

'Submerged Perspectives': Ecocriticism in Central America

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Mathilde Damoiseil, dir. *When Banana Ruled*, 2017.

Categories / Methodology:

As a product of my SURE summer research, I split my work into the following six categories:

1. Colonization / Coloniality
2. Extractivism
3. Deforestation
4. The Panama Canal
5. Preservation / Conservation
6. Post Apocalypse / Speculative Landscapes

The categories I selected and organized this research around provide a unique and non-chronological way to explore the concept of 'ecocriticism'— and its various iterations— through a variety of themes specific to Central America. The categories themselves, inspired by Gisella Heffes' *tres tropos medioambientales*— destruction, sustainability, and preservation— became a useful way in which to think through ecological considerations, considerations that bridge time and space to focus on theme and issue. It is hard to do any kind of decolonial work through a Western academic space, but small things— like organizing my work categorically and non-chronologically— begin to deconstruct a typical research program.



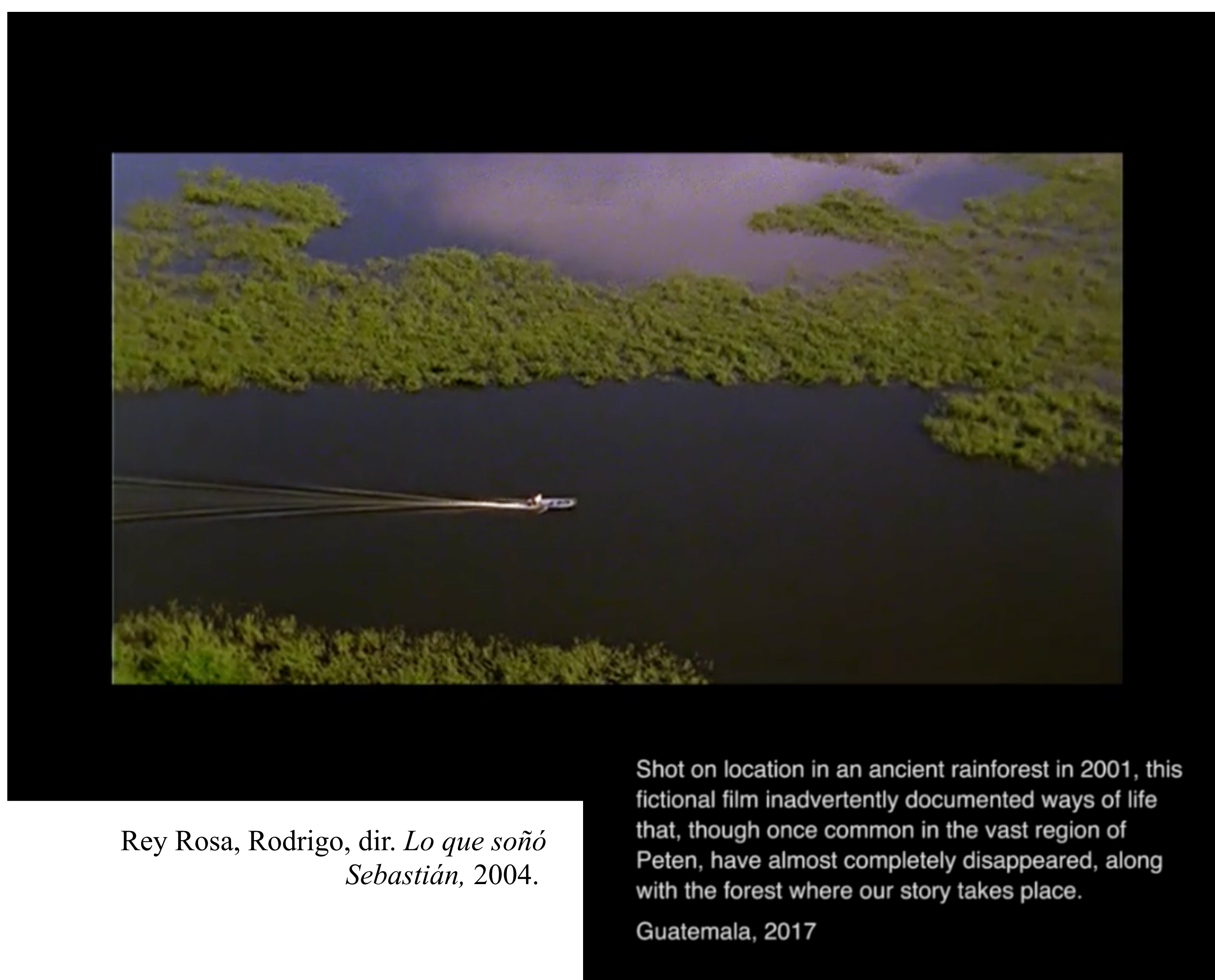
Victoria Cabezas "Sin título (Untitled)" 1973.

Research Questions:

Jennifer French defines the term 'ecocriticism' simply as "a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." It is important to note the word 'study' in this definition: the 'criticism' aspect of ecocriticism refers to the study of a particular theme— in this case, the environment— as it appears in literature. At its core then, ecocriticism is simply a criticism with an ecological tilt. However, this term quickly becomes complicated in a pluricultural, multinational context. The word itself is a contentious topic when applied to Latin American, but especially Central American works. After all, does the term ecocriticism even apply when it makes a particular distinction concerning the environment, when for many Indigenous and Black cultures no such distinction exists? Can it apply even as its application in Central America looks vastly different from traditional Western— but more specifically U.S. and British— canonical ecocritical texts?

Submerged Perspectives:

My project makes use of Macarena Gómez-Barris's term 'submerged perspective,' a perspective seminal to the way I approached my analysis: it allows me to 'dive through the muck' and sift through the impacts of colonization and coloniality in order to see what lies "within, beneath, or below." In other words, a submerged perspective is a way of approaching analysis that can "pierce through the entanglements of power to differently organize the meanings of social & political life" and ultimately "challenge obliteration." It's important to note that it is rare for a text or work to be a perfect example of a submerged perspective; some pieces can be submerged in some ways and still very colonial in others. It can therefore be possible to see a text for more than its colonial— or colonized— context: my own analysis seeks to pierce through these and other entanglements and focus on what a text can offer us, once all of its external layers are unraveled. Overall, in this analysis, I want to explore these peripheral spaces, the "the invisible, the inanimate, and the nonhuman forms that creatively reside as afterlives of the colonial encounter," even if such forms and spaces occur only briefly in a work that is otherwise colonial.



Galindo, Regina José. "Ríos de gente" (performance project) 2021.