

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Re-Primarization All Over Again? Extraction and Resistance in Twenty-First-Century Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

Community of Peace: Performing Geographies of Ecological Dignity in Colombia. By Christopher Courtheyn. Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2022. Pp. xx + 284. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780822947141.

Latin American Extractivism: Dependency, Resource Nationalism, and Resistance in Broad Perspective. Edited by Steve Ellner. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. Pp. ix + 292. \$41.00 paperback, \$94.00 hardcover, \$39.00 eBook. ISBN: 9781538141564.

Things with a History: Transcultural Materialism and the Literatures of Extraction in Contemporary Latin America. By Héctor Hoyos. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 302. \$30.00 paperback, \$90.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780231193054.

Planetary Longings. By Mary Louise Pratt. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. Pp. viii + 340. \$28.95 paperback, \$104.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781478018292.

Life without Lead: Contamination, Crisis, and Hope in Uruguay. By Daniel Renfrew. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019. Pp. xv + 308. \$29.95 paperback, \$85.00 hardcover, \$29.95 e-book. ISBN: 9780520295476.

Mourning El Dorado: Literature and Extractivism in the Contemporary American Tropics. By Charlotte Rogers. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019. Pp. xv + 340. \$39.50 paperback, \$79.50 cloth. ISBN 9780813942667.

The Small Matter of Suing Chevron. By Suzana Sawyer. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. Pp. xv + 400. \$29.95 paperback, \$109.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781478017950.

Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America. By Rose J. Spalding. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xvii + 308. \$83.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780197643150.

The Three Deaths of Cerro San Pedro: Four Centuries of Extractivism in a Small Mexican Mining Town. By Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022. Pp. xiii + 307. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469671109.

To say that mining is a top concern in Latin America today is an understatement. China's hard pivot to industrialization after the Cold War plus crushing debt and a worldwide neoliberal slide pushed governments across the Americas to jettison economic nationalism and

import-substitution industrialization. Global demand for minerals and hydrocarbons had soared by the late 1990s, lifting commodity prices across the board. What followed were two decades of unbridled extraction from Sinaloa to Patagonia, a stark return to primary materials dependency even in the region's largest and most industrialized countries, including Argentina and Brazil. In others, like El Salvador, metals mining became an issue for the first time since the colonial era. In many cases, government borrowing against future commodity production followed earlier, exuberant patterns, only with China as a major lender alongside the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Re-primarization, as it is sometimes called, extended beyond minerals to encompass agriculture, forestry, fishing, and livestock raising. Open access to genetically modified crops like soy and maize plus massive fertilizer inputs (many of them mined) suddenly enabled commercial farming on unforeseen scales. "Mining" genetically modified animals followed suit, along with fish farming. New wealth and jobs appeared, as did collateral damage: with the twenty-first-century commodities rush came jumbo-scale environmental destruction. Corruption also metastasized across the political spectrum, and murderous gangs and militias invaded the mountains, rainforests, and countryside. Since the year 2000, more environmental activists have been killed in Latin America than in any other part of the world, a sickening statistic that continues to grow.

Amid this early twenty-first-century commodities boom, Latin American academics, including the Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta, the Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa, and the Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas spoke out, at times equating "extractive" agribusiness with mega-mining and clear-cut logging. If extractivism was the Chilean Chicago Boys' basis for development, then it seemed—from the ground level, anyway—that New Left governments like those led by Argentina's Cristina Kirchner, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, and Bolivia's Evo Morales were not so different. According to critics, the region's so-called Pink Tide regimes were engaged in neo-extractivism. Like the old extractivism, this process was destructive, rushed, and unsustainable. Some used the term *sacrifice zones* for those portions of the national territory (and their human and nonhuman inhabitants) that were expected to take one for the team, so to speak.

From a distance, both forms of twenty-first-century resource nationalism, extractivism and neo-extractivism, seemed the opposite of mid-twentieth-century economic nationalism, characterized by protections, state subsidies, and tariffs. It looked as if the doors were being thrown open. But the aim of Pink Tide governments was to chart a new course by selling a nation's reserves to the world's highest bidders while prices were high to create basic social programs and lift the poorest from destitution. To an extent, this trend resembled what some economists call neo-mercantilism. (All the "neos" can be confusing.)

In places, neo-extractivism seemed to work, or to deliver on its promises, and it was often popular—especially in cities, but also in rural areas not directly affected by mining and other extractive projects (the sacrifice zones). Mass exportation without regulation exploded in scale beginning in the early 2000s, encompassing not only mountains, plains, and jungles but also seas, where fish have been netted to the point of species and even ecosystem collapse. Much has been said of the environmental costs of salmon, shrimp, and tilapia farming in Latin America, and several recent studies explore the costs of tuna, anchoveta, and other forms of Latin American deep-sea fishing after the Cold War as well.¹

A massive global commodities boom-bust cycle was followed by the COVID-19 pause in 2020–2021, and as of 2024, analysts anticipate an even bigger mining cycle on the immediate horizon. "Transitioning" to a so-called green economy will allegedly demand copious copper,

¹ An outstanding monograph is Kristin Wintersteen, *The Fishmeal Revolution: The Industrialization of the Humboldt Current Ecosystem* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021). On shrimp, see Eduardo Rebolledo Monsalve and Eduardo Quiroga, "Farmed Shrimp Aquaculture in Coastal Wetlands of Latin America—A Review of Environmental Issues," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 183 (October 2022): n.p. (Art. 113956).

lead, nickel, cadmium, silver, lithium, coltan, rare earth minerals, and much more. There will also be more mouths to feed, human and nonhuman. Economists and politicians in the Global North have warned Latin Americans not to resist this new “green” wave of rising world mineral demand, even as they pressure governments like that of Guyana to enable more exploration for oil and gas. By this reckoning, the world economy cannot flourish without unfettered access to Latin America’s prodigious subterranean treasures and fertile soils. The matter is urgent, and it is as if there were no alternatives to unbridled primary materials exports for the foreseeable future. Is this Latin America’s fate (again)?

Scholars from many fields have seized on re-primarization as the topic of our time, and this essay reviews only a tiny sample of the burgeoning output focused on Latin America. It includes a taste of new work by anthropologists, geographers, historians, literary critics, political scientists, and sociologists, some of them also activists. The works here reviewed are based on a blend of fieldwork, close reading, archival sleuthing, and number crunching, but all explore the theme of extractivism or reliance on primary materials production for foreign exchange.

Some authors emphasize successful community-led resistance to mining projects or demand for restitution after pollution. Other studies read like foretold tragedies. For some authors, environmental consequences of extraction are paramount, whereas for others, it is political or social consequences, typically expressed in transformed ethnic and gendered identities but also in new political maxims. In a few cases, authors engage novel theoretical approaches such as the new materialism, indigeneity, and planetary versus global or cosmopolitan models and perspectives. After twenty-plus years of relentless digging, there is a lot to ponder.

First is an essay collection that helps define the problem. *Latin American Extractivism: Dependency, Resource Nationalism, and Resistance in Broad Perspective*, edited by Steve Ellner, covers much of Latin America (with the notable exception of Brazil) during the past twenty-odd years of expanded mining and other extractive projects. Have the projects all been the same? No. As the editor and several essayists suggest, by comparing left-leaning governments’ attempts to harness mineral rents and revenues to social policy goals with more traditional or “neoliberal” extraction models elsewhere in the region, we might see the phenomenon of Latin American extractivism as more complicated than some of its critics have imagined.

Ellner opens by noting a tendency by some critics of Pink Tide resource policies to see everything extractive as equally bad: beholden to global capital, repressive of especially Indigenous or poor rural people, environmentally destructive, and ultimately unsustainable. In this view, Pink Tide resource nationalism is a sham, as it shares too many features with standard neoliberalism. Ellner and most of the book’s authors point to difference rather than similarity, arguing that Pink Tide resource nationalism has indeed been transformative. If nothing else, people across the region now have a spectrum of experiences to reflect on and models from which to select. So: is there a neo-extractivist thesis or paradigm that has been blindly embraced? And have some who adhered too closely to it broken up socially oriented coalitions unnecessarily? Perhaps. It is important to proceed with caution since the stakes could hardly be higher.

The book has three parts: “The Global Focus,” “The Pink Tide Countries,” and “Conservative and Right-Wing Governments.” Most essays fall under the loose rubric of political science (or political ecology, as some authors prefer), but several chapters are by anthropologists and sociologists. All have a strong economic component, but not a lot of tables or formulas. Less evident are perspectives from history or geography. Most chapters end around the year 2020 with “where to now?”

In addition to compressed time depth, the book suffers a bit from commodity conflation, with oil, gas, and gold the main foci, although one chapter centers on soy cultivation. Of course, scholars can do only so much in an essay collection, and ultimately

what unifies the chapters is the question of economic gain for the nation-state. Who has benefited from the new extractive turn, left, right, or center, and who has lost? Which political strategies worked to stem the tide or direct its energies, and which ones failed?

“The Global Focus” contains three chapters, the first by Kyla Sankey on Colombia’s promising policies in global context. The chapter has historical value, as many are now watching the current president, Gustavo Petro, who has promised to curb mining and fossil fuels extraction. Next is a chapter by Alfredo Macías Vásquez and Jorge García-Arias on Bolivia’s attempt under Evo Morales to capitalize on gas and oil revenues. The continued policy has been both popular and controversial as Bolivians turn their eyes to lithium. Third is an examination of Chinese investment in Venezuela’s oil sector by Emma Miriam Yin-Hang To. Dependency on Chinese creditors is a theme raised here for Venezuela, perhaps too lightly touched on elsewhere.

Part 2, on the so-called Pink Tide nations, starts with a chapter by Luis Fernando Angosto-Ferrández. He finds “national pride” behind the success of the Pink Tide, giving a brief example from rural Venezuela. Next is a chapter exploring foreign direct investment under Evo Morales by María J. Paz and Juan M. Ramírez-Cendero. Like nearly all of Morales’s policies, this one split constituents and surprised outsiders. Darcy Tetreault then submits Mexico’s president Andrés Manuel López Obrador to a test: did he deliver on resource nationalist campaign promises? (Answer: no). The anthropologist Teresa A. Velásquez then summarizes her work on water rights versus mining concessions in Ecuador’s southern highlands (site of a rare success from the locals’ point of view).² And finally the sociologist Amalia Leguizamón provides a summary of her work on the environmental effects of soy cultivation in Argentina and the sharply gendered nature of support and resistance.³ As with most large-scale extractive enterprises, life in the sacrifice zone reveals the consequences of dealing with the devil.

The book’s final section, on extraction under conservative and right-wing administrations, begins with a chapter by Anthony Bebbington, Benjamin Fash, and John Rogan comparing antimining policy in El Salvador (where it prevailed) and Honduras (where it failed). The chapter’s opening section provides useful definitions for students of political ecologies. The specifics of El Salvador’s 2017 ban on metal mining are succinctly laid out, then contrasted with the more splintered and ultimately unsuccessful efforts of multiple groups to effect similar legislation in neighboring Honduras. Activists in both countries were murdered for their efforts, but as the authors point out, key was convincing members of several social classes and various political persuasions that a shared nationalist “settlement” had to be reached.

In El Salvador, the crux of the mining matter was focused: protecting widely shared and limited water sources from permanent damage. This direct and simple question enabled but hardly ensured consensus. Honduras, a nation with a much older mining past (and a different geology), was not so easily brought together despite the efforts of many parties, including religious leaders. The key was to explain the difference between older mining practices and current ones, which affect fragile tropical environments on a vastly different scale. The future of El Salvador’s landmark anti-mining law appears endangered under President Nayib Bukele, who as of this writing is promoting the world’s largest Bitcoin “mining” outfit, to be powered by the sun and geothermal energy.

The book’s final chapters, by Zarái Toledo Orozco and Castriela Esther Hernández Reyes, turn to a different facet of post-Cold War mineral extraction: artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Toledo Orozco compares miners’ organizational tactics and state policies in

² Teresa A. Velásquez, *Pachamama Politics: Campesino Water Defenders and the Anti-Mining Movement in Andean Ecuador* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022).

³ Amalia Leguizamón, *Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soybeans in Argentina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, noting how miners in all three countries have organized to one degree or another to protect their interests. States have responded differently. Since about the year 2000, Colombia and Peru officially demonized small miners in the push to welcome foreign direct investment and to exert maximum state control over marginal areas. Bolivia has nurtured small-scale miners to some degree, though not without sharp negotiation.

Policy differences aside, Toledo Orozco acknowledges that small-scale mining has hurt the natural environment and has not decreased raw-commodity dependency. Artisanal mining's economic and social roles in the future of Latin America remains uncertain, determined in large part by fluctuations in the global gold price (and to a lesser degree the prices of tin, coltan, and precious stones). As in Brazil, neither poverty reduction programs nor forcible repression has yielded tangible, lasting results when it comes to curbing *garimpagem*, or freelance prospecting.

Hernández Reyes focuses, more in the vein of Leguizamón's discussion of Argentine soy farming, on the gendered aspects of artisanal gold mining. This is in part because the region the author studies, Colombia's Chocó, or Pacific Lowlands, has relied since colonial times on women panners. In a sense, Hernández Reyes provides an example of how what Toledo Orozco terms "the extractivism of the poor" shapes community formation and radicalizes political identities.⁴ Overall, *Latin American Extractivism* is a helpful primer on this pressing topic, chock-full of regional cases and far from one-dimensional in its overall findings. The authors remind us why local-level analysis is vital, as is cross-regional comparison.

Another comparative but single-authored study is *Breaking Ground: From Extraction Booms to Mining Bans in Latin America*, by the political scientist Rose Spalding. This is a mature and measured book, clear on the stakes but avoiding polemics. Spalding draws extractive examples from Central America, ending with a summary of mining reform policies in Latin America more broadly. Chapter 1 sets the context, describing how mining rose to become a conflictive social issue in Central America following post-Cold War peace accords and subsequent neoliberal policies. Chapter 2 identifies the groups or stakeholders who have supported and resisted mining projects. Key categories of analysis include "elite preferences," "resistance organization," and "state permeability." The following four chapters trace the politics of mining in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. The final chapter adds a wildcard: forced, external arbitration following international trade accords.

The title of the book may seem to overstate the case, as all the countries treated are in Central America, a region not traditionally known for its mining heritage or potential (with the partial exception of Honduras). But what is striking is how differently the four chosen nations and their citizens responded to the considerable environmental challenges and limited opportunities for gain that mining in the era of big open pits entails. Spalding explains how each nation's response to mining pressures (two for, two against) differed in accordance with state, elite, and activist alignments, much as we learned from Bebbington and others above. Yet Spalding adds striking details on foreign trade agreements and their binding clauses.

In this realm of so-called investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), things got complicated soon after the year 2000. Many nations worldwide were pressured to sign international accords tooting the horn of free trade but replete with binding, sovereignty-reducing clauses. In lieu of national courts, signers of trade treaties had agreed to third-party arbitration of mining (and other commercial) disputes, often heard by the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) in

⁴ Compare Daniel Stubb, *Shifting Livelihoods: Gold Mining and Subsistence in the Chocó, Colombia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

Washington, DC. Spalding summarizes three such arbitration cases from her study area, showing that ISDS significantly slowed even the most unified anti-mining coalitions in nations like El Salvador and Costa Rica, which ended up all but banning mining. Looking at a larger sample of nearly four hundred such cases, corporate and elite interests were almost always favored by arbitrators, to the extent that several Latin American nations have decided to opt out of their agreements—at no small cost.

Given the speed with which current mining operations extract vast amounts of earth and suck up and pollute millions of gallons of water, time matters. In countries that did not ban mining, such as Guatemala, the deterrent effect of even a threatened arbitration has been significant enough to override reasonable, agreed-on checks. Again, recent elections may put some of these matters to the test. Indeed, despite this powerful pro-mining tool (forced arbitration), Spalding shows that even some of Latin America's smallest and poorest nations have managed to resist the perilous attractions of large-scale, open-pit mining.

In turning from the big to the small, we are reminded of the substantial risks of resistance. A single community study is the political geographer Christopher Courtheyn's lyrical *Community of Peace: Performing Geographies of Ecological Dignity in Colombia*. Mining is not the core issue here, but extraction in other forms looms large. Courtheyn chronicles a thirty-year struggle by Colombian campesinos near the Gulf of Urabá, on the Caribbean shore, to live peaceful and productive lives while caught in the crossfire between paramilitary groups, government forces, and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC. As so often happens in such cases, poor locals found themselves in a vise, not trusted by those at war and thus accused from all sides of supporting the "enemy." Many such people in Colombia simply fled, part of the mass exodus that has marked the country and swelled its cities with refugees for decades. As Courtheyn explains, residents instead responded to periodic massacres and targeted assassinations by forming "communities of peace."

Greater Urabá's peace communities focused on solidarity, self-sufficiency, and nonviolence, all of which looked like thinly veiled communism to paramilitaries—and to certain past governments, including that of former President Álvaro Uribe, a native of Antioquia who said as much in public. Uribe may as well have painted targets on peasant foreheads; murders proliferated. Locals could not win for losing. From the far left, Urabá's peace communities, at the core a town called San José de Apartadó, looked insufficiently militant, like helpless doves. Outside observers "embedded" themselves from time to time, hoping to stave off more massacres. Courtheyn observed this and more across a dozen years of participation (what the author calls ethnographic action research).

Where does extraction appear in this improbable survival story? Part of Courtheyn's book reads like "the world and a very small place in Colombia." There was no hiding from economic globalization, and San José de Apartadó sits at a crossroads. The struggle in this instance was over not minerals, but land. Urabá's tropical lowland terrain has easy Atlantic port access and thus has been used to extend cattle ranches and African oil palm plantations. The global North demands fats and proteins, and Urabá can produce them cheaply, though not without the kinds of costs or externalities described by some economists. The Urabá Gulf region has also been a hot spot for coca cultivation and drug transport, to say nothing of human trafficking, hence the firefights between FARC and Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) or auxiliaries. Has San José de Apartadó, then, served as another kind of sacrifice zone, a victim of extractive geographies? Its resilient residents might dispute such a characterization, but too many have paid the ultimate price.

This is a deeply personal book derived from extensive fieldwork, a testament to sustained commitment to a single community in a time of great need. The novelty of Courtheyn's approach may be his conception of performed geography. What he learns

from the people he lived with is to value both religious and secular pilgrimages and claims-staking perambulations. Given the deadliness of passive resistance, separating religious and secular realms and rituals may be impossible. But this is also a book about sustainable subsistence, what the author calls ecological dignity, a withdrawal from global extractivism. Peacemaking in San José de Apartadó is breathtaking. It is worldmaking, world renewing, intent on remembering its martyrs but also forgiving what might seem the unforgiveable sins of its enemies.

A very different milieu appears in the anthropologist Daniel Renfrew's *Life without Lead: Contamination, Crisis, and Hope in Uruguay*. Yet there are familiar echoes in this true and sobering tale. A silent poison most toxic to children and pregnant mothers, lead has lately returned to public attention throughout the Americas. Lead, like mercury, sneaks into the nervous system through inorganic and organic compounds, arresting or retarding development and inhibiting normal activity. The story told by Renfrew focuses on the industrial barrio of La Teja, Montevideo, where residents learned just how toxic lead can be, whether its source was lead pipes, oil refineries, or petty industry. In La Teja and other poor neighborhoods, lead exposure was exacerbated by recyclers who dismantled batteries and burned cables.

Much has been said in praise of recycling versus mining, but the detritus of our built world is often toxic. Scrap lead gets in your blood. The metal's effects are cumulative, slow as poisons go, but ultimately severe. Renfrew's story is as much an awakening as it is a disaster in the usual sense. There was no great "lead spill" in Montevideo but rather a sudden discovery of cumulative harm, which then reverberated across the country and lifted awareness, ultimately leading to major changes to public health policy. First was the elimination of leaded gasoline in 2004, then the removal of badly contaminated soils from urban areas, and finally the more careful monitoring of water supplies, agricultural and animal products, and even beach sands.

Since the book's appearance, some of these matters have been overshadowed by shortcomings of Uruguay's larger water management infrastructure in the face of human-induced global warming. Such compounding and overlapping concerns (pollution, then drought, then flooding) will continue to surface and reverberate throughout Latin America, as they have elsewhere around the globe. As a work of political anthropology, *Life without Lead* succeeds, and like the work of Courtheyn (and Velásquez and Leguizamón), it is also deeply heartfelt. Although mining is not at issue in this story, regulating lead extraction and containment required the kind of concerted, cross-class political efforts described by Rose Spalding.

Contamination and cleanup—and more broadly, environmental justice—are also at the core of the anthropologist Suzana Sawyer's bracing book, *The Small Matter of Suing Chevron*. Sawyer has spent many years examining oil extraction in Ecuador's lush Amazonian region, site of substantial activity since the late 1960s. *Crude Chronicles* (2004) traced the struggles of Indigenous peoples against past and current contamination of their lands, air, and waterways against the Ecuadorian state and select corporations. Ecuador's first major multinational driller, Texaco, merged with Chevron in the year 2000, and thus it was that enormous corporation that stood as the Goliath against the David of the Cofán, Waorani, and other aggrieved local residents. Suing Chevron was no small matter. After much tribulation and rejection by US courts, the Texaco case was settled in Ecuador in 2011, favoring Indigenous victims and handing Chevron a \$9.5 billion fine for damages.

The Small Matter of Suing Chevron narrates the unhappy aftermath of the 2011 judgment, putting special emphasis on the word *matter*. Specifically, Sawyer argues that oil's own slippery chemistry played a central role in the saga that unfolded in international courts (and yes, arbitration tribunals; Chevron accused Ecuador of trade-treaty violations). It was as if crude oil had a life of its own or a degree of unexpected agency; it could be infinitely split, its bonds dissociated. Perhaps similar things could be said of other extracted

minerals, or even of commercially produced soybeans or sugarcane, to say nothing of “industrial” animals.

Not everyone will see the need for this sophisticated theoretical approach to the “small matter of suing Chevron,” but Sawyer wants to do more than simply chronicle the machinations of silver-tongued lawyers as they break down their opponents’ depositions like so many complex hydrocarbons. Amid the curious language of chemical philosophy, Sawyer leaves space for clear Indigenous voices speaking truth to power. When given a platform, they don’t mince words. Extraction has severe and durable consequences. May justice be served.

Engaging animate matter as a means to rethink extraction continues in the cultural critic Héctor Hoyos’s provocative *Things with a History: Transcultural Materialism and the Literatures of Extraction in Contemporary Latin America*. Latin American literature has long played prism to contemporary dilemmas, splaying white-light ambiguities into a full-color spread, flipping things upside down and turning them around. Works highlighting the manifold problems and dilemmas of resource extraction are hardly new, as Hoyos acknowledges. They long predate magical realism, for example. Hoyos finds, however, that critics have lagged when it comes to the so-called material or new materialist turn pushed by Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and others, often remaining stuck in an ethereal funk, forgetting that books (and computers) are themselves things with a history.

Even so, Hoyos does not share some of the new materialism’s posthuman and “sci-minded” tendencies. Thus, he combines old-fashioned historical materialism with new materialism to argue for what he calls transcultural materialism. Inspired by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation, Hoyos says it is not enough to argue that matter is animate and therefore active. “Material” people still shape political ecologies, and thus we still have need of critics who can demystify the fetishized commodity, call primitive accumulation when they see it, and otherwise mediate between things and the people who produce, move, and consume them—as depicted in art. One might say we need suspicious minds as well as networked ones.

Hoyos tests his model on recent literary and plastic artworks centered in one way or another on extraction, some old, some new. Visual artists like Carolina Caycedo stand out starkly, in part because their products are often tangible and pointed directly at extraction or extractivism. But Hoyos reminds us that writers like Margo Glantz, César Aira, and Alejandro Zambra have been animating things all along, extraction in mind. Hoyos stresses too that at the other end of extraction is consumerism, which deserves the artist’s attention. Consumerism in art may have to go over the top to make its point, a “thing” Hoyos calls hyperfetishism.

In summary, Héctor Hoyos takes readers on an interesting tour, and the book has a jaunty, carnivalesque feel despite the seriousness of the topic. A discipline-crossing scholar, Hoyos hopes historians will join the material-minded project. His challenge, in part, is this: “History, with a capital H, rests upon a truce between words and things that narrative and literary language can help bring back into question” (227). I will not give away Hoyos’s choice last words, but he does not doubt the seriousness of the shared project of code-sharing and decipherment that engaging with the Anthropocene’s extractive core demands.

A more traditional approach to Latin America’s extractive literature is *Mourning El Dorado: Literature and Extractivism in the Contemporary American Tropics*, by Charlotte Rogers. Sampling Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, Milton Hatoum, Álvaro Mutis, and Mario Vargas Llosa, Rodgers explores the persistent El Dorado Myth in tropical lowland South America but with a twist. These late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century writers clearly share a sense of loss and “mourning” (inspired by the Brazilian critic Idelber Avelar’s work on postdictatorial fiction), but the Amazon is not the same for any of them. Nor is it dead and buried, although profound loss is prefigured thanks to outsiders’

insatiable desire to extract material wealth from the great basin in the crudest forms (gold, oil, rubber, timber).

Rogers hints at historical continuity in these works as they fuse past and present. Yesterday's rubber boom is today's gold rush, and yesterday's gold rush is today's hydroelectric project (its wattage used to process aluminum from locally exploited bauxite). Rogers offers a fine close reading of selected texts, taking a page from ecocriticism and alert to overlooked gender dynamics. Yet I found myself most interested in hints of new directions, perhaps led by Indigenous writers like Davi Kopenawa, whose work Rogers treats in the final pages. One sentence describing Kopenawa's massive 2013 testimonial *The Falling Sky* stood out: "In his explanation of the mythology of minerals in Yanomami society, the legend of El Dorado is notably absent" (257). Rogers concludes by suggesting that perhaps it is time to move on as well as to reverse course. But can the myth of El Dorado be killed and buried once and for all, or is it like a genie that once out of the bottle cannot be contained? What Kopenawa calls "metal smoke" seems to have intoxicated us all, and it may be back for another round in the name of a green transition.

A very different but also fundamentally literary book is Mary Louise Pratt's *Planetary Longings*. In this volume, Pratt collects and updates essays from a distinguished career in cultural criticism centered on Latin America. In accordance with Hoyos, who pushes Latin Americanist critics to link up with world literature, Pratt argues that Latin America's best writers have always been worldly (connected, networked). Nowadays, some are going further, bending toward the planetary. Pratt, a Canadian, made a name for herself in 1991 with the concept of the contact zone. She followed up with *Imperial Eyes* (borrowing, like Hoyos, from Fernando Ortiz's elastic notion of transculturation). Pratt has done much more in the intervening decades, recently delving into Indigenous literatures and other cultural productions for signs of hope in desperate times.

Planetary Longings is not a book about extraction or extractivism per se, but it starts and ends there. Part memoir, part retrospective, Pratt traces her own intellectual journey from anticolonial criticism to the Anthropocene ("facing Gaia," à la Bruno Latour), coming full circle and back to Canada. The book's cover features a photograph by Edward Burtynsky of an Ontario nickel refinery that encapsulates this trajectory. (As a side note, nickel has been mined and refined near Sudbury, Ontario, for over a century, and with rising demand for batteries, this will likely continue. The main Sudbury smelter is now owned by Brazilian mining giant Vale, which was a state-owned company until 1997, and before that, a US-owned company, nationalized by Getúlio Vargas. Though most keen on concepts, Pratt explores such entanglements in this book.)

As with Hoyos's essay collection, I felt I had to read *Planetary Longings* forward and backward to grasp its full significance. Both authors traffic in concepts or conceptual tools, but Pratt's project, as the book's title suggests, is broader in scope and less interested in treating the tangible. Like some environmental historians and many scientists, Pratt sees a "crisis of futurity" brought on by the stark realization that humans have set the world in motion toward catastrophe. It is now probably (some would say surely or definitely) out of our hands. Life in a hurtling, "no-analogue state," a term Pratt borrows from Earth-systems scientists, is truly unimaginable and yet we are called on to do so, to create, or at the very least, to make do.

As Pratt puts it, our abiding obsession with oppressive systems and structures necessarily falls away as we confront unseen forces, wild fluidity, profound uncertainty. We may in such times learn most from people who have been here before, or rather, who have been here all along. And thus, Pratt prizes indigeneity, a thing she sees as vital force, in battle with coloniality, with modernity—force against force rather than the subaltern against structure (colonialism, modernism). No longer global agents, says Pratt, we are now planetary subjects, reduced or demoted and yet not freed from responsibility. Perhaps in this newly acknowledged geo-biochemical space some call the Anthropocene it is our

last hope to hang onto something recognizably human, even as humanity takes its last breath.

The book's sixteen essays are divided into two parts: "Future Tensions" and "Coloniality, Indigeneity, and the Traffic in Meaning." There is also an introduction and a "coda" (touching on the death of George Floyd). I longed for a conclusion, but in rethinking extraction, I found Pratt's chapter "Anthropocene as Concept and Chronotope" especially helpful. Borrowing from the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, Pratt explains how "concept" provides space for thinking and then acting. So far, so good. Yet the crisis of futurity that the Anthropocene entails looks to Pratt more like Bakhtin's chronotope (with the frontier in US history as analogy).

The literal dead end we face has sent many scrambling after Indigenous thinkers like Davi Kopenawa for "end times" pointers, but Pratt admits, aided by the photographs of fellow Canadian Edward Burtynsky (that orange stream of nickel waste on the cover), that "nothing enlivens the world more than capitalism. For capitalism, everything that exists or can be imagined carries the potential to be transformed into something that generates profit. Nothing is inert. Everything has the ability to inspire some process of extraction, invention, manufacture, the adding of value. How possible will it be to force these exhilarating powers into retreat or repurpose them in undamaging ways?" (123–124). How, indeed? Again, can we humans be trusted to kill and bury the myth of El Dorado, to leave money in the ground?

Pratt is bothered by unexamined words, or rather careless concepts. She goes on to question the utility of Anthropocene as both concept and chronotope, as spur to inventive intervention. As she puts it: "The fatal limitation of Anthropocene is surely that, unlike Burtynsky's photography, it leaves the anthropo- in its place. It remains compatible with the man/nature dichotomy and the narrative machine of man acting on nature. So far, it offers mainly a story, a structure of desire, whereby humankind undertakes to redeem itself by acting on nature in different ways than it has in the past, thus rescuing both nature and itself. But tell that to Hurricane Maria or the coronavirus or the mountain pine beetle. That rescue story is long gone - this is a no-analogue state" (124).

Pratt ends *Planetary Longings* with a coda that feels like a swerve. Yes, people can be moved to demand change by horrific events such as the murder of George Floyd even in the midst of a pandemic, but when we "scale up" to a Koyaanisqatsi level of consciousness, Pratt leaves us scratching our heads. Is facing Gaia then facing fate? Would a better label than *Anthropocene* make a difference? Would it persuade us to stop digging? To abandon cornucopian fantasies? In North America, we might ask Hopi or Diné elders about their sacrifice zones, about mining coal and uranium in Indian Country for the greater good. Or we could consult Lakota elders about Black Hills gold, the Ghost Dance, and why Custer died for our sins. What they've been saying for many, many years rhymes with the humble observations of Davi Kopenawa. Put another way, the truth has been hiding in plain sight. All it takes is to not look away.

We started with mining, and we'll end with mining. The Canadian historian Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, in *The Three Deaths of Cerro San Pedro: Four Centuries of Extractivism in a Small Mexican Mining Town*, takes a longer view than the other authors here, yielding a different sort of cautionary tale. Unlike in Ecuador, El Salvador, or Costa Rica, popular resistance in northern Mexico failed to stop a massive gold mining project that resulted in the total devastation of Cerro San Pedro, the old mining complex that built the nearby city of San Luis Potosí after "discovery" in 1592. Studnicki-Gizbert describes how extractivism (he extends the term back to colonial times) has changed primarily in scale, expanding in fits and starts in response to many factors, including labor mobilization, water access, and global commodity prices, but with each major expansion triggered by some combination of government-corporate complicity plus a new mining or refining technology.

Thus, what happened to the Cerro San Pedro is more typical of modern mining in Latin America than the rosier outcomes mentioned for parts of Central America and Ecuador. Along the way, Studnicki-Gizbert applies concepts from industrial ecology to explain how “mining metabolisms” evolved from the colonial and artisanal to the mechanized but still underground and finally to the mega-mining and thirsty cyanide heap leaching of the past few decades. Studnicki-Gizbert plus students and colleagues (Fabiola Bazo, Laurent Corbeil, Saúl Guerrero, David Schecter) have chronicled the displacement and near enslavement of the Indigenous Guachichil and migrant Nahuatl speakers beginning in the sixteenth century, rampant colonial deforestation to produce charcoal for smelting up to Mexico’s 1810 independence, and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poisoning of air, soil, and stream by North American giant Asarco and other multinationals.

Each step in this expansive process is carefully laid out and helpfully presented with maps and flowcharts. The last and most destructive phase was led by a Canadian company called Metallica, which was quick to latch onto neoliberal policies pushed through in the mid-1990s, finally winning approval for the mine and nearby cyanide heap-leaching pad in the early 2000s. Like some of the other authors here, Studnicki-Gizbert was a participant-observer, actively opposing what he knew to be a disastrous enterprise.

An example of what environmental historians call the great acceleration, mega-mining as practiced in early twenty-first-century Cerro San Pedro staggers the mind; it is pharaonic in scale yet also speedy. Again: time matters. The divided residents of Cerro San Pedro and nearby towns could not fathom the result until they witnessed their mountain made into a miniature Grand Canyon in the space of a decade.

By borrowing from ecological economics, Studnicki-Gizbert avoids talk of externalities, a term too frequently used to describe (or rather, dismiss) social and environmental destruction. As most local observers have always known, the language of profit and loss never was close to adequate to describing mining, even on the colonial or artisanal scale. But there seems to be no stopping those who dream of extracting gold from Latin America’s ample hills and river basins while the getting is good.

Studnicki-Gizbert adds that the Americas have filled the “resource imaginary” of Europeans since the time of Columbus, fashioning a durable rhetorical “assemblage” that has toggled between the extremes of superabundance and scarcity, bonanza and crisis. The Cerro San Pedro was sacrificed for gold, for which there is no significant technological demand (it is mostly hoarded), but the language of urgency in today’s so-called green transition to electric vehicles and renewable energy sources like wind and solar power should give pause. As Studnicki-Gizbert ably shows, Mexico and Mexicans have been “saving the world” by way of mining for centuries, only to keep digging bigger holes, felling more trees, and fouling more streams, to say nothing of human sacrifices. The same could be said of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and practically all other Latin American nations. Just add oil and stir.

Latin America, rich as ever in minerals far beyond the needs or wants of its own people, is poised for another mining boom. This one promises to be gargantuan in scale and more rapid than anything that came before. And farther reaching. The evidence is already available. Just take a look at Chuquibambilla or Carajás for a taste of what is to come, what scaling up really means. To be sure, today’s “re-primarization” does have a more global feel than older cycles. Demand for minerals, including gold, has shifted away from the United States and Europe to Asia, including South Asia. China’s Belt and Road Initiative and other transformative projects have picked up where Cold War-era terraforming schemes left off, slicing up Latin America like another magnificent cake. Meanwhile, Brazilian multinationals scour Africa—and Canada. But even these new configurations are likely to get scrambled in the face of increasing uncertainty.

Either way, the belief that somehow this time things will be different, that extraction of limited mineral resources will lift the masses out of poverty and even sustain some new

level of generalized prosperity seems antiquated or nostalgic at best, reckless or stupid at worst. “We’ve been through this before,” says anyone willing to stare into the abyss, “only now the stakes are higher.” Fortunately, many Latin Americans, sometimes following the lead of Indigenous peoples, sometimes simply awakening to a shared, precarious destiny on a warming planet, are rejecting the assumption that they and their worlds—all that surrounds and sustains and depends on them—are nothing but someone else’s externalities. It ought to be obvious that Latin America’s greatest treasures, human and nonhuman, tangible and intangible, have no price.

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