SRN, 17.10 2014.

Langsame Heimkehr, the film that does (not) exist: a script between landscape and archive. by Pablo Gonçalo.

In my research about the collaborations between Peter Handke and Wim Wenders I found a script that has never been filmed, which would explain why it has never been analyzed in academic bibliographies related to their partnership. Wim Wenders wrote a script entitled *Langsame Heimkehr* (Slow homecoming) in 1982 as an adaptation of the homonymous tetralogy by Peter Handke. This 'find,' along with the absence of interpretations for it, led me to ask more specific questions about the role of the script in narratives that make up a certain history of cinema. Furthermore, I gradually discovered the meaning and value of a script, whether historical or narrative, for a nonexistent film.

I have divided this presentation into three different themes. First, I will describe and share with you an abstract of the *Slow Homecoming* script that considers it a proto-archive of a film. Second, I will introduce the issue of scripts as archives: ghosts and specters of cinema history, which will develop the description of Wenders' script. Finally, I think it is important to formulate and share some questions on the meaning of these scripts that have not been filmed, from the perspective of film studies tradition.

I. Slow Homecoming *(Langsame Heimkehr)*

"We are in Alaska, on the Yukon. It is autumn. The camera slowly sinks deeper and deeper on the landscape down, which propagates in the light of the setting sun." This is how Wim Wenders begins his description of the opening sequence in *Langsame Heimkehr*, and then introduces Sorger, the protagonist, who is in a laboratory holding a drawing pad in his hands. Next to him is Lauffer, who tries to interpret Sorger's drawings

throughout the narrative. The first part of the script - and the book - is called *Die Vorzeitformen* and narrates Sorger and Lauffer's expeditions with an Indian that accompanies them through Alaska. The book contains several more geological and scientific descriptions, but Sorger's main pursuit is to find the 'forms of all forms' by using observation, drawings, and technical analyzes of space as well as experiments with the topographical configurations of the locations.

In the script, Wenders translates part of this relationship with these words:

> It was a specific place in the countryside that Sorger drew everyday, where a promising world history without violence or even Screeching seemed more, clearly took place before his eyes. It is an ordinary landscape selected by Sorger between an earthquake fault line in the foreground and a loess with fragments of a plateau in the background.

The camera is always behind the subject - in this case, Sorger as the observer - and the broad landscape that surrounded him. In both the book and the film, the sensitive relationship with landscapes is influenced by Heidegger, who believed that aesthetic elaborations create a parallel nature that is present but situated between observation and the object and provides a relationship of truth between the world and art. “Nobody knows, where I am”, says Sorger in a voice-over offering a singular displaced geologist.

In *Slow Homecoming* the relationship with space is not only central or intrinsic to geology. Space also inhabits intervals and specific locations: glaciers, forests, small villages, remote settlements, big cities like Los Angeles and New York, and the mountains and rocks of Aix-en-Provence. Like in Handke's tetralogy, we see travel between locations when Sorger, an Austrian, goes back to a small village in Europe. Both Wenders and Handke highlight this trip.

The script has several subtle narratives that merit a more careful analysis in

another context. For my objectives, however, it is important to note that Wenders' script and Handke's book places us face to face with the relationship between materiality and aesthetics. In Handke's literary work, this relationship with landscapes produces the presence of space for the reader, creating as it were, a cinema location or a painting. Inspired by Cézanne's paintings of the Sainte-Victoire Mountain, Handke states in *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* that building a relationship of proximity is more important than one of representation. The strength of producing the presence of Cézanne's mountain is what fascinates Handke, and hence permits a materiality that does not separate things, images, or writing (*Ding-Bild-Schrift*).

> *Thing-image-script in one: that is the miracle – and yet it does not fully communicate my feeling of nearness. Here I must also mention the house plant which, looking through a window, I saw against the landscape as Chinese character. Cézanne's rocks and trees were more than such characters; more than pure forms without early traces – in addition, they were woven into incantations by the painter's dramatic brushstroke. At first my only thought was: So near. Now they seem to me related to the first cave paintings. They were things, they were images, they were script; they were brushstrokes – and all these were in harmony.*
>
> *(The lesson of Mont Sainte-Victoire, Peter Handke)*

These experiments with landscapes establish points between the materiality of location and media specificities. Landscapes become images in movement rather than static paintings, and more mediated by indexes that forge an absent presence and seek to reactivate the redemption of space. The events, whether aesthetic, visual, or narrative slowly become contaminated by cinematic occurrences. This is the type of dialogue that the *Lansame Heimkehr* script tries to produce. Making landscapes the central theme of the script suggests a meta-remediality where space is constantly felt, not only through the eyes of Sorger the geologist. The landscape is more than merely seen, it is produced, reproduced, and repeated between media instants and transitions, in enigmas and noises, between feeling it and formally deciphering it.

II. Scripts as archives: ghosts and specters of cinema history

In describing *Langsame Heimkehr* it is easy to give in to the temptation of imagining images, scenes, sequences, characters, and moments that could potentially exist on screen. However, there is no film, just words on paper - a script for a film that has never been made. This further unfolds the discussions above. If landscape engenders a direct dynamic with medias, it also flirts with the subject of archives, in the sense that landscapes themselves can be understood as sensations that surface the moment they are archived. Thus, like crystals, landscapes are transformed into archives.

This path takes us first to the political aspects of archives. On one hand, landscapes are natural phenomena, or data, that lead to archives and to archiving perceptions. On the other hand, it must be understood that, according to Derrida in *Mal d'arquive*, previous discourses help determine what can and cannot be considered an archive. In this sense, the 'archons' of archives - their founding structures - reveal desires for both repression and suppression. The problems of archives, this impulse to create historical institutions based on metaphysical concepts, is inherent to the chorus of discussions that sustain institutions.

These considerations allow the script to be seen as a proto-archive that only touches on what cinema, as a discourse and institution, has defined as archive. Here the focus is not so much the debates about the ontology of cinema (and of cinematic archives), which is already understood and connected to the take and film occurrence. It is about taking a step further to investigate the historical relationships that enable this discourse. In order to conduct a detailed critique, it would be necessary to rebuild the genealogy of the institution of cinema that recounts the history of archives,

cinematheques, and film archives.

Nonetheless, one of the central points in this institutionalization process was the creation of cinematheques in the 1950s. The trajectory of Henri Langlois, for example, shows how a set of archives and cinematic copies, along with institutions in England and the United States, produced an 'official' discourse about the history of cinema that misrepresented artists, authors, and historical periods that were much more demarcated. Consequently, this cinematheque context was a fundamental cause of the 'author controversy' where screenwriters were rejected as authors and the role of the director and staging became the central element of cinematic language. In other words, the creation of a cinematic canon, which privileges directors to the detriment of other authors and genres, the emphasis placed on cinematic occurrences that are directly associated to takes and mis-en-scene, and the fundamental importance that the screening room and projection have in this concept of cinema are addressed here.

The script obviously cannot be understood as a cinematic archive, since it does not interact directly with the technical apparatus of the camera. However, neither can it be restricted to a written archive because it suggests and indicates images, and later formulates them in their reading as if it were an *Ekphrasis* awaiting a media translation. It is perhaps a mistake to think of a script as a ghost of an existing film, which would thus always make it an archive restricted to commenting on the cinematic archive proper, or in other words, the edited film and what 'happens' on the screen.

For this reason I suggest a more spectral relationship between script and archive. Spectral in that it suggests images with no bodies and without defined media that are not anxious to happen or to acquire flesh. Like Derrida says, if every archive were inclined to

create a future, the script could be understood as a dramatic-visual configuration intended to create cinematic or media events. Thus, the script would be a proto-archive or an archive that constantly restitutes and updates the events of cinematic archives and can potentially generate infinite filmic events. *Langsame Heimkehr* is even more interesting in that the script represents a proto-archive of proto-landscapes.

III. What is the value of an unfilmed script?

In his recent book *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea*, Ian Macdonald analyses the last script written by David Lean and his collaborators, which would have adapted the novel *Nostromo* by Joseph Conrad. Lean, however, died just before the set work. I quote Macdonald's final considerations concerning what he calls the 'object problem' of these unfilmed scripts:

> "Scripts drafts are not incomplete at the time they are written, and may even (on occasion) prove more satisfying expressions of the screen idea than the film itself – one more reason why we should not always accept the film as the final, 'correct' version. The imagination still works here, on the script page, before we are tied down to the concrete and the emulation of the real" (MACDONALD, pg. 213).

Macdonald highlights the relationships between film as a work of art, in contrast with the moments of the script as readable instants, and the audience experience, which will, not by chance, regard it as the definitive filmic experience. Additionally, I would also suggest transferring the 'object problem' to an 'archive problem', which means finding the dramaturgy of film in both a paper-based script and directly on the screen. In comparison with theater, film shares a similar gesture where the drama inscription occurs between scenes and dramaturgical moments. However, in a different sense, film always has a media apparatus that interacts intrinsically with technological tools. Film, as dramaturgy or experience is a blend of these two different ontological archives and

writing traditions.

In this sense it is interesting to maintain the comparison with theater. In an analysis of the historical role between plays and their publications, French scholar Roger Chartier noted how Shakespeare started publishing his plays later in his career. As an actor, Shakespeare wrote most of his dramaturgy on the stage, during rehearsals, and personally led his team in creating a narrower distance between writing and performance. However, when some publishers began copying and selling his plays, Shakespeare began writing directly on paper and then publishing his plays himself in order to obtain control of his work.

Chartier's research shows how publishing practices are also historical constructs that might change writing (and reading) practices. Or, in a larger sense, how we might find a number of gaps or empty spaces between the writing moment itself, and the instants of publishing and reading. Theses gaps are filled with institutions and commercial practices that, incidentally, also create and change the values of the text (as playwright or script), creating omissions, substitutions and additions to the 'original texts'. These institutions are what Derrida calls the Arch-archives.

Nowadays it is not so relevant whether a playwright has been on stage or not because we have been learning to consider playwrights naturally as a literary text and consequently, the playwright as an author, even if he works in a group. At this point, scripts and texts in film are not consolidated as archives with the same force as theater texts.

To conclude, I would like to return to the script of *Slow Homecoming*. Even though it is only first a draft, one can capture the film dramaturgy revealed by the script

as a reading experience. The narrative arose directly from the location and the adaptation written by Wenders builds a character that occurs between landscapes, cities, and drawings. It is something that goes on to appear in many of Wenders' later films, such as *Paris, Texas,* and *Wings of Desire*, but which might have had its aesthetic turning point concentrated in these lines. In this sense, as an unfilmed script and an archive without a screen, *Slow Homecoming* reveals to researchers (and future readers) the potential aspects of an invisible history of cinema.

Thank you very much for your attention.