Blinking Spaces in Contemporary Psychogeographical Documentaries

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Time flies. Space remains, although it does not always remain the same; actually, it constantly changes. The same spot can give rise to different places, depending on what happens there over time. Some places preserve traces of their past while others strive to erase them, but even so they are always open to historical interpretation: their meaning is conditioned by multiple layers of their past, which are usually intermingled. Even the most transformative and self-confident present is destined to become a past shortly after its heyday. Wherever we look, we see remnants of the past, susceptible to be regarded as timestamps inscribed in space.

How to represent the coexistence of different times at the same location? Comic book artist Richard McGuire found a simple and brilliant method in *Here*, a six-page comic strip originally published in the magazine *Raw* in 1989, that was later expanded into a three-hundred-page graphic novel in 2014. All of the panels in the comic strip, as well as all the double pages in the graphic novel, show the same spot through the same frame –the corner of a living room in a house, an abstract and everyday space where anything can happen– but each one focuses on a different scene with different characters at a different time, in both the past and future. The composition varies from one panel (or double page) to another because McGuire subdivides each one into multiple panels to explicitly represent the infinite accumulation of times and events within the same space: the fictional space of the corner of a living room and the real space of a panel in a comic strip or a double page in a graphic novel.

McGuire works with still images –basically, drawings of frozen scenes in time– in which he can control everything. His cumulative collage of superimposed panels is certainly a good method for representing the temporal layering of space in a comic book and could be adapted to other media. What about cinema? How do moving images convey this idea? Similar to McGuire in *Here*, the first step is to create a "blinking

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in *New Approaches to Cinematic Space* on 2019, available online: https://www.routledge.com/New-Approaches-to-Cinematic-Space/Rosario-VillarmeaAlvarez/p/book/9780367663353

space", that is, "a particular type of cinematic space in which the past and present incarnations of a film location are simultaneously depicted", as I have written elsewhere (Villarmea Álvarez, 2016, pp. 33-34). Filmmakers usually choose locations that present significant traces of the past in order to represent them through visual strategies that highlight their temporal depth in an attempt to capture the location's *genius loci*, a concept whose current meaning has been summarized by Merlin Coverley as follows: "[the] spirit of place, through which landscape, whether urban or rural, can be imbued with a sense of the histories of previous inhabitants and the events that have been played out against them" (2010, p. 33). Accordingly, what emerges from this kind of spaces is not only a portrait of a historic site, but an invitation to recall or to imagine what the place was like decades or centuries ago, and especially what happened to the people that lived there. Thus, by combining several temporalities at once, blinking spaces offer a glimpse into the past without leaving the present.

There are some films more appropriate than others for exploring the temporal depth of such spaces. Without going any further, there is a long tradition within non-fiction film of psychogeographical documentaries specifically interested in the history of certain places and the emotions and feelings that they can convey to both their usual residents and occasional visitors. Many of these works adopt a contemplative attitude towards their respective blinking spaces to allow the audience to experience them for a few seconds, minutes or even hours, depending on the film's running time. The most remarkable example of a psychogeographical documentary is probably *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), which carefully explains the ruthless logic and logistics of Jewish Holocaust through a series of selected testimonies and extensive views of the death camps filmed in the late 1970s. Claude Lanzmann's decision to show these places in the present, without using any archival material, reinforces its timeless perception, inasmuch as every viewer must envision what happened there from the scarce vestiges that still remained in place.

This contemplative strategy, which I have termed "psychogeographical landscaping", consists in depicting a given place as both "a historical location and a lived space" through a gaze that somehow emphasizes the existing links between "the current look of landscape" and "its former incarnations, whether the buildings or structures that formerly stood in the same spot, or the events that took place right there years or centuries ago" (Villarmea Álvarez, 2015, pp. 40-41). There are many different

techniques to create blinking spaces in psychogeographical documentaries, such as the visual palimpsest, the archaeological gaze, the use of spectral soundscapes or the practice of cinematic cartography, to name but a few possibilities. The aim of this paper is therefore to discuss the internal working of these systems of representation through the close analysis of four works from different countries that share the same will to delve into the temporal omniscience of blinking spaces.

The Empty Centre: The Visual Palimpsest

German essay film *The Empty Centre* (*Die leere Mitte*, Hito Steyerl, 1998) reflects on the changes of the Berlin cityscape in the 1990s, after the fall of the Wall. Its title refers to the 'death strip', the area where the Wall stood, a 'no man's land' located right in the former political centre of the city. There, visual artist Hito Steyerl filmed the redevelopment of symbolic places and landmarks in which several layers of historical meaning overlap one another. Postdamer Platz, for example, recalls the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the Cold War and the near future, four periods respectively associated with the Haus Vaterland,[1] the New Reich Chancellery, the Wall and the Daimler complex. All of these constructions, with the sole exception of the last one, have currently disappeared, which suggests that the urban surface of Berlin has become a palimpsest where "borders and boundaries shift constantly", as Steyerl says in the commentary.

This idea led the filmmaker to develop the main formal strategy of the film, the visual palimpsest, a technique consisting in combining two images taken from the same camera position through a slow dissolve in which the first image –filmed in 1990, when the Wall still stood– fades out while the second one –filmed in 1997, when the Wall had already been demolished– simultaneously fades in. As the frame remains the same, both images overlap for a few seconds before revealing the most evident changes in the cityscape, beginning with the replacement of the wall woodpeckers by construction workers. The rewriting of a dozen shots throughout the footage gives rise to a visual metaphor for the interregnum between the fall of the Wall and German reunification, a short period during which the communist and capitalist systems coexisted for a few months.

The real winner of the Cold War was transnational capital, which took advantage of the disintegration of the Soviet bloc to enter new markets. At the beginning of the 1990s, when Steyerl began to work on this film, Berlin was becoming a testing ground

for the internationalization of land markets due to the systematic privatization of public properties in East Berlin. There, urban developers attempted to delete the architectural traces of both the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic by choosing the Prussian architecture of the early 19th century as an aesthetic model, a tradition that had determined the form and image of the city until World War II. Consequently, the former death strip was redeveloped as a series of city *tableaux* in which, according to Marie-Christine Boyer, "the reiteration and recycling of already-known symbolic codes and historic forms (…) contain a schema or program that generates a narrative pattern, a kind of memory device that draws associations and establishes relations between images and places, resemblances and meaning" (1992, p. 188). The resulting cityscape, however, was partly a fake because it hid those episodes that the new urban owners preferred not to remember. In fact, city *tableaux* are actually built to forget rather than to remember, as Manuel Delgado has stated:

> Major monumentalization policies usually pursue a clear goal: to superimpose institutionally appropriate symbolic productions to those that real life continuously generates by filling urban space with countless memories. These monumentalization policies are actually of and for a fib memory, a great makeup operation in which memory becomes a parody based on replica and simulacrum, an evocation of non-existent spaces that contrasts with the proliferation of de-memorised spaces, a massive loss of meaning on behalf of a reified and fraudulent pseudo-memory. Overall, such policies of memory undertaken by the authorities are usually policies of and for oblivion (2007, p. 106).

In the particular case of Berlin, the local government strived to restore the old urban fabric, but its renewal was ultimately determined by private interests (Muñoz, 2010, pp. 113-124). In view of this policy, Steyerl gives voice to the people opposed to the sale of the death strip to large corporations, beginning with a group of squatters who claimed the right to decide what was going to be built there. The most meaningful part of this interview is when the filmmaker asks them "How do you think Berlin will look in nine years, in 1999?" to which the squatters immediately answer, "You won't find us here". After this sentence, the image of the squatter camp is replaced by a shot of the same spot in 1997, when it had become a construction site, thereby suggesting that public

opinion was not taken into account for reshaping the area. In this sense, the title of the film can be interpreted in both literal and metaphorical terms, whether referring to the impact of the death strip on the urban fabric or to the lack of public participation in the city's affairs. The centre of Berlin, therefore, would no longer be a civic space in which citizens could express their political will, but a source of income for local authorities and transnational companies.

The Empty Centre not only shows the evolution of Berlin's cityscape from 1990 to 1997, but also recalls landmark episodes of colonialism and anti-Semitism that took place near the Wall, in places such as the Reichstag, the Haus Vaterland or Felix Mendelssohn's house. Regarding the first, the film reminds us that the Berlin Conference of 1884, in which African borders were decided by European politicians, was held in this building. The history of the Haus Vaterland, in turn, recalls the xenophobic atmosphere of the Weimar Republic that led to the Third Reich. Finally, the reference to Felix Mendelssohn's house, which was located close to the Reichstag, serves to introduce the story of the social exclusion of his family: first, in 1743, philosopher Moses Mendelssohn could not enter the city through a gate located in almost the same spot as his grandson's future home –he was turned away because he was Jewish– and then, in 1819, Felix Mendelssohn was spat on right there during an anti-Semitic riot. Considering the spatial proximity of these places and events, the *genius loci* of the centre of Berlin seems to be marked by the systematic exclusion of foreigners, as well as by the subsequent rejection of 'the other', whoever it is.

Right after telling Mendelssohn's story, Steyerl shows a communist souvenir shop that stood near the composer's former house for a few months in 1990. There, she interviews its owner –who knows nothing about Mendelssohn's house, but can indicate the exact location of a former checkpoint between East and West Berlin– and his sole employee, a Jamaican woman who explains her problems as a temporary resident in Germany. This sequence, which only lasts about three minutes, addresses up to four different historical periods from a single location: first, the mid-18th century, when Moses Mendelssohn arrived in Berlin; second, the early 19th, when Felix Mendelssohn lived there; third, the Cold War, when the Wall divided the city; and finally the interregnum before reunification, when the filmmaker recorded the images. The impression of travelling though time is achieved here by using simpler techniques than the visual palimpsest: the first two periods are referred to in the commentary and

visualised through old drawings, the third is recalled in the first interview, and the fourth is documented in the contemporary images. Thus, one way or another, Steyerl's psychogeographical gaze transcends the here and now by locating Berlin's urban renewal within larger processes, whether the global tendencies of urban planning at the end of the 20th century or the disturbing recurrences in the historical evolution of certain places.

California Company Town: The Archaeological Gaze

American travelogue *California Company Town* (Lee Anne Schmitt, 2008) depicts up to twenty three former company towns in California that were abandoned after the closure or bankruptcy of their primary employer. Its director, Lee Anne Schmitt, spent five years visiting and filming these kinds of places in search of their *genius loci*, which according to her images might be in all those remnants that recall that there was once life there, such as abandoned homes, old murals, torn wallpaper or anachronistic posters and leaflets. Wherever she goes, she carefully explores every location in search of significant findings to share with the audience through a series of laconic images and terse remarks. This dynamic, which she will use again in later films such as *The Last Buffalo Hunt* (2011) and *Purge This Land* (2017), leads her to develop an archaeological gaze towards the landscape that highlights the temporal continuity between distant periods, thus allowing her to address controversial issues from a historical perspective: the relations between capital and labour in *California Company Town*, the frontier myth in *The Last Buffalo Hunt* and racial conflicts in *Purge This Land*.

California Company Town, in particular, is organized into a three-act narrative based on the succession of business cycles: the older company towns belonged to extractive industries, post-war suburbs were associated with the military-industrial complex and the most recent developments are the outcome of high-tech industry, as can be seen in Table 4.1.1. The first half of the film is therefore devoted to the logging and mining towns in Northern California and the Sierra Nevada Mountains, while the second half moves to the industrial, military, resort and carceral towns of the Mojave and Colorado deserts, using the service areas and agricultural towns in the Central Valley to transition between the two [Map 4.1.1].

Table 4.1.1: *California Company Town*, distribution of towns by economic activity

Town Type	Number of Sections	Towns
Logging Towns	5	Chester (§1), Scottia (§2), Kaweah (§3), McCloud (§7), Westwood (§8)
Mining Towns	5	Calico (§4), Darwin (§5), McKittrick (§6), *Boron (§14)*, Eagle Mountain (§15)
Industrial Towns	4	Corcoran (§9), Trona (§13), *Boron (§14)*, Richmond (§22)
Military Towns	3	*Boron (§14)*, Adelanto (§16), Palmdale (§18)
Agricultural Towns	2	Arvin (§10), Keene (§11)
Resort Towns	2	Salton City (§19), Silver Lakes (§20)
Carceral Towns	2	Manzanar (§17), California City (§21)
Service Area	1	Buttonwillow (§12)
Technopolis	1	Silicon Valley (§23)

The reasons for the abandonment and subsequent dematerialisation of these towns usually have to do with a paradigm shift in the economy. Some times, their natural resources ceased to be profitable, as in the case of logging towns, or were simply exhausted, as happened to many mining towns. Other times, the parent company went bankrupt or was acquired by larger corporations, as in the case of industrial towns. Finally, the more recent company towns usually failed due to miscalculations in their growth expectations, beginning with those military towns that did not survive the end of the Cold War. Overall, although paternalistic companies that provided their employees with housing and social benefits have become obsolete in late capitalism, the film does not intend to praise their legacy. On the contrary, Schmitt harshly criticises their totalitarian control over houses, shops, schools and even union offices, as well as the systematic employer violence against any attempt to change the relations of production. This criticism arises from the first-person commentary, but also from the clash between the contemplative images of abandoned places filmed in the mid-2000s and the set of previous cultural productions included in the film, such as mural paintings, old pictures, archival footage and radio excerpts.

Map 4.1.1: *California Company Town*, geographical distribution of towns

The commentary complements the images by explaining what these company towns mean and how their past can be read on their current surface. By recovering the memory of these places, Schmitt seeks to overcome the *damnatio memoriae* imposed over them due to their nature as alternative, failed or directly ominous locations that might contradict the official historical discourse. In fact, there is a great difference between seeing an anonymous ruin and seeing the same ruin while knowing that it was formerly the headquarters of the United Farm Workers Union [Keene, §11], the location of repressed strikes [Westwood, §8], the scene of racial struggles [Richmond, §22], a socialist commune [Kaweah, §3; Palmdale, §18] or a concentration camp for Japanese-Americans [Manzanar, §17]. All these places tell a completely different story about the socio-economic evolution of California different from the one that the power discourse

holds. In this sense, the reasons these places have been forgotten are precisely the same reasons why Schmitt became interested in them.

California Company Town attempts to honour the memory of these places by searching out and making visible their last vestiges, whether architectural ruins, remnants of everyday life or recordings of the past: for instance, the sequence devoted to Eagle Mountain [§15] –a thriving community that suddenly became a modern-day ghost town after the closure of its iron mine in the 1980s– features an old recording of the last high school concert held in town, probably circa 1983, when everyone already knew that the place was economically doomed. The gloomy music of the school choir becomes a spectral soundscape that brings the past to the present, giving rise to a blinking space in which the audience can wander the ruins of the town guided by its former residents [Fig. 4.1.1]. The resulting images seem to belong to a parallel dimension far away from both the heyday of Eagle Mountain and the time of filming; an impression reinforced by the use of 16 mm film, since this format began to look outdated in the mid-2000s.

Fig. 4.1.1: *California Company Town*

Schmitt's detached sympathy towards most company towns disappears in the last sequence of the film, in which Silicon Valley is depicted as an eerie garden city that conceals a landscape tamed by large corporations. This time, the filmmaker does not

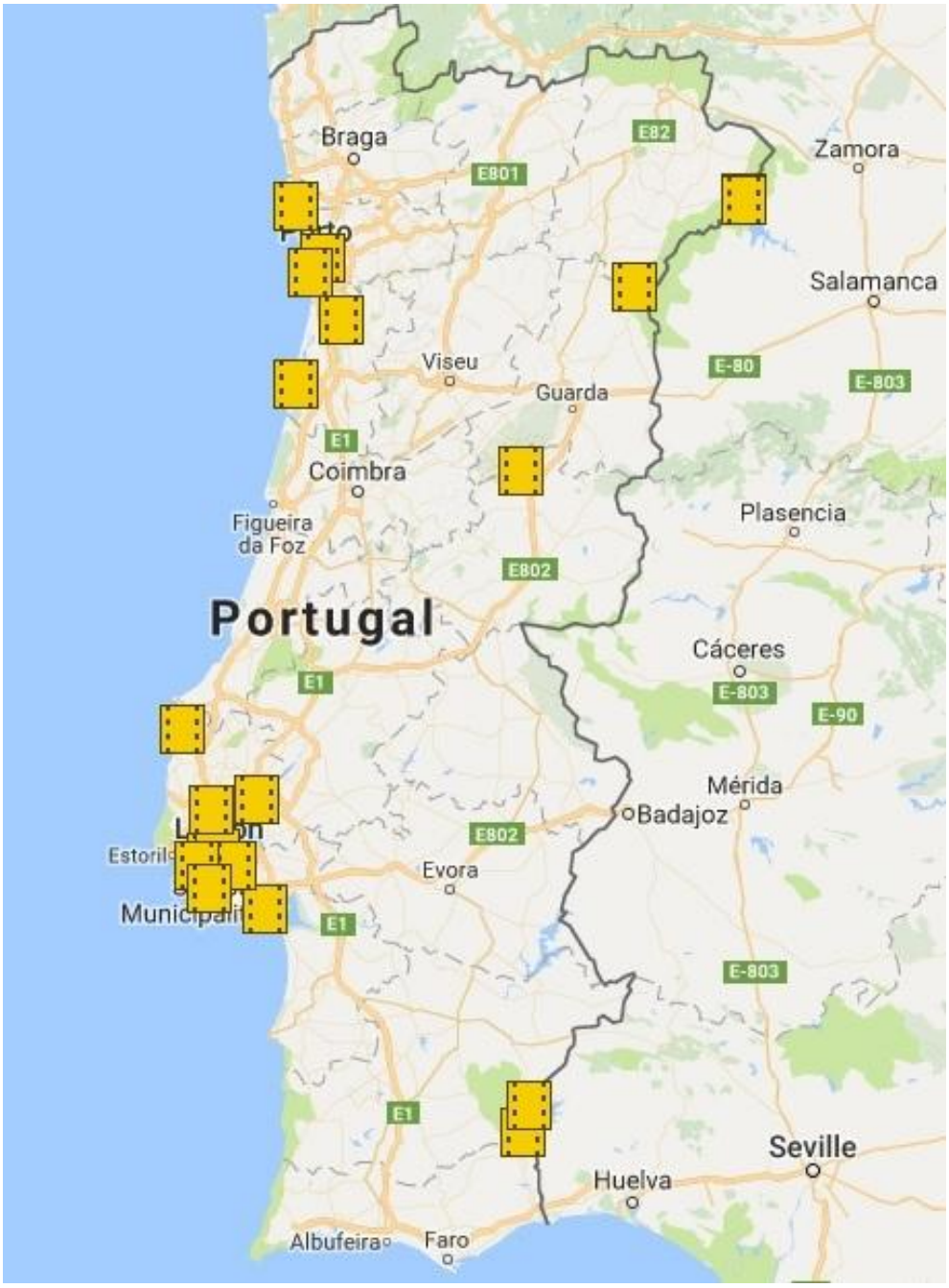
find any alternative narrative to the economic success of high-tech companies, but only a silence in the territory that is emphasised by a reciprocal silence in the commentary. This change of strategy closes *California Company Town* with a pastoral stillness that may be interpreted as the calm before the storm, a fleeting mirage that might suffer the same fate as the previous twenty two company towns. Accordingly, by claiming a historical and emotional reading of the territory, the archaeological gaze allows Schmitt to discuss the past and present forms of land occupation, warning the audience about the dangerous volatility with which large corporations create and destroy places.

***Ruins*: Spectral Soundscapes**

Portuguese film *Ruins* (*Ruínas*, Manuel Mozos, 2009) portrays a country haunted by its past. The very title already announces its content: a set of non-narrative sequences showing the ubiquitous presence of ruins throughout Portugal. These ruins, however, are neither heritage sites nor tourist spots, but residential, productive and leisure spaces that were abandoned after becoming obsolete, such as panoramic restaurants, roadside inns, seaside resorts, mountain sanatoriums, boarding schools, popular theatres, museum ships, closed mines, working-class neighbourhoods, and again, company towns. Some of these places are well known in Portugal, but none are especially old: most date from the years of the *Estado Novo*, the fascist regime that ruled the country from 1933 to 1974. Many of the constructions shown in the film are therefore ruins of modernity (see Hell & Schönle, 2010): not the powerful and triumphant modernity of other richer countries, but a local and incomplete version that has remained unconsciously associated with the Salazar dictatorship.

The film focuses on twenty three specific locations, most in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, but also a few in inland rural regions such as Trás-os-Montes, the Serra da Estrela and the Alentejo [Map 4.3.2]. Contrary to *California Company Town*, these places are not identified until the closing credits, since *Ruins* does not follow a geographical logic but an emotional one: the idea is to convey the impression that the whole country, no matter where, has been long neglected. This perception is constructed in the editing room: transitions from one sequence to another are made with close-ups in order to avoid the audience recognizing the film's locations until each sequence is well advanced. Consequently, cinematic space is created here through the gradual opening of

the visual field, transitioning from close-ups to long shots and from interior spaces to exterior landscapes.



Map 4.3.2: *Ruins*, geographical distribution of film locations

Blinking spaces emerge this time from the contrast between the observational mise-en-scène and the performative commentary. Manuel Mozos, the director of the film, uses long static shots emptied of human presence, which he overlaps with popular songs, movie dialogs and mysterious voices reading different types of texts, such as

public notices, business letters, medical reports, educational texts, cooking recipes and excerpts of the book *Memórias e Receitas Culinárias dos Makavenkos* (Grandella, 1919). These voices, as explained by Filipa Rosário, are never identified or contextualized: they appear without any prior introduction to then sink into silence, as if they were ghosts haunting these ruins (2014, p. 190). Their presence, Rosário continues, summons invisible characters that introduce fiction within these spaces, turning them into settings for potential stories that must be imagined by the audience (2014, p. 197). The blend of voices generates a series of spectral soundscapes that allow the past to seep into the present through anecdotal, but highly evocative aspects of everyday life.

Fig. 4.1.2: *Ruins*

Most texts are closely related to the depicted spaces, whether because they talk about these places or because they have been written when they were still inhabited. There is even one found on location: the so-called health commandments, which are shown framed and hung on a wall of an old boarding school just after having been recited in the commentary. Another example of site-specific text appears in the sequence filmed in Barrocal do Douro, a modernist company town built in the late 1950s to house the workers of the Picote Dam, in Trás-os-Montes. There, a real report published in a local weekly newspaper aimed at praising the town's facilities is read aloud over images showing these same facilities. Once again, this sequence gives rise to a blinking space through the combination of two simultaneous temporalities. On the one hand, the images were originally recorded in the late 2000s, when the town had already been

abandoned. On the other hand, the voice in the commentary seems to come from fifty years ago, when Barrocal do Douro had just been built [Fig. 4.1.2]. Just as the Eagle Mountain sequence in *California Company Town*, the more time that passes since these images were filmed, the more timeless they become because they represent, above all, the sedimentation of time in space.

Mozos uses both the archaeological gaze and spectral soundscapes to suggest that the past refuses to leave the Portuguese landscape: it would not only have entrenched itself in already existing ruins, but would threaten to transform any slightly neglected construction into new ruins. This omnipresence of the past ends up being a problem for the country because it conditions its development in the medium and long term. In this sense, the accumulation of images of abandoned places in *Ruins* conveys an ominous feeling of stagnation that has to do with what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called "the problem of the past":

> The set of representations of the historical conditions that in a given society explain the deficiencies of the present, formulated as backwardness vis-à-vis the present of the more developed countries. Given the historical duration of said conditions, difficulties in overcoming such deficiencies in the near future are to be expected (2011: 399).

The film thus aligns with a long tradition of self-representations that depicts Portugal as an anachronistic and disoriented country, trapped in nostalgia for both a glorious past long gone and an idealized future never reached (see Lourenço 1978). Its haunted ruinscapes symbolize the systematic pre-eminence of the past over Portugal's present and future, a burden that prevents the country from synchronizing its historical temporality with that of more developed countries. Mozos' images admit a nostalgic reading, of course, but also warn of the fragility and impermanence of places, and especially about the dangers of living in a temporality out of step with the historical moment. This warning certainly arrived at the right time, since *Ruins* was released in the midst of the Great Recession. In that context, what was intended to be a reflection on Portugal's incomplete modernity became a premonition of the later cinema of austerity, which would address the effects and consequences of austerity measures imposed on the European population starting in 2010. Arguably, therefore, spectral

soundscapes in *Ruins* work as a *memento mori* aimed at Portuguese society because they draw attention to the past's ability, for better or worse, to pervade, and sometimes even overshadow, the present.

Toponymy: Cinematic Cartography

Argentine documentary *Toponymy* (*Toponimia*, Jonathan Perel, 2015) is a cinematic tour through four small villages located at the southwest end of the Chaco Plain, fifty kilometres south of San Miguel de Tucumán. These places were founded by the military authorities just a few decades ago, in the late 1970s, within the framework of the so-called Operation Independence against the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), a guerrilla group that tried to start a war front in the area. The primary function of these settlements was to assemble the population and keep them under surveillance to prevent any contact with the guerrilla fighters, so that the four villages were planned according to a panoptic logic. The most disturbing thing about these places is that they were serially conceived, which means that their architecture and layout are almost identical: the same constructions and the same spaces were reproduced with minor differences in four different locations, imposing a uniform lifestyle on them that discouraged any kind of dissent. Consequently, everything in these villages echoes the authoritarian project of the last Argentine dictatorship, beginning with their names: Teniente Berdina, Capitán Cáceres, Sargento Moya and Soldado Maldonado, which correspond to the ranks and surnames of four military men killed during the Operation Independence.

Before directing *Toponymy*, Argentine filmmaker Jonathan Perel had already made several works on places that had something to do with state terrorism in Argentina, such as *El predio* (2010), *17 monumentos* (2012) or *Tabula rasa* (2013), in which he embraced an observational mise-en-scène that privileged location sound and dispensed with any commentary: the only texts included in these films were excerpts of official documents that Perel showed in close-up and then juxtaposed with current images of the places to which they refer to. This system of representation would be further developed in *Toponymy* by dividing the footage into four similar sections, each composed of about sixty-eight fifteen-second-long static shots in which the audience first sees the original founding acts of the these villages followed by a series of images recorded there in 2014. Each section repeats exactly the same series: the same kinds of spots are shown

through the same kind of shots, which are edited exactly in the same order. The rules and restrictions of this system of representation are so rigid that they mirror the rules and restrictions of the time, as Patrick Brian Smith has stated: "The rigorous formal style employed by Perel aims (…) to echo not only the rigidity of these fabricated social spaces but, concomitantly, the military dictatorship's ideological and spatial desires for control and surveillance" (2016).

Space itself, according to Irene Depetris Chauvin, was subject to an operation of social domination and transformation at the time (2016, 2017). Nowadays, however, the battle for space has become the battle for its meaning: the names and shapes of these villages anchor them in a violent and militarized past, but Perel's images suggest that these places strive to release from this legacy, although they do so by neglecting and vandalizing its material remains. *Toponymy* thus documents the perennial tension between the strong ideological discourse that emanates from the architectural program and the residents' efforts to ignore it and continue living there like in any other place. By systematically exploring the overwhelming similarities between these places in search of their slight differences, the film adopts what Depetris Chauvin calls a mapping agency, the main aim of which would be to promote contradictions that allow the audience to think critically about the constellation of times inhabiting these spaces (2016, 2017).

The system of representation devised by Perel is imbued with what Teresa Castro has termed "the mapping impulse", which is "a particular way of seeing and looking at the world" linked to "the processes that underlie the understanding of space" (2009, pp. 10-11). Shot after shot and section after section, *Toponymy* develops an accurate and meaningful representation of these four villages in order to locate them in the audience's geographical imaginary: its architectural views faithfully describe the appearance of these places, focusing on their design and constructions, while the unalterable order of shots establishes a recurring itinerary that conveys the feeling of being there, hanging around, looking for something –a meaning– that will only be revealed through the accumulation of repetitions. Hence, the film becomes a cognitive mapping of these cloned spaces, and consequently enters the field of both "cartographic cinema" (Conley 2007) and "cinematic cartography" (Caquard and Fraser Taylor, 2009, pp. 5-8; Roberts, 2012, pp. 190-218), despite not including any map in its footage.

The camera positions seem to have been chosen to identify the spatial elements discussed by Kevin Lynch in the book *The Image of the City*: paths, nodes, landmarks,

districts and edges (1960: 47-48). The paths, for example, would be streets that go nowhere, because all of the villages take the form of a closed rectangle beside the road. The nodes, in turn, would be the institutions that regulate community life, such as churches, communal houses and schools, but also the structures that fulfil a practical function, such as shopping centres, sports complexes, industrial sheds and bus stops. These buildings reproduce the same architectural typology and occupy a similar spot within the villages, which make them look interchangeable for everyone except the locals. The same can be said about landmarks, the elements in which the ideological discourse of the dictatorship becomes more explicit –from the road signs bearing the names of the villages to the water towers with painted slogans, going through entrance gates, plaques, sculptures, stages and flagpoles– because they expose a militarized space halfway between the prison and the barracks. Regarding the districts, each village can be considered a different one, although they are actually the same repeated district in a different location. Finally, the edges would be the border between the natural and the built environment, in which the planned space gives way to an entropic landscape. Perel's decision to end each section at the outer limits of the villages [Fig. 4.1.3 to 4.1.6] invites the audience to look at the off-screen space, which must be understood in both spatial and temporal terms. On the one hand, from a visual and spatial perspective, these images open a vanishing line towards the non-regulated space of the guerrilla. On the other, from a temporal perspective, they send us back to the past, when wilderness was perceived as both a threat and a hope, depending on people's ideology.

Fig. 4.1.3 to 4.1.6: *Toponymy* (from upper left to lower right:
edges of Teniente Berdina, Capitán Cáceres, Sargento Moya and Soldado Maldonado)

By means of cinematic cartography, Perel recalls the traumatic past of these villages and shows how they have evolved over time. The structural logic of the editing reveals the oppressive component of their planning, but the images, as Patrick Brian Smith argues, also point out "the ways in which the community has reshaped and reappropriated its social milieu" (2016). Oddly enough, the clearest example of these 'liberating' interventions is the vandalism of the sculptures that were erected by dictatorship: Sargento Moya's bust has been removed from their plinth in the homonymous village, the same as the baby that should be in a statue of a mother and child, leaving a gaping hole in its place that becomes an especially significant symbol in a country with thousands of disappeared persons victims of state terrorism [Fig. 4.1.7]. These findings suggests that the battle of meaning always remains open: faced with the monuments that force the audience to passively accept a given discourse, *Toponymy* operates as a countermonument –an artefact that challenges its own constitutive laws, according to Perel's definition (2015: 517)– in which historical memory is first and foremost understood as a work that must be done by the audience. The meaning of the film would then be the audience's search for a meaning for the film: a search that necessarily involves taking a walk through the blinking spaces of Teniente Berdina, Capitán Cáceres, Sargento Moya and Soldado Maldonado.

Fig. 4.1.7: *Toponymy*, statue of a mother without her child in Sargento Moya, Argentina

Conclusions

Moving images help us to remember because they make people, places and events singular, and also because they feed an archive that we can review again and again. Nevertheless, many people and places have not been filmed at the right time, and most have not been filmed in any way at all. In these cases, we have to imagine them from available materials, and space itself is probably the most lasting resource we have. Many filmmakers have realized that they can recall the past by simply showing its vestiges: they just need to find the right place and, what is most important, the right way to represent it. The visual techniques and strategies addressed here –namely, the visual palimpsest, the archaeological gaze, the use of spectral soundscapes and the practice of cinematic cartography– are able to join past and present in the same cinematic space: a blinking space, in which the camera frames the present to allow the audience to experience the past, or, more exactly, the permanence of the past in the present. The films discussed in this paper use these techniques and strategies to depict different places –whether larger or smaller, from lost villages to entire countries– and to address different issues –from the spatial logic of capitalism to the overwhelming burden of the past– but they all share the same dynamics: they give rise to cinematic spaces in which the here and now is not limited to the time of the filming, inasmuch as they also include traces of the past intended to reach the future.

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[1] This building housed a 2,500-seat café, a 1,400-seat movie theatre, a large ballroom and several theme restaurants, including an American bar, an Italian *osteria*, a Turkish cafe, a Japanese teahouse and a Spanish winery. Built in 1928 to replace the Haus Potsdam –a similar but smaller place– the Haus Vaterland remained open until 1943, when it was partially destroyed by fire.