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Book Review

– *Indigenous Visual Cultures in Latin America: Seeing, Being, and Meaning*, edited by Tamara L. Bray and Carolyn Dean. University of Texas Press, 2026

Seeing, Being, and Meaning, the subtitle of *Indigenous Visual Cultures in Latin America*, captures much of what Tamara L. Bray and Carolyn Dean bring together in this book. The volume consists of an introductory chapter, five case studies, and a concluding commentary. The cases range from first-millennium ceramics in Argentina and Inka textiles to a colonial Tlaxcalan manuscript, Mexico sacred bundles, and Huni Kuin graphic designs in the Brazilian Amazon. After reading them, I was tempted to add another term to the subtitle: becoming. The chapters are concerned not only with what images and things mean, but with how they are seen, made, transformed, and brought into relation with humans and other-than-humans.

Bray and Dean open their introduction with a line from Laura Sewall that captures much of the book's purpose: "To see another reality, we must make a point of looking beyond our assumptions and habits" (p. 1). The editors start from one such habit: Indigenous images and objects have often been studied mainly by asking what they represent or symbolise. They do not reject this approach but ask what else these things might do. An image may not only stand for something absent; it may also help make a person, being, relationship, or event present. As they put it, imagery might be as much about "bringing into being, or 'presencing,' as it is about re-presenting things in the visible world" (p. 1). This shift also makes apparently clear distinctions between objects and subjects, humans and other-than-humans, or things and the beings they represent less stable. The editors place these questions in conversation with the ontological turn, new materialism, and debates on nonhuman agency. At the same time, they stress that many of the ideas currently explored in academic scholarship have long been part of Indigenous ways of understanding and relating to the world. Contemporary scholarship, they argue, needs to acknowledge and engage with Indigenous knowledge rather than present relationality and forms of agency not limited to humans as entirely new.

The five case studies make this proposal concrete while progressively complicating what it might mean to represent, make present, and see. Benjamin Alberti examines Candelaria ceramics from northwest Argentina whose bodies combine human, animal, and plant features. Drawing on Amerindian perspectivism, Alberti argues that the pots do not simply depict hybrid or incomplete species. Their eyes, mouths, seedpods, bulges, and other features evoke particular capacities associated with different beings. The ceramic itself can therefore be understood as a body assembled from these capacities, what Alberti calls an “affectual singularity,” rather than as an inert representation of an animal, plant, or human.

Carolyn Dean similarly moves from representation to presence by asking how Inka textiles helped deceased rulers and ancestors remain materially present beyond flesh and bone. Garments could be understood as extensions of the person that witnessed and participated in their actions and carried their memories and vitality. As Dean puts it, garments “witnessed, experienced, and participated in what was done by those who wore them” (p. 49). By connecting *p’acha* (clothing) with *pacha* (land and time), she shows how textiles could move ancestral presence across space, attach it to particular places, and preserve it through time. Through funerary practices, the presence of a deceased ruler could be multiplied across different sites. Textiles did more than represent an absent person or past; they helped make persons, memories, and histories materially present.

Federico Navarrete Linares examines the sixteenth-century *Descripción de Tlaxcala*, produced by the Nahuatl-speaking authorities of Tlaxcala, an Indigenous polity in central Mexico allied with the Spaniards in the conquest of the Mexica. Commissioned in response to a royal questionnaire, the work combined a Spanish-language text with 153 images made largely by Indigenous *tlacuilome*, or writer-painters. Navarrete argues that it should be understood not only as a European-style book but also as an *amoxtili*, part of the Mesoamerican tradition of *tlacuiloalli*, in which writing, painting, oral narration, and ritual performance worked together. The *Descripción* did more than record Tlaxcala’s history and privileged alliance with the Spanish Crown. Carried to Spain by Tlaxcalan ambassadors, it could make Tlaxcala, its sacred and political spaces, and its claims materially present before the king. Navarrete thus presents the manuscript itself as a “complex being,” at once a book, visual history, model of Tlaxcala, and political and ritual instrument.

Molly H. Bassett makes the question of material presence even more explicit through Mexica *tlaquimilolli*, sacred bundles made from bones, stones, textiles, animal skins, and other materials. Her central problem is how something humans manufacture could simultaneously be a god-body. The answer requires taking the bundle’s making seriously. Bones could become relics, greenstones could become hearts, and other materials could become parts of a deity. Manufacture helped constitute the god-body itself. “Bound together,” Bassett writes, “the wrapped things became the god’s body in a new form and shape” (p. 105). Just as importantly, these bodies existed through relationships. People made, carried,

protected, and gathered around them. The *tlaquimilolli* was both an assembled material body and a means of bringing humans and gods into physical and social relation.

Els Lagrou pushes the argument toward the act of seeing itself through her work with Huni Kuin graphic design in the Brazilian Amazon. The Huni Kuin describe themselves as “people with design,” and pattern participates in making bodies and artefacts, as well as in ritual and visionary experience. Lagrou argues that looking for recognisable figures or asking what a pattern represents misses much of what these designs do. Northwestern Amazonian design systems “do not mimetically represent figures but trace connections, suggest movement, and map spaces” (p. 132). Patterns guide the gaze along lines, destabilise relations between figure and ground, and require viewers to complete what is only partially given to the eye. Seeing becomes an activity beyond recognising a finished image. Lagrou connects design to transformation: patterns make perceptible a world in which bodies, positions, and identities are relational and potentially transformable. Her chapter makes especially clear what is at stake in the volume’s invitation to learn to see differently.

The book is not always easy reading. Readers less familiar with archaeology, anthropology, Indigenous studies, and approaches to material and visual culture may find some discussions dense and the conceptual vocabulary demanding. But this difficulty is also connected to the book’s central challenge: taking seriously ways of understanding images, objects, persons, and other beings that unsettle familiar analytical categories. Elizabeth DeMarrais’s concluding commentary helps bring the different cases back together and clarify their shared stakes.

Reading the volume brought me back to W. J. T. Mitchell’s *What Do Pictures Want?* (University of Chicago Press, 2005). Mitchell’s deliberately unsettling question was not an invitation to treat images literally as animate beings, but a way of taking them seriously beyond the familiar task of decoding what they represent. Asking what pictures “want” shifts attention toward the desires, affects, relations, and forms of social life that gather around images and that images themselves help organise. The contributors to this volume pose similarly difficult questions. They repeatedly refuse to stop once an image or object has been identified as representing something else, asking instead how it participates in making persons present, constituting bodies, sustaining relations, shaping perception, or transforming an encounter.

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Book Review

– *Sex and love in Porfirian Mexico City: A social history of working-class courtship*, by Michael Matthews. University of Florida Press, 2025

In *Sex and love in Porfirian Mexico City: A social history of working-class courtship*, historian Michael Matthews, over the course of six chapters, marshals a rich set of archival materials culled from newspaper repositories in Mexico City as well as Mexico's Supreme Court archive to provide a "social history of lower-class sexual life in and around Mexico's capital at the turn of the century" (6). As the author proposes, this is particularly important given that "relatively little has been written on the sexual mores and practices of the inhabitants of Porfirian Mexico City" (p. 7). Indeed, the so-called Porfiriato (1876-1911) – when strongman Porfirio Díaz led the nation through a moment of urbanisation, industrialisation, and modernisation – remains a somewhat understudied moment in North America. Matthews's study challenges the idea that the working classes held fast to traditional notions of sex and love: "their words and actions reveal a culture of courtship, romance, and sex that could be ambivalent toward a wide range of norms such as honour, shame, marriage, love, and female chastity" (p. 7). Such views, Matthews contends, were essentially a product of the respective material and social conditions that humbler classes faced: they "lived lives more sexually liberated than those of their social higher-ups" (p. 12). Matthews' text evinces an unwavering commitment to find real-life stories of Mexico City's sizable young adult population – particularly, the city's inchoate industrial proletariat, its domestic workers, street sweepers, sweatshop labourers, and self-employed market vendors, among others. It is not difficult to see Matthews' study as inspired by E. P. Thompson's classic *The making of the English working class*; that the comparison even comes to mind is no small compliment.

With Chapter 1, Matthews demonstrates how the transformed realities of Mexico City under Díaz – modernisation and industrialisation – altered individuals' choices in terms of their affective lives. Leading readers down the grimy alleyways, through the rancid-smelling cantinas, and into the flophouses of Mexico's monstrous capital city, Matthews recounts both the dangers and delights of Porfirian society. With Díaz's Mexico, industrial and urban relations of production unfettered individuals from traditional moral codes. Industrialisation

primarily “served to shift daughters’ balance of power within the family and promoted their personal freedom and sexual openness” (p. 39). New urban spaces, in turn, granted opportunities for semi-clandestine meetings. Astutely, Matthews’s study also problematizes traditional opinions of prostitution, given that “the need for varied financial streams to support economic survival blurred the lines between committed relationships and sex for hire” (p. 168).

Chapter 2 is wonderfully Foucauldian in timbre, showing how the “state’s capacity to surveil, detain, and adjudicate manifested itself in the instances when residents called on legal authorities to arbitrate matters of courtship and inter-generational conflict” (p. 57). In short, Matthews’s close archival research never loses sight of the French philosopher’s famed axiom that “Where there is power, there is resistance.” Throughout *Sex and love*, Matthews unlocks the secrets of romantic and sexual experiences by delving into an unfathomable number (234!) of *rapto* and *estupro* cases from residents in and around Mexico City. While *rapto* constitutes “the abduction of underage women from parental authority”, *estupro* is defined as “the initiation of sexual relations with underage women” (p. 65). Ultimately, they provide Matthews a wealth of information about the limits of the law in Porfirian Mexico. Matthews convincingly argues that men – but especially, women – rather than suffering lackadaisically under the weight of authoritarian moral codes, often “adapt[ed] state power, its agents, and its apparatus to their advantage” (p. 84). Matthews shows how women, having been tempted into sexual relations with the promise of marriage, later leveraged the charge of rape to force their lovers’ hand in nuptials.

Chapter 3 illustrates how the Porfiriato – an immensely significant period for changes in Mexican law – often teetered between liberalism and colonial legacies. In the courts, women were often left at a disadvantage. The category of “will” was particularly contentious in the judicial system; Matthews proposes that when “openly exercised personal will, judges most often viewed them as accomplices in their own abductions” (p. 92). Effectively, men found it far more advantageous than women to appeal to the notion of “will” within court proceedings related to abductions, elopements, etc. With both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Matthews finesses the archive to detail the variety of relationships in Porfirian Mexico, whether permanent, temporary or fleeting. Against stereotypes of Mexican women, Matthews finds many cases of women enjoying casual sex and evincing ambivalence toward marriage. Most interestingly, the author considers that “working-class Mexicans chose *amasiato* – long-term consensual unions – as the most common form of cohabitation” (115). Chapter 5 illustrates how the humbler classes used “sex strategically in the hope of improving their financial or social lots” (p. 144). Particularly intriguing here is the section on *mala vida* – cases of young women who elope to flee abuse in their parental household.

With the final chapter, Matthews’s analysis is partially stymied by distinctions that feel somewhat Manichean. At issue is Matthews’s definition of the penny press, as well as his claim that embourgeoisement necessarily implied a movement toward conservative values. Did conservative values always come

from above while liberal values flow up from society's lower rung? Scholars like Kari Soriano Salkjelsvik have recently explored conservatism in nineteenth-century Latin America, pointing out that we need not accept the facile but celebratory reading of Porfirian *científicos* as bellwethers of progress and liberal values; nor should we let lower classes off the hook for their ideological misidentifications.

Although Matthews's study could have tied together these few loose ends, it is a solid social history of Porfirian Mexico's legal engagement with amorous entanglements, and a necessary read for scholars of the Porfiriato. The book will be crucial to those cultural and literary critics who situate their analyses in the lived social world. Ultimately, the study should appeal to a broad audience of Latin Americanists across disciplines, particularly those who think deeply about intergenerational conflict, family life, gendered norms, spousal choices, and economic needs.

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Book Review

– *Artery: Racial ecologies on Colombia's Magdalena River*, by Austin Zeiderman, Duke University Press, 2025

While territorial disputes in Latin America have been extensively studied, increasing attention is now being paid to their fluvial and liquid dimensions. Scholars have documented how riverine communities – particularly artisanal fishers – confront intertwined crises of environmental degradation, livelihood dispossession, and institutional neglect. Together, these contributions conceptualise the Magdalena River not merely as a natural resource or a hydraulic object, but as a contested socio-natural territory shaped by enduring struggles over knowledge, governance, and life.

With *Artery*, Zeiderman contributes to the fluvial-racial dimensions of territorial struggles. Zeiderman demonstrates excellent, in-depth, personal, and grounded work in the Middle and Lower Magdalena River, elucidating how racialised ecologies sustain dominant river imaginaries. The central question is: when, why, and how does a river become a racial formation? Zeiderman states to “seek a prose whose theoretical baggage is light, empirical details are privileged, disciplinary jargon is minimal and contextual specificity is paramount.” (p. 18). The book's argument begins in Chapter 1 by depicting Colombia's racial geographies, in which the Andean interior is historically associated with Whiteness, and the Caribbean and Pacific coasts with Blackness. In Chapter 2, Zeiderman describes how the promise of infrastructure as a vehicle for prosperity is entangled with Colombia's 2012-2017 navigability project, which ultimately collapsed due to corruption scandals. In Chapter 3, Zeiderman describes the racialised ecology of *navegantes* (boatworkers) and its entwining with the legacy of *costeños* (inhabitants from the Caribbean coast) and the historical figure of the *boga* (rower). Zeiderman draws from literature on the logistics of the slave trade, which conceptualised Black bodies as commodities – expendable once their utility diminished. The issue of obsolescence and civilizational hierarchy is further examined in Chapter 4 through securitisation efforts that seek to safeguard supply chains and quantify risk, rather than securitising workers' bodies, raising the question: who and what is deemed worthy of protection? Chapter 5 continues by describing how navigating the Magdalena is inherently

unpredictable and requires intuitive, embodied knowledge embedded in local, gendered, social and spatial orders. In the conclusion of Chapter 6, Zeiderman brings all findings together by showing how the racialised category of *boga* was constructed around notions of biological fitness for arduous labour but received little reward – a dynamic still visible today in the disparity between corporate profits, the low wages of river workers, and the unequal risk distribution.

The main point of the book is that race and nature are two of the most powerful organising principles of both human societies and non-human environments. Focusing on the Colombian mega-project to make the Magdalena navigable as a logistics corridor – an artery of production, movement, and modern capitalist development – Zeiderman describes deeply racialised practices of planning, securitisation, labour, and care. In planning, through the assumption that *ribereños* are trapped in the past and need a prosperous future through a tamed and planned river; in securitisation through the privileging of supply risk over bodily risks of workers; in labour through the assumed racialised and gendered knowledge/bodies that is needed to do the work; and in care through the day to day practices of navigation. In addition, large-scale infrastructural interventions necessary for taming the river and its subjects are articulated and structured by racial and naturalising logics, socio-technical imaginaries, geographical orders, and civilizational hierarchies.

Artery provides rich empirical material for examining the organisation of race and nature along the Magdalena. Racialised typologies, such as *navegantes*, *costeños* and *ribereños*, are linked to spatial ordering and labour dispositions. Zeiderman's extensive historical analysis situates these typologies not only spatially but also temporally. The most interesting part of the book is the author's compelling connection between past, present, and future temporalities and the temporal-spatial and racial ordering of Colombia. While regionalism, rather than racism, is often cited as the main explanatory factor for inequality in Colombia, Zeiderman convincingly argues that spatial and temporal orders are deeply rooted in racialised spatial divisions, naturalised labour, and unequal distributions of capital, profit, and risk. Herewith, the author sheds light on the enduring colonial and racial logics embedded in infrastructure and logistics.

The book offers a profound examination of the dominant (navigation) river imaginary. It presents nuanced discrepancies and positionalities that sustain it, without resorting to a simplistic blame narrative or general concepts, which is refreshing and incredibly insightful. At the same time, some arguments could have been developed more profoundly. Zeiderman notes, for example, that although Colombian rivers are increasingly being recognised as subjects with rights, those who live and work with the rivers are “rarely recognised, even by critical voices advocating for equality and justice.” (p. 206) Yet his own engagement with notions of equality and justice remains limited. For instance, he describes how *pescadores* (fisherfolk) are battling for inclusion in planning the river's future, out of fear of obsolescence. Still, their specific contributions to logistics and the racial ordering of ecologies remain underrepresented, which

limits broader contextual insights into the day-to-day practices of justice and inclusion in the Magdalena.

The book thus stops short of fundamentally challenging the power structures and socio-natural hierarchies that underpin this dominant imaginary; instead, it primarily describes them. The in-depth empirical approach could have served as an excellent source for illustrating instances of (subtle and/or historical) resistance among riverboat workers, thereby contributing to the broader literature on socio-natural resistance in the Middle and Lower Magdalena.

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Book Review

– *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism*, by Tulio Pagano, Amherst College Press, 2023

Disciplines, much like continents and languages, are separated by imaginary borders. But the intricate tapestry of history and human migration is not as clearly delineated as power structures or scholarly discourse would want us to believe. As a Latin American scholar, I rarely encounter the multiplicity of reciprocal gazes involved in the history of diaspora and colonialism in the region. Tulio Pagano's *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism* offers a welcome perspective, prompting reconsideration of my field through a different lens. Pagano traces intellectual exchanges alongside the uncomfortably coupled processes of emigration and colonialism. While his focus may seem confined by the title's direction from "Italy to Argentina", his work is also an endeavour to reexamine Italy through the eyes of those who have journeyed to Argentina and returned to redefine their national and regional narratives.

Argentina emerged as a primary destination for Italian immigrants in Latin America, welcoming about 3.5 million Italians between 1850 and 1950. It is no wonder then that both countries forged close familial, political, and intellectual ties. Tulio Pagano's research focuses on emblematic "symptomatic" cases of Italian intellectuals – travel writers, anthropologists, novelists, economists, lawyers, and anarchist revolutionaries – who engaged with Argentina. By symptomatic, I mean that instead of seeking the "essence" of the Italian diaspora, Pagano builds a broader history by addressing contradictions and highlighting pivotal moments, offering a panoramic view enriched by a constellation of thinkers. Although Pagano initially frames his research as centred on "travel writing," his book is better described as an intellectual history, analysing the intertwined rhetoric of economy, militarization, and colonialism, as well as the paradoxes in the narratives and motivations behind one of the largest Italian diasporas.

Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism challenges the presumed disjunction between emigration and colonialism within the Italian diaspora. As the author argues, "the common goal pursued by the otherwise opposed nineteenth-century Italian groups – liberals who encouraged emigration to Argentina and nationalists who sought to create an Italian empire – was

conquest” (p. 5). Despite differentiating between liberal proponents of “free” emigration and nationalist and fascist advocates of military interventions, their shared thread was “the racist ideology, camouflaged as scientific discourse, that permeated even the most progressive Italian and Western scientific discourse at the turn of the century” (p. 27). Regardless of their ideological leanings, the author contends that both groups contributed to the process of land colonization and “internal colonialization”. The extent of the argument, however, may be limited in scope, merely unveiling the hidden agenda of colonialism behind the efforts and attempts by Italian intellectuals to promote emigration. This approach prompts reflection on whether such critique inadvertently perpetuates a broader narrative, amalgamating diverse ideologies under the guise of what we now consider to be a societal concern. It also risks overlooking the nuanced differences between ideologies and oversimplifying the complex historical dynamics.

Pagano begins his intellectual voyage by focusing on the economist Jacopo Virgilio, who wrote about transatlantic migration in 1868, shortly after Italian unification. For Pagano, Virgilio’s text establishes the nexus between migration and colonization, portraying them as intertwined and often “indistinguishable, as powerful nations extend their influence and create new colonies” (12). Advocating for spontaneous, gradual emigration, Virgilio saw this as a path to advantageous, enduring outcomes. The seemingly organic Italian migration to the Río de la Plata region epitomized this model, foreseeing it as a lasting economic and cultural imprint. The “peaceful colonization” by Italians left a lasting imprint both in the economic sphere (facilitating trade and exchange of people, goods, and capital) and in the construction of an imaginary identity (as “the love for the native country is often enhanced by distance”). Despite Virgilio’s disdain for the “imperialist” tendencies later embraced by Italian nationalism and Fascism, his advocacy for emigration aligned with a model of colonization. Continuing this historical exploration, Pagano examines Paolo Mantegazza’s travelogue and epistolary novel set in Argentina. Mantegazza depicts Argentina as both progressive and inhospitable to the impoverished, reflecting the colonial desire to reclaim and “civilize” the continent. These works highlight the complexities and setbacks of such endeavours, illustrating the dual nature of colonial ambitions intertwined with migration narratives.

Next, Pagano examines Edmondo De Amicis, emphasizing nostalgia, attachment, and loss in the diasporic experience. De Amicis’ use of military metaphors reveals a colonial mindset despite promoting voluntary, highlighting the tension between the ideals of civilization and colonial realities. Pagano then shifts to Luigi Einaudi, a liberal economist and the first president of the Italian Republic, who uses the metaphor of a merchant prince to depict Italian expansion. Einaudi, like De Amicis, uses military language to describe economic strategies, equating migrant workers to soldiers directing an “emigrant invasion” of South America. This militaristic imagery is echoed in the journalism of Luigi Barzini and Giuseppe Bevilacqua.

The fifth and most compelling chapter delves into Italian Anarchism as a transnational movement thriving through global networks, with militants like Malatesta and Pietro Gori spreading Anarchist ideals amid Argentina's social and political upheavals. Figures like Malatesta and Pietro Gori intended to disseminate Anarchist ideals amidst escalating social and political tensions in Argentina. The final chapter examines Gina Lombroso's travel writings in "*Nell'America meridionale*". Influenced by her father Cesare Lombroso, Gina reflects on institutions and Italian diasporic communities in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. Her narrative, shaped by her perspective as a woman, sees women as a "natural" barrier against racial conflicts exacerbated by modern capitalism.

In conclusion, while *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism* by Tulio Pagano offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of Italian migration and its intersections with colonialism, it falls short in fully extending its main argument beyond the tracing of a dialectics with emigration and colonialism. Despite its exploration of intellectual exchange and acknowledgment of narrative contradictions, the book's theoretical framework would have benefited from further development. The author's examination of Italian intellectuals' promotion of emigration is fascinating in principle, yet parts of the analysis seem to overlook the nuanced differences between ideologies and risks oversimplifying complex historical dynamics. Overall, while Pagano's work sheds light on important aspects of the Italian diaspora, there is scope for enhancing the depth and coherence of its central argument, suggesting avenues for further research and refinement.

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Book Review

— *Doing democracy differently: Indigenous rights and representation in Canada and Latin America*, by Roberta Rice, University of Calgary, 2024

Roberta Rice's latest work offers an innovative contribution to the increasingly relevant debate on the realization of Indigenous self-determination in countries with colonial pasts. Her comparative analysis of Indigenous peoples of the South (Bolivia, Ecuador) and those of Northern America (Yukon and Nunavut) is a valuable methodological choice that differs from the usual approaches, which tend to compare cases located in the same geographical areas or with shared trajectories. For Rice, it is possible to compare the various Indigenous peoples of the Americas to the extent that extractive colonialism (Latin America) and settler colonialism (North America) share similar logics of extermination and exclusion – logics that continue to define nation-states within each context to this – day (p. 4).

Similarly, Rice's proposed analytical framework enhances traditional perspectives in the subfield of comparative politics by incorporating premises from the subfield of Indigenous politics, such as the persistent coloniality in the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the state as well as the difficulties facing liberal democracy in addressing key Indigenous political demands (autonomy and self-governance). The result of this innovative theoretical perspective takes shape in the key concept of democratic decolonization, which Rice defines as the re-establishment of Indigenous traditions and values in the institutions that govern or regulate society (p. 26).

Looking at the chapters of the text, Rice argues in chapter 2 that the model of autonomy achieved by the Indigenous nations of Yukon (Canada) – which for her represents one of the ways of democratic decolonization – best embodies Indigenous aspirations for sovereignty and self-governance. For her, the agreements reached between the Canadian government and these Indigenous nations – rights over surface and subsurface land, and establishment of their own forms of governance, among others – reveal a nation-to-nation relationship. That is to say, the Indigenous nations of Yukon would have power not within the Canadian state but alongside or equivalent to it.

In contrast, chapter 3 argues that Bolivia shows an alternative path of democratic decolonization. In the absence of prior recognition of territorial rights, Rice argues that Indigenous peoples opted to redesign the state through substantive constitutional reform with a plurinational perspective. This strategy facilitated, among other benefits, the creation of the so-called Indigenous Original Peasant Autonomy (AIOC, in Spanish) as a new sub-national political-administrative entity. Although Rice warns that this strategy has been criticized for its excessive bureaucracy, several Bolivian municipalities have transformed into AIOCs and are establishing their own forms of self-governance. The ongoing issue is that, while there is a way to achieve self-governance, the legal framework does not include rights over non-renewable natural resources.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the last two cases, Nunavut (Canada) and Ecuador. The case of Nunavut is similar to that of Bolivia, as the path of decolonization taken responds to the significant weight that the Indigenous population holds in the northeast of Canada. However, rather than redesigning the government's structures – a matter that is also unfeasible due to its federal design – the Inuit have established themselves as a “territory” – that is, a federal entity with fewer powers than those of a province, according to the Canadian federal system. For Inuit leadership, the government's “inuitizing” is understood as a necessary intermediate step before achieving greater autonomy and becoming a province. Finally, Rice argues that Ecuador aligns with the mini-municipal autonomy model, where Indigenous self-governance is formalized as a local government reliant on the established state institutional framework.

Overall, the cases addressed by Rice provide a better understanding of the Indigenous political action in the Americas. Indeed, if we consider that most influential studies – especially those focused on Latin America – take as a starting point the state's centrality in the building of ethnic identities or interpret their politicization as a reaction to the expansion of statehood, Rice's work shows us the other side of the story: namely, Indigenous peoples' efforts to engage in formal politics to expand democratic institutions till they transcend them. The result of this latter process would be the consolidation of a different democracy that enjoys greater legitimacy, as conventional institutions coexist with others that better represent the political aspirations of Indigenous peoples (self-governance, shared sovereignties, etc.) (p. 107).

In her conclusions, Rice states that her cases reveal that liberal democracy is more flexible than one might think (p. 107). Likewise, when she identifies the factors that may explain the various paths of democratic decolonization, she concludes that the differences between these are partly due to the reluctance of governments to cede sovereignty, particularly those from the Latin American region (p. 105). Rice acknowledges, however, that as the cases of Yukon and Nunavut show, the establishment of territorial rights is crucial to fully achieving Indigenous autonomy and self-governance (p. 81).

As a result of this observation, the significant differences between the cases of autonomy achieved in the North versus the South deserve further explanation,

as they call into question part of Rice's argument about democracy's flexibility. That is to say, we could ask whether "decolonization without territorial rights" (Ecuador and Bolivia) would respond solely to the political will of the governments, or perhaps it is because democracies are not as flexible as Rice claims. Although she acknowledges that there is a tension between the extractivist development model promoted by Latin American elites and democratic decolonization, a larger debate with Latin American neo-extractivism interpretations – that, from certain perspectives, erodes democratic institutions as it expands based on authoritarian logics and territorial dispossession (Anthias & López Flores, 2023) – could have been useful to strengthen her argument. Nonetheless, as she states towards the conclusion, the debate remains open and revolves around a major paradox: Is it possible to decolonize liberal democracies using the very mechanisms of the democratic-liberal state?

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Book Review

– *Go with God: Political exhaustion and evangelical possibility in suburban Brazil*, by Laurie Denyer Willis, University of California Press, 2023

How do people maintain hope under conditions of violence and abandonment? In *Go with God*, anthropologist Laurie Denyer Willis gives us an important part of the answer by foregrounding how religious desires and sensations – a healing touch, an angelic smell – make the lived experiences of precarity bearable. Her focus lies on Evangelical believers in Batán, a community in the Northwest of Rio de Janeiro shaped by histories of government neglect and territorial disputes between drug traffickers, police, and paramilitary groups.

Throughout the book, Willis takes a feminist perspective that interrogates the gendered and racialized dynamics of this structural violence. As others before her have shown, racial violence has been central to the creation of the Brazilian nation-state and has produced a system in which black bodies are seen as disposable, dangerous, and unworthy of care (Alves, 2018). The systematic anti-Blackness is visible not only in the high number of deaths and disappearances in predominantly black neighbourhoods but also in the lack of investment in public infrastructure such as hospitals and transportation facilities in these neighbourhoods. Willis particularly highlights how these different forms of racial violence affect the lives of black mothers, who are often the primary caretakers within Brazilian families yet who are also consistently denied care.

The book's main strength is Willis' attention to the material-affective dimensions of religious experience. Drawing on the work of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, Willis develops a reading of Evangelicals' experiences and desires as "graceful elaborations" (p. 11). Graceful is the term believers use to describe feelings of beauty, joy, hope, and worthiness that may occur during prayer circles or when fulfilling small, everyday tasks. As Willis notes, these feelings are not permanent but come and go in waves, "like a good perfume or a stench" (p. 12). But in the context of racialized and gendered violence, abuse, and pain, fleeting moments of grace, wherever these may be found, are extremely powerful.

The author beautifully captures this fleeting nature in her writing. The ethnographic illustrations woven throughout the different chapters are written in a

narrative and attentive style that breathes movement into the text and alerts readers to their own sensorial experiences, particularly those readers who might be familiar with the smells, sounds, and sights of the *subúrbio*. Willis invites her audience to consider how the people in Batán experience pain, sorrow, hope, joy, and anger in all their complexity. To accomplish this, Willis also writes herself into the ethnography and continuously reflects on her own emotions, dreams, and desires.

Willis' attention to the positive, if fleeting, effects generated through worship makes two important contributions to ongoing discussions about the popularity of Evangelical Christianity in Brazil and beyond. First, scholars have often approached Evangelical Christianity (and Pentecostalism in particular) through a rather instrumental lens and have interpreted Evangelical conversion as a socio-economic strategy aimed at survival. While certainly valuable, these works offer little insight into how religious practices are felt within the body and how these bodily sensations in turn allow for a reconfiguration or re-imagination of social and political life. *Go With God*, on the other hand, foregrounds personal experiences and sensations and emphasizes the political potential of the search for grace, in particular, how graceful experiences allow for a different imagination of the city as a space where black lives are valued and cared for. This reaffirmation of life, Willis argues, is not only focused on socio-economic survival but involves a radical reappraisal of self and community.

At the same time, the author also acknowledges how Evangelical communities have been used and manipulated by right-wing politicians and pastors to secure votes and money for conservative and repressive projects. Jair Bolsonaro's presidency has attracted international attention for his outright support of Evangelical administrators and important research has been done on the societal impact of this religious-political configuration (Hutta, 2021; Salem, 2024). Willis' book reminds us, however, that the popularity of Evangelical belief cannot be reduced to electoral politics and capital alone but is tied to a lack of trust in the political system as a whole, both on the left and right. For believers, going with God offers an opportunity to think of politics otherwise and to imagine spaces and communities that cannot be fully captured by the logic of state or non-state armed groups.

Willis' point indirectly also raises questions about how other Christian-inspired and syncretic movements popular in Rio (notably Umbanda) have responded to the lack of trust in political parties and the uncertainty and unpredictability of life in the urban periphery. Whereas Evangelicals only believe in the power of God and consider the worshipping of popular saints and spirits as blasphemous and even dangerous, it would be interesting to examine whether the devotion to these saints and spirits creates a similar potential to uplift and reaffirm the value of black and marginalized lives. My research on Umbanda practitioners suggests that it does. Moreover, these practitioners also noted that the hostility of a part of the Evangelical community towards Afro-Christian and syncretic religious movements contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization

of the Afro-Brazilian community. Whether Willis has not directly encountered such hostilities or has chosen not to make them explicit is unclear.

For readers interested in urban anthropology, *Go with God* includes a reflection on cities as sites of experimentation and possibility. Even if Rio's suburbs are produced through a politics of relegation and neglect, generating spaces where "waste" can be hidden away from the eyes of tourists and upper-class residents, the suburbs are also experienced as spaces where waste can be repurposed in new ways. This experimental aspect materializes in the perfume-turned-divine disinfectant that Ana sells in Batan, for example. An understanding of the *subúrbio* as productive of creative expressions of resilience further extends the discussion on socio-spatial inequalities in urban Brazil beyond common dichotomies and sheds light on a part of the city that has received considerably less scholarly attention than neighbourhoods in the South of Rio de Janeiro.

In the conclusion, Willis describes the book as resembling a "tunnel of feeling" (p. 112): a patchy work that reveals hopes, desires, and anxieties but bypasses other ways of knowing, telling, and understanding. She is probably right, for all academic work is impartial. But she certainly got the "feeling" part right, and that in itself makes her book a very evocative and insightful read.

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Book Review

— *Indigenous Plots in Twenty-First Century Latin American Cinema*, by Maria Chiara D’Argenio, Springer, 2022

Indigenous Plots in Twenty-First Century Latin American Cinema is more than just a book; it is an invitation to rethink how cinema engages with indigeneity, past and present. D’Argenio provides a transhistorical, nuanced, and interdisciplinary analysis of the processes behind the conception, creation, and reception of significant Latin American feature films centred on indigeneity and released in the early twenty-first century. Many of these cinematic works productions are rooted in pivotal historical events that have shaped the region, ranging from bi-piracy in the early twentieth century to internal displacement in rural Peru during the 1980s, and the deforestation and violence against Indigenous communities in the Amazon Basin at the turn of the twenty-first century. As a reader, one is drawn by the book’s overarching aim to contextualize the events that inspired the eleven films it predominantly examines. This comprehensive method is one of the monograph’s most striking aspects, emphasizing its significance as an academic contribution. D’Argenio presents these films as genuine efforts to explore and explain, through layered and intricate aesthetics, the experience of being indigenous in contemporary Latin America.

The opening chapter, “Inter/cultural Films for Global Consumption,” highlights the need to understand how cinema functions on multiple levels. She stresses that the historical and social contexts of pre- and co-production are essential for engaging with films shaped by “encounters taking place on and off-screen” (p. 2). To grasp the full impact of internal displacement in 1980s Peru, the book argues, it is necessary to examine the living conditions of indigenous rural communities at that time. This chapter sets the foundation for the subsequent exploration of collaboration, participation, and implicit co-authorship between filmmakers and the communities they depict; a theme continued throughout the remaining chapters. Through this lens, D’Argenio provides in-depth analyses of *Madeinusa* (2006), *La teta asustada/Milk of Sorrow* (2009), *Ixcánul* (2015), and *La Llorona* (2019) in the second and third chapter. Central to her discussion of directors Claudia Llosa and Jayro Bustamante is their effort to evoke and reenact communal consciousness in post-conflict settings. The author

asserts that these four films illustrate how the deep wounds left by a turbulent past redefine recovery processes, yet must be visually addressed, even if doing so provokes controversy and reopens old scars. A recurring theme throughout *Indigenous Plots* is the role of cinema as a political tool for shaping collective memory and fostering critical reflection across time and space. Screening fragments of history is reenacting events that have defined its course.

The fourth chapter delves deeper into this intricate dynamic through an analysis of *El abrazo de la serpiente/The Embrace of the Serpent* (2015). Here, D'Argenio offers a detailed examination of the revisited travel journals of Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) and Richard Evan Schultes (1915-2001), who journeyed through the Amazon during two separate periods in the 20th century. In the fifth and sixth chapters, the book's pace and focus shift notably. Through a detailed and multifaceted analysis of *Zona sur/Southern District* (2009) and *Terra vermelha/Birdwatchers* (2008), the author unpacks the intricate realities of indigenous societies in contemporary Latin America, both on- and off-screen. One of the volume's strengths is its careful examination of specific scenes from these films, highlighting the brutality, violence, erasure, and racism that marginalized communities endure daily. D'Argenio suggests that capturing these harsh realities in cinematic form not only underscores the inevitability of injustice and oppression but also showcases the educational power of cultural production to foster societal progress. This thread of hope continues in the seventh and eighth chapters, "Coevalness, Indigenous Modernity and Indigenization: *El sueño del mara'akame* (2016)" and "The Power of Aesthetics: *Retablo* (2017), *Wiñaypacha* (2017), *Canción sin nombre* (2019)." Returning to Peru, the book highlights the unique position of films produced by independent directors who often operate on the fringes of mainstream production and distribution networks. The author demonstrates her deep knowledge of Andean cinema and history, carefully analysing why hope is a central theme in the visual narratives emerging from more decentralized productions. Some readers might perceive a slight disproportionate emphasis on Peruvian visual culture compared to other countries; however, this is warranted by Peru's significant prominence in the cinematic landscape over the past two decades.

Indigenous Plots' title signals D'Argenio's approach to the films. The plots are indigenous not only because they are inspired by the histories and current reality of native communities in Latin America but also because they unfold through stories shaped by their experiences. Like any narrative, time is essential to understanding how the plot develops within the characters' spaces and lives. The study cases skilfully connect each film to major historical events – some of which may be unfamiliar to global audiences – such as the trial of Guatemalan dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt (1960-1996), or the impact of paramilitary movements on Colombia's unrest in early 1970s. Moments that are essential for grasping the filmmakers' decisions, viewpoints, and how their work contributes to reenacting and portraying key events in the region's cultural history and perception of Latin American indigenous heritage. The presence of self-identified

indigenous filmmakers, such as Óscar Catacora (1987–2021), is acknowledged in *Indigenous Plots*, though perhaps not to the extent the title might suggest. Arguably, the only minor shortcoming in this otherwise substantial scholarly work is the limited focus on lesser-known Indigenous filmmakers, working individually and as a community, that have not yet garnered significant academic attention. However, considering the author's impressive expertise in Peruvian visual culture, what initially seems like an oversight may hint at the potential for future publications exploring Andean Indigenous cinema or Cine regional. Such works would be a welcome addition.

Indigenous Plots is an essential reading for those interested in the topic of indigeneity in the cultural history of Latin America and the social and political life of cinema. It convincingly integrates various theoretical frameworks and presents a wide array of thoughtfully crafted analytical perspectives. D'Argenio's work makes a vital and timely contribution to ongoing debates about the role of historiography, memory, and cultural production in contemporary Latin American public discourse.

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Book Review

— *Pensadores rebeldes*, by Cristóbal Kay, Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2023

Social scientists are often quick to accuse others, like electoral constituencies, or even more in general societies as a whole, of forgetfulness. Blaming them for forgetting how treacherous, or corrupt, a politician or party turned out to be, the former time he (not often she) governed. Or even forgetting the fact a politician earlier turned out despotic, or cruelly vindictive towards opponents. Social scientists would be offended and even accuse the electorate of being “stupid” if people would, a few years later, again vote for him. But social scientists themselves are also forgetful. I realized this reading a compilation done by Cristobal Kay, of articles on “rebellious thinkers”. In it, Kay reviews the work of scholars on whom he published biographic articles in earlier years. Now, Kay brought these pieces together, and they turn out to be a more than worthwhile reminder for many a social scientist on Latin America, that may have forgotten these facts: “Hey, you stood on the shoulders of predecessors you may have forgotten about...”. Kay’s message: remember them. Not to simply honour them, but to recall the important things they contributed to your own thinking now.

Most impacting are the chapters on the scholars who, in the 1960s and 1970s, gave voice to Latin America’s protest against its alleged matter-of-fact poverty and underdevelopment. In their own ways, authors like Raúl Prebisch, Celso Furtado, André Gunder Frank and Theotônio dos Santos (chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4) all demystified the idea that Latin America (and other “Southern Countries”, for that matter) was poor, because it “lagged behind” or simply “had not developed yet”. Based on solid historic and economic data, Prebisch began to reveal how the unequal exchange between “the centre” and “the periphery” produced and reproduced the economic backlog of Latin America. A range of structural conditions, he argued, perpetuated and aggravated the cleavage between growth rates of the different poles. Here, the first contours of the Dependency Theory emerged. The earlier publications of Celso Furtado in the mid-1960s built on Prebisch’s work and demonstrated how low incomes in the South inhibited industrial developments and thus contributed to a deepening inequality and economic stagnation in Latin America. Policies like Import Substitution

Industrialization and Agrarian Reform became increasingly convincing suggestions to undo the ongoing “development of underdevelopment”. And that was exactly the thing that needed to be stressed again and again: underdevelopment is not a fact of life; it is made.

It is a reminder, I believe, that many scholars of the generations of the 1990s and 2000s and later, desperately need. Today, absorbed by the many dramatic events both in Latin America and worldwide, it is easy to forget the crucial insight that still today shape and also should shape, our analyses of global and local developments. Let’s remember, and let’s include, how structural unequal and unjust exchanges and information access shape our, and peoples’, perceptions of their realities and their interests.

In chapter 3 and 4, André Gunder Frank and Theotônio dos Santos, two other representatives and contributors to currents of Dependency Theories, are addressed. Here too, their inspirations, the developments of their thinking, their trajectories of institutional affiliations, and their contributions to the elaborations of Dependency Theories and affiliated analyses, are well expounded by Kay. In chapter 5, Solon Barracough’s story is told. Born in the United States but working mainly in Latin America, he was less interested in “politically charged” theorizing. But he contributed both scholarly and in action to agrarian reform insights and practices. Although possibly less known, he certainly deserved this tribute to his contribution. Last but not least, chapter 6 is dedicated to Willem Assies, who died in 2010, way too young. I knew him well. And was delighted to see him amongst these renown scholars. Kay beautifully portrays his work on agrarian issues, on citizenship and democratization, on social movements and the vicissitudes of indigenous peoples and their activism, both in Bolivia and other Latin American countries.

One could argue that the combination of these biographies is a bit disperse. The first four still embody an interconnected theme where they portray the emergence of the Dependency-paradigm and it’s follow-up turnings. The story on Barracough, on the other hand, is only loosely connected, and it remains a bit unclear why he, being less politically outspoken, also was a “rebel”. Willem Assies may have been more a very engaged and solidary fellow-thinker with “rebels” like social movements and marginalized groups fighting for a voice, than a thinker that knocked over established or dominant theories. And of course he was of another generation. So, a minor point might be the selection of these “rebels”, and the absence of a female rebel – they were there! But these really are minor issues. On the whole, this book was for me an aide-mémoire, a re-enlivened enormous knowledge deposit, and also a realization of “what remained of me as a scholar after much of what I had studied earlier, had faded”, as my paraphrase of the old saying goes. The reminder was more than worth it. And once over, I learned a lot.

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