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Emissaries from other worlds: Asteroids, science and mythology in *The Color Out of Space* and the film *Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds*

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Abstract: In this paper, we suggest a speculative comparison between the short story *The Color Out of Space* (Howard Phillips Lovecraft, 1927) and the documentary film *Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds* (Werner Herzog and Clive Oppenheimer, 2020). We explore the similarities between Herzog's specific interest in extreme phenomena of Nature and Lovecraftian Cosmicism. We observe that both authors have, to a certain extent, compatible views on the relationship between humans and nature: Herzog and Lovecraft seem to be interested in identifying and investigating humanity's difficulty in coping with their insignificance when facing catastrophic events caused by indifferent Nature; both chose the same kind of landscape (iced lands, volcanic areas) and extreme natural phenomena (like meteorite falls); and they show a particular interest in characters connected to scientific experiences, and obsessed (even sometimes driven to madness) with the mysteries of nature. Our analysis does not suggest a direct influence of Lovecraft on Herzog, but a productive coincidence that can shed light on the film *Fireball* and its possible Lovecraftian resonances.

Keywords: cinema, Werner Herzog, literature, H.P. Lovecraft, *The Color Out of Space*

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Wysłannicy z innych światów: asteroidy, nauka i mitologia w *The Color Out of Space* i w filmie *Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds*

Streszczenie: W artykule proponujemy spekulatywne porównanie opowiadania *The Color Out of Space* (Lovecraft 1927) i filmu dokumentalnego *Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds* (Herzog i in. 2020). Badamy podobieństwa pomiędzy szczególnym zainteresowaniem Herzoga ekstremalnymi zjawiskami natury a kosmicyzmem Lovecrafta. Zauważamy, że obaj autorzy mają, do pewnego stopnia, zbieżne wizje relacji pomiędzy ludźmi a naturą: Herzog i Lovecraft wydają się być zainteresowani zidentyfikowaniem i zbadaniem trudności ludzkości w radzeniu sobie z jej nieistotnością w obliczu katastrofalnych wydarzeń wywołanych przez obojętną Naturę; obaj wybrali ten sam rodzaj krajobrazu (lodowce, obszary wulkaniczne) i ekstremalne zjawiska naturalne (jak uderzenia meteorytu); wykazują szczególne zainteresowanie postaciami powiązаныmi z doświadczeniami naukowymi i opętanymi (a czasami doprowadzonymi do szaleństwa) tajemnicami Natury. Nasza analiza nie sugeruje bezpośredniego wpływu Lovecrafta na Herzoga, ale twórczy zbieg okoliczności, który może rzucić światło na film *Fireball* i jego możliwe interpretacje lovecraftowskie.

Słowa kluczowe: kino, Werner Herzog, literatura, H.P. Lovecraft, *The Color Out of Space*

*You are the most curious of men. You are like the storytellers of old,
returning from far lands with spellbinding tales.*
Letter from Roger Ebert to Werner Herzog, 2007

*It is not because of anything that can be seen or heard or handled,
but because of something that is imagined.*
H.P. Lovecraft, *The Color Out of Space*, 1927

Introduction

The full-length documentary film *Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds* (2020), directed and presented by the German filmmaker Werner Herzog and British volcanologist Clive Oppenheimer, reflects on the presence of meteorites throughout human history in cultural memory, mythology, and religion, in different continents and places on Earth: Mexico, Australia, France, Antarctica, Saudi Arabia, India, Italy, Polinesia, Russia, Norway and Hawaii. The film asks how a meteor fall creates complex beliefs, exploring traditions of representation of cosmic forces and cataclysms by human societies. The narrative

alternates moments of nihilistic humour with scientific discussion, pointing out the reflections sought by Herzog, as the narrator and photographer, and Oppenheimer, as an excited interviewer.

We believe there is a kind of Lovecraftian resonance in the film as Herzog brings up the cosmic elements of natural events of great magnitude, while Oppenheimer, a scientist able to go anywhere to identify and describe natural phenomena, undertakes a search for eccentric testimonials – comparable, in a way, to the experience of the narrator of *The Color Out of Space*. In the film, passionate scientists interviewed by Oppenheimer and Herzog describe and comment on what they consider terrifying phenomena – such as, for example, the crater caused by a meteorite fall in India and its mystical influence over religious conceptions; the legendary descent of the Mayan to craters created by a meteor in the Yucatán peninsula; the speculative relationship between a meteorite fall in 1492 in Northeastern France and the travels of the explorer Christopher Columbus; and the worship of a meteorite in the holy city of Mecca. These instances reinforce the idea that humanity needs to attribute meaning to the existence of incomprehensible natural phenomena.

In Lovecraft's short story *The Color Out of Space*, the fall of an asteroid contaminates the soil, water, fruits, plants, animals and people, turning everything into ashes. In Herzog's film, meteorites are sometimes presented as pests from the solar system that wreck the planet's surface while bringing undecipherable messages from the Cosmos. We believe that Herzog and Lovecraft share the desire to unveil the limits of science and philosophy, revealing the limitations of human understanding and people's inability to influence the destinies of the Universe. The common idea between Herzog and Lovecraft is a kind of apocalyptic wisdom: both of them seem to share a catastrophic sensibility and the acceptance of mystery as a constituent of human experience in the Cosmos.

In this paper, we aim to explore possible relations between the work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Cosmicism expressed in some of Herzog's documentaries as a continuation of the work that we have been developing since 2018, exploring the Lovecraftian Cosmicism expressed in some documentaries made by Werner Herzog. In our first paper (Mello et al. 2018), we suggested the existence of a dialogue between three documentaries directed by Herzog (*Grizzly Man*, 2005; *Encounters at the End of the World*, 2007; *Into the Inferno*, 2016) and the notion of cosmic horror. In the present article, our analysis of *Fireball* seeks to observe specific similarities between the narratives of the film and Lovecraft's first sci-fi story, *The Color Out of Space*, written in 1927. We intend to show that both the film and the short story diminish human life, restricting it to insignificance within an infinite, hostile and unknown universe. Our idea is not to prove some direct influence of Lovecraft's Universe on Herzog's work but to demonstrate some affinity between these authors influential for the 21st century.

Fireball and Herzog's universe

"I believe the common denominator of the Universe is not harmony, but chaos, hostility and murder", Herzog claims in *Grizzly Man*. This kind of cynical, sometimes nihilistic judgments made by his voice-over, alongside other cinematic procedures, bring a sarcastic tone

similar to Lovecraft's when he tries to unveil the dark side of nature, a universe of appalling indifference and deliberate hostility towards humankind. When the film *Fireball* begins, Herzog's voice-over describes an apocalypse, covering it with images of Mexican rituals, Russian dashboard cameras and an Australian crater:

Merida, on the Yucatan Peninsula, is ground zero of the biggest cataclysm that ever occurred to our planet. A whole asteroid hit right here. This happened millions of years before human beings appeared, yet this fireball ritual feels like a reenactment. Certainly, the ancient Mayans could not have known. We do not know what in the future is coming at us, eventually destroying us. But it will look like this Fireball in Siberia, only much larger. What simple dashboard cameras recorded feels like science fiction. Visitors from other worlds, from the dark of the Universe, have come. And uncountable of them are on their way. If something big is going to happen, it will illuminate the sky even in daylight. Meteorites have hit the planet all the time, and the bigger ones have changed entire landscapes. But they also have left a deep impact on cultures (Herzog's narration of *Fireball*, 00:01:10).

Herzog is a unique screenwriter, director, and narrator. He is the only filmmaker in the world who has already filmed in the five continents, often in challenging conditions – as we can observe, for example, in *Aguirre*, filmed in the wild Amazon in 1972, and *Lessons of Darkness* shot around the oil wells burned during the Iraq war in 1992. Herzog built a personal mythology around himself because of his soul of an adventurer, which made critics, such as Roger Ebert, observe a kind of spiritual quality in Herzog's works (Ebert 2007). Filming fiction and documentaries since the 1960s, the German filmmaker has developed, especially in the last fifteen years, a cinematic procedure characterized by the omnipresence of his voice-over in documental films. The voice-over allows him to summarise philosophical reflections with self-reflexive and self-representative rhetoric, which often guides the debates about his movies.

As discussed by authors who studied Herzog's *oeuvres* – such as Brad Prager (2011), Dylan Trigg (2012), Richard Eldridge (2019), Blake Wilson and Christopher Turner (2020), among others – there seems to be a coherent philosophical system that supports his ideas in more than forty feature films. The central conflict at the heart of his fictional or documental stories is the confrontation between the human spirit and the Universe, inherently violent and indifferent to human beings. The indifference of the Universe often leads the characters to madness, like the obsessed and tragic protagonists of the fiction film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and the documentary *The White Diamond* (1999), both filmed in wild forests. It becomes more dramatic as long as most of his characters find it difficult to communicate with other human beings, which is the central theme in films like the fiction film *Kaspar Hauser* (1975) and the documentary *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971).

The ideas of art, science, and myth in Herzog's work were investigated by many authors. For example, Eric Ames (2012; 2014) describes the German filmmaker's dedication to unravelling the most profound truths of cinema, practically unattainable, through fabulation and imagination. To Ames, Herzog seeks to achieve poetic and ecstatic truth differently from those more common in the documentary tradition. Ames explores how Herzog dismisses the idea of documentary as a search for the real purpose in cinema to intervene and poetically participate in reality creatively. Similarly, Laurie Ruth Johnson (2016) seeks to reconnect Herzog's mythical and fabled documentary strategies to the characteristics

of German Romantic thought, especially the relations between reason and passion, civilization and wild nature, reality and belief. On the other hand, Matthew Gandy argues that political and imperial ideologies from the nineteenth-century remain within his imagery, even “disguised within his use of cinematic sublime to convey a romanticist cosmos of universal values that transcend time and space” (1996: 01).

Herzog’s interest in science fiction shouldn’t be ignored either, even though he didn’t pursue this genre of films in a conventional way. In the narration of the documentary *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), filmed in Kuwait oil fields of post-Gulf War, Herzog emulates a science fiction ambience, emphasizing an “alien” view of the cataclysm in a region of the Planet Earth. In *The Wild Blue Yonder – A Science Fiction Fantasy* (2005), Herzog showed his more clear interest in science fiction. The film is narrated by a character interpreted by American actor Brad Douriff, who articulates a complex story about astronauts, space travels and time tunnels with actual footage obtained by NASA and interviews with scientists who reflect on life on (and outside) planet Earth.

In recent years, Herzog has been recurrently making documentaries that address scientific themes and characters who are professional scientists (like the cell biologist Samuel S. Bowser in *Encounters at the End of the World*) or amateur researchers (like the main character of *Grizzly Man*, Timothy Treadwell). In the documentary *Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World* (2016), Herzog interviewed scientists, cultural analysts, heads of the big-techs techs and also ordinary people to analyze the impacts of the internet on contemporary society, as well as the limits and frontiers of experience in a world dominated by digital technology. Two of Herzog’s recent scientific documentaries (*Into the Inferno*, 2016 and *Fireball*, 2020) have been filmed (or made) in partnership with the University of Cambridge volcanologist Professor Clive Oppenheimer. Most characters in these two films are scientists (biologists, geologists, astronomers), even though some of them are also artists, philosophers, or priests.

In *Fireball*, the characters’ comments on meteorites – the extra-terrestrial characteristics; the ability to modify the Earth’s surface and its life forms; the meanings that have been attributed to meteorites over time through human history – go far beyond a mere description of natural phenomena; the contributions they make are related to a philosophical effort that seeks to put anthropocentrism aside, trying to locate human fragility and curiosity in a chaotic Cosmos full of overwhelming mysteries. Thus, seduced by the extraordinary events and the meanings given by human societies to the fall and presence of meteors, we have a film structured as a reflection of our tiny place in the Universe.

One of the characters of *Fireball* is the Norwegian jazz musician Jon Larsen, who discovered the existence of micrometeorites (small cosmic dust particles). He uses a simple magnet to attract the microparticles and observes them in a microscope with the help of the Texan geologist Jan Braly Kihle. As Herzog states, Larsen and Kihle found an entirely new branch of science by passion, but their interest seems to do with hard sciences and beyond.

To me, they [the micrometeorites] are the oldest matter there is. Nothing has travelled further. When I pick out one micrometeorite, and I feel it on my finger, no human being has ever touched anything older. It’s really like looking eternity in the eye. This is the ashes of another generation, a previous generation of dying stars (interview with Larsen in *Fireball*, 00:21:20).

In a place they call “the underworld” (a laboratory in the basement of Kihle’s house), Larsen and Kihle take higher-resolution colour pictures with *magnification* of 3000x of the micrometeorites to keep photographic documentation of the sidereal objects. As a result, they have astonishing images of more than two thousand different particles, made of varied materials (such as iron and glass), full of different colours (blue, green, pink, yellow, grey, brown), absolutely different from the terrestrial geology. Some of the particles collected by them are similar to one gigantic eye or one colourful egg. When these incredible particles are magnified, they seem like ancient monsters from unknown places of the Universe.

If micrometeorites can have the appearance of gigantic living creatures, Herzog and Oppenheimer also explore the possibility of meteorites carrying life. At the Arizona State University, the scientist Laurence Garvue takes them to visit an immaculate room full of meteorites, and one of which smells like organic matter. Then Garvue tells Herzog and Oppenheimer an incredible story:

This stone actually fell only a few weeks ago in Costa Rica (...) in a doghouse when the dog was still sleeping in it. It missed the dog by millimetres and embedded itself in the ground right next to the dog. (...) And what makes this one so amazing is the fact that if you smell it, you can actually smell organic compounds. So there are four and a half billion years old compounds that were formed on an early planet (and that planet no longer exists) and got trapped in this stone and basically resided at the asteroid belt for four billion years before, for some reason, left the asteroid belt and landed in Costa Rica and it’s now in our meteorite vault here (interview with Garvue in *Fireball*, 00:36:30).

The idea of a life form sent to the Earth from outer space is also explored by another scientist inside the crater Ramgarh, in India, where the geochemist Nina Sahai discusses the idea of *panspermia*. She explains that:

DNA is actually found to be quite robust. And it’s possible to survive in space. And even an entire organism might survive in a spore-like mould. If people had actually dug deep into the Earth, even a couple of kilometres down, they would have found bacteria that have been living there presumably for millions of years and survived in this kind of suspended animation (interview with Sahai in *Fireball*, 00:47:40).

Impressed with the idea of such kind of suspended life ready to be reanimated, Oppenheimer asks her why Indian priests built a temple exactly in the meteorite crater Ramgarh. She replies that this tantric temple is dedicated to Shiva and Parvati, representing creation. “But Shiva is also the God of destruction”, she alerts. Therefore, in this dynamics between creation and destruction, the film goes deeper and deeper into our relationship with the mysteries of the Universe. *Fireball* also brings brilliant reflections presented by scientists, sometimes willing to live great adventures – such as Paul Steinhardt, from Princeton University, who travelled to Russia to confirm that a meteorite may contain a geological structure called *quasi-crystal*, which was considered impossible to exist in nature until his discovery.

The film seems to represent meteorites as samples sent from the Universe that reveal the limits to our understanding of the secrets of nature. All respondents demonstrate scientific accuracy in their words. Still, at the same time, they conclude their scientific discourse

in speculations about the origin of the Universe and the limited meaning of human life. The experience of these dialogues with scientists allows Herzog and Oppenheimer to demonstrate their fascination for what appears to be a junction between science, philosophy, and art, as seen in the beautiful images of Larsen and Kihle's micrometeorite and many other examples presented throughout the film.

On a horrific asteroid

“Something terrible came to the hills and valleys on that meteor, and something terrible – though I know not in what proportion – still remains”, says Lovecraft's narrator in *The Color Out of Space*. The tale, written in first person by an unnamed scientist, tells the story of a place in New England destroyed and damned by a mysterious phenomenon caused by the fall of a meteor.

Lovecraft was himself a man of sciences. As described by Greg Conley (2017: 08), as a child, Lovecraft had an early fascination for anatomy, geology, and chemistry and wrote his treatises on the subject of Chemistry. Around the age of thirteen, he produced his hectograph magazines on astronomy. For Sunand T. Joshi (2013: 671), *The Color Out of Space* is the first of Lovecraft's great tales to bring together his two passions – gothic horror and sciences – which would become a trademark of his work. Lovecraft's short stories from the 1920s and 1930s built a bridge between the Gothic decadence of the end of the 19th century and the more “rational” demands of science fiction of the new century, as asserted by Erik Davis (1995).

Lovecraft's theoretical essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (written between 1925 and 1927) makes it clear that the American writer was aware of the fact that the properties of the Gothic horror of the 18th and 19th centuries “had lost all symbolic value, becoming banal and standardized tropes, more likely to produce laughter than chills” (Joshi 2013: 46). This perception led to the progressive reformulation of his literary style, although he never wholly abandoned the Gothic and horrific vein. According to Erik Davies (1995), if in Lovecraft's early works there is something of a “pastiche” of the Gothic, his mature production has a “pseudo-documentary” style, which uses the language of journalism, scholarship and science to build a realistic prose voice that explodes in ugly horror. In *The Color Out of Space*, we can see it in the character who does extended interviews with witnesses of a terrible event that haunts a piece of land in the region of New England.

This story was Lovecraft's favourite, defined by him as an “atmosphere study” (Joshi 2013: 671) due to creating an inexplicable horror landscape. When describing the meteorite fall, Lovecraft's narrator says:

Then without warning, the hideous thing shot vertically up toward the sky like a rocket or meteor, leaving behind no trail and disappearing through a round and curiously regular hole in the clouds before any man could gasp or cry out. [...] It was just that. Only a wooden ripping and crackling, and not an explosion, as so many others of the party, vowed. Yet the outcome was the same, for in one feverish kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and substance; blurring the glance

of the few who saw it, and sending forth to the zenith a bombarding cloudburst of such colored and fantastic fragments as our Universe must needs disown. Through quickly reclosing vapors they followed the great morbidity that had vanished, and in another second, they had vanished too. Behind and below was only a darkness to which the men dared not return and all about was a mounting wind which seemed to sweep down in black, frore gusts from interstellar space. It shrieked and howled and lashed the fields and distorted woods in a mad cosmic frenzy, till soon the trembling party realized it would be no use waiting for the moon to show what was left down there at Nahum's (Lovecraft 1975: 30).

Lovecraft had no specific intention of writing a science fiction short story. The author, at the time, was even critical of most of the narrative conventions of the genre. However, Lovecraft associates science fiction with horror having in mind a very definite purpose: to expand the poetic and narrative possibilities to achieve effects hitherto little explored in literature. *The Color Out of Space* moves away from 19th-century Gothic literature and approaches imaginative realism precisely because it explores fictional elements at the interface between cosmic horror and science. Thus, Lovecraft ends up producing an exciting relationship between reality and weirdness. In other words, he creates a fictional narrative based on the materiality of strange phenomena.

In *The Color Out of Space*, the confrontation between ambience and information are fictional elements connected to reality. Thus, through the poetic creation of science fiction, the author ends up embodying the uncanny. Lovecraft is acclaimed as a horror science fiction author, and it is precisely this intersection that makes possible a more significant relationship with a documentary dimension. Lovecraft is interested in science fiction less because of its novelty concerning the technological implications of modern societies in an imagined future and more because of the sublime and extraordinary consequences of inexplicable events. In other words, he was more interested in exploring the effects of scientificity in the creation of frightening narratives than in the technological contents used by sci-fi authors such as Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov, for example. To Lovecraft, even if it is an imaginary science, the scientific environment allows him to explore terrifying threats to the human condition.

Fireball and the Cthulhu Mythos

In cinema, Lovecraft's horror stories have appealed to some well-known directors and writers, leading to productions such as, among others, Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982). Despite not being adaptations *per se* of Lovecraft's writings (Migliore et al. 2006: 11; 107), the first could be considered an appropriation of *At the Mountains of Madness*, and the latter owes a lot to the central tropes of the novella: the setting (a research station in Antarctica), the science-world characters, and the shape-shifting alien creature¹. However, Lovecraft's vision should not be limited to horror fiction. As we

¹ The screenplay by Bill Lancaster was adapted from the short story *Who Goes There*, published by John Campbell Jr. in the American magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, in August 1938, under the influence of Lovecraftian style.

suggest, Herzog's *oeuvre* – which includes only one horror film, *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979), an adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic novel and its 1922 German version, directed by Friederich William Murnau – also evokes the cosmic horror and even some ancient myths similar to those created by Lovecraft. In fact, Herzog's universe is full of deities and unknown possibilities, as noted, for example, in documentaries such as *Fata Morgana* (1971) and *Bells From The Deep* (1993), and in fictions such as *Heart of Glass* (1976) and *Where The Green Ants Dream* (1984).

Lovecraft created several deities throughout his literary career to represent the horror of our insignificance. This complex bestiary, developed over the short stories and novels, cannot be fully understood by humankind because its meaning is lost in the abyss of the past when the Universe was still young, and the concept of space and time did not even exist. The writer August Derleth organized and systematized part of the so-called "Cthulhu Mythos", the cycle of stories that present these deities that are connected in some way, such as Cthulhu, Shub-Niggurath, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, the Magnum Innominandum. Most of these deities were Lovecraft's original creations, but he also adapted from previous writers, like Ambrose Bierce. Discussing these creatures, Conley highlights that even though they are treated by Lovecraft's characters (and by some critics of Lovecraft) like demonic entities that seek to destroy the Earth and the humankind, "the creatures in the bulk of Lovecraft's stories are not demoniac, but alien, usually literally" (2017: 08). To Conley, only some of these creatures that come from other planets or dimensions wish to take over Earth: "Few want to subjugate humanity, as they generally have not noticed humans at all. [...] They are not evil – or good" (ibid: 9).

Herzog and Oppenheimer seek the origin of humankind on Earth. When they visit the Yucatan Peninsula, in Mexico, in a place called Chicxulub Puerto, Herzog's voice-over says that "this is the very place where our planet suffered an unimaginable apocalypse. What came down from space right here had the force of hundreds of millions, possibly thousands of millions, of atomic bombs Hiroshima size." Then, Oppenheimer observes that the changes caused in the Earth's ecosystem by this major explosion allowed humans to exist: "The mammals [...] took advantage of the new ecological opportunities. We probably wouldn't be here ourselves, *homo-sapiens* as a species, were not this colossal impact".

In a way, it is possible to see the sublime aspects of Nature pointed out by Herzog and Oppenheimer to a poetic technique adopted by Lovecraft in *The Color Out of Space*. The author often describes scenes or situations that create tension between the load of information linked to scientific aspects – an essentially documental characteristic – and unexplained cases. The narrator comments with grotesque uneasiness over all the vegetation and a touch of unreality. He compares this situation to light and dark elements of perspective painting, implying that something was out of place. Here, sciences is treated as a backdrop to create a disturbing effect on the scene described, as the unimaginable and inexplicable in *Fireball* results from natural events.

Lovecraftian cosmic horror plays with our ignorance about the nature of the Universe. It enhances it for the ultimate reality of everything, filling it with the most disgusting and horrible ideas. In front of a Universe inhabited by vast, ancient, indifferent and hateful beings, what we have left is impotent, irrelevant humanity with no purpose or meaning. What makes Lovecraft's writing so frightening are the questions he proposes about ideas such as:

how would we feel if, outside the microscopic outline of our world, everything else in the Universe was horrible and frightening?

Inspired by his bleak vision of a terrifying non-anthropocentric universe, Lovecraft conceived a complex cosmology that is somehow similar to the mythology full of strange creatures that Herzog shoots in an inhospitable landscape like icebergs (in *Encounters at the End of the World*), volcanoes (in *Into the Inferno*) and wild nature (in *Grizzly Man*). Lovecraft introduced countless mythological monstrous alien species to horror. Humankind, in Lovecraft, is nowhere near the centre of the Universe – the Cosmos abandon us. The past has nothing to do with humans, and the Universe was not created from or for human comprehension – and, in Lovecraft’s stories, this is a terrible discovery that drives the characters to madness.

However, in Herzog’s films, the same perception about our unimportant existence becomes a kind of comfort. In his works, the elements of incomprehension and even madness are accompanied by a certain comfort when science discourses meet Herzog’s images, words and sound editing, and we see that the director shares with his characters the same perplexity in the face of the unknown. Sometimes contemplation and adventure scenes are staged, which add layers of fantasy and confabulation to the reflections produced by the films. Still, if Herzog doesn’t reach the same horrific conclusions as Lovecraft’s characters, his non-anthropocentric perspective and his ability to make nature seem unrecognizable to us are procedures that echo, in a way, Lovecraft’s monstrous perspective on our helplessness and loneliness in the Cosmos.

Final considerations

To compare such vast artistic universes as Herzog’s and Lovecraft’s is a risky endeavour, as it requires that we discuss particular cosmologies that have established eclectic dialogues with the Arts and the Sciences. However, it seems that both Herzog and Lovecraft propose a speculative exercise of envisioning an experience that goes beyond the physical, objective world, as perceived by direct contact with the landscape, although never ignoring it. Lovecraft and Herzog sought to endow their work with scientific contemporaneity, drawing on the knowledge available in their times using geological, biological and physical information to produce philosophical encounters with the world and its mysteries.

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