

MYTH, ATMOSPHERE, TERRITORY: A CINEMATOGRAPHIC HYPOTHESIS ON THE NAME AMERICA*

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A TERRITORY?

One of the major concerns of film scholars has been to understand, unravel and explain cinema's relationship with space. A film can exist without a story, as do many works of experimental cinema; a film can even exist with an absolute—or nearly absolute—absence of movement, like *La jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962), a picture made up entirely of still frames except for one moment that shows a slight movement of the eyelids of the protagonist's beloved. However, although *La jetée* contains hardly any visual movement, there is a voice that gives it continuity and duration, as well as shape, body, extension, and visuals. Time is essential to cinema, but so is space, even when it is subordinate to the expressive movements of the affection-image, as suggested by Deleuze (1983, pp. 125-144), or understood as Bergsonian duration rather than chronological time, as in the different variants of the time-image (1985). Even

if we understand cinema as the manifestation of a corporeal existence (Bellour, 2009), space underlies everything from the composition of the frame and movements in the shot to the editing. More than the movement of the camera, cinema's great contribution to the manifestation of space is editing: our perception of chaotic cities, squalid streets, crowded offices and bars, solitary highways, lush or desolate landscapes, opulent palaces and inhospitable planets, intimate rooms or halls of justice is different when these things have passed through the filter of cinematographic production. But cinema, more than merely representing pre-existing spaces, creates and expresses spaces with which, over the years, it has become practically coterminous: consider, for example, the Western U.S. and the cinematic mythology of the western. It is for this reason that a key concern of studies of cinematographic space is the relationship between cinema and geographical space, resulting in a long list of monographs and

papers on cinema and the city, cinema and the landscape, cinema and the land.

It could be argued that what underlies this interest is an understanding of cinema itself as a territory. But what is a territory? And what would a cinematographic territory be exactly? The Polish-American philosopher and scientist Alfred Korzybski coined the phrase: “A map is *not* the territory it represents” (1933, p. 58). With this observation Korzybski sought to argue that territory cannot be reduced to its representation, from which we could conclude that as such, territory involves a kind of act, presence or manifestation that arises, endures and resists representation, meaning its mapping on a plane other than the one on which it already exists. In cinema, it is clear that territory is not the mere representation of a geographical space; in other words, it is not the construction of a space that supports a diegesis intended to represent a place or a situation, but the construction of an effect of the presence of a place that exists in its own right, expressing something beyond representation. How can this effect be explained? Deleuze and Guattari posit that “territory is the effect of art”¹ (2010, p. 322). In so doing, they suggest that territory is an act of appropriation: not an appropriation of sovereignty on the part of humans, or an appropriation through aggression on the part of animals (contrary to the theory of the ethologist Konrad Lorenz), but an appropriation of mediums (space-times that consist of a periodic repetition of elements: colours, shapes, sounds) and rhythms (critical variations of time and space that coordinate heterogeneous mediums) of a place (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010, p. 321). According to Deleuze and Guattari, territory is the result of mediums and rhythms shifting to an expressive (i.e. artistic) level:

Property is fundamentally artistic because art is fundamentally *poster*, *placard*. As Lorenz says, coral fish are posters. The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropri-

tive, and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries them or produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not a constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode. (2010, pp. 322-323)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the first artists were the animals, in the sense that they mark territory, they “make placards” or refrains with their colours and their sounds. It could thus be suggested that if animals *sign* their territory with colour and sound, humans *sign* theirs with sound, with colour, with shapes, but above all by giving a territory, an abode, a proper name: territory exists when the expressive components of a place, its mediums and rhythms, acquire a signature, a proper name. In this paper, I seek to argue that cinematographic territory exists when space substitutes or neutralises its representative function to describe, designate and express a unique place (consisting of an interaction between mediums and rhythms that will be identified below as cinematographic mood or atmosphere) that either launches a search for a signature, for a proper name, or already possesses one. One case is a vindication where the images support the affirmation, for example, that “this is America”, “this is New York”. Much U.S. cinema serves as a good example of this case: there is a tendency, both in Hollywood movies and in alternative American cinema, to claim the proper name “America” as a designation for a unique land for a people, or a “melting pot” of peoples, that is exceptional in nature. The other case instead constitutes a hypothesis, “this would have been my land”, “this is what the country could be”. This case could be attributed generally to a trend in the new Latin American cinema: the films of Argentine director Fernando Birri, Cuba’s Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Bolivia’s Jorge Sanjinés can be understood as cinematographic claims to a land that is still searching

for its name, or that has lost it due to colonisation. But perhaps the most obvious example of this trend can be found in the filmography of Glauber Rocha. In addition to being marked by an aesthetic of hunger and of dreaming, as the filmmaker himself would describe in his manifestos (2011, pp. 29-35; pp. 135-140), Rocha's work has a territorial tendency: *Entranced Earth* (Terra em transe, 1967) takes place in the fictitious Republic of Eldorado, but what it expresses could be applied to the proper name of any Latin American country. However, both the vindication and the hypothesis express a spatiotemporal uniqueness that finds a kind of reassurance, appropriation or placard in the proper name. This means that the question of cinematographic territory explored here involves the relationship between space (converted by the expressive elements into a unique place) and the proper name.

THE QUESTION OF A PLACE'S NAME MAY PERHAPS BE EQUIVALENT TO THE QUESTION OF ITS FOUNDATIONAL STORY.

But the question of a place's name may perhaps be equivalent to the question of its foundational story. It is in this sense that all cinematographic territory, in its distinction as a geographical space of cinema in general, is mythical. To talk of myth is problematic because the word has many definitions and uses. The first thing that it is important to point out is that "mythical" as I use it here does not refer to film stars qua "mythical figures" or to films that recount ancient myths, but to a particular configuration: cinematographic territory exists where there is a substratum, an indication in the spatiotemporal expression that refers to the proper name as a foundational mythical act. Deleuze concludes that "myth, with its always circular structure, is indeed the story of a foundation" (1989, p. 256). The foundational ori-

gin, or *arche*, is not only a chronological beginning (whether legendary or historical) to a sequence of human acts; it is also a *topos*: a place where that sequence attempts to find its authority or legitimacy (Derrida, 1995, p. 14). Just as there would be no real foundation without myth, there would be no myth without a place of origin.

Rather than questioning whether these foundational acts, stories and *topoi* are fictitious or historical in a given film, which could be verified relatively easily, we would have to conclude, as the Mexican essayist Carlos Monsiváis suggests, that "we no longer come from the jungle or the savannah, [...] [w]e come from dreadful and glorious movies" (2000, p. 35). In other words, our myths often do not come from the stories, ideologies or discourses of the places that we belong to or believe we belong to really or geographically, but from that other geography that cinema maps out in its territories and that manages to convince us that, at least affectively (or perhaps even phantasmagorically), our mythical origin can be found on the movie screen: the fact that the myth is presented in cinema as an ostensibly false story, given that nobody actually comes from a film, in no way devalues its mythical-affective function. Just as space in cinema in general and cinematographic territory in particular are not real spaces or territories, the *topoi* of cinema are fictions and virtual realms that enshrine and populate the real. Cinema and its substitutes not only offer stories for us to agonise or delight over, or characters in whom we can recognise ourselves; they also facilitate an affective *topos* that is sensed as an origin and, given the circular structure of myth as noted by Deleuze, would also shape the idea of a destiny. The hypothesis of this paper is that under certain conditions, the affective environments or moods (which I will refer to here as cinematographic atmospheres) give rise to the appearance of places or *mythical topoi* that in turn reflect a certain geographical substratum of cinema, which I will call *cinematographic territory*,

and that this substratum, as will be discussed below, has in America, as a figure, as a landmass, but above all as a *proper name*, its privileged *topos* in the history of cinema.

ON A CERTAIN PREDOMINANCE OF THE TOPOS OVER THE IMAGE

How do technological moving pictures relate to the representation, expression and appropriation of the *topos*? The answer to this question needs to consider its aesthetic and technical aspects, but also the political dimension, because although appropriation is expressive, as in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of territory, what links myth to the *topos* is the *nomos*, the ancient notion of the prerogative over or right to a place (Schmitt, 1974, p. 13). How does this relate to cinema? In opposition to a certain theoretical tendency which, with Deleuze as its leading proponent, views the defining aesthetic-political category in cinema as time, and that tends to focus on analysing the effects of specific images and sequences on individual perception, Walter Benjamin (2008) suggests that it is the habit of perception on the level of the masses that defines the relationship between the cinematographic and the political. Benjamin's perspective focuses on the continuous physiological absorption of cinematographic stimuli by the collective body (the audience, the masses) in what he calls *distracted perception* or *tactile perception* (2008, p. 82). For Benjamin, the perception is *distracted* because it is not defined by thoughtful, almost ruminant individual analysis of the components of the image to link them intellectually to the elements of a tradition (as occurs in painting) but by a collective sensibility that is innervated (in other words, that is physically affected by the action of the nervous system) with the successive, frenetic changes of the edits. And it is *tactile* because, as in architecture, spectators need above all to become accustomed to certain stimuli that are internalised in the

collective perception like a kind of extended body. While for Benjamin, photography (instantaneous perception) and knowledge of monument design (the blueprint) matter less for architectural sensibility than its integration into everyday urban life, what matters in cinema is not the particular meaning of a unique image but the incessant absorption of images by the collective body, which is quickly innervated by an aesthetic of shock, i.e. of strong and constant stimuli provoked by the camera movements and the editing (Benjamin, 2008, p. 83).

The most important aspect of Benjamin's conceptualisation (2008, pp. 65-72) is that it suggests that the empathic effectiveness of cinema may lie less in its capacity to tell stories or even in the sensual identification with the icons of the star system by means of *Testleistung* (test performance) than in its capacity to create atmospheres or environments in which the collective, irrespective of the specific content, will feel *at home*. It might quite reasonably be objected that what captivates audiences the most in cinema is always a specific image, movement, scene or sequence: the sensual gaze of Scarlett Johansson, Ricardo Darín's winning smile, but also a revolutionary's funeral in Havana in *I Am Cuba* (Soy Cuba, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964) or the air attack on the Vietnamese village in *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). But from a tactile perspective, such scenes function as counterpoints in a sort of surface of spatiotemporal accommodation that links them together in a series of important moments of pauses and transitions. It could be suggested that the captivating moments in cinema are similar to significant places (rivers, mountains, valleys) and events (seasons, solstices) that define and delimit the world in its primitive magical phase (Simondon, 2006, pp. 182-183), which in this sense constitute the incidents of the affective space constructed by the editing to then be absorbed by the audience as a *topos* or virtual atmosphere that invites us in.²

FROM ATMOSPHERE TO CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORY

But what exactly is an atmosphere in cinema? It is the surface that hosts the narration and the story to give them a perceptual coherence. The cinematographic atmosphere is generated by the tones of sound and vision, by the rhythm, by the *tempo*, by a pulsation that orders the actions to produce something more than just a diegesis; a synthesis of stimuli, like a feeling of cold or fear: a sensation. In this sense, Robert Sinnerbrink (2012) argues that aesthetic studies of cinema have overlooked what he calls “mood”, despite the fact that some film genres are even defined by it (the thriller and the romance, for example). But mood can also be understood as an affective tone, an atmosphere or, to use a colloquial expression, the *vibe* of a place. Mood can thus be identified with what is referred to here as atmosphere or affective space: a place that defines a state of mind through the use of certain lights and shadows, spaces, tones and rhythms of editing and movement, as in film noir. Atmosphere in cinema is mood, a sensation of an environment which, precisely because of its atmospheric, airy nature, tends to be a vague feeling. In this sense, atmosphere, or mood, operates inversely to the universe of diegetic images. If we take up the idea that Deleuze himself drew from Klee, that “the task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible” (1984, p. 39), and we reconsider this visible activity as the case of all visual and audiovisual images, we could posit that atmosphere acts in the opposite direction, as the synthesis of invisible and inaudible effects that are initially audiovisual. The invisible and the inaudible here is the *synesthetic*, almost cutaneous (*tactile* in Benjamin’s terms) sensation of the surface that houses the events. Atmosphere is neither seen nor heard; it is experienced, *felt*: it is *pneumatic*, meaning that it is related to the influence of an indefinable spiritual impulse (the psychological element of mood);

but it is also environmental, because it is associated with aspects such as temperature, confined or open spaces (the spatial element of mood). This could be summed up in a somewhat vague formula: *atmosphere is the feeling that a film gives the skin*. Atmosphere is not action or event, although it is sensed in both of these. Atmosphere is not a ray of light, but the darkness and the storm that accompany it. If the event took place, atmosphere acts as the air or smoke that can be deduced from it, but that is no longer the event itself. Atmosphere insists (foreshadowing the action) and persists (lingering on in the air). This does not mean that we should conclude that atmosphere is a time-image, because it is certainly not an image, and although it captures and hosts the variations of movements and of time, it does not imply a liberation from the time of spatial coordinates as Deleuze’s notion of the time-image does, because for Deleuze time is a category superior to space, as reflected in his characterisation of Antonioni’s “disconnected spaces” and “emptied spaces” (Deleuze, 1985, p. 13). What insists and persists in the cinematographic atmosphere is a *psycho-geographic* place (Debord, 1955).

The vague, airy nature of atmosphere makes it difficult to delimit: if it is not a specific image, or even a sequence, because a sequence is still diegetic, we may reasonably ask: how many atmospheres does a film contain? Does atmosphere in cinema have a beginning and an end? It may well be impossible to demarcate all its possible variations, but what I am concerned with here in any case is its relationship with myth. Atmosphere in cinema is the manifestation of the to-

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pos, but this does not mean that all atmosphere is mythical. A heated discussion in an apartment is not mythical in itself, nor is an action scene in the street. In this sense, atmosphere in cinema designates a condition analogous to that of the mediums and rhythms before the emergence of territorial expression as described above drawing on Deleuze and Guattari. Thus, a film like *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) can create an atmosphere associated with a metaphysical, almost theological fear, while in the atmosphere of the forest in *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015), the terror is inspired by the unknown forces of the earth, approaching what H. P. Lovecraft (2012, p. 28) refers to as “cosmic fear”: a fear intertwined with the sensation of primordial chaos, before any foundation or order. For an atmosphere to be mythical, it must give rise to the appearance of the *nomos*. But this can only be achieved with the presence of a perceptual, visual, cosmic drama that can unfold alongside the story or plot, but that transcends it. When spaces of great magnitude—plains, mountains, rivers, deserts, jungles, forests, reefs and cliff tops, the abandoned highway, the desolate landscape, cities with their imposing monuments and buildings—abandon their merely decorative functions, i.e. when the background ceases to be merely a complement to the action, when the narrative connections and mechanisms and the characters’ actions recede and give way to rhythmic concatenations in which the space provokes an eerie sensation that is something more than human, or that tends to surpass the boundaries of human culture, we can be said to be dealing with something that is more than an atmosphere: a territory. This cinematographic territory can be described as the strange and rather ambiguous sensation for the spectator of *effectively being on earth*, as opposed to the impression of experiencing a story or following a narration.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle had pointed out long ago that narration imitates by telling a story,

while drama imitates by acting it out. Epic poetry mixes narration and acting. But drama is always acted (1974, pp. 133-134; 1448a; 19-29). Cinema can be said to be able to mix the narrative and the dramatic (Pérez, 1998, p. 16), and also to take the form of documentary or essay, as in the cases of Farocki and Godard. But cinematographic territory is always presented, however slow it may be to reveal itself, as a perceptual drama that can run parallel to these cinematic variants or that may interrupt, neutralise, and even negate them, as in the eminently territorial filmography of James Benning. In any case, cinematographic territory would be present only in the moment when the narration, drama, documentary or essay were superseded, threatened by a sensation that shifts from the atmospheric to the territorial; in other words, by a tendency towards dramatisation that seems to go beyond strictly human concerns. Even so, cinematographic territory would be defined not just by a tendency toward a slackening of the narrative, but by a neutralisation of the scenic function of the frames. Territory is not landscape, because the latter is presented as a construction in which the shots function as pictorial frames for the spectator to view comfortably and safely from outside the space represented. Landscape is in fact presented as a human and subsequently historical construction: landscapes have not always existed. It is for this reason that I have chosen to develop the notion of territory based on the conceptualisation of Deleuze and Guattari and not of American authors like the landscape designer John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1994) or the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2014), whose work on the experience of place and geographical space are certainly interesting but, I would argue, depend too much on the notion of landscape, or, to use Benjamin’s terminology, optics, while territory as I seek to define it is above all tactile, rhythmic, and environmental. In cinema, the scenic function of the frames is generally operative when the shots serve to locate and

contextualise an action, while cinematographic territory involves a feeling of cosmic vastness, or that aspires to the cosmic, in which humanity must either adapt or perish. By this definition, a film like *The Revenant* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2015) would not be a territorial film, because despite the majesty of the landscapes captured by Emmanuel Lubezki's cinematography, what unfolds is an action and adventure film replete with shocks that could just as easily have had a different setting. On the other hand, a film like *Jauja* (Lisandro Alonso, 2014) is dominated by the action of natural and earthly forces against human forces. It could be argued that territory goes hand in hand with a feeling of inhumanity, even in places constructed by humans, like scenes in which the towering blocks of a big city are radiant with artificial light in the vastness of the night: there is thus something paradoxically territorial in the urban scenes that open *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) and in the night-time driving scenes in *Drive* (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011). Landscape is generally beautiful and safe, but territory is rough and hard, imposing and defiant. Thus, the frozen Arctic planes in *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922), the geological formations in Arizona's Monument Valley in the films of John Ford, and the lushness of the Amazon in *Embrace of the Serpent* (El abrazo de la serpiente, Ciro Guerra, 2015) contribute more to the territorial sensation than the orderly nature of European landscapes, even the rugged Alps, as in the famous opening scene of *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965). Landscape implies a certain pause for contemplation, but territory appears as a pulsating or rhythmic duration with time-frames that are not related to history but to cycles and ages of the Earth.

Insofar as it is cinematographic, territory is still a human, cultural and technological artifice, but what matters here is the atmospheric, territorial sensation of open space, understood not only in climatic and physiological terms but as a

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foreboding of abandonment by culture, as if civilisation had collapsed and disappeared for us, even while the characters converse or keep the human dimension precariously present, like the lost pioneers desperately searching for water in the Oregon desert in *Meek's Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2010), or the old Danish captain in *Jauja* who gets lost in an apparently lunar landscape in Patagonia, or even in a minor colonial official's interminable wait to be transferred from his inhospitable frontier post in colonial Paraguay to the city where he hopes to be reunited with his family in *Zama* (Lucrecia Martel, 2017). While it is true that Martel's film includes numerous indoor scenes, what is important is that the indoor world, the world of culture, is permeated by the harshness or sumptuousness of the outdoor world, to the point that human objects corrode so severely that they end up looking squalid and phantasmagorical. Consider, for example, the strange scene of the French plantation in the Vietnam of *Apocalypse Now Redux* (Francis Ford Coppola, 2001), in which the protagonist, a US army captain who heads into the jungle in search of the renegade Colonel Kurtz, appears to return for a moment to civilisation. At the dinner there are French delicacies and wine, and the diners are dressed strangely as if they were living in a temperate European climate rather than a monsoon forest. The captain is unsure whether these French characters and their mansion in the middle of the inhuman jungle are spectres or hallucinations. It may perhaps be important for the plot and for the spectator that the question remains uncertain. What matters here is that territory permeates and corrodes the human order to establish something more than an order, a *chaosmos* (Guattari, 1992).

ON TERRITORY AND ITS NAMING

The fact that territory is presented as a space beyond culture, as a force that corrodes all things human, like a plasticity that disables or weakens the narration, does not mean it is not fictional. Territory in cinema is a cosmic drama in which humanity appears to try its luck as if it were playing its last card, even if humans do not appear on the screen. The movements, rhythms and textures of territory create a fiction that is dramatic, non-anthropomorphic, and demoniac (in the Ancient Greek sense of *daimon*), which transports and brings to life an otherness, a destiny. Referring to U.S. literature, D. H. Lawrence (1920, pp. 11) called this intuition “spirit of place”. Years later, to refer to the geographical forces that pervade U.S. literature, Leslie Fiedler (1969, pp. 11-15) would call it the “demon of the continent”. The last card, which is perhaps also the only one, that the human draws against this *daimon* is language, or more precisely, the foundational word, i.e. *the name*. What every territory cries out for, or at least appears to demand from the human, is a name. The need for a proper name spiritualises territory and gives it its mythical quality.

But what is a proper name? What is its function? Drawing on Saul Kripke’s well-known study *Naming and Necessity* (1981), Jean-François Lyotard notes that “[a] proper name has no meaning; it does not designate a property of the subject or object designated. It is merely an index which, in the case of the anthroponym, for example, designates one and only one human being. The properties attributed to the human being designated by this name could be validated, but not his or her name. The name adds no property to him or her. Even if initially many names have a signification, they lose it, and they must lose it” (1983, p. 60).

Lyotard (1983, p. 65) adds that proper names are closely related to deictics, i.e. words or expressions that indicate situations, places, or subjects whose meaning depends on the context in which

they are used: me, here, you, now, in this place, yesterday. Because the deictic depends on the place, time and position in which it is spoken, it has no meaning of its own; it is merely an index, an indicator. For Lyotard, a proper name is a “rigid marker” or a “quasi-deictic” (1983, p. 66), because, just like deictics, proper names indicate without signifying, but unlike deictics, names do not vary in the sentences and universes in which they are referred to or cited. In other words, a name supports, bears, and marks that which resists the vicissitudes of sentences; it is an imprint that survives their injuries: “what survives cannot be spoken except by a name. The name is exactly that which conveys what is conveyed. The name designates the vestiges of a passage. Or better, the name can concentrate the vestiges of the action, the name itself being that which acts” (Déotte, 1998, p. 95). A name is the incorporeal mark of the vagaries of the corporeal; it is what survives of the evolution and metamorphoses of actions and images, the timeless vestige of the temporal. Thus, “names transform *now* into a date, *here* into a place [Rome, Sahara, Santiago], *I*, *you*, *he* into Jean, Pierre, Louis” (Lyotard, 1971, p. 66). The place, character or object may be fictitious, but never the proper name, like the name Rosebud in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941). There can be no cinematographic territory, fantastic or real, that does not evoke or aspire to a name in which it could possibly find the answer to what it is, has been or aspires to be: *Alphaville*, Paris, the South, Dallas, Transylvania, Gotham City, Alderaan, Casablanca, Eldorado, *Twin Peaks*, America.

There is no territory that does not seek a name, because there is no territory without myth, and there are no myths that do not designate their *nomos*, their law, by name: there is no mythology without proper names. In the Biblical Genesis, to name a thing is to create it, and the first gift that the divinity bestows upon humankind is the naming of the things of the world: cartography is proof that the appropriation of territory begins

with its naming. But if legend, literature, history, geography and cartography all take part in a kind of appropriation of a place by its naming, how does this apply to cinema? If cinematographic territory is rhythm and visual drama, it could also be argued that its unique quality is that of being a *temporal texture*. Cinema is distinguished from text because in the latter the eye recognises signs whose meaning is outside the materiality in which they are inscribed: an epigraph on a gravestone, for example. On the other hand, in a texture, the signs, or what appear to be signs, refer to relations that are inherent in the surface on which they are displayed: the roughness of a cloth, the changeability of a cloud's shape, the vastness of the sea. The outline of a horse could be identified in a cloud, but this nevertheless would be a pseudo-reading, as the eye does not find a response that refers to a code of words, letters or ideograms. In saying that territory is a temporal texture, I mean that its nearly tactile quality occurs as duration. This duration reflects an experience of constant effort and searching that only finds an answer in a name; in other words, in the foundational designation of a temporal surface that does not engage in dialogue, whose pseudo-signs will always be mysterious because they refer to what was before and will be after humanity. Thus, the experience of cinematographic territory is generally both ancestral and archetypal. Ancestral, because its signs are marks of geological time. Archetypal, because the feelings it evokes from the characters and the audience are close to primal earthly human drives that are almost animal: hunger, thirst, fear of the dark, helplessness in the face of nature and contact with the other, whether animal or human.

AMERICA AS A NAME

Bazin was right when he suggested that the worldwide success of the western genre was due to the fact that "it was born of an encounter between a mythology and a means of expressing it [cinema]" (2002,

p. 219). If for Bazin the western is the quintessential cinematographic mythology and the Odyssey of our times (2002, p. 227), it is because everything in it relates to archetypal configurations and feelings, like the battle between good and evil. And although it could be claimed that the western is the film genre that gets closest to the territorial, this is only a sign that it may perhaps represent the most important relationship between cinematographic territory and the name. Kracauer observed that the appeal of U.S. cinema compared to French film has to do with the use of the camera and of space. While the French made films with very little movement, in closed spaces and with highly intellectual dialogues, almost like a replica of the theatre, Hollywood movies used all the possibilities of movement and speed that the camera offered, with plenty of action, generally in open spaces (and not only in westerns) marked by the occurrence of natural events: storms, wildfires, or earthquakes (Kracauer: 2016, pp. 51-63). Kracauer sums up this impression of mobility and vastness that Europeans see in Hollywood cinema with the assertion that "the main source of information was the background, not the plot" (2016, p. 57).

It could be argued that this background expresses an American experience of territory. Of course, the designation of something as "American" is controversial, especially for Latin Americans. And as the screen set up by Alfredo Jaar in New York City's Times Square in 1987 pointed out, the map of the United States is not America; America spans two continents, from Alaska to Patagonia. The words *American*, *America* and their related terms are, to use Lyotard's (1983: 9) terminology, the object of a *différend*: a dispute between parties with different understandings of a matter that cannot be finally settled in court. Although this *différend* over the term *America* is unresolvable, it could be suggested that, as a proper name, America reflects a historical phantasmagoria and mythology. *America* is not a name like those of other landmasses: it was born as a cartographic designation on Martin Waldseemü-

ller's map *Cosmographiae Introductio* in 1507 (Rojas Mix, 2015, p. 31), just as projective geometry was being established as an interpretative framework for reality in paintings, diagrams, charts and maps. In modern charts and maps, signs tend to become independent from their material referent (Arnauld & Nicole, 1992, p. 46) and to establish relationships with each other in a homogeneous time and space whose language is that of Renaissance geometry (Lyotard, 1973, p. 181). What this language implies is the replacement of a temporality based on revelation (which implied a belief in an end of the world) with a temporality based on endless progression towards the future. But this progression would itself be delimited by the provisional time of the project. In other words, "America" is the name of a modern project, the *New World*, which implies a belief in and a technological phantasmagoria of progress without end. But what geometric language represents reappears as a mythology of the strange and the vast in the stories of conquistadors and explorers (Bernal Díaz; Cabeza de Vaca). The phantasmagoria of progress and the mythology of the strange and the vast come together in the push westward in North America, and southward in South America, but also in the impression (sometimes fantasised, sometimes real) of the vastness of its horizons and the inexhaustible nature of its resources compared to Europe. Although Asia is larger and richer in resources, it was in the technologised mythology of photography and cinema, heirs to the modern projection and perspective, that the settings of America became synonymous with spatial vastness and human mobility for the West: the deserts and plains of the Western United States, the glaciers of Canada and of Patagonia, the jungles of the Orinoco and the Amazon. America would become the name of the techno-cosmic Western myth of the experience of an Earth that was vast, fast-paced and unyielding, new and old at the same time, and that found its territorial home in cinema.

ALTHOUGH THIS DIFFÉREND OVER THE TERM AMERICA IS UNRESOLVABLE, IT COULD BE SUGGESTED THAT, AS A PROPER NAME, AMERICA REFLECTS A HISTORICAL PHANTASMAGORIA AND MYTHOLOGY

In an age when the name *America* appears to have been expropriated by the United States, and the concern with what it means to be American south of the U.S. border has given way, for logical reasons, to what it means to be Latin American, an exploration of the uses of this name is called for. If the political function of *America* as a name seems to be in the air, it is perhaps in cinema that this name can still find a body. In general terms, it could be said that the name America has two delimiting cinematographic variations, two territorial moods that operate as polar opposites. In the first, the name and the territory are present, while the experience has been emptied. This has been one of the themes of U.S. cinema since *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), as shown in the ironic opening phrase "I believe in America", and in general since the beginning of the New Hollywood era (*The Last Picture Show* [Peter Bogdanovich, 1971]). The second, probably more closely related to Latin America, occurs when the experience and the territory are present, but not the proper name: as in the film *Amereida, solo las huellas descubren el mar* [Amereida, Only the Footprints Discover the Sea] (Javier Correa, 2017), which recounts the adventure of a group of Chilean and French architects, poets and artists who set off from Tierra del Fuego to travel around the southern tip of the Americas with the plan of founding a city, and to give a new name to America, a poetic name, combining *America* and the *Aeneid* (*Eneida* in Spanish): *Amereida*.

CONCLUSION: THE PERSISTENCE OF AMERICA

Mexican poet Alfonso Reyes once wrote, in the pages of the literary journal *Sur*:

To speak of American civilisation here would be out of place: it would lead us into the field of archaeology, which lies outside the scope of our topic. To speak of American culture would be misleading: it would lead us to consider only one branch of the tree of Europe, that which has been transplanted to the soil of America. But we can speak of the American mind, its vision of life and its reaction to life. This will allow us to define, even though only provisionally, the particular tonality of America. (1936, p. 7)

It is politically unfeasible today to speak of an American mind in the singular, just as it is useless to attempt to encompass the experiences of America in a single configuration. America is many things, not all of which are recognised as “American”, mainly because of the colonial stamp they bear. Nevertheless, the myth survives and persists, independently of any individual or collective will. But even with its dangers, it is viable to suggest that we need myth just as we need the cosmos and the name. The name in myth reveals the childlike nature of humanity. Contrary to scientific reason, technology does not neutralise or repress myth; it merely reconfigures it. Cinematic technology shows that there are myths that are not dead, and that scientific reason itself can be a myth, i.e. a claim like so many others. If there is still a place for the myth of the American territory, if there is still a place for the American mind that Reyes talks about in the quote cited above, it is probably the cinema. It is in cinema’s nature to preserve and revive what was believed to be lost in culture: the cosmos, the atmospheres of childhood, the mood of youth, the vast territories. Cinema may perhaps also preserve in techno-aesthetic terms what one day will be techno-political, like the America invoked by Reyes. That is and will be of concern not only to Americans, but to all of

us who, as Monsiváis puts it, “come from dreadful and glorious movies” (2000, p. 35), and who find in cinematographic territory our last myth. ■

NOTES

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- 1 This and all other English translations of quotes originally published in French or Spanish are the author’s.
- 2 Perhaps the relative opposition between a specific image or sequence and a cinematographic environment or atmosphere can be resolved with the following hypothesis: the specific image or sequence concerns the Cartesian subject, i.e. the individual who can define, grasp and understand the image intellectually; who can, in short, vest it with sense and meaning. Based on this hypothesis, the Cartesian subject in cinema would be the individual spectator. As atmosphere concerns sensibility, which as often as not is grasped neither intellectually nor consciously, it cannot belong to the subject or individual spectator, but configures a collective affectation that can only be sensed, *felt* by the individual.

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MYTH, ATMOSPHERE, TERRITORY: A CINEMATOGRAPHIC HYPOTHESIS OF THE NAME AMERICA

Abstract

This article offers a philosophical exploration of the concept of *cinematographic territory*. It draws on the concept of territory formulated by Deleuze and Guattari to propose that cinematographic territory is not a montage of spatial, geographical or scenic features with a diegetic or representative function, but an effect of appropriation and presence that occurs when the *mise-en-scene*, by means of a feature referred to here as *cinematographic atmosphere*, gives rise to a cosmic drama. All territorial human appropriation implies the endowment of a place or *topos* with a proper name, but this endowment also signifies a mythical foundation. Cinematographic territory is mythical because the identification of expressive forces that it brings together involves the vindication of, or the search for, a foundational name. The proper name that links cinema to political history would thus be America, which is not only a landmass or a contentious cultural reality, but a cinematographic myth with multiple variations.

Key words

Myth; Atmosphere (film); Mood (film); Territory (film); Proper Name; Philosophy of Film.

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MITO, ATMÓSFERA, TERRITORIO: UNA HIPÓTESIS CINEMATOGRÁFICA DEL NOMBRE AMÉRICA

Resumen

Este artículo desarrolla filosóficamente el concepto de *territorio cinematográfico*. Parte del concepto de territorio formulado por Deleuze y Guattari para proponer que el territorio cinematográfico no es el montaje de elementos espaciales, geográficos o paisajísticos con función diegética o representativa, sino un efecto de apropiación y presencia que acaece cuando la puesta en escena, por medio de una instancia que aquí se denomina *atmósfera cinematográfica*, provoca el surgimiento de un drama cósmico. Toda apropiación territorial humana implica la donación de un nombre propio al lugar o *topos*, pero esta donación supone también una fundación mítica. El territorio cinematográfico es mítico porque la singularización de fuerzas expresivas que en él convergen implica la vindicación de un nombre fundacional o la búsqueda de este. El nombre propio que une al cine con la historia política sería el de *América*, que no solo sería un continente o una realidad cultural polémica, sino un mito cinematográfico con diversas declinaciones.

Palabras clave

Mito; atmósfera (cine); mood (cine); territorio (cine); nombre propio; filosofía del cine.

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