

The American Nightmare, or the Revelation of the Uncanny in three documentary films by Werner Herzog

*La pesadilla americana, o la revelación
de lo extraño en tres documentales de
Werner Herzog*

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This paper analyzes three Werner Herzog's films: *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (1976), *Huie's Sermon* (1981) and *God's Angry Man* (1981) through his use of the sequence shot as a documentary device. Despite the strong relation of this way of shooting with direct cinema, Herzog deconstructs its use to generate moments of filmic revelation, away from a mere recording of events.

KEYWORDS: Documentary device, sequence shot, Werner Herzog, direct cinema, ecstasy.

El presente artículo analiza tres obras de la filmografía de Werner Herzog: How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck (1976), Huie's Sermon (1981) y God's Angry Man (1981), a partir del uso del plano secuencia como dispositivo documental. A pesar del vínculo de esta forma de puesta en cámara con el cine directo, Herzog deconstruye su uso para la generación de momentos de revelación filmica, lejos del simple registro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Dispositivo documental, plano secuencia, Werner Herzog, cine directo, éxtasis.

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INTRODUCTION

Werner Herzog's creative universe, which includes films, operas, poetry books, journals; is labyrinthine, self-referential, iterative ... it is, we might say— in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1990) when referring to Kafka's work – a lair. In this sense and in view of the selection of three of the German film maker's documentaries that were made in the 1960's and 1980's when his fiction works did not have today's prestige, we can safely say that the present analysis will try to focus on three moments of the labyrinthine tour suggested by Herzog. And even though I will not delve in the analysis of other documentary and fiction works, the text needs to reference how far or how close these documentaries are from the monumental fictions that launched him to success and from the best known documentaries, such as *Grizzly Man* (2005) or *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007), which put him back on the limelight among cult authors.

His films are all interconnected. Some establish a dialog with others, the music from a film reappears in another piece years later, he has filmed a documentary character again this time in a fiction, and a lesser anecdote in a commissioned documentary can become the main character of an author piece. Intertextuality makes his work one that requires knowing his complete filmography to avoid naïvetés or false analytical readings.

That is why in the case of the German film maker, the phrase that all the films by the same author are part of the same film applies almost literally. And this fact also causes his filmography to be regarded as a narrative universe to inhabit and recognize rather than as a succession of films that simply build a film-making career. And these connections that are invisible at a first glance make it important to analyze both, the famous pieces and those that have been referred to tangentially by biographers, interviewers and scholars.

It is in these three documentaries that we explore one of the fundamental dimensions of cinema: time. The paper's interest will focus on analyzing the materialization of time in these films; I will use a specific devise: the sequence shot, which will serve the purpose of questioning the way in which Werner Herzog uses the length of shots to generate meaning in his works. The use of these shots and the time he

assigns to them to record the actions become part of the film maker's mechanisms to shape his interpretation of reality— as physical presence and symbolic evocation; which in Herzog's case it is evocation of ecstasies, of the ineffable, in a sense, of the uncanny—.

The uncanny, as I explain below, reveals itself through a relation and not the recording of the real. The filmic device operates as a dialogic mechanism, not as the capture of the flow of reality. It is, in a way, something that is missing, that is not there, that makes the viewer uncomfortable. It is from this perspective and from this theoretical-methodological principle that we question the three films.

CORPUS

The documentaries chosen, made in a five-year period, have similar formats, composition and subject matters. If it were not for Herzog's versatility, we might consider them as a phase in his work. The production of fiction films among which we can find realistic ones (*Stroszek*, 1977), just as others with an impressionistic inspiration (*Heart of Glass*, 1976; *Nosferatu*, 1979), makes it difficult to set a periodization of this phase, in particular, and his work in general. The films obey to different impulses, to different quests, to subject matters or obsessions that are not necessarily satisfied systematically and homogeneously.

In spite of the above, the similarities among the documentaries presented can withstand group analysis, since they are considered part of the same general reflection and filmic solution (though with a different story). Because they are little known pieces, it is necessary to describe briefly each of them to start noticing these parallelisms.²

*How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*³ is a forty-four minute documentary about a livestock auctioneer championship in New

² The three documentaries are available on YouTube. In addition, the reader can find them for sale in DVD format on Werner Herzog's official website. *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* was also edited by Avalon in DVD, in Spain.

³ It has been decided to use the English names of all Herzog's works, because of his capacity as global film maker, he himself has entitled all his films in

Holland, Pennsylvania. The film maker has mentioned that this dizzying and swift form of selling is, to him, a new form of capitalist poetry. This claim approaches this mid-length documentary to the pieces related with the subject of language, of the American way of life, and due to its closeness to Amish culture, to the collision between vicious capitalism and a traditional, almost medieval economy.⁴

The distribution of space in auctions is particularly interesting: semicircular stands across from a narrow aisle for the animals; and the contestant–auctioneer on the other end, where the proscenium would be, had it been a theater. The space to determine the shooting production invites recording the auctioneers from several points of view, as if it were a TV program; while the points of view selected for the cameras may also record aspects of the livestock and the audience that were bidding to buy the animals.

*Huie's Sermon*⁵ is a documentary with a mid-length format, approximately forty minutes long, about a sermon delivered by pastor Huie L. Rogers in his Brooklyn, New York church. Herzog comments about his film that the character's performance is even better than any by Mick Jagger (Cronin, 2014, pp. 181-182). His main interest was to let the action roll for as long as possible and only change the shot when it was necessary to change the reel of film. The inserts of the shots to cover these changes are evident, and they are just brief views of the churchgoers on the pews in front of the preacher, or sequence shots of the New York streets from a car. The simplicity of this film's manufacture is an element to be emphasized in this piece.

English, regardless of the original titles in other languages. Almost all of his films have a title in English and German, although now his American production only keeps the English names. In the case of *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*, it was translated in Spain as *Cuánta madera roería una marmota*. In Mexico and Latin America, there are no titles in Spanish.

⁴ These related works are mentioned in the following sections of the present text within the general argument.

⁵ Without a title in Spanish.

God's Angry Man,⁶ the last of the three films in the corpus is also a mid-length documentary that runs for approximately forty-four minutes. The film is a portrait of TV Evangelist Gene Scott, a controversial character who collects millions on his eight-hour-a-day TV show and religious service. The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) declares war on him by trying to cancel his broadcasts. The religious man entrenches himself in his studio for days, while he continues to berate his tele-parishioners for not donating enough money. Herzog presents a follow-up of the character's routine, accompanied by takes in the manner of a *making of* the show, by filming backstage, as the evangelist musicians or Scott himself present their show in front of the cameras.

The constant that acts as the mortar to think of these three pieces as one is the choice of three shows represented in front of an audience. The staging of the events as such acts abyss setting of Herzog's filmic device and reveal preparation of the actions to be viewed and completed by a present public as a fundamental element of the films. In addition to this thematic and reflexive dimension, the length of the pieces also shows their nearness, just as it happens with the choice of the sequence shot as one of the relevant cinematographic devices of the frame shot.

EXPLORING THE LAIR AS STATE OF THE ART

Going back to the idea of how to explore this labyrinth created by all of Herzog's films, it should be considered that we are in front of a film maker's work that demands knowing his films and theoretical lines that have been gestated by the large number of researchers who use his films as a reference or object of study. Recognizing the interpretative tunnels that have sought these links and associations among the films, which have established classical analytical horizons to read Herzog and, at the same time, leave voids of reflection like the one exploited in this paper.

Before us there are three almost forgotten pieces in the work, which is now most extensive, about Herzog's work.⁷ These three works

⁶ Without a title in Spanish.

⁷ Suffice it to review the filmmaker's own website where he has compiled over one hundred academic and advertising articles about his work.

are mentioned, almost reluctantly by the film maker himself in the many interviews that have turned into books (Ames, 2014; Aubron and Burdeau, 2013; Cronin, 2002, 2014), the same happens with the researchers dedicated to unraveling the filmic twists and turns of a rather plentiful corpus, which include them almost as a complement to other documentaries or as a lesser part of a thematic category of the film maker's work (Ames, 2012; Corrigan, 1986; Prager, 2007).

These categorizations that some authors propose, in which they compile packages of Herzog's films that are analyzable from the same perspective or theme, whether it is religiosity, ecstasy before nature, the mountains, language, show the interconnected nature of his films, as well as the need for not being analyzed as single, separated, closed pieces, but as an open work that is in constant evolution.

Therefore, considering that the pieces analyzed are *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*, *Huie's Sermon* and *God's Angry Man*, three documentaries filmed during his early production stage in the USA, and once the literature has been reviewed, we realize these are films that have been very little dealt with as minor pieces within his work and literature about them is rather scant; and comments about them during interviews with the film maker are succinct.

If anything, *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*, because it was made during the trip to the USA in which Herzog shot *Stroszek* (1977), they are often analyzed together from the perspective that they both build part of the film maker's view about the American nation and culture.⁸

The other in which *Huie's Sermon* and *God's Angry Man* have been connected with each other and with other films is the most obvious one: the subject matter. Both documentaries deal with characters connected with religion. Along with *Bells from the Deep* (1993) or *Wheel of Time* (2003), they are films in which Herzog explores beliefs, legends or religion. In the same way, *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* is also often associated with the works that present languages as subject

⁸ There is a scene in *Stroszek* where the properties confiscated from the main character are auctioned off, and of course, he echoes the documentary that I analyze here.

matter or the issue to be explored, case in point *The Flying Doctors of East Africa* (1970), or *Last Words* (1967).

As we try to locate the possible connections, the most evident ones, the literature about Herzog has generated consistent forms of questioning his work from documentary theoretical traditions or from its links with different artistic movements. Of these approaches, perhaps the most common are the neo-romantic reading (Alcalá, 2011; Casper & Linville, 2001; Prager, 2012); the reading that emphasizes the shooting process as a tremendous display of athleticism and adventure (Bachmann, 1977); the reading of Herzog as essayist cinema (Akçali Çakırlar, 2016); the Germanic reading due to its possible associations with the new cinema or with other German traditions, such as mountain cinema (Perlmutter & Perlmutter, 1997); the reading of his cinema's musical and sound density (Johnson, 2008). These previous affiliations are interesting and they may contribute ideas to the analysis, but they do not work when it comes to fully explaining the present corpus.

THEORETICAL SCOPE

Once we have presented a useful general notion such as the idea of an interconnected work, we can begin to particularize, categorize the relevant analysis components and how they can be traced in the films. Next I develop the hermeneutical horizon that I use to question the three documentaries under analysis. I am interested in establishing and characterizing the concept of the *uncanny* as a category, which would reveal the first component. The second element is the context in which I insert the reflection about the documentary and the crisis of the modern paradigm. Herzog's films will be questioned depending on how they speak of the world and contemporary society, how they stand in front of the paradigm of modernity. Finally, I use the sequence shot as a filmic device in which it is possible to detect the two former components; it is the material form of expressing the uncanny and the modern crisis.

This is, in short, the theoretical program that will derive into detailing the elements to be observed in the long shots of the three films, by means of an analysis methodology based on the shot by shot of the documentaries but not from a structural perspective but rather from a

relational logic of the shots. The segmentation and separation of all the shots that make them up will be the principle for ordering and selecting the sequence shots susceptible of being questioned.⁹ The hypothesis is that it is precisely in long shots, in sequence shots, where it is possible to observe the relations that reveal the presence of the uncanny and the modern crisis; elements that Herzog uses to show the way in which truth is revealed in these documentary pieces.

The uncanny as a category

Regarding the notion of the *uncanny*, from German *unheimlich* –a concept coined by Sigmund Freud in his seminal 1919 book, *Das unheimliche* – we are interested in exploring how filming the bodies, the length of shots and the relations between the camera and the subjects it is recording possess this unsettling familiarity in the films that are part of the corpus.¹⁰ This way we question the photographic inheritance of cinema which allows him to transfer the reflection about the decisive instant of the photographic (or cinematographic) shot and its relation with the awareness of death; a subject matter that is ever so present in the debates about the technical character of capturing reality with a camera. This idea of capturing the instant as a technical process, that is at once almost magical, supernatural, is one of the paradoxes that modernity has introduced in visual studies. The presence of the machine and the human eye coinciding to capture by digital or photochemical means a piece of reality that is happening in front of the lens.

If the click of the camera, still following Mulvey, is comparable with the moment of death, then the cinema is death twenty-four times

⁹ Although the *découpage* was made, it was only used as raw material for the comparative analysis of the shots and their relations. For reasons of length it is not included in the present text.

¹⁰ In Spanish the word *extraño*, *ominoso* or *perturbador* is used as translations of the concept. In our case, and in an attempt to bring close together the theoretical realm and the field of cinema, we make use of the general approaches that Laura Mulvey (2006) follows from a revision of the concept present in the work by Bazin, Barthes, MacCabe and, above all, Rosalind Krauss.

per second. But, at the same time, the perception of movement of the frames in sequence would seem to allow the filmed subjects to escape death in two ways: on one hand, recording the bodies on a camera shows them to be alive, as moving beings; on the other hand, this record appeals to the phantasmagorical imagery that the document may remain as transcendence, as evidence, beyond the subject's death and existence in the world.¹¹

Roland Barthes, also quoted by Mulvey, associates the instant of the photographic take with another concept, that of *punctum*, which is also useful to explain this perceptual fracture of the spectator in front of the represented image which I am interested in analyzing. The association of *punctum* with awareness of death can be understood, in the words of Barthes himself, "as that vertigo of time defeated" (p. 62). We are, thus, in the presence of two categories that intend to show a fright, the spectator's suspension of disbelief regarding what they are experiencing in the movie theater. This temporary suspension of the feeling of having been expelled from the narrative allows creating the awareness of the black box and the cinema as a device. That is where cinema and the uncanny converge.

This most brief theoretical formulation cause time to emerge as a fundamental element of the technical analysis of photography and cinema, as we announced at the beginning of the paper. The questions about time lead us to questions about the instant as a concept and, in addition, how the uncanny manifests itself in long shots, or sequence shots, unlike the instant. The temporal lapse, beyond this interpretation of the still image and the cinema as arts linked with the *memento mori*, can it be understood as an element that allows the inclusion of the uncanny as a constituent element connected with this filmic device? And if so, under what conditions does this appearance take place?

¹¹ Although the latter claim can also be understood as an act of mummification, where we might also think about the "mummification of change" proposed by Bazin (1990, p.23), for example. It also works as an even more direct confirmation of the presence of death and its relation with the filmic act. Probably hence the fascination and association of the cinema with the vampire, the living dead, the zombie...

If the uncanny operates in setting in motion the spectral still image, then it is necessary, through the analysis of shots, to see how Herzog assumes this condition of the cinema and the still so as to, from there, explain these relations that bring about the disturbing components that allow the spectator to drill through the cinema screen and have access to a form of truth that is beyond the realistic cinematographic record.

Modernity as a context

The uncanny as a category of analysis acts as the key to open the door to the context in which I am interested in framing Werner Herzog's films. And it is precisely in context where we will find the second level of the disturbing, alien, ominous components, which will make up the spectator's tools to unravel the meaning of the documentaries and the relevance of these films in the film maker's work.

The elements of the uncanny have to do with the time period, with the way of representing reality proposed by Herzog. When we ask ourselves about the general and primary intention of his cinema (verifiable in the diversity of his films, in the subject matters he chooses and the ways in which he films; as well as in the multiple interviews in which he mentions it), what we find is an eagerness to explore human nature. He is interested in and attracted by the limits of this vital experience of the people, the way they think, they grow and behave. Therefore, they can be understood as comments about the situation or moment the characters of his works are living, and he himself, as an inherent part of his narrative universe. Herzog inhabits his films along with his main characters, it is a performative documentary form (Nichols, 1991, p. 203) where he explores what is taking place from within the frame or narration.

This distinctive hallmark of his cinema makes it possible for us to wonder how the three films selected for analysis work as a comment on their time (the 1970's and 1980's); but, also, what happens when they are updated to the present moment, when they are interpreted today. We speak of how Herzog understands the passage of modern cinema and its evolution in view of the technological changes (which will be another subject matter in his films). It is also relevant to question how it receives television as the great informative and representational invention of his

generation. And in the social and political order, how the post 1968 movements are shown, the emergence of cultural studies, globalization and the expansion of international trade, among other issues.

To summarize a little this avalanche of events, processes, theories and twists of history, I use as a *zeitgeist* the canonic text about the evolution of cinema in the second half of the 20th Century by Eugene Youngblood (2012), in which he addresses technological transformation and the impact of the media (television and the news media) on the way we understand the world:

A culture is dead when its myths have been revealed. Television is exposing the myths of the republic. Television reveals the observed, the observer, the process of observation. There can be no secrets in the paleocybernetic era. At the macrostructural level television as a whole is a close circuit that is constantly making us return to ourselves ... Before television we saw little of the human condition. Now we see it and hear it every day. The world is not a stage, it is a TV documentary ...

...We are in direct contact with human condition; there is no need any more to represent it through art. This does not only release the cinema; it practically compels the cinema to move beyond the objective human condition and towards a newer extraobjective territory (pp. 98-99).

Herzog shies away from the notion of nation as a filmic emblem; he despises the idea of national cinema; he seems to understand the world system suggested by Youngblood, where the death of the republic is erected as the beginning of the period when it was his time to film. It can be understood as an awareness of the globalization of the time in which, film maker and theoretician formulated their works.

Youngblood continues explaining how the cinema went from the dichotomy fiction-documentary to generating a realistic form characteristic of the time after WW II: the *cinema vérité*. The whole book focuses on justifying the following step in filmic evolution, namely going from the *cinema vérité* to the “synesthetic cinema” (an experimental cinema mixes all the previous styles, a form of integrating the avant-gardes, with narrative cinema and the *vérité*, but it is free, extraobjective, as mentioned in the quote).

This exercise of thinking of the cinema in view of the crisis caused by the preeminence of television and the emergence of computer art acts as the perfect context for reflection for Herzog's documentary pieces. This revelation of the myths of modernity will be a fundamental component of the works I am analyzing. Herzog seems to be aware of this change of the cinema; perhaps that is why he renounces *cinema vérité* that is why he speaks of a cinema that makes no distinction between fiction and documentary, a cinema that seeks ecstasy.

Going back to Youngblood's formulation:

Television is invisible. It is not an object. It is not a piece of furniture. The TV set is irrelevant for the phenomenon of television. The videosphere is the noosphere transformed into a perceptible state. 'Television – says video artist Les Levine – is the most obvious realization of software in the general environment. It shows the human race as a functioning model of itself. It turns the social and psychological condition of the environment visible for the environment' (p. 98).

This invisibility of television and visibility of the environment in which the human race model functions are the elements of the fracture that Youngblood intends to introduce, and it can be understood as uncanniness. Finally, this transformation is nothing but the crisis of the modern model itself, which many authors associate with the notion of post-modernity. If the postmodern world is a TV documentary we could easily define it, following Debord (1995), as a show society. A society that has stopped being the stage to become a TV documentary.

Without delving in this point any further, since that is what corresponds to the analysis per se, I will just add that the review of the three films can be understood, beginning by *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* and finishing by *God's Angry Man*, as the transition from stage spectacle to direct transmission in postmodern times.¹²

¹² Certainly, the three ritual public events that are documented in the films come from different cultural origins and nurture from different stage forms. It is interesting to question them from the view of a filmmaker that gets them to dialog and it works as a common bond that envelops them and explores

And before beginning formally with the analysis, it is necessary to define the filmic mechanism used by Herzog which will help us reveal this presence of the spectacle as a component of the modern crisis and how that become the premonitory symptom of its own obsolescence, which makes its own paradox of presence and absence visible, its invisibility and visibility, its being a fractured modern paradigm, one understood as a postmodern prefiguration. It is here that the uncanny emerges in the second component, the hole that allows re-signifying a documentary form appears, in direct appearance and dedicated to the simple realistic record, to turn it into a process of revealing something that is not directly in the representation of the reality registered in the film.

The sequence shot as a device

If as I have argued the filmic form of these Herzog's documentaries strays from direct (or *vérité*) cinema, in spite of the fact that he uses the same elements of cinema language, it is imperative to establish how the recording mechanism and the generation of meanings work in the German film maker's work. To see how this *ecstatic reality* is generated, to which he aspires with his cinema by using a filmic device that is very close to the filmic form he despises, which is associated with the "the storytellers' truth", as he calls it in his *Minnesota Declaration* (Cronin, 2002, pp. 301-302).

These films, despite the use of long shots, zooms and sequence shots, do not intend to work as a realistic device that normalizes the flow of action in front of the camera. It does not intend to cause a feeling of fluidity of the take and simulate, through the long lapse of the shooting, the hollywoodesque suture that makes the way scenes are shot and edited seem invisible. It intends exactly the opposite, it intends to leave room for the uncanny, the disturbing.

them from the same point of view, despite their differences. We might say that they are discrete sophistications of the same thematic exploration made by Herzog about the spectacle, the public's relation with the camera and stage charisma.

It does not want to give an opportunity for the chance to confirm the lack of manufacture in cinema, it does not intend to increase realism by including unplanned, chance elements. It intends to introduce an element that dismantles the uncritical reading of the filmed experience presented before us a spectators. He reveals the entrails of the model; it becomes the *making of* of the pretend production of reality in front of the camera. Here is where the shot, the material decision of how to film on the part of Herzog aligns with what is put forth by Youngblood and by Mulvey. It is precisely from this way of understanding the sequence shot that we can go into the analysis to confirm whether it actually works like this.

ANALYSIS OF THE THREE FILMS

The choice of shots

This section, as it has been announced throughout the paper, intends to show the photographic decisions in the documentaries that reveal components of what we have defined as the uncanny, or those that are part of Herzog's reflection on the modern paradigm crisis.

The sequence shot is the filmic component that is the focus of our attention, but that does not mean that we are not paying attention to the remaining shot lengths, the frames or durations different from long shots, which are usually associated, but not exclusively with the sequence shot. When separating, measuring and counting the number of shots, as well as their length, we can see how some constants and particular features of each film emerge.

In principle this treatment of the shots favors the duration of the takes and how many sequence shots there are in each film rather than the type and size of the frame. The table below shows the first discoveries of segmenting the three films take by take.

We are in the presence of three documentaries with a relatively similar running time, shot in a rather similar manner, in a more or less short time period (five years), with characters and subject matters that are not that dissimilar and yet, it is clear that the nature of what is filmed determines to a great extent the decisions about how to shoot and later on, how to edit the material.

TABLE 1

Film	Running time	Number of shots	Average length of a shot
<i>How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck</i>	44 minutes	144	18.5 seconds
<i>Huie's Sermon</i>	40 minutes	25	37.3 seconds
<i>God's Angry Man</i>	43 minutes	69	96.3 seconds

Source: Made by the author.

The length of the shots and, therefore, the number of shots present in each film varies considerably. In this sense, there is not a constant to compare the films. That poses the challenge of keeping looking for elements that would allow us to discover consistent features in terms of the use and structure of the shots in the films. Although it is possible for the number of contestants in *How Much Wood ...* to be what skyrocketed the number of shots present in this film, as opposed to the other two. It is still not a valid criterion for the three documentaries.

In this sense and seeking a common denominator, when watching the films, it is easy to notice that there are shots that carry a large portion of the expressive and narrative burden of the documentaries. These are shots where the action takes place from the perspective of shooting long takes; not many things happen forcibly, rather, the camera and the film maker give a chance for things to happen while they record the events. The film crew adapts, becomes flexible to move the camera, change the focus or recompose the framing to favor the action before the edition of the shots. That is how the sequence shot is revealed as a possible unit of comparison. It happens this way in all the cases.

On the other hand, if we have already established the sequence shot as a constant in these documentaries, it is necessary to ask ourselves what the rest of the shots are like, since none of these films are a mere succession of sequence shots. That is why it is important to know how long the remaining shots in the films are to see the relative weight of the use of this mechanism within the corpus. Table 2 shows a summary of the number of sequence shots per film and some further findings regarding the length of shots in the films.

TABLE 2

Film	Number of sequence shots (of over 60 seconds) /total # shots	Number of shots shorter than 10 seconds/total # shots	Length of the longest shot (seconds)	Length of the shortest shot (seconds)
<i>How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck</i>	9/144	83/144	150	1
<i>Huie's Sermon</i>	11/25	6/25	890	3
<i>God's Angry Man</i>	15/69	16/69	146	2

Source: The author.

In view of this evidence, short shots do not emerge as a systematic device or a favorite element in the making of the scenes in the films. Their use, like that of sequence shots, is discretionary. In spite of this, the number of sequence shots is rather large and their lengths indicate a proneness to favor action as the center of attention. Which leads us to the second point, wondering why these actions are the center of attention, which appear as constants and common to all three films.

Relation between shot length and content

The first thing that one might think is that, because they are documentaries, the long shots are interview shots, but that is not the case in any of the three films. Here is where the first similarity of this perspective appears. We are not watching talking head documentaries; even though there are interviews, direct speech in front of the camera is not favored over the action, or over a character's comments on camera as they perform a certain activity.

Thus we run into an element that determines the documentaries in this analysis. The flow and progression of the stories is not based on the interview and the character as plot centers. The spaces and actions are not interrupted by moments of the interview, which reveals the shot

length within a specific context and a space as a favored element of the analysis. This occurs in the three cases, and the actions are connected with the show production or the public exposure of a discourse. Here is where we finally manage to find similarities among the three pieces.

This means that, when analyzing the total number of shots present, although many of them are used with descriptive and narrative functions related with space, they are not so relevant to the film maker's interests. This fact reinforces the idea that the heart of the filmic proposition lies in time, not space as a cinematographic element; and the performativity of the discourses in front of the public or the camera as the central subject matter.

To almost finish, when watching the films, we can confirm what functions are fulfilled by the sequence shots in the three films. These shots are meant for the main characters when they are performing the main action in each documentary. When the pastors are preaching (in the cases of Rogers and Scott), or when the auctioneers are participating in the contest.

We are in view of the second constant of the sequence shot in the documentaries: they are meant to be used when the show is on, when the performance and presentation is taking place in front of the audience in each event. The actions are performative in the three cases, the characters play a role associated with the spectacular, theatricalized or ritual context they are a part of. The sequence shot is meant for the *live* takes of the people, when they are in front of the audience.

Here is where the absent becomes visible, where the uncanny we were looking for materializes, at least in one of its facets. The documentaries devote a large percentage of their length to recording the shows set up for a public or a community that, only in a secondary manner, are filmed by Herzog. This abyss production of the show represented turned into a filmic record is, no doubt, the disruptive component that can result in the spectator's awareness. The stages, the pulpits, the microphones, the cameras and the television studios were not prepared for Herzog's camera. It is Herzog who consciously films them taking advantage of the construction and spatial determination that makes it easier for the public to watch and enables the presence of the filmic device with access to the event.

And as a complement (and consolidation of the hypothesis), this function of the sequence shots reveals to us, by opposition, the role played by short shots within the films. Practically all the shots less than 10 seconds long are used to capture the public's reactions. These small inserts act as counter-shots of the stage characters' follow-ups. Here is where the proposal of discovering the mechanism behind the documentaries analyzed in the relation, in the cinematographic dialog, is revealed to us.

The three films are stories of actors, *performers*, in front of their audiences. We attend as spectators and witness the relation between community and leader, between buyers and sellers, between the *showman* and the people behind the cameras or in front of the TV set. Herzog's camera and microphone have infiltrated these shows where human experiences linked with contemporary rites and religions, as well as hyper-specialized forms of sales in the post-capitalism era take place.

The confirmation of the theatricality of the events, even despite the fact that the camera was not rolling there, this theatricalized preparation of an everyday act, the association of the religious ritual with tele-marketing, or the sophisticated contest that reaches the rapturous point in which it is almost impossible to understand the language if you are not part of the spectacle, they are all samples of extreme experiences associated with the disturbances we were seeking.

That is the modern crisis proposed by Herzog, the camera shoots spectacles from the past and the present, even though they had not necessarily considered being a space for cinematographic record, as it happens now with any sports broadcast, with the visits of dignitaries and leaders to our countries, even with the political debates, which are now televised. This vocation behind the cameras (even in a TV studio) is what generates duplication, the mirror in which we see Herzog, and ourselves, watching these productions. Where the awkwardness of the double show emerges.

The German film maker infiltrates himself through the cracks of the modern model of representation to show that it is dying, he still remains in the background, saving the privileged spot of the attending audience, bearing witness to the extinction of the physical presence in front of the spectacle. It is the entrance to the realm of viewership.

This tryptic Herzogian documentary filmed in the United States is confirmation of the change of times from the German film maker's perspective. They are works that are a testimony of cinema as awareness of the modern crisis that the invention itself and its form of narrating are undergoing. Therefore, the presence of the uncanny in these films can be seen as a premonitory reading of the US technological, political and religious nightmare: The American nightmare.

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