

MAPS IN THE CINEMA. AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY

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This paper addresses the links between cartography and film, through analysis of maps and plans exhibited in the most popular Western film productions. A larger study, in addition to the bibliography and filmography, a reflection on the history of that relationship in pictorial art and literature, is available in "La cartografía en el cine: mapas y planos en la producciones cinematográficas occidentales" published in issue 334 of the electronic journal *Scripta Nova* (<http://www.ub.es/geocrit/sn/sn-334.htm>).

Similarly those readers interested in the overall links between geography and film will find: Gámir, A. and Manuel C. "Cine y Geografía: espacio geográfico, paisaje y territorio en las producciones cinematográficas", on the following link:

http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/10016/828/1/Gamir_Manuel_Cine_Geografia_mayo_07.pdf

There is an English version of this mentioned work ("Cinema and Geography: Geographic Space, Landscape and Territory in the Film Industry) on the link http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/10016/3608/1/cinema_and_geography.pdf.

The location of a city or movement of the protagonist of a movie can easily show with the techniques of filming. However, when the director of the movie wants to show the emplacement of an urban centre to its environment, or the path of the actors in a longer journey usually goes to the map. Whenever a spatial issue is a key to the understanding of a film the viewer will find a map.

When a map or a plan in a film is displayed, a number of formal conditions that are outside the map must be taken into account; however, they are specific part of film making. Although the two techniques meet to represent the space on a two-dimensional carrier, they differ in the use of time factor, which is critical in the case of film making but not relevant in cartography. This adaptation of the map to a format alien to it is an apparent initial disadvantage: the maps in movies are shown in a finite time, sometimes a very short time, and that requires that its contents might be simplified.

However, this disadvantage is offset in the cinema by additional qualities. Thus, changes of scale in the movies are easy, and the film maker can even add information as the camera zooms on target (“The Englishman who went up a hill but came down a mountain”, Monger, C. 1995) (figure 1).

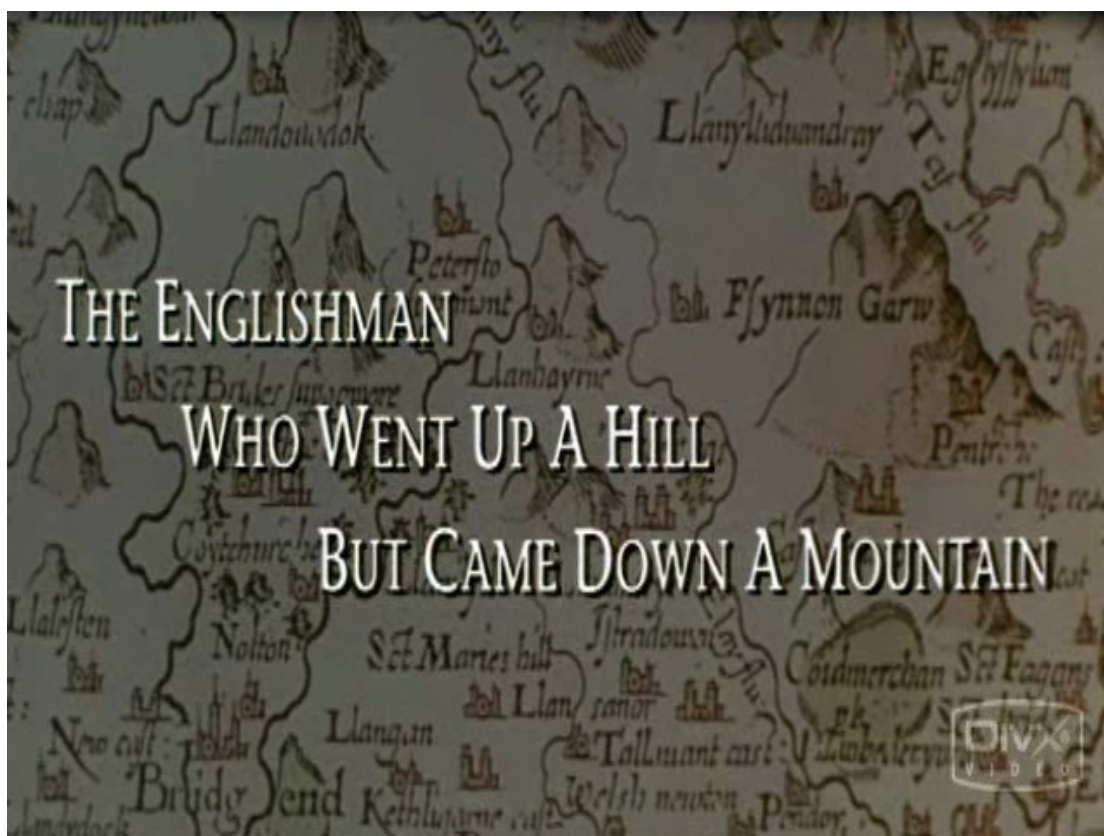


Fig.1

There is also the chance of walking around the map sight seeing, being close to it, and then stopping at a chosen place. Even the film maker can also use the character dialogues to aid the moviegoer in a proper interpretation of the map (location of certain elements, accidents of topography, proximity to certain areas, etc.). Also do not forget the ability of cinema to present two sequence shots simultaneously, so that together behind the map, the director can show - in a veiled way - other image that illustrate the landscapes (forests, deserts, jungles, seas) linked to those places ("Casablanca", Curtiz, M. 1942) (fig.2).



Fig. 2

In the relationship between cinema and mapping there are a variety of objectives. But before the analysis, it must be taken into account that, as in the painting, the message given by the film should be interpreted on two different levels. The first one is straightforward and it has an additional purpose to the narrative of the story that the film maker wants to tell. The second one is indirect, so its nature is more subtle, and it tends to emphasize the ownership and control of the territory.

An inductive investigation of these features must be made from a cataloguing or taxonomy of those scenes in which cartographic elements appear. In this regard it should be noted that there are different possibilities to drive several approaches.

No doubt the most simple option is that based on the types of cartographic appearing in the scenes of films. Thus, we can find earthly globes ("The Great Dictator," Chaplin, Ch 1940, "Close Encounter of the Third kind", Spielberg, S. 1977), world maps ("Around the World in 80 Days", Anderson, M. 1956 Coraci, F. 2004 (fig.3),



Fig. 3

"The Three Musketeers" Herek, S. 1993), large scale maps ("The Longest Day" Annakin, K. and Marton, A. 1962 (fig.4),



Fig. 4

"Il deserto rosso" Antonioni, M. 1964 (fig. 5),



Fig. 5

"Indochine" Wagnier, R. 1992, plans ("Der Untergang" Hirschbiegel, O. 2004), panels showing positions ("The Hunt for Red October", Mc Tiernan, J.1990, "The world is not enough" Apted, M. 1999), (fig. 6)



Fig. 6

even schematic drawings on a blackboard ("Lawrence of Arabia" D. Lean, 1962) (fig. 7), or painted with chalk in the soil of a room ("Seven Years in Tibet" Annaud, J.J. 1997.



Fig. 7

But this kind of typology is not useful to the objective of this research: to highlight the relationship between film and cartography.

For the same reason, the possibility of developing a classification referring to the historical time, does not seem adequate. That one corresponds to maps that are filmed, and would give us a sort of history of cartography filmed walking from Ptolemy's map that appears in "The Fall of the Roman Empire "(Mann, A. 1964) (fig. 8),



Fig. 8

or "Gladiator "(Scott, R. 2000) (fig. 9)



Fig. 9

to nearest manufacture maps.

So it is more appropriate to use a typology that takes into account the objectives –the shown and underlying ones- that the director of the cinematographic work pretends when including a history map in a scene of his film. Therefore these scenes can be grouped according to the following descriptive intentions:

- Locate, in a generic way, the story is telling.
- Show the place of combatants or troops in conflict areas.
- Locate, either on a map or in a plane, criminal acts (theft, kidnapping, murdering), revolution, social unrest, etc.
- Locate the destination and submit the travel itinerary of the protagonists.
- Place the exotic or unexplored territories. Report to the viewer where there are resources of the territory.
- Indicate the characters, but also the viewer, the basic value of the map as a tool for cultural minimal training. For example, maps at the school, or highlighting the presence of the map as an important element in the cabinet of the wise man or the scientific.

In the same way that some novels begin with a description, sometimes very detailed, of the city or the landscape where the story unfolds, the directors of the films need to move the viewer, in a short time, the main characteristics of the site where all or part of the film developed. Sometimes, either the script requirements or lack of footage, this desire should be limited to identifying the location, giving up a more detailed description. At this point the director has a variety of technical resources to fulfill this basic objective: the first scenes to superimpose a map of the place or enter a plan of a monument or landmark easily recognizable by the viewer and associated with a city. It is often seen in films set in the Ancient as the action takes place while a supposed ancient map, though its place name in English, appears in the background (as featured in "Alexander the Great", Rossen, R. 1956) (fig. 10).



Fig. 10

In the film productions there are numerous stories that develop peoples, nations and social groups, and certainly among the most relevant stories and reviews of these groups there are included armed conflicts. In these films the location maps of areas in conflict are essential for the viewer to understand where the action takes places. Here the range of scales is remarkable. Thus, planispheres appear in stories that show the expansion of British and French empires in the eighteenth century, continental maps are presented in productions which describe the military operations of Napoleon's incursions in Central Europe ("Austerlitz", Gance, A., 1960) (fig. 11).

View the following movie clip



Fig. 11.

the World War I and II ("The Longest Day", Annakin, K., Marton, A., Wicki, B. 1962), or even large-scale maps of islands of the Mediterranean Sea which control was essential during the last race ("The Guns of Navarone", Lee Thompson, J., 1961). These are maps that show where the action is situated, what is the progress of the enemy and their defenses or what the military operations that aim at developing players. For all these objectives descriptive map is an assistant for the director and without it, a story

that takes place in a disputed territory would be hardly understood by the viewer. Naturally it is essential the presence of characters with the capacity to read the map, because without these characters the map becomes an instrument of little use. An example of how ignorance of the minimum skills in map reading can provide comic situations can be found in "La vaquilla" (García Berlanga, L. 1985) (fig. 12)

View the following movie clip



Fig. 12

The case of "Objective Burma" (Walsh, R. 1945) provides a clear example of the importance of maps in the cinema, particularly if films showing the race are released (the Second World War) at the same time of military facts (fig. 13). Here the importance of cartography grows up. The evidence of this importance is the significant role of the map at the beginning of filming, being booked for proper presentation several minutes of footage that is sometimes accompanied by a voiceover. This care to provide a geographical argument is clear: it is necessary to explain to the public why certain decisions that were taken on ongoing military operations can cost victims to other citizens mobilized. Thus, the map also plays an educative role and of propaganda that of course is enhanced by using the additional support coming from the success of the film.



Fig. 13

The domain either on large areas or smaller spaces, such as cities, is exercised with the help of maps ("Alatriste" Diaz Yanes, A.2006) or urban plans. Not surprisingly, therefore, the use of maps and plans for the location of crimes and its interface with other spatial variables. So, the protagonists or antagonists manage and show maps that serve as an explanatory tool to highlight the relief features -places that encourage military skirmishes or the hiding of a persecuted hero-, to show how communications (specially in the colonial territories in Asia or America for example), serve to spread social troubles and uprisings ("Indochine," Wargnier, R. 1992) (fig. 14).



Fig. 14

With respect to the plans of cities, they are essential either to control urban rebellions in an occupied place by an enemy army ("Roma città aperta", Rossellini, R. 1945) (fig. 15),



Fig. 15

or to suppress the insurgency in cities ("La Battaglia di Algeri," Pontecorvo, G. 1966) (fig. 16)

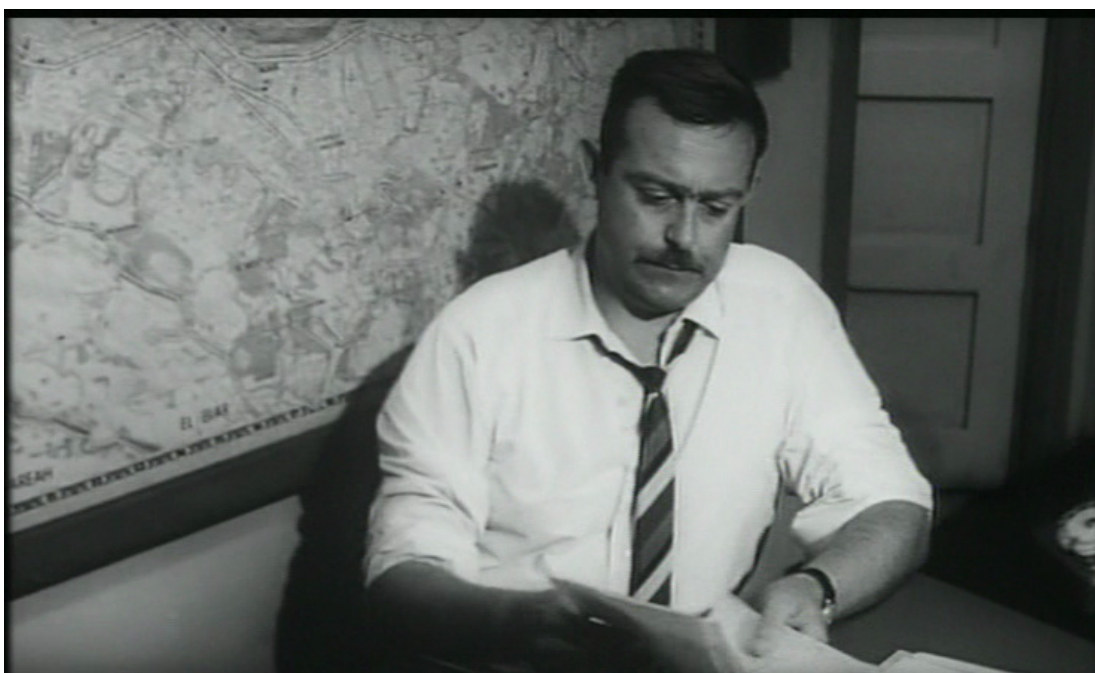


Fig. 16

and to exercise more effective control of crime in American cities. A widely used resource in such action films, is the scene where the characters paint marks on the map or click colored flags or pins to locate on the map on the wall several facts. As well as those whose plot revolves about an election ("El disputado voto del Señor Cayo", Giménez-Rico, A. 1986 (fig. 17)

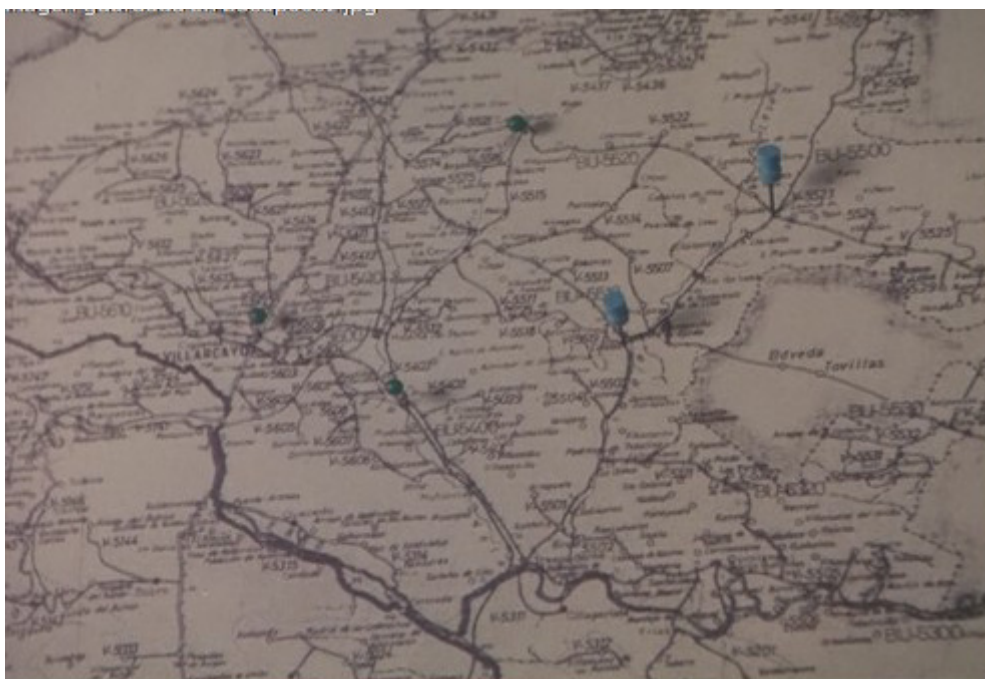


Fig. 17

"The World Is Not Enough", Apted, M. 1999)(fig 18).



Fig. 18

A more modern version of the placement of flags in the maps constitutes it the Geographical of Information Systems (GIS) in movies of more recent premiere as well as in series of TV, that have police forces and criminal investigation as protagonists. Thus, from the last decade of the 20th century in forward a duality is taking place in the procedures of representation of the space: the traditional map, in format paper, appears already as a "historical" resource, a sufficient resource to narrate past facts, whereas the images of satellite turn into suitable systems of representation to exercise a control on phenomena that happen real time. ("Mission Impossible III," Abrams, J. 2006) or future ("Minority Reports" XX.)(fig.19).



Fig. 19

The maps itineraries correspond to movies of adventures in which an individual or a limited group of persons must make a trip. The resources of presentation are varied: a map placed in a table or in the wall on which one of the prominent figures slides one of the fingers of his hand showing the location of the destination ("Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht", Herzog, W. 1979) (fig. 20),



Fig. 20

or maps that appear slightly blurred and overlapping scenes of landscapes through which passes the path ("Around the World in 80 Days", Anderson, M. 1956 Coraci, F. 2004 (fig. 21), "Casablanca", Curtiz, M. 1942, "Raiders of the Lost Ark, Spielberg, S. 1981)



Fig. 21

We should also add those films that fall into the genre called Road Movies ("Paris, Texas", Wenders, W. 1984)(fig. 22).



Fig. 22

In other cases the map is essential to show the considerable distance to the protagonist ("Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis", Boon, D. 2008)(fig. 23).



Fig. 23

Another objective motivating the presence of cartography in the films is due to the need to show how the viewer maps of unexplored or virgin territories can be exploited economically. Should be noted that, especially in the productions released before the Second World War, the additional message of these maps was to show the absence of any organization that denote some kind of sovereignty in these territories and, consequently, the legitimacy Western man to appropriate its resources. So in the Tarzan film series, supposedly set in Africa but filmed in the Florida peninsula, the first scenes contain a rudimentary map of Africa showing a virgin continent capable of being conquered by the white man ("Tarzan's Secret Treasure" Thorpe, R. 1941)(fig. 24).



Fig. 24

These maps have the trait of being prepared for visitors with limited geographical knowledge. The simplicity of the contents shown in them (little more than outline the coasts, a feature and a city) suggests an unclaimed territory, with primitive civilizations inside, which becomes the physical medium both in challenge and source of adventure.

The scenes in which maps of resources appear have as aim that the spectator locates the resource - mineral, oil, fertile land, water - ("Flawless", Radford, M. 2007) and also that he can see the ways to extract and transport it. This kind of map is the key and explanation of the effort the protagonists must do to access the resource ("King's Solomon's Mines" by Bennett, C., Marton, A.1950) (fig. 25),



Fig. 25

("Fitzcarraldo," Herzog , W. 1982) (fig. 26). *View the following movie clip*



Fig. 26

Regarding those spaces - islands or valleys hidden between the mountain chains - whose value for the protagonists resides precisely in the ignorance of his location on the part of the leaders, it is necessary to remember the kind of the pirates' movies (including those of the cartoon). So much in those that use as script literary texts of the XIXth as in the ones recently produced from original stories, there can not be absent of the "treasure map" or, in a more precise way, the map of the Tresure Island placed in the Caribbean sea or in the Pacific Ocean ("Treasure Island", Haskin, B. 1950) (fig. 27).



Fig. 27

In those movies in which the school or high school appears as key places to the experiences of the protagonists, whether pupils or teachers, school maps are in the habit of appearing together with elements that underline the belonging of a community or nation to a territory - flags - or a religion - crucifixes-. In most cases they are contemporary maps to the time of the story and that they show already the limits and characteristics of the land ("They quatre Cents coups ", Truffaut, F. 1959) (fig. 28),



Fig. 28

the situation of this one in a more wide regional set, sometimes with deliberately old-fashioned cartographies to underline the lag of the educational system ("Welcome Mr. Marshall" Berlanga, M. 1953) (fig. 29).



Fig. 29

In another educational stadium, the map in hands of the technician, university or scientific teacher, can obey different extreme purposes. In another educational stadium, the map in hands of the technician, university teacher or scientific, can obey different

extreme purposes. Sometimes merely adorn, as another instrument, the cabinet, the study of science or religious character. It is the case of the map of Russia which appears in the residence of Leo Tolstoy and shown in "The Last Station" (Hoffman, M. 2010). In others, we might affirm that the key of the history that is reported resides precisely in the map, which only the protagonists and / or the scientist can read and uncover (the geographic coordinates of "Close Encounter of the Third Kind, Spielberg, S. 1977 (fig. 30)

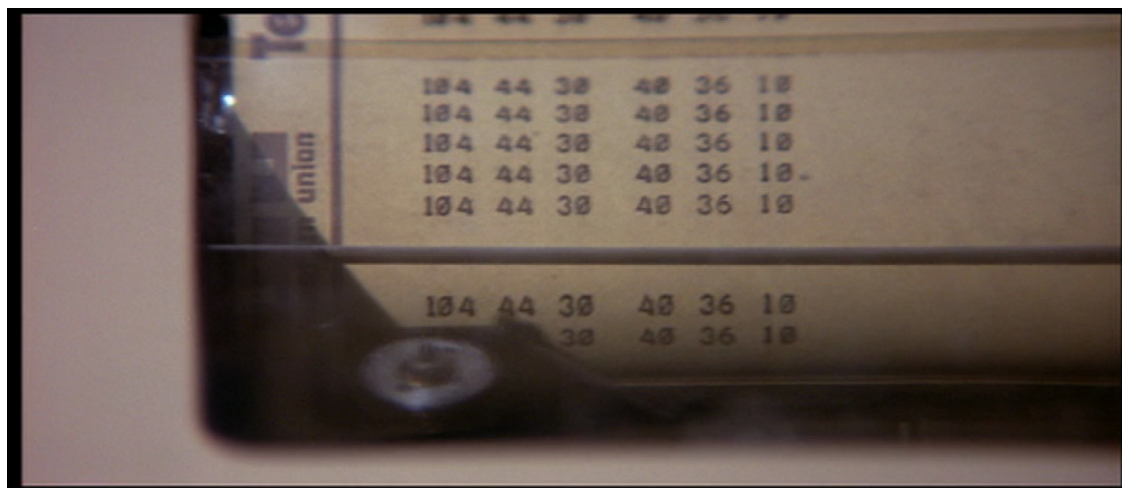


Fig. 30

or "Angels and Demons", Howard, R. 2009).

But, apart from analyzing the descriptive objectives of the maps, it is pertinent to note that they have another function which becomes part throughout the film. First of all, it is necessary to indicate that the cartography made in the ends of XIXth and the beginnings of XXth century, altogether with the cinema, try to demonstrate the capacity that the Man has own to know the totality of the Earth. Nevertheless, close to this universal interest there exist others that seek in last instance to justify the domain of a few countries over others. Especially when the diffusion of both supports, mapping and cinematography, coincides with a period with that the geographical discipline and the cartographic one have a fundamental role in the consolidation of the building of empires. The film thus becomes, in another system of appropriation of the world. In the first decades of the 20th century the cinema turns into an instrument of propaganda and indoctrination of the first order. And that for the visual impact inherent in this way, in contrast with the painting or the photography, joined its aptitude to spread between the public in general, independently of their degree of training, images corresponding to landscapes of remote and unknown places.

Up to the Second World War in the movies of adventures set already be out of the European area or the North American subcontinent, it does not turn out to be strange to observe very simplified maps. It is a kind of maps elaborated by the western man, only legible for the leader, the technician or the explorer white, and designed for the access to a territory alien to him. Maps provide information on features of the topography, hydrography or vegetation but rarely show the presence of other human communities settled in the territory. The ultimate goal of maps in films may be to explain the ownership of disputed territories through military action ("Northwest Passage", Vidor, K. 1940), to gloss expedition travel and the consequent decline of the so-called "natural boundaries" limiting the territorial expansion of kingdoms or countries. The maps serve to identify colonization wilderness and apparently uninhabited or transmit to younger generations the love for their country. For all these purposes the map on the screen becomes an essential instrument and accomplice, a synthetic way to reinforce the story telling.

The processes of decolonization characteristic of the second half of the 20th century and of the formation of a new national identification come naturally accompanied, when the economic conditions allow it, of a national cinematography that reflects the independence of the metropolis. This film maps provide an essential educational function that must be analyzed. But even in the western productions the cartography in the movies reinforces the story of revolutions or historical changes that appear. This happens in "Invictus" (Eastwood, C. 2009) when the newly elected President Nelson Mandela access to the offices of the former government of FW Klerk decorated with a map of Africa designed by the Flemish cartographer Johannes Blaeu.