

REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), AN EXERCISE IN MEMORY FROM AN EXILE PERSPECTIVE

PABLO CALVO DE CASTRO

MARÍA MARCOS RAMOS

The New Latin American Cinema developed in a context of social upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s, when the “rise of military dictatorships in almost every country in the region resulted in persecution and censorship and forced many filmmakers to go into hiding or exile, if they were able to avoid being abducted or killed” (Gumucio Dagron, 2014: 26). Working in a context of repression, but also with very limited resources, these filmmakers were notable for “the formal and expressive audacity of their very different films” (Ortega Gálvez and García Díaz, 2008: 79), with the documentary form being given a hegemonic role. Filmmakers thus went out “with their cameras to capture everyday social reality, using an artisanal, flexible, low-budget form of filmmaking” (King, 2000: 69), a description of relevance to the film analysed in this study. Much of the New Latin American Cin-

ema was produced, as Schroeder Rodríguez points out, “in two successive but not mutually exclusive phases” (2011: 11). The first phase was characterised by a militant approach that predominated in the 1960s. During this period, many filmmakers understood their work as an essential part of a broader project of political, social and cultural emancipation. The second phase, identified as a Neo-Baroque phase, encompassed the 1970s and 1980s. In this period, many of the filmmakers of the first stage, as well as a number of new emergent directors, sought to transform the militancy into a pluralist discourse, identifying with civil society in opposition to the authoritarian regimes that controlled so much of the region.

In this second stage the New Latin American Cinema was characterised by the use of a Neo-Baroque style to represent a discourse of the una-

ligned—and therefore invisible—masses. Just as a set of theoretical principles developed by the main exponents of this movement were important to the first stage, in this second period works such as Fernando Birri's *Por un cine cósmico, delirante y lumpen* [For a Cosmic, Raving and Lumpen Cinema] (1978), Glauber Rocha's *Eztetyka do sonho* [The Dream Aesthetic] (1971), Jorge Sanjinés's *El plano secuencia integral* [The Integral Sequence Shot] (1989), and Raúl Ruíz's *Poética del cine* [Poetics of Cinema] (1995) were offered as manifestos reflecting the movement's transition from militancy to the neo-Baroque not just in practice but in theory as well.

In Argentina, this phenomenon developed along two lines defined by the political affiliations and theoretical premises of their respective ideologies. One was represented by the Cine de la Base collective, which focused on the workers' struggle, while the other was led by the Cine Liberación group, with Octavio Getino, Fernando Solanas and subsequently Gerardo Vallejo, whose documentaries offered reflections associated with a broader conception of society.

It was *The Hour of the Furnaces* (La hora de los hornos, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968) that gave rise to "a new conception of cinema, which, after the film's screening and the political events that marked the end of the decade, would be expanded and consolidated in the early 1970s" (Halperin, 2004: 13). It was a foundational film in the history of Argentine documentary cinema, but it was also a work that systematised a particular form of storytelling, turning it into "a cultural artifact with the purpose of raising awareness about the political situation in Argentina and Latin America" (Halperin, 2004: 17).

The Cine Liberación group coined the term *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema) to describe its films, recognising that "it was the content of the Argentine reality of the late 1960s that defined the content and the specific form of a film production and its corresponding theoretical expression" (Ge-

tino, 1979: 3). It was established as an inherently political collective, with an orientation informed by the convergence of socialism and early Peronism, evolving towards what came to be known as revolutionary Peronism, associated with urban working-class militancy. Juan Perón would be an increasingly recurring figure in the group's work, making an explicit appearance in *Actualización política y doctrinaria* [Political and Doctrinal Renewal] (Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1971), a film clearly addressing the Peronist movement that radicalises many of the ideas previously addressed in *The Hour of the Furnaces*. The contradictions in Cine Liberación's political principles are evident, and this would lead to their becoming somewhat ambiguous in the mid-1970s, although the myth of Peronism would continue to be extolled for decades, as exemplified in Leonardo Flavio's *Perón, sinfonía del sentimiento* [Perón, A Symphony of Feeling] (1999), although it might equally be criticised, as Raymundo Gleyzer did in *Los Traidores* (1973).

GERARDO VALLEJO

Gerardo Vallejo (b. Tucumán, Argentina, 1942-2007) was a prominent figure in the movement known as the New Latin American Cinema, on a level with filmmakers as celebrated as the Brazilian Nelson Pereira dos Santos, the Argentine Fernando Birri, the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés, and the Cubans Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa. Although their films deal with a wide range of themes, they were all influenced by "the French New Wave, Italian neorealism, the British Free Cinema movement, Germany's *Neuer Deutscher Film*, and the New Spanish Cinema that emerged after the Salamanca Conversations in 1955" (Pérez Murillo, 2023). In addition to drawing inspiration from the same film movements, the films of this movement are all realist works made for the purpose of protest, especially against social injustices.

Vallejo's career in cinema encompassed many roles, as he worked as a director, screenwriter, actor and producer in both documentaries and fiction films in Argentina. Beginning with his directorial debut in 1968 with *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* [Viejo Reales' Long Way Journey to Death], he developed a filmography characterised by political militancy and an identification with social causes. His work can be divided into three distinct periods. The first, from 1965 to 1968, is notable for his affiliation with the Santa Fe documentary school founded by Fernando Birri in 1956, reflected in works such as *Las cosas ciertas* [True Things] (1965) and *Olla popular* [Community Kitchen] (1968), which exhibit his own unique approach to auteur cinema and a markedly political dimension typical of the first period of the New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s. The second, covering the ten years that followed, began with *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* (1968-1971) and ended with *Reflexiones de un salvaje* [Reflections of a Savage] (1978) (Image 1). His films during this period maintain a connection with auteur and protest cinema but also reflect a stronger leaning towards less purely militant styles. The third phase, from the 1980s onwards, includes films such as *The Sternness of Fate* (El rigor del destino, 1985) and *Con el alma* [With the Soul] (1993-1994), which incorporate certain distinctive elements of post-dictatorial Argentine cinema such as "nostalgia, dread, supposedly naturalist dialogue and a more classical editing structure with flashbacks and retrospective narration" (Rodríguez Marino, 2013: 64) (Image 1).

The life and political activity of Gerardo Vallejo left a profound mark on his filmography. When he became a target of the paramilitary organisation AAA (Argentine Anticomunist Alliance), also known as the "Triple A", Vallejo was forced into exile in Panama in 1974. Years later, the persistent threat posed by the Argentine military dictatorship compelled him to leave his country again, this time seeking refuge in Spain, the



Image 1. A moment from the film *Reflexiones de un salvaje*

homeland of his grandparents. Once settled in Spain, in 1979 he founded a recognised film school in Madrid, which attracted more than 150 students during the three years it was operational. After the return of democracy in Argentina, he chose to return home, where he remained until his death in February 2007.

REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (1978)

Once settled in Spain, Vallejo took a trip to Cespedosa de Tormes, a hamlet in the province of Salamanca that had been the home village of his grandfather, who emigrated to South America in the early 20th century. Upon arriving there in 1978, Vallejo decided to make the documentary film *Reflexiones de un salvaje* as a way of coming to terms with his past. In his own words, he sought to "understand that my exile had not begun with myself; it had started much earlier, with my grandfather, a shepherd [...] who decided to escape poverty and move to the Americas" (Vallejo, 1984: 220). The film begins with a voice-over provided by the director himself, explaining his reasons for making it:

A dream, when I was a child, gave me the image of the grandfather I had never met and, for the first time, the caress of his peasant hand. In my childhood fantasy, that dream reconstructed a portrait

that I could never forget. With my eyes and my Latin American soul, I discovered that far-off Spain that my grandfather had one day been forced to leave behind. Perhaps that is why I have always wanted to learn about that past and to search in the Spain of today for the factors that led him to emigrate. Now dream and reality blend together. What I had never imagined was that one day, like him, I would have to leave the land where I was born, and experience life as an emigrant like he did, right here, in the same country he left so long ago. Everything blends together, stories, anecdotes, landscapes, war, in a chain of sorrows and long-forgotten tears that are my roots, in this Spanish town, Cespadosa de Tormes, where my grandfather was born.

The main reason for Gerardo Vallejo's decision to return to his grandfather's village and make a documentary there was to comprehend the motivations and social, political and economic conditions that made him leave Cespadosa de Tormes and emigrate to Argentina. The documentary identifies the main reason for his emigration as the difficult economic conditions in Spain in 1910, which had made living off the land (the main source of income in the region) an unfeasible option. This precarious situation not only prompted his grandfather to seek a better life in another country but also led thousands of other Spaniards to make the same decision. Along with the issue of economic migration, the documentary also considers the exodus that occurred for political reasons a few decades later in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, another subject explored in the film. Vallejo also "attempts to discern, amidst the apparent squalor of the houses and dirt roads, the true identity of a village steeped in a past that seems to belong to no one, which he, in a way, has inherited" (Parés, 2010) (Images 2 and 3).

By talking about his grandfather's absence in his hometown, and about the need that compelled him to leave it behind and move to another country on a different continent, Vallejo is able to allude, if only metaphorically, to his own situation as an exile. This theme is evident in the sequences where a child is depicted walking through the fields in the Argentine province of Tucumán, which in reality represent the fields of Cespadosa. This boy, who listened to his grandfather's stories about his village and his country, visualises the stories he was told. Vallejo reconstructs the memories by creating a narrative in a land that is at once alien and familiar to him, a place to which he himself has now been forced to come, much like his grandfather had been forced to go to Tucumán.

Images 2 and 3. A moment from the film *Reflexiones de un salvaje*



The documentary reflects the filmmaker's desire to explore the exile experience without making explicit reference to it. This absence of references to his own situation—and by extension, to the situation in Argentina—effectively turns all exile into a universal experience. In this sense, “Vallejo’s interest lies not in reflecting on Perón, Videla, political violence or resistance in exile, but in considering the exile’s condition in general and almost metaphysical terms by delving into his own family’s history of displacements” (Campo, 2012: 8).

Vallejo’s trip to Spain arose from an urgent need to leave his country due to the political situation there. His inability to return to Argentina was effectively a banishment, as going back would have meant endangering his freedom and even his life. For Vallejo, exile is “a time lapse between Argentina and Spain, between the Republican struggle of ’36 and the revolutionary struggle in Latin America. It is also an experience that constitutes the temporalisation of space and the difference of narrating a simple journey, which spatialises time” (Rodríguez Marino, 2013: 70).

In the film, emigration and exile are intertwined to tell the same story: expulsion from a territory, a life, a time and a space. For Vallejo’s grandfather, this expulsion, although voluntary, was at the same time forced by economic need, which meets the definition of emigration. For Vallejo, it is both involuntary and forced, the product of political factors that define it as exile. However, in *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, these two experiences are depicted similarly through the representation of absence. An emblematic example of this is the sequence where one person dictates a letter to another in Tucumán, which is later read by a third person in Cespedosa. This segment, highly original in its conception, reveals a discourse on different levels and uses parallel editing between Spain and Tucumán. One person expresses ideas, and another transforms them into eloquent sentences, so that finally a third party can read them

to the person concerned. Beyond accurately reflecting the reality of emigration to the Americas at the beginning of the last century, this unit of action stands out for the originality of its mise-en-scène and editing.

The director makes several comparisons between Europe and Latin America at significant moments in the documentary, such as the scene showing Cespedosa’s few children marching through the village in a protest demanding improvements to their school. Although the location is clearly identified in the film, it does not have a regionalist focus. Vallejo uses the story of Cespedosa to reflect on the history of Spain, in the same way that he uses Tucumán to expand his reflections on it to the whole of Argentina.

Vallejo uses the testimonies of Cespedosa’s residents to tell his own story through the voices of others. The film’s title also reveals a comparative objective, as the word *salvaje* (“savage”) refers both to the Argentine exile forced to live in Spain and to a Spaniard hunted by Franco’s troops who is forced to live in the wild like a hermit, or almost like a savage, a concept also mentioned in the film.

SELF-REFERENTIALITY OR FILMIC REFLEXIVITY

Vallejo takes an active leading role in *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, giving the film a subjective, self-referential quality. The lack of an autobiographical dimension was identified as a shortcoming of militant political cinema by Birri, who praised Vallejo for his use of it in a letter he sent to the filmmaker (Vallejo, 1984).

The inclusion of an autobiographical element has only recently begun to be consolidated in documentary film due to the objective character originally associated with the genre, which has grown in maturity thanks to this addition. In Latin American documentary cinema, it took time for the value of self-reflexive and self-referential documentaries to be fully recognised. According



Images 4 and 5. A moment from the film *Reflexiones de un salvaje*

to Ruffinelli (2010), one of the reasons for this may have been that the interests of the collective were always prioritised over the individual in the past when filmmakers sought to explore certain themes and present those explorations in a film. This perspective was associated with the notion that history is shaped by the masses rather than by individuals, in a context marked by the intense social changes and active militancy that characterised Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although she is not referring specifically to documentary cinema, Leonor Arfuch (2002) discusses multiplicity in stories, which may be told in different ways, in different registers and with different co-authors, such as in conversations, life stories, interviews or psychoanalytic relationships. This multiplicity, also identifiable in *Reflexiones de un salvaje* in the different roles adopted by Vallejo, helps construct a recognisable framework of its own, albeit one that can only be defined in relational terms: I am in a sense here in relation to certain others who are different and external to me (Images 4 and 5).

From the 1980s onwards, self-referentiality, especially in documentary films related to memory, began being consolidated with the presence of the director, although using different narrative strategies that lean toward narration and the need to negotiate identities between the subject of what

is being enunciated (the other) and the enunciating subject (the narrator). New relationships were established between what was traditionally understood as the subject and the object (the other), and also between these two and the receiver, i.e., the new audience (Ruffinelli, 2010: 77).

Ruffinelli establishes four categories of the use of referentiality in Latin American documentary cinema. The first is “diary” cinema or the personal diary. The second is characterised by a personal gaze on the family. The third involves a retrospective exploration with the aim of emotional reconciliation, working in the present but investigating the past. And the fourth category is comprised of investigative documentaries that constitute investigations in themselves, raising questions about social issues based on an exploration of personal or family matters. Vallejo’s film could be placed in the third of these categories, as it is essentially a retrospective inquiry that investigates the past now in the present in an effort to come to emotional terms with that past (Ruffinelli, 2010: 69). Indeed, *Reflexiones de un salvaje* is a prime example of this category, because the director declares his intention right from the outset in the opening voice-over: to reconstruct and investigate the past in order to understand the present.

Vallejo makes use of one of the most common narrative strategies to highlight the self-referen-

tial nature of this film: the voice-over. In this case, the voice is his own, a choice that accentuates the documentary's self-referential character and distances it from any notion of supposed objectivity, as what is narrated is simply Vallejo's personal experience. Everything we learn is presented to us from his perspective—represented by the camera—and with his voice, which acts as a vehicle both for the story and for the images. Vallejo's voice plays a leading role in the scenes depicting his childhood in Tucumán, where we see a child walking over the hills of the region holding his grandfather's hand, thus evoking the past.

There is a high level of symbolism in the documentary in the self-referential strategies, which are conveyed on two levels: a micro-level and a macro-level. On the micro-level, Vallejo describes his own experience of exile, the search for his grandfather and the stories of his relatives and other villagers of Cespedosa de Tormes. On the macro-level, running through the subtext but also dealt with explicitly at certain moments, Vallejo touches on issues of repression and exile in relation to both the Spanish Civil War and the Argentine dictatorship. He also discusses poverty and uses the image of Cespedosa as an analogy for Spain. The Spanish village is presented as a bleak place, almost like a graveyard, with narrow winding streets, dilapidated houses and hungry inhabitants, as reflected in a sequence showing food rations being distributed to the villagers. This Spain is populated with mournful, disheartened characters, such as the woman who appears throughout the film praying, weeping and enduring hardships in a country that has just emerged from a dictatorship that is still keenly remembered. This is also made clear in the figure of the old Spanish Republican who crosses a battlefield strewn with the bodies of victims of the Franco regime's repression; this sequence is particularly striking and remarkable given that it was filmed in 1978, just three years after Franco's death, when the dictatorship's violent past was still a very sensitive topic.

The main element used by Vallejo to address the issue of political exile is the voice-over, which turns the director into the narrative guide. Through interviews with Cespedosa's residents and personal testimonies, the story acquires a uniquely personal quality, establishing "early on an autobiographical pact of veracity with the spectator, personalising a retrospective story and establishing a unity between narrator, character and author" (Piedras, 2012: 41).

Reflexiones de un salvaje not only tells the story of Vallejo's exile and his grandfather's emigration but also uses these stories as a starting point for a broader narrative. In this way, the documentary delves into other cases of exile and emigration, extending its scope to explore similar experiences of other Spanish immigrants who were forced to leave their homeland in search of a better life, fleeing the hardship they had faced in Spain. The documentary thus offers a broader reflection on the causes and consequences of exile and emigration, revealing the universal nature of these experiences and their impacts on people's lives.

On the other hand, Vallejo does not date his story, avoiding the use of visual or audio deictic cues while also maintaining a kind of spatial indeterminacy. The absence of time references is combined with a homogeneous mise-en-scène to reinforce a sense of continuity, with the lighting and scenery barely changing throughout the documentary. Even Vallejo's clothing—brown coat, black trousers and a beige hat—remains the same in every sequence, contributing to the idea of time suspended, as if nothing ever changed and the story was unfolding in a continuous present. The rhythmic and visual elements contribute to the narrative seamlessness using continuity editing.

Using various narrative techniques to make his presence felt in the film, such as his on-screen presence as an interviewer and his participation as narrator through his voice-over, Vallejo acknowledges his subjectivity as a filmmaker and participant in the process of creating the documentary,

facilitating a more complex and nuanced exploration of the issues. Furthermore, his inclusion as a character reinforces the subjectivity of the work, as in addition to being audible in the voice-over he is also the subject making the film, as well as the object presented in it. This new style of documentary, which was consolidated in the mid-1980s, reformulates the conceptions of subject and language that predominated in classical cinema. Like other directors in the new wave of “post-documentaries”, Vallejo reinvents the author’s role “as a subject who expresses a worldview and a personal poetry through the cinematic discourse” (Piedras, 2012). In this way, “by calling attention to filmic mediation, reflexive films subvert the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication, a window on the world, a mirror promenading down a highway” (Stam, 2000: 151). These films question not only the role of the author but also the functionality of referential language itself, freeing it “from its false identification with the phenomenal world and from its assumed authority as a means of cognition about the world” (Minh-ha, 1991: 31).

Vallejo tells his story not only through his voice-over but also through the testimonies of the villagers, who are given a voice in the interviews included in the film. Although he is present in these conversations, Vallejo listens to the stories the locals tell him with minimal interruptions. This gives them the opportunity to express themselves, but the story is still Vallejo’s, as he uses their experiences and concerns to tell his own. He thus interweaves his own narrative with the voices of the community, creating a story that reflects both his personal experience and the experiences of those he encounters there. Through the interviews, the villagers reconstruct stories of the past that have been told so many times that it is difficult to distinguish the reality in them from the invention. These reconstructions constitute one of the greatest achievements of the film, as reflected in the long sequence that ends the documentary,

where the villagers recreate an event that occurred in 1917: a public uprising after the murder of Manuel Vallejo, the filmmaker’s grandfather, at the hands of a landowner for gathering firewood on his land. In a spontaneous reaction, the people rose up and stormed the landowner’s property, forcing him to leave the village and sell his land to the municipality at a reduced price. This story, repeated so often by the people of Cespedosa, was filmed by Vallejo without apparent scripting. The villagers move in and out of the shot, reenacting a story they have heard many times. In the performance, “there is no control over their actions, because their actions are true. And they are true because they really happened, and in each one’s mind, that story has been imagined hundreds of times” (Parés, 2010). The villagers reenact other stories in addition to this one, such as the death of a teacher who lived for seventeen years in the wild hiding from the Francoist authorities. Through these reenactments and the villagers’ testimonies, Vallejo catches glimpses of the hidden truth of Cespedosa, passed down from generation to generation.

The director sets the pace of the film based on his own exploration of the village and the surrounding countryside. The interruption of the narration with scenes seemingly disconnected from the main story is a notable feature of the film: examples include images of a smelter ablaze and a blacksmith working and footage of the lynching of a peasant. These interruptions may seem strange at first, but they actually add layers of meaning to the main narrative.

The alternation of two sequences showing pigs in a slaughterhouse and the killing of peasants is reminiscent of the segment in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Strike* (Stachka, 1925) where images of the massacre of workers by Tsarist forces are cross-cut with footage of cattle being slaughtered. Eisenstein’s film, famous for its use of intellectual montage, served as inspiration for Vallejo, who also uses visual metaphors for narrative purposes.

In *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, this montage creates a regular thematic rhythm that alternates between the memory of life in the countryside—referring to a historical time—and the present context of interviews in his grandfather's village in Spain. The alternation of temporal rhythms serves not only to contrast the two contexts but also to highlight the connection between violence in history and exploitation in contemporary times. The brutality of the slaughterhouse is interwoven with the oppression of the working classes, thereby highlighting the persistence of injustice over time. This editing technique vests the film with an aesthetic complexity that in turn serves to enrich its social and political commentary on the cyclical nature of human oppression and suffering. Like Eisenstein, Vallejo makes the montage clear in certain scenes by using shots of short duration, framing, rhythmic montage, parallel sequences, etc.

For Vallejo, past and present are inseparably intertwined. His grandfather's experience of being forced to leave his homeland resonates in his own life. The director presents a stagnant time in which life is viewed as an interminable burden, and the passage of time is experienced as an endless waiting. This feeling is reinforced by the depiction of Cespedosa, a village frozen in time, whose residents are all old, with the exception of the schoolchildren shown briefly in one sequence. Only for one short moment does Vallejo leave this static setting to show the hustle and bustle of life in Madrid. This contrast between the rural village and the cosmopolitan capital suggests that the only way for young people to find a future is to leave the country behind and move to the city. The filmmaker seems to be hinting that all the opportunities for a good life are found in urban centres, while little villages like Cespedosa offer no more than a stagnant past and a limited future. The contrast between the rural and the urban underscores the idea that progress and development are only possible outside the confines of one's hometown.

Pierre Nora (1989) uses the term *lieux de mémoire* ("realms of memory") to refer to sites or territories where memory crystallises through remnants of human experience that belong to an inaccessible past. Cespedosa is for Vallejo a *lieu de mémoire* because it was his contact with this place in the province of Salamanca that inspired his documentary about exile from Argentina. According to Nora (1989), memory functions as a repository of experiences about the past whose common nexus is not so much the existence of sites to which we attribute a symbolic value as the presence of social or cultural links or rituals that connect people. Nora's concept is essentially cinematic in the sense that cinema provides access to these remembered experiences and gives them an audiovisual form outside the sealed container of individual memory. *Reflexiones de un salvaje* is thus a documentary that reclaims the memory and makes it universal, as it has the character of a dialectical and metafictional reflection in which the image represents the filmmaker's gaze and memory underpins everything that is filmed and subsequently resignified through the editing process.

Moreover, Vallejo vindicates the role of cinema as a medium capable of embalming memory (Mitry, 1997), as he captures the present moment, reflecting on the role of the image as a mirror of the fleeting nature of our memory, as the embalmer of reality described by Bazin (1990). Providing audiovisual narrative forms with new functions beyond mere capture and representation is an avant-garde practice that serves to question the dominant modes of representation (Drummond, 1979: 13). Thus, for Vallejo, memory is a nostalgic way of reconstructing his personal history by revisiting sites of the past and reinterpreting them. Vallejo reconstructs his memories through the spatial dimension, in an exercise that encompasses two meaningful locations: Cespedosa and Tucumán. These sites have a duality that reflects both their individual and their collective nature, as Nora points out, as they are part of Vallejo's

VALLEJO RECONSTRUCTS HIS MEMORIES THROUGH THE SPATIAL DIMENSION, IN AN EXERCISE THAT ENCOMPASSES TWO MEANINGFUL LOCATIONS: CESPEDOSA AND TUCUMÁN

personal memory but also part of the shared memory of many others. The filmmaker explores this memory by transforming these places into film settings, immortalising them not only on celluloid, but also in the memory of all the film's spectators.

CONCLUSIONS

Films have a life of their own that goes beyond the time they were made, and watching them in the present facilitates new readings that are sometimes similar to the ones proposed when they were first made. Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of this film when viewed in the present day is the fact that one of Spain's biggest contemporary issues is already evident here, in a documentary made fifty years ago: the "Empty Spain" phenomenon, referring to the rural exodus that occurred in certain regions of the country, such as Castilla y León, when large numbers of people began to emigrate in search of a better future. Today, far from having improved, the situation is considerably worse, and villages like Cespedosa have all but disappeared. Vallejo's documentary points out some of these issues, which are expressed by the villagers themselves.

In *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, the director addresses topics that would be recurring themes in his filmography, such as rural life and our relationship with land and territory. However, the main focus of this film is the feeling of rootlessness. Vega Solís points out that "diaspora, exile, nomadism, tourism, migration and vagrancy are all forms of travel, although each one is under-

stood differently depending on the subjects, places and times that determine them" (2000). For Vallejo, this travel represents an opportunity to make sense of his condition as an exile, to find out what his grandfather lost by leaving his homeland, his people and his world, and it functions as an analogy for what Vallejo himself has lost by having to leave his homeland, his people and his world.

The film's mournful tone is pervasive not only in the narrative. It is especially evident in the scenes of the grandfather and grandson walking over the hills of Tucumán, although it can be sensed as well in the general atmosphere. Brown and greenish tones predominate, in harmony with the landscape, while the naturalistic light helps to underscore this feeling of absence. Vallejo shows the impact that migration and being unable to continue their lives in their homeland had on both the people of Cespedosa and his grandfather, which serves as an analogy that helps him understand what he himself experienced in having to flee Argentina due to the threat posed by the dictatorship.

Vallejo explores the absence, the emptiness, the desolation resulting from being banished from one's own life. This absence is expressed in images, in silences, in words, in what is said and left unsaid. From the very beginning of the documentary, the spectator is made aware that it is about a personal experience—the filmmaker's and his grandfather's—but as the narration progress-

VALLEJO SHOWS THE IMPACT THAT MIGRATION AND BEING UNABLE TO CONTINUE THEIR LIVES IN THEIR HOMELAND HAD ON BOTH THE PEOPLE OF CESPEDOSA AND HIS GRANDFATHER, WHICH SERVES AS AN ANALOGY THAT HELPS HIM UNDERSTAND WHAT HE HIMSELF EXPERIENCED IN HAVING TO FLEE ARGENTINA DUE TO THE THREAT POSED BY THE DICTATORSHIP.

es, this experience becomes universal. Vallejo extends the discourse to involve the audience in this absence, as spectators may have experienced it directly themselves or know someone close to them who has. Herein lies the beauty and the success of *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, as Vallejo effectively turns a personal experience into a universal concern: what happens to our lives when we are gone, when we are missing, when we disappear? ■

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REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), AN EXERCISE IN MEMORY FROM AN EXILE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Reflexiones de un salvaje is a documentary directed by Gerardo Vallejo that explores the director's family history and his own experience of political exile. On a journey to Céspedes de Tormes, his grandfather's home village, Vallejo seeks to understand the motivations behind his family's emigration to Argentina. The film explores issues such as rootlessness, absence and loss. Vallejo uses a self-referential voice-over to tell the story, combining his own experiences with the testimonies of villagers. The documentary investigates the duality between the country and the city, as well as the ongoing oppression of communities over time. Vallejo also considers memory as a central theme, exploring the connection between past and present based on places of significance for him (Céspedes, Spain, and Tucumán, Argentina). *Reflexiones de un salvaje* ultimately offers a universal reflection on the human experience of absence and emptiness, inviting the spectator to ponder what happens to our life when we are absent.

Key words

Memory; Documentary cinema; Gerardo Vallejo; Exile; Migration.

Authors

Pablo Calvo de Castro holds a PhD in Documentary Film from Universidad de Salamanca, where he is an associate lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Audiovisual Communication and a member of the Audiovisual Content Observatory. His main lines of research are documentary film as a tool for social change, gender studies and visual anthropology. He has published numerous articles and book chapters, including *Cine documental latinoamericano. Conclusiones con base en un estudio trasversal con enfoque contextual y formal de 100 películas documentales* (Kepes, 2019). He has also made numerous documentaries for film and television. Contact: pablocalvo@usal.es

María Marcos Ramos holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication from Universidad de Salamanca, winning the university's Extraordinary PhD Award. She is a senior lecturer in the Audiovisual Communication and Creation degree program at Universidad de Salamanca and a research member of the Audiovisual Content Observatory at the same institution. Her lines of research include the representation of minorities and of society in audiovisual fiction, on which she has authored articles published in scholarly journals and monographs. She is also the author of the volume *ETA catódica. Terrorismo en la ficción televisiva* (Laertes, 2021) and the editor of several books. Contact: mariamarcos@usal.es

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REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), UN EJERCICIO DE MEMORIA DESDE EL EXILIO

Resumen

Reflexiones de un salvaje es un documental dirigido por Gerardo Vallejo que explora las raíces familiares del director y su propia experiencia de exilio político. A través del viaje a Céspedes de Tormes, el pueblo natal de su abuelo, Vallejo busca comprender las motivaciones detrás de la emigración de su familia a Argentina. La película aborda temas como el desarraigo, la ausencia y la pérdida. Vallejo utiliza una voz en *off* autorreferencial para narrar la historia, mezclando sus propias experiencias con los testimonios de los habitantes del pueblo. El documental indaga sobre la dualidad entre lo rural y lo urbano, así como sobre la continua y recurrente opresión de los pueblos a lo largo del tiempo. Además, Vallejo utiliza la memoria como un tema central, explorando la conexión entre el pasado y el presente a partir de lugares significativos, como Céspedes y Tucumán. En última instancia, *Reflexiones de un salvaje* ofrece una reflexión universal sobre la experiencia humana de la ausencia y el vacío, invitando al espectador a contemplar qué sucede en la vida cuando estamos ausentes.

Palabras clave

Memoria; Cine Documental; Gerardo Vallejo; Exilio; Migración.

Autores

Pablo Calvo de Castro es doctor en Cine Documental por la Universidad de Salamanca, profesor asociado del departamento de Sociología y Comunicación Audiovisual y miembro del Observatorio de los Contenidos Audiovisuales de la Universidad de Salamanca. Sus principales líneas de investigación son el cine documental como herramienta para el cambio social, los estudios de género y la antropología visual. Ha publicado numerosos artículos y capítulos de libro, entre los que destaca *Cine documental latinoamericano. Conclusiones con base en un estudio trasversal con enfoque contextual y formal de 100 películas documentales* (Kepes, 2019). También ha realizado cuantiosos documentales para cine y televisión. Contacto: pablocalvo@usal.es

María Marcos Ramos es doctora en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universidad de Salamanca (premio extraordinario). Es profesora titular del grado en Comunicación y Creación Audiovisual de la Universidad de Salamanca y miembro investigador del Observatorio de los Contenidos Audiovisuales de la misma institución. Sus líneas de investigación versan, entre otras, sobre representación de las minorías y de la sociedad en la ficción audiovisual, temas sobre los que ha publicado artículos en revistas y monografías científicas. Es autora del volumen *ETA catódica. Terrorismo en la ficción televisiva* (Laertes, 2021) y editora de varios libros. Contacto: mariamarcos@usal.es

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