

Introduction

Latin American Cinema Beyond the Human

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After years of visiting zoos in Mexico City, Caracas, and New York—strolling and sketching animals, gathering ideas for poems—in 1938, the Mexican writer José Juan Tablada declared that zoos were, in fact, hellish. Contrary to expectation, he wrote in a *crónica* published in *Excelsior*, little could be learned from seeing animals in captivity because the “diabolical torment of claustrophobia” rendered them unnaturally sluggish.¹ If his readers actually wanted to learn about animals, Tablada suggested, they should watch the films by Martin and Osa Johnson, which “reveal the secrets of the jungle.”² Naturalist explorers and documentary filmmakers from Kansas, the Johnsons pioneered the nature film genre with films like *Congorilla* (1932) and *Baboon* (1935). The first to film Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya by air, they inaugurated the now-iconic aerial shots of herds traversing the African plains. Their adventure-documentaries simulated the face-to-face encounter with wild animals and interpreted the behavior shown on-screen.³

Taken with these moving images, Tablada concluded that cinema was a better pedagogical tool than the zoo. Unlike the zoo, “a color and sound film,” he wrote, “captures the marvelous colors of hides and plumages, the savage and mysterious polyphony of the virgin jungle.”⁴ Tablada proposed that film was the optimal medium, ethically and aesthetically, for experiencing nonhuman wildlife—better than seeing it in the flesh. Cinema was less interventionist; the camera observed without disrupting. The cinematic experience of the nonhuman, he wrote, had become all the more “accurate”

because of advances in color and sound technologies, diminishing the incentive to see it firsthand. In turn, the close-up provided a more intimate encounter than that contrived by the zoo.

What Tablada did not note was that the seemingly organic encounters filmed by the Johnsons were in many cases simulated. The Johnsons of course did disrupt wildlife during filming—often provoking animals to charge directly at the camera to heighten the experience for viewers back home. Additionally, their turn to the nature genre was steeped in racialized dynamics. Their earlier work focused on the ethnographic study of the “savage” peoples of Africa and the Southwest Pacific, as captured in silent films like *Cannibals of the South Seas* (1918) and *Head Hunters of the South Seas* (1922).⁵ Upon realizing that the public was more eager to see difference across, rather than within, species, the Johnsons shifted focus to animals.⁶ Put simply, the nature documentary’s ostensible objectivity and ethical virtue occluded its participation in uneven global dynamics and its perpetuation of the myth of unmediated wilderness.

Nearly one hundred years after Tablada wrote his defense of cinema’s ability to unveil the secrets of the nonhuman, film continues to be a privileged medium through which to gain awareness of nature. Cinema provides access—a means of entry—to locations, scales, and temporalities that exceed the singular human perspective. Techniques like time-lapse photography and underwater videography stretch anthropocentric experiences of the world. Such strategies provide glimpses of alternative timescales that govern creaturely life; timescales that are shorter or longer than processes of human history, or cyclical and aimless rather than linear.

As a medium that mediates our perception of environmental space, cinema has also propagated essentializing and comforting fictions about the nonhuman world. Principal among them is its figuration of the environment as a reliably unchanging setting, an aesthetically pleasing and self-regulating backdrop against which human action unfolds. Flora, fauna, and landscape have been indispensable cinematic props that give texture to character, mood, and narrative. Likewise, as the Johnsons’ transition to animal subjects suggests, the fascination with nonhuman difference has often coincided with a racialized fetishization of human difference, leading to the troubling collapse of aboriginal peoples within the paradigm of local color, as was the case in early Latin American ethnographic film.⁷

Since the mid-1990s, scholars have begun to examine how film negotiates our understanding of the nonhuman through approaches that range from ecocriticism to posthumanism. While it is tempting to frame these

conversations as proper to the present, the question of nonhuman representation has long occupied thinkers in Latin America and around the globe. Nonetheless, it is only of late that scholars of Latin American cinema have started to seriously account for the ways in which Latin American films imagine the more-than-human. In an era in which human practices are recognizably inflicting permanent ecological consequences, the task of making these effects visible feels all the more urgent. Coincident with this need to highlight human impact is the seemingly opposing impulse to destabilize cinema's anthropocentric thrust. A difficult undertaking, because cinema is, after all, the human creation of a world on-screen, and yet its materialization and materiality are embedded in the extraction of natural resources, and extractive capital is its condition of possibility. Furthermore, because it emerges from the "estrangement and denaturalization" of hegemonic print environment, many cinematic projects are critical about the materiality of their objects and methods as well.⁸ Bearing this in mind, is it possible for cinema to detach itself from its anthropocentric origins and its anthropogenic effects? Is it tenable to disassemble the human subject from its filmic protagonism? How can it account for or speak for the more-than-human while simultaneously addressing human concerns?

Pushing Past the Human in Latin American Cinema brings together fourteen scholars who wrestle with how Latin American cinema attempts to push beyond the human. Some question the very nature of this enterprise—whether cinema should or even could actualize such a maneuver. Others signal the ways in which the category of the "human" itself is interrogated by Latin American cinema, revealed to be a fiction that excludes more than it unifies. The aim of this volume is not to simply reflect upon the response of Latin American cinema to environmental degradation—although some chapters do—but also to interrogate how the moving image reinforces or questions the division between human and nonhuman, and the settler epistemic partition of culture and nature that is at the core of the climate crisis. As the first volume to specifically address how such questions are staged by Latin American cinema, this book brings together analysis of films that respond to environmental catastrophe, as well as those that articulate a posthumanist ethos that blurs the line between species without extracting nature from its material and historical instantiations.⁹ By including chapters on the representation of animals and natural phenomena alongside those invested in the toll of environmental destruction on vulnerable communities, we echo the expansive range of nonhuman imaginaries staged by Latin American cinema.

Although it is dedicated to the intersection of Latin American cinema and ecocritical, materialist, and posthumanist approaches, this book does not aim to be comprehensive, but to foster dialogue among scholars invested in the nascent study of Latin American cinema beyond the human. Building upon the ever-growing corpus of Latin American ecocritical research, this book adds to and diverges from existing scholarship by narrowing the focus to Latin American cinema. In doing so, we advance a medium-specific argument that cinema is uniquely able to trouble anthropocentric accounts of the world through form, technique, and genre. Furthermore, we posit that the fusion of film studies and ecocriticism proffers the ideal lens through which to examine different ways of representing reality, as well as the processes of signification through which reality can be rethought and transformed. We see this work as an initial step that will forge greater connective pathways between scholars of Latin American ecocriticism and of film, as well as among scholars interested in Global South accounts of environmental collapse.

The Anthropocene and Latin America

As a species, humans have become “a major environmental force.”¹⁰ Human energy use, fossil fuel emissions, and extractive activities have changed the makeup of the lithosphere. The term Anthropocene, coined by biologist Eugene Stoermer and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, describes the current geological epoch shaped by human activity. The term is also invoked in reference to the planetary consequences of human activity, like climate change and the sixth extinction. It serves as a framework for critiquing the human role in the ongoing degradation of the Earth, which has been put in motion by new forms of colonialism and extractive imperialism, as James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer have rightly demonstrated, a pursuit for accumulation that has paradoxically put human longevity into jeopardy.¹¹

The framework of the Anthropocene has been rigorously and justifiably critiqued by many. The undetermined prefix *anthropo* suggests that this crisis has been collectively engendered by all humans—regardless of race, gender, class, or location—without accounting for the highly uneven way in which different groups have contributed to, or are affected by, these changes. The invocation of “a phantasmic figure called “human,”” Neel Ahuja observes, replicates the colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples, this time by equating the entire species with “settler ways of life” that lead to planetary destruction.¹²

Others have suggested that the term naturalizes the fatalist idea that human practices inevitably lead down this path. Instead, critics suggest, it is the pursuit of capital gains, dominance, and development, ideologies structural to colonialism and capitalism that have brought us here. For this reason, Jason Moore prefers the term “Capitalocene” to situate environmental harm as the result of capitalist reliance on cheap nature.¹³ Alternatively, Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests the “White Supremacy Scene” as a substitute that underscores the crisis’s origin in racist practices like colonialism and slavery.¹⁴ The link between colonialism and the Anthropocene has been accentuated by scientific documentation of the Orbis spike. The spike, which dates back to 1610, records a sharp drop in atmospheric carbon dioxide caused by the mass extermination of Amerindian peoples after the arrival of Europeans to the Americas. The climactic effects of this genocide, and the resulting decline in farming and regrowth of forests, is visible in Antarctic ice core records.¹⁵ This geological record of European brutality echoes Aimé Césaire’s memorable equation, “colonization = thingification,” the violent objectification of human and nonhuman bodies.¹⁶ In contemporary resource extraction, this legacy of colonial land use has been thought about through the rubric of the Plantationocene. This term accounts, as Donna Haraway claims, for the devastating transformation of different kinds of “human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor.”¹⁷

The task is a tricky one. It requires that we think about the entwined history of the species and the planet at the same time that we do not abandon critical theories of race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, imperialism, and so on—the analytical tools that have vigilantly identified the mechanisms of power that have enabled the systematic exploitation of life. As a field of critical inquiry, Latin American cultural studies has by-and-large obviated this elision. Ecocritical and posthumanist approaches to Latin American culture acknowledge the centrality of coloniality, imperialism, and capitalism to the perpetuation of a singular, linear, utilitarian approach to nature. They recognize that the contemporary crisis is the result of entrenched ways of being, a civilizational paradigm rooted in violent histories of colonization, patriarchy, and capitalist development. This “civilizational crisis,” as Mexican environmental sociologist Enrique Leff described it in *Ecología y capital* in 1986, puts into doubt dominant epistemological paradigms.¹⁸ It requires new methodologies that integrate human and ecological relations, a “new episteme” that combines “novel paradigms of criticism” with new strategies

for survival.¹⁹ As cultural scholars, we might add that these urgent questions necessitate new modes of narrating and visualizing: modes that help viewers stretch beyond themselves—beyond the partial human perspective—and toward other forms of life, human and more-than-human alike.

We agree with Arturo Escobar that the only solution to such structural ills is blanket change, and not just a departure from capitalism. It requires the utter transformation of “an entire way of life and a whole style of worldmaking.”²⁰ This desire for total change—the revamping of ontologies, epistemologies, and praxis—has turned the attention of scholars and artists to groups that have long been marginalized from mainstream modes of thought and practice. The turn to Indigenous and Afro-descendent cosmologies is in part an effort to trouble the hegemony of Western thought, whose universalization, Walter Dignolo argues, “was part of its imperial project.”²¹ The drive to document different cosmologies reframes the world not as a unified totality, but as a pluriverse, a world that contains many worlds—“where many worlds might fit,” as the Zapatistas put it in the *Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*.²² For many Latin American filmmakers, the commitment to place is equivalent to the valuation of other ways of being grounded in relation to those spaces. Indeed, many of the chapters included in this volume signal the inextricability of environmental preoccupation with that of the human cultures that inhabit those endangered spaces, themselves at risk.

Brazilian anthropologists Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argue in *The Ends of the World* that as we contemplate the decisive catastrophe of climate change, which will effectively end the world as we know it, we should seek guidance from Indigenous peoples. Amerindian groups that survived colonialization effectively experienced the end of the world, but nonetheless persisted, and “carried on in another world.”²³ Through documentary and fiction, Latin American filmmakers see in Indigenous cosmologies the possibility to reimagine the human, or, at the very least, to bring to Western publics an awareness of different ways of living in the world, and how the world we have created reflects our practices of being.

Renewed attention to Indigenous cosmovisions requires navigating stereotypes that have long dogged these groups. This includes the ghost of the good savage, or what Marisol de la Cadena identifies as the temptation to represent aboriginal groups as homogenous or innately good.²⁴ The depiction of Indigenous groups in harmony with nature and in diametric opposition to capitalism—rather than actively negotiating with ongoing processes of extraction, ecotourism, and development—can reinforce the nostalgic image of Indigenous peoples trapped in a precapitalist past. Several

contributors explore films that focus on characters that are both complicit with and victimized by extractive economies, including Lisandro Alonso's *La libertad* (*Freedom*) and coastal Central American documentaries, *El ojo del tiburón* (*The Shark's Eye*, Alejo Hoijman) and *Lih Wina* (Dania Torres).

The chapters of this volume are indebted to the burgeoning field of ecocriticism (attention to the nonhuman environment), new materialism (the agency of matter), and posthumanism (the deconstruction of human exemplarity) in Latin American cultural studies. The scholars who have laid the groundwork for the field include Jens Andermann, Mark Anderson, Laura Barbas-Rhoden, Jennifer French, Roberto Fornis-Broggi, Gisela Heffes, Jorge Marcone, and Lúcia Sá.²⁵ In conceptualizing this volume, we decided not to compartmentalize these methodologies, but rather to allow their resonances to commingle. In other words, we are not interested in parsing the distinctions between these approaches (or between terms such as environment, nature, and nonhuman), but in fostering dialogue between film scholars circling around similar concerns. Together the contributors signal different modes of entry by which Latin American cinema produces and negotiates our understanding of human and nonhuman life, destabilizes (Western) human-centered ontologies, or transgresses the usual subject/object binary.

Cinema of Nature, the Nature of Cinema

We have produced our environment; there is no nature outside of the human. The desire to mold the world as we see fit is mirrored by many modes of aesthetic practice. The human aspiration to manipulate life, create artificial worlds, and simulate the weather is particularly evident in cinema. Cinema is a cultural practice of world-production that Adrian Ivakhiv terms “cosmomorphic” because it “makes, or takes the shape of, a world, a cosmos of subjects and objects, actors and situations, figures moving and the grounds they move upon.”²⁶ Film is a medium through which humans can act out the fantasy of exerting control over time and space by physically reproducing the world and reenacting the weather. In this way, Jennifer Fay proposes, cinema can be considered “the aesthetic practice of the Anthropocene,” or at the very least, a technology that “helps us to see and experience the Anthropocene as an aesthetic practice.”²⁷

Although cinema is the human mediation of worlds on-screen, it is also innately material. Itself a product of the human manipulation of the environment, filmmaking relies on organic materials farmed from the earth.

More so than any other cultural art form (like the book or photograph), the production, distribution, and reception of cinema requires a large amount of energy and generates copious electronic waste.²⁸ The recent move to the digitization of film and streaming platforms might appear to be less tangibly reliant on matter, but it too engages loops of extraction, energy, and discard.²⁹

In Latin America, the fate of the film industry has risen and fallen alongside that of extractive economies. For instance, historians of Venezuelan cinema note that the birth of the nation's film industry coincided with an oil boom in the mid-seventies, which enabled President Carlos Andrés Pérez to pass legislation that promoted state funding of feature films.³⁰ Oil is not only a theme in Venezuelan cinema, but also structural to its vigor and decadence.³¹ Thinking about cinema through a new materialist lens encourages us to attend to on-screen representations of the nonhuman, but also to acknowledge that media itself is material and begins with the geophysical.³² As Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway observe, this revelation means that the environment underlies "every aspect of the study and understanding of film."³³

So, for a medium that is produced by and for humans, can there be a cinema "beyond the human"? Cinema is an anthropocentric exercise and an anthropogenic activity; its narratives largely center human protagonists who ground the emotional and narrative stakes. Even when the camera gaze adopts a nonhuman "view from nowhere," or a disembodied and objective perspective, it is important to be skeptical of this "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere," which Haraway warns obscures "the particularity and embodiment of all vision."³⁴ The seeming objectivity of the technological eye simply shrouds the filmmaker's partial way of seeing. In the same way that it is impossible to ever fully position oneself from the viewpoint of a subjective "other," it is likewise impossible to wholly adopt a more-than-human perspective. This dilemma can lead to a standstill. To counteract this paralysis, it is important to recognize, as the contributors to this book demonstrate, that Latin American cinema has been, and continues to be, a rich space for questioning the seeming universality of the cinematic view, particularly in its heteronormative, male, colonial iteration. The push beyond the universal "human" point of view affirms the value of situated knowledge.

Cinematic visualizations can encourage viewers to see the world otherwise, from perspectives that are diffracted or submerged, rather than from an all-knowing eye. Macarena Gómez-Barris advances the submerged perspective as decolonial methodology in *The Extractive Zone*, writing that it shifts how we sense the world "by reckoning with the thick opacity of

what lies below the water's surface."³⁵ As portable cinematic technologies and computer-based editing have become more affordable, submerged perspectives that have been sidelined by dominant visualizations have proliferated. In the twenty-first century, access to filmmaking has become more democratic because of better handheld technologies and decreased costs, especially in documentary filmmaking—a privileged mode of ecocinema.³⁶ Regions and populations that were previously priced out of such practices are now enfolded into global festival networks where demand is high for “diverse” perspectives, funding the boom in Latin American environmental cinema, Central American cinema, and Indigenous documentary filmmaking, to name just a few.

Cinema can also contextualize, narrate, and make visible ongoing ecological transformations that are normally hidden. Representational practices have become increasingly important given that environmental damage unfolds over long, drawn-out timelines, or in locations marginalized from mass media visibility.³⁷ Because humans are ocular-centric creatures, when these crises are out of sight, they are also out of mind. Cinema offers a way to appreciate these alterations. It can narrate and contextualize environmental harm or tell stories that reorient our understanding of the relationship between human and nonhuman. These imaginings can be geared to different effects, as a means of compelling ethical response or simply induce enchantment: a new appreciation of the nonhuman prompted by affective and aesthetic engagement. Cinema can prompt what Jens Andermann calls a state of trance, in which viewers suspend their technocognitive judgment and give in to sensorial pleasure.³⁸

Greening Latin American Cinema

Latin American ecocinema, defined broadly as cinema concerned with environmental issues, has experienced an extraordinary boom since 2010. This boom, of course, is not without precedent. The environment has long been a privileged trope in Latin American cinema, whether out of fascination with the landscape's unique aesthetic possibilities, as in *Limite* (*Limit*, Mário Peixoto, 1931), or as a means of enacting social critique through allegorical images, like that performed in *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968). The medium's enthrallment with environmental phenomena can be traced back even earlier, to the very first silent films, like the actuality *Huracán en las playas de Veracruz*, filmed by

Gabriel Veyre of Société Lumière in 1897. *Revista de Mérida* praised Veyre's footage of the hurricane for capturing "the most handsome views" of tempestuous environmental drama.³⁹ The moving image translated the spectacle of atmospheric disruption to the delight of viewers safely removed from the event. Since its very beginnings, cinema has engaged viewers' ecological fascination by inducing the experience of remote geographies or environmental disturbances, communicating its beauty without the bodily peril.

Fast-forwarding to the twenty-first century, interest in environmentalist topics—writ large, as the entanglement of human life with our surrounding habitat—in cinema exploded, reflecting the widespread acknowledgment of climate change as an alarming reality. As of 2010, this thematization has intensified.⁴⁰ This boom can be attributed to the decreased cost of filmmaking, the greening of the zeitgeist, and the explosion of film festivals dedicated to environmental issues. The proliferation of art-house festivals like the San Sebastián Film Festival, Toulouse Latin American Film Festival, and Guadalajara Film Festival provide Latin American filmmakers with platforms to gain international visibility and funding opportunities for script development, editing, and postproduction. On a more specialized level, niche festivals dedicated to environmental issues help Latin American ecocinema circulate and recoup funds. Festivals like the United States' Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital (established in 1993), Spain's International Environmental Film Festival (FICMA, since 1993), and Portugal's Cine Eco (since 1995) connect environmentally attuned international audiences with Global South filmmakers, revealing the increasingly decentralized and networked nature of activism and cultural consumption in the twenty-first century.

Scholars have signaled that while film festivals are invaluable sources of funding and distribution for Latin American cinema, they also tend to incentivize reductive tropes. Miriam Ross has argued that the "uneven benefactor-beneficiary relationship" between Global North funders and Global South filmmakers perpetuates certain representational norms, namely the foregrounding of the national setting, poverty, and marginalized subgroups.⁴¹ While the films produced with the help of transnational sources are far from homogenous, Ross signals that it is important to recognize that filmmakers participating in these circuits are aware of the international audience's expectations and desire for "authentic" depictions of the developing world.⁴² Tamara Falicov has furthered that these unequal transnational collaborations have created a globalized art-house formula that is local in *mise-en-scène*, but universalizable in theme.⁴³ All of this is to say that while many of the

films analyzed within this volume focus on national or hyperlocal concerns, given current structures of funding, production, and circulation, they are also inevitably interwoven into transnational dynamics that may or may not affect the environmental imaginaries produced by Latin American cinema.

Yet it would be a mistake to assert that these films are not deeply engaged with local publics and national conversations about place-specific futures. The surge in specialized film festivals in Latin America dedicated to environmentalist cinema attests to growing regional demand for these conversations. Green film festivals in Brazil were the earliest on the scene: Festival Internacional de Cinema e Video Ambiental (FICA, since 1999), Festicineamazônia (since 2003), and FILMAMBIENTE International Environmental Film Festival (since 2010). Since 2009, Mexico has hosted the long-standing festival Cinema Planeta (FICMA MX, a spin-off of Spain's FICMA), which is funded jointly by the state and the United Nation's Environment Program. Mexico is also the host since 2011 of the ECOFILM Festival Internacional de Cortometrajes Ambientales, which focuses on short films.

Most Latin American environmental film festivals are not for profit and receive funding from a mix of government sources, arts councils, volunteer labor, and corporate sponsors. They often last a weekend or a week; attendance is inexpensive, as is the cost for submitting a film for consideration. This encourages participation and makes these generative spaces for face-to-face interaction between filmmakers and the public. Other ecofestivals in Latin American include Peru's Festival Sembrando Cine (2009–), Argentina's Festival Internacional de Cine Ambiental (FINCA, 2010–) and Patagonia Eco Film Fest (PEFF, 2016–), Bolivia's Festival Internacional de Cine Verde (2011–), Colombia's Festiver Festival de Cine Verde de Barichara (2011–), Dominican Republic's Muestra de Cine Medioambiental Dominicana (DREFF, 2011–), Venezuela's Festival Internacional de Cine y Video Verde de Venezuela (FESTIVERD, 2013–), and Ecuador's ECOador International Film Festival (2016–). These smaller-scale, regional film festivals generate local communities coalesced around shared concerns.⁴⁴ Increased festivalgoer interest in environmental films is perhaps due to the relative absence of these topics in the mainstream media, as issues of environmental degradation are often displaced by more outwardly pressing political concerns.⁴⁵

Low-budget, small-scale Latin American ecofilms often find afterlives online. This is the case for many of the films included in this volume, which are available for international audiences on streaming sites like Netflix, HBO, Kanopy, or platforms like YouTube or Vimeo, where they circulate freely. To give one brief example, after select theater screenings, the low-budget

Guatemalan documentary about genetically modified seeds *Morir sembrando vida* (Matias Quinzio and Marcos Mendivil, 2015) found a robust viewership online on sites such as YouTube, Films for Action, and Cine Vivo. As of this writing in 2020, *Morir sembrando vida* had more than 250,000 views on YouTube, and comments from viewers across the globe, from Colombia to Vietnam, who noted similar varietal losses. These online platforms allow hyperlocalized, low-budget films to find an audience even in the absence of national exhibition infrastructures.

Chapter Outlines

This volume appraises Latin American cinema's depiction of the more-than-human planet. As the fourteen chapters indicate, engagement with the nonhuman in Latin American cinema is manifold and can be read in radically different ways. It is actualized through a multiplicity of strategies that alternatively foreground nonhuman bodies, criticize extractivist development, or document marginalized cosmologies. We have grouped the chapters in three thematic sections, which respectively attend to genre, bodily difference, and indigeneity. As these chapters attest, Latin American cinema frequently resists the imperative to move fully beyond the human, instead dramatizing the inextricability of planetary care and social justice. In productive tension with the volume's title, its chapters warn against losing sight of the human altogether.

The first section, *Genre Beyond the Human*, probes the role of the nonhuman in four distinct film genres. Through the repetition of images and narratives, genre establishes patterns that become recognizable and expected by audiences. It formulates a system of signification and a mode of approaching the world. The genres under consideration here—the road movie, the disaster film, the documentary, and slow cinema—invoke the nonhuman to different ends, giving shape to the cultural and symbolic meanings affixed to the natural world.

In the first chapter, Patrícia Vieira unpacks the centrality of traveling in films that take place in the Amazon. Vieira hypothesizes that because “nature itself is permanently on the move” in Amazonia, the momentum of constant growth, reproduction, and flow finds its mirror image in the traveling bodies of explorers and the moving images of cinema. Accordingly, the visual exploration of Amazonian plants, rivers, and landscapes has adopted the conventions of the road movie. The road movie genre, Vieira argues, is uniquely equipped to

render visible the damage wrought by extractivist policies and to give screen time to the region's inhabitants that persist in the face of this violence.

Unlike the road movie's focus on lively ecologies, the natural disaster genre foregrounds the unsettling agency of seemingly exanimate forces, like the atmosphere or the geosphere. Through a reading of the cinematic representations of the 1985 earthquake that devastated Mexico City, Carolyn Fornoff argues that the earthquake is a visual interruption of geological agency and deep time into human history. The natural disaster film is a genre of the Anthropocene in that it dramatizes the collision of human and nonhuman forces, which compound to devastating effect. Fornoff furthers that in spite of generic convention, recent interventions like Jorge Michel Grau's thriller *7:19* (2016) disclose that the natural disaster is not wholly natural, or fully beyond the human.

Turning her attention to the documentary, Juana New traces the origin of the genre in Latin America back to an unlikely source: Alexander von Humboldt. According to New, Humboldt's blend of the sensorial, aesthetic experience of nature with scientific inquiry anticipates contemporary approaches to documentary cinema. Two recent documentaries, *Farmacopea* by Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (2013) and *El botón de nácar* (*The Pearl Button*, 2015) by Patricio Guzmán, particularly resonate with Humboldt's nonrational approach. By foregrounding the sensorial, these films articulate other ways of being in the world that no longer marginalize non-Western cosmologies and representational modes.

In the section's final chapter, Amanda McMenamín draws parallels between the genre of slow cinema and the representational dilemma of environmental slow violence. In her analysis of Lisandro Alonso's *La libertad* (2001), McMenamín writes that long, observational takes materialize the drawn-out temporalities of gradual, often invisible environmental attrition. The contemplative praxis of slow cinema compels the audience to experience the time that it takes a tree to be felled and to witness the reduction of a vegetal life to an object. Alonso's experimentation with camera angles and extended takes, McMenamín posits, prompts viewers to reflect upon the pace of deforestation and the exploitation of human labor.

The second section of the volume, *Encountering Difference*, brings together chapters that stage cinematic encounters with the nonhuman. The forms of difference engaged in this section are disparate, including animals, technologies, and bodies of water. Collectively, these imaginings foreground Latin America as a multispecies habitat where human and nonhuman (including discarded objects) jumble together. These encounters are performed

through modes that range from the archival capture of the documentary to the speculative animacy of animated film. Cinematic encounters with the nonhuman can be used to different ends—as pedagogy, allegory, or sensual texture—to heighten a film’s political or aesthetic interpretation of the human experience.

Moira Fradinger discusses the long-standing use of the nonhuman animal body as a prop in Latin American left-wing cinema. Fradinger argues that the contiguity between victimized nonhuman and human bodies allegorizes the violence of capitalist exploitation. On-screen animal slaughter stands in for violence against humans, blurring the distinction between species. Yet at the same time, this “pedagogy of slaughter” reinforces humanist narratives that confirm the dignity of human life and the disposability of nonhuman animals. One line of flight from this anthropocentric paradigm, Fradinger suggests, is the close-up of the bloodied eye, which becomes deterritorialized from any one species.

The life-giving aesthetics of animation, Katherine Bundy argues, is another sort of pedagogy: one that teaches viewers to perceive the nonhuman anew. Through animation, seemingly inert, inorganic objects like technology and trash can be imbued with agency, movement, and emotion. Bundy describes how the animated short series *Bendito Machine* (2006–2017) by Peruvian-Chilean animator Jossie Malis Álvarez deploys animation to critique extraction and accumulation. The series, with its chorus of animated subjects, furthers a nonhierarchical—albeit nonsymmetrical—redistribution of agency among human, nonhuman, and posthuman subjects.

Vinodh Venkatesh describes how Papu Curotto’s film *Esteros* (2016) fleshes out queer desire through the erotics of the rural landscape. *Esteros*’s privileging of the natural, rural setting, Venkatesh explains, reflects the trend away from urban spaces in contemporary Argentine cinema. Instead, desire is linked with the rural landscape, an association that is crystallized through haptic, tactile images of water. Through the positioning of the camera and the sonic evocation of the aqueous, *Esteros* dwells in queer bodily pleasures, enmeshing ethics and erotics.

Cinematic techniques can also be used to obscure difference and perpetuate a selective view of place. Lisa Blackmore explains that recent visualizations of the Dominican Republic have done just that by presenting the island as a tourist Caribbean fantasy. This fantasy is sustained by tricks of montage that cut out undesired images that do not align with the island’s brand, like poverty, trash, and pollution. In contrast with the capitalist “hydraulic order,” Blackmore is interested in films that detect its

counterflows: the residual and contaminated spaces that are typically excluded from national marketing. The documentary *Caribbean Fantasy* (Johanné Gómez Terrero, 2016) opens a portal to one such counterflow. It redirects viewers away from the Dominican Republic's endless beaches and toward the contaminated River Ozama and the locals who reside along its banks.

Continuing with the idea of flow, Mark Anderson probes how viscosity and toxicity are represented in two documentaries that record oil spills in the Ecuadorian Amazon: *Crude: The Real Price of Oil* (Joe Berlinger, 2009) and *The Blood of Kouan Kouan* (Yorgos Avgeropolous, 2009). In their accounts of the "material logic of toxicity," these films underscore the porosity of human and nonhuman bodies, challenging ideas of bodily integrity vis-à-vis the environment. Anderson posits that film breaks down the myth of self-containment by affectively transmitting to the viewer the bodily sensation of toxicity, thus "leading to a form of ethical engagement that arises from the materiality of encounter rather than any ideological predisposition."

The final section, *Screening the Pluriverse*, brings together chapters that signal the inextricability of environmental and social justice. The consequences of environmental harm are unevenly distributed and disproportionately affect those already in a vulnerable social position. The cinematic impulse to document previously marginalized cosmologies troubles the supposed universality of Western humanism as well as the simplistic notion that an ahistorical, universal human is behind climate change. By tracing other ontologies and epistemologies, the films analyzed in this section seek to reframe the world not as a unified totality, but as a pluriverse, a world that contains many worlds.

While the compounding precarization of specific human communities due to environmental degradation might seem to suggest the renewed importance of human rights, Fernando J. Rosenberg delineates the limitations of this discourse. Rosenberg argues that Patricio Guzmán's documentaries *Nostalgia de la luz* (*Nostalgia for the Light*, 2010) and *El botón de nácar* (*The Pearl Button*, 2015) evidence the Chilean director's shift beyond the anthropocentric, nationalist discourse of human rights. These documentaries map new ways of thinking about the value of life after human rights by interweaving intimate human histories with exceedingly vast nonhuman life spans. Focalizing the spaces of the desert and the ocean, Guzmán takes viewers to the threshold where life and death intermingle in an effort to reimagine a planetary ethics of care.

Echoing Blackmore's critique of the tourist fantasy of idealized landscapes, Mauricio Espinoza and Tomás Emilio Arce discuss the representational

imagery that characterizes the Central American Caribbean coast. Dominant, picture-perfect depictions of the region visualize it as an exotic, multicultural, and ecological paradise. The slickly produced Costa Rican feature *Caribe* (Esteban Ramírez, 2004) sells one such idyll to transnational viewers, sanitizing the region's socioeconomic realities. By contrast, the Nicaraguan documentary short *Lih Wina* (Dania Torres, 2012) questions the tensions that arise between top-down conservationist policies and local traditions, such as the customary consumption of turtle meat. Espinoza and Arce warn that concepts such as “fragility” and “endangerment” should not be exclusively applied to nonhuman nature, nor should environmentalist policies be put in place that compound the adversity faced by ethnic communities that have long cohabitated those spaces.

Julia M. Medina also focuses on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. Through a close reading of two documentaries, *El ojo del tiburón* (Alejo Hoijman, 2012) and *El canto de Bosawas* (Camilo Castro and Brad Allgood, 2014), Medina interrogates their “(neo)imperial gaze,” which perpetuates a certain othering of the subjects they document. The former film follows two boys coming of age along the San Juan River who must choose between traditional shark hunting and the drug trade. The latter documentary follows a film crew's efforts to record Mayangana music. The uneven power dynamics between filmmakers and subjects is charged with tension. Nonetheless, Medina argues, it can be read as “a contemporary rendition of testimonial narrative in the form of audiovisual recording” that expresses Mayangana relationship to space.

Similarly concerned with the dynamic of othering perpetuated by documentary film, Iván Eusebio Aguirre Darancou proposes that Mexican director Nicolás Echevarría's documentary *Eco de la montaña* (*Echo of the Mountain*, 2014) centers the Wixáritari peoples without exoticizing them. Aguirre unpacks the presentation of Wixáritari humanimal intersubjectivities, or the notion that the individual exists only in relation to others. Particularly resonant for Aguirre's analysis is a pair of eyes at the center of a mural woven by the film's subject, Santos de la Torre. The documentary resists overt explanation of Wixáritari cosmology and instead urges viewers to decipher, gaze at, and be gazed at by the mural. Aguirre argues that the mural's protagonism evidences Echevarría's political goal: the recognition of Wixáritari subjectivity as part of the national body.

In the final chapter, Gisela Heffes examines the role of activist documentaries in contesting extractivist policies in South America. The three films analyzed by Heffes—*Cielo abierto* (Carlos Ruiz, 2007), *When Clouds Clear* (Danielle Bernstein and Anne Slick, 2008), and *Operación diablo*

(Stephanie Boyd, 2010)—trace different case studies of mining. Together they articulate what Heffes terms “decapitation resistance,” a political and aesthetic strategy that gathers alternative forms of knowledge to dispute the official rhetoric and homogenizing epistemological claims of modern extractive projects. The “undisciplined knowledge” of decapitation resistance recuperates threatened landscapes through collective action motored by hybrid modes of world making. These documentaries mobilize decapitation as a threat not only to the landscape, but also to the health and livelihoods of local populations.

As the first book-length work to seriously account for the representation of the nonhuman in Latin American cinema, the chapters in this volume collectively consider how filmmaking can operate as a generative posthumanist or environmentalist practice that imagines alternative ways of sensing the world while at the same time examining the cinematic mechanisms that allow for this to happen visually and materially. The corpus considered in these chapters covers different national contexts and genres to give readers a sense of how these questions play out across different frameworks. While the majority of the chapters are concerned with contemporary production, we also include chapters that analyze films from the twentieth century to combat the sense that these issues are new. Although filmmaking is an inherently human practice, meant for human consumption, the works considered here renew our perception of difference, both external and internal to the humans who make and consume them. Latin American cinema that pushes past the human activates our capacity to see beyond the human-nonhuman divide. These chapters mark the first incursion into this area of inquiry. Much remains to be done.

Notes

1. José Juan Tablada, “El infierno zoológico,” in *Una antología general* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), 393. All translations are our own.
2. Tablada, “El infierno zoológico,” 393.
3. Kelly Enright, *The Maximum of Wilderness: The Jungle in the American Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).
4. Tablada, “El infierno zoológico,” 394.
5. Lamont Lindstrom, “Shooting Melanesians: Martin Johnson and Edward Salisbury in the Southwest Pacific,” *Visual Anthropology* 29, no. 4/5 (2016): 360–81.
6. Kelly Enright, *Osa and Martin: For the Love of Adventure* (Guilford: Lyons, 2011), 64.

7. See Christian León's discussion of Swedish filmmaker Rolf Blomberg's ethnographic documentaries in Ecuador. Christian León, *Reinventando al otro. El documental indigenista en el Ecuador* (Quito: La Caracola, 2010).

8. See Michael Ziser's discussion on how "ecological media" defies "traditional single-medium environmental disciplines." "Ecomedia," in *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, ed. Joni Adamson et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 75–76.

9. Allison Carruth, "Ecological Media Studies and the Matter of Digital Technologies." *PMLA* 131, no. 2 (2016): 364–72.

10. Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002): 23.

11. James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, "Agro-Extractivism: The Agrarian Question of the 21st Century," in *Extractive Imperialism in the Americas* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 62–100.

12. Neel Ahuja, "Posthuman New York: Ground Zero of the Anthropocene," in *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human*, ed. Michael Lundblad (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 49.

13. Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015).

14. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "It's Not the Anthropocene, It's the White Supremacy Scene," in *After Extinction*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2018), 123–50.

15. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (2015): 171–80.

16. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.

17. Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6 (2015), 162.

18. Enrique Leff, *Ecología y capital: racionalidad ambiental, democracia participativa y desarrollo sustentable* (México: Siglo XXI, 2005), 68.

19. Gisela Heffes, *Políticas de la destrucción/poéticas de la preservación: apuntes para una lectura ecocrítica del medio ambiente en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2013), 24, 27.

20. Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), x.

21. Walter D. Mignolo, "Foreword: On Pluriversality and Multipolarity," in *Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), x.

22. EZLN, "Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona," January 1, 1996.

23. Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, trans. Rodrigo Nunes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 107.

24. Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 360.

25. Other scholars who have recently widened the scope of the field include Monique Allewaert, Lisa Blackmore, Lucy Bollington, Zelia Bora, Irene Depetris Chauvin, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Scott DeVries, Liliana Gómez, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Héctor Hoyos, Adrian Taylor Kane, Edward King, Ilka Kressner, Paul Merchant, Ana María Mutis, Joanna Page, Elizabeth Pettinaroli, Rachel Price, Charlotte Rogers, Victoria Saramago, and Macarena Urzúa Opazo, among many others.

26. Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 6.

27. Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (New York: Oxford Press, 2018), 4.

28. Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

29. While there are numerous attempts to “green” film productions, it is nonetheless anthropogenic. To mitigate its footprint, film productions should increase the use of LEDs, switch on-set heaters from propane to biodiesel made from reused cooking oil, as well as use 100-percent compostable materials or reusable plates and cutlery instead of plastic. Filmmaking also impacts local environments. It may disturb wildlife and the environment with sound and light pollution.

30. John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990), 219.

31. For more on oil and Venezuelan cinema, see Rebecca Jarman, “Melodrama at the Margins: Poverty, Politics, and Profits in ‘Golden Age’ Venezuelan Cinema,” *Modern Language Review* 112, no. 3 (2017): 645–65.

32. Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6.

33. Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway, “Introduction: Intersecting Ecology and Film,” in *Screening Nature: Cinema beyond the Human* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 1–2.

34. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

35. Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), xiv.

36. María Guadalupe Arenillas and Michael J. Lazzara, “Introduction: Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium,” in *Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

37. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

38. Jens Andermann, *Tierras en trance: arte y naturaleza después del paisaje* (Santiago: Metales Pesados, 2018), 25.

39. Juan Felipe Leal, Eduardo Barraza, and Alejandra Jablonska, *Vistas que no se ven: filmografía mexicana, 1896–1910* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), 45.

40. Rocío González de Arce proposes that of the nearly 1,200 Mexican films with identifiably green characteristics (counted expansively: documentary and fiction, shorts and features, coproductions), a whopping 92 percent were produced in the last decade, between 2008 and 2018. Rocío Betzabé González de Arce Arzave, “El viaje del cine mexicano de ficción hacia la conciencia ecológica: Imaginarios de la naturaleza, ecotopías y ética ambiental en la pantalla,” master’s diss., Universidad Iberoamericana, 2019: 142.

41. Miriam Ross, “The Film Festival as Producer: Latin American Films and Rotterdam’s Hubert Bals Fund,” *Screen* 52, no. 2 (2011): 263.

42. Ross, “The Film Festival as Producer,” 267.

43. Tamara L. Falicov, “‘Cine en Construcción’/‘Films in Progress’: How Spanish and Latin American Filmmakers Negotiate the Construction of a Globalized Art-House Aesthetic,” *Transnational Cinemas* 4, no. 2 (2013): 261.

44. Salma Monani, “Environmental Film Festivals: Beginning Explorations at the Intersections of Film Festival Studies and Ecocritical Studies,” in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. S. Rust, S. Monani, and S. Cubitt (New York: Routledge, 2013): 253–78.

45. Kay Armatage, “Planet in Focus: Environmental Film Festivals,” in *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human*, ed. Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 264.

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