

KATARZYNA PASZKIEWICZ AND ANDREA
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ANTHROPOCENE: AFFECT, ECOLOGY, AND
MORE-THAN-HUMAN KINSHIP.*

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ANDRÉS BUESA
Universidad de Zaragoza
abuesa@unizar.es

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The depth and urgency of the different environmental crises that threaten the world's existence have triggered an ecological "turn" in many disciplines across the humanities, and film studies is no exception. Envisioned as a "bustling global crossroads for a radical rethinking of media and ecology" (Rust et al. 4), "ecocinema" scholarship has grown in the last decade or so under the assumption that film, both in its textual and industrial dimensions, mediates the multiple entanglements between the human and the non-human. In this context, the belief in cinema's potential to reimagine our ways of inhabiting in and with the world is the trigger for Routledge's recently published volume *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene: Affect, Ecology, and More-than-Human Kinship*, edited by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Andrea Ruthven. Combining a thorough command of previous work on the field—including an awareness of its potential shortcomings—with an interdisciplinary outlook—ranging from decolonial studies to queer ecofeminism, animal studies, affect studies, or critical posthumanism—the twelve contributions to the volume share the goal of exploring new ways of seeing and thinking the Anthropocene from an intersectional perspective; one which is attentive to questions of gender, Blackness, Indigeneity, and animality, among others. Well-informed and richly contextualized, Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's opening chapter is exemplary in grounding such aims, as well as in outlining the volume's central contributions to the ecocinema conversation: namely, an opening up of the corpus to a wide range of genres and territories, an engagement with the affective dimension of film, a decentring of the human and its associated binaries (i.e.

human/nonhuman, nature/culture), and a decolonial questioning of Western-centric narratives.

Among its many virtues, the volume stands out for its careful search of cinematic forms, both aesthetic and narrative, which foster an engagement with the world that is more attuned to the challenges of the Anthropocene. While common to most contributions, such a task takes centre stage in the first three chapters of the volume's first section—entitled “Affect, Ecology, and Pedagogies of Worldly Reciprocity.” William Brown's “A Film History of Utter Rebellion: Dewesternizing Film Studies for the Chthulucene” pursues the notion of openness as a guide to a de-Westernising engagement with cinematic style, film history, film archival practices, and film canon-making. Through the analysis of Indian silent film *Kaliya Mardan* (D.G. Phalke, 1919), it contends that certain “open” stylistic choices—a lack of narrative closure, episodic structures, and *tableau* aesthetics, among others—oppose the logics of exploitation and separation guiding much Western film and offer instead a relational understanding of the world. In a similar vein, Libe García Zarranz's chapter engages with recent instances of Indigenous and Black animation—the short films *The Bear Facts* (Jonathan Wright, 2010) and *Twenty Something* (Apton Corbin, 2021)—as exemplary of what she calls “wilful aesthetics.” Such a term encompasses those formal strategies—space construction via lighting and colour, sound effects, character animation—that foreground the wilfulness of all non-human elements in the film, thus activating new “ways of re-seeing or recovering erased histories” in line with Indigenous knowledges and Black kinship (37). Looking at climate change documentaries, Alexia Weik von Mossner's contribution wonders what the most effective form of storytelling might be to foster social and political action in viewers. More focused on narrative choices than aesthetic ones, Mossner favours what she calls “slow hope” films: those able to trigger an affective blend of both hope and despair through a focus on individuals and collectives engaging in transformative action.

The two remaining contributions in the volume's first section—chapters 5 and 6—work to bridge this section's interest in cinematic forms of re-envisioning the Anthropocene and the second section's emphasis in decentering the very notion of the human. Virginia Luzón Aguado's “Take Back the Walk: Trekking and Female Empowerment in *Wild* and *Tracks*” embarks on such a task through a questioning of the construction of nature in two recent instances of the survival-in-the-wilderness film: *Wild* (Jean-Marc Vallée, 2014) and *Tracks* (John

Curran, 2013), both featuring female protagonists. From a gender perspective, Luzón Aguado traces how these films counter normative attachments of the wild to masculinity and instead present the natural outdoors as a site for female adventure—disrupting, in the process, pre-established ideas of what we understand by nature. In Ignacio Bergillos’s analysis of *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) in chapter 6, the idea of environment is equally contested: seen not as pristine nature, but as intimately linked (and produced by) media and technology. Bergillos reads Peter Weir’s celebrated film—in particular, its representation of the entanglements between human and media—as a metaphor of our ambivalent position in the Anthropocene. Rather tentative in the potential ways out of the crisis, the chapter uses the film to question the ways in which we make sense of the environment surrounding us.

The second part of the volume, entitled “More-Than-Human Kinship, Hybridity, and Monstruous Alliances,” opens with two contributions united by their decolonial lens. In her analysis of Nova Paul’s film installation *Ngā Pūrākau Nō Ngā Rākau* (2023), Missy Molloy draws on “Indigenous theories, worldviews, and aesthetics” to reframe the goals pursued by scholars dealing with the Anthropocene (109). She reads the different elements that make up the installation—from the materiality of the celluloid to the spatial structuring of film viewing—as guided by Māori notions of time and kinship, and contends that they work to highlight the connections that enmesh us with the more-than-human world. Andrea Ruthven, in chapter 8, zooms in on epistemologies of land aliveness and how recent Indigenous filmmaking constructs the land as “agential and animate through its connections” rather than as separate from the human (127). Her reading of the short films *Wakening* (Danis Goulet, 2013) and *Biidaaban* (Amanda Strong, 2018) emphasises how alternative temporalities and narrative structures—what she terms the “slipstream narrative”—foreground the relational nature of the union between living and non-living beings, including the land. These two chapters—but also Brown’s and García Zarranz’s in the volume’s first section—are exemplary of one of the book’s greatest strengths; namely, its engagement with Indigenous epistemologies as a path towards a de-Anthropocentric future.

Chapters 9 to 12 offer alternative ways of rethinking the relationships between the human and the non-human other in different cinematic contexts. Under the category of “shamanic” cinema, Marta Segarra explores the ways in which certain films

acknowledge agency to the more-than-human. Through the analysis of several case studies—spanning from Thai fiction *Tropical Malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004) to the experimental documentary *Agrilogistics* (Gerard Ortín, 2021)—the chapter traces cinema’s potential to de-naturalize the notion of agency as exclusive of humans. Such dismantling of human exceptionalism also fuels Kornelia Boczkowska’s exploration of human-horse relationships in contemporary experimental film—in two case-studies, *A Horse Is Not a Metaphor* (Barbara Hammer, 2009) and *Passage* (Ann Oren, 2020). Her chapter reads haptic aesthetics, achieved via editing, framing, and sound, as the strategy through which the films under analysis highlight “the fragility and fluidity of inter-species barriers” and subvert the human-animal divide (155). Cross-species hybridization and non-human agency are also central to Galyna Maleeva and Camil Ungureanu’s reading of *Annihilation*, both the novel by Jeff VanderMeer and its cinematic adaptation (Alex Garland, 2018), in chapter 11. The authors engage with the dissolution of the nature/culture and human/non-human binaries through a look at how the film and the novel differently reimagine the links between humans and nature, favouring the novel’s shift towards non-anthropocentric kinship as the guide to transforming societal relations. The volume closes with Verena Andermatt Conley’s exploration of the human-virus relationship in chapter 12. The author uses the representation of viral culture in *Contagion* (Steven Soderbergh, 2011) as a starting point “to account for how we are enmeshed with the world” (185); so again, as in the rest of part II, the chapter works to reassess the entanglements between the human and the nonhuman (the virus, but also the contact with animals and living beings).

While this review has proceeded through a chapter-by-chapter logic, *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene* achieves an internal coherence that is rare in edited collections. Chapters are not just loosely linked by a thematic interest—i.e., ecology in film—but truly engage with the volume’s central aims and provide different paths towards a shared goal: that of exploring the many possibilities offered by cinema in reconceptualizing our relationship with the world in the context of ecological crisis. Such well-curated consistency enriches the reading experience and allows the reader to trace countless echoes and connections between the different contributions. At the same time, the volume’s interdisciplinary outlook and breath of corpus make it a productive read not only for film scholars, but for anyone interested in

the ties between ecology and the arts across all disciplines in the humanities—including, of course, researchers in American Studies.

WORKS CITED:

RUST, Stephen, et al., editors. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice 2*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.