



MORE THAN HUMAN EXPERIENCE WITH *OTHER FIRE*

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FAGUNDES, Guilherme Moura. 2017. *Outro fogo*. Brasília, DF, Brazil, color, 21 min.

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What its fear? This question opens *Other Fire* (2017), film directed by Guilherme Moura Fagundes,¹ winner of the “Prêmio Pierre Verger” at the XII edition of its ethnographic film category, in 2018. The worlds created by the film lead us to rethink many possibilities of relationships with the environment. We face some kind of anguish related with social-environment practices presented to us. What we see in *Other Fire* is literally a way of inhabiting and managing the environment that a southeastern Brazilian point of view – that is, my point of view – could interpret as a relationship of destruction of the landscape. Therefore, in this review, I start from a situated perspective of one possible sensory experience among different interpretations of the film, as well as from the author’s experience as a privileged spectator (Triana and Gómez, 2016).

We are transported to a burning environment. Under the sound of whistles and crackling, the first part of the film leads us to confront the issue of fear and the supposed dangers of fire. What appears on the screen is an instrument that drips fire into the woods, leaving a trail of flames along the path of the pickup truck that takes the person handling the tool along with the cameraman. While the whistles create a grim atmosphere, we realize that these are fire crackles in contact with the woods. The sound continues to show plans taken in the Cerrado forest, all yellowed in the incandescent sunlight. Fire in these planes is a central element: one is the product of human action, another is the one that lights the environment by the sun.

The crackle of the fire proceeds to the image of a bonfire roasting some meat on sticks. It is the fire that feeds the working men of brigade members from ICMBio, as we can see in their uniforms. We are then located in Jalapão and Chapada dos Veadeiros, in the summer of 2016, places of social-environmental relationships between brigade members and the fire but not only that. The film takes us to a burned but alive Cerrado, from the woods to the animals that live there. By confronting the film, we are transported into a world not only of images and sounds, but also of a true physical experience, which escapes an entirely rational narrative (Jameson 1995).

The true bodily relationship that brigade members have with the flames stands out in the narrative. They strike the fire so intensely and in perfect sync that it looks like a choreographed scene. Some planes divide the burned ashes on one side and the Cerrado forest on the other, separated by fire, making flames and forests, fire and Cerrado co-exist, and the brigadiers in the center as the fundamental element of

1. It is not the intention of this review to discuss issues of authorship, but it is worth mentioning that besides the director there are other people and institutions in the production of the film, including those who participate as characters.

their relationship, creating some closeness and intimacy with the fire for themselves. I emphasize not only the difficulty of the activity of the brigadiers, so close to the flames, but also of the cameraman, who placed himself bodily close to them, creating a direct confrontation of the audiovisual effects with the spectator's body experience. The images of the flames are intense, covering the whole plane near the smoke. They bring a sense of closeness, and Riobaldo's² questioning at the beginning of the film, of the fear that is produced within us, which sometimes jolts, especially from the moment when the brigade members spot another focus of the flames and rush to it when the soundtrack "emerges" through the fires.

We can cheer for the brigade members in the supposed fight against the flames. Following the film's narrative, we are faced with the following question: what is the origin of this fire? Is the fire caused by human action? Could this be an arson attack like the one that plagued the Amazon lately? Is the fire caused by the sun? What sensitive experience does the movie provoke in us? "Pirophobic" feelings can invade the viewer in what I consider the movie's biggest tension point, when even the soundtrack converges with the brigade's movements towards the flames.

However, in the second part of the film, an ambiguous experience regarding fire arises. A conversation of characters that cannot be seen appears in the night. They talk about the fear, this pirophobia that occurred in the previous scenes. Some brigade members, probably those less experienced, also share this fear. Who is talking? We can, while spectators, understand that they talk to us – "if the cap fits" as they say. In fact, fear is "produced within people", "deposited" – taking Riobaldo's speech once again –, and life is where this "fun of fear" is destroyed. In this case, life and experience of the fire brigade members, fire is used for conservationist and agropastoral purposes, in a relationship of true pirophilia. As Fagundes (2016, 60) comments, "O MIF [Manejo Integrado do Fogo], como se convencionou chamar no Jalapão, consiste em uma perspectiva ambiental presente em diversas savanas pelo mundo. Como o nome sugere, visa 'integrar' saberes e práticas científicas e locais relacionadas ao fogo..."³

The narrative form of the film puts both paradigms in question and how they affect the imaginary of fire relationships in the Cerrado. Whereas in the first part we are confronted with pirophobia, with intense scenes of fire containment by the brigade members, the second half focuses on

2. A character from *Grande sertão: veredas*, a romance by João Guimarães Rosa (1986).

3. MIF [Integrated Fire Management], as it is commonly called in Jalapão, consists of an environmental perspective present in various savannas around the world. As the name suggests, it aims to 'integrate' scientific and local knowledge and practices related to fire... (free translation).

providing an audiovisual narrative about management, showing the relationships established with human and non-human beings through fire and speech. There is an attenuation of the film's tension about the fear of fire for a "philia" relationship with it.

Thus, the narrative in *Other Fire* plays with ambiguous feelings about fire through the dichotomy (phobia and philia) placed and questioned by it. This "deposited" fear, which reflects from within, can be confronted with regional fire management practices in Jalapão, as stated in the conversation we hear in the middle of the film, to come out "with another mindset." Considering cinema as a mimetic machine, "that is, as a modern narrator capable of provoking and transmitting knowledge that significantly affects the viewer" and considering that such a machine provokes sensible experiences and ethical reflections (Triana and Gómez 2016, 118-22), *Other Fire* directs us to experience and reflect different conceptions of multispecies relationships, but also sociotechnical relationships in which fire is its central tool, and may reflect the limits of the "other" – often built within anthropological perspectives and beyond the limits from humans, towards an experience other than, or more than, human.

It is "other" because it destabilizes what we imagine (at least in the urban context of the Brazilian southeast, from where I write) to be the agency of fire in the forest, bringing the experience of relationship of brigade members with that environment. It is other because it is not that fire recently made in the Amazon for agribusiness. It is other fire because it becomes other, in its becoming-tool within the social and environmental relationships in the Cerrado. The film, the result of a scientific study in social anthropology, gives us, above all, a feeling of radical otherness towards this non-human element, fire, which invades the plans and touches even those who watch.

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