

## Landscapes of *desapropiación*: Necropolitics and Hydropoetics in Recent Mexican Documentary Film

To avoid the ethical risks associated with the artistic reproduction of images of spectacular violence—images that occupy a central place in the media—filmmakers and writers in Mexico have sought alternative modes of framing violence in the epoch of the recent ‘War on Drugs’. One notable aesthetic strategy has involved the displacement of violence away from wounded human figures and towards nonhuman forms. This poetic substitution enables cultural producers to confront necropower from a reflexive temporal and spatial remove. It has also meant that the nonhumans featured in contemporary cultural production are imbued with urgent and wide-ranging sociopolitical questions.

An example of this tendency can be seen in the extensive attention afforded to landscapes and built environments in two recent documentary films: Mexican-Salvadorian director Tatiana Huezo’s *Tempestad* (2016) and Mexican director Betzabé García’s *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* (2015). Huezo’s *Tempestad* dovetails two narratives of recent violence: in the first, the film retraces the long journey home taken by a woman named Miriam Carbajal—an old friend of the director’s—following her unexpected release from a prison controlled by criminal actors, where she was incarcerated after being falsely accused of human trafficking; in the second narrative of *Tempestad*, a nomadic circus performer named Adela Alvarado, forced to assume an underground existence, speaks of her search for her disappeared daughter Mónica, who was likely abducted by a network of human traffickers working in conjunction with local authorities. García’s film *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* focuses on the flooded town of San Marcos in Sinaloa, where only three families persist in residing, drawing the viewer’s attention towards forms of infrastructural and criminal violence that produce a ghosted spatiality. I shall argue that, rather than depicting violence directly, Huezo and García incorporate landscape shots in order to linger in the affective, spatial and mnemonic wakes of violent loss in a context marked by representation’s practical and ethical ruin. A further similarity connecting Huezo and García’s films is their use of a visual poetics of water, a *hydropoetics*, guided by the terrains they shoot, and spanning storms, rain, floods, littoral and oceanic imagery, and *cenotes*. This visual poetics of water contributes to the prevailing sense of loss and dispersal that the landscape shots set into motion, and also serves synecdochally as a symbol of the filmmakers’ wider diffuse strategy of registering violence from a distance.

I shall begin by discussing the theoretical treatment of the landscape form within film studies and art history to provide the context through which to introduce my governing concept: landscapes of *desapropiación*. I shall then turn to Huezo's *Tempestad*, analysing the complex relationship between landscaping and mapping that the film constructs, examining how the documentary has recourse to decaying buildings when framing landscape, and considering the documentary's use of water, with reference to the *cenote* that appears in the final sequence. Turning to *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, I shall describe the 'heterotopic' relationship García constructs between the town of San Marcos and a necropolis. I shall examine the film's use of images associated with the literary works of mid-century Mexican author Juan Rulfo, and discuss García's framing of the remaining three families' ongoing attempts to dwell in the landscape of San Marcos following its ruin.

### **Theorising Deformative Landscapes**

Film theorist Martin Lefebvre has suggested that cinema is uniquely poised to bring together different traditions of thinking about landscape (2006 and 2011). Lefebvre contends that film incorporates something of the autonomous landscape genre of still media art that gained prominence in seventeenth-century painting (2006: 62). These pictorial landscapes are broadly characterised by the foregrounding of natural terrain above human figures (Lefebvre, 2006), and by framing that promotes a detached, surveying spectator set apart from the environment being viewed (Casid, 2018: 246, Andermann, 2018: 4). For Lefebvre, film combines aspects of the pictorial landscape form with the understanding of landscape as a 'lived and inhabited' space of physical and symbolic dwelling and immersion, an understanding prominent in the disciplines of cultural anthropology, archaeology and human geography (2011: 63-76). To this end, Lefebvre suggests that 'in [film's] quality as a temporal representation of human dwelling' it may function as key to 'the experience of landscape as lived space' (2011: 74). I shall argue in the following sections that Huezo and García's films intersect with but also move away from the traditions that Lefebvre describes: whilst the landscapes the filmmakers frame often lend themselves to autonomous contemplation, their films dis-appropriate the detached perspective of pictorial art, and they approach spaces in which the possibility of dwelling is undermined.

The documentaries' framing of landscape resonates with wider tendencies in Latin American cinematic history. In relation to this context, Jens Andermann has surveyed the extraordinary recurrence of landscape as a 'critical counter-politics' to the power of geopolitical (and neo-colonial) cartographic inscription (2017: 134-35). In dialogue with Lefebvre, Andermann

suggests that Latin American filmic landscapes function as an ‘excess’ that destabilises ‘the spatial inscriptions that articulate places into narrative continuity’ (2017: 134). In *Tempestad* and *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, this counter-politics is routed towards contemporary necropolitics in Mexico: the documentaries elide location, holding it in abeyance or underscoring its negation, in order to evoke the displacement wrought by different forms of violent dispossession.

Given the historical connection between the development of the pictorial landscape form and colonial and capitalistic expansion, critics have noted that violent accumulation has marked the genre from its beginnings. As art historian Jill Casid puts it, the particular ‘dreamwork’ of the landscape tradition in art lies in ‘its picturesque prospects of verdant horizons, and the proprietary claims of master-of-all-I-survey perspectives’, perspectives that ‘scape’ the land and in so doing appropriate it and reduce ‘nature to object’ (2018: 246). In a recent article, Casid puts forward the concept of ‘necrolandscaping’ to describe ‘scapings’ of the land that inflict both human and ecological violence (2018). ‘Necrolandscaping’ also seeks to conceptualise the unanticipated modes of resistance that emerge in the aftermath of this violence.<sup>1</sup> Landscape has been theorised as the art of giving form to space: the art of ‘finding a view by creating or shaping it through the framing’ so that ‘suddenly the view becomes organised, it “holds” together’ (Lefebvre 2006: xv). Necrolandscaping, by contrast, emphasises *unforming*, describing ‘an aesthetic tactics of landscape in the deformative that mines the de-forming, volatile, but also strangely resilient powers of the negative, from shame to dirt’ (Casid 2018: 247). Casid’s argument is influenced by queer, feminist and trans work on ‘the art of dying as a way of living with and making something provisionally habitable with the dead out of tainted aesthetics and the compost of discarded forms’, habitations that communicate a sense of mutual exposure (2018: 247). This framework resonates with *Tempestad* and *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, for these films linger in landscapes in processes of deformation, and extend the aesthetics of the deformative towards the very frames through which landscapes are seen.

The concept of necrolandscaping can be usefully brought into contact with the notion of *desapropiación* coined by Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza in her theoretical text *Los muertos indóciles* (2013). Both Casid and Rivera Garza theorise forms of art and politics that emerge in spaces of shared loss and that reflect and attempt to resist necropower. Drawing on the RAE, Rivera Garza initially defines ‘desapropiación’ in the following terms: ‘Desposeerse del dominio sobre lo propio’ [‘the act of dispossessing oneself of possession over that which is one’s own’] (2013:13). Focusing primarily on textuality, Rivera Garza argues that creative works that

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<sup>1</sup> In putting forward the concept of ‘necrolandscaping’, Casid draws on Achille Mbembe’s seminal theorisation of ‘necropolitics’ (2003).

demonstrate a poetics of *desapropiación* bypass proprietary circuits of authorship, ownership and individuality, opting instead to recalibrate the text as a site of collective labour (2013). In outlining this form of aesthetic production, Rivera Garza describes the written word as a unit of art (a ‘ready-made’) that is recycled across literary texts but never possessed by an author; she puts forward a vision of the author as a curator (rather than a creator) who is engaged in the task of rearranging and displaying the words of disavowed Others (2013: 92-93). This artistic imagery means that the blueprints for an extension of Rivera Garza’s work towards the visual terrain—the task I engage in here—are embedded in her theory. Huezo and García’s films demonstrate an artistic repurposing of discarded elements that resonates with Rivera Garza’s theory, though the derelict elements displayed in these films pertain to nonhuman landscapes rather than written texts. *Desapropiación* is also germane to an analysis of the documentaries because of this concept’s negative etymological relationship to ‘property’: the proprietary, both on the subjective level of the gaze and, more literally, in relation to the built environments screened, is marked by processes of ruin in the documentaries.

It is important to note that Rivera Garza differentiates *desapropiación* from ‘expropiación’ [‘expropriation’] in her theory, writing that ‘expropiar es un vocablo administrativo, que involucra la indemnización, por eso no lo utilizo aquí’ [“‘expropriate’ is an administrative word that implies compensation, and this is why I do not employ it here’] (2013: 91). While *desapropiación* is an evocative concept, Rivera Garza’s opposition to ‘expropriation’ is not entirely satisfying, and I do not uphold it here. On the one hand, this is because expropriation exceeds the purely administrative meaning to which Rivera Garza consigns it, as exemplified by this term’s treatment in contemporary political philosophy.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in moving away from the notions of expropriation and compensation Rivera Garza distances herself from an important terrain of violent struggle, collective activism and loss. García’s film, which is set against the fraught backdrop of (illegal) expropriation, brings these material realities into sharp focus, providing occasion for an extension of Rivera Garza’s lexicon.

The deformative landscapes of Huezo and García’s documentaries can be further understood with reference to the urgency surrounding the notion of ‘the count’ in contemporary Mexican culture. This urgency relates, first of all, to the impossible task of counting deaths in the context of violence. Many of those killed in the drugs conflict have been the poor or migrants—

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in *Communitas*, Italian biopolitical philosopher Roberto Esposito describes the common as that which ‘is not characterised by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically [...] by a removing what is properly one’s own that invests and decentres the proprietary subject, forcing him to take leave of himself’ (2010: 7). This is highly comparable with the logic of *desapropiación* as Rivera Garza theorises it.

those without a significant social voice and those in transit—the exact number of victims is unknown, and the figure has also been downplayed by the government (Paley, 2014). The act of counting deaths has been central to activist politics that put pressure on existing drug war policy (and on official ‘counts’), as exemplified by the work of *Menos días aquí*. Following the thought of Jacques Rancière, the count can also be understood in broader political terms. Rancière centralises the concept of the ‘count’ to think through the ways in which societies constitute themselves through the unequal allotment of social roles. This unequal assignment of roles produces exclusions, those who Rancière refers to as the ‘demos’, the ‘part without part’, or the uncoun- ted (1999). For Rancière, challenges to the existing social count emerge from this space of excess, and as such politics is animated by an interaction between counting and excess that enacts redistributions in meaning. The landscapes of *desapropiación* that I theorise in this article operate in this space of excess, for they evoke the necropolitical pathways and dispossessed experiences that exist below the social count, deploying aesthetic tactics rooted in loss and ruin, rather than presence, to record deaths and dispossessions. The hydropoetical elements that characterise these cinematic landscapes gain heightened significance when considered in relation to excess: as a dispersive entity that cannot be held or counted as such, water, in its very make up, echoes a certain impossibility of representation—the impossibility of fully counting or accessing violent loss. As a reflective entity, water also exists as a visual excess that sometimes marks and obscures the image, thereby forcing a partial or refractory spectatorial perspective.

### **Necropolitical Journeying in Huezo’s *Tempestad***

Despite the historical connections between the emergence of the (pictorial) landscape form and improvements in cartography and topography (Lefebvre 2016: xiv), there is some disagreement amongst critics about the ongoing relation between these terms when it comes to film. Jonathan Rayner and Graeme Harper have suggested that filmic landscapes offer ‘a cartographic receptacle to assist the acquisition of further human understanding’, positing landscape as a critical part of the ‘shared pilgrimages’ that cinema can facilitate (2010: 15). On the other hand, as mentioned, Andermann views landscape as a ‘counterpoint’ to ‘a film’s cartography’, a counterpoint that works by emphasising ‘the singularity and strangeness of places’ (2017: 134-135). These debates facilitate an analysis of the complex relation between landscape and cartography in *Tempestad*. Reworking along necropolitical lines longstanding visual associations between filmic landscapes and travel,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The recurrent images of transportation and transit in early films characterise the cinematic relation to modernity, whilst ‘one of the first wonders the cinema offered its viewers was that of images of the natural world in movement’, a view often provided through early travel films that gave the spectator a sight-seeing experience (Lefebvre 2006: xi).

the documentary's extensive recourse to landscape shots works to evoke the submerged pathways of movement that occur beneath the surface of political visibility in Mexico. By indexing these pathways, the film outlines the barely perceptible trajectories of an impossible and shifting topology, which is at once physical, affective and mnemonic, and which cannot be fully accounted for or brought together. Instead of a cinematographic cartography that aims to organise space and emplace viewers, *Tempestad's* necropolitical landscapes promote a sense of dispersal and indeterminacy. The documentary performs a negative cartographic function that is characterised not so much by an act of un-mapping as it is by the pursuit of the discarded and itinerant elements that comprise an 'impossible geography' (Lefebvre 2011: 66).

*Tempestad's* impossible geography is palimpsestic in character. To begin with the first layer, the film spends the greatest portion of time retracing the journey home that Miriam took from the self-governing prison in Matamoros, along Mexico's north-eastern border with the US, southwards for more than 2,000 kilometres to Tulum, a littoral town in the southeast of the country, where her home is and where her young son, Leo, still remains. Over the course of this trajectory, the documentary incorporates panoramic shots of different kinds of natural landscapes and fields, often seen through the windows of busses or buildings, as well as shots of ruined, abandoned built environments, and littoral terrains and seascapes. The visual movement of the camera along the coastline is accompanied in a detached way by the unseen narrator's recollections, which are relayed through a voiceover. Critically, the narrator's reflections do not stick to the southwards trajectory that is mapped visually: Miriam moves fluidly between describing the Matamoros prison and describing her home in Tulum, and she also outlines a counter-journey northwards when she recounts the arrest that occurred in her place of work in Cancun, her eight-day detainment in Mexico City, and her arrival at the prison. Frequent spatial differences between image and narration complicate any cartographic localisation of the landscapes screened and create the impression of the landscape's repeated traversal.

In place of mapping, the interaction between image and narration in this primary story is characterised by a rhythm of correspondence and divergence. There are sequences in which derelict hotel buildings are framed, for example, and their spatiality makes one think of the prison that is being discussed by the narrator, despite the spectator's awareness that these are distinct locales. On an affective level, at times the rain-strewn, flooded landscapes that Huezo captures correspond to the pained emotional state of the narrator. However, there are also times in which the landscapes screened are dis-appropriated from the story being relayed. For example, at one point Miriam describes the Matamoros prison in great detail—discussing the absence of locks, bars and uniforms, for example, and the presence of music, juke boxes, dancing and other

unexpected pastimes—while spectators watch a bustling indoor market halfway along the coast followed by shots of littoral landscapes and seascapes. In this sequence, the images and the narrative vie for the spectator's attention and pull the spectator in different directions. Yet, following this drift, Huezo momentarily conjoins the two once more: part way through the sequence, the camera frames the sea through a barred window. While this image contradicts what has just been said about the prison in Matamoros lacking bars, it functions unmistakably as a visual metonym for incarceration, and a symbolic rendering of what it feels like to be detained. The seascape framed through the window comes to signify, in this equation, the narrator's hope of returning to Tulum, which stands in tension with her residual sense of entrapment. After this temporary convergence, however, the visual landscapes and verbal narration part ways once again.

This oscillation between resemblance and difference echoes Lefebvre's arguments about 'landscape's conflictual or tense relationship with narrative' in cinema (2006: xii). According to Lefebvre, landscape is constantly at risk of becoming setting—of functioning as something that merely serves the narrative—yet landscape is also poised to exceed this function. Lefebvre makes the case that there are two types of filmic landscape: the 'intentional' and the 'impure' (2006: 30). The former are the landscapes encouraged through editing and cinematographic decisions that promote a conflict between landscape and narrative; the latter come about through the contingency of the spectator's gaze, which can always opt to contemplate a landscape autonomously, ignoring attempts at narrative capture. Both types of landscape are evident in *Tempestad*, though the film is notable for its intentional pursuit of landscape as I have indicated. In large part, the declining possibility of the narrative appropriation of landscape in *Tempestad* is influenced by the film's recognition that the violent spatialities and experiences it seeks to relate evade emplotment—they cannot be fully mapped.

When discussing 'impure' landscapes, Lefebvre suggests that landscape's reliance on the spectator's gaze renders it a 'precarious' cinematic form (2006: 29). In *Tempestad* this precariousness is redoubled because the movement of the spectator's gaze works alongside a dispersal of perspective that is inscribed into the film's form. The visual journey that the documentary charts may be initially organised around Miriam's story, but it surpasses this context and viewpoint at every turn. The documentary's shots of landscapes are alternated with shots of different human figures—particularly travellers, who sit and sleep on busses, wait at transportation hubs, or stand at document checkpoints—creating the impression that the perspective through which the film's spectators view landscapes could belong to any, all or none of these passengers, and thus that Miriam's story could belong to any of them too. In this way, the historical perspectivism associated with the Western pictorial landscape form—the detached, surveying, appropriating 'I'—is replaced

in *Tempestad* with a plural, itinerant, and almost shared dispossessed perspective created through the camera's drifting; a perspective that resonates with the poetic logic of *desapropiación*.

Another layer of the documentary's impossible geography is introduced through Miriam's mention of Central American migrants travelling through Mexico. Miriam speaks of the violence perpetrated against Central American prisoners detained in the Matamoros jail, owing to the fact that they were unable to pay the charge demanded by the organised crime members running the prison. Early in the documentary, Miriam also discusses the infamous discovery of a mass grave of seventy-two migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in 2010, which occurred shortly before her release from jail. Whilst the context of this massacre is never discussed in the film, the San Fernando killing was attributed to *Los Zetas* cartel and took place in a climate of rising drug war violence following the division between the Zeta and Gulf cartels. The seventy-two migrants, who were abducted from busses, were reportedly murdered because they refused to work for *Los Zetas*, and because they could not secure the money demanded for their release. The 'horrorism'<sup>4</sup> evident in this massacre and others like it, such as the San Fernando massacre that took place the following year, points to the precariousness of migrants and the vulnerability of their travelling routes to interception. Due to this, Miriam's early reference to the migrant massacre cannot help but inflect the spectator's reading of the documentary's entanglement of landscape shots with shots of different forms of transportation, such as trains and busses. The connection between the film's landscapes and migrant precarity is also enforced spatially, because the main journey of the documentary largely coincides with the states in which the highest crimes against migrants have been reported (with the exception of the southernmost point of the film's journey, which forks towards Tulum, moving away from Chiapas) (See Leutert 2018).

Further layers of the film's impossible mapping are introduced in the second narrative of *Tempestad*, that of circus clown Adela, which commences some thirty minutes into the documentary. In this second narrative, Adela relates how her search for Mónica provoked her family's movement underground, their becoming *clandestino*: she recounts how her family had to leave their home and separate from one another due to the death threats they received from local authorities because of their persistent investigations into what had transpired. The undercurrent of concealment that marks Adela's story is articulated visually through Huevo's slow framing of the costume, embodied contortions and face-painting of the figures engaged in the circus show. Initially, this focus on the human figure provides a contrast with Miriam's narrative, and the only landscapes viewed within this second narrative are the landscapes seen from the circus tent or

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<sup>4</sup> I employ this term, following Italian political philosopher Adrianna Cavarero (2011), who uses 'horrorism' to describe forms of violence in which those who most need care are treated with excessive brutality. 'Horrorism' has been taken up in Mexican critical theory, particularly in the work of Cristina Rivera Garza (2011 and 2013).

observed through rain-strewn caravan windows. As Adela's recollections continue, however, Huezo moves from the circus to dispersive shots of a bus journey that is difficult to locate geographically, and which is characterised by itinerant landscapes and dispersive perspectives in a manner that provokes a strong sense of visual convergence between Miriam and Adela's stories. When Adela relates the fragments of context that she has been able to discover about her daughter's kidnapping, a final infra- and supranational cartography is suggested verbally: that of an expansive, shifting network of criminality traversing licit and illicit actors and strewn across the terrain.<sup>5</sup>

### The Broken Frame

*Tempestad* also calls attention to the broken and abandoned built environments produced in the wake of contemporary necropolitics. Huezo frames decrepit buildings in previous work, notably *Ausencias* (2015), a short film set in Mexico that tells the story of a mother whose husband and son were kidnapped. In the director's words, in *Ausencias* a prolonged sequence framing ruined walls was incorporated to evoke the emotional state of the narrator: 'I decided that the walls, full of cracks and stains, could impart the feelings of exhaustion in her voice' (De la Fuente and Huezo 2015: n.p.). Instead of appropriating the woman's shattered faciality as a vehicle for artistic expression, Huezo displaces her emotions onto nonhuman structures, having them signify in her place: the decaying walls are poised to allegorise difficulties in dwelling, and their various cracks and markings also invite viewers to engage in a forensic architectural search for traces of violence, particularly given the unclear contextual place of these built forms within the film's narrative.

In *Tempestad*, ruined buildings are central to the film's reflexive commentary on its own approach to framing landscapes. This is exemplified by the opening sequence. *Tempestad* begins in a darkness that lasts around two minutes: as Miriam begins to speak, recounting the story of her unexpected release from prison, spectators hear sounds such as crickets, a dog barking, and wind rustling plants, as well as noises linked to various moving mechanical parts, doors opening, and the sound of transportation, but they cannot yet visualise this environment or connect the thick sonic fabric to the documentary's narrative. The first shots following this darkness are of the broken windows of abandoned and decaying buildings, windows that Huezo marshals to frame plant life as well as other nearby buildings (see Figure 1).

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning that Mónica's story, and Adela, figure within the interactive web documentary *Geografía del dolor*, directed by Mónica González, a project that curates reports of disappearances from across Mexico, positioning these reports on a map. The prominent map of Mexico that demands attention from the viewer as they first visit the website of this project functions as a cartographic excess that records points of disappearance in the face of a wider lack: what cannot be added to the map are the unknown and inaccessible pathways of trafficking and loss—the pathways that relatives are searching for.

[Insert Figure 1 near here: Still from *Tempestad* (dir. Tatiana Huezo, México, 2016)]

Lingering on these broken frames, Huezo's filmmaking plays on the capacity of the moving image to pause and momentarily become akin to painterly display. This display does not take place in the institutional context of an art gallery but amidst a deserted built terrain; the framing executed here curates derelict material forms within an art-making process, preserving them in cinema. In this recycling of loss, Huezo's opening images resonate with Rivera Garza's poetics of *desapropiación*, which, as mentioned, highlight the significance of curating in artistic production. Playing on the etymological connections between curating and the idea of the cure (2013: 92), Rivera Garza perceives the curatorial incorporation of the disavowed and dejected to be part of a healing process. Rivera Garza has in mind the incorporation of disenfranchised voices of excluded human figures, though Huezo's recourse to built structures evokes something of this approach, opting as it does to integrate that which is otherwise abandoned. Huezo's broken frames are also redolent of Casid's comments on the 'deformative' character of necrolandscaping (2018). Indeed, the frames themselves are marked by decay to the effect that spectators first perceive sights that resemble landscapes through an internal perspective that is characterised by deformation.<sup>6</sup> This broken mediation anticipates Huezo's wider use of dispossessed perspectives when framing landscapes throughout *Tempestad*. As Huezo moves from these broken frames to the dust-filled interiors of the empty buildings, and across the ruined streets of a deserted, cracked and partially overgrown cityscape, wider patterns of deformation can be glimpsed that create the latent sense of the transformation of built space towards landscape in the aftermath of ruin.

### Into the *Cenote*

In addition to ruined structures, water frequently marks the landscapes Huezo films. The documentary's title, 'tempestad', provides an initial evocation of water.<sup>7</sup> 'Tempestad' was selected,

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that the broken frame has wider resonance within contemporary Mexican filmic culture. For example, it is put to striking use in the intermedial documentary opera-film *Bola negra, el musical de Ciudad Juárez* (2012), which records an aesthetic collaboration between experimental author and performance artist Mario Bellatin and operatic composer Marcela Rodríguez. During a ten-minute sequence at the centre of this film, Bellatin and Rodríguez interact with a series of abandoned houses: as Rodríguez sits in the glassless window frame of one of these houses, Bellatin moves into another house and selects items from the debris, which he places next to Rodríguez in the broken frame. Amongst other meanings, this sequence invokes the film's commitment to marshalling the materiality of loss rather than appealing to the sort of spectacular visual images of violence seen in many works on Juárez. This aesthetic approach is highly comparable to Huezo's.

<sup>7</sup> 'Tempest' is a heavily laden word within Latin American cultural history, given its connection to William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1611) and to the rich genealogy of Latin American cultural reworkings of this text.

Huezo states, because whilst shooting the film she often witnessed ‘storms’ and ‘darkened skies’, and these weather conditions seemed to her to evoke the emotional turbulence suffered by the people she framed (Betancourt and Huezo 2016, n.p.). As mentioned earlier, the documentary’s water-strewn landscapes do coincide with the narrators’ affective states, in a manner that pushes landscape towards backdrop. Yet, water in *Tempestad* also exceeds this affective function.

The most striking use of water in *Tempestad* occurs with the *cenote* of the final sequence (identified in interview as *El pit* in Tulum). *Cenotes* are classified as ‘dissolution lakes’ or ‘lakes formed by the action of water on soluble rock’ (Martos López, 2008: 101). They are recurrent in early chronicles of the Yucatán landscape, first appearing in Diego de Landa’s *La relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (1566),<sup>8</sup> and returning across Franciscan accounts of the land as well as nineteenth century travel logs by authors such as John Lloyd Stephens and Alice Dixon Le Plongeon (Martos López 2008: 102). *Cenotes* captured attention due to their striking appearance and because of their great significance to the ancient Maya of the Yucatán. As Luis Alberto Martos López explains, for the Maya these underground spaces provided an essential source of water and were also spiritual terrains for ‘rainmaking rituals and ceremonies associated with concepts of life, death, rebirth and fertility’ (2008: 105). Within these ceremonies, the *cenotes* were understood to facilitate communication across sacred planes, ‘the nether world, the sky and the earth’ (2008: 106). Moreover, the *cenotes* were understood, symbolically, to be the original waters that the Maya believed to exist prior to the creation of the universe; in death ceremonies, human bones were thrown into them, with the understanding that this constituted an act of return to the ‘waters of creation’ in order to ‘guarantee rebirth and existence on another plane’ (Martos López, 2008: 106). These themes of death and rebirth chime, on a poetic level, with Huezo’s final sequence, which frames the floating body of contemporary necropolitics suspended between the traumatic memory of recent violent deaths and the uncertain possibility of re-emergence.

As the final sequence begins, spectators see the contours of a forearm floating in an unidentifiable dark, voided space—an image that produces a corpse-like impression. In the following shot, the camera dollies out, moving backwards through what appears to be an underwater forest. As spectators contemplate the aqua-blue and misty contours of this aquatic

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Huezo’s film, however, does not demonstrate the characteristics that would situate the documentary within this lineage.

<sup>8</sup> De Landa described the *cenote* in the following terms: ‘En la tierra proveyó Dios de unas quebradas que los indios llaman *zenotes* (sic.), que llegan de peña tajada hasta el agua, en algunos de los cuales hay muy furiosas corrientes y acaece llevarse el ganado que cae en ellos, y todas estas salen a la mar de que se hacen las fuentes dichas. Estos *zenotes* (sic.) son de muy lindas aguas y muy de ver, que hay algunos de peña tajada hasta el agua y otros con algunas bocas que les creó Dios, o causaron algunos accidentes de rayos que suelen caer muchas veces, o de otra cosa; y por dentro con lindas bóvedas de peña fina y en la superficie sus árboles, de manera que en lo de arriba es monte y debajo *zenotes* (sic.), y hay algunos que puede caber y andar una carabela y otros más o menos’ (2011: 88).

landscape, Miriam, through voice over, discusses her difficulties upon returning home: her fear of leaving the house, her fear of being in crowded public spaces, and her ongoing internal discussions with a man named Martín whose murder she witnessed in prison.<sup>9</sup> The perspective of the shot changes to a worm's-eye view from the depths of the *cenote*, and the camera looks upwards to frame one large and a couple of smaller openings in the ground above, where the water surfaces. Through these openings, spectators glimpse silhouetted branches of trees or plant life. As the camera zooms in, spectators begin to discern a human figure drifting into the largest opening, as if emerging from the landscape. The impression of a river of death is evoked.

**[Insert Figure 2 near here: Still from *Tempestad* (Huezo, 2016)]**

This final sequence stands out in *Tempestad* because of the ways human figure, landscape and perspective become entangled and merge. Before the human figure drifts into the terrestrial frame, it is initially indistinguishable from the blackness of the earth. A multi-layered convergence is temporarily cast as human and landscape are conjoined, while the camera drifts and immerses itself in the water across the sequence, disavowing any sense of detachment from the environment framed. Moreover, the final deformative internal frame through which the figure is eventually viewed (Figure 2) is itself made of the landscape, echoing the broken window frames of the documentary's opening, and evoking a final progression from landscape as filmic subject to landscape as frame. The multifaceted collapsing of human, land and perspective in this final sequence puts a necropolitical spin on the horizontality that Andermann has theorised as surpassing or upturning the historical landscape form. In his introduction to *Natura: Environmental Aesthetics After Landscape*, Andermann argues evocatively that ecological art which emphasises assemblages and horizontality over distance implies 'there is no landscape, at least not in the conventional sense of the sensory perception of an external material universe (*Umwelt*) on behalf of a subject of cognition that is therefore partially or completely removed from this same plane of objectuality and materiality' (2018: 4). Huezo's film does not undercut human/ nonhuman borders due to an ecological or posthuman politics, but as a final stage in the dis-appropriative poetics of the documentary as a whole, as a final dispersal or deforming of human form into water and

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<sup>9</sup> In interview, Huezo has described the descent into the subterranean aquatic space of the *cenote* as productive of an emotional landscape. Huezo recounts: 'my intention for these final shots was to depict Miriam's homecoming. She was medicated for many months. She couldn't get out of bed. She really couldn't be in the world', and the director continues that she wanted to show how Miriam's life had become an 'abyss' by 'shooting in this *cenote* [...] where at the bottom you see this hollow, clouded forest floating' (Betancourt and Huezo 2016, n.p.). Yet, as I argue here, this final sequence has broader significance because of the ways human figure, nonhuman landscape and perspective become entangled.

towards the land. Even when it becomes apparent that the floating figure is a human body, this silhouetted body continues to resemble the darkness of the earth, thus maintaining a mirrored relation to the land. Towards the end of the sequence, viewers note, as the camera moves closer, that most of the figure's left leg is absent, an embodied sign suggesting this figure is the otherwise withheld body of the narrator, for in an earlier narrative anecdote Miriam relates that she had her leg amputated. The only time the primary narrator appears visually, then, she appears sutured to, and framed through, the landscape form that has otherwise claimed the spectator's gaze. Landscape ultimately does not become setting for human action and eventhood in the documentary's pictorial economy; human becomes landscape.

### **Infrastructural Dispossession in García's *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe***

The floating imagery at the close of *Tempestad* finds immediate resonance with García's *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* in Pani's statement that 'En la vida no hay agarraderas, estamos flotando en el universo' [Life doesn't offer any handles, we're just floating in the universe']. Pani is one of the few remaining residents of the flooded town of San Marcos, Sinaloa that García frames in her documentary, a town once home to some 300 families and which is now home to just three. Whilst Huezó's documentary covers a wide geographical expanse and traces an impossible cartography, García focuses on this singular spatiality and on forms of continued dwelling that take place at the limits of dwelling's possibility.

The landscape of San Marcos is marked by infrastructural and criminal violence. The flood that inundates the town emerged as a consequence of the construction of the Picachos dam megaproject in Sinaloa; San Marcos is one of six such local towns flooded owing to this project. In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta and Hannah Appel note that teleological discourses frequently accompany infrastructural projects, which are typically grounded in a rhetoric of progress, futurity and potentiality. The authors stress that such discourses attempt to mask the fundamental inequalities that undergird infrastructural developments—which sacrifice parts of the populace in the name of progress—and they argue that 'the material and political lives of infrastructure' tend to reveal the 'fragile and often violent relations between people, things, and the institutions that govern or provision them' (2018: 3). The example of San Marcos resonates with these dynamics. The construction of the Picachos dam—much like other Sinaloan megaprojects<sup>10</sup>—was accompanied by a promissory rhetoric. Sibely Cañedo Cázarez relates that

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<sup>10</sup> In their discussion of the ways neoliberalism and megaprojects have impacted upon fishing communities in Sinaloa, J. Cástulo Valdés Estrada, Jaime Renán Ramírez-Zavala, Francisco Javier Tapia Hernández and Joel Bojórquez Saucedo write that 'los megaproyectos [...] son considerados la tabla de salvación de regiones consideradas "deprimidas" por los funcionarios públicos', and yet planned at a distance from the communities they proclaim to

from the outset the government extolled ‘las bondades económicas del proyecto’ [‘the economic benefits of the project’], stating that the dam would ‘dotar de agua a Mazatlán por lo menos hasta el 2035’ [provide Mazatlán with water until at least 2035], that it would benefit producers, protect 19,300 inhabitants from flooding, and create ‘la posibilidad de generar energía eléctrica y actividades recreativas y deportivas para su explotación económica’ [‘the possibility of generating electricity and recreational and sports activities that could be exploited economically’] (2012: 14).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the environmental, social and cultural risks of the project were minimised by the government (Cañedo Cázarez, 2012: 14).

The residents of San Marcos, by contrast, denounced the Picachos dam as illegal from the outset, claiming that the construction of the dam was planned to take place on land that was designated for common use, and which had not been legally expropriated by the state. Further community activism and protest occurred after the dam’s construction because the displaced residents were not adequately compensated for their forced displacement from their ruined homes and community. The conflict reached its violent apex with the assassination of Atilano Román, the man who led the resistance movement on behalf of the displaced, who was murdered by armed men during a live radio broadcast in 2014, in which he was discussing the demands of the movement. In text written across the screen at the close of *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, García dedicates the documentary to the memory of Román and to all ‘los comuneros que han muerto en la búsqueda de una reubicación justa’ [‘the *comuneros* that have died in search of a just resettlement’]. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, García situates her documentary as a continuation of Román’s efforts, in the sense that by visually evidencing the dispossession that is apparent in the landscape of San Marcos the film aims to counteract the culture of censorship through violent intimidation that characterises the present (2016: n.p). Surveying the ruin that occurred in the wake of the Picachos dam, García’s documentary lingers in the sacrificial underbelly of infrastructure’s promissory claims.

While, as we will see, García’s film resonates visually with the poetics of *desapropiación*, the documentary also puts pressure on this term. First, as mentioned earlier, whilst Rivera Garza defines *desapropiación* at a distance from expropriation, the context of San Marcos suggests that she is too quick to dismiss the idea of compensation, which has been of urgent material and practical necessity for the town’s displaced residents. It is clear that compensation would not fully redress the initial loss—the voiding of a town—thus implying that expropriation entails a greater degree of permanent dispossession than Rivera Garza makes space for. Second, a rich tradition of debate

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‘save’ such projects ‘afectan negativamente la vida comunitaria donde son llevados a cabo, destruyendo formas de existir, prácticas productivas ancestrales, relaciones sociales significativas y ecosistemas [...]’ (2016: 155).

<sup>11</sup> Sibely Cañedo served as production assistant for the documentary.

in visual studies has underlined the unequal power dynamics that tend to underpin documentary framings of human marginalisation, and these debates suggest a more problematic relationship between visual culture and notions of *desapropiación* and expropriation. In part, this has to do with the bind that García, as director, will profit from the images of hardship she frames—in terms of artistic reputation and acclaim—whereas the people she films likely will not. In this sense, the documentary does not escape the notion of ownership that Rivera Garza’s concept of *desapropiación* seeks to move away from, and indeed in practice *desapropiación* often risks falling back into appropriative circuits in this way. Moreover, as several writers, from US artist Martha Rosler to Mexican cultural theorist Irmgard Emmelhainz, have noted, images of human suffering can have both vague and problematic political effects: rather than leading to greater social equality, the visibility such images provide can shore up divisions between the privileged observer of images and the marginalised people these images frame, reassuring spectators of their relative position of comfort vis-à-vis suffering others, rather than forging meaningful alliances and inspiring structural change (Rosler, 2006: 178-179).<sup>12</sup> I do not introduce these caveats to discount García’s film; there is much to say about the ethically sensitive ways *Los reyes* elides any direct focus on embodied violence through its prolonged engagement with landscape, water and ruined built structures, and about the ways it highlights acts of resilience and resistance. Rather, I mention these debates to point to the ways the documentary image runs the risk of echoing the very expropriative dynamics it frames and critiques (insofar as the documentary ‘extracts’ images of human hardship to a certain extent to its own gain).<sup>13</sup>

The infrastructural context of expropriation that marks San Marcos is interwoven with the violence of the drugs conflict, which has been particularly acute in Sinaloa. Since early in the twentieth century, Sinaloa has been an important area for the production of opium and marijuana in Mexico. The state has witnessed the emergence of a range of historical figures of criminal leadership who have gained media prominence; has seen expanding expressions of criminal

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<sup>12</sup> Martha Rosler advances these and other arguments in her acclaimed essay ‘In, Around, and Afterthoughts’ (Rosler, 2006). See also Emmelhainz’s critique of cultural portrayals of pain, suffering and bereavement that aim to evoke empathy in her book *La tiranía del sentido común*, especially her suggestion that such portrayals can work to enforce isolated communities of sufferers (2016: 170-76).

<sup>13</sup> These possible limitations also impact upon Huezo’s film, given how it also ‘appropriates’ stories and images people suffering from pronounced grief. However, in the case of *Tempestad* these dynamics of empathy and exploitation are rendered more complex. In part, this is because we learn that Adela’s protest and activism are grounded in attempts to make herself visible and thus memorable (through her distinct embodied appearance as an elegant clown), and therefore Huezo’s film arguably enhances this desired visibility, even while it also benefits from it in terms of filmic acclaim. Also, as mentioned in the previous section, during almost the entirety of Miriam’s narrative (the narrative afforded the greatest space and time in *Tempestad*) Huezo frames the landscape rather than the embodied figure of Miriam herself. More so than García, then, Huezo distances herself from the direct visual framing of embodied human marginalisation and suffering through the sheer quantity of filmic space and time she affords to the landscape.

culture, such as the folkloric Malverde cult; and has been a space in which innovations in the black market and smuggling have taken place (Enciso 2010: loc 10). The violence that the state has experienced during the drugs conflict has meant that, in the words of Froylán Enciso, Sinaloa has become a ‘símbolo del fracaso de la actual política de combate a las drogas y el narcotráfico en México’ [‘symbol of the failure of current policies targeting drugs and narco-trafficking in Mexico’] (2010: loc 10). This wider violence impacts upon García’s documentary to the effect that the flooded landscape that starts as a material index of infrastructural dispossession is poised to allegorise violent invasion. As García puts it, the town ‘was flooded, not only by water but also by fear. After the construction of the dam, the submerged town became a breeding ground for violence [...] the flood had become a metaphor for fear’ (Kamen and García 2015, n.p.).<sup>14</sup> The drugs violence does not mark the documentary’s landscapes as a visual component but reverberates across the soundscape: the violence is heard through the sound of possible gunshots, and evoked by the whispered and cut-short stories of the remaining families who are fearful to discuss criminal violence because ‘the walls have ears’. As García puts it, ‘It’s a film that basically puts you there; it asks you to look closely, listen carefully, and ask the questions we were asking ourselves, “where are those gunshots coming from?”’ (Betancourt and García 2016, n.p.). Sound thus provides a mechanism through which viewers are immersed, uncomfortably, in a landscape poised on the edge of habitability.

By way of a brief comparison, this displacement of visual violence onto the soundscape is a strategy apparent in another important Mexican documentary film set in Sinaloa, Natalia Almada’s *El velador* (2011). *El velador* takes place in in the *Jardines del Humaya* cemetery, a site in which former organised crime groups are buried, in excessive mausoleums. In this documentary, sparse verbal dialogue in the necropolis is accompanied by radio and televisual broadcasts detailing shootouts, deaths, tortures, and other acts of violence. These broadcasts reach their apex with the notice of the killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, a drug boss heading the Beltrán Leyva cartel in Sinaloa, whose death gained spectacular media attention. Whilst Almada explicitly avoids incorporating any images of mutilated bodies, the soundscape cements the heterotopic relationship between the repeated construction of mausoleums in the necropolis framed in the documentary and the unseen violence occurring in Sinaloa.

This comparison with *El velador* is also apt because in many ways the landscape framed by García appears as a corollary for a necropolis, albeit a necropolis characterised by derelict buildings

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<sup>14</sup> In interview, García recounts that violence was constantly in the background of the filming process during the five years it took to make *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* (Kamen and García 2015, n.p.). Initially and ostensibly about the Picachos dam, this wider sense of conflict inflects the framing, tone, and editing decisions of the film throughout.

and overgrown plants rather than by spectacular tombs. García's framing of San Marcos is strongly reminiscent of Juan Rulfo's seminal haunted rural landscape of *Pedro páramo* (1955), a text that is similarly comprised of images of abandonment, overgrowth, rainfall and crumbling stone. García's haunted landscape represents an historical updating of Rulfo's ghosted landscapes, in its focus on an abandoned town in the epoch of contemporary necropolitics that lies at the sacrificial edge of the national and transnational (criminal) map. The sense that San Marcos is a liquid graveyard is suggested visually from García's choice of opening: spectators watch a man rowing into the town against foggy grey sky, moving across the water towards submerged buildings, and passing a cross once attached to the roof of a building that is just visible above the flooded water, poised as if demarcating a grave. The crossing of a river—mythically linked to a movement into the underworld—screened in this opening finds an echo later in the film when Yoya, one of the remaining residents, recounts the saying that when one dies one crosses a river, and the dogs that were one's companions during life are present to assist with this crossing. García's editing choices enforce the connection between Yoya's adage and the landscape framed: across the documentary García follows stray dogs that encircle and cross the newly created rivers (alongside other animals), or that move through the town's abandoned properties. Death is also a recurrent narratological trope within the conversations of the remaining residents. At one point, Yoya and her husband Jaimito discuss a cemetery specifically: Jaimito becomes worried one night when Yoya returns late from a cemetery visit, explaining that he was concerned something may have happened to her on the road home. While they are talking about a different locale (the cemetery) the fears that Jaimito articulates closely resemble the fears frequently voiced in relation to San Marcos itself, thus enforcing the connection between the town and a necropolis.

Much as in *Pedro páramo*, Huezó's ghosted landscape is brimming with mnemonic traces of life. In one sequence, a man who has now left the town provides a boat tour of sorts, educating viewers in a manner that evokes the landscape's connection to memory—pointing out local restaurants, events and rivalries. Amongst other tales, the man recounts the story of a man named Martín Rochín, who got it into his mind that someone had shot him in the leg. This man would slash at his leg looking for the bullet, and eventually he contracted gangrene and sadly died, despite the fact that he had never been shot. As the credits roll at the documentary's close, moreover, García includes found footage of a party captured by video camera on 9-10 May 1991, footage that captures dancing, music and festivity. Through these examples, the film both laments what has transpired in San Marcos and exhibits a certain joy in preserving local stories that are enmeshed with a now bygone landscape.

## Impossible Dwelling

Like *Tempestad*, García's landscape shots make use of a poetics of *desapropiación* in which derelict buildings are repeatedly framed (see Figure 3). The theme of property has a specific historical resonance in relation to violence in Sinaloa. Diego Enrique Osorno argues that the origin of Sinaloan criminal activities can be found in the advent of private armed squads following the Mexican Revolution, which emerged precisely 'para proteger la propiedad privada' ['to protect private property']. The state's richest inhabitants would use gunmen like *el Gitano* 'para mantener intactos sus privilegios mediante la aplicación de una ley propia' ['to preserve their privileges through the application of their own form of law']. The governmental corruption and installation of fear created in this context meant that criminal actors were able to expand their activities from the protection of private property to areas such as 'la siembra y venta de marihuana y adormidera' ['the planting and sale of marijuana and opium'] (2010: loc. 1119- 1147).<sup>15</sup> This historical context chimes with a growing consensus in drug war scholarship that organised crime groups operate according to a common capitalistic and proprietary logic, rather than being symbols of an alternate, aberrative or dissensual social logic (see Williams 2011, Zavala 2014, and Guzmán 2017).

**[Insert Figure 3 near here: Still from *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* (García, 2015)]**

To a certain extent, García's framing of San Marcos invokes a relationship between the breakdown of property and the loss or displacement of life, thereby suggesting something of the necropolitical underside of a modern biopolitical proprietary logic. Yet the documentary also moves beyond this in the attention it affords to continued attempts at dwelling in the ruined terrain, an editing decision that emphasises both the ongoing hardship and the forms of resilience and relationality that exist on the other side of the necropolitical scaping of the land. Dwelling, much like cartography, has a contested relationship to landscape within scholarship. As mentioned earlier, Lefebvre argues that film conjoins aspects of the autonomous landscape of still media art with the experience of landscape as a lived and inhabited space (2011: 74). By contrast, Andermann draws on the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy to suggest that landscape 'does not orientate us in another place making it habitable for us but, on the contrary, presents it in its ontological alienness, as un-place where we can no longer dwell' (2017: 135). An impossible dwelling is inscribed in García's film from the start through the title, which presents the space of the documentary as a

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<sup>15</sup> Guzmán (2017) also marshals Diego Enrique Osorno's insights about property when analysing Natalia Almada's *El velador* and its Sinaloan context.

negated place (*el pueblo que no existe*). Later, the town is proclaimed ‘imposible’ [‘impossible’] by Miro, who laments the closure of businesses and restaurants and the absence of employment opportunities and sociality, emphasising that all the town has is ‘escombros’ [‘rubble’]. However, in the vein of Rivera Garza’s theory of *desapropiación*, García’s framing of the ways the remaining families inhabit the landscape draws attention to the relational bonds woven following property’s demise, and as with Casid’s theory ‘necrolandscaping’, García calls attention to resilience as well as loss.

The context of criminal violence in San Marcos catalyses Pani and Paula’s specific response to dwelling. Pani relates a story in which he and his wife were pursued and eventually came under gunfire as they were driving down a nearby road. He relates how, in the wake of their narrow escape, he and his wife pledged to reconstruct the church that had been destroyed and abandoned following the flooding of the town. Their careful reconstruction of the church fits into, and perhaps triggers, the wider acts of care and reconstruction Pani and Paula demonstrate towards the desolate landscape in the documentary. In the opinion of Lilia Adriana Pérez Limón, these acts produce ‘a reparative experience; the process of rebuilding San Marcos is the work that matters, and that ultimately creates a feeling of a commons that allows for the residents’ survival’ (2018: 99) and she also suggests that ‘the experience of repetition is a concrete sensory experience that allows people to be in tune with what is happening around them’ (2018: 106). By Pani and Paula’s own admission, their acts of rebuilding are not compensatory in a lasting sense: they are fully aware that the rising levels of the water might mean that the following year their efforts are completely submerged and destroyed once more. Their careful reconstruction of the church also takes place in the context of the absence of any parishioners. And, yet, Pani and Paula continue. Reconstruction becomes a repeated expression of an impossible dwelling that operates as symbolic ritual rather than material investment, given that it unfolds in a space marked by present and future dispossession.

Jaimito and Yoya take a different approach to dwelling in the abandoned landscape. The couple appears to be the most joyous of the families framed: whilst they recount, and show, their fear of violence at multiple junctures, they also laugh, dance, tell stories and joke with each other, with the camera, and with the other remaining residents. Jaimito describes how they now live in the greatest house of the town—joking with Yoya that he has gifted this house to her. When the flood prompted the mass exodus of people, Jaimito and Yoya claimed the largest abandoned house, moving from the wooden shack that they used to live in. Jaimito likens himself and his wife to the little birds that find a nest that is already built and move into it, claiming it as their own, so that when the other birds return they discover it has been occupied. García’s framing of Pani and

Paula's and Jaimito and Yoya's respective approaches to inhabiting the terrain thus calls attention to the creativity and care that continues following, and through, the violent impetus of necrolandscaping.

The third and final approach to inhabiting San Marcos comes with García's framing of Miro, who vocalises the greatest resistance to dwelling in the town, believing that it will one day become mud. Central to García's framing of Miro's relationship with landscape is a sequence in which Miro rows to visit a stranded cow. I mentioned earlier the connection between *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* and Rulfo, and the sequence that frames Miro and the cow calls to mind Rulfo's short story collection, *El llano en llamas* (1953), which is saturated with rich naturalistic descriptions of bareness and desolation in the context of uneven land distribution. Of particular resonance is Rulfo's story 'Es que somos muy pobres', which combines descriptions of the image, sound and smell of a rising flood with a bovine allegory in the form of a cow that is swept away by the water, and whose fate becomes entangled with that of the narrator's young sister.<sup>16</sup> In *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, García frames the flood's creation of miniature islands that separate the landscape. Instead of being swept away and lost in the flood as such, the cow of García's film is trapped on one of these islands. In one sequence, Miro rows over to the island and whistles for the animal before presenting it with corn tortillas, which, he remarks, the cow really enjoys. The piece of land that the cow exists on, Miro recounts, used to belong to his father, and it was said that the flood would never reach it. As he rows away from the island, the camera turns to capture the cow once more, framing it as a faded figure lost in the vastness of an overgrown landscape. This framing closely mirrors the initial shot of the sequence, in which Miro arrives on the island to visit the cow: Miro is wearing a light-coloured top and appears in the same way as the cow—a minute figure subsumed by the overgrown landscape. The bovine allegory in this case stands for Miro's feeling of entrapment in San Marcos. However, as Pérez Limón suggests perceptively, Miro's act of care towards the cow contradicts, to a certain extent, his complete despair: Pérez Limón contends that Miro's treatment of the cow functions as a mode of existing in precarity through a form of 'slow life' that is 'attuned to the daily structures that need adjustments' in a manner that carries broader ethical and political implications (2018: 107). In this sense, this act of care, which proceeds across human-nonhuman lines, functions as a mode of continued dwelling and relationality in a landscape otherwise characterised by dwelling's impossibility.

In her theoretical work, Rivera Garza argues that the poetics of *desapropiación* can enact 'comunalidad', a term she employs to describe a contingent community, defined by mutual loss,

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<sup>16</sup> The river carries off the cow that has been gifted to the narrator's sister Tacha on her twelfth birthday to give her a dowry of sorts that will permit her to marry rather than to turn to prostitution like her older sisters.

that can emerge in the wake of necropolitics. Rivera Garza's vision of community here is influenced by other contemporary political theories of voided communities, especially Jean-Luc Nancy's theories of the 'inoperative community' and 'literary communism' which Rivera Garza evokes directly (Nancy, 1991; Rivera Garza 2013: 274-275). While the remaining residents of San Marcos framed by García exhibit aspects of the contingency and shared loss that marks these renewed ideas of community, it would be a mistake to conflate the voided town of San Marcos fully with these theoretical visions. What García captures is not a hopeful model of a different mode of community rooted in lack, but forms of individual and collective existence and survival that take place out of necessity and remain marked by the intertwined and difficult dynamic of violence and resistance that Casid associates with necrolandscaping.

## Conclusions

Huezo's *Tempestad* and García's *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* both make recurrent use of landscapes characterised by discarded and ruined elements that are left in the wake of violent intervention, accumulation and expropriation in order to provide a critique of necropower from a site of dispossession and dispersal. *Tempestad* employs landscapes in a way that indexes a multi-layered and mobile cartography that surges beneath the surface of political visibility, and which is characterised by a broken, displaced and recycled use of perspective and framing that moves beyond the characteristics associated with the historical landscape form of still media. *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* deploys landscape shots in a manner that evokes, at a representational remove, strands of both infrastructural and criminal violence that intersect to 'scape' the land in a way that ghosts, expropriates and negates an entire town. Inflected with Rulfian undertones, and thus pointing back to a longer cultural history of landscapes of *desapropiación*, the documentary frames multiple attempts to dwell in and inhabit the ruined landscape in the wake of its flooding and in the midst of persistent fears of violence. In both documentaries, water emerges as a powerful material and poetical symbol for the experience of dispersal and for visual reflection and refraction. Whether marshalled to create a liminal image of corporeal floating in the mythically rich space of a dissolution lake, the *cenote*, or framed to suggest a liquid graveyard replete with memory and heterotopic implications, hydro-poetics are central to the documentaries' registering of the uncounted experiences and abandoned spatialities that are brought about by contemporary necropower in Mexico.

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