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ARTICLE

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES, (COUNTER)VISUALITIES, AND MODERNITY
THE ACTIVIST AND ARCHIVAL INTERVENTIONS OF PAULO TAVARES

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Abstract

Beginning with the assumption that the climate crisis is a crisis of colonialism and coloniality, this article discusses Paulo Tavares – an architect, researcher and activist who engages in ecological-political struggles throughout but not limited to South America. Throughout this article considers Tavares in view of decolonial, Africana and radical continental theory in order to elucidate his epistemological, ethical and methodological principles for researchers in the Global North. Focuses include the employment of research by Tavares and those he collaborates with to demystify colonial archives, invert modern visual technologies and produce critical discourses in order to fashion what can be described as counter histories and counter archives. This includes the appropriation and subversion of colonial photographic archival material and the production of technically rendered digital images that are used to expose the dual anti-ecological and anti-Indigenous attacks throughout the Amazon Forest, and beyond. Elsewhere Tavares' partnerships with Indigenous activists and deployment of Indigenous epistemologies to criticize and decentre modern epistemology are considered in view of the goal of enacting political-legal change within official modern structures of knowledge and power. Specifically, the article details how the act and application of counter archival material within organizations, such as the museum, gallery, university and court, exposes the ingrained inability of modern structures to respond to climate breakdown and decolonial demands.

Keywords: Modernity, Colonialism, Histories, Archive, Paulo Tavares.

INTRODUCTION

Faced with the collapse of the earth systems and the continuing globally articulated demand to address the ongoing legacy of colonialism, the centres of academia in the Global North are increasingly producing knowledge for the purposes of decarbonization and decolonization. Both inside and outside the institution efforts to change humanity's relationship to the environment in the Netherlands, where I write from, have largely been conceptualized in isolation from the enduring "political, epistemic, scientific, legal, and philosophical struggles to dismantle the colonial structures of living together."[1] As argued by Malcom Ferdinand, the lack of engagement with "the colonial question" has led academics and activists alike to "overlook the fact that both historical colonization and contemporary structural racism are at the centre of destructive ways of inhabiting the Earth."[2] Compounded by the ethical and moral responsibility of institutions who historically fulfilled and in many respects continue to fulfil key functions within the project of modernity – constituted by interlinked interventions into the world's environmental and social systems – academics must conceptualize and thereby link the two struggles together as a matter of urgency.

Through the touchpoint of architect, researcher and activist Paulo Tavares, this article discusses the epistemologies of and activities within multiple intersecting alliances based across the world, including in South and North America/Abya Yala and Europe. These groups jointly struggle towards Indigenous land sovereignty and against the violent environmental extractivism and abuse enacted throughout the globe by public-private partnerships. The various communities Tavares has engaged with partake and theorize endeavours that cross boundaries between political action, education, research and art. This also includes projects conducted in the fields and official spaces of academia, heritage, law, design and architecture.[3] To a significant degree Tavares's participation revolves around synergistic ecological-political struggles and the fashioning of critical discourses. Recurrent throughout the various levels of activism is Tavares's involvement in the collective generation of visual counter archives including but not limited to rearranged colonial photographs and new digitally produced technical images. The act of creating new archival material constitutes and is constituted by interventions into modern state-corporate organizations – such as the museum, gallery, university and court – with the intention to enact political-legal change within official structures, for example, the granting of legal protections by the state to a given social group, in addition to challenging the way these structures conceive of and thereby operate in the world.

This article considers Tavares's production of visual counter-archives in view of theory that overlaps with his stated emancipatory and ecological intentions. This includes scholarship at the junctures between decolonial, Africana and what in Europe is referred to as radical continental theory. Rather than seeking to evaluate or taxonomize the intellectual concepts used by and activities of Tavares, this article foregrounds the epistemological, ethical and methodological principles that

guide the communities he engages with. Theory to this end facilitates the location of ideological "common ground" and potentialities of alliances inside and outside of the academy.[4] A particular focus is how decolonial theory and praxis can be generated *vis-à-vis* visual archives within the context of modernity's traditional knowledge producing structures.

Beginning with an overview of Tavares's epistemological and ethical outlook, the first section of the article outlines understandings of the past within decolonial, Africana and radical continental theory. This entails a discussion of the concepts of colonialism, coloniality, western knowledge and knowledge production, History, the archive, modern visual technology, histories and counter-archives. Highlighting the interconnectedness of ecological and decolonial demands and strategies, this section provides framework with which to elucidate Tavares's work. The second part of the article focuses on the projects of "Des-Habitat", those carried out in collaboration with *Forensic Architecture* and "Trees, Vines, Palms and Other Architectural Monuments." Included is a discussion of how Tavares appropriates architectural, spatial and visual technologies as a means of producing counter visual archives. Additionally, the use of retellings of history are discussed in the context of their application within the political-legal structures of modernity.

EPISTEMOLOGIES AND APPROACHES

Tavares and the groups he engages with are informed by a plurality of epistemological frameworks. Amongst other influences there are traces of an understanding of the past shared in decolonial, Africana and radical continental spheres throughout his work. Broadly this shared history conceptualizes the epoch of modernity as the production and reproduction of the contemporary "transnational, capitalist order" that was established by the European conquest of the New World, transatlantic slavery and colonization from the 15th century onwards.[5] Decolonial scholarship describes modernity as being constituted by both colonialism, described by Maldonado-Torres as the "political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation", and coloniality, that is, the "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations."[6] Tavares focuses on both the ongoing colonial projects of political and economic control, such as the continued incursions by settler-colonial groups into Indigenous lands, in combination with the hierarchical "authoritarian and discriminatory mentality and form of sociability" that is a product of the homogenizing, monopolizing dynamics of coloniality.[7]

Modernity can be seen as the dominant ideology of the "ruling exploiting" class which was established through conquest, slavery and colonialism.[8] This group's "'own' explanation of history" – referred to in this article as History – serves "its class interests, cements its unity, and maintains the masses under its

exploitation."[9] As outlined by Jackson, modernity is premised on the reduction of non-western forms of knowing to chaotic and incomplete forms of reason.[10] In turn this produces an epistemic hierarchy that crowns European thought and its various colonially mediated mutations as an inviolable form of reason or, in other words, the only cognitive and linguistic means through which reality can be accurately represented. As evident in the binaries produced by modernity to interpret the world, for example, "nature/society, savage/civilized, developed/underdeveloped", the ideology of modernity enforces a historically contingent, limiting and limited "conceptual orthodoxy" that masquerades as ahistorical and universal.[11]

For Tavares, the hierarchical ordering of forms of knowledge by no means ceases or has ceased following the end of colonialism. Instead, in line with Mignolo's following description, he infers that contemporary "master paradigms" – from universal categories in academia, design, architecture to law and beyond – are entangled with "imperial desires" by their claim to singularly reflect reality.[12] This is evident in his exposition of individuals emanating from the official institutions of western knowledge production, including "the north American archaeologist Betty J. Meggers", the sociologists Gilberto Freyre and Werneck Sodré and "the urban planner of Brasília" Lucio Costa, as complicit in the project of modernity.[13] Contrasting the professed objectivity and neutrality of western epistemology's claims to reveal the truth, Tavares situates modern academic thought in view of the social networks, relations and historical contingencies that it constitutes and is constituted by. For example, Meggers's interpretation of Indigenous civilization as 'limited' due to "the incapacity of the tropical forest soil to sustain intense agriculture" is positioned as a product of, in part, her localized Euro-American metrics of progress.[14] In this case, a successful civilization is synonymous with that which erases biodiversity for the purposes of monoculturalizing agriculture and establishing dwellings cleaved from nature. An unsuccessful, underdeveloped civilization by extension is one that does not follow western practices and interpretations of the relationship between humanity and nature. Highlighting the Achuar's conceptualization of "the forest as an extension rather than the outside of the village space" in view of Megger's diagnosis, Tavares demonstrates the colonial dynamics of supposedly neutral scholars who profess to be able to speak for others.[15] Likewise technologically western means of representing the world, for example, advanced digitally rendered images, are within dominant ideology conceived to be objective, transparent reflections of reality. Photographs and video, for instance, are viewed to be adequate mediums to be used to establish the truth of a past event within a legal setting over, for example, Indigenous forms of storytelling. To this end the control of image technology and its positioning as superior to other forms of representing reality can too be seen as exclusionary in that if a claim to truth is not produced using a western technology of knowledge, it risks being labelled as corrupted.

Tavares also adopts a critical stance towards what Benjamin describes as the archive. Envisioned as the repository of all sources considered to be accurate, reliable fragments of the past, and as such a material manifestation and site of

sustaining a given historical outlook, the archive's self-representation as a neutral vessel is exposed as a fallacy. Instead, here the archive is conceptualized as a schema that ascribes value to objects ossified within it according to the regional epistemic principles of the West – principles which are draped in garments of universality. Historian of the Middle Passage Smallwood elaborates this notion by arguing that the archive acts to naturalize the West's particular historical perspective, by neutralizing others' through the casting of alternative understandings as non-existent, ahistoric or underdeveloped and therefore unworthy of note. The archive's unequal ethical consideration of racialized groups reifies the hierarchical and totalizing notions of the ways in which the past can be interpreted by claiming to be transparent and universally legitimate rather than the product of a particular historical vantage point. In this sense the archive embodies "the process of colonial violence".[16] Smallwood uses the example of slave ship accountancy logs to elucidate this point, noting that the transformation of details of victims lives into homogenous, banal economic data construed in terms of (un)successful trading voyages serves to create "comforting and harmonious stories" out of barbarous events.[17] One can determine that even if future generations condemn the morality of past historical actors, by assuming the neutrality of the archive the mode by which the past is interpreted and related to is repeated – the enslaved remain numbers on a balance sheet and antiblack slavery remains a 'trade', that is, a civilized form of economic behaviour.

Rather than achieving hegemony through accident or merit, Tavares's understanding of colonialism and coloniality posit that the triumph of western knowledge was achieved through the joint ecological destruction, genocide and "epistemicide" that occurred and is occurring throughout modernity.[18] Visual scholar Mirzoeff concurs by arguing that the "inevitability" of History's narrative of superiority and its archive's claim to embody objective truth rests upon an endless cycle of violence.[19] Specifically the aims and functions of "[c]lassifying, separating, and aestheticizing", so as to ultimately control and justify that control, was and continues to be at the core of the operations of (visual) power in modernity.[20] It is in this context that Tavares enacts "epistemic disobedience" as a means to combat the effects of colonialism and coloniality "*experienced* by all the inhabitants of the globe" through practices of history.[21] This in part can be seen as deriving from the acknowledgement that different "modes of knowing, being irremediably partial and situated, will have different consequences and effects on the world."[22] In practice this constitutes the application of varying forms of knowledge according to the ethical and political priorities of a given group, thereby "coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes."[23] This is reflected by Tavares's critical engagement of western epistemologies with non-western epistemologies as a means of challenging the assumptions of colonially derived forms of knowledge through exposition and contrast, in turn "recovering" and mobilizing the "emancipatory potential of science."[24] This engenders appropriating modernity's material and ideological infrastructure for emancipatory and ecological ends. Tavares's critical engagement with visual

technologies complicit in modernity in this light turns the products of modernity against itself.[25] Within this matrix knowledge becomes disentangled from notions of cognitive superiority and is instead attached to utility for a given community.[26] The role of the academy and institutions in this light becomes structured by the respect of, in the case of Tavares's engagements with the communities of the Amazon forest, Indigenous sovereignty and an understanding of the historically cognitively violent role played by official, western knowledge producing centres within modernity. In turn the exchange of knowledge and research relationships are structured around accountability "to the collective" and an inversion of the hoarding, exclusionary production of knowledge that traditionally characterized and continues to characterize occidental academic and institutional organizations.[27] This can be said to be guided in part by the decolonial value of "self-reflexivity" that "productively reshapes the context of practices into the motive and engine of actions that do not simply repeat their contexts" – such a repetition here would be the complicity of Tavares, as an individual occupying 'official' roles within modern institutions, in epistemicidal discourse.[28]

The regeneration of histories, that is elements and retellings of the past that counterpose History and its claim to universality, can be described as acts of epistemic disobedience. Using Mirzoeff's concept of countervisuality, histories can be positioned as "totally different form[s] of seeing, acting and being grounded" that contribute towards "tears" in modernity's hegemonic History.[29] Countervisuality is similarly "the dissensus" with modernity and "a dispute over what is visible as an element of a situation, over which visible elements belong to what is common, over the capacity of subjects to designate this common and argue for it."[30] In this sense countervisuality does not accept the modern archive's framing of events. Instead, it seeks to create new narratives that expose the violence of colonialism and coloniality. This is countenanced through "attempts to bring into view, and into being, alternative ways of imagining and modes of becoming, that aim to challenge and undo authoritative regimes."[31] Following that histories and countervisual forms of knowledge intersect, one can surmise that both are grounded in understandings of the past that defy the western narrative of progress.[32] In other words rather than repeating modernity's story, histories are explanations of the past and present which address "the precise dialectical problem that the present is called upon to resolve", thereby gearing knowledge production towards the needs of the community.[33]

Tavares deploys histories through engagement with the institutions and concepts of modernity to craft antihegemonic concepts of being that defy colonial thought. In challenging their operative terms, the goal to expand the universal rights enshrined within law – which are here conceived of as products of modernity – is forwarded in an effort to re-engineer the contemporary state and world order's governing logics. Specifically, human life and subjectivity are represented as interrelated with and constituted by the nonhuman. This is reflected by his production of histories and knowledge that articulates to a community that goes beyond the anthropocentric, individualized conception of society and life in

the western tradition. Deconstructing and disavowing the racialized hierarchy of beings present within modern knowledge, potential and already existing alliances that are at once local and global are centralized by threading the fates of all humans across the world in view of the dual crisis of colonialism/coloniality and ecological breakdown.[34] This collective is also evoked through Tavares's efforts to resurface histories which highlight the interconnected struggles of Indigenous sovereignty and ecological justice, the health of the Amazon Forest, for instance, being shown to a great degree to depend upon on whether the land is still occupied by Indigenous people. To this Tavares argues:

> Given that those territories under Indigenous stewardship are among the best-preserved areas in the Amazon rainforest, and that deforestation in the Amazon is itself a major contributor to global climate change, upholding Indigenous land rights becomes a matter of both sovereignty and survival.[35]

At the transnational level, this collective is evoked through the production of a digitally published and publicly available visual-textual or multimedia sites with each project that makes the information gathered accessible to anyone on the internet. By activating the constituency of the global collective, Tavares opens questions up and poses solutions for the inadequacies and ingrained toxicities in modern thought that prevent dominant culture and official organs of power from responding to the interweaved colonial and ecological crises of the day. Following Benjamin's proposal, this is achieved by incorporating already existing ideas from Indigenous communities into modern structures as opposed to seeking to fashion new forms of knowledge from the epistemology that resulted in the issue, in this case, the Euro-American model of development and progress. In this sense Tavares seeks to amplify rather than conceal the knowledge contained within what Benjamin terms the "struggling, oppressed class".[36] For Benjamin and Tavares alike rather than imposing solutions on this group, listening and engagement facilitates the proliferation of novel counterhegemonic modes of being through the process of drawing upon "the depository of historical knowledge" that has been systemically attacked from the onset of modernity.[37] Following their mobilization, Tavares's engagement of histories within modernity principally constitutes efforts to reconfigure the legal-political structures of modernity towards the collective's egalitarian goals. The alliances he participates in do not therefore attempt to turn back the clock to before colonialism, rather they attempt a "working through of Enlightenment claims to rights in the context of coloniality, with an emphasis on the right to subjectivity and the contestation of poverty."[38] In the following section Tavares's production of histories and their accompanying counter-archives are discussed using examples of projects. The networks Tavares operates within are shown to appropriate and invert the archive, technology, western knowledge and modern institutional structures of power through participation as a means of exposure. This entails thinking through and reworking the archive, as well as producing new counter-archives to produce histories. In turn

through application within institutions, the reconfiguration of praxis and discourse is shown to produce modes of being that counter the ongoing interlinked forces of colonialism and coloniality within rather than outside of modernity and its social-ecological dynamics.

PROJECTS

The archival visual "textual-graphic project" "Des-Habitat", featured in the *Bauhaus imaginista* São Paulo exhibition in 2018 and later launched in the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in 2019, can be considered an intervention into History.[39] The project centred on the Brazilian mid-twentieth century arts and design magazine of the same name, headed by influential architect Linda Bo Bardi, described as a "militant-modernist" publication that "not only propagated images of modern art and architecture, but also images of popular and indigenous crafts and artifacts."[40] "Habitat" juxtaposed modernist art, design and architecture with Indigenous objects to promote an image of a nationally specific Brazilian form of modernist design and architecture – emphasizing that the European-derived modernism of Brazil was "more primitive than Europe" through the nation-state's dominance and perceived ownership of lands formerly inhabited by Indigenous people.[41] A product of a nationally specific iteration of the homogenizing, racializing dominant mode of humanity that was established during Early Modernity, "Habitat" articulates a Brazilian historical consciousness that positions Indigenous people as racial inferiors through a hierarchical Eurocentric understanding of civilization. The magazine's framing of "images of indigenous, bodies, arts, and crafts as […] objects detached from their social and territorial milieu", for example, positions inhabitants of the Amazon as people who do not qualify for ethical consideration.[42]

Seeking to invert the dissociated Historical narrative of "Habitat," the project reframed the self-styled and publicly disseminated "images of civilization, images of modernization" as "archives of colonial power" through recontextualization.[43] Enacting "an archaeology of media", the atomized and decontextualized Indigenous objects featured in the magazine next to avant-garde modernist works are traced in view of Brazil's "politics of pacification" campaign – a set of post-war efforts by the Brazilian government to integrate and homogenize Indigenous peoples within the framework of the nation-state.[44] Using the same "constructivist modernist" aesthetic register employed in the magazine to construct links between Indigenous objects and Brazilian modernism, the project inserted archival photographic evidence of the pacification campaign to draw attention to those Indigenous people who visually featured or through the medium of stolen objects were connected to the magazine. In turn Tavares and the project participants were able to add those "outside the frame" of this archive's History and historical perspective back into the picture.[45] Specifically archival traces of the colonization of the Karajá people and their land surrounding the Araguia River in the Brazilian interior are reinserted into "Habitat's" textual-

visual narrative. Although originally produced as strategies and manifestations of a modernist historical consciousness, the logic of the "Habitat" archive is inverted when elements of other colonial archives are interweaved against the original logic of their organization. This includes the positioning of aerial photographs taken from the declassified archives of Brazil's military dictatorship, produced with the purpose of surveying and in turn mastering the people and forest alongside the Araguia River, next to images from "Habitat" to highlight the complicity of modernist design with the subordination of Indigenous people. This is because the featuring of Karajá objects in the magazine is shown to be a product of settler-colonial efforts to expand control in the region over several centuries. Specifically, the objects utilized by members of the magazine's board, such as Bo Bardi, are situated in the context of property of the Karajá people passing to missionaries, governmental officials and state sanctioned academics during 'pacification' attempts. The result is a an elaboration of how the Karajá were victims of colonization by expulsion and resettlement in addition to having their home transformed into a "highly mediatized space from where images of nature, primitiveness and national identity were produced, diffused, and manipulated."[46] Tavares describes this as a process of questioning how the visual archive and its images "partake in an ecology of violence" in order to "unlearn" images of modernity understanding them instead as "images of violence […] documents of civilization that are in fact documents of violence."[47] In "Des-Habitat," the invisibility of the history of violence on the magazine's pages is rectified through a research process crossing into photography, art, design and architecture. This in turn challenges and reworks the History of Brazilian aesthetics by incorporating histories produced outside of the academy. Recontextualizing the stolen objects serves a restorative function, transforming an exclusionary narrative into an inclusive one. In view of Mirzoeff, the necropolitical function of "Des-Habitat" – that is, its joint ontological silence and justification of colonial politics affirming the right of Brazil's government to determine "who may allocate, divide, and distribute death" – is replaced with the right of the Karajá people to exist.[48] Following Opperman's conceptualization of racism as the "specific tactics, imaginaries, and knowledges" that produce and "are themselves shaped by the environments they attempt to ossify and control", the project's aesthetic redeployment of modernist art and Indigenous objects constitute efforts to produce the forms of knowledge and understanding necessary to generate wider networks of solidarity.[49] In this case the visual archive has been engaged with to posit who the visual archive is for by redeploying western knowledge "as a tool that can be subverted and reconfigured to tell other stories, to tell not only stories of those who won but also those who struggled".[50]

In addition to reworking old colonial archives, the networks Tavares operates within also create new counter-archival material through the use of technology. Specifically, architectural, spatial and visual digital technologies are utilized to uncover the interlinked realities of ecocide and the persecution of Indigenous people in the Amazon. For example, in the *Forensic Architecture* project "Gold Mining and Violence in the Amazon Rainforest" Tavares appropriates

technically sophisticated digital image making technologies not for the purposes of surveillance and extraction, for which they were designed, but rather as a means of exposing colonial violence. Likewise, "The Mirador Mine" project has combined geolocation and remote sensing with fieldwork, that is, on the ground expeditions in collaboration with villagers expelled by the mining companies' operatives in Cordillera del Condór in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The former project makes use of 3D modelling, geolocation, pattern analysis and image complex remote sensing so as to reconstruct the illegal mining that proliferated under Jair Bolsonaro's regime.[51] Bolstered by the government's neofascist rhetoric and *laissez-faire* policy changes, violence against the environment and the Yanomami people has accelerated. To expose this extractive violence, technology is deployed in collaboration with Indigenous groups to visually map the destruction of the forest and poisoning of the water, in addition to identifying the perpetrators.[52] The use of this technology alleviates the lack of evidence in the modern archive, opposing the disinformation that South American officials and multinational corporations seek to amplify. In this sense technology is employed to produce a different imagined zone of the Amazon Forest – one produced through the visual language of modernity in a manner that connects "different forms of knowledge and technologies" so as to learn "from the indigenous leaderships and communities" which can in turn "expose the ways in which [technologies] have been complicit with colonial power by the very act of using them against neocolonial systems."[53] At the level of the digital, the publication and utilization of visual culture by Tavares and his colleagues at *Forensic Architecture* to create pressure on, amongst others, the Canadian and Chinese mining companies active in Ecuador and beyond via exposure and legal challenge can also be seen as an appropriation of the modern. As with the increasing availability of relatively cheap but highly technical image rendering technology, the internet has provided activists with powerful tools that enable them to produce and disperse culture in ways that were formerly not accessible. For example, the Ecuador mining projects resulted in the creation of an online platform with technologically realized event reconstructions, historical context and video testimonies alongside a physical exhibition entitled *Atmósferas de Terror*. In operating across rather than within different disciplines, spaces and networks, Tavares articulates a wide-ranging collective that interconnects the fate of communities in the Amazon with those in the urban centres of South America as well as in the Global North. Articulating this global community necessarily entails claiming the digital because, according to Tavares, "we are already in this domain", it therefore being imperative to establish "what kind of rights, what kind of new domain of rights we need to forge, we need to create in order to establish certain types of barriers for state and corporate power."[54] Reflected elsewhere by the choice to engage with modern structures rather than act outside them, Tavares argues that one task of the online activist is to challenge the "toxic ecology of images that block us from seeing the truth" by reformulating what we mean by truth through focusing on "how you read [the] image, display the image, how you organize the image in order to counter this toxicology that now

makes our public sphere."[55] Rather than more surveillance and more images, for instance, Tavares argues for a restructuring of our relationship with online images. Drawing on Tuhiwai Smith's concept of truth, one can note that Tavares's emphasis on relationality between images and how they are read indicates that his digital interventions are not only attempts to obtain recognition or adapt the narrative within official knowledge producing institutions such as the academy.[56] They also centre around activating and mobilizing new networks and collectives that tip the balance of power in a given social context towards History's victims and those allies who seek to challenge the power of the hunter.

Through the production of histories and counter visual archives, Tavares deploys co-opted western technology with non-western knowledge for the purposes of effecting legal change. One example is the use of technical images in combination with "Indigenous epistemes and visions that escape the knowledge-technological apparatus of the colonial-modern western gaze" as a means of challenging how the state thinks about Indigenous land sovereignty and ecology.[57] This can be seen in the project "Trees, Vines, Palms and Other Architectural Monuments," a collaborative endeavour realized by *autonoma* – a research and intervention platform co-created by Tavares in 2017 – and the Bö' Xavante Association, an organization stemming from the Xavante Indigenous people seeking to protect and reclaim their ancestral lands. Following the dual agricultural modernization and genocidal forced migration of the Xavante people enacted during Brazil's years of military rule, much of the forest was transformed into what is referred to as farmland in the modern, rational imperial imagination. With the aim of helping to restore the sovereignty of the Xavante people and the biodiversity of the land, Tavares has employed a variety of visual technologies forged through colonialism and coloniality – including but not limited to maps, airplane photographs, satellite images, remote sensing, drone photography, 3D modelling, geolocation and pattern analysis. In practice they are deployed in collaboration with Xavante survivors of the expulsions to identify villages such as Bö'u in north-western Brazil. Unseen by the Western eye, elder knowledge of the spatial layout of plant life has resulted in the identification of the ruins of villages in the modern register currently on farmland – the digital technical image being a form of knowledge production recognized and valued by settler-colonial governments such as Brazil. As with the "Des-Habitat" project, old archival images taken by the government during the expulsions as well as newly produced images were used. In addition to facilitating the recognition of the lands as Xavante by the government, the practice of reworking images formerly "reported as evidence, as images, representations of a country that in colonizing itself was moving towards the future" contributes towards the crafting of an alternative imaginary.[58] In this sense the violence of colonial imagery as a means of justifying destruction is counteracted by combining an "image archaeology" with "landscape archaeology".[59] The counter visual archival material has been submitted to the Brazilian National Institute of Artistic and Historic Heritage (IPHAN) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with the intention of attaining protected status,

thereby returning the land to the Xavante people.

Whilst the technical images produced during the project ultimately conform to modern notions of knowledge, their application directly challenges other forms of knowledge such as the western specific, architectural understanding of built heritage. This is because visual material is deployed within an institutional and legal-political context to engage with, expose and challenge hegemonic universal categories of matter and being. In the case of "Trees, Vines, Palms and Other Architectural Monuments," this is constituted by a challenge to the concept of heritage which in the western tradition is understood as an unliving, constructed form of property. It is in this vein that Tavares employs Indigenous understandings of heritage that recognize plant life as ruins, the Amazon Forest and the plants within it being "neither fully or exclusively human, nor are they completely natural."[60] Rather, they are "the product of long-term and complex interactions between human collectives, environmental forces and the agency of other species, themselves actors in the historical process of 'designing the forest.'"[61] As such, he proposes:

> Beyond listing monuments to be dismantled, we need to build new memorial landscapes to care for, land sites that can enable other histories to be told, all the while repairing communities and restoring the environment. Grounded and global, architecture-as-advocacy simultaneously responds to situated land conflicts and the earth-politics of climate change.[62]

Elsewhere Tavares also seeks to introduce the notion of "the forest as a cosmopolis" which "implies that every being that inhabits the forest — rivers, trees, jaguars, peoples – are 'citizens'; agents or subjects within an enlarged political arena to whom even rights ought to be granted" in a legal-political context, modernity, that is centred around the basic legal unit of the universal (hu)man.[63] Through this intervention "an altogether different form of polis […], one that escapes the spatial imaginaries, political geometries and epistemic frames of colonial modernity" is proposed.[64] In turn the "original design-act" narrative of modernity is too challenged, implying that human life "does not rest on clearing the forest but rather on the continued practice of its cultivation."[65] To this end Tavares cites the power of histories to suggest "an image of design" and at large human behaviour

> that is less about planning and more about planting the planet, inasmuch as planting is also a practice of planning and design, but one that needs to be fine-tuned to the agency of winds, climates and the myriad of beings upon which the seeding and pollination of life depends.[66]

This approach can be said to be in part inspired by Ecuador's lawsuit against British Petroleum (BP) during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill which similarly sought to expand legal fiction by "advocating not on behalf of the interests of the users of the Gulf of Mexico but 'in *defense of the rights of the sea.*'"[67] This was embodied by the prosecution's framing of nature "as the primary subject whose rights had been

violated rather than only the medium through which the rights of persons were impaired", an intervention that confronted modernity's logics of individualism with a collective ecological legal category.[68]

CONCLUSION

The various networks and alliances discussed in this article are united in their efforts to combat the dual ecological and colonial/coloniality crisis. For researchers in the Global North, aside from employing decolonial conceptual tools and modes of understanding, the approach of Tavares may be followed in order to structure how knowledge is produced, who it is for and the ways in which it is applied. Regarding the ways in which knowledge is produced, Tavares defies modernity by subverting western academic disciplinary and technological boundaries through the use of Indigenous epistemes and the appropriation of digital spaces and tools. Research is hence carried out in a collaborative rather than top-down manner, sharing ideas and approaches that draw on and synthesize non-western and activist approaches. To this end knowledge production does not reproduce conclusions that modernity engenders. Concerning who knowledge is produced for, Tavares and those he works with follow the decolonial principle of reflexivity. This translates to a form of praxis that, as individuals occupying official positions of intellectual authority, ensures they do not become "subsumed" into the hierarchical positionalities of knowledge production that characterize academic and institutional structures.[69] Part of this creates research that is respectful towards, accessible and legible to those outside of the academy – research that circulates to those who within modernity are positioned as the intellectually superior keepers and guardians of knowledge. It also follows that an inclusive global collective that crosses geopolitical lines and modes of being established during colonialism should be evoked within research, as a means to cross the binaries of the civilized/uncivilized and human/nonhuman that are both overtly and discretely embedded into western academic approaches. Concerning application, in opposition to "the ecocidal designs of late modernity", the researcher may seek to produce counter-archives that, in addition to overhauling power dynamics between the Global North and Global South, can be effectively deployed to probe "how nature appears within legal forums and texts" combined with "questioning the ways by which violence against forms of life other than human are legally moderated".[70] These demands, importantly, must not shy away from the political, including the demand for Indigenous sovereignty over colonized land that the decolonizing movement is rooted in.[71] Although not the only strategy available to researchers, the combination of making counter-archives accessible and putting them to work in legal environments is shown by Tavares to be particularly effective. This is because it opens possibilities for structures which are public in name – namely the state, its law and by extension international law – to be reconfigured to serve the majority of the earth's people and its nonhuman inhabitants. Through these engaged, collaborative and political means, action can

in turn be galvanised with the goal of making "life a possible project amidst the ruins of the 'age of humans.'"[72]

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