In this essay, I consider intersections between environmental thinking and Indigenous art-making in recent scholarship and artistic production in Brazil, situating some of their contributions to Latin American Cultural Studies in recent years. I examine Stelio Marras, Joana Cabral de Oliveira, Marta Amoroso et al.’s *Vozes vegetais: Diversidade, resistência e histórias da floresta* (*Plant Voices: Diversity, Resistance and Forest Histories*, 2021) and Ailton Krenak’s *A vida não é útil* (*Life is Not Useful*, 2020a). I show that both works challenge extractivist paradigms and the hierarchisation of life forms. I then consider works by two Indigenous artists: Glicéria Tupinambá’s powerful reclaiming of the traditional Tupinambá cloak, and Denílson Baniwa’s critical engagements with museums and collectionism. By mapping some of the emerging directions in environmental thinking and Indigenous arts in Brazil, I argue that recent shifts in scholarship and artistic production in the country owe much to Indigenous approaches to interspecies relationality, offering valuable lessons about forms of creativity that resist commodification.

**Keywords:** Brazil; Indigenous arts; environmental thinking; monoculture; mining; extractivism

This review essay considers intersections between environmental thinking and Indigenous art-making in recent scholarship and artistic production in Brazil, situating them in a wider field of cultural and academic production in Latin America. The 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, held in 2016, sought to reflect on strategies offered by contemporary art to inhabit uncertainty. Titled *Incerteza Viva* (*Live Uncertainty*), the biennale raised debates about contemporary environmental crises, concerns about the future, and the Anthropocene. Indigenous ways of life stood out as a theme, and showed up in creations by non-Indigenous artists, such as Bené Fonteles, and the presence of Indigenous artists while the presence of thinkers – like Davi Kopenawa, Ailton Krenak, and Jaider Esbell – remained limited to guest-talks or quotations. This would change in the 34th Bienal de São Paulo, held in 2021, which presented the highest number of Indigenous artists in its history, such as the late Jaider Esbell, Daiara Tukano, Sueli Maxakali, and Gustavo Caboco – part of a generation that has been consolidating Indigenous protagonism in the arts in Brazil. Theories and concepts related to posthumanism and conflicts between ontologies have also been gaining momentum among Latin
Americanist circles in the 2010s, serving as a ground for new developments in the work of Marisol de la Cadena (2010, 2015), Mario Blaser (2009, 2010, 2013), Mauro Almeida (2013), and Eduardo Kohn (2013), among others.

As Vincent (2017) argued, one of the risks involved in the thematisation of Indigenous realities by the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo was the projection of primitivist and romantic clichés on the association between ecology and Indigenous societies. Whatever the scenario, it is key to keep in mind that what Euro-American discourses understand as “environment”, “ecology”, and “nature” may not coincide with Indigenous conceptual frameworks. A clear example of that is Davi Kopenawa’s rejection of the idea of “meio-ambiente”, a common term in Brazilian Portuguese, since it would, in his view, imply the idea of “halving” the environment. In contrast, he proposes the Yanomami idea of “urihi a” or “land-forest”, meaning the entire world, which should be conceived as a whole, not divided in halves (Pinheiro Dias 2016).

Informed by a commitment to advancing the decolonisation of knowledge production in Latin American Cultural Studies, I argue that even if Indigenous creative and intellectual contributions do not take place specifically or strictly within academia, they should nonetheless be discussed alongside academic scholarship. By mapping emerging directions in environmental thinking in Brazil as part of this unfolding process, I intend to show that Indigenous epistemologies have been playing a central role among the most important currents in scholarship in the country over the last decade. Most notably, the period has been profoundly marked by the impact of the work of Brazilian Indigenous intellectuals Davi Kopenawa Yanomami and Ailton Krenak, which has energised research agendas committed to a critique of human exceptionalism, consumerism, and utilitarian approaches to life. Their influence is also readily apparent in Vozes vegetais (Marras et. al. 2021). Krenak’s and Kopenawa’s conceptual frameworks make space for envisioning a “reduction or slowing down of the Anthropocene” (Viveiros de Castro and Danowski 2017, 104), of which Krenak’s notion of “treading lightly on the Earth” (2020a) can be considered a key analytical trope. In Yanomami terms, in turn, “treading lightly on the Earth” could be seen as an antidote against the ambitions of the “Earth eaters” (urihi wapo pê) who insist on exploiting plants, minerals, and all instances of interspecies socialities as “resources”, objects of extraction in the name of the anthropocentric greed of the “people of merchandise” (matihi têri pê).

### Against monoculture

An edited collection of 17 chapters stemming from a symposium held at USP and UNICAMP in 2019, Vozes vegetais reflects on a diversity of forms of co-constitutive entanglements between plants and humans, placing the philosophies and practices of Indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and workers from the landless workers movement (MST) at the centre of the debate. Their sense of intimacy with hyper-agrobiodiversity contrasts sharply with what Joana Cabral de Oliveira, in the chapter “Agricultura contra o Estado” (Agriculture Against the State), describes as the
“herbicidal state” — a reference to the political anthropological work of Pierre Clastres. She discusses how “a cosmopolitical war has been waged through plant alliances” (2021, 78): on one side, the homogeneous character of monoculture, which makes species more vulnerable to pests and large-scale infestation; on the other side, Amazonian Indigenous peoples and their heightened awareness of interspecies relationality. The chapter also advances the idea that the relationship between plants and Amazonian Indigenous peoples is not based on the control of the former by the latter. In addition, it is not a one-on-one relationship, but a collective effort: for instance, other beings, such as temitóroh ants and caxirizeira bees, also take part in how cassava comes to life. In addition, cassava inebriates and seduces Waŋapi women with its aesthetic properties and flavour to keep them planting and increasing its diversity. Learning to do politics with plants with the Waŋapi people living in the Amazonian state of Amapá, Cabral de Oliveira notes that their knowledge about cassava and their respect towards the particular rhythm of each species that relates to it allow them to maintain and increase agrobiodiversity, preventing problems usually faced by capitalist industrial agriculture. Cassava, in the same way as other species, is not to be commodified and treated as a “natural resource”, says Cabral de Oliveira as she quotes Krenak in her chapter, mentioning his rejection of the framing of rivers, mountains, and forests as “natural resources” (Krenak 2016, 159).

Marta Amoroso’s chapter, “A descoberta do manhãã: seguindo as trilhas da flor-esta com os Mura” (Discovering Manhãã: Following the Trail of the Forest with the Mura), shows how, for the Mura people from the Cunhã-Sapucaia Indigenous Territory in Borba, Amazonas, the manhãã potato (Casimirella spp.) constitutes a temporal index that points to trails travelled by ancestors to past villages, often indicating to the Mura where they can find “Amazonian Black Earth” (“Terra Preta de Índio”) – anthropic soils of remarkable fertility that many scientists say are the result of human activity in the Amazon, beginning thousands of years ago. Amoroso expands on Caetano-Andrade et al.’s description of Brazil nut trees (Bertholletia excelsa) as “time capsules” that echo stories of human-forest entanglements (2020), and argues that manhãã potatoes are a living record of how nutrients, humans, and other organisms have communicated and circulated in Amazonian soil across time – like “books in a library” that tell stories of ancient, interspecies forest technologies. Another insightful contribution comes from Karen Shiratori, whose chapter “Vegetalidade humana e o medo do olhar feminino” (The Plantness of Humans and the Fear of the Female Gaze) describes how the Jamamadi people living along the middle Purus river, in Southern Amazonas, describe the different cycles of the human body by mobilising categories that coincide with those used to refer to the growth and development of plants. For instance, in the vocabulary relating to human morphology, girls who are in pubertal seclusion are seen as developing like fruit, that is, as going from a state of bor-ehe, or unripened, to a state of hasa, or ripened. With that in mind, Shiratori goes on to argue that Jamamadi humanness is produced with and through plants. At the same time, the Jamamadi do not conceive of plants as deprived of human character and subjectivity. Her analysis of Jamamadi plant perspectivism suggests that it is not structured by polarised notions of “anthropomorphisation of plants”, on the
one hand, or a “plant-like metaphorisation of the human”, on the other – since that perspective would reassert the dichotomy between nature and culture. What Shiratori presents is an alternative framework that allows us to capture the plantness of humans – or, put otherwise, to see how plants hold ties of kinship with humans and are invested with metaphysical dignity and political existence.\textsuperscript{6}

_Vozes vegetais_ provides the reader with a broad theoretical overview of the place of plant agency in worldmaking from the perspective of traditional peoples in Brazil, as well as with clear examples of the inseparability between humanness and plantness in Amazonian Indigenous thinking. It is no news that humanity, for Amazonian Indigenous peoples, is not a domain separate from plant and animal life – in the same way that culture is not a domain separate from nature (Viveiros de Castro 1996, 2002a; Descola 1986, 1992, 2005). As Davi Kopenawa powerfully epitomises, “no forest, no history” (Dias and Marras, 2019). Poet Júlia de Carvalho Hansen, who has long been interested in interactions between forms of plant communication and human language, and who opens the four parts of _Vozes vegetais_ with a selection of poems from the 2016 book _Seiva veneno ou fruto_ (Sap, venom or fruit), recently noted that if a “plant turn” or “virada vegetal” (as it is called in Brazil) is indeed taking place as a critical current, it must be taken into account that this notion of “turn” is an Eurocentric one, since plants have been playing a central role in many non-European traditions since time immemorial (Flip, 2021). Having said that, I must add that even though the notion of “turn” is frequently mobilised in academic discourse, I would, in what concerns a consideration of Indigenous modes of thinking, express reservations about the assumption that knowledge-production necessarily unfolds in sequential phases that could be quantified as “turns”, or stages at which knowledge radically changes in a different direction, since Indigenous traditions are not anchored in the same kind of progressive, teleological, cumulative understanding of time that is predominant in Euro-American cultures. Rather than necessarily associating transformation or meaningful change with grand theoretical trends, Indigenous knowledges invite us to reflect on time – as well as on changes in thinking – as a variable value through which historicities take shape (Overing 1995). Therefore, the kind of interspecies relationality seen as part of a “plant turn” or an “animal turn”\textsuperscript{7} in a conventional academic timeline may be common knowledge for many Indigenous people.

Bearing that in mind, it is fair to note that _Vozes vegetais_ shows that the increasing scholarly interest in plant agency within the Humanities and Social Sciences at large, and in particular within Brazilian studies – in a way that is analogous to what has become known as the “ontological turn” – owes much to a greater openness in academia towards taking seriously what Indigenous peoples themselves take seriously. Here I refer to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (2002b) well-known approach to the notion that taking Indigenous thinking seriously implies refusing to neutralise it by framing it as a system of beliefs, and instead considering Indigenous ideas as concepts, symmetrically taking them as knowledge that is as theoretically valid as academic knowledge. Twenty years after the original publication of Viveiros de Castro’s seminal essay “O nativo relativo”,\textsuperscript{8} Indigenous academics are on the rise in Brazilian universities, achieving and consolidating the legitimacy to ensure their own conceptual self-determination, that is, to specify themselves the
conditions under which their ideas are to be taken. A historical watershed of this process was the enactment of Brazil’s affirmative action law for universities in 2012, known as Law 12.711, which provides for a quota of vacancies in federally funded public universities for self-declared Black, brown, and Indigenous students, expanding access to higher education for non-white people (Baniwa 2013).

Treading lightly

_A vida não é útil_ (2020a) – Ailton Krenak’s most recent book manifesto, consisting of texts adapted from talks and live streamings held between November 2017 and June 2020 – constitutes an eloquent critique of extractivism that is having a significant impact on Latin American Cultural Studies today. “We humans are not all that – the Earth declares it”, Krenak asserts. The Indigenous thinker argues that life is not useful in the sense of not serving utilitarian purposes. He points out that we who are “addicted to modernity” keep forgetting that everything is permeated by a deep relationality between animals, mountains, trees, humans, and minerals, reminding us that we have been guided by an idea of humanity as an upper caste or an exclusive club that leaves out a sub-humanity composed of Indigenous peoples, caicaras, quilombolas and many others marginalised by utilitarianism. The members of this exclusive club have proven to be the plague of the planet, consuming the Earth and its various life forms for the sake of the concentration of wealth and progress. He criticises the fetish for technological apparatuses and advocates the connection between dreams and everyday life, while arguing that we have to stop “developing” and start “getting involved”. The possibility of the continuity of life on Earth, as well as what is useful and what is useless for those who want it, is a connecting thread between the five chapters of the book – “Não se come dinheiro”; “Sonhos para adiar o fim do mundo”; “A máquina de fazer coisas”; “O futuro não está à venda” and “A vida não é útil” (You can’t eat money; Dreams to postpone the end of the world; The machine for making things; The future is not for sale and Life is not useful). Krenak urges us to consider the meaning of life “beyond the dictionary”, since in his view we have been stuck in a reductionist approach to living.

Engaging incisively with debates around anthropocentrism and the Anthropocene, Krenak says that biodiversity does not need us, since there are many forms of life beyond us. The COVID-19 pandemic, as Krenak points out, is the consequence of a variety of factors: a mode of production that is destroying the planet, unbridled consumerism, life-draining necrocapitalism and its unsustainable relationship with the Earth. At stake here are the issues of greed, human exceptionalism, and the utilitarian will to control life, against which Krenak proposes the practice of “treading lightly”.

Indigenous approaches to interspecies relationality also offer valuable lessons about forms of creativity that “tread lightly” and resist commodification. Let us consider the recent exhibition _Kwá yapé turusú yuriri assojaba tupinambá | Essa é a grande volta do manto Tupinambá_ (This is the Great Return of the Tupinambá Cloak), held from September to November 2021, first in Brasília and then in Porto Seguro. It centred on the history of the Tupinambá’s cloaks, known in Old Tupi as “assojaba”, ritual feathered capes that were taken from Brazil by Europeans in the colonial period. It also showed that the cloaks never ceased to inhabit the
world of the spiritual entities that guide the Tupinambá — the encantados — even if the garments that sit in European museums were never repatriated. Eleven of these cloaks, produced between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are still kept in museums in Basel, Brussels, Copenhagen, Florence, Milan, and Paris. Glicéria Jesus da Silva Tupinambá, also known as Célia Tupinambá, an important leader, teacher, and filmmaker of the Tupinambá community from Serra do Padeiro, has long been exploring the role that the cloaks play in the history, cosmology, and culture of her people. Along with Augustin de Tugny, Juliana Caffé, and Juliana Gontijo, she was one of the curators of the “Essa é a grande volta do manto Tupinambá” exhibition. One of the pieces included in the exhibition was a video of Tupinambá at the collection storage of the Musée du Quai Branly, where she had the chance to see one of the cloaks that were taken to Europe. During the visit, she felt that the cloak was speaking to her; in fact, she felt that it had been waiting for her (Tupinambá apud Roxo 2021). Through careful observation, Tupinambá realised she would apply beeswax to wax raw cotton thread, weave it with the traditional jereré technique – which is still used nowadays for making fishing nets – and give form to the structure to which the cloak’s feathers are attached. She emphasises that cloak-making does not involve killing any birds: feathers are only harvested when birds naturally shed old, worn feathers during the moulting process.¹²

Rather than adopting the repatriation of the cloaks located in European museums as her agenda, Tupinambá (2021) focused on reactivating ways of relating to her territory and engaging her community, human and other-than-human alike, in the making of new cloaks (Figures 1 and 2). In fact, Tupinambá’s understanding is that the encantados do not want the repatriation and that Europeans are condemned to serve the penalty of “spending billions” to preserve the fragile material of the old cloaks. Therefore, the fact that the Nationalmuseet of Denmark and the other European museums that hold Tupinambá cloaks are to continue to care for the pieces indicates that the Tupinambá “do not forgive them”. The decision to let Europeans carry the burden of their own plundering legacy, as Tupinambá concludes, shows that they are being punished for their wrongdoings: “repatriating the cloak would mean that we have forgiven them, and we don’t intend to forgive them”, she continues. “If we were to ask for the repatriation of the cloak, it would mean that it would return to nature.”

The mode of creativity with which Tupinambá becomes entangled evokes a notion of technics that is not exclusive to humans. In this sense, her assertion resonates with Viveiros de Castro’s recently published dialogue with Yuk Hui (2021), in which the Brazilian ethnologist argues that even if we agree that “it is possible to talk about human technics and then about non-human technics”, “a less anthropocentric definition of technology is needed”. “Technics is not immanent to humans; it always comes from outside”, Viveiros de Castro asserts. For environmental thinking, an implication of this argument in favour of the technical continuity between humans and other living beings is that if humans are not considered as the only players of what we call creativity, art praxis is populated by a tangled ecology of human, plant, animal, mineral, spiritual, and other non-human beings. It also follows that humans, as actants or agents involved in the creative process, are not in full control nor can utterly predict what will arise from this symbiotic driving force.
The Tupinambá cloak matters not only because of how emblematic it is in their historic resistance, taking one back to stories and memories shared by elders. It matters not only because of how substantially it embodies the territory, being made from several plants and animal species, most notably domestic and wild bird species. It matters because it is an index of the Tupinambá’s fundamentally relational approach to life and creativity: without the forest, there can be no birds; without the birds, there can be no feathers; without their territory, there can be no Tupinambá and there can be no cloak. Unlike the seventeenth-century cloaks that are in European museums, the twenty-first-century cloaks are no longer bright red like the scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) – since the bird stopped living in their lands – but bear the earthy tones of the Tupinambá territory, predominantly brown and beige.

Overall, this recent exhibition marked the culmination of years devoted by Tupinambá to investigating the technical and cosmological aspects involved in the
making of the cloak, which unfolded in tandem with the struggle of her people to take back the areas where they traditionally lived. Bringing cloak-making back to life was thus an existential reclamation. Here it is pertinent to make reference to Isabelle Stengers’s notion of “reclaiming” (2012) not as a nostalgic gesture that would resurrect the past as it was, making some “true’, ‘authentic’ tradition come alive”. This perspective invites us to think of the reclaiming of the cloak as a way of reactivating an environment through a regeneration of practices. As a consequence of this approach, focusing on artistic practices that have been critically engaging with the intersection between environmental issues and Indigenous creativity suggests that we expand our notion of “environment” beyond the nature–culture divide. To this end, Tupinambá’s work provides us with the means to learn by way of a powerful Indigenous interrogation of the Anthropocene.

On ashes and Amazonian Black Earth

What the artistic and intellectuals works discussed in this essay contribute to environmental thinking in the scope of Latin American Cultural Studies centrally involves challenging the assumed division between aesthetics and ecology, as a result of a questioning of the demarcation of creativity as solely human. Among contemporary art
practitioners contributing to these unfoldings is the Amazonian Indigenous artist Denilson Baniwa. His timely work unfolds through a confrontation of how museums – as well as cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and the ways they were built on Indigenous territories – materialised and validated a system of dispossession and prejudice. At the same time, while his interventions expose epistemologies stemming from and relying on colonial practices, they also seek to prepare the soil for new forms and practices of living. Baniwa’s aesthetic responses to the fire at the National Museum converge with his denunciation of the history of plunder and epistemic violence, a constant theme in his works. In his protest-performance “breaking into” or rather, as he puts it, “hacking” the 33rd São Paulo Biennial in November 2018, dressed in his Jaguar-Shaman cape, mask, and rattle and holding flowers in his hands, Baniwa tore up a copy of the Brazilian edition of Susie Hodges’s “The Short Story of Art” pocket guide. Standing in front of large-scale photographs of the Selk’nam People from Ona-sin land (later called Tierra del Fuego by colonisers), curated by artist Sofia Borges, he then declared: “The short story of art. It’s so short, so short, that I don’t see any Indigenous art. So short that if I see Indians in this story of art, it is only as sources. I see Indians and the cultures that were stolen from them” (Baniwa 2018). The artist continued to take up this leitmotif through different initiatives, among which I would call attention to his installations “Amáka” (2020) – the second work in a three-part project he developed for Pinacoteca de São Paulo’s exhibition Véxoa: Nós Sabemos (Véxoa: We Know, 2020–2021) – and “Pequenas crônicas de uma cidade-memória” (Short Chronicles of a City-Memory, 2021), on show as part of the Crônicas Cariocas (Chronicles from Rio de Janeiro) exhibition at MAR (the Rio Art Museum), in Rio de Janeiro, until 31 July 2022.

For Véxoa, Baniwa proposed a work in three parts, entitled Nada que é dourado permanece (Nothing Gold Can Stay), one of them being 2: Amáka (Coivara), in which he gathers ashes from the National Museum fire, which occurred on 2 September 2018, in a set of glass jars. Amáka is the term in the Baniwa language that designates an area burnt for the purpose of planting by using slash-and-burn agriculture, a technique that seeks to make land fertile. With the site-specific intervention 1: Hilo, Baniwa began planting medicinal and ornamental plants, flowers, and spices in the parking lot of the Pinacoteca, exactly two years after the National Museum was consumed in flames. 3: Terra Preta de Índio (Amazonian Black Earth), in turn, consists of a video recording of the sowing process that took place in the parking lot, broadcast live and shown inside the museum (see Pinheiro Dias 2021).

In Nada que é dourado permanece (Figure 3), Baniwa makes reference to notions of destruction and rebirth by bringing together two seemingly contrasting yet complementary acts: planting new seeds, possibilities, and futures between the paving stones in the Pinacoteca parking lot; and displaying vestiges of the fire that ravaged the National Museum, consuming invaluable items of Indigenous material culture. In the interview that we conducted for the short documentary Fertile Land: Véxoa and Contemporary Indigenous Art at Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2020), he told me that his purpose was to reflect on the role that institutions play in safeguarding Indigenous memories, in particular on how those memories become imprisoned in bureaucratic, colonial institutions, in spite of apparently being very safe and well
protected. The ashes that make up Amáka (Figure 4), therefore, are an index of memories in transit: charcoal and ashes indicate the ephemeral character of those memories. The artist notes:

They have become something that you cannot discern. You can feel them, smell them, taste them if you’d like, since they still exist. But they do not exist in a visually recognisable form. For example, think of the Aymara mummies that were burnt and lost in the fire. Just like this institution, I have put them in bottles. They still exist, even if we cannot see them.¹⁵

Baniwa thus invites us to imagine modes of memory-keeping that are constantly forged in transformation, rather than based on the confinement of objects in

Figure 3. Denilson Baniwa, Nada que é dourado permanece 1: Hilo. Pinacoteca de São Paulo. 19 September 2020. Photograph by Isabella Matheus. Courtesy of Pinacoteca de São Paulo. São Paulo, Brazil.
archives and collections. In a more recent conversation, this time with artist and filmmaker Ana Vaz, Baniwa talked about the feelings of despair, shock and the constant and continuous mourning that followed the fire at the National Museum. On the other hand, it is possible to think of ways of reconstructing forms and practices of living amid the ruins and ashes. The already-mentioned notion of “Amazonian Black Earth” (“Terra Preta de Índio”) is suggestive of that. As Baniwa puts it, it is as “living memory, a library, a database that’s been alive for 5,000 years” (Baniwa, 2021b). His stimulating approximation of the high fertility of Amazonian Black Earth and a millenia-old library invites us to think of ways of cataloguing that contrast with the importance that Westerns place on collectionism. While it may look as a contradiction, the fact that Baniwa and other Indigenous artists in Brazil are using museums – the very spaces that have historically excluded them from the art canon – as platforms to showcase their works is a conscious effort to subvert the authority of dominant forms of representation. In Amáka, in particular, his decision to “confine” the ashes of the National Museum to a set of glass jars – similar to those used to store specimens in natural history museums – can be interpreted as an ironic confrontation of Western collectionism.

For the Crônicas Cariocas exhibition at the Rio Art Museum, Baniwa takes one step further with “Pequenas crônicas de uma cidade-memória” (2021), invoking and giving shape to a mummified head that references those that were lost in the ashes of the National Museum (Figure 5). He argues that the mummy can be seen as a former political prisoner that was given a “habeas corpus” by the fire in a text that accompanies the installation, noting: “Lost forever in the ashes of the 2018 fire, it is no longer trapped between the walls of the glass case where it was trapped. It is now free and walks around the city, revisiting the old places it knew before its museological imprisonment” (Baniwa, 2021a). This invented mummy, who had witnessed the birth of Brazil, now enjoys a taste of freedom and walks around places in Rio de Janeiro where confrontations between Indigenous people...
and European colonisers took place – such as Cinelândia, Largo da Carioca, Candelária, Saara, among others – fully equipped with cardioid and shotgun microphones, an audio recorder, and other sound-capturing tools. However, as it returns to its places of origin, the now released prisoner does not recognise the streets, river embankments, and inlets of Rio. The impossibility of a proper return and recognition of those places points to a link between colonisation and the theft of memories.

Conclusion

In Brazil, debates around Indigenous epistemologies and their contributions to environmental thinking in broad terms are being shaped by a confluence of historical factors, ranging from the growing visibility that Indigenous artists have achieved in recent years, an intense production of film, literary writing, music, and social media content by Indigenous creators, as well as an increasing presence of Indigenous students in higher education. Of course, the rights that the 1988 Constitution guaranteed to Indigenous peoples helped to lay the foundation for these developments. Considering this context, this essay has sought to provide an assessment of recent publications and artworks as valuable contributions for discussing the issue of commodification of life, both human and non-human, that persists in extractivist practices. Of key importance here is Krenak’s critique of a homogeneous and exclusive idea of humanity, which shows how epistemic diversity and agrobiodiversity go hand in hand, echoing Sousa Santos’s call for an ecology of knowledges that could open up the dominant canon and challenge the “monoculture” of Western scientific thinking.

Resonating with the non-utilitarian approaches put forward in Vozes vegetais, Tupinambá’s and Baniwa’s artistic resistances to legacies of dispossession, appropriation, and erasure ultimately offer original ways to break the cycle of epistemic...
and material theft that undergirds colonial legacies. The liveliness of both Tupinambá’s cloak and Baniwa’s approach to “Amazonian Black Earth” defy the fossilising contours of collectionism, reflecting an awareness of interspecies relationality as active in worldmaking and art-making. As we have seen, from Baniwa’s bold jaguar-shaman to his freed mummy, passing through his investigation of devastation and regeneration involving ashes and fertility, one can find an opportunity to engage in conversations about Indigenous art-making as a way of challenging the assumption of a homogeneous humanity, reconnecting with memory and building anti-colonial struggles and futures. Tupinambá’s radically non-anthropocentric reclaiming of cloak-making techniques, in turn, opens up fresh perspectives on the unforgiving denial of the premise of repatriation, on tangibility, intangibility, and collective processes of creation, and the inextricable bond between Indigenous arts and the regeneration of Indigenous territories. In the end, what is important is this: no matter how many tangible cloaks the colonisers could steal, they would never be able to take away the Tupinambá’s intangible mode of relating to the land, which one cannot objectify and then commodify. Their cosmotécnica [cosmo-technics] – as Tupinambá terms it (Roxo 2021) – could not be captured by the logic of plundering, precisely because it does not operate according to extractivist paradigms.

Thus, what these Indigenous forms of art-making might give rise to is not the “resurrection” of an “authentic past” against coloniality, but modes of decommodifying the very nexus between time and creativity – experiments in aesthetic reactivation that are not exclusive to the present nor to the human – and in which, nonetheless, the human might still feed the soil for ancestral and future arts to sprout. Therefore, the new directions these developments signal in Latin American Cultural Studies push forward environmental thinking by making explicit the link between creativity and a myriad of life forms. In conclusion, Indigenous approaches to interspecies relationality offer reflections about how the hierarchisation of life forms takes part in a history of epistemic violence that is implicated across the spectrum of both capitalist monoculture and the coloniality inherent in the history of museum collection practices.

Notes

1. The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman (2013), originally published in France (La chute du ciel: Paroles d’un chaman yanomami, 2010, and subsequently in Brazil as A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami, 2015).
2. Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo (Ideas to Postpone the End of the World, 2019, published in English in 2020 by House of Anansi) and A vida não é útil (Life is Not Useful, 2020a).
3. In the Brazilian context, some of the key moments that gave shape to this shift in academia were Krenak’s talks in events such as the one held at University of Brasília’s Sustainable Development Programme, which took place on 15 April 2009 and initially inspired the title of his widely read book Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo (Ideas to Postpone the End of the World); as well as the colloquium Os Mil Nomes de Gaia (A Thousand Names of Gaia”), in Rio de Janeiro, 15–19 September 2014; and the 6th Meeting of Anthropology of Science and Technology (ReACT), at the University of São Paulo, 16–19 May 2017.
4. Kopenawa and Albert (2015, 261).
5. Vozes vegetais joined a number of important translations and original-language books pointing to the idea of plants as protagonists that have recently been published in Brazil, such as those by Coccia (2018), Mancuso (2019) and Nascimento (2021).
6. For a more in-depth and detailed study, see Shiratori’s doctoral dissertation (Shiratori 2018).
7. In Brazil, recent translations of thinkers such as Haraway (2021) and Despret (2021) have been increasingly influential. See also Fausto (2020).
8. Published in English as The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds (Chicago: HAU Books, 2015).
9. Traditional populations living alongside the southern Brazilian coast who descend from Indigenous, Black, and Portuguese ancestors. Their livelihood is primarily based on small-scale fishing and agriculture.
10. Descendants of ancient runaway enslaved communities, or (former) maroon communities (quilombos), that have maintained cultural and religious traditions throughout the centuries.
11. The exhibition “Kwá yapé turusú yuriri assojaba tupinambá | This is the great return of the tupinambá mantle” was on display at Galeria Fayga Ostrower – Funarte Brasília from 16 September to 17 October, and Casa da Lenha, in Porto Seguro, where it was shown from 28 October to 27 November 2021. It was developed as part the project “European travelling artists and the case of the Tupinambá cloaks in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Porto Seguro”, curated by Augustin de Tugny, Glicéria Tupinambá, Juliana Caffé, and Juliana Gontijo, and awarded the Funarte Visual Arts Prize 2020/2021. In addition to three cloaks made by Glicéria’s hands, it included photographs, poems, and drawings by Gliceria as well as by Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, Fernanda Liberti, Gustavo Caboco, Livia Melzi, Rogério Sganzerla, and Sophia Pinheiro. The catalogue is available on https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/65935132/catalogo-kwa-yepe-turusu-yuriyiriassojaba-tupinamba, accessed 10 December 2021.
12. A rich and detailed description of Glicéria’s engagement with the process of cloak-making is available on the website of the Another Sky (“Um outro céu”) project: https://anothersky.ufba.br/exhibition/tupinamba-mantle/, which was developed as part of the “Sustainable” Development and Atmospheres of Violence: Experiences of Environmental Defenders, financed by the British Academy and coordinated by Mary Menton (SSRP/University of Sussex), Felipe Milanez (IHAC/UFBA), Jurema Machado (CAHL/UFRB), and Felipe Cruz Tuxá (Opará/Uneb).
13. As Alarcon shows, cocoa monoculture has occupied the area since the end of the nineteenth century, acting as the main instrument of expropriation against the Tupinambá, preceded by Jesuit settlements in the seventeenth century. Tourism also intensified capitalist expansion on Tupinambá lands in the twentieth century. See Alarcon (2018). For a comprehensive account of this process, see Alarcon (2019). See also Alarcon’s documentary “Tupinambá: The Return of the Land” (24m38s, 2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDF3ZrSlACA, accessed 10 December 2021.
14. The Baniwa consider the jaguar-shaman to be the most advanced and knowledgeable form of shaman. See Wright (2013).
15. Due to time constraints, this excerpt of the interview I conducted with Denilson was not included in the final cut of Fertile Land.
16. Consider, for instance, the 2021 São Paulo Biennial, which became known as “the Biennial of Indigenous peoples”, as well as recent acquisitions, rehangs, and exhibitions at
Pinacoteca de São Paulo, the São Paulo Art Museum (MASP), the Modern Art Museum of São Paulo (MAM), and MAR (the Rio Art Museum), to name but a few. See also Queiroz (2021).

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