

# BECOMING-ANIMAL: NON-HUMAN PERCEPTUAL FORMS AND *DISPOSITIFS* IN CONTEMPORARY IBERO-AMERICAN CINEMA\*

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## INTRODUCTION

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In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, when Gregor Samsa wakes up to find he has turned into a beetle, his first worry is how to put on a shirt with two sleeves when he has so many legs, as he needs to get dressed and go to work. He has the sensibility of a human, but the motor skills of an insect. In his celebrated course in European literature, Nabokov suggested that perhaps Samsa's metamorphosis had somehow been interrupted, that he had ended up stuck in a limbo between human and non-human states. This intermediate space is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari draw on in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005) with their concept of "becoming-animal", a concept that refers not to a human turning into an animal (or vice versa), but to the power of becoming itself, as a space and time for a hybridisation that can open up our perception. Kafka himself posited an in-

verted version of becoming-animal in his short story "A Report to an Academy" (1983), in which an ape tries to convince a group of scientists that he belongs to the human species. In the story, Red Peter describes the hardships of his captivity, and how his acquisition of human language and culture was not a liberation or an achievement but a forced and unnatural learning process to which he submitted only to avoid being condemned to a cage in a zoo. His report aims to remind the scientists that we all share a similar origin, a similar evolutionary condition marked by painful learning experiences. The menacing shadow looming over our perception of this shared limbo—intuited by Kafka from a sinisterly existential human angle—is a psychological drive that has been taken up and radicalised in recent years by various authors, from J. M. Coetzee to Donna Haraway and from John Berger to Octavia Butler. While in Kafka's work the identification of this fuzzy state

of interspecies becoming generated an existential unease in humans, today this apprehension has been transformed, as humans who immerse themselves in this space will expand their sensibility and open their perception up to other creatures, and this contagious condition seems to give rise to a liberating symbiosis.

The concept of becoming-animal proposed by Deleuze and Guattari is echoed in the human being's way of approaching animals through the cinematic apparatus. "No art is imitative", the authors assert in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005: 304). "The painter and musician do not imitate the animal, they become-animal at the same time as the animal becomes what they willed, at the deepest level of their concord with Nature" (2005: 305): pure line, pure colour, sound, speed. To characterise the originality of their concept, Deleuze and Guattari describe the idea of becoming in opposition to imitation:

As we have seen, imitation can be conceived either as a resemblance of terms culminating in an archetype (series), or as a correspondence of relations constituting a symbolic order (structure); but becoming is not reducible to either of these. The concept of mimesis is not only inadequate, it is radically false (2005: 546).

In their emphatic assertion that "becoming is never imitating" (2005: 305), Deleuze and Guattari point to processes of affective transformation that bind species together, such as wasps and orchids connected in a process of becoming that does not involve evolution, filiation, identification or progress. "Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree" (2005: 239) they explain, thereby associating the becoming process with the concept of the rhizomatic condition, a notion that runs throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, which

has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it over-spills [...]. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction [...]. The rhizome pertains to

a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight (2005: 21).

For this reason, they argue that "[t]he orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp", but rather "forms a map" with the wasp in a rhizomatic connection (2005: 12). This particular connection posited by Deleuze and Guattari with their concept of "becoming-animal" is thus closer to an alliance or somatic sensory conjunction (2005: 243). In this respect, the notion of becoming-animal is understood here as an alliance between human artists and non-human animals, who establish an affective conjunction that is realised and expressed in various film scenes. Deleuze and Guattari describe becoming as a "zone of indiscernibility" (2005: 280) where a double deterritorialisation takes place: a zone where the two participants in the encounter mutually change and modify each other. This principle can be identified in certain Ibero-American films released in recent years that focus on the process of becoming-animal. This article analyses different strategies for documenting these *becomings*, with special attention to the issues that these strategies bring to light in productions that attempt to imagine and express this interspecies phenomenon in cinematic language.

This study is positioned at the intersection between these philosophical intuitions and contemporary audiovisual strategies to offer a reading of recent Ibero-American films as spac-

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**DELEUZE AND GUATTARI DESCRIBE BECOMING AS A "ZONE OF INDISCERNIBILITY" WHERE A DOUBLE DETERRITORIALISATION TAKES PLACE: A ZONE WHERE THE TWO PARTICIPANTS IN THE ENCOUNTER MUTUALLY CHANGE AND MODIFY EACH OTHER**

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**THESE FILMS ARE EXPLORED NOT MERELY AS REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ANIMAL, BUT AS EXPERIENCES THAT BRING INTO PLAY A PERCEPTION BEYOND THE HUMAN**

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es for exploring the notion of becoming-animal. These films form part of a globalised trend, based on lines of research on films made in other regions. It is also important to acknowledge studies that have been conducted on the historical representation of animals, which have taken different approaches depending on the region concerned: wildlife films (Bousé, 2000), the avant-garde and surrealist explorations of scientific images of animals by Jean Painlevé (Leo Cahill, 2019), and in the case of Spain, Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente's nature documentaries (Ares-López, 2019). Although this article examines a number of aesthetic trends identifiable in contemporary Ibero-American cinema, it also has the aim of highlighting the urgent need to chart the genealogy of this approach, to which end a preliminary outline is offered here. Of particular interest for this study is how certain cinematic *dispositifs* (ways of framing, viewing, narrating or distributing the presence of animal bodies) create "zones of indiscernibility" where humans and non-humans mutually affect each other. Rather than resolving the tensions of interspecies contact, these zones actually exacerbate them, opening up new possibilities of perception that are disconcerting to the human ego.

As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the objective of becoming-animal is not to imitate the animal but to become with it. This involves a double deterritorialisation that transforms both the human subject and the animal represented. In this article, it is argued that cinema, as a sensory *dispositif*, offers a visual grammar that can capture these overflows. The films analysed here—which deal with a range of Ibero-American contexts—

experiment with ways of depicting the animal that go beyond mere representation to evoke, interrogate and reconfigure it. In particular, this analysis focuses on three key aspects around which the study is organised: non-human filming technologies and visual regimes; the perspectives and overflows of the animal camera; and the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphic realism. These aspects can shed some light on how the dreams of hybridisation—understood as human attempts to understand and often to dominate the other animal—are reproduced or disrupted in contemporary cinema (Segarra, 2025). But they can also reveal the creation of non-domesticating connections in certain films, shifting the logic of control towards other forms of cohabitation, care or de-identification. These films are thus explored not merely as representations of the animal, but as experiences that bring into play a perception beyond the human.

## **I. NON-HUMAN FILMING TECHNOLOGIES AND VISUAL REGIMES**

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The films *Salvaxe, salvaxe* [Wild, Wild] (Emilio Fonseca, 2024), *Reserve* (Gerard Ortin, 2020) and *592 metroz goiti* [Above 592 Metres] (Maddi Barber, 2019) explore different ecosystems of the Iberian Peninsula and its animal wildlife. In some cases they make use of camera trap images or infrared footage to represent forestry research or management work involving species such as wolves and vultures.

Filmmaker Gerard Ortin's short film *Reserve* deals with the disappearance of the Iberian wolf from the Cuadrilla de Añana region of the Basque Country. This species, which once played an essential role as a predator—leaving remains that other animals such as vultures could later feed on—and thus helped maintain a regulated ecosystem, has not been seen in this region for many years. The filmmaker becomes involved in research and management in the area, making



Image 1

and filming a phone call to an American company that produces urine essences to attract wolf packs. This short film also tracks the process of providing food for the vultures in the region, which includes hunting wild boars and distributing carrion.

The opening sequences focus on hunters on the reserve who are getting shooting practice on a hunting ground. The wide shots of the forest use a slow-motion movement to simulate an ethereal presence, which sometimes reveals humans camouflaged among the trees, and which is enhanced by a low-frequency sound design with specific non-human noises. The short film constructs the space of the forest with a night sequence filmed using an infrared camera to show the process of stalking a wild boar. The red-tinged image of the forest at night appears gradually, and in one of the trees is a camouflaged hunter, moving stealthily and aiming a gun. Filmed using infrared technology, the footage of a boar eating off the ground next to an animal-shaped hunting target has the estranging effect of an artificial image (Image 1). Such approaches destabilise animals and technologies, with the aim of “incorporating other non-human entities and positioning them on the same level” (Veloso, 2018: para. 3).

Another example of camera trap images can be found in Maddy Barber’s short film *592 metroz goiti*, which shows a park ranger working with vultures in the vicinity of the Itoiz dam, a devastating construction that has altered the eco-social conditions of the Navarre region to which the filmmaker has dedicated part of her filmography (Cordal, 2024). The film begins by introducing this species living in the mountains and flying over the dam, with the mediation of technology by means of a vignetting

technique that replicates the view through the park ranger’s binoculars, suggesting an embodied camera that is never disassociated from its human position. Another scene shows a vulture being captured in a construction zone, offering a reflection on extraction zones and interspecies contact that necessitate the biopolitical management of animals’ bodies in order to avoid interruptions to economic activity. The park ranger has to relocate the animal, leaving food for its survival and some surveillance cameras in the forest. This technology provides the material for a sequence of still images that represent the behaviour of vultures in an area where they go to feed, observed from a distance through an analytical mechanical lens. However, the montage concludes with one last photograph in which the vultures seem to subvert this logic of observation, glaring at the camera with their wings outstretched as if defending themselves.

Complementing the explorations of human actions related to the hunting and management of Iberian fauna in these short films, Emilio Fonseca’s *Salvaxe, Salvaxe* (2024) follows a group of biologists through the forests of Galicia and Portugal as they track down the region’s last surviving wolves, displaced from their habitat by the

human presence in the region. Camera trap images reveal their behaviour, as we observe the intermittent activity of humans by day alternating with fleeting forays into the area by wolves, foxes and boars by night. We see the scientists analysing the night images, comparing what they record with archival footage and examining animal droppings, and gradually we begin to discern that the film's aim is to construct a non-invasive gaze.

The fact that the wolves are never followed by the camera marks an invisible ethical boundary for the human presence, which both the team of scientists and the film crew have agreed not to cross. This filmmaking approach implements the defence of animal privacy proposed by Anat Pick (2015) in an essay based on ideas previously posited by Brett Mills (2010), who points out that while invading the privacy of humans must always be justified, the success of footage of animals shown in BBC wildlife documentaries depends on the difficulty of access to those animals: the harder it is to capture them, the better. Inverting this logic, the distance maintained to ensure the wolf's privacy in *Salvaxe, salvaxe* constitutes an act of "resistance" (Pick, 2015: 116). This form of mediated observation points to a new way of looking in the age of the Anthropocene, a term proposed by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) to designate the geological epoch in which human activity has become a force capable of irreversibly altering our planet's ecosystems. The adoption of this perspective entails an acknowledgement of the ethical weight of the human gaze on the natural world and the need to reassess its impact, similar perhaps to Randy Malamud's suggestion that we should be seeking out "less harmful ways of looking at animals", or even considering the possibility of not looking at other animals



Image 2

at all (2012: 89). This perspective is also in keeping with the notion of "implied contemplation" that some authors have used to describe the films and filmmaking practice of Trinh T. Minh-Ha (Ramos, 2021: 4), who rejects both the supposed objectivity of the classical documentary and the authoritarian forms of intervention in the subjects filmed.

*Salvaxe, salvaxe* brings into play a *negative* aesthetic apparatus that effectuates an estrangement of our human gaze: we feel the remoteness of the object of study, its absence and even its imminent disappearance. In one scene, two reflective pupils captured on the nocturnal surveillance camera seem to return our gaze, in a phantasmagorical voyeurism between a species being forced to cede its territory and another known to be an invader (Image 2). At another moment, the camera trap image freezes and we contemplate the silhouette of the wolf, which has become a constellation of luminous points. *Salvaxe, salvaxe* "covers" our eyes and teaches us to view the "wild" from a distance, in keeping with theories that dismantle the binaries of nature/culture and animality/humanity (Morizot, 2021). At the same time, the film aims to teach our ears to listen differently: at dusk, the biologists focus their attention on the noises of the valley and point out the multiple layers of sound:

beneath the murmur of the road and the hissing of electric cables, we can discern some distant howls. As the scene ends, we continue to hear them, but the screen has now turned to black. This long shot functions as a sort of auditory relic, a black box of lingering sounds.

## 2. FROM THE EYES OF THE OTHER: PERSPECTIVES AND OVERSPILLS OF THE ANIMAL CAMERA

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Another contemporary cinematographic strategy that can be identified is the positioning of the camera from the point of view of the non-human animal, in an effort to break with the traditional anthropocentric perspective. In recent films by some Ibero-American filmmakers, there are clear strategies to reproduce the position, height, size or movement of animals, or to construct visual and auditory perceptions similar to what those animals might experience. In this context, Jonathan Burt (2002) has been a pioneer in research on the breadth of semiotic and semantic meanings contained in film images of non-human animals. In addition to rhetorical animals constructed specifically to allude to metaphors or allegories in films, representations focusing on the relationships between humans and animals have also been developed, giving agency to the animals (Burt, 2002), sometimes adopting their point of view and revealing the fluid boundaries between the two categories.

While such approaches offer more ethical forms of scopic interaction with animals, it is important to recognise, as John Berger points out, that all representation is still a mediated, second-hand experience (Berger, 1980, quoted by Creed and Reesink, 2015), inevitably constrained by the framing of the shot. However, although they are still characterised by this conditioning inherent to the film medium, the films of Silvia Zayas and Carlos Casas display a deliberate effort to expand the human vision and offer experienc-

es closer to the perception of non-human animals. These are filmmakers who question not only why we look at animals, but also how they and the physical world they inhabit look at us, exploring the construction of our image and existence in their visual world (Creed and Reesink, 2015). This is an idea considered in Thomas Nagel's famous essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (1974), in which the author uses the example of the use of echolocation by bats to identify an epistemological and phenomenological boundary between human and non-human experience. Nagel argues that consciousness has an inevitably subjective character, and therefore any attempt to imagine how another animal perceives the world is necessarily mediated by our own human subjectivity; in short, when we try to imagine the experience of another creature, we can only represent what it would be like for us to behave like that creature.

This cinematic strategy of placing the camera in the position of the non-human animal and working—or experimenting—with the medium's sensory perceptual potential in relation to otherness is also employed in Silvia Zayas's *Ruido ê* (the film) (2023), a research-production project that observes the *Torpedo* electric ray from a remote underwater perspective<sup>1</sup> and explores the impact of anthropogenic noise on these sea creatures. Zayas describes the project as a somatic journey based on the idea of "speaking nearby", adopting Trinh T. Minh-Ha's expression to name a type of filmmaking that eschews "speaking about" (quoted by Zayas, 2025: para. 7-8) and proposes an eth-

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**[ZAYAS] PROPOSES AN ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC ALTERNATIVE THAT DOES NOT APPROPRIATE THE VOICE OR THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS, BUT RECOGNISES AND RESPECTS THE DISTANCE AND DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FILMMAKER AND FILMED SUBJECT**

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Image 3 (above)  
Image 4 (below)

ical and aesthetic alternative that does not appropriate the voice or the experience of others, but recognises and respects the distance and difference between filmmaker and filmed subject. This is an approach that can be brought into dialogue with the notion of the embodied experience in cinema proposed by Vivian Sobchack (2004) to define filmmaking as an exchange of perception and knowledge between two sentient bodies: the body of the spectator and of the film itself, which also *feels* and *perceives*.

This approach is evident in the film's sound design, which not only focuses on acoustic impact but also explores noise as an inability to read or interpret the unknown, as well as the fuzzy yet intelligible images of the sea floor (Image 3). For these images, no attempt is made to facilitate human decoding; instead, the film encourages a somatic immersion in an alien perceptual universe. Especially significant in this respect is the

beginning of the film, where the breakwaters off the coast of Barcelona are framed in a shot showing the surface of the ocean from the perspective of a human floating in the water. At this moment, some subtitled human voices, which are initially intelligible, become increasingly muffled (Image 4) as the camera descends into the water, marking the beginning of a journey of becoming-animal in which the human presence gradually dissolves.

The camera plunges into a chaotic maelstrom of particles floating and shooting in different directions, while the perspective is deterritorialised and expanded towards the haptic sense: wandering, swaying at the mercy of the currents and suddenly varying the intensity of our hearing and reaction. This presence, through whose senses we explore the underwater world, intones a vague nasal melody. As Zayas explains, “‘ê’ is a nasal sound made when you cover your nose [...] underwater” (Zayas, 2021:3). This kind of “trans-mental lullaby” induces a dreamlike state, in a “becoming-aquatic” that elicits memories and associations from our subconscious.

According to Dziga Vertov, upon being freed from the motor limitations of the human eye, the camera's eye discovers a whole new perception of reality (2011). In the Deleuzian universe, the cinematic apparatus becomes a “body without organs”, a sensibility “with no connections to an external unifying principle, soul, or unity of an organism; positioned at the level of matter itself, hyletic flow, an as-yet uninformed material plane of ‘intense and unformed, unstratified matter’” (Deleuze, quoted in Sauvagnargues, 2006: 101). In Zayas's work, the becoming-animal is attained through this body without organs, which is able to disappear and dissolve into a cinematographic-aquatic plasticity. The camera that facilitates access to the sensory universe of the torpedo ray is deterritorialised, located not in the eye but in the torso of the filmmaker. The animal barely appears in the film, but the camera attempts to encounter its becom-



ing by roaming, abandoning all coordinates and opening up to all kinds of stimuli. In this way, the camera emerges as an indispensable agent in the transition from the vertical-ocular-anthropocentric sensibility of the human to the perception of a nocturnal cartilaginous species which, for reasons unknown, has learnt to survive in a hostile environment. It is thus worth considering whether somatisation and the attempted approximation of animal vision might invoke a more environmentally conscious interaction between humans and animals, in line with the rejection of Cartesian dualisms by other artists (Malamud, 2012).

There is also an element of becoming-animal in the fades-to-black and phantasmagorical images in *Cemetery* (Carlos Casas, 2019). These strategies serve to suspend human perception and open up a liminal sensory space: an altered, fragmentary and indeterminate reality. In a sense, Casas'

film acknowledges the problem that Nagel (1974) points out, that it is impossible to faithfully represent how animals see, and so instead of attempting an unachievable mimesis, the filmmaker chooses to suggest their otherness through suspension, the void and the evocation of the unfathomable.

*Cemetery* follows the journey of an old Asian elephant and his keeper through the Sri Lankan jungle.

Weather alerts are broadcast on the radio, the first few drops of what looks like a mighty deluge begin to fall, and we glimpse the unsettling presence of ivory hunters. Meanwhile, the man and the elephant silently prepare to leave their habitat forever. Before their departure, the keeper burns his family records, and among the photographs consumed by the flames we see one of him as a young man, posing next to his elephant, at what appears to be a circus. This brief shot signals that

Image 5





the mysterious interspecies connection between the two characters has its origins in forced adaptation to the colonial, extractivist presence in Southeast Asia. A key scene in the film reveals the heart of the “becoming-animal” of both characters: the enormous animal is lying in a pond, and the keeper begins washing him, scrubbing every fold of his skin, adjusting the intensity of his touch as the progresses from the beast’s feet to his thin ears (Image 5). The animal’s relaxed attitude suggests that this is an exchange that the two have engaged in for decades.<sup>2</sup> The scene ends with a close-up of the elephant’s eye, which blinks as the creature dozes off: the bath has the appearance of a rite of initiation, in which the keeper lulls the animal to sleep. The elephant seems to exist in an ambiguous zone between rational knowledge and Rilke’s notion of “the Open”: “you can take the elephant out of the jungle, but you can’t take the jungle out of the elephant. And the elephant will take you into the jungle” (Casas, 2021: 157). Between the two figures there seems to be a transmission of the knowledge they will take with them on their journey through catastrophe, and finally, extinction.

The protagonists’ long journey to the mythical cemetery at the end of the film constitutes a transformation that involves a process of “becoming-animal” for both. In the hypnotic sequence of the journey through the jungle, the characters’ figures are replaced with POV shots that shift between the keeper and the elephant in a delicate hybridisation. We learn to sway with the rhythm of their steps and enter the world foreshadowed by the elephant’s drowsy gaze in the bath scene. As we enter the darkness of the jungle, we begin to adopt a single, fused gaze upon the pre-linguistic mystery that unites the species. Through the estranging sounds of the jungle—bird and insect noises merge into a dense network of encrypted messages—we are faced with the abstraction of form; pure shadows that recall the elephants’ ancestors in prehistoric caves.

### 3. THE USE OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ZOOMORPHIC REALISM

The films *Pepe* (Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias, 2024) and *Monólogo colectivo* [Collective Monologue] (Jessica Sarah Rinland, 2024) offer representative cases of processes of becoming-animal that border on anthropomorphism. These two films expose the historical issue of anthropocentrism in moving image culture and question the centrality of the human in the capacity of cinema to identify anthropomorphically with animals (Smaill, 2016).

*Pepe* tells the story of a generation of hippos transported to the Hacienda Nápoles, a 3,000-hectare estate of the Colombian drug baron Pablo Escobar. The film thus explores a process of extractivism that replicates the logic of colonialism (presented at the beginning of the story in Africa) and its latent effects on Colombian society. It is organised into three parts: the extraction of three hippos from their natural habitat in Namibia; their arrival at the Hacienda Nápoles in Colombia, where they adapt as an *invasive* species; and the encounter with and subsequent hunting of the hippo Pepe, who wandered from his herd towards the fishing communities along the Magdalena River. Film critics have pointed out how the film repositions the hippo as the narrator of his own story, thereby proposing a rhizomatic interconnection between history, animals and humans (Díaz de la Vega, 2025). This is an idea that the director himself has also emphasised, pointing to the crisis in humankind’s sense of belonging to nature (Martín and Álvarez López, 2024).

*Pepe* uses animation, archival images, fiction and documentary footage of hippos in pursuit of a strategy to give the animal an anthropomorphic voice, while laying bare the process of ethnographic documentation of the territory carried out by the director (De Los Santos Arias, 2024). The film includes a distorted and dramatised voice, bordering on comical caricature, which begins



Image 6

by identifying itself with the animal who proposes to tell his story, adopting the register of fable. Throughout the film, the voice alternates between different languages (Mbukushu, Afrikaans and Colombian Spanish), evoking hybrid cultures and colonial power flows. With this mechanism, as Mónica Delgado points out, “Pepe speaks because there is a need not only to articulate an ‘animal’ mode of thinking but also to transfer the analogy to a whole colonial apparatus that creates subjugated beings within hegemonic discourses” (2024: para. 4). Moreover, incorporating the *dispositif* of surveillance, the filmmaker also mixes images from camera traps located in the hippo’s habitats to capture how it moves, how it sleeps and how birds perch on its body. In one scene, the camera simulates a helicopter, descending and plunging into the water to film underwater images of hippos escaping (Image 6). Later, a succession of aerial shots and wide shots of the landscapes mark the

journey of the helicopters illegally transporting the hippos to Colombia in large cargo boxes.

In contrast to the excessive editing of wildlife documentaries, where a narrative of animal behaviour is manufactured using a voice-over that reduces the images of the animals to only one possible meaning,<sup>3</sup> here their behaviour is filmed while the voice-over of the hippo Pepe invents his own story of his banishment from the Hacienda Naples. This approach effectively dismantles the dynamics of human domination over animals and the predominance of the anthropocentric paradigm that Smaill identifies in wildlife films (2016). The strategy of turning the story of the hippo into an anthropomorphic narrative, which contributes to the construction of an interconnected history between humans and animals, invites critical reflection on the possibilities of these mechanisms, as James Leo Cahill (2013) points out. Not all anthropomorphism is constructed from an anthro-

pocentric perspective (2013), and in the case of *Pepe*, the strategy serves as a critical exercise that facilitates access to a form of knowledge in which nature and animals constitute historical agents.

*Monólogo colectivo* documents the work of a wild animal rescue centre in La Plata, Argentina, showing how a group of caregivers monitors them, feeds them, conditions their environments, and above all, provides them with affection and cares for their emotional well-being. Every scene depicting the caregivers' attention and caresses hints at the violent past of these animals due to colonial practices (circuses, zoos, poaching, etc.). The title of the film alludes to a term coined by Jean Piaget to designate the phase of childhood development when children believe that the natural world has been created for them and that they can influence it at will. The film portrays the consequences of extractivist practices and shows us how a new relationship of mutual understanding can be cultivated in the Anthropocene era.

In a key scene in *Monólogo colectivo*, the caregivers take part in a training session, divided into pairs, one in the role of "trainer" and the other in the role of "animal". They are given a set of objects as brainteasers, and the "trainer" guides the "animal" while the latter experiments with them. The scene shows how preconceived logics are dismantled and how the intuitive apparatus needs to be engaged in order to step into the skin of the animal. We quickly realise that the caregivers are communicating using codes similar to animal training or domestication techniques because the animals in their care have been affected by a forced *becom-*

*ing-anthropocenic*, irremediably altered by human influence. After the experiment, participants share their difficulties and frustrations and discuss the need to maintain a channel of communication. As Smaill notes, the role of the people who appear in these encounters with animals is crucial for mediating the subject-object relationship (2016). We thus see the rescue centre workers draw on codes from the context of exploitation, but with the aim of developing new connections.

While *Red Peter* addresses humans after having undertaken an irreversible transformation,

Rinland's film explores the creation of a language halfway between the human and the animal that is able to overcome the collective monologue phase. The heart of this language is tactile. The multiple shots of caresses, gazes and physical contact orchestrate a code shared with the various species kept

at the centre, from the gorilla to the elephant to the anteater (Image 7). Through such contact, the film itself becomes a field of experimentation with this new haptic language. "This term comes from the Greek (*haptomai*), which means 'to come into contact with', 'to touch' or 'to grasp', and this term's status as a deponent verb presupposes another meaning, as to touch means to be touched" (Maurette, 2017: 56). In contrast to the use of the eye (the quintessential organ of modernity, facilitating a scopic drive through the hunter's sighting device), this film—in line with phenomenology and the affective turn—portrays humans who seek to be transformed by the animal, providing a close-up view of the contact between the rough textures of the primate's hand



Image 7

and the thin fingers of the caregiver, revealing a new recognition between the two on screen. In *The Expression of Hands*, Harun Farocki (1997) discusses the dramatic importance of the close-up on hands, which becomes a sort of *stage*. In this sense, *Monólogo colectivo* constructs a stage for the most essential issues raised in this article: a new universal interspecies contract, a historic restitution confirmed by hands coming together over both sides of the fence.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the Ibero-American context, the films discussed here cannot be dissociated from a shared history of colonisation, extraction and violence against bodies (human and non-human) that has shaped the political ecologies of these territories. In this respect, the different forms of becoming-animal portrayed in these films not only share a questioning of anthropocentric hierarchies but also explore a specific region (Ibero-America) that has historically been strained by conflicts related to hunting, conservation and agro-industry. Film-making practices such as these can be interpreted in relation to the concept of “creaturely poetics” posited by Anat Pick (2011), who proposes an animal ethics based not on subjectivity or personality, but on a recognition of the vulnerability that all living bodies share. The strategies adopted by these filmmakers thus do not merely imitate the gaze of non-human animals; rather, they seek to recognise their otherness and their agency, while avoiding anthropomorphic simplifications. The different examples analysed in this article reveal how the practice of opening up the space of representation (and refraining from speaking on behalf of or over anyone) can facilitate an audiovisual exercise that deliberately suspends meaning, allowing other perceptions, other (non-human) ways of looking to enter and inhabit the image. These zones of indeterminacy halfway between the animal and the human gaze, between sensory

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**IN THIS SENSE, MONÓLOGO COLECTIVO CONSTRUCTS A STAGE FOR THE MOST ESSENTIAL ISSUES RAISED IN THIS ARTICLE: A NEW UNIVERSAL INTERSPECIES CONTRACT, A HISTORIC RESTITUTION CONFIRMED BY HANDS COMING TOGETHER OVER BOTH SIDES OF THE FENCE**

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engagement and the cinematic image, establish an interspecies sensibility that challenges traditional ways of talking about the natural world. And they do this through a transformative power which, as Kafka suggests, reveals both the challenge and the promise of a shared perception. ■

## NOTES

- \* This article is the product of the research project titled “Mutations of Visual Motifs in the Public Sphere – Representations of Power in Spain 2017-2021: Pandemic, Climate Change, Gender Identities and Racial Conflicts” (PID2021-126930-I00), developed at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by ERDF, EU.
- 1. To develop a methodology for the non-invasive observation of these beings, Zayas, in collaboration with marine biologists, has developed a prototype for a low-tech underwater recording device (Baited Remote Underwater Video, or BRUV) that can film marine life without the presence of humans.
- 2. Each elephant keeper (*mahout*, in Hindi) is assigned an elephant when it is still a calf, and over time they forge a unique working relationship.
- 3. On this question, in addition to the aforementioned criticisms made by Smaill (2016) and Mills (2010), it is worth noting the studies of wildlife documentaries by Mitman (2009), Bousé (2000) and Chris (2006).

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## BECOMING-ANIMAL: NON-HUMAN PERCEPTUAL FORMS AND DISPOSITIFS IN CONTEMPORARY IBERO-AMERICAN CINEMA

### Abstract

This article addresses the concept of becoming-animal, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, as a «zone of indiscernibility» where the human and the animal mutually modify each other, in order to analyze from this prism the cinematographic strategies of contemporary films of Ibero-American cinema, such as: *Salvaxe, salvaxe* (Emilio Fonseca, 2024), *Reserve* (Gerard Ortin, 2020), *592 metroz goiti* (Maddi Barber, 2019), *Ruido è* (Silvia Zayas, 2023), *Cemetery* (Carlos Casas, 2019), *Pepe* (Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias, 2024) and *Monólogo colectivo* (Jessica Sarah Rinland, 2024). The research is organized around three axes: 1) Capture technologies and visual regimes of the non-human, 2) Perspectives and overflows of the animal camera and 3) Anthropomorphization and zoomorphic realism. Through an iconographic analysis of the works, the article finds that new forms of interspecies perception are generated, allowing other -non-human- sensibilities to emerge and inhabit the imagery of these films.

### Key words

Iberoamerican Cinema; Becoming-Animal; Deleuze; Guattari; Interspecies; Cinematic Devices.

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## DEVENIR ANIMAL: DISPOSITIVOS Y FORMAS PERCEPTIVAS DE LO NO-HUMANO EN EL CINE IBEROAMERICANO CONTEMPORÁNEO

### Resumen

El presente artículo aborda el concepto de «devenir animal», propuesto por Deleuze y Guattari, como una «zona de indiscernibilidad» donde el humano y el animal se modifican mutuamente, para analizar desde este prisma las estrategias cinematográficas de obras contemporáneas del cine iberoamericano, como: *Salvaxe, salvaxe* (Emilio Fonseca, 2024), *Reserve* (Gerard Ortin, 2020), *592 metroz goiti* (Maddi Barber, 2019), *Ruido è* (Silvia Zayas, 2023), *Cemetery* (Carlos Casas, 2019), *Pepe* (Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias, 2024) y *Monólogo colectivo* (Jessica Sarah Rinland, 2024). La investigación se organiza en torno a tres ejes: 1) Tecnologías de captura y regímenes visuales del no-humano, 2) Perspectivas y desbordes de la cámara animal y 3) Antropomorfización y realismo zoomorfo. A través de un análisis iconográfico de las obras, el artículo constata que se generan nuevas formas de percepción inter-especie, permitiendo que otras sensibilidades —no humanas— puedan emerger y habitar entre las imágenes de estas obras.

### Palabras clave

Cine iberoamericano; Devenir animal; Deleuze; Guattari; Inter-especie; Dispositivo cinematográfico.

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