

The place of the self and the others: Reiterative spaces in the Bolivian cinema (The Altiplano and the city of La Paz)

El lugar de lo propio y lo ajeno: los espacios reiterativos en el cine boliviano (El Altiplano y la ciudad de La Paz)

Sebastian Morales-Escoffier

Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Bolivia.
sebastian.morales.escoffier@gmail.com

Resumen

El cine boliviano ha filmado con obsesión dos espacios en particular: la ciudad de La Paz y el Altiplano, cercano a la urbe. La razón por este interés no es difícil de adivinar: son los espacios en donde se ha jugado gran parte de la historia política de Bolivia. El texto presente analiza el cine boliviano desde el punto de vista del espacio, reflexiona acerca de los contenidos y las características que los cineastas bolivianos han asignado a la ciudad de La Paz como al Altiplano, y se describe cómo los cineastas han representado la relación entre el campo y la ciudad. En el análisis de los dos espacios, se hace patente una búsqueda obsesiva por la identidad y la pregunta por el otro, que se traduce formalmente en narrativas circulares. Se ha realizado un análisis plano por plano del corpus, apoyado en la noción de espacio fílmico, tal como lo propone Eric Rohmer..

Palabras clave

Cine boliviano, espacio fílmico, identidad, campo, ciudad.

Abstract

The Bolivian cinema has filmed two spaces in particular: the city of La Paz and the Altiplano, near to the city. The reason for this interest is not difficult to guess: they are the spaces where it has played much of the political history of Bolivia. Being a cinema with very political characteristics is clear that Bolivian filmmakers should install their cameras in such spaces. This paper will analyze the Bolivian cinema from the point of view of space. It will think about the contents, characteristics that Bolivian filmmakers have given both the city of La Paz and the Altiplano. Understand how the Bolivian cinema has showing the relationship between town and country. In the analysis of the two spaces, an obsessive search for identity and the question for the other becomes evident. A shot-by-shot analysis of the corpus has been carried out, supported by the notion of filmic space, as proposed by Eric Rohmer.

Keywords

Bolivian cinema, Filmic space, identity, countryside, city.

1. Introduction

Bolivian cinema has filmed two spaces in particular: the city of La Paz and the Altiplano near to the city. The reason for this interest is not difficult to guess: they are the spaces much of the political history of Bolivia has been played out. Being a cinema with very political characteristics is clear that Bolivian filmmakers should install their cameras in such spaces.

Thus, an important perspective in order to analyze Bolivian cinema is the comprehension of these spaces. It involves reflecting on the content, the characteristics that filmmakers have given the city of La Paz as well as the Altiplano. The objective is to understand how this cinematography has portrayed the relationships between the countryside and the city, and the images that filmmakers have given the city of La Paz as well as the Altiplano. This analysis not only has political implications, (the question about the “other”), but also existential implications (given that it implies inquiring about something so elusive and complex as identity) and, above all, it has aesthetic connotations because it sets the scene for a discussion that appears time and time again in Bolivian cinema.

In order to commence such analysis, mention will be made of the concept of filmic space of Eric Rohmer. Said notion obligates reflection on the form of Bolivian films, which is to say, aesthetics. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the aesthetic perspective will quickly overflow into one that is political and existential. After defining the concept of filmic space, the next step is to analyze Bolivian films made in the western part of the country (La Paz, Oruro, Potosí) paying particular attention to the opposition between the city of La Paz and the Altiplano.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. A Cinema in Search of Identity

The main problem in the Bolivian seventh art is an obsessive search for the elusive national identity. Thus, as Mary Carmen Molina states so well (2014):

the thematic and aesthetic concerns of cinema made in Bolivia had, have, and will have to do with complex and obsessive reflection –from diverse, multiple, and conflicting standpoints; ideological and political stances; aesthetic and ethical objectives; artistic convictions and visions– on cultural tensions –encounters and conflicts, dialogues and confrontations– that define us and in which we live our drawn out routine and transcending history (160).

In a country that recognizes, since 2009, the existence of 35 different cultural groups in a population of less than 10 million (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia, 2008) the question of identity must necessarily consider the relationships between the different cultures present. Thus, asking about Bolivian identity implies putting into question the relationship with the other, the indigenous, whom throughout history are understood to have been marginalized by the State.

The conflict of Bolivian identity is defined by the confrontation between a repressed, indigenous majority and a white, privileged minority. Cinema has attempted to search for the aspects of this repressed culture, find its cultural richness, and bring it out of its clandestinity. Being a cinema that aims to be political and revolutionary, it is clear that its main theme should be the indigenous, as a marginal but fundamental entity for a country like Bolivia. The attempt to give an image of this clandestine nation –which is to say a population of customs and ways of seeing the world differently from the west and that is marginalized by the Official State for this very reason– is imminently a political position (Morales, 2015: 66-67).

Bolivian cinema is very political and when asking about identity, it necessarily must question the place of the indigenous in a historically excluding State. For this reason Bolivian cinema is interested in the two spaces where the indigenous is found (highland), the Altiplano and the outskirts of the country’s political center: La Paz (Morales, 2011). The two spaces appear as a metaphor of a certain existential, political situation of the indigenous.

2.2. Filmic Space

The chosen perspective requires the mentioning of a series of concepts that will serve as a guide for later analysis. Above all, it is necessary to define what is going to be understood as space in cinema based on formal considerations. This is because the author of the cinematographic work, who creates its structure, who chooses a certain conception of the stage and defines the formal aspects of the setting of the scene, asks himself, at first instance, about the temporary and spatial aspects that are going to appear in the movie. According to Rohmer (2004): “[i]n the logic of an art that, being par excellence the art of movement, must organize its codes of meaning to be used based on a general concept, whether it be time or space” (42).

Now, how should space be understood in cinema? According to Rohmer, there are three spaces that coexist in film and that define the setting of the scene and therefore, propose a way of understanding space. The first is pictorial space, defined by Rohmer (2000) as follows: “[t]he cinematographic image projected on the rectangular screen -as fleeting or mobile that it may be-, is perceived and understood as the more or less true representation, more or less beautiful representation of or such part of the outside world” (6). With this first type, Rohmer seeks to find the pictorial relationships of the cinematographic image, which is to say, understand this image as *frame*. Here there are pictorial categories like those of composition, light, as well as color.

The second space is named by Rohmer as the architectural space. This space is merely referential and can be defined simply as the: “parts of the world, natural or created, provided by an objective experience” (Aumont and Marie, 1990: 174). The architectural space comprises all those elements that you could call objects in the film, which is to say, the objects that are shown on screen. The analysis of this type of space has to do, above all, with filming sites, with locations.

The last category is filmic space. At first instance, Rohmer (2000) tries to define this concept stating that: “it is not the space filmed that the spectator is imagining, but rather a virtual space reconstructed in his imagination, thanks to pieces of elements that the film offers” (7). In order to comprehend what Rohmer understands as “a virtual space” the cinematographic concepts of “on screen” and “off screen” must be specified as well as the relationships

that exist between both categories. “The on screen is usually seen as the only visible part of a broader space that undoubtedly exists around it” (Aumont et al. 2008:24, p. 24). The off screen, in contrast:

“is essentially linked to the on screen given that it only exists based on this; it could be defined as the sum of elements (characters, sets, etc.) that, although they are not included in the on screen, they are nevertheless assigned in the imagination, by the spectator, via any type of media” (Aumont et al. 2008: 24).

Between the onscreen and the off screen there is always a relationship of reversibility. This is to say, that what appears at first instance in the off screen can appear later in the on screen and vice-versa with a simple camera movement or with a change in scene using the montage. Together the two form a unit called filmic space. It is a space under construction, made up of what is seen (on screen) and what is not seen (off screen). This space can only be found in the spirit of the spectator, and is created by him in his imagination based on what is seen on screen. Thus:

The cinematographic space would be defined in relation to the space of the scene, as well as the narrowness of the surface of visibility and the expanse of the place of action. It is not, therefore, just the inside of each one of the shots that the filmmaker must determine based on a certain conception of spacing, but rather the total filmed space” (Rohmer, 2004: 42).

The on screen and off screen dynamic is essentially based on two cinematographic mechanisms: the montage and camera movements. Upon determining the content of this virtual space, it's possible to discover common notions, and specific elements of a filmmaker or of a tendency. Thus, the camera movements and the analysis of the montage are key in the proposed methodology.

3. Methodology

A detailed analysis of Bolivian films has begun and for this reason it has been decided not to go too into detail. This work does not aim to tell about the history, but rather a cinema aesthetic. Two criteria have been proposed in order to choose the films analyzed in this essay:

a) Discourse on space: the films chosen portray throughout and based on the *form* a discourse on space.

b) Architectural spaces: This essay is interested, above all, in the way that the city and the Altiplano have been represented. The films chosen do not only bring up the two spaces, but also show, in the description of both and their correlation, an aesthetic, political and/or existential discourse. In the descriptions of the city, preference was given to films that talk about La Paz considering its proximity to the Altiplano.

According to Espinoza and Laguna (2014), throughout the 20th century, 40 full-length films were made in Bolivia, while between 2003 and 2013, 70 movies were made. Evidently, many of these films do not comply with the previously-mentioned criteria. Thus, to find perspectives of analysis, with a collection of sufficiently representative films, its necessary to consider a long period of time. Likewise, with the goal of outlining some aspects that future Bolivian cinema could propose, short films by young filmmakers belonging to a group self-proclaimed as Socavón Cine have been considered. This collective, according to Espinoza (2015), may be bringing about a new style of Bolivian cinema. In a comparative analysis, it's worth recognizing the repeated and unique aspects in what could be called "classic cinema" and "contemporary cinema", in terms of the use of space.

The previously-mentioned criteria have made it possible to build a collection including the films of Jorge Ruiz, Jorge Sanjinés, Antonio Eguino and works by young filmmakers Carlos Piñeiro and Kiro Russo. In certain specific themes, the analysis has included fragments of other films that do not comply with the criteria in order to propose future reading prospects in regards to Bolivian cinema that exceed the limitations of this essay. The following are the films selected according to the proposed criteria:

Table 1: Films and Short Films Analyzed

YEAR	FILM / SHOR FILM	DIRECTOR
1953	<i>Vuelve Sebastiana</i>	Jorge Ruiz
1966	<i>Ukamau</i>	Jorge Sanjinés
1969	<i>Yawar Malku</i>	Jorge Sanjinés
1977	<i>Chuquiago</i>	Antonio Eugenio
1989	<i>La nación clandestina</i>	Jorge Sanjinés
2003	<i>Dependencia sexual</i>	Rodrigo Bellot
2009	<i>Rojo, Amarillo, Verde</i>	Martín Boulocq, Rodrigo Bellot y Sergio Bastani
2010	<i>Enterprise</i>	Kiro Russo
2010	<i>Max jután</i> (cortometraje)	Carlos Piñeiro
2013	<i>Plato Paceño</i> (cortometraje)	Carlos Piñeiro

Source: Author

The analysis of space in cinema as defined in the previous section implies a methodology that gives preference to the formal aspects of Bolivian films. For this reason, a shot-by-shot or *découpage* analysis was done of the collection. Special attention has been given to the following aspects:

- a)** Location (the architectural space in which the shot has been filmed).
- b)** The movement of characters in the shot
- c)** Dialogues
- d)** Soundtrack
- e)** Frames
- f)** References off screen (glances, sounds, reflections, dialogues, etc.)
- g)** Camera movements
- h)** Match cut (transitions from one shot to another)

Based on the systematic description of the aspects mentioned, a comparative analysis has been done of the collection, finding similarities and differences in the treatment of space. The aspects they share have been grouped in different categories in order to find common aesthetic, political, and existential themes that run throughout Bolivian cinema regardless of genre, phases, or technological considerations.

4. The Cinematographic Space of the Indigenous: the Altiplano and the Hillside

"Classic" Bolivian cinema proposes the problem of identity by creating a juxtaposition between spaces foreign to the indigenous world and those that belong to it. Furthermore, these movies follow the assumption that the characters, for different reasons, want to be in the foreign space. In other words, the person that at first appears to be legitimate, given that he lives in the world that belongs to him, ends up alienating himself by way of a physical or spiritual journey. Thus, the protagonist must make a torturous trip back to return to the space considered as his own in order to fully understand what his identity means, always tied to a land. The places of the self and the other, in the collection chosen, are identified with the Altiplano and the city respectively.

Vuelve Sebastiana (1953) by Jorge Ruiz is probably the first Bolivian film to propose these dichotomic relationships. Sebastiana (Sebastiana Kespí) lives in an indigenous village that is so poor that its inhabitants cannot ensure their own survival. The film, with evidently ethnographic overtones, begins with a mythical tale. Ruiz relates the inhabitants of this village with a mysterious millenary culture: the Chullpas. After talking the mummies that which in the Ruiz's perspective correspond to the culture called Chullpas, a direct cut is made, to introduce Sebastiana, from the Chipaya village. She inhabits the space where these mortuary monuments will be found. This relationship gives Sebastiana a millenary cultural inheritance, based merely on the village's proximity to these archaeological remains.

One scene of the film shows the girl as she herds her sheep. She comes upon an Aymara boy who takes her to his village. Sebastiana is amazed by the prosperity found there, with seemingly no lack of commodities or food, in contrast to her own village. Due to Sebastiana's prolonged absence, her tired grandfather decides to go look for her. To convince her to come back, the grandfather appeals to the long tradition that their village has. Sebastiana understands the need for her return thanks to the wise explanations of her elderly grandfather. Unfortunately, the trip becomes too much for the grandfather to bear and he dies halfway home. The director's intentions are apparent, so much so that it's as if he's trying to teach them. The land and one's own territory are the inheritance of an identity that is as old as it is mysterious, and it must be taken care of.

Moreover, it is assumed that this inheritance is in evident danger due to the one-by-one disappearance of the members of the Chipaya village, heirs of the Chullpas. At the end of the film, the grandfather's sacrifice to go look for Sebastiana has a price: death. The grandfather's sacrifice serves as a lesson throughout her life, causing Sebastiana to become aware of the importance of her land. Each one of the members must uphold this tradition, remaining in the space they belong.

The opposition between the opulence of the Aymara town and the poverty of Sebastiana's village, se translate into a problem of identity. Travelling means the loss of this enormous cultural inheritance, the loss of identity, a distancing from oneself. The film evokes a nostalgia for the past that is confusing and has a certain degree of conservatism, calling Sebastiana to accept sacrifice as a noble responsibility she must uphold to her own people and territory.

Jorge Sanjinés seems to be very influenced by the narrative proposed by Ruiz in *Vuelve Sebastiana*. So much that in his first film, *Ukamau* (1966), he also proposes as the *leitmotiv* a journey that implies a hard loss for the main character. The film tells the story of revenge between the Indian Andrés (Vicente Vernerós) and the mestizo Rosendo (Néstor Peredo). The first must travel for several days to the town market. He leaves his wife Sabina (Benedicta Huanca) alone and defenseless. Rosendo takes advantage of the situation to rape and kill her. The distancing of Andrés, although temporary, a trip to and from town, implies a hard loss for him. Thus, it is not about a meaningless trip, but rather brings about a dichotomic concept of space. Andrés's initially

innocent trip is similar to Sebastiana's: "[i]n both films (*Ukamau* and *Vuelve Sebastiana*) there is a geographic boundary that separates both cultures. When the Indian crosses the geographic boundary, he automatically loses his own" (Kenny, 2009:111).

Rape, vexation, related to a loss of identity and the correlation between one's own space and foreign space can be found in films that appear completely opposite, thematically and formally-speaking, to the films of Sanjinés. Take, for example, *Dependencia sexual* (2003) by Rodrigo Bellot. In the sequence of the film that has to do directly with migration, Bellot follows the typical macho-type: Choco (Jorge Antonio Saavedra). The character seems to have a promising future, good friends, a beautiful girlfriend and very soon a study abroad trip. In this part of the film, Choco arrives in the USA. During the film's climax, the character is raped by a group of American football players in a parking lot. Although sexual violence appears in several of the film's stories, this sequence seems to have an enormous meaning in terms of the spatial point of view. The character who appears, in this own space in Santa Cruz, to be someone who is in control of his actions, including someone who is feared for his abrupt and unjustified acts of violence. Upon embarking on the journey, he completely loses this control of action. The United States appears here explicitly as a space of negation: of violation of the identity that until this moment defended the character.

Like in *Ukamau*, the rape appears like a taking of what belongs to one, operating as a movement towards a place of not belonging. Therefore, if the city is where Andrés loses what is his, only in the countryside can he regain it. The character doesn't decide to go to a judge or the police (to representatives of the official state), but instead decides to get revenge on the mestizo with his own hands. The plot for revenge is planned slowly. Andrés, following an Aymara concept of time, waits for the right moment to take action. One of the conditions that must occur in order to get revenge is find the mestizo in Andrés's own space, the Altiplano. Only here is the indigenous owner of himself, and his actions. Like in the case of *Vuelve Sebastiana*, *Ukamau* is also the story of a metaphoric return, of returning to pick up the reins once again.

In another film by Sanjinés, *Yawar Mallku* (1969) it is possible to find even more evidence of the topics that appear in the films mentioned. In the small town where Ignacio (Marcelino Yanahuaya) lives, all the women have trouble bearing children. The film's protagonist conducts an investigation resulting in him realizing that a group of American "volunteers" is sterilizing the women without their consent. Ignacio and the community decide to expel the foreigners with violence. During the confrontation, Ignacio is shot. He and his wife Paulina (Benedicta Huanca) go to the city to try to heal the wounds. In La Paz, the couple meets with Sixto (Vicente Vernereros), Ignacio's brother. Likewise, the journeys of Sixto are narrated as he tracks down enough money to help heal the wounds of his brother.

Unfortunately, no one helps Ignacio and he ends up dying. After this roaming of the city, a fruitless coming and going through a space that Sixto finally recognizes as foreign to him, he decides once and for all to return to his town to continue the fight that his brother Ignacio has begun. In both stories there is a dichotomic conception of the spaces that appear on screen: the country and the city. According to Espinoza and Laguna (2009):

the master Sanjinés shows us the confrontation between the rural and the urban, he shows us the painful experiences of the inhabitants of a clandestine nation. (...) in the journey from the countryside to the city, Ignacio, Paulina and Sixto will come face to face with exclusion, with violence, with alienation, with harmony.(100-101).

In addition, as Kenny mentions (2009): "The city, Sixto's habitat, is the place where you breathe frustration, violence, racism and loneliness" (128). The author continues:

In *Yawar Mallku*, like in *Ukamau*, two juxtaposing spaces are established, the country and the city. Individuals are also the result of their respective habitat. Thus, Sixto cannot change and be happy in the city. Realization is found in the return to the territory, where the ancestral culture has its geographic space (131).

In addition to seeing the urban space as a place of exclusion, of demonizing compared to the countryside portrayed as a type of paradise –like in *Vuelve Sebastiana* and *Ukamau*– it also shows there is a difference concerning identity in the two spaces. The first time Sixto appears on screen, he is playing soccer. Due to the nature of the game, Sixto violently

trips up a rival. This player, lying on the ground and deaf to the apologies of his accidental aggressor, yells and emphatic: "Fucking Indian!". At this moment, Sixto's consoling attitude turns 180 degrees and in an aggressive tone, he says: "Do you know me? Did you see me being born? I am not an Indian!". This sequence, with the signature teaching style of Sanjinés films, shows Sixto's situation. The character, in his attempt to adapt to the city, must deny his origins.

At the moment when Sixto meets with Ignacio and Benedicta, an initial journey begins towards consciousness. After having been an observer of the city that up until that moment he didn't know, unsupportive of another's pain, and of having recognized (once again using a teaching style) the town's oppressors and its footmen- the same ones that have hurt his brother and are supported by the white bourgeois of La Paz- decides to return to his town. The film shows Sixto's movements having a circular structure. The main character in the second story performs a double movement throughout the film. In the first place, there is roaming, erratic behavior and running in circles trying to find help. Secondly, there is the movement of going (which is not shown on screen) and the one of triumphant return, even revolutionary. Within these two movements, something has changed in Sixto. He has become conscious of the fact that he cannot continue denying his origins, that it is time to go back to his place and return to be owner of his actions. The Altiplano appears like the space that must be recognized as one's own, but after a spiritual and physical journey. It is here where the indigenous identity is developed and the destination of an ancestral culture.

In his masterpiece *La nación clandestina* (1989), Jorge Sanjinés delves into his first insights. The film features Bolivian cinema's most important character, Sebastián Mamani (Reynaldo Yujra). He is an indigenous man who immigrates to the city. Just like Sixto, the character does all he can to be accepted in his new surroundings, which implies denying his origins. But Sebastián does not have the same noble character as Sixto.

The protagonist of *La nación clandestina* does not hesitate to betray the people of his village upon changing his name, from the clearly indigenous Mamani to the satirical Maisman. For his actions, Sebastián is cast out of his village and forbidden to return. Nevertheless, the character becomes conscious of his actions and decides to return to carry out a forgotten ritual as a way to ask his village

forgiveness: that of Jacha Tata Danzanti (dance to death). Laguna and Espinoza (2011) describe the film in the following way:

La nación clandestina is a film about the constant journeys of Sebastián, about his journey to alienation, about his journey to denial of himself, about his journey to an animal state, about his journey to corruption, about his journey to regret, about his journey to redemption by way of the Jacha Tata Danzanti (Great Dancing Man). But above all, *La nación clandestina* is the return journey to one's origins, the return journey to who one really is (196).

It is not about a simple return to the village story, but rather a purification, a pilgrimage to return to one's self. The film's final sequence shows what it means to return. Meanwhile in the city, Sebastián is rather alone, making ends meet the best way he can, without thinking about the other. His death and redemption imply a return to the community. Here, recovering one's identity means returning to be one with one's community of origin. Sebastián is the prodigal son that returns and, after the necessary sacrifices, is accepted back into his family.

This theme of returning is not just a way to spark off a story, but rather expresses an authentic cinematographic concept. If it is possible to think of a classicism in Bolivian cinema, it would necessarily have to consider this going back movement, of the round trip away and towards one's origins. The obsession with circularity is a hallmark of the narrative structure of Bolivian films. According to Kenny (2009), *Vuelve Sebastiana* (1953), *El coraje del pueblo* (1971) and of course, *La nación clandestina* (1989), so as to give a few examples, have a circular structure because the characters embark on a journey of transformation that always has its point of return set in the origins of each one.

This circular journey is a constant in Bolivian cinema, even for filmmakers that apparently seek to oppose the themes of classic filmmakers like Sanjinés and Ruiz. The theme appears, for example, in *Rojo, Amarillo, Verde* (2009). The film is a type of manifest by three young filmmakers: Martin Boulocq, Rodrigo Bellot and Sergio Bastani. The film consists of three stories, directed by each one of the filmmakers mentioned and that correspond to the colors of the Bolivian flag. Without a doubt the project was an ambitious one that sought to create a new way of making movies in Bolivia, breaking away from the

Sanjinés's conception of filmmaking. The master of Bolivian cinema structures his films like great political metaphors about the country. In contrast, the program of the three B's (as they call themselves) appears completely different, given that it seeks to talk about Bolivia but not like a long story, but rather based on a characterization of the fatherland (or better said *motherland*) as an intimate sphere. Therefore, the three stories place emphasis on love of one's mother in terms of an authentic connection with the land.

Even when the plan was to make a breakthrough manifesto film, the full-length film segment that has most caught the eye of the critics is *Amarillo*, filmed by Bastani, which is a tribute to *Vuelve Sebastiana*. Bastani's camera follows a boy, in contrast to Sebastiana, who seems to come from a middle-class family. The story's protagonist begins to walk, distancing himself greatly from the family's home, until finally, he is lost. His mother calls him insistently but the boy seems not to want or be able to return. Thus, the walker comes to find another boy, an indigenous. After they meet, just like Sebastiana does upon her grandfather's insistence, the boy will return to his mother's side. It is true that the movie in general, and this part in particular, seems to distance itself from a traditional political vision on identity. Rather than this, a Bolivian cinema emerges that brings up intimacy. Nevertheless, the primordial gesture of Bolivian cinema has to do with this circular journey of setting out towards the unknown and returning to one's own land and to one's mother. Laguna and Espinoza (2011) in their critique of *Rojo, Amarillo, Verde* state:

[t]hat movement, to journey outside, in order to return inside, to return to the mother's uterus, to return to one's self, is the same journey of Sebastián Mamani (Reynaldo Yujra) in *La nación clandestina* (1989) by Jorge Sanjinés. *Amarillo* makes a journey similar to that which two important characters of Bolivian cinema make, Sebastiana and Sebastián. It is part of a powerful tradition, a tradition that calls the Bolivian to return to the place where he or she belongs, to the *motherland* (196).

5. The cinematographic shape of the circle: the integral sequence shot

From the narrative point of view, the circle is clear in this round-trip journey that the characters embark upon through spaces that appear with contrary characteristics, always linked to a certain conception of identity. Up to now, the architectural spaces have been reviewed and the analysis has been essentially based on the story that the different films portray. But this conception of space is not merely narrative but rather has a correlation in terms of the form. This form translates into the use of what Sanjinés has named "the integral sequence shot" (ISS). Laguna and Espinoza define this technique used by Sanjinés in the following way:

The moment in which this sequence shot becomes integral is when time ceases to pass linearly and the shot can include both the past and the present (...) Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it does not require cuts nor montage ellipsis, but rather a simple panning, travelling or other similar camera movement covers both the past and the present (Laguna and Espinoza, 2009:167).

The importance of *La nación clandestina* for Bolivian cinema has to do with the ISS. With this technique, Sanjinés attempts to approach a population not accustomed to western cinematographic codes. In other words, he aims to cinematographically capture a way of thinking that is particular to the Andean cosmovision:

The appearance of Sebastián at the end has to do with a cyclical, circular conception of time that Aymara have. Their concept of time is different from that of the western world. For the western world the passing of time is linear. It starts with a genesis and moves towards infinity or until it reaches a final judgment. It is a conception in which what ends cannot return (...). On the contrary, the Aymara concept of time considers that the past and the future may be behind us and not ahead of us. This occurs with Sebastián when he is already in the future and he sees his own burial behind him" (Sanjinés, 1990:7)

The ISS is an Ariadne's thread that goes unraveling at the rate at which Sanjinés consolidates his way of thinking about cinema (and society). However, it should be no surprise that the use of ISS in the written sense, which is to say, a sequence shot that unites past and present with a camera movement,

appears on very few occasions in the Sanjinés's cinematography. This is because the technique cannot be used just any place or anytime. Firstly, in terms of it representing the Aymara way of seeing the world, it can only take place in its place of preference: the Altiplano. Only in the Altiplano can the indigenous be who he really is. This implies that only in this place can he express in all its magnitude his own cosmovision. For this reason: "its use is restricted to the Andean Altiplano scene and, in particular, to the protagonist's community and surroundings, and thus cannot take place in urban settings" (Espinoza and Laguna, 2009:169). Therefore, Sanjinés only uses this cinematographic technique three times in *La nación clandestina*.

The first time ISS is used in the film, it shows Sebastián raping who would be his future wife, Basilia (Delfina Mamani). After an initial struggle, there is a cut, in which you can see the characters from far away as simple silhouettes, although one can assume that Sebastián throws the woman to the ground. At that moment, the camera a circular pan, until stopping at Sebastián's face which is found on a lookout, as if he were observing the scene. In this sequence the past interconnects with the present thanks to a panning movement.

It must be recognized that from a sociological point of view, the scene is shocking. It is as if Sebastián, in an act diametrically opposite of that of love, "takes over" his wife, who in the rest of the film shows a disconcerting affection towards the main character. Something similar also occurs in *Ukamau*. In this film, the rape does not appear exactly how it happens, the humiliation of a human being, but rather as the taking of something that belonged to the Indian Andrés by the mestizo. It is as if for Sanjinés, the woman would simply have a utilitarian function in his films, a prized object to be taken over or taken from. For this reason it is difficult to see, as it seems the film wants the spectator to, that the sequence clearly shows the loving union between Sebastián and his wife, a moment that undoubtedly would forever affect the lives of both. Either way, the second feature that a scene must have in order to be able to use ISS is very clear: it can only be used when what is evoked from the past has an important emotional weight on the character.

The second time that Sanjinés uses this technique is when Sebastián escapes his village, chased by a furious mob of people. You can see the film's protagonist from afar running along the top of a mountain,

a camera pan follows the character's movement. As the fugitive distances himself, the camera shows a close up of Sebastián's face. In the same image, Sebastián of the past and of the future, meet. The same formula from the previous sequence is repeated, in which he goes from a regular shot to a close up, from the past towards the present, using a circular or semi-circular camera movement.

The third and last time ISS is used in the film *La nación clandestina* is in the final sequence. A group of peasants walk as they carry the dead body of Sebastián. The camera moves in the opposite direction of the characters. The camera lens shows the face of the deceased and then the group of people quickly passes. Sebastián appears again, a little behind, which the camera films as a close up. This sequence has a more qualitative discourse importance than the other two described here. Not only does it clearly define a view of time thanks to a simple circular movement, it also makes its philosophical portrayal appear much deeper.

Sanjinés plays with a series of opposites. This travelling not only unites the past and the present, it also unites different levels of reality. It unites life with death, establishing both as complementary opposites, in absolute coherence with the Aymara way of thinking (Estermann, 2009:176). There is also another opposite in harmony, the individual and the group. Sebastián, who up to this moment had acted as an individual, becomes for the first time and authentically part of the collective. The camera movement conciliates the opposites, but also proposes certain equivalencies. The individual is a *non-being* while at the same time, as part of the collective, he is seen as a whole being. Returning to the village, to the group, means returning to see life, returning to fulfillment.

The ISS is supported by a double dimension of space. Firstly, a relationship is established between architectural space (the Altiplano) and the profound identity of indigenous characters (their subjectivity and their cosmovision). Secondly, as a camera movement, a dynamic link is established between the on screen and the off screen. In other words, a filmic space is built in the form of a circle. This shape in Bolivian cinema does not refer exclusively to the movement of characters, but to the authentic conception of space expressed by imminently cinematographic media.

Therefore, the integral sequence shot does not only seek to show a way of seeing time (in its circular form) but also becomes a discourse on space, always related to an statement about identity. As Kenny says (2009):

Geographic borders are limits, a significant referential framework inside which culture develops. This presents us with a fundamental condition: in order for cultural permanence, there must be a physical space, whose characteristics undoubtedly will influence the culture. Therefore, the individual cannot be part of a culture if he is not in the territory or society (17)

In a cinema tied to the land, to one's origins, the journey means a movement towards that over there, towards the non-self, towards the denial of one's self. Although these two spaces are evidently contrary to one another, both are important for the classic narrative of Bolivian cinema. One's own space can only appear as the place of identity by way of a journey of alienation. Only via movement is it possible for the character to become conscious of the importance of his place of origin, which, at first, seems like a dull place, of which he denies himself for different reasons.

6. The City's Siren Songs

There's one doubt left: Why go on such a journey? What is there in that place foreign to one that calls his attention so and that necessarily obligates to go in the first place, before returning? It is evident that the journeys of the characters Ignacio and Sebastián to this city are very different in terms of motives to those of Sebastiana and Sixto. The first travel to the city out of obligation. Ignacio travels out of the urgent need to find a doctor who can heal him. Meanwhile, Sebastián does it as a young boy, when his father "gives" him to an affluent resident of the city. Perhaps for this reason, especially in the case of Ignacio, there is a demonic view of the city. When Benedicta arrives in La Paz in a truck, Sanjinés (following the dialectic montage learned from Russian cinema) merges the woman's face with images of large buildings, filmed from below looking up and in movement, simulating a subjectivity of the character. With a face that to say the least expresses uneasiness at this spectacle, plus dramatic music featuring violins, Sanjinés shows this space to be dangerous and neither Benedicta nor Ignacio is in their place.

It is difficult to know the exact reason why Sixto moves to the city given that the film starts when he is already living there. But it is possible to speculate on some reasons, vaguely. You could propose the theory that Sixto seeks to climb the social ladder. In fact, it is also the reason why Sebastián seems to stay in the city in the first place. Likewise, Sebastiana, in the film by Ruiz, is obviously surprised by the opulence of the Aymara village, the ease at which you can find food and the feature comforts of the urban centers.

Chuquiago (1977) by Antonio Eguino offers a new motive for embarking on a journey to the city. The film is an x-ray of the inhabitants of La Paz, proposing a relationship between the dramatic landscape of the city and its social classes. The film contains four different stories from the city. As the stories connect, the camera moves towards the south side of La Paz, where the city's most wealthy people live. For purposes of this article only the first story will be considered, that of Isico (Nestor Yujiri), a peasant boy who comes to live in what today is known as El Alto, on the border between the city and the Altiplano, at the highest point and to the north of La Paz. The parents of Isico take him to the city and, like Sebastián, hand him over to a woman for her to take care of him and so he can work. When Isico goes to get water from a well, he meets another boy, who invites him to see a fascinating sight: the city of La Paz from a lookout point. Isico, gazing over the city's landscape, immediately decides to escape from his caretaker and go down to the streets of La Paz. It is a difficult decision given that, as it is evident in the last minutes of this first part, life in the city is hard. Isico, almost at his own will, starts working as a bag carrier in the markets. In the film, there is no –in contrast to the films of Sanjinés or Ruiz– merely sociological motivation for embarking on the journey, but rather there is a fascination in Isico for the city. It is an imminently aesthetic gesture.

This gesture of fascination for the city of La Paz, is also present in contemporary cinema productions. In the short film *Max jutam* (2010) –translated into English, it would be *Max, Come*– Carlos Piñeiro revives the formal and narrative proposed by classic Bolivian cinema. The young Max (Luis Machaca) embarks on a journey to the city that, according to his initial plans, is only temporary. After a very tiring trip, the character arrives at the outskirts of La Paz. Max is surprised by a poetic image: the tiny shops where several barbers work that are located at the top of a lookout point where you can see la

hoyada paceña in all its glory. With a cut to black, Piñeiro makes an ellipsis to show the old Max (Luis Fuentes), in one of these tents, working as a barber. The protagonist ends up falling in love with the visual landscape that the city offers and decides to stay, not for the same reasons as Sebastián, but rather simply for a fascination, for that surreal, postcard-like image. From a different vision, Piñeiro revives the preferred themes of "classic" Bolivian cinema. This is so not because the *leitmotiv* of the film has to do with a journey from the city to the countryside, but because he also uses the circular shape as the main narrative technique. At the end of the film, as usual in this type of protagonist, Max decides to return to his village. The vision is desolate, time has taken its toll on his little house which appears abandoned. The character goes to the village cemetery, as if he were looking for some sign of his life before his trip to La Paz, apparently without finding any. Max returns, but only to realize that the passing of time and coming of death is unavoidable. When the return trip is done late, the theme of a possible redemption is not even discussed. Thus, the discourse on the weight of spaces like the Altiplano or the outskirts of the city are modified by an aesthetic vision of the city that causes a profound fascination.

It is no coincidence that this fascinated vision of the city repeats itself time and time again, shots in which the characters gaze at the city from one of the multiple lookout points of La Paz. Both Max and Isico each spend several seconds looking at the city, known as *la hoyada*, before making this decision to stay forever. This vision of La Paz is a siren's song, given that it implies at the same time, an enormous sacrifice on behalf of these characters. Despite a very difficult life awaiting Isico as a beggar, Max decides to leave his place of origin, from the warmth of his loving mother. For this reason, his return to the village can only show the vestiges of a life that is evidently different now.

In *Plato paceño* (2013), Piñeiro's third short film, this type of shot is repeated. This time, you see a character tying a knot in a tie, preparing himself for a funeral. In the background the city is alarmingly introduced. Here there is no gesture of characters like Isico and Max that observe La Paz in front of them. The character in *Plato paceño* seems more concerned with his knot. Here the spectacle is not for the characters, but rather for the spectators. The city is relevant for its plastic, photographic potential.

The sociological perspective is replaced by one that prefers fascination.

Another example is *Enterprise* (2010) by Kiro Russo. In this short film, the camera follows a porter walking through the alleys of the city with an interesting looking package: a figurine of Woody, the character of *Toy Story*. More than being interested in the movement of the character, this is an excuse to experiment cinematographically with the city. In this experiment, evidently there has to be a general shot of *la hoyada*, while the porter walks past a lookout point. In all the cases mentioned here, including that of Isico, this type of shot consists of two aspects, the human figure and the city. It is as if the characters were used as objects of scale to show the immensity of the city, of its hills and its strange composition. The city appears like an otherness that beckons the characters to enter, to become lost forever, at least until, a road of return opens, of consciousness of one's self and a return to one's origins.

7. Conclusions

The spaces and landscapes of Bolivian cinema are not neutral, but rather have a strong symbolic, political, and existential meaning. The Altiplano appears like a place of belonging while the city is a space of alienation. The relationship between both spaces is established by a journey of initial discovery, in which the characters, in general indigenous, deny their origins and their cultural diversity in search of recognition from others, in this case, the white people, the urbanite. Yet only in the return to one's own space is where a character can fully recognize himself. It is necessary to momentarily loose one's identity with the journey out in order to understand the importance and value of the space, the culture one belongs to, one's identity. It is a narrative that appears over and over again in Bolivian cinema. This narrative structure contains says something about the Bolivian identity.

Finally, we would like to highlight the narrative mechanisms that the different filmmakers propose to establish the dichotomic relationships between spaces, round-trip journeys and the search for the indigenous identity. It is worth noting, for example, the reiterative use of rape in terms of losing what belongs to one. Although it is clear that in Sanjinés cinema, a woman's body appears like a possession (especially in *La nación clandestina*), it can also appear like a conflictive relationship with the other, like in *Ukamau*. Without a doubt, it is a theme pending analysis, a formal analysis of the different meanings of sexual violence that exist in Bolivian cinema.

Furthermore, it is important to note the obsession Sanjinés has for circular camera movements and the poetic beauty that it reveals. Sanjinés films have always analyzed from a sociological and political perspective, but the aesthetic innovations of the filmmaker have been rather unexplored in their full poetic dimension. It is probable that the formal aspects of Sanjinés cinema have been well influenced by highly important films for Bolivia's seventh art, such as, for example *Zona Sur* (Juan Carlos Valdivia, 2009) and *El viejo calavera* (Kiro Russo, 2016). Either way, there are many aspects of Sanjinés cinema that need to be explored. Not only that, the formal analysis of Bolivian films proposes there is much work to be done in order to understand the true dimensions of a cinema that has generally been overlooked by Latin American cinema studies.

Bibliographic References

Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia. (2008). *New Political Constitution of the State*. En: http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/bolivia/bolivia_newconstitution_spaorof.pdf.

Aumont, J. (2011). *Cinema Theories*. Paris : Armand Colin.

(2008). *Cinema Aesthetic: Filmic Space, Montage, Narration, Language*, Buenos Aires: Paidós Comunicación.

Aumont, J y Michel, M (1990). *Film Analysis*, Barcelona: Paidós.

Espinoza, S y Laguna, A. (2009). *Cinema of the Clandestine Nation: approach to the Bolivian cinematographic production of the Last 25 Years (1983-2008)*. Cochabamba: Gente común.

Espinoza, S. y Laguna, A. (2011). *A Question of Faith: History (and) Critique of Bolivian Cinema of the Last 30 Years (1980-2010)*. Cochabamba: Nuevo Milenio.

Espinoza, S y Laguna, A. (2014), "From Celluloid to Digital: Bolivian Cinema, 1990-2013". En: Mariaca, G y Souza, M (2014), *Bolivian Cinema: history, directors, movies* (pp. 173-207). La Paz: UMSA.

Espinoza, S (2015). "Bolivian Cinema of Today: A View from the Sink Hole", *Hay vida en marte*. <https://hayvidaenmarte.wordpress.com/2015/10/13/cine-bolivia-no-de-sanjineses-digitales-y-socavones/>.

Estermann, J. (2009). *Andean Philosophy: Indigenous Wisdom for a New World*. La Paz: ISEAT.

Kenny, S. (2009). *Searching for the Other Cinema: A Trip To Bolivian Indigenous Cinema*. Mendoza: Editorial de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras/ Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.

Laguna, A. (2013). *Por tu senda: The Bolivian "road movies", Chronicles of a Country's Journey*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona.

Mesa, C. (1979). *The Adventure of Bolivian Cinema*. La Paz: Gisbert.

Morales, S. (2016). *An Aesthetic of Enclosure: approximation to a Perspective of Bolivian Cinema*. La Paz: El Greco.

Morales, S. (2015). "A Mediterranean Cinema: Filmic Space in Bolivian Movies". *Punto cero*, 30, 69-80

Morales, S. (2011). "Learning About a Country Via Its Spaces and Images", *Cinemas-cine* [sitio web]. <http://www.cinemas-cine.net/historia/conociendo-un-pas-en-sus-espacios-e-imagenes--26> (consultado el 22 agosto del 2012).

Molina, M (2014). "The Most Beautiful and Its Best Years. Bolivian Cinema of the Last 50 Years (1964-2014)". *Ciencia y cultura*, 32, 153- 182

Rohmer, E. (2000). *L'organisation de l'espace dans le Faust de Murnau*. Paris : Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma.

Rohmer, E. (2004). *Le goût de la beauté*. Paris: Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma.

Sanjinés, J. y Grupo Ukamau. (1979), *Theory and Practice of a Cinema United with the People*, México DF: Siglo Veintiuno.

Sanjinés, J. (1990). *La nación clandestina*. La Paz: Grupo Ukamau.

About the author:

Sebastian Morales -Escoffier

Master's Degree in Higher Education (Universidad Católica Boliviana) and Undergraduate Degree in Philosophy from Universidad Mayor de San Andrés.

How to Cite:

Morales-Escoffier, S. (2016). "The Place of the Self and the Others: Reiterative Spaces in Bolivian cinema (The Altiplano and the city of La Paz)". *Comunicación y Medios*, 25 (34), 82 - 95.