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A Network of Ecologies in J. A. Bayona's *Society of the Snow* (2023)

Elaine Erwin Casero

ABSTRACT

Society of the Snow (La Sociedad de la Nieve, 2023), directed by J. A. Bayona, is the third film production that portrays the Andes plane crash of 1972. It differs from the two earlier film renditions in significant ways. Seen through an ecocritical lens, Bayona's version raises questions concerning the shifting ecological network, presenting the environment as an essential part of human experience. While the two previous film adaptations, *Alive* (1993) and *Survive! (Supervivientes de los Andes*, 1976), focus on a heroic narrative and a shocking, sensational narrative, respectively, *Society of the Snow* tells a story of ecological awareness, social responsibility, and collective (cultural) consciousness. This article explores the ecological network of Bayona's film and, in doing so, will draw on Félix Guattari's principles of the three ecologies as a theoretical framework.[1]

KEYWORDS

Ecocriticism, ecocinema, environment

Introduction

On October 13, 1972, a plane crashed in the South American Andes on its flight from Uruguay to Chile. Out of forty-five passengers, primarily young men in their first years of university, many of whom were members of the Uruguayan Old Christians

[1] All translations in this article are mine.

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rugby team, only sixteen survived after spending seventy-two days in the snow-covered Valley of Tears. A complete change of environment required them to rethink everything and reevaluate known facts and values if they wanted to survive in the mountains.

The "Tragedy/Miracle of the Andes" is an event that has reached international attention since its occurrence. It has been depicted, discussed, analyzed, and represented in and through countless media, including two feature-length films: *Survive!* (*Supervivientes de los Andes*, 1976) and *Alive* (1993). Most recently, the survival story was adapted into a new drama film, titled *Society of the Snow* (*La Sociedad de la Nieve*, 2023), directed by J. A. Bayona, which is based on Pablo Vierci's book of the same name. The repeated reprocessing of this tragedy/miracle across different media over the last fifty years not only shows a persistent interest in such a survival story but also allows us to study changes in the shifting perception of this event. This approach makes it possible to trace dominant narratives of the incident over the years and, as Robert Geal points out, to analyze how conceptions of human-environmental relations change over time (6–7). Particularly from an ecocritical perspective, it becomes relevant to study the varying representations of the same story through film, as, according to Stephen Rust and Salma Monani, cinema can shape how we perceive the world and how we act in and towards it (2). Bayona's film adaptation offers a new cinematic view on the plane crash's aftermath – one that moves away from past (sensational and heroic) representations of the story to one that allows the viewers to see the environment, in this case the mountains, as an essential part of human experience.

By comparing the environmental, social, and mental relations portrayed in the first two films of the plane crash, *Survive!* and *Alive*, with the ones in Bayona's film rendition, I will argue that Bayona frames the story in a way that can be seen as an effort to highlight the transactional processes that occur between the (snow-covered) environment, the (new) society the survivors formed, and the mental shift of perspective that accompanies the characters throughout the story, thus displaying the importance of environmental, heterarchical, and collective thinking. It presents the viewers with a model of society in which a group of individuals is able to broaden their (mental) ecologies and permeate the barriers imposed by an anthropocentric view of the world towards a more ecocentric point of view. The foundation for this analysis will be Félix Guattari's "ecosophy", which proposes an ethico-political framework to confront the ecological imbalance that the planet was, and still is, facing (19). He achieves this by introducing a transactional approach that considers environmental, social, and mental relations within a heterarchical rather than a hierarchical model (19–21). Guattari's philosophical theories can thus provide a productive ana-

lytical framework for studying the power of (eco)cinematic storytelling in Bayona's *Society of the Snow*.

The first part of the article will focus on a general framing of the story as a survival narrative and outline how it was presented in public discourse over the last fifty years. It will also include relevant ecocinematic studies, such as Paula Willoquet-Maricondi's book *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* and Stephen Rust et al.'s introduction to ecomedia, to help conceptualize and situate the three films within an ecocritical frame. Guattari's principles of the three ecologies, however, will be the main literary reference upon which this article will be based. The second part will center on analyzing selected scenes from the three films that demonstrate the varying portrayals of Guattari's three ecologies and, consequently, how Bayona's *Society of the Snow* presents the Andes story as one of ecological awareness, social responsibility, and collective consciousness towards the environment.

Moving Ecologies: (Eco)cinematic Storytelling

The Andes survival story has been portrayed and discussed across a range of media since the survivors' return in December of 1972. Various periodicals, memoirs, nonfiction books, documentaries, (the already mentioned) narrative feature films, as well as interviews with the survivors on radio and television shows have since documented the events of the plane crash's aftermath from various perspectives. However, these adaptations, particularly the three cinematic representations of the incident, do not only adapt the content or idea of a story but, according to Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, also "evolve with changing environments" (444), i.e., adapt to what surrounds them. This aspect becomes especially relevant from an environmental and ecocritical perspective, as adapted stories reflect how the understanding of human-environmental relations changes over time (Geal 6–7). These processes can be observed in survival films, among others, where adapting (to) a new environment can become a form of survival or living.

These survival stories often portray a person or group facing extreme adversities (usually in a challenging environment) and eventually achieving the (humanly) improbable to overcome them. Oftentimes, they highlight the best and/or worst of the human species, portraying people reverting to their most basic instincts of survival or rising to the occasion by accomplishing an almost supernatural deed. More importantly, however, these stories raise questions about what human beings consider necessary for survival, what they need to achieve it, and what they require to call it living. These deliberations are fundamental in a world where the consequences of climate change affect us in unprecedented ways, putting us in positions where we might have to reevaluate the meaning of survival and living. It becomes necessary to tell (survival) stories that foster a transactional understanding of the environment,

including all its members: humans, non-humans, and everything in between. Donna Haraway proposes to look beyond traditional (heteronormative) relationships and "make kin," i.e., form relations with and within the environment that do not necessarily have ancestral ties (102–03). Put differently, and as maintained by Ursula K. Heise, nature and culture are (and should be seen as being) interconnected; they influence and shape each other and surpass local and national (human-defined and imaginary) borders (21) – and more of these stories should be shown to create a deeper (environmental) awareness.

Regarding the Andes survival story, public discourse has varied in its narrative focus over the years. Constanza Moncada M. gives an overview of early newspaper headlines that presented it as something tragic and miraculous, highlighting the unlikeliness of sixteen people surviving a plane crash in the mountains after spending seventy-two days enduring extreme conditions. At first, there was uncertainty over how the survivors had been able to endure for such a long time without proper nutrition (Moncada M.). However, when the information came out that they had survived by consuming the remains of the deceased during their time in the Andes, it became one of, if not the most elevated features of the survival story's public rhetoric. This framing of the story primarily highlighted the sacrifices the survivors had to make to endure on the bare minimum in extreme and unforeseeable conditions. They had to abandon their previously known habits and transition to a stage of mere survival, satisfying their need for food by ceding their civility to the circumstances of the situation. As Fran Chico points out in an article for *Fotogramas*, a particularly sensational headline in this regard read "May God forgive them! Justified cannibalism" ("¡Que Dios los perdone! Canibalismo justificado"). In a *BBC* article, Enzo Vogrincic, the actor playing Numa Turcatti, one of the passengers who died, in Bayona's film, comments on this view, saying that "[p]eople who don't really know the whole story will probably know this particular part of it" (qtd. in Jones). This statement suggests that previous (film) adaptations of the Andes story had given particular attention to the anthropophagic aspect of the event, leaving other issues in the background or omitting them altogether.

Another approach within the public discourse of the Andes crash was that of telling a story of heroes who were not just able to survive but to (sur)pass what it means to live by acting beyond what is considered humanly possible. They managed to save themselves by walking out of the valley where they were trapped. In an article published six years after the crash, Charels A. Krause outlines how the media attention the survivors received after their spectacular rescue mission turned sixteen young men into overnight heroes and saints, whether they wanted or felt this way or not.

Drawing a connection to the existing narrative films and their ways of telling the Andes story, the first rendition of the plane crash's aftermath mirrors this

"cannibalistic" discourse of the survival story. *Survive!*, a Mexican production, was released only four years after the crash. It can be read as an exploitation film, propagating the shocking and morbid aspect of anthropophagy by explicitly showing a long sequence of how the bodies were cut. Coinciding with one side of the public discourse, this film raises questions about what sacrifices must be made to survive and satisfy basic human needs, and whether those sacrifices are justifiable. The second rendition of the Andes crash, a US-American production, was directed by Frank Marshall. His film *Alive* mainly puts the narrative within the heroic survival frame, which aligns with the "culturally dominant way of imagining disaster" in Hollywood, as Simon R. Troon explains (36). Especially from the 1990s onward, disaster films portray (environmental) threats that affect the whole planet, reflecting current anxieties about climate change (Troon 45–46). Troon argues that these films usually present male heroes who possess the physical strength and expertise to overcome these adversities (47–48). If we link these deliberations to adaptation studies, the two narrative films can be seen as cultural and historical reflections of their respective time periods (Geal 7): *Survive!* highlights the shocking revelation of anthropophagy, whereas *Alive* represents a more conventional Hollywood survival film that tends to avoid dealing with the moral or ethical issues associated with the disaster and instead focuses on men's triumph over nature (Troon 48).

Obviously, how a story is told influences the way it will be perceived. The same (survival) story, as described above, can be told from different perspectives and be mediated through different media, consequently making the receivers reflect upon certain norms, values, and ideals, depending – in a cinematic context – on the vision of the filmmaker(s). All three cinematic adaptations, including Bayona's *Society of the Snow*, have the same premise as a baseline argument, as they are all grounded in the same (real) survival story. However, Bayona's film contributes to a discourse that neither focuses on the anthropophagic aspects nor on presenting the survivors as heroes. Instead, he frames the survival story as a (mental) process the characters go through by showing what it means to rethink society and communal living under such extreme circumstances as well as to live within and learn from a new environment. It remains a survival story, a reflection and testimony of how humans function under extreme circumstances. However, this time, it is a film where the environmental, social, and mental dimensions interact with each other, offering a new frame to tell a different (survival) narrative.

As Rust and Monani point out, "[c]inematic texts . . . affect our imaginations of the world around us, and thus, potentially, our actions towards this world" (2). In other words, cinema can be a powerful storytelling tool that not only represents particular points of view and conveys an array of possible messages but that also constitutes a means of transmitting these idea(l)s to the world outside the screen and transforming

them into actions. The authors particularly refer to this phenomenon in an ecocritical context, emphasizing cinema's role as a negotiator and mediator within the environment, which encompasses both the physical and cultural worlds (Rust and Monani 1). Eco-trauma cinema, as described by Anil Narine, also offers a gateway to engage with ecological disasters, presenting different relations between humans and the environment that can help "[map] contemporary eco-traumas" (9).

Telling stories that highlight an ecocentric instead of an anthropocentric view becomes increasingly relevant in the context of climate change. Particularly (eco)cinema, as Paula Willoquet-Maricondi argues, "can offer us alternative models for how to represent and engage with the natural world; . . . [and] foster a healthier and more sustainable relationship to that world" (44). These (alternative) stories, told through film, can heighten the awareness of our dependence on and interconnectedness with the environment and, as Rust and Monani argue, alter our perception and behavior towards the ecological and environmental crisis in the world (2). Such an alternative ecological model moves away from viewing the environment and its resources in hierarchical relations, in which they are either perceived as strange and abstract, opposite to humans, or as subservient and instrumental to human needs. Instead, the environment and all its components should be viewed as elements of a single network, in which no one stands above or below anyone. Various scholars attempted to formulate theories and frameworks that should help understand the transactional processes between humans and the environment and which, in a further step, could serve as a tool to view different narratives (in our case Bayona's film *Society of the Snow*) through an ecocritical lens, thus fostering a more ecocentric view of the world.

Guattari's framework of the three ecologies can help us understand and see *Society of the Snow* through such an ecocritical lens. He repeatedly stresses that the three ecologies – environmental, social, and mental – do not conform to rigid and hierarchical structures. Instead, he argues that their continuously moving and evolving strands produce an open, heterarchical assembly of perspectives that allow for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness, mutual influence, and dependency of the three ecologies (35–36). As Gary Genosko explains, they should not be viewed in isolation from one another, as alterations in one ecology can lead to significant changes in the other (104), making a more profound understanding of their transactions necessary to grasp and eventually alter the ecological imbalance Guattari describes (19). Gregory Bateson argues, in line with Guattari, that one element of "any biological system" cannot be modified without exerting an impact on the other components that make the system whole (501). Furthermore, he indicates that the environment does not stand in opposition to humans and society but once even served as a source of inspiration to structure and organize our society and culture (490). This so-called "totemism" also worked the other way around, namely by projecting

our own culture onto the environment, which Bateson identifies as "animism" (490). These notions underscore the interconnections between the environment and humans, suggesting that isolating the two realms is a counterproductive endeavor in addressing the ecological imbalance. Gilles Deleuze and Guattari's description of a rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* also furthers the notion to think and see by departing from a network in which everything is (inter)connected, instead of deriving everything from a single center or fixed point, thus following a traditional and hierarchical structure of things and beings (5–6).

Guattari links the principle of the first ecology, the environmental ecology, which studies the interrelationship between humans and the environment (43), to Bateson's discussion of civilization's relationship with the environment that has become successively unstable due to the constant development of new and potentially exploitative technological advancements (499–500). The second ecology outlined by Guattari – comprising the social dimension – is mainly concerned with rethinking established societal structures, wherein their components are entangled and influenced by each other, as well as by the constant interactions with their surroundings. They form a collective that shifts the focus of the individual to the processes that happen between them, within the collective (24–25). Finally, the mental ecology focuses on the processes and changes that (need to) happen in people's minds concerning the environment. This ecology implies that not only should the physical and social environment be taken into account when attempting to tackle the ecological crisis, but also the interior processes, including "sensibility, intelligence and desire" (20), should be recognized and validated. Put differently, the principle of the mental ecology intends to focus attention on the necessity to shift the current (cultural) values, beliefs, and knowledge that are deeply ingrained in people's minds and that shape how people interact with their surroundings (33), towards a transactional, non-hierarchical, and collective understanding of the environment as a whole.

Besides the theory of the three ecologies, media itself, particularly the medium of film, presents a tool through which a shift in the mental ecologies, as described by Guattari, can be incited. Seen from an ecocritical understanding of media, as advocated by Rust et al., cinema can demonstrate how the three ecologies (can or could) interact with each other, highlighting the transactions that occur between humans and the environment, thus fostering a more ecocentric worldview (2–3). As an environmentalist medium and mediator, cinema essentially makes the connections between the three ecologies apparent, functioning as a filter and negotiator that helps us understand our reality through symbolic counterparts detected on screen. To view films through an (eco)critical lens thus becomes significant to determine whether a movie perpetuates an anthropocentric view (Rust and Monani 11), or if the medium manages to frame a world in which an interconnectedness between all three ecologies

exists. In their introduction to ecocinema, Rust and Monani emphasize that every film can potentially be viewed through an ecocritical lens (3). This approach means that not every movie has to center on an environmental concern but rather that it can be analyzed based on how cinema, or the film in particular, represents the interconnectedness between ecologies (Willoquet-Maricondi 45). Consequently, it is possible to say that cinema, as an art form and medium, can be a crucial mediator in bringing about a change in people's mental ecologies and in fostering a relationship with the environment that is fluent, where neither literal nor figurative barriers limit people's perceptions of it.

Mapping the Ecologies in *Society of the Snow*

The representation of the manifold relationship between humans and the natural world and, as a result, the portrayal of the environmental ecology can be traced throughout the three film renditions of the Andes plane crash, particularly in relation to the mountain landscape. The mountains may be portrayed as an isolated and desolate entity, opposite to humans, as an imminent obstacle that humans need to overcome, or as an ally, where a functioning relationship between humans and the environment becomes essential for living and surviving. Depending on how it is represented, it will tell the audience a different story.

As outlined by François Jullien, one of the earliest and still dominant ways of viewing and representing a landscape is through a subject-object relationship (5). This traditional Western view marks a distance between the part of nature that is visually framed (the observed) and the humans (the observers) who look at the landscape (Jullien 5). In the first film portrayal of the Andes plane crash, *Survive!*, it is possible to detect such a distance between the representation of the characters and the mountains. The panning shot of the snow-covered Andes from the plane that will crash only minutes later, while the voice-over narrator comments on the hard facts of the journey, creates a first visual dichotomy between the observer and the observed. The film repeatedly shows similar shots from planes and helicopters when the search parties look for survivors after the crash. This portrayal of an untouched landscape, shown from the point of view of airplanes/helicopters – i.e., a human-centered perspective – among others, highlights the subject-object relation between the two entities in the first rendition of the Andes crash. Besides panning shots of the landscape, repeated zoom-ins of the mountains also visually mark the distance between nature and humans in this film. The narrative context is particularly relevant to establishing this distance, as the zoom-ins are applied when the perspective switches from showing the rescue efforts to the situation of the survivors in the mountains. The characters trapped in the Andes are framed as the object of the people on the rescue team, i.e., something or someone different, strange, and even inhuman, just like nature. By

extension, the perspective of the rescuing team can be seen as a mediator between the people in and outside of the mountains, including the viewers at home, underscoring the isolation the survivors are withstanding and the sacrifices they must make due to their distance from civilization.

The film's cinematography, particularly during scenes featuring the survivors, further supports the distance between them and civilization. We are constantly confronted with white, foggy, and snowy images (partly impairing our ability to see the survivors in sharp focus), an oftentimes undecipherable background, and a continuous blowing of the wind. In other words, the presented effects of the environment on the characters and the viewers, among others, put nature in the menacing position of a stranger. Unlike *Society of the Snow*, this film frames the environment as threatening, pulling the characters away from civilization and, consequently, their (civilized) habits and norms. Thus, this portrayal also contributes to a distance between the characters and the viewers, creating less intimacy and greater distance as they slowly seem to be swallowed by the wild and unknown nature. The audience does not empathize with the characters as much as in *Alive* or *Society of the Snow*, because they learn relatively little about them. Viewers primarily perceive how events, such as the avalanches or the explorations, affect the survivors on the screen without being able to form a compassionate connection with them – the audience becomes a witness to the series of challenges the survivors must undergo, looking at them from both a visual and emotional distance.

Alive follows a similar approach in representing the relationship between humans and nature. However, this film focuses more on the heroic portrayal of the survivors, who manage to overcome the challenges imposed by the environment, driving them to unprecedented extremes that demonstrate their physical and mental abilities. One is reminded of mountaineer Reinhold Messner, who discusses these aspects in the context of extreme mountaineering (14). The continuous search and urge to find a new (personal and physiological) limit to surpass puts human capabilities into focus, seeing the mountains as something fascinating, extreme, challenging, and primarily as something that is defined in relation to humans (Messner 16–19).

In one of the first attempts to explore what lies beyond the valley, a few survivors are confronted with cracking snowpacks, the loss of oxygen, and the need for food, which is further dramatized by the near fall of one team member. The environment here is framed as an entity that is dangerous for human beings and that challenges the survivors in ways that seem to exceed the humanly possible: "It'll take more than a map to get out of here. We just tried to climb a little hill, and it kicked our asses. Climb one of those mountains? Who's going to do that, Superman?" (*Alive* 00:48:00–07). The reference to Superman and the attitude of "anything is possible" concerning their capabilities align with Messner's description of continuously trying to surpass

what is physiologically possible up until that moment (16–19). “You know what it is that we’ve lived this long, the way we have? Seventy days? That we climbed this mountain? You know what it is? It’s impossible. It’s impossible, and we did it. . . . I’m proud to be a man on a day like this – alive!” (*Alive* 01:49:26–50). This quote from the end of the film summarizes the portrayal of a hierarchical relationship with nature in a single scene. Nando and Roberto have reached the top of the mountain and are about to descend to the next valley – they have not only achieved the humanly impossible but also get to contemplate the beauty of what they have conquered.

This scene contrasts with the one presented in *Society of the Snow*, which shows Nando and Roberto in close-up shots, focusing on their emotional states as opposed to the medium and full shots in *Alive* that highlight their (bodily) and physical feats. In Bayona’s film, Roberto, though convinced they are going to die, unquestioningly trusts his friend’s judgment as he asks whether he sees the green valleys on the horizon. In *Alive*, Roberto is also reluctant to continue walking. However, Nando finishes the conversation by referring to what their expedition means to them both physically and spiritually: “We’re going to die, you know?” – “Maybe. But if we die, we’re going to die walking” (*Alive* 01:50:46–58). The continuous references to the unlikeliness of overcoming the mountain’s obstacles, dramatized through scenes where the characters come perilously close to death, create a power imbalance between humans and the environment that perpetuates an anthropocentric view of nature, as well as a hierarchical relationship between the two entities.

Compared to *Survive!* and *Alive*, *Society of the Snow* presents a story of a relationship in which the characters learn from and with the environment, fostering an ecological and ecocritical view of their interactions and behaviors towards one another. The survivors make (good) use of the freezing temperatures to store the food and accumulate water but simultaneously need to be conscious of the extreme nightfall temperature drops that could lead them to freeze to death. The awareness of their situation leads to an intent to organize their needs based on what the environment can provide. This intention aligns with Bateson’s concept of totemism, which proposes adapting societal structures according to examples set by nature (490). Notably, the adaptation process is not framed as a fight against or a struggle to overcome the limits imposed by the mountains. It is about finding a way to learn from, live in and with the environment – a process that is ongoing.

A scene that demonstrates this precarious learning path is when Numa, who also serves as the voice-over narrator, and two other team members wander off to search for the missing plane tail, which contains a battery that could help them send an SOS transmission. The imprudent decision to depart without considering how the environment might impact them leaves the explorers stranded in the middle of the night, exposed to the freezing temperatures. This scene can serve as a warning that there

is no room for individual heroism or superhuman explorations: "The greater the effort to get out, the harder the mountain hits back" ("Cuanto mayor es el esfuerzo por salir, más fuerte golpea la montaña") (*Society of the Snow* 00:55:59–56:06). It is a reminder that humans do neither stand above nor below the environment but are forced to make ends meet living with it, even though it might seem impossible at the beginning of the film: "It is a place where living is impossible. We are the strangers here" ("Es un lugar donde vivir es imposible. Lo extraño acá somos nosotros") (*Society of the Snow* 00:25:36–46). Notably, it is not nature that is referred to as strange but the humans themselves. This portrayal seems to indicate a shift away from an anthropocentric view.

Cinematographically, the two mentioned scenes also support the presentation of an ambivalent and transactional relationship between the characters and the mountains. As Numa awakes after surviving the freezing night, the viewers first see an extreme long shot of the Andes, showing the morning sun just peaking over the top of the mountains. Various close-ups and extreme close-ups of the explorer's hands and feet breaking out of the ice, very slowly, after surviving the freezing night outside, are followed by a medium shot of Numa bathed in the morning sunlight (*Society of the Snow* 00:55:07–56:02). The precarious relationship here is shown by contrasting the (negative) effects the low temperatures had on their bodies through the extreme close-ups with the image of the Andes that shows a hopeful, calm, and bright sunrise. By presenting the different layers the mountains can have, the landscape is not just a background to the story but becomes an active character in it. As Jean Epstein argues, the representation of landscape in cinema should not merely serve as a picturesque background but should be something more than that (11). He particularly discusses how nature can be framed through close-ups that allow the viewer to experience it from a different perspective, revealing previously unknown aspects about it (10). The intimacy and proximity created through the close-up of a landscape or other things and beings in general allow us to see the tiniest movements that would have been denied to us otherwise (10–13). This movement is what he identifies as the essence of the close-up (9). According to Epstein, "[t]he close-up limits and directs the attention" (13), leaving the viewers with "neither the right nor the ability to be distracted" (13). The emotions that are transmitted are thus all-encompassing (13).

In the expedition scene described above, the bodies of the three characters shown in close-ups and extreme close-ups become part of the face of the landscape. First, they are set against a stormy environment that clouds their vision and makes it hard to advance through the snow that swallows their bodies with every step. The close-ups reveal faces, hands, and body parts that struggle to move, as they attempt to maintain blood flow in the freezing temperatures. The proximity to the characters conveys and intensifies the anxiety felt by them directly to the viewers, culminating

in the release of tension when the film cuts to the extreme long shot of the quiet mountain range at sunrise. The viewers then see how the characters have become part of the landscape itself, buried in the snow and slowly starting to move hands, feet, and faces again. The landscape reveals its many faces, with its heavy and treacherous snowstorms as well as its bright and majestic sunrises. By showing movement in close-ups and calmness in long shots, viewers experience the interplay between the environment and the characters at the closest cinematic level possible, seeing up close how the three bodies merge into a new face on and of the snowy landscape. *Society of the Snow* thus portrays the environment as one more character in the film, highlighting a diverse and complex relationship with the (human) characters that at one point also (visually) become part of the environment. It emphasizes an interconnected and transactional understanding of the processes that occur between both realms, moving away from an anthropocentric view of the environment.

These processes cannot only be observed in the portrayal of the human-environment relationship but also in the changing (societal) relations that start to surface among the characters after the plane crash. The perceivable shift in preestablished (cultural) values and norms aligns with the principle of Guattari's social ecology, wherein the focus is on how members interact with and influence each other and their surroundings to form a collective that is based on corresponding exchanges between humans and the environment (24–25). Portraying the formation of a society based on altered values within a new environment that incites these changes promotes a more ecocentric perspective. It demonstrates how the environment, as well as its (human) components, depend on and are interconnected with each other.

Society of the Snow, unlike *Alive* and *Survive!*, embraces a portrayal of Guattari's social ecology, one in which hierarchical structures are dissolved and where each member plays a crucial role in building a new society. Particularly, the representation of heroism (or lack thereof), as well as anthropophagy and the religious beliefs of the group members, exemplify how *Society of the Snow* presents a more ecocritical approach within Guattari's social ecology, moving away from a pure anthropocentric view. In Bayona's film, the rugby team captain – unlike the corresponding portrayal of the character in *Alive* – does not declare himself group leader but instead is presented as a reference for the others when they seek advice or need to make a group decision. By contrast, the captain in *Alive* is repeatedly shown standing opposite the rest of the group, giving instructions, scolding the members when they disobey, and making decisions regarding organization and procedures. The hierarchical structure maintained in *Alive* is not only reflected in the captain's role but also in how the rest of the group is framed in relation to the "protagonists" and/or "heroes" of the film. Roberto and Nando, the two men who set out to find the green valleys of Chile, are the ones who overcome the extreme adversities and save the group in the end.

Throughout the film, both Roberto and Nando, along with the captain and Carlitos – one of the film's staunch believers in God and a consistent source of comic relief – draw most of the camera's attention. They are often in the center of the frame, shot from a low angle to signify superiority or standing in front of the other members, among others. These cinematographic choices visually foster the hierarchical structure that exists within the group. *Survive!*, as already mentioned above, does not assign this level of prominence to a particular member, as the characters' personalities are only secondary compared to the shocking events unfolding before the audience's eyes. Changing the survivors' real names to fictional ones further underlines this film's focus on the catastrophe itself rather than on the development and portrayal of potential relations between the characters and the environment.

Telling a story of individual heroes, as Willoquet-Maricondi asserts, only reveals one side of the story – the side of the survivors – ignoring or setting aside that of the victims (49–50). The whole narrative thus centers on only a few individuals, shifting the focus away from the underlying cause or aim that the characters are fighting for and concentrating on their individual stories and capabilities (Willoquet-Maricondi 50). In Vierci's book, one of the survivors criticizes that heroism was artificially introduced to the (cinematic) portrayal of their story: "Who are the heroes? I ask myself, what heroes? What are they talking about? This was a story of unfortunates, and in that framework, there was no space for heroes or show-offs. That concept belongs to the conventional society . . ." ("¿Quiénes son los héroes? Yo me pregunto, ¿qué héroes? ¿De qué me hablan? Ésta fue una historia de desgraciados, y en ese marco no había espacio para héroes ni lucimiento. Este concepto pertenece a la sociedad convencional . . .") (135). This quote not only discards a heroic presentation of their story but also emphasizes the necessity to start telling stories that do not comply with the "conventional society."

Bayona's film takes the first step in doing so by naming his film *Society of the Snow*, highlighting the importance of forming new social relations and interactions in and with a new environment. This title stands in contrast to the other two film titles, *Alive* and *Survive!*, that maintain a heroic narrative of the Andes crash. They focus on man's extraordinary survival story in an environment in which it seems impossible to live. Shifting the narrative to the formation of a new society, portraying all its members (including the environment) as being essential in the process – be they dead or alive – allows to highlight the transactional processes that occur between all members of the (new) society, which concords with Guattari's notion that all ecologies are intricately interconnected. Roberto Canessa summarizes the group's newfound philosophy in Vierci's book as follows: "What remained in the mountains was the commitment we made to each other not to let ourselves be contaminated by the pride and vanities of the conventional society we came from. . . . What remained was

the philosophy of the men from the mountains, that muleteer's code of giving one another a hand even if it meant that they were risking their own lives" ("Quedó en la montaña el compromiso a no dejarnos contagiar por los orgullos y las vanidades de la sociedad convencional de la que proveníamos. . . . Quedó la filosofía de los hombres de montaña, ese código de los arrieros de darse una mano aunque en ello se jueguen la vida") (49). This statement not only deviates from the conventional way of telling a hero-centered story but restates the importance of every member in the society of the snow – a way of thinking that breaks with the hierarchical structures of the "society of the plains" ("sociedad del llano") (Vierci 10).

The characters' relationship with anthropophagy in *Society of the Snow* further highlights a significant shift in their societal thinking and adaptation to the new environment. Compared to the previous two film versions, Bayona's rendition attempts to portray the group's decision to resort to anthropophagy as an act that is part of living within this new environment. The depiction chooses to include the narrative of the victims, in Willoquet-Maricondi's words, trying to incorporate the oftentimes forgotten side of the same story (49–50). Cinematographically, this is achieved by avoiding showing how the flesh is cut, only hinting at it through reflections, and by showing the backs of the survivors who cut the bodies. The idea that the role of the dead should at least be as important as the role of the living in the society of the snow is supported by Bayona himself when he states: "If you make it, I make it" ("Si tú llegas, yo llego") (Zurro and Bayona 00:15:53–55). Essentially, this means that eating the bodies of the dead meant that both were able to continue living: The dead helped the living to survive by allowing them to eat their bodies and simultaneously kept on living in the survivors' bodies as an extension.

By contrast, the first two film versions explicitly show how the bodies are cut, portraying it as something sensationally repulsive and shocking. When the first bodies are cut in *Alive*, a large group of survivors stands in the background of the frame, waiting and looking at what Roberto is about to do. We see up close how the flesh is cut and then eaten, dramatically announced by Roberto himself in front of everybody: "The meat is almost frozen. I am going to eat this piece" (*Alive* 01:01:08–13). The dramatic and sensationalist portrayal of anthropophagy in *Alive* frames it as something unimaginable yet necessary to gain strength and overcome the limits imposed by the environment. *Society of the Snow*, however, frames the decision as something rational and spiritual – something that allows everyone to continue living in the new environment, even if it only means living through someone else. Numa, the survivor struggling most with this decision, ultimately sees that he needs to eat in order to help and contribute to the collective good of the group, as encapsulated in the quote "If you make it, I make it," an idea that reflects the importance of the collective to build a working society (of the snow).

The importance of the collective becomes apparent not only through the changed perception and presentation of anthropophagy but also in how the characters' shifting values concerning their religious beliefs are portrayed. In *Society of the Snow*, religion is no longer presented as something that is imposed by an external entity or as something that is (God-)given. Instead, a new concept of religion evolves through interaction with the environment and the group's members. From the very beginning of Bayona's film, the viewers see that the group is religious (they go to church, pray, etc.). However, these conventions are questioned in the mountains – not necessarily by every character but through the voices that do see the need to shift their thinking in the mountains, Bayona starts the conversation of questioning preestablished (religious) values. The key scene in the film that articulates these processes is when Arturo and Numa start to discuss faith. Arturo tries to explain to Numa very delicately why his faith has not faded but has shifted in the mountains: "that God tells me what I have to do at home but not what I have to do in the mountains" ("ese Dios me dice lo que tengo que hacer en mi casa, pero no me dice lo que tengo que hacer en la montaña") (*Society of the Snow* 01:15:42–52). He further outlines that his faith now lies in the people who surround him and contribute to making the society of the snow work every day, including the dead.

In the film *Alive*, the influence of religion on the group's members is also rather apparent. They pray as they feel the plane will crash; they pray when they feel hopeless in the plane fuselage, etc. In contrast to *Society of the Snow*, *Alive* insists on maintaining traditional religious values characteristic of a conventional society. In *Alive*, Carlitos, the survivor who (wistfully) makes allusions to old conventions (birthday celebrations, for instance), repeatedly insists on praying as a group. After the avalanche hits the plane fuselage, he presses the agnostic group member to pray with them as well, even though he had refused this several times before. As the menacing sound of another possible avalanche approaching the plane reaches the group, the agnostic decides it is time to pray after all. The continuous references and allusions to the values and conventions of the "society of the plains" ("sociedad del llano") (Vierci 10) hinder the portrayal of a collective that changes with and learns from its new environment. It maintains the ideals that were left behind in the plains, reiterating an anthropocentric view of the world.

Transcending Memory

The last of Guattari's three ecologies is concerned with the interior, mental processes that occur in people's minds when it comes to altering preestablished societal values and structures, as well as their relationship with the environment in particular. The instance that vocalizes these interconnections in *Society of the Snow* is Numa's voice-over narration. His voice transcends the boundaries of a straightforward narration as

he continues to speak even after he has died. It is one of the central elements that distinguishes Bayona's film from the other two. Even though both films have voice-over narration, in *Survive!*, it primarily serves as a framing commentary at the beginning and end of the film to explain to the audience the hard facts about the flight. This voice-over choice mirrors the film's overall focus on presenting facts and depicting the events, highlighting the emotional distance between the characters and their detachment from the environment. In *Alive*, the narrator, one of the survivors, is shown at the beginning and end of the film. The choice to have the story told by one of the survivors furthers Willoquet-Maricondi's point, as she notes that stories are usually told from the hero's point of view (50). Notably, primarily the characters who survived were named after the actual survivors of the plane crash in *Alive*, whereas most of the dead's names were changed. Bayona's decision to literally give the dead a voice makes the story transcend the narrative boundaries not only by creating connections within the story but also by establishing a relationship with the viewers in front of the screens. The voice reflects, questions, explains, narrates, reads, and addresses the viewers directly, creating a shared consciousness with all members of the narrative, including the environment, as well as the people watching and listening to the story.

Numa draws on the collective cultural memory established in the society of the snow, sharing their (new) values, habits, views, and interactions with everyone who is ready to listen. Just as Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka write, "cultural memory [is] a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (126). In other words, by passing on the cultural knowledge they acquired in the mountains, their story can be kept alive for generations to come and influence people's behavior and actions. Numa's voice comes to represent a communal sense that stands in for both the survivors and the medium film, as a mediating figure that reveals the interconnections between environmental, social, and mental ecologies.

The photographs that are taken and shown in the film provide another illustration of this communal sense and the impulse to pass on collective memory: "What happened to them? What happened to us? Who were we in the mountains?" ("¿Qué les pasó? ¿Qué nos pasó? ¿Quiénes fuimos en la montaña?") (*Society of the Snow* 01:41:38–49). These narrative impulses are relevant not only because they contribute to the presentation of the interactions between the three ecologies, but also because they demonstrate that memory is in continuous motion, changing and being changed constantly, depending on who sees, tells, or remembers the story. The narrator makes this notion very clear at the beginning of the film: "One must return to the past, knowing that the past is what changes most" ("Hay que regresar al pasado, sabiendo

que el pasado es lo que más cambia") (*Society of the Snow* 00:01:45–51). It further signifies that it is important to find new ways of telling the same story, as the account of one discourse cannot encompass the entirety of the whole narrative. Consequently, Bayona's choice to incorporate these statements into the film keeps the audience active, attentive, and involved in the story, while reminding them that the events unfolding on their screens also have something to do with them. It depends on us how we treat each other. It depends on us how we treat our environment. It depends on us how we (want to) remember the past. It is possible to change and widen our mental ecology through film. "Memory is indeed the past made present, but with a view to provoking thought about the future" (Kaplan 108). With these words, E. Ann Kaplan summarizes what Bayona captured in his film through numerous scenes, dialogues, shots, and the narrative instance, namely, the resolution of the boundaries between past, present, and future as well as those of the environmental, social, and mental ecologies. He found a way of telling the (whole?) Andes story from a communal perspective by setting aside sensationalism and heroism to make room for the story of a society formed in, from, and with the environment.

Conclusion

Snow is the persistent element in *Society of the Snow*. It reminds us that the environment, as an all-encompassing entity, influences countless aspects of our daily lives – many of which we are not even aware of. It influences and contributes to our society and culture through media representations and materiality but also makes itself present in weather, beauty, and strangeness. The knowledge and images we have of the environment as something external to us are deeply ingrained in our mentalities and, ironically, shaped by media, society, and culture in return. "Old habits die hard," they say, which is why it is important to feed oneself with many little impulses to try and break with those mental patterns and widen our knowledge to include and perceive the environment as being directly connected to us and our daily lives. As already stated, media, in this case films, offer an effective and affective resource to foster such a shift in our mental ecologies towards a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the environment, society, and our ways of thinking.

Society of the Snow takes an important step towards expanding this understanding and reviewing environmental, social, and psychological relations in narrative forms that support earthly survival. In the film, the mountains become an active part in the creation of the society of the snow and do not merely serve as a background or training ground for the tale of human survival. The group questions the norms they have come to deploy automatically in the society they left, noticing that they cannot be applied in the same way in the Andes. Religion and anthropophagy acquired new meanings, and the society they built, based on those ideas, did not have a hierarchical

but a heterarchical structure, in which the dead played an essential part. Viewing *Society of the Snow* through an ecocritical lens can broaden viewers' awareness and readiness to see and feel that all beings are intricately interconnected and therefore depend on one another. The immersive and intimate experience that Bayona created with his film – aided by (extreme) close-up shots and Numa's voice-over, among other elements – allows viewers to affectively enter this interconnected world and connect it to their own reality. Numa's concluding words in the film highlight this connection and make the viewers resonate with the film: "You are the answer. Keep taking care of each other. And tell everyone what we did in the mountains" ("Ustedes son la respuesta. Sigan cuidándose unos a otros. Y cuéntenles a todos lo que hicimos en la montaña") (*Society of the Snow* 02:09:29–50).

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About the Author

Elaine Erwin Casero is currently studying English and Spanish in the Master's teaching training program at the University of Innsbruck. She has worked as the coordinator of the Center of Inter-American Studies at the University of Innsbruck from 2023-2025. As part of the Aurora short-term mobility program, she spent three weeks at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam doing research on her master's thesis. Her academic interests include ecocriticism and film studies.

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