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# NO FUTURE: The Colonial Gaze, Tales of Return in Recent Latin American Film

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**Abstract:** The past is certain, the future an illusion. Contemporary films such as *Ivy Maraey: land without evil* (Juan Carlos Valdivia 2013), *Embrace of the Serpent* (Ciro Guerra 2015), *The Fever* (Maya Da Rin 2020), and *Bacurau* are border films, from the genre of contact films. They announce how coloniality maintains a grip on frontier territories in the Americas. These films also present particular indigenous visions that challenge western epistemes and confront audiences with particular ways of being in the world, where the modern subject finds its limit. The article introduces a critical perspective on cinema as a colonial tool, producing forms of capture that are part of the modern archive and the notion of linear time. These films also build on cinematic traditions such as *tercer cine* and afro-futurism, and are strong on concepts such as cosmopolitanism, resistance, and subalternity. They present forms of adaptation, reaction, return, and redemption while maintaining the status of cinema as a capturing device, entertainment, and capital investment (the triad of destruction in modernity/coloniality).

**Keywords:** Bolivian cinema; Brazilian cinema; Colombian cinema; indigenous cinema; coloniality; tercer cine; decoloniality; Latin American cinema



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The now-classic film *Rodrigo D, No futuro* (Victor Gaviria 1990) shares an already post-apocalyptic vision, from the perspective of marginalized urban youth in the city of Medellín, Colombia, in the late 1980s. A barren landscape, pollution, and noise in a hyper urbanized and precarious space where even the soundtrack, made up of punk music, illustrates theme (as in the Sex Pistols, *God Save the Queen Symphony*, 1977). Few green spaces are shown amid the bare cement buildings that plague the *comunas* (favelas) in the mountainous outer-rims of the city. This theme echoed across the global south, as seen in the urban transformation of other post-apocalyptic films such as *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund 2002), or *Sin Nombre* (Cary Fukunaga 2009). These were visions of the future sold by the promises of neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s as a way out of underdevelopment. The result was the accelerated destruction of the social fabric of already weak welfare states, followed by an avalanche of privatizations of public goods and the monetization of everyday life. The romantic ideas of pastoral life shown before in Latin American film and literature changed into cityscapes ravaged by lawlessness, violence, pollution, and corruption. Economies now based on extractive industries and service industries have been destroying idyllic forests. Nature becomes a postcard and wallpaper illusion, such as in the opening scene of *Sin Nombre* where the protagonist, Casper, is lost in a fake forest due to a trance induced by pot. The advance of the neoliberal economic agenda had expanded the productive frontier that serves the thirst of the Asian, European, and North American markets.<sup>1</sup>

In this scheme, the environmental cost is high. As seen in the cutting and burning of tropical forests, the pollution of rivers, the particles in the air, the depletion of soil nutrients, and extreme weather. The expansion of mono-crops (soy and palm oil), mining, and cattle are threatening the most biodiverse regions of the Amazon. The scheme also revealed the existence and struggles of the lawful occupants of such territories, and bringing indigenous peoples into this neo-colonial stage.

In this article, I focus on a group of contemporary border films, from the genre of contact films: *Ivy Maraey: land without evil* (Juan Carlos Valdivia 2013), *Embrace of the Serpent* (Guerra 2015), *The Fever* (Maya Da Rin 2020) and *Bacurau* (Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles 2020). They announce a renewed interest in the expeditionary forces at the base of the colonial project in the Americas. They also present particular indigenous visions that challenge western epistemes. They build on cinematic traditions of the south such as *tercer cine* and afro-futurism, addressing issues of indigeneity and coloniality. These films are strong on concepts such as cosmopolitanism, resistance, and subalternity. A discussion on cinema as a colonial tool, part of the modern archive, and the notion of linear time versus cycles, supports the conceptual framework. These films present forms of adaptation, reaction, return, and redemption, while maintaining the status of cinema as capturing device, part of the entertainment industry, and under the rule of capital.

### 1. Visual Autonomies. The Past, Present, and Future of Survival

At the beginning of his 2013 film *Ivy Maraey*, Bolivian filmmaker Juan Carlos Valdivia calls cinema “a weapon of destruction”, a reference to the archival power of the medium and its direct responsibility in the documentation of the richness of the world. It is interesting how at the turn of the century, dualistic notions such as civilization and savagery (culture and nature) and a renewed appetite for the expansion of modernity as the organizing force on the planet are still strong. As a road film, *Ivy Maraey: Land Without Evil* features filmmaker, Andres Caballero (Valdivia) and an indigenous Guarani guide, Yari (Elio Ortíz) in an un-learning journey of sorts, or what in decolonial theory is called delinking.<sup>2</sup> Delinking does not mean going to the jungle to join a tribe and live wild. It refers to the decolonial option, a recognition of the colonial matrix of power.<sup>3</sup> As such, delinking is the result of conscious work in the entanglement and differential of power, a move that entails a border epistemology and particular thinking and doing.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate dichotomy, culture and nature, civilized and savage, modern and ancient are put to test in the film as a common sight in the western history of media and art production.

The well-off metropolitan filmmaker, Andrés, hopes to retrace the trail of the early Swedish documentarian Erland Nordenskiöld, whose 1911 ethnographic film documented the Guarani in their savage stage. To do so, he needs a local, an urban Guarani, Yari, to join him as a guide and native informant. Both travel from the Bolivian highlands to the low land-forest in search of savages. The film is interlocked with rumblings (soliloquies) of larger questions of memory, the politics of representation, identity, and the power of cinema. Dressed as a fancy explorer, driving a jeep, the director and his guide address, as they traverse the country, their differences and find themselves lost in their own translations and on the mission of finding the true savages.

*Ivy Maraey* can also be classified as a “contact film”, where a subject is informing/guiding the gaze of the other, as the former shapes his/her understanding of the later through an exercise of representation. Contact films can be traced to early examples of cinema, and recently seen in the popular “first contact” films, mostly in science fiction stories.<sup>5</sup> This subgenre features the first meeting between western (white) man and non-western, and/or extraterrestrial creatures (human and non-human alike). Contact films present the exhilarating pace of exploration of the unknown on Earth. They treat the encounters as the realization of the expansion of Western (Euro-American) ways of life into places plagued with conditions that would have to be re-formatted (terraformed) to accommodate (white) modern civilization. Latin American film has a history of such “contact films” as shown in Clarisse Alvarenga’s book *Da cena do contato al inacabamento da história* (Alvarenga 2017).<sup>6</sup> Films such as *Ivy Maraey* show processes of adaptation (journeys of escape and redemption) to the new conditions. However, mostly, they are about the expansion of the economic frontier and imperial or national desires for control. The theme allows authors to explore topics, such as xenophobia, transcendentalism, and basic linguistics, by adapting the anthropological topic of first contact with terrestrial, indigenous, and aboriginal, peoples with a blurred understanding of the other-than-human creatures as

extra-terrestrial cultures (mostly derivatives of those on Earth). The tradition is related to fantasies of colonial exploration (the chronicles of the Indies and else), but also to the era of scientific exploration when detailed documentation of lands, peoples, and natural resources took place.<sup>7</sup>

A similar plot is found in *Ciro Guerra's Embrace of the Serpent* (2015), built in part on the study of field notebooks by western explorers in the Amazon during the first half of the 20th century. In addition, it is set in the aftermath of the rubber boom in Perú, Colombia and Brazil. The film centers on the shared journeys and the relationship developed by two explorers, German Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872–1924) and American Richard Evans Schultes (1915–2001) with their native informant, Karamakate (played by Nibio Torres and Antonio Bolívar).<sup>8</sup> The film tells two stories thirty years apart, connected by Karamakate (the one who tries), the pure native. The first takes place around 1909 when the German ethnographer (played by Jan Bijvoet) falls sick traveling with his local assistant Manduca (a former slave rubber tapper). Theo is searching for *yakruna*, a (fictional) sacred plant as the only cure for his disease. After finding Karamakate, the three set off to search for it. The second, features the American ethnobotanist, Evan (played by Brionne Davis), around 1940, who is looking for the rare *yakruna* (but hiding his real purpose), in part based on Theo's journals. The film moves back and forth in time showing different interactions between Karamakate and the explorers. It is important to mention that the whole film was shot in black and white, to match the daguerreotypes (photo prints) made by Theo who made some of the first images the west saw of Amazonian peoples.<sup>9</sup> Karamakate prolongs Theo's life, blasting powder up his nose, but is hesitant to help him due to what is happening in the forest. When Evan finds a much older Karamakate, he says he is an empty shell, which is reinforced when Evan shows him a book of Theo's that includes an image of young Karamakate, the last of the Cohiuano, which he refers to as his *chullachaqui*, a native term for hollow spirit. Reluctantly, Karamakate agrees to show the location of the last *yakruna* to the botanist. Both expeditions feature a Spanish Catholic Mission, *La Chorrera*, on the banks of the river. The first visit features a lone missionary surrounded by indigenous children. The second visit features a pagan messiah that leads a mad cult. Finally, Karamakate, Theo, and Manduca arrive in Karamakate's town to find his people drunk and realized that they had broken tradition and cultivated the plant. In rage, Karamakate destroys it, leaving Theo without the medicine, to die. Decades later, Karamakate does show Evan the plant. He reveals the power of the flower from the last of the *yakrunas*—as he is the last man that knows its secret. He prepares it for Evan, and dissolves in thin air.

On the one hand, Valdivia created a road film in which the changing landscape functions as a narrative device. Three distinctive places aesthetically support the transition of the subjects to the culmination: from the highlands through the arid lands of the Andean range arriving in a humid woodland in the southeast of Bolivia. That is where the filmmaker is looking for remnants of uncontacted Indians. On the other hand, Guerra uses open frame (periscopic lenses) and observational mode, slowing time while exposing the film to a level of burning, which creates a patina that makes it distinctive. This is due to the particularly dark conditions and lack of perspective in the Amazon, which creates a sensation of oppression. This would culminate in the open-air scene when Karamakate offers the last magical flower to Evan on the iconic *tepuyes* where finally, color, perspective, and visual texture appear. The use of sepias in Valdivia, and black and white in Guerra, stresses the time differential, making the films distant but at the same time truthful. Both films play with locations (roads, rivers, missions, and the forest), images, and sounds that question the audience about temporality, placement, identity, representation, and the national projects at the edges of civilization. In the case of the Bolivian film, it is situated in a country undergoing enormous social, political, and historical transformations. Since 2006, Bolivia has been struggling to create a plurinational project where opposite ontologies intend to establish an intercultural society. Based on a parity between indigenous politics and nation state, it has been openly resisted by those historically in power. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, several forces are also at play: A war for the consolidation of

national borders between Colombia and Perú in the aftermath of the collapse of the rubber boom (due to its displacement to southeast Asia); the coming to terms with the genocide, displacement, and cultural assimilation of the Witoto and Bora peoples; and the necessity to find an economic project for the forest. All taking place amid the porosity of such borders, only understood in the fluidity of the rivers that crisscross the Amazon basin. In addition, the films are a testament to old and new imperial aspirations, represented by the deployment of expeditions to survey all sorts of resources and routes of extraction. After failures and partial successes of the Spaniards, Dutch, Portuguese, German, and British, the suggestive idea of the Amazon as an alternative cosmopolitan space emerges. Based on those transnational encounters (many proven ill) and reinforced by the presence of multiple indigenous nations with their own eco-political agendas and long-standing intercultural dialogues.<sup>10</sup>

As an initiated in the knowledge of plants, Karamakate is depicted as a mythical figure able to travel in time and space from the Brazilian, Peruvian and Colombian Amazon (a transnational space). He connects two stories of extraction: German exploration at the dawn of the 20th century, as an extension of Alexander Von Humboldt's era of expeditions, related to the ambitions of global power by the German Empire before WWI. In addition, he connects the United States' interests as a consolidating presence in the region, before WWII, to secure rubber and other resources for the war machine.<sup>11</sup> Far from observing another's culture, these films also speak of forms of capture and invite participation in a sort of immersive experience.

#### *Mirrors: Dry and Wet Archives*

*Ivy Maraey* is a reflexive film, a film within a film that goes to the foundations of the cinema tradition. As the filmmaker, Andrés is tracing the steps of Swedish explorer Erland Nordenskiöld; the film travels to 1911, the era of Amazonian modern exploration. There, Nordenskiöld used his camera to document the life of the Guarani, which ended up being a weapon in their destruction, the first echo of a film as such. In *Ivy Maraey*, the *Karai* -white man (Valdivia) and the indigenous subject (Ortiz) play their own characters. According to the credits, the story was written by both of them, walking the thin line between documentary and fiction. Such practice is customary of Latin American directors of the *tercer cine* (such as the case of Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau collective writing stories with miners, peasants, and indigenous in the 1960s).<sup>12</sup>

In Guerra's film, the idea that the Amazon is a no-man's land is proved wrong. It has been inhabited by a plethora of autonomous indigenous peoples with distinctive linguistic traits, forms of governance, and cultural output. They have occupied sovereign lands larger than many European countries for centuries. They have been considered to be outside (Western) history due to their lack of writing. However, in its own terms the Amazon is a cosmopolitan space, because of its transnational, multilingual, and pluriversal condition. Amazon peoples have lived in relational ways, at times in conflict with other humans, at times in peace but always in balance with non-human and beyond-human forces that sustain their fragile ecosystems (Escobar 2018). They narrate their histories in alternative archival processes: storytelling and embodied knowledge (rituals animated by oral narration, performance, dance, and trance via sacred plants). On the one hand, the modern archive is based on fixing information (ink on paper), and collecting and producing data (dry). These can be accessed via institutions (libraries, museums, record-keeping institutions, and technologies of capture), to learn about places, peoples, goods, and services, which constitute notions of knowledge and (linear) history. On the other, alternative archival practices based on oral and bodily transmission are fixed via experience. They take place in nightly communal sessions (accompanied by meals, magic plants, chants, and dances) where stories are shared in multi-generational settings (under the roof of the Maloca or the stars). There, elders (shamans), who hold sophisticated botanical knowledge, prepare several compounds (wet) based on a set of particular plants (coca, yoco, tobacco, ambil, ayahuasca, yuca, etc.). Those are the "hojas" (sheets) that function as the local paper,

where stories exist to be shared: the voice (the word) becomes the “ink” which is embodied, experienced, and fixed by the participants via ingestion, repetition, dance and trance through generations, completing a process of direct transmission in a communal setting.<sup>13</sup>

Karamakate is in reality a situated scholar and guardian (librarian/archivist) of forests knowledge. He must behave in a particular way. He is shown in his monastic discipline, attire, demeanor, diet, and labor. In various scenes, he reminds Theo that there are times of the year when fishing of certain species is forbidden. The *beda*, a form of replenishing of the life cycles known by contextual and situated beings. With a master there is always an apprentice. They must also master daily activities; from the production of material culture (ceramics, weaving, carving, painting, building the *maloca*, etc.), planting the *chagra* (cultivation plots in the forest), to hunting and gathering. In his *Art Effects: Image, Agency, and Ritual in Amazonia* states, Fausto (2020) argues against Lévy-Strauss’s assertion of how material culture is irrevocably linked to subjectivity, intentionality, and agency. These films present some aspects of such alternatives to the hegemonic model of knowledge production via the archive. Embodied knowledge connects the stories in the everyday life with the forces of nature, the non-human and the beyond than human that inform lives and relations in the forest (Rojas-Sotelo 2017). The difference between archival (H)istory and myth is that the latter is fluid. It changes as time progresses and, as it is embodied, it is adapted, generation after generation. While the former, dry, intends to be stable and factual while being incomplete at best. By the end of the film, the near-empty Karamakate, the last of his lineage says ‘I wasn’t meant to teach my people. I was meant to teach you’.

Richard Evan Schultes would become the most important ethnobotanist of his generation, training many after him.<sup>14</sup> For a long time, film crews, directors, producers, cameraman, etc., have been fascinated with exotic locations, lost civilizations, and their forms of life (Oscilloscope 2015). As film critic Adrián Zuluaga stated “Guerra repeated a constant gesture in Colombia’s contemporary cinema: shooting peripheric geographies, registering with anthropological will spaces threaten by war and predatory capitalism, and bringing to the center of the narrative an unavoidable contradiction between progress and tradition” (Zuluaga and Munoz 2018). Nonetheless, it is not far-fetched to argue how cinema represents the possibility to ritualize narration: cinema and ritual are one of a kind. To compress space-time, and immerse audiences in a black box, in a communal experience, makes cinema closer to this alternative form of archival practice—its mirror.

## 2. Alternative Cosmo-Polis | Cosmo-Forests

The Amazon presents us, also, with an alternative to cosmopolitanism (the organized city), as the notion of a liberal world citizen is expressed outside a *polis*. Traversed by river highways as avenues, and small streets as tributaries and creeks, the Amazon compresses several modern nation-states (existing with many indigenous nations). There, multicultural encounters and conflicting economic interests take place. The region offers a vision of civilization like no other. In her opera prima, after two documentaries on the modern experiences of the Amazon (*Borders* in 2005 and *Lands* 2009), Brazilian director Maya Da Rin’s *A Febre (The Fever)*, 2019, presents a compelling case. Justino (Regis Myrupu), is an indigenous man working in a free trade zone in Manaus, the capital city of the Amazon in Brazil. His life as a security guard oscillates between a port full of containers of commodities coming from all over the world, public transport, and his home, located bordering the forest. A late widower, raising a family (a son and a daughter) on a minimum salary with some benefits, represents the common (migrant) worker in any city of the world today. However, Justino has lost the way of the forest, only the stories he tells his grandchild brings him back: “Once a man was lost after hunting more than what he was supposed to, he was punished and taken by the monkeys to live in their realm. At first, he felt eerie, but soon he became important to the monkeys because he was a man and knew a lot. Before returning him, the monkeys taught the man how to make yuca-beer, to dance, and speak to the forest”.

In *The Fever*, a bordering film of sorts, the soundscape plays an important role. Here the aural supports the narrative and becomes itself a bridge connecting spaces, not only as transitions from one scene to another, but as a major narrative element. At times it is absent, at times it is overwhelmed by city noise, then it is undertaken by sounds of the forest, and then back to sounds of domestic space (the kitchen, TV, and radio). Temperature, as the title suggests, is also relevant. As any film in the tropics, it shows how the forces of nature affect the characters in play: Justino is suffering a fever, an illness of the tropics that his daughter, a nurse that wants to become a doctor, treats with modern medicine. The city cannot conquer the tropical forest, at times downpours bring a standstill, at times humidity and heat oppresses the landscape. There are just few man-made spaces that escape this spell, such as the hospital (AC units are shown in the opening scene). There, an indigenous woman cannot communicate her illness as she does not speak Portuguese or the main Desâna language Justino's daughter speaks as she is the interpreter of language and medicinal practice. The woman is shown arriving in the city in a little canoe, from an uncontacted group, to find some help for an illness their shamans cannot cure, like many of those illnesses brought by civilization. Here COVID-19 is referred to, and an echo of the past/pests that killed most of the population in the Americas after the arrival of the Europeans, and that still have a bodily memory in uncontacted groups in the Amazon. The fever comes and goes and during his hallucinations, Justino is hunted by dreams about being back in the village. At one point, Justino's brother, who still lives in the village, visits the city, and Justino describes the animal that is hunting him in his dreams: 'The body is empty; no organs, just skin, but a heart that still beating'. This beyond-the-human presence is also hunting the city. The TV reports cases of sightings and attacks, which are spreading. Justino suspects it is stalking him too, as he moves in the bordering worlds of the city, the warehouse, and the forest. The entity might jump out from a crevice at any moment. However, Justino had reached the promise of progress, he is becoming white, as his brother asserts. He lives as a city dweller, his grown children do not want to go back, and only shadows of indigenous life remains, shown at times in what the family eats. All comes now from the supermarket, in plastic bags and bottles (Justino drinks soda constantly); the rituals of hunting, of paying back (pagamento) to nature for meat and fish are long gone. All of this lack of respect for nature is manifesting in Justino's body, a fake "Indio" as his co-worker calls him (a former foreman in a Hacienda). He is reaching a point of no return. Even if the supernatural creature is invisible, the root cause is clear to see.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.1. Futurology

Beyond the forest, in the north-eastern *sertão*—the Brazilian wilderness, a semi-desert territory bordering the Amazon, is Bacurau. This small fictional town, Bacurau, is where a disturbing ultraviolent film, *Bacurau* (Nighthawk 2020), directed by Brazilian filmmakers Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles ([Mendonça Filho and Dornelles 2020](#)), takes place. This border film builds on the tradition of Cinema Novo, and mashes up many themes and influences in a clear connection to Glauber Rocha's 1964 *Black God, White Devil* ([Baldelli 2019](#)).<sup>16</sup> It also comments on satirical defiance against the return of non-apologetic neoliberalism embodied in Jair Bolsonaro's policies that famously promised to make the country more open to foreign trade. Expanding the economic frontier without regulation, and in fact, deforesting and burning hundreds of thousands of acres of rain forest in the process.

The film is set a few years into the future, in a world where death penalty executions of criminals are streamed live on TV. A young woman, Teresa (Bárbara Colen) returns to her hometown for the funeral of her grandmother. She arrives on a truck that delivers drinking water in a tanker. Bacurau needs the water because of a dispute with regional authorities concerning a dam in which a corrupt politician, Tony Jr. (Thardelly Lima) is involved. She has also brought pills for the local doctor, Domingas (Sonia Braga). The medicine seems to play a role in reconnecting people to their past (which the funeral encapsulates). There is a museum of the history of Bacurau, a building that would prove more important than the

church, later on, playing a fateful role in the town's destiny, since museums are not only cabinets of curiosities (which this is), but also time machines, in a real and symbolic sense.

Bacurau, without water, descends into oblivion while a narrator/trickster speaks via a mobile amplifier. Suddenly, the town does not show in any GPS system as all modern communication collapsed. There is no signal of Bacurau's existence, or a river to take anyone there (only references in the old maps of the schoolhouse). As the town moves away from reality, surveillance is unleashed in the form of drones, which resemble old-school flying UFOs. From nowhere a group of foreign tourists gathers in what seems to be a hunting lodge near the town, armed to the teeth with hi-tech gear. They are evidently on some kind of safari-tour package, under the guidance of a Dutch guide, Michael (Udo Kier). It becomes clear that they intend to do what any developmental project does, to claim land without people, as wilderness empty of humans cannot confront progress. The plot becomes apparent, these recreational slaughter militias want to exercise the right of global tourists on a new service economy with the cooperation of the central political establishment. Soon, resistance that was dormant in this dystopian town rises. The multi-ethnic (indigenous, afros, whites, mestizos) folk organize. A pluricultural space, the amalgamation of Brazilian peoples: workers, teachers, bandits, housewives, etc., are again a common defense front. They use the powerful indigenous psychotropic (the pills brought by Teresa) that prove fundamental to tackle the invaders in a blood-bath style battle that unfolds in the harsh landscape. Here the film becomes a sample of genres: contact film (as in Sci-Fi) encounters hyper-realism (an echo of Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo encountering Spaghetti Western), with a hint of neo-noir Tarantino and zombie films. Mónica Castillo (2020) recalls how quick edits of villagers taking drugs intersperse through both tense and slow moments in the film. An eclectic collection of electronic and Brazilian sounds and music is played in the background to enhance the movie's sense of place and futurism (a mix-track by Mateus Alves and Tomaz Alves Souza).<sup>17</sup> The film critic for *The Guardian* (Bradshaw 2020) described it as a "really strange film, beginning in a kind of autoethnography in documentary style, becomes a poisoned-herd parable or fever dream and then a Jacobean-style bloodbath" (2020). However, most critics agree on the fact that *Bacurau* is executed with ruthless clarity, force, and purpose. Deriving visual references from Jodorowsky, Eastwood (*A Fistful of USD*), and Kotcheff (*Wake in Fright*), *Bacurau* comments on the capacity of the brutality of filmmaking and the struggles on the economic frontiers taking place in the near future (and echoing the past).

## 2.2. Intermission

In *Ivy Marae* the quest for knowledge is performed through the eyes of the informant. The opening scene presents us with the gaze, the reflection on each other's eyes. Learning comes from the other's way of being, and listening (the oral) becomes a sort of performance where knowledge is fixated and embodied by other means. If all comes from the 'word,' if naming is a common thread, the problem is translation. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, the search for knowledge is more conventional, it is achieved via the ingestion of a magical plant, via hallucination and storytelling, which reveals the true nature of the beholder, the climax of alternative knowledge for the white man with all the ecstasy and violence, as Hegel has put it: the forest is "a place beyond history".<sup>18</sup> In *The Fever*, Justino is awoken by a dream-fever. The beyond that human creature claims his presence that is banishing (as the forest does) in the comforts and exchanges of the city-port. Bacurau's people find strength in a collective realization of their marginal condition. The pill helps bring back the former dignity (indigenous perhaps) and offers a path, a reverberation to the progressive gains of the Lula years, a common front against neoliberal overtaking. However, to achieve such realization (knowledge) would take the characters of these films through the narrative arch of any fictional western narrative, the tipping point to search for redemption. They are road movies of sort and the future probes illusory at best.

### 3. What Comes

In the indigenous worldviews of the Americas, the conception of linear time does not correspond to their vital and relational experience. For the Guarani, time and space are not separated, as *'ara'* is the term for both. Ciro Guerra, regarding time in *Embrace of the Serpent*, stated, "time to them is not a line, as we see it in the west, but a series of multiple universes happening simultaneously" (2015). This in reference to the Witoto myth of origin that tells how the Amazon river was formed after the collapse of the "tree of life" (food tree). It created three levels (a tree laying horizontally on a plane): the sky (the climate system), the land (the impact created the main river and its tributaries), and the underground (a concealed river and the realm of the dead). The flow of life emanates from the cycles of dry and wet times known to the peoples of the Amazon (Rojas-Sotelo 2017). For the Mayans of Mesoamerica, for example, what is in front is not the future, but the past (the ancestors). The future does not exist in the same way western teleology explains. Which was based on the notions of evolution, development, and progress since early modernity, and supported by Newton and Einstein's theory of the expanding universe, which are now on revision by quantum physics and the idea of the multiverse.<sup>19</sup> The Yucatecan Mayan writer and performance artist, Isaac Esaú Carrillo Can (1983–2017) in his performance *Uj'* (2014), (re)presents this dichotomy. At the start of the event, Carrillo Can is dressed in urban clothing (black leather jacket, turtleneck pullover, and black trousers). Suddenly, he makes a movement and starts singing (in Yucatec Maya); walking backward. He drops what he carries in his pockets (his Mexican passport, smartphone, watch, money), leaving a trail on the floor. Then, one by one he abandons his garments and with it all contact with the western world. He walks slowly, demarcating the four cardinal points (east, *lik'in*; north, *xamam*; west, *chik'in* and south, *nohol*) while singing lullabies and telling Maya stories of origin, he goes back to the origin (Rojas-Sotelo 2019).

There is no future, as these films show the lack of indigenous agency in western terms, only revelation through metaphysical means or extreme violence. Using methods of ethnographic practice, Valdivia, Guerra, Da Rin, and Mendonça/Dornelles find themselves as part of the long tradition of expeditionary pioneers. The presence of missions, baroque music, excess and precarity, loyalty and treason, survival and escape, civilization and the savage, culture and nature, is at the center of the plots. Time and space compression are some of the techniques of cinema. For the peoples of the Amazon, resilience or conflict, adaptation or displacement, mestizaje and syncretism are their tools of survival. In *Ivy Maraey*, the director finds the 'invisibles' when encountering an indigenous film crew making a film about a massacre of indigenous peoples in the past. In a tautological and reflexive mode Valdivia shows a second film within a film, where the indigenous won the war, because they are still alive. For Karamakate and his people, destruction and invisibility are their fate as the last of his line of knowledge passes the secret to a white man. Justino's success in the city meant the loss of his family (his wife is dead, a son and a daughter that will not return to the village), as he faces the devouring creature bordering both spaces (literally and metaphorically) he also contemplates return. Redemption comes for the inhabitants of Bacurau in the form of social organization, a return to a glorious past, the pill just takes away the fear of confrontation, and redeems them from sacrificial justice. Contact films go to the limits of the known, to cross the threshold and to extract the image of the savage/alien other, its final objective. These films are journeys of redemption and to reach it, they have to peel layers of encounters until the pure noble savage is revealed. Yari, Karamakate, Justino, and Bacurau all are the vehicles to achieve it, and the environment is the container of their struggles.

### 4. The Triad of Destruction

Modern technologies have been used to capture, document, categorize, obliterate, integrate, homogenize, and discipline societies; cinema is one of them. Cinema is a result of a triad: a technical/scientific development; an amusement/spectacle device; and a new aesthetic language (the seventh of the arts). Thanks to these qualities it became the most

immersive of the arts. Presently, there is no difference, the so-called digital revolution uses the same recipe in the form of a mobile device. Apps, video games, and AI have taken the position of cinema as the most immersive and also commercially successful of the arts. Cinema's archival capacity of documenting, capturing, and keeping valuable information in the hands of economic powers resembles old imperial desires, apps are the pinnacle of the model. Today this aspiration is finally exercised globally via social media's meta and big data disputed among private corporate interests and national rivalries. In addition, they all need rare minerals, such as the ones found in the Amazon to maintain the hegemony of the system (gold, oil, coltan, lithium, magnesium, etc.). However, cinema also pertains to the realm of the repertoire (Taylor 2003), the aesthesis in decolonial terms, where stories, narratives, voices, and sounds are embodied (Mignolo and Vázquez 2013). This is a kind of knowledge otherwise channeled to a captive audience, also cosmopolitan with interest in the exotic other, and with the potential of creating an individual yet collective experience. In that sense, cinema—audiovisual media as well as visual art offers also possibilities of self-representation, organization, resistance, and recognition.

As reflexive films, *Ivy Maraey: land without evil* and *Embrace of the Serpent* exercise such inner cultural critique. It is well-known how documentary cinema is an extension of the colonial gaze (Kalpana 2018; Weaver-Hightower and Hulme 2014; Ruétalo and Dolores 2009). As critical pieces, *The Fever* and *Bacurau* show how capitalism is the darker side of the renaissance (Mignolo 2003) and part of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000). In postcolonial theory, the gaze has meant an unequally constituted right to scrutinize, to represent what is gazed at, and to intervene and alter the object of representation.

Cinema as technological development is based on a formula of scientific exceptionalism and aesthetics of privilege, in the form of spectacle (capital). At the apex of *Ivy Maraey*, the director (Valdivia) becomes an actor in a movie that is taking place to commemorate and glamorized in film-form a massacre of Guarani peoples; in the *Embrace*, indigenous children captives in La Chorrera mission perform a religious song in a European chorus style; their angelical voices are only matched by the abuses they faced. Justino and the people in Bacurau are trapped in popular media, which offers a sense of comfort, and security, until it breaks. Cinema's power of capturing the world has been used systematically in the processes of constructing knowledge from a modern conception of culture/science versus nature. Guerra uses Karamakate's botanical knowledge to eradicate from La Chorrera, in the second scene of the former catholic mission, the messianic cult that had consumed its people. The expeditionary drive of these films is an extension of imperial desires: cataloging landscapes, natural resources (raw materials), animals (biology), plants (botany), peoples (ethnography), and developing taxonomies for understanding Eurocentric perspectives on issues such as economic growth, development, and progress. The town of Bacurau unleashes a blood battle to regain the little control they have. The central objective of cinema is not to present the complexity of relations between the human and other-than-human (forces also present in these films), but as in the case of *The Fever*, to operate as a medium that represents and reproduces the colonial matrix, due to its archival dimension. The entire western apparatus has been built on isolating, in positivist terms, agents, and creating objects of study, capture, and consumption.

*Ivy Maraey: Land Without Evil* and *Embrace of the Serpent* go back in time, and search for, from a Romantic viewpoint, the noble savage, distant and lost in a pristine past only revealed via the exegesis of the quintessential western expeditionary hero that in the process is transformed in a sort of savior (while actually being the culprit of the disaster). Here the directors ended playing the role of new expeditionary champions, just as Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), or Joffe's *The Mission* (1986) did before, reinforcing against their best intentions the dominant discourse of internalization of inferiority. Da Rin's *The Fever* and Mendonça/Dornelles *Bacurau*, on the other hand, look for a representation that is less romantic as is situated in the "contact zone" (Pratt 1991), and where agency comes in the form of hunting, facing, and/or exiting the system of oppression.

Frantz Fanon believed that the colonial status is not only supported by the domination of material resources and physical suppression over the colonized. It is also supported by the conceptual control over the colonized through a kind of complex of inferiority, which is the product of a double process: One is economic and the other is by the internalization of this inferiority (Fanon [1967] 2008). Based on his own experience, Fanon investigated the internal mechanism of the inferiority of Blackness, which could be used to understand Indigeneity. He stated how, “already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*” (Fanon [1967] 2008), p. 116). Being fixed under white eyes was already inscribed as a way of naming the other, in the act of saying “look a Negro!”, “look an Indian!”, an exercise of power is enhanced.

Otherness is then created by the colonial matrix of power, and cinema is one of its tools. For Walsh (2011), the matrix is what links empire to its colonies, and justifies its structure and subjugation of the other.<sup>20</sup> As an ideological mechanism, it establishes the social order and created the notions of race, class, genre, language, and religion (Walsh 2011). As a political mechanism, the matrix established spaces of governmentality in the form of nation-states. They are possible thanks to the usurpation of territories beyond western control, by force, and the no recognition of ancient modes of sovereignty. Cinema has been used as propaganda attached to cultural policy and soft diplomacy.<sup>21</sup> As an economic mechanism, the matrix is based on the rule of capital and the exploitation of natural resources, which established vertical markets in which people are also treated as commodities. Films are statistical points in the entertainment industry, which includes the box office, audiences, by-products, and the cult of genius (directors and stars). As a producer of sense, epistemologically the matrix has centered the production and knowledge of Euro-American models of science on rational and scientific logic. It has rendered subaltern other knowledge, alternative epistemes, and ontologies. These mechanisms dictate the social, economic, political, and religious norms on which social relations are based (Walsh 2011, p. 93).

As an ordering system, cinema functions like the matrix. In Valdivia’s film, the story is constructed as a collection of cut-outs of the director’s notebook that become reminiscent of film strips and finally turned into small spheres (resembling planets). It is, at the same time, a conventional linear film and an internal critique on the ways film is a capturing (archival) practice. Printed words, printed images and sounds, dialogues of encounters, and dis-encounters are all included. In Valdivia and Guerra’s work, photography (daguerreotype) and the gramophone (being played on a riverbank of the Vaupés River), underscore the inner commentary of the reflexive nature of the film as a capturing device that connects the traditions of the west and imposes them onto the other. The matrix acts as a tool that subjugates and controls populations. Neoliberalism in the form of shipping cargo, containers, and adventure-tourism is shown in *The Fever* and *Bacurau*. Film homogenizes societies, and shares value systems and aesthetic canons. Constituted by its gaze, the West has inflicted an injury and produced a trauma on the subaltern subject. Before that gaze, there existed no realization of otherness. Justino is constantly reminded of his indigeneity, ‘*you are a fake Indian*’ by his brother and co-worker, and he is questioned why he does not use his condition of Indio to game the system of welfare, by the HR supervisor. Through the modern era, the internalized look, the gaze, has developed a mindset of inferiority and shame. These films are mirrors (if bizarre ones at times) of such a realization.

In her book *Indigenous Cosmolectics* author Gloria Chacón’s (2019) quotes Isaac Esaú Carrillo Can that in 2013 said: “Estar inmerso en una lengua y cultura que nos permite ver al mundo con otros ojos, nos impulsa a resistir y re-existir, ahí radica el resurgimiento” (To be immersed in another language and culture allows us to see the world with different eyes, it propels us to resist and re-exist, therein lies the resurgence) (Chacón 2018, p. 4). Chacón states that cosmolectics goes in the opposite direction to dialectics, as a departure in the academic space when studying indigenous cultural production (mostly Maya and Zapotec in her work). Chacón explains that the fundamental role that the cosmos and history, sacred writing and poetry, nature and spirituality as well as glyphs plays in memory is what articulates indigenous ontologies. Although the term cosmos is etymologically

Greek, meaning “order”, it is an accepted translation in English and Spanish to name an arrangement that includes stars, planets, gods, galaxies, nature, and an indigenous autonomy that reaches beyond land (Chacón 2018, p. 6).

### 5. Grammar(s): Visual, Oral, and the Body

Hegemonic romance languages dominate the stories of the films in study. However, not completely. Some critics mentioned the languages spoken in *Ivy Maraey* (Spanish and Guarani), *Embrace of the Serpent* (at least twelve languages), as well as in *The Fever* (at least three languages, two indigenous and Portuguese), and *Bacurau* (Portuguese, Dutch, English, Tupi), could make their circulation and acceptance by global audiences more difficult. However, here we go beyond the discussion of post-national cinema and the effects of self-exoticization for the global market, these are restorative exercises that take cinematic form.<sup>22</sup> Valdivia gives space to his co-writer and co-star Elio Ortíz to narrate the segments in Guarani, with impeccable diction and subtitling (and later in the film Valdivia speaks in fluent Guarani himself). Guerra allows old Karamakate (Antonio Bolívar) to participate in the writing of scenes and translates during the shooting, at times adjusting the narrative to fit his descriptions and details almost in real time (Costa 2016). Da Rin uses Desâna and Portuguese interchangeably in the film in a normalized way. For instance, these films can be cataloged as independent global art pieces, not made for large audiences, nonetheless each one fits within the trajectory of each director and the crew, establishing a metanarrative. Yari, Karamakate (also Manduca in Guerra’s film), as well as Justino and his daughter, are polyglots, real cosmopolitans (world citizens) in their land, while Andrés (at first), Theo, Evan, and the white mercenaries are mostly lost in translation. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, multiple languages, beyond the visual and aural, are spoken: Ocaina (which is most frequently used), Ticuna, Bora, Andoque, Yucuna or Jukuna, Cubeo, and Muinane, but also English, Dutch, Catalan, Portuguese, Spanish, and Latin. Old Karamakate speaks in many languages (Ticuna, Cubeo, Witoto, Spanish) at times not matching some of his interlocutors, as if such a detail will dissuade any non-Ocaina speaker to read the subtitles as a good consumer of global cinema. In addition, highways turn into unpaved roads and then into trails in *Ivy Maraey*. There, Andrés encounters a local film crew, two young indigenous directors enter the scene, Oji and Tegua, that also join the white director’s journey. Andrés surprises Yari when speaking in Guarani language, Yari feels betrayed and lost in his own language. Wide and narrow rivers and creeks connect (times) villages and sacred sites (both Western and indigenous) in *Embrace of the Serpent*. The whirring cranes that move containers subtly mimic the towering trees of the jungle in *The Fever* where Justino struggles to stay awake. The sertão does not have roads, as an open space is crossed by trails, unpaved roads, motorbikes, cars, donkeys and on foot; no map is needed as all roads and stars lead to Bacurau.

The Amazon, a *cosmolectical* space, is here captured by the archive and liberated by practice and sublimation. These films, as Chacón poses it, “are informed not only by land, community, and language but also by the moon, stars, the sun, and other ‘kinstallations’” (Chacón 2018). I would add that they are informed by non-human and beyond-human creatures and forces that live relationally within the stories.

In these films the museum of curiosities is turned upside down. At the end of *Ivy Maraey*, Yari (Ortíz) settles straight the journey in search of the invisibles; in *Embrace of the Serpent*, Karamakate (Bolívar) gives the last of the Yakruna to Evan to free himself from his initial sin.<sup>23</sup> In *The Fever*, Justino faces, and is finally free, of the force that hunted him and returns to the forest. In addition, in *Bacurau*, the museum as stated by Patricia Mourão de Andrade, “holds the iconography of popular struggle in the region, as well as the weapons used on past confrontations, which remain available for future ones” (Mourão de Andrade 2021, p. 247). As indigenous images are captured, their knowledge stolen, and their material culture decontextualized in films, labs, and museums, we also see how the physical undressing of Andrés, Evan, Justino, and the defenders of Bacurau serves as an allegory for embodiment (the opposite of the archive). In the closing scene in

*Ivy Maraey*, the dismemberment of the vehicle symbolizes another capturing force, an art installation in the forest while Andrés asks the girl: “What is your name?”.

## 6. The Future—An Illusion and Cycles of Return

To conclude: In this article, I set out to examine the subgenre of contact films through the analysis of four titles that in contemporary times are building on cinematic traditions such as *tercer cine* and afro-futurism (Cinema Novo). They are strong on concepts such as cosmopolitanism, cultural resistance, and decoloniality. They restore discussions about the power of cinema as a device of capture, entertainment, and capital investment (the triad of destruction). They also deal with constructions of the idea of individuality, challenging and inverting hierarchies between the west and its others. These films capture the attention of global audiences through cinematography and narrative innovations. They bring indigenous aesthetics to the fore while promoting a diverse range of cultural and ecological issues. They present forms of adaptation, reaction, return, and redemption while maintaining the status of cinema as a close ally of immersive and embodied practices.

Futurity is ancestralism, it is also a gesture of detachment from the colonial matrix of power. The idea of the future does not register in indigenous cosmivision, only the present in direct connection with the past. Before history and despite it, the only certainty we humans have is what has been. The paths of those that walked before, which are still shared via embodied practices in indigenous spaces via situated knowledge (botany), songs, dances, and trance.

These films promote intercultural and invite metropolitan audiences to engage with cultures that are radically different from their own, challenging notions of superiority and regimes of knowledge. Their collaborative model of production, coupled with the cosmopolitan ethics articulated in these films, make them examples of a new type of situated yet global cinema emanating from the south.

Yari tells Andrés how ‘ritual is what distinguishes us from the beasts’ (referring to the drunkenness of the white men in the mission). Yari explains to Andrés that indigenous are those with a deep connection to the origin (roots). Andrés answers that in the West, being uprooted far from the land is a symbol of prestige (the idea of the global citizen: a world traveler, a conqueror, and initiator of new history).

As the Guarani voice explains the myth of the land without evil, an almost total absence of light on the screen is filled with a message: ‘*We are today what we are going to be tomorrow in this eternal darkness*’ (*Ivy Maraey*, 36:16). Later in the film, we hear, ‘*To be in darkness is to be with your origins . . . only then will you realize the only lifesaver is your heart*’ (51:50).

In the indigenous worldviews of the Americas, the conception of linear time does not correspond to their vital and relational experience, informed by the cycles of life and death.

Andrés says, ‘I do see the world as you do,’ she (the invisible one) responds, ‘and how do you know how I see the world?’. Karamakate offers *caapi* to Evan, and tells him ‘this is the embrace of the serpent’. Opening a window to the pluriverse and vanishing in the form of yellow butterflies.

The HR officer threatens Justino saying, ‘You’d get no redundancy pay . . . You only started contributing when you came to work for the port. It’s only what’s on the books that counts’. But, However, Justino has defeated the fever, now he descends from a canoe, the camera follows him briefly, he walks away from it entering a place without history, facing the dark forest where his ancestors dwell.

The last lesson comes from *Bacurau*, the night bird that flies out of “fear and terror... as phantoms haunt the wake”, as the film’s soundtrack shares. However, what the film brings is the total erasure of the individual, as there is no protagonist in this epic. *Bacurau* is one and all, it has cannibalized the oppressor becoming one with it. In addition, finally trapping in the earth (the underground in the middle of the town) the white perpetrator. To consume his power, as legend has it, *Bacurau* was a Phoenician scribe who was mistaken

for a bird-god by the local indigenous, angered Tupā (the god of thunder). With the stroke of his lightning, he made him into a bird, and this bird is Bacurau.

Here cosmopolitanism is turned upside down.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Which had also produced a form of globalized poverty due to concentrations of wealth on the value chain of global export-markets of raw materials (mining, forestry, oil, gas, and people), tertiary products for leisure (mostly drugs, sex traffic), popular culture (music and media), and fake news (on a planetary scale).
- <sup>2</sup> Delinking in decolonial theory has different manifestations. Some are related to dewesternization (exiting from the Euro-American area of influence), the other related to decoloniality (to recognized and act before the colonial matrix of power). One is political, the other is ontological (much more complicated). For a discussion on the issue see: Delinking, Decoloniality & Dewesternization: Interview with Walter Mignolo. Accessed on 8 January 2022 from: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/>
- <sup>3</sup> In Anibal Quijano's seminal article on the colonial matrix of power (2000), the author described its four interrelated domains: 1. Control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); 2. Control of authority (institution, army); 3. Control of gender and sexuality (family, education); 4. Control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). Cinema pertains to the four domain, with implications in the third and first one.
- <sup>4</sup> As Walter Mignolo poses it, "one of the forms of 'method' (the way) of delinking is precisely to think and become by embodying categories of thoughts that are grounded in non-western experiences". Border thinking and doing (artistic creativity as well as any other forms where thinking is manifested) is precisely the decolonial method. This is a way of understanding what Linda T. Smith is telling us by arguing for a "decolonizing methodology", and what Leanne Simpson is telling us by saying that among the Nishnawbe, "theory comes in the form of storytelling". An excerpt from an interview with Walter Mignolo in: Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2014) Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 206.
- <sup>5</sup> From the very beginning of cinema, a drive for capturing the unknown turned cameras to "exotic peoples and lands" (starting with Edison's *Sioux Ghost Dance* and *Buffalo Dance*, 1894). In 1898–1899, Alfred Cort-Haddon (biologist and marine zoologist from Cambridge), uses film in his travel to Papua New Guinea (Straight of Torres / Northern Australia) to film un-contacted people. This was the first-time non-western people were caught on film and consolidating the use of the camera for ethnographic research. Others would follow, Edward Curtis in 1914 documenting the fleeing lives of Native Americans in the US west; Scott Sidney (producing the first Tarzan of the Apes in 1918); Martin and Osa Johnsons in Borneo and else from the early 1920s on, etc. Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* is in a sense a contact film (as well as *Moana*, *Tabu*, and *Man of Aran*). As the planet became smaller contact films moved into interstellar narratives (which also started with Georges Méliés *Le Voyage Dans la Lune / A Trip to the Moon*, 1902, based on H.G Wells *The First Men in the Moon* of 1901), this Sci-Fi genre is well-known and studied as proto-anthropology, metalinguistics, and science. Among the best know titles in this genre we have: *The War of the Worlds* 1953 (based on the 1897 H.G. Wells novel); *The Day the Earth Stood Still* 1951; 2001: *A Space Odyssey* 1968; *Alien* 1979; *The Abyss* 1989; *Star Trek: First Contact* 1996; *Arrival* 2016; *Dune* 1984/2021, among others.
- <sup>6</sup> According to Alvarenga, "contact films" are a rare type of cinema made in Brazil. Few directors dedicate themselves to filming, over extended periods of time, the devastating experiences of contact between the national society and the peoples who originally lived in the territory. Some well-known are: Adrian Cowell (British but worked in Brazil), Vincent Carelli (with Video nas aldeias), and Andrea Tonacci. They captured multiple encounters, and even trained generations of indigenous filmmakers to counterbalance the equation of representation. In doing so they opened new paths for cinema. Some of the titles analyzed by Alvarenga are: Cowell's *The Tribe that hides from man* (1970), Carelli's *Corumbiara* (1986–2009), and Tonacci's *Os Arara* (1980-). Other filmmakers such as American Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and her *Wounnan Trilogy* (1964–1966/2011) created contact films as part of academic engagements while living among indigenous in Colombia (Choco rain forest). There are many more to explore and study.
- <sup>7</sup> I am referring here to chronicles such as those of Christopher Columbus in his *Diario del viaje al nuevo mundo* (1492–1493), copied and used by Bartolomé de las Casas in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542), but most directly to the work of people such as Alexander Von Humboldt that in his multivolume *Kosmos* (1845–1862) narrated his travels of scientific discovery. Followed by others such as Lewis and Clark in their journey to the American West (1804–1806), and the subsequent expeditions to underscore the natural resources of the land. I am also referring to literary works such as *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad 1899), Edgar Rice Burroughs *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), and Latin American Literature such as José Eustasio Rivera *La Vorágine* (The Vortex) 1924; Rómulo Gallegos *Doña Barbara* (1929); and Mario Vargas Llosa *La Casa Verde* (1966), among others.

- 8 Torres (Karamakate the young) and Bolivar (Karamakate the elder), both natural actors from the Colombian amazon were selected after a long casting process. Nibio Torres from the Cubeo community of Mitú, and Antonio Bolivar from the Ocaina tribe in the Colombian Amazon. Antonio Bolivar was a victim of the first wave of Covid 19 in May 2020.
- 9 The real Koch-Grünberg died Brazil in 1924 after contracting malaria. He was on an expedition to map the upper reaches of the Rio Branco with American explorer, geographer, and physician Alexander H. Rice, Jr. and the Portuguese-Brazilian cinematographer Silvino Santos. A film of the expedition was entitled *No Rastro do El Dorado* (Santos 2025). He published before his death *Vom Roroima zum Orinoco: Ergebnisse einer Reise in Nordbrasilien und Venezuela in den Jahren 1911-1913* (From Roraima to the Orinoco), D. Reimer in 1917. The volume had multiple daguerreotypes taken in the expeditions.
- 10 Daniela Berghahn in an article about cosmopolitanism and exoticism in which *Embrace of the Serpent* is compared to *Tanna* (Martin Butler & Bentley Dean, 2015) stated that “by contrast, the new type of exoticism challenges and decenters western values and systems of knowledge and aligns itself with the ethico-political agendas of cosmopolitanism, notably the promotion of cross-cultural, an ecological awareness and the empowerment of hitherto marginalized communities”. (Berghahn 2017, p. 16)
- 11 American Ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes worked as a field agent for the governmental Rubber Development Corporation. Schultes began work on curare, a “poison” used in the Amazon to hunt—not killing the prey (which was fundamental in the development of modern anesthesia), also as a Guggenheim fellow concurrently undertook research on Amazonian ethnobotany. While researching wild disease-resistant rubber as a field agent for the Rubber Development Corporation, in the leadup to U. S participation in WWII as the Japanese seized plantations in South East Asia, he discovered thereafter the British had taken seedlings from the Amazon at the end of nineteenth century.
- 12 Some of Sanjines’s most important films with the Ukamau collective are: *Ukamau* (1966), *Yawar Malku*, *La sangre del condor* (1969); *El coraje del pueblo* (1971), *El enemigo principal* (1973), and *La nación clandestina* (1989), among many others.
- 13 In the book *Tobacco: A Cultural History of How Tobacco Seduced Civilization*, author Iain Gately (2003) describes the ubiquity of the plant in Amazonian cultures. “Tobacco was sniffed, chewed, eaten, drunk, smeared over bodies, used in eye drops and enemas, and smoked. It was blown into warriors’ faces before battle, over fields before planting, and over women prior to sex, it was offered to the gods and accepted as their gift, and not least it served as a simple narcotic for daily use by men and women”. Lengthy treatises have been produced about the sacred (hallucinogens) plants of the Amazon.
- 14 The most well-known are: Michael J. Balick and Wade Davis.
- 15 Nick Chen, 2021. The Fever: Maya Da-Rin (2019) on her Brazilian drama about Indigenous heartache. *Daze Magazine*. Accessed on 22 December 2021 from: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/film-tv/article/53745/1/the-fever-maya-da-rin-brazilian-drama-indigenous-heartache-interview>.
- 16 The clearest is the direct quote from Glauber Rocha’s *Aesthetic of Hunger* manifesto (1965): “Cinema Novo teaches that the aesthetics of violence are revolutionary rather than primitive. The moment of violence is the moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the existence of the colonized”. See the entire manifesto in (McKenzie 2014).
- 17 The main sound track “Bichos Da Noite”(creatures of the night) is by legendary Sérgio Ricardo. Ricardo also composed soundtracks for Rocha’s emblematic films *Terra em Transe* (Entranced Earth) and *Deus e Diabo na Terra do Sol* (Black, God, White Devil).
- 18 Hegel refers to the people living in the forests in Africa in his *Theses of Philosophy of History* (1857).
- 19 See Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time* (2017). In the book, Rovelli explains how time is an illusion based on our naive perception of how its flow does not correspond to physical reality. The apparent existence of time was written in the mathematical languages of Newton, Einstein, and Erwin Schrödinger and based on limited information about the universe (which does not make them less relevant and right in some of their equations). Rovelli is one of the creators and champions of loop quantum gravity theory, which attempts to marry quantum mechanics with general relativity. Loop quantum gravity does not attempt to be a ‘theory of everything’ out of which we can generate all of particle physics and gravitation and goes against ‘string theory’ that puts everything ‘forward in time as the direction in which entropy increases, and in which we gain information’.
- 20 Translations from Spanish are my own throughout the text.
- 21 And compartmentalized by gender as a black film, ethnic film, national film, independent film, experimental film, film noir, popular film, Sci-Fi film, etc.
- 22 Indeed, there is a level of authorship that operates within the cinema world. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to discuss these films within the oeuvre of each director (and crews), which could prove relevant in the general discussion.
- 23 The death of Theo is the narrative arch in the film. This realization informs about the real objective of the film, the transmission of indigenous knowledge to science. Guerra creates the Yakruna from one of the hundreds of botanical species brought to science by Richard Evans Schultes, identified as *Psychotria Viridis* (Chacruna) a potent short-hallucinogen.

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