

Research Paper for the PhD Certificate in Film and Media Studies

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Imagining a horizontal community of resistance and rebellion in the borders of the Peronist *Nueva Argentina*: Hugo del Carril and the film *Las aguas bajan turbias* (1952)

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On October 9, 1952, *Las aguas bajan turbias* was released in Buenos Aires. The film, directed by Hugo del Carril, was a great success. It is one of those rare cases in which a strongly political film is, at the same time, a commercial hit. The exhibition of the film in the capital city of Argentina, convoked a massive and popular audience. Del Carril, a tango star and a Peronist public figure, attracted spectators who followed him on the radio. Based on the novel *El río oscuro* (1943), written by a Communist journalist, Alfredo Varela, and adapted to the screen by a Catalan Anarchist exiled in Buenos Aires, the writer Eduardo Borrás, the film represents the life of the *mensúes* in the *yerbales* of the Alto Paraná, the northeastern border of the country. Through the convergence of different political perspectives in the production of the movie, and the use of audiovisual techniques to represent implicit social contradictions, Hugo del Carril subtly subverts the official discourse of the *Nueva Argentina*, producing a heterodox Peronist reading of the present and the recent past of the nation and the working-class. In this article, I analyze how the film proposes a critical aural and visual exploration of the geography of the Alto Paraná, while performing a fictional story that condenses the repressed history of the brutal exploitation of the *mensúes*. In this sense, I examine how Hugo del Carril, as a politically engaged filmmaker, focuses on the horizontal relationships of resistance and solidarity that

the rural workers create. Finally, I explore how, as an actor and a singer, Hugo del Carril invests the interpellating power of his star persona in the creation of a political cinematic experience for the urban, working class audiences, involving pleasure in the imagination of a horizontal community of workers.

1. National cinema and the imagination of a *Nueva Argentina*

In 1947, Juan Domingo Perón proposed the political concept of *Tercera Posición* (Third Position) to define the *Nueva Argentina* (New Argentina), a re-building of the nation on the principles of economic independence, social justice, and political sovereignty. The intention was to distinguish Peronism from Capitalism and Communism, both characterized by Perón as imperialist systems. In the context of the Cold War, this was a statement of independence from the two poles of power: The United States and the Soviet Union. Perón was proposing an independent, cooperationist, and pacifist mode of establishing international relationships, in opposition to imperialism, and especially against the interventions of the United States in Latin American countries.¹ At the same time, as a political and social movement, Peronism was promoting a new world picture for Argentinians. This new world picture (Heidegger's *Weltbild*),² in which Argentina was not anymore subordinated to external capitalist

¹ Interestingly, when Perón was still exiled in Madrid, and Pino Solanas and Octavio Getino interviewed him for the film *Perón, la revolución justicialista* (1971), the *Tercera posición* was re-read by the leftists Peronists as the conceptual and political antecedent of the revolutionary implications of the notion of Third World. Perón himself, in this new historical context of the Cold War, established the connection between the Third Position and the struggles of the Third World - Latin America, Africa, and Asia-, for independence and social justice. Then, he referred to the *socialismo nacional* (socialism with a national perspective in oppressed countries) as the consequent project of the Third World revolutions, linking them with *justicialismo* (Peronist philosophy) as an antecedent. Moreover, Pino Solanas and Octavio Getino inherited, among various influences, Hugo del Carril's political cinema. The representation of the histories of social injustice and the struggles and resistance of the working class, are the common terrain in which *Las aguas bajan turbias* and Grupo Cine Liberación meet. For instance, in Pino Solanas' film *Los hijos de Fierro* (1972), about the Peronist resistance (a movement that recognized Hugo del Carril's voice as a cultural symbol of the resistance) between 1955 and 1972, the striking images of the corpses of the workers resemble those of the *mensús* in *Las aguas bajan turbias*. The revelation of the hidden history of domination, exploitation, and violence is patent in both films.

² In the essay *The Age of the World Picture* (1938), Heidegger reflects on the modern phenomenon of "man" becoming subject, "the relational center of that which is as such" (128). This change (a rupture, according to Heidegger, between Medieval and Ancient times, and the Modern age), implies the representation of the world as a picture: "what is, in its entirety [the world], is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that is set up

forces, nor inclined to accept Soviet Union's model as the only possible alternative to individualist consumerism, was vividly present in Argentinians' everyday life. The Peronist world picture, in which Argentina was the active center of its relations with the world, was explicitly present in school textbooks, labor unions' press, newsreels, and graphic propaganda. Imagining the nation as *subjectum* in relation to other nations of the world went along with the re-imagination of the nation as a community (Anderson), based on relations of solidarity and social justice.³

The Peronist world picture informed the multiple images and discourses that gave substance to the imagination of the *Nueva Argentina* across different media and cultural spheres. Graphic propaganda represented, for instance, a map of Argentina with the name of "Perón" breaking its chains of dependence; a map of the country with a strong hand emerging with a factory, or an image of children hoisting the Argentinian flag followed by the inscription "*Justa, Libre y soberana... Políticamente soberana*" (Just, free, and sovereign... Politically sovereign), or the cover of a school textbook with the image of happy children (from different gender, class, and ethnic background) in a blooming field with the sun rising.

Cinema also participated in these cultural and political practices of imagination of the nation (Majumdar 2009). As in other countries in the world, in Argentina the government had great interest in the pedagogical power of cinema. It was a spectacle attractive to massive audiences, in which political messages could be effectively communicated. For instance, when the women's suffrage was sanctioned, newsreels such as *Noticiero Panamericano*, produced *docu-dramas* in which political concepts were represented in short films to educate the new voters.⁴ Also, cinema contributed to create a new

by man, who represents and sets forth" (129-130). Heidegger, thus, affirms: "That the world becomes a picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subjectum* in the midst of that which is" (132). In this sense, the Peronist imagining connotes Argentina becoming subject, the relational center of the world as it was pictured by it.

³ According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is "an imagined political community", "inherently limited and sovereign" (6). The nation is "imagined as a community", because it "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

⁴ *Noticiero Panamericano*, "La mujer puede y debe votar" (Women can and should vote), directed by Luis Moglia Barth, 1951.

sense of national culture, in which popular cultures were included. This reflected the Peronist valorization of the working-class cultural traditions and practices, at the same time that the urban and rural workers were recognized as political subjects, taking active part in different public and institutional spheres.⁵ This went along with the idea according to which all cultural production and knowledge should be socialized (workers had the right to access to higher education and all forms of culture including those that tended to be restricted to the bourgeoisie), and that cinema should participate in this political aim. In this way, Peronism attributed to cinema a social function that justified the governmental interest in supporting the development of the national film industry (Kriger 2009). At the same time, the expansion of national cinema entailed the Third Position of Argentina in relation to the world, since it implied the strengthening of an independent culture industry, and the on-screen representation of local languages, environments, musical traditions, and cultural codes. In 1947, Perón recognized cinema as an industry of “national interest”, facilitating financial support to local studios, so that they could expand their production; while the exhibition of Hollywood films was limited to promote the circulation of national productions in the movie theatres (Kriger 2009, 43-50).

The development of national cinema was associated with the achievements of the *Nueva Argentina*: the industrial and technological evolution of the economy, the improvement of the local culture industries, and the Peronist democratization of culture and education. In the opening of *Cómo se hace una película argentina* (How an Argentine film is made), a short documentary commissioned by the Subsecretary of Information and Press to Arturo Mom in 1948, the camera shows, with high angle shots, the improved studios located in the province of Buenos Aires, expressing the utopia of the

⁵ References: Juan Domingo Perón’s discourses “La realidad del panorama nacional. Conceptos del presidente de la nación ante representantes de los gremios obreros” (The reality of the nation. Ideas of the president for the labor unions) (April 24, 1949), “Con motivo de la inauguración del servicio radiofónico internacional” (On occasion of the inauguration of the international radiophonic service) (April 11, 1949), and “En el día de la lealtad” (In the day of the loyalty) (October 17, 1949). Also, Second Five Year Plan, where it is stated that it was a fundamental objective of the government to promote the formation of “a new national consciousness”, integrating different “historical cultures” (69-71).

Nueva Argentina in the representation of the industrial and technological development of the country. Simultaneously, a male voice-over frames these images in the Peronist world picture: “In a little more than ten years, the primitive galleries of the Argentine cinematographer have been transformed into these monumental constructions. Enormous factories that have positioned our cinematographic industry among the most important ones in the world”.⁶ In the following sequences, the documentary implicitly expresses Perón’s conception of culture as a social right, and the contemporaneous interest (both in the government and in the culture industries) in cinema as a pedagogical media, as it explains and illustrates to the audiences how the film industry works, and how a film is produced in its different stages. Moreover, this documentary reveals how the government employed cinema not only for direct propaganda, but also for other political and pedagogical purposes such as educating the new working-class audiences of national cinema.⁷

This pedagogical function is ambivalent: on one hand it socializes knowledge about filmmaking and film production (responding to and inspiring a popular cinephilia, a desire to know how the cinematographic artifice works),⁸ unveiling the cinematic apparatus and the labor that is implied in the production of a film, and, in this sense, demystifying cinema; and, on the other hand, it tends to reproduce the enchantment of the spectacle, sustaining the cult of the movie star (Benjamin) and the mystification of cinematic world. Regarding the first tendency, in *Cómo se hace una película argentina*, film techniques are employed to expose the concealed mechanisms that make possible the

⁶ Although it was peripheral in the world in relation to Hollywood, it is certain that Argentine cinema was prominent in Latin America (together with Mexican cinema), and that it was actively participating in international festivals.

⁷ The Peronist government, in this regard, was concerned about improvement of the aesthetic, intellectual, and technological quality of national cinema. There is an interesting document of 1955, “El cine nacional y sus problemas” (The national cinema and its problems), in which it is published the discussion that the subsecretary of information and press at that time, León Bouché, has with the film producers. Bouché claims that cinema has the responsibility to form the popular culture, that cinema cannot be a mere entertainment. It needs to have a social value. Bouché tells the producers that they need to investigate about the national history, the national literature.

⁸ Since the 1920s, a significant variety of popular magazines divulged scientific and technic contents (Sarlo). This tendency in the culture industries is subjacent in Arturo Mom’s documentary, together with the increasing participation of the working-class as audiences in the cinematic spectacle, and the circulation of popular magazines specialized in cinema (*Set, Cinema, El Hogar. Suplemento de Cine*).

cinema experience, counteracting the fetishism of the film as a commodity (Marx), and democratizing knowledge about cinematography. As an example, through long shots, pans, and crane shots, we see the workers in different instances of the production of a film set. In the montage, a series of medium shots and close ups from different angles shows us the numerous workers carrying out different activities, emphasizing the idea of the multiple and complex labor that is implicit in a film. Concerning the second tendency, a scene shows the movie star Zully Moreno arriving to the studio, while the male voice over, enhancing, with its acousmatic character, the ineluctable distance that is necessary in the cult of the movie star, playfully simulates to be interacting with her on behalf of the audience, while expressing his admiration for her. The dialectic tension between demystification and mystification is clear in the scene, explaining how the rear projection works with the performances of the actors, when the camera moves back and shows the scene being filmed in the set (including a lamp and a fan), and the voice over adds: “but we should not lose our illusions”.

Cinema was a privileged site for the utopic imagination of the *Nueva Argentina* (modern, industrial, spectacular, glamorous, popular, massive), at the same time that it enabled (unveiling the hidden, the repressed, the contradictory) a political pedagogy of demystification of cultural, social, and economic processes that were sustaining the development of the country. This political pedagogy (often implicit and coexisting with the opposite tendency) is perceptible in documentaries and fictions, in official and unofficial productions during the Peronist decade. In the official discourse, though, was prevalent the idealization of the *Nueva Argentina* as a utopic present of progress, social justice, and economic independence. Most of the official documentaries had a narrative that was structured on a dichotomy between the past, associated with social injustice and economic dependence, and the present, the time of the *Nueva Argentina* (Kriger 2009, 117-118). This structure is patent in the narrative framing (performed by a voice-over) of *Las aguas bajan turbias*, for it was an exigence of Raúl Apold, the Subsecretary of Information and Press, to clearly establish that the violent exploitation of the rural

workers in the plantations of *yerba mate* in the northeastern borders of the country (and in the symbolic limits of the imagined national community) was not a current issue in the Peronist present. Hugo del Carril, though, through the convergence of different political perspectives in the production of the film, and the use of audiovisual techniques to represent implicit contradictions, counteracts the mystifying discourse of the *Nueva Argentina*, producing a heterodox Peronist reading of the present and the recent past of the nation and the working-class.

2. *Las aguas bajan turbias* (Hugo del Carril, 1952): A subtle subversion of the official discourse of the *Nueva Argentina*

In the making of the film directed by Hugo del Carril, political heterogeneity was productive in exceeding the limits of the official discourses and images of the *Nueva Argentina*. The Peronist interest of Del Carril in the stories of the rural workers of the Alto Paraná generated a new cinematic reading of *El río oscuro*, the novel by the Communist writer Alfredo Varela. Hugo del Carril read *El río oscuro* at the beginning of the fifties, when Varela was in prison for political reasons. Del Carril was deeply interested in Varela's literary work about the lives of the *mensú*s in a border region where workers from Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil met in the *yerbales*.⁹ He decided, together with the

⁹ At the end of the nineteen-thirties, Varela traveled to Misiones guided by Marcos Kaner, the leader of the union of *yerbateros*. In 1941, Varela published, in the magazine *Abora*, and in the Communist journal *La Hora*, a series of articles on the conditions of labor of the *mensú*s. A three months travel to Misiones, and the interviews with the workers of the *yerbales*, informed the articles and, later, the novel (Korn and Trímoli). Varela was committed to denounce the terrible conditions of labor in the region of the Alto Paraná. This was a direct attack against the official discourse of the Argentinian progress, in the context of the government of Roberto M. Ortiz (1938-1942).

producer Lina Courtade,¹⁰ to make a film based on the novel. Eduardo Borrás,¹¹ a Catalan Anarchist exiled in Argentina since the Spanish Civil War, wrote the script. Del Carril kept visiting Varela in the prison of Devoto, and shared his ideas about the film with him. The film implied a conflict with Apold, because the source was the book of a Communist writer.¹² Hugo del Carril was finally able, with the intervention of Juan D. Perón, to make and release the film.¹³ However, Apold had a victory in his personal quarrel: he was able to erase the name of Varela from the credits. This conflict between the subsecretary of Information and Press and Hugo del Carril, the popular voice of the *marcha peronista*,¹⁴ shows the difference between two forms of conceiving Peronism and imagining the nation: Apold represents a vertical and centralized praxis of power, and a notion of an ideologically homogeneous *Nueva Argentina* (permeated by an anti-Communist perspective), and Del Carril expresses the horizontal conception of the organization of a working-class that reunites different political traditions and experiences.

¹⁰ Lina Courtade was married with Miguel Machinandiarena, the owner of the Estudios San Miguel. According to Claudio España, Courtade participated actively in the production of the films, but she was not credited for that. Interestingly, Courtade decided to produce *Las aguas bajan turbias* independently, working with Hugo del Carril to take Varela's novel to the movie theatres. Apparently, she was very interested in the novel about the *yerbales*. Moreover, Claudio España indicates that it was probably she who proposed to Del Carril the idea of making a film about it.

¹¹ Eduardo Borrás arrived to Buenos Aires in 1942 as a journalist working for the Cuban magazine *Bohemia*. He was exiled in Cuba after escaping from prison at the end of the Civil War in Spain (Korn and Trímboli, 180). Borrás was an active militant of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica during the war (Korn and Trímboli, 180). In Buenos Aires, Borrás worked in the radio, the press, and the theatre, until he started working as a scriptwriter for Daniel Tinayre and then for Hugo del Carril. The case of Borrás is representative of many Spanish and Catalan intellectuals and artists who worked in the Argentine culture industries during their exile. They brought their heterogeneous political experiences and perspective to the cinematographic and editorial projects in which they collaborated. This enriched the complexity of the local mass culture during the Peronist decade.

¹² As Clara Kriger explains in *Cine y peronismo. El estado en escena*, since 1949 there was a process of centralization of political power that was patent, in the case of the regulation of the cinematographic industry, when Raúl Apold (former director of the newsreel *Noticiero Panamericano*) became the subsecretary of Information and Press (dependent of the Executive). In the case of *Las aguas bajan turbias*, Hugo del Carril had to face many obstacles because of personal conflicts with Apold. The subsecretary of Information and Press first opposed to the adaptation of the novel *El río oscuro* because the author was a Communist, and then, when the film was finally released and it was a great success, Apold accused Del Carril of having sung in a Uruguayan radio during the funerals of Eva Duarte de Perón (who died the same year, in 1952, in July), so that the exhibition of the film could be canceled.

¹³ Hugo del Carril, the singer who recorded the Peronist anthem, was a personal friend of the president, who reasoned that the film was coincident with the Peronist political principles (dismissing the accusation that Apold made against Del Carril because of the adaptation of a Communist novel).

¹⁴ The Peronist anthem.

In *Las aguas bajan turbias*, the narrative framing obeys to the dominant separation of the *Nueva Argentina* from a past characterized by social injustice and economic dependence. This responded, as I mentioned, to a demand from the Subsecretary of Information and Press that intended to avoid the “misunderstanding” of the social problems and conflicts represented in the film as forming part of the present (Kriger 2009, 188). In a pedagogical prologue, while we see a panoramic view of the Paraná river, a male voice-over describes the geography of the region, and the fertility of its nature: “*El Alto Paraná, uno de los más ricos territorios argentinos. Suelo fecundo y pródigo. La yerba mate, el oro verde, ha sido y es fuente de fabulosa riqueza*”.¹⁵ Then it states, in a documentary tone, that the workers are now free, but that this has not always been like that: “*Sobre esa tierra, sembrada por su mano, el hombre es libre y vive libremente de los frutos que cosecha. El río es un camino de civilización y de progreso. Pero no siempre ha sido así. Hace unos años, unos pocos años, éstas eran tierras de maldición y de castigo*”.¹⁶ The text separates two temporalities: the present of freedom, civilization, and progress (the Peronist time, the time of the audience), and the dramatic past, the time of the story. It is made clear to the spectator that the reality that is going to be represented is not current. This dichotomy between an unjust past and the present of a *Nueva Argentina* is, following the official discourse, present in this film.

But precisely when the film is being politically framed by the official representation of a utopic present in opposition to the recent past, the text of Varela enters and informs *Las aguas bajan turbias*. The voice of the narrator changes its tone. It no longer follows the pedagogical style of the *docu-dramas* or newsreels. Now it is assuming a dramatic tone, introducing an impacting fragment of the novel:

“*Las aguas bajaban turbias de sangre, y el Paraná traía en su amplio regazo la terrible carga que vomitaba el infierno verde. Río abajo solían venir los cadáveres boyando. Cadáveres sin rostro. Sin nombre. Sin familia. Al*

¹⁵ “The Alto Paraná, one of the richest Argentine territories. Fertile soil. The *yerba mate*, the green gold, has been, and it is, the source of great fortune”

¹⁶ “In that land, cultivated by his hand, men are free and live from what they produce. The river is a path of civilization and progress. But it has not been always like this. A few years ago, a very few years ago, these lands were of damn and punishment”

principio se acercaban algunos curiosos, pero pronto se cansaron de asombrarse. El espectáculo era demasiado conocido y demasiado difícil identificar al muerto. La gente de Posadas lo sabía. Era un secreto tremendo compartido por todos. Un día veían partir un barco repleto de mensús. Tiempo después, el infierno verde devolvía una procesión macabra. Llegaba un cadáver boyando. Y luego otro. Y otro. Y otro. Jirones de ropa y jirones de piel.”¹⁷

The film adds to these literary expressions the impressive images of the corpses of the workers in the river. As Clara Kriger proposes, it is patent that the power of these images changes the focus of attention, erasing the limits that the voice-over previously established between the past and the present of the *Nueva Argentina* (2009, 191). But, furthermore, the close-ups of the unrecognizable faces of the assassinated *mensús* are superimposed with the movements of the water, representing the repetition of the story (thus, the previously established linear fracture in time loses its clarity). Story is a key word here, because, at this point, the voice-over assumes the character of a storyteller (telling a terrible story that he has heard or seen): the voice descends in its pace and volume, conveying a more intimate narrative environment. It aurally represents and condenses different scenes in the novel in

¹⁷ “The waters of the river came dark of blood, and the Paraná brought the terrible load that the green hell vomited. Down the river the corpses arrived. Corpses without faces. Without names. Without families. At the beginning some people from the town, out of curiosity, would approach them, but soon they got tired of being astonished. The spectacle was too common, and too difficult was to identify the dead. People of Posadas knew it. It was a tremendous secret shared by all. One day people would see a ship full of *mensús* departing towards the *yerbal*. Later on, the green hell returned them in a macabre procession. A corpse would come down floating. And then another one. And another. And another. Shreds of cloths and shreds of skin”. The original text, in the novel, says: “Hasta Posadas solían bajar los cadáveres, boyando. El Paraná traía en su amplio regazo, que nunca se niega, la terrible carga. Al llegar a la vera de esa loma poblada por el rancharío, abandonaba los cuerpos, como desligándose de toda responsabilidad. Él no sabía nada o, como la selva, lo sabía todo, pero callaba. Abí, en la playa, quedaban los pobres cuerpos de los mensús. A veces estaban desnudos. O si no, les quedaban jirones de ropa y jirones de piel. O solo unos huesos machucados. Se acercaban al principio algunos curiosos. Pero ya estaban cansados de asombrarse, y pronto se iban. El espectáculo era demasiado conocido. Y demasiado difícil identificar al muerto.” (Varela, 16) (“The corpses would arrive to Posadas, floating. The Paraná brought in its broad lap the terrible load. When arriving to the coast of the town, the river would abandon the corpses, separating itself from any responsibility. It didn’t know anything, or, as the jungle did, it knew everything, but remained silent. There, at the beach of the river, the poor bodies of the *mensús* were left. Sometimes they were naked. If not, from them would only remain shreds of clothes, and shreds of skin. Or just a few bruised bones. At the beginning, some people from the town, out of curiosity, approached them. But then they got tired of being astonished, and they stop coming to see them. The spectacle was too common. And too difficult was to identify the dead.”). The re-arrangement of the literary text in the film implies the incorporation of two new metaphoric expressions that symbolically articulate a disturbing image of the Alto Paraná. The first one: *Las aguas bajan turbias* (“The waters of the river came dark of blood”), referring to the recent and distant past, and *Las aguas bajan turbias* (“The waters of the river come dark of blood”), referring to the diegetic present, and serving as the title of the film. The second one names the *yerbal* in the past that is represented in the story as *el infierno verde* (the green hell).

which the *mensúes* meet in the night, around the fire, in the wilderness, far from the administration, and tell each other stories of escapes, resistance, and murders. It evokes the horizontal relationships (contingent or sustained) between the workers, the relative autonomy that they achieve when they create communitarian forms of resistance and solidarity. It is a sphere (a popular public sphere, thinking in Negt and Kluge's terms) that cannot be absolutely absorbed by the vertical power of the state.

The subtle subversion of the official discourse of the *Nueva Argentina* that the film produces is also expressed in the absence of the state in the development of the story. The notion of a *Nueva Argentina* was based on the idea of a disruptive political regime, inaugurated by Perón, responsible for the institutionalization of the social rights claimed by the working class in the past. In the case of the film, however, there is no sign of the action of the state or the government. Instead, in the cinematic narration of *Las aguas bajan turbias*, we only see and hear the transforming action of the workers: defending each other, coming together, organizing an escape, and, finally, rebelling against the landowner. In this sense, Del Carril does not reproduce the official representation of the present and the past of the nation and the working-class. Instead, he seems to pull not only from Varela, but also from Anarchist perspectives, to create his own fictionalization of the history of the *infierno verde* (the green hell). As Marcela Gené points out, Perón presented himself and his government as a complete rupture with the past, and, in this way, he stated in his discourses an opposition between the Anarchist tradition of violence and the joyful celebrations of the Peronist present (105). *Las aguas bajan turbias*, on the other hand, emphasizes the revolutionary elements that are present in Varela's novel, representing the revolt as part of the struggle of the workers to free themselves from the abusive regime of the *yerbales*. Utopia is being horizontally built towards the future, instead of being a reality articulated by the Peronist government.

3. The *infierno verde* in the borders of the nation: the demystification of the *yerbal*'s landscape and the imagination of a working country

In the prologue of the film, the nondiegetic and acousmatic character of the voice over establishes a distance between the wild and border territory of the Alto Paraná, and the urban spectator watching the film.¹⁸ Moreover, this distance is enhanced by the text that frames the sequence, which separates the time of the audience, the modern present of the *Nueva Argentina*, associated with the industrial development and the national progress, from the dramatic past, the time of the observed land. In this way, the vision of a *landscape* -in Raymond Williams' terms: an image of rurality that "implies separation and observation" (120) – is offered to the urban audiences.

This vision, though, remains unstable. Throughout the film, critical compositions of contrasting images and sounds tend to demystify the Alto Paraná's landscape (the land where the *yerba mate* is produced),¹⁹ revealing the exploitation and violence of the *yerbal*. *Las aguas bajan turbias* proposes, then, the imagination of a *working country*, a country being produced (Williams, 120). In this sense, it focuses on the labor of the *mensú*s,²⁰ on their exploitation and suffering, on their horizontal

¹⁸ Since the late XIX century (coinciding with the nationalization of the territory of Misiones in 1881), different images and metaphors of the Alto Paraná represented the borders of the nation (in Anderson's terms): an indigenous area (mainly Guaraní) alien to the national project of "civilization", a frontier territory in which workers from different nationalities (Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay) met in the *yerbales*, a marginal territory without political representation (Misiones, the Argentine territory in the Alto Paraná, was not a province until 1953), and a wild, exuberant, and fertile land, a mine of *oro verde* (green gold) (Alcaráz and Oviedo).

¹⁹ Challenging the images of Misiones that were shaped from the centralist and distant perspective of Buenos Aires. As Rebecca Stephanis points out, between 1881 and 1953, "Misiones is referred to in various texts as "national treasure", "jewel of the Republic", "promised land", etc. While each of these designations varies slightly in the specific traits of its referent and often seeks to reflect the physical beauty of the region, the vast majority refer to Misiones' economic potential either for its agricultural and botanical resources, or later for its national parks" (3). In Hugo del Carril's film the emphasis is on exploitation and violence. Instead of the *oro verde* (the green gold), Del Carril portrays the *infierno verde* (the green hell).

²⁰ Eduardo Borrás wrote the script for the film based on Varela's research and writing about the *mensú*s in Misiones. Varela, as I mentioned before, traveled to Misiones at the end of the nineteen-thirties guided by Marcos Kaner, the leader of the labor union. In this way, he was able to interview the workers of the *yerbales*. Therefore, the representations in *Las aguas bajan turbias* are, at least partially, based in the testimonies that Varela collected for his articles and the novel. It is also very possible that Hugo del Carril was inspired, for his cinematographic representation of the labor of the *mensú*s, in the short stories by Horacio Quiroga, and in the film *Prisioneros de la tierra*, directed by Mario Soffici (1939).

relationships of resistance and solidarity. Moreover, in the film, different uses of the voice and the sound, in dialectical connection with critical images, generate points of identification (Doane, 162) for the working-class audiences, based on the proximity of a labor experience.

In this regard, there is a scene in the wilderness that initiates with a close up of a *capanga* (foreman) shouting “*neique!*”, a Guaraní word that means “Go!”. This close up fades while a long shot of the *mensús* working in the forest replaces it. The voice of the *capanga* is still present and audible, although it’s off screen. We see the effect of the voice, the labor of the *mensús* (the surplus: the production, the destruction, the suffering). We hear other voices, that are audibly but invisibly superimposed. They are shouting the power of the *capanga* (limited by their bodies: they are replaceable, a piece of the production system). We hear, also, almost as a *key-sound* (Schafer) of the *yermal*, the whip. The voice of the *capanga* is reproduced, covering the sonic sphere, while its concrete source is dissipated. The shout “*neique!*” is now disembodied, liberated from the limits of the diegesis.

The powerful effects of the acousmatic voices in the representation of the exploitative order of the *infierno verde* are also clear in a scene where a *capanga* appears, symbolically, speaking for the *patrón*.²¹ When the workers Santos (Hugo del Carril) and Rufino Peralta complain about the excessive debt that the administration wants to charge them,²² the *capanga* rudely answers: “a mí qué me importa lo que les dijeron allá en Posadas. El patrón ha pagado esto por ustedes (...).”²³ But while we hear him say this, we see a medium shot of the *patrón* smoking in the hammock. The voice of the *capanga* is off-

²¹ The landowner, the chief, the man in power.

²² The workers were recruited in the cities, in this case, in Posadas. They were promised high salaries if they went to the *yermal*. The recruiter (*el conchabador*) promised that they could earn money easily by the end of the sixth month, and then they could leave the *yermal*. They were poor, so they were not able to pay the travel to the *yermal* and the cloths and food that they needed, so they were given an *anticipo*, an advance of money. The *patrón* was “lending” them that money so that they could arrive to the *yermal*. The hostels and the bars of the port of Posadas (the main city of Misiones), were associated with the *patrón*. The workers, before boarding the ship, spent money on food, cloths, alcohol, and prostitutes, and all that went to the account of the *patrón*, who paid the spending to, later, charge it higher to the worker once in the *yermal*. The worker, then, when he arrived, was so indebt with the *patrón* that he wasn’t able to receive his money, so he was paying with his work his debt. Moreover, the food, the cloths, the medicines, everything in the *yermal* was sell by the stores owned by the *patrón*, so the prices were extremely high, and the workers, indebt even more. Finally, they couldn’t leave the *yermal* because they were, practically, slaves because of the debts.

²³ “I don’t care what you were told in Posadas. The landowner payed all this for you”.

screen, disembodied, allowed to speak for the landowner (symbolizing the mediation of violence in the system of production, and the alienation, in this case, of the foremen), who looks towards the audience (that is positioned in the place of the *mensús*, fomenting identification).

These scenes that represent the system of exploitation in the *yerbal*, the *infierno verde*, are overdetermined by the images of the corpses that we see in the opening of the film. They signal the hidden and horrific consequences of the system that produces the *yerba mate*,²⁴ the predatory capitalist violence that modifies the natural environment of the Alto Paraná. A superimposition of the corpse of a *mensú* floating in the river with the transparency of the *yerbal*'s landscape constitutes a visual metaphor for the destructive effects of the production of the *yerba mate*. In the critical juxtaposition that Hugo del Carril proposes, the repressed history of the brutal violence suffered by the *mensús* in the Alto Paraná, is in the forefront. The vision of the corpse is the clear image that contrasts with the phantasmatic and distant landscape of the *yerbal*. In this sense, the landscape is represented in its illusionary character, and the representation of the corpse of the *mensú* becomes visually prevalent, exhibiting the emergence of the repressed in a close up.

The horrific image of the corpse returns, now in the diegesis, when the *mensús* are travelling to the *yerbal*. We see a woman with a baby in the deck of the ship, suddenly standing up, and signaling down to the water with horror in her eyes and her voice, shouting: “Allí, allí!” (There, there!). The guitars that the *mensús* are playing stop. The acousmatic sound of the baby crying disrupts the experience of the aural communion among the workers, only to lead their (and the spectators’) attention to the signs of the *infierno verde* in the dark river. We see the workers with their families approaching the edge of the deck, looking down to the river in a *misè-en-scene* that resembles a theatrical spectacle, evoking for the audience the experience of proximity with the performers (as in

²⁴ The *yerba mate* that is produced in the Alto Paraná is popularly consumed in the entire Argentina (and also in Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile), including rural and urban areas. This means that even for urban spectators of the film the theme was inevitably interpellating.

Leónidas Barletta's pedagogical *Teatro del Pueblo* -Popular Theatre). The terrible image of the corpse takes us back to the prologue that politically frames the film. The repetition of the image that first appears in the prologue, connects the fictional story of Santos and Rufino Peralta (adapted from Varela's novel) with the hidden history of the *mensús* in the Alto Paraná. A history that was present in the memory of the workers and their families (Alfredo Varela reconstructed that history through the testimonies of the rural workers that he interviewed in Misiones), but hidden, or repressed in the official discourses of the national history.²⁵ The dramatism of the image is enhanced by the non-diegetic music, the offscreen sound of the baby crying, and the tracking shot of the faces of the *mensús* looking at the corpse, mirroring their devastating future. Rufino Peralta puts words to this collective vision: these abandoned and unrecognizable corpses are “*los que vuelven*” (those who come back).

The critical effect of the visual superimposition that we see in the opening of the film, in a demystification of the *yermal's* landscape, returns in the diegetic context of the aural communion among the *mensús* through their autonomous musical experience (when Hugo del Carril, as Santos Peralta, sings *Noches del Paraguay* – Nights in Paraguay). This incipient emergence of a horizontal community is marked with the collective vision of the corpse in the river, the sign of the *infierno verde* (the reverse

²⁵ In the official narrations of the history of the nation, the stories of the *mensús* were excluded. Even during Perón's government, the representations of the *yerbales* avoided their history. The history of the *yerbales* was vague or absent in the representations of the past of the *Nueva Argentina*. And, in the official representations of the Peronist present, the *yermal* was depicted as a space of social and economic development (*La Argentina de Hoy*, 1949, Archivo Histórico de la Radio y la Televisión Argentina). Hugo del Carril, with *Las aguas bajan turbias*, forms part of a genealogy of critical intellectuals and artists that challenged the official discourses (of different governments) that repressed the history of the *mensús*. The first one was Rafael Barret, who wrote *El dolor paraguayo. Lo que son los yerbales* (1909). Barret was a Spanish journalist who arrived in Paraguay in 1904. He denounced the mechanisms of economic enslavement of the rural workers in the *yerbales*. Barret's work was one of the main inspirations for Alfredo Varela. The system of hiring the workers while indebting them, denounced by Barret, is one of the features of the life in the Alto Paraná that structures the first chapters of *El río oscuro*. These practices are also depicted in *Las aguas bajan turbias*, following closely the representation created by Varela. The escapes of the workers from the *yerbales* are one of the central topics in Varela's novel, and also in Hugo del Carril's film. The failure of these attempts is symbolized in the corpses coming down by the river. In Barret's book there is the story of Bernardo, a *mensú* that the writer met in his travel through the Alto Paraná. Bernardo, tells Barret, is one of the few slaves that was able to escape from the *patrón* without leaving his bones in the Paraná (Barret, 17). Horacio Quiroga (in the 1920s) and Augusto Roa Bastos (in the 1930s and 1940s) also wrote about the *mensús*. In this trend, Hugo del Carril created the first mass culture product focused on the exploitation, violence, and rebellion in the *yerbales* (the antecedent is the film by Mario Soffici, *Prisioneros de la tierra*, which is focused on alcoholism, delirium, sickness, and tragedy, but not on the collective experiences of labor, suffering, resistance, and rebellion).

of the disseminated images of the Alto Paraná).²⁶ Hugo del Carril represents, at the end of this sequence, the contrast between the false promises of the *conchabador* (the employer, the recruiter) about the life that the *mensús* would enjoy with their earnings in the *yerbal*, and the material constataion of the many stories (narrated by those who lived the experience of exploitation and violence, or by those who witnessed the arrival of the corpses in the coasts of the river) about the infernal conditions of labor and life in the Alto Paraná. Over the clear image of the corpse in the dark water, we see the transparent image of the *conchabador* promising the workers a gracious life in the *yerbal*. It is the representation of the memory of an illusion that fades away in the confrontation between the *conchabador*'s promises and the ineluctable presence of the "those who come back". Hugo del Carril, in this sense, puts at work a political pedagogy similar to that of *Cómo se hace una película argentina*, the official documentary about the film industry, which exposes, at the same time, the context of production of *Las aguas bajan turbias*, a film that was regarded as an expression of the development of the national cinema.²⁷

Las aguas bajan turbias, filmed in the wild forest of Misiones (an innovation in the Argentine cinema at that time),²⁸ proposed to the urban audiences a critical aural and visual exploration of the

²⁶ Disseminated not only through official discourses and images (for instance, the short documentary that I mentioned in the previous note, *La Argentina de Hoy*, 1949, showing a prosperous and harmonious *yerbal*), but also through the commercial advertisements of the *yerba mate*. In the advertisements of *Nobleza Gaucha* (one of the most extended and famous brands of *yerba*), the mate is decontextualized from its place of production, and publicized with the image of urban families drinking mate. In this way, the context of production, and the labor embedded in the product, are eluded. The only element from the Alto Paraná that persists is the *mate*, which is associated, in other cases, with the *gaucho* (from the Pampas) who drinks *mate*, but does not produce it. The *mensú* is erased from the references to the *yerba mate*.

²⁷ In the review of the film published in the Communist newspaper *Nuestra Palabra* (November, 11, 1952), it says that *Las aguas bajan turbias* is a "dramatic and human document" of the history of exploitation in the Alto Paraná, and an "extraordinary production that marks the path of our cinematography, and that can be exhibited along the best productions in the world" (in Korn and Trimboli, 206-207). It coincides with the Peronist representation of the development of the national cinema (obliquely converging with the Peronist world picture in which Argentina is *subjectum* in relation to other nations in the world. In the magazine *Continente* (in which intellectuals with different political perspectives converged) (November, 1952), Juan Carlos Bettini wrote that Hugo del Carril "brought to the screen a national [the exploitation of the *mensús*], in a film of great quality and strong dramatism", winning "a place in the first row of the defenders of the national cinematographic art" (in Korn and Trimboli, 197-198).

²⁸ The Spanish republican exiles Gori Muñoz and José María Beltrán were the authors of the aesthetic design of the use of the natural locations, and of the artistic photography of the film.

geography of the Alto Paraná, while performing a fictional story that condenses the repressed history of the brutal exploitation of the *mensús*. This is patent in a sequence in which Santos Peralta (Hugo del Carril), deepens in the wilderness to search for a missing colleague (one who attempted to scape). We see Santos opening his way through the forest with his machete. The tool labor (the tool that accompanies exploitation),²⁹ the device to produce the *oro verde* for the landowner, is also represented as an instrument to resist the systematic disappearance of the *mensús*. We hear the sound of the bushes moving as Santos penetrates the deepness of the wild forest. At the same time, the acousmatic sound of the prey birds, signaling the imminent finding of the body of the *mensú*, connotes the deadly reverse of the fertile land. Then, instead of the image of the dead body, we see, in a close up, Santos' expression of shock, a gestural description of the image that we cannot see. In the following sequence, we perceive the *infierno verde* through the expressions of the *mensús*, many of them performed by non-professional actors, rural workers from Misiones. In a subjective, tracking shot, we see the *mensús* reacting with astonishment and horror at something that is off screen, positioned in the place of the camera. The camera moves forward, through the central axis of the frame, as the *mensús* move to the sides, taking off their hats in sign of respect, and keeping their eyes fixed in that thing that we cannot see, and that is unsettlingly positioned in our place (the place of the audience). This shot cuts to a medium shot in which we see a surprised *patrón* asking: “*Por qué lo has traído?*” (Why have you brought him?). We hear in his tone of voice, and perceive in his gestures, a different expression from those of the previous scenes in which he flaunts his power. Now we notice a slight expression of fear. An eye-line match shows us Santos Peralta assertively answering: “*Para darle sepultura como a un cristiano*” (To give him Christian sepulture). A tilt down shot finally reveals the body of the disappeared colleague in the floor. The repressed returns to the surface. The abandoned body of the *mensú* beaten to death, hidden

²⁹ In a previous scene, when the workers arrive to the *yerbal*, they are forced to give in their knives -which were possible weapons of resistance-, and received, instead, their machetes to work for the landowner.

in the depth of the forest, is recovered and exhibited in the administration headquarters, in front of the workers. The power to repress (to punish, to hide) that the landowner holds is challenged by the solidarity and dignity of the *mensú*s, represented in the heroic character of Santos Peralta. Hugo del Carril, directing the film and performing the role of Santos, unveils the repressed history of the brutal violence suffered by the *mensú*s in the Alto Paraná, and puts in the forefront the horrific consequences of the *yerbal*'s productive order.

4. Noches del Paraguay: stardom, popular cultures of listening, and the imagination of a horizontal community

Since the first Argentinian sound film, *¡Tango!* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933), part of the success of a film was based on the pleasure of the audience in the recognition of popular figures and voices on the screen. In this regard, the tango stars were the public figures who drew audiences to the movies (Majumdar 2009, 25).³⁰ The embodiment of the voice of the star in the cinematic media (Majumdar, 2001), was of great importance in *Las aguas bajan turbias* as well, although in Hugo del Carril's film the glamour of the star is invested in the creation of a political cinematic experience, involving pleasure in

³⁰ Azucena Maizani, Tita Merello, Libertad Lamarque, and Alberto Gómez in *¡Tango!* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933). Tita Merello in *Noches de Buenos Aires* (Manuel Romero, 1935) and *Mercado de Abasto* (Lucas Demare, 1955). Carlos Gardel in *Tango bar* (John Reinhardt, 1935), *El día que me quieras* (John Reinhardt, 1935), *Esperame* (Louis Gasnier, 1933), and *Melodía de arrabal* (Louis Gasnier, 1933), *Cuesta abajo* (Gasnier, 1934), and *El tango en Broadway* (Gasnier, 1934). Mercedes Simone in *La vuelta de Rocha* (Manuel Romero, 1937). Hugo del Carril in *La vida de Carlos Gardel* (Alberto de Zavalá, 1939), *La vida es un tango* (Manuel Romero, 1939), *El astro del tango* (Luis Bayón Herrera, 1940), *La canción de los barrios* (Luis César Amadori, 1941), *Pobre mi madre querida* (Homero Manzi, 1948), *Historia del 900* (Hugo del Carril, 1949), *El último payador* (Homero Manzi, 1951). Virginia Luque y Tita Merello in *Historia del tango* (Manuel Romero, 1949). Hugo del Carril and Libertad Lamarque in *La cabalgata del circo* (Mario Soffici, 1945). Alberto Castillo in *Adiós Pampa mía* (Manuel Romero, 1946) and *La barra de la esquina* (Julio Saraceni, 1950). And there are many other examples. In the origins of this connection between tango and cinema, there is the key figure of Carlos Gardel. He performed in the Paramount's film *Luces de Buenos Aires* (Adelqui Migliar, 1931), two years before the release of the first Argentinian sound film, named, not accidentally, *¡Tango!*. According to Rielle Navitzki, "Gardel's popularity as a recording artist and radio star had helped naturalize the tango as an authentically national form. In turn, his Paramount films provided effective models for nascent Latin American popular cinemas that capitalized on the appeal of local musical genres" (29).

the imagination of a horizontal community.³¹ In this sense, the film, on one hand, represents popular cultures of narration, singing, and listening (Thompson) as social practices that inform the workers' capacity of collective resistance and solidary organization in the context of oppression and exploitation. And, at the same time, it offers a form of collective experience, mediated by cinema, in which the voice of Del Carril, so many times heard on the radio, and associated with the urban popular culture of tango, enables a point of identification (Doane, 162) for the audiences: an element that connects the working-class cultural practices across geographical (Buenos Aires-Alto Paraná, city-countryside, capital city-wild frontier of the nation) and mediatic (radio, cinema-oral narration, the voice and the guitar) borders.

Hugo del Carril was one of the most popular figures and voices at the time of the release of *Las aguas bajan turbias* (1952). During the nineteen-thirties, Del Carril performed in the paramount radios: *Radio Nacional* and *Radio El Mundo*. He also recorded albums for RCA Victor and Odeon. At the end of the decade, the film director Manuel Romero introduced Del Carril to the world of cinema.³² The tango singer made his debut as an actor in *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (1937), singing the emblematic song *Tiempos viejos*. He began, in this way, his cinematographic career, gaining great

³¹ According to Richard Dyer, “two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as ‘escape’ and as ‘wish-fulfilment’, point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism. Entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized. Entertainment does not, however, present models of utopian worlds, as in the classic utopias of Thomas More, William Morris, *et al.* Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized. It thus works at the level of sensibility, by which I mean an affective code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production” (1992, 20). I think that in the case of *Las aguas bajan turbias*, entertainment converges with utopia but, differently to what Dyer observes in Hollywood cinema, the construction of the utopian world is a reality produced by the working class through a long process of struggle and suffering. In this sense, the film portrays this process in the Alto Paraná, where the *mensúes* form communitarian forms of resistance and struggle. At the same time, the pleasure that the spectacle produces, in this case, accentuates the process of identification and imagination of a collective body.

³² In November 1979, in the city of Montevideo, Hugo del Carril was interviewed in a radio broadcast called *Así es Carlos Gardel*. In that interview, the artist recalled when he first met Manuel Romero, the tango musician and filmmaker that directed Carlos Gardel in *Luces de Buenos Aires* (1931) and then Hugo del Carril in several films. It was at the radio station El Mundo, where the singer was performing an homage to Carlos Gardel. Romero invited him to perform as a singer in the film *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (1937).

popularity as a *galán cantor* (Calzón, 2).³³ Del Carril played, predominantly, roles of tango singers for Lumiton, the first Argentinian cinematographic company.³⁴ Finally, in 1939, Hugo del Carril performed the main role in the film *La vida de Carlos Gardel*, directed by Alberto Zavalía and produced by Argentina Sono Film. This movie situated, symbolically, Del Carril as the successor of the *zorzal criollo*, Carlos Gardel.³⁵

But it was during the Peronist decade (1946-1955) when Hugo del Carril started his own path as a filmmaker.³⁶ He was already a film star, especially since his performance in Zavalía's production about the life of Gardel, but it was in 1949 when he decided to direct his own films. This decision coincided with Hugo del Carril's political and cultural engagement with Peronism. In 1988, in *Historias con aplausos*, a television documentary dedicated to Hugo de Carril, the journalist Andrés Fustiñana explained how he met the singer in the set of *La vida es un tango*, and what the star told him about his reasons to become a filmmaker: "I am going to be more than an actor, I am going to be a filmmaker. I will produce films about our themes, our feelings, our problems, the problems of the working class". This popular association between Hugo del Carril's cinema and his engagement with the struggles of

³³ A male star, a singer and actor who performs leading roles in films and is popularly considered handsome and attractive. As a star, his photographs appear in magazines and advertisements, is interviewed by the press, and is a popular celebrity who is invited to special and publicized events. In this sense, the clear antecedent for Hugo del Carril's star image as a *galán cantor* is Carlos Gardel. As Clara Kriger points out, in the mid 1930s, the specialized press, specifically *El Heraldo del Cinematografista*, would emphasize that what interested about Gardel's films was not the story nor the direction, but the figure and the voice of the star (2018). In this sense, according to Kriger, in the beginnings of the Argentinian sound film, the influence of Gardel in the formation of the audience was central (2018, 204).

³⁴ In films such as *La vuelta de Rocha* (1937), *Tres anclados en París* (1938), *Gente bien* (1939) y *La vida es un tango* (1939).

³⁵ *Zorzal criollo* was the name that Carlos Gardel received as tango star. The name reunites the figure of a bird (the *zorzal*), as a metaphor for his beautiful voice, and the notion of the *criollo*, that alludes, in this case, to a tradition of local culture, based on multiple influences (European, African, Indigenous). The *zorzal criollo* is also a representation of the development of the local culture industries, as Gardel became a star because of the popularization of the form of the *tango canción* (tango song), since 1917, through the new media that was informing the incipient local mass culture: radio broadcasts, discs, and gramophones. Later (in the late 1920s and during the 1930s), through the proliferation of magazines about the radio broadcasts, which publicized his photographs and information about his performances (*La canción moderna*, *Radiolandia*, *Antena*, *Sintonía*, etc.). As Richard Dyer points out, "star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual" (3). With cinema, Gardel (and then Hugo del Carril) amplified the impact of his image as a star, also reaching an international recognition.

³⁶ The first films that Hugo del Carril directed, before *Las aguas bajan turbias* (1952), were *Historia del 900* (1949) and *Surcos de sangre* (1950).

the working class became part of his legendary image during the Peronist Resistance (1955-1973).³⁷ In the same 1988's documentary, Guillermo Kelly, a well-known Peronist activist, narrates the episode of Hugo del Carril being incarcerated in the prison of Las Heras after the coup d'état of 1955. Kelly, who was already imprisoned, recalls that one day everyone in Las Heras knew Hugo del Carril was there without even seeing him (the Peronists were isolated in individual cells): they heard his voice singing loudly, energetically, the *Marcha peronista*. In 1949, the same year that he directed his first film, *Historia del 900*, Del Carril recorded the Peronist anthem, a symbol of the emergence of the *descamisados* (the working-class) as a new force in national politics.³⁸ The recording of the *Marcha peronista* (also called *Los muchachos peronistas*) was commissioned by the government to the famous tango singer and film star, a referent of popular and mass culture, to commemorate the foundational event of October 17, 1945.³⁹

In *Las aguas bajan turbias*, Hugo del Carril performed Santos Peralta, a character that concentrates Peronist symbolizations of the working-class, journalistic and literary representations of the rural workers in the *yerbales* (from Barrett's book to Varela's articles and novel), ideologic principles from the first Anarchists tendencies, and attractive elements of the figure of the *galán-cantor*, predominant in the contemporaneous Argentine mass-culture. In the scene in which the *conchabador* is recruiting workers for the *yerbal*, we hear in the background that they are calling "Santos Peralta". It is the initial appearance of the main character in the film; and the first element that we see of Santos

³⁷ In 1955, a military coup d'état interrupted Juan Domingo Perón's government, and inaugurated a long period (until 1973) of violent repression against the working-class, proscription of the Peronist party, and military intervention in the labor unions.

³⁸ *Descamisado* literary means "without shirt", but it was re-signified in the Peronist discourse as a symbol of the working-class identity. It works very much as "sans culotte" in the context of the French revolution.

³⁹ In October 17, 1945, the *descamisados* occupied the political center of the nation to defend the labor legislation that guaranteed new social rights for the working-class. Multitudes of workers, most of them organized in labor unions, others spontaneously mobilized, arrived to the Plaza de Mayo from the margins of the city, to claim for the liberation of the Secretary of Labor, Minister of War, and Vice President of Edelmiro Farrell, Juan Domingo Perón. This had, as Daniel James stated, an "heretic impact" in the capital city. As Laura Podalsky puts it, the poorest workers, many of them from rural and indigenous origins, were, from the perspective of the dominant classes, "transgressing the boundary between periphery and the center" (4).

Peralta (Hugo del Carril, the *galán cantor*, the singer of the *Marcha Peronista*) in a close up are his *alpargatas* (espadrilles), as he walks assertively towards the employer. This slight delay in showing Del Carril's face, which emphasizes the audience's expectations about seeing on screen the *galán cantor*, forms part of the glamorous connotation that his figure embodies, and that is transferred to the character that he performs. At the same time, the association between the call we hear, "Santos Peralta!", and the visual representation of the character as a worker through the image of his *alpargatas*, functions as a political synecdoche: since the XIX century, the *alpargatas* were associated with poverty and ignorance, but in the emergence of Peronism they were transformed into a symbol of the workers' legitimacy as political subjects, representing their dignity. The film expresses the valorization of the working class promoted by Perón, at the same time that draws from previous Anarchist traditions (rejected by the official Peronism) to create a rebel and independent character (not subordinated to any institution). The *alpargatas*, then, become an open symbol, exceeding the limits of the Peronist imagery.

In *Las aguas bajan turbias*, the *galán cantor* also embodies a different code of masculinity, compatible with the ideological principles of horizontality and solidarity that the traditional working-class movements promoted since the late XIX century, including the Anarchist, Socialist, and Communist struggles for gender equality. Throughout the film, Hugo del Carril/Santos Peralta conveys a model of masculinity that is different from the exhibited in characters played by the actor in the past, which were representative of the tango films. In these films, typically, the male main character reveals a possessive attitude towards the women he supposedly "loves". Instead, in *Las aguas bajan turbias*, romance, one of the elements of attraction in commercial movies, in which the glamour of the *galán cantor* finds the opportunity to shine, is based on the values of respect, independence, horizontality, and solidarity. In the scene in which the *mensú*s are coming back from the forest, carrying the sacs of *yerba mate* on their backs, we see a female worker falling, extenuated. Santos Peralta halts to help her. Again, we see in a close up his *alpargatas*, symbolizing the dignity that the working-class

can represent. An eyeline match connects a close up of Amelia's gaze (Adriana Benetti) with Santos's, both exhausted, without words. This first encounter between Amelia and Santos is mediated by labor: by the exploitation they suffer and the solidarity with which they resist in the *infierno verde*. In another scene, that shows the *mensú*s having a party and getting drunk the night before embarking to the Alto Paraná, Flor de Lis, a renowned prostitute in the town, glamorously appears walking down the stairs. We see first her elegant shoes, then her eyes, sparkling as her jewelry, in a potent close up. One of the *mensú*s, after offering her his money, aggressively asks her to undress in front of all of them. She fights with him: Flor de Lis is represented as a strong, not submissive woman. Finally, the man goes to her and rips her clothes off. Rufino and Santos Peralta intercede to help her. A political pedagogy is at work here, interpellating the audience: alcohol abuse and violence against women are condemned by the opposition between a drunk and aggressive man, who finally is defeated, and the woman and the two brothers that will later in the film lead the rebellion in the *yermal*. Moreover, while demystifying the *yermal*'s landscape, and revealing the *infierno verde*, Hugo del Carril, as a filmmaker, exhibits the double exploitation and oppression, economic and sexual, that the women suffer in the predatory capitalist structure of the *yermal*. In the scene of the party that the administration organizes upon arrival of the workers from Posadas, we see the *capangas* sexually harassing the female workers. In another scene, Amelia is raped by one of the *capangas* who breaks into her house, when the father is absent. And in the sequence of Flor de Lis' arrival to the *yermal*, we see the *patrón* ordering the *capangas* to take her to his cabin, as he says: "everything in this land is mine".

As an auteur, Hugo del Carril articulates the social practices that inform the collective resistance and solidary organization in the context of oppression and exploitation. In this regard, the representation of popular cultures of narration, singing, and listening, are central in the creation of a point of identification (Doane, 162) for the urban audiences with the communitarian experiences in the Alto Paraná. That's how the voice of Hugo del Carril becomes a key element.

In the film, Del Carril performs folkloric songs of the Alto Paraná, combining a tango style of singing with the rural *guaranía*. The diegetic music of the film also includes a *polka* with lyrics in Guaraní (*Nda recoi la culpa*), and an anonymous song, *Soy un pobre mensú*. The audience to whom this film was addressed, would recognize not only the famous voice and style of Del Carril, but also the songs. According to Emilio Portorrico, *Noches del Paraguay*, one of the most relevant songs in the film, was, at the time of its inclusion in *Las aguas bajan turbias*, well known in Argentina (2019). It had different versions, as it was performed by different Paraguayan and Argentinian musicians and singers (Portorrico, 2019). As Portorrico points out, Perón fomented the folkloric music, including expressions from Paraguay, Bolivia, Perú, and Chile (2019). In this gesture, it was subjacent the Peronist world picture in which the horizontal relationships between Latin-American countries were crucial for the development of an independent position of the sub-continent. Folkloric music from different regions of Argentina and the neighbor countries were increasingly broadcasted by the radio stations, and also, were played and sung in cultural and popular events.

In the scene in which Santos Peralta (Hugo del Carril) sings *Noches del Paraguay* (Nights in Paraguay), the *mensús* are travelling to the *yermal* through the river. We start hearing the music as we see a close up of the water moved by the steamboat. A tilt down shot of the nocturn sky leads us to the deck of the ship, where Santos Peralta is singing and playing the guitar, and the other *mensús* are attentively listening to him. A low-key lightening inspires an intimate atmosphere, a separated environment in the ship, in which the *mensús* start to create a relatively autonomous articulation. Singing, playing, and listening to songs that tell the stories of the rural workers, are social practices that imply a subtle resistance to alienation, since they are not profitable for the capitalist, nor they contribute to the reproduction of the *mensús* as labor force (unlike eating and sleeping). Instead, they favor the creation of horizontal relationships of mutual recognition that sustain the formation of a solidary community.

A tracking shot represents the *mensús* (performed by rural workers from Misiones) listening to the music. A medium shot frames the figure of Hugo del Carril, singing and playing the guitar. It reminds us to previous films of the *galán cantor*; but, in this case, Del Carril separates himself from the image of the *tanguero*, and explores a different identity: that of the rural worker in the borders of the nation. A relatively long take makes us focus on his musical performance. Now, we are positioned in the perspective of the *mensús*, the audience of Santos in the film. Interestingly, even if the song is diegetic, the duration displaces our attention from the story to the musical performance itself. For two minutes, the audience of *Las aguas bajan turbias* could have easily acted as the audience of Hugo del Carril, the singer. In the following shot, the image of the *mensús* converges with the voice of the singer. A point of identification with the *mensús* is offered to the working-class audiences of Buenos Aires: the experience of cinema facilitates the recognition of popular cultural practices across borders, functioning as a magma for the convergence of memories and desires.

This scene represents, in the film, the first instance of communion among the *mensús* in the formation of a horizontal community of resistance and rebellion. It is connected with a later scene in which Santos, the only literate worker in the group, reads aloud a letter sent by the brother of one of his colleagues. The letter explains about the union in the south of the region, and invites the workers of the Alto Paraná to create their own association. Here, the voice of Hugo del Carril adds to the revolutionary content of the letter, the interpellating power of his star persona. At the same time, Del Carril, as the film director, recreates, in this scene, a culture of narration and listening associated with the Anarchist practice of the solidary reading, among workers, of literature or the press. In the scene, the *mensús* are gathered around the campfire, when the night falls. They extract, from the scarce time that is left for them after a long and extenuating working day, a few hours that they convert into subjective, communitarian time. In a long shot, with low key lightening, we see the faces of the *mensús* and the *mate* that they share to keep themselves awake; we see, then, only what is illuminated by the

fire: an intimate zone, separated from the darkness of the night, protected from the hell of the *yermal*. They tell each other stories of the Alto Paraná, some of them tell stories of workers who tried to escape and failed; others tell their own experiences of resistance, and are willing to share their secrets with those who want to organize a collective action. The camera follows the *mate* that the workers share together with their experiences and knowledges about the *yermal*. Del Carril represents, in this symbolic scene, an independent political pedagogy of the horizontal working community.

Epilog

Jacques Attali underlines that “any organization of sounds is (...) a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality” (32). Attali believes that this organization connects (ideologically, sentimentally, sensitively) the subject to a center of power (32). In Argentina, during the Peronist decade, there was a propagandist pedagogy that was driven by the verticality of power. But, at the same time, it is important to recognize the heterogeneity of Peronism as a phenomenon that exceeds the figure of Juan Domingo Perón, and includes heterodox militant practices and ideologic interpretations of the working-class experience. This is the case of Hugo del Carril, who drew ideas, concepts, and aspirations from other political sources, including Anarchism and Communism; and conceived the *Nueva Argentina* not as a vertically organized, and ideologically homogeneous community, nor as an utopic reality of social justice, but as a project of a horizontal community of workers built on the reunion of different political traditions and experiences of the working class.

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