

Kressner, Ilka Mutis, Ana María and Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli (editors). *Ecofictions, Ecorealities, and Slow Violence in Latin America and the Latinx World*. Routledge, 2021.

SANTIAGO ALARCÓN-TOBÓN
UNIVERSITÀ CA' FOSCARI VENEZIA

Rob Nixon's notions and especially his concept of slow violence, proposed and developed in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), have deeply influenced environmental humanities studies in recent years. A clear example of this is the magnificent collaborative volume entitled *Ecofictions, Ecorealities, and Slow Violence in Latin America and the Latinx World* (2020), edited by Ilka Kressner, Ana María Mutis, and Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli, which brings together thirteen essays that analyze different Latin American and Latinx works (books, films, performances, among others) departing from Nixon's ideas.

In particular, the concept of slow violence refers to a type of environmental violence that unfolds over long periods and across vast spaces, going beyond national borders or specific ecosystems. This violence is characterized by its invisibility and the lack of public attention compared to other environmental catastrophes. Nixon states that we are facing a crisis of representation, which inspired the editors to ask themselves a question that runs through all the essays collected in this volume: “How can we convey this form of violence beyond a spectacular metonymical headline image?” (4). As the editors explain in the introduction, the aim of the contributions is to understand how Nixon's ideas can help critically examine the geographical and material realities of Latin American and Latinx worlds. These regions face a series of environmental problems (deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, loss of natural areas, among others) due to the consolidation and intensification of a development model based on intensive resource extraction, rooted in the continental colonial past and following the logics of capitalist globalization. The editors state that their hope is to showcase Latin American and Latinx artistic practices “as forms of creative activism that challenge the notion of environmental degradation as inevitable and unveil neocolonial and neoliberal tactics that prescribe passivity and inaction as the only possible attitude” (5).

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, the volume is founded on a theoretical triangulation that is explained in the introduction. Firstly, it addresses the notion of environmental justice and how it has been influenced by the colonial legacy and the current oppressive extractive

regime. Secondly, it examines how ecocritical thinking is marked by materiality, going beyond the intellectual field and allowing the conjunction with other knowledge and sensibilities. Lastly, it explores the specificity of Latin American and Latinx voices as carriers of a discourse of art as a transformer of society. I would particularly like to highlight this element since it makes explicit and draws attention to how the work of artists and academics is, in turn “an ethical endeavor” in “precarious times and spaces marked by forms of abuse and neoliberal domination” (19). This is not only a critical stance but also a concrete choice in the structure of the volume, which materializes in the fourth section dedicated to expanding the number and type of voices, conversations, and actors.

The first section, entitled “Bad Living: Mutations, Monsters and Phantoms,” delves into the bodily transformations caused by the visible effects of slow violence’s invisible harm as narrated in some major works of contemporary Latin American literature. The section opens with Ana María Mutis’s chapter on Samantha Schweblin’s *Distancia de rescate*, where she analyzes the figure of one of the novella’s protagonists as a child-monster, arguing that it contains a critique of the Argentinian model of production, its manipulation of crops, and widespread use of agrochemicals. In the same vein, Gisella Heffes’s essay also departs from Schweblin’s novella, extending the analysis to two other books, Juan Diego Incardona’s *Las estrellas federales* and Natalia Rodríguez’s *La vi mutar*, and one poetry collection, *Un pequeño enfermo* by Julián Joven. Heffes focuses on exposing the representations of transformed human bodies in these narratives, highlighting the transformation of the Argentine rural space characterized by a constant pursuit of economic growth at the expense of conditions for all living organisms. Finally, Diana Aldrete’s essay on Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* closes the section by offering an ecocritical and environmental justice analysis of the garbage dump “El Chile” in the novel as a place where humans and industrial material share a common space in a globalized world.

The second section of the book, “Econarratives and Ecopoetics of Slow Violence,” includes three essays that analyze representations of slow violence in filmic and literary poetics and narratives from Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Nicaragua. The first two studies in this section, essays by Laura Barbas-Rhoden and Ida Day, propose an ecocritical reading of filmic works, demonstrating the potential use of Nixon’s concepts. Barbas-Rhoden’s essay brings our attention to the movies *Y tu mamá también* directed by Alfonso Cuarón and *Temporada de patos* by Fernando Eimbcke. She argues that, despite not explicitly engaging with environmental topics, both showcase slow violence and its consequences. Her reading, which entangles concepts from spatial justice theory and postcolonial theory, exposes how the films’ poetic sensibility and narrative arcs make visible the “spatiality of injustice and the co-occurrence of biocide, ecocide, and psychological malaise in the ordinary and

mundane” (110). Next, and using a different set of theoretical tools borrowed from spiritual ecology, Day’s essay examines two poetic documentaries, *Daughter of the Lake* directed by Ernesto Cabellos Damián and *The Pearl Button* by Patricio Guzmán, and their deep connections with indigenous values and attitudes. Using poetic language, these films portray different forms of violence against local populations and the environment, allowing Day to conclude that “crafted as visual poems or collective dreams” (125), both films challenge and inspire the audience in deeply personal ways and against the extractive Western logics. The second section concludes with Jacob G. Price’s essay about Pablo Antonio Cuadra’s *Cantos de Cifar y del mar dulce* and Ernesto Cardenal’s *Vuelos de victoria*. His essay explores how both poetry books contain environmental sensibilities that renegotiate the relations between human and non-human: Cuadra’s work as a recount of Nicaragua’s environmental fragility and slow violence during the Somocismo, and Cardenal’s as a renegotiation with nature after the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Moving forward, the third section of the book groups three essays dedicated to exploring the “Protracted Degradation and the Slow Violence of Toxicity,” as its title suggests, in some contemporary Latin American and Latinx works. In Adrian Kane’s essay, we find an analysis of Héctor Camín Aguilar’s *El resplandor de la noche* and Jennifer Clement’s *Prayers for the Stolen*, particularly the relationship between nature and culture portrayed in the roles of logging companies and drug cartels. He concludes that both novels resist the binomial formula of nature vs. culture and instead expose the entanglement between the human and broader ecosystems, offering a critique of the environmental repercussions of capitalism. Next, Carlos Gardeazabal Bravo’s essay explores how Evelio Rosero’s *Los ejércitos* uses different forms of violence, “making apparent the entanglements between trauma, spectrality, and slow violence” (163). Engaging with the notions of Juliana Martínez’s “spectral topographies” and Slavoj Žižek’s “objective violence,” the essay shows how Rosero’s novel offers a counternarrative to neoliberal policies and their associated trauma. One of the key outputs of the essay, as Gardeazabal Bravo mentions in his conclusions, is how the novel can challenge Nixon’s ideas about the entanglement of different types of violence, showing that they are more interconnected and fluid. Next, Charlotte Rogers’s essay turns our attention to the novel *Nuestra Señora de la Noche* by Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos-Febres, especially in how the novel can feature the intersection between race, gender, class, and environment. Influenced by critical ecofeminism, her reading reveals the slow violence that colonialism and industrialization have brought to a poor and marginalized community of color in Puerto Rico.

As mentioned before, the closing section, “Materialities, Performances, and Ecologies of Praxis,” brings together four different essays that prove the versatility of Nixon's theoretical proposals. In the first essay, Lauren Woolbright engages with environmental degradation and Tarahumara indigenous culture through an ecocritical reading of the video game *Mulaka*, developed by a Chihuahua-based game development team, Lienzo. Her analysis unveils how, despite the deployment of industry-standard mechanics, the video game manages to transmit an ecocritical message. As Woolbright concludes, games like *Mulaka* can pave the way to “more explicit interactive media engagements with elements of slow violence” (214), like the connection between postcolonial and environmental themes. The next essay, from a decolonial ecocritical standpoint, by Thaiane Oliveira, explores the scientific systems of the countries of the Global South, specifically Brazil. Oliveira’s proposal considers the scientific community as an ecosystem, using concepts from ecology such as resilience and revolution to unveil the dynamics of power and its epistemic violence. Ilka Kressner’s chapter studies dance as a form of ecological art in two contemporary performances, *Agua* and *Pixel* by Mourad Merzouki’s dance troupe, Compagnie Käfig. Considering the significant presence of plastic cups and pixels in both performances, the essay examines their connections with bodily materiality and their strategy to “slow down and deepen perception” (250). Kressner, departing from Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's “material ecocriticism” notions, exposes the connection between this art form with neoliberal practices, our creation of plastic waste, and our bodily relation with virtual spaces. The volume concludes with a magnificent essay by Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli that examines *Lluvia Negra: 11 narradores paraguayos y non-paraguayos*, edited by Douglas Diegues. This cartonera book collectively narrates the mysterious black rain that fell over Paraguay’s capital, Asunción, in 2009, showing the complications of representing slow violence but also embodying, in its own elaboration, the link between aesthetic responsibility and socio-environmental consciousness. The essay remarks that the short stories compiled inside the book propose a reconsideration of the relationship between environmental slow violence and historical processes. As Pettinaroli concludes, “slow violence is not confined to the past and that its environmental consequences still dwell in the bodies and spaces of the Paraguayan, Argentine, and Brazilian Triple Frontier” (273).

The collaborative volume *Ecofictions, Ecorealities, and Slow Violence in Latin America and the Latinx World* successfully demonstrates the profound impact of Nixon’s work on environmental humanities and its usefulness for studying Latin America and the Latinx worlds. The different essays contained in this volume reveal the pervasive, often invisible environmental injustices rooted in Latin America’s colonial past and current neoliberal practices. The volume underscores the importance of artistic and

academic engagement in addressing these long-term environmental crises, proposing the analysis of a wide variety of narrative and filmic works, while also opening to other conversations where Nixon's proposals can be useful. Definitively, by bridging theory with lived experiences, this volume provides crucial insights and inspires transformative responses to environmental degradation.