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Nature/Ch'ixi/Culture and the Cinemas of Latin America: An Introduction

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I saw it, like a road through the trees, / What is perhaps the Great Secret, / That Great
Mystery of which the false poets speak. / I saw that there is no Nature, / That Nature
doesn't exist, / That there are hills, valleys, plains, / That there / are trees, flowers, herbs,
/ That there are rivers and rocks, / But there is no whole to which they belong, / That a
real and true whole / Is a disease of our ideas. / Nature is parts without a whole.
"The Keeper of Flocks", Alberto Caeiroⁱ

Alberto Caeiro's poetic insight that "Nature is parts without a whole" unsettles the notion of a stable, totalising, and universal Nature. This disruption frames the central problematics that we aim to address in this dossier: how does Latin American cinema negotiate, perform, and reconfigure the ontological fictions underpinning the Eurocentric modern conceptions of nature and the understanding of nature and culture as separate spheres? The assumption of Nature as an external, pre-existing realm—detached from human intervention and structured within a hierarchical order privileging a Eurocentric, rational, and civilised subject—has long been challenged in philosophical and ecological thought (e.g., Merchant 1983, Barad 2007, Alaimo 2010, Tsing 2017). Indeed, beyond Western philosophy, non-Western epistemologies radically defy this assumption. Cinema, as a medium entangled with representation, performativity, perception, and affect, plays a crucial role in dismantling this binary and imagining alternative configurations of existence.

Rather than presupposing a pre-existing nature that cinema merely documents or interacts with, we propose thinking through cinema's engagement with more-than-human worlds. This includes its enactment of multispecies entanglements that resist the nature-culture divide, challenging both ontological and epistemological boundaries. Donna Haraway's notion of natureculture rethinks this separation, pointing out how these domains are enmeshed, co-emergent, and symbiotic (Haraway 2016). In a distinct yet resonant gesture, Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's recovery of an Aymara notion of *ch'ixi* posits the coexistence of apparently opposed elements as an irresolution to insist on (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018). Aware that the use of indigenous concepts like *ch'ixi* risks appropriation when detached from their cultural and political contexts, we believe engaging with such ideas is crucial for challenging the universalising frameworks of Western thought and fostering pluriversal ways of knowing. *Ch'ixi* does not resolve into synthesis; it remains an ongoing simultaneity of differences, resisting purification, assimilation, and the imposition of categorical separations. To think nature/ch'ixi/culture is thus to embrace messy existences, recognising the unfinished, becoming-with, and always-negotiated character of the world.

The designation "nature" functions as a strategic nominal category that encompasses what is not recognised as human, naming a relationship rather than a substance. Like other classificatory constructs such as "animal/animot" (Derrida 2006), it operates as a linguistic mechanism that relegates all that is not understood as human to the domain of the object, stripping it of agency (Latour 2013). This erasure underpins anthropocentric, extractivist, and "developmentalist"

paradigms, whose consequences are both starkly visible and problematised politically and aesthetically in Latin America (Andermann, Giorgi, and Saramago 2024). As the climate emergency unfolds with particular intensity in the region, artistic and cinematic practices engage critically with these dynamics, offering ways to rethink and reimagine more-than-human relations. Various studies have contested these paradigms, contributing to the collapse of the modern episteme based on the separation of cosmological and anthropological orders (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2019).

Despite the growing interest in the intersections between moving images and (post)natural worlds, contemporary Latin American cinema offers a vast and dynamic terrain for further exploration. While a small but expanding body of studies has examined Latin American films that challenge human-centric conceptions of and relations to nature, as well as the interplay between posthumanism and Latin American cinema (e.g., Anderman 2014; Fornoff and Heffes 2022; Depetris-Chauvin and Gattás 2024), much remains to be studied. This dossier aims to be a space for dialogue and contribute to the ongoing conversations in this domain by focusing on experimental and nonfiction films.

How does cinema reconfigure dominant definitions of culture and nature, challenging their underlying hierarchies? Latin American cinema, through its engagement with indigenous cosmologies and situated epistemologies alternative to the dominant Western cosmology, emerges as a critical site for rethinking the duality of Nature/Culture. Whether through repurposing cinematic techniques, engaging the materiality of film practices, or exploring more-than-human perceptual worlds, Latin American film practices contest anthropocentrism, extractivism, and the ontological hierarchies that sustain them.

The plural epistemologies of the region in their diverse cosmologies, including Andean, Mapuche and Amerindian worldviews, to name just a few, propose world-making practices that challenge the Western naturalist paradigm and its human exceptionalism. Indigenous cinemas, in particular, redefine how film configures, shapes, and reimagines human and more-than-human relations, offering a cinematic grammar that resists imposed subject-object or nature-culture binaries.

Furthermore, several experimental films emerging from Latin American foreground multispecies entanglements, exploring vegetal, animal, and mineral agencies while challenging dominant regimes of visibility and representation, as this dossier shows, although without an aim to be representative of the work done in this field. In visualising more-than-human perspectives, cinema fosters a cosmopolitical (Stengers 2010) rethinking of world-making practices, offering “points of life” (Coccia 2016) rooted in animal, vegetable, mineral, and even spectral existences (Despret 2015).

Instrumental in decentring the human as the sole agent of perception and thought, although a tool of Eurocentric modernity, the medium of cinema has played a pivotal role in reconfiguring relationality beyond the human. Cinema is not merely a set of elements to be watched; it is a mode of seeing and knowing, a *dispositif* that materially intervenes in knowledge production. In what ways do cinematic techniques and the moving image allow for new visualisations of more-than-human modes of existence? How does cinema expose and perform different forms of being, contributing to an ontology that does not subscribe to a hierarchical valuation of existence?

At the heart of this dossier lie the questions: how does cinema function as a site of ontological reconfiguration? How does the cinematic *dispositif* facilitate new world-making practices that destabilise hierarchical value systems and redistribute agency among humans and more-than-

humans? This collection of essays explores cinema's ability to reanimate what has been imposed as an inert, available Nature—not by indiscriminately attributing life as a supposedly superior condition, but by insisting on relationality, becomings-with, and the performative negotiation of dualities and their beyond.

In addressing these concerns, this dossier invites diverse perspectives on Latin American cinema and its entanglements with nature/ch'ixi/culture. From indigenous filmmaking to experimental cinema, from the politics of extraction to the aesthetics of vegetal and mineral rhythms, these contributions seek to rethink the possibilities of cinematic intervention in times of ecological crisis and epistemic transformation. By situating cinema within a cosmopolitical framework, this collection of essays and conversations traces how moving images become sites of resistance, negotiation, and reinvention in the pluriverse of Latin American worlds.

I. Plant Worlds

This dossier foregrounds plant worlds through essays by Angela Prysthon and Lucca Nicolesi, Paula Bertúa, and Salomé Lopes Coelho, who also interviews Mexican filmmaker Azucena Losana about her eco-development project using plants from South America.

In **Botanical offerings, plants as gifts, experimental cinema and the world of Claudio Caldini**, Prysthon and Nicolesi explore how early cinema, driven by scientific inquiry, employed new technologies to capture the subtle movements and growth of plant life. Their analysis extends to the work of Argentine filmmaker Claudio Caldini, situating his films within the broader history of experimental cinema and examining his distinctive approach to depicting the relationship between plants, technology, and human observation.

Through a materialist and post-naturalist lens, Paula Bertúa analyses Argentine filmmaker Leandro Listorti's film *Herbaria* in **Herbaria: essays for a material and postnaturalist memory of botany and film**. Bertúa investigates the ways in which the film engages with the preservation of both natural and artistic heritage amidst the ongoing ecological crisis. By examining *Herbaria's* exploration of “material memory”, Bertúa critiques the role of modern classification systems in science and art, questioning their established criteria for knowledge and collection.

Salomé Lopes Coelho's essay, **Los ritmos de la materia más-que-humana en la serie de films eco-revelados *Metarretratos*, de Azucena Losana**, examines Losana's metaportrait of *Ceibo/Erythrina crista-galli*, a film developed using the very flowers it depicts. Considering the Ceibo tree's specific location in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo, Coelho situates its botanical and material-semiotic significance within a broader spatio-temporal context. Coelho argues that eco-developed films reveal the agency of both cinematic and vegetal matter in world-making, highlighting the interconnectedness of nature and technology. She further suggests that the film's apparatus translates the Ceibo's curative properties, offering a potential mechanism for addressing eco-traumatic landscapes. Coelho's insights are enriched by her interview with Azucena Losana, **De la Planta a la Pantalla. Diálogo con Azucena Losana a partir de su proyecto *Metarretratos***, which provides a deeper understanding of the project's aims and processes.

II. Cosmopoetics, Shamanism, and Indigenous Filmmaking

Indigenous cinemas—an inherently plural designation—offer a vital lens for challenging conventional cinematic representations of human and more-than-human worlds, encompassing

spirits, plants, animals, and others. These practices reinvent modes of filming, editing, and storytelling, contributing to a reconfiguration of cinematic grammar. This dossier engages with these territories through Catarina Andrade and Álvaro Brito, and Marcos Aurélio Felipe's essays.

Andrade and Brito's article, **Re-existence through cosmopoetics: a decolonial approach to contemporary cinema**, presents cinema as a cosmopoetic tool capable of fostering new realities and shared worlds. They examine its potential as a decolonial force, arguing for the emancipation of film technology from capitalist exploitation and advocating for its use in social transformation. Their essay critiques conventional film production and circulation, highlighting the importance of diverse filmmaking practices within Indigenous communities and other marginalised spaces.

In turn, Felipe's article, **ETĀN BĒ TALI BU: apontamentos sobre dimensões cosmo-filmicas indígenas de Abya Yala**, explores the historical erasure of Indigenous peoples in Latin America through the lens of cinema. He critiques the colonial narrative of disappearance, demonstrating how Indigenous communities have actively resisted this erasure through ongoing struggles for survival and resurgence, with cinema playing a crucial role in this process. By exposing the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production, Felipe reveals how dominant narratives have obscured Indigenous presence. His analysis calls for a decolonial approach to filmmaking that amplifies Indigenous voices and perspectives.

III. Poetics of Material Landscapes

Constanza's interview **El cine como una experiencia situada: entrevista a Jeannette Muñoz**, delves into the creative processes and conceptual frameworks underpinning Jeannette Muñoz's work, exploring the diverse influences that shape her practice. From a deep engagement with cinema to an acute sensitivity to place, history, and material traces, Muñoz's artistic research unfolds across multiple temporalities and disciplines. With a critical and poetic approach, Muñoz reflects on the paradox of visibility in contemporary Europe, where historical structures persist beneath the surface, often hidden in plain sight. Through her work, she reveals the tensions between preservation and control, natural and artificial environments, and the uneasy relationship between past and present.

Through a close analysis of *Echo Chamber* (2014), Federico Windhausen's **Slow onset: a brief consideration of Guillermo Moncayo's *Echo Chamber*** examines how Moncayo critiques state-led climate communication strategies that often fail to account for the lived realities of rural communities. The film juxtaposes disembodied official alerts with haunting images of neglected railway infrastructure, and abandoned buildings, exposing the inadequacy of top-down disaster narratives. In contrast, Moncayo offers an alternative vision of adaptation and survival amid ongoing environmental and political neglect.

Pedro Melo's analysis of the Mexican collective Los Ingrávidos in **Irreconciliado e insubmisso: a estética do Colectivo Los Ingrávidos**. It examines how the films *Transmisión/Desenquadre*, *Coatl*, and *Pirámide Erosionada* disrupt conventional cinematic grammar. Drawing on the theories developed by the Frankfurt School and contemporary film theory, Pedro explores Los Ingrávidos' strategies of discontinuous montage, the autonomous relationship between sound and image, and discursive multiplicity to address themes of coloniality and shamanic materialism.

Drawing from their curatorial experiences in Mexico, Sebastian Wiedemann and Byron Davies reflect on how experimental film communities sustain and care for experimental cinema,

particularly in its intersections with cosmopolitical image-making, trance, liminality, and spectrality. In their conversation, **Ecologías post-naturales del cine experimental latinoamericano reciente. Un diálogo entre Sebastian Widemann & Byron Davies**, they discuss the evolving role of trance in their curated programmes, moving from a historical-philosophical inquiry into its presence in experimental film towards a broader engagement with questions of political absence, extinction, and post-natural aesthetics.

IV. Feral Experimentations

As something that belongs neither to nature nor culture, as Juliana Fausto (2021) reminds us in her essay “La pensée feral”, the feral might be the name for a cinema that transcends these divisions. A manifesto does not merely describe but calls into being new ways of seeing, making, and inhabiting the world—a provocation that finds full force in Erin Wilkerson’s manifesto, **Feral Filmmaking: wilding cinema as a decolonial act**. Wilkerson calls for a radical reimagining of cinematic practices, positioning filmmaking as a decolonial act of resistance against dominant, monocultural structures. Inspired by the resilience and adaptability of weeds, she champions a DIY approach to filmmaking, one that thrives on accessibility, collaboration, and deep entanglement with place. Drawing from Third Cinema’s guerrilla tactics, she dismantles the hierarchical and extractive nature of Hollywood, advocating instead for a cinematic landscape rooted in insurgent creativity. Feral filmmaking, she argues, is a form of “critical fabulation”, blending documentary, fiction, and experimental approaches to confront historical erasure and amplify marginalised voices.

In **Becoming moita**, Pedro Urano reflects on his creative and filmmaking practice in collaboration with participants of the *moita* carnival—a group of inhabitants of the Vale do Macaé in the Serra (mountainous) region of Rio de Janeiro State. Reflecting on the animal and vegetal agencies created in the manual making of the *moita* carnival costumes, Urano traces this symbiotic performance beyond modern, colonial-extractivist, Enlightenment thought, looking at the intersection of multiple histories, and bringing the character and artifact of the *moita* close to its premodern manifestation, namely, the “green man”, imbued monstrosity and rewilding potential. Urano’s photographic and film imagery offers a pathway to reimagine *feral* practices through situated botanical knowledge and communal actions.

Together, the diverse contributions of this dossier offer scholarly, curatorial, and creative insights into how experimental and nonfiction cinemas made in Latin America move radically apart from a dichotomous understanding of nature and culture. Rather, the authors argue for a rethinking of notions of territory and the environment, urging us to consider more-than-human modes of existence as constituents of other forms of knowledge production.

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ⁱ Original version: Entrevi, como uma estrada por entre as árvores, / O que talvez seja o Grande Segredo, Aquele Grande Mistério de que os poetas falsos falam. / Vi que não há Natureza, Que Natureza não existe, / Que há montes, vales, planícies, Que há árvores, flores, ervas, / Que há rios e pedras, / Mas que não há um todo a que isso pertença, / Que um conjunto real e verdadeiro / É uma doença das nossas ideias. / A Natureza é partes sem um todo. (Alberto Caero, *O Guardador de Ebanos*)