The Cry of King Kong: Crisis and Male Fear of the other, of the Woman

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Introduction

Crisis or the Three US Versions of King Kong

It is a well-known fact verified by Social Sciences that times of crisis –the end of antiquity; the passage from feudalism to the modern age; the religious censorship in the seventeenth century; romanticism, a 'transition' period; 1914-1945, a 'time of catastrophes'; from 1973, the 'dark' postmodernity– (Schmitt, 1981: XX, 12 and ff.-168 and ff.; Nouschi, 1997; Reeves, 1998: 111; Popkin, 1998: 133; Hobbsbawm, 2001: 15 and 29 and ff.) generate or intensify various types of fear. These fears have increased in modern societies due to the awareness of the multiple threats which hover over human beings and the world (Delumeau, 2002: 10-19). This growth of fear seems inherent to modernisation itself, as suggested by the sociology of risk, according to which the more modern we are, the more dangerous and uncertain modernity becomes, and the more likelihood of crises, catastrophes and disasters happening (Gil-Calvo, 2003: 11-23). This is particularly the case in the 'opulent' western societies (Galbraith, 1985), even though they seem to be accustomed to uncertainty. In any case, despite the fact that reactions to fear change according to the historical time and its specific social and cultural contexts, they always have the generation of flight or social escape strategies in common.

This is what happens in the three most important US films (there are other secondary TV and Japanese versions) which narrate the myth of King Kong. The first 1933 version, which created this myth, was directed by Merien C. Cooper and Ernest B. Shoedsack; John Guillermin directed the second version in 1976; and the third one, with Peter Jackson as its director, reached cinema screens in 2005. The main plot –explained below– is similar in all three films, although the second version differs from the other two in a number of significant aspects. Unlike what happens in the 1976 version –where the reason for the trip is the search for oil and the actress appears alone in a boat in the middle of the ocean once the sea voyage has started– the 1933 and 2005 versions present an actress who has become unemployed due to the 1929 crash and is hired by a movie director who wishes to shoot a film on a remote island. They set sail from the port of New York towards Skull Island for that purpose. What they find there is a prehistoric world inhabited by a giant gorilla, King Kong, and by a tribe that celebrates strange rituals to appease his fury. This tribe kidnaps the young actress and gives her to the ape, whose love for her leads him to his downfall, since King Kong will be captured by the ship crew, taken to New York and, once there, shown at a theatre spectacle. Nevertheless, the gorilla will manage to escape and put the whole city in danger. The story ends with King Kong perched on top of the *Empire State Building* (in the first and the third film; and on the *Twin Towers* in the 1976 version) and ruthlessly gunned by planes and helicopters.

Horror films have traditionally flourished during periods characterised by traumatic social situations and in this sense, the first 1933 version was rooted in the 1929 crash (Gubern, 1974: 20; 1979: 11). My suggestion is that crisis underlies the other two versions as well: the 1973 oil crisis in the 1976 film; and the terrorist attack against the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001 in the most recent 2005 version. However, as the readers of the present paper will have the chance to see, each one of these three interpretations is associated with a different expression of crisis. Thus, the content has to do with the economic crisis in the first case; with ecology in the second case; and with risk and security in the third one. These crises are in turn linked to the specific manifestation of horror that each one of them generates –internal and external; imaginary and real; film-based and social– thus making fear and crisis melt in an iconic and symbolic way in order to shape the foundation of the narrative plot and the film structure. More precisely, crisis provokes the irrational fear of 'the other' –which materialises in men's fear of women in the films analysed here (Bourdieu, 2000: 71).

In my opinion, this connection between crisis and fear of women makes it possible to build a coherent interpretation thread which not only links the three versions to one another but also relates each one of them to its respective time, to the evolution of the twentieth century and of the twenty-first. It reveals a type of society which evolves from the industrial character –shown in the first King Kong film– to another marked by digitisation – present in the third one– and from a society that could be referred to as modern –in the first film– to another hypermodern one –in the second and, above all, in the third one. Following that development, there is an obvious variation in the conception of the woman offered by the three versions. This connection between cinema and society was possible through an iconological analysis of the three films, a method with a long tradition in Sociology (González García, 1988: 23 and ff.; Barboza, 2002: 201-213; Bericat, 2012: 201 and ff.) which discloses the role which images play as social documents. And this is so because the iconological analysis –as indicated by its own etymology– allows us not only to carry out an analysis of the image rational logic, that is, to observe the way in which its different constituent parts (characters, architectural constructions, objects, landscapes…) are interrelated, but also to discover its *logos* –its discourse– under the image rationality; in other words, the ideology on which it is supported.

Taking Van Dijk as a reference, ideology is defined in the present paper as a political or social system of ideas, values or precepts meant to organise or legitimise the group's action. In turn, discourse is understood as the social action and interaction mode which prevails in collective contexts; that is, both the discourse and its mental dimensions (its meanings, for instance) are placed within social situations and structures (Van Dijk, 1998: 16-9). At any rate, the iconological analysis inevitably refers the image back to the social context where it originates and, consequently, to its social meaning. Therefore, it is arguably an excellent supporting method for Weberian comprehensive or interpretive Sociology, according to which the social world and the relationships that it produces are full of sense, of meaning (Weber, 2006: 13 and ff., 43-4 and 172; González García,1992: 37 and ff.; González García, 1998: 208).

Three Crises –Economic, Ecological and Risk-Related– Or Modernity as Crisis

The Great Depression of 1929 caused by the catastrophe derived from the loss of European markets –after the First World War disaster– and the subsequent collapse of the economy, the financial sector and the Stock Exchange is very much present in the 1933 version, especially in its first minutes. A clear illustration of this can be found in the sequence that develops in a sordid and misty New York quarter with a queue of women patiently waiting to receive a dish of hot food at the *Woman´s Home Mission*. These such crudely realistic and current images –which almost seemed to be taken from a documentary (Gubern, 1974: 54)– must have strongly impressed the cinema audiences of the time, especially because they were ordinary women belonging to the middle class – the bourgeoisie or high bourgeoisie– who were not at all shabbily dressed and had simply been surprised by the crisis in a sudden, unforeseen manner. What is more, the images most probably brought back to their memories the queues of unemployed people waiting to receive free soup, coffee and fritters. In fact, fate had so unexpectedly hit the life both of the fiction characters and of the audience members themselves that their own survival was compromised and, as a result, fear –which was latent in the faces of the women appearing in that scene– came to the surface in such an unexpected and uncontrolled way as the actual crisis situation.

It is worth highlighting that these images are shown at the beginning of the film, since that is the root of what will happen later. As shown below, they are necessary for the audience to relive the fear of depression and so that this fear can be fed and increased with the presence of King Kong, an unknown being that is more horrific than any real affair. Therefore, the overwhelming strength of this last panic overcomes the previous one and even makes it disappear into oblivion. This is precisely what happens to Ann Darrow, the actress who has experienced the fear of depression, of unemployment and hunger in her own flesh and will suffer an atrocious panic attack at the sight of King Kong's huge figure. Then, at that very moment, the intense feeling of anguish will appease her and make her forget the one that she suffered in New York: the same might have happened to the members of the audience. The main character carries out a journey which is simultaneously physical, psychological and symbolic, as it leads her away from the city of New York towards a world where her atavistic fears of being kidnapped and raped by a wild 'monster' of nature will reappear.

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[1] This paper was translated by Mr Victor Manuel Pina-Medina, Senior Lecturer at the English Studies Department of the University of Alicante (Spain)

The 1973 oil crisis made the world fall into economic recession and, since then, the world seems to have left behind the planet's 'golden age' represented by the post-Second-World-War period (Hobsbawn, 2001: 29 and ff.) and replaced it by the 'Age of Uncertainty,' an economy which loses all its security (Galbraith, 1984: 137 and 209).From that date onwards, society has gradually become aware of the shortages that affect raw materials such as hydrocarbons, of natural disasters, of the problems related to pollution and desertification –there is hardly any vegetation left in the island of the second version– and the ozone layer, and of the planet's global warming too. We no longer find ourselves in an opulent world which has left shortages behind; instead we are in a world that has gone from opulence to Earth exhaustion (Nisbet, 1981: 166; Galbraith, 1985: 27 and ff.). The economic uncertainty is accompanied by an ideological uncertainty. This is explained by the far-from coincidental choice of the name for the ship that will take the main characters to the mysterious new world in this version: *Petrox Explorer*, a highly justified name to express that the origin of fear lies in the oil crisis, and also by the fact that the palaeontologist Jack Prescott (Jeff Bridges) fights to preserve the island's nature. However, the truth is that, when the ship reaches its destination, its passengers do not find the sought-after black gold but the enormous King Kong, an impressive work of nature –as black as oil– that becomes a valuable good in the mind of the ambitious explorer, who hopes to obtain the profit denied by the lack of oil. However, as it happened in the previous version, King Kong will not only produce a huge profit but also trigger an atrocious fear which seems to replace the one generated by the energy crisis.

The 2005 version equally contains a sequence which shows the unemployment, poverty and hunger caused by the Great Depression of 1929. Again, the audience can see a queue of well-dressed men –once again belonging to the middle class– waiting to collect food; a deprived urban area on the outskirts of New York with fragile dwellings, almost shacks, and an elderly woman giving a child something to eat among debris and rubbish. Nevertheless, the images are a cultural citation or reference rather than a reminiscence of the fear caused by the 1929 crash –already very distant in the spectators' minds. In my view, the crisis which lies behind this new interpretation of the King Kong myth is the one produced by the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers. This version provides a digital recreation of New York in the 1920s and 1930s with the aim of showing the bustling atmosphere of the streets and the bridges packed with cars. Furthermore, there is a significant image of a worker busy in a new skyscraper and suspended in mid-air on an iron beam –from which hangs a US flag. That image symbolises the strength and energy not only of a city but also of a country that is shaping itself, forging its place in History –like iron– and becoming a world power –represented by the height of the building. And it all precisely in moments of sorrow, confusion, crisis, uncertainty and fear after the attacks suffered by the Twin Towers which made people feel nostalgia for the original New York, for the vitalism and optimism that used to prevail in the city, the country and the world.

It is also highly significant that the two previous versions –especially the 1975 film– showed some burning pieces of the planes or helicopters dangerously touching or hitting the skyscraper walls, thus anticipating what was eventually going to happen in 2001. There is actually an eloquent image uploaded on the Internet where King Kong can be seen straddling the Twin Towers with one foot on each tower and fighting against the planes, with an anguished and desperate question below: "Where was King Kong when we needed him?" Therefore, the crisis inferred from this version is no longer exclusively economic or ecological; it has to do with security and highlights the risk entailed by the construction of such high buildings and the manufacturing of such dangerous weapons and planes. It is now strongly believed that human beings' actions have unpredictable consequences, the society of risk and uncertainty has taken shape displaying new fears which are added to the traditional and everyday ones.

Crisis additionally seems to constitute an inseparable travelling companion of Modernity –understood precisely as a time of crisis. As shown above, the fears generated by the crisis essentially hit the middle class –the largest part of the audiences who saw the three films and most of their main characters– which formed the backbone of those societies. In this respect, the terror caused among the spectators of King Kong or the damages that skyscrapers may suffer is possibly in direct correlation with his disproportionate –by no means 'intermediate'– size. After all, the three successive –economic, ecological and security-related crises– presented in the King Kong films still remain nowadays, combined and widespread, in these early years of the twenty-first century, which explains why the fears gripping us are even more intense and diverse than those which existed in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the anxiety and unrest provoked by the situation of generalised crisis result in disagreeable and pernicious feelings of uncertainty and risk (Roche, 2012: 148 and ff.).

The Woman: The Male Fear of 'The Other'

The Woman as an Object of Erotic Desire: Kidnapped, Undressed and Penetrated

The fears generated by the crisis intensify the male rejection of the other, the feminine. The patriarchal approach conceives the woman as an object and not as a subject able to feel and think, and to build her own future and biography. Furthermore, the woman becomes an instrumental object bound to the purposes of man's dictates and, above all, to his wishes and fears, the feelings which shape the typical ambivalent patriarchal gaze at the woman's body (Cao, 1995: 43; Bourdieu, 2000: 35 and 62; Alario, 2008: 71).

During Prehistory and in ancient warrior societies, the collective abduction of a woman was associated with hunting or war; it stimulated male sexual desire and was linked to society's general fertility. This abduction preceded rape –so present in many Greek myths– or marriage (Flynn, 2002: 25; Iriarte & González, 2008: 77-263). In any case, women were the victims of such acts without ever being asked –and their consent did not matter at all either. In the 1933 version, two aborigines jump on the ship where our main female character is; they force her to abandon the wreck and take her to the island, where she is surrounded by tribesmen dressed for war – with their faces painted or disguised as gorillas and surrounded by torches. Later on, our actress is made to go through the huge wall door which symbolises the rite of passage from the virginal state to that of a married woman. In fact, behind that door is the lush island and, most importantly King Kong, the monster who is going to marry her; in other words, the rite also means –thus inverting the traditional parameters of any such rituals– the passage from the encircled civilisation (which is actually somewhat neurotic and fear-gripped) to wild nature.

In the 2005 film, the actress is wearing a beautiful long white dress which enhances her slender figure and has her blonde hair up; she consciously, wholeheartedly and theatrically sways her hips, gorgeous, along the ship deck, while the movie director is filming her. Since she is not naked, she suggests rather than show, and her figure consequently arouses unconcealed eroticism among the men watching her, which is intensified by the background formed by the splendid sunset behind her. As a symbol of the irrepressible eroticism that she awakens, there is a low phallic-shaped object between the director and the actress. However, the 1933 film equally shows the aforementioned eroticism in the sequence where the actress and her suitor fall into the water and she reveals her breasts through her wet dress while he is trying to pull her out to safety. Similarly, in the 1976 film, King Kong is on the water and carries the woman's body with her soaked clothing that reveals her shapes on his enormous hands –with fingers that are reminiscent of penises– and this immediately before undressing her! Something similar happens in the 1933 film, when King Kong playfully touches the girl's slender body with his fingers, after which he sniffs them and undresses her delicately. The next step becomes visible in the 1976 version, since the ape-man decides to penetrate her, as is symbolically shown through a revealing image in which King Kong's 'giant' finger, diagonally directed from top to bottom, presses the female pubis of Jessica Lange who is incidentally bare-breasted. The scene could be nicely rounded off with King Kong powerfully and victoriously pounding on his chest, which he repeatedly does in all three versions at various moments, as if trying to say: "I am the king; I am a true 'macho.'"

The Woman as an Object of Fear: She Is a Permanent Problem, a Memory of Temptation and Sin, and Provokes Wars

In fact, the woman is not only regarded as an object of desire in the King Kong films but also as an object of fear. The 1933 film provides an illustration of this in the sequence where the actress and Jack Driscoll –the chief officer who will later fall in love with her– talk on the ship deck. The director carefully selected the portrayal of the characters so that they could reflect the patriarchal conception of women that prevailed at the time. Despite being together, they look in opposite directions: her, with a candid, dreamy face and slightly dishevelled hair; and him, with his sailor's cap –a sign that he has a social function, a profession. He has a cigarette in his hand and throws it overboard, with a clearly air of superiority and bravado, exactly at the moment when he confidently tells her "it is not your fault that you women cannot help being a problem. You have been made to behave like that."

According to the film, women have therefore been made to behave problematically and are a problem, which suggests that the utilisation of these two verbs –'behave' and 'be'– precisely translate that women are problematic both temporarily and permanently.

Seeking to confirm this idea, i.e. that women have always been like that ever since the origin of the human race, the film provides some semiotic references to the Biblical *Genesis* (1,4), when Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise. As a result of this forced expulsion, she has to obey her husband –she is thus bound to marriage– and give birth with pain –devote herself to procreation– while he must work with sweat –he is the one who feeds his family and, consequently, his wife with his dedicated effort, and not naturally (as the woman does). This all constitutes the ultimate consequence of sin, previously originated in the temptation of Eve, who dared to eat the apple forbidden by Yahweh. That fruit, frequently linked to the myth of Aphrodite (Bandinelli & Paribeni, 1998: card 474) –the Greek goddess of desire– and later to Eve too, represents the memory of sin, of the ruin of mankind –of men– as its shape symbolises the female breasts (Morillas, 1999: 31) and, because it is an exuberant, fresh fruit which can be eaten, it is a representation of food, pleasure, eroticism, sexuality and fertility, as well as the loss of virginity, torn by the breaking of her hymen the same as the bitten apple (Hill & Wallace, 2006: 96-7).

The apple actually appears at the beginning of the 1933 and 1976 versions and, therefore, before starting the trip back to the lost paradise. More precisely, what happens is that the main actress wanders hungry along the streets of New York, and pushed by necessity, steals an apple from a supermarket. In short, she has just violated a social norm; she has sinned once again –it is her nature– and, without the authorisation of a male (the shop owner in this case), she has taken and touched the fleshy and mouth-watering fruit –a sexual symbol since Antiquity. Therefore, she has been led by her natural impulses –hunger– and by the rational ones –the due obedience to the laws; and more importantly, she has committed the greatest possible sin: she dared to contravene the rules, to act as a free being –the same as Eve. The modern recreation of the biblical mytheme is complemented in the three King Kong versions with the appearance of a snake or a dragon (which replaced it especially in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), two animals which are witnesses of the matriarchal religiousness of the (Mesopotamian and Minoan) Mother-Goddess who became metamorphosed into a generally phallic, aggressive and destructive animal which identifies sexuality and the devil that it personifies in the Biblical Fall.

Furthermore, this reptile along with the fallen angels and the demons are the ones who try to overthrow the divine order, which means the ruin of the earth and is related to the woman because it looks tempting and sinuous like Eve's body itself and the apple –the forbidden fruit. Hence their transformation into a permanent memory of the dangers associated with the flesh and into the prototype of the sinner, transgressor woman (Lucie-Smith, 1994: 243; González & Polo, 1996; Lalouette, 2000: 75; Hill & Wallace, 2006: 122; Billinghurst, 2007: 15). The 1933 version shows how King Kong takes 'his' girl to 'his cave –to the mother's womb, another ancient vestige of the matriarchal feeling which is defamed, since it stops being a metaphor of the woman's body to blend with that of the male monkey– and places her in a high rocky parapet. At that very moment, a snake comes into the picture to endanger the girl's life, before which King Kong –the male protector of the defenceless girl– reacts killing the snake-like beast and ultimately saving his valuable 'conquest.' Instead, the 1976 film portrays a 'dragon' meeting the lead female character face to face in the middle of a forest, which could possibly mean –from the patriarchal perspective– that a male wild creature is in front of another female wild creature.

Well, it turns out that the saurian has its jaws open –which could symbolise the male fear of the *vagina dentata*, of the female's sexual power, of being castrated (Lucie-Smith, 1994: 227), exactly in the same way as the wide-open toothy mouth of the sea monster which is going to gobble the sailor who has just fallen into the water in the 1933 film. It is obvious that the dragon wants to eat the tasty girl, and bite her as if she were a fleshy apple, which has already been described here as a symbol of the erotic relationship. Finally, the scene in the 2005 version is as follows: once again, a snake tries to attack the girl, but the monkey comes to her rescue endangering his own life, as shown by the ophidian's curling up around his body, a metaphor of its desire to destroy the virility of his opponent. Therefore, all three versions show a phallic-shaped snake or dragon that wishes to enter the beautiful girl's body while King Kong –jealous that another male being can penetrate her– defends his sexual property with the ardour of the warrior who kidnaps his victims with the aim of stimulating his erotic desire and the patriarchal society's fertility.

Continuities and Changes in Patriarchal Thinking In Relation to the Woman and Her Body

Considering all the above, although these three films keep a patriarchal ideology, this does not prevent them from showing differences and describing an evolution in the conception of the female body throughout the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century.

For instance, the main actress in the 1933 film is candid, shy, dreamy and romantic, and the curls in her hair are neatly combed –a sign of sexual respectability which is complemented with the long dress that covers her whole body. Moreover, she also shows a certain passiveness throughout the film –and especially when King Kong approaches the sacrifice altar to which she is tied– that she compensates with numerous and recurrent terrifying, hysterical and irrational screams. Instead, the main character of the 1976 version is joyful and uninhibited and acts without any prejudice whatsoever. She dresses with a 'provocative' and very tight pair of shorts which draw her shapes and a narrow pink T-shirt which hardly covers her navel and through which her provocative breasts can nearly be seen. Furthermore, she is submissive, happy and willing to allow the sailor who falls in love with her to carry her in his arms along the beach.

In turn, the 2005 film sequence where a saurian is ready to attack the girl while it shows its sharp teeth portrays the girl in front of King Kong (who shows his teeth too). The erotic female who provokes war –Aphrodite and Ares, Paris and Helena– (Fränkel, 1993: 70; Iriarte & González, 2008: 19 and ff.) and the male who fights against the male and whose arched arms seem to protect the small body of the/his female. This is confirmed with a markedly hostile war atmosphere because, although she and the animals find themselves in a small clearing, that clearing is the door to an impenetrable and unsafe forest to which are added the sharp mountain peaks, similar to the teeth of the saurian and the ape, at the background. Nevertheless, the same girl willing to be helped –with her open arms– who appears in this version is active too, since she escapes from the monkey and runs alone into the forest trying to save her life. It must equally be remembered that, unlike the lead female characters in the two previous two films, the main actress in the 2005 version shows her morality because, despite being hunger-stricken and absolutely desperate to achieve a job as actress again, she does not accept an offer to work in a tempting *burlesque* locale where erotic shows are staged. This is reinforced by the fact that this is the only one of the three versions in which the main female character does not take the forbidden apple.

All three films show the girl seducing King Kong who, owing to the effect of attraction (and love?) becomes tender and sentimental. This transformation is more vividly expressed in the 2005 film, where everything starts when the gorilla plays naughty games with the girl, repeatedly knocking her to the ground and picking her up again, which causes the partial unbuttoning of her clothes that open and show a revealing (night?) undershirt. King Kong pounds his chest, apparently enjoying himself and even laughing during the game, but she ends up becoming angry and telling him: "No, I said No!" The animal's eyes show his confusion before the actress's vigorous order and perhaps also suggest the beginning of a seduction process that will eventually affect them both. In this respect, there is another moment of the film in which King Kong looks at her with inquisitive eyes. The actress is with her back to him; she is wearing a white dress and the air moves her loose hair, a sign of both her open willingness and the seduction that she is exerting on the animal (Bornay: 1994, 56 and ff.), although this is a pure-feeling courtship, as shown by the dress colour. As a result, the animal's eyes little by little become softer and start gleaming with emotion, which is complemented with the scene where he takes the girl up to his den so that they can watch a beautiful sunset together.

The process of mutual attraction reaches its final climax in the ice-skating sequence where the emotions are displayed in parallel to the animal's circular movements; tears well up in her eyes, he looks happy; furthermore, the 'romantic' scenery of ice and white snow with small lights on seems more than appropriate for the occasion. In any case, they both –woman and animal– have been touched by the arrow of Eros in this development of erotic emanations. Thus, love makes him become civilised, as it happens to the savage Enkidu in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when he is stripped of his intimacy with animals after meeting a woman and having sex with her (Sanmartín, 2005: 117 and ff.). In turn, our lead female character understands the animal and perhaps feels attracted to her, which in turn denotes –according to the patriarchal mentality– that she is very close to him or belongs to his world. However, at the same time –and this constitutes a paradox– the animal loses its condition and is transformed into a being that has a nearly human status. Summing up, all three versions of King Kong offer reflections of an incessantly changing society; that is, continuities and changes can be observed in the patriarchal vision of the woman and her body. Thus, while she is a shy, passive and irrational-hysterical being in the first film, she is unscrupulous but active in the second one and, finally, she is dependent but ethical, active and with feelings in the third version.

The Fight between the Beauty and the Beast, Between Nature and Civilisation

The film credits of the 1933 version show a sign with the following legend: "And the prophet said: "And Io, the beast looked upon the face of beauty. And it stayed its hand from killing. And from that day, it was as one dead". Old Arabian proverb." Therefore, ever since the beast gazed at the face of beauty, she was dead from that precise moment. The movie director turned into an impresario from the last King Kong version once again narrates this proverb before his theatre audience, thus highlighting that, in the fight between the Beauty and the Beast, the latter is defeated by the brilliance of beauty. This is suggested through an extraordinary close-up of the blonde main actress, who comes gradually closer to the camera, firstly with her eyes closed, but opening them little by little until the audience can see their bright blue colour, next to which also stand her sensual fleshy slightly parted and tasty lips, and an intriguing face with some sadness or melancholy, as if it announced the beast's death caused by the seduction, the bliss towards beauty. This all stresses the relationship between woman, eroticism and death (Camacho, Miró *et al*., 2001: 16-155; Vernant, 2001: 129-30) and that atavistic male fear towards the woman started in the ancient patriarchal societies and reinforced by Christian patristics, by seventeenth-century medicine and by nineteenth-century psychoanalysis: desire leads man to disaster.

King Kong certainly ends up dying for the love of a woman, as it happens in the 1976 version, where we can see his body lying on the ground, lifeless, empty and lonely, surrounded by a crowd that is not only different from his nature but also alien and indifferent to his feeling. She is standing in front of him, bemused, full of life, wearing an attractive long dress, with her head upright and contrasting both with the animal's head tilted downwards and with his horizontality. Contrarily, an advertising poster for the 1933 film shows King Kong standing straight above the skyscrapers; his eyes are full of rage, he has his mouth half open menacingly showing his teeth; his arms are fully extended and one of them grabs Ann Darrow, whose body is arched: her head, hair, arms and legs inanimately point towards the city, while the rest of her body is extended towards the animal. Suspended in that way, it seems as if she lay between Nature –the gorilla and the sky– and the City-History, as if she were between Barbarism and Civilisation and between monkey and man. If my approach is correct, this is yet another reflection of the patriarchal ideology which underlies the film, an ideology which has assimilated the evolution of man from the ape, but strengthening the superiority of the former at the expense of woman's undervaluing.

This same conception explains why the lead female character appears alone in the middle of a landscape in the 1976 and 2005 versions. In the 1976 version, for instance, Jessica Lange looks happy in his heavenly scenery which includes a waterfall –the woman is water and fire, as shown above–. In turn, Naomi Watts runs lost in the 2005 version –her look is directed towards the sky and not towards the way ahead of her– in the middle of a wild landscape where she is running away from King Kong's mountain, at the background of the film shot. In any case, the actress identifies to such an extent with the natural scenery in both films that she seems nature; she is nature, heavenly in the first one and wild in the second. Furthermore, while the first version evokes Eve, the second one refers back to just another 'savage' like the ones who inhabit the island. Therefore, seen from the male mind, the woman is nature and heaven (Serrano, 2007) and also wild world. Nevertheless, our main actress is also presented as an integral part of the city. A beautiful and disturbing sequence of the 2005 version shows her walking calm and solitary along a straight street in New York between the tramway rails and surrounded only by buildings and black cars. Her face is shown in semi-darkness just like the actual road and her head is dimly lit, as if it were just another street lamp. Her mystery will only be unveiled little by little as she approaches the camera; then the audience will discover once again what she is hiding, her beauty, and what it reflects, the nearly dark city street: she is the city.

Consequently, since she is simultaneously considered nature and city, wild and human, the woman can become the hinge of the great battle between Nature and Civilisation. Thus, King Kong –the beast– embodies the most unbridled part of Nature, whereas the Beauty personifies its kind face. However, on some occasions, the film game of inversions transforms King Kong into a being who is also brave, who risks his life and brims with feelings, while she is sometimes a carefree and irresponsible vain girl who triggers the catastrophe of the animal. And of the city as well, because this fierce fight between barbarism and civilisation brings undesired consequences, insofar as human beings lose their lives and urban elements get destroyed. It must equally be remembered that the Beauty-city also has to become a warlike and irrational beast that cannot adequately measure its actions and is totally disproportionate in its reactions in order to defeat the Beast-King Kong.

Therefore, between city and nature, between beauty and bestiality, between the human and the animal, the woman not only provides light but also darkness and, at any rate, she deeply disturbs male beings who can hardly tell one thing from the other, as they have ended up merging both characteristics and imagining a world full of polarisations related to crises and fears. In this case, to the male fear of the feminine which is transformed into a fiction –the main character is an actress who represents the woman– but does not constitute a reflection of what men really are: humans who can become irrational and uncontrollable beasts at any given time (Figes, 1980: 60).

Epilogue: From the Industrial Society to the Digital One or King Kong Versus Instrumental Rationality

The ship voyage represents the way from order to chaos, but the return brings an unexpected guest: the barbarism which settles down in the heart of civilisation. That ship which heads for Skull Island in the 1933 version leaves behind it the image of the imposing New York skyscrapers which densely populate the earth and open up towards the sky in uneven heights. The small boat moves through the water driven by its engine and by its tall steam funnel which, the same as the cigar of a capitalist, proudly fills the city with smoke. It consequently symbolises an industrial society driven by the energy of steam, coal and steel that makes it possible to erect extremely high buildings for the first time ever in history. Indeed, we find ourselves in a country which has invented the Ford T model and the fordist industrial planning system, which moves in a fast and organised way driven by the pistons of the ship's steam engine and a rationality which is bound to certain purposes –mercantilism. Despite the serious crisis, New York emerges as the economic capital of an emergent country which –like the ship– wishes to flee from the 1929 crash fast and with a steady course, to dream of a better future and, above all, to become the planet's greatest economic, cultural and military superpower.

That utopia is yearned for in the 2005 version, with the digital recreation of the dynamism which characterised New York during the early twentieth century –as is wonderfully suggested in the sequence of streets packed with cars and people working that express an indefatigable creative energy. Precisely that street is quickly crossed by the movie director (Jack Black) who is carrying in his hands the film rolls that he wants to protect. After all, the United States brought its renown to the cinema and turned it into a mass phenomenon, into a real industry converted into a factory of dreams which could be used to reproduce the past and the present and also –openly or latently– highlight the differences between one period and the other. It is worthy of mention in this respect that the King Kong myth was created by the cinema in 1933 and the two subsequent films have done nothing but recreate it. In my opinion, this suggests that –as far as the US is concerned– the true and deepest crisis was the one that took place in 1929 and the other two –in 1973 and 2001– did nothing but reminisce about the former.

In any case, the attack on the Twin Towers carried out by terrorists who had taken advantage of technological rationality to produce a disaster is still closely felt in 2005. The highly modern digital and global society broadcasts the event to the whole planet, at the very instant when it is happening, and once again makes us reflect on the fact that human actions may bring unexpected consequences; that we live in a society of risk and uncertainty; in a civilisation which is actually as barbaric as the previous ones or even more barbaric than them; and which, far from appeasing the contemporary fears, has intensified them while simultaneously reviving old fears. This is evidenced by the fact that King Kong is still alive, or better said, that his presence is needed so that we can keep killing him and all that he represents time and time again; in other words, the monster that we all have inside, the unexpected guest in the ship to whom I referred above. But what is the real face of the beast that hides behind the imaginary one?

We apparently live in a high-tech society where instrumental rationality has reached its peak, the supreme abstraction, the evanescence, the digitisation and virtualisation of reality (Roche, 2013). We wish to escape from the current crisis and the present fears using that instrumental rationality; and it has allowed us once again to sacrifice the monster, this time located in an altar built with the binary language of computers which –surprise, surprise!– is newly based on the contrast between two different poles and can therefore be included in the representational base of the patriarchal ideology. This ideology –which is convinced that it owns the enlightening reason, continues to regenerate monsters like King Kong who, over and over again, escapes from the ties of mercantilism and thus ultimately shows us something very important and decisive for the near future: that it is impossible to live exclusively with *logo*s.

It is true that the masculine principle fails to make out that there is also a need to articulate and manage emotions together with purpose-bound rationality and, in this sense, it is highly significant that in all three versions where the animal's transformation process driven by love makes him become a sentimental and pleasant being, he is eventually executed by the rationality of technique. Might his death also express the male wish to do away with feelings? Has the possibility of men getting to understand the transforming scope of emotions and love not expired with King Kong? And, ultimately, when we kill the Beast, do we not kill the Beauty which is inseparably attached to it too? And there is still something even more terrifying: what do we humans obtain after the immolation of King Kong, as well as of the woman and her capacity to encourage love? What remains is solitary women and men who are not brought together by that cultural feeling (Alberoni, 2005: 97; Luhmann, 2008: 15), who are afraid both of nature and of the city and whose future is risky and uncertain. Therefore, after the crisis and the fears generated by it, after the fictitious film horror which sought to avert the real one, the only thing left to us is loneliness and uncertainty. Nevertheless, it must also be remembered that uncertainty can also be a door for us to follow the road of freedom (Roche, 2012: 157), of the possibility to build a crisis-free future and a path of renewal. But, above all, uncertainty represents the hope of truly appeasing those fears or others which have always stalked us since we left our mother's womb, since hanging upside down –the King Kong full of life stands upright– they slap our fragile and defenceless bottom for the first time –King Kong powerfully beats his own chest– and we give a cry, the first scream of horror, the original King Kong.

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