

Termite operation: for a second league of Chilean cinema

Operación Termita: por una segunda línea en el cine chileno

Operação Cupim: por uma segunda linha no cinema chileno

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ABSTRACT

The explosive emergence of a new kind of Chilean cinema in the mid-2000s opened a discussion about its sources, motivations, narratives, and aesthetics, which has focused its efforts on the construction of a canon of contemporary Chilean cinema (*Novísimo* (newest) Chilean cinema, centrifugal cinema). This paper seeks to explore an alternative approach, establishing a division between a corpus of films that have international recognition and high circulation in festivals and a group of films less visible films that, in a sort of “termite” operation, stress and undermine the intentions of instituting an official canon of Chilean cinema.

Keywords: Chilean cinema; minor cinema; termite operation; film festivals; distribution; contemporary cinema.

RESUMEN

La explosiva aparición de un nuevo tipo de cine chileno a mediados de la década de 2000 abrió una discusión sobre sus fuentes, motivaciones, narrativas y estéticas, que ha enfocado sus esfuerzos en la construcción de un canon del cine chileno contemporáneo (Novísimo cine chileno, cine centrifugo). Este artículo busca explorar una línea alternativa, estableciendo una división entre un corpus de películas que gozan de reconocimiento internacional y alta circulación por festivales y un grupo de películas menos visibilizadas que, en una suerte de operación “termita”, tensiona y carcome las intenciones de instituir un canon oficial del cine chileno.

Palabras clave: cine chileno; cine menor; operación termita; festivales de cine; circulación; cine contemporáneo.

RESUMO

Desde a explosão de um novo cinema chileno em meados da década de 2000, a discussão de suas fontes, motivações, narrativas e estética concentrou seus esforços na constituição de um cânone do cinema chileno contemporâneo sob o nome de “Novíssimo cinema chileno”. Dentro desta discussão, este artigo procura dividir linhas de trabalho, estabelecendo uma divisão entre uma primeira linha festiva e reconhecida internacionalmente e uma segunda que a enfatiza, trazendo à luz obras menos visíveis, que, em uma espécie de operação “cupim”, geram tensão e se alimentam das intenções de instituir um cânone oficial para o cinema chileno.

Palavras-chave: cinema chileno; cinema menor; operação de cupins; film festivals; distribution; contemporary cinema.

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TERMITE OPERATION: FOR A SECOND LEAGUE OF CHILEAN CINEMA

In March 2018, *A fantastic woman* (2017), a Chilean film directed by Sebastián Lelio, received the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. What could be seen as the maximum recognition received by Chilean cinematography is the result of the consolidation of that country's cinema as a field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993).

The promulgation in 2004 of the Law of Audiovisual Promotion (Law n° 19,981), the creation of the Council of Arts and Audiovisual Industry (CAIA) and of the Audiovisual Development Fund allowed the development of a film production—that would reach historical numbers years later—and promoted an expansion in research and discussion on contemporary Chilean cinema. This increase in production allowed a thematic, narrative, aesthetic and stylistic diversification that has achieved an important circulation and recognition in the global circuit of film festivals and international awards. The academia and the specialized critics have installed a series of discussions in an attempt to classify, organize and understand the Chilean film production, analyzing its narrative, political and aesthetic features.

Our paper, however, focuses on the existence of a group of minor films and authors, away from the recognition of the audience, critics or festivals. The “termite” operation is part of the discussions about a minor cinema (Deleuze & Guattari, 1978; Deleuze, 1987; Rodowick, 1997; Schefer, 2012; Gunning, 1989; Quintana, 2011), what Raúl Ruiz defined as a second, and even third, league within the national cinemas, and in the concept of “termite art” coined by the American critic Manny Farber (2014). These films, many of them directorial debuts, are positioned outside of the predominant narratives and aesthetics during the last decade of Chilean cinema, putting pressure on the possible homogeneity of the current canon. Our selection is based on their secondary position in Chilean cinema, their scarce recognition by national film festivals and in being the first films of a group of filmmakers who, in some cases, have only made that work. This corpus is composed, in chronological order, by *Mami te amo* (Elisa Eliash, 2008), *Piotr, una mala traducción* (Martín Seeger, 2009), *Los iluminados* (Sebastián Pereira, 2015), *Rastreador de estatuas* (Jerónimo Rodríguez, 2015), and *Maleza* (Ignacio Pavez, 2017).

REGARDING THE CANON. LITERATURE ABOUT CONTEMPORARY CHILEAN CINEMA

In the international competition of the XII International Film Festival of Valdivia, in 2005, a group of Chilean films stood out due to their evident difference with the previous national cinematography. The premiere of *Play* (Alicia Scherson 2005), *La Sagrada Familia* (Sebastian Lelio, 2005), *Se Arrienda* (Alberto Fuguet, 2005), and Matías Bize's second film, *En la Cama* (2005), along with two documentaries by José Luis Torres Leiva, gave the first signs that a new cinema was emerging. These films were characterized by their cinephile inspiration, beyond the political allegories present in the Chilean cinema of the previous decade and the beginning of the 21st century. The French magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* related these films with the Dogma movement and with a strong inspiration in the Chilean cinema of the 1970s (Azalbert, 2005, pp. 60-62). The following year, in 2006, the Cinélatino festival, Rencontres de Toulouse, made a special edition about Chilean cinema. In the annual magazine of the festival, Carlos Flores del Pino (2006) highlighted the emergence of a new narrative in a novel generation of filmmakers in the country.

Nevertheless, the interest in studying, analyzing and grouping these films arose only in 2010, in the dossier on cinema and politics in Chile (No. 47) of the journal *Aisthesis*. On the one hand, Carolina Urrutia raised the discussion about politics in this contemporary Chilean cinema, laying the foundations of what, a few years later, would be her proposal on Chilean cinema as a centrifugal cinema. For Urrutia, the political moves to the sphere of the intimate and daily, in the displacement and in the paths taken by these films' characters (Urrutia, 2010). On the other hand, and related to some extent with Urrutia's proposal, Antonella Estévez (2010) presented for the first time the idea of a certain cinematographic melancholy that links some of the films of this new generation, as a sort of unresolved grief, something that did not and will never happen.

However, the first text with a stable corpus regarding the canon was *El Novísimo cine chileno* (2011), edited by Ascanio Cavallo and Gonzalo Maza, a book that brought together a group of filmmakers and critics in a group of 21 directors who, with directorial debuts or second or third films, showed a new panorama. Although the book does not define the *Novísimos* (new) beyond a generational coincidence, it is a text that

explicitly presents a certain need to define a canon for Chilean cinema at that time.

The very roots of the conflict that the later bibliography has underlined seem to be present in it, showing the ambitions of an industry with a desire for internationalization, but also its internal divisions. Thus, a contradiction can be seen within this project: the book turns out to be, from an external perspective, the product of a successful cross between the film and publishing market (first objective of the publication); however, within it, there are positions more related to a more industrial perspective—linked to the genre, but also to authorial cinema— and a more political and experimental one, making (at some points) the limits between what could be properly a cultural movement indistinguishable from a marketing strategy. From the beginning, this tension between market and art seems to strongly configure this first canon. As pointed out by Claudio Guerrero (2012) in his review of the book in *laFuga.cl*: “In this regard, we can affirm that this is not a book in which the *Novísimo* emerges as a rigorous conceptual construction, but as an editorial operation” (par. 18)¹.

The literature that emerged later sought to develop definitions about this new cinema, focused mainly on its position on the political. Pablo Corro states that Chilean cinema of this era is a cinema of “weak poetics” that moves away from a central conflict, from close-ups and strong characters, to privilege “insignificant issues”, medium shots and off camera, appealing to the subjectivity of the story and the spectator (Corro, 2012, p. 217). This moves the political into the fields of intimacy and the subjective; by “recording the vague”, the limits between fiction and non-fiction become diffuse and the allegories that these films can represent move into the field of ambiguity (Corro 2012, p. 218). The weak poetics in contemporary Chilean cinema urge to see the political in the field of the diffuse, of the intimate and in the background.

It is in this context that the subsequent approaches to contemporary Chilean cinema develop. On the one hand, Carolina Urrutia states that Chilean cinema can be understood as a centrifugal cinema: away from a main conflict, it reinterprets cinematographic realism, establishing new relations between the center and the periphery, thus displacing the political towards other fields (Urrutia, 2013). This vision, based fundamentally on what Raúl Ruiz proposes in *La poética del cine* (2000) on the dissolution of the central conflict, and in the cinematographic ideas of Gilles Deleuze, has provoked

an intense discussion about politics. Antonella Estévez (2010, 2017) talks about a melancholic cinema, which has to do with a Chilean identity developed during the democratic transition in the nineties, based on the consolidation of an overwhelming neoliberalism and social justice that never came. On the other hand, Póo, Salinas and Stange pose that the characters of this contemporary Chilean cinema—centrifugal or melancholic—are decontextualized from their historical and social condition (2012). They add that the characters are created as “subjects without time, history or social class” and that they only have a superficial emotionality (Póo, Salinas, & Stange, 2012, pp. 6-7). In the same vein, Carlos Saavedra speaks of “disenchanted identities”, where the political moves to the filmed, i.e., to intimist stories, individualist narratives that reflect the disappointments and discomfort of a generation (2013, pp. 28- 70). A final approach is that of Vania Barraza (2018), who, from a rereading of the discussion on recent Chilean cinema, observes that “although the general distancing of an explicit political discourse is permanent among the new directors, this cinematography reconfigures the spectrum and the constitution of a social political cinema” (2018, p.25).

With all the difficulties involved in pointing out a monolithic canon in a group of films where the heterogeneous prevails, it is possible to distinguish orientations linked to an industry project in its different levels of production and circulation, where names like Matías Bize, Pablo Larraín or Sebastián Lelio stand out; throughout these years, they have shaped the international visible face of Chilean cinema, nowadays legitimized by the sectorial brand Cinema Chile². Intertwined between the market, international festivals and critics, there is a need to think about these legitimation criteria and about the question of industrial orientation in a globalized economy that, as Ossa pointed out, constitutes the current phase of global financial capitalism in its cognitive phase:

Cultural policies, therefore, have the task of managing territories, prioritizing subjects and consecrating stories: global market, innovation and entrepreneurship are the trinity of financialization. The tensions with the public sphere, caused by artistic and cultural practices refractory to bureaucratic decisions, forces us to institutionalize criticism and, without annulling its rebellious gesture, create a limbo of protected disobedience (2017, p. 19).

The *Novísimo* should be seen in the light of this new international panorama, and how a discourse of “originality, diversity, effervescence, quality, permanent renewal of the offer” (ProChile, n.d., par. 6) operates in it within the framework of the labor flexibilization and the hard competition of a creative entrepreneurship market.

In recent years, it is common to identify the artist's stereotype, with its precarious and creative status, as the ideal of self-management. A dynamic author of attractive projects capable of seducing the business groups, he/she manages with his/her existential instability to offer the image of the ideal entrepreneur, indolent to the turbulence he/she advances towards an audience eager to obtain aesthetic abilities (...). In times of technological hyperbolization, the lost and subjectivizing figure of art, clean of social criticism and embodied in passionate creation, is very suggestive, which is why Hollywood invests in films that meet Frida Khalo with Jackson Pollock, until victory always. At the same time, a certain ‘critical art’ makes it possible to level the discords and justify the consensus that, by authorizing the circulation of controversial works, celebrate a hierarchical pluralism (Ossa, 2017, p. 67).

Based on this question regarding its statute and nomenclature, we believe that the discussion opens a series of critical junctures considering the reception of the *Novísimo* (Pinto Veas, 2015). One of them is to distinguish discursivities, focusing on more intrinsic searches, elective affinities, discursive groups and subgroups in different formations that, we believe, deserve a more medium-term analysis, beyond the *Novísimo*. An example of this is the website *Campo contra campo: ficción y política en el cine chileno* (<http://campocontracampo.cl>), which proposes the end of the *Novísimos* in 2013, beginning to talk, since 2014, of a contemporary Chilean cinema. It would then be a question of establishing a broader reflection that shows the operations, strategies, meanings and lines of work that are less visible and more unstable within the textual complex of recent Chilean cinema, as a tension and decentering of the established canon. In summary:

- -The starting point is a critique of the idea of Chilean *Novísimo* Cinema (Chilean cinema posterior to 2005) and its canon proposal.
- -We seek to visualize different projects within an unstable and heterogeneous corpus in the filmography after 2005, particularly the proposal of a minor cinema.

Our hypothesis is based on a 2005-2017 Chilean cinema, with a multiplying discursivity, within which there is a second league, not at all present or underlined in previous demarcations; it is a cinema more invisible or little studied, either because of its production scale or its political and aesthetic orientation.

A SECOND LEAGUE OR TERMITE OPERATION

Several authors have posed the question about validation circuits. In our paper, we will build on what was raised by the academic Marijke de Valck (2014): that film festivals act as validators, or as a seal of quality, for films, authors and national cinemas. For promotion agencies and state funds, this criterion of validation – malleable and full of interests external to the political or aesthetic sense of cinema – is a criterion of quality. This is related to something that the literature has discussed about the latest generation of Latin American cinema: the emergence of a phenomenon called festival film, a cinema that seeks to approach the international market by adapting to certain programming criteria.

The film critic and former producer of Bafici, Quintín (Eduardo Antín), defines the criterion in this way:

A paradigm that unifies while excludes, which brings together a couple of fairly recent trends in contemporary cinema: on the one hand, the search for young talents proliferates, whose films are supervised by the aid funds that co-produce them. They are films very supported in the script, very calculated in their detailedness, their effects and their folkloric color. On the other are the new teachers, those of the generation emerged in recent years, increasingly closer to certain formats of the plastic arts, with their facilities, their projects commissioned by museums. Films for big prizes are added to that mix (...). The fact is that there are more and more films, but, paradoxically, the invisibility of the great majority is accentuated (Antín, 2012, p. 80).

In a similar reflection, Josetxo Cerdán has focused on the abuses and excesses of the festival circuit and the global distributive network as a unified system of distribution and legitimacy:

In that decentralized network of contemporary global distribution (and perhaps also of production, although possibly not so established) there are hegemonic narratives whose narratives dominate their circuits or, at least, some of their most visible nodes. Since the distributive systems (that include, as we will see, more things than the cinematographic distributors) are those who, finally, raise the terms of the representations

negotiation, i.e., those who configure the true playing field in which uses, but also the abuses, are developed (2004, p. 152).

This effect, variable and moldable, can reach limits such as the adaptation of artistic or thematic searches, and derive both in a cinema that looks for thematic impact or a cinema of formal sophistication. Thus, films that seek to enter certain festivals require certain characteristics. The most notorious –to point out one– would be the contrast between the FIDMarseille and Cannes festivals: for the first, an experimental language linked to non-fiction is required; for the second, a regional cinema must possibly enter via the thematic or social impact.

This exemplifies what we understand as an internal division, or a divergence of senses of production and circulation. While films like *A fantastic woman* (2017) or *No* (2012) look for the legitimacy of a class A circuit, films like the ones we propose seek other paths, such as Bafici, FIDMarseille or local festivals (with less impact on the circuit). This approach from the surface can help us see that, on the one hand, there is a heterogeneity of circuits and that, in turn, not all orientations point to the same path; that, inside, the industry seems to contain its own limits. We call this the second league.

Therefore, we propose that there is a second league, perhaps less visible and more unstable, that requires another kind of look and analysis for its understanding. This interest in a second league comes from what was outlined by Raúl Ruiz, who raises the idea that in each country it is possible to think about the cinematographic panorama in football terms, where there is a first and a second league, and that “a country should never judge its cinematography by the first, but by the second” (Universidad de Valparaíso, 2011, 23:00). From this perspective, the best known, respected and important national filmmakers belong to the first league. In a second or third league, it would be possible to think transversely of atypical, medium filmmakers, in whose works there are less explored perspectives, perhaps more erratic, but therefore more complex. They also fail to build another space and maintain their character of anomaly and a kind of anonymity or invisibility; they are works or filmmakers that rarely come to be investigated, deepened or established at all. They are first films, the entry point of new filmmakers who have a specific search.

In this regard, the Argentine critic Roger Koza deepened Ruiz’s approach, noting that this vast second league of directors “unintentionally erect a living tradition in which the cinema evolves and fuel a discussion” (2017). Koza relies on the Ruiz’s argument to analyze a series of filmmakers present at the premieres –and even at festivals– which has established an exploratory and analytical line in Argentine cinema: Alejo Moguillansky, Maru Aparicio, Fernando Restelli and Matías Lucches. They are less pretentious filmmakers, who have allowed themselves different explorations, anomalies and aesthetic licenses without pretending to be an exemplary cinema in representative, monumental terms or in search of the demonstration of artistic genius.

Our analysis focuses on a set of films from the period that do not have a pre-established link between them. They are rather films that share an anomalous character within the national cinematographic panorama, far from the mainstream of the most prestigious international festivals. These seem to open a question for a minor tone in the Chilean cinema from the twisting of the technical and qualitative market indexes, looking at alternative representation modes (Byrón, 1998), through fabulation (Rodowick, 1997), the subjectivization of the device (Schefer, 2012), a way to corrode the system from within. This minor cinema can also be understood in the way in which some filmmakers, such as Samuel Fuller or Budd Boetticher, were able to subsist on a small, exploratory project with less commercial ambition within the framework of American industry, or Carmelo Bene, Straub-Huillet or Andrea Tonacci, within the framework of other European and Latin American contexts.

We will use the term minor in the sense with which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1978) defined a minor literature: enunciated from “the linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape” (p. 44). I.e., understood as a literature “which a minority constructs within a major language” (p.28), orienting a question about the “revolutionary conditions” that this minor literature establishes with a major or established one (p. 31). Deleuze put, some years later (1987), this approach in cinematographic terms: certain national cinemas, with a defined identity, which were at a disadvantage or under the hegemonic look of Europe and Hollywood.

In this regard –and although the Chilean cinema could be considered like a minor cinema within the world and even regional cinematography– the existence of this hegemonic relation can be raised within the national cinemas, as Ruiz understood it. Therefore, the minor Chilean cinema could be a group of films that goes unnoticed in the face of the current success of international Chilean cinema, with a presence mainly in small festivals, with discursive production and materials conditions quite dissimilar.

We are also thinking about a line that could historically relate, for example, filmmakers scarcely analyzed at the local level, such as Rodrigo Maturana (eighties generation), the Bustamante brothers (eighties decade), Sergio Navarro (eighties decade), Juan Vicente Araya (late nineties), Carlos Flores del Pino or Cristián Sánchez (with works since the late seventies), with current directors with a very minor vocation: Jairo Boisier, Camilo Becerra, Sebastián Pereira, Jerónimo Rodríguez, Cristóbal Vicente, Elisa Eliash, Javier Zoro, Martín Seeger or Bernardo Quesney, all present with titles since the second decade of 2000.

What do these filmmakers have in common? Not the fact that they have not gone to international festivals, that they have had a presence –or not– in the canon of the *Novísimo* or that their second films can be part of the first league. Their relationship with this first canon is of dialogue, of entrance and exit, but their emphasis is the one of a poetic in a minor tone. And it is this tension of tones that refers to the revolutionary conditions of a minor language over the major, the way of twisting the scheme. This group of films sets a scenario that proliferates towards very different genres and styles: docufiction, dramatic or poetic realism, formal experimentation. But what is relevant is not so much the genre to which they ascribe, but a type of operation of deterritorialization of the language, a deformed appropriation of the cinema, used for other purposes and objectives, which advocate an operation that seeks to undermines artistic principles.

We call the latter operation “termite operation”. What does a “termite art” mean? We take up the words of the American critic Manny Farber, who proposes this term in the text *White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art* (2014) for a type of art that “always advances devouring its own limits and leaves nothing in its wake but traces of its anxious, hardworking and careless activity” (2014, par. 4). It is an art opposed to what he calls the

white elephant, a tinsel art linked to the monumental yearnings of the so-called great art, which yearns for beauty and perfection. What could a white elephant be in our context? We could say that it is the cinema of festivals, with its aesthetic for prizes, detailedness, calculations and folklore, which enters into an international distribution network accommodating itself to discursive criteria, geo-politically distributed as representations, but also as representative systems (Cerdán, 2004; Wong, 2011; Antin, 2012). The termite act means undermining the representative schema from within, opening processes rather than results, inserting itself inside a model as a contraband and negotiation.

Now that we have presented our main ideas regarding the possibilities of a second league in Chilean cinema, and established the initial proposal of a termite operation, we will try to prove and exemplify this proposal from a specific and dissimilar corpus.

MAMI TE AMO: AESTHETICS OF THE RESIDUE

With two films premiered to date, Elisa Eliash has become an essential filmmaker to understand the ways of Chilean cinema in the second decade of 2000. *Mami te amo* is her first film, from 2008, the same year in which she won the Festival de Cine B of Santiago, after having circulated in several festivals.

In the argument, Eliash deepens into the world of a girl that seeks her mother’s attention, recreating games on the edge of ingenuity and the macabre. A hint of blindness is the starting point to assume a world that goes from the real to the unreal. Eliash fragmentarily approaches (almost in autonomous sequences) moments, instances, of the characters’ life, moving with ease between universes of infantile fantasy and a marginal realism. Neither absolutely realistic nor absolutely narrative, her proposal seems radically formalistic, by tearing away the visuality of its reference, increasing the graphic sense of the image, and working in turn with a social marginality that at times reminds the characters of Víctor Gaviria or Aldo Francia. Thus, neither documentary film nor illustrative realism, hers moves from an avant-garde pole, constructive and somewhat dirty and punk, which derives a residual aesthetic from the urban edge and visual noise. Eliash also takes elements of avant-garde cinema: she begins with visual topics,

objects in black and white in which the girl, behind an oculist's machine, must be examined. The elements of this first sequence (figures, circular reframing within the scene) seem to recall the abstract cinema of the first avant-garde. Eliash underlines it through an ever-present cut, an association of fragments that builds a poetic universe in shock and discontinuity. The editing is both a conceptual operation as well as poetry and fracture and must be understood from a nonlinear superposition of visual scenes in tension with narrative linearity. The visual brusqueness of these treatments contrasts with the fragility of its protagonists. It is their bodies that are subject to risk, to threat, to a violent external presence –the city at night, the maternal estrangement, the adrift.

Mami te amo is a film about precarious childhood, estrangement and orphanage. During a trip to Fantasilandia (an amusement park), the mother loses her and confuses her with another girl without even realizing it. An implicit tragedy runs through this confusion, this disconnection. The girl, alone, walks through the city. Scenes without sound and a hand camera follow her at night. She, aimlessly, hums, plays, gets lost in the city. From a discursively opaque point of view, Eliash films a girl who embraces chaos and imagination as a way of subsistence, showing at the same time a portrait of a Santiago microworld.

PIOTR (UNA MALA TRADUCCIÓN), THE ANTI-MONUMENTALITY

Martin Seeger's debut film is an unusual exploration in absurd comedy. With winks at the cinema of Ruiz (particularly *Diálogos de exiliados*, 1976) and Aki Kaurismäki, Seeger offers with *Piotr (una mala traducción)* –premiered in Bafici, in 2010– another work disengaged from the canon. Although it was present in the book *El Novísimo cine chileno*, its inclusion –like that of other filmmakers– is extemporaneous and forces us to think about the exploratory possibilities of a reflective and ironic cinema, which tends to move away from the most linear and conflictual representative schemes.

Piotr had the background of a short film called *Las traducciones de Piotr Herroll* (2007), included almost in its entirety in the feature film of 2009. In this short film there were already some elements present in the film, as the main character *Piotr* and his universe: Nacrovia, a country invented by Martín Seeger for the short film,

where Nacrovia is spoken. The short film can be understood as a formal game, where, on the one hand, we watch an intimate couple drama in Nacrovia and, on the other, there is a formal game with the Nacrovia to Spanish subtitles and the staging. In this game, the screen in black or white or the speed of the subtitle intentionally renders the written text illegible, making invisible what should be functional and transparent, thus adding this text to one of the expressive functions of the short film. In this way, the short film establishes a meta-reflexive operation on the narrative conditions of the film itself.

Taking this as a starting point, the film goes much further. *Piotr* is now a young man in his twenties, of Nacrovia nationality, who seeks economic independence in the capital of Santiago. Therefore, he decides to apply to a governmental competition fund and set up a play on the history of Nacrovia, “a country in which for years there was a democratic dictatorship until some aristocratic revolutionaries decided to put an end to the empire of mediocrity” (Ballestrazzi & Seeger, 2010). The sequence of the staging of this text is one of the central lines of the film and a reflection on creation and the precarious conditions to make art in Chile. At the same time, it is a reflection on the mechanisms of the cinematographic staging through the theatrical: from the language games, it establishes a series of blind spots in the cinematographic translation of the theatrical staging. Thus, the monumental dramaturgy of the work on Nacrovia falls into the hands of a small-time company, with untalented actors plotting against the director. In addition, the constant games with the Nacrovia language and its translation into Spanish lead to the absurdity of ending up doing a staging with the light off.

From here the question of translation is cast as a fundamental argument of the film and a series of questions on the cultural issue, misunderstanding and lack of communication appear, which serves Seeger to build a “sociopolitical satire” (Nazarala, 2011, p. 174) from the perspective of the foreigner:

The director also creates ironic comparisons and contrasts between what we suspect is Nacrovia –a former Soviet republic– and Chile. The perimeter that surrounds La Moneda (the only stage of the film) has rarely been as militarized as in this film, with parades, a policeman playing the cornet systematically and a sense of order that becomes pure nonsense. On the other hand, Nacrovia's independence came after a coup carried out by aristocrats (Nazarala, 2011, p. 174).

Piotr (una mala traducción) creates a parody of the historical and monumental construction of the nation based on the signs it brings into play and the references to the revolutions of the 20th century. The contrast between Chile and Nacrovia is shown through a group of apathetic characters, who speak a foreign language and wander into a gray Santiago, dominated by the signs of a militarized and monolithic State, absent and bureaucratic. Thus, by winning a competitive fund and reaching a stalemate with the project, he must confront a series of bureaucratic notifications that will end with a subpoena to the court. The problem of translation becomes a matter linked to State language and subjective estrangement; a look distanced from what Althusser (1971) called ideological State apparatuses.

LOS ILUMINADOS, WASHED-OUT REALISM

Sebastián Pereira's debut film is humble in its intentions and aware of its own fragility. The film introduces us to Felipe, a young adolescent finishing the school year; he only has one last history work he must do with his best friend, Lucas. To concentrate entirely on this task, Lucas lodges him for a few days in his house. From there, the film presents the dysfunctional family realities of both. But the film is not enclosed there, in that house, and opens a second reading axis through José, an Ecuadorian immigrant in Chile, who rents a house to Felipe's mother in the Yungay neighborhood and works as a street artist in the center of Santiago, disguised as the Sioux Indians of North America. The relationship between the two is friendly, complicit and even paternal.

In addition, *Los iluminados* has a strange retro effect, a nostalgic and anachronistic touch: there are no iPhones, social networks or Transantiago (public transportation) buses. Added to this is the use of, and obvious tribute to, the Chilean band Los Vidrios Quebrados (a psychedelic rock group that sang songs in English in the 1960s), not only as the absolute soundtrack for the film, but also having its vocalist (Juan Mateo O'Brian) playing a supporting role. Everything adds elements of strangeness and an ancient look to the film.

This anachronistic option leaves the feeling that what we see is the recount that the protagonist makes about a confused and turbulent moment of his adolescence, when the hormones did not let him

fully understand what was happening around him. A time in which—despite the difficulty of having a voice and will of his own—marked in an important way the search not only for his own identity, but, rather, for the places in the city where he found refuge and the people he could count on and relate to in order to feel at home.

Sebastián Pereira's graduation project from the Film School may seem too amateur at first sight. However, if we recognize in his formal searches the background of Cristián Sánchez, Raúl Ruiz and José Luis Sepúlveda—use of non-professional actors, informal speech, taking the camera to the street and the abrupt editing cuts—we can see that these elements endow its washed-out aesthetic of great richness. Thus, *Los iluminados* builds a detour of the classical representative scheme, from a formative family story, as in Sánchez's films, rarifying and anachronizing its naturalness in an operation of washed-out realism.

Los iluminados premiered in the national competition FicValdivia 2015 and in the Radicales cinema in 2016.

RASTREADOR DE ESTATUAS, MINIMAL SUBJECTIVITIES

Documentary essay, intimate diary, travelogue and detective story, *Rastreador de estatuas* intertwines in this narrative essay various genres, making it an atypical case of contemporary Chilean cinema, which re-elaborates several recurring themes: memory, the filial relationship, the children's story, the subjective tone and the crossings between personal, family and social history.

While the protagonist watches the Spanish documentary *Monos como Becky* (1999), by Joaquim Jordá and Nuria Villazán about the Portuguese psychiatrist Egas Monis, inventor of the lobotomy, he has a vague memory of years ago, when his father took him to see a bust of that doctor located somewhere in the municipality of Ñuñoa.

From that point begins a research process that moves between the computer screen, the cinematographic image and the blurred image of the filial memory, guided by frustration at the lack of certainty within the urban memory: statues without names, busts or plaques.

The documentary research occurs between travel and search and derives in a fictional format by using the voice-over of an omniscient narrator who presents

Jorge, Rodríguez's alter ego. The narrator tells us the journeys, searches, thoughts and feelings of this detective protagonist, that run as a stream of consciousness and are related to the model of free association that constitutes thought at the brain level. Like his father, a neurosurgeon, Rodríguez works with the cinematographic material in a surgical way, leaving the protagonist's body –which we never see and whose journey we only know through the images he captures– out of scene.

Although he never finds the statue that his father showed him, the project turns this fragility of memory, personal and visual, into an essay on other fragilities of memory, such as the familiar, social or urban. It does so by means of a cross between the indication of the real (through images and the fictionalization of the facts of the story that open a space to the essay) and the connection between the personal, the familiar and the social history.

The memory of children, the story of exile, the never resolved dialogue between generations, parents and children who find their fictional realization in the film, are quite developed trends in Chilean cinema: *El eco de las canciones* (2010), *El edificio de los chilenos* (2010), *El pacto de Adriana* (2017), *El color del camaleón* (2017), to name a few. But *Rastreador de estatuas* takes that as a starting point to refer more to Raúl Ruiz's essay filmography and Ignacio Agüero's cartographic documentary than to the contemporary Chilean cinema framed in the *Novísimo*. Subtracting the subjective self and incorporating the alter ego and voice-over narrator, it moves away from the testimonial and the emotional, linking scientific and documentary research and connecting with another type of canon or cinematographic tradition less common in the national commercial scenario: the cinema of essay, nonfiction and experimental documentary.

Its form of production is anchored in an idea of the minimum scale, of the solitary gesture, at a distance, no greater than the radius of operation of the director's own body. In an interview with *El Agente Cine*, Rodríguez also describes this in political terms: "I also believe that this way of working, with freedom, on the smallest scale and alone, is a way of resisting" (Pinto Veas, 2016).

MALEZA, THE EXTENSION OF MARGINS

This film is genealogically installed within the Chilean cinema from a reference to *El Pejesapo*

(2007) and even further back, in the search for the representation of marginality that it is possible to place from *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (1968) onwards. *Maleza* manages, for various reasons, to successfully approach a universe of marginality. The main one is that it has a markedly stated enunciation. From an aesthetics of follow-up with a hand, low-quality camera, it tells the story of Daniel, a former inmate in rehabilitation who arrives at an evangelical center, where there are strict rules and where his stay is fragile under the threat of re-offending. From here, the film builds a realistic story thanks to the interaction with real places (the downtown itself, the suburban landscape of Santiago) and to the *verité* digital camera treatment, which accentuates a game with the documentary. One of the virtues of the film is that it acts as the protagonist's shadow. An amateur camera (Hi8) records Daniel's every move. Each space is portrayed from a closeness and dirtiness that at times overwhelms, but that allows us to delve into the story of a place beyond the socially known. It is the story of the true excluded, the outsiders who are not cool and whose only option is to survive in the margins.

Maleza extends the margins of the city to the excluded, the invisible and the lost. While the precariousness of the home that receives Daniel and the economic fragility with which it operates are evident, the focus is not on the social work, but on his little journey from a place of salvation to nowhere. It is a path with no sense or clear motive, where we can only observe a character who barely speaks, who does not show emotions or intentions.

The film omits the sociological or political explanations, but clearly shows a landscape of exclusion modulated by a lo-fi recording technology, which expresses the desolation and anguish of a character with no way out. This impressionist landscape achieves its most symbolic vein in a scene of surrealist traits with close-ups of animal corpses, reminiscent of the existential despair of *Black God, White Devil* (1964), by Glauber Rocha.

Maleza inserts fluidly into the local cinema within certain traditions, such as realism and concern for social margins, added to a mode of precarious production that narratively refreshes these topics from a punk sensibility. In times of exportable products, *Maleza* opts for precariousness, saturation and noise, a dirty aesthetic for an incomprehensible and conflicting reality.

CONCLUSIONS

Following an open game board, we propose to look at a second league of Chilean cinema in the light of the film debates about the recent canon and the modes of production and circulation. We speak of a termite operation, which corrodes the most crystallized representative schemes, opening fluctuating possibilities for a staging and a language in a minor tone. As we have indicated, the minor tone is proposed, from Deleuze and Guattari (1978), always in relation to a major language, defining itself in three elementary operations: 1) the deterritorialization of the language, 2) the articulation of the individual with the political immediate, and 3) the construction of a collective enunciation device (1978, p. 31). Let us review the proposals considering these ideas.

1. Regarding the most official and first league canon of Chilean cinema, termite-cinema elaborates something more failed, more erratic, far from the scheme of technical perfection and the scripted calculation. From here, it appropriates a major language –a genre, a format, a canonical text– to make a detour, with the deterritorialization of the language, and look for a new enunciative zone. Its operations are anti-spectacular and tend more to opacity, irony, gestures or play, establishing a dense area in the work with the signifier. This is what happens, for example, with *Los iluminados* and its cinematic realism in dialogue with the noir, but also with the formative novel, which enter a complex scenario where the phantasmagorical opens the film to an indetermination area. In *Mami te amo* the genres and limits between the real and the unreal, the imaginary and the residual, blur, moving in a fragmented and iconoclastic aesthetic, which appeals to primary and sparkling affections through the editing. *Piotr (una mala traducción)*, by Martín Seeger, delves into the parody and the reflective elements, looking from an ironic style into the question of cultural translation. From another perspective, taking the documentary as a starting point, Jerónimo Rodríguez, in *Rastreador de estatuas*, uses documentary as a hybrid and rhizomatic form that connects the intimate and social memory from a depersonalization of the author in a fictional double. Finally, *Maleza* appeals to the limits of realism, with a punk and precarious aesthetic, advocating for a character marginalized of society, part of a gestural and raw image.
2. The modulations of the political are fully present in the corpus, in a connection that does not entirely separates the issues of the intimate and the public, inserting in the daily life a direct correlation with social forces in tension. This is the case of the family structure in *Los iluminados*, an economic and political unit in dissolution, threatened by external forces, or the link between the protagonist of *Rastreador de estatuas* with the republican memory of his father, which connects with a series of forgotten monuments of a homeland that no longer exists. Also of *Mami te amo*, where naked childhood and physical blindness are, as in Kafka, elements that become immediate and – from the perspective of affection– direct anguishes for the spectator, a sensory and affective shock where there is no room for compassion. The representations of a national identity and the parody of a monumental aesthetic appear in *Piotr (una mala traducción)* anchored to the problem of the language and the non-communicational absurdity, where the State becomes a threatening and external bureaucratic entity.
3. Finally, these forms involve in their operation a collective device, not from the separation individual/community or from an epic allegory of the nation, but from a community re-traced and re-imagined in its social bond. It is a *we* that, through impotence, emerges as a lost community, a “missing people” (Deleuze, 1987, p. 288) and is fabulated (Rodowick, 1997) in cinematographic terms, a community without a homeland, of pariahs, united by the tragic destiny of a country and a History. This is seen in *Los iluminados*, between the lumpen and the decadent middle class; in *Piotr (una mala traducción)*, an imagined country that speaks a foreign language, a group of exonerated wanderers in a community that does not speak to them; in *Rastreador de estatuas*, a lost myth of a community that perhaps never came to exist except in the memory of the protagonist, and in *Mami te amo*, a girl and her friend, semi orphans, wandering around the city.

From precarious but diverse modes of production, this set of films creates a second league of Chilean cinema that establishes a formal and narrative exploration, inserted in a silent local tradition. In this strange language, it distorts the aseptic aesthetics of

festivals, but also of the eminently representational language, installing its operation “in unstable places, fugitively occupied, uninhabitable, contradictory” (Barthes, 2005, pp. 99-111).

This instability of its signifiers clashes with its opposite: formal stability and discursive clarity, a kind of neutral realism where cinema is the repository of a treatment that does not interrupt its argument and its path to dramatic resolution. It is not only about classical versus modern cinema, but about the possibility of inhabiting an intermediate space of the language connected with exploration and the deconstruction of the foundations of filmic experience.

This dimension speaks to us of inhabiting contradictory spaces within the framework of the global circulation of capital, where the overly humanitarian and compassionate content of an institutional realism for export dwells in an area of ideological comfort; where the sharp images of aesthetic laboratories become artificial, resolved and prefabricated, distant from dense, complex and fugitive enunciation zones. To inhabit this intermediate land, we must get out of the polarizing schemes—modern/classic; aesthetic/political; public/private; rupture/continuity; new/old; critical/noncritical— and look in the anomaly the possibility of tracing textual vanishing points, possible modes of production, laborious and perhaps, silent, languages from a minor politics.

FOOTNOTES

1. In the same review, Guerrero (2012) gave a good opportunity to think about the *Novísimo* effect as an unsuspected territory that gave rise to strategies and counter-strategies: “The names with which historical phenomena survive are not always backed-up by academic credentials or analytical guarantees. A concept sanctioned by the academia does not necessarily have more possibilities of becoming the hegemonic name of an era than the headline of a newspaper or the sentence out of context of some public figure. The success of a category in the long term is decided in the most improbable battles, conducted in complex correlations of strength that are not safe from arbitrariness and chance” (par. 19).

2. Cinema Chile Promotion Agency. The brand CinemaChile began operating in 2009, led by the Association of Film and Television Producers (APCT) in a joint effort with ProChile. In its beginnings as a brand positioning, it sought to empower the message through different actions: “The Chilean audiovisual sector is young, with a great work capacity and to create surprising and original stories, with a new generation of professionals, an important variety of locations and production volume, inserted in a competitive, transparent and reliable socioeconomic system”. (...) Attributes of the brand: Originality, Diversity, Effervescence, Quality, Permanent renewal of the offer. Retrieved from <https://www.prochile.gob.cl/marca-sectorial/cinema-chile/>

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