FILMED CITIES. CINEMATOGRAPHY AS A DESIGN TOOL.

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Abstract

The ability of art to shape "language", which differentiates each place, determines its creative expression. At a time when light and landscape dominate, consciously or not, in the world of images, the cinematic depictions of cities and their details as elements of memory and knowledge for the viewer, constitute a dominant urban mythology in modern cultural creation.

Cinema is a special way of exploring the way we imagine cities as an experience, but also as a theoretical construction. Films allow us to draw some conclusions about how we experience the real urban space, how we would like it to be, what we are afraid of or what we hope can happen in the future. It is essentially an opportunity to delve into a theory of representation, for the sake of a theory of spatial practice.

Wim Wenders in cities (from the film "Alice in the City", 1974)

Introduction

The way in which man experiences the world at a certain period of its evolution is expressed in his art. Cinematic expression in particular is a kind of recording and processing of time experience.

The development of cinema, at the beginning of the 20th century, coincides with the effort of the city dweller to capture the constant change of modern urban life and the ephemeral character of events, to connect images and situations that follow one another with great speed and to incorporate them to a whole.

Cinema was the first art that managed to "occupy" the space with such fullness. "It is a peculiar spatial form of culture" (Mark Shiel, 2001) that can be more fully understood if one studies its aesthetic theory (space in films) and its "urban planning" practice (films in space).

The characteristics of a film are not only the way in which the person is placed in front of the camera, but also the way in which it depicts the world with its help. Cinema, based on the breadth of the visual and auditory senses, has had the effect of expanding and deepening our sensory perception.

The physiognomy of the city in cinema. Cinematography as a design "tool"

The spaces of a film are a very exciting subject. Factors such as the season and its choices, the creator's gaze, the spectator's participation in the completion of the meaning, the work itself as an individual and autonomous creation in time and space are involved. Moving images, despite the imaginative flow of continuous flow and fullness they give us, are nothing more than a unique and unrepeatable "filmmaking". The selected spaces, although real, represent a "universe" that is built strictly for the particular film and captures the truth of the moment that takes place. The city is not projected as an unrecognizable setting, but as an unshakable, and at the same time, threatening system, "distorted" by the camera's intervention. In addition, cinematic photographs are a unique resource for future researchers, as cities are rapidly transforming and this makes understanding them more and more difficult. The image of cities, as depicted in movies, is a representation of the respective time period, but through the perspective of each creator. According to F. Loyer, "In order to know what a city is, we should not ask Le Corbusier, but Michelangelo Antonioni, Francesco Rosi or even Jean-Luc Godard." Reading and interpreting the city in cinema seeks in its representations, that dynamic, which will allow a reflection on the city to be expressed. "As long as you keep your eyes open, then reality is charged with importance" says M. Antonioni.

The physiognomy of a real or imaginary place determines its identity, while at the same time indicating its uniqueness. The city as a living organism emerges and highlights films as points of reference and memory, when it stars, but even when it is abandoned within them. It is, according to Michel Boujut (2002), the city as a place of fiction-uterine culture, the city as a creator of stories, a setting that transcends the meaning of the setting and is always placed at the center of the cinematic fantasy; a photo-mosaic of places and times, melodies and rhythms. As Michalis Dimopoulos characteristically notes (Megacities, 2000) "From Vertov, to Godard, and from Antonioni to Woody Allen and Wim Wenders, the city plays a dominant role in the history of cinema. It is incorporated into fiction, either as a presence or as a subject. Sometimes it predetermines the action of the characters and other times it is at the center of the action itself. In any case, it always ends up being deeply etched in our memory and its evocative presence usually replaces, over time, the fleeting or frayed impression of a plot or a drama. In other words, the impression of the city in movies like Alphaville, Blade Runner or The Wings of Desire is never erased from our minds. Cities owe much to cinema: their mythological dimension, their mythological reduction, their imaginary perpetuation. Space becomes time, the past present, the memory of fiction disappears behind the fiction of memory. Apart from the simple scenery, the building and the architecture, the city unfolds like a whisper, it exists as a surrounding feeling without being completely visible." In this sense it is always imaginary, as "what remains is emotion" (Ezra Pound, Canto 81)

Essentially, the question now arises of the breadth of recording speech (language of the mind) and myth (language of the soul), the culture of a place. The unique ability of art to form a language, which differentiates each place, determines its creative expression. At a time when light and landscape dominate consciously or not in the world of images, the cinematic depictions of cities and their details as elements of memory and knowledge for the viewer, form a dominant urban mythology in modern cultural creation.

Cinema is a special way of exploring the way we imagine cities as an experience, but also as a theoretical construction. Films allow us to draw some conclusions about how we experience the real urban space, how we would like it to be, what we are afraid of or what we hope can happen in the future.

It is, according to E. Soja, the "urban imaginary", which is the guide not only for understanding, but also for the reproduction of the urban space as a place and way of life, while at the same time confirming or opposing the prevailing interpretations, desires and mythologies.

Utopian or dystopian, the city is a key point in the evolution of human adventure, as cinema follows in the footsteps of man on his journey to discover the lost city of the past and search for the inconceivable city of the future. A journey from space to its depiction, from speech to image, from architecture to cinema and vice versa.

For the pioneering Soviet filmmaker Jiga Vertov, the camera, as early as the third decade of the 20th century, was not only a substitute for the eye, but a tool that could overcome the inadequacies of human vision. The cinematic lens wanders the streets of the city, penetrates the walls of buildings and touches its soul, myth and discourse over time. It offers an opportunity to deepen and transform the fragmentary and ephemeral urban experience into a systematized and unified knowledge that makes us capable of "spatial" action. In particular, cinematic writing can emerge as a "tool" for reading interpretation, evaluation and ultimately analysis of the quality and content of the city. Even as a "tool" of spatial design, as it is original, in addition to the traditional cameras and common, easy to use digital cameras, which have the ability to provide complete and credible urban information. It is noteworthy that as early as the 1980s, sociologist W. Whyte filmed urban squares, parks and sidewalks, analyzing how urban spaces work and suggesting ways to design successful public spaces. Today, with the development of digital technology, from mobile phones to drones, more and more opportunities for research, analysis and composition of spatial design parameters of an area are constantly being provided.

Now a camera is constantly recording. The new generation is leading the digital camera, without divisions, but also without "sensitivities", towards a new form of "resistance". It is direct cinema with processes of participation and reflection, as required by the principles of direct democracy. In the age of globalization and the economic crisis, where the fictitious, the virtual, has become certainty, while the real uncertainty, all that remains is Godard's persuasion and the basic principle of cinema: "walk towards light and illuminate the night…".

Therefore, the city of the film studio is not about the art of cinema, a sterile, unimaginable image of the city, which is accompanied by an urban planning of distance, in contrast to any idea of immediacy. "The city brings the momentum of life and is brought by it: the city, a game of composition between architecture and urban planning, in its volumes, in its gaps and in its light, is full of life," says Costas Axelos. Cinema does not have the right to set aside life, it must see, hear and doubt ...

The analysis of cinematic urban patterns requires, in addition to a spatial one, a sociological and anthropocentric approach, as the city is not just its image. The city is its people, its living forces, the cause that moves and unites them. It is the actions, thoughts and desires of its inhabitants, its myth, reason and history. "The city (which has gained a self-awareness through cinema) and cinema (which focuses on all parts of the urban space) are chosen and mediated productively and inductively, seeking common ground and dissemination with a view to understanding, revision and rearrangement of the terms of our multifaceted and long-suffering urban life" notes the director Thanasis Rentzis (2009).

The city is now acquiring its "living" dimension, highlighting its "interpretations - roles" in film writing. Thus, we have the "real" and the "fantastic" city, the "historical" and the "future". At the same time, the mood of the art of cinema towards the city is revealed,

which is sometimes critical, sometimes projecting and highlighting its historicity, through the creation of city-symbols, as in the case of Athens which is shown in terms of mixing historical and urban models. It is an opportunity to delve deeper into a theory of representation, for the sake of a theory of spatial action. A collage that emphasizes the parallel exposure not only of different moments, but also of different types of representation of the city's physiognomy.

Through cinema, it is possible to predict the future of the city, as it is represented as a city "of the next day", but also its current transformation, in the sense of "metropolis", in the globalized "metapolis". But always keeping in mind the "other city", the city of the 3rd world in the "new" order of things. Those parts of the big cities that are dominated by misery, violence, illegality, poverty. These are the slums, the suburbs, the favelas, which are becoming more and more densely populated, as from 2008 and for the first time in the history of mankind, the world's urban population has surpassed the global rural population. There, the cinema is not entertainment. It complains, provokes, sensitizes emotions…

Cinematographic Athens

In Athens, the coexistence of multiple spaces in the same place, such as the ancient Athens of monuments and the modern of apartment buildings, results in the abolition of any sense of linear flow of time, which makes the city cinematic.

As far as Greek cinema and its relationship with the city is concerned, the choice of protagonists who follow exactly the course of life and the evolution of post-war Athens is characteristic. From "The Girl of the Neighborhood" and "Drunkard" (Or. Makris) of the old Athenian neighborhood (Plakas) we pass to the films starring Logothetidis ("A Pebble in the Lake", "A Hero with Slippers", "Counterfeit Pound") that is, the classic Athenian bourgeois of the 50's and 60's. Then we move on to the typical domestic immigrant, the successful, cunning, but honest, provincial Thimios (played by Hadjichristos). Immediately after, we move on to the crazy and moving rhythm, the stress and the frantic frenzy of the afflicted bourgeois of the 60's - 70's Thanassis Vengos, who is also the ideal performer of this type. The 80's and 90's with the director in the foreground are characterized by a declining social introversion (loneliness of apartment buildings, drugs, etc.) until it reaches the middle of the last decade of the 20th century and then focuses on the immigrant, who is a protagonist of Athens as "other", as a foreign, but also as a strange city. And if the question was initially: who is the immigrant? in films such as "From the Snow" by Sotiris Goritsas (1993) at the dawn of the new century, he mutated, focusing on a more internal search, to the question of who we are as opposed to the immigrant in movies such as "Plato's Academy" by Filippos Tsitos (2009).

What is important in cinema is the search for the sense of space and ourselves in the world and especially in the city, the depiction of our urban life in its dynamic expansion. In space, as a real field of forces, it is the energy that, in the case of the city, emanates from the social dynamics, the component of the forces that determine its social structure. The dynamics of immigration in combination with the effects of the economic - humanitarian crisis of recent years now determine the social and cultural identity of Athens and have a catalytic effect on the formation of its urban environment. The "stranger" has become "our mirror". He is a resident, part of ourselves and not just another user of our city, as is pointed out in K. Katzourakis' film "The Road to the West" (2003) "… and whoever does not have a job in the country is a foreigner".

Today, the day after tomorrow of the metropolitan Athens, the city of the homeless and immigrants is at the risk. The city is in danger especially in the areas of disorder, in the intermediate spaces, in the surrounding urban gaps, in the degraded zones, in the meteoric spaces of otherness in the center and on the outskirts of the city. Places where bold and

inventive design programs should be implemented and should be explored narratively and iconographically by the films. This can be done with studies on the boundaries, the assemblies, the microclimate, the free appropriation of the space by the resident. Following a cinematic practice, the space is activated and time is localized with a dialectical relationship between image and movement, where each sequence of images can be the subject of reflection. Cinema as an art of audiovisual writing, makes it possible to reinvent our relationship with space and time.

In a globalized environment in times of crisis, but also in an intercultural environment, Athens must immediately focus on its inhabitants, in an alternative experience, but also in the representation of the city. In particular, its commitment - in an act of humanity and solidarity - with the pockets of its vulnerable social groups, with the cultures and needs of immigrants and the homeless, is now the only social dynamic capable of determining it. This practice can put the city at the forefront of the transformation of its identity from the Greek landscape to a Human-landscape, to the magic of the culture of persons, having as its only condition its self-knowledge, as culture has neither clear borders nor specific ethnicity.

Conclusion

The relationship between the city and cinema is highlighted not only in films that promote the city, but mainly in those that represent the uniqueness of the urban phenomenon in its daily life. The approach that should be start with what the city itself really is, which remains well hidden, as we do not see the city, we do not look it in its "eyes", we do not try to understand or feel it, we just pass it. *"Because ultimately the cinematic art of cinema's narrative art is that it challenges us to compare what we see and hear with what we live with, with what it brings to mind, with what we would like, with what we tried, but also with what we never thought or didn't feel..."* (S.Stavridis 1998).

At stake now is the launch of a dialogue about the urban landscape, its changes and their effects, as they are found in cinematic representations and in the pursuit of modern urban planning and architecture. The cinematic discourse about the city can be the starting point for an attempt to understand urban life in theory and in practice, to realize the crisis of urban space and to deal with the daily violence that it exerts through an alternative representation of its "truth". As the great architect D. Pikionis has pointed out in the past: "A little more humanity, deeper intellect and mental sensitivity - and everything changes: from the initial attitude to the details".

For cinema, the city is not just a field for writing stories, which transform it into a comprehensible text. The spaces of the city themselves, with their operation, guide the narration. Stories are mapped out in ways that can get you anywhere, but nowhere. But the urban landscape also contains a story, it involves an identity, a physiognomy. It affects people, creates a sense of time and "cinematic" emotion, in short, the landscape is inhabited.

The cinematic possibility of a narrative about the city and at the same time a description of its image are the elements that cannot only be projected, but also act as a catalyst in shaping its physiognomy, as the cinema was created to capture the eternal that is constantly changing forms. On the other hand, architecture aims to make the form eternal. As Doors singer Jim Morrison notes in his vision notes: "In the dim light, the form is sacrificed to light. In abundant light, light is sacrificed in form. "

The city of cinema is never a definitive picture. It is always evolving, like its urban environment, as it is made up of people who experience it, feel it, are moved by it, it is a living organism. It is a city always invented, even when it is real. The cinematic image usually imposes fragmentary views of the city, bounded by the frames chosen by the creator. As Jean-Louis Comolli (1996) said: "The cities that were loved by the cinema have been filmed as

riddles. They are there and they are not there, they hide at the same time that they are revealed, escape and condense in the bodies that embody them, disappear within them ".

According to Jorge Luis Borges, "the city is always in search of a poem." Thus, it's not just the cinema that loses the city, it's the city itself that has been lost. According to anthropologist Marc Augè, there are no more cities or "deserts", so this is not exactly the city we considered it to be today, but mainly a place that needs to be re-evaluated, discovered from the beginning to evolve / design the story of tomorrow. Underground stations, the arbitrary settlements of the region, the ghettos of the urban center and the favelas of the big cities of the third world, are, in the same way as the highways, the waiting rooms in the airports, the office towers and their malls spectacular metropolises. It is the undefined space of a story that although we were completely unaware of, some inspired creators such as Wim Wenders, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, became our eyes and ears and through their images, "could make us see and hear the noise it makes, as it approaches like the stormy sea".

As Jean-Luc Godard points out in the video "Moments from the History of Cinema":

"What is cinema? Nothing

What does it want? Everything

What can it do? Something".

If the film could do the same, P. Greenaway, 1972

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