

Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art

Edited by Lisa Blackmore
and Liliana Gómez

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Giuliana Borea and Rember Yahuarcani

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Rivers in Government Projects and Indigenous Art

*Giuliana Borea and Rember Yahuarcani*¹

As we write this chapter, the Amazon, the world's largest tropical forest, is burning. Fires are frequent in the Amazon in the dry season and are extinguished by the rains. However, according to Brazil's Space Agency, the volume and magnitude of these fires in 2019 have so far increased by more than 85% over 2018, and this corresponds to deforestation.² The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and other agencies point out that the magnitude of the fire is the consequence of human activity specifically for the expansion of the agricultural-livestock frontier.³ This expansion closely correlates to the right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro's dismantling of environmental regulations since assuming the presidency in 2019, with serious impacts on the lives of the plants and animals that make up this forest and on the lives of the Amazonian indigenous peoples whose selves, belongings and resources are in mutual relationship with the forest. Thus, the fires not only are contributing to the global climate crisis but also endangering the continuity of the indigenous people's lives, memory and worlds.

While we write this chapter, on the Peruvian side of the Amazon the Peruvian government is promoting the Proyecto Hidrovia Amazónica (Amazonian Hydrovia/Waterway Project).⁴ This project adds to other waterways projects promoted globally and particularly in this region, such as the Tapajos-Teles Piles Hydrovia in the Brazilian Amazon and the Parana-Paraguay Hydrovia promoted by Mercosur.⁵ According to the Peruvian authorities the Amazonian Hydrovia will improve the navigability of the Amazon's river and tributaries: the Huallaga, the Marañón and the Ucayali. The water flow in the rivers fluctuates with the seasons of rain and drought, determining the loading level of vessels used both for commercial products and people, with certain sectors sometimes so shallow that boats can run aground. According to the government, this creates unsafe conditions and delays, and thus the project intends to make the rivers navigable 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, ensuring "good, safe, efficient conditions for the transport of cargo and passengers" (Ministry of Transportation and Communication).⁶

For this, the project includes dredging thirteen shallow sections, which the project calls "bad steps," clearing the logs and tree debris from the river and monitoring the water level to determine the amount of cargo that vessels can carry. The Amazonian Hydrovia Project's promotional material reads as follows:⁷

Amazonian Hydrovia: The great route to the integration of our Amazon. Iquitos, Pucallpa and Yurimaguas are three important cities in our forest. They are linked by the Huallaga, Marañón, Ucayali and Amazonas rivers. All three have river ports with great development potential.

These rivers are the main means of communication for these cities and all the surrounding Amazonian communities.

In the months in which the rivers are less deep because their flow drops, vessels are only able to travel at 30 percent of their capacity to avoid running aground. This increases the cost of transporting both passengers and products.

In light of this, for a safer, orderly and economic navigation, Pro-Investment, commissioned by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, is promoting the Amazon Hydrovia Project.

Pro-Investment is a public-private partnership, PPP, that aims to ensure a year-round unobstructed navigation channel.

A concessionaire will be in charge of maintaining a channel 56 m wide along the majority of its lengths and will allow ships of 1.8 m draught to travel safely along the 2,687 km that extends along the entire waterway route. The concessionaire will also carry out work to facilitate access to Iquitos City's river port. The boats will be equipped with GPS, providing digital information about the navigation channel and its depth to ensure a safe navigation.

This improvement will promote the integration and development of all Amazonian peoples living along the waterway.

It will provide them with easier access to public services including education, health and social programs.

The Hydrovia will enhance the development of the Amazon by ensuring vessels' orderly and safe transit day and night, with shorter travel time, which will be reflected in lower passenger and freight transport costs.

Amazonian Hydrovia. The great route to the integration of our Amazon.

ProInversion.

Government of Peru, Working for all Peruvians. (our translation)

This chapter analyses the tensions between the Peruvian government's notion of, relationship with, management of and making of the river through its Amazonian Hydrovia Project and Amazonian indigenous peoples' conception of, feelings about, relationship with and management of river-making. We highlight how this governmental project endangers what the river means to Amazonian indigenous people—to *our* very lives. We argue that an analysis of the Hydrovia (waterway) and Water-worlds allows for the exploration of the ontological distinctions and the relations of power of who determine what the river is and how it is managed, and to whose knowledges and realities the notion of "diverse perceptions" is attributed. Following anthropologist Mario Blaser,⁸ this chapter emphasises not the diverse conceptions about the river that maintain the existence of *the river per se*, but its very diverse *existence*, which is reinforced by different practices of relationality and management.

We argue that contemporary indigenous art, with its national and international circulation, has become a key practice that provides visibility and reinforcement of Amazonian indigenous people's realities and worlds, with the possibility to expand its viewers' comprehension of Amazonian ontologies and to allow exploration, explanation and activism for the artists. The artists' engagement in mutual tactical collaborations with curators, anthropologists, environmentalist and cultural producers to mobilise their work show that co-designing an exhibition with an academic article and to larger projects is possible. While much of this work is frequently carried out as "cultural diversity" in both the artworld and cultural policy, today many Amazonian artists are key political actors seeking to transform the structures of power, knowledge and reality so that indigenous peoples' worlds are respected and valued beyond extractivism and cultural exploitation. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the works of Shipibo artists

Harry Pinedo (Inin Metsa) and Roldán Pinedo (Shoyan Sheca) and of the Uitoto artist Rember Yahuarcani approach and inform about *the river*. The works we analyse here put forward the Amazonian indigenous Water-worlds—one of the realities of the rivers, amongst others, although this reality is immersed in networks of power that determine *the real*. Through their work we explore how the Amazonian Hydrovia Project (waterway project) and Amazonian Water-worlds are based on different densities, spatialities and times of water, and more broadly on distinctive notions of solidity and liquidity. We argue that while the artists' work can be read as ecocritical art, it is a more precisely an ontocritical art within which ecological issues are immersed in complex interrelations of conceiving-being the world/s and structures of power.

This co-authored article is part of a set of artistic-ethnographic collaborations and conversations starting in 2009 between a Peruvian Uitoto indigenous artist and writer, Rember Yahuarcani, and a Peruvian Italian mestizo anthropologist, Giuliana Borea. This is the first text we have written together, and one of the first questions that arose was: who is the “we” that we are speaking from? Does it need to be a “we”? The “we” in this text is sometimes an indigenous voice and sometimes an academic-Western “us,” and other times the division between the two is shown. We, with our diverse contributions and starting points, have conversed and written together, but we have tried to avoid our voices merging into a neutral “us.”⁹ In addition to *our* voice, this chapter includes reflections from Harry Pinedo, the Uitoto artist and leader Santiago Yahuarcani and the Kukuma radio director Leonardo Tello Imaina¹⁰—highlighting also the specificities of Amazonian peoples' worlds. Finally, we draw attention to various key exhibitions of Amazonian art which have included references to and metaphors for the river, which we quote as subtitles in this text.



Figure 7.1 Harry Pinedo/Inin Metsa, *El Protector II* (The Protector II), 2020.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7.2 Harry Pinedo-Inin Metsa, *El Rugir del Yana Puma (crítica hacia la destrucción y la contaminación de la Amazonía)*, (The Guardian and The Black Puma's Roar); critique against the destruction and contamination of the Amazon, 2017.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.

***“From Its Long Crying the Amazon Was Formed”*: Waterway¹¹**

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines a waterway as “a narrow area of water, such as a river or canal, that ships or boats can sail along.”¹² It is a navigable body of water and is expected to have a flow. The current use of the concept of “waterway” in relation to a management project implies modification of such rivers or canals, usually for commercial and economic purposes, based on arguments of safety, efficiency, effectiveness and development. In his study of the Amazonian and Paraná-Paraguay waterway projects, José Enrique Reátegui defines a waterway as “the professional, technological and permanent management of a navigation channel. For its efficient management it is necessary to provide security and predictability for channel navigation.”¹³ This succinct description provides a clear image of the ideas and rhetoric that guide the conception and promotion of these Hydrovia projects.

The aim of the Amazonian Hydrovia Project was clearly announced on the website of the project’s concessionary company, the Chinese-Peruvian association COHIDRO (text originally in English):

The Hidrovia Amazonica focuses its strategic aspect on the possibility of integrating the Amazon to the so-called Amazonas Norte Multimodal Hub, which

brings together the departments from Piura [on the coast] to Loreto [on the Amazon] and allows integration with neighboring countries Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil.

This information was published on the website until August 2019 and then removed.¹⁴ The Amazonian Hydrovia will connect Loreto to Piura and to neighbouring countries and, specifically, will connect Loreto to Piura's port of Paita in the Pacific Ocean and thus to the Asian-Pacific and particularly the Chinese market; it will provide a faster exit to the Atlantic via the Amazon river and connect with the European market. Thus, through government policy different bodies of water will be connected and managed in order to facilitate and speed the flow of goods, not in all directions and for everyone but to global markets controlled by certain corporations and agents. The Amazonian Hydrovia Project would speed the transportation and commercialization of wood, gold, oil and palm hearts—Peru's main Amazonian products with global export growth.

It is important to note that in 2014 and 2015 Peru's Ministry of Culture undertook prior consultation in 14 indigenous communities that will be affected by the Amazonian Hydrovia. However, the information given to the communities about the potential impacts was limited, as the government was not aware and still ignores most of these impacts. The Director of Ucamara Radio, the Kukama Leonardo Tello Imaina,¹⁵ has questioned the instrumental use of indigenous practices in the consultation process: offerings (*pagos*) to the river were promised as part of the mechanisms for the acceptance of the project, which Tello affirms will have an immense impact on the lives of these populations. Further multi-sectorial projects were requested by the communities. The University of Engineering and Technology (UTEC)'s Water Research and Technology Centre of the Wildlife Conservation Society warned in a video released on Facebook on 24 May 2018 that nobody knows the effects that this project will have on the rivers, the local communities and biodiversity.¹⁶ On 6 July 2017 the concession was granted to the Peruvian-Chinese consortium for twenty years, despite the lack of certainty about its social and environmental impacts. In general this project has scarcely been disseminated or publicly debated in the media as it passed through the proposal, consultation, public tendering and impact study phases.

On 19 May 2019 the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESEP), which groups Amazonian indigenous associations, released a firm statement: "AIDSESEP and the indigenous peoples of Loreto and Ucayali demand that the Amazonian Hydrovia be declared unviable and we denounce the continuous violation of indigenous and environmental rights."¹⁷ The National Environmental Certification Service (SENACE) is currently evaluating the Project's Environmental Impact Study, and it is important to say that it is in this context that COHIDRO's information referring to the fact that the project's strategic aim is the integration to the Amazonas Multimodal North Hub has been deleted.

The Amazonian Hydrovia Project sees the river as a means of communication and transportation that must be managed with efficiency. This is the existence that the Peruvian government allows the river. The river is not mentioned as a constituent part of a complex ecosystem, and still less is it approached in the terms of the indigenous peoples, as we explain here.

“Water Serpent”: Water-World¹⁸

Many of *us*—indistinctively if *we* have been in the Amazon—have in mind the image of the undulant, long, brown rivers that extend across the exuberant rainforest. “Water Serpent” is a powerful metaphor that has been used to name exhibitions, catalogues and books that draw attention to these Amazonian bodies of water and to the Amazon itself. Beyond this image, this section explores further associations of the river, the serpent and the water beings, analysing the river as a Water-world through the work and voices of three indigenous contemporary artists: the Shipibos Roldán Pinedo and Harry Pinedo and the Uitoto Rember Yahuarcani. These artists are actively exploring their world, their history and their contexts. Through their aesthetic choices and political decisions, they express and provide visuality to Amazonian peoples’ knowledges, realities and political-social agendas as they participate in the local and international artworld and public sphere.

Roldán Pinedo (Shoyan Sheca is his Shipibo name) was born in the Shipibo Amazonian community of San Francisco (Ucayali, 1971) and migrated to Lima in the 1990s, where he learned to paint with his cousin Robert Rengifo (Chonomëni) at the Rural Studies Seminars’ art workshops promoted by the historian Pablo Macera. His work focuses on Shipibo cosmology and ontology and explores the diversity of the Shipibo area flora and fauna, with emphasis on water beings. His works, along with those of Elena Valera (Bahuan Jisbë), circulate widely in the Peruvian contemporary artworld, and they have also participated in international exhibitions. Roldan Pinedo is a political leader of the Shipibo community of Cantagallo in Lima.¹⁹

Harry Pinedo (Inin Metsa) was also born in the Shipibo community of San Francisco (Ucayali, 1988), and his family migrated to Lima with him when he was a child. He learned to paint in Lima with his parents, the renowned Shipibo artists Elena Valera and Roldan Pinedo. His work, on medium-sized canvases using acrylics, provides a political view of the Shipibo people’s current situation, addressing issues such as the impact of hydrocarbon exploitation and the problems and possibilities of migration and place-making of the Cantagallo Shipibo community in Lima. Currently his work circulates nationally. Harry Pinedo is completing his university degree in Intercultural Bilingual Education at Cayetano Heredia University and is an active agent in the discussion of Peru’s intercultural education.

Rember Yahuarcani is a renowned Uitoto artist with a transnational artistic career. He was born in the community of La Colonia (Loreto, 1985). He learned to paint from his father, the artist Santiago Yahuarcani, and was introduced to Uitoto mythology by his grandmother, Martha López. Using *llanchama* (a tree bark), canvases, natural and acrylic dyes, his medium- and large-format paintings focus on Uitoto mythology and beings, capturing the various connections in the Amazonian ontologies. Yahuarcani’s work has been shown at exhibitions and biennials in Latin America, the US, Europe and Asia. Yahuarcani is also a writer; his books include *El sueño de Buinaima* (Buinaima’s Dream, Alfaguara, 2010), *Fidoma y el bosque de estrellas* (Fidoma and the Star Forest, Arsam, 2012), *Las Aves sus colores* (The Colours of Birds, Déjalo ser, 2015) and *El verano y la lluvia* (Summer and Rain, Casilit, 2017); and he contributes to an opinion column in *El Comercio* paper.

In general, *rivers*, to the indigenous Amazonian people, are integral parts of *our* world, *our* being. They are the principal source of water to drink, wash and clean, and of food: fish is the daily source of protein. The river is the main means of communication that

makes social relations between members of the same group and between groups and foreigners possible in both peace and conflict; the river offers a sense of belonging among the different communities of the same group that live along its banks. It is a means of transport and of exchanging products and knowledge; it is the place where fish and other beings live and the protective spirits of the water beings are. When the river grows, its water brings nutrients to the plants and animals. The rivers and the forest are bonded together; human ancestors with other bodies live on the rivers and are in communication: “the river is the life itself” (Leonardo Tello);²⁰ “the river, like the forest, is an extension of our body, of our life” (Rember Yahuarcani). What this means, and how contemporary artistic practice explores, discusses, and re-makes *the river*, is discussed later.

For the Shipibos, who live along the Ucayali River and its tributaries in Peru’s Central Amazon, there are four interconnected worlds.²¹ The Water-world that takes place in and through the river is the home of various types of fish, red dolphins, anacondas and water plants, and in its depths live the owners of these animals and beings. The Forest-world is where human people, houses, communal houses, animals, plants and their spirit owners are. The Yellow-world is the world of diseases and is where the spirits of bad people end up when they die. The Celestial-world is where the stars (*wishmabo*), Father sun and Mother moon are. Good people become *wishmabo* when they die. These worlds are connected by the travels of the most specialized ancient shamans, *meraya*, who, aided by long special diets and sexual abstinence, disappear deep into the forest for days and nights and master the use of powerful plants to transform themselves into jaguars, birds and dolphins with the help of the plants and the spirits and circulate through the different worlds. They link the worlds, transmitting their knowledge to the older people. Today the shamans (*onanya*), via the consumption of powerful plants such as *ayahuasca* and *toe*, communicate with various spirits in different worlds to help them see their patients’ disarrangement and cure them. In 1998 Giuliana Borea collected a series of *icaros*, healing songs, from the renowned shaman Lucio Muñoz in San Francisco. A fragment of one of these songs describes the different worlds and regions that the shaman visits and locates to connect with the spirits and heal the patient:²²

Deep in the water, I’m standing
 Deep in the water, the people (twice)
 standing in a town (twice)
 Deep in the day, I’m standing
 standing in the depths of the virgin forest,
 standing in the depths of the sky
 doing it or acting
 unleashing it in the path of a large bad luck.

“Deep in the water,” as the shaman Lucio Muñoz sang, the protectors of the water beings live. In *Dueño de las Cochis* (Guardian of the River Ponds) (Figure 7.3), Harry Pinedo offers an insight into these protectors, who are beings such as mermaids, red dolphins and anacondas. They are responsible for producing and caring for fish—the riverside people’s food—and protecting the waters. In this work Pinedo features the anacondas’ bodies covered with the Shipibo designs, the *kené*. The artist tells us:

The anaconda is a path who lives in the river and has several of the designs seen in the visions on it. The anaconda is one of the guardians of the river and gives

food to those who inhabit it. It is said that the anaconda throws fish into the river by its mouth.

Their bodies are covered with various Shipibo designs, and it is from the anaconda that the aesthetics and creativity of the *jonikonbo* people originate.²³

Researchers have studied associations between the anaconda, the designs, *ayahuasca* and forms of synaesthesia. For instance Carolyn Heath²⁴ affirms that the anaconda “combines all imaginable designs on her skin,” and Bruno Illius’s²⁵ ground-breaking early study explains that all designs can be designated as a whole as *ronin kené*: “anaconda designs.” Studies have pointed out that according to some Shipibo-Konibo shamanic songs, the universe itself originated when the anaconda sang the designs it has on its skin, “insufflating their existence as a fundamental graphic-musical power.”²⁶ These invisible designs, which surround and create paths between the different worlds and the elements of each world, can be seen and traced using powerful plants. Consuming *ayahuasca*, *toe* and other plants, shamans communicate with various spirits in order to be able to see and straighten the entangled patient’s body designs; by dropping *piri* into their eyes, women artists can see the designs and transfer these invisible patterns into tangible, visible designs on fabrics, ceramics and other bases.²⁷

The contemporary artists Roldán and Harry Pinedo also draw attention to these associations explored by scholars between the serpent, designs and the use of powerful plants, and they highlight their link with the river. In their paintings they are taking formal decisions but also researching their world: while there is a wide use of the *kené* for the contemporary market,²⁸ many of these artists are also researching in the field, at home, and expanding previous academic studies. The anaconda is the mother of the waters, the mother of the river, the mother of all the Shipibo designs and is seen as a path covered with designs, *kené*. Roldán Pinedo reinforces this association in his work *Río de Kené* (River of Kené) (Figure 7.4). This apparently abstract work refers to a set of anacondas with their designs laying one over the other and forming a path, a river of Shipibo design, of identity. We argue that the relationship between the anaconda, designs and understanding of *the river itself* requires more attention and further analysis.



Figure 7.3 Harry Pinedo/Inin Metsa, *Dueño de las Cochas 2*, (Guardians of the River Ponds 2), 2013, acrylic on canvas.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7.4 Roldán Pinedo/Shoyan Sheca, *Río de Kené* (River of Kené), 2018, acrylic on canvas. Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7.5 Roldán Pinedo/Shoyan Sheca, *Doncella* (Barred Catfish), 2018, acrylic on canvas. Source: Image courtesy of the artist.

Roldán Pinedo also registers the Water-world with a focus on the rich fauna of the Shipibo Ucayali area. As a man knowledgeable in fishery, he has detailed knowledge of the characteristics of fish and is producing a series of paintings that feature a fish in rich detail at the centre, surrounded by other types of river animals. Part of this inventory is his *Doncella* (Barred Catfish) (Figure 7.5), in which the main fish is accompanied by the *gamitana*, *pañna*, *boquichico*, *carachama*, eel and stingray, showing the rich and varied population of the water.

For the Uitotos, who live on the banks of the Putumayu River and its tributaries, there are three interconnected worlds that cannot be understood separately: the Sky-world, Ground-world and Water-world.²⁹ From the perspective of the White Heron Clan, to which one of the authors belongs, the Water-world is divided into seven semi-aquatic worlds, each of which is populated by spirits, gods, animals and other beings. The *Aima* or shaman, who has achieved superior knowledge of plants compared to other healers, uses tobacco and coca to travel to these other spaces, taking the forms of different animals or water creatures, often becoming an anaconda, dolphin, jaguar or bird.

Unlike the Christian beliefs in which God or the Creator is located above, in heaven, in the Uitoto world the Creator is below, and to be precise, in the seventh and final circle of the Water-world. The Water-world is governed by two important gods of

their/our cosmology: Buinaima and Buiñaiño. The Uitoto elders say that after creating the world, Móó Buinaima, the father creator, travelled through the water and settled in the place he occupies today, and from there he sees *us*, looks after *us*, watches over *us* and guides *us*.

It is important to highlight that for the Uitoto people the first three primal elements are water, wind and darkness, and the world is created of these three elements. Rember Yahuarcani's *La Creación del Mundo* (The Creation of the World) (Plate 7) is a study and a visual assemblage of one of the oral myths about the creation of the world. In this version Móó Buinaima sits on nothing and moves from one place to another across the universe, traveling the same paths as his ancestors. Much fatigued after a lot of walking, he goes to sleep on his seat. When he wakes he discovers water moving at his feet. Buinaima tries to catch the water in his hands, but it manages to slip away. With a very powerful *icaro* (shamanic song), the water is immobilized, but it changes shape and breaks free again. Buinaima chases the water for a long time and finally manages to control it. The darkness is thick, the sound of the wind is the only sound. Buinaima tries to stand up but fails; he spits, and his saliva rumbles in the dark. It is a white spot in the middle of the night. With his fingers, he caresses his saliva, making slow circles, and it becomes solid; when he puts his right foot on it he discovers he can hold himself up and slowly leaves his seat. Standing on his saliva, Buinaima walks in circles over it as it widens more and more, becoming a great fountain. He thinks he has done a good job and falls asleep. In his dreams his ancestors speak to him, advising him and guiding him to create new things and beings. In one of the dreams they tell him that he must create a tree and *icarar* (sing shamanic songs to) its seeds. This tree is the *achiote*. The Uitotos say that they themselves were created from *achiote* seeds. After the creation of the world and the Uitoto people, Móó Buinaima went down to where the river runs, and from there he looks at his children.

Buiñaiño is Buinaima's partner. She manifests herself in the three Uitoto worlds (Figure 7.6) by taking different bodies and forms: in the sky she is the rainbow, in the forest she is the *aguaje* (a type of Amazonian palm fruit) and in the water she is the anaconda (Plate 8). When they see that a rainbow originates from the river, many Uitotos say that an anaconda lives there in the depths of the water. In relation to herself as *aguaje*, the large areas of land where many *aguaje* plants grow—*aguajales*—are abundant in fish but are very difficult to navigate due to the thickness of the water. It is also the favourite habitat of anacondas and leeches. It is said that there is a very close relationship between the *aguaje* plant and the anaconda, in their cylindrical bodies, textures, designs and length and slender presence. When the high trunk of the *aguaje* dies, it serves as a nesting place for a group of very precious birds: the red and blue macaws. Its height makes it difficult for predators to reach their nests. Beneath Buiñaiño's domain are all the aquatic animals *we* know, and she is responsible for distributing the fish to all people to eat. Buiñaiño is transparent, her scales shine in midday light and moonlight, and she speaks all languages. Unlike Buinaima, Buiñaiño does not have a fixed place in any of the three worlds: she lives in them all, moving, camouflaged, seeing everything.

The other circles or Water sub-worlds are inhabited and protected by other spirits. The only human person who manages to explore, to go and return, is the *Aima* (healer). These trips do not seem strange to the indigenous world. In the community there are many experiences where it is narrated that the healer travelled to the bottom of the river to ask how to cure a patient or what ailments afflict him. When lightning



Figure 7.6 Rember Yahuarcani, *Buiñaiño, esposa del Creador* (Buiñaiño, the Creator's Wife), 2009, acrylic and natural dyes on tree bark.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.

strikes the water or hits a certain kind of tree, or when there is a night of torrential rain, it is said that the healer is traveling to the bottom of the river. In that sense, water is not only another of the planet's elements but also a path to heal and learn.

To understand what the river is for the Kukama, who live in the lower banks of the Marañon, Huallaga and Ucayali rivers, we quote from an article by the Director of Radio Ucamara, the Kukuma Leonardo Tello Imaina, which is based on a series of six YouTube videos entitled *El Río que Camina* (The River that Walks) and produced by the radio station in response to the Amazonian Hydrovia Project:³⁰

The Kukama people depend on fishing for their physical survival and on the rivers for their spiritual and cultural survival.

The bottom of the river is very important for the spirits that live in the water, such as the *purawa* (the snake) or the *karuara*, who are the people who live in the depths of the river when carried there by the water spirits. Those who have gone to live in the Water-world communicate with their families that live in the Ground-world through dreams. The river pools that form on the banks of the rivers and allow the water to keep spinning is where our ancestors live. In this sense the Kukama have a deep personal relationship with the rivers.

The bottom of the river is very complex for other life systems. Many fish live, reproduce and feed on the riverbed. In its depths there are high and low places, like the dunes in a desert. They influence the current in the river, sometimes forming backwaters and swirls, associating different species of flora and fauna with the river's dynamics.

The river or "great snake" cannot be seen as a fixed path: it is constantly changing and exchanging with the forest and its many life systems. The river has a time of flood and a time of drought. In times of flooding, water, with its sediment, enters the forest, shaping the wetlands, where water is the main controlling factor of life. Floods leave sediment that produces specific habitats and brings nutrients that fertilize the land. The floods also help to connect the various water creeks that feed the forest, helping the plants, shrubs and fruit trees necessary to sustain life in the forest along the rivers to develop. The fruits of some trees deworm the fish so that they remain healthy during the summer. The fertilized lands are also used by the Kukama people at different times of the year for their crops.

Even the trunks of trees that fall into the river, whether by erosion or collapse, are an important element of the rivers. For example, when a *quiruma* [piece of tree trunk] falls in the centre of the river where the flow is highest, it slows the water, creating a backwater where the big fish rest, fulfilling a very important function. Similarly, the branches that remain on the riverbanks create breeding grounds for many fish.

The *rivers* and the forest are one: everything is united, nothing is separated. Thinking about rivers and protecting them is thinking about our lives and defending them. The rivers speak, feel and express themselves. The Kukamas, however, must face the skepticism of the Hydrovia Project engineers and concessionary agents and of the government.

Rusbel Casternoque, *apu* or head of the Kukama community of Tarapacá on the Amazon River, said: "When Westerners talk about bad steps [*malos pasos*], we just keep seeing what we already know: that can be the tail or the head of the *purawa*; when a beach comes out into the middle of the river, there is the *raya mama*. As usual, they lie down somewhere, and there the sand or mud piles up and the beach emerges. That is why, for us, the indigenous peoples, dredging the river is a threat that carries the risk that over time, these beings will leave the rivers."³¹

"The Skin of the River": Water Textures³²

From the names themselves of these large water management projects, hydrovia (waterway) and hydropower plants, the water element is addressed as "hydro," H₂O, as an inorganic chemical component, stripping it of its relationship as water with organic forms, suggesting a more scientific, objective, real, controllable and neutral connotation and thus facilitating its management and exploitation. Talking about "hydro," or even water, separates the projects from being rivers (like talking about ice or snow instead of high mountains).³³ "River", even in Western thought, is charged with more organicity and location than "hydro." Furthermore, the project's name prefixes "hydro" with "via," which implies mobility from one point to another point. In other words the river is not the place itself but the way to reach a site.

The Peruvian government's Amazonian Hydrovia Project sees the river as a waterway whose modification is justifiable if it improves and speeds up the transport of goods. Specifically, for a distant state governed by business interests, the river is a transport route for merchandise extracted from the Amazon towards international markets for the benefit of the extractive and commercial agents. The aim is to standardize and "discipline" the river: flattening the relief in its depths and clearing it of trunks and palisades, increasing the speed of its flow. This standardization of the river includes technological control of its water. This river management strips it of its textures, modifies its fluids, conditions its fluctuations and erodes its lives in order to accelerate and make the commercial flow secure.

The Amazonian peoples do not merely have a different conception of the river: the "reality" of the river differs. As Mario Blaser points out,³⁴ it is not a question of different conceptions about a reality, "the river", defined by Western thought and neoliberal logic. In the lines recorded earlier and from the work of Amazonian artists we have shown that the river, the forest and the lives of human and non-human populations (Figure 7.1 and 7.2) are articulated through worlds that are interconnected by designs, stories and the circulation of beings. Following Blaser's discussion of life-projects,³⁵ the Amazonian peoples not only oppose the Hydrovia Project, but they also have their projects for the river and its future—this completion of the phrase is important in the narratives and understanding of what indigenous people are claiming. The work of the artists shown in this chapter and of other Amazonian artists rises, then, as an expression of indigenous river projects: projects of river-making. There is where its strength and agency reside, especially if these art practices and artists find resonance on local and global platforms of enunciative and economic power.³⁶

The meanings/beings of the river are not only "hydro" and "waterway" but also "world" and "path." The Amazonian Water-world distances itself from the characteristics of constant flow and lightness.³⁷ The water/the river has density, is inhabited and, for the Shipibo, it is also related to a source of *kené* design; far from the definition of liquids "as close together particles with no regular arrangement":³⁸ in these waters there is an invisible, real, arrangement connecting to other worlds. Amazonian artists rise, *we* rise, as agents who claim other realities and national policies that collect the plurality of knowledge, the plurality of realities.

The coloniality of reality implies thinking that there is "one reality" out there and any others are mere conceptions. As scholars have pointed out,³⁹ the problem of locating indigenous ontologies as "culture" is that this extracts them from their design of reality, and this is how Peru's Ministry of Culture—and those of many other countries—operates. "Government of Peru, Working for all Peruvians," as the slogan for public projects including Amazonian Hydrovia declares, does not consider or respect the realities built by all Peruvians, and even less those of indigenous Peruvians which are based on coordinates other than Western-neoliberal ones. As Burman says, ontological conflicts—in this case water conflicts—must be understood in the asymmetries of power at large.⁴⁰

The river-making projects and life projects at large by the artists in this chapter provide visibility to the Amazonian worlds, but these are projects embedded not only in local histories⁴¹ but in transnational strategies and various set of appropriation.⁴² Indigenous art practices are arenas in which ontologies and strategies (e.g. appropriations, networking and activism) work together, showing the possibility of concrete negotiations for co-designing major projects when indigenous people, their agency

and their intellectuality are taken seriously. In co-writing this paper and through other collaborations, we argue that the diversity of ontologies is not a barrier for mutual understanding and negotiation (from any starting point, whether Western, Amazonian, or other), but discrimination, greed and necropolitics are, bringing us back to the lack of ethics at the level of rhetoric—“Government of Peru, working for all Peruvians”—and the level of politics—“the Amazonian Hydrovia Project.”⁴³

“The River That Walks”: Fluidity and Metaphors⁴⁴

Finally, we want to add a note on fluidity, metaphors and positionality. Many authors have already pointed out that modernity is based on the construction of dualities: nature/culture; body and matter/thought; object/subject; science/culture, etc. This modern Western ontology has been located as the reality from which man operates and dominates and consumes the world. However, these dualities and the positionality of man over the world and other beings do not extend to other ontologies such as the Amazonian, a subject that has been widely developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola.⁴⁵ Within Amazonian cosmology and practice the bodies of people, animals and plants have the potential for mutual transformation into other bodies, as shown by the myths, the abilities of shamans, and the arts. The body is not fixed: it can transform, the corporeal fluidity is possible; and bodies—the human person and the animal person—have had humanity as their starting point. When “persons” transform into other bodies they assume the physical and sensory capabilities of the entities which they have become, which modifies—and in some cases amplifies—their perspective. In this sense, Viveiros de Castro calls for an understanding of the Amazon in terms of multinaturalism rather than multiculturalism: many natures, one culture.⁴⁶

Besides its dualities, modernity is built on unstoppable human exploitation of the world and the assessment of constant change through capitalism. Responding to the notion of “postmodernism” as overcoming modernity, Zygmunt Bauman proposes understanding current times as a late modernity in which constant change has amplified. Bauman opens *Liquid Modernity* by pointing out that “‘Fluidity’ is the quality of liquids and gases”; explaining that what distinguishes them from solids is their continuous change in shape under stress, while “the solid undergoes no flow.”⁴⁷ The author affirms that “we”—the West—associate this mobility of fluids with the idea of lightness, and thus, “fluidity” and “liquidity” help Bauman as metaphors to explain this time of fast flowing identities, space and capital.

But *welsholars* are using the metaphor of “fluidity” to approach two very different ontologies: the Western and the Amazonian. One of these is characterised today by constant change marked by the flow of capital on a global scale, with the consequent dominion of man (a group of men) over nature and other men, and the fluid changes in social position and individual identities (maintaining the same body and on the same space level); the other is characterised by a human–non-human mutual relationship in which there is a fluidity of bodies across different worlds and different levels of space. This latter “fluidity” is linked to socio-cultural ascriptions and group identities—here the solids have not melted into air, to borrow a powerful phrase from Marx and Engels.⁴⁸ Here the bodies are not so solid, nor are the liquids so liquid; or, as Tim Ingold asks, discussing Philippe Descola’s arguments, what if the starting point is not naturalism but animism?⁴⁹ What if the starting point is not the defined body or is not

liquid as fluids? The metaphor of “fluidity” makes sense from a comparative perspective, when comparing an earlier time with late modernity, or Western with Amazonian conceptions-realities.⁵⁰ In any case, “fluidity” is a metaphor that serves to explain from the “Western I,” and therefore understanding its construction and positionality is crucial to understanding its possibilities and limitations.

We conclude by introducing a metaphor from indigenous intellectuality to the discussion—not of liquidity *per se*, because as we have explained this “state of matter” is entangled with bodies and rivers, but of rivers. This is a metaphor that brings together the river, identity, memory and the future of the indigenous people. In the words of the intellectual and artist Santiago Yahuarcani “Myths are the rivers of our memory. They are life. They are the origin. They are our past, present and our precious future. Myths are the rivers where our grandparents’ memory navigates, and there we must catch the wise words of resistance against forgetting, discrimination and exclusion.”⁵¹

Notes

1. We want to express our gratitude to Harry Pinedo, Santiago Yahuarcani, Leonardo Tello Imaina, Guillermo Salas and Gabriel Arriarán for sharing their knowledge and comments on this chapter with us. Thanks to Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez-Popescu for their invitation to collaborate on this volume and for their feedback. Giuliana Borea is supported by the Marie Curie Individual Fellowship (844895).
2. See Programa Queimadas do Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais: <http://queimadas.dgi.inpe.br/queimadas/portal> (accessed in August 2019).
3. Roberto Troya, “WWF Vice-President for Latin America and Caribe,” *CNN*, August 22, 2019.
4. The Hydrovia Project is an initiative of the Peruvian Government via the Ministry of Transportation and Communications and promoted by the Private Investment Promotion Agency (Pro-Inversion) of the Ministry of Economy and Finance.
5. See Jonathan Watts, “Brazil’s Mega Hydro Plan Foreshadows China’s Growing Impact on the Amazon,” October 5, 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/brazil-amazon-tapajos-hydrovia-scheme (accessed in July 2019).
6. In Ministry of Culture’s Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ6VWW4AJeU (accessed in July 2019).
7. Source: Video Proinversion: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tJ60KB6J0Y (accessed 22 August 2019). See the Project’s promotional image in: <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-hidrovia-amazonica-conoce-por-sera-gran-via-integracion-la-selva-peruana-673006.aspx>
8. Mario Blaser, “Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe,” *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 5 (2013): 547–568.
9. This article was written based on multiple set of translations, face to face interactions and online conversations while Rember was on an art residency at China and Giuliana was in the UK.
10. To address an issue: it is important to note that we are aware that our selection of artists for this text does not include the work of indigenous Amazonian women artists, who play an important role in the arts.
11. *De su Largo Llanto se formó el Amazonas* (From its Long Crying the Amazon was Formed: Native narratives not represented in the Peruvian history, Sala Porras Barnechea, 2014) was an exhibition curated by Giuliana Vidarte and Christian Bendayán that questioned how Peruvian history of the Amazon has not included the memories, versions and stories of the Amazonian people but rather those of outsiders, whether missionaries, rubber exploiters or the government. Using the work of various artists, the exhibition sought to retell the stories from those silenced voices.
12. In the Cambridge English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/waterway>

13. José Enrique Reátegui Ríos, *Propuesta de Gestión de Hidrovías en el Perú* (Master Thesis in Public Management, Universidad del Pacífico, Lima, 2018), iv.
14. See www.cohidro.com.pe/en/hidrovia-amazonical/ (accessed 22 August 2019). I searched this website again on 26 September 2019, and the page was not working). However, a COINDRO document uploaded by the Peruvian government and still on the Internet says: “Amazon Waterway is Peru’s anchor project that will allow the connection of waterways and roads to the ports of Manaus, Iquitos, Yurimaguas-Nueva Reforma and Paita. The main objective is to *maintain commercial navigation* in safe and economic conditions 365 days a year with a minimum water depth of 8 feet along approximately 2,687 km of river” (translation and italics are ours). In: www.ositran.gob.pe/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/PDN2018_COHIDRO.pdf (accessed 22 October 2019).
15. Leonardo Tello Imaina, “La Hidrovía Amazónica en Perú contra los ríos que caminan,” *Rainforest Movement*, 2019, <https://wrm.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin-wrm/seccion1/la-hidrovia-amazonica-en-peru-contra-los-rios-que-caminan/>
16. Universidad de Ingeniería y Tecnología and Wildlife Conservation Society, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1164388420370709
17. See www.aidesep.org.pe/noticias/aidesep-y-los-pueblos-indigenas-de-loreto-y-ucayali-exigimos-se-declare-inviable-la (accessed in August 2019).
18. *Serpiente de Agua: La Vida Indígena en la Amazonia* (Water Serpent) was the name given to one of the first key exhibitions on the Amazon, held in Lima in 2003 and curated by Gredna Landolt and Alexandre Surrallés with the support of AIDSESEP and first lady Eliane Karp. This exhibition featured the different ways in which Amazonian peoples give value and meaning to their material and immaterial worlds, through objects, music and art works.
19. For a detailed explanation of Pinedo’s artistic trajectory see Daniel Castillo, “Las pinturas y los artistas amazónicos que viven en Cantagallo: el caso de Roldan Pinedo,” in *Arte y Antropología* (Lima: Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2017).
20. Leonardo Tello Imaina, “La Hidrovía Amazónica en Perú contra los ríos que caminan,” 2019.
21. This distribution of worlds derives from diverse myths and oral knowledge, and thus certain variations can be found. This distribution is based on the explanation given by Harry Pinedo. Also see, for example, Clara Cardenas, *Los Unaya y su Mundo: Aproximación al sistema médico de los Shipibo-Conibo del Río Ucayali* (Lima: IIP, CAAP, 1989), 115–116.
22. The songs were translated into Spanish in situ by Ronal Roque Agustín, and the English translation is by G. Borea. Carolyn Heath has collected shamanic songs similar to that mentioned above: “I am travelling through the lands and the waters. I am flying through the air and through the mountains. I am looking for the cause of the disease at the bottom of the river” (2002: 50, our translation).
23. The first section is a quote from an interview with Harry Pinedo. The second is a quote from Pinedo’s written answer to “Who is the pond’s guardian?” (both in August 2019).
24. Carolyn Heath, “Una Ventana hacia el Infinito: El simbolismo de los diseños Shipibo-Conibo,” in *Una Ventana hacia el Infinito* (Lima: ICPNA, 2002), 46.
25. Bruno Illius, “La ‘Gran boa’: Arte y cosmología de los Shipibo-Conibo,” *Amazonía Peruana* 12, no. 24 (1994): 185–212.
26. Luisa Elvira Belaunde, “Diseños materiales e inmateriales: la patrimonialización del kené shipibo-konibo y de la ayahuasca en el Perú,” *Mundo Amazónico* 3 (2012): 128 (our translation).
27. See Luisa Elvira Belaunde, “Diseños materiales e inmateriales,” in *Quimeras em dialogo. Grafismo e figuracao na arte indígena*, edited by Carlo Severi and Els Lagrou (Rio de Janeiro: 7 letras, 2013).
28. Luisa Elvira Belaunde, “Diseños materiales e inmateriales,” 126.
29. We want to thank Santiago Yahuarcani for contributing his knowledge to this section.
30. Our gratitude to Leonardo Tello Imaina for allowing us to reproduce an entire section of his text. The full text is in: <https://wrm.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin-wrm/seccion1/la-hidrovia-amazonica-en-peru-contra-los-rios-que-caminan/> (accessed in August 2019; our translation omits the original highlights of the text).
31. In the city of Nauta, PURAHUA, the Kukuma School of Art, directed by artist Casilda Pinche Sánchez, has produced murals that explore the Kukuma Water-world. These and

- other murals are allowing to provide visibility and voice to other narratives of memory—such as those of the rubber boom era—and worlds in the public space of this mestizo city.
32. *La Piel de un Río. La Amazonía en el Arte Contemporáneo* (The River's Skin, The Amazon in Contemporary Art, San Marcos Art Museum, 2008) was an exhibition curated by Christian Bendayán that included indigenous and mestizo artists expressly addressing contemporary art.
 33. For a study of hydropower plants, water conflicts and local life projects in Peru's Andes and Coast, see Astrid B. Stensrud, "Water as Resource and Being: Water Extractivism and Life Projects in Peru," in *Indigenous Life, Projects and Extractivism*, edited by C. Vindal and J. J. Rivera (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 143–164. For a study of climate change, named Andean mountains, and local life projects see Guillermo Salas Carreño, "Cambio climático, meteorología moral y medidas locales en la peregrinación de Qoylluriti," in *Montañas y paisajes sagrados: Mundos religiosos, cambio climático e implicancias del retiro de los glaciares* (Lima: Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya & American University, 2019), 64–100.
 34. Blaser, "Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe," 547–568.
 35. Mario Blaser, "Life Projects: Indigenous People's Agency and Development," in *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects, and Globalization*, edited M. Blaser, H.A. Feit and G. McRae (London & New York: Zed Books, 2004).
 36. See Giuliana Borea, "Personal Cartographies of a Huitoto Mythology: Rember Yahuarcani and the Enlarging of the Peruvian Contemporary Art Scene," *Revista de Antropología Social do PPGAS-UFSCar* 2, no. 2 (2010): 67–87, and *Configuring the New Lima Art Scene* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
 37. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 1–2.
 38. In Gases, Liquids, and Solids, www.chem.purdue.edu/gchelp/liquids/character.html
 39. See Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond Politics," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 334–370; Anders Burman, "The Political Ontology of Climate Change: Moral Meteorology, Climate Justice, and the Coloniality of Reality in the Bolivian Andes," *Journal of Political Ecology* 24 (2017): 921–938; Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds* (London: Duke University Press, 2018), 1–22.
 40. Anders Burman, "The Political Ontology of Climate Change: Moral Meteorology, Climate Justice, and the Coloniality of Reality in the Bolivian Andes," *Journal of Political Ecology* 24 (2017): 931.
 41. Blaser, "Life Projects."
 42. About Amazonian artists' appropriations see Giuliana Borea, "Personal Cartographies of a Huitoto Mythology." Arnd Schneider discusses appropriation and ontology in his presentation "Apropiación, arte, antropología, y alteridad: algunas consideraciones. Seminario Internacional Antropologías Visuales en Latino América at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Nov. 8, 2019.
 43. While on the one hand Peru's government and the financial elites fostering contemporary art at the museum and market level are finally promoting Amazonian contemporary art internationally—e.g. the participation of Amazonian art at the 2019 ARCO Madrid and the Pan American Olympic Games ceremonies—, on the other, the government and powerful financial groups seek to implement projects that directly affect the life of the indigenous Amazonian peoples, revealing the paradoxes in how the artworld operates. In addition, artists mobilise Amazonian ontologies and agendas through one of the spheres most determined by neoliberal logics: that of the contemporary art circuit. Giuliana Borea's *Configuring the New Lima Art Scene* (in press) and her new research project explore these issues.
 44. *El Río que Camina*, (The River that Walks) is a series of six YouTube videos produced by Kukuma Radio Ucayali in response to the Amazonian Hydrovia Project.
 45. Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3 (1998): 460–488; Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).
 46. *Ibid.*, 478.
 47. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 1.

48. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 87–129.
49. Tim Ingold, “A Naturalist Abroad in the Museum of Ontology: Philippe Descola’s *Beyond Nature and Culture*,” *Anthropological Forum* 26, no. 3 (2016): 1, 25.
50. In a discussion where the time variable requires further attention to avoid essentialisms.
51. Quoted by Rember Yahuarcani, “Sobre el concepto de arte en los uitotos aimenu,” in *Arte y Antropología* (Lima: Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2017), 164.

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