

Myth and catastrophe. Characters and landscape in Werner Herzog and its echoes in Latin American cinema

*Mito y catástrofe. Personajes y paisajes
en Werner Herzog y su eco en el cine
latinoamericano*

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The relationship between myth and catastrophe can help us understand Werner Herzog's filmography. Taking as a reference this relationship, and analyzing character and landscape narratives, I will compare Herzog's filmography with some contemporary Latin-American films to show that, even if these films resonate with the language of catastrophe of the German director, they objectivize catastrophe to the point of demystification.

KEYWORDS: myth, catastrophe, Latin American cinema, film.

La relación entre mito y catástrofe es útil para analizar la cinematografía de Werner Herzog. Tomando como referencia esta relación, y focalizándose en el tratamiento narrativo dado a los personajes y a los paisajes, este artículo compara esta cinematografía con algunos ejemplos del cine latinoamericano contemporáneo. Se demuestra así que el cine latinoamericano que resuena con el tono de catástrofe del cine de Werner Herzog tiende más hacia la desmitificación que hacia el mito.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cine, mito, catástrofe, cine latinoamericano.

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In this paper I will establish the relationship between Werner Herzog's filmography and a selection of contemporary Latin American films. My main goal is not to know whether the German filmmaker has influenced Latin American filmmakers, but to analyze the relationship between the two. I will start by trying to understand a decisive subject in Herzog's filmography: catastrophe and myth. I will then analyze the Latin American film examples that resonate with this subject, while paying special attention to two particular elements, character narrative treatment and landscape figurative treatment.

WERNER HERZOG AND CATASTROPHISM

Catastrophe has two facets in the filmography of the German director: catastrophe as a natural phenomenon, but also catastrophe as a civilizational phenomenon. Myth, as an archetypal narrative linked to a historical situation, episode or character, unifies these two facets. Nonetheless, there are some differences. Concerning nature, Werner Herzog confronts us with the immenseness of volcanoes and glaciers, inhuman and wild spaces, the sensation of danger and fear, the necessity of surviving and the astonishment of death. In *La Soufrière* (1977), for example, Herzog travels to Basse-Terre, a city that has been evacuated because of volcanic activity, and tries to find the people that refused to leave. He goes searching for the last man on Earth as if he were looking for the most authentic and conclusive sign of life. What appears to be at first glance an act of suicide is in fact, as reflected by the testimonies and the filmmaker's experience, a singular and mythical vitality. According to Gabrea (1986), Herzog's films contain mystical experiences that reestablish a mythical order of the world.²

² Gabrea (1986) has emphasized the mystical dimension of Herzog's films. According to him, the mystical experience is an essential part of the director's filmography because it allows him to restore the lost bond between myth, or the society that believes in them, and the scientific skepticism, or postmodern society. Other examples where we can find this are: *Fata morgana* (1977), *Ecos de un reino siniestro/Echoes from a sombre empire-Bokassa* (1990), *Alas de esperanza/Julianes sturz in den Dschungel* (2000),

As a civilizational phenomenon, catastrophe becomes historical. First of all, we must note that Werner Herzog belongs to a generation that brought “catastrophe” to the center of the public debate. According to Walter (2008),

pessimism about the present was extremely prevalent in German society during the seventies and eighties, as if the nation indulged living in a neurotic atmosphere and believed in the pedagogy of catastrophe. During the eighties, German society was living in a kind of end of the world hysteria (p. 222).

In this context, Herzog tried, as pointed out by Gabrea (1986), to rescue Western culture from urban pollution, industrial expansion, warfare, fascism and its consequences. Likewise, Carré (2008) observed that Herzog’s filmography reflects German debates from the eighties. According to the author, Herzog brought to light “the failure of Western civilization, visible in the representation of ecological and humanitarian catastrophes caused by Western intervention” (p. 193). Therefore, Carré establishes a connection between the films of Herzog and Adorno and Horkheimer’s³ criticism of Enlightenment.

In response to the progress of Enlightenment or *Aufklärung*, a progress that leads to a servile, unconscious and even mythical belief in Western positivism, Herzog created emblematic narratives that predicted the failure of exclusive positive thinking. He aimed for the revival and vindication of a magical thinking. The German filmmaker tried in this manner to re-enchant a world submitted to a rational and scientific discourse, transforming it into a mythical and pre-modern

El diamante blanco/The White diamond (2006) y largometrajes de ficción como *Aguirre o la cólera de Dios/Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972), *Corazón de cristal/Herz aus Glas* (1976) o *The wild blue yonder* (2005).

³ An important precedent to understand Adorno and Horkheimer is Walter Benjamin. In Benjaminian thinking, catastrophe is synonymous of progress (Benjamin, 2002, P. 242). He opposes the teleological idea of progress to an ethics of rupture and resistance that hopes to find at the end of catastrophe the moment of redemption. Some critics have named this philosophy as “material messianism” (Richard Lane or Arno Münster).

world. “In filmmaking, Herzog said, I am hostile to History, I prefer to go back to cinematic dreams and maybe to a new Creation” (Carré, 2008, p. 223). Gabrea (1986) has effectively noted that Herzog’s films are an “enchanted ceremony” that raise the following questions: where do we come from?, who are we?, and where are we going? (p. 14).

Herzog’s mythical narrative configurations are in constant dialog with the catastrophe of modernity. Representation here is a means to find and show the primary destruction, the one that concentrates all catastrophes, the archetype that will establish a collective *ethos* parallel to the idea of progress and positive reason. In this respect, Gabrea adds: “Ironic and pessimistic, the film director condemns humanity for its inability to preserve a balance between natural domination and exploitation. Though, he suggests that we still have the power to stop our fall into the abyss” (1986, p. 21).

For example, the apocalyptic imaginary of *Fata Morgana*, *Lessons of Darkness/Lektionen in Finsternis* and *The Wild Blue Yonder*, is grounded in narratives coming from Christian and non Christian myths. But even in his most recent documentaries made with the help of members of the scientific community, such as *El Diamante Blanco/The White Diamond* (2006), *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) or *Into the Inferno* (2016), the intervention of the filmmaker and his particular way of storytelling replace the scientific world apprehension with a mythical one, that can effectively become a mystical experience. At the same time, in most of Herzog’s films, the stories rely on adventures that are the basis for mythical narratives, not just because these actions are considered limitless experiences, but also because of their uniqueness. I can cite here the biography of Kaspar Hauser, the life of the prophetic character of *Herz aus Glas* (1976) or the life experience of the only survivor of a plane crash in *Julianes Sturz in den Dschungel* (2000).

Finally, I observed that the relationship between catastrophe and myth can be extended to the cultural field, mostly because of the importance of this relationship in Romanticism. While the 18th century tried to eliminate the authority of religion through reason, at a symbolic level the sublimation of catastrophe was an aesthetic compensation.⁴ In

⁴ From a kantian point of view, to sublimate a catastrophe through art means

order to abstract things from their mere material being and to establish the existence of a totality beyond sensible objects, catastrophes were taken to a transcendental level. Likewise, since the seventies the postmodern discourse has claimed that it had dispelled the idea of Western development, but at the symbolic level, an artist such as Herzog compensated the loss of the idea of progress itself with a sublimation of the disasters produced by this conception of modernity.

In order to do this, Herzog relies on a variety of narrative and figurative resources. Here I will limit myself to two: characters and landscape. These two elements are also the central points of our comparative analysis with Latin American cinema. The films that I have chosen for this comparison have been described as “cine mínimo” (Corro, 2012), “suspenseful narratives” (Schroeder, 2016), or “slow cinema” (Flanagan, 2008). This includes films with antiheroes, marginal characters, banal stories and cold atmospheres that play with time to accentuate the sensation of duration. As a result, these films call our attention on post-traumatic and memorial issues (Page & Sánchez, 2012), social alienation, mortality and social anxiety (Jaffe, 2014) and on a claustrophobic form of capitalism/capitalistic system governed by high-frequency trading. (Luca & Barradas, 2016).

Furthermore, like the movies of Herzog, the Latin American films analyzed here deal with limitless and catastrophic experiences, although they stay away from mythical narratives. Moreover, the critique on Western brutality disappears or is subordinated to local or national catastrophes. For example, in three of the studied cases, memorial and historical national processes of the recent past are the main sources of catastrophe representation.

As opposed to Herzog’s approach to myth as a means of expression, the Latin American films analyzed have a tendency towards allegory. Thus, codified narratives that expand the meaning of the stories replace emblematic narratives. Juggling between literal and figurative language, fiction and history, textual and intertextuality, these films produce

that we are convoking a transcendental liberty, a liberty that goes beyond natural laws and that shows the autonomous character of man facing nature (Kant, 2000).

subjacent narrative logics that have to be decoded. Instead, Herzog's filmography aims to uncover a revelation of an original, transcendental and eternal meaning that remains nonetheless mysterious, ambiguous and sublime.⁵

The comparative analysis that I propose can lead us to understand two ways of filmmaking through catastrophe representation: the one of the German filmmaker and his intellectual tradition that, though not a homogeneous one determines a conception of catastrophe, and the one of the Latin American filmmakers that is characterized by particular national histories that also shape a conception of catastrophe. This comparative analysis can also help us understand the differences between the character configuration and landscape figuration in the films of Herzog and in Latin American films.

CHARACTERS IN WERNER HERZOG

The most emblematic characters of Herzog's filmography tend to be misfits on the edge of madness. As Benelli (2014) put it, we are dealing with "characters out of synch with, if not in open rebellion against, the societies within which they live" (p. 90). The dramatic reasons why characters have a misfit personality are many: Kaspar Hauser because of his delayed education, Hias because of his prophetic attitude, Fitzcarraldo because of his megalomania, the dwarfs of *Auch Zwerge Haben Klein Angefangen* (1970) because of their tendency to anarchic behavior and the indigenous communities of *Wo die Grünen Ameisen Träumen* (1984) because of their rejection of a way of life dependent on the industrial exploitation of natural resources.

⁵ This dichotomy is similar to the one of allegory and symbol. It is true that this dichotomy is complex and polemical, but it can help us to understand our corpus. Nonetheless, we use the modern definition of allegory, that is, an allegory that can not be read clearly through conventional meaning and signifier and signification union but that explores the separation between signifier and signification, that reveals the destruction of conventional meaning and that explore new possibilities of unions (Gersternkorn, 1995; Mélon, 1998).

Each one of these characters clash with their contextual reality and unveil the fact that the catastrophe of “Western reason” trying to control nature is hiding behind this reality. As a consequence, these characters are unpredictable, hermetic and barely likeable. Further more, most of these characters undertake projects that can seem absurd and that usually end in failure: Fitzcarraldo trying to transport a ship over a hill, Hias announcing the coming of a new world and then losing himself in the woods and the dwarfs crucifying an ape in their institution. Nonetheless, it is because of this that these characters become mythical. Despite their low likability and the failure of their projects, Herzog honors the character’s acts, maintaining an intimate bond with their narrative evolution. In this respect, the image of Fitzcarraldo in his symphonic ship at the end of a tragic adventure is emblematic. Beyond natural constraints, this character demonstrates the challenging and conquering spirit of Western behavior.

Another example is Hias, the main character of *Herz aus Glas*. Herzog sublimates this tragic prophet introducing the myth of the apocalypse. In one of the starting scenes, Hias predicts that two men are going to pass through two different bridges at almost the same time. The prediction turns out to be true. We see, from the perspective of one of the spectators who heard the prediction, the passage of the two men, in two low shots. This scene persuades not just the fictional spectator but also the spectator of the film that Hias’ predictions can actually be believed. Thus the character starts to acquire a mythical characterization. Furthermore, the narrative instance shows us the character’s mythical visions. At the end of the film, we see a post apocalyptic world. In a voice over, the character tells the story of the only survivors, a group of people that live isolated in little islands and aim to find out if the earth is flat, as they believe it to be. This is a mythical story that deals with the start of an incredible and challenging history. Moreover, panoramic shots taken from a helicopter show us how small Man is when confronted with the immensity of the world and the theatrical *mise en scène* underlines the archetypical nature of characters.

We can now establish a comparison with two Latin American films, Carlos Reygadas’ *Japon* (2002) and Pablo Agüero’s *Salamandra* (2008). In these two films the characters also clash with reality or have

problems being in touch with it. However, these two characters are not mystified by the narrative instance. They remain ordinary antiheroes. Moreover, instead of revealing a “civilizational catastrophe”, they appear to be allegorical signs of a private and national catastrophe.

JAPON'S “HOMBRE”

The story of *Japon* has multiple levels of interpretation. Starting with the title, which has no obvious link to the story, Carlos Reygadas invites the spectator to be aware of the absence of a single interpretation and of the allegorical discourse of the film. Thus, for example, Rowlandson (2006) considers that Reygadas' film renews an allegory that Juan Rulfo had already dealt with in *Pedro Paramo*, which consists of questioning the relationship between the author, the reader and the act of reading. As pertains to the subject of catastrophe, Epplin (2012) infers a different interpretation. According to the author, Reygadas presents how society is reduced to the cold world of capitalism and in particular how the appearance of a violent form of neoliberalism in the country and its rise in the year 2000s, caused a division between the consumerist world of the cities and the ritualistic, humble and vital, though vulnerable, rural world. In this sense, the film reflects the decline and state of nihilism of a highly educated elite in a neoliberal and divided nation.⁶

The plot of the film consists of an anonymous handicapped man mourning. We never know what or why he is mourning and this lack of information makes him hermetic and unpredictable. As with Herzog's characters, there is going to be an opposition between the character's personal universe and the context in which he finds himself. The character is going to find himself isolated: In the middle of the mountains (a landscape loved by the German director) in an odd and unfriendly place for a city person who enjoys art and culture. Moreover, his suicidal behavior contrasts with the vitality of the peasant woman

⁶ In an interview, Reygadas states that the inspiration for the character was a cultured friend of his parents and his “existentialism”, which seemed to be no more than a frustration with having renounced to a familiar conventional life (Romero, 2003).

that gives him shelter. Nonetheless, the character does not embrace any heroic or emblematic project, as Herzog's characters commonly do. Reygadas replaces myth with the ordinary and intimacy and uses his character to highlight the loss of meaning of the urban world.

The inhospitable nature, shaped by cliffs, rocks and canyons; the encounter with the dead horse on top of the mountain; the sexual impotence; the collapse of the house of the woman that gives him shelter; the train disaster that causes the character's death; all these things are expressions of the catastrophe that surrounds the main character. Little by little, his world dissolves around him and with it, the ideals of the cultural elites are being questioned. One of the most revealing visual signs of this devastation is the use of lengthy subjective shots that follow the man as he walks through rural areas. These shots emphasize the instability of the character, but also, and by contrast, the restlessness of the urban world.

The train disaster at the end of the movie is a notable example of the the man's world collapsing. The scene was shot with a slow forward tracking shot that turns occasionally to show the traces of the accident on both sides of the rails: the burnt merchandise, the derailed coach, the bricks and the corpses. The shot resembles the subjective shots used throughout the film. The soundtrack of this scene, an Arvo Pärt piece, is magnificent and dramatic, and creates a strange and introspective atmosphere. All these elements constitute a hyperbolic event that thus acquires the characteristics of a catastrophe, albeit a private one. This disaster is a catastrophic allegory of the psychological collapse of the main character. Furthermore, the scene's artificiality and the gravity of the *mise en scène* highlights the relationship between psychological ruin, cultural ruin, and rural ruin. For this reason, and we're coming back to Epplin's (2012) arguments, the allegorical discourse of *Japon* could effectively evoke the complex and tragic relationship between the material scarcity of rural people and the spiritual scarcity of the urban ones after the arrival of neoliberal politics. In other words, the ritualistic vitality of the rural people and the social aspirations of the urban intellectuals are both in a state of decline.

ALBA AND INTI IN *SALAMANDRA*

In Pablo Agüero's film *Salamandra*, the figure of the child acts as a catalyst for the allegorical discourse. According to Dufays (2014), in post-dictatorship Argentinean cinema the figure of the child has been used as an allegorical figure to symbolize the idea of nation. Children summon concepts such as origin, innocence, memory, and hope; all sensitive issues dealing with national belonging. Moreover, the point of view of the child, an innocent and magical one, can disarticulate the conventional world of the adults and stimulate an allegorical discourse.

In the case of *Salamandra* the connection between childhood and nation is not obvious. Nonetheless, there are some signs of its presence. Alba has just been released from a psychiatric clinic and, rebelling against the daily routine of city life and in the hope of finding a more libertarian environment, she and her son, Inti, leave for the south of the country, to a village called El Bolsón. However, the journey turns out to be full of obstacles and dangers, transforming hope into tragedy. The film is reminiscent of Herzog's *Strozek* (1977). Much like the characters of Herzog's film, Alba travels to the south looking for a new life but finds herself stuck in an unfriendly environment. However, the main obstacle is not going to be the progress of modernity and liberal capitalism, as in *Strozek*, but rather the lack of concrete alternatives in an extremely precarious and sometimes hostile village. In some respects, El Bolsón brings together the economic crisis of the 2000s and the dictatorial past of the country. Let's not forget that this village represented a domestic safe haven for many leftist militants during the dictatorship.

Beyond the question of modernity, the main catastrophe of this story is the state of vulnerability of the characters in a particular regional context. Moreover, Agüero does not focus on an emblematic character and thus on the development of a mythical register, as is the case in *Strozek*. The main characters are not the only ones trying to find an alternative in El Bolsón, there is a whole community. Inti is not the only child trying to survive in this village; there are other children that must find a way to adapt to their parents' pursuit of a different life. Through the eyes of the child, this ideal of finding a different and alternative nation seems to turn into a strange dream, and even, at times, a nightmare.

Furthermore, the Argentinean director uses naturalism and modernism to disrupt the adult's world and reinforce the idea of catastrophe. Firstly, the figure of the child allows him to tell a story from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable character. And secondly, this vulnerability is accentuated by the structure of the narration itself. Because of its tendency to discordance, chaos, the use of jump cuts and deliberate continuity errors or *faux raccords*, the plot is in constant metamorphosis, its development always in danger and in a state of vulnerability, much like the characters.

Neither of these two films I have here succinctly analyzed have the mythical, heroic or even mystical characteristics of Herzog's films. Though in either case the characters crash with a reality that is not in tune with their desires and pursuits, thus instigating a state of catastrophe, the characters of these Latin American films do not obey to a mythical narrative configuration. Instead, the narrative configuration is shaped by a modernist rhetoric and by allegory. Furthermore, these two films are representative examples of a wider phenomenon. Films like as *Tony Manero* (Larraín, 2008) and *La teta asustada* (Claudia Llosa, 2009) can be examined through the same lens. In these two films, the two main characters, Raúl Peralta and Fausta, live in social environments that are reminiscent of periods of terror: Chile's dictatorship and Peruvian State terrorism of the Nineties. Thus Raúl's itch to become a TV star and Fausta's speechlessness and sadness serve as allegories of two disastrous historical periods.

HERZOG'S LANDSCAPES

In Herzog's filmography, landscapes are one of the main figurative elements tied to the representation of disaster. Nature, like a vampire, swallows the boat of Fitzcarraldo and the fragile gaze of Kaspar Hauser. Nature appears to be the prophetic sign of the destruction of Hias' world and of the world of Herzog himself in *Lessons of Darkness/Lektionen in Finisternis* (1991). Natural landscapes incarnate the superhuman, a world indifferent to human life. In this figurative landscape, characters, and even in some cases the German director when he acts as the narrator,

are transformed into ephemeral and insignificant beings led towards astonishment, risk, fear and the affirmation of life limited by death.⁷

In a sense, Herzog's landscapes represent the radical other of Western civilization. As a plastic representation of something that exceeds human life (the nature of the jungle, the nature of a volcano), Herzog's landscapes embody this excess in the human world. But much like his characters, Herzog's landscapes are also mythical. According to Jansen:

The image of the landscape becomes a vague and unsettled distant memory of a lost primal state, in which idyll and might, the individual and the world, the self and the other are still facets of one and the same sensation, and neither moral nor political categories (Koch, 2014, p. 83).

In this sense, the excess of nature is returned to the human world through myth as something that is at the same time typical and excessive, original and strange. That is why Herzog has underlined that his landscapes reflect what could be a "human soul" (Cronin, 2012, p. 176), they are literally "internal landscapes" of the excess and the mystical experiences of his characters. Nature is thus sublimated as a colossal, bewildering and superhuman territory, but also as an internal excess of human life itself, the mythical and spiritual catastrophe that ends the tragic cohabitation of Man and nature⁸. According to Gabrea (1986), this conception of nature through landscape representation results from a pantheistic philosophy. In this sense, landscape would herald the imminence of the divine in the world. Thus Herzog's landscapes are metaphors of the characters' personalities and also of the mythical

⁷ According to Prager (2010, p. 100) this paradox is central to Herzog's cinematography. The German director not just explores the threats of an indifferent universe but also the experience of life in the close encounter with death.

⁸ The divine character of the image has a close relationship with religion. This relationship must be analyzed in a more detailed way that we cannot address here. Nevertheless, a reflection on this subject and its relation with the film production context of Northern Europe can be found in Coates (2003).

bonds between the world and the divine, “spiritual landscapes”.

In order to achieve this, Herzog has said that the spectator must be unable to recognize the landscape represented on the screen; the film must stimulate the strange sensation of a new discovery and not the “Discovery channel recognition” (Prager, 2010). Much like the character’s search in *Herz aux Glas* (1976), we must find in each landscape shot the origin of the world. The German director wants to battle the conventional TV language, which, just like the categorical and academic languages, is killing us he says. For this same reason, landscapes in Herzog’s films are neither comforting nor reassuring. On the contrary, they are oppressive and challenging. To create these “spiritual landscapes”, Herzog films wild spaces with monumental panoramic shots, dramatic soundtracks, and, sometimes, a voice over that highlights the monumentality of the landscape itself. He defamiliarizes representation and stimulates imagination, sensation and the mystical experience of the new discovery. Herzog’s images thus demand a sensory appreciation before demanding a rational explanation (Prager, 2010, p. 51). In consequence, the German director’s landscapes are mostly made to be contemplated. Landscapes in Herzog’s films can almost be seen as a cinema of attractions. Though they are narrative and thus they can reflect the personal state of a character, the core of their expressive power resides in contemplation and attraction.⁹

I will now describe the similarities between this type of landscape representation and what we find in two Latin American contemporary films: *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* (Ciro Guerra, 2015) and *Jauja* (Lisandro Alonso, 2014).

THE LANDSCAPE OF *EL ABRAZO DE LA SERPIENTE*

The Amazonian landscape is a central figure in *El Abrazo de la Serpiente*. The jungle, though a violent space also represents the hope of salvation. As in Herzog’s films, the expedition of the two western explorers and their local guides into the jungle becomes a mythical

⁹ I rescue Lefevre’s (2006, p. XII) discussion on Eisenstein landscape and its differentiation between narration and contemplation.

journey. Furthermore, much like the language of the German director, Ciro Guerra's cinematic language is foreign to the instrumental and conventional language of Western culture. The film also deals with the demographic disaster that is the disappearance of indigenous people due to the Western exploration, and the Western myth of progress behind it. Nonetheless, Ciro Guerra explores the mythologies of the indigenous communities, their internal landscapes, instead of the mystical landscapes of Western culture. Thus, nature appears, not as a dangerous other for the Western Man, but as an element that can live in community with man. Nature is humanized to the point that it has its own voice, expressed through the indigenous characters.

As I put it before, Herzog humanizes landscape as something that is at once strange to Man but also that from which he originated. Nonetheless, nature still represents the excess of the superhuman. "In Herzog's films, the sky does not suffer with us, but rather abandons us to our mortal fate" wrote Prager (2010, p. 99). On the contrary, in Ciro Guerra's film the humanization of landscape gives a voice to nature and this voice is also incarnated by the indigenous characters that reveal the vastness of a jungle that hears, feels and answers.

One of the most significant sequences is the one in which Kaiamakate's mouth is used to show aerial shots of the jungle. In this sequence, the film shows us the width and the length of the Amazonas river before revealing the mesmerizing NASA images about the universe and its origins. The soundtrack of the sequence mixes indigenous songs with sounds of the jungle and of the universe. These images are shown after the "Caapi" ritual. This is how Ciro Guerra gives a mythical and indigenous voice to nature. As in the films of Herzog, these images have the magic and the mysticism to re-enchant the world, but in a shamanic way. Ciro Guerra's *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* echoes the films of Werner Herzog, but Guerra replaces the latter's pantheism with polytheism.

Another element that illustrates the differences between these perceptions of nature is color. According to the Colombian director, black and white was not just a recreation of the 19th century images but also a metaphor for the difficulties that the western explorers had understanding the jungle (Rodelo, 2016). In this respect, nature

doesn't appear to be the dangerous other, like in the German director's films, it appears to be alien, something incomprehensible to Western civilization.

Thus, *El Abrazo de la Serpiente's* landscapes contrast the worldview of indigenous communities with the worldview of western explorers. In both cases there is a narrative filter: the characters. This filter supposes a more allegorical treatment of landscape than a sensitive one. In consequence, landscape representation has more of a narrative and moral function than a contemplative function. Its first goal is not to amaze but to condemn Western ignorance about nature. In this sense there is, again, a slight difference with the German director. The film presents a historical and allegorical discourse that differs from Herzog's mystical and sensorial discourse.

LANDSCAPE IN JAUJA

Between dream, reality, fantasy and allegory, the story of *Jauja* is strange. In the extreme south of Argentina, a Danish captain takes part in the Conquest of the Desert of the second half of the 19th century. In this remote and inhospitable area where locals are dying because of the new visitors, the Captain loses his daughter. He starts looking for her, but as he enters the Pampa desert, nature becomes strange and unreal. At the end of the story it is unclear whether it was real, or all just the dream of a Danish girl.

Even though the story is a strange one, Lisandro Alonso evokes a precise historical event, the Conquest of the Desert, and exposes the deception of the colonial imaginary. At the start of the film we read that even if "Jauja" was thought to be a mythological land that promised abundance and happiness, it was in a reality a legend that led a lot of people to no man's land. This premise is maintained throughout the film and is the basis for the allegorical film's narrative. Thus, the film demystifies the colonial imaginary and addresses the demographic disaster that it provoked.

Because of this, landscape representation is mythical and at the same time trivial, monumental and ordinary. In order to exalt the landscape Lisandro Alonso uses stationary camera shots with a large depth of field

that contrast with: a repetitive *mise en scène*; a square frame that recalls ancient photography, and a cool image temperature. We will study these three aspects. First of all, characters in the movie, and particularly the captain, move from the foreground towards the background of the image, in a way that makes them disappear on the horizon. Herzog has also used these kind of shots. In *Gasherbrum* (1985), for example, a couple of climbers lose themselves on the horizon of a white mountain. In both cases, the landscape is monumental, overwhelming and challenging. However, in Lisandro Alonso's film, this *mise en scène* is repeated over and over again. Consequently we feel time and duration, a sensation of slowness, until the point when the landscape isn't a mystical and superhuman revelation anymore, but something more similar to a dreamy image. Secondly, Alonso uses an antique square frame that does not only reduce the panoramic representation of the landscape but also adds a hyperrealist effect. The landscape seems to be contained in a fixed old picture with barely any movement and that, like color in *El Abrazo de la Serpiente*, can be interpreted as a reference to the limited understanding of the western visitors.

Finally, the Argentinean director preferred to use a cool color temperature to give the landscape a more homogeneous and flat appearance. The square frame and the cool image temperature diminish the monumental landscape representation. In this sense, the landscapes seems to portray nature not as wild and lively, but as lifeless. These cinematic resources help the allegorical narrative about an expiring world, which is ending because of the myth of colonial thinking, which the Conquest of the Desert embraced. In fact, the last sequence, where the Danish girls awakes, ends this world and gives rise to a new one where the colors are warmer, where there are more camera movements, but also where landscape has disappeared with its 19th century disasters.

El Abrazo de la Serpiente and *Jauja* use the landscape as a hybrid element that mixes mythology and allegory. Because of this use of Allegorical landscape representation they distance themselves from the sensitive, mystical and symbolic landscape representation of Herzog's movies. Furthermore, nature does not appear as the dangerous other, but as the place where a historical catastrophe collides with the mythical imaginaries stemming from unique worldviews. *El botón de nácar*

(Patricio Guzmán, 2016) could constitute another Latin American example that would confirm this cinematic trend. In this film, landscape representation seems to embody the historical memory of the Mapuche people and the colonial demographic disaster.

FROM WERNER HERZOG TO LATIN AMERICAN FILM

I would now like to highlight some of the differences that we have put forward throughout this study. Firstly, the cinematic approach of the German director is a major one, it answers questions about Western civilization, its barbarism and its disasters. In contrast, the approach of contemporary Latin American cinema, is more minor, it answers private and national questions about a catastrophic past. This difference could be due to cultural factors. Herzog's cinema was born in a time in German history, when the concept of « Western catastrophe » was a major topic of discussion. The historical context of Latin American cinema is different and questions about memory and past local traumas are at stake. Even though the question of mythology is addressed, the mystical and mythological re-enchantment of nature seems to be marginal. Nonetheless, the fascination with characters on the edge of madness and in a hostile environment, and the strong interest in the exuberance of landscape are present in both cinemas.

Secondly, in three of the studied films (*Japón*, *Salamandra* and *Jauja*), duration and slowness play a central role. This temporal effect is not completely present in Herzog cinema. We can say that it is not his way of challenging conventional narratives. Moreover, the slowness or sensation of duration of Latin American films highlight the allegorical presence of historical traumas. It would be necessary though to study the phenomenon of time in both cinemas in a more detailed way, politically and stylistically, in order to establish a clearer distinction between them.

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