bodies. It is a world of fantastic and authentic places, many of which remain unexplored because they have been forbidden to us."[5] In the flesh of "Bicha e Planta" Uýra reflects the cultural and racial hybridity of *mestizaje*, while transforming it as a disruptive and oppositional practice, a means of queering identities and historical narratives, or in José Esteban Muñoz's words, a means of "dissidentification."[6] For Muñoz, the cultural performer revisits the processes of identity and identification through "different strategies of viewing, reading and locating 'self' within representational systems and disparate life-worlds that aim to displace or occlude a minority subject."[7] Uýra Sodoma's performances are examples of a dissidentification as they are a "mode of tactical recognition" employed to resist dominant ideology."[8]

Dissidentification in Uýra's performances operates through mimicry, camouflage, and the reversal of the gaze, re-situating the minoritarian self within the systems that have rendered it absent. Through camouflage and metamorphosis, Uýra's art participates in a broader field of performances that dates back to the 1960s, when artists began to inscribe the body as a political and aesthetic surface, opening new dialogues on gender, sexuality, and the environment. However, as Gislaine Pagotto observes, Uýra's art recovers ancestral knowledges and places them within the context of a decolonial ecology of relations: "Moreover, they

denounce the urgent need to think about sustainability from an expanded field: how is the control of bodies exercised through land (life, water, territory, food), and how does this control of bodies relate to colonial ways of thinking."[9] Uýra's work exposes these entanglements by transforming drag into a cosmological practice, one where the act of *me montar*—literally, "to mount oneself," or "to transform oneself"—becomes a ritual of ecological and spiritual becoming. As Paulo Henrique Trinidade Corrêa reminds us, by means of this embodied cosmology, *me montar* becomes an act of reclaiming kinship with the forest, reshaping the body as a site of restoration and interspecies alliance—a body that remembers, mourns, and regenerates in concert with the living world.[10]

Water stands at the center of Uýra Sodoma's artistic universe. Living in the capital of the Amazonas state, Manaus, Pontes interrogates the contradictions of a region where the abundance of freshwater hides the pollution and recurrent flooding caused by rapid urbanization and inadequate sanitation infrastructure. *Mil quase mortos* ("A Thousand Almost Dead") consists of a series of performances staged in one of Manaus's *igarapés*—small urban waterways that historically crisscrossed the urban fabric of Manaus—where the artist embodies agonizing figures immersed in polluted waters. Uýra's body appears covered with mud, leaves, and vegetal debris gathered directly from the surrounding forest. These materials are not decorative; placed carefully onto the skin, they evoke both regeneration and decay, positioning the body at a threshold between life and extinction. Historically, the city of Manaus was known as the "Venice of South America" because of its dense network of waterways known as *igarapé*—a term from the Tupi language meaning "canoe path." Today, however, these same waterways are sites of environmental crisis: an estimated twenty-seven tons of trash are removed daily, and bodies of water that once sustained collective life have become associated with waste accumulation and housing precarity.

Manaus: uma cidade, na aldeia (2020), commissioned by the Instituto Moreira Salles and created and performed by Uýra Sodoma with the collaboration of Thyago Nogueira, is a video-performance structured into four acts that unfolds across the urban landscape of Manaus. As the city of the Brazilian Amazon, Manaus bears the marks of colonial and industrial transformation, from the Indigenous dispossession that accompanied Portuguese settlement, through the rubber boom's brutal extractivism at the turn of the twentieth century to the military dictatorship's creation of the Free Trade Zone in 1967.[11] The performer appears as a reptilian, trans-Indigenous figure — skin covered in scale-like markings, crowned with an headdress of organic materials — moving through streets and public spaces where vendors, pedestrians, and the rhythms of everyday urban life continue around them. The video opens and closes at the margins of the Rio Negro and it adopts the form of a fragmented, non-linear montage, accompanied by the performer's essayistic voiceover. Each of the four acts focuses on one aspect of Brazil's historical trauma such as slavery and colonial punishment, the invisibilization of Indigenous peoples, and the failed promises of Brazilian modernity. In the final act, as Uýra returns to

the margins of the Rio Negro, removes the ceremonial headdress, and closes with a monologue that reflects on the flows of the Amazonian rivers as metaphors for the return of suppressed histories.

If, as Judith Butler suggests, *grievability* defines what is considered of a human existence, Pontes' work pushes this framework further by extending grief beyond the human itself.[12] Uýra Sodoma's performances take place in urban spaces, transforming these sites into public stages that invite passersby to become active participants in collective mourning. As a ritual invitation to mourn, performances are led by a non-human—the serpent-spirit of Boiúna, the reptilian creature emerging from the Rio Negro—in order to emphasize that ecological devastation does not afflict humans alone, but reshapes and destroys the living world in its entirety. If Butler's framework of *grievability* asks whose losses are recognized as losses, the camouflaged body –neither fully human nor fully serpent—refuses to locate grief in a single subject, proposing instead that mourning is a condition shared across species. The *igarapé* experienced as the serpent in Uýra's performance, is a grieving entity in their own right and, whose suffering the performer does not represent so much as inhabit. In *Manuas: uma cidade, na aldeia*, this invitation is made explicit through a direct address: Uýra speaks to the audience using vocatives and rhetorical questions that interpellate spectators as co-mourners rather than passive observers, implicating them in the histories the performance stages. This pedagogical impulse is not incidental — Pontes is also an educator who works with teenagers in the Amazonas, a dimension of their practice that inflects the performances' commitment to collective awareness. As Ashlee Cunsolo argues, nonhuman lives are also grievable, and our shared vulnerability with other species forms the basis of ecological solidarity. To approach climate change as a "work of mourning," as she suggests, is to reimagine environmental justice as a collective practice of remembrance, accountability, and care—an ecological democracy grounded in shared loss and interdependence.[13]

Rememory, a concept coined by Toni Morrison, allows for an understanding of collective grief as a non-chronological, trauma-based narrative form. The fragmentary format of performances such as *Manaus, uma cidade na aldeia* echoes traumatic experience that refuses narrative closure. Re-memory describes the cyclic character of historical trauma: the past is not completed but it remains embedded in bodies, places and objects, returning with undiminished force to those who encounter it.[14] As a shared and embodied experience, rememorialization brings back traces of colonial violence, the ghosts that Avery Gordon describes as sociological, for they activate histories that the community may have learned to ignore.[15] Staged in polluted waterways and city streets, Uyra's performances draw the spectator into an affective and ongoing relation with the past, compelling recognition of structures of violence that continue to shape the present.[16] Of particular relevance is Nancy Tuana's concept of "viscosity," which describes environmental harm as a lingering residue that permeates bodies and landscapes.[17] Viscosity gives rememory its material dimension: the contaminated

water of the igarapé does not merely symbolize colonial harm but carries it, literally, in its composition. Within this intertwined ecology of grief and memory, water becomes a medium of memory: it returns, floods, and resurfaces, insisting on the unresolved traumas of extractive modernity.

MIL QUASE MORTOS: MANAUS' AFTERLIVES

Mil (Quase) Mortos [A Thousand (Almost) Dead] (2018, 2019) is a series of performances created between 2018 and 2019, born as a cry to protest against the pollution of Manaus's *igarapés*.[18] Shaped by the Amazon's dense network of waterways, the city of Manaus once grew alongside these natural tributaries; while official records identify 67 *igarapés*, environmental organizations estimate that nearly a thousand once cut through the city, sustaining its ecological and collective life. Rapid urbanization, however, has transformed many of them into invisible, open-air dumps incorporated to the urban landscape. As Uýra observes, thousand *igarapés* are "not dead yet:" despite contamination and abandonment, they continue to traverse the city, embodying resilience amid environmental devastation.

Primarily set in the Igarapé do Mindu, the series of performances unfolds as a ritual for mourning and raising of social awareness. In *Caos* (2018), Uýra positions herself beneath the São Jorge Bridge, beside the *Igarapé* do Mindu, surrounded by garbage and dirty water (Figure 1). Two types of snails cover her eyes, while her head is decorated with wilted leaves and plants. The makeup and adornments are made by the artist herself, inspired by Amazonian indigenous practices. In *Boiúna* (2019) the transformation turns the artist into the great Amazonian serpent. To do this, she wears a tail made of leaves more than eight meters long. The majestic figure—a noble being in indigenous cosmology—appears prostate and powerless amid environmental degradation. Both performances represent a violent irruption into public space. People passing over the bridges and streets of Manaus are confronted by this extraordinary figure emerging from the refuse. Lying down on the riverbank amid refuse, powerless, suffocating (Image 2), Boiúna calls out to the passerby spectators: "This water is ours. We must take responsibility."[19] As Kathryn Bishop-Sánchez states, the "Boiúna performance demonstrates Uýra's kindship of caring, belonging, enduring, and mourning. As she calls out the passers-by on the bridge above the *igarapé*, she laments the consequences of past ecological mismanagement as witnessed in the vulnerable present state of the waterways."[20] As the artist explains,

> In both essays, I repeated a ritual: during the two hours in which I transformed to receive Uýra, sitting on the banks of the *igarapé* that would be part of the portrait, I simply observed the passersby. Almost no one looked (or looks) toward the *igarapés*. As a landscape, it stands abandoned: the waters that make us are invisible and abject. But as soon as the photo performances began, all the commotion started attracting attention. People gathered, looked toward the *igarapé*, and began taking photos and videos. Suddenly, the invisible became visible.[21]



Figure 1
Caos (2018)
Photo: Matheus Belém.
Source: celeste.art.br



Figure 2
Series *Mil [quase] Mortos: Boiúna*, 2019.
Performer: Uýra Sodoma.
Photography/Editing: Matheus Belém.
Conception: Emerson Munduruku and Matheus Belém.
Source: wheretheleavesfall.com/

"Suddenly, the invisible became visible." As a ritual for transformation, the *Igarapé* and the community are sites where Boiúna becomes alive, the serpent as the social consciousness that reverses invisibility that urbanization imposes on Manaus waterways. For Uýra, performance operates as a form of mediumship, summoning the ghosts of the *igarapés* back into presence. Suspended between life and death, the *Igarapé* and its spirit, Boiúna, are being brought back to life. Reanimation comes by means of rising a consciousness of existence, and by restoring the fractured relations between the audience and rivers. Nature emerges as the voice of an "almost death" being, a "we:" the waters that "make us invisible and abject." The performance is a ritual of collective mourning that paradoxically brings back a life force through the spectral presence of Boiúna (Figure 3).



Figure 3
Series *Mil [quase] Mortos: Boiúna — Boiúna and Spectators*, 2019.
Performer: Uýra Sodoma.
Photography/Editing: Matheus Belém.
Conception: Emerson Munduruku & Matheus Belém.
Source: wheretheleavesfall.com/

In *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt describes the figure of the "seeing man," whose gaze organizes and ultimately possesses the world it observes, making imperial expansion by presenting itself as scientific curiosity or aesthetic appreciation.[22] Only those being seen—and being named—entered the ethnographic and botanical European catalog that shaped a new stage of global consciousness.[23] *Mil quase mortos* strategically challenges the domination of the gaze by means of one of the most important strategies of colonialism: mimesis. Performance emerges as a means of decolonizing the gaze. By becoming one with nature — dissolving the human body into the serpent Boiúna, into the debris of the igarapé, into the refuse that the city has deposited on its own waterways (Images 1–3) — the performer reenacts what Homi Bhabha defines as counter-mimesis, whereby the colonized employs repetition of the colonial model in ways that are inherently destabilizing. For Bhabha, colonial mimesis produces subjects who are "almost the same, but not quite," revealing the ambivalence at the heart of colonial authority.[24] In *Mil quase mortos* this logic is reversed and radicalized: it is not the colonized subject who mimics the colonizer, but the human body that mimics the nonhuman—the serpent, the river, the waste— in order to expose what colonial and extractive modernity has done to both. The performer's body, covered in river debris and barely distinguishable from the surrounding refuse is "almost nature, but not quite": it retains the human voice, the ceremonial headdress, the eyes that look back at the spectator, and it is precisely this residual human presence within the nonhuman figure that makes the performance so unsettling and so politically effective (Image 4). The colonial gaze, accustomed to classifying and possessing the natural world—what Pratt calls the "imperial eyes"—encounters in Boiúna something it cannot organize or domesticate: a figure that is neither fully human nor fully nature, that speaks from within the waste it inhabits, that addresses the spectator not as an observer but as an interlocutor accountable for what surrounds them.



Figure 4
Series *Mil [quase] Mortos: Boiúna*, 2019.
Performer: Uýra Sodoma.
Photography/Editing: Matheus Belém.
Conception: Emerson Munduruku & Matheus Belém.
Source: wheretheleavesfall.com/

In *Specters of Marx* (1993),[25] Jacques Derrida coins the term "hauntology" to propose a spectral ontology that displaces the metaphysics of presence at the core of Western thought. Unlike classical ontology, which centers on being, hauntology is concerned with what hovers at the edge of existence—neither fully present not fully gone. This absence-in-presence, the specter's refusal to be either fully here or fully gone, becomes the defining logic of Uýra Sodoma's work. *Mil Quase Mortos* directly invokes a subjectivity at the limit. Being "almost death," the Igarapé refuses to disappear, its agonizing voice still being heard thanks to the performer's artistic work. Read within the larger context of Pontes' art, the meanings of this spectral ontology can be traced to the origins of colonial erasure, whereby the colonized subject—both human and nonhuman—are rendered a non-beings, and vulnerable to extractive violence. When Derrida develops the concept of hauntology, Marx's ghosts are looming in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, posing a fundamentally ethical question: what to do with an inheritance that Europe wants to erase but cannot. From this uncomfortable fact emerges one of the essay's most powerful ideas: listening to the dead who have not finished speaking is not a nostalgic gesture but a moral obligation; to ignore them is a form of violence. As Derrida argues, and as Avery Gordon and Jo Labanyi would later expand, the specter is not a metaphor for an absence, but a subjectivity located between life and death that carries an unfinished claim on history. For Gordon, the ghost is precisely the "improperly buried body"—those rendered invisible or disposable by social structures—whose return interrupts the present's desire for narrative closure. [26] Jo Labanyi argues for this return as an ethical demand: the dead who were never properly mourned insist on being heard, and to ignore them is to repeat the violence that silenced them in the first place.[27]

But what happens when the ghost is not a person, but a river, a forest, an entire ecosystem? *Mil quase mortos* extends hauntology's framework into a new direction.

In Uýra's performances, ghosts emerge from polluted waters, where boundaries between the mourning subject and mourned ecosystem dissolve. The shifting of pronouns is revealing—"the waters that make *us* invisible and abject"—signaling that artist and river share the same abjection and invisibility. As the embodied ghost of the *igarapé*, the serpent-spirit Boiúna, though almost dead, continues to speak. Manaus' *Igarapés* are those "improperly buried bodies:" reduced to rubbish, ignored in their unbearable ugliness, yet still traversing the city with spectral persistence. Performance brings those after-lives to the present, and it inhabits their invisibility. Manaus, once celebrated as a symbol of Brazil's modernizing ambition, emerges as a haunted landscape, crossed by the specters of its own modernity.

Anibal Quijano argues that European modernity and colonial power were co-constituted: the very paradigms of rationality, knowledge, and humanity that modernity claimed as universal were forged in the process of colonial domination and then imposed on the rest of the world as if they were neutral or inevitable. Modernity's universalism was, from the start, a colonial universalism.[28] Uýra Sodoma's performances make evident the relevance of this connection. The specters that traverse Manaus are not simply the ruins of a failed modernity but rather the product of a coloniality of power that lies at the foundation of Brazilian modernity itself. As the other side of colonial domination, modernity also requires the instrumentalization of Amazonian peoples, rivers and ecosystems, and their reduction to the category of the non-beings—objects—in order to sustain the violence of extractive capitalism. Uýra's artistic practice challenges such dynamics by mimicking the colonial system that transformed specific beings—those categorized as both humans and non-humans—into objects of the European gaze, natural resources, and bodies subjected to enslavement. Furthermore, Uýra inhabits the threshold between invisibility and hypervisibility, the space of the ghost. Her transformation into nature is a form of camouflage, but one that suddenly fails: the figure that was meant to blend into the background erupts into the foreground, forcing a recognition that had been systematically withheld. It is in this oscillation—between seeing and being overlooked, between nature as backdrop and nature as a body and a voice—that counter-mimesis operates. Counter-mimesis is, in this sense, the performative method by which the hauntological return is staged: Uýra does not describe the ghost of the igarapé or advocate on its behalf but embodies it, gives it a voice, and directs that voice at the spectators on the bridge above, implicating them in the haunting they have inherited. (Image 4) The serpent that speaks from the garbage—barely breathing, almost dead, but speaking—is the figure of a history that colonial modernity tried to silence and who refuses, in each performance, in each moment of collective attention, to accept that silencing. Mourning, here, becomes a collective and interspecies act of resistance: not the private grief of individuals, but the claim of a community—human and nonhuman alike—to be heard, to be grieved. In both *Mil quase mortos* (2019) and *Manaus: uma cidade, uma aldeia* (2020), Manaus emerges as a living archive of colonial and environmental histories, where water



Figure 5
Manaus, uma cidade na aldeia, 2020, still 1.
Performer: Uýra Sodoma, in collaboration with Thyago Nogueira. Commissioned by Instituto Moreira Salles (Programa Convida).

functions as an agent of memory—an idea that leads us to examine more closely how these performances stage the city's haunted hydroscape.

SPECTRAL BAROQUE: ALLEGORICAL MANAUS

For ruins are the favorite habitat for ghosts.

Throughout Walter Benjamin's writings, one idea emerges with particular force: the centrality of material culture in understanding how history is remembered. First developed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, his notion of allegory becomes a crucial lens for interpreting the aesthetic and historical significance of ruins, as it shows how allegorical structures and imagery inscribe death and impermanence within a material form. For Benjamin, allegory is not merely a rhetorical or symbolic device but a structure of perception: a way of seeing history as a ruin, the scattered remnants of a once-coherent world, and modernity as built upon forgotten lives and the persistence of loss.[29]

Uýra Sodoma's *Manaus: uma cidade na aldeia* (Manaus: A City in the Village) stages the history of Manaus from an allegorical perspective.[30] Commissioned by the Instituto Moreira Salles, and created and performed in November of 2020, this video performance begins and ends at the margins of Rio Negro. It is significant that the artist choses the Amazon's large tributary as the starting point. The Amazonian region rose to global prominence during the nineteenth century's rubber boom, and since then, it has remained central to Brazilian history because of its strategic importance, a military-era industrial free trade zone, and its now-critical role in global climate politics.[31] Structured into four acts, the performance centers on key historical sites: Praça Dom Pedro II, Teatro Amazonas, and the port. Uýra transforms into a reptilian figure, her body adorned with scales and organic matter. She moves through Manaus a creature's gait—advancing and

retreating in slow, deliberate steps, as if dragging her body across in the asphalt the way a reptile crosses hostile terrain. This choreography is inseparable from an off-screen critical monologue that exposes one of the central contradictions in Brazilian history: the thrive to modernize without ever fully reckoning with the painful legacies of slavery and colonization.

The first act, "Pra memória guardar. Nasceu de costas" ("To Preserve Memory. Born Backwards") opens with a direct address to the audience, Uýra speaking from a first-person plural perspective. (Figure 5) "E para muitos, os presentes e palmatórias. Por inúmeras as noites de fome por causa de nossa língua. Reduziram os brotos para que houvesse a fuga. Pedaços de nossos corpos entregues como troféu. E por isso nasci de costas."[32] Some expressions resist translation such as *palmatória*—a flat wooden paddle used to strike the open palm—that was deployed across colonial Brazilian society: on plantations, and in Jesuit missions and aldeias to enforce conversion and suppress indigenous languages.[33] Similarly, the expression, *Reduziram os brotos para que houvesse a fuga*, condenses the colonial logic of violent repression, including the killing of indigenous peoples, as well as the destruction of their knowledges and traditions. Uýra sets her speech at the roots of the colonial trauma, while she uses first-person plural pronouns to engage as the protagonist and the keeper of this collective memory ("pra memoria guardar"). *Nasci de costas*—"I was born backwards"—frames dispossession as the condition of her existence: she arrives into a world that has already turned its back on her, inhabiting the wounds of a past that the present has yet to resolve. She offers the audience "*presentes e palamatórias*"—gifts and paddles—invoking and inverting the colonial gift relation, the structure by which European missionaries presented subjugation as benevolence.

Act 2, "Vovó presente" cadê vovó? Estranha vovó" ("Grandma is here, is present; Where did grandma go? Grandma is strange") centers on the paradox of architectural beauty as a cover for colonial violence. The video lingers on her feet against the cobblestones of Praça Dom Pedro II, where 300 funerary urns were unearthed in 2002, confirming that the city's seat of colonial power was literally built on the remains of her indigenous ancestors:

> Um bonito prédio, né? É uma beleza arquitetônica, com as origens de Manaus. Daqui, barões acendiam charutos com notas de cem dólares enquanto comandavam a construção de Manaus e o alargamento da Amazônia. Essa modernidade neoclássica cobriu o natural. Uma bela época que nada tem de bela. E ali dentro, exibidas em sala como objetos, estão as urnas funerárias de meus parentes, que lá são chamados povos nativos pré-colombianos.[34]

The phrase *uma bela época que nada tem de* (a beautiful era with nothing beautiful about it) crystallizes the performance's central critique: neoclassical modernity served to cover over the violence of colonial dispossession, rendering it invisible beneath the surface of architectural grandeur. As Uyra begins walking toward the city, she extends this critique to the broader mechanisms of historical erasure:

"O Paço nada tem de liberdade. Me incomoda e me faz falar — não o que está aqui é real sendo visto, mas o que está aqui é real: o que sempre esteve aqui e não é visto. Tô indo, né? Já está indo de verdade, mas está indo de verdade? (…) As páginas brancas abertas, ensinou-se que ficamos no século 16, que índio não existe mais. Por isso, de novo — no vírus, o governo brasileiro enterrou muitos parentes meus como não indígenas. E dessa vez eu vi."[35]

Act 2 centers on the topic of invisibility. The pedagogical project of the modern nation-state produced a narrative in which Indigenous peoples had disappeared, a recurrent narrative already present in the sixteenth-century theatrical productions of the Jesuit missionary José de Anchieta. Confronting Manaus's urban landscape, Uýra recognizes the success of the "civilizing" process shared by state and church: "Um jardim—os meus, que um dia nos teriam como lendas. Parece que o teatro de Anchieta funcionou. Esse dia chegou. Ás páginas brancas abertas, ensinou-se que ficamos no século XVI, que indio não existe mais. Por isso, de novo, no virus, o governo brasileiro enterrou muitos parentes meus como não indígenas. E dessa vez eu vi."[36] This closing line marks a moment of self-awareness, echoing the artist's decision to change their name from Pontes to Murukundu in recognition of their ancestral origins. Uýra Sodoma's reflections foreground education and art as tools for preserving epistemological violence. Pontes' artistic practice belongs to a larger group of contemporary Indigenous artists in Brazil that challenges institutional exclusions while reclaiming narrative authority, linking artistic practice to political struggle, historical redress, and the defense of Indigenous rights amid ongoing state violence.[37]

The urban landscape presents as a ruinous surface revealing layers of history in a complex Baroque-like assemblage. The video performance's aesthetics reinforces its allegorical structure through a deliberately rough and fragmentary editing. A persistent background noise—a motorcycle engine that intrudes upon the soundscape—mingles with the sharp, almost piercing call of a bird, producing an unsettling sonic dissonance. The repetition of certain images—Uýra walking backward through the streets, her movements alternating between ritual and defiance—further denies the viewer the comfort of narrative closure. This open-ended, non-linear montage enacts what might be called a Baroque form of resistance: a visual and auditory excess that disorients perception and disrupts representational order. A similar structure of fragmentation governs Uýra's spoken monologue, whose irony underscores self-reflection on her own experience of invisibility within colonial modernity.

Manaus, uma cidade na aldeia unfolds through an allegorical structure marked by spatial and temporal discontinuities. As a challenge to a linear historical time, what emerges in this performance is a spectral temporality. In Jacques Derrida's words: "Haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docilely given in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar."[38] In Act 4, "The flooding has begun again. The river rises once more," Uýra returns to the water, removes her beaded headdress, and

finally looks directly at the viewer: "Se Manaus começou de costas para o rio, o para a vó e para quem é de verdade, nessa época do ano, quando as águas voltam a encher, as águas trazem mais águas: são espaços de liberdade."[39] In this final act, the idea of being "born backwards" becomes a symbol of an entire society, trapped in the spectral temporality of trauma. This backwards movement suggests not regression but the reliving of fragments of history experienced, through the walking in the city, as a material experience of textures, streets and surfaces that build a haptic memory map.[40]

As Derrida reminds us, "A specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back."[41] The river traces the flows of a memory that is relived through a hauntological reversal: in its comings and goings, the flows of a history reveal, bring back, in a cyclical movement, spaces of freedom. Of the 2.3 million square miles that compose the Amazon rainforest, more than 320,000 consist of low-lying wetlands adapted to life both above and below the waterline. Each year, the rainy season inundates these regions with as much as forty feet of water, establishing a cyclical rhythm of submersion and renewal. In *Manaus: uma cidade na aldeia*, Uýra transforms this seasonal pulse into a metaphor for the movements of history itself: a continual ebb and flow through which buried memories and silenced knowledges, like floodwaters, inevitably return to the surface. The performance is not only an aesthetic gesture but an epistemic act of witnessing. It invites the audience to enter the rhythm of the Amazon itself—to perceive time as fluid and memory as sedimentary, layered, and alive.

CONCLUSION: OF OTHER SPECIES

Uýra Sodoma's performances mirror the ecological fragility of water while, at the same time, her water-based performances reflect the beauty emerging in the peaceful coexistence among species. When they started their performances, Emerson Pontes was concerned with spreading ecological and environmental awareness, but eventually their work evolved to include a discussion of heteronormativity.[42] Against this logic, Uyra's *bicha e planta* refuses taxonomic containment: it is neither one nor the other, but a relational becoming that disrupts the boundaries through which both nature and human populations have been classified, ranked, and controlled. Queer ecology and indigenous epistemologies converge as forms of resistance, undoing the separation between human and nonhuman, culture and nature, challenging the racialized and sexualized ordering of life itself.

I would like to conclude with a final example of Uýra Sodoma's queer ecologies. In one of the artist's Instagram posts, they poetically evoke the floating islands of the Amazon, the *Mataոá*, as symbols of the TLGBQIPN+ pride in Brazil.[43] *Mataոá* are floating islands of life that drift along the blackwater rivers of the Amazon carrying seeds, plants, and animals downstream, regenerating the Amazonian rainforest. In the artist's words, the rivers filled with *Matanás* turn green, red, yellow, and blue—colors that represent the lives of the TLGBQIPN+ community in Brazil. Mataոá people—as those belonging to the TLGBQIPN+

Community—bring life, a life that resists the monoculture of heteronormativity and racism: "Today, June 28, the Day of TLGBQIPN+ Pride, I want to remind us of Mataпá. We, whose existence is daily denied or questioned because we rebel against the monoculture imposed by the little (dull) gray men who have lost the meaning of what Nature is; We who are a beautiful and plural Floresta, who turn Life's turbulent banzeiros (river waves) into a force to go on; Who, even when we fear the trembling waters, keep floating, letting life multiply—affirming our presence EVERY DAY with pride in our worlds. We are MATAПÁ-PEOPLE."[44]

Mataпá-people, as amphibians—a source of inspiration for a large body of their work—are able to adapt and propagate diversity despite hostile environments, an allegory for queer and trans existence. Hybridity is at the core of Uýra Sodoma's articulation of a queer body—*bicha e planta*; it functions as an aesthetic critique of the classificatory regimes that underpin both scientific taxonomy and social hierarchy. These hybrid forms unsettle the boundaries between species, genders, and epistemologies, inviting reflection on how such divisions are produced and sustained. Like amphibians in their mutable habitats, Uýra's hybrids inhabit zones of transition, where solidarity and new languages of coexistence can emerge.

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1 A note on pronouns: The performer, Emerson Pontes, identifies as non-binary; accordingly, I use the pronouns, they/them pronouns when referring to the performer. Uýra Sodoma, as described by Pontes, is a feminine persona, and I therefore, use she/her pronouns when referring to the character.

2 Paulo Enrique Trindade Correa, "Uýra Sodoma, a mata que anda," *Gênero, Etnografias e Performances Rituais*, edited by Juliana Farias de Souza and Fernando de Figueiredo Balieiro, (Hucitec Editora, 2022),118.

3 The name Uýra derives from the Tupi-Guarani form Iara or Yara that signifies beauty and feminine authority, often linked to a water goddess. She is a symbol of water, strength, and purification. Sodoma, the Portuguese version of Sodom (as in Sodom and Gomorrah), is a term more broadly known in Western circles than Uýra and has several connotations through its Biblical designation; these include a demonized place that defies authority, inhabited by sin. Kathryn Bishop Sánchez, "Queering Ecology and the Embodiment of Diversity: The Underflows of Uýra Sodoma's Performantive Art," (Portuguese Studies), 40, no.1, (2024): 83.

4 For a visual record of Pontes' body painting process and the nonhuman transformations it produces, see Juliana Curi, dir., *Uýra: The Rising Forest* (Abispa Films/PBS POV, 2022), available online at https://www.pbs.org/pov/films/uyratherisingforest/.)

5 *Me montar* is a Brazilian Portuguese queer expression that literally means "to assemble oneself" or "to put oneself together." "Em carne de Bicha e Planta. Me montar é uma viagem constante de reconhecimento do corpo que vivo. Acho que a gente se engana quando diz que já conhece tudo sobre nosso corpo. Ele é um mundo de lugares fantásticos e autênticos, mas muitos deles permanecem inexplorados porque são locais que nos foram proibidos." Uýra Sodoma, (@uyrasodoma, April 15, 2018). https://www.instagram.com/p/Bhmm0R3A7R-/

6 Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material, Queering the Archive*, (Litwin Books), (2014), 4.

7 Oscar Muñoz, *Dissidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 17.

8 Muñoz, *Dissidentifications,* 97.

9 Gislaine Pagotto, "Confluências entre arte e natureza na contemporaneidade em corpos latino-americanos [como entidades] nas artes visuais: Ana Mendieta, Panema e Uýra Sodoma," *Revista Científica/FAP,* 28, no. 1 (2023): 361.

10 Paulo Henrique Trinidade Corrêa, "Uýra Sodoma, a mata que anda," 114–115.

11 The rubber boom (1850–1920) brought extraordinary wealth to Manaus — visible today in the Teatro Amazonas and other European-style monuments — while subjecting Indigenous and caboclo populations to systems of debt bondage and forced labor that amounted to slavery. The collapse of Brazil's rubber monopoly plunged the region into prolonged economic decline. The Manaus Free Trade Zone, established by the military dictatorship in 1967, sought to reverse this decline through industrial development, attracting manufacturers with tax incentives and spurring rapid urban growth; it also, however, accelerated the destruction of surrounding ecosystems and the displacement of riverside and Indigenous communities. See Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850–1920* (Stanford University Press, 1983), and Adrián Lerner Patrón, "An Empire of Beads? The Making of the Manaus Free Trade Zone," *Iberoamericana*, XXV.28 (2005): 11–25.

12 In *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler reconceives grief as a fundamentally political condition that reveals the relational nature of human life. Rather than a private emotion, grief exposes forms of dependency and ethical responsibility that bind individuals into political communities. At the same time, Butler critiques the "hierarchy of grief" produced in the post-9/11 context, asking whose lives are recognized as grievable and thus as fully human. (20, 22).

13 Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief,* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 156.

14 Viviane Saleh-Hanna, "Black Feminist Hauntology. Rememory the Ghosts of Abolition," (*Champ pénal/Penal Field*), Vol. XII, 2015, Accessed, March 25, 2026. https://doi.org/10.4000/champpenal.9168.

15 Viviane Saleh-Hanna contextualizes the definition of rememory in the continuity of structural violence that links plantation/slavery to modern prison/penitentiary system. In this framework, rememory rewrites historical memory as embedded in the bodies that endure intergenerational violence.

16 The original quote of *Beloved* that references the concept of rememory: "Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, (Alfred Knopf, 1987), 35.

17 Nancy Tuana coins "viscous porosity" to describe how bodies and environments

interpenetrate. She develops the concept to show how events like Hurricane Katrina, cannot be separated into purely "natural" and purely "human-induced" causes—environment and body, matter and history, are always already mixed. Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." In *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, (Indiana University Press, 2008), 192.

18 Igarapés are the narrow, winding, shallow channels and creeks that cut through the Amazon rainforest, acting as natural tributaries to major rivers. In Manaus, these intricate waterways historically served as vital lifelines for fishing and transportation, but rapid urban expansion has left most of the city's 150 urban igarapés severely degraded and polluted.

19 Uýra: The Rising Forest, Performances by Uýra Sodoma, directed by Juliana Curi, (2022, PBS Distribution/POV), Accessed 5 Oct. 2025, https://www.pbs.org/pov/films/uyratherisingforest/. Sections of the performance can be watched in the documentary.

20 Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez, "Queering Ecology and the Embodiment of Diversity: The Underflows of Uýra Sodoma's Performative Art," *Portuguese Studies*, 40, no.1 (2024): 92.

21 Uýra Sodoma, "Urgências de Agora," Accessed October, 3, 2025. https://4parede.com/16-urgencias-do-agora-despertar-nos-as-florestas-que-dormem-embaixo-das-ruas.

22 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7–11. Pratt lso develops the concept in relation to Alexander Von Humboldt, 120–126. She explains the role in the formation of a European consciousness and observational practices around nature: "Natural history called upon human intervention (intellectual, mainly) to compose an order. The eighteenth-century classificatory systems created the task of locating every species on the planet, extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings (the chaos), and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system (the order—book, collection, or garden) with its new written, secular European name. Linnaeus himself took credit for adding 8,000 new items to the corpus during his lifetime." Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (Routledge, 1992), 125.

23 Mary Louise Pratt explains the role such classification of nature had in the formation of a European consciousness and observational practices around nature: "Natural history called upon human intervention (intellectual, mainly) to compose an order. The eighteenth-century classificatory systems created the task of locating every species on the planet, extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings (the chaos), and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system (the order—book, collection, or garden) with its new written, secular European name. Linnaeus himself took credit for adding 8,000 new items to the corpus during his lifetime." Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation, (Routledge), 1992.

24 Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man. The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," October, 18 (1984): 125–133.

25 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,* translated by Peggy Kamuf, (Routledge, 1994).

26 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 123.

27 Jo Labanyi describes history as an unfinished narrative where the present is haunted by the revenants of the past. This carries a moral imperative: to bear witness to those denied voice and memory, the "living dead" who were not allowed to leave a trace. "History and Hauntology," 80.

28 See Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21. no.2 (2007), 168-175.

29 Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, translated by John Osborn, (Verso), 1998.

30 *Manaus, Uma Cidade na Aldeia*, performed by Uyra Sodoma, with collaboration of Thyago Nogueira, (2020; Programa Convida, Instituto Moreira Salles), Accessed April 2, 2026, https://ims.com.br/convida/uyra-sodoma.

31 See Adrián Lerner Patrón, "An Empire of Beads? The Making of the Manaus Free Trade Zone," *Iberoamericana: Revista de Historia de América*, XXV. 28, 2005: 11–25; Godfrey Browder, *Rainforest Cities: Urbanization, Development, and Globalization of the Brazilian Amazon* (Columbia University Press, 1997); and Deusamir Pereira, *Amazônia (in) sustentável: Zona Franca de Manaus: estudo e análise,* (Editora Valer, 2005).

32 "E para muitos, os presentes e palmatórias. Por inúmeras as noites de fome por causa de nossa língua. Reduziram os brotos para que houvesse a fuga. Pedaços de nossos corpos entregues como troféu. E por isso nasci de costas". (Uýra Sodoma, "Programa Convida" 0:22–0:43).

33 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "A inconstância da alma selvagem," in *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros ensaios de antropologia* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002). Viveiros de Castro argues that Jesuit missionaries in Brazil encountered a form of indigenous subjectivity fundamentally unlike anything they had faced in the Old World. Among European pagans, the missionary knew what he was up against: rival dogmas, priests, liturgies. In Brazil, by contrast, the Word of God was received eagerly by one ear and dismissed by the other. The obstacle was not a competing belief system but what Viveiros de Castro calls *inconstância* — an indifference to dogma, a refusal to choose or fix belief. As Vieira himself lamented, the peoples of Brazil were "the most brutish, ungrateful, inconstant, and difficult to teach of all peoples in the world." This perceived inconstancy — registered not only in matters of faith but as a defining trait of Amerindian character — became the justification for increasingly coercive methods of conversion, of which the *palmatória* was one instrument. See chapter, "O mármore e a murta: sobre a inconstância da alma selvagem," 125-185.

34 "Um bonito prédio, né? É uma beleza arquitetônica, com as origens de Manaus. Daqui, barões acendiam charutos com notas de cem dólares enquanto comandavam a construção de Manaus e o alargamento da Amazônia. Essa modernidade neoclássica cobriu o natural. Uma bela época que nada tem de bela. E ali dentro, exibidas em sala como objetos, estão as urnas funerárias de meus parentes, que lá são chamados povos nativos pré-colombianos." (Programa convida 1:06-1:50)."

35 "O Paço nada tem de liberdade. Me incomoda e me faz falar — não o que está aqui é real sendo visto, mas o que está aqui é real: o que sempre esteve aqui e não é visto. Tô indo, né? Já está indo de verdade, mas está indo de verdade? (…) As páginas brancas abertas, ensinou-se que ficamos no século 16, que índio não existe mais. Por isso, de novo — no vírus, o governo brasileiro enterrou muitos parentes meus como não indígenas. E dessa vez eu vi." (Programa convida 2:42-3:08)

36 "A small garden—my people, who one day would be treated as legends. It seems that Anchieta's theater worked. That day has come: on blank, open pages, it was taught that we remained in the sixteenth century, that the Indigenous people no longer exist. That is why, once again, through the virus and the Brazilian government, many of my relatives were buried as non-Indigenous. And this time, I saw it."

37 Emerson Pontes began their own identification as "Indigenous" around 2022–2023, when they began adopting the last name, Munduruku, which designates an Indigenous ethnic group traditionally located in small communities along the Tapajós river and its tributaries, at the south-eastern end of the state of Amazonas and in the south-western part of the state of Pará—the state where Emerson was born and lived until moving to Manaus at age five. Bishop-Sánchez, Queering Ecology and the Embodiment of Diversity, 82.

38 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 3.

39 If Manaus began with its back turned to the river—to the grandmother, to those who truly belong—at this time of year, when the waters rise again, the waters bring more waters: they are spaces of freedom."

40 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 199.

41 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

42 "When Uýra appeared in 2016, I was already saturated and very hungry, thirsty, to take the life conservation agenda to other places and understanding this life not only as the life of the animal, the plant, the forest, but the transvestite, the black woman, the peripheral being. Life in a broad meaning, in fact." "Uýra Where the Leaves Fall." *Where the Leaves Fall*, issue 12. Accessed 10/04/2025, https://wheretheleavesfall.com/stories/uyra.

43 In Brazil, the acronym TLGBQIPN+ stands for Trans, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Pansexual, and Non-binary (plus other identities not explicitly listed). It's a variation of the more globally familiar "LGBTQIA+," but reordered to center trans identities.

44 "Hoje, 28 de junho, Dia do Orgulho TLGBQIPN+, quero nos lembrar de Mataná. Nós, cuja existência todo dia é negada/questionada, por renunciarmos à monocultura imposta pelos homenzinhos cinza, que perderam o sentido do que é Natureza; nós que somos floresta bonita e plural, que fazemos dos duros banzeiros impulso para seguir; que embora as vezes tenhamos medo do balanço da Vida, sempre continuemos a flutuar e vidas proliferar, demarcando-nos TODO DIA com Orgulho nos mundos. Somos GENTE-MATAПÁ." Uýra Sodoma, @Uýra Sodoma, Instagram Post, June 28, 2024.