

Ancestralism, Memory, and Collective Healing: Contemporary Approaches to Ritualistic Cinema (Excerpted from “Cinema & Ritual: Decolonial Feminist Approaches to Image-Making in the Americas and the Caribbean”)

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“For me, ritual is a symbolic action,” reflects Barbara McCullough in her 1981 film *Shopping Bag Spirits and Freeway Fetishes: Reflections on Ritual Space*, “that I’ve dealt with in terms of my own internal state, to help release myself and move from one space and time to another.” McCullough, who emerged during the L.A. Rebellion filmmaker movement of the 1970s, a group of black filmmakers challenging dominant Hollywood approaches to image-making at UCLA’s film school, following the legacy of Third Cinema filmmaking in Latin America — a revolutionary cinema movement that emerged in the late 1960s, viewing the “camera as a weapon” and its people as guerilla units, opposing “auteur” and “Hollywood” filmmaking styles (Solanas and Getino 231) — opens dialogue with black Los Angeles-based artists — including, David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, and Betye Saar — about the role of ritual in black life and creative practice. She discusses the ways in which ritual is often inseparable from art practices in various African societies and spiritual practices. Yet, as musician Kenneth Severin reflects in the film, “It’s only in western society that the artist deals with this need for ritual, whereas in other cultures...it’s expressed in a more direct way, it’s expressed religiously.” Ritual has been “desacralized” in western society, Severin argues, where the artist bears the burden of communicating extraordinary insights as if they were taking the role of a shaman or other spiritual figure.

Severin's words are resonant to consider within the context of the enduring legacies of colonization, captivity, dispossession, and displacement in the west. In "Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo," Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Margarite Fernandez Olmos define ritual as a process that "dramatizes myth and promotes the magic that responds to life problems" (Fernandez Olmos et al., 13). As European colonialism enacts violence on indigenous land and people in the name of modernity, the role of art and ritual has continuously been exalted to bring meaning to existential query. For example, the fact that Haiti's revolution in 1791, culminating in the first free black republic of the Americas, began as a Vodou ceremony is one that is all too often erased. Within various Afro-diasporic and indigenous ancestral practices, ritual takes the form of prayer, dance, music, and storytelling. Experienced in an embodied and visceral way, ritual honors ancestral ways of knowing that defy western paradigms.

As McCullough discusses in an interview,¹ exploring ritual in her films allows her to reflect on the ways in which many people in the west have lost their connection to their ancestral past. Fusing film technology with ancestral ritual objects rooted in nature attempts to create a space to navigate this disconnection. Cinema, as a medium, creates a link between past, present, and future tenses. It serves as a vessel for reflection, documentation, activation, and archiving that can at once connect ancestral tradition with contemporary technology. The use of ritual in cinema offers a space for contemplating alternative narrative structures, visual languages, and film culture. Ritualistic cinema may refer to the representation of ritual in the actual produced image, the relational process of making a film, or the activation of ancestral and cultural ritual objects, or a combination of all. There are no firm guidelines but rather the intention of ritual that drives the process of filmmaking or storytelling.

¹The full interview with Monona Wali can be access here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wx0eRt-vOF8>

This essay is inspired by McCollough and many others who have centered ritual in their filmmaking practice. Ritualistic cinema has been investigated at length by ethnographic filmmakers such as Jean Rouch, and filmmakers emerging from the New American Cinema Group such as Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Jonas Mekas, and Chick Strand, and continue to inspire many artists and filmmakers today. Contemporary works by Almudena Escobar López Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, Fox Maxy, Shahkeem and Tanika Williams, Jess X. Snow, Fatimah Asghar, Aqua River Moon, Olinda Yawar Tupinambá, and Renata Flores featured in this essay offer decolonial feminist visual languages through the moving image by centering ritual as a methodological framework. Through the invocation of ritual objects and mythology, ancestral knowledge passed through oral storytelling, song and music, soul retrieval and surrealism, prayer, and manifesto, these expressions of ritualistic image-making offer intuitive, non-linear, and affect-based ways of relating to the world, a counter gesture to linear, cis-masculinist, extractive western filmmaking practices. “Ritual is anything that makes you operate outside of yourself,” says Shahkeem Williams. It invites us to be in relation to the mysterious workings of life around us. It is a call to contemplate our relationship to the place, both physical and metaphorical, in which we find ourselves.

Ancestralidad y trance: Trance Aesthetics and Shamanic Materialism in the Films of Colectivo Los Ingrávidos

In 2021, Tehuacán-based Colectivo Los Ingrávidos and independent curator, archivist, and researcher Almudena Escobar López launched the online curatorial project *Ancestralidad y trance*, exploring experimental nonfiction films and texts that approach filmmaking as a

ritualistic practice. Drawing from the legacy of American Avant-Garde filmmakers, the project operates within the conceptual frameworks of “Trance Aesthetics” and “Shamanic Materialism” to challenge the totalizing view of western cinema, and instead invite the fragments, loops, and ruptures that give way to other ways of producing knowledge. Structured within a pictographic image of the Aztec Sun stone, the project makes use of the archeological ritual object to connect past and present temporalities of ongoing violence and colonization. Of the several films featured by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos is their four-part 2017 film *The Sun Quartet*, which tells the story of the 43 disappeared students from the rural school of Ayotzinapa in 2014. The film includes sporadic protest footage depicting banners demanding justice for political prisoners and recorded speeches by mothers of the disappeared students, scored by frenetic jazz music beats. Connecting this event to other instances of state violence such as the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre and the Mexican War on Drugs, the film highlights the lack of accountability by then-President Enrique Peña Nieto’s government to address the student disappearances as a state crime. The latter part of the series offers a multilingual eulogy for the disappeared, which hauntingly states, “*whoever reads this must know that the dead are far from gone and have not disappeared.*”

Another referenced work is the 2017 film *Coyolxauhqui* (see figure 1), named after the Aztec moon goddess who was dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli, which connects this ancestral mythology to the present realities of femicide within rural Mexico, as well as the ecological devastations of present-day neoliberalism and tourism industries. Nahuatl cosmology sustains the notion of gender duality, with an emphasis on militaristic ideology and the suppression of the feminine (Taylor 91), reflected in this mythology. The film weaves together kaleidoscopic images of spiky *nopales*, crosscut with haunting images of discarded bones, heeled shoes, and underwear on the ground. No people or bodies are shown in the film, but rather the

grim reality of their absence and fragmented belongings. In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor writes:

It is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied. The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems. Gender impacts how these bodies participate, as does ethnicity. The techniques of transmission vary from group to group. The mental frameworks — which include images, stories, and behaviors — constitute a specific archive and repertoire (Taylor 86).

Through their films, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos offers a nuanced way to engage with fraught histories, mythologies, and present circumstances. Taylor's discussion of cultural memory and archive is instructive to consider alongside films such as *The Sun Quartet* and *Coyolxauhqui*, which perform an important historiography of Mexican culture. They are discerning of the images reproduced in their films — particularly of working-class indigenous and mestiza women — which offer meaningful context without sensationalizing the affective experience of the mothers of disappeared students or the victims of femicide.

Contrary to the western logic of image-making which prioritizes linear storytelling, totality, and sensationalized affective response, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos entrusts viewers to derive meaning through an intuitive sense-based process. Within the aesthetics of “Shamanic Materialism,” they say:

The relationship between Thought and Being is “spiral”, there is a tissue there but any attempt to totalize Being and Thought is impossible...rather [it] proceeds through fragments, ruptures, loops, clusters, drifts, ascents, descents, series, folds, that is, it breaks the solipsistic recursion of both thought and being. The spiral is both avant-garde and

neo-baroque, a shamanic vortex, there are superstitious twists, porous monadology, it is labyrinthine, a baroque trance, Mesoamerican spell: this is what we call the Aesthetics of Trance.

Colectivo Los Ingrávidos weaves a connection between mind and body through their lively soundscapes and prismatic images, a process that elicits nuanced responses from viewers. It is at once empirical and evidential while maintaining the mystery of spiritual dance. Organized intuitively and in observation of indigenous knowledge systems, *Ancestralidad y trance* is an invitation to consider the association between works in their spiritual, historical, and material qualities. Taylor says “Memory is embodied and sensual, that is, conjured through the senses, it links the deeply private with social, even official, practices” (Taylor 82). As López describes, the use of ritualistic objects in the films, such as the stones, awakens the elements inscribed within the objects themselves using the camera as a form of “slow archeology.” It brings together historical moments and ancestral knowledge as part of a “long ritual” that is experienced sensorily by viewers.

Fox Maxy’s Gush (2022) & The Rituals of Spectatorship

Similarly employing elements of free-association, found footage, and personal archive is Fox Maxy’s 2022 experimental film *Gush* (see figure 2), which explores themes of healing the impact of sexual violence and experiencing joy through community and land. As with other of Maxy’s films, *Gush* flows in a stream of consciousness, playfully irreverent of genre and temporality. Maxy, Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians and Payómkawichum, is often personable and vulnerable in the film, while challenging reductive representational tropes and

sharing on her own terms. One sequence features an archival excerpt from *The Tyra Banks Show* in which Tyra Banks confronts Naomi Campbell, both of whom have been known to have a tense relationship, with invasive questioning about past trauma. Campbell ongoingly deflects Banks's questions, maintaining a sense of privacy amid the public broadcast, which is playfully layered over by an animated boxing skeleton graphic. Toggling between nature scenes to a staged interview featuring Maxy reflexively saying "*the weird thing of being a public figure is that everything is out there for others to consume,*" her image-making is sharply perceptive while not taking itself all too seriously. The kaleidoscopic aesthetic of the film invites audiences to submit to a trance-like experience of viewing, where it is interactive rather than passive, eliciting emotional nuance and embodied sensation. Maxy, who regularly films slice-of-life moments on her phone, democratizes the process of filmmaking as something that everyone has access to, not just a select few. Filming for her is not only a creative practice but gestures towards rituals of spectatorship. During a Halloween event at MoMA last Fall², described as "an evening of haunting and healing" Maxy presented a work-in-progress screening of *Gush* followed by a performance in which the audience was simultaneously being filmed. Much like her films, the event invited viewers to locate themselves within the work and co-create a space of spectatorship. Considering the fraught relationship that black and indigenous people have with the camera as a colonial tool of surveillance and exploitation, it is interesting to challenge the traditional passive viewership that contemporary cinema-viewing has become. Diana Taylor suggests that ethnography is not only a documentation of performance but is a performance in and of itself. She writes:

"Much performance, in a sense, has something in common with the raw material of ethnography, stemming from social behaviors, rituals, and dramas that ethnographers

² <https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/8288>

make their focus. Performance, too, explores the use and significance of gesture, movement, and body language to make sense of the world. Twentieth-century artists have actively tried to reconnect to ritual action, as evident in the writing and work by major practitioners such as Artaud, Grotowski, and Barba. However, performance is not just a doing, a form of carrying through. Like ethnography, it has also served as an instrument of cultural analysis, though the society under examination has tended to be the artist's own, rather than the Other's" (Taylor 77).

Maxy's filmmaking and screening event, at once personal and evasive, imbues meaning into mundane moments through a performative affect. Her gesture to film the audience turns the camera back on viewers, raising crucial questions about spectatorship, passive consumption, and parasocial relationships that audiences develop with on-screen characters. It is a reminder that spectatorship is never an impartial process, but one that highlights subjective perspectives and experiences. "It's like who wants to be sensory, and then who's not down...to surrender their frequency as the only frequency that exists," says Maxy. "The ritual of watching a movie asks the viewer to sit back and NOT KNOW what's going to happen next." Given the culture of spectacle, immediacy, and limited attention span fomented by contemporary social media, Maxy's filmmaking approach is self-reflexive of these trends while also shifting the roles of spectatorship and power within them. These rituals of spectatorship both within Maxy's films and the live screening event offer new ways of relating to film as a medium that is constantly evolving.

Healing through Oral Tradition in Shahkeem and Tanika Williams's Sanctuary (2020)

Navigating a careful balance between intimacy and anonymity is something filmmakers Tanika Williams and Shahkeem Williams also prioritize in their creative practice. Their 2021 experimental short documentary *Sanctuary* (see figure 3) touches upon experiences of African-Caribbean mothers and daughters navigating family separation as a result of immigrating to the United States. Structured in two parts by way of close-up shots and voiceovers, recorded anonymously in a black room out of protection for the film participants, the film serves as an intimate confessional space for mothers and daughters to openly share their feelings. Filmed in the filmmakers' home garden in Brooklyn, the film features various Caribbean plants and herbs transplanted to colder weather, mirroring the psychic reality of the women's stories. The film features an archival interview with Linda Villarosa, in which she discusses the systemic inequities causing health disparities for black immigrant mothers and their babies in the United States. Considering that black Caribbean immigrant women, primarily from Haiti and Jamaica³, make up the largest population of black immigrants in the U.S., many of whom are employed in the care industry, the film is sensitive to the commonality of such experiences of separation between mothers and daughters without sensationalizing it. In her essay, "Post-Third-Worldist culture: Gender, nation, and the cinema," Ella Shohat discusses the patronizing attitudes that emerged towards Third World feminist filmmakers in the late 1960s, which often subordinated the role of women in revolutionary struggle to domestic spaces. Third-Worldist culture gave way to feminism that was intricately tied to analyses about the nation, community, and culture. As a result, "it is necessary to contextualize [Third-Worldist] feminist work in national/racial discourses locally and globally inscribed within multiple oppressions and resistances" (Shohat 54). The works emerging by Third Cinema feminist

³ See recent study by Pew Research Center:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/01/27/key-findings-about-black-immigrants-in-the-u-s/>

filmmakers, including Sara Gómez's *De Cierta* and Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga*, reflected political undertones through images of everyday mundane settings. They depicted women who were developing a revolutionary political consciousness, tied to their lived experiences regarding race, class, and gender. The aesthetics deployed by Third-Worldist feminist filmmakers could be described as "fragmented" and "dislocated," reflecting affective understandings of postcolonial cultural displacement, dispossession, and unbelonging: "Many of the films explore the complex identities generated by exile — from one's own geography, from one's own history, from one's own body — within innovative narrative strategies" (Shohat 62). These narrative strategies included, but were not limited to, diary-style narrative, personal narratives, use of archival material, and non-linear temporality. Within diasporic communities in the Global North, these films also often called into question the notion of "dislocated identities" in a capitalist, globalized world. This differed from Hollywood filmmaking practices, which commonly employed three-act structure storytelling, heroic epics, and linear chronology.

Shohat's discussion of Third-Worldist feminist filmmakers offers insight into the legacy of filmmaking taken on by Williams. Their focus on black migrant motherhood offers nuance, intimacy, and levity to a topic that is all-too-often sensationalized within the media. Speaking on her fraught relationship with her mother, one of the interviewed women in *Sanctuary* said this relational circumstance of separation due to migration "*allowed [her] to become the person who could help people find words for their own experience.*" Reflecting on her own estrangement from her mother in Jamaica at a young age, filmmaker Tanika Williams describes finding comfort in the storytelling practices normalized by her grandmother as a way of feeling rooted in her lineage and environment. The repetitive act of oral storytelling and walking meditations within the garden offer spaciousness to the heavy topic addressed in the film. Williams, who is

also a performance artist, says that ritual is a way of ordering the senses through acts of repetition, which she describes through the metaphor of nesting and mothering in a recent essay⁴. The process of storytelling, active listening, and sharing moments of silence with the interviewed women in the film allowed for new information to emerge over time in a way that felt mindful of everyone involved. “Time and presence is what makes a good story,” remarks Shahkeem Williams.

Creating Ceremony through the Moving Image in Jess X. Snow’s After Earth (2017) and Fatimah Asghar’s Retrieval (2023)

Creating spaces for intentional connection and healing is something filmmakers Jess X. Snow and Fatimah Asghar also center in their artistic practice. Snow’s 2017 experimental short documentary film *After Earth* (see figure 4), made in collaboration with trans Chinese-American poet and playwright from Hawaii, Kit Yan, offers portraits of four trans and queer artists who fight to preserve the volcanoes, oceans, land, and air of their ancestral homelands in Hawaii, the Philippines, China, and indigenous Turtle Island, respectively, for current and future generations who are increasingly threatened by climate crisis. Through song, storytelling, and slow sweeping imagery of lands connected by the Pacific Ocean, the film serves as its own ceremony weaving together the cultural and artistic practices of each artist in their desire for collective healing. Professor Heidi Amin-Hong describes the film as having “decolonial femme aesthetics” through its foregrounding of “indigenous genealogical relationships to land, sea, and history as crucial to dreams of decolonial love and abundance” (Hong). The film teaches the importance of forming kinship with the land and the environment to form kinship with others. “*We come from mothers*

⁴ The full essay can be found here: <https://adjacent-ecoscope.itp.io/Nesting-A-Ritual-for-Mothers>

who learn to pray in the water. When you sing to this ocean, our ghosts will sing back,” recites poet Isabella Borgeson, drawing a connection between ancestralism, motherhood, and the environmental devastation of the 2013 Haiyan typhoon. “*How can I feel at home in this body when my body is not at home in this world?*” asks Kit Yan, reflecting the corporeal and existential displacement experienced by them and their migrant family. Yan reflects on their relationship with their mother Wan Ping Oshiro, also featured in the film, who modeled a loving relation to the land and community from a young age, and one they aim to continue to carry forth. “*In order to have food, you need to have seeds/ In order to have seeds, you need to have history*” remarks Oshiro. Yan and their mother reflect the tradition of cultural and agricultural preservation passed down from generation to generation in their family, despite their context of migration and living on occupied indigenous land. “Memories and survival strategies are transmitted from one generation to another through performative practices that include (among other things) ritual, bodily, and linguistic practices. These practices have histories.” (Taylor 108)

Asghar also engages personal storytelling and aesthetic practices in her work. Asghar, who is also a poet, came to develop her 2023 debut narrative short film *Retrieval* (see figure 5) as a way to process and heal from the lingering trauma of sexual assault experienced in her early twenties. *Retrieval*, whose cinematography is credited to Snow, offers a lyrical exploration of healing in the aftermath of sexual trauma, rooted in the concept of soul retrieval, or the process of healing parts of oneself that have been fragmented due to traumatic events. It fuses surrealism, spirituality, and memory as a portal for healing ruptured temporalities. In the film, a young woman in a red *saree*, performed by Asghar, arrives on horseback to a beach at dusk, finds an abandoned bracelet on a tree, and stumbles upon familiar city scenes in which people have been frozen in time. Looking slightly puzzled by all that she witnesses, she arrives at an apartment

where she encounters a scene of assault between a young brown woman, also performed by Asghar, and an older cisgendered white man. Asghar takes the young woman's hand into hers, causing her to awaken and the walls of the apartment to rupture. Back at the beach shore at dawn, the two women sit side by side. "*How long was I there for?*" asks the younger woman, to which the older Asghar responds, "*years.*" Asghar hints at the nonlinear and circular process of healing from severe trauma in the body and spirit. While a person may be functional in the aftermath of trauma, the lingering energies of the impact don't necessarily dissolve so easily or swiftly. Composed of a rich color palette, engaging deep blue hues and warm lighting, the film serves as a love letter to Asghar's younger self and other survivors of sexual violence.

At an event co-hosted in the Fall 2022 by Mil Mundos Books and Mayday Space in Brooklyn, NY, "an alternate future in the sky"⁵, Snow brought together close collaborating artists and friends for a space of incubation to collectively process the grief and anxiety of living through the ongoing effects of a global pandemic and environmental devastation. Their care-centered approach to sharing space feels refreshing amid film industry gatherings that often feel hyper-focused on growing social capital at the expense of marginalized filmmakers. "Spectatorship, voyeurism, surveillance, forced performance of good citizenship, and technology oftentimes doesn't care for the needs of its viewers or subjects and feel like the opposite of embodied presence," says Snow. "Whereas meditative cinema, long takes, reminiscent of a non-western gaze, helps us become present, witness the aching beauty of the land, and remember what it feels like to have an open heart." Snow, whose film shoots are often accompanied by embodiment practices such as meditation, breathwork, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and live music, is intentional in the way they hold space and bring people together. The focus on the body, senses, and emotion feels antithetical to the multi-hour film shoot days spent fretting about

⁵ <https://www.milmundosbooks.com/an-alternate-future-in-the-sky>

money and time. Embodiment stands in opposition to colonial control and the legacies of captivity, dispossession, and colonization on indigenous turtle island. It is this return to the sensational experience of the body, and not just the abstraction of the mind, that offers a decolonial approach to image-making and encourages a safe space for participants to express freely on camera, much like Williams' work. This approach to cinema, both in the process of making and viewing, becomes a healing meditative ritual itself. Similarly, Asghar describes her intention for having the film set serve as a ceremony for herself and everyone involved, including the support of intimacy coordinator Alexandra Tydings who ensured physical safety for all the actors involved. Asghar draws from her Muslim faith to inform her understanding of ritual, ceremony, and healing. She notes, "As I've grown in my spiritual practice, I've closely related ritual with the idea of ceremony; how to slow down, how to make ceremony every day, how to imbue intention and spirit into the moments that make up life."

The Digital Body in Aqua River Moon's Black as Resistance/ Trans as Transcendent (2020) & Olinda Yawar Tupinambá's Equilibrio (2021)

Similarly contending with self-portraiture and nature aesthetics is Aqua River Moon's 2023 film *Black as Resistance/ Trans as Transcendent - a prayer & a love note for my siblings, lovers & kin* (see figure 6) and Olinda Yawar Tupinambá's 2021 short film *Equilibrio* (see figure 7). In their film, Moon, who hails from Ayiti, offers a one-minute digital prayer and ritual for black trans liberation. Relying on self-portraiture and superimposed nature shots, the film is reflective of contemporary decolonial queer aesthetics that create alternative visual languages. We witness Moon sitting in front of an altar, with their back facing the camera, as they hold an orange rose and blade in either hand, reflective of militant feminine aesthetics. River water,

ocean water, and palm trees appear in smaller frames throughout the film. Moon narrates the video with a self-described spell, prayer, and love note, in which they reflect, *“you will never be selfish for watering your own garden/ For there is no revolution without us.”* Similar to Asghar, Moon cites their trans black body as a site of reflection and liberation on both an individual and collective level. Engaging nature aesthetics and feeling-based storytelling reflects a feminist decolonial approach to their filmmaking: *“Sitting with the self is climate resistance/ That which is meant for us will never miss us.”* This line suggests that self-liberation goes hand in hand with collective liberation. It is an approach that is perceptive, intuitive, and emotion-based rather than one rooted in linear, action-based, prescriptive storytelling. “Ritual is what grounds me and connects me to time with intention,” says Moon. “It is a doorway, a portal and a reclamation of time in a world where time is always being robbed of us by capitalism and survival.”

Olinda Yawar Tupinambá’s *Equilibrio* is a short experimental documentary that serves as a cautionary tale about global environmental devastation. Narrated by the entity Kaapora, a forest spirit known to the indigenous Caramuru-Paraguaçu territories in Bahia, Brazil, the film takes a more oppositional stance to its audience. Performed by Tupinambá, who is Caramuru, Kaapora appears nude in front of a green-screen rainforest environment, covered in a natural red pigment dye. *“You use my image in fairy tales for children and this is because you are not even able to respect your children, you treat them as incomplete beings incapable of understanding the world, who must be tutored by your civilization until they become insensitive and arrogant adults that you are,”* says Kaapora. This self-reflexive statement contends with the legacies of colonial imagery that render indigenous people as “primitive” and “barbaric.” Tupinambá’s direct gaze into the camera and oppositional messaging to viewers perhaps serves as a form of refusal to be categorized within colonial imaginary and materiality. Contending with colonial thought that

seeks to codify bodies through labor exploitation along racial and gender lines, the film offers a different way of relating to these all-too-common images. Invoking the spirit of Kaapora, the film fuses both cultural myth and political critique as a call to action to viewers who are complicit within the “predatory civilization.” Images of increasing carbon emissions, forest fires, polluted oceans, and rivers circulate throughout the rest of the film. The film forms part of a larger project led by the Meli Network dedicated to agricultural restoration within these ancestral homelands, which, up until 2012, were invaded by farmers who introduced mono-crop agriculture and other forms of environmental devastation on the land. By replanting native plants to the area, such as *jenipapo*, banana, and *jatobá*, and prioritizing beekeeping, the project has inspired regrowth in the land and sustainability practices for the local community⁶.

I think of Moon and Tupinambá’s films alongside artist and scholar Tiara Roxanne’s essay “Digital Colonization: Decoding the Body,” which grapples with the risks and limitations of artificial intelligence and the ways in which digital spaces perpetuate colonization and surveillance on indigenous people. Roxanne discusses the body as both a physical and spatial term; for indigenous people, spatiality is “both territorial and historical” (Roxanne). Within our contemporary reality of border imperialism, forced migration, and geopolitical displacement by settler colonial and imperial states, indigenous people are distanced from their territories, further boxed into new geographical contexts, and erased from their identities, cultures, and histories. Postcolonial theory raises a complex paradigm that places indigenous bodies in a “constant state of colonization” (Roxanne). Within digital spaces, Roxanne suggests that the indigenous body ceases to be flesh and is absorbed as data, becoming digital. Roxanne wonders whether this process of reading a body beyond flesh, sensation, and identity can potentially offer a different

⁶ More information about the project can be found here:
<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/10/brazils-indigenous-communities-turn-to-native-beekeeping-to-recover-nature/>

kind of subjectivity. In a time when social media and digital marketing campaigns commonly use images of black, indigenous, people of color to sell products and build social capital, both Moon and Tupinambá's engagement with self-portraiture may be seen as a way of reclaiming space within the digital realm on their own terms. The visual register of their films depicts nearly nude black and brown feminine bodies, vulnerable to objectification. Yet, the audio channels of either film offer oppositional stances of resistance and calls for accountability from viewers. There is a dialectical tension between the image and sound of either films, thereby creating new spaces of meaning and connection in the process of image-making. Their cinematic offerings, rooted in ritual and ancestral myth, disrupt normative readings of nude indigenous feminine bodies, and instead form new meanings through voice. Moon and Tupinambá's voices are disembodied and out of sync from their bodies represented in the film, perhaps reflecting the disassociation and fragmentation from selfhood, experienced by colonized people. It also speaks to the time in which both films were made, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many people worldwide to stay at home and engage with one another exclusively from behind screens. Desktop cinema aesthetics, much like the ones seen in Maxy's film, have been employed as a workaround to the alienated reality experienced by many people. The films have a more muted tone, while still offering space for deep reflection and transformation.

Quechua Futurism in Renata Flores's "Akakaw" (2023)

Quechua-Peruvian rapper Renata Flores's 2023 single "Akakaw" comes to life through her recent music video (see figure 8), featuring notable Peruvian cumbia band Los Mirlos. Flores, who raps in Quechua and Spanish, offers this music video as a tribute to her recent travels

to the Murui Buue community, in which she met the last surviving speaker of the Taushiro language. In the music video, Flores encounters a large floating metallic cube amid a grassy Andean mountain valley. As she approaches it, two masked figures holding large staffs emerge from behind it. A bright light engulfs Flores, paving the way to a portal entrance in which she can hear the distant voice of Amadeo, the last surviving Taushiro speaker. Flores is then transported to a jungle setting in which she initiates the melody of her song. “*The jungle is about to burn what is depleting it / the water is about to burn what is depleting it,*” raps Flores. “*We are humans, oxygen is what we need.*” Fusing folkloric cumbia, an Afro-Indigenous music genre of the Andean region, as well as contemporary reggaeton beats, with Afro-Caribbean roots, Flores reflects the creolization process of culture within many Quechua communities in Latin America and the diaspora. Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s concept of “transculturation” is instructive here to analyze how “colonization had initiated...a creative, ongoing process of appropriation, revision, and survival leading to the mutual transformation of two or more pre-existing cultures into a new one” (Fernandez Olmos et al., 3). While upbeat and celebratory, Flores, like Tupinambá, uses discernment around representing the ancestral territories they inhabit. The futurist aesthetics in the film serve as a temporal link between past, present, and future histories of the land. The fusion of musical styles reflected within Flores’s music, as well as both traditional indigenous and futuristic aesthetics depicted within the music video, reflects the creolization process experienced by young Quechua communities in South America and the diaspora. This process of creolization refers to the blending of beliefs and practices that “adapt to new understandings of class, race, gender, power, labor, and sexuality” (Fernandez Olmos et al., 4). It is not a neutral process, as it forces us to “confront issues of power, race, and history” (Fernandez Olmos et al.8). As a result, Flores’s music video may be seen as a gesture towards

developing a decolonial relation to oneself and their environment. It is self-reflexive of Flores's social positionality and the ways it relates to the reggaeton music industry, which all-too-often abstracts the genre from its Afro-diasporic and indigenous roots.

Conclusion

In a time when cinematic practice is often confined to commercial, prescriptive, and linear ways of making, these ritualistic works serve as much-needed audiovisual disruptions asking us to perceive deeply with them, and by extension ourselves and each other. The contemporary film works referenced in this essay explore the ways in which technology and ritual come together to create decolonial feminist visual languages and liberatory ways of occupying digital space. With a focus on sensation and affect-based ways of relating to the mind and body, these moving-image works recenter the importance of intuitive embodied ritual practices for knowledge production, which is in opposition to the often-dissociative effects of colonial visual cultures. Fernando Ortiz's concept of "transculturation," is instructive here, as well, to consider how traditional Afro-diasporic and indigenous ritual practices, cosmovisions, and spiritualities have been fused with contemporary digital technology to produce nuanced affective experiences. Escobar López, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, and Tupinambá point us toward the use of ritual objects and how they are linked between past, present, and future temporalities. Williams and Flores offer us heartfelt storytelling of those who have come before us. Maxy challenges traditional rituals of spectatorship and prompts us to be mindful of the othering gaze within moving image works. Snow, Asghar, and Moon model the ways in which filmmaking can be used as a balm for healing ruptured temporalities and fragmented selves. While many of these filmmakers and cultural workers cite the role of ritual in their own personal practices, they also

point to the ways in which they are linked to the collective living experience. Ritual becomes the methodological framework from which to reflect, remember, return, act, spiral, and move forward.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. Still from *Coyolxauhqui*. Directed by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, 2016.



Figure 2. Still from *Gush*. Directed by Fox Maxy, 2022.



Figure 3. Still from Sanctuary. Directed by Shahkeem Williams, 2020.



Figure 4. Still from After Earth. Directed by Jess X. Snow, 2018.



Figure 5. Still from Retrieval. Directed by Fatimah Asghar, 2023.



Figure 6. Still from *Black as Resistance/ Trans as Transcendent - a prayer & a love note for my siblings, lovers & kin*, Directed by Aqua River Moon, 2023.



Figure 7. Still from *Equilibrio*, Directed by Olinda Yawar Tupinambá, 2021.



Figure 8. Still from the music video for Renata Flores's song "Akakaw," 2023.

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