

PUNKU

Regie J.D. Fernández Molero

Peru, Spanien | 2025
130 Min. | Spanisch, Quechua, Machiguenga mit englischen Untertiteln

Buch J.D. Fernández Molero. **Kamera** Johan Carrasco Monzón. **Montage** J.D. Fernández Molero. **Musik** Carlos Gutiérrez Quiroga. **Sound Design** Fernando Mendoza Salazar. **Ton** Cesar Centeno Yauri. **Szenenbild** Susana Torres. **Kostüm** Andrea Martolleret. **Animation** Diego Vizcarra. **Produzent*innen** Verónica Ccarhuarupay, J.D. Fernández Molero. **Executive Producer** J.D. Fernández Molero. **Produktionsfirma** Tiempo Libre (Quillabamba, Peru). **Mit** Marcelo Quino, Maritza Kategari, Ricardo Delgado, Hugo Sueldo.

Synopse

Meshia, eine junge Machiguenga, findet am Flussufer im peruanischen Urwald den bewusstlosen, seit zwei Jahren vermissten Iván. Sie bringt ihn in ein Krankenhaus in der Stadt Quillabamba. Nach einer Augenoperation kehrt er zu seiner Familie zurück, wo auch Meshia unterkommt und Arbeit in einer Bar aufnimmt. Schon bald gerät sie jedoch zwischen Schönheitswettbewerb und aufgezeigten Männern auf undurchsichtiges Terrain, während Iván kein Wort mehr spricht. Sein eingeschränktes Sehvermögen gaukelt ihm eigenartige Bilder vor – auf handentwickeltem Super-8- und 16mm-Film atmosphärisch eindrucksvoll realisiert. **PUNKU** (das Quechua-Wort für Tor) ist J.D. Fernández Moleros verstörende Bestandsaufnahme des Erwachsenwerdens im modernen Peru mit seiner Mischung aus spätkapitalistischer Wirtschaftsordnung und einer von traditionellen Werten und starren Geschlechterrollen geprägten Kultur. Die indigenen Jugendlichen verbreiten ihr Leben hier via TikTok; homöopathischen Wundermitteln vertraut man wie der modernen Medizin. Durchsetzt mit autobiografischen Elementen zeichnet **PUNKU** die ungewöhnliche Freundschaft zwischen Iván und Meshia, Außenseitern, die zusammenfinden. (Ted Fendt)

J.D. Fernández Molero ist ein peruanischer Filmemacher, Produzent und Cutter. Sein Film **REMINISCENCES** (2010) wurde 2011 bei den Modern Mondays des MoMA gezeigt, **VIDEOPHILIA (AND OTHER VIRAL SYNDROMES)** gewann beim Internationalen Filmfestival Rotterdam 2015 den Tiger Award und erhielt den Hubert Bals Fund für Postproduktion. Der Film war der peruanische Kandidat für die 89. Oscar-Verleihung. Sein zweiter Spielfilm, **PUNKU** (2025), gewann das Visions Sud Est-Produktionsstipendium und ein Stipendium des peruanischen Nationalen Filmfonds des Kulturministeriums.

Filme: 2010: *Reminiscences*. 2015: *Videophilia (and Other Viral Syndromes)*. 2025: *Punku*.

Kommentar des Regisseurs

Ein vielschichtiger Dialog

PUNKU erschafft einen Diskurs zwischen Formen, Formaten und Kulturen, um die peruanische Identität zu erforschen

Erstes Interesse am Kino entwickelte ich, als ich im Medium Film die Möglichkeit sah, das auszudrücken, was sich mit Worten nicht richtig vermitteln lässt. Wie wenn man versucht, einen Traum nach dem Aufwachen zu beschreiben. Als Kind hatte ich Schwierigkeiten, Sprache auf herkömmliche Weise zu entwickeln, und diese Unfähigkeit, verbal zu kommunizieren, entwickelte sich zu einer tiefen Verbundenheit mit den Möglichkeiten der Filmsprache.

Meine ersten beiden Filme, **REMINISCENCES** (2010) und **VIDEOPHILIA** (2015), waren jedoch von finanziellen Einschränkungen geprägt, was mich dazu inspirierte, mich mit alternativen Produktions- und Schnittmethoden zu befassen. Durch das Avantgarde- und Experimental-Kino entdeckte ich Werkzeuge, die es mir ermöglichten, sowohl wirtschaftliche als auch kommunikative Barrieren zu überwinden.

Bei **PUNKU** rückten Budgetbeschränkungen zum ersten Mal in den Hintergrund und ich konnte mich darauf konzentrieren, nicht nur den Film zu machen, den ich machen konnte, sondern den, den ich wirklich machen wollte und den ich machen musste. Dabei ging es nicht nur darum, meine persönlichen Erfahrungen festzuhalten, sondern auch darum, einen Ort darzustellen, den ich im Kino oft stereotypisiert und vereinfacht sehe.

Mein Ziel war es, den Ort aus einer persönlichen inneren Perspektive zu zeigen und gleichzeitig in die unterschiedlichen Innenwelten seiner Bewohner*innen einzutauchen. Im Rahmen der Recherche führten wir etwa 500 Interviews mit Teenagern, um den Fokus auf meine eigenen Erfahrungen und die meiner älteren Verwandten auszugleichen.

In diesen Gesprächen teilten sie ihre Interessen, Träume und Alpträume, was den Prozess der Neufassung des Drehbuchs erheblich stärkte, der bereits in der Stadt Quillabamba, in der der Film gedreht wurde, stattfand, wo ich von 2019 bis 2023 ganzjährig lebte. Diese Zeit war sehr bereichernd, um meine eigenen vorgefassten Meinungen zu hinterfragen und zu lernen, mich dem Unerwarteten zu öffnen.

Aus diesem Grund war es wichtig, nicht nur mit einem technischen Team zusammenzuarbeiten, das hauptsächlich aus Menschen aus der Region bestand, in der wir filmen würden, sondern auch, dass die Menschen aus der Region die Möglichkeit bekamen, sich selbst zu repräsentieren. Ihre Gesichter, ihre Akzente, ihre eigenen Aussagen, wenn sie Dialoge entlang nur subtiler Hinweise meinerseits improvisierten, sodass sich die Charaktere an die Person anpassten und nicht umgekehrt, wie es normalerweise der Fall ist.

Sich Zeit nehmen, um die Schauspieler*innen kennenzulernen, und sich das Vergnügen gönnen, Nachbarn, Freunde und Familie zum Schauspielern zu bringen. Das Team zu Darstellern machen

und den Cast ebenfalls Teil der Produktion sein zu lassen. Fiktionen erfinden, um persönliche Räume darzustellen – in denen man aufgewachsen ist, in denen man schwimmen lernte, in denen man Tote begraben hat. All diese Methoden, die sich mehr von den industriellen Vorgängen unterscheiden, sind die Säulen dessen, was es wirklich lohnenswert macht, so viele Jahre in die Produktion eines Films zu investieren, der das Unausgesprochene zeigt und über das Unsichtbare spricht.

Als peruanischer Filmemacher bin ich mit nur wenigen lokalen kinematografischen Referenzen aufgewachsen, die unserer Realität gerecht werden. Dieses Gefühl des Mangels ist noch größer, wenn man wie ich aus einem so abgelegenen Ort stammt, dass man das Gewicht jahrelanger Unsichtbarkeit mit sich herumträgt. Vielleicht habe ich mich deshalb so verzweifelt der Cinephilie zugewandt, weil ich einen Spiegel brauchte, in dem ich mich reflektiert fühlen konnte. Aber ich frage mich, wo leben diese Bilder? Bewohnen sie denselben Raum wie Träume, Erinnerungen, Mythen, Lügen und die Toten? Ohne die Antwort zu kennen, beschloss ich, dass ich in **PUNKU** das Kino mit anderen Welten in einen Dialog bringen könnte, einen Ort wie Quillabamba mit der Geschichte des Kinos und meine eigene Subjektivität mit dem Kollektiv.

Das Nebeneinander mehrerer Realitäten ist ein wiederkehrendes Thema in meinen Filmen. Durch verschiedene Stile und Formate – darunter Stop-Motion-Animationen, TikTok-Reels und per Hand entwickelten Film – möchte ich Spannung erzeugen und Hierarchien zwischen verschiedenen Realitätsebenen verschieben. Durch die Erkundung des unendlichen Potenzials der Montage, der verschiedenen Arten von Sprüngen zwischen Formaten, Standpunkten, Aufnahmen oder sogar zwischen einzelnen Bildern wollte ich eine einzigartige ästhetische und konzeptionelle Erfahrung schaffen, bei der der Schnitt ein zentrales, magisches Mittel der Schöpfung und Verwandlung ist.

PUNKU, was auf Quechua „Tor“ bedeutet, überschreitet spezifische filmische Traditionen. Stattdessen befasst er sich mit den Möglichkeiten des Kinos, zum Verständnis der menschlichen Erfahrung und ihrer Geheimnisse beizutragen. Der Film besteht aus einundzwanzig „inneren Toren“, die eine persönliche, synergetische Mythologie bilden und auch darstellen, wie eine Lücke zwei Momente, zwei Menschen oder zwei Welten miteinander verbinden kann. P V N K V, wie ich den Titel gerne schreibe, ist die Rückkopplungsschleife zwischen Beobachtenden und Beobachteten.

J.D. Fernández Molero

Interview

Looking Through the Gate

J.D. Fernández Molero on his first fiction feature and critically examining Peruvian myths and culture

DAS INTERVIEW WURDE AUF ENGLISCH GEFÜHRT.

*Barbara Wurm: We are happy to have your challenging film **PUNKU** in Forum, your third feature.*

J.D. Fernández Molero: Yes, but only my second fiction film. The first one, **REMINISCENCIAS**, was an experimental, autobiographical film.

*BW: We thought of **PUNKU** as experimental fiction. Is it in fact autobiographical, experimental fiction?*

JDFM: There is a link between this film and my first, shot in 2009 in the same location, my grandfather's house – the main character's house. Back then, I was watching my family's home movies on VHS and Super 8. While I was editing, I started to

imagine another kind of memory that is neither material memory nor my own. Memory cannot be captured by cinema, by cinematic memories. I started to develop this film in 2009, but it was just the seed of the idea of spaces that have their own collective narratives and collective unconscious. Then I made **VIDEOPHILIA** (2015), which was less personal because I thought the previous one was too close to myself. **PUNKU** was the first film for which I actually had funding. The two previous films were very DIY, no budget projects. So in some ways it was the first film where I could really go beyond economic restraints, at least at the beginning. The places that I chose to shoot are also protagonists. Many of the locations were in my first film – not only the house, but also the river where the kid gets lost in the beginning. In general, the city of Quillabamba. My uncle acts in the film along with neighbours and friends. So I do use techniques that come more from experimental documentary and a different kind of production that is less industrial or professional, more like amateur cinema where you react to your environment. In this case, it was really important to me to shoot in real locations, like the hospital. It actually has a strong link to my family: My grandmother was a nurse there. I was also hospitalised there once, which inspired this film. I got attacked by my grandfather's fighting cock. It poked my eye, but I blinked, so it only injured my eyelid, and I went to that hospital, where they stitched my eyelid. If I hadn't blinked, I would have lost my eye and I probably wouldn't be the same filmmaker.

Irina Bondas: Thank you for your fantastic film. Following up on what you said about the autobiographical links and the locations as protagonists in the film: Machiguenga culture is something that comes up in it time and again. It is also personified through the female protagonist. Is this also inspired by your biography? Why is it an important element in your film?

JDFM: There is the cultural aspect of the city of Quillabamba, which is a melting pot, a doorway between the Amazon and the Andes. If you see the whole South American landscape of the Amazon, it's always next to the Andes. But because it is so close to the Inca capital of Cusco, the Andean influence, especially the Quechua influence, is very strong. Machiguenga culture has been in dialogue with Quechua culture for many centuries. So this territory has always been a place of encounters and Quillabamba is located where the Machiguengas were originally based. Later, the Inca and the Spanish Empire started to push them into the Amazon flatlands. But originally they were from the tropical mountains. I thought it was really important to convey the multiple influences of the Amazonian and the Andean, the mountains and the Amazon flatlands. My own connection is mostly to Quechua. My two grandfathers spoke Quechua even though they have more Spanish ancestry. They were raised in Quechua communities and learned Quechua as their first language. When I started film school, I felt a visceral rejection of some kinds of classical cinema language. And I started to wonder why. It doesn't come naturally to me to compose or structure a scene in the conventional way. So I started to think about what kind of neurological baggage I've inherited through my two grandfathers and grandmothers. It's a way of seeing the world. Sometimes you lose the language, but you don't lose the brain connections that language creates. There are two filmmakers – one from Bolivia and one from Peru – who have experimented a lot with language, which hasn't been so common here. Jorge Sanjinés from Bolivia and Armando Robles Godoy from Peru. They have different intentions, but they're always trying to use language for more than a narrative. They have a philosophical or a sociological approach to language and cinema. So I think that's one of the ideas in this film.

IB: Speaking of language, I'm curious about the film's title.

JDFM: The film's name comes from the Pongo de Mainique canyon in Peru. Pongo is the Spanish adaptation of the Quechua word punku. I learned during my research that Pongo is this canyon that cuts through the Andes and opens towards

the Amazon. So it's actually the division between these two territories. That's where the film was shot. It's also interesting because you can see a whole mix of worlds there: it's called Pongo de Mainique in Spanish, Pongo, or punku, from Quechua and Mainique from the Machiguenga word maini for bear, like the Berlinale bear. It means "gate of the bear." This mixture was one of the starting points for my research, which brought me all the way to this film.

IB: Right from the start, I had the feeling that you play a lot with references and that you quote a lot of filmmakers, either reclaiming, undermining, or reinterpreting their images. The first scene – maybe I'm completely wrong – already seems to be a reference to Tarkovsky. And then there are the Surrealists, like Buñuel, but also Lynch and other contemporary filmmakers. The film deals a lot with vision and seeing something on film, but also with the question of what is not seen, like indigenous cultures. I wondered if this is also related to the fact that indigenous cultures often pass on knowledge through oral history less than through images. Was it an attempt to translate these cultures and their stories into visual language?

JDFM: You're not wrong at all, you've actually pinpointed many of my initial objectives or ideas. I still have the original storyboard of the chapters and, yes, it began with some frames from Tarkovsky's MIRROR, then Bergman's PERSONA and so on. Of course, Peru was not initially part of the cinematic cultural dialogue. It's just starting to become part of that dialogue and not only a place where we copy other cinematic styles. There hadn't really been an exchange in both directions. So to some degree you always feel a lack, a void in your culture and your belonging, you don't feel part of the conversation. I was trying to enter into dialogue with these movies, with this universe. It is also my own mythological background, with cinema as contemporary mythology. And that brings me to the other part of the question: I was raised with this oral history and these ways of seeing the world. Another issue is that I have some trouble with the concept of magical realism, with the influence that magical realism has had on Latin American and Spanish-speaking countries which try to go beyond a natural realism or objective realism. Zitat: I was obsessed with these kinds of stories. But how do you show something that is an oral description, that you can't see?

BW: Because there is pressure that you have to go this way?

JDFM: Yes, it's a self-contained label that is a burden. I even have this debate with fellow Latin American artists because they have different feelings about this. Before magical realism, there was just culture. So it's one of the branches, but oral history has a shared origin. I didn't grow up with only fables or bedtime stories. The style of the film derived from that. I also grew up with anecdotes tainted by some things that could be questionable or puzzling. What did it mean that my uncle or someone's uncle was walking by the river and saw a mermaid, or that my cousin got pushed by a supernatural creature? I'm more focused on the psychological effect, this kind of normalisation of a broad notion of consciousness, of reality, but it generally taught me to research local mythology. I was obsessed with these kinds of stories. But how do you show something that is an oral description, that you can't see? I play with the visual imagery of a mermaid that comes from the Western world. But I actually have other conceptions that I can't really put into words. The film reflects on that while also acknowledging the Western influence on myself.

BW: I was struck by the overall arc of your structure and the love between the two people who ultimately get a voice in their shadow play. One of them, the woman, Mesha, gets a lot of screen time, and as a female she also is very exposed. And then there is the one-eyed male teenager character, Iván.

JDFM: Originally, the characters were twins, a boy and a girl. I even cast a twin. But once I cast Maritsa as Mesha, who was

actually a secondary character at first, I understood that she was not a secondary character and I adapted the story to fit her personality. Neither of them are trained actors. Initially, I did an open call at the local council. Of course, the people that came were very extroverted people who always go to after school activities and are pro-active. So I had to change tactics. I consulted documentary filmmaker Miguel Hilario. We started going to schools and just went into the classes inviting students to talk with us about our film. That's how I met the boy cast as Iván. He was an orphan. His stepparents loved him, but they didn't have time to take him anywhere. It was very magical to meet him. For Mesha, on the other hand, we were looking for someone from the native communities in the Amazon. We started to talk with people and realised how complicated it would be to bring someone from that community to the city, especially a minor. My field producer, who also acts in the film, recommended Maritsa, who had also competed in a beauty contest before. Her father is Machiguenga and her mother is Quechua, so she actually contained a lot of what I wanted to portray. There were some details about her, like her activity on TikTok and her braces, which I thought were interesting for the character. I usually don't describe much of my characters in the scripts. I describe everything around them, because I know the locations. And then I start looking for these people. That's why I just chose people that are from there, they're already part of these places that I imagine.

BW: You portray both the path to empowerment as well as the illusions and disillusion of this empowerment, which is uncommon, at least in Latin America. There is also a lot of criticism of this society. It's especially powerful thanks to the presence of this wonderful actress. For me, it is also a story about exploitation not by one individual person, but by a society and by a very patriarchal, very masculine society. Did you ever think about your film in terms of gender and class? Did you discuss these problematic social issue with the people participating in the film or was it more a dialogue with yourself?

JDFM: I definitely talked with the people in the film about its critical aspects as well as how to make a film that can be critical without taking it away from the people you're portraying. I lived there for four years and have always been there at least one month out of the year. I've always been concerned about not doing cultural extraction or exploitation, not becoming the exploiter while criticizing it. Iván and Mesha grow up in this normalised patriarchal, violent, and classist environment – my country. There's a mixture of specific things: things I like, things that make me angry, things that make me sad. Not only with regards to gender or the male gaze. There's a lot of discrimination towards indigenous people from the Amazon, even more than towards the Andean indigenous people. Even the Andean people discriminate against the Amazon people. And on top of that, the Amazon communities often feel distinct from the no contactados – people who haven't had any contact with Western society. There are so many levels, it's so complex. Of course, when I'm exploring these kinds of environments, I try to ask myself questions. Why haven't I seen any films that portray a teenager from a native community who also uses TikTok? I've explored this region since 2008 and observed some cultural shifts, not only in the native community, but also in Quillabamba and everywhere. I thought it was important to try to capture these cultural contradictions. For me – and this is the film's documentary aspect – it's also a sonic testimony. It's not only about what they are saying, it's what they want to say and what they feel comfortable saying. For them to feel comfortable saying what they say, I had to back out and make it a safe environment. Let them be themselves. It is also important that their dialects differ. It depends on how much influence you have from either side, in addition to the centralised media with a homogenised Spanish. But they have a different way of speaking. I have seen it in my mother who is from there. On old VHS tapes she speaks differently, while she has now lost her dialect.

BW: I want to turn to the film's structure, how you chose to divide it into chapters.

JDMF: One of the principal influences were the Major Arcana of a tarot deck. I had 22 chapters at the beginning, starting with the fool, the zero card. And then it went all the way to the 21st Arcana, the world. Because of the pandemic, I had a lot of time and started to explore astrology and demonology and all sorts of stuff. I only wrote until chapter 13, the Arcana of death. The structure changed a lot during this process. The idea of the chapters was very conceptual, too, because the title, **PUNKU**, means threshold or gate. In Incan culture, doors were basically just like gaps that separated one place from another. The whole film is about this concept applied to cinema, to cuts. Going to sleep, waking up. These kinds of doors between states of being. Zitat: I wanted to portray a collective unconscious that is half collective unconscious and half personal imagination.

IB: I wonder if your interest in cuts is also connected to your work as an editor. For me, one of the most striking qualities of your film is how you juxtapose elements. You mentioned that you didn't want to engage with cultural extraction. At the same time, you portray how cultural and economic extraction has happened over centuries. Colonial history and its legacy are very present in your film. Consumer culture resonates with colonialism, it's brought from the West. I was wondering why you decided to use very drastic imagery for loss, violence, and exploitation.

JDMF: The idea of including TikTok came late in the editing. I thought it was important to add that layer. It's a fake representation, but it's also real because it is Maritsa's own TikTok channel. I think it was important to show how she, Maritsa, and her character, Mesha, portrays herself. I thought it was interesting to show her inner fantasies or the external fantasies that she projects, and also to correlate these kinds of dreams or nightmares with contemporary media. I think Peru's culture is very violent. Not necessarily in an obvious or literal way, it's more of a climate or how people relate to one another. It's also inherited from colonialism and capitalism. How we see the other, the other being different: different gender, different social class, different culture. It was something that came up in the process of writing a story to fit the space I was portraying. I wanted to portray a collective unconscious that is half collective unconscious and half personal imagination. In some way, **PUNKU** is my doorway to this collective unconscious or to the way I relate to this culture. Of course, there's a lot of love, but if you love something, you can criticise some aspects of it.

BW: The question is also how accessible it will be for festival audiences. I believe it triggers a lot of different interpretations and ways of perception. It's strong as a visual exploration. It's a dark film, but there are a lot of scenes that are not dark at all. It questions belonging and there is a variety and vastness of symbolic fields and spaces, but at the same time there is also a really harsh impossibility of getting out, getting away and creating something new.

JDMF: I'm also interested in hearing all the different interpretations. I'm excited, scared – everything. I think that sometimes the darkness in what we understand as magical realism is censored. So, it's also a film about the shadows, it's about being able to see the dark side.