Tracing the Ouroboros' Tail: Paradoxical Politics against Necropolitical Binaries in Lukas Avendaño and Muxx Project's Theory and Practice

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Necropower often relies on taxonomic distinctions between self and Other, a binary structure that is associated with gender binarism, digital dualism, and negations of life's entanglement with death. This essay discusses deployments of paradox against these necropolitical binaries by Lukas Avendaño, a Binni Zaa (Zapotec) and *muxe* (nonbinary gender) artist and anthropologist, and Muxx Project, an artistic collective founded in 2020 by Avendaño and multimedia artists EYIBRA, Óldo Erréve, and Nnux. The essay's "dialogical body" traces Avendaño and Muxx Project's understandings of how their body-based and digital performances attempt to disrupt gender binarism and digital dualism, to then focus on Avendaño's paradoxical view of life and death forged through artistic practice, and, most importantly, his experience as an activist confronting the complexities of necropower in contemporary Mexican politics. Following Avendaño's theorization of the ouroboros as an embodiment of life's paradoxical entanglement with death and the artist's prioritization of action over theory,

the essay concludes by reflecting on the potential of an ouroboric, or *para*-paradoxical, ontopolitics that might undo emergent necropolitical dichotomizations, such as that between the digital and the virtual, as they occur, potentially laying the ground for living, and dying, outside and beyond the binaries that undergird a violent world.

Key words: necropolitics; digital performance; digital dualism; coloniality of gender; paradox; Zapotec.

DA CAPO: FROM THE SERPENT'S HEAD

Introduction: Corpo-Digital Muxeidad as Paradox

The first time I saw Lukas Avendaño, it was in digital form: a cluster of liquid-crystals twisted into helix formations through which binary signals choreographed light to produce an image upon the computer's vitreous screen (fig. 1).[1] Next to the digital image were these words:

> What you will not find about my people in the codices, the geographic surveys, the letters of relations, nor in the ceramics, the sculptures, the reserve funds, the museums and in the libraries with their doctoral theses, you will find here in my body. (Avendaño "Lukas Avendaño")

Choreographer, performance artist, and anthropologist Lukas Avendaño, the author of the Facebook publication cited above, is socially enunciated as *muxe* by the Zapotec—or Binni Zaa (Didxazaa; *binni*, "the people" and *zaa,* "from the cloud")—community in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec that Avendaño is a part of.[2] When asked if *muxe* can be understood as a Zapotec third gender,[3] Avendaño answers that this is not "a simple yes-or-no question" (para. 23). Refusing such oversimplification, Avendaño ("Queer: No") conceptualizes "*muxeidad,*" which has been deeply rooted in Binni Zaa culture "since pre-Colombian times" (pars. 11-15), as a "'total social event'" that paradoxically

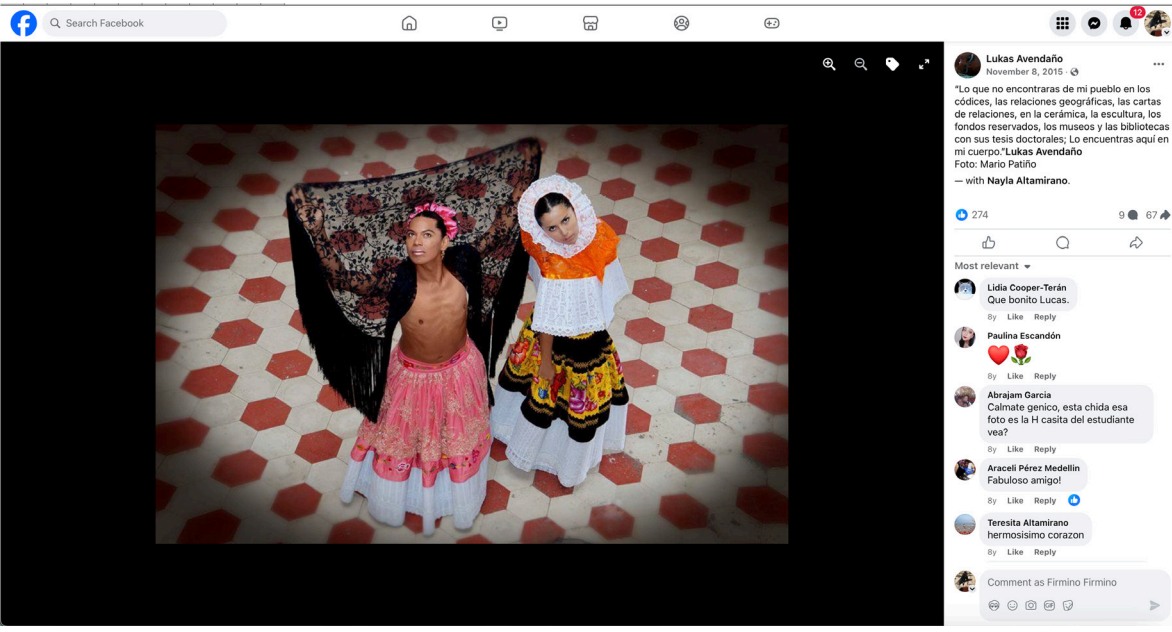

Figure 1: Screenshot of Facebook post by Lukas Avendaño (2015); digital photo of Avendaño and Nayla Altamirano © Mario Patiño.

encompasses a plurality of masculinities and femininities (para. 20) without seeking to resolve their apparent contradictions. Similarly, Avendaño's pronouns, in this essay and beyond, oscillate between the feminine and the masculine, also paradoxically.[4]

Paradox is likewise present in the digital image where I first saw Avendaño (fig. 1). Avendaño stands next to artist and collaborator Nayla Altamirano, who is read as woman within a colonial ontology imposed through force, but also installed hegemonically through consent.[5] Her position next to Avendaño—who outside of the Binni Zaa context is hegemonically and colonially read as male and queer—is neither oppositional nor an equivalence. The juxtaposition is intentionally ambiguous, as reflected in their sartorial choices: they both wear the long skirt and *enagua* (lace slip) of Tehuantepec. Altamirano's face is framed in starched white lace, and her body is fully covered. Avendaño holds open a black lace shawl, her arms raised in a "V" above his head. Shirtless, she reveals a flat and well-toned chest. Through these and other details,[6] this image becomes more

than an image; it becomes a digital and corporeal performance of a politics of paradox that contests gender binaries, digital dualisms, and other dichotomies that undergird the necropolitical formations of an enduring coloniality.

The potential of paradox to disrupt colonial impositions of binary gender and other dualist taxonomies, such as the distinction between the materiality of the analog and the virtuality of the digital, is present in the image above and its accompanying caption. As the juxtaposition between image and caption suggest, the virtuality and intangibility of bodies rendered through the digital image depend on fleshy, material bodies existing in specific spatiotemporal coordinates. At the same time, Avendaño uses both his digital body (existing as pixels of light) and her physical body (as flesh, bone, blood, and all else that constitutes a person) to signal, simultaneously, the archive as instrument of domination, the ephemeral nature of historical memory, and the enduring mnemonics of the flesh, despite the flesh's mortality, decay, and eventual physical disappearance. Furthermore, Avendaño invokes, through his own physicality and her own words, the embodied memory of the non-normative *muxe* body, which is subject to erasure and misrepresentation, but not only through the colony's archival procedures; it is also absented from the codices, the ceramics, and the sculptures often relied upon to trace—and sometimes to regenerate—that which colonialism and other forms of power attempt to destroy. Therefore, Avendaño's *muxe* body and embodied knowledge surface the need for paradox in *any* politics capacious enough for such multiplicity.

In this essay, I trace the paradoxical in Avendaño's work and in Muxx Project, an ephemeral collective founded in 2020 by composer and multimedia artist EYIBRA (formerly known as Abraham Brody), digital and performance artist Óldo Erréve, sound and performance artist Nnux (Ana López-Reyes), and Avendaño. Through dialogical engagements with the artists, I discuss the intentions behind their digital and body-based performances—namely, critiques of gender binarism and digital dualism—to then trace the relationships between such dichotomizations and the necropolitical tools of colonial domination. I pay particular attention to Avendaño's performance-based research on the non-dichotomous relation between the physical ouroboros and the abstract lemniscate (∞), the mathematical symbol for infinity and a metaphor for the cyclical continuity between living and

dying. I characterize this as the "dialogical body" of the essay. This is followed by a discussion of how Avendaño's theoretical findings are grounded in his practice as a *muxe,* as an artist, and as an activist who has had to navigate the complex terrain of a contemporary Mexican necropower that configures her as killable in multifarious ways. I place Avendaño's experiences and ideas in conversation with critical analyses of the paradoxes that have historically shaped contemporary Mexican society, especially the reformulation of Mbembe's necropolitics by R. Guy Emerson, who argues that the indeterminacies of a violence that is so multifarious and that is no longer the monopoly of the state complicate the dichotomizations between death and life that have long been mobilized for necropolitical ends. These strands of thought and practice are woven together to tentatively propose a politics *lived* paradoxically in relation to the ubiquity of death. I conclude by cautioning against the instrumentalization of paradox as a utopian formulation, proposing a *para*-paradoxical, or ouroboric, politics that regenerates by eating itself, continuously unsettling its onto-epistemological certitude as an antidote to novel necropolitical dichotomizations.

I will return to the topic of paradox, and specifically to how a *para*-paradoxical politics might disrupt normativized binary ontologies, but first I will discuss how taxonomic either/or distinctions undergird worlds produced through separation and destruction. Starting with gender, as *muxeidad*—an ontological paradigm incommensurable with Western gender categories (Mendoza-Álvarez and Espino-Armendáriz 132-133)—reveals, and as María Lugones argues, the violently imposed "Modern Colonial Capitalist Gender System" (21) based on a rigid male/female binary is not universal, necessary, or even desirable.[7] It is an epiphenomenon of historically specific constructions of onto-political categories—such as the masculine, the heavenly, the abstract mind, and the human—construed to be in opposition to other likewise invented categories—such as the feminine, the earthly, the material body, and animality—in order to legitimate violence and domination.

Historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe associates this dichotomizing activity with the production of "*death-worlds,*" which he describes as "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*" (92). The conferring of this status

and the "subjugating of life [or more precisely, *specific lives*] to the power of death," which Mbembe terms "necropolitics" or "necropower" (92), are ontologically productive acts catalyzed by processes of taxonomification. For the living to become killable, they must be socially constructed as ontologically Other, and even always-already dead. But because both the living and the dead are trans-corporeal entities in a web of inextricable entanglements, there are no ontologically separate others.[8] As Mbembe puts it, "since this object [the ontologically separate being] has never actually existed—does not and never will exist—desire must continually invent it" (43).

Mbembe calls the space of inclusion constructed through necropolitical exclusion "*this enchanted circle*" (43; my own emphasis). Each word in this phrase is heavy with meaning: "this" indicating that the death-world is the dominant contemporary social order; "enchanted" describing it as a world produced through the conjuring of the other; and "circle" pointing to its exclusionary circularity, and to a circular, and even solipsistic, logic within which the imagined objects of ontological exclusion may change, but the self-replicating structure remains. As Mbembe notes, "Yesterday, 'Negro' and 'Jew' were the favored names for such objects. Today, Negroes and Jews are known by other names: Islam, the Muslim, the Arab, the foreigner, the immigrant, the refugee, the intruder, to mention only a few" (43).

This circularity is described by dramaturge and social theorist Sylvia Wynter as an "autopoetic, cosmogonically/sociogenically induced closure" ("The Ceremony Found" 222) formed by ontologically constitut*ed* and constitut*ing* dyads—such as "symbolic *life/death*" (211)—which "served to charter the secular West's two sociogenic replicator codes" that performatively enact, Wynter explains, "*Man* (as the incarnation of *symbolic life*)" and "*Human Others* (as the embodiment of *symbolic death*)" (229). This process has resulted in material and social consequences that, historically, have not been conducive to life for the great majority of beings on the planet (230), for "these codes were/are then performatively enacted only on the basis of the West's negation of its human subjects' equal co-humanness with all other (originally non-Western) members of humankind" (229).

These acts of othering are "socio-technologies" productive in the "*positive/negative representations* of the specific order of knowledge"

that compel "perspectives of 'otherness' as abnormal anomalies" (212). Such projections of binary taxons onto multiplicitous being fabricate the normal and the natural, while violently configuring those outside such arbitrary and solipsistic parameters as abnormal and "*contra natura,*" colonial classifications through which *muxe* and other individuals not adhering to sexual and gender behavioral norms were criminalized and therefore rendered killable (Tortorici "Against Nature" 169).

Dichotomizing processes of normativization by negation are applied to living beings (including people), as well as entities and phenomena, and they have long undergirded violent colonial territorializations, imperialist expansions, and economies of extraction. Furthermore, they now generate death-worlds through the binary structure's continued iterations of itself in new forms. A relatively novel dichotomization is "digital dualism," which social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson defines as a "bias to see the digital and the physical as separate" (para. 2). As a corrective, Jurgenson proposes "an alternative view that states that our reality is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once. [We]...live in one reality, one that is augmented by atoms and bits" (para. 7). Another critique of the digital/analog divide traces it to a long-standing Cartesian ontology splitting spirit from matter and mind from body, which is premised upon "a view of the brain as a computing machine whose logic and data can be abstracted from its physical manifestation" (Carr para. 3). What kinds of social orders do these emerging dichotomizations support? If they are iterations of the same structuring dichotomies that Mbembe and Wynter critique, what are their corresponding practices and technologies? Might these dichotomizations offer ideological legitimization for the deployment of digital technology for mass state violence?[9] Given the autopoietic persistence of necropolitical dichotomizations and their emerging iterations, is it strategically viable to base theory, politics, and artistic practice with anticolonial intent on the same onto-epistemic models undergirding colonial and imperial death-worlds?[10] Finally, if dichotomy structures the death-world, then what might paradox make possible?

In what follows, I trace the presence of paradox as politics in Avendaño and Muxx Project's performance processes, focusing on the lived experiences and intentions behind their practices as well as

their own understandings of the critical interventions that their digital and body-based works make, especially in regard to the coloniality of gender, digital dualism, and a life/death dichotomy associated with necropolitical configurations of social reality. The body of this essay intentionally unfolds dialogically, not only as a rhetorical form, but as a method akin to the onto-political possibilities of paradox suggested by theorist and physicist David Bohm's definition of dialogue:

> "Dialogue" comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Logos* means "the word," or in our case we would think of the "meaning of the word." And *dia* means "through"—it doesn't mean "two." A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two. Even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. (6-7)

Following Bohm and the trans-corporeal nature of memory and knowledge expressed by Avendaño's pronouncements, may this dialogue also reach the reader and involve them, perhaps becoming part of their flesh in the sense conveyed by Wynter ("The Pope") when she wrote: "Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities" (35).

Before proceeding to the dialogical body, I will trace the movements across space and time through which the writing of this essay occurred.

Dialoguing Across Time/Space and Bodies

In February 2022, I witnessed Muxx Project's *Bardaje*,[11] a performance installation consisting of live music by Nnux and EYIBRA, virtual reality and 3D video by Erréve, and Avendaño's durational interactive performance (fig. 2). *Bardaje* was performed at Laboratorio ArteAlameda in Mexico City, formerly a colonial convent, and in the vicinity of a mural painted in 1948 by Federico Cantú depicting Bernardino de Sahagún's Nahuatl informants who pro-

Figure 2: Lukas Avendaño performing in *Bardaje,* with holographic projection of Avendaño by Óldo Erréve, Laboratorio ArteAlameda, Mexico City (February 13, 2022) © Lukas Avendaño and Muxx Project.

vided the ethnographic knowledge that Spain used to control its colonial subjects. Set in this context, Avendaño's intention was to invoke in and through her body the transhistorical presence of the *muxe* and other sexual dissidents that the Virreinato de la Nueva España (present-day Mexico, Guatemala, the U.S. Southwest, and the Philippines) violently persecuted as "sodomites" who violated Christendom's strictures against non-reproductive sexuality and threatened the "natural order."[12]

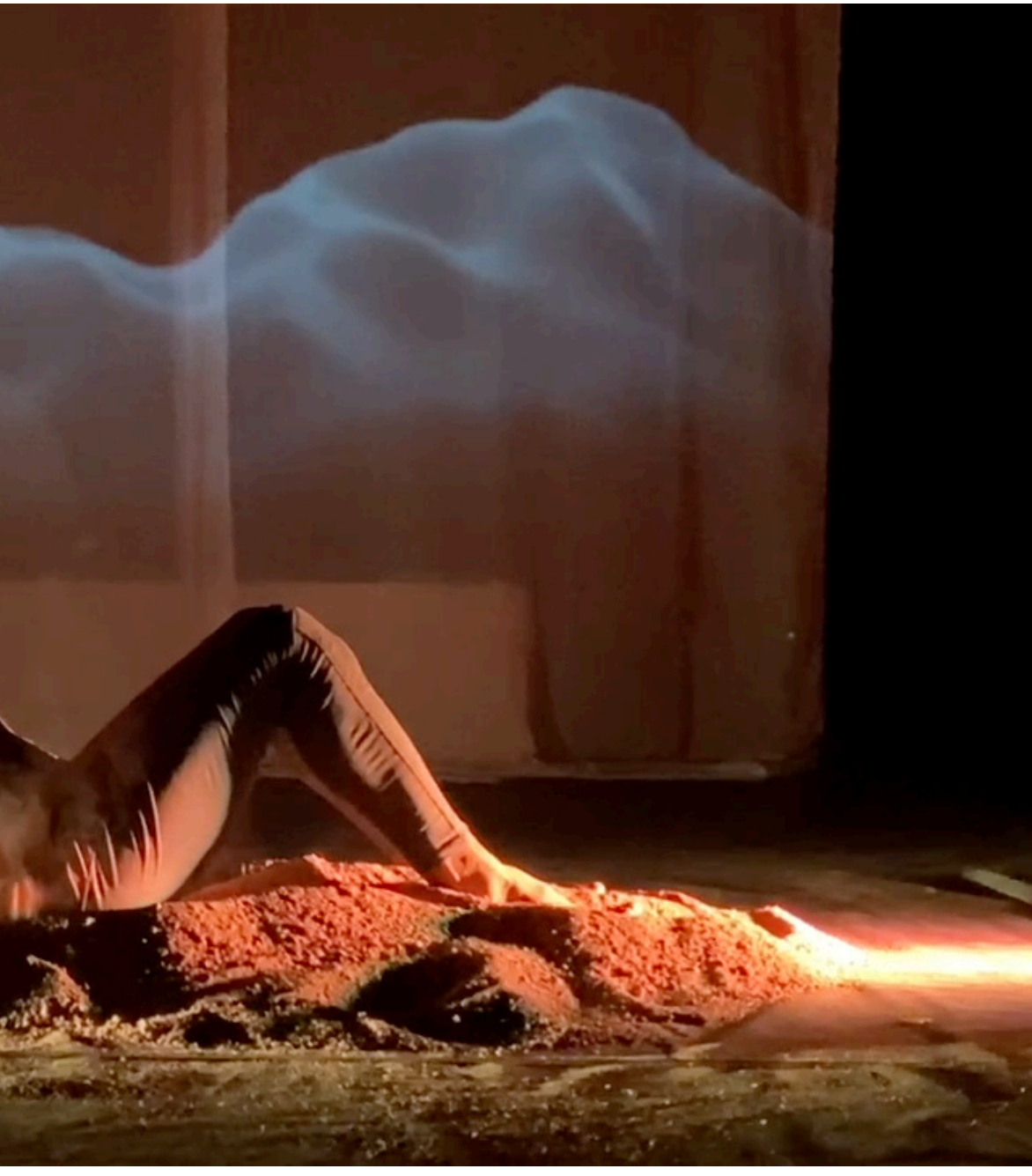

Figure 3: Lukas Avendaño during a rehearsal of *MUXX: **una presentación escénica des-generada,*** with digital topographic projection by Óldo Erréve, Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (February 2022) ©María Regina Firmino-Castillo.

Figure 4: Lukas Avendaño in *Biguidiribela*, Los Angeles Dance Project (September 16-17, 2022) ©Lukas Avendaño and Muxx Project.

In late March of 2022, I traveled to San Agustín Etla in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico to accompany and support the development of *MUXX*, which the collective described as a "de-gendered/degenerate performance."[13] Exploring otherwise imaginaries of gender and sexuality—again through 3D video, live music, and performance—*MUXX* centered Avendaño's chimerical presence, spanning the holographic, through Erréve's 3D video, to the telluric, through an immersive set centered around a mound of earth under which Avendaño was buried, and from which she emerged, evoking the bodies of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons who are disinterred by those who refuse to accept such necropolitical annihilation.

In September of the same year, I witnessed an iteration of *MUXX* at Los Angeles Dance Project. Retitled *Biguidiribela*, (Didxazaa; "butterfly made of flesh"), the performance built on previous themes and structure, while tracing the sidereal origins of terrestrial life. It explored the "ouroboros-consciousness," as Avendaño terms it after Blanca Solares (2007), in which binaries such as life/death, animal/human, male/female, and digital/analogue are revealed to be more paradoxical than dichotomous.

Biguidiribela and *MUXX* were informed by Avendaño's preparatory research for *Lemniskata*, a dance work commissioned by the Conjunto Santander de Artes Escénicas y Cultura, in Zapopan, Jalisco

Figure 5: *Lemniskata,* Conjunto Santander de Artes Escénicas (July 8-9, 2023) ©Jaime Martín and Lukas Avendaño.

and the Kampnagel theater in Hamburg, Germany. *Lemniskata* was choreographed and directed by Avendaño for fourteen male-identified dancers and one woman-identified. The project originated in Avendaño's "concept of '*Mujerismos = Muxerismos,*'" which was informed by the artist's encounter with "the multiple symbols, territories and dances of the State of Jalisco that are enunciated from the feminine" (Avendaño "*Lemniskata*").[14] *Lemniskata* centers woman not as one side of a biocentric idea of gender, but as "the creative and destructive *power of the whole* that resists a country dominated by necropolitics, exploitation, and the disappearance of bodies." Avendaño's concept of the feminine is "unearthed from [colonial] syncretism" to reveal that the "the paradigm of time has carved into stone an irreverent and rebellious goddess who does not inhabit the heavens—quoting Eduardo Galeano—because she lives in the depths of the world, lying in wait for us" (Avendaño "*Lemniskata* Program" 2).[15] Avendaño applies this "unearthing," which she has often described as an "*arqueología de la memoria,*" to the territory itself.[16] While tracing Jalisco's living historical memory of Nahuatl origins and an enduring matriarchal social structure, Avendaño uncovered the recurrence of the serpent as a symbol of the infinite present in the region's dance, architecture, popular culture, and local discourse. This led Avendaño toward the lemniscate, the mathematical symbol for infinity (∞), and its relationship to the ouroboros, the Greek name for the serpent that eats its own tail, which Avendaño interprets as the *mater/*matter which gives birth to herself.[17] I was unable to attend live performances of *Lemniskata* and was only able view video documentation. However, it is not my witnessing, whether live or virtual, that forms the core of this essay, but the artists' embodied understandings of their processes. As such, in the next section my voice oscillates between their voices in a dialogic tracing of paradox.

THE DIALOGICAL BODY[18]

Axcan quema: tehuatl, nehuatl.

> **Firmino**: Thank you for sharing your time and space, Lukas [Avendaño], to speak about *Lemniskata* and its connection to Muxx Collective.

Avendaño: Yes, yes: as you rightly mention, the projects with Muxx Collective are the immediate result of fieldwork in the state of

Jalisco. In the first place, the research process provided me with a different perspective on the municipalities I visited, such as Acatic, Tuxpan, Tonalá, Zapotlán, Huichitlan, Amatitán. My first surprise was that all these names are in Nahuatl. The second surprise was that the feminine figure recurrently appeared as a figure of authority, as a figure of power, as a figure of organization, as a figure of resistance.

And yet another thing that struck me was the use of Nahuatl expressions in many of the communities we visited, expressions such as *"¡Axcan quema!"* which translates into Spanish as *"Ahora sí"* ("Now is the time"). Many of the dancers we interviewed told us that this was the war cry with which Santiago Tenamaztle would go into battle.[19] The complete phrase is "*¡Axcan quema: tehuatl, nehuatl!"* which in Nahuatl means "Now is the time: you or me!" In other words, "your life or mine."

And it seems to me that the people we interviewed in all the different municipalities, they are always saying *¡Axcan quema!* due to the agrarian conflicts from centuries ago which remain unresolved. Just recently, the communal authorities of a Wixárika (Huichol) municipality in the highlands of Jalisco walked from their place of origin, crossing Zacatecas and several states, before arriving in Mexico City to request an audience with the then-president of the republic, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. One of the demands of the Huichol authorities, of the Wixárika (which is how they recognize themselves), is the return of their communal lands.

So, that phrase *¡Axcan quema!* is still in force; it is like saying: "Now there will be justice. Now is the time for our ancestral rights to be recognized. Now is the time for us to have our full existence and full enjoyment of our fundamental rights." This phrase is not limited to the romantic expression of the war cry of those peoples who fought for their sovereignty and autonomy against the entire administration of the viceroyalty of the new Spain. To me, "The time is now" is a concatenation of events that reaches us in the present with the same force and the same demands.

> **Firmino:** I am intrigued by the recurrence of this phrase and wonder if it resonates with what you call "the archaeology of memory."

Avendaño: The phrase comes to us as an archaeological vestige, just like the teeth and eyes of Tlaloc that are embedded in the church in Tuxpan. This is a tangible, and material, vestige, unlike memory which is intangible and immaterial in the conventional sense. The archaeology of memory is precisely the short circuit through which memory comes to us in other ways.

So, yes, I think that this phrase is the semantic expression made tangible or embodied in the sound of *¡Axcan quema: tehuatl, nehuatl!* as an exercise of memory which, despite conventional archaeology's denial of an objectual or analogical relationship, does not cease to be true, does not cease to be relevant or contemporary, and does not cease to be a way of evoking memory as a gesture that generates knowledge, that generates identity, and generates dignity in those who enunciate it and embody it.

The Ouroboric Relation Between the Digital and the Analogic

> **Firmino:** Can each of you speak to your roles in the three interconnected projects (*MUXX, Bardaje, and Biguidiribela*)?

EYIBRA: The project mainly explores nonbinary gender and queerness through the lens of Lukas' identity as *muxe*. We bring in Lukas' research and our own investigations, which also influence the ritual, the presentation, the imagery, the direction, and intention of the project: that the origin of the world is nonbinary, that the origin of the world is gender fluid, and that the lifecycle can be looked at in that way.

Almost every moment of the performances has symbolism behind it, even if it's not so obvious. Not everyone knows, for example, that the part where we're making a statue with our bodies is a reference to the Mexica, or Aztec, deity Coatlicue (fig. 6), who is like the mother. She's related to serpents. She's also the mother of the God of War. Not everyone will get that, but if you see the movements of our hands (fig. 7), it references this famous statue of her.

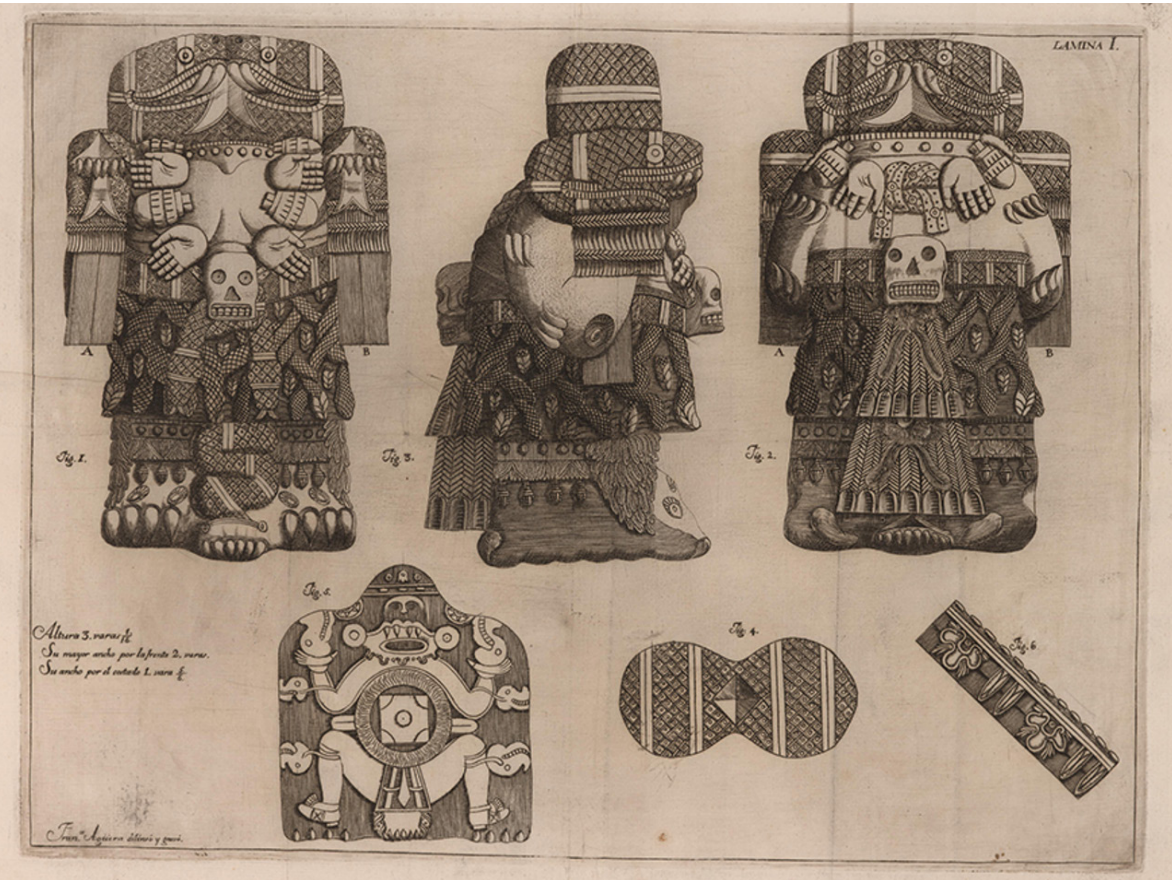

Figure 6: "The Great Coatlicue," from Antonio de León y Gama, *Descripción histórica y cronológica de las dos piedras que hallaron en la Plaza Principal de México,* plate 1. (1792) ©John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Avendaño: A few years ago, I read *Madre Terrible,* by Blanca Solares (2007). She develops a theory of the stages of the psyche through an analysis of the archaeological record. Her thesis is that there was a stage of the psyche that she called "matricial." She doesn't call it matriarchal; the matriarchal is a stage of society, a politically organized society in the sociological sense. However, in the anthropological sense there is a stage of the psyche that is matricial. And this matricial stage appears again and again in the pottery, in those material vestiges that we can still

Figure 7: EYIBRA and Nnux in *Biguidiribela,* Los Angeles Dance Project (September 16-17, 2022) ©María Regina Firmino-Castillo.

recognize as part of our culture's past. And it is this matriciality, this matrix-reality, that, in the case of Mesoamerican culture, contributes to an affinity towards the earth, because the earth is conceived of as the great *mater,* or matter.

During my fieldwork in Guadalajara, when the ouroboros appeared as the analogic reference for the lemniscate, as synthesis in the virtual, as synthesis or abstraction par excellence of algebraic mathematics, I was compelled to search for my notebooks and I found my notes on Blanca Solares' ouroboric conscious-

ness.[20] I suspect that this ouroboric consciousness is the reason why the Coatlicue (fig. 6), this giant monolith at the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City, was so disturbing. After its excavation [in 1790], it was buried again. Then German geographer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt came; he wanted to study it, and they unearthed it again for him to draw it, but eventually they had to bury it again because Indigenous people began to worship the monolith, to offer flowers to this monolith covered with skulls and serpents.[21]

The curious thing about this monolith is that at the base, on what would be the soles of her feet, there is a bas-relief of the teeth of Tlaltecuhtli (fig. 6; lower left), who is the earth. Coatlicue is the totality of existence, but the origin is the earth. That's why she's grabbing the earth with the teeth on the soles of her feet.

These references appear in Solares' work, and as recently as last night, I saw them while rewatching *Pedro Páramo*, the film (Velo) inspired by Juan Rulfo's novel which takes place in the cultural ecosystem of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Colima. In one scene, Susana, one of the main characters, is about to die. The priest arrives to accompany her as she is dying. The priest says to her, "Repeat after me." She starts repeating the priest's words: "My mouth is full of dirt. I swallow frothy saliva. My mouth caves in, contorting into a grimace, lacerated by gnawing, devouring teeth."[22]

All this made me remember a conversation I had with my mother a few months ago. I told her that if I were to die first, I would not want to be buried. I would want to be cremated. My mother said that it would not be fair to deny the earth the sustenance of my body after I had received sustenance from the earth throughout my entire life. In other words: the earth gave birth to me, and now the earth eats me, and from my flesh others will be birthed and others will be eaten.

Nnux: [During production] Lukas talked to us about how we come from the earth, and we go back to it, and about the repeating cycles of life and death. And we also talked about how those cycles are represented in mythology, and that's also something that we brought into the process. The whole piece is a representation of the origin of life and the origin of the world, not only of human

life, but the life of a plant and the life of the universe. Lukas starts the performance with his whole body covered in earth (fig. 9), and he comes out of it (fig. 3), and then EYIBRA and I are embracing each other in this kind of womb (fig. 8), but it's also a seed and we're germinating, and then blooming.

EYIBRA: Lukas being buried is a reference to the origins, but it's also a more contemporary reference to disappeared persons in Mexico, including Lukas' brother who was kidnapped five years ago.[23] And that's a reference that I think most Mexicans looking at a body buried under a mound of earth for fifteen minutes (that part of the piece is almost twenty minutes long) will understand. And hearing Lukas say, "My mouth is full of earth, my mouth is full of earth…" over and over would probably make them connect to that. I'm not sure an American audience would, but of course it's going to provoke discomfort, making them think about death.

We've been trying to relate these ideas to the sound design, so that the music also coincides with the concept. For example, there's a part where I'm playing the violin, and I'm hitting the strings with the wood of my bow. This section is referencing the Catholic Church burning queer people and others considered socially deviant. And so, I was thinking a lot about wood sounds. And the sound, for me, of hitting the violin strings with the wood of my bow is a more abstract way of thinking about, for example, how a pyre sounds. How do I get people to feel this wood burning, this crackling type of sensation?

Nnux: In my case, I'm a musician. I've never expressed myself with my body in this way. It's a very interesting thought process, because the way Lukas thinks about movement or action always comes with symbolism, and that changes everything. It changes the way you interact with the world. I'm thinking about the sound and the symbolism attached to sound and asking: How can we correlate sound and movement?

EYIBRA: There's a part at the beginning where Nnux and I are connected in this twin dress that has magnets and then it pulls apart. In that section, we're referencing origins, amoebas, cells separating. And in that part, we're singing. My background is Lithuanian, and we decided to adapt this Lithuanian ritual song,

Figure 8: EYIBRA and Nnux, with Avendaño, and with topographic projection of Avendaño by Óldo Erréve during a rehearsal for *MUXX: una presentación escénica des-generada*, Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (February 2022) ©María Regina Firmino-Castillo.

a really ancient ritual song, to take out the words and kind of mess with this song that is kind of, for me, connecting all these timeless, primordial sounds. Those songs are pre-patriarchal, pre-Christian, they date back to a matriarchal time. Traditionally they're only sung by women.

And so that was also an interesting connection, because we're trying to look back to this time while connecting the future through the digital visuals that Óldo [Erréve] creates. Really, we're trying to demonstrate that in the length of human history, queerness has survived much longer than Christianity and Catholicism; queerness has existed before and hopefully will exist after.

Figure 9: Lukas Avendaño and stage assistant during a rehearsal of *MUXX: una presentación escénica des-generada*, with holographic projection of Avendaño by Óldo Erréve, Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (February 2022) ©María Regina Firmino-Castillo.

Erréve: The vision I want to forward in this project is that of genderless digital entities, or otherworldly supernatural avatars, which allow for the total transformation of human and spiritual presence as they coexist in a series of metadigital ecosystems that give life to science fiction flora and fauna as well as ancient symbols.

From the digital end, my duty is to create a virtual record of history and build a bridge to preserve the traditions that are important to us as a community of queer artists. It is like capturing the roots in a cloud that is always moving towards the future.

> **Firmino**: Óldo, I would love to hear more about the image of the cloud. It opened my imagination and made me think about how "The Cloud" (the digital cloud) has become this kind of icon for our times. And I'm especially thinking about "The Cloud" as a repository of information, or even as a kind of ontology. What does that mean for space-time in the body?

Erréve: Well, what I mean is that it feels like capturing a root within a cloud that embraces the future, precisely because of what a cloud means now: it is a space where you can store a tremendous amount of data, a lot of information. So, it's like rescuing this cultural heritage that we have as Mexican persons, to be able to have this record of the ancestors and allow it to remain through time. It's as if I could travel in time through this cloud to preserve ideas. But it is a very big challenge to connect two totally opposite extremes: the culture of our ancestors and the digital opening to the virtual world in which we are immersed at this moment in history.

> **Firmino:** Lukas, I want to ask you about the analog and the digital, terms you've used in relation to *MUXX*, *Bardaje,* and *Biguidiribela*. In all three performances, there was a contrast between your digital presence, your holographic presence, which was immaterial—yet simultaneously very material, because, as we've discussed, the digital presence depends on the materials that the machines are made of—and your bodily presence, your telluric corporeality.

Figure 10: Lukas Avendaño crossing through the projection screen that divides the stage in two, with a holographic projection by Óldo Erréve on Avendaño's torso. Rehearsal of *MUXX: Una presentación escénica desgenerada*, Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (February 2022) ©María Regina Firmino-Castillo.

In *MUXX* and *Biguidiribela*, you are a telluric force emerging from the earth. One can see your muscular effort, your pain, your discomfort, and then your corporeal transformations during the performances, which were very dependent on your flesh, your movement, and your life force. And then you return to the earth and interact with it, again, in a very dynamic way at the level of the body. And while this is going on, the space is divided by a screen upon which your virtual holographic presence is projected. And there were other virtual elements projected on this screen, like the virtual topography that Óldo Erréve designed, and that digital collage of genitalia. I am struck by the contrast between the corporeality, which is

very organic, coexisting with the other corporeality, one that is digital and virtual. So, in that contrast between the virtual and what you've referred to as the analog, what are you looking for? How are you conceptualizing this?

Avendaño: I think that until that moment, as an experiment, that was our point of departure: the relation between the digital and the analogic. You and I have been in dialogue about this, and I have also been engaging with the Muxx Collective about it, asking what each of us could contribute in terms of the ouroboric. The importance of these encounters is that they allow us to summon different subjectivities, from those that are analog—of performance for performance's sake, where the body is present—to those that are more digital.

We talk about virtuality, and we are led to believe that virtuality does not have an analogical reference. But I hope that I can contribute to the understanding that the virtual also has a physicality. For example, insofar as light intervenes, light, has a physicality. Hence, the light of the stars reaches us thousands of years after their journey. In reference to the physicality of light, during the production of *MUXX* we had a big discussion about the number of lumens needed for the projector, because the projection's distance distorts the journey of those particles of light that eventually impact the screen to produce an image.

Firmino: Light, if I'm not mistaken, is a particle and it's also a wave. There is that experiment—I'm not sure if I remember—Heisenberg? But there is an experiment in which light sometimes appears as a particle and sometimes it appears, or allows itself to be seen, as a wave.[24] It's like a being, we could say, that is very mischievous, very chimerical: "Well, right now I want to be a particle; now I want to be a wave."

Avendaño: Yes.

Firmino: Óldo, are you interested in your project coexisting with what Lukas calls the analog?

Erréve: Creating a bridge between ancestors and descendants is akin to making a meta-spiritual representation of Lukas. So, what I am doing, what I see in Lukas, is his spiritual and digital representation, and the connection that exists between the two.

> **Firmino:** Lukas, now that the Lukas hologram has been birthed by Óldo from the analog Lukas, is one of the purposes of Muxx Project to make visible the necessary relationship between what you describe as analog, or the material, and the digital, or virtual?

Avendaño: On the one hand, yes. But on the other hand, I am aiming to challenge the idea that Indigenous art must necessarily be deprived of these other tools or these technologies, especially in these curatorships of contemporary art, where it seems that what "smells" analog or "smells" of native peoples seems to be, by default, already relegated to a certain genre. And so here my game is to insert into the spaces of the contemporary scene these remnants of tradition, these short circuits of memory, that coexist in these two formats: the analogic and the digital. But that does not mean that one format is less contemporary than the other.

> **Firmino:** Related to this relation between the digital and the material, another thing that I've been thinking about is that since the pandemic we've been using these machines more and more to do virtual work. And there is now this metaverse, and we can inhabit a supposedly digital reality.
>
> But there are workers in giant warehouses and factories building the devices we use, and people mining the earth for minerals, with their bodies. And there are also workers who are processing the algorithms, people behind screens, sitting there all day. These are physical acts that are invisiblized in the virtual space.

Avendaño: Yes, yes, this is invisibilized labor. I think that this is the narrative about virtuality or digitality that intends to alienate us, to expropriate our consciousness.

But can virtuality or digitality dispense with analog existence? I

think not. The digital and the virtual exist as long as there is the analog. The analog, in contrast, *can exist* without virtuality or digitality.

This brings us to the topic of women. In so far as a woman can impregnate herself, she can exist without the male other.[25] But what is difficult for us to recognize is our finitude as "macho, male, alpha, silverbacks," and so we invent a superiority because we are very afraid to recognize our finitude.[26]

> **Firmino:** I want to talk about chaos. There is some Freudian and post-Freudian literature—for example, Julia Kristeva's book, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980)—that talks about chaos, which is associated with the womb, and order, which is associated with the phallus. All that you are sharing makes me ask myself why there is such a fear of the origin? What does that division construct? Is it that a fear of the origin is associated with a fear of death?

Avendaño: I don't know if it's an anxiety about the awareness of our finitude and our insignificance. And that's why we try to justify our existence, constructing stories and feeling indispensable. I don't know….

Lemniskata: The In/finite

Avendaño: Several elements appeared and were repeated over and over again during the research in Jalisco, such as the dances evidencing a pre-Columbian syncretism with rituals and deities dedicated to water, fertility, and multiple feminine beings. All this information was synthesized in the project's name, *Lemniskata*, which has an earlier referent: the ouroboros, which is commonly associated with the snake that bites its own tail. But it was precisely during the fieldwork in Jalisco that we found that the figure of the serpent was a constant. And that's why the lemniscate (∞) was synthesized as this algebraic figure.

That is, the reference of the lemniscate is a virtual reference, insofar as it is a mathematical abstraction, but the analogical reference is the ouroboros, the snake that we are told bites its own tail.

The choreographic work is titled *Lemniskata* because the theme of life's continuity appeared recurrently in our research: this recognition of who gives life and where life comes from.

I already knew that snakes molt, that is, they change their skin; but it was precisely this fieldwork that made me reconnect with that memory, and that's when I realized that the serpent molts by emerging from its own mouth. That's why the skin it sheds remains intact. This led me to make a connection to pre-Columbian pottery, those pieces with women's bodies squatting and a person's head emerging from the genitals.

Conventional archaeology recognizes these as representations of fertility or femininity. But I had the impression that these sculptures represent something like the act of the serpent emerging from its own mouth; consequently, the being that they are birthing is the continuity of their own corporeality. So, I thought, "Of course, the ouroboros, this snake said to be biting its own tail, *isn't* biting its tail; *it's giving birth to itself*."

> **Firmino:** Well, yes, at a biological level, the child that is born is, genetically, at least in part, the mother, or a version of the mother; there is a genetic thread.

Avendaño: That was the great discovery that led me to conclude that the ouroboros is an analogic figure, but the lemniscate is the abstraction of this analogic figure. It begins to make sense: the figure of the serpent is so important not because of the serpent, per se, but because of what it represents, the symbolism for the possibility of giving birth to itself. The serpent emerges from its skin through the mouth, just as we are also born from the mouth of the genitals.

And this also makes sense in relation to the *canamayté,* this figure composed of a rhombus or square that is inspired by the skin of the rattlesnake of the Yucatan Peninsula, where the *canamayté*, formed from a geometric dissection, is the template for architectural proportions.[27] It is also the figure on top of the Coatlicue's head; there, these two heads meet in front of each other to form a single head at the crown which appears as a square traversed by an "X" or a cross.

Firmino: So, this is the Mesoamerican square divided by a cross, two intersecting lines? This evokes the two parts of the lemniscate, where the lines intersect.

Avendaño: Yes, if this were a sheet of paper, a perfect square, the intersection of the two lines would produce a division and a doubling. When we fold it in half again, and again, this also produces a division and a doubling, and if we continue with this, then the square multiplies exponentially to infinity, right?

Firmino: Aha! Like the serpent that emerges from its own mouth…?

Avendaño: Yes, yes, to infinity…. And the topic of agriculture has an ouroboric origin as well. For example, the use of the word *coatl* in Nahuatl, which means serpent. *Coatl* is also a tool with which to plant maize. And *coat* is the root of "*cuates*"—brothers who are born of the same mother at the same moment. So, there is the ouroboric symbol of the serpent present in *coatl* as name, in *coatl* as this instrument for penetrating the earth to deposit the seed, and in *cuates,* in which two are born, like the bifid or forked tongue of the snake. *Coatl*, again semantically and semiotically; the ouroboros closes and the ouroboros opens.

There are many traditional dances in Guerrero and Oaxaca in which people hit each other and bleed. Why do they do this? They give "a drop of blood for a drop of water." It's a way to ask for rain. Just yesterday, I was conversing with one of the *Lemniskata* dancers who happens to be from the state of Hidalgo, where there is a large Otomí population. The dancer doesn't claim indigenous ancestry, but he carries that indelible phenotypic watermark. He told me that when his wife was going to give birth, she needed a blood transfusion. He donated his own blood so that his child could be born. He told me that while he was donating his blood, he began to understand that expression, "a drop of blood for a drop of water." The sweat that his wife secreted in her efforts to give birth was tantamount to water. He bled so that his child could be born.

Firmino: It's like the ritual you mention, of bleeding so that there can be rain, but brought to an interpersonal level. So, this is evidence of that consciousness that is—

Avendaño: —ouroboric—

Firmino: —an ouroboric consciousness emerging in the dancers, right?

Avendaño: Yes, yes, yes….

Firmino: It seems to me that it's an understanding that there is no binary between life and death.

Avendaño: Yes. There is only continuity.

Firmino: And infinite finitude?

Avendaño: Infinity.

Firmino*:* It does not make sense to separate them.

Avendaño: To be infinite, you must be finite.

CODA: FROM THE SERPENT'S MOUTH…

Approaching the death-world, paradoxically

After reading a draft of this essay, Avendaño reminded me that she is "more practical than theoretical," and that his theoretical insights on the polyvalences of the *coatl*, on the serpent's regeneration from the dead skin of its body, and on the paradoxical relation between living and dying are wrought from practice.[28] She was referring to artistic practice and, more broadly, as that which cannot be separated from the experience of life in a necropolitical terrain where persons living non-normative genders and sexualities, including those who are interpellated as *muxe* by their communities, are killed with impunity.[29] Nor can practice be removed from necropower's paradoxical reach, extending to Avendaño's brother, Bruno Alonso Avendaño Martínez, whose status as a Navy corporal did not shield him from a violent and premature death. Bruno, who was forcibly disappeared on May 10, 2018, and eventually assassinated, was just one of over thirty-thousand people killed in Mexico each year since 2018.[30] Therefore, it has also become part of Avendaño's practice to

confront necropower in order to bring the material and intellectual authors of Bruno's assassination to justice, a practice that has now positioned Avendaño and her family as targets of retaliation.[31]

The context of Avendaño's practice reveals the multifarious and shifting categories of killable subjects that necropower constructs in contemporary Mexico.[32] But it would be an error to think that necropower is monolithic or unilateral. As political scientist R. Guy Emerson has observed: "Death in Mexico is not a category of rule reducible to any one actor" (2), and the roles these actors play are ambiguous, if not paradoxical. Mass violence in Mexico has historically been associated with drug cartels which have long operated with relative impunity conferred by state institutions; at the same time, the Mexican state has also committed its share of extra-judicial killing, especially in its efforts to *control* (but not to stop) organized crime while simultaneously repressing political opposition (Center for Preventive Action para. 1). These long-wrought webs of collusion and complicity between organized criminality and the state challenge the usual taxonomies of governance, positioning Mexico as the classic example of a *narcoestado* (De la Garza in Sánchez para. 6). However, the *narcoestado* (narco-state in English) is not a purely Mexican or Latin-American creation. This paradoxical form of governance was instituted by the U.S. backed counterinsurgent "Dirty War" (1960s to 1980s) which first gave rise to "the antiguerrilla, antinarcotics military and police agents who became narcos themselves" (Aviña 265).[33] According to Emerson, this "violence breaks free of enclosure to suspend affiliations and confound organization" (1). What forms of resistant politics become possible when the sovereign's power "to make die and let live" (Emerson 2) through the discursive construction of an enemy is redistributed and necropower's constitutive structures are disarranged?

An ouroboric politics of paradox

In the context of the conditions described above, Emerson attempts to approach the death-world paradoxically by engaging Mbembe's necropolitics in a way that acknowledges death's grounding in life and life's inextricable entanglement with death. Thus, Emerson proposes a "politics of life and death" (186) that resists "the forceful reduction of life to external authority" through an insistence on centering "life amid death," with an emphasis on the practice of *living* (viii):

> An immanent politics of life and death… is an affirmation of existence. Life is recognized as continually opened up and extended amid death, as individuals learning from death…. Disavowed is the disposability of life in favor of its interconnectedness with the violent-laden surrounds. Bodies are tied to one another and the elements and relations that make up their surrounds in a manner productive of unique relations, affinities and potentiality. This reorientated politics of life and death is not to suppress, eliminate or abandon life, but to celebrate it in its radical contingency. Life amid death becomes the infinite elements and relations possible that enable a going on living. (Emerson viii)

Emerson's proposal resonates with Avendaño's ("Queer: No") tracing of *muxeidad* to the concept of *guenda*, which in Didxazaa refers to the "creative energy" coursing through all persons, objects, and words (para. 11-15). It is this *guenda*—the life force that transcorporeally, and even ouroborically, circulates between and beyond individual bodies—that resists colonial destruction and perdures because it refuses the necropolitical taxonomification executed through naming and killing.

But, again, it is important to recall Avendaño's assertion at the start of this essay that what is not found in the codices and other representations of power might be found in the non-normative body. This suggests that an ouroboric consciousness and politics is continually forged through an active, in-the-flesh, process of unflinchingly engaging the death-world, knowing, through practice, that death encompasses more than itself. In the passage below, Emerson describes a process that reflects this ouroboric consciousness and politics grounded in both the paradoxical and the practical, resonating with Avendaño's insistence that theory comes from practice:[34]

> The death world enters the body to form part of it, dissolving in the body. Immersed in violence, the body becomes an emergent re/construction wherein the thought-felt (the recognized relationality of encountering a mutilated corpse, combined with the affective force of witnessing death) is not simply imposed on the body, but composes what it is capable

> of doing. There is a continual revision of bodily habits and territorial rhythms no longer tied to government, but to the multiple cartographies of violence (3).

I suspect that a similar process occurred during the more than three years that Avendaño searched for Bruno accompanied by the dozens of other family members of the forcibly disappeared. This is a corporeal and relational living of death-in-life, as was finding Bruno's remains in a clandestine grave on November 12, 2020. Conditioned not solely by the paradoxical violence of Mexican necropower, but, more importantly, by the co-presence of other bodies searching for vestiges of their loved ones during those years and beyond, Avendaño's capacity for doing extends to every means possible and needed: from her hands excavating the earth for traces of Bruno, to his voice and demands in the tribunals, to her body on the streets and stage, to his digital form in the virtual space. It catalyzes the absences left by these countless forced disappearances and premature deaths and indicts the "total 'absence'" of the state as a guarantor of rights and protections (Lozano in Diéguez Caballero 130). It is in the space of these multiple absences that Emerson identifies an opening for a "transversal" politics, one that I characterize as paradoxical, and that potentiates what Emerson describes as "the mutually inclusive nature of life, death and power…" (4) in ways we are, through practice, still learning.

Ouroborically resisting calcifications of the paradoxical

In the foregoing, I have centered the possibilities of paradox as an immanent politics of "life amid death" (Emerson viii), while considering the ways that it can disrupt the coloniality of gender and digital dualism. In what follows, I attempt an ouroboric treatment of paradox: an eating of itself to ensure that its powers remain vital. In other words, I treat paradox *para*-paradoxically,[35] to prevent its calcification into a political formula for teleological arrival to dys/utopian futures. As such, a *para*-paradoxical politics suggests a continuous movement toward that which eludes the certainty of classification or arrival. Therefore, the only promise of the paradoxical is its capacity to move the onto-epistemological and political imagination away from what is given a priori.

As forewarned, this dialogical essay did not offer linear argumentation or conclusive answers, but instead sought to extend the dialogic process to the reader. This is premised on the understanding that it is not the individual body—vulnerable to ephemerality through death and decomposition, but also subject to colonial and other forms of capture and annihilation—that is the sole carrier of resistant memory. It is the trans-corporeal transmission between and across multiple bodies through space/time. The digital platform is, for better or worse, a stream of that transmission.

As mentioned above, Avendaño is Binni Zaa, "Cloud People." Perhaps then, those of us who use these platforms are also "cloud people"—even if we are not all Binni Zaa—in so far as The [digital] Cloud, as a "complex web" of interconnectivity and transmission between heterogeneous entities (Mishra, Swain, et al. 45), is structured similarly to the interactional and relational networks constituted by corporeal entities. But, as Avendaño urges, it would be an error to consider the digital a disembodied space. "The Cloud"—a seemingly immaterial entity—is entirely dependent on its devices and physical infrastructure and on the persons who mine the minerals that these devices and infrastructure are made from, and who extract the petrochemicals that fuel them, and who operate their servers.[36] Therefore, The Cloud is nothing without Flesh and Matter.

Additionally, and *para*-paradoxically, The Cloud also exists as something that eco-critic Timothy Morton (2010) has theorized as the "hyperobject:" manufactured material that, in its spatial and temporal vastness, is "already beyond the normal scope of our comprehension" (131). Like other hyperobjects, The Cloud appears "almost more real than reality itself" (130). But this is not an innocuous ir/reality; as Morton notes, hyperobjects tend toward a toxic self-implosion because they "do not burn without themselves burning (releasing radiation, dioxins, and so on)" (130). This self-implosion is not an ouroboric operation in the sense theorized by Avendaño. Such self-implosion would not likely regenerate life, at least not a life that our current bodies could survive in. Given these conditions, it is imperative to expand our scope of comprehension so as not to be (auto)annihilated by the (hyper)objects of our own making.

What might an ouroboric consciousness and politics, which comprehends the paradoxical cycles between life and death and the finite

and the infinite, offer towards this aspiration? Can the ouroboros' material grounding in paradox generate a corporeal awareness of the entanglements between the digital and the material, as well a critical grasp of the ir/reality of The Cloud, in order to transform a world in which thousands live and die in brutal conditions while mining the coltan and cobalt used in the ubiquitous devices of our informational infrastructure? This includes the device upon which I am now writing, and the devices behind Avendaño and Muxx Project's digital experimentations. This admission brings me to another set of questions: Can our dialogical engagements—oscillations between the digital and the analog—become a "stream of meaning" (Bohm 6-7) that transversally reaches beyond the screen and the page? Can our words, sounds, and digital projections become flesh (recalling Wynter 35), animated by "muscle and bone," materializing into the practices needed to survive and transform the death-world in its unfolding complexity?

In an intentionally inconclusive response, in which the next steps are to be found beyond this page and the screen it is probably being read on, I recall Avendaño's observation that *¡Axcan quema!* ("The time is now") is the repeating culmination of a "concatenation of events that reaches into the present." These words are activated by the force and urgency of long unmet demands for justice, and even the power conferred by *living* death. Uttered by Avendaño's research collaborators in Jalisco in 2023 and transmitted to me through our electronically mediated dialogues soon after, these reverberations of *¡Axcan quema!* are echoes of the sixteenth-century battle cry of Caxcan leader Francisco Tenamaztle. His voice also resonated in 1555 before a colonial tribunal to argue that war waged in self-defense was a form of "natural justice," paradoxically applying the colony's own taxonomic criteria of legitimacy to defend his people from colonial violence (Carrillo Cázares 176). Francisco Tenamaztle's astutely argued demands before the tribunal were probably not met, and it is probable that he died in Spain during the judicial proceedings (León-Portilla 175-176).

His flesh long-gone, his battle cry remains, suggesting that a politics of paradox does not rule out insurgent action when necessary. This leads me to ask if such action can be engaged in without reproducing the taxonomic criteria of the colony? Can it be engaged in paradoxi-

cally, without the necropolitical construction and destruction of an ontologically separate Other?

Moving toward a response rooted in practice and which follows an ouroboric form, the first words of "the dialogical body" of this essay, *para*-paradoxically transformed, become the final words of this coda and the first words of the possibility of an "actuality" that may yet be "crystallized" into flesh and matter (Wynter "The Pope" 35):

> ***AXCAN QUEMA: ~~TEHUATL, NEHUATL.~~***
> ***NOW IS THE TIME: ~~YOU, OR ME.~~***

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Notes

1 For more on the ways that images are produced on LCD (liquid-crystal displays), see March Lorch's "The chemistry behind your LCD flat-screen devices: how a scientist changed the world" and Riverdi Corporation's "Understanding LCD: How Do LCD Screens Work?"

2 The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is in the southeastern part of Oaxaca, Mexico.

3 See Ramirez and Munar for a thorough overview of this misperception of *muxeidad.*

4 Avendaño, personal communication, 2018.

5 Here, the term hegemony is used in the Gramscian sense as a generalized consent to the dominating class' ideological impositions. As Gramsci writes, "this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production." However, hegemony is never total. Within any formation of power, there are individuals and groups who do not consent, "either actively or passively," to the dominant group's impositions. Where there is no consent, the state deploys violence to coerce (145).

6 In this image there are multiple performances of a paradoxical politics that trouble other taxonomies such as race and ethnicity, but a discussion of these is beyond the scope of this essay.

7 In a post-humous essay, Lugones critiques the assumption that gender is a universal ontological category, arguing that it is "the arrangement of social relations determining who is a man and who is a woman in the West among bourgeois men and women and that the socialization of this sexual difference is deeply embedded in the 'social/political/economic structures in formation' in the modern world;" furthermore,

"Gender, then, is quite particular, modern, colonial, capitalist but it has operated as universal in the conquering, colonial ventures, colonizing the relation among peoples" (21).

8 These pronouncements are informed by the work of Stacy Alaimo, a researcher in the environmental humanities, and her theory of trans-corporeality, which she argues "is not a mystical, spiritual, phenomenological or experiential sense that 'everything is connected'" but instead "a radical rethinking of ontologies and epistemologies" based on the empirical observation that "all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them. While transcorporeality as an ontology does not exclude any living creature, it does begin with the human, in order—paradoxically perhaps—to disrupt Western human exceptionalism" (435-437).

9 It is beyond the scope of this essay to fully engage these questions which others have critically reflected on, for example, Grégoire Chamayou in *A Theory of Drones* as well as Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca L. Stein in *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age.*

10 Here, I am informed by Denise Ferreira da Silva's *Unpayable Debt* and her critique of Kantian ontology, Hegelian logic, and dialectical materialism as well as her speculative form of analysis that relies on quantum operations. I am also inspired by the intellectual community cultivated during a graduate seminar based on this book that I facilitated in the spring of 2024, in which many generative discussions revolved around the possibility that Ferreira da Silva's critique suggests a paradoxical rather than binary (colonial) or dialectic (Hegelian and Marxist) logic as the basis of an anticolonial politics.

11 The title, "*bardaje,"* is a word used in colloquial Spanish to refer, offensively, to homosexual men. The English equivalent is "berdache," a term "first used in Italian in the 15th century, recorded in French in 1548, in Spanish (cognate term) in the first quarter of the 16th century.... While the Spanish and French originally used the term for male transvestites or the passive partner in sex between males, anthropologists later applied the term berdache to American Indians who assumed the dress, social status, and role of the opposite sex" (Vries para. 2). It is currently considered an inaccurate and offensive term for the way it erases cultural and historical specify.

12 Personal communication with Avendaño, 2022. See Tortorici (*Sins Against Nature*) for the history of the juridical prosecution of sexualities deemed "*contra natura*" by colonial authorities.

13 In the original, "*una presentación escénica des-generada,"* which I translated to underscore that in Spanish "*des-generada*" means ungendered while also evoking "*degenerada*," or degenerate.

14 Original in Spanish; translation is my own.

15 Original in Spanish; translation is my own. Emphasis added.

16 For more on Avendaño's "archaeology of memory" see Marios Chatziprokopiou's interview with Avendaño, "Los menos que menos que nadie," and Firmino-Castillo's "The Disappeared of Xibalbá: Bodily Remembrances of the 'Xibalbay' by Lukas Avendaño."

17 Avendaño 2023. Personal communication.

18 The following are excerpts from recorded conversations I engaged

in with Avendaño and members of Muxx Project during 2022 and 2023. The conversations with Avendaño took place in Spanish and were translated by me. The excerpts that appear in this essay were organized thematically and therefore do not follow the order of the original conversations. Additionally, excerpts have been edited for brevity and clarity and were reviewed and approved by Avendaño and the members of Muxx Project.

19 Francisco Tenamaztle was a leader (1540s–1550s) of the Caxcan peoples in the region of Jalisco, Zacatecas, Durango, Colima, Aguascalientes, and Nayarit. He fought many battles against the Spanish and while on trial in Valladolid, Spain, he argued that the war waged by the Caxcanes against the Spanish was "natural justice," a justifiable form of self-defense against the colonizer's violent abuses (Carrillo Cázares 176).

20 According to Solares, the "matricial ouroboros" is the "undifferentiated body of the Goddess…which contains everything;" it is through a violent rupture that masculine and feminine differentiation occurs and is rigidly sustained through structural limits represented in Mesoamerican cosmology by four directional tree-gods that impede matricial reintegration (305). Original in Spanish; translation is my own.

21 The andesite monolith, Coatlicue, was unearthed in 1790 during the excavation of a water canal in front of the national palace (Boone 19). It was exhibited for a short time at the university, but then it was reburied under orders of the Spanish clergy to prevent the reactivation of ritual practices that the colonial project violently repressed for centuries. In 1804, German geographer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt, requested that the monolith be disinterred temporarily to study it (Villoro). It was unearthed again in 1823 and is now displayed at the National Museum of Anthropology (Cordova).

22 In the book (Rulfo) and the film (Velo 01:29:58), the priest recites: "*Tengo la boca llena de tierra. Trago, saliva espumosa. Mi boca se hunde retorciéndose en muecas perforada por los dientes que la taladran y la devoran*." Susana repeats some of these words, but also distorts them.

23 Lukas Avendaño's brother, Bruno, was forcibly disappeared and assassinated on May 10, 2018 and found thirty months later in a clandestine grave. As of May 2024, there are approximately 100,000 forcibly disappeared persons in Mexico (Red Lupa).

24 See Camilleri for a precise explanation of what is known in quantum physics as wave-particle duality and its relation to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

25 Serpents have been observed to give birth through parthogenesis, female asexual reproduction, common among a variety of organisms (Shibata, Sakata, et al. pars. 3-4). Because mammalian reproduction requires certain genes that come from sperm, mammals have not been observed to reproduce through parthogenesis (Burns para. 2). Recent developments in stem cell research are making it more possible for persons with uteri to give birth without sperm-producing donors. This process, called in vitro gametogenesis, uses cells from "almost any part of the body" to create gametes, or sperm, potentially rendering cis-gendered men optional for human reproduction (Cohen and Perlman 2-3).

26 In colloquial Spanish "*macho alpha lomo plateado*" refers to a toxic form of masculinity.

27 Montero García explains that the *canamayté* (quadrivertex) appears on the back of the rattlesnake

(Crótalus Durissus Tzabcán) endemic to the Maya region (92-93). According to Díaz Bolio, the Maya mimetically based their architecture on the pattern observed on the rattlesnake's skin, which also reflects the structure of the cosmos.

28 Personal communication on July 14, 2024.

29 As reported in *The Guardian*, "Mexico is Latin America's second-deadliest country for transgender people, after Brazil." From 2021 to 2023, 231 members of the LGBT community were murdered, and 65 percent of those murdered were transgender. (Graham para. 16). As of July 2024, in Mexico City, transfemicide is a crime punishable by up to seventy years in prison (Graham para. 3).

30 The Center for Preventive Action's "Global Conflict Tracker" reports that "Mexico faces a crisis of kidnappings, disappearances, and other criminal violence that has left over thirty-thousand people dead each year since 2018" (para. 1).

31 In March of 2024, Avendaño's driver was nearly killed by a gunshot to the head after dropping Avendaño off at the airport; this was followed by death threats against Avendaño and his family (Bombín pars. 3-4).

32 See "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mexico" (U.S. Department of State): "Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by police, military, and other governmental officials; forced disappearance by government agents; torture or cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; restrictions on free expression and media, including violence against journalists; serious acts of government corruption; insufficient investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities" (para. 3).

33 The United States' role in the global drug trade reaches back at least to WWII (Congressional Record 1998) and continues to impact Mexico's contemporary politics (Hackbarth pars. 22-23).

34 Emerson concedes that as an "outsider" far removed from "the embedded nature of death, from its everyday expressions to its more violent eruptions" (15), his book's theoretical contributions are indebted to the embodied knowledge of his research collaborators, "those living death" in contemporary Mexico (16).

35 Here, multiple senses of the ante-prefix "*para,*" from Greek, denoting, paradoxically: origin, proximity, contrariness, and departure.

36 For more on the material underpinnings of digital networks, see: Christina Gratorp's "The materiality of the cloud: On the hard conditions of soft digitization," Ben Saith's "Data centres, cloud infrastructures and the tangibility of internet power," among other recent works.