# Handbook of Latin American Environmental Aesthetics

Edited by
Jens Andermann, Gabriel Giorgi, and Victoria Saramago

DE GRUYTER

Lisa Blackmore

# Water

Environmental Aesthetics proposes the analysis of physical landscapes and their mediation in cultural production as two intertwined threads that further our understanding of socioecological worlds. This chapter takes up that task in relation to liquid environments and water-related art. The first part explores territories, infrastructures, and systems of flow as "objects of appreciation" (Fisher 2005: 667) in their own right, whose aesthetic formations bespeak long histories of human relations to water and their related political ecological contexts. I refer to these as "hydrocultural formations," that is, material aesthetic forms produced by human and non-human forces. Attending to physical environments of more-than-human water cycles reaffirms what scientists have long known about bodies of water: they exert their own aesthetic agency as active flows that move, sound, and sculpt other material bodies to create territories and thus challenge anthropocentric humanist paradigms of cultural criticism (Blackmore 2022). The aesthetic contours of hydrocultural formations are important to consider since they cipher the actions of waterbodies themselves and the impacts of historical contexts, contemporary socioeconomic dynamics, and ongoing struggles. The discussion below maps broad hydrological, hydropolitical, hydraulic, and climatic energies that shape aquatic environments in the region, and examines paradigmatic hydrocultural formations entangled in "the wider process of rationalization, state formation, and the emergence of 'technoscience'" (Gandy 2014: 3) and in active claims for socioenvironmental and cognitive justice for "epistemologies of the South" (De Sousa Santos 2014; Escobar 2016).

The second part of the chapter identifies aesthetic currents in artworks that invent channels to sense flows of more-than-human water cycles across multiple scales and registers, from the bodily to the infrastructural, the sacred to the contaminated. In material and metaphorical terms, water is much more than a chemical compound; its fluid forms interact with other matter in "liquid ecologies" that are "host to turbid histories of capital flows, philosophical currents, aesthetic traditions and residual traumas that connect distinct spaces, times and bodies" (Blackmore and Gómez 2020: 2). Liquidity and fluidity are thus also figures of thought for thinking beyond conventional and dominant epistemologies and aesthetics. Modes of hydraulic and turbulent flows have long been inspiration to writers and artists in Latin America (Pettinaroli and Mutis 2013) as well as scholars in the "hydrohumanities" (De Wolff, Faletti and López Calvo 2022). By identifying and analyzing key figures and dynamics in a select corpus, I chart how artists mediate the "interpermeations" (Neimanis 2016), "contact zones" (Pratt 1991) and modes of fast and "slow violence" (Nixon 2013) inherent in the Latin American hydrosphere, and explore how artworks imagine alternate water cultures and hydrocommunities engaged in speculative "ethics of care" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), and socioecological and cognitive reparation.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110775907-028

## Hydrocultural Formations

Latin America and the Caribbean have vast and varied aquatic ecosystems, from watersheds containing 30 per cent of the world's freshwaters (Sempris 2012) to the driest desert on Earth. Spanning Mesoamerica and Patagonia, Indigenous cultures' socioecological patterns, relations, and rituals have emerged in tune with the water bodies and water cycles they honor as sacred life forces. *Chinampas* in Xochimilco, spiral aqueducts in the Nazca desert, *palafitos* in the Caribbean, canoe routes through the Amazon, and peatbogs in Karukinka/Tierra del Fuego, to name just a few hydrocultural formations, all index how ancestral cultures evolved by intertwining with water to articulate a "wet network of relations" and co-existence of earth and water bodies in (Neimanis 2016). Hydrocultural formations have historically materialized ancestral ways of relating to aquatic environments and climatic patterns that encompass more-than-human kinship with "earth beings" (De la Cadena 2016) expressed in origin stories and ceremonial culture (Borea and Yahuarcani 2020; Limón Olvera 2006); power hierarchies and communal stewardship of water (Bray 2013); and infrastructural and urban design (Dean 2011; Rojas Rabiela et al. 2009).

Colonization in the early modern period radically transformed the lives and landscapes of hydrocommunities, imposing imported anthropocentric paradigms that rendered water a resource subordinated to human development, separating nature and culture, non-human and human waterbodies. European colonists attempted to displace autochthonous "amphibious culture" (Fals Borda 1984) exerting power through hydraulic systems (Bell 2014). Imperial projects that were "dreaming of dry land" (Candiani 2014) led to the draining of wetlands for settlements, crops and cattle raising in cities such as the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán and the muisca-inhabited Sabana de Bogotá (Rodríguez Gallo 2021). Through travel writing, cartography, and traveller artist representations (Manthorne 2015), "imperial eyes" (Pratt 2008) envisaged seas and rivers basins as access routes to *Terra Nulis*—a liquid infrastructure for territorial domination (Nemser 2017), the necroeconomics of the slave trade (More 2019). Extractive prospecting, primitive accumulation, and the evangelization of native communities made of waterbodies liquid graves that indexed genocidal violence against Indigenous and black bodies. The modernization processes that bridged the colonial and republican periods increasingly transfigured major waterways (such as the Magdalena, the Río de la Plata, and Orinoco Basin) into forms that approximate the "industrial sublime" (Nye 1994), imagining water courses as commercial and industrial infrastructures for riparian steam travel, sites of extractive industries, and, from the late nineteenth century onwards, hydropower generation and megadams.

One paradigmatic example of how colonization and urbanization have impacted aquatic environments and produced environmental aesthetics of desiccation, contaminated flows, and hidden waterbodies, is the Valley of Mexico. Water covered 1500 of the lake basin's 8058 square kilometers in pre-Hispanic times, where the Mexicas created a hydraulic environment that negotiated human coexistence with fluid dynamics

through shoreline agriculture that worked with (not against) seasonal flooding; dams, irrigation canals and intercommunal raised bed horticulture (*chinampas*) that enabled populations to expand and prosper, as reflected in the famous map of Tenochtitlán, printed in Nuremberg in 1524 (Figure 1). Water was weaponized during the conquest of imperial Tenochtitlán as "the war between the Aztecs and the Spaniards and their indigenous allies was waged on and through human bodies, land, and water," with both sides leveraging water (by flooding or cutting off its supply) to obtain the upper hand (Candiani 2014: 26). The defeat of the Aztecs is reflected in the receding waters of the Valley of Mexico, the *desagüe* (drainage) system of tunnels and canals initiated by the Spanish to drain Mexico City in 1607, gradually built until the late nineteenth century to confront persistent flooding and used as the sewage system for a growing city. Paralleling the Victorian hydroengineering response to the "Big Stink" in mid-nineteenth-century London, the modernizing program of the Porfiriato (1876–1911) materialized its will to "govern" water in the Gran Canal del Desagüe (Angostini 2003: 127), equating monumental water infrastructure to progress. As waterbodies were buried underground, attention was diverted to the monumental Cárcomo de Dolores pump station in Chapultepec Park (a water infrastructure designed to be visited and admired by the public). Mexico City's rivers have been increasingly channeled into concrete tubes and covered by major highways (like the Viaducto Miguel Alemán, inaugurated in 1952). This long history dramatically transformed the physical

**Figure 1:** Map of Tenochtitlan, printed 1524 in Nuremberg, Germany, attributed to Friedrich Peypus (1485–1534). Left: Gulf of Mexico; right: Tenochtitlan. WikiCommons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Tenochtitlan,_1524.jpg (April 10, 2023). Public Domain.

aesthetics of the Valley of Mexico, rendering water a latent pulse and making the canals of Xochimilco a rare remnant of pre-Hispanic water culture. As Latin Americans continue to leave the countryside for cities, unstinting urbanization has caused near-biological death for major rivers in cities like São Paulo and Bogotá. Landscapes of toxic foam and black waters full of waste co-exist, in these settings, with sanitation infrastructures that underscore the aesthetics of rivers as "organic machines" (White 1995).

Beyond urban milieux, for millennia riparian communities have exploited rivers for artisanal extraction of aggregates and minerals but transnational capital's mechanical extraction of water and minerals as "cheap nature" (Moore 2016) has had devastating effects manifested in landscapes of the Capitalocene. The privatization of water rights (as in Chile) exposes aquifers to water grabbing; in mining areas (like Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), companies contaminate human and non-human waterbodies with lethal chemicals, like mercury; and in river basins like Colombia's Cauca and Brazil and Paraguay's Paraná, megadam construction (Figure 2) makes "developmental refugees" (Nixon 2011) of riparian communities, exacerbating long-standing forms of social and racial marginalization. These forces shape diverse hydrocultural formations that exist as physical realities and iconic images, which include landscapes populated by water-grabbing industrial agrobusiness and water-starved communities reliant on cistern trucks; Amazonian riverbanks rendered as

**Figure 2:** Itaipu dam on the Paraná river, between Brazil and Paraguay, 2013. Photo by Deni Williams. WikiCommons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Usina_Hidroel%C3%A9trica_Itaipu_Binacional_–_Itaipu_Dam_(17174796329).jpg (April 10, 2023). Creative Commons Attribution 2.0.

pools of toxic mud by illegal mining; towering concrete walls built to stop the flow of water and divert it to hydropower plants, among others.

The environmental aesthetics of extraction thus involve a visual politics in which corporate public relations, material infrastructures, and affected ecosystems and communities compete to disseminate contesting imaginaries and discourses. A paradigmatic example of this occurred in Mariana, Minas Gerais, Brazil, on November 5, 2015, when a dam at an iron mine collapsed, unleashing a catastrophic wave of tailings and water into the River Doce and out to the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 3). Owned by Samarco Mineração S.A. (a Vale and BHP Billiton joint venture), the dam "burst open, sending 62 million cubic meters of muddy waste down the Doce River, killing 19 people in floods and sending toxic brown water flowing toward the Atlantic Ocean, where it arrived two weeks later, contaminating beaches and towns" (Santos and Heimrich 2018: 34). As the wave of mud spread out to the sea, it displaced communities, inundated the river with mercury, arsenic, iron, killed wildlife and rendered all the regions it traversed—from the mining town through the Krenak Indigenous reserve and to the coastal port infrastructures—scenes of ecocidal devastation (Serra 2018). Amid environmental degradation, pressure from activist groups like the Aliança Rio Doce and Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (River Doce Alliance and Movement for Dam Victims) and ongoing criminal court

**Figure 3:** Image of polluted riverbed following the tailings dam collapse in Bento Rodrigues, Minas Gerais, 10 November 2015. Photo by Romerito Pontes. WikiCommons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bento_Rodrigues_dam_disaster#/media/File:(2015-11-10)_Visita_%C3%A0_Bento_Rodrigues-MG_070_Romerito_Pontes_(23146715464).jpg (April 10, 2023). Creative Commons Attribution 2.0.

proceedings, Vale launched *Fundação Renova* (Renovation Foundation), the official body tasked with social and environmental reparations, including creating new homes for displaced inhabitants of Bento Rodrigues. Simultaneously, it created an immersive, virtual *Expedição Rio Doce* (River Doce Expedition 2022) that offers audiovisual navigation of the river to showcase advances in ecosystem restoration. The restoration of the river has thus emerged as a leveraging device in corporate public relations (mirroring other post-catastrophe campaigns) and a counter-imaginary to the environmental aesthetics of pollution and devastation that reshape the contours of rivers in the "extractive zone" (Gómez Barris 2017).[1]

Desiccated waterbodies, straightened and channelized rivers, man-made reservoirs, megadams, and contaminated flows remain the dominant environmental aesthetics of the contemporary Latin American hydrosphere amid neo-extractivist economics, increasing urbanization and unchecked developmentalism. Human and climate-related stresses are generating additional aesthetic shifts, such as the disappearance of Lake Poopó in Bolivia and receding tropical glaciers in Peru and Colombia. The United Nations predicts that local and transboundary conflicts will worsen amid ongoing climate change and competing demands for water by urban, energy, and agricultural sectors (UNESCO 2020: 139). However, some settings offer hope of "future histories of water" (Ballesteros 2019) and emergent material-aesthetic shifts from contamination to care, exploitation to abundance in water cultures. If they are upheld and respected, which is a pending task (see Shade 2015), the declarations of the rights of nature in Ecuador (2009) and Bolivia (2010) along with water law reforms (like the deprivatization of water proposed in 2022 as part of the (rejected) reform of Chile's constitution), and the legal personhood afforded to the Atrato River (2016) in Colombia, should bring change to hydrocultural formations through ecological restoration and more equitable access to water. At the grassroots level, the communal water committees as in Costa Rica (Ballesteros 2019), citizen science initiatives (e.g. Ríos to Rivers 2022), ecosystem restoration projects (e.g. Redes 2022), and transnational art-activism projects (e.g. *Canto al agua* (Song to water), 2022), signal the germination of environmental aesthetic strategies that cultivate "speculative ethics" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) of care, collaboration, and celebration in more-than-human hydrocommunities.[2] Envisaging a large-scale shift in environmental aesthetics to equitable and healthy waterbodies, however, is for now more the realm of imagination than reality.

1 Another key example is the Hidroituanguo plant built on the Cauca River in Antioquia, Colombia, where in 2018 a catastrophic failure in tunnels built to divert the river to enable construction of the megadam led to flooding downstream and loss of life in the town of Puerto Vallarta.

2 Ríos to Rivers is a transnational initiative founded in 2012 that "inspires the protection of rivers worldwide by investing in underserved and indigenous youth who are intimately connected to their local waters and support them in the development as the next generation of environmental stewards" (Ríos to Rivers 2022).

## Aesthetic Currents

Spanning a range of media and aesthetic strategies, artworks that probe liquid ecologies are generative means to imagine ways of relating in the more-than-human hydrocommons of interpermeating bodies of water. This section identifies select aesthetic strategies whereby artists stimulate critical and sensorial engagements with fluids and fluid matter, examining how they stimulate sensitivity to the liquid basis of life and how they raise awareness of specific problematics that shape the contours of human relations *to* and *through* water in Latin America.

The political philosopher Jane Bennett (2001, 2009) sustains that the body forms the starting point of our ethical dispositions toward life in all its vegetal, animal, mineral, liquid and even infrastructural forms. She proposes that it is as we dispose our body towards others' suffering and misfortune that we begin to articulate the experience of recognition, empathy, and care. In a feminist vein, Silvia Federici (2020) also centers the body as a means of remaking and reclaiming modes of relating that are not captured by capitalist logics but are (re)generative of politics of solidarity and common wellbeing. This attention to embodiment as a critical sphere resonates with performance and action art produced from the 1960s to the 1980s, when ecofeminist artists across Latin America worked "intuitively with performativity, the physiological and biological dimension of their bodies, the recovery of nature-based forms of spirituality, the exploration of non-linear and relational structures based in the use of water and other fluids, and women's gender roles" (Moñivas 2020: 129). By generating encounters between bodies, artists advanced modes of speculative inquiry into the basic fact that all life gestates through and is sustained by water. Their actions invite reflection on the ethical implications of this biological fact, which implies that mutual flourishing in the more-than-human hydrocommons depends on the health of liquid human bodies and non-human watery bodies that flow through each other. Examples of this orientation toward embodiment include the haptic and relational encounters with water that are central to Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's *Água e conchas* (Water and shells, 1966) from her *Objetos relacionais* (Relational objects) series, where the interactive work encouraged contact as a process of negotiation between human touch, enclosed liquid and solid matter via the malleable membrane of a plastic bag. Drawing on their backgrounds in martial arts, experimental dance and yoga, the Venezuelan performance duo, Yeni y Nan explored more fully immersive fluid environments in *Integraciones en el agua* (Integrations in Water, 1981; Figure 4), where they writhed, clad in full-body monochrome suits, inside large water-filled plastic membranes, before breaching the waters and emerging out onto the gallery floor. The focus on interpermeation with other waterbodies deploys a mode of posthumanist performativity that stages life as anterior to representationalist encodings of (human) language and storying. In so doing, it works with liquidity as "an active agent in the world's becoming . . . not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (Barad 2003: 820).

**Figure 4:** Yeni y Nan, photograph of the performance *Integraciones en el agua II* (1982) Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas. Photo courtesy the artists and Henrique Faría, New York.

Whereas these examples staged more abstract liquid encounters, other works have interrogated structural causes whereby humans pollute waterbodies. In her video performance *Anónimo 3 (El río Cauca como otros tantos ríos del mundo y la tierra en general están siendo afectados por desechos contaminantes no digeribles que arrojan las industrias y los seres humanos. Residuos que alteran los componentes propios de la naturaleza . . .)* (Anonymous 3 (The Cauca river like so many other rivers in the world and on earth that are generally being affected by non-digestible pollution that industries and humans throw into them. Residues that alter nature's own make-up . . .), 1982), Colombian performance artist María Evelia Marmolejo urinates naked into a toilet in an open field, creating an analogy between the body's abject flows and pollution of industrializing rivers, like the Cauca. Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña's practice also weaves human and natural bodies together to critique pollutant, extractive relations, and to honor the "liquid indigeneity" (Merchant 2020) and menstrual flows that unite waterbodies in more fluid—and caring—continuum. Her film *Kon Kon* (2015) deploys poetic narrative, performative land art actions, song, and archival footage to lament and protest the cultural and ecological destruction of the maritime environment through the imposition of an oil refinery on sacred, ancestral wetlands. Echoing Vicuña's contemporary works, which take up collective struggles in collaborative performances, Regina José Galindo and Carolina Caycedo also work at the intersections of art and activism, coordinating groups of human bodies to articulate

collective defense of waterbodies. In *Ríos de gente* (Rivers of People, 2021), Guatemalan artist Galindo, involved thousands of Indigenous people in this performative work that campaigned against water extraction, having them hold up "an endless stretch of translucent fabric . . . —a river of blue [that] snaked through desert farms, town squares, and mountain terrains," making visible victims of mining, hydroelectric and monoculture industries (Ou 2022: 149). Among the many *Geocoreografías* (Geochoreographies) she has developed in her long-term project BE DAMMED (2014–ongoing), Caycedo allied with Colombian social movement *Ríos Vivos* to create GEOCHOREOGRAPHY ORITOGUAZ (2015) a duo of aerial photographs of bodies lying on the banks of the Yuma (Magdalena) river spelling out phrases like "RÍOS VIVOS" (living rivers) and "YUMA RESISTE" (Yuma resists) in protest to the construction of the Oporapa dam in Huila.

Caycedo's work is an exemplar of contemporary art practice that is oriented to the fates of rivers and communities ensnared in industrial and extractive economies (Gómez Barris 2017; Blackmore 2020a, 2020b) and she works closely with activists across the Americas, producing processual works in the field and studio-based sculptural objects. In *Serpent River Book* (2017) Caycedo assembles a visual ecology of impacts of hydraulic projects on more-than-human river communities that intertwines these threads of her practice. The two-sided, tri-folding artist book takes an unfolding, meandering form that emulates a riverine course from source to mouth. It collages the official optics of corporate public relations and State-led development through maps, documents, diagrams, and satellite images, with a "countervisuality" (Mirzoeff 2011) of "submerged perspectives" (Gómez Barris 2017) of photographs, drawings, poems and testimonies from the ground and grassroots. Designed to be manipulated, moved and collectively performed, the book's "figures of eddying water, the pleats of time, and the predominance of touch over sight all call into question the instrumentalization of water as a resource that powers industrial progress" (Blackmore 2020b: 24). Alongside Caycedo, Colombian artist Clemencia Echeverri and Brazilian artist-researcher Mabé Bethônico also interrogate the environmental aesthetics of extractive industries' impacts of rivers, taking devastated lands and waves of pollutants as their figurative leitmotifs. In her multi-channel audiovisual installations *Sin cielo* (Without Sky, 2017) and *Río por asalto* (River by Assault, 2018), Echeverri edits aerial views of gold mining infrastructure and turbulent river flows onto multi-screen installations and projections, whose soundtracks engulf the viewer in "apocalyptic" scenes typical of catastrophic environmental degradation and infrastructural collapse (Tarver 2020: 90). Bethônico takes up toxic flows in her installation *Speaking of Mud* (2019), re-assembling two series of 16 pages of newspaper spreads covering the Mariana and Brumadinho disasters discussed above, in which the artist has cut out all text and left only images of the Doce river basin engulfed by industrial waste. Through this act of appropriation, she signals how the environmental aesthetics of disaster circulate predominantly in journalistic images and discourse but are apt to be metabolized and contested through art, as well as the theatre productions, legal processes (Santos and Heimrich 2018) and documentaries (such

as the interactive, virtual reality *Rio de lama* (River of Mud, 2016) that offer critical commentary on these catastrophic events. In *Speaking of Mud*, the hypervisuality of disaster is set in counterpoint to the shady status of transnational capital, created through two additional photographs that sit alongside the newspaper cuttings, taken by the artist at the Swiss offices of Vale, the company responsible for the Brazilian mining disasters. In them, Bethônico's hands hold up *Le Monde* showing a headline that reads "La peur des brésiliens à l'ombre des barragens" (Brazilians' fear in the shadow of dams) but whose accompanying photograph has been cut out, and through whose void the viewer sees Vale's building.

Making visible and apprehensible systems of flow control—from visual technologies and media ecologies, through to the literal circuitry of dams to pipes—is a key aesthetic operation in art that addresses water. This operation plays out in literal terms through the representation of water as channeled flow while it also raises broader political questions about how hydraulics advances critical reflection on how "partitions" are made in the realm of the sensible (Rancière 2004). That is, artworks ask: What liquid flows get to be seen and heard, and which are rendered opaque or absent, and why? The relegation of water to underground channels in urban settings and the contamination of rivers are symbolize human paradigms of mastery over nature. Artworks that unearth such waterbodies seek to re-establish connections to them via sensory means and in so doing they raise questions about the historical and epistemological contexts in which this "partition" of (some) waters occurs in collective life. Mexican interdisciplinary artist Tania Candiani has a long-standing practice of evoking the submerged and contaminated flows through sound works. In *Ríos antiguos, ríos entubados, ríos muertos* (Ancient, channeled, dead rivers, 2018) she excavates the memories of twenty-one rivers that flow through Mexico City, translating the hydrographic maps of each into a coded composition that viewers reproduce by turning the handle of a wind-up music box, an antiquated technology where tuning forks create vibrating sounds from bumps on a rotating cylinder. The cylinder boxes themselves are mnemonic doubles for the huge concrete tubes that, below the perceptual surface of the city, keep rivers out of the human sensorium. As the installation is activated as a collective sound performance when visitors "play" the rivers, *Ríos* creates sonic deltas that pay "acoustic justice" (LaBelle 2020) to the present and ancestral hydroscape, restoring traces of it to the public realm. In so doing, *Ríos* joins a corpus of works that—through different media and at different times—enact gestures of bringing aquatic memories and lives to surface perception. These include historical works like the Cárcamo de Dolores pump station complex in Chapultepec Park, in Mexico City, the site of Diego Rivera's sculptural depiction of the water god Tlaloc and underwater mural *Water: Origin of Life on the Earth* (1952) and Ariel Guznik's *Cámara Lambdona* (2010), a contemporary intervention in the same space that sounds groundwater in the aqueduct (Carrillo Morell 2018). Situated in a State-run infrastructure in a public park, these artworks operate within the umbrella of official water culture. By contrast, and beyond the city center, María Theresa Alvez' collaborative project *The*

*Return of a Lake* (2012) charts the spontaneous re-emergence of a waterbody and its community regeneration (Alvez 2018), thus incentivizing attention to decolonial gestures that emerge from and through water, where the community restoration of *chinampas* (raised bed water-based agriculture) and rooting of territorial memory in the Valle de Xico Community Museum (Amaro Altamirano 2018) honor pre-Hispanic relating through water.

In this broader context of the distribution of the sensible, the entanglement of waterbodies with political violence is a further aesthetic current that explores how authoritarian regimes have used oceans and rivers as unmarked graves and how victims appear in aquatic imaginaries in spectral forms. Water serves as a vehicle for video and film works that reflect on disappearance and conflict, including Chilean Enrique Ramírez's three–screen installation *Los durmientes* (The sleeping, 2015) and Patricio Guzmán's documentary *El botón de nácar* (The Pearl Button, 2015), which reflect on the dumping of bodies in the Pacific Ocean during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1989) and the colonial violence enacted in Chile's watery geography (Depetris Chauvin 2020). In Caribbean art, liquids cipher conflictive processes of colonial economies in the work of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons. In *Everything is separated by water, including my brain, my heart, my sex, my house* (1990) a portrait of a female body divided in two by a neoclassical column of water references different types of embodied liquids to "bind together the ocean water of the Atlantic passage with the bodies of the slave trade" (Gómez 2020: 37). In the sound and smell installation *Matanzas Sound Map* (2017) she explores liquid forms of violence in Cuba's sugar industry by evoking the historical conditions of rum distillation in an interconnected network of blown glass vessels filled with treacly liquids. Also in the Caribbean, maritime flows are inseparable from contemporary migration and its human victims, where water creates a realm of "tidalectic diffractions" that intersects historical times, bodies, and their violent encounters (DeLoughrey and Flores 2020: 166). This is apparent in Dominican artist Tony Capellán's installation *Mar Caribe* (Caribbean Sea, 1996), where the assembled mass of 500 turquoise and blue flip flops washed up on the coast evokes idyllic images of the sea while the barbed wire straps retrofitted into each one is a stark alert to the dangers faced by those who attempt to cross liquid borders.

Deficits in reparations and emergent forms of cognitive and socioecological justice are important currents in water-related art as it reflects on the interpermeations of different forms and times of violence. In Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz's *Re/trato* (2003), a video recording of the artist's process of using water to paint a self-portrait on a concrete pavement and its rapid disappearance as trace, evokesthrough the vanishing liquid form the contested and fragile memory politics surrounding the country's protracted civil conflict at a moment when the peace accords (signed in 2016) were still a distant horizon. Today, as transitional justice augurs a nascent "ecopolitical imagination" (Cagüenas et al. 2020) in Colombia, the Truth Commission recognizes rivers and ecosystems as victims of war ("La naturaleza herida por la violencia" 2022; Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición 2022) and "voices of water"

are presented in exhibition spaces related to political violence (González-Ayala and Camargo 2021). In this vein, sound artist Leonel Vásquez, on commission by the Comisión de la Verdad, created a participatory work to explore how conflict permeates waterbodies. Presented on the seafront in Buenaventura—a major port on the Pacific coast in the Valle del Cauca, one of the regions most affected by ongoing violence—just weeks after the final Truth Commission reports were published on June 28, 2022, *Río La Verdad* (2022) made water a place of collective mourning for the entangled forms of violence suffered by the region's populations and nineteen rivers, which include processes of displacement, contamination, and forced disappearance, among others. The installation (Figure 5) consisted of an eight-meter-long immersion pool where people could submerge and listen to an *alabao*, a traditional, afro-Colombian funerary lament declared national heritage in 2014 which is part of a soundscape of resistance, reparation, and reinvention in the Pacific region of Chocó (Pinilla Bahamón 2017). The project departed from Truth Commissioner Ángela Salazar's insistence on the importance of listening to the voices of rivers through the songs and celebrations of riverine communities which had been silenced by Colombia's violence as a way to "resonate through waters and cure them" (Vásquez 2022).

**Figure 5:** Leonel Vásquez, *Río La Verdad*, 2022. Photo courtesy the artist.

Also in the Chocó, the designation the Atrato River as a legal person in 2016 established official duty to bring reparations for the violence the interconnected forces of civil conflict and illegal gold mining caused to the river's health and the well-being of its local communities, proposing deindustrialization, an ecocentric vision of governance and the defense of biocultural rights as legally binding objectives. This decision presented

another setting where social and ecological justice are mutually implicated, rather than separate, and where aesthetic implications emerge in the question of how to translate the behavior and needs of the river basin's more-than-human communities might be represented (broadly and in court) in ways that eschew anthropocentric framings. These challenges are only now being explored by in-progress projects (e.g. Gallón Droste 2019), which will remain a topic for future research in water-related environmental aesthetics. Related questions about *how rivers think* and *how they express themselves* are addressed in a wide range of works, from the performances cited earlier that consider liquid intelligence from posthuman perspectives, via contemporary artworks that reflect on vibrant matter in Amazonian waterworlds. Taking its name from Eduardo Kohn's important more-than-human ethnography *How Forests Think* (2013), Ecuadorian artist Oscar Santillán's *How Rivers Think* (2018) is an essay in sympoeisis (Haraway 2016)—a "making-with" an Amazonian river whose water and organic materials he collected and contained in eighty customized slides as living ecosystems that were projected onto the gallery space. Against the extractive methods of botanical expedition that mapped and represented waterways in the region to capitalize on their lifeforms, this assemblage of agencies and arrangements redistributes the task of representation between artistic intent and material semiotics, emphasizing the aesthetic force of liquid life beyond its use value. Indigenous contemporary art similarly insists on the immanent lifeworlds and enduring cosmologies that flow through the Amazon's liquid territories. In Yanomami artist Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe's abstract, graphic works, he draws on his personal experiences dwelling in the Upper Orinoco in the Venezuelan Amazon to isolate elements of the jungle ecosystem and cosmology, including its trees, rivers, and animals, on paper made from natural fibers ("Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe talks about his works" 2020). In a related vein, but in a more figurative aesthetic, Abel Rodríguez's precise botanical illustrations, drawn from his personal experiences in the Colombian Amazon, depict periodic flooding in *Ciclo anual del bosque de la vega* (Seasonal changes in the flooded rainforest, 2009–2010) showing the cyclical ways that water marks time.[3] Such vital waterworlds also feature in paintings by Uitoto contemporary artist Rember Yahuarcani, whose colorful, highly embellished works evoke the spiritual and shamanic dimensions of the Peruvian Amazon that are central to Indigenous more-than-human ontologies (Borea and Yahuarcani 2020).

**

Amid the advances of extractive industries across Latin America, macro-scale infrastrutural projects, such as Peru's China-backed Hidrovía Amazónica, and the challenges

3 It is worth noting that Rodríguez does not consider himself an artist in the conventional Western sense. Quoted by José Roca, in a text for *documenta14*, he states: "We don't really have that concept, but the closest one I can think of is *iimitya*, which in Muinane means 'word of power' –all paths lead to the same knowledge, which is the beginning of all paths." See Roca (2017).

**Figure 6:** Photo of the Muisca crop cultivation system being recreated by Colectivo Camellones y Zanjas in the Reserva Thomas Van der Hammen, Susa, Bogotá, 6 August 2022. Photo by Sergio Durán. Courtesy of Colectivo Camellones y Zanjas (María Buenaventura, Diego Bermúdez, Juliana Steiner, Lorena Rodríguez Gallo).

facing the path to reparations for bodies of water like the Atrato River, the meeting points of aquatic environments, their communities, and public platforms created by the arts are more important than ever to igniting imaginaries of socioecological wellbeing. The rise of large-scale art events oriented to water in Latin America, such as *Libertad para el Auga* (Guatemala, 2021), *Bienal del Bioceno, Cambiar el verde por azul* (Ecuador, 2022), and *Inaudito Magdalena* (Colombia, 2022), as well as national and transnational initiatives that bridge the arts, interdisciplinary water research and public engagement, such as *TurbaTol* (2022), Camellones y Zanjas (2022; Figure 6), and *entre*—ríos (2022), all signal that liquid ecologies are a leading concern in artistic and curatorial practice oriented to environmental aesthetics.[4] More broadly, the examples of hydrocultural

4 *TurbaTol Hol-Hol Tol* is an interdisciplinary arts-led initiative that advocates for the intertwined biocultural rights of wetlands and the Selk'nam Indigenous people in Tierra del Fuego, Chile. It is part of Ensayos, a nomadic collective convened by curator Camila Marambio since 2011. TurbaTol represented Chile at the Biennale di Venezia in 2022; see: https://turbatol.org/. Camellones y Zanjas is a collective project led by the Colombian artist María Buenaventura, curator Juliana Steiner, architect Diego Bermúdez and archaeologist Lorena Rodríguez Gallo, to (re)create the Muisca system of raised beds and channels in the Sabana de Bogotá. It is a commission for the Network Project for Colombia curated by Juliana Steiner as part of *COMMON GROUND: An International Festival on the Politics of Land and Food* (2022), initiated by the Center for Human Rights and the Arts and The Fisher Center

formations and aesthetic currents cited above all offer further confirmation that the Hydrohumanities is an important field of inquiry at a time when climate instability and water stresses are on the rise, not just in Latin America but on a global scale. At the time of writing, droughts in Europe and China, among the worst in living memory, are inhibiting agricultural production, causing water scarcity, stopping hydroelectric production, and blocking riverine trade routes. Growing public awareness of these issues, and the urgent need for actions that improve the health of more-than-human water cycles, present opportunities for cultural practitioners to continue to imagine alternative water cultures based on ethics of care and concrete actions to safeguard the biocultural rights of hydrocommunities.

## Works Cited

Alvez, Maria Theresa. "The Return of a Lake.": *~~Natura~~: Environmental Aesthetics after Landscape*. Eds. Jens Andermann, Lisa Blackmore, and Dayron Carrillo Morell. Zurich: diaphanes, 2018. 51–60.

Amaro Altamirano, Genaro. "Dissipating Darkness.": *~~Natura~~: Environmental Aesthetics after Landscape*. Eds. Jens Andermann, Lisa Blackmore, and Dayron Carrillo Morell. Zurich: diaphanes, 2018. 61–72.

Ballesteros, Andrea. *A Future History of Water*. Durham: Duke Univesrity Press, 2019.

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003): 801–831.

Bell, Martha. "Agua y poder colonial: ciclos, flujos y procesiones en el manejo hidráulico urbano en Lima durante el siglo XVII." *Boletín del Instituto Riva-Agüero* 37 (2014): 75–121.

Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

——. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Blackmore, Lisa. "When Walls Become Rivers: Carolina Caycedo's *Serpent River Book*." *Afterall* 49 (2020a): 90–99.

——. "Turbulent River Times: Art and Hydropower in Latin America's Extractive Zones." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin* American *and* Caribbean Art. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020b. 13–34.

Blackmore, Lisa, and Liliana Gómez. "Beyond the Blue: Notes on the Liquid Turn." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 1–10.

Borea, Giuliana, and Rember Yahuarcani. "Amazonian Waterway, Amazonia Water-worlds: Rivers in Government Projects and Indigenous Art." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 106–124.

Cagüenas, Diego, María Isabel Galindo Orrego, and Sabina Rasmussen. "El Atrato y sus guardianes: imaginación ecopolítica para hilar nuevos derechos." *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 56.2 (2020): 169–196.

---

Lab Biennial at Bard College. *entre*—ríos is an art practice-led network that curates practice-research, interdisciplinary residencies, workshops, exhibitions, and publications. It was started by the author in 2019 as a platform for international collaborations in projects that reignite public connections to bodies of water; see http://entre-rios.net.

Candiani, Vera S. *Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

*Canto al Agua*. https://www.cantoalagua.com/ (18 August 2022).

Carrillo Morell, Dayron. "Aquatic Visions and Watery Sounds: Ruptures and Sutures in the Lacustrine Landscape of Modern Mexico City.": *~~Natura~~: Environmental Aesthetics after Landscape*. Eds. Jens Andermann, Lisa Blackmore, and Dayron Carrillo Morell. Zurich: diaphanes, 2018. 145–170.

Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. *Cuando los pájaros no cantaban: Historias del conflicto armado en Colombia*. Digital version published 28 June 2022. https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/cuando-los-pajaros-no-cantaban (Aprl 10, 2023)

Dean, Carolyn. "Inka water management and the symbolic dimensions of display fountains." *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59–60 (2011): 22–38.

De la Cadena, Marisol. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth, and Tatiana Flores. "Submerged Bodies: The Tidalectic of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 163–186.

Depetris Chauvin, Irene. "Memories in the Present: Affect and Spectrality in Contemporary Aquatic Imaginaries." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 144–159.

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

De Wolff, Kim, Rina C. Faletti, and Ignacio López Calvo, eds. *Hydrohumanities: Water Discourse and Environmental Futures*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022.

Escobar, Arturo. "Sentipensar con la Tierra: Las luchas territoriales y la dimensión ontológica de las epistemologías del Sur." *Revistas de Antropología Iberoamericana* 11.1 (2016): 11–32.

*Expedição Rio Doce*. https://expedicaoriodoce.fundacaorenova.org/ (18 August 2022).

Fals Borda, Orlando. *Historia doble de la costa, tomo III: Resistencia en el San Jorge*. Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1984.

Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2020.

Fisher, John. "Environmental Aesthetics." *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Ed. Jerrold Levinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 667–678.

Gallón Droste, Elizabeth. "Navegar futuros por ríos de oro." *Latin American Futures* 9.1 (2021): 75–85.

Gandy, Matthew. *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014.

Gaard, Greta. *Critical Ecofeminism*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019.

Gómez, Liliana. "Acts of Remaining: Liquid Ecologies and Memory Work in Contemporary Art Interventions." In *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Ed. by L. Gómez and L. Blackmore. Routledge, New York, 2020. 35–53.

Gómez-Barris, Macarena. *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

González-Ayala, Sofía N., and Alejandro Camargo. "Voices of Water and Violence: Exhibition Making and the Blue Humanities for Transitional Justice." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 64.1 (2021): 183–204.

Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think: An Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

"La naturaleza herida por la violencia." *Comisión de la Verdad*. https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/impactos-afrontamientos-y-resistencias/la-naturaleza-herida-por-la-violencia (23 August 2022).

LaBelle, Brandon. "Towards Acoustic Justice." *Law Text Culture* 24 (2020): 550–572.
Limón Olvera, Silvia. "Entidades sagradas y agua en la antigua religión andina." *Latinoamérica. Revista de estudios Latinoamericanos* 43 (2006): 85–111.
Manthorne, Katherine, ed. *Traveler Artists: Landscapes of Latin America from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*. New York: Fundación Cisneros, 2015.
Merchant, Paul. "Cecilia Vicuña's Liquid Indigeneity." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 187–204.
Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *The Right to Look*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
Moñivas, Esther. "Water, Women and Action Art in Latin America: Materializing Ecofeminist Epistemologies." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 127–143.
Moore, Jason W. "The Rise of Cheap Nature." *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*. Ed. Jason Moore. Oakland: PM Press/Kairos, 2016. 78–115.
More, Anna. "Necroeconomics, Originary Accumulation, and Racial Capitalism in the Early Iberian Slave Trade." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19.2 (2019): 75–100.
Neimanis, Astrid. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
Nemser, Daniel. *Infrastructures of Race: Concentration and Biopolitics in Colonial Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017.
Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.
Nye, David. *The Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
Ou, Cecilia. "Regina José Galindo: Ríos de Gente, produced by Maiz de vida, for the festival Libertad para el Agua, various locations including Monte Olivo, Comunidad Nuevo Montecristo, Lanquín and San Juan Chamelco, Guatemala, April 15, 2021." *The Senses and Society* 17.1 (2022): 149–152.
Pettinaroli, Elizabeth, and Ana María Mutis. "Introduction: Troubled Waters: Rivers in Latin American Imagination." *Hispanic Issues On Line* 12 (2013): 1–18.
Pinilla Bahamón, Andrea Marcela. "Alabaos y conflicto armado en el Chocó: noticias de supervivencia y reinvención." *Revista Encuentros* 15.3 (2017): 152–169.
Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* (1991): 33–40.
——. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 2008.
Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Collection, 2004.
Redes – Restauración Ecológica y Desarrollo. https://www.redesmx.org/ (18 August 2022).
*Rio de lama*. Dir. Tadeu Jungle. Brazil, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zQZqqSkJq0 (25 February 2022).
Ríos to Rivers. https://www.riostorivers.org/ (18 August 2022).
Rivera Cusiquanqui, Silvia. *Sociología de la imagen: Miradas ch'ixi desde la historia andina*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015.
Roca, José. "Abel Rodríguez." *documenta14: Daybook*. Eds. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk. New York: Prestel, 2017.
Rodríguez Gallo, Lorena. "Permanencias y transformaciones: el territorio muisca en la Sabana de Bogotá en la segunda mitad del siglo XVI." *ACHSC* 48.2 (2021): 363–398.
Rojas Rabiela, Teresa, José Luis Martínez Ruiz, and Daniel Murillo Licea. *Cultura hídrica y simbolismo mesoamericano del agua en el México prehispánico*. Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Tecnología del Agua; Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2009.
Santos Junqueira Creado, Eliana, and Stefan Helmreich. "A wave of mud: the travel of toxic water, from Bento Rodrigues to the Brazilian Atlantic." *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros* 69 (2018): 33–51.

Sempris, Emilio. "Climate Change and Freshwater in Latin America and the Caribbean." *UN Chronicle* 46.4 (2012): 36–38. https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/climate-change-and-freshwater-latin-america-and-caribbean (25 February 2022).

Serra, Cristina. *Tragédia em Mariana: a história do maior desastre ambiental do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2018.

Shade, Lindsay. "Sustainable Development or Sacrifice Zone? Politics Below the Surface in Post-Liberal Ecuador." *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2.4 (2015): 775–784.

"Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe talks about his works." *Colección Cisneros*, 28 July 2020. https://www.coleccioncisneros.org/editorial/featured/sheroanawe-hakihiiwe-talks-about-his-works (25 February 2022).

Tarver, Gina. "'The Roar of the River Grows Ever Louder': Polluted Waters in Colombian Eco-Art, From Alicia Barney to Clemencia Echeverri." *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. Eds. Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. London: Routledge, 2020. 89–105.

UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme. *Water and Climate Change 2020*. Paris: UNESCO, 2020.

Vásquez, Leonel. Personal correspondence with the author, 7 September 2022.

White, Richard. *Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.