

Introduction: Spanish Environmental Cultural Studies

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INTRODUCTION: SPANISH ENVIRONMENTAL CULTURAL STUDIES

Luis I. Prádanos

*“The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself”
(Gregory Bateson)¹*

This Introduction engages with the following questions: What is meant by “environmental cultural studies”? How are cultural practices related to inequality as well as processes of extinction, energy, toxicity, and climate disruption? How is Spanish cultural studies responding to rapidly changing biophysical and social conditions? How do Spanish environmental cultural scholars contribute to make sense of the ecological crisis? What current dilemmas face the field and what are some promising possibilities moving forward? How can Spanish cultural studies and political ecology enrich each other and make sense of our past, present, and future socioecological entanglements? How can Spanish environmental cultural studies promote alternative cultural paradigms that encourage appropriate and regenerative socioecological relationships?

ENVIRONMENTAL CULTURAL STUDIES IN CONTEXT

During the last few years, a number of scientific reports make clear that the expansion and intensification of the growth-oriented global economy is destroying, at break-neck speed, the web of life on which human survival depends. For example, the 2018 *WWF Living Planet Report* revealed “that population sizes of wildlife decreased by 60% globally between 1970 and 2014.”² Similar disturbing results were published in 2019 by the IPBES in their *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*.³ If terrestrial wildlife is declining dramatically

1 Gregory Bateson, p. 501.

2 World Wildlife Fund, *Living Planet Report – 2018: Aiming Higher*, ed. by Monique Grooten and Rosamunde E. Almond (World Wildlife Fund, 2018) <www.wwf.org.uk/updates/living-planetreport-2018>.

3 IPBES, *Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, ed. by E. S. Brondizio, et al. (Bonn: IPBES secretariat, 2019) <<https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>> [accessed 2 June 2021].

during the last decades, marine life is dying off even faster, as aquatic life is highly sensitive to rising temperatures and ocean acidification. In December of 2020, an article in *Nature* found that human-made things now outweigh all biomass on Earth. Put otherwise, the globalization of the dominant economic culture is rapidly transforming planetary life into commodities and infrastructure. In January of 2021, a group of sustainability scholars claimed – based on a broad review of scientific literature – that societies are grossly underestimating the gravity and danger of the environmental situation and that “the scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its life-forms – including humanity – is so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts” (Bradshaw *et al* 1). All these studies should lead to a clear conclusion: the dominant economic culture – growth-oriented, petroleum-based, techno-industrial, consumer-driven – promotes an ideology of death because the more it globalizes and becomes ubiquitous, the more rapidly it depletes and impoverishes the planetary web of life.

Numerous scientific reports clearly describe the drastic declining health of species and ecosystems, but most of them fail to emphasize the cultural narratives, power relations, and historical dynamics that are behind those ecological declines. Most scientific reports disregard the connection between the last few centuries of colonial/capitalist planetary expansion and the processes that annihilate life in order to appropriate human and nonhuman labor for capital accumulation. Sustainability discourses usually emphasize the need to align economic, social, and environmental aspects while overlooking the cultural dimensions that mediate the historically differentiated understandings of these three aspects. In fact, mainstream sustainability frames – by focusing on notions of control, management, and measurement – actually reproduce and perpetuate the mechanical and anthropocentric metaphors and mindsets that naturalize the dominant extractive economic thinking, making it even more difficult to frame socioecological problems in a way that could be solvable. Correcting this situation is one of the main tasks of environmental humanities in general and environmental cultural studies in particular.

Environmental cultural studies have a broader, more inclusive scope than literary ecocriticism while being much more precise than environmental studies. Ecocriticism, at least within the context of Spanish academia, is mostly associated with literary studies and tends to rely on close reading approaches to textual representations of the environment, not always theoretically informed by the ongoing global debates in environmental humanities. On the other hand, environmental studies – as a vague umbrella term – is so broad as to include anything from scholars working on conservation ecology to social science-oriented approaches to sustainability. Many environmental studies programs tend to ignore, marginalize, or overlook the more critical approaches to the environmental crisis that are advanced by political ecology and the environmental humanities and, as such, favor a grossly ineffective mainstream reformist approach – market-oriented, technocratic, quantitative, and managerial – to environmental issues. By framing environmental crisis as a techno-managerial issue – rather than an issue of culture and power as political ecology and the environmental humanities do – these approaches disregard or minimize the role of the dominant political and economic

culture in the ongoing ecological collapse, and they ignore how existing power relations impede counterhegemonic framings and practices that could envision and design effective and regenerative solutions. If we recognize that the environmental crisis is a “crisis of perception”⁴ brought about by a life-depleting cultural paradigm globally imposed by colonial and neocolonial exploitative power relations, then we need to start paying more attention to the complex ways in which culture and power determine how we perceive – and relate to – everything that exists.⁵ In other words, if “unsustainability arises from the fundamental structure of our culture,”⁶ then we cannot continue living, quite literally, within the dominant cultural paradigm for much longer. We have to change not only our institutions and infrastructures, but also the stories we live by, the metaphors and framings we use to make sense of our realities and act upon them.⁷ We have to actively contest the dominant imaginaries that inform and are informed by our daily practices. The question remains: what would it take to transition from our current extractive and exploitative cultural paradigm that is extinguishing life on Earth to other paradigms based on regenerative and reciprocal relations between ourselves and our ecologies? Can environmental cultural studies play a role in facilitating such cultural transition in ways that are materially viable and socially just? If so, how? Because environmental cultural scholars are motivated by an activist sensibility in which activism guides scholarship and scholarship informs activism, they are well-situated to help guide this transition.

Environmental cultural studies enrich cultural studies by infusing them with environmental humanities debates and approaches. At the same time, environmental cultural scholars contribute to the rapidly emerging field of environmental humanities by calling attention to the paramount importance of cultural processes, practices, and manifestations needed to understand (and respond to) the socio-ecological crisis. Environmental cultural studies could be considered the part of environmental humanities brought about by cultural scholars who are highly sensitive to socioecological issues (and take the time to pay sustained attention to them). Philosophers and historians contribute to environmental humanities through insights coming from environmental philosophy, environmental history, and environmental ethics. Environmental cultural studies not only dialogues with all these insights (as well as others coming from ecological economics, environmental sociology, critical geography, energy humanities, ecolinguistics, anthropology, political ecology, etc.), but enriches and enhances all of them by

- 4 Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- 5 Susan Paulson, “Degrowth: Culture, Power and Change,” *Journal of Political Ecology*, 24.1 (2017), 425–48.
- 6 John Ehrenfeld, *The Right Way to Flourish: Reconnecting to the Real World* (London: New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 10.
- 7 Ian Hughes, Edmond Byrne, Gerard Mullally, and Colin Sage (eds), *Metaphor, Sustainability, Transformation: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2021); Arran Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

adding cultural studies' methodologies to the mix and providing nuanced analysis of specific cultural manifestations and practices as they respond – more or less consciously – to the ongoing socioecological crisis.

Environmental cultural studies recognize that an economic culture is simultaneously a material and semiotic entanglement, a symbolic and infrastructural construction and, as such, it mobilizes soil nutrients, desires, technologies, narratives, identities, energy, bodies, and discourses. All cultural manifestations and practices today are necessarily participating in these messy and constantly changing socioecological arrangements and responding to the material and symbolic flows mobilized by the dominant global economic culture. Environmental cultural scholars track these flows and how they inform cultural manifestations and practices. By doing so, they can expose the social and ecological costs that are discursively erased and materially externalized in the process. Their work makes clear that the current dominant culture's energy-intensive urban developments, petrochemically dependent agroindustrial productivity, tourist megaprojects, and economic growth can only be celebrated if its socioecological downsides are ignored, downgraded, or pushed outside the representational frame. In fact, many contributions within this *Companion* make visible the high social and environmental costs of these developments in Spain during the last decades – inequality, displacement, labor exploitation, animal suffering, loss of food security and sovereignty, waste proliferation, soil depletion, water mismanagement, biodiversity loss, and political corruption. To unveil all these connections, environmental cultural scholars look for threads that connect power relations, linguistic patterns, material practices, social imaginaries, sociotechnical infrastructures, and ecological processes. In sum, environmental cultural studies is a transdisciplinary field that “welcomes everyone who shares the project of understanding present and past human-nonhuman relations equipped with a consciousness of the current planetary crisis and a future-oriented critical gaze.”⁸

SPANISH ENVIRONMENTAL CULTURAL STUDIES

Environmental cultural studies' close attention to the ongoing process of rapid extinction, the unacceptable levels of income and wealth inequality, the technologically enhanced social alienation and political polarization, and the global energy situation, leads to an obvious conclusion: the hegemonic global economic culture is incompatible with both human wellbeing and the ecological systems that regulate life on earth. Thus, the cultural narratives and imaginaries that justify this dominant economic paradigm are obsolete and dysfunctional in the current socioecological context.⁹ Replacing these dominant cultural imaginaries is not

8 Katarzyna Beilin and Daniel Ares-López, “Environmental Cultural Studies as a Transdisciplinary Field: Latin American and Iberian Studies,” in *Environmental Cultural Studies through Time: The Luso-Hispanic World*, ed. by Katarzyna Beilin, Kathleen Connolly, and Micah McKay, *Hispanic Issues On Line*, 24 (2019), 1–26 (p. 5) <<https://hdl.handle.net/11299/212508>>.

9 Luis I. Prádanos, *Postgrowth Imaginaries: New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture*

optional, but necessary to maintain the ecological functions that make our planet a viable environment for human societies to live and thrive. Spanish environmental cultural studies understands the need for this urgent cultural transition and strives to contribute to it.

In some ways, Spanish literary and cultural studies – along with most academic fields – have served to perpetuate the dominant economic culture by reproducing narratives and metaphors that minimize, ignore, or make invisible the pressing ecological and energy issues that will define this century. For example, metaphors such as the “Spanish economic miracle” and “to take the train of modernity” are deeply ingrained in Spanish literary and cultural studies discourses.¹⁰ These expressions not only ignore that an economy addicted to constant growth is socially undesirable and ecologically unviable, but also imply that the unsustainable economic system that is annihilating life on Earth deserves to be fully embraced and celebrated as the only possible path to human development and progress. This idea is obviously unhinged from reality if we consider that no human community can develop or progress in the long term within a dying planet. The illiteracy that many literary and cultural scholars show regarding energy and ecological processes is ingrained in textbooks and academic publications alike.¹¹ This makes the field complicit in perpetuating outdated cultural narratives that prevent us from thinking, articulating, expressing, and envisioning desirable postgrowth futures and regenerative cultural practices. It seems that cultural theory has traditionally had trouble confronting the socioecological crisis.¹² Fortunately, during the last decade this situation has begun to rapidly change as a critical mass of Spanish cultural scholars are seriously contesting these commonplace practices, overtly confronting the socioecological crisis and striving to transform the field.

The edited volume *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* and its associated *Hispanic Issues On Line Debates* (2016) served as a forum to assemble a group of Spanish cultural scholars already working on environmental issues that would, from then on, collaborate actively to make Spanish environmental cultural studies as vibrant and influential as it is today.¹³ Some members of this group have since then organized and coordinated several encounters, seminars, events, and special issues. As a result, the interest in Spanish environmental cultural studies

in Post-2008 Spain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

- 10 Luis I. Prádanos, “Repensar los estudios culturales españoles en tiempos de extinción masiva y declive energético,” *Estudios Culturales Hispánicos*, 4 (2022).
- 11 Prádanos, “Repensar”; and Luis I. Prádanos, “The Pedagogy of Degrowth: Teaching Hispanic Studies in the Age of Social Inequality and Ecological Collapse,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 19 (2015), 81–96.
- 12 Jaime Vindel, *Estética Fósil. Imaginarios de la energía y crisis ecosocial* (Barcelona: Arcadia y MACBA, 2020), p. 38.
- 13 Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz (eds), *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016; Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz (eds), “A Polemical Companion to Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates,” *Hispanic Issues On Line Debates*, 7 (2016) <A Polemical Companion to Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates | Hispanic Issues | College of Liberal Arts (umn.edu)>.

has grown significantly in the last few years. A few landmark publications are the monographs *In Search of an Alternative Biopolitics: Anti-Bullfighting, Animality, and the Environment in Contemporary Spain* (Beilin 2015) and *Postgrowth Imaginaries: New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture in Post-2008 Spain* (Prádanos 2018), the special issue in *Letras Hispánicas* on “Ecocrítica Ibérica Contemporánea” (edited by Prádanos 2017) and the special section “Ecología y estudios culturales ibéricos contemporáneos” published in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* (edited by Prádanos 2019), the edited volume *Spanish Thinking about Animals* (edited by Carretero-González 2020), and the forthcoming edited volume *Decentering the Anthropocene: Spanish Ecocritical Texts and the Non-Human* (edited by Leone and Lino). Other relevant recent books include *Transoceanic Animals as Spectacle in Early Modern Spain* (Beusterien 2020), *Ecopoéticas. Voces de la tierra en ocho poetas de la España contemporánea* (Gala 2020), *Estética Fósil. Imaginarios de la energía y crisis ecosocial* (Vindel 2020), and *Basura: Cultures of Waste in Contemporary Spain* (Amago 2021). In addition, the last few years have seen a proliferating number of academic papers, conference panels, and dissertations related to Spanish environmental cultural studies. Several edited volumes and special issues that are broader in their regional scope also incorporate contributions dealing with Spanish environmental cultural studies. Deserving of special mention, the 2019 *Hispanic Issues On Line* devoted to “Environmental Cultural Studies: Latin American and Iberian Studies” (edited by Beilin, Connolly, and McKay 2019) includes an introduction by Beilin and Ares-López that serves as a manifesto for environmental cultural studies. Other examples are the special issues on “South Atlantic Ecocriticism” (edited by Prádanos and Anderson 2017) and “Mediterranean Ecocriticism” (edited by Iovino 2013), both published in *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*; the special issue on “Humanidades ambientales: ecocrítica y descolonización cultural” in *452ª Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada* (edited by Prádanos 2019), and the volumes *Transatlantic Landscapes: Environmental Awareness, Literature, and the Arts* (2016) and *Hispanic Ecocriticism* (2019), edited by Marrero Henríquez, as well as several other collective publications sponsored by the Spanish-based ecocritical research group GIECO, just to mention a few. We could include a number of collective publications for less academic audiences by *Ecologistas en Acción* that embrace social ecology and ecofeminism in their approaches to the socioecological crisis, such as *Cambiar las gafas para mirar el mundo* (2011) and *La gran encrucijada. Sobre la crisis ecosocial y el cambio de ciclo histórico* (2016), as well as various publications by Yayo Herrero, Ramón Fernández Durán, Jordi Pigem, or Jorge Riechmann, to mention only a few. In addition, the Association of Spanish Culture *ALCESXXI* is currently a catalyst for Spanish environmental cultural studies, in particular, and for a meaningful transformation of Spanish literary and cultural studies, in general. *ALCESXXI* is a paradigmatic example of how to facilitate networks of support by creating equalitarian and inclusive spaces for cooperative (un)learning and collective work. *ALCESXXI* has created a transformative synergy that is rapidly transforming our field in meaningful ways and, among other things, is nourishing and facilitating the development and dissemination of Spanish environmental cultural studies (see <<http://www.alcesxxi.org/home/>>).

Overall, most Spanish cultural scholars could potentially participate, in one way or another, in the development of environmental cultural studies as long as they understand the inseparability of ecological and cultural processes. But for many decades, prior to the recent shift described above, Spanish literary and cultural studies – mirroring, rather than exposing, the hegemonic cultural paradigm – were immersed in a sort of implicit collective denial: the refusal to honestly and clearly recognize and address the existential socioecological crisis without diluting or ignoring it. Just take a look at the table of contents of the most prestigious journals, conference programs, and monographs in our field during the last few decades. Based on the recurrent topics and debates that are privileged and prioritized, no one would suspect these scholars were living in an extractive economic culture that was rapidly destroying the ecological conditions that made their very existence possible. As early as the 1970s, the unsustainability of this economic culture was predicted by computer models – and it is now confirmed by recently updated models – but, until a few years ago, Spanish cultural scholars were not consistently addressing this reality.¹⁴ The collective denial of Spanish literary and cultural studies regarding ecological concerns and its blindness toward human cultural dependency on ecological processes does not only apply to the more traditional, elitist, and stagnant literary approaches but also, and most disturbingly, to supposedly innovative and progressive trends – current hot topics – within Spanish cultural studies. “Food cultural studies” and “fashion cultural studies” are good examples, given that both the fashion and the food industry are expressions of energy-intensive, consumerist, unsustainable cultures with immense environmental repercussions (see essays by Afinoguénova and Close in this *Companion* for a correction of this tendency in food cultural studies).¹⁵ These two industries are clearly and deeply entangled and invested in human and nonhuman labor exploitation and ecological devastation, and so reading recent scholarship engaging with cultural studies of food and fashion that completely ignore socioecological issues is especially telling.

Spanish literary and cultural studies’ refusal to address the direst realities of our time has had a cascade of consequences for how the field has developed its blind spots and built upon its erasures. Completely ignoring certain issues make them irrelevant by default to our theoretical, pedagogical, and institutional radars. As such, most undergraduate and graduate programs are, by omission, training students to overlook ecological and energy issues by offering courses that grossly ignore and routinely disregard our biophysical realities and overlook the strong interrelation between the dominant cultural paradigm and the annihilation of life on Earth.¹⁶ These programs convince students that writing, formatting, editing,

14 Donella Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, *The Limits to Growth: 30-Year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004); Gaya Herrington, “Update to Limits to Growth: Comparing the World3 Model with Empirical Data,” *Journal of Industrial Ecology* (2020), 1–13.

15 Thanks to Jordi Marí for pointing this out in a personal communication.

16 Prádanos, “The Pedagogy”; Luis I. Prádanos, “How Did This Class Prepare You for Extinction?” *Resilience* (Post Carbon Institute), 21 April 2020 <<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-04-21/how-did-this-class-prepare-you-for-extinction/>>.

and publishing jargon-loaded academic papers without even acknowledging the ongoing socioecological crisis is a meaningful way to spend their time, energy, and effort in a time of civilizational emergency. This is pedagogically misleading, if not deeply irresponsible, because all academic fields have the ethical responsibility to name and recognize the socioecological problems we are facing if we are to have a decent chance of designing possible ways out of the deadly trap in which we find ourselves. What is the point of working in fields that are insensitive to their biophysical context and whose priorities may in fact contribute to divert our attention from the most pressing existential issues of our time? Living on a dying planet, we can no longer afford to avoid difficult questions about the future viability – at least in their current form – of dominant cultural imaginaries and modern institutions (such as nation states, capitalist markets, and neoliberal universities) that have proved unable not only of providing viable solutions to the socioecological problems they generate, but of even addressing such issues in a way that does not seriously compromise the livelihood of most humans and nonhumans, now and in the future. Most environmental cultural scholars featured in this *Companion* talk from within these kind of institutions with a mix of privilege and frustration: how can we radically transform our field – let alone our cultural paradigm – when we are often unable to even change our own departments and programs?

The answer – as *ALCESXXI* demonstrates – may be to organize and to foster collective support, collaborative (un)learning, and cooperative work, for we cannot successfully confront the challenges of our time individually. Similarly, one person alone could never do justice to the diversity, heterogeneity, and sophistication represented by the emerging and vibrant field of Spanish environmental cultural studies. For this reason, when I was commissioned to work on this *Companion*, I knew I should not embark upon this project alone. When confronting the socioecological crisis, we have the option of fighting and sinking alone (the neoliberal approach) or cooperating and thriving together (the communitarian approach). As will be explained in the final section of the Introduction, this *Companion* was envisioned as an academic expression of the second choice. Although there is a significant range and diversity of thematic and theoretical approaches enriching this *Companion*, all the contributors have one thing in common: they are actively and purposely working to transform Spanish cultural studies as they do not shy away from confronting the main crises of our time in honest and meaningful ways. They do not hide behind their academic silos and jargons to excuse themselves from their ethical responsibility to actively respond to the existential issues of our time. Instead, they are implicitly responding to the call recently made by Jordi Marí to push our field out of its ivory tower.

At this point, it is time to reflect on what – if anything – is specific about the Spanish context in the midst of the global socioecological crisis. Spain carries an ecological footprint that has grown more than three-fold since 1950, grossly overshooting its current territorial biocapacity.¹⁷ This disproportionate ecological footprint not only translates into the drastic, rapid, and unsustainable ecologi-

¹⁷ Óscar Carpintero, *El metabolismo de la economía española: recursos naturales y huella ecológica (1955-2000)* (Teguiise, Lanzarote: Fundación César Manrique, 2005).

cal depletion of the Spanish territory, but also contributes to the socioecological impoverishment of other regions outside Spain from which its increasing material and energy demands are extracted. If all nations had the same ecological footprint as Spain, more than three Planet Earths would be needed to keep up with its material inputs and absorb its waste. This unbalanced footprint is clearly unviable and, as such, cannot be sustained much longer. It is also an obvious environmental injustice as the increasing number of environmental refugees worldwide is the result of the current global ecological overshoot to which Spain contributes.

Climatically and hydrologically, most of the Spanish territory is highly vulnerable to desertification and severe hydrological stress related to climate change and the drastic changes in land use occurring during the last decades. As several essays within the *Companion* make clear, many decades of water and land mismanagement and growth-oriented policies that incentivize extractivism have made this situation much worse. Overall, Spain's territorial development is a paradigmatic example of "the unevenly articulated, crisis-prone urbanization process" of "tourist infrastructural investment and real estate speculation" that dominates the Euro-Mediterranean region.¹⁸

The Spanish food industry is ecologically devastating, energy-intensive, extremely cruel, and massively wasteful (see Close's contribution in this *Companion*). If the global petrochemical-dependent agroindustrial complex is one of the main contributors to water pollution, biodiversity loss, and top soil depletion on a global scale, the situation in Spain is especially alarming given its place as a main agricultural producer within the European Union. Suffice to say that a decade ago Spain was producing "ninety percent of European agricultural GMOs" (Beilin and Viestenz, *Ethics*, xvi) and that "in 2020 meat production was the country's fourth largest industry" (see Close in this *Companion*). This urban-agro-industrial model (as Fernández Durán calls it)¹⁹ depends on massive availability of fossil fuels, creates an increasing metabolic rift between rural and city spaces, and disrupts soil nutrient cycles, making the model unsustainable by design. This extractivist model triggers a process of depeasantization that was most intense during the last half of the twentieth century in Spain, as several contributions to this *Companion* emphasize, resulting in what is called today the *España vaciada*. Depeasantization is not a uniquely Spanish phenomenon, but a recurrent and ongoing manifestation of the planetary urbanization of capital and its accumulation by dispossession strategies. Today, the wrongly called "energy transition" is triggering an immense new extractivism in many rural spaces of the world with an astonishing socioecological destruction that massively displaces people, forces rural-urban migration, and results in food insecurity and lack of food sovereignty on a planetary scale: a "global depeasantization" with immense social and ecolog-

18 Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis, "Is the Mediterranean Urban?" in *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, ed. Neil Brenner (Berlin: Jovis, 2013), pp. 428–59 (pp. 454–55).

19 Ramón Fernández Durán, *El Antropoceno: la crisis ecológica se hace mundial. La expansión del capitalismo global choca con la biosfera* (Madrid: Coeditores Virus y Libros en Acción, 2010).

ical costs (Araghi in Arboleda pp. 98, 102).²⁰ “The depeasantization [is always] associated with resource extraction” (p. 104). This is now happening in Asia and Latin America at breakneck speed and with astonishingly massive displacements of people; the process is transforming self-sustained peasant communities into precarious temporary workers barely surviving in the informal urban settlements mushrooming around megacities and extractive megaprojects. *España vaciada* is currently affected – although with much less intensity than some Latin American, African, and Asian regions – by this wave of neo-extractivism not only by the territorial wounds caused by “clean” energy macro-projects (and its associated ongoing protests), but also with massive touristic and logistic infrastructures ever-expanding to ecologically sensitive areas.²¹

I do not think these two aspects (urban and rural maldevelopments) should be analyzed as two separate processes or as typically Spanish historical episodes. They are two sides of the same global process, namely, the planetary urbanization of capital. Both aspects are better understood as socioecological manifestations of the same urban-agro-industrial metabolism that characterizes the planetary urbanization of capital.²² This metabolism is unsustainable by default and depends on massive inputs of fossil fuels that are not going to be available in the near future. As this metabolism is increasingly costlier to sustain, its dysfunctions are becoming more and more difficult to ignore everywhere. The disruptive consequences are more noticeable in some regions than others given the uneven spatiotemporal nature of the planetary urban process triggered by the expansion of global capital. Spain, given its aforementioned energy and geographical situation, will soon be forced to pay urgent attention to these issues as its associated dysfunctions will tend to overwhelm its infrastructures and institutions.

España vaciada and densely populated corridors within the Spanish geography are the logical consequences of a linear developmental model that creates an ever-expanding metabolic rift. By disconnecting cities from their sources of nourishment, this urban model disrupts the cyclicity of the soil nutrients and, as a result, depletes the topsoil in the so-called rural areas and generates toxic concentrations of nutrients and chemicals elsewhere. This disruptive metabolism becomes clear if we track the flows of water, energy, food, labor, and waste, as many essays in this *Companion* show. In other words, the urban-rural dichotomy does not hold if we understand the rural as an operational landscape of the planetary urbanization of capital.²³ For this reason, I believe that Spanish environmental cultural studies will

20 Martín Arboleda, *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2020), pp. 98, 102.

21 Luis I. Prádanos, “The Cultural Ecology of Tourism: Life-Capital Conflict in Post-2008 Spain,” in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Spain: Ideas, Practices, Imaginings*, ed. by L. Elena Delgado and Eduardo Ledesma. (London; New York: Routledge, accepted).

22 Luis I. Prádanos, “Energy Humanities and Spanish Urban Cultural Studies: A Call for a Radical Convergence,” in *Environmental Cultural Studies: Latin American and Iberian Studies*, ed. by Katarzyna Beilin et al., *Hispanic Issues On Line*, 24 (Fall 2019), 27–45.

23 In “Operational Landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene,” Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis affirm that the urbanization process has a global socioecological metabolism

benefit from studying the interconnection between the planetary urbanization of capital and the expansion and intensification of extractivism, energy depletion, labor exploitation, power centralization, inequality, and ecological breakdown. The planetary urbanization of capital and extractivist intensification – this includes not only mines and dams, but also industrial agriculture and tourist macro-projects which are also extractive territorial approaches – go hand-in-hand and could not exist at the current scale without abundant fossil energy, drastic territorial fragmentation, and soil depletion, as well as massive enclosures and displacements associated with the process of global depeasantization and rural marginalization. The current intensity, scale, and material footprint of this new planetary extractivism is immense and without parallel in history (Arboleda, pp. 11–13).

The urban-rural divide is the materialization of a linear design that depends on exploitative, extractive, and wasteful spatial relations and the extremely uneven distribution of power that mobilizes massive flows of energy, nutrients, labor, and waste for the sake of capital accumulation (as many contributions to this *Companion* make clear). Such an extreme distinction between rural and urban spaces would not be possible without the linear and unsustainable growth-oriented economic culture that relies on constant extraction and waste production.

For these reasons, I did not want this *Companion* to reinforce a rural-urban heuristic approach that – together with methodological nationalism, as we will see soon – emphasizes theoretical distinctions that prevent Spanish cultural scholars from focusing on flows and metabolisms; these approaches trap and limit scholars' attention to the study of specific spaces (e.g., cities, national or regional territories) as somehow self-propelled and self-contained units. Instead, I thought it was more fruitful to think about water and waste circulation, migrant and tourist movements, or food systems, for instance, since keeping track of their material and discourse flows – which requires one to pay attention to relations, processes, and metabolisms – unveils more critical and systemic understandings of global socioecological issues.

The Spanish state has an almost total dependency on imported fossil fuels.²⁴ In the current context of progressive and irreversible global energy decline and increasing demand – not to mention the geopolitical and ecological instability that

that drastically transforms not only the spaces where cities are located but all of the biosphere, including “supply zones, impact zones, sacrifice zones, logistic corridors ...” (24). The urbanization process entails the “operationalization of the entire planet, including terrestrial, subterranean, fluvial, oceanic and atmospheric space, to serve an accelerating, intensifying process of industrial urban development” (Brenner, *Critique of Urbanization*, p. 200). Given that “cities are not self-propelled” but “supported by diverse metabolic inputs (labor, materials, fuel, water, food) and engender a range of metabolic byproducts (waste, pollution, carbon), the vast majority of which are produced within and, eventually, absorbed back into non-city zones,” Brenner and Katsikis encourage urban scholars to abandon the city-centric approach that has dominated the field during the last decades and focus instead on the metabolism of the urban process (p. 25).

24 Antonio Turiel, *Petrocalipsis. Crisis energética global y cómo (no) la vamos a solucionar* (Madrid: Alfabeto, 2020), p. 73.

could suddenly compromise energy supply at any time – Spain’s energy situation is dire. The country will likely face rising fuel prices in the near future and, eventually, the end of/disruptions in a reliable energy supply. Drastically reducing Spain’s overall energy consumption will likely become the only viable mid-term solution (Turiel, p. 185). Renewable energy will not resolve these issues related to fossil fuel decline for several reasons. First of all, to date there has been no energy transition but only energy addition,²⁵ meaning that the gains in renewable energy production over the last few decades are not substitutes for fossil fuels, but merely add to them to cover the constantly increasing global energy demand. Second, most renewable technologies cannot be expanded much further given current material and energy constraints. Hydroelectric energy is currently the most important source of renewable energy in Spain – the section on “Water and Power” within the *Companion* addresses its historical developments and its sociocultural, ecological, and political implications – and climate change is already affecting water distribution and availability (Turiel, p. 95). In any case, hydroelectric production cannot be expanded much more given that most rivers are already utilized, with the high socioecological costs that these hydroelectric interventions entail (see essays by Fernández-Cebrián, Trevathan, and Gajiç in this *Companion*). Third, the energy return on energy invested for most renewables is extremely low in comparison with conventional fossil fuels. It is in fact too low to sustain the energy demands of techno-industrial societies and consumerist cultures. This is clearly the case in Spain with photovoltaic technologies, according to the research conclusions published by Prieto and Hall.²⁶

The only viable option for Spain moving forward would be to significantly reduce its economic metabolism and overall energy use. This transition to postgrowth economic cultures should be done at a global scale in a decade or two to avoid the worse consequences of a systemic collapse.²⁷ The resulting postgrowth societies will use much less energy and, as such, they will evolve into radically different – non-consumerist – cultures.²⁸ Other than the specific geographical, climatic, and geopolitical situation of Spain, there is nothing properly Spanish about all these issues: the planetary urbanization of capital happens everywhere in the world, although with different intensities, uneven distribution of responsibilities and risks, and different political and cultural responses. Capitalist accumulation always depends on the uneven socio-spatial developments it creates, as critical geographers clearly understand. For example, although we can see some cultural and political peculiarities in the rapid Spanish “economic modernization” in the second half of the twentieth century (a late modernization relative to other Western

25 Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020), p.104.

26 Pedro A. Prieto and Charles A. S. Hall, *Spain’s Photovoltaic Revolution: The Energy Return on Investment* (Berlín: Springer, 2013).

27 Megan Seibert and William Rees, “Through the Eye of a Needle: An Eco-Heterodox Perspective on Renewable Energy Transition,” *Energies*, 14.15 (2021), 4508 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/en14154508>>.

28 Ramón Fernández Durán and Luis González Reyes, *En la espiral de la energía*, 2nd edn (Madrid: Libros en Acción, 2018), p. 33.

European countries), similar patterns were recurrent in many other regions before and afterwards with similar socioecological consequences: acritical public celebration of rapid national economic growth accompanied by marginalization of its critics; exacerbated social inequality; loss of food sovereignty; depeasantization, massive displacement, and rural-urban maldevelopment; increase in energy use, waste production and petrochemical inputs; and overall ecological degradation. As such, there is nothing properly Spanish about the celebrated Spanish economic miracles – and no good reason to celebrate them if attending to their enormous socioecological costs – if we look at them from a global and decolonial socioecological perspective (e.g., postdevelopment theories).

CURRENT DILEMMAS FOR THE FIELD

Analyzing cultural responses to global socioecological issues through a methodological nationalism lens can lead scholars to interpret – or worse, to celebrate – specific manifestations of uneven capitalist socio-spatial developments as national idiosyncrasies (Prádanos, “Repensar”). Thus, I believe that methodological nationalism may be a counterproductive approach from a critical environmental cultural studies point of view. Frankly, this dilemma has tormented me during the entire process of working on this *Companion*, as I was painfully experiencing the paradox of engaging on this project that felt to me both extremely important and highly inadequate in its national framing: the “Spanish” in the title speaks for itself. The need to make the *Companion* cohesive, focused, useful, and manageable, by limiting its regional scope, meant that I was unable to include some potentially important contributions as these did not focus sufficiently on Spain. A similar feeling of inadequacy often seizes me when I teach courses on environmental humanities within my Spanish department. Limiting the readings and examples to a specific region and a specific language – “ignoring the ecology of languages,” as Joseba Gabilondo put it in a personal communication – prevents me from including some broader but integrated relational perspectives that could better illuminate the socioecological entanglements I am teaching about. On the other hand, I see the opposite problem with some environmental discourses that are so abstract as not to address any specific environmental conflict and, as such, become politically irrelevant. This is the main drawback of environmental approaches that do not consider specific environmental conflicts and cultural practices: “afirmar que todo está conectado con todo puede no decirnos nada sobre de qué modo concreto lo está” (affirming that everything is interconnected says nothing about concrete connections) (Vindel, p. 148). This is why I have always insisted that Spanish environmental cultural studies must be informed by political ecology and degrowth debates. How Spanish environmental cultural studies can confront this “methodological nationalism” conundrum moving forward is something that the field must figure out collectively. I see a false solution in the proliferating number of edited volumes related to ecocriticism that include an incoherent miscellanea of essays from different regions – mostly Euro-American-centred – and featuring contributions of highly unequal quality. It seems to me that some of the possible ways to negotiate these issues

in a fruitful manner would be for Spanish environmental cultural scholars to dialogue more explicitly and openly with South Atlantic and Mediterranean environmental cultural studies,²⁹ participate in the ongoing development of the Global Hispanophone,³⁰ as well as engaging more proactively with decolonial scholars and activists.³¹ I strived to include some of these perspectives in this *Companion*, but they are not represented nearly as much as I wished because it was not easy to find contributors prepared to take on these complex challenges given restricted timelines and pandemic disruptions.

Significantly expanding our spatiotemporal radars to understand environmental cultural history could be a productive way to overcome myopic and neocolonial spatiotemporal academic approaches (e.g., methodological nationalism, Euro-American environmental reductionism, and North Atlantic ethnocentrism) that prevent us from better contextualizing and contesting capitalist and colonial modernities. Some recent contributions by Hickel, Graeber and Wengrow,³² Patel and Moore,³³ Fernández Durán and González Reyes, and Yusoff³⁴ are but a few examples of what this expansive critical perspective could look like when dealing with global socioecological issues. If we expand the spatiality and temporality of our cultural and environmental histories beyond the colonial/capitalist dominant cultural narratives (and beyond the human, of course), we can see more clearly how inequality and ecological degradation are not the natural outcomes of human civilization, and then a wide palette of emancipatory political possibilities emerges (Graeber and Wengrow; Patel and Moore). This broader contextualization of where our cultural ecologies come from – beyond modern techno-industrial epistemologies – also helps us understand that capitalism and colonialism are mutually constituted³⁵ and, as such, need to be dismantled in tandem.

- 29 See Luis I. Prádanos and Mark Anderson, “Transatlantic Iberian, Latin American, and Lusophone African Ecocriticism: An Introduction,” in special issue “South Atlantic Ecocriticism,” *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, 8.1 (2017), 1–21, and Luis I. Prádanos, “Toward a Euro-Mediterranean Socioenvironmental Perspective: The Case for a Spanish Ecocriticism,” in special issue “Mediterranean Ecocriticism,” ed. by Serenella Iovino, *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 4.2 (Autumn 2013), 30–48.
- 30 See Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, “Entering the Global Hispanophone: An Introduction,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 20 (2019), 1–19 for an introduction to the Global Hispanophone.
- 31 Elizabeth DeLoughrey, et al. (eds), *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 32 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).
- 33 Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).
- 34 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
- 35 Ramón Grosfoguel, “De la crítica poscolonial a la crítica decolonial: similitudes y diferencias entre las dos perspectivas,” in *Diversidad epistemológica y pensamiento crítico*, ed. by Javier Tobar (Popayán, Columbia: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2019), pp. 65–78.

For Spanish environmental cultural studies specifically, it would be helpful to expand the spatial radar beyond not only its national-state territorial borders, but also beyond the Euro-Atlantic region that usually frames some of its most ingrained cultural narratives that will not hold under a more decolonial and ecological scrutiny (Prádanos and Anderson). To maintain an Atlantic-centric perspective today may be heuristically detrimental, as the Pacific has become “the main infrastructural corridor of world trade,” and it is now a critical region to understand the drastic intensification of global extractivism as well as its associated sociotechnical and ecological transformations (Arboleda, pp. 13, 46–51, 116). According to Mbembe, “Europe is no longer the center of gravity of our world” and “the demotion of Europe opens up possibilities – and presents dangers, for critical thought.”³⁶

If, in addition to looking for these openings, we also put the concept of “energy” into our theoretical radar when we try to understand cultural practices and narratives, we get powerful insights into why our dominant cultural paradigm is not only socially unfair and undesirable, but also impossible to sustain from a basic biophysical standpoint. If we study the role of energy in the acceleration of history (Fernández Durán and González Reyes, p. 24), it becomes clear that the collapse of global capitalist civilization may be inevitable, and that there is a strong relation between social complexity and energy intensity as well as between energy and power concentrations (p. 28). The good news, if we agree with Fernández Durán and González Reyes, is that the degree of social complexity doesn’t necessarily correlate with human wellbeing and environmental health (p. 34). As David Graeber and David Wengrow recently point out, humans can organize politically in many creative ways beyond what social scientists are trained to recognize, which keeps our future political possibilities much more open and exciting than the self-limiting options – techno-optimism or catastrophism – offered by current dominant cultural narratives.

Zooming in again on the Spanish context, a flourishing radical ecological activism that was significantly influenced by ecological economics and political ecology (see Gorostiza and Martí Escayol’s essay in this *Companion*) existed in the 1970s and 80s but was subsequently silenced and ignored, paradoxically, at the precise moment when the global expansion of the growth-oriented economic culture began overshooting Earth’s regenerative biocapacity. Why is it that a popular ecological movement lost its grip – rather than built momentum – at the very moment when capitalism started facing the ecological limits to its expansion on a global scale? Again, this issue cannot be understood using a methodological nationalist framing because it transcends national boundaries (we need to zoom out again). During the 1970s and 80s, popular recognition of biophysical limits to economic growth were not uncommon within industrialized and postcolonial nations alike. The obvious conclusion was that, if you cannot grow the pie indefinitely without collapsing the planetary ecosystems, the only way to meet human needs for all of humanity in a finite biosphere with limited resources was to distribute existing wealth and opportunities more fairly (this was always the case and will

³⁶ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. by Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 1.

always be). This conclusion was obviously an inconvenient truth for a global elite that could not justify – and feel good about – their “accumulation-by-dispossession” strategies. Neoliberalism came to the rescue by reframing and depoliticizing the environmental debate (e.g., environmental economics, sustainable development, green growth, ecomodernism) and by claiming that there were no ecological limits to economic expansion that could not be overcome by intensifying capitalist technological, market-oriented, and managerial innovations. This movement was not only a recipe for financial, environmental, and labor deregulation, but also for simultaneously introducing regulations in favor of corporations, in particular, and capital accumulation, in general. Apparently, removing all obstacles in the way of neocolonial capital accumulation was supposed to solve the socioecological problems brought about by centuries of fierce capitalist and colonial expansion. The dominant ethnocentric, anthropocentric, exploitative, and mechanistic paradigm that has been the signature of the growth-oriented imperial cultural imaginary for the last few centuries – and even Western science developments proved it obsolete and unsustainable at that time – was taken to its maximum potential by neoliberalism and became the default global economic policy for decades to come. After several decades of the reigning neoliberal globalization rationality, the outcomes speak for themselves: massive extinction and massive inequality are at an unprecedented scale in human history.

The neoliberal consensus apparently collapsed after 2008, as the dominant growth-oriented system was significantly contested at a global scale. Postgrowth and postdevelopment discourses, which until then were only discussed in small radical circles, started gaining significant traction as counterhegemonic cultural influencers. There was a notable proliferation of postgrowth cultural narratives and practices in Spain and elsewhere after 2008.³⁷ This is something to celebrate. Unfortunately, the breakdown of the neoliberal globalization consensus has also had other less desirable cultural and political responses, and quite dangerous ones. On the one hand, we are witnessing a worldwide resurgence of authoritarian and xenophobic nationalisms and regionalisms, which either plainly deny the ecological crisis, or else frame it as a threat to national security, and as an excuse to blame vulnerable populations and further militarize borders. On the other hand, we see a proliferation of ecomodernist and green growth discourses which, while recognizing the environmental crisis, seek to maintain neoliberal techno-market fundamentalism by becoming more awkwardly unrealistic in their techno-optimist global proposals.³⁸ The Anthropocene discourse, so popular today in academic environmental discourses, if it is not carefully nuanced, entails the exaltation of these ecomodernist neoliberal fantasies. It is becoming a dominant

³⁷ See Prádanos *Postgrowth Imaginaries* for what this looks like in Spain; and see Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018) and Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (eds), *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2019) for a more global overview.

³⁸ They propose, for instance, embracing risky and unsafe geoengineering schemes, advancing space colonization by corporations with mining and tourism plans, or counting on nonexistent technologies to avoid climate breakdown.

cultural narrative that takes anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism, and the illusion of industrial/capitalist managerial and technological global mastery to a new level.³⁹ The concept of the Anthropocene, by making all humanity an indistinguishable geological force that can be managed by technoscientific capitalism, avoids thinking about race and coloniality (Yusoff, p. 18), and it does not question “the ability of the colonizer to both describe and operationalize world-space as a global entity” (Yusoff, p. 32). This narrative “assumes the master model of modernity as representing the entire human species ... If we accept that all humanity is one with the master, from where, then, should we expect change to come?” (Barca, pp. 4–5).

In other words, the main counterproductive cultural reactions to the undeniable socioecological crisis exacerbated by neoliberal globalization are expressed either by embracing a logic of fragmentation, securitization, tribalism, authoritarianism, and competition (xenophobic nationalisms) or by redoubling on the universalizing, techno-scientific, and managerial logics of neoliberal globalization (Anthropocene narrative). They are both counterproductive environmental framings because they do not challenge the colonial and capitalist worldviews that make our techno-industrial economic cultures unsustainable and unfair by design. They do not question exceptionalisms (national or ethnic in one case, human in the other), growth-oriented logics, and rampant inequalities that are incompatible with regenerative and just economic cultures. Inequality is socially and environmentally corrosive⁴⁰ and, therefore, “regenerative cultures are more equitable cultures” where relations of reciprocity and cooperation are prioritized.⁴¹ These two counterproductive reactions to the downfall of the neoliberal globalization consensus are grossly inadequate to address the socioecological crisis, precisely because they disregard inequality and power asymmetries while either attacking or obliterating cultural and epistemological diversity. Both approaches stem from (neo)colonial, ethnocentric, patriarchal, and racist mindsets and, therefore, cannot deal appropriately with cultural differences to advance emancipatory politics. The species discourse of the Anthropocene is an ecomodernist reinterpretation of “the end of history” neoliberal narrative and, as such, fails to even recognize differential responsibilities and vulnerabilities, by universalizing and naturalizing the culture of techno-managerial capitalism. Xenophobic nationalisms, with their inherent exceptionalism, go even further by automatically translating cultural, racial, religious, gender, sexual, ethnic, and national differences into inequalities.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FIELD

Although all contributors to this *Companion* implicitly or explicitly condemn both xenophobic nationalism and global neoliberalism, several essays mobilize the Anthropocene concept without contesting – at least explicitly – its neoliberal

39 Stefania Barca, *Forces of Reproduction: Notes for a Counter-Hegemonic Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 52.

40 Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), pp. 217–33.

41 Daniel Christian Walk, *Designing Regenerative Cultures* (Axminster, England: Triarchy Press, 2016), p. 251.

eral, neocolonial, patriarchal, technocratic, and anthropocentric overtones (I plead guilty of doing the same thing in other publications). I believe that, moving forward, the field should be more mindful about the dangers of perpetuating certain environmental framings that overlook the concerns raised by political ecologists, decolonial thinkers, and feminist economists. For our field to understand that both nationalism and neoliberalism are different articulations of the same growth-oriented, patriarchal, colonial, ethnocentric, competitive, and anthropocentric, imperial mode of thinking, Spanish environmental cultural studies should strive to overcome the tendency of Hispanic studies to rely on methodological nationalism while significantly engaging with global decolonial feminisms and post-development debates.

I believe that future contributions to Spanish environmental cultural studies would benefit from engaging more explicitly with energy humanities, as well as further analyzing the inextricable connections among capitalism, colonialism, energy regimes, and cultural hegemonies that are incompatible with planetary life. More investigation could also be used to understand the links between toxic masculinities, xenophobic national identities, techno-optimism, energy consumption, and ecological breakdown.⁴² In this vein, another area that deserves further attention entails tracking the connections between cultural narratives that negate the limits to economic expansion and capital accumulation and the narratives that celebrate techno-optimism, as well as how these narratives grossly misunderstand how energy really works.⁴³ Similarly, there could be a greater focus on how techno-optimism and catastrophism are counterproductive, disempowering ways of framing the socioecological crisis, since they both imply that there is no alternative to our dominant economic culture and, as such, significantly limit our political possibilities. Most of these cultural narratives assume that we cannot design a more desirable and viable economic culture and, therefore, we are condemned to keep doing what we are doing – until we either make the planet uninhabitable and collapse, or an uber-rich white male provides a technofix to save us all.

The second scenario is not realistic at all for two converging reasons: energy decline and massive inequality. Modern technologies depend on energy-intensive industrial systems that are not going to be viable in the near future owing to the irreversible and progressive global energy decline (Fernández Durán and González Reyes; Turiel; Seibert and Rees), so technofixes are not going to be an option. In addition, extreme inequality is historically associated with increasing negative ecological impact (Hickel, p. 183). Thus, expecting a solution to our pressing socioecological crises coming from a convergence of high technology and high inequality is delusional. These two factors – the existence of billionaires and the high dependency on energy-intensive infrastructures and technologies – are actually the perfect ingredients for socioecological collapse, not the solution

42 Cara Daggett, “Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 47.1 (2018), 25–44.

43 Samuel Alexander and Jonathan Rutherford, “A Critique to Techno-Optimism: Efficiency without Sufficiency Is Lost,” in *Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance*, ed. by Agni Kalfagianni, Doris Fuchs, and Anders Hayden (London; New York: Routledge, 2020).

to it. The much-needed emancipatory responses to the socioecological crisis are more likely to come from social innovation and diversified leadership, not from masculinized and elitist techno-capitalist innovation.⁴⁴ For these reasons, I am convinced that the combined issues of inequality, energy, and technology deserve more attention from Spanish environmental cultural scholars moving forward. As such, we can expect to see future contributions by Spanish cultural scholars dialoguing with energy humanities, decolonial eco-feminisms, and the political ecology of technology.

How societies and communities address several contested socioecological issues today will determine if the planet remains liveable for most of the existing human population and future generations. If during the last centuries some entrenched cultural narratives and metaphors have monopolized meaning-making and imposed a pathological understanding of humans' role in the planetary ecology with dire consequences for the web of life, then we need different cultural paradigms and narratives that can better serve us to navigate the current socio-ecological context. We need regenerative and postgrowth cultural paradigms that are able to displace the toxic and extractive cultural narratives that are currently ingrained in techno-industrial, petroleum-based, growth-oriented societies. Spanish environmental cultural studies is well suited to explore the intersections of all these issues. It is a transdisciplinary field that does not ignore the elephant in the room, but fully interrogates it from diverse angles, to illuminate how cultural dynamics brought us here, and what kind of cultural transformations could help us thrive in the current historical and ecological conjunction. The drastic biophysical transformations driving ecological breakdown and species extinction are shaped by neo-colonial, racist, and neoliberal rationalities of total control and management of a separate entity called nature, which can be exploited in perpetuity in a search for constant expansion, growth, and power. These ideologies justify and facilitate labor exploitation and all forms of extractivist relations, with fatal material consequences for the web of life, as many contributions in this *Companion* show. These toxic narratives get materialized into toxic infrastructures, alienating institutions, disempowering educational systems, addictive technologies designed to absorb and monetize our attention, and pathological mindsets which are ingrained in our collective identities, habits, stories, and memories through persistent metaphors and infrastructures that condition, and significantly limit, our political imagination, collective desires, emancipatory practices, and planet liveability. These institutionalized cultural narratives not only deplete nonhuman life, but also make human experience increasingly meaningless, precarious, and unviable: "the systemic risks experienced specifically by Black slaves during early capitalism have now become the norm for, or at least the lot of, all of subaltern humanity" (Mbembe, p. 4). For Mbembe there is an ongoing tendency to "universalize the Black condition" (p. 4) as more people are forced to enter into the ever-expanding sacrificial zones created by the intensification of neoliberal capital accumulation, and as such, most people are "relegated to the role of a 'superfluous humanity'" (p. 3).

44 Jennie C. Stephens, *Diversifying Power: Why We Need Antiracist, Feminist Leadership on Climate and Energy* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2020); Daggett, pp. 29–33.

Moving forward, Spanish environmental cultural scholars could also dialogue with queer and disability activists to critique the harmful binaries reproduced by the reductionist and hierarchical thinking ingrained in the dominant cultural imaginary.⁴⁵ Paying due attention to the bodily maintenance and care required for social reproduction, as ecofeminists suggest, can also go a long way to contest patriarchal techno-industrial modernities that are designed to deplete such bodies as well as the territories in which they are embedded (as the decolonial feminist notion of “body-territory” emphasizes). Similarly, our affective and emotional lives are worthy of exploration. After experiencing the enormous – although unevenly distributed – trauma of living in a socio-politically polarized and dying world, we must learn to heal if we want to reclaim the emotional energy needed to actively engage in the difficult work of grief and regeneration. As the so-called “affective ecocriticism” claims, we cannot avoid the hard work of acknowledging and processing our grief and eco-anxiety – and cultivating our love – to find our motivation to act in the midst of increasing bodily vulnerability and socioecological uncertainty.⁴⁶

We also must be able to desire more than the prefabricated plastic rewards offered by neoliberalism and the false pleasures promised by its algorithmically propelled attention economy: “We have only begun to imagine alternative desiring strategies for the new Earth” (Daggett, p. 43). We need to collectively cultivate emancipatory subjectivities and desires that are neither associated with energy and material overconsumption nor triggered by the shallow and convulsive overstimulation of the algorithmic calculations of turbocapitalism. As Jorge Marí told me recently in a personal communication, perhaps environmental cultural studies should not be one more academic discipline after all, but a fountain of inspiration, motivation, wisdom, alternative values, and practices with real life application and tangible impact in the world. As such, environmental cultural activist-scholars should strive not only to develop meaningful academic projects, but also to learn other relevant skills – permaculture, ecopedagogy, independent journalism, organizing public workshops – together to enhance their capacity to better dialogue with and learn from their students and communities. The nurturing space for this kind of practical, meaningful, and transformative scholar-activist practice is exactly what the cultural collective *ALCESXXI* has been fostering during the last decade.

I also think that ecocriticism and Spanish environmental cultural studies would benefit from avoiding overemphasis on animal studies as a way to correct the anthropocentrism of our dominant economic culture. This well-intended movement risks changing some classifications that transform differences into inequalities and extractivist mindsets (human/nonhuman) for other ones that are equally arbitrary and exclusionary (animal/nonanimal).⁴⁷ We do not have to start from scratch

45 See Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara (eds), *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory* (University of Nebraska Press 2017).

46 See Kyle Blalow and Jennifer Ladino (eds), *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

47 I see the same problem with favoring regional nationalisms within the Spanish state

to go beyond “the animal turn” as there already exists substantial work on, for instance, critical extinction studies,⁴⁸ plant life and intelligence,⁴⁹ stone vibrancy,⁵⁰ and fungi agency.⁵¹ Beilin and Suryanarayanan’s work on multispecies alliances to resist toxic agribusiness in Argentina is another good example of transcending the animal/non-animal dichotomy in politically fruitful ways (see also Beilin and De Moya-Cotter’s essay in this *Companion*).⁵² As Sharon P. Holland suggests, we must move from the animal-human distinction to focus on ethical relations. Holland is not interested in human-animal distinction but in life itself.⁵³ The key question remains, can we live differently in order to liberate *all* beings from the necropolitical machine of industrial productivism? The dominant economic culture confuses productivity with the appropriation and depletion of the ecological systems’ capacity for bioproductivity. So, the more productive techno-industrial societies become, the unhealthier the living systems in which they are imbedded also become. As Robin Vall Kimmerer compellingly argues in “Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance,” we have to understand that real abundance and wealth come from reciprocity, generosity, and healthy socioecological relations because “all flourishing is mutual.”

Postnational approaches and, in general, explicit interrogations of the role of nation-states in perpetuating the socioecological crisis, would also be welcomed as Spanish environmental cultural studies further develop. But more than anything, I believe, we need to engage more intensively with the reconstruction of commons of all kinds. Commoning may be the best strategy to collectively guarantee our social reproduction in a biologically impoverished planet while we work on unlearning dominant cultural imaginaries, dismantling systems of inequality, and undoing the extractive ecological relations promoted by the hegemony of nation-states, hierarchical epistemologies, and market fundamentalisms. Enclosures and constant attacks on the commons were not limited to a historical period of

as a way of contesting its central nationalism (rather than questioning the notion of nationalism itself).

- 48 Suzanne McCullagh, Luis I. Prádanos, Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan, and Catherine Wagner (eds), *Contesting Extinctions: Decolonial and Regenerative Futures* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).
- 49 Robin Vall Kimmerer, “Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance,” *Emergence Magazine*, 10 December 2020.
- 50 Jeffrey Jeromem Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 51 Fungi provide an insightful example for how to blur hierarchical distinctions, as they defy traditional classifications between plants and animals. Fungi are ecological enhancers and, among their many qualities, they can detoxify and decompose industrial waste and regenerate degraded soils (mycoremediation). See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- 52 Katarzyna Beilin and Sainath Suryanarayanan, “The War between Amaranth and Soy: Interspecies Resistance to Transgenic Soy Agriculture in Argentina,” *Environmental Humanities*, 9.2 (2017), 204–29.
- 53 Sharon P. Holland made these remarks during her talk “A Black Feminist Consideration of Animal Life” at Miami University (4 November 2021).

primitive capitalist accumulation, but are an essential and intensifying feature of capitalism during its whole history.⁵⁴ To engage with the transformative potential of a cultural ecology of the commons in Spain, we need not start from scratch thanks to the work by Palmar Alvarez Blanco and all the collective initiatives and cultural practices that are mapped in her ongoing project *Constelación de los comunes*.⁵⁵ Moving forward, it will be crucial to reinvent and rearticulate the commons necessary to guarantee our social reproduction in a fair and effective way in the context of material restrictions and ecological breakdown. The key will likely be to initiate a decommodification and commonization of human (and more-than-human) care, as feminist degrowth scholars have suggested.⁵⁶

I hope that this introduction makes it sufficiently clear that thinking about environmental issues without considering the insights of political ecology (and without decolonial, ecofeminist thinking for that matter) is not appropriate. The current dominant culture's separation narratives and ideologies of disconnection that classify, exclude, and divide in an attempt to control, manage, accumulate, exploit, extract, and dominate are deeply inadequate to guarantee our social reproduction moving forward. As such, discussing environmental issues without questioning the cultural paradigm that favors competition (among individuals, species, universities, political parties, cities, nations, and corporations) and (neo)colonial hierarchical distinctions is counterproductive. If being modern means accepting hierarchies among separate beings and if such modes of thinking facilitate the emergence of competitive, exploitative, and extractive cultural paradigms and material relations, then acknowledging environmental issues without changing these dominant framings can only lead to (as it already has) xenophobic environmentalism, national security discourses, neocolonial extractivism and land grabs reframed as green energy transitions, and regional competition and militarization as responses to the intensifying environmental conflicts caused by climate change and ecological breakdown.⁵⁷ Socioecological issues can only be successfully addressed with more equality, more and better democracy (Hickel, pp. 243–48), and an embracing of systems thinking (Capra and Luisi). As such, when environmental discourses rightly point to the need for re-localizing economic activities (reducing the material and energy throughput of meeting human needs), we should emphasize the importance of simultaneously remaining as culturally open and diverse as possible to avoid “falling into the traps of a resurgence of radical regionalism and narrow-minded parochialism” (Wahl, p. 63). In other words, we must embrace “open-localization”: economic cultures that are locally adapted materially, but globally connected culturally and that cooperate and share knowledge.⁵⁸

54 Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019).

55 Palmar Alvarez Blanco, *Constelación de los comunes* (2020) <<https://constelaciondeloscomunes.org/en/home/>>.

56 Corinna Dengler and Miriam Lang, “Commoning Care: Feminist Degrowth Visions for a Socio-Ecological Transformation,” *Feminist Economics* (2021).

57 Robert Marzec, *Militarizing the Environment: Climate Change and the Security State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

58 Giorgos Velegrakis and Eirini Gaitanou, “Open Localization,” in *Pluriverse*, eds Kothari et al., pp. 259–62.

From the standpoint of environmental cultural studies, it is clear that human communities urgently need to collectively transition to regenerative – rather than extractive and wasteful – material cultures if we want to enjoy thriving communities that are able to navigate the challenges of this century. I have been asked numerous times if we need to save the humanities (they are currently under attack or, at least, massively defunded) in order for academia to play a significant role in this much-needed endeavor. Well, my answer is “it depends.” It seems to me that many literary and cultural scholars asking this question wrongly assume that the humanities are worth saving because they are intrinsically critical to the dominant material culture that is destroying life on Earth and, as such, will automatically contribute to the fostering of transitional regenerative cultures. However, cultural and intellectual history clearly show that some developments within humanistic thinking were – and still are – instrumental to promoting the human exceptionalism and hierarchical ethnocentrism that theoretically justified colonial and capitalist exploitative and extractive worldviews of nature and labor. My experience working in several university departments that fit under the humanities umbrella tell me that a significant number of humanities scholars are not necessarily systems thinkers, and that energy and ecological literacies are anything but the default within such departments. In many cases, the same reductionist, elitist, and anthropocentric approaches, which are a signature aspect of the dominant cultural paradigm that has taken us to the brink of extinction, are perpetuated within humanities departments. To me, a more fruitful question is not whether we should save the humanities, but rather why the humanities are worth saving. This question calls for a less complacent and more critical, nuanced, and transformational approach to the humanities. Perhaps it is more meaningful to put our energies into promoting systems-thinking and ecological literacy within our educational and cultural institutions, rather than in saving something that may be irretrievably invested and deeply rooted in mechanistic, anthropocentric, disciplinary, colonial, ethnocentric, patriarchal, and reductionist origins. Even if we tried, we could not defend the humanities as if they were a unified, solid, and homogeneous thing with intrinsic values – because they are not. But we could certainly make sure that going forward the humanities projects in which we participate are informed by systems thinking, do not perpetuate (neo)colonial, nationalistic, and anthropocentric epistemic patterns, and are serving students and communities to contest the extractivist logics and practices that have triggered inequality and extinction for far too long.⁵⁹ Those working in environmental humanities and energy humanities, in general, and environmental cultural studies, in particular, are good examples of scholars trained as humanists who – perhaps in spite of their academic training – are able to engage in socioecological thinking. Environmental humanities is a rapidly emerging field that is fascinating, vibrant, and dynamic.

⁵⁹ Some good models in this regard are the Center for Environmental Futures at the University of Oregon, The Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, or the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory in Stockholm, just to mention a few. At my own institution, the Miami University Humanities Center also offers a good example of a synergetic, transdisciplinary, and collaborative space that encourages faculty and students to engage with the most pressing issues of our time. Its signature Altman Program is exemplary in this regard.

The key for me is not about saving a unified vision of the humanities that never existed, but to maintain its most critical insights while infusing it with whole systems thinking, decolonial feminisms, and political ecology. Environmental cultural studies is an important part of this critical development and is well-suited to help contest the dominant economic culture as well as the various counterproductive cultural responses to the socioecological crisis it creates. For it is important to assert once again that the existential problems we face are not managerial or technical, but ones of justice, distribution, power, and culture related to our crisis of perception.

STRUCTURE OF THE *COMPANION*

When I committed to work on this *Companion*, the first step was to establish several topics that I considered crucial for a critical shaping and understanding of Spanish environmental cultural studies: political ecology, environmental cultural history, water, extractivism, memory, animal studies, food studies, ecofeminism, decoloniality, critical race studies, tourism, visual culture, waste. Then I invited a group of outstanding Spanish cultural scholars to tap into these issues and connect them with the socioecological context of Spanish culture. I did not only invite people who had already contributed to the development of the field, but also other scholars with innovative approaches to Spanish cultural studies that had clear potential – if offered the opportunity and encouragement – to do so in refreshing and exciting ways. They all exceeded my expectations.

Contributors were given the challenging task of writing short pieces intended to be both intellectually rigorous and reader-friendly. To strengthen the sense of community, generate synergies, and foster cohesion and collaboration, I organized a virtual event (November 2021) where contributors had the space to share their perspectives on the field of Spanish environmental cultural studies and discuss important emerging threads and gaps.

All the contributions within this *Companion*, taken together, are crucial in doing three things: 1) helping understand and critically shape and expand the rapidly emerging field of Spanish environmental cultural studies, 2) exemplifying the importance of Spanish environmental cultural studies in redefining and rethinking Spanish literary and cultural studies in the current context of mass extinction, energy decline, social inequality, and ecological breakdown, and 3) showing how this rapidly emerging field clearly illuminates cultural texts, processes, and practices in unexpected and fruitful ways and, therefore, provides models for how other Spanish cultural scholars and students can respond critically to the important challenges of our time. While some contributions offer a panoramic and historical perspective in relation to important aspects of Spanish environmental cultural studies, other pieces exemplify concrete applications by exploring the socioecological implications of specific cultural manifestations. This combination of contributions, constantly guiding readers to navigate theory and practice, creates an intentional rhythm – zooming in and zooming out – that enriches the usefulness and scope of the *Companion*. As such, this book will hopefully serve not only as the main reference for the field in years to come, but also as an inspiring model

for any student and scholar interested in engaging with Spanish environmental cultural studies.

Readers can find several entry points into this *Companion*. The specific sections of the book are not meant to be considered solid containers, but porous contact points that can be arranged in different combinations to illuminate different connections. The sections though are not random, but have been intentionally organized to serve as signposts pointing to recurrent themes and threads that have had a significant influence in the ongoing development of Spanish environmental cultural studies. Here are some examples of these themes and threads: the historical entanglements between culture and ecology and between inequality and power (in the section “Environmental Cultural History and Political Ecology”); the changing political ecologies of the Francoist regime and how they keep affecting Spain’s current territorial organization, infrastructure arrangements, political identities, and cultural memories (in the sections “Water and Power” and “Ecologies of Memory and Extractivism”); the historically underappreciated importance of non-humans for all economic and cultural matters (in “Animal Studies and Multispecies Ethnographies” and “Food Studies and Exploitative Ecologies”); the incredibly revelatory insights that get unlocked when we dare to think through water, waste, and food beyond our usually narrow anthropocentric and extractive dominant cultural perspectives (in the sections “Water and Power,” “Food Studies,” and “Trash and Discard Studies”); the unnegotiable necessity of engaging with environmental issues from decolonial and feminist angles in order to understand the historical relation between capital accumulation, labor exploitation, racism, patriarchy, and environmental depletion (in “Ecofeminism” and “(Neo)Colonial and Racialized Ecologies”); the many connections between tourism discourses, ecological transformation, and the construction of national and regional identities (in “Tourism and the Environmental Imagination”); or the ways in which different cultural media inform – and are informed by – the changing ecologies they intend to represent (in “Eco-Mediation and Representation”).

Rather than chronologically, the book sections are organized in a more intentional manner. The first section opens with an essay on political ecology (see essay by Martí Escayol and Gorostiza) to clearly emphasize an important message from the outset: Environmental discourses that do not seriously engage with power relations, inequality, and environmental justice are not only missing a central point, but may actually be reinforcing the cultural logic that has made unsustainability its default mode during the last few centuries. I am convinced that environmental concerns that are not informed by political ecology could ignite fear-infused competitive and exclusionary sensibilities that can be easily appropriated and co-opted by eco-totalitarian and eco-fascist discourses (see essays by García-Caro and Caballero Vázquez in this *Companion*).

Closing the book with the section on waste seems most appropriate to me, as our wasteful culture is a manifestation of the final end of our pathological linear economic design that is taking us to a dead end, quite literally. A linear economic system that requires constant, intensifying extraction on one side of the line, and generates massive untreatable waste on the other side, is destructive and unsustainable by default. It rapidly transforms a living planet into a deadly

planetary mine (Arboleda) and a toxic planetary landfill.⁶⁰ A functional economic system within a limited biosphere should be designed in a biomimetic circular and cyclical fashion. Such a system should not only strive to minimize extraction and avoid introducing waste that living systems cannot safely absorb and timely metabolize, but should also regenerate and enhance the overall bioproductivity, diversity, and health of the whole system as much as possible. This can only happen in an economic system that is well designed, namely, by mimicking the patterns of ecological systems to generate abundance, diversity, and whole system health (Wahl, p. 138). Flourishing socioecological systems do not produce anything considered as waste at the ecosystem level. The waste from one living organism becomes the nutrients for others. This cycle allows for long-term viability and health. Thus, finishing the book with four essays on discard studies signals that, going ahead, two possibilities emerge regarding how our culture relates to and thinks about waste – and one of them is lethal. We can either keep the wasteful linear design of our growth-oriented economic culture, *or* we can transition to one that is zero-waste, circular, and regenerative. Put another way, we have the (undeniably temporary) option of allowing the extractivist, and extremely unfair, economic system to continue to do what it is doing, until most human and nonhuman living beings get buried under or choked by toxic pollution and waste – whilst a handful of billionaires egotistically squander the last retrievable fossil energy and rare materials on their techno-eccentricities. End of story! This may be the actual “end of history” and it would be much less glamorous, pleasant, and celebratory than Fukuyama ever imagined. The other option is to transition to ecological and postgrowth economic cultures that prioritize social justice and ecological regeneration and do not produce anything considered trash. In the first case, our toxic waste destroys us. In the second, we design our social metabolism so that no new waste is introduced and the existing trash is – as much as possible – neutralized, composted, repurposed, and safely reintroduced as nutrients to nourish many new beginnings. Finishing the book with waste therefore symbolizes this crossroad: either we are unable to liberate ourselves from our toxic attachments to colonial, capitalist, patriarchal modernity; or we transition to something else and turn the existing ruins into the composting medium for seeding and sprouting many new regenerative and postgrowth cultures. Perhaps the future will materialize into many different experiences in between these two poles, a patchwork of different – more or less socially desirable – postgrowth cultures unevenly distributed across the planet.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The opening section, “Environmental Cultural History and Political Ecology,” starts with an essay by Gorostiza and Martí Escayol that provides a panoramic view of “Political Ecology in Spain.” The authors explain that political ecology understands the political character of all socioecological issues and explores the relations of power and inequality underlying all environmental conflicts. In

⁶⁰ Marco Armiero, *Wasteocene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Spain, political ecology developed during the 1970s and 80s and the publications by Joan Martínez-Alier and José Manuel Naredo in the 1980s would significantly influence the field. The foundation of the journal *Ecología Política*, which “combines academic research with activist voices,” would become the main point of reference for political ecology in Spain and Latin America (p. 36). The next essay, by Ares-López, “drawing from the environmental anthropology of Tim Ingold and the STS [science and technology studies] intellectual tradition,” introduces the concept of “cultures of nature” as a fruitful framing for understanding modern Iberian history, transcending as it does the divisions between two sets of historical fields – cultural and intellectual history on one side, and environmental history and history of science and technology on the other (p. 49).

The section on “Water and Power” features three essays that explore the socioecological entanglements of Franco’s hydro-modernity and its multiple implications regarding political power, labor exploitation, rural displacement, and ecological and cultural transformations. Fernández-Cebrián considers “dam novels” of the 1950s and 60s as “an archive of the collective memory of resistance to hydraulic projects” with potential for enriching environmental history and illuminating current socioecological debates (p. 60). The contribution by Trevathan also studies “dam novels,” including recent ones, to expose Francoism necropolitics and the impossibility of the regime to control the agency of social processes and water flows. Gajić’s essay focuses on aerial imaging technologies to understand their “active implication... in the process of environmental transformation and management in Spain from the 1950s onward” (p. 69). All three essays make clear the negative social and ecological implications of a technocratic developmentalism unable to recognize that living socioecological processes cannot be controlled and engineered to work as machines without dire unintended consequences. All these essays contribute – albeit implicitly – to emerging debates on critical infrastructure studies and energy humanities.

The section on “Ecologies of Memory and Extractivism” consists of three pieces that reveal the connections between extractivism, socioecological violence, and cultural memory. The dominant extractive economy exploits human and nonhuman labor and by so doing creates social violence and environmental toxicity. Labrador Méndez examines the extractive poetics of the Francoism necrotic developmental paradigm that connects Spanish past and present with the evolution of global capitalism. The memory of the wounded, mined landscape reminds us of the social and ecological violence that extractive capitalism, in general, and its Spanish versions, in particular, simultaneously inflicts and strives to hide from our cultural memory by erasing the links between public infrastructure, dispossession, and monumentality. Ferrán’s essay provides an ecocritical reading of a recent photographic exhibit by Catalan multi-media artist Francesc Torres. Torres places in dialogue photographs of two ruined sites by the Galician coast, a wolfram mine and a whaling factory. The presence of these contrasting images in Torres’ photography unveils the uncanny memory of the human and nonhuman violence imposed by an extractive logic that we are made to confront in the present. Caballero Vázquez’s piece uses the Valley of the Fallen as a case study to explore “the intersection of memory and environmentalism” (p. 102).

Caballero Vázquez's examination of current debates on the resignifications of this monumental site reveals "the ways in which totalitarian ideologies can appropriate ecological discourse while democratic governments remain indifferent to, and fall behind on, those concerns" (p. 102).

The section on "Animal Studies and Multispecies Ethnographies" features three essays that participate in the "nonhuman turn" in the humanities. Beilin and De Moya-Cotter advocate for the need to "ecologize the humanities." By drawing on environmental anthropology, science and technology studies, and multispecies ethnographies, the authors read two Chirbes' novels (*Crematorio* and *En la orilla*) and a recent Óliver Laxe movie (*O que arde*) "as stories of multispecies entanglements with technologies" (p. 114). In their analysis of the movie, the authors notice how both wildfires and bulldozers can cause environmental destruction, but one is resisted and the other accepted because of their different roles within the institutional economic culture. Beusterien's piece introduces the notion of "Humanities Biogeography" and suggests that it could be productive for environmental cultural scholars to think of the possibility of a non-speciesist and non-reductive anthropocentrism. In the last essay of this section, Viestenz explores "the presence of the animal in texts produced during the Francoist dictatorship" to then focus on "the figure of the pigeon-dove in Mercè Rodoreda's 1962 novel *La plaça del diamant*" (p. 125).

Two complementary essays integrate the next section on "Food Studies and Exploitative Ecologies." In the first, Afinoguénova advocates for environmentally-informed food cultural scholarship, given the obvious ecological impact of the modern Spanish food system. Afinoguénova offers a review of Spanish food cultural history that is useful for understanding the relations between Spanish culinary nationalism, the promotion of tourism by the Franco regime, and changes in the Spanish diet that have led to the current place of Spain within the global industrial food system. The essay emphasizes the patriarchal nature of Spain's gastronomy and its exploitation of migrant – mostly female – labor. In the following essay, Close dwells in the visual work of Aitor Garmendia, which makes vividly and painfully visible the extreme animal cruelty behind the environmentally devastating Spanish pork industry. Spain is one of "the world's highest per capita meat consumers" as well as pig meat producer (p. 148). This has immense deleterious environmental and public health consequences that Spanish gastronomic celebratory discourses prefer to ignore.

In the section on "Ecofeminism," García-Caro suggests the existence of "early forms of ecofeminism in two texts from before the Spanish civil war" (p. 159). Both novels depict not only the environmental, but also the gender-coded violence associated with capitalist extractive activities in Southern Spain. Next, Leone and Lino offer an overview of Spanish ecofeminism that is relevant for understanding the most critical socioenvironmental movements in Spain. According to the authors, "to empower (especially racialized) women is paramount in order to achieve planetary wellbeing," as there is a parallelism between femicide and ecocide (p. 170).

The next section, "(Neo)colonial and Racialized Ecologies," shows why a Spanish environmental cultural studies approach that ignores the (neo)colonial and racial

entanglements of the ongoing socioecological crisis is not only deficient, but also complicit, in the dominant cultural imaginary that has brought us to where we are. Stehrenberger's piece focuses on the island of Annobón in Equatorial Guinea to exemplify how environmental disasters reveal the "coloniality" of the present. This essay suggests that the toxicity externalized by the racist and colonial Francoist regime not only affected the past, but also conditions the future. Coleman's essay explores how racist environmental metaphors influence how immigrants are perceived in Spain and how these linguistic frames play out in a 2011 play by Irma Correa as well as in Jason deCaires Taylor's "Museo Atlántico." Again, these two essays suggest that addressing all types of inequality could be the best way to address the socioecological crisis.

Two essays are dedicated to exploring "Tourism and the Environmental Imagination." In the first contribution, Picornell Belenguier and Martínez Tejero focus on the "tourism-environment-culture triangle" to understand the current cultural ecology of tourism in Spain (p. 204). The next essay by Valdivielso advocates for a convergence of Spanish cultural studies of tourism and environmental humanities and identifies three spatial framings that have been used to subvert and contest dominant discourses on tourism: the land, the ecological footprint, and the commodity frontier.

The section on "Eco-mediation and Representation" features three essays related to ecopoetics, eco-film, and comics, respectively. Marrero Henríquez proposes to extend the metaphor of breathing as a way to "agglutinate the different and even contending literary and critical tendencies within Hispanism that pay attention to the ecosystemic flows of life" (p. 215). Marí provides a panoramic view of the "tense and contradictory" relationship between the film industry and the environment and shows how even environmental film festivals in Spain have significant ecological footprints. If "Spanish film scholarship has largely ignored the environment," Marí invites cultural scholars to correct this deficiency and recognize that "every film says something about the environment" (p. 227). The author provides a list of environmentally significant Spanish films from different historical periods, genres, and styles that could serve as a solid starting point for any Spanish cultural scholar interested in studying eco-films. Catalá and Martínez, who offer a history of environmentally themed comics within Spain, remark that "comics take advantage of the medium's ability to represent" ecological relations given its formal peculiarities, and warn that comics with environmental themes are not always advancing and promoting ecological thinking (p. 232).

Four essays within the "Trash and Discard Studies" section close the *Companion*. Phillips explores the eighteenth-century Spanish debates around burial practices and public health that prelude contemporary waste management policies and current public health discussions. These debates resonate with today's politicization of public health concerns related to the ongoing Covid pandemic. Amago uses a variety of Spanish cultural manifestations to exemplify the relations between space and waste in the context of global capitalism production of waste space in Spain. McKay argues "for the relevance of discard studies to an environmental cultural studies-centered approach to the study of Spanish literature" (p. 263) and focuses on *Misericordia*, a novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, to make his point. Zubiaurre's

contribution studies the projects of Spanish architectural collective *Basurama* to show how waste and space are mutually constituted and contested by *Basurama*'s brilliant interventions in public spaces.

IN CLOSING

As Joseph Jenkins explains in *The Humanure Handbook: Shit in a Nutshell*, the incredible and unnecessary effort and sacrifice that we make collectively to maintain a destructive linear metabolism that disconnects excretions and nutrients is monumental.⁶¹ It is so costly in all possible senses because it defies and disrupts ecological cyclicity. Jenkins shows how the solutions are fairly simple, broadly accessible, and do not require big investments or high-tech, but rather a change in the way we *think about shit*, quite literally, and the willingness to work with biochemical natural patterns, not against them (which entails a radical change in the dominant cultural paradigm as we have seen). Working against ecological patterns, as our techno-industrial societies are doing, is utterly insane because, as Bateson succinctly put it, “The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself.”⁶²

Many of the essays about discard studies that close this *Companion* mention that trash is an unavoidable but unintended reality (Amago, McKay, Zubiaurre). This is certainly the case within the context of our current extractive, linear, and growth-oriented economic culture. But it does not have to be this way. It was not during most of human existence on this planet. I am convinced – my experience practicing permaculture showed me that it is possible – that trash is not inevitable, moving forward, as long as we embrace regenerative cultural paradigms. A system that produces waste is, by definition, a badly designed system. The existence of anthropogenic toxic waste at the current scale is a clear testimony of the massive design failure of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal modernity (Escobar, p. 33). The good news is that humans, like all other living beings, are naturally capable of designing and relating to the planet in ecologically enhancing ways (this is individually and collectively much easier, healthier, and rewarding than working against life).

As trash is the topic of the section closing this *Companion*, I also wish – for the sake of circularity and fractality – to finish my Introduction to it with a final reflection on this topic. If we start designing in a way that redefines and re-integrates waste, we can turn most of our existing trash into repurposed materials and composted nutrients ready to feed the new regenerative cultures that will flourish out of the mess caused by the toxic growth-oriented cultural paradigm that we will be leaving behind. Our multispecies allies, if we ask them respectfully and kindly, will certainly help with cleaning up the mess (mycoremediation and

61 Joseph Jenkins, *The Humanure Handbook: Shit in a Nutshell*, 4th edn (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2019).

62 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 501.

phytoremediation will be key). I hope that Spanish environmental cultural studies in general and this *Companion* in particular will inspire readers to engage in this transition toward regenerative (non-extractive and non-wasteful) cultures. If this Introduction does not motivate you to do so, dear reader, feel free to use its pages as toilet paper and then compost them along with your humanure (Jenkins' book will teach you how to easily and safely do so). After all, it is time to recognize the limits of theory and to understand that academic publications can only take us so far. It is high time to abandon the academic ivory tower and get back to earth with open hearts, clear thinking, and dirty hands.