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***"THE CITY PLAYS ITSELF—***  
***CINEMA AND THE CITY"***

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# ***The City Plays Itself*— Cinema and the City**

Special Issue Guest Edited by

José Duarte (School of Arts and Humanities, ULisboa)

and Luís Urbano (School of Architecture, UPorto)

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## Contents

1. Introduction: *The City Plays Itself* – Cinema and the City – José Duarte and Luís Urbano **6**
2. Control Freak Constructing a Virtual Cityscape: Alfred Hitchcock’s “Rear Window” – Etienne Boumans **12**
3. City, Cinema, Modernity in the 1960’s: The Cinematic Swinging London – Maria Helena Braga e Vaz da Costa **27**
4. When the Global City Confronts Terrorism: New York City in Films on 9/11 – Moxi Zhang **40**
5. Future Slums: Problems of Urban Space in Science Fiction Cinema – David L. Pike **52**
6. Dome and Away: *Logan’s Run* Post-Apocalyptic Cityscapes – Hermínia Sol **71**
7. The Material World of *Gattaca* – Michael Johnston **83**
8. The Haptic Utopia: Tarkovsky’s Resolution to the Conflict of the Oppressive Dystopian City in *Stalker* (1979) – Miguel Ezcurdia Royo **94**
9. (Re)emerging from Ruins: Screening the American Postindustrial Urban Landscape of the 80’s – Luísa Sol **101**
10. Representing the Banlieue’s Space: An Investigation Into French Cinema – Antonin Pruvot **118**
11. Places of Otherness. Strategies of Urban Representation in *Foreign Parts* – Iván Villarrea Álvarez **131**

## *The City Plays Itself – Cinema and the City*

José Duarte (School of Arts and Humanities, ULisboa) and

Luís Urbano (School of Architecture, UPorto)

### **Reading the Cinematic City**

In *The Cinematic City: Film in Urban Societies in a Global Context* (2001), Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice focus on the intricate connection between cinema and the urban space, perceived at different levels. Thematically, cinema is fascinated with representing the city, registering different spaces, life-styles, experiences and possibilities. Formally, cinema has the ability to capture and reproduce the spatial complexity of the urban tissue and its social dynamics. The city, therefore, is a source of great inspiration for cinema, finding in the urban text an opportunity to explore modernity (space and time, memory and mobility, stasis and fluidity), as the moving image is “an advanced cartographical apparatus” (Webber 2).

The relationship between cinema and the city is long-established one, as is the case with early films like *L’Arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat* (1895) by the Lumière Brothers, or the City Symphony genre – such as Strand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta* (1921) or Ruttmann’s 1927 *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. These are some of the most well-known examples of how the early twentieth century was a period characterized by the “emergence of the modern metropolis” (Webber 5) and with it, the emergence of cinema as a means to record that experience.

During the pre-modern, modern and post-modern era different cinematic genres and visual styles that captured spatial experience came into existence. As Wojcik (2014) notes, City Symphonies, German Expressionism, Experimental, Avant-Garde, Gangster Film, Noir and Neo-noir, Italian Neo-Realism, Nouvelle Vague, Contemporary City-films, Documentaries, Sci-fi, Fantasy, Horror and, more recently, Superhero films, all reveal multiple visions of the city that offer the opportunity to reflect upon the metropolis and the moving image. These readings present a perspective of the city as a place of transit and transition, motion and emotion (Bruno 2008), but they also allow for the creation of an archive that registers and “reflects the changes in the urban landscape” (Wojcik 2014).

The many faces of the city – mediated through the lenses of distinct directors and artists – offer perspectives that interrelate various styles, narratives and ideologies. Cinematic cities



have been depicted as being nostalgic, romantic, real or imaginary, utopic or dystopic, but also dark and dangerous or alienated places. At the same time, the work on the city and cinema has been the object of interdisciplinary analyses that range from Film Studies, Cultural studies, Architecture, Visual Culture, and Geography to Urban Planning.

Some of these approaches are organized as a general overview of the relationship between the city and cinema (Clarke 1997; Fitzmaurice & Shiel 2001 and 2003; Barber 2004), other anthologies open the discussion to several areas (Mitchell 2004; Mennel 2008; Harper & Rayner 2010; Koeck and Robert 2010) or explore the city-film in very specific contexts, genres, or spaces (Dimendberg 2004; Alsayyad 2006; Lindner 2006; Zecker 2007; Brunsdon 2007; Webber and Wilson 2008). This multidisciplinary approach produces a wide range of interpretations of the cinematic city, manifesting “ideas and ideals” (Wojcik 2014) in an increasingly globalized world.

### ***The City Plays Itself***

With this in mind, the current issue of *The Apollonian* is dedicated to the correlations between reel and the real and the interrelationship between cinema and the city as subject/character. In this regard, and taking into account the diversity of essays here presented – a total of ten –, this issue is divided into three specific moments. The first moment, composed of two essays, considers how cities are specifically represented in cinema, giving the audience meticulous visions of the urban space taking into consideration particular moments in time.

The first essay, by Etienne Boumans, “Control Freak Constructing a Virtual Cityscape: Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Rear Window’”, analyses the “reel” city and the “real” city in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), while Maria Helena Costa’s essay “City, Cinema, Modernity in the 1960’s: The Cinematic Swinging London” delves into an important and defining moment in British culture by looking at how five films from this period create “paradigms of cultural imagination about the idea of a specific city.” In the third essay, “When the Global City Confronts Terrorism: New York City on 9/11,” Moxi Zhang examines the relationship between the 9/11 events and New York City by observing two particular films: *11'09''01-September 11* (2002), composed of several segments from different directors and *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006). Basing her analysis on urban and cultural theories, Zhang’s text proposes a reading of New York in which the city “contains both centripetal and centrifugal forces.”

Section two, which targets Science Fiction films, includes four essays. David L. Pike's "Future Slums: Problems of Urban Space in Science Fiction Cinema" considers the science fictional representation of slums in two parts: the first between the late 60's and the Cold War Period and the second after 9/11. For the author, the study of the representation of slums in Science Fiction allows us to register and reflect upon the different changes in urban representation. Hermínia Sol's essay, on the other hand, "Dome and Away: *Logan's Run* Post-Apocalyptic Cityscapes," contemplates the symbolism of a domed city by looking at Anderson's 1976 film as a mirror of the Cold War paranoia and 1960's counterculture, but also as a dystopian scenario of the future. This is particularly relevant, since the next essay by Michael Johnston, "The Material World of *Gattaca*," also explores the film (*Gattaca* directed by Andrew Niccol, 1997) as a metaphor for a "futuristic dehumanized society." With his analysis, Johnston aims at examining how Modern architecture – in particular Jerome Morrow's apartment and Frank Lloyd Wright's Marin County Civic Center, in California – is used in the film as a way of materializing Niccol's vision for a cinematic dystopia.

Thus, the interior and exterior and the real and imagined reveal the importance of the architectural space and its use as a way to convey ideas, visions and sensations. The final essay of this section, "The Haptic Utopia: Tarkovsky's Resolution to the Conflict of the Oppressive Dystopian City in *Stalker* (1979)," by Miguel Ezcurdia Arroyo, develops an interpretation of Tarkovsky's *Stalker* in which he explores "The Zone," "a delimited and supernatural area where impossible phenomenon becomes possible." His reading also proposes an analysis of the characters and their surroundings in a way that tries to show that the body is "the ultimate utopia."

Finally, the last section, which is organized into three essays, proposes a reading of the urban marginal and post-industrial setting. Luísa Sol's opening essay illustrates how the image of the post-industrial and postmodern North-American city in the 80's is depicted in films and music videos. For the author, the "fragments and ruins left over by Industrialization have given rise to a new form of seeing and living the space in the post-industrial city," which potentiate a new beginning for the urban landscape. Antonin Pruvot, in "Representing the *Banlieue*'s Space: An Investigation Into French Cinema," also looks at a particular urban space: suburbia. By exploring the cinematic representation of the suburbs around Paris, the author underlines the way the *banlieue* is usually depicted as a marginal and forgotten place. This representation has allowed the government to use it as a place of exclusion and "deploy repressive policies and laws towards it," which also contributes to a continu-

ous oppression towards the Other. Finally, Iván Villarrea Álvarez, in “Places of Otherness. Strategies of Urban Representation in *Foreign Parts*,” also examines marginal and foreign landscapes, as he tries to understand the complexities and pluralities of the urban setting by looking at the documentary *Foreign Parts* (Véréna Paravel and J. P. Sniadecki, 2010). This last essay is an adequate example of how certain strategies of representation potentiate positive or negative views of the urban space and how they are used to render visible or invisible those who inhabit it.

### **Conclusion: Filming the City**

The purpose of this thematic issue is, therefore, to offer a broader but at the same time specialized view into the cinematic city, by focusing on the urban as an essential cinematic space. With the title echoing Thom Andersen’s film *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), this issue tries to work towards a collection of creative and groundbreaking texts that examine the many issues arising from the dialog between the different theoretical approaches and the work of directors.

Moreover, since the cinematic city is not restrained to one single vision, this issue also reflects upon the multifaceted perspectives and meanings of the filmed spaces, urban changes and characters that inhabit them. Starting with New York in the 50’s, going through alternative and science fictional urban settings in the second section, and ending with multicultural and marginal places like Willets Point, in Queens, this issue tries to illustrate how cinema has played a key role in registering and seeing the city, with each generation creating a new and renewed vision from the early twentieth-century up to contemporaneity and into the future.

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## Control Freak Constructing a Virtual Cityscape: Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window"

Etienne Boumans, MA, MSc, Independent Researcher

### Introduction

While arguably the 1950s were known as a period of booming cultural productivity, unparalleled by any other decade of the twentieth century, as Horowitz notes (103), they were identified, internationally as well as on the national US level, for the prioritization of surveillance, and several of Hitchcock's films reflect this feature. During that decade, branded by Gibson as one of the most shameful episodes of narrow-mindedness in recent American history, citizens witnessed a major outbreak of broadly supported political intolerance and repression (1). Many ordinary Americans honestly believed, as Schrecker demonstrated, that communist agitators threatened US society, its way-of-living, laxity and sexual modernism, and hence they contributed to an intolerant climate and helped to construct a political repressive system (1047).

It is against this political, social, and cultural background that *Rear Window* (1954) is to be situated. Hitchcock's emblematic film *Rear Window* has been described by Zimmer as "a paradigmatic example of Hollywood surveillance narratives" (108). The director himself was fascinated by secrets that would eventually be disclosed, and, thus, shaped *Rear Window* as the perfect vehicle to display entire lives (and the occasional death) behind the uncovered windows of an urban space (von Drehle). Also, if one takes out the romance subplot, and interprets the movie as a commentary on the Cold War (which was ongoing during the time the movie was made), the moral of the story is: do not trust your neighbors, your enemies are among you. While this attitude expresses the need to reinstate a collective consciousness, it is at the same time a clear indication of a propaganda-like subtext, which was absent from the initial source text, created by Woolrich in 1942 (Iordjhi, Stam).

### It Had to Be Murder?

Mystery author Cornell Woolrich published his *novelette* *It Had to Be Murder* in *Dime Detective*, a popular pulp fiction magazine, in February 1942. In this short story, the warm weather and lack of exercise have left Hal Jeffries, who is confined to a single bedroom with an unscreened bay

window, with an inability to sleep. To thwart boredom, he starts observing the nameless, faceless “rear-window dwellers” around him.

Woolrich knew how to live in a New York apartment and, unlike Hitchcock, what it was like to be restricted to killing time by default. The author did not have an easy life, was known to rarely leave his flat and eventually died there of a stroke. *Film noir* expert Andrew Dickos claims that Woolrich was an expert of describing the interior world of people caught in arbitrary and destabilizing circumstances that provoked fear, often unto terror, and the feeling of utter helplessness in the face of it (99). He recalls Francis Lacassin who considered that the power of Woolrich’s style lay in “the art of transporting the anguish of the imaginary universe to the consciousness of the reader” (Dickos 103). It was this narrative ingenuity that was captivatingly transcribed on the *noir* screen in several movies based on Woolrich’s stories. Dannay and Lee, who jointly wrote detective stories under the pseudonym of Ellery Queen, said of Cornell Woolrich that he could “distil more terror, more excitement, more downright nail-biting suspense out of even the most commonplace happenings than nearly all his competitors.” It is therefore no surprise that many of Woolrich’s short stories were adapted repeatedly for the big screen, television, and radio.

Due to the striking visual nature of *It Had to Be Murder*, which was tailor-made for the screen, Hitchcock was enchanted by the story and purchased the rights at little cost. Woolrich was rather bitter about having been underpaid for his work, which was sold outright, excluding any kind of supplementary payment in case of a cinematic adaptation. But what enraged him even more than the tiny compensation, was that the acclaimed director did not bother inviting him, who supplied the source material, to the premiere film screening in New York.<sup>1</sup>

In preparing *Rear Window*, Hitchcock and his newly hired script writer John Michael Hayes had to turn a short story into a feature-length picture likely to hold the public’s attention for some two hours running time. By integrating a multitude of characters and a wealth of – often non-significant – themes that were either absent from or hardly dealt with in the original story, they accomplished their goal, without fundamentally altering the story’s plot structure. Belton (Alfred 5) pretends that “the film narrative is based, in large part, on a short story, *It Had to Be Murder* (...). The original story, however, differs considerably from the script of the film, the adaptation introducing a profession for the protagonist (photographer) and a girlfriend,” a statement which I consider an exaggeration, belittling the initial author and his visionary effort.

Indeed, *Variety* commented at the time: “Hitchcock combines technical and artistic skills in a manner that makes this an unusually good piece of murder mystery entertainment. A sound story

by Cornell Woolrich and a cleverly dialogued screenplay by John Michael Hayes provide the producer-director with a solid basis for thrill-making” (Brogdon).

## The Set

Hitchcock, who was known to be a control freak, avoided shooting outdoors as much as possible, since he had no control over the weather. Scott Curtis reminds us that, for Hitchcock, it was clear from the outset that the very nature of the film called for a studio set as a substitute for location shooting. To create a sense of reality, Erickson, the film’s unit production manager, was sent to New York to acquire photographs of typical Greenwich Village courtyards, likely to supply the details for the construction of a set. Based on the storyboards, Hitchcock, Paramount unit art director Joseph MacMillan Johnson, and head of art department Hal Pereira started sketching a set containing the elements Hitchcock wanted (Curtis 28).

“Mac” Johnson was responsible for constructing and supervising the set, the largest indoor set ever built at Paramount’s, which caused multiple technical difficulties.<sup>2</sup> Rivalling and even outweighing Cecil B. DeMille’s legendary spectacle sets

the colossal set was 98 feet wide, 185 feet long, and 40 feet high (that’s approximately 30 meters wide, 56 meters long, and 12 meters high), with structures rising five and six stories (...). There were 31 apartments with most of the action occurring in at least eight completely furnished rooms, besides a labyrinth of fire escapes, roof-gardens, an alley, a street, and a skyline (Curtis 30).

Whereas all apartments in the building directly across from Jeff’s were allegedly habitable, for the courtyard, laborers dug 30 feet below the stage level. The set allegedly cost 25% in total of the budget compared to 12% for the actors (including James Stewart and Grace Kelly), which underscores the priority scale of Hitchcock in making this picture.<sup>3</sup>

Director of photography Robert Burks explained that the problem was to arrive at a lighting balance where there was enough light inside the apartments to reveal the action, but not enough to make them appear fully lighted, as for night, in which case they would appear unnatural (Gavin). But the final result must have been to Hitchcock’s liking: he gained precise control over lighting and camera angles, even if he had to give actors direction via radio while he was shooting from the opposite side of the vast courtyard set.

The studio set conditions also had an impact on the narrative process: partly as a response to the immense heat caused by the myriad light bulbs in the studio environment, standing in for outside

weather conditions, Hitchcock and Hayes thought up a heat wave. In the absence of window air-conditioners in the mid-1950s, it allowed Hitchcock to keep the windows open – as if shades did not exist either – which was vital for the film’s narrative.

*Rear Window* explores the limited perspective of the main character, L.B. Jeffries (impersonated by James Stewart), who is confined to a wheelchair with a casted leg because of his professional activities as a photographer. All this information is supplied by visual means in the opening sequence of the movie. In *Architecture of the Gaze*, Steven Jacobs reminds us that the first crane shot serves as a classical establishing shot that gives the spectator an understanding of the architectural organization of the situation and of the spatial relations between the different places important to the narrative (Gaze 550). From the initial panning shot, moviegoers get a clear view of all neighboring apartments that Jimmy Stewart’s character can see, so they too can see each player clearly, and Hitchcock-the-manipulator introduced details to make it easier for his audience to quickly identify each apartment’s occupant (Renée, Jacobs House 285). Throughout the movie, the spectators are more knowledgeable than the main characters, but less so than the narration (Bordwell 42).

Hitchcock was utterly pleased that he was able to tell the essence of *Rear Window* with purely visual means. In fact, Woolrich’s original story, though largely concentrating on the murder plot, anticipated a cinematic process by introducing readymade visual discoveries (up to Thorvald’s glowing cigarette in the dark) that Hitchcock merely copied as such in the film.<sup>4</sup> Even though the story and the number of side characters had to be beefed up to reach the required feature length, much of Woolrich’s source text stood upright.

### **Breen Office**

In preparing his American film debut, *Rebecca* (1940), Hitchcock had a first confrontation in 1939 with the Production Code Administration, the studio system censorship panel created in 1934 and headed by Joseph I. Breen. Thomas Doherty recalls that Victorian Irishman Breen was convinced that censorship was “a nettlesome but necessary job of work,” facilitating the artistic creativity and industrial efficiency of the Hollywood studio system (77). Written records were essential for the verification by the Breen administration, as they allowed a tighter control over the Hollywood movie industry (Doherty 81). In line with the cultural climate in the 1950s, the censors soon became interested in and critical of Hitchcock’s and Hayes’s edgy representations of sexuality, as foreshadowed in the screenplay of *Rear Window* (Review).



In an ingenious response to Breen's objections to the script, Paramount suggested that the Production Code staff meet with Hitchcock on the set. The Breen Office was lured into making the trip from downtown LA with the argument that "the set design was crucial to understanding the narrative" (Curtis 33). The investigators were told that "many of the incidents which [the protagonist] observes, while described in great detail in the script, will be minimized by distance and camera angle in the shooting of this picture" (Curtis 33). Convinced by this reasoning, Breen approved, unaware of Hitchcock's objective of turning voyeurism as such into the central theme of the production.

### **Voyeurism**

We start off with a single-set film placing the story in a gigantic though claustrophobic spatial organization of an apartment and a makeshift courtyard, enclosed by the rear walls of a three-story apartment building in a redbrick style. In the mid-1950s, Greenwich Village where the events are supposedly taking place, was known for its diversity and significant presence of artists of all sorts, and *Rear Window* reflects this phenomenon admirably. The detailed way the set was elaborated allowed Hitchcock to display a prodigious thematic creation – using the frame of Jeff's apartment's rear window as the frame of a metaphorical movie screen.

In this re-created slice of urban space, Jeff's temporary insomnia, linked to boredom stemming from his inability to act, yields the ultimate compound for voyeuristic adventures. Jeff's voyeurism is the extension of his career as a professional photographer, and it explains the presence of manifold viewing devices that can be used in spying on his neighbors. Across the crowded housing complex, all tenants live with their windows wide open, without using shades to keep the bugs out. Only a newlywed couple we see moving in, close their shades, for obvious reasons.

The characteristic Hitchcock point of view (POV) shots generate the illusionary feeling of illicit, or even illegal, voyeurism, and not just by the main character, whose attitude clearly is morally ambiguous. Jeff identifies his dilemma: "I wonder if it's ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long focus lens?" Both Jeff and the movie audience live a similar ethical dilemma, as Hitchcock conceived *Rear Window* as an unprecedented example of a camera simultaneously acting as our eyes, the director's and the protagonist's eyes (Fraley). A voyeuristic undertone is, of course, inevitable in a movie experience: it's very often about peering into other people's lives and invading their privacy.

Commentators have constantly interpreted *Rear Window* as an allegory of the "gaze" (as coined by Foucault) and the cinematic apparatus. Hitchcock himself described the movie's plot as "the

purest expression of a cinematic idea.” Steven Jacobs rightly considers that “the theme of voyeurism combined with the spatial confinements of a single set turns the architectural construction of *Rear Window* into a magisterial device. The architecture becomes an instrument of the gaze” (House 286; Gaze 546, 550). Crew members revealed that Hitchcock aggrandized the windows on the other side of the panoptic courtyard for maximal visibility of the urbanites’ activities: the simulated reality of a bustling Greenwich Village block was manipulated for even better viewing of the occupants, turned into exhibitionists, to please the voyeurs among us. By assigning the same proportional dimensions of a movie screen to the windows – not just in Jeff’s apartment – in the entire film set, Hitchcock subtly draws the movie viewer further into the film and setting (Gaze 546).

Hitchcock successfully employed the complete array of camera techniques (from point of view shots, to panning and crane shots) to engage the viewer into peering – if not peeping – into the lives of the courtyard characters. A few exceptions aside, foley and sound effects were used to provide the movie with a diegetic score, intended to enhance the authenticity of the suggested urban action (Yablun). Not coincidentally, Hitchcock showed an urban space few of us know, and exploited to the full the comparative naivety of the residents, disarmed by the relative privacy of the informal backyard space. It is a delicate social balance based on the collective use of spaces and on implicit rules of conduct between neighbors (Jacobs House 294).

Unlike in a real urban environment, Jeff – and hence the audience – has an almost unimpeded view of the opposite premises, not only through the windows *per se*, but also via the connecting spaces (lack of obstructive objects, such as trees; so-called “railroad apartments,” hallways, a narrow alleyway, unto the street itself) that are clearly visible and turn the whole set into a collective room. Also, the courtyard labyrinth enhanced the feeling of isolation and divisions within the community, or rather, a loosely tied association. The voyeur contemplates a collection of anonymous townies that are part of a *Gesellschaft* of independent persons – and not of a *Gemeinschaft* (based on the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies) of interacting neighbors united around a shared urban space (also: Jacobs House 293).

The political and cultural climate of the McCarthy era made ordinary people fearful of making friends and distrustful of close neighbors, in view of the potential secrets they may be hiding from them (Jordjh). A murder certainly qualifies in this category, and its revelation by the end of the screening brings relief and absolves the audience of a voyeuristic guilty feeling. In the end, Hitchcock exploited the McCarthy frenzy to invite us in keeping a close eye on our neighbors, just in case... (Fox). According to John Fawell, *Rear Window*, which many times has been de-

scribed as critical of voyeurism, could just as well be interpreted as a “story of a man who pulls himself out of passivity and social indifference [...], a person who reestablishes contact with humanity,” and as a reward of voyeuristic behaviour (81).

## Auteurism

Hitchcock, who went to Berlin in 1924 to work in a studio where he observed camera work by Murnau, Lang and Pabst, said that his experience with German cinema, prioritizing set design and atmosphere, played a central role in his career: “The Germans in those times placed great emphasis on telling the story visually. (...) In those days, everything was done on the lot. It didn’t matter what the set was, they’d build it” (Thomas).

Alfred Hitchcock was involved from start to finish at all production stages of a picture, demonstrated outstanding craftsmanship and planned every shot well in advance through his storyboards. Yet, as Steven DeRosa reminds us, someone actually had to sit down and write the scripts (Review). First, playwright Joshua Logan was asked to write a treatment – a detailed outline of a film’s plot, character descriptions and dialogue suggestions – as a first step towards adaptation of the source text. But it was John Michael Hayes who set the mood and heightened the visual texture of the narrative. In 1953, when he was hired by Hitchcock to write *Rear Window*, Hayes, 34, was an established author of successful radio drama and a produced screenwriter at MGM and Universal and brought along great writing expertise. It was Hayes who gave depth to Jeff’s character, and replaced Sam, the houseman in the novel – who is only circumstantially revealed as black: through word use, reverence, and personal interests – with Stella, an insurance company nurse who turns out to be the film’s moral spokesperson. There is no doubt that both men gained hugely from each other’s capacities. Hitchcock was gifted in choosing writers and shaping stories, fortunately, since the director relied heavily on the talents of his writers. At a later stage, due to growing popularity, Hitchcock took most of the credit for screenwriting himself, dismaying his scriptwriters (Burnett).

At the time of release of *Rear Window*, the reviews were almost unanimously positive, with a few notable exceptions. A *New York Times* commentator missed the “element of ‘menace’ of being in imminent peril” in the movie (Crowther). John McCarten, in *The New Yorker*, was most critical of all: he found that the courtyard people “lead singularly public lives” and “[i]n the current foolishness, [Hitchcock] is confined to an implausible back yard.” While calling the Woolrich’s story “claptrap”, McCarten feared that “*Rear Window* must also be taken as another example of [Hitchcock’s] footless ambition to make a movie that stands absolutely still” (50-51).

The film was not unanimously appreciated in its own time. *Rear Window* was nominated in four categories for an Academy Award (Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, and Best Sound) but earned none, Hitchcock himself losing against Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954).

## Real City

From the beginning, the representation of idiosyncratic spaces, lifestyles, and human relations in the city have always fascinated cinema and moviemakers. Hitchcock's oeuvre contains four remarkable single-set films (*Lifeboat* (1944), *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window*, *Dial M for Murder* (1954)), and throughout his career, the director dealt with problems of social existence and, often, sexual desire, as products of urban density and architectural transparency (Jacobs House 75).

Hitchcock's commitment to details and eye for visual pleasure is legendary, and *Rear Window* makes no exception to the rule. The courtyard neighbors, carrying out their daily routines oblivious of each other, were effectively depicted as representative for the kind of sophisticated folk – though without massive resources – one could have encountered in a typical West Village scene in the mid-1950s (Pomerance 108).

A *New York Times* reviewer, years after the release, rightly observed that “this set is as much a character as any of the actors in the film” (Canby). Art director Hal Pereira confided that “[t]he movie could never have been accomplished on location with the same dramatic impact” (Jacobs House 285).

The inspiration for the edifice recreated on the set – which researchers argued was situated at an imaginary address in Manhattan (125 W. Ninth Street), just east of Hudson Street; the “real” location being 125, Christopher Street – included the rear of Jeff's apartment, itself located on Tenth Street, as well as his view of the patio and buildings that enclose the court. The address had to be fictitious because American law, since 1953, prohibited that a film crime took place at an existing site (Jacobs House 282). As Donald Spoto accurately exposes, Jeff's apartment building being situated on Tenth Street explains why, when called upon, two police officers arrive almost immediately: the NYPD Sixth Precinct, responsible for that part of Manhattan, is located on Tenth (217). However, in real life and surely in an emergency, they should have taken the shortest route (says Google Maps), approaching Thorvald's apartment building from the other side, outside our viewing perspective, which must have been unacceptable for Hitchcock's visual narrative process.

In *Habitats: Private Lives in the Big City*, Constance Rosenblum elaborates on the smallness of New York City apartments, stating that, “except for the extremely wealthy or the extremely lucky, chances are good that New Yorkers live in a shoebox. (...) Some places seem so tiny as to be uninhabitable. This is especially true for people in the arts (...)” the courtyard dwellers *par excellence* in *Rear Window*. Thus, she clearly pays homage to Hitchcock’s near-obsessive cinematic detail editing and concludes: “It’s thanks to the voyeur in all of us that the film *Rear Window* has become the definitive statement about the sometimes oddly public nature of apartment life in New York” (6). Essayist Sharon Dolin comments:

I always thought *Rear Window* was my favourite Hitchcock movie (...). I remember thinking how familiar the scene looked, like it could have taken place in my Brooklyn neighborhood of East Flatbush, where there were always those who looked and those who were looked at. That was part of the urban contract. (...) Some message about social class and economic power got communicated to me: the higher-ups lived higher up. Privacy was reserved for the more well-to-do. (1)

However, New York film critic Bosley Crowther remarked that we “are let in with [Jeff] on such spying as you could rarely get in one window in New York.” James Sanders, an architect with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the movies, advocates that the casual behavior of the courtyard occupants would never have occurred in the more formal front of the building. He suggests that there have been two New York’s throughout the twentieth century – the real city and urban agglomeration where people live, and a dream, or movie, city, made up of images and models and sets and mattes. He understands the dream city not as a myth in need of deconstruction but as a commentary in need of explication – a kind of parallel universe, neither more nor less fantastic than the subject it mimics and enlarges (Briefly).

I became mindful of the difference between the “real city” and – what Baudrillard calls – its simulacrum through a remark heard from an American tourist visiting the historical city of Bruges in Belgium: overwhelmed by the beauty of the medieval city centre (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), he asked what the opening hours of the city were! As if he was visiting a theme park equivalent of Universal Studios or Walt Disney World... an experience light-years away from the residents’ reality.

At the turn of the century, *Variety* finally admitted that the film “will look somewhat old-fashioned due to the obvious (but quite marvelous – *sic*) studio set and the non-naturalistic use of color,” which the recent restoration preserved with all due authenticity (McCarthy).

However, unlike in other films – like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961), *The Cool World* (Shirley Clarke, 1963), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969), or *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977), to name but a few – the flavour of the genuine (idealized or nightmarish) New York exteriors is missing from *Rear Window*. Shiel highlights the relationship between the movie business and the real city and between the real city and its myth (Hollywood 129). While, in his view, the internal architecture of the movie studios was highly artificial, heterogeneous and mutable, many of their characteristics spilled out across the real city, making them simulacra of each other (Shiel 172). None of the meticulously detailed work by Hitchcock and his lot can convince us that the events in the supposedly West Village courtyard are actually happening – let alone in New York. It is not very different from witnessing a show in an admittedly huge theatre. Luckily for Hitchcock, Baudrillard comes to his rescue with his idea of simulacrum: in Baudrillard's semiotic context, the simulacrum is a copy of a copy so dissipated in its relation to the original that it can no longer be called a copy. Hence, the simulacrum stands on its own as a copy without a model. But if we envisage the city as “a complex of social realities within a variety of urban settings in the present and recent past” (Hollywood 244), *Rear Window* fails to pass the test, even if we accept that the urban space in the film has been deliberately confined.

Most commentators insist upon the authenticity of urban activity in *Rear Window* and do their utmost to substantiate the veracity factor created by Hitchcock's cinematic demarche. Yet, we think it is imperative to highlight the manipulative attitude and techniques deployed by the movie director to lure his audience into a virtual reality – 1950s style – that is but a mockery of the “real city” as we understand it. Hitchcock's intention was not to give an articulate representation of popular attitudes towards urban life, but merely to exploit the moral ambiguity of make-believe voyeuristic activity surrounding a fictitious murder plot. Imagining that this ethical paradigm happens in a normal, for real, environment is just as credible as pretending that Westeros (*Game of Thrones*) or Tolkien's Middle Earth are real spaces beyond the realm of fantasy. Which they are, of course, to many of us, since the globalization of virtual realities is blurring increasingly the boundaries between reality and fantasy to create the unique aesthetic experiences we aspire.

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<sup>1</sup> <[http://bernardschopen.tripod.com/rear\\_nov.html](http://bernardschopen.tripod.com/rear_nov.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these difficulties are described at length in Curtis, Scott, “The Making of *Rear Window*.”

<sup>3</sup> <<https://ksamaarchvis.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/the-importance-of-set-design-in-hitchcocks-rear-window/>>.

<sup>4</sup> For example: Everyone praises Hitchcock for advancing the window theme so prominently in *Rear Window*, whereas Woolrich's short story already contained the word “window” no less than 76 times.

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## City, Cinema, Modernity in the 1960's: The Cinematic Swinging London

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Although not the first publication to note the extraordinary changes which London was experiencing in the Sixties, or to highlight the professional, commercial and cultural talents behind these changes, in its issue of 15 April 1966, *Time* magazine coined the term “London: the Swinging City.” This label became a current expression to describe the particular sensations related to London in the Sixties. Mini-skirts, stage nudity, sexual permissiveness, drug-taking, television satire, student protest, Pop Art, and so on, all set to the heartbeat of Beatles’ songs, brought about dramatic changes to the cultural scene, now inculcated into the collective imagination. This is also the period in which Swinging London was continually expressed in and through films.

This article will critically comment on five of the best-known Swinging London films: *Darling* (John Schlesinger, 1965), *The Knack* (Richard Lester, 1965), *Catch Us If You Can* (John Boorman, 1965), *Georgy Girl* (Silvio Narizzano, 1966) and *Smashing Time* (Desmond Davies, 1967). These films certainly distinguish themselves by emphasizing specific themes and visual imagery and for representing and propagating images of the artistic scenes of London at a time when the city was exporting popular culture to the world.

To situate the films within the Swinging London context, this study will look at the discourse generated by contemporary critics and historians who claimed that Swinging London was a “myth” created to justify and validate the modernization and economic expansion of London at a time when, they assumed, the reality of the city was contrary to the image it propagated. By looking at a range of cityscape shots in these films, the ways in which these are constructed and the interpretation they offer of contemporary reality, this work seeks to establish the cinematic representation of “London: the Swinging City.”

### London in the 1960's

It was not until April 1966 that *Time* magazine discovered “the swinging city,” but in the early 1960s, London was already overcoming the vestiges of wartime austerity. Changes

were occurring which had a fundamental effect on society and the environment. Post-war reconstruction had favored the creation of a new London and the city was becoming younger and more cosmopolitan. Young middle-class people, who wanted to escape from the safe suburban lifestyle of their parents, began to move into inner London suburbs like Camden Town and Islington, where decayed Georgian and Victorian houses could be bought cheaply (Murphy 152).

The building and property boom reached its peak in the 1960s as a consequence both of the urgent need for urban renewal and the upturn in the economy (Hewison 39). The year 1962 witnessed the opening of the Hyde Park Underpass, and the construction of a number of glass-and-concrete towers, including the Shell Building on the South Bank of the Thames (Booker 8-9). The arts in general became also the beneficiaries of the building boom as libraries and galleries were built and the projects for the Barbican Arts Centre, the new Museum of London, the new British Library, the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall, were set in motion.

In the early 1960s, specific geographical spaces within the city began to acquire a symbolic reputation. The new Bohemian ambience, which was to be closely related to and to some extent responsible for turning the image of London into the swinging city, where the young upper-middle class were most obviously “having a great time,” started to emerge. This new world materialized in defined areas of the city: in Kensington and Chelsea with their bistros and unconventional little restaurants; Notting Hill and Westbourne Grove, where many of the avant-garde artists and critics lived; the boutique of Mary Quant in King’s Road, and the transformation of Carnaby Street, in northern Soho, into a center of male fashion by John Stephen. This new scene represented the onset of a period that was associated with an avant-garde of photography, fashion, advertising, pop art and pop music.

The “Pop” atmosphere (a world of youth and “style”) that would eventually characterize the image of Swinging London, one constituted by singers, photographers, hairdressers, fashion designers, was emerging before the public gaze. It was in this young upper-middle class scene that people attending The Establishment Club started to buy the first copies of *Private Eye*. This magazine helped to initiate the craze for “satire” and introduced an anarchic, anti-establishment atmosphere which was frequently reported, supported and guided by magazines, newspapers and television shows throughout the 1960s (Booker 20); (Hewison 56-57). London was then re-inventing itself and transformed into a place for self-expression and the unconventional, a place where an air of ridicule and contempt of the conventionally established was welcomed, a place which came to represent the essence and

the very “image” of the new decade (Booker 20; Hewison 78; Murphy 152).

The increasing fascination with London was aided by the propagation of images of all sorts from a variety of media – newspapers, TV, photography, advertising – and through fashion, motorcycles, sport cars, sexual liberation, and so on. Fashion photographers such as David Bailey, Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy were among London’s new “celebrities” who, in the 1960s, contributed to the process of turning London into a kind of cultural center. These young photographers, most of whom from a working-class background, paid little attention to tradition and began to innovate in their professional insight and approach to fashion, photography and art photography.

Within this context, *Time*’s placing of London as “the scene” encapsulated the optimistic feeling of confidence and creativity which turned this city into a place that represented many things: better jobs, new friends, romance, music, fashion, sophistication, consumerism and fun! A place where the young generation wanted to (and were beginning to) change society and to conquer sexual liberation inspired by Vidal Sassoon haircuts, Mary Quant clothes and Beatles’ songs.

Swinging London is thus seen as a result of a new spirit, one that was well captured by the article in *Time* magazine which showed not only a brief selection of fashion and main cultural movements but also produced an “useful” map showing where the swinging scene was taking place. “London: the Swinging City” was then the epitome of a whole new, irreverent, energetic and optimistic moment in the history of the city.

Within this context, Swinging London films were frankly and, more importantly, imaginatively dealing with contemporary society within the context of not only the cultural and social customs of the time but also with the interpretation of them within the context of an imagery already established for London’s contemporary society – the image of a “Swinging City.” Swinging London films are the result of an inspiration, and the response to a contemporary affluent artistic and cultural scene. These are films that have an antiauthoritarian positioning towards sex, lunacy, and social taboos. The mocking and fantasizing mood of these films was the way filmmakers found to represent the changes they believe British conservative society, and the social and political authority related to it, was going through. The result was the cinematic aesthetics of the whole idea of Swinging London.

## The Cinematic Swinging London

Swinging London films worked on an idea that dates back to earlier studies about life in the city: Georg Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903). Simmel traced the psychological shift in the individual's perception as a consequence of intensified sensory exposure, which made humans define themselves in the modern space increasingly as "visual sensitivities." Defining the changing conditions of modernity, Simmel emphasizes factors that are constitutive of, and derived from, an aesthetics and perception of the city.

Swinging London films associate images of the city of London to the specific modern sensations in the streets, sites for the display of fashion, art, behavior, new technologies and these places create visual sensitivities characterized by the changing mood of the time.

The cityscape shots in Swinging London films are not only incorporated into the plot, establishing a city's meaningful narrative and flow, but also into the "reading" of the place as a particular set of social and cultural elements. The images of the city become a signifier for the narrative, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonists, and a signifier of the city.

Looking at the opening of the Swinging London films, it is noticeable that they define the city as the essential element for the story. *Darling* opens with the image of an outdoor, onto which an "ad" appealing for "world relief" showing black children supposedly from a poor country, being replaced by the advertising of a book on Diana Scott's (Julie Christie) life. Here, Diana's blonde, clean and smiling face is an illustration of the rise of a culture that is much more interested in surface appearances than in the "concrete" world of poverty and starvation.

While *Catch Us If You Can* starts with the heart-beat music of the same name while on the screen one can see *The Dave Clark Five's* running around in a park in the early hours of a winter morning, *The Knack* moves from an image of Colin (Michael Crawford), in his bedroom, commenting on Tolen's (Ray Brooks) success with the girls to an image of an innocent girl from the north arriving in Victoria Coach Station.

Similarly, *Smashing Time* opens with its two heroines, Yvonne (Lynn Redgrave) and Brenda (Rita Tushingham), coming down from the north of England, to experience the delights of Carnaby Street. They are talking about their expectations of having a "smashing time" in London; the place where "its all happening." *Georgy Girl* opens with the image of its protagonist walking (almost dancing) in the busy streets of London in a manner that people supposedly walked in Sixties London. This jaunty walk, the way she swings her bag – the

same way the character of Diana swings hers in *Darling* – or she stops to look at shop windows, with the tune of a pop-hit music as the soundtrack, places the film and the narrative directly within the context of the swinging scene.

An evident element within all these Swinging London films is that the relationship between the landscape and the characters is effectively “psychological.” Accordingly, in all five films discussed here, the protagonists have an intrinsic connection to the city, or rather to its image, to what London signifies or stands for. Even when the characters do not inhabit the city (*The Knack* and *Smashing Time*), they are driven to it by what the city represents, what they can get from it. The cityscape is rendered by the narrative as a “geography of mind,” where London becomes a “sign of reality,” it speaks a history, a cultural memory.

Swinging London films in general epitomize the euphoria of London in the process of redevelopment. The cinematic London that comes out of these films is nevertheless multifaceted. It is placed between houses in demolition and construction in the East and West parts of the city, advertising outdoors nearby bombsites, car-parks, small shops, and the new modernist spaces of the new high-rise buildings, the motorway underpasses and the fashionable and colorful boutiques of Kings Road, Oxford Street and Carnaby Street. The modernist environment under construction portrayed in these films is a comment on the specificity of a time and the fast-speeded changes that were occurring in London.

These contrasting city images follow a similar pattern to the eclectic imagery in the cover of the *Time*’s “Swinging” issue that featured the “hard-edged color signs” of London’s new imagery juxtaposed to an older Victorian neo-Gothic. As Mellor (1993) points out, “...a contrast is made between Big Ben, the Palace of Westminster and the polychrome geometrical patterned clothing of Londoners in the foreground” (Mellor 54). The very differentiation created by these multifarious and contrasting images provides the “visual material” for an increased self-consciousness in the city.

In Swinging London films, the streets of London are represented as the primary site of an ever increasing, mutually reinforcing kaleidoscopic imagery. The dynamics of elements such as advertisements, billboards, posters, placards, store signs, shop fronts and display windows, and the multitude of commodity forms and shapes, fashion and architectures that the city offers in its sights and traffics, multiply the expanding visual aspects of reality.

In these films, the city is often presented as a “moving,” passing object composed by radiant geometric lines and shapes in a dazzling visual pattern. Normally presented as a point-of-view shot of a character who is in a speeding car or motorcycle (*Catch Us If You Can*,

*Smashing Time* and *The Knack*), this filmic construction aims to take the viewer into the dynamics of the city by knitting together different elements of the urban imagery – buildings, signs, traffic, lights, and so forth – with the velocity of a driving-by. This cinematic construction gives a kind of graphic representation to the city imagery.

In a sequence of *Catch Us If You Can* a pop idol, Steve (Dave Clark), and a model girl, Dinah (Barbara Ferris), decide to leave their life and work in London to start an adventurous journey to the north of England. They are now in a car speeding away from London, and the city is registered in this sequence as a set of traces, signs, in a speeding movement showing only fragments of the cityscape on the screen, a kinetic evidence of a mobile traffic. Generally speaking, this kind of “speedy sequence” established a metaphoric connection with the “moving city” or the “city in fast-change,” the process through which London was supposedly going.

Pop Art also becomes a fruitful source of reference for Swinging London filmmakers, and these films should be seen as contributing to the constructive relationship between people’s visual practices and their visual culture. This can be directly related to what Mellor (54), commenting on Pop Art, refers to as “action painting”: those collages of abstract graphics, graffiti and photographs in which pieces of the city are combined to represent an urban culture which, in the pop artists’ view, should be understood not through its whole body but, as fragmented as it is, through its “bits,” through the meaningful collage of its different realities (Mellor 58).

*Smashing Time* tells the story of two North Country girls, Yvonne (Lynn Redgrave) and Brenda (Rita Tushingham), who go to London in hopes of breaking into the mad fashion world. While Yvonne becomes a successful pop singer, Brenda, after being “discovered” by a famous fashion photographer, Tom Wabe (Michael York), becomes “the Sixties face.” Having just arrived in London, Yvonne and Brenda ask a drunk in the street for the direction of Carnaby Street. The drunk insists on taking them there and the three of them start walking. At this point the city can be seen on the screen in “display” mode. London here is shown as a fast “postcard” collection of images.

Just as pop artists have been incorporating imageries of the urban scene into pictorial space, and Swinging London filmmakers started to integrate very similar patterns of representation into their own work, specific attention was also given to a “Pop” system of commodity-signs in the cinematic context. The re-fashioning of London as a city of desired commodities becomes then an outstanding characteristic of Swinging London films. Ac-



cordingly, most of the Swinging London characters are presented as consumers in a consumer-oriented society. Diana (*Darling*) and Dinah (*Catch Us...*) are looking for fame, Tolen and Colin (*The Knack*) for sex, Meredith (*Georgy Girl*) and Yvonne (*Smashing Time*) for fashion and success.

When these characters are out in the streets of London, driving or walking, it seems that they are discovering a “new world”; a world constituted by an enormous diversity of shops with objects displayed in their windows as if they were precious works of art and where the shiny transparency of shop windows, the flashing of neon signs and the giant billboards, introduce a different way of perceiving the city.

These films comment on the excessive importance attributed to appearance, fashion and consumerism in Swinging London where celebrities were not just film or television stars but hair-dressers, fashion designers, photographers, and so forth. Swinging London was supportive of the idea of modernizing London, but modernization of a different kind: one which was receptive to design as well as the effect of the expansion of electronics, plastics and pharmaceutical products on everyday life (Mellor 54). At the same time Pop Art, pop music and the hardedge designs of Op Art were influencing and celebrating mass culture. The frantic, fragmented and “inconsequential” events shot in bleached black and white textures of Richard Lester’s film version of Anne Jellicoe’s play *The Knack* (1965) are here a perfect example of the smart visual style that comes from the influence of television commercials and cartoons strips of the mid-1960s.

*The Knack* tells the story of Colin (Michael Crawford), a sexually repressed young teacher who shares his flat with a kind of “swinging Don Juan,” Tolen (Ray Brooks). In *The Knack* fashion photography is adapted to accentuate individual particularities, such as in the all white living-room which Tom (Donald Donnelly) has painted over “in case the bomb falls.” Against the blankness of the room, the human shapes are photographed with all their dynamics emphasized. Through the illusion of depth that it creates, this artifice depicts a series of movements in space. It sharpens the contrasting figures (dressed in black or dark-grey) offering a spectacle of rhythms.

*Smashing Time* comes close to being a slapstick musical comedy sufficiently in tune with Swinging London to present an accurate parody of Pop Art and “swinging” styles full of caricatures: Michael York’s working-class photographer, Anna Quayle’s trendy aristocrat who calls her boutique “Too Much” and Peter Jones’s Candid Camera television program “bringing happiness and glamour into simple ordinary people’s drab little lives.” *Smashing*

*Time* presents five slapstick sequences: sauce/paint/insect repellent spraying in a greasy café; an art gallery private view full of disturbed robots; pie-throwing in a King's Road restaurant; bedroom farce ending in Brenda, Yvonne, Bobbie Mome-Rath (Ian Carmichael) and a flat caretaker (David Lodge) under a collapsed ceiling; the Post Office Tower's rotating restaurant spinning so fast that it becomes a fairground with its trendy guests splayed against the wall. Such visual exuberance and kaleidoscopically exaggerated anarchy seem well crafted a la Pop Art and the use of color as an extravagant, stylish and experimental addition to the adventurous has its aesthetic momentum.

So, *Smashing Time* moves from the "realist" paradigm, related to the other films discussed so far, to a more anarchist, colorful and exaggerated "dream like" attitude. The case is that the new emergent promotional culture, the "realism" of Pop, its closeness to objects, images and reproductions of everyday life, stimulated a new debate about the relationship between art and life, image and reality (Huyssen 1988). Interestingly, though Yvonne and Brenda might be obsessed with Carnaby Street, much of the action takes place in the decayed area of Camden Town, demonstrating the film's solid realist sense of geography underpinning its fantasies.

Swinging London films, in their particular ways, present a portrayal of the search for excitement of young men and women in London, the city that symbolized everything which was exciting. In consequence, the rise of individuals with a new sense of independence and heightened awareness of mobility, whose spaces of perception and movement in the city characterize its singularity, is noticeable.

All Swinging London films show a similar imagery, the difference is the sites where these cliché images take place. *Georgy Girl* happens in settings such as Edgware Road, a decayed flat in Maida Vale, Central London and the river Thames; *Darling* is set in central London streets and modern buildings, Paris and Italy; the first part of *Catch Us If You Can* is set in central London until it moves to northern areas of the country; *The Knack* is set in West London areas such as Sheperds Bush, Holland Park School, Ewill Junkyard, and *Smashing Time* in Camden Town and central London areas.

So, the characters are normally placed within the context of the city (following its fashion, modes, vocabulary, and so on) unless an ambivalent contrast is needed. This is the case, for instance, in *Georgy Girl*. Roughly, *Georgy Girl* is the story of how a plain but goodhearted and unselfish working-class girl, who grew up in the rich household of her parents' employer, James Leamington (James Mason), takes over her beautiful and fashionable but ungrateful

flatmate's husband (temporarily) and baby (permanently) and settles down marrying her ageing admirer (Mason's character). Georgy is frequently positioned within the narrative as an outsider – the one who is not fashionable or attractive enough to be part of the swinging context. This is clear in a sequence in which Georgy is seen trying to cross a busy road but none of the passing cars would stop for her. As soon as two young attractive girls attempt to cross the same road, the cars automatically stop.

London, these films seem to point out, is for the young, fashionable and attractive. That is why an evident quality in these Swinging London films is the generalized disregard for authority and the frantic and irreverent rebelliousness of the young people associated with the 1960s. Hence, *The Knack* works with the idea that mid-1960s London had become vividly aware that young people had taken over (Walker 291). For its part, *The Knack* plays around the idea of outrage about sex and ridiculed the “deadly” seriousness, which never acknowledged fantasy, play, and spontaneity. Accordingly, the over-thirties in *The Knack* are presented as out-of-place people whose only function is to give a set of replies and comments to the most amazing sequences of the film and these remarks are sharply accommodated within the paradigms of the conservatism of their generation. The sequence in which Nancy stuffs a shopping bag beneath her coat and stops the road traffic by faking pregnancy, is an example of the irreverent and spontaneous attitude of the young in the film.

One film in particular, *Darling*, was built entirely on the specific attitude of a young woman, Diana Scott (Julie Christie), who does not want to play the traditional role attributed to women in society and who wants to achieve everything. *Darling* is a story of an ambitious young woman's rise to the top of London fashion scene. In her exciting, but morally dubious route to the top, Diana betrays her first husband, deserts her journalist mentor first for an advertising company director and then for a homosexual photographer, and ends up married to an Italian millionaire who does not give her any attention. The film's real focus though is on the cynicism and emptiness of the world surrounding the characters, that is, the smart and beautiful Swinging London people and their less than beautiful amoral doings.

As the film locates Diana's fate in her being manipulated by three image-makers – a television interviewer, who has a troubled conscience as he tries to be true to himself working for a medium that encouraged him to be false and to present an untruthful view of society; a cynical advertising executive who manipulates the values of a consumer society by presenting an infinitely more attractive illusion of reality; and a smart magazine photographer, who abstracts the images of society from their reality –, *Darling* portrays well what was go-

ing on in British society at the time, that is, the craziness of the illusory world of advertising and image-making which was in the very center of the swinging London scene.

Following the same mood, in *Catch Us If You Can*, Steve and Dinah take off on an impulse, to be hunted down relentlessly until the final shot shows a crowd of cameramen and journalists, caught where sea and sky meet in nothingness on the screen. The film is a comment on the sudden enfranchisement of youth – which may well be temporary – and shows the insecurity of the new phenomenon in the context of Pop culture. Following the same pattern, *Georgy Girl* represents a comment on a drift in a new morality. The escalating “permissiveness” of the era is in *Georgy Girl* worked into the ménage à trios inhabited by Georgy (Lyn Redgrave), her selfish flatmate Meredith (Charlotte Rampling) and the latter’s boyfriend Jos (Alan Bates).

*Darling*, *Catch Us If You Can*, *The Knack*, *Georgy Girl*, and *Smashing Time* started representing the excitements in the big city but, in their own particular ways, ended up endorsing traditional virtues like sincerity, loyalty, friendship, and social conventions: marriage, heterosexuality, and so on. Moreover, one can trace the identical pattern of an initial dream-like excitement slowly souring into a bitter “reality” which culminates in an apparent disenchantment not only with the dream but also with life itself.

Among all these films, *The Knack* is the only one that (apparently) has a happy end, with the image of Colin and Nancy walking together in the foreground of the London cityscape. They will be together as she is “moving in” to live in his flat. However, this is still a traditional way of ending a story. Here, one realizes that all the excitement, enjoyment and disregard for tradition showed throughout the film is in the end cancelled for a more conservative attitude.

In the end of *Darling*, Diana apparently achieves all the success and fortune she looked for, but again this “happiness” is just a matter of appearances. The film ends “locking” her up in the loneliness of an enormous Italian palace without emotional or sexual fulfillment. Similarly, *Catch Us If You Can* ends on an “island” where the runaway pop idol and the model girl finally arrive. However, at low tide the dreamed “island” turned out not to be an island at all. So, the fantasy fades and the individuals have to face their reality. The film ends with him leaving while she is left to face the publicity cameras.

*Georgy Girl* ends with the characters of Georgy and James coming out of a church after their wedding ceremony. But this is not exactly a happy ending. One realizes that Georgy has married an older man (who she does not love), just because he represents the economic

and moral assurance she needs to become the foster mother of Meredith's baby daughter. Again, *Georgy Girl* ends giving its protagonist the "illusion" of happiness but not emotional or sexual fulfillment. Following the same pattern, *Smashing Time* finishes with Yvonne and Brenda deciding to return home, where they will supposedly re-assume their quiet and traditional life, after discovering that London was not the place they thought it was.

These ironic "happy endings" show that filmmakers, though active participants within the myth of Swinging London, noted the distinctions between myth and reality and were ambiguous towards the glitter and the glamour of Swinging London.

### Summing Up

This article has suggested that Swinging London films could be seen as good examples of the diversity of images that represented their time and the social and cultural context within which they were inserted. The Sixties embodied the sense of a future that represented a great deal of change mediated by the production of "new images." Within this context, not only the concrete imagery of the city, but also all the elements related to and responsible for a new image of London – composed by a youth culture, pop art, pop artists, fashion, photography, and so forth – became relevant for the cinematic apparatus.

Swinging London filmmakers' interest in sexuality, fashion, pop culture, and so on, motivated them to invest the cinematic landscape with a sense of "fantasy," of dubious sympathy and "musical" motion in such a way that the "realistic" landscape, contradictorily, ended up legitimating and authenticating a fantastic universe.

The cinematic city is here constructed by "famous" cityscapes and buildings that are themselves involved in an anarchic narrative pattern to represent the Swinging London "mood." That is, the "reading" of the cityscape goes from conservative and historical to culturally locate within a social/cultural phenomenon, and the cinematic city becomes a metaphor for the pre-established myth of the city that "swings."

Within this context, London: the Swinging City, is a city that enforces consumption (as every modern city) and the city's buildings, streets, signs, traffic, and so forth, are together working to represent the "new" way to perceive the "new" London, the city that transformed itself – or so it seems – in the 1960s by acquiring a distinctive look.

In the end, London is in Swinging films assimilated as a symbolic landscape in which the association of the geography of the city with the myth of Swinging London allows it to be

at the same time a representation and an active element within the context of the formation and construction of the myth.

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## When the Global City Confronts Terrorism: New York City in Films on 9/11

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### 9/11, New York City, and Films

On September 11, 2001, four passenger planes were hijacked by terrorists and used as weapons to attack civilian targets in the United States, with two of these causing the complete destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City. Scenes of the collapse of the Twin Towers have become the most vivid recollection of the 9/11 attacks in people's minds. From then on, these two former skyscrapers have become an eternal absence of their former presence, which, by remaining to be a representative of the city, retains a quiet yet equally forceful influence as before. They have started, unsurprisingly, to appear in films, being re-erected and re-destroyed again and again.

Among the films that focus on 9/11, *11'09"01-September 11* (2002) and *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006) are a particularly interesting pair. *11'09"01-September 11* is "perhaps one of the most unusual films about 9/11" (Dixon 4). It is a collective film composed of eleven short films made by eleven directors: Samira Makhmalbaf, Claude Lelouch, Youssef Chahine, Danis Tanovic, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Ken Loach, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, Amos Gitai, Mira Nair, Sean Penn, and Shōhei Imamura. Each short film lasts eleven minutes, nine seconds, and one frame. The eleven directors reflect on 9/11 from distinctive perspectives, most of which are in an international context. Alain Brigand, the producer of the film, notes that:

Sept. 11 was an American tragedy, but also a universal catastrophe . . . The entire world shook, but what was it thinking? The directors were given total freedom to respond. The only constraints were time, a maximum budget of \$400,000 each and a commitment not to promote hate or violence or to attack peoples, religions or cultures. (Dixon 5)

However, the film proves to be controversial upon release to the extent that it was denounced as "stridently anti-American" and thus banned from screening in the U.S. (Dixon 4).

*World Trade Center*, a Hollywood product and presumably pro-American, is made in a different context. In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. politicians already informed Hollywood exec-



utives to make films and televisions to follow the pointed message: That the war is against terrorism, not Islam; that Americans must be called to national service; that Americans should support the troops; that this is a global war that needs a global response; that this is a war against evil; that American children have to be reassured; and that instead of propaganda, the war effort needs a narrative that should be told... with accuracy and honesty. (Westwell 8)

However, the message resulted in Hollywood's "removal of anything that might be seen to have a direct reference to 9/11" for the following several years. (Westwell 9) It was Oliver Stone's courageous attempt to directly deal with the event in *World Trade Center* that brought Hollywood back to the topic. *World Trade Center* unfolds its story mainly from the New York police officers' point of view. It is mainly based on the experience of the officers and their families when the Twin Towers were under attack. Apparently, its whole interest lies within New York and with the American citizens.

Through different approaches to the event of 9/11, the two films reveal the double roles played by New York as both a domestic and an international city. By reading the two films closely and invoking urban and cultural theories, I argue that, New York City, when becoming a global city with a new kind of economic base, contains both centripetal and centrifugal forces, which help form a center-periphery relationship, whose center lies within the city and periphery lies both within and outside the city. Nowadays, the city's social and economic development increasingly relies on such a relationship. As it develops, the city's centripetal and centrifugal forces get intensified, generating a propensity for self-destruction of the city. And such propensity was exposed by the tragic event of September 11, 2001.

### **The Center**

In its opening sequence, *World Trade Center* showcases an ordinary dawn in New York City, with four police officers leaving from home for work. It starts with John McLoughlin (played by Nicolas Cage) waking up at home beside his wife. Before McLoughlin leaves home, he opens their doors to see each of his children still sleeping. On his drive to work, we learn that McLoughlin and his family live in a suburb outside the city. Shots of other officers going to work using different types of transport alternate with shots of typical New York City scenes. After the shot of Will Jimeno (played by Michael Peña), who is driving his car on a bridge accompanied by a cheerful song, the camera is lifted up to capture the

World Trade Center. The caption under the silhouette of the Twin Towers shows that it is “September 11, 2001.”

Among the information conveyed by this sequence, I focus on the identity formation of McLoughlin as well as the social and economic structure of New York City. McLoughlin, a police officer, living in the suburbs with his nuclear family, is a typical representative of the traditional middle class, one that can be found in every American city. New York City, whose contour is vaguely shown in the opening sequence, is by definition a global city with high densities of the business district and flow of people. Before moving on to examine the relationship between McLoughlin and New York City, I will first look at the global city as such.

By global city, I refer to the term coined by Saskia Sassen in her seminal work on global cities. (Sassen) In the post-war decades, the international regime had been based on the United States’ dominance of the world economy. This system had broken down by the early 1970s, and large U.S. transnational industrial firms and banks began to form, with the management of the international economic order now run from the headquarters of these firms. However, by the early 1980s, these large U.S. transnational firms and banks experienced the massive Third World debt crisis and sharp losses in market share as a result of foreign competition. According to Sassen, it is at this time that “the geography and composition of the global economy changed so as to produce a complex duality: a spatially dispersed, yet globally integrated organization of economic activity” (Sassen 3). The combination of spatial dispersal and global integration from this point onwards characterizes major cities with long histories as centers for international trade and banking. These cities now function in new ways, including “as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy” (Sassen 3-4). The changes in the function of cities have led to the emergence of the global city. These global cities, as a new city type, concentrate control over vast resources with their urban social and economic order restructured. New York is one such city.

Sassen (5) further suggests that, as the economy becomes more globalized, the agglomeration of central functions in the global cities become higher, with the extremely high densities evident in the business districts of these cities as one spatial expression of the logic. (Sassen 5) Such spatial expression is easily found in the *World Trade Center* with the city’s business district of New York City represented by WTC in Lower Manhattan. And apparently the city’s “extremely high densities” are a result of the skyscrapers standing in proximity to one another.

The city's new spatial characteristic points to its new kind of economics. The latter, as suggested by Sassen (5), is characterized by "the vastness of the operation and the complexity of the transactions, which requires a vast array of specialized services" (Sassen 5). Further, this new kind of economics fosters a new type of high-income workers, a growing number of young professional women, and immigrants, thus leads to a reorganization of the consumption structure with an urbanization of the professional class.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, in global cities, a new class alignment is shaped and developed, whose concrete expression could be found "in the massive expansion of a new high-income stratum alongside growing urban poverty" (Sassen 342). In a word, Global cities, being one main arena for the new class alignment, "contain both the most vigorous economic sectors and the sharpest income polarization" (Sassen 343). Sassen's observations on global cities are shown in *World Trade Center* through its representation of a wide range of street scenes in New York, from shopping malls full of high-income customers to penniless and homeless people.

In this light, I suggest that, New York, as a global city, contains both centripetal and centrifugal forces. The most vigorous economic sector and the high-income stratum, driven by the centripetal force, both become components of the center of New York's economic and social structure. The center, through the centrifugal force, exerts dominant influence on its periphery. The periphery contains not only the low-income stratum but also other components, be they spatially within or outside the city, national or international.

### **The (External) Periphery**

In *11'09"01*, the film directed by Samira Makhmalbaf tells a story of a teacher and her pupils in an Afghanistan refugee camp in Iran on September 11, 2001. The teacher tries to tell her pupils that an event of global importance has happened on that day. However, the pupils show no interest. The teacher tells her pupils that the event has taken place "in America, in New York City" and that "two airplanes hit the World Trade Center towers." As the pupils do not know what a tower is, the teacher explains to them that a tower is like the chimney. Yet the pupils still do not show any interest. The teacher gets angry when her pupils do not follow her example in keeping silent for one minute in honor of those killed in New York. She then punishes them by making them stand outside to look at the chimney and to think of the people who have died.

In high contrast to New York City's high densities of skyscrapers as seen in *World Trade Center*, the space of the Afghanistan refugee camp in Iran as shown in *11'09"01* is always

open. There is no proper building within one's vision, and the only structure that the people try to build is a shelter to keep them safe from American bombs. It is apparent that the refugee camp is faced with a scarcity of resources. Given the toughness of the refugees' material conditions, education seems to be a luxury (or even ridiculous) to them. Moreover, the comparison between the Twin Towers and the chimney by the teacher is extremely ironic, with the two belonging to two different worlds. The chimney symbolizes heavy industry in a world that has not yet finished the process of industrialization, while the Twin Towers, symbols of highly developed financial system, points to a world already entering the post-industrial period for decades.

The Twin Towers and the chimney, however, are juxtaposed together by globalization. While the economic concentration of the global cities continues, where large firms dominate most of the flows and international transactions, global networks of factories increase (Sassen 329). The film reveals that such networks even extend to refugee camps in Iran. The juxtaposition of the Twin Towers and the chimney implies the center-periphery relationship of New York with Iran and Afghanistan. Although Iran and Afghanistan are rich for oil and gas energy, they, driven by the centrifugal force, are not on the side of those who share the benefits. It proves that, for prosperity of the center, poverty of the periphery is inevitable.

Another film in *11'09'01*, directed by Idrissa Ouedraogo, unfolds a story that takes place in a small town in a West African country. There, a young boy called Adama believes that he spots Osama Bin Laden in his town and mobilizes his friends to capture him for the reward of 25 million dollars. This story is unfolded in a lively and funny tone. At the beginning of the film, an old man holds and listens to a radio broadcasting the news of 9/11. Adama's father asks what is happening in the news. Adama tells his father that "some planes have crashed into buildings higher than our presidential palace." He then asks for money to buy pencils, pens, and notebook covers, which his father cannot afford. As in the film directed by Samira Makhmalbaf, where children can only imagine the Twin Towers according to a chimney, in Ouedraogo's film, the WTC as well as New York City are beyond Adama's imagination. 9/11 seems such an irrelevant event to this small town. Yet through the media, including radio and newspaper, 9/11 becomes worldly well known. By trying to capture Bin Laden, Adam with his friend even make 9/11 part of their lives for a while. The film structurally juxtaposes 9/11 with Adama's life on three occasions. The first occasion, as already mentioned, is when he tells his father the news and then asks for money to buy stationeries. The second occasion is when he sells the newspaper with Bin Lad-

en's photo on it because he wants to pay for his sick mother's medical fees. The third occasion is when he and his friends want to capture Bin Laden for the reward money.

In a word, it is his poverty that makes 9/11 relevant to Adam's own life. At the end of the film, Adama and his friend even think of kidnapping George Bush for the ransom. It demonstrates that, as long as Adama remains in poverty, America will always represent for him a way of getting money, a way of impossibility. The film seeks to suggest a relationship between a small town in West Africa and America. The relationship foregrounds WTC in New York City as "the main receiver of capital, the center for investment decisions and for the production of innovations that can maximize profitability" (Sassen 331). Thus the film demonstrates the huge global influence of the center, which even reaches a small town in West Africa its periphery.

### **The Propensity for Self-Destruction**

Although New York City's development relies on the existing center-periphery relationship, the examined components of the external periphery outside New York reveal that the relationship is problematic. 9/11 is a radical expression of this problem. I argue that 9/11 is the center's expression of its self-destruction propensity rather than a response from the periphery to the center. Because the periphery lacks capacity to offer a response, in the same sense that Adama is not able to get rid of poverty.

The center-periphery relationship, embodied by the relationship between the WTC in New York City and the poverty of an Afghanistan refugee camp as well as a small town in West Africa, is undoubtedly dominated by the center's enormous global power. However, as Baudrillard notes, "power is complicit with its own destruction." (Baudrillard) To elaborate his argument, Baudrillard further suggests that a system with global power is internally fragile. In other words, it is the entire system that, by its internal fragility, helps the initial (terrorist) action. The more the system is globally concentrated to constitute ultimately only one network, the more it becomes vulnerable at a single point. (Baudrillard)

This "system" is the system of the center, where terrorism emerges as the shadow of its own domination. The system of the center:

can face any visible antagonism. But with terrorism — and its viral structure — , as if every domination apparatus were creating its own antibody, the chemistry of its

own disappearance; against this almost automatic reversal of its own puissance, the system is powerless. (Baudrillard)

Thus the event of 9/11 should be seen as an attempt of suicide of the center in response to the multiple challenges of death and suicide by its periphery. Its suicide is even desired by those who share benefits. Because:

an allergy to all definitive order, to all definitive power is happily universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center embodied perfectly, in their very double-ness (literally twin-ness), this definitive order. (Baudrillard)

If Baudrillard seeks to theorize the event of 9/11 as an expression of a self-destruction propensity of the center in the center-periphery relationship, Noam Chomsky revisits history to illustrate the similar point. According to Chomsky, the perpetrators of 9/11 come from the terrorist network that has its roots in the mercenary armies that were organized, trained, and armed by organizations including the CIA. The United States once used the huge mercenary army composed of radical Islamists, which Bin Laden joined in the 1980s, to attack one of their cold war enemies, the Soviet Union. (Chomsky 82) The U.S. made use of these people, including Bin Laden, because they were the best killers they could find. However, the Islamists had always been fighting for a different reason. Their intent was to overthrow the regimes of non-Islamic governments in the Middle East. In doing so, they harmed many innocent people. However, as Chomsky states:

The terrorists draw from a reservoir of desperation, anger, and frustration that extends from rich to poor, from secular to radical Islamist. That it is rooted in no small measure in U.S. policies is evident and constantly articulated to those willing to listen. (Chomsky 83)

Although Chomsky does not directly relate his analysis of 9/11 to New York City, his account makes it clear that the attacks of 9/11 were not simply a response of the periphery to the center or to its dominant power and influence. Instead, 9/11 is to some extent an indirect consequence of the U.S.' national policies. However, its most serious victim was New York City itself, the city that "remains the leading international financial and business center in the United States, with the other cities a far second."<sup>2</sup> Thus the event of 9/11 is not only an expression of the problems relating to the existing center-periphery relationship but also the expression of a self-destruction propensity of the center itself. Self-destruction of the center accordingly means breakdown of the center-periphery relationship. As New York City's development relies on being the center in the center-periphery relationship, it is

fair to suggest the propensity for self-destruction of the center is equal to a propensity for self-destruction of the city per se.

### **The (Internal) Periphery**

Notably, the center-periphery relationship also lies within New York City. And the propensity for self-destruction of the city appears more evident when it comes to the periphery within the city. Even before the striking expression of the propensity through 9/11, the city has arguably always had such propensity. This propensity is actually part of the nature of New York City, a global city, containing both centrifugal and centripetal forces. However, this study would risk the accusation of essentialism if it were simply to attribute the propensity for self-destruction to the nature of New York without further discussion. Examination of context and causation is therefore necessary. As Bollens points out:

Cities are often located on the fault-lines between cultures—between modernizing societies and traditional cultures; between individual-based and community-based economies; between democracy and more authoritarian regimes; between colonial governments and native populations. (Bollens 170)

Thus, contemporary cities have gradually become “the battlegrounds on which global powers and stubbornly local meanings and identities meet” (Graham 8). They are sites where ongoing violent struggles and strategic discourses take place. The participant culture, power, meaning or identity contribute to constantly construct or deconstruct New York City as a site. Their struggles and discourses are always complicated and intense, as each participant often aims to completely demolish its antagonist(s). Yet the participants’ forces are uneven, because the site, where they fight and interact with each other, is a global city whose social and economic structure is based on the center-periphery relationship. The relationship is formed by as well as intensifying both centrifugal and centripetal forces. The participants of struggles and discourses as components of the periphery is driven even further by the centrifugal force, while the participants as components of the center are drawn together by the centripetal force. The former, together with every possible solution it might offer to the city’s problem, is doomed to be demolished by the latter. The city, as a site where the periphery keeps being demolished by the center, always risks being destructed by itself due to the lack of any solution to its existing or would-be problems.

The film directed by Sean Penn in 11’09’01 offers a very pertinent illustration. It unfolds the daily life of an old man whose wife passed away and who lives alone in a dim and obso-

lete flat in New York City. However, he pretends his wife is still alive and chooses a dress for her to wear every day. He keeps talking to himself while leading a simple and monotonous life. Due to the shadow of WTC tower that darkens his flat, a spot of flowers on the windowsill has shriveled and died, as flowers “need light to wake up.” On the morning of September 11 when WTC towers collapse, the shadow cast over the flat disappears. The old man is woken up by the light filling his room and is exultant to see that the flowers on the windowsill are blooming. He attaches the flowers to his former wife’s dress, which he places on his bed, pretending that it is his wife. Finally realizing that his wife is dead, the old man cries with grief. The camera then tracks out of the apartment window, leaving the shadow of the collapsing WTC tower projected on the wall beside the window. It is a beautifully and skillfully made film, in which, as Guy Westwell notes, “the use of split screen and slow motion draws attention to the film’s detailed *mise-en-scène*: the rusted patina on a faucet, streamers blowing in the draught of an air-conditioning unit” (Westwell 24).

The film depicts how the WTC affects people’s life in a poetic way, emphasizing the discourse of spatiality in the city. The hugeness of the shadow of WTC and the smallness as well as narrowness of the old man’s apartment are in sharp contrast with each other. Even though the old man lives in a relatively neat apartment close to WTC in New York, one sees that he too is a component of the periphery. The film further reminds its audience of the influence exerted by the mere construction and existence of WTC as buildings. The original site of WTC was home to hundreds of commercial and industrial tenants, property owners, small businesses, and approximately one hundred residents. Many of them fiercely resisted forced relocation. Yet the demolition work of the original site began in 1966 with thirteen square blocks of low rise buildings cleared construction of WTC.

The role that WTC and its shadow play in the film to some extent proves Stephen Graham’s observations that:

Even in supposedly democratic societies, planned urban restructuring often involves autocratic state violence, massive urban destruction, the forced devastation of livelihoods, and even mass death. These are justified through heroic and mythologizing discourses emphasizing modernization, hygiene, or progress. Invariably, the destruction that follows is directed against marginalized places and people that are discursively constructed as backward, unclean, antiquated, or threatening to the dominant order. (Graham 34)



Apparently, the old man is a representative of those seen as “backward, unclean, antiquated, or threatening to the dominant order,” whose life, although not destroyed, is darkened by WTC, which is representative of the “heroic and mythologizing discourses emphasizing modernization, hygiene, or progress.” (Graham 34) Hence, when the old man says: “Rich people! A bunch of crumbs bound together by dough . . . they shouldn’t have been there in the first place,” he eloquently questions the justice of urbanization process.

New York City as a site in *World Trade Center* reflects a struggle between other embodiments of center and periphery, a struggle between values of different classes within the city. As I mentioned earlier in the paper, McLoughlin, a police officer living in the suburbs with his nuclear family, is a typical representative of the traditional middle classes one could find in every American city. His responsibilities are to protect New York and maintain its order. Yet the structure of the city changes with time, from the suburbanization of the earlier professional class to the urbanization of the contemporary professional class. Accordingly, the order also changes. McLoughlin, more or less a product of the suburbanization of the professional class in the earlier years, is now an outcast in a sense. In the film, a sequence shows the transmission of the news of the collapse of WTC through media to the world. The transmission process is depicted as a continuum starting with McLoughlin and his colleagues being trapped under the ruins of WTC. The heroes are supposed to save people, yet they are now themselves trapped and in need of being saved, thus constituting a kind of anti-hero narrative. This anti-hero narrative conveys a strong sense of alienation on McLoughlin’s part, as he serves to maintain order even though the order, embodied by the ruins of WTC, is against him. While McLoughlin devotes himself to the maintenance of the order dominated by the center, he is himself alienated from this center as another component of the periphery.

Both of the films reveal the ongoing discourses and struggles on the site of New York City before 9/11. It is notable that 9/11 in both films is constructed as “a hemmed-in and ahistorical” experience or event (Westwell 172-173). Both films end with perceiving 9/11 as a redemption. For the old man in Penn’s film, 9/11 removes the shadow cast over his flat, thereby resurrecting his flowers. For McLoughlin, 9/11 glorifies his role as a police officer through the occupation’s characterization of self-sacrifice and empowers him to be a patriarchal subject at home. These films both view 9/11 as an attempt, in the most extreme way, to solve the problems that lie in the center-periphery relationship within New York City. Not surprisingly, it is a failed attempt. The caption at the end of *World Trade Center* reminds the audience of the forthcoming war in Iraq, which will exacerbate the problems.

Similarly, at the end of Penn's film, the camera renders the old man powerless as his wife will never again be alive and he will continue to live – almost imprisoned – in the flat poorly and alone. The film shows that the problems, e.g., the polarization between rich and poor, are far from solved. Moreover, any alternative solution to the problems is yet to be figured out.

## Conclusion

Since it has become a global city, New York's social and economic structure has been shaped and developed through a center-periphery relationship, formed by and intensifying the centrifugal and centripetal forces generated by the new kind of economic base. The relationship, with a huge and inevitable influence both nationally and internationally, continues to exacerbate the uneven global development. Thus it proves to be problematic. The event of 9/11, especially the collapse of WTC, is an expression of the problem in the most extremist way. The event proves a propensity for self-destruction of the center, thereby revealing a consistent propensity for self-destruction of New York City per se. This propensity is the result of the impossibility of any possible solution to the problems brought about by the center-periphery relationship, on which relies the development of New York City. Moreover, the revelation of such propensity by 9/11 even has worsened the situation, where a circular violence is provoked, including the "War on Terror" and the construction of "the terror city," with the latter especially leading to changes of New York City in a not very optimistic way (Gray and Wylie 229-348).

On the other hand, through my analysis I foreground that New York, the city, plays a role not to be neglected in films. The city not only becomes a stage either for a show to play on or for audience to be observed, but also comes to life with its own operation mechanism that participates in structuring the world. Its characteristics are captured by films and help films to explore more possibilities for representation of violence. Through the interaction between films and their all kinds of reception, the power or impotence of representation can also be a way of intervening reality for better or worse.

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<sup>1</sup> The urbanization is as opposed to the suburbanization of the same class, the latter of which is seen a typical phenomenon of an earlier period. See Sassen, *The Global City*, 340-343.

<sup>2</sup> "The other cities" referred to include Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. See Sassen, *The Global City*, 333.

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## Future Slums: Problems of Urban Space in Science Fiction Cinema

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The slum has been a staple setting of city cinema since D. W. Griffith's 1912 short film, *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*. And since that film, filmmakers have used the slum setting to frame visually any number of struggles over urban space: the informal negotiations between honest workers and criminal gangsters, between the newly arrived immigrant and the established authorities, between legality and corruption, and between modernity and whatever is defined through the slum as *not* modernity. Slums are where cinema and urban imaginaries more generally have long located and visualized whatever does not fit within social norms and middle-class society. If respectable neighbourhoods, office buildings, parks and monuments are the familiar settings for bourgeois dramas of business and pleasure, the tenements, shanties, packed diurnal and empty nocturnal streets of the cinematic slum are the setting for grinding poverty, spectacular crimes and other alternatives to bourgeois drama: they define the "other half" and thereby also "us" (the typical spectator) and show us where and how that "other half" lives. No respectable drama could ever have ended the way Griffith's does: the virtuous Little Lady (Lillian Gish) protects gang leader Snapper Kid (Elmer Booth) from the strong hand of the police; at the same time, a close-up of a hand reaching out to give Snapper Kid a sheaf of bills shows us the "Links in the System" that bind this otherworld economically to the "respectable" world of money. The slum is where mainstream movies reveal and define the social links that bind urban space together.

This article studies the emergence of the slum as a setting within a specific film genre – science fiction – where it plays a significant if not frequently remarked function, from the late 1960s until the present day.<sup>1</sup> There are, to be sure, influential future slums before the 1960s, most notably the workers' housing in Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1927); however, it is not until the late 1960s that the slum emerges cinematically as a *problem* within the future city. Indeed, one could say that it is not until the late 1960s that science fiction cinema more generally begins to engage directly with urban modernity as a problem, and that the slum becomes an important way in which science fiction represents that problem. In *Metropolis*, the problem is labor, not modernity. The workers' housing, despite its location deep beneath the earth, is never at issue per se; the workers' problem is not domestic infrastructure, housing, or public space, but working conditions. When the labor dispute is finally resolved, it is presumed that the workers will happily return to their soon-to-be-rebuilt apartment blocks with, perhaps, an improved alarm system

and evacuation route. Labor relations were no longer at stake in the same way in the future slum from the mid-60s through the end of the '80s.<sup>2</sup> Instead, what we witness is the rise of the post-apocalyptic city as a dominant setting for a nuclear imagination turned sour and a reckoning with the technological modernity that had produced and been produced by that imagination. Where postwar science fiction tended to use the city to portray a community united against a common threat – most frequently an irradiated monster – the '60s turn deployed the post-apocalyptic city to stage a society divided and the slum to visualize what was most at stake in that division: the right to the future.

Post-9/11 and post-neoliberal globalization, the slum has tended to be mobilized for a different kind of struggle over space: the right to resources and the right to mobility. Where urban science fiction from the '20s through the early '60s projected modernity into an unproblematically technologized cityscape, the future slum imagines the city to come as a struggle between modernity's liberatory promises and utopian potential and modernity's failure to fulfil those promises or to live up to its potential. The cinematic slum, visually, narratively, and thematically repudiates the spaces of urban modernity. Moreover, it manifests the hidden costs of the construction of that modernity. Nevertheless, the future slum is not irredeemably negative; rather, it creates a space to critique modernity, to make visible what has been occluded by it, and to imagine alternatives to its dominant spatial conceptions.

I choose to focus on the science fictional slum not so much for its distinction from cinematic slums more generally, but to draw attention to the ways science fiction tends to extrapolate current social questions into stark polarities and philosophical conundrums. Through science fictional representation, the dominant features of an urban imaginary gain clarity in ways they do not always do in other more conventionally realistic genres. At the same time, that clarity, as always with popular genres, entails obscuring other dominant features. I discuss what the future slum clarifies and what it obscures in urban imaginaries, and the function of this process, in two sections. The first section treats science fictional slums from the late '60s through the end of the Cold War. Here, the dominant tropes of urban representation include: the underground and underground space in both their physical and their cultural senses; new forms of sociality available to (or forced upon) the first generation to grow up within the nuclear condition; and the transformative effects of corrupt authority within urban space.

The second section treats science fictional slums after 9/11, where the slum remains associated with various undergrounds, but this time migratory, environmental, and digital in form. Within the neoliberal war on terror, the slum occupies an urban borderland, no longer physically central

but instead figuring the fraught and permeable periphery of fortified urbanity. In the city after the turn of the twenty-first century, the struggle over urban space no longer occupies the ghettoized center; instead, migrant forces cluster at the edges, while the barricaded powers-that-be reach out tentaculantly far into the hinterlands, seeking ever more space, resources, and control.

### **Slumming out of the '80s: Underground Culture and Nuclear Futures**

The most frequently rendered future cityscape through the 1970s is the ravaged core. *The Planet of the Apes* (1968) renders this image in the stark icon of the Statue of Liberty buried on the beach of what the audience has believed throughout the film was a distant planet. Out of that initial shock, the rest of the five-part *Apes* series unfolds an entire inner city: in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), New York City is rendered through its preserved subway system, buried underground along with St. Patrick's Cathedral, sheltering an atomic device which will eventually destroy the planet. In the subsequent three films, the distant simian future travels back to the near future, and the dark city streets become the setting for a battle between apes and humans that easily channels the race rioting and social unrest of the late 60s.<sup>3</sup> In dystopic New York futures from *Soylent Green* (1973) through *The Warriors* (1979) to *Escape from New York* (1981), the city has been taken over by the underclass (Sanders 366-98; Page 143-72). *Soylent Green* extrapolates population growth (at a time when the bankrupt city was actually emptying out) into the dystopic vision of an aimless society literally feeding on itself. The slum here is defined in terms of over-dense and unsanitary living conditions, as if in justification for white flight to the suburbs. There is no possible humanity left in this urban vision.

In contrast to the conventional necessity of humanism in Hollywood realism, science fiction permits a far starker presentation of urban anomie. When Tony Manera (John Travolta) is required to face the emptiness of his working-class Brooklyn life in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), he is able to take the subway that had loomed in the background of his Bay Ridge street-life throughout the film into Manhattan and the promise of a sunrise and a new life. The city goes on. Science fiction used the end of the city to envisage the end of the world. Charlton Heston has nowhere to go at the end of *Soylent Green* except into the belly of the machine beast, and nothing to do at the end of the *Planet of the Apes* except rail at the folly of his now-dead fellow Americans. James Franciscus, who plays his counterpart in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, can only walk the subway tunnels musing about the life he grew up in; there are no trains on the horizon. Still, when we see something closer to a conventional slum, we also find that the ravaged city preserves a savage vitality. The eponymous gang members in the near-future New York of Wal-

ter Hill's *The Warriors* are trapped in a hostile nocturnal cityscape, but they also know how to play it and the subway runs for them all night. There is no escape from this city as slum, but they can survive it. John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* takes a similarly bleak look at the future city; however, here, as the title tells us, there is potential to get out again. Rather than an existential condition, this city is a maximum-security prison, with an inside and an outside. We see a similar dynamic in *A Boy and His Dog* (1974), except that for the eponymous duo the feral darkness of a post-nuclear L.A. proves preferable to the repressive conformism of the artificially-maintained small-town community hidden beneath the radioactive ground.

Physical realism is not, of course, a requirement of science fiction cinema. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that those films that adopt the perspective of the slumdweller or permanent denizen of the ravaged city like *Soylent Green* or *The Warriors* lean more towards the verisimilitude of location shooting, while those more invested in the relationship between the slum space and the non-slum space are less concerned with reproducing a recognizable cityscape. Carpenter, famously, shot *Escape from New York* in the safer and more convenient St. Louis, while *A Boy and His Dog* and the *Apes* films use sets and urban detritus in desert locations for their post-apocalyptic visions. In contrast to the grittier aesthetic of the '70s city, the urban '80s, whether studio- or location-shot, tend towards stylization and theatricality. *Blade Runner* (1982), for example, is primarily shot with sets and models; when it does use locations, L.A.'s Union Station and Bradbury Building, it transforms them. The former becomes a police station and the latter, significantly, the setting of inventor J. F. Sebastian's proto-steampunk loft space, inhabited by retro-automata, thrift-store chic, and dying replicants (Pike, "City Settings," 45-9).

The warm performativity of Sebastian's space in contrast to the cold noir stylings of Deckard and Rachel helps to delineate two visions of an urban future. The latter – hard-boiled, world-weary, and dying – hearkens back to the dark cities of '40s noir, paeans to the dying urban dynamism and sociality of the heights of American urban living before the war (Reid and Walker 90-1). The former – playful, idiosyncratic, and creative – rejects postwar modernity and progressive futurism in favor of a future excavated from alternative pasts. So, while we see plenty of future-noir slums of shadows and crime, we see just as many counter-cultural slums of oppositional urban practices. As in *Blade Runner*, these twin slum imaginaries appear in different films combined in different proportions of pre-nuclear cool and post-nuclear theatricality, figuring different forms of sociality for a nuclear generation. *Radioactive Dreams* (1985), the story of two young men raised in a mountain-side bunker on hard-boiled crime fiction, finds the predictably named Philip and Marlowe emerging into a 1990s "Edge City" resembling nothing so much as an '80s punk underground of dingy clubs and posing youths in distressed thrift-shop wear. The

plot is a pastiche of neo-noir commonplaces; however, the strange effect of setting this pastiche in a post-apocalyptic slum that resembles nothing so much as the '80s urban present is to argue that the '80s underground of alternative and oppositional culture was, itself, imbued with radiation. As the title song, performed by post-punk group Sue Saad and the Next, pleads, "Get me out of this wasteland / of radioactive dreams."

'80s science fiction is steeped in radioactive dreams. The parodic neo-noir of Alex Cox's *Repo Man* (1984), also set in "Edge City" (and shot on location in the then-post-industrial and now gentrified Arts District in downtown L.A.), gains its sf twist through a vintage car with a glowing trunk that vaporizes anyone looking into it. A loving homage to the late noir whamsit of Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), the radioactive Malibu finds its ideal mate in hard-boiled repo man Harry Dean Stanton, who drives off glowing into the night sky. On the surface a bitter critique of consumerist culture – Cox carefully rewraps and relabels every prop in the film with generic design and nomenclature – *Repo Man* also suggests in its fantastic conclusion that a radioactive dream may be the only way of escaping from that same culture. In John Carpenter's 1988 sf-horror film *They Live*, special sunglasses reveal L.A. yuppies as grinning skulls possessed by aliens and a cityscape, similar to Cox's generic consumer goods, full of coercive billboards and magazines promoting consumerist conformism. Resistance is rooted in Justiceville, an '80s version of the Depression-era Hoovervilles, until repressive authorities bulldoze the settlement and its inhabitants.

Carpenter filmed Justiceville on location just east of downtown L.A. and peopled its multi-ethnic population with extras drawn from the local homeless community. Wilson quotes the webpage on the easy contrast with the modern cityscape that rises in the background: "The dramatic backdrop of high-rise office towers, freeway lights and air traffic contrast [sic] sharply with the shadowy hovels on the set" (32). This underclass appears temporarily to prevail, but the long-term odds look doubtful. As one of the possessed yuppies opines of the aliens, "They're free enterprisers. The earth is just another developing planet. *Their* third world." The setting references the noir city ("Much of the film was shot at night... working with a limited supply of light" [Wilson 32]) while contrasting it with the burgeoning growth of postmodernity.<sup>4</sup> What Nayman calls "the sheer blatancy of Carpenter's tale of fraudulent surfaces" makes it endlessly available as a primer for ideology critique.<sup>5</sup>

*Blade Runner*, *Repo Man*, *They Live* and other '80s sf films use the visual contrasts available in L.A.'s slums to ground an inchoate call for change within a sense of entrapment between a deadly past and an impossible future. What emerged from these films was a visual lexicon for the



cinematic future that remains with us today; as Davis presciently argued at the end of the '80s, "Hollywood's pop apocalypses and pulp science fiction have been more realistic, and politically perceptive [than 'contemporary urban theory'] in representing the programmed hardening of the urban surface in the wake of the social polarizations of the Reagan era" (223).

While L.A.-based sf favored a cinematic duality, elsewhere we find past or present separated in the future. New York sf of the '80s tends to eschew the nostalgia of noir trappings altogether in favor of a more radically alternative future set in neighborhoods on the margins of or in outright war with the nuclear condition. Lizzie Borden's 1983 agit-prop pseudo-documentary *Born in Flames* imagines a plethora of feminist responses to a patriarchal police state on the streets of a Manhattan dominated by counter-cultural voices. The experimental post-nuclear porn movie *Café Flesh* (1982) extrapolates an irradiated underground culture in which the 1% still able to tolerate sexual contact performs for the other 99. John Sayles's congenially left-wing parable *Brother from Another Planet* (1984) subverts the slum dynamics of New York. To the brown-skinned alien (Joe Morton), Harlem is simultaneously a terrifyingly immersive experience, the only place he fits in, and just another working-class neighborhood.

Other examples root their future almost solely in the past. This is especially the case of the British dystopias *1984* (1984) and *Brazil* (1985), both of which record the future, or the alternative present, as a nightmare image of postwar England, a London by any other name where any sign of dissidence leads immediately to arrest and torture, and where the texture of everyday life has been turned inside out. In *1984*, the semantic betrayal occurs through language, the dismal phenomenon of double-speak; in *Brazil*, director Terry Gilliam visualizes wrongness through the ducts that spill out of the walls, ceilings, and floors to dominate private and public urban space, infrastructural entrails pouring out of their proper place in the body politic. Here, too, the dreams are as radioactive as the nightmares, especially in *Brazil*, where Sam's kitsch fantasy of a winged angel battling the forces of oppression to rescue the damsel in distress feels as toxic as the torture fantasies of the corrupt office of Information Retrieval. "Reality," reads a simple but pointed graffito on the side of the Shangri-La Towers. In the nuclear wastelands projected out of the '80s, "reality" can be found only in the background of the set for the futuristic city.

Like the graffito on the side of the tower block in Gilliam's alternate London, the future slum is where '80s science fiction locates whatever devices it uses to visualize the necessity of seeing past what appears in order to get to what is, the reality obscured by the corruption of social institutions and the brainwashing of the nuclear condition. John Nada gets the dark glasses that reveal the truth about an alien takeover from a mission-style church next to Justiceville. Otto finds in

the “Repo Code” the anti-system he needs to articulate his nihilistic disgust with both conformism and pure rebellion. In *Total Recall* (1990), Arnold Schwarzenegger’s construction worker travels from the illusory comfort of a corporatized 2084 metropolis to the misery of the Martian slum, only to discover that the slum itself is as artificial a construct as his luxurious life had been. Future Detroit-set *RoboCop* (1987) and the Neo Tokyo of Japanese anime classic *Akira* (1988) suggest a similar dynamic primarily through their plotting, which reveals in both cases a deep betrayal by corrupt authorities that affects both the slum-dwelling underclass and any honest surviving bourgeois or public servants. This slum dynamic is mostly limited to the U.S. and allied countries such as Britain or Japan that readily adapted the dynamic to their own urban imaginaries. In contrast, Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979, USSR) plots an urban trajectory on railroad tracks through derelict factories and warehouses to reach The Zone, an alternate space within the city center that is drenched in the colors, sounds, and textures of the natural world while just as clearly saturated in radioactivity. The drab Soviet slum somehow contains within its center a core that simultaneously blows one’s mind, poisons it, and (perhaps) grants one’s wildest dreams. Because it was such an effective mode for thinking the unthinkable – nuclear war and life in the shadow of that war – science fiction cinema especially in the ’80s provides a rich archive of the nuclear condition within urban space. The slum proved to be especially apt for appropriation to this archive. It provided a familiar repository for the positive *and* negative associations with community and solidarity, a powerful set of visual cues – urban infrastructure, high-rise housing, and both empty and overpopulated streetscapes – for reassessing modernity, and a cultural imaginary dense in negativity but with streaks of utopianism. The artificiality and performativity of so much of ’80s science fiction especially drew attention to the ideological power of the nuclear condition while the residual allegiance to an actual and recognizable cityscape maintained a modicum of faith in materiality and, again, “reality.” Like Schwarzenegger’s Hauser, saved by the flashes of “genuine” memory in his constructed personality of Quaid in *Total Recall* and like Robocop, who brings down the corrupt authorities of Detroit through the refusal of his human trace to forget, the science fictional slum asserts its basic humanity as shield against falsehood and illusion even as the spaces of modernity it shows us function mainly by denying basic humanity.

## The Global Slum after the Twentieth Century: Neoliberals, Zombies, and Transnational Migrants

It is not difficult to consider *The Matrix* (1999) and other late '90s sf-noir films such as *Dark City* (1998), *eXistenZ* (1999) and the *Thirteenth Floor* (1999) all devoted to the confusion or choice between illusion and reality as bridges to the quite different dynamics of post 9/11 science fiction.<sup>6</sup> *The Matrix*, in particular, makes of the slum its token of "reality." In a world coded by AI to persuade humans of its reality, the nocturnal and noir zones of the Matrix seem directed at the particular daydreams of Morpheus, Neo, Trinity, and their Zion allies, their chosen uniform of black leather and shades the perfect correlative of the seedy hotels, perpetually rain-drenched underpasses, and derelict subway stations in which they battle Agent Smith in a virtual duel with physical consequences in the actual world of their rebel vessel. The '90s city is the setting for a brief post-Cold-War reckoning with cyberspace, when the "desert of the real" still seemed a consequential choice and the gentrifying cities of the global north had not quite yet become the playgrounds of the elite the new century would ratify them as. But the war on terror and the ascendancy of neoliberalism quickly pushed the terrain of the urban imaginary out towards the peripheral phenomena of migration, control of resources, and security. At the same time, science fiction as a movie genre became more and more the global vernacular that neo-noir had been during the 1990s, as digital photography, editing, and effects made production and distribution cheaper and more efficient and filmmakers of the global south found it to be an effective medium for thinking through contemporary problems on a transnational level (Feeley and Wells; Frelik 249, 253).

The trajectory of South African-Canadian filmmaker Neill Blomkamp is not only instructive but central to this global shift in science fiction. All three of his feature films – *District 9* (2009), *Elysium* (2013), and *Chappie* (2015) – are set primarily in urban slums, two in Johannesburg and one in a global extrapolation from that city's spatial dynamics. And each of these slums is simultaneously local and transnational: District 9 is a peripheral Johannesburg ghetto for "prawns" (as the film's aliens are derisively termed) and Nigerian weapons dealers; the ruins of L.A. in *Elysium* have become a peripheral township serving the gated community in the giant space habitat orbiting above it, on a globalized Johannesburg model; and the Soweto-set squatted power station in *Chappie*, shared by local hip hop duo Die Antwoord, the Latino sidekick Amerika (played by American actor Jose Pablo Cantillo), the brown-skinned "nerd" Deon Williams (played by Indian actor Dev Patel), and the eponymous artificial-intelligence-powered robot. Moreover, the malevolent corporation that causes much of the mischief (and also inadvertently provides the solution) in each film is explicitly multinational in constitution and function. In *District 9* and

*Elysium*, the slums exist primarily as a security measure; they are gated, fenced, and fortified ghettos. In *Chappie*, the entire city will be abandoned to the criminal element; order is maintained by a robot police force, and when this force is hacked, all hell breaks loose. There is much good still residing in Blomkamp's slums – even the hardcore hooligans in *Chappie* reveal late-breaking hearts of gold – and not really any good to be found anywhere else. Moreover, his films make abundantly clear that the evil there is in these slums is just as much the result of modernity as a rebellion against it. The most visually evocative moment in *Chappie* is also its principal Johannesburg location: Ponte City, the tallest building in Africa, frequently cast in movies as a vertical slum (Brown), here inhabited by the city's reigning crime boss and, in “real life,” a toweringly ambivalent symbol of the city's world-class aspirations. Especially given their narrative incongruencies and vexed racial dynamics, the enduring power in all three of these films comes from the incisive anger with which they eviscerate the hypocritical nostrums of neoliberalism. Blomkamp's films use the pulp tropes of science fiction to stack our sympathies fully on the side of the aliens, even when those aliens are simply the struggling poor, as in *Elysium*. Who can argue that Chappie does not make a better Indestructible Robot Gangsta No. 1 than a hapless police droid No. 22?

South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's films *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) are equally explicit parables of capitalism and modernity mobilized through the urban slum imaginary. *Snowpiercer* takes the railroad, icon of cinematic modernity, and transforms it into a vehicle of exploitative horror, an engine of capitalist inequality hurtling through a ruined environment. The only acceptable, if futile, action, is simply to fight your way from the back to the front only to be told that the system is necessary.<sup>7</sup> Bong's genius is visual: he films the narrow confines of railway carriages as a cross between Holocaust trains and overcrowded slum housing. *The Host* transforms the landscape of central Seoul in equally imaginative fashion, rendering the concrete landscape of a riverside park and iconic bridge into the playground of an insectoid monster, the unwitting “host” of a giant parasite. Birthed out of a laboratory run by a corrupt American scientist with the complicity of his Korean assistant, the creature emerges from its chrysalis affixed to the underside of the bridge. The bystanders toss it food like another urban attraction before it, inevitably, tosses them like food instead.

Unlike the generally benign if often ineffective military of the '50s monster movies to which *The Host* pays homage, these authorities are as intractable and malevolent as the engineers of the train in *Snowpiercer*; they wantonly quarantine, torture, and determine to spray the populace with a toxic chemical to protect against a non-existent virus. Bong films much of the action inside the drainage infrastructure, and within the spooky concrete labyrinth beneath the bridge and along the river, which the monster has made its own. The indestructible landscape of modernity proves the

perfect host; the hapless and sometimes heroic victims, on the other hand, who live in a trailer in the middle of the riverside park, seem to be just passing through.

Marginality and migration are equally at the core of much of recent Latin-American science fiction. Even the freedom to speculate seems a hard-earned privilege to filmmakers of the global south usually confined to a limited repertoire of themes and topics. As Julio Arrieta, leader of the theatrical and filmmaking collective La Villa 21 Barraca, based in a Buenos Aires *villa*, or peripheral slum, put it in an interview in the documentary *Estrellas* (2007) about their alien-invasion project, *El Nexo*, “Where is it written that you can’t have aliens in the slum? And note,” he continues, “that we always appear as thieves or hooligans, but we never appear as heroes or lawyers. Because we have a certain look, we get fixed roles.” Not only does science fiction promise an escape from the clichés of the urban underclass and the global south, but it provides a novel set of tropes for representing that very underclass differently than the mode of “realism” to which such representations have customarily been confined. Both Alfonso Cuarón and Fernando Meirelles, once they gained entry into the ranks of Hollywood with naturalistic urban-based dramas (*Y Tu Mamá También* [2001] and *Cidade de Deus* [2002], respectively), chose science fiction, among other unconventional genre choices. Perhaps not surprisingly, both *Children of Men* (2006) and *Blindness* (2008) locate their action in permutations of the future slum. Both settings resonate strongly with 21<sup>st</sup>-century issues of migration. The second half of *Children of Men* takes place in a fortified ghetto of abandoned tower blocks for refugees in the south of England. The irony is that Theo (Clive Owen) is able to use this terrifying ghetto to hide from the authorities with Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey), the pregnant woman he is escorting through a world of infertility. The camp is simultaneously a Hobbesian nightmare and the cause of the world’s preservation and hope, as they eventually escape through a sewer tunnel onto the open sea. The migratory segregation in *Blindness* is more allegorical but no less pointed, as those stricken blind by a strange virus are quarantined and left to their own devices, in a world even more nightmarish than Cuarón’s. As in so many zombie movies, physical difference or disease determines rights, or loss of rights to space and to the status of humanity.

Most contemporary imaginings of a population divided by a virus into the living and the dead (or undead), especially those from the global North, take the point of view of the humans rather than the afflicted. Nevertheless, there remains a strong charge of global class warfare in this imaginary. The cynical protagonists of the horror comedy *Juan of the Dead* (2010), shot exclusively in Havana, mordantly name the zombies overrunning their city “dissidents,” after the lame government explanation for the apocalyptic disaster.<sup>8</sup> Zombies may have been invented during the Cold War as a cinematic refraction of conformism, but in the twenty-first century they look

more and more like a way of thinking through the dehumanizing effect of neoliberalism and globalization, the coming conflict over dwindling resources, and the ever-more-desperate spectacle of refugee populations. It is not far from the debased behavior of the majority of the refugees in *Children of Men* or *Blindness* to the unthinking savagery of the infected in *Twenty-Eight Days Later* (2002) or the ferals in *I Am Legend* (2007), or numerous urban zombie films around the world. Nor, for that matter, is zombie behavior much different from the equally unthinking savagery with which the human survivors tend to dispatch the undead hordes besieging their cities at every turn. As in the post-apocalyptic New York of the '70s and '80s, the zombification of the population transforms the city into an enormous, dangerous and unpredictable slumscape. In *I Am Legend*, for example, the lone human survivor has squatted and fortified an elegant townhouse on Washington Square Park, furnished with Old Masters lifted from MoMA and the Met; in contrast, the ferals live in a dank, disgusting, and blacked-out parking garage in Chelsea. It's a social geography dating from 1980s squatters that ignores later gentrification, but it's an iconic social geography nonetheless. Recognizing the ferals' status as slumdweller is the audience's first begrudging step in recognizing their humanity, a step that Neville (Will Smith), blinded by his own privilege, is himself never able to make. The English horror-comedy *Attack the Block* (2011) makes a similar point more humorously, using an alien invasion in South London council housing to force its audience to accept the humanity and ingenuity of the intrepid slumdweller who refuse to give up their turf to any aliens. The immigrant and other marginal communities imprisoned in the locked-down Paris periphery in *Banlieue 13* (2004) and its sequel *Banlieue 13 – Ultimatum* (2009) are similarly dehumanized; however, they are partially redeemed by the physical grace of inhabitant Leïto's (David Belle) parkour virtuosity.<sup>9</sup> As Michael Rubenstein suggests, this alternative mode of moving through urban modernity indicates as well an alternative mode of thinking through urban modernity (196-203). Despite (or, really, because of) its enclosure within a fortified and unserviced ghetto within an exploitative film bereft of narrative interest, the future slum gives rise to alternative spatial and critical practices more adequate, perhaps, to the cities to come.

Alex Rivera's transnational border science fiction, *Sleep Dealer* (2008) pulls together a number of the features of the contemporary slum imaginary in its tale of life in the slums and factories of "Tijuana del Futuro."<sup>10</sup> Their bodies no longer admitted or needed within the U.S., migrants instead work in factories on the Mexican side, remotely operating robot agricultural, domestic, and construction workers through metal nodes that plug directly into their nervous systems. It's virtual-reality labor in 12-hour shifts that drains their energy and vitality as surely as we are told that Internet and gaming addictions will do. To recharge, they use the same nodes for virtual

drinking, sex, drugs, and other escapism. The only difference, in other words, from the present day, is that they are exploited virtually and at arm's length. As Villazana notes, the setting marks the paradoxical migration; in this film, "the urban landscape becomes a *transnational virtual mobile city*, a sort of bridge between Mexico and the United States" (224). At the same time, multinational companies have grabbed water rights and employ their own remote guardians, from the other side of the border, to police their seized territory from water thieves and "Aqua-Terrorists" via remote drones and warplanes. The portentously named Memo has migrated from his Oaxacan village of Santa Elena del Río to support his mother and brother after his house has been destroyed and his father killed by drones putatively protecting the water in the dammed river that used to belong to the villagers and which it now sells to them. Memo travels to Tijuana del Futuro, where he obtains black-market "nodes" from a "coyoteka" who is herself milking him for a life story of memories she sells as downloads through her nodes and sells online. The only trustworthy advice Memo can get is from a trio of elders in the peripheral slum where he lives (filmed on location along the border [Wells 77]). Blinded, we assume, from years of working for the "sleep dealers," as the factories are known, the trio explains the world to him in the manner of village elders. Rivera's sentimental plotting allows the exploitative journalist, Luz, and the culpable drone pilot, Rudy, at least partially to redeem themselves. His primary interest, it seems, is in the complex speculative geography he has invented, visualizing for us the nexus of stolen resources, exploitative transactions, and digital frontiers that molds transnational networks. Rather than a simple movement from south to north, Rivera argues, these worlds are linked through natural resources, through human resources, and through innumerable digital connections, with goods and information constantly moving in both directions. Twice, Memo visits the wall that runs down into the Pacific Ocean south of San Diego, a barrier to corporeal but not sensorial crossing. And several times he cuts away to a perspective shot of an enormous white metal pipeline receding into the frame as it crosses the desert. In real life, probably a water pipe; in the language of *Sleep Dealer* it contains the wires transmitting thousands of neural signals; in our imaginary it is the infrastructure of the modern world that is buried in the middle-class world but always exposed in and transformed by the slum.

## Conclusion

There are many other contemporary permutations of science fiction cinema than the films set in future slums: the privileged future worlds of AI dramas such as *Her* or *Ex Machina*; the metaphorical, multidimensional, or dystopian adventures inspired by *Star Wars*, Marvel and other

comics, and YA fiction; the investigations of bioethics and animal consciousness in the rebooted *Apes* franchise and elsewhere. These sub-genres share their use of the estranging gaze of science fiction – as Darko Suvin defined it, the genre functions by making the world strange so that we can think about it differently (372; Wells 72) – which separates the viewer from the charged emotions of the contemporary issues they project into their imagined worlds. This effect is especially striking in the future slum, since slum naturalism traditionally is based on the tension between emotional identification and class repulsion. Moreover, as Wells argues of border sf, the estrangement characteristic of the genre interacts powerfully with the estrangement characteristic of capitalist labor and also the migrant's geographic estrangement (72). As opposed to naturalist dramas of poverty and migration, which work on us through our identification with the emotions of actors as suffering individuals, science fictional slums ask us to identify with specific situations and, as Jameson put it, to reflect on them in a totalizing way unavailable to us in the present day (“Progress” 152; Wells 84-5). And they do so in the form of what Jameson calls a “spatial enclave,” a “pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change” (*Archaeologies*, 15). Within such an enclave, we identify with science fictional protagonists far less through their static character, which tends to be defined only in terms of their function in the plot, than through their relationship to the ideas, the technology, and the whatsits of the imagined world. What we gain from intellectual distance, we lose, naturally, from empathy. The loss of empathy is especially striking in the wanton and guiltless violence characteristic of zombie movies. But I would suggest also that the rise the slum as setting in science fiction cinema has itself partly been motivated by an impatience with the inefficacy of empathy as a motor for change and its effectiveness as an engine of stasis. Cities are where societies have for millennia imagined community; slums are where within cities for several centuries societies have imagined the loss of community and the costs of that loss. Central to the future slum of the late Cold War was its function in registering the bankruptcy of radioactive dreams and the few remaining traces of liberatory potential within them. Central to the future slum since 9/11 has been its function in registering within an urban landscape new crises of migration, dwindling resources, and the paradox of borders. There are no answers to be found within science fictional cities, but we would do well to attend to the new ways they allow us to ask questions.

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<sup>1</sup> On the slum in cinema more generally, see Pike, “Cinematic Slum.”

<sup>2</sup> Wells makes a similar distinction between modernism's proposed “alliance between labor and capital” and the pessimistic, more “atomistic” visions of post-modern science fiction (74). While I find this distinction persuasive, my focus is on the ways the dwindling of hope in reconciliation opens up other kinds of space within more recent urban imaginaries.



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<sup>3</sup> Greene unpacks the films' racial allegory; Nama discusses how the films progress from working to "decenter whiteness" to "overt racial polemics and paranoia" (126-32).

<sup>4</sup> Decker instructively connects Carpenter's use of L.A. and of Nada as a "mechanic hero" with the 19th-century tradition of the urban mystery. As Pike argues, that tradition itself passes from the 19th century through film noir before it reaches the 1980s (*Metropolis*, 211-19).

<sup>5</sup> The most thoroughgoing and persuasive reading of *They Live* as ideology critique is Žižek, *They Live!*, and in more polished form in the opening of *Pervert's Guide*. See also Lethem, who, apologizing for his "jargon," terms *They Live* "probably the stupidest film ever to take ideology as its explicit subject" (7).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Lavery on the relation to gaming; Newman on the "illusion" of "normal life"; Nunn on the theme of "invisible and all-pervasive control."

<sup>7</sup> We find a similar scenario, and a similar mistrust of authorities, in the Korean zombie film *Train to Busan* (2016), where the human survivors must somehow share a bullet train with a horde of undead in order to reach the only city still open to them.

<sup>8</sup> On the use of this term as a satirical "overturning" of visual and linguistic symbols of the Revolution, see Maguire.

<sup>9</sup> *Broken Mansions* (2014), an American remake of the first film, which also features Belle, is set in a walled-off ghetto in Detroit.

<sup>10</sup> Rivera's timely synthesis has justly attracted a good bit of scholarly attention. I borrow the term "border science fiction" from Wells, who argues strongly for the utility of sf cinema in the critical study of transnational labor. While Wells in particular touches on the film's setting in Tijuana, this scholarship (Duran, Heide, Jeffries, Martín-Rivera, Orihuela and Hageman, Villazana) tends to focus on specific topics such as border studies, transnational labor, virtual reality versus material reality, or cosmopolitics without sustained engagement with questions of urban cinematic representation or imaginaries.

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## Dome and Away: *Logan's Run* Post-Apocalyptic Cityscapes

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The rapid growth of population has been a global concern for quite some time due to its severe environmental, poverty control and social instability implications. A concern that becomes even more acute if one is to accept the United Nations' Population Division latest predictions that by 2050, more than two-thirds of the world's population is to live in cities (United Nations 1). Despite not being new, the concept of smart city has, in recent years, acquired privileged status amongst city planners and imagineers all over the world due to the belief that its focus on innovation, technology, ecology and people's well-being can contribute to a more sustainable urban paradigm (Cowley; Dameri; Lindner). Mostly, smart cities are fast becoming a tangible representation of the futuristic cityscapes which were, till recently, confined to science fiction literature and cinema. Thus, it is no wonder that these tend to be regarded as a sort of dream-come-true project with a strong emphasis on the notion that the products and mechanism generated therein will ultimately "ensure the 'good life'" (Foley et. al. 84). Whether this premise is a hundred percent valid it remains to be seen as smart-city initiatives are still being put to the test. Yet, the dangerous implications of present-day societies' blind faith and dependence on technology have been persistently tackled in science fiction texts since the 1950s. A fine example of one such text is Michael Anderson's film *Logan's Run* (1976), a dystopian account of the pleasures and perils of the inhabitants of a computer controlled domed city in a post-apocalyptic future scenario.

As defended by several researchers (Bina et al.; Foley et. al.), science fiction's speculative spectrum regarding architecture and urban planning is particularly relevant as it provides "alternative insights into what challenges lie ahead," both in terms of "future 'possibilities' and 'warning signals'" (Bina et. al. 167). Consequently, both material and imaginary cityscapes "mingle and resonate together in complex and unpredictable ways" (Graham 395) since they influence each other. Bearing all this in mind, this article will first consider science fiction's impact in the conception of the city of the future. While doing so, it will also consider how the notion of city of the future often carries utopian overtones, only to see them degenerate into dystopian scenarios. Subsequently, it will examine the different architectural styles present in *Logan's Run* and their intended

symbolism. Lastly, it will look into some warning signs regarding the environmental and personal privacy challenges that come with living in a smart city.

### **Cities of the Imagination**

The association of technological development with innovation along with human and social progress explains the allocation of considerable funding for techno-science research in many developed countries. In this context, advanced technology is “described in terms of empowerment and performance improvement” (Bina et. al. 174). In other words, technology is future itself.

This perspective somehow perpetuates the rationalist utopia of the Enlightenment which positions science, technology and rationality as the motivating forces for human development, a notion that found its way into science fiction novels and films having, as its ultimate goal the achievement of a new and better social order. Considering that urban development has always played a considerable part in people’s well-being, European utopians and novelists like Samuel Butler, William Morris, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells resorted to literature as a means of expressing their concerns regarding the dangers of “a naïve idolatry of the Machine” (Bellagamba 83). With the entrance in the twentieth century, the opposite trend is observed in the United States. The potential of technological civilization is celebrated in pulp science fiction magazines, whose stories and vibrant illustrations “of idealized future cities,” on many occasions, suggest “the perfectly geometric, often circular or grid form of the ideal cities of the ancient world or the utopias of modern times” (Bellagamba 84).

As the century progressed, this enthusiasm for all things technological started to fade and the city of the future became the epitome of estrangement and authoritarianism in science fiction texts. This is particularly true in filmic narratives where “the visions of utopia” commonly exhibited “prove illusory or oppressive” (King and Krzywinska 15). Technology is no longer seen as the solution to all humankind’s problems. Instead, it is portrayed “as a means of social domination, rationalization and manipulation by government and corporations, leading sometimes to the loss of rights and privacy” (Bina et al. 174). The city is a downright artificial landscape and, in many cases, “separated from nature” (Bina et al. 174). This perception is also backed by Smiljanic and Mlinar, whose study defines five different types of science fiction cities: metropolis (those represented as totalitarian mega cities and which favour Modernist architecture for its simple, yet oppressive and heavy forms, i.e. *Logan’s Run*, 1976; *Metropolis*, 1927); City-Machines (those represented as space stations, i.e. *A Space Odyssey*, 1968); degenerative cities (late-capitalist, decentered megalopolis whose signs of disintegration are starting to show and which display a



preference for a post-modern architectural style, i.e. *Blade Runner*, 1982; *Brazil*, 1985); regressive cities (those set in post-apocalyptic settings which have fallen prey to crime, to social, economic and moral decline due to the collapse of civilization, i.e. the *Mad Max* tetralogy, 1979, 1981, 1985 and 2015); and virtual space cities (those which are abstract entities rather than actual physical spaces, despite adopting the structure of mega western cities, i.e. *The Matrix*, 1999) (250, 253). However, these different categories must not be perceived as rigid given that, more often than not, the cities displayed in them comprise a plurality of architectural registers. Such is the case of *Logan's Run* dome city, as it will be demonstrated.

Due to its plasticity and hybridity, science fiction is a hard to define genre. However, and for the sake of accuracy, henceforward the term *sci-fi* will be used instead due to its strong association with cinema and because it is “the standard term used to designate blockbuster SF cinema and mass market enterprises like the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises” (Rieder 2). Either way, both designations imply the “interaction of estrangement and cognition” as well as “an imaginative framework alternative to” the creator’s and spectator’s “empirical environment” (Suvin 375). In other words, when undergoing a process of *cognitive estrangement*, the viewers agree to be taken out of their perceived reality into another “world which seems strange and disjointed, but believably so” (Graham 395). Given the fact that all this happens in the realm of speculative imagination, the types of cities mentioned earlier on are “cities of the imagination” (Sobchack, “Cities” 4) as they “exist somewhere between the real of concrete space and the subjective realm of our conception and experience of that space” (Collie 425).

It is now a commonly accepted notion that sci-fi has the power to raise social and political consciousness. Its capacity to make the hypothetical feel “real” contributes to its foresight ability, instigates viewers to question the preview of the future being disclosed and, ultimately, triggers a demand for change (Bina et. al.; Foley et. al.). More so because, rather than referring solely to the future, sci-fi is about the present for it mirrors and, somehow, responds to society’s current fears and anxieties (Matrix 94). Therefore, “sci-fi cities, whilst being futuristic fables, inevitably resonate powerfully with contemporary concerns. They are also, ... , pivotal in constituting the materialities of contemporary cities” (Graham 395). To put it differently, “imaginary architecture ... is more than mere background” (Sobchack, “Cities” 4).

### ***Logan's Run* (s)mart Architecture**

Based on the 1967 homonymous novel by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson, *Logan's Run* was adapted to film under the direction of Michael Anderson and released in 1976. Both, the novel and the film, disclose a growing feeling of unsteadiness and insecurity caused by “a widespread perception that the foundations of the American Dream had been shattered by years of decline and frustration” (Tomasulo 157). The Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal and the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s had all contributed to this perception. Young people's restlessness and their perceived permissive lifestyle were considered threats to American values and social stability. Thus, *Logan's Run* conveys an implicit criticism to the possible emergence of a heavily technological and youth-ruled society (Chapman and Cull 148; Tomasulo 158).

Set in a post-apocalyptic future, a large community made up exclusively of very young people seems to live a leisurely and stress-free life in the City of Domes, a technologically sustained and controlled city-state. The urban environment presented on screen is that of a domed metropolis, carefully planned, featuring modernist/brutalist buildings amidst wide, well-arranged green areas and a lake. A disposition that resembles an architect's model of a futuristic spa resort. The idea of private motor vehicles does not exist. Instead, there is a system of suspended tubed railways where small pod cars slide in an orderly manner and stop at specific stations to drop off or pick up passengers.

The atmosphere is one of pure hedonism with matching futuristic décors. For instance, the interior city spaces reflect a commercial and exhibitional quality projecting the idea that not only are they consumption-based (Babish 28), but they also allow for those who use them to showcase themselves. The city itself resembles a huge Shopping Mall, a mart-like precinct which epitomizes the transition from modernity to postmodernity by embracing its role as a total space of consumption (Babish 202). Plastic surgery, gyms, psychedelic drugs, love shops and dinners are but a few examples of the type of commodities available under the dome. What is more, because the community lacks “a societal system of work” (Babish 203) there are no social classes. Likewise, the concept of nuclear family as well as that of generation have been eradicated seeing that absolutely all aspects of the citizens' lives, from conception to death, are controlled by computers. This always-on monitoring system feeds on big data and pushes people into a data-driven life dynamics (Matrix 93). The City of Domes is, thus, an extreme example of a smart city while also a reflection of Cold War paranoia.

With plenty of free time on their hands, its pleasure-seeking dwellers indulge in physical exercise, recreational drug use and casual sex. Not only is this extreme pursuit of pleasure a *panem et circenses* strategy meant to prevent citizens from questioning and rebelling against the validity of *status quo*, but it also conveys a false yet inebriating sense of freedom that keeps the population compliant with a set of myths (Chapman and Cull 148; Brerenton 171). Being a sci-fi film, this apparent free and “good life” comes with a cost. And a high cost it is, considering that the maintenance of the community’s social equilibrium requires that the life span of all its dwellers be abruptly interrupted at the age of 30 by submitting willingly to “renewal.” By choosing this particular age as the dwellers’ termination date, *Logan’s Run* is alluding to the hippie slogan “don’t trust anyone over 30” (Abbott 110; Telotte and Duchovnay 56) while, simultaneously, condemning it by showing one of its possible consequences.

In order to identify those who must perish, all dwellers carry a life clock in the palm of their hands, in the shape of an implanted crystal whose colour changes according to the age of the person. Once it turns black, it is time for renewal. The renewal ceremony, a euphemism for death, takes place in the arena of a Coliseum-like structure called the carrousel. Once inside, and before an enthusiastic and cheering crowd, the bodies of those up for renewal are lifted and lethally lasered in a choreographed show that resembles a live videogame. Despite the futuristic setting, both the space and the event described are reminiscent of Ancient Rome’s recreational architecture and forms of entertainment (Brerenton 171). An aesthetic choice that seems to stress the *panem et circenses* analogy.

This shocking requisite, which aims to solve resource-scarcity problems by controlling demography, somehow disrupts the utopian appeal of this forever-young community. As a matter of fact, many nearing the “last day” spectrum rebel against this fate and attempt at breaking out of the dome – the *runners*. Yet, their chances of escaping are dim as the *sandmen*, an all-male state police whose job is to “monitor and regulate this chronopolitical economy” (Matrix 88), which will hunt and mercilessly eradicate them. Nonetheless, this order of things is greatly unsettled when Logan 5 (Michael York), a sandman, starts to question it and becomes a runner himself. Together with Jessica 6 (Jenny Agutter), a dissenter that belongs to an underground resistance movement, Logan 5 embarks on an odyssey, outside the dome, with numerous perils that need to be overcome in order to reach “Sanctuary”; that is, the runners’ hypothetical promised land.

As noticed by Stephen Babish, *Logan’s Run* exhibits several “consistent diegetic spaces” (25) emerging from specific *mise en scène* architectural choices which should be “subject to the same interpretative protocols as film and literature” (23). Borrowing from Beatriz Colomina, Babish

defends that “architecture is essentially a mass medium” (22-23) and, as such, it is a text that requires reading. For instance, the decision to use geodesic domes as the main structure in the film is both symptomatic and symbolic. First and foremost, the concept came out of R. Buckminster Fuller’s utopian impulse to provide energy-efficient and inexpensive housing for 1950s America. Due to their environmental friendly and functional nature, as well as their potential for communal living, they were embraced by the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s. On that account, they became a symbol for counterculture utopianisms. However, domes also became “a prototyping technique for generating forms of emergency shelter” (Diaz 94), which is something of an advantage in disaster scenarios, namely a nuclear war. Therefore, domes acquire a twofold significance. While they can be recognized as a utopian production, they can also be read as a foresight signal of a disaster waiting to happen. Yet, the versatility of domes does not end here. They also double as a protection from wild nature’s adversity and as an example of a carceral compound (Abbott 109). While the “hermetically sealed artificial bio-system” (Brerenton 172) safeguards citizens from nature’s ruthlessness, it also blocks them from accessing the natural world.

Two other architectural settings that deserve mentioning, and which stand in clear contrast with the idealized (s)mart cityscape of the domed metropolis, are the decaying industrial structure located under the domes and Cathedral. A point to be made is that they both bring regressive cities to mind and, as such, there is something apocalyptic about them. In the first case, it invokes a prison-break scenario with its dark metal staircases leading to tunnels, secret passages and dungeons. Given its underground status, it becomes the headquarters for the runners’ resistance movement. In the second case, Cathedral stands as an example of a ghettoized, inhospitable and degraded site or quadrant inhabited solely by child and juvenile delinquents – the *cubs*. All things considered, these ominous urban features seem to indicate that not all is well in the City of Domes.

### **Visions of the Future**

Once outside the dome, Logan 5 and Jessica 6 face a reality that can be recognized as the result of an environmental catastrophe. They go from experiencing polar temperatures during their crossing of an ice cave, which serves as a morgue for all runners listed as missing by the Dome’s computer, to enduring the hazards that come with finding oneself amidst territory that has been profusely reclaimed by nature. Having lived all their lives in an urban sociotechnological sheltered *milieu* they initially find it hard to adapt to an untamed natural world where, as Jessica notes,

“everything hurts.” As their journey progresses they reach an abandoned city. Contrary to the City of Domes, which is a purpose built set with no authenticity concerns, the second city staring in *Logan’s Run* is easily recognized as Washington D.C.. Yet, for storytelling purposes, Washington’s tradition and authority has been undermined (Nowell-Smith 104). Its neoclassical grandeur and civilizational value are in a state of decay. Washington is nothing but ruins, “an abandoned landscape on a radically altered planet” (Sobchack, “Cities” 13). The city has been taken over by nature and there is only one inhabitant left – an old man (played by Peter Ustinov) resembling a biblical figure – living at a library, also in decline as if hinting at the loss of the value of knowledge, as opposed to that of information gathered by technological means (Bina et. al. 175). Logan and Jessica’s contact with the old man and with Lincoln’s statue covered in ivy at the Lincoln Memorial, is their first exposure to old age and to a symbol of liberal democracy (Berenton 172), two dimensions that have been eliminated from the City of Domes.

The fact that Washington is presented as a ruin is somehow demonstrative that grand civilizations are perishable too. Again, this seems to illustrate the Cold War dread of annihilation that swept the USA during that anxiety-fueled period. Nevertheless, renewal is always possible. For instance, Washington’s ability to reassert itself as a symbol of freedom is addressed when Logan, while at the library, kills Francis (Richard Jordan), a sandman that has obstinately chased the pair, using the American flag as a weapon and gaining his freedom. Moreover, the state of wilderness they found outside the dome is one that “has the possibilities of social rebirth” (Abbott 110). A prospect that Logan 5 wishes to share with all of those that are still captives of the dome and triggers him to return. Once there, while being interrogated by the central computer, he prompts its destruction by conveying too much information and thus overloading its systems. The destruction of the central computer leads also to the destruction of the domes’ seals and to the consequent release of all the dwellers.

Either way, both Washington and the City of Domes can be understood as the result of an extreme future scenario (Yeoman and Wouters 284). If the former finds itself in a regressive state due to some sort of natural or human caused disaster, the latter is a vision of what the future may hold should climate change, food, water and fuel supply-related disturbances start to escalate. On top of that, the viewers are confronted by “the ambiguities of being human in a world where advanced technology has altered both the contours and meaning of personal and social existence” (Sobchack, “Science Fiction” 231). For the sake of environmental balance, an inflexible biopolitics of birth and death must be enforced through a tight monitorization system, whose constant state of surveillance leads to the dehumanization and disenfranchisement of the popula-

tion (Matrix 87). There is not much room for spontaneity or critical thinking as everything has been prescribed.

As post-apocalyptic cityscapes are concerned, none of the above is appealing as they exhibit a dystopian vision of the world, something that utterly clashes with the City of Domes initial utopian mission. Yet, one should bear in mind that “dystopia is often presented as a failed utopia, as a demonstration of the dangers of attempting to engineer any kind of perfect world” (King and Krzywinska 15). According to Bina et. al. these are examples of the (science) fiction foresight relationship and of the kind of warning signs urban developers are to pay attention to if better solutions to the disturbances mentioned are to be found (168).

## Conclusion

Even though the film ends on a positive note, many questions regarding urban management remain unanswered. How did the domed city dwellers manage the waste generated within their mass consumer-driven society? How was their food sourced? Or, on different note, how are they to survive without the guidance of the central computer? How are they to deal with the signs of physical degradation that come with aging? This was, after all, an experience they had been shielded from by the chronopolitical system they have been liberated from. Overall, the future does not seem too bright as these questions are infused with warning signs themselves.

At the same time, and as stated by Margaret Atwood, though science fiction is very often set in the future, it is “always about now” (“Margaret Atwood” par. 2). Therefore, present concerns, fears and anxieties are projected onto the screen. *Logan’s Run* is, thus, a metaphor for the distress brought about by youth culture uprisings in the 1960s and 70s and by the Cold War in the United States. What is more, it also stresses the fact that utopias tend to lead to ideological dogma which, more often than not, degenerate in dystopias.

As for the different architectural styles featured in the film they function as text and as such they contribute to *Logan’s Run* diegesis for they are diegetic spaces themselves. Moreover, as a science fiction cinematic text, it speculates on future developments regarding the consequences of society’s blind reliance on technoscience and on data-thirsty digital technologies. Such a stance can be instrumental in making sense of how cities should be designed and inhabited. However, this approach is nothing short of complexity since the dichotomized relation between factual and imaginary cities is fast becoming a blur (Graham 395). Present day smart cities are an example of the hyper-mediation of the film industry and, as such, this synergy of reality along with fiction can result in unpredictable consequences.

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## The Material World of *Gattaca*

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Andrew Niccol's 1997 film, *Gattaca*, depicts a world in the "not-too-distant future" (Niccol) where genetic engineering is the new-norm for human reproduction. Any genetic abnormalities can be removed before the egg and sperm *meet*. The result is pre-fabricated human beings. Niccol paints a grim portrait of the future where individual talent and natural-born ability are obsolete and one's fate is determined at birth. Niccol's not-too-distant future is uncanny – depicting a future more 1950 than 2050. Modern architecture and design root this sci-fi thriller's future firmly in the mid-twentieth century.

Andrew Niccol uses the aesthetics, politics, and failure of Modern architecture to illustrate the failure of *Gattaca*'s futuristic dehumanized society. This study will focus on two Modern designs in the film, Jerome Morrow's apartment and Frank Lloyd Wright's Marin County Civic Center in California, and how the filmmaker employs their architectural materials and Utopian design philosophies to concretize his cinematic dystopia.

Modern, modernity, and modernism are three widely debated terms inside and outside the architectural dialogue. Scholars and critics argue the definitive start to the modern period and continue to investigate the impact of modernism and modernization on society and globalization. Thus, and for the sake of clarity, in this essay the term "Modern" will point only to architecture and design that began around the turn of the twentieth-century and took root in a machine-age aesthetic that reflected the mechanization of modern life.

Modern architecture blossomed in different places at different times: Le Corbusier in France, Antonio Sant'Elia and the Futurists in Italy, and Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe in Germany. Each school shared similar design principles: simplification of form, insistence on form over function, use of geometric shapes paralleling Cubism, lack of ornament, and use of new building materials such as glass, steel, and reinforced concrete.

Modern architecture's aesthetic principles and failures have been featured and highlighted in many films, most notably Michelangelo Antonioni's tetralogy: *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1960), *L'Eclisse* (1962), and *Il Deserto Rosso* (1964). Antonioni explicitly announces that architecture will serve as much more than mere background. The opening sequence of *La Notte* juxtaposes

poses a noisy street packed with traffic and the ornamental excess of a late-nineteenth century façade. A sudden cut transports the viewer to the unoccupied and sharply defined terraces of Gio Ponti's Pirelli Tower (1957). In these two shots, Antonioni establishes the opposition of turmoil and order, crowds and silence, and historicism and the modern movement that run through-out the tetralogy (Schwarzer 198-9). In *L'eclisse*, Antonioni shows "the inability of modern-age designers to achieve idealized dreams of pure geometric cities" (Schwarzer 201):

Throughout the tetralogy, Antonioni sets the frosty architecture of the modern city against the earthtones of architecture's past. Characters often project their most vital desires onto old buildings and public spaces, and onto memories of their youth associated with objects unspoiled by modernity's infertile conventions. (Schwarzer 202)

In this sense, and as Schwarzer further elaborates: "Modern architecture not only cuts people off from each other, it also cuts them off from the past" (204). Antonioni captured Modernism's dehumanization and machine-age sense as it was happening and in real places – not sets created for his films. *Gattaca*, made nearly fifty years after Antonioni's tetralogy and set in the future, uses extant mid-century architecture as its *mise-en-scène* to communicate a similar dehumanization as Antonioni but without the juxtaposition of a concrete material history. *Gattaca* is all future.

Modernism's goal was to separate itself from the past. To establish new lines and new reasons for existence based solely on the conditions of Modern living. "Such an architecture cannot be subject to any law of historical continuity" (Banham 128). The Futurists felt that architecture had exhausted itself with tradition and that the profound changes in the condition of life brought on by the machine age called for a new way to live. Modern society was equipped with new materials – materials whose possibility their ancestors could never have fathomed. Materials used in these designs were light and practical (Banham 128/9). These materials were not cohesive to a previous material world.

*Gattaca* tells the story of Vincent Anton Freeman (Ethan Hawke) and his struggle to overcome a futuristic society where individuals are discriminated against due to their genetic make-up. Those that are conceived the old-fashioned way are in the hands of God (God-child) and are often born with standard abnormalities; in Vincent's case, myopia and a heart condition that doctors believe will limit his life to just thirty years. Due to his inferior DNA, society deems Vincent an "In-Valid." In *Gattaca*, the standardization of perfection and symmetry is paramount. To pursue his dream of space travel, Vincent purchases the identity of a "genetically-engineered" man, Jerome Eugene Morrow (Jude Law), in order to enter the Gattaca Space Corporation (GSC) where only the genetically superior have the right to work.

Jerome Eugene Morrow is an embittered cripple paralyzed by an auto accident; it is later revealed that the accident was an attempted suicide. A result of the burden of perfection. Vincent becomes Jerome and is immediately accepted into society's elite class. Even among the standardized "Valid" class, Vincent separates himself further by becoming the elite of the elite. However, when one of Vincent's stray eyelashes is found near a crime scene inside the GSC, his identity as well as Niccol's futuristic class structure is threatened. Vincent is suspected of murder.

Mid twentieth-century architecture and design parallel Niccol's society and characters. *Gattaca* is a concrete system, a concrete society. Vincent proves that it does not function. There are holes. The Modern architects referenced in the film's set design, like Louis Kahn and Mies van der Rohe, imposed their systems of belief and values on the public, aesthetically and politically (Brolin 8). Some viewed their functional, industrial designs as the degradation of societal stratification while others viewed them as egalitarianism taking form. Modern architecture is epitomized by the machine aesthetic – buildings were designed without ornament to perform simply and efficiently. But function often failed. An example is Modernism's use of the flat-roof design. Intended to create an extra room for living, the flat-roof design proved nearly impossible to waterproof (Brolin 33). *Gattaca*'s failure and dehumanized society reflect Modernism's principles as well as its failures. The society of *Gattaca* is perfectly functional, but like the flat-roof design, it is marked by significant failures.

Le Corbusier referred to his residential designs as "*machines à habiter*" (machines to be lived in) (Janson 543). In *Towards An Architecture* Le Corbusier explored standardized industrial design and engineering – pointing to the airplane and automobile – as a new foundation for Modern Architecture. When Vincent purchases Jerome's identity, Vincent is forced to move into Jerome's cold, minimal apartment to maintain their guise; Vincent becomes Jerome and Jerome becomes Eugene, adopting his middle name. But the apartment is not a machine upon first viewing; it becomes a machine only after Vincent purchases Jerome's identity and moves in. The apartment will transform into Le Corbusier's machine-house as Vincent and Jerome further mechanize their bodies and home.

The exterior of Jerome's apartment is characteristic of Beton-Brut (raw concrete) or Brutalist architecture. Louis Kahn's Salk Institute in La Jolla, California was designed in Brutalist fashion and is used in the film. Niccol uses the raw, scraped concrete exteriors to parallel Vincent's constant scraping of dead skin from his body throughout the film – a process of removing his past identity.

At their first meeting with the DNA broker, the interior of Jerome's apartment is messy; clothes, books, and empty liquor bottles are strewn about credenzas, tabletops and floor. There is no order, no cleanliness, no function, no industry. A space that will soon function as laboratory, functions first as nothing more than a place for Jerome to hang his soiled laundry. Niccol visualizes Jerome's depression and alcoholism as non-functional and weighted in the past. While Jerome possesses the perfect DNA, he possesses no will to succeed. Vincent, his polar opposite, possesses only the will to succeed. In order for the two men to move forward and succeed, they must cut themselves off from other people and the past. Their new arrangement requires a new way to live.

The interior space visualizes their differences. Jerome's apartment has two levels, an upper and a lower, connected by a spiral staircase. The spiral staircase is situated between two concrete columns. The lower-level has high, horizontal windows that show nothing outside but trees. The walls are all concrete and lack any decoration – no paintings, no photographs. There are small laboratorial cut-outs in the walls that hold glass bottles and vials. The space is cold and uninviting. When Vincent enters the lower-level room with the DNA Broker, Jerome rolls out from behind a column in his wheelchair and stops at the bottom of the spiral staircase. Vincent and the DNA Broker stand over Jerome, looking down at him. As Vincent has yet to purchase Jerome's DNA and begin the transformation process, Niccol features both Vincent and Jerome occupying separate film frames – never framing the men in a two-shot. Just as they are separated genetically, they are also separated cinematically and spatially. Niccol has yet to establish the *machines à habiter* or Vincent and Jerome as repetitive visual pattern – both men are still tied to their own history. Neither is modern.

It is illustrative for Niccol to use high, horizontal windows for framing nature just outside Jerome's apartment. These are not traditional windows but windows similar to those used in Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1929-31). Jerome's reduced height due to his wheelchair plays into the height of the windows because Jerome can never stand or sit atop nature. He is disconnected from God's creation. He is attached to the mechanized system of his wheelchair. Due to his genetically engineered perfection, he is un-natural. He is not a "God-child" like Vincent. For Jerome, nature framed by a horizontal window serves the same purpose as a landscape painting on the wall – in dimension, subject matter, and intangibility.

Before Vincent speaks to Jerome for the first time, he walks directly in front of the window into an eye-level close-up, his head framed and backlit by nature. Niccol cuts to a high-angle reverse shot of Jerome sitting in his wheelchair bathed in the light emanating from the window – the

light that is formed by the sun and shadowed by trees and Vincent's "God-child" body. While the genetically superior are guaranteed access to Gattaca, they are not guaranteed access to the natural world. Here Niccol employs high, horizontal windows to emphasize that his futuristic society is more concrete and cold than it is beautiful and natural and that nature (Vincent) is greater than science (Jerome). Nature cannot be perfected. In the apartment, as in his reality, nature is always beyond Jerome's view and grasp.

The apartment's most thematically symbolic design element is its spiral staircase. Shot in wide angle, Niccol reveals the spiral staircase for the first time when Jerome rolls himself in front of the camera from behind a concrete column and stops at the bottom of the spiral staircase. The spiral staircase serves a dual function in the film – paralleling both Niccol's characters and his theme. The shape of the spiral staircase is that of the DNA double-helix. The man who occupies the apartment is crippled and moved into the space after his accident, therefore the stairs can serve no functional purpose. They do, however, serve the film's purpose. Throughout the film, Vincent places Jerome's DNA all over his body to gain and maintain access into GSC. Vincent wears pouches containing Jerome's urine and finger sachets containing Jerome's blood to pass frequent GSC screenings. Vincent scrapes his own body of any loose skin and hair while he plants Jerome's chaffing and stray hairs at his workstation. Vincent and Jerome make the interior into the exterior. The spiral staircase functions as the visual representation of the interior becoming exterior – man's DNA designed in cold steel and bordered by two concrete columns. The notion of the interior as exterior is fundamental to Modern architecture aesthetics. It reached its zenith with Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1957) where the architect placed steel I-beams on the exterior of the building.

In Modernism, the inside indeed became the outside – the skeleton replaced the skin, as Banham notes:

Skyscrapers reveal their bold structural pattern during construction. Only then does the gigantic steel web seem impressive. When the outer walls are put in place, the structural system which is the basis of all artistic design, is hidden in a chaos of meaningless and trivial forms (268).

Vincent's perfection is only possible when wearing Jerome's urine strapped to his thigh. While Modernism eschews all ornament, Vincent achieves modernization via DNA ornament. Without the urine bag ornament, Vincent remains Vitruvian in the GSC. The spiral staircase also emphasizes the *social* hierarchy of *Gattaca*. When Vincent and Jerome first meet, both men are situated at the bottom of the staircase, the bottom of society. The genetically superior Jerome should

stand atop the stairs looking down at Vincent, but he does not. He cannot. Rather, Vincent looks down on Jerome. Genetic engineering creates lower forms of human life. When Vincent asks Jerome who lives upstairs, Jerome responds, “Well I certainly don’t.” Before the question is answered, it has been resolved.

The use of the stairs and the characters’ occupation of upper and lower levels of the stairs continues throughout the film. There is never any sense of physical or social leveling in this film. As Justin Shaw writes in *Social Vertigo and Loss of the Self in Gattaca*, “When establishing its stratified social order, *Gattaca* subtly involves its audience in class discrimination by asking us to look up or down at characters” (165). Niccol visualizes Vincent’s rapid social and physical ascent in three different shot compositions within the apartment. All three compositions feature Vincent and Jerome in two-shots, sharing the film frame for the first time narratively. They are dependent on one another. Niccol establishes repetition of form.

The first composition shows Vincent after leg surgery. To complete his transformation, Vincent has two-inches added to his shins, form over function. Vincent lays on the floor (foreground – center) in a crucified Jesus posture, his legs bound by braces. Jerome (background – frame right) sits in his wheelchair looking down on him. Vincent’s insistence on overcoming nature places him below Jerome who was born perfect – Jerome did not seek perfection. For the first and last time in the film, the viewer sees Jerome looking down at Vincent.

The second composition shows Jerome drawing blood from his arm for Vincent’s use at GSC while Vincent lies on a metal table practicing Jerome’s signature. The two men are eye level and side by side. There is a simultaneous transference of Jerome – one extracted in blood and the other injected via ink. Eye to eye, Vincent is told that “Jerome Morrow was never meant to be one step down on the podium.” A reference to Olympic reward, hierarchy, and physical perfection. Jerome is not only transferring his identity but also the burden of perfection.

Niccol’s third composition is Vincent’s return from GSC where he has now been accepted into the space program. Vincent (background – center) stands atop the spiral staircase looking down upon Jerome (foreground – center) at the bottom of the stairs. Vincent informs Jerome that he was accepted at GSS. Drunk, depressed and unsurprised, Jerome absorbs the news with his back to Vincent. Niccol breaks the end of the scene and their two-shot compositions by segregating Vincent and Jerome to separate film frames again. Their brief moment of social, physical, and cinematic equality is over. Vincent is superior.

Jerome Morrow’s apartment symbolizes a mechanized aesthetic and visualizes Vincent’s transformation from classical, Vitruvian man, to a modern, mechanized worker as well as a low-class

“de-*gene*-rate” (term used in film with emphasis on gene) to a high-class citizen. It is inside the apartment that the inside of Jerome Morrow is extracted, bagged, numbered, dated and stored for future use, while the exterior of Vincent Freeman is scraped away and burned in an incinerator. It is not a home but a factory. It is not a place to lounge but a place to record the heartbeats during exercise. A place where the refrigerator chills bags of urine and blood instead of food and wine and where the oven cooks human skin instead of chicken dinners. Their *machines a habiter* cuts any and all ties to a past, to a tradition and personal histories, and to conventional living. Like Modern architecture’s repetitive, uniform design, Vincent and Jerome become an identical non-entity.

Frank Lloyd Wright’s posthumously completed Civic Center in Marin County, California serves as the headquarters for the Gattaca Space Corporation. It is the building that Vincent first enters an “In-Valid” janitor and exits a “Valid” first class navigator. Daniel Terdiman, states Wright’s design “looks like a futuristic spaceship, resplendent with sand beige walls, a sky-blue roof, and a 172-foot-tall gold tower.” While Wright’s Civic Center was designed and completed within the same period as Modern icons the Seagram Building and the TWA Flight Center, Wright insisted that his architecture was Organic Architecture and that Modern architecture grew out of the Organic. Wright did not care for the mechanized box structures of Modernism. “Thus Modern-architecture is Organic-architecture deprived of a soul” (Wright 238). How does Wright’s Organic architecture work in *Gattaca*; a film dependent on the cold, functional lines of Modernism? Bob Craft, the film’s Location Manager discusses Wright’s building:

The civic center – designed in 1959 and composed of three circular buildings connected by long hallways – was the one building that we all felt epitomized the future reality of *Gattaca*. In the film, it becomes the headquarters for the Gattaca space program, the pride of the movie’s engineered Uberclass. Indeed, the center looks like some alien ship that has mysteriously landed on the California hillside. Its simple, clean lines conveyed just the impression we sought – a future where everything is orderly, sterile, and well planned (142).

Wright’s architecture was not only created simultaneously with other Modern architecture, but rather, Wright’s early Prairie-style and Organic-style helped spawn the movement that is Modernism. Examining the history of architectural styles in comparison to *Gattaca*, we see that Vincent is tied to a Wright-ian logic, a Wright-ian attitude while Jerome is tied to a Mies-ian (van der Rohe) aesthetic. Not only that, but Vincent enters GSC as his original organic self and departs his natural organic self – surrendering the guise of Jerome Morrow and boarding the space shuttle as Vincent Freeman. When Jerome carries his crippled body up the spiral stairs to the



upper level in order to fool a detective looking for Vincent, he sits in Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair. Vincent never sits in the Barcelona chair just as Jerome never sits in behind a desk in GSC. Wright's Civic Center symbolizes Vincent's truth. He is an individual whose actions and success do not reflect rational argument or logical thought.

In 1932 Philip Johnson and Henry-Russel Hitchcock organized *The International Style* exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibit included the works of Le Corbusier, Jacobus Oud, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius and other architects from fifteen countries. In the 1966 foreword Hitchcock writes that in contrast to those Modern masters, "...Wright occupied the principal place in the exhibition" (vii) with his Organic Architecture. Johnson and Hitchcock explained that the International Style was not a consistent style, but it did possess three distinguishing principles: emphasis upon volume as opposed to mass and solidity, regularity as opposed to symmetry, and dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament (13).

According to Johnson and Hitchcock, Wright was the major influence on many of the young architects in the exhibit. And while Wright submitted in part to the disciplines of the style, he would remain too individualistic to ever truly become part of the new style. Wright was "a rebel by temperament" and refused a fixed style. Wright damned the very styles he had originated. Instead of developing some of the manners he initiated, he began again and again with new materials and problems – arriving at a quite new manner each time (Johnson/Hitchcock 26-27).

Vincent excels as Jerome but Jerome cannot excel without Vincent. Just as a younger generation of architects exhibited at the *International Style* were indebted to Wright, Jerome is indebted to Vincent. It is Vincent's individualism that permits Jerome to vicariously achieve greatness with his own DNA strapped to someone else's body. Wright's Civic Center, while tied to Modernism in time and principle, and representing the uniformity of *Gattaca's* futuristic society, is the film's only concrete representation of the human spirit – Niccol's theme.

Covered with a glass roof – Wright's Marin County Civic Center brings outer space close to ground level and Vincent's desk. Wright's design was created in a time period that author Thomas Hine refers to as the Populuxe, period which existed from 1954-1964 (vi). While the Populuxe period depended on mass consumption of mass-produced, machine-age products, the products themselves were produced and consumed by a fascination with a future age, a space age – an age with a clear cut from the past. A future where anything was available with the push of a button – similar to the GSC's finger-prick identity scanner.

Wright's building as the GSC depicts the world Vincent does not belong to all the while visualizing his dream of space through the glass roof. Vincent is two people and the GSC represents two worlds. In Wright's words, "The *within* is thus made concrete realization in *form*" (226).

While Wright dismissed block architecture as being deprived of a soul, his unique systematic approach and uniform interior space provides a similar dystopian feel that is visualized in Jerome's cold apartment. Each workstation in *Gattaca* is perfectly identical and evenly spaced. Wright not only repeats the workstations but repeats the circular shape throughout the Civic Center. For Niccol, the circle symbolizes the moon Titus Vincent is traveling to. It symbolizes the circle that encompasses the classical, Vitruvian man – a man of perfect proportion and harmony that predates the mechanized, modern man. The circle symbolizes the vagina and man's natural entrance into the world. When Vincent boards the space craft at the film, he enters a brightly lit circular tunnel. Vincent is leaving the prejudicial world of *Gattaca* and returning to his natural, God-born nature.

Niccol's use of mid-century modern architecture best reflects the themes and characters of *Gattaca*. While more contemporary architecture like that of Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, or Norman Foster might provide a less dated look for the film's futuristic setting, their materials, forms, and aesthetic principles do not mirror the themes of the film. To have created a film-set with the same intention would forfeit the inherent value in the buildings and designs of the Modernist era. No other architectural period was as tied to a futuristic look than the mid-century Moderns. This period of design was defined by the mechanized form of the jet-engine and by the notion of a futuristic, space-age (Hine 84).

Niccol's future is 1950 because his themes and characters embody a mentality and design inherent in that era. A post-war period is defined by massive shifts in social and political attitudes. Modern architecture addressed those changing attitudes. While Mies stated, "Less is more," it appears that *Gattaca* believes in the Post-Modern dictum that in fact, "Less is a bore." Niccol employs Modernism as an aesthetic choice. He uses Modernism's principles and design to depict an ordered, uniform society, and he uses Modernism's failings as commentary that man cannot be perfected and does not function under an engineered society.

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## The Haptic Utopia: Tarkovsky's Resolution to the Conflict of the Oppressive Dystopian City in *Stalker* (1979)

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The negative vision of the city, not as the core of the essential problem, but as the backdrop where the existential difficulties of the human being are projected and reflected, has been portrayed extensively in all artistic productions, and cinema has been no exception. On its part, Science-fiction, due to its capacity to transgress the realms of immediate reality, has exposed the city's problematics in its utmost orientations, oscillating in the limits of the current city and the potential city. This paradigm is not exclusively recent, and movies such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), have come, not so much to alert us, as to show us the possibilities of the progress (or decline) of cities. *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky seems to include itself in this field of potential representation of the city. The film presents a set of characters who pretend to enter a place called Zone, that is closed by militaries and whose entry is forbidden. Past events related to extra-terrestrial phenomena lead to the Zone's closure, and it is believed that these occurrences had anomalous consequences in the area, where perhaps lies a room in which intimate desires of visitors are fulfilled. Only Stalkers dare to penetrate this area.

The city, or more precisely, the exterior context of the Zone that is not defined by its limits, apparently lingers around this unusual space as its direct opposite. This differentiation is reinforced in the picture by two essential factors: on the one hand, the cinematographic technique, on the other hand, the spatial configuration of these two distinct territories. Tarkovsky shoots the sequences outside the Zone in black and white, in which we glance an industrial city in deterioration, and the inside of the Zone in colour, where nature predominates. In this way, the classical dichotomy between architecture and nature, between oppressive city and rural landscape is implied. Nonetheless, these two territories bear a different emotional meaning to the characters: The Zone represents hope, search for desire, the impossible; the city, due to the absence of these factors, represents the opposite. As Koolhaas mentions in its Generic City concept, the contemporary city represents "a place of weak and distended sensations, few and far between emotions, discreet and mysterious like a large space lit by a bed lamp" (1250). Somewhat, this description is

the opposite of the depiction of the Zone which, although mysterious, remains a place of intense and nearly vital sensations, and corresponds to the image of the colourless industrial city.

But can we underline the factors related to this generic city's oppression as presented by Tarkovsky? Michel Freitag refers to fragmentation as the symptom and cause of social and contemporary space's problems: it originates arbitrariness, disarticulation and the real devastation of the world (16). He adds that the plurality of factors that determine the contemporary city's organization finds its main representation in the multiple ways of transportation and their different traffic's facets (54). Therefore, one of the effects of fragmentation is the problem of mobility and its marking presence in the city; and it will be the most evident mechanism used by Tarkovsky to emphasize the feeling of transit and instability in *Stalker's* city. We see it for the first time in the protagonist's house, when we hear a passing train whose motion (that we imagine very close to the house) shakes the furniture and the objects in it. As Koolhaas mentions in a sense that can be applied to our protagonist, "Manhattan denigrates as 'bridge-and-tunnel people' those who need infrastructural support to enter the city, and makes them pay for it" (1249). In this case, the situation seems to be of those who literally live next to these infrastructures, suggesting an unfavourable social and spatial situation. The next frame reinforces the presence of mobility as an image of the city: the protagonist leaves the house and is surrounded by stationary trains, as he walks to the bar to find the others Zone's intruders.

These references to means of transportation try to convey the protagonist's feeling of alienation, as if an illusion of stability was impossible in the black and white city, and all surrounding mobility was the cause and the metaphor of the character's anguish. The materialized forms of society no longer express neither a vision of the world nor a conscience of one-self (Freitag 63). Therefore, identity is absent in the city's inhabitant: the protagonist is in permanent departure, heading to an equally alienated place near the city, where the expectation of identity remains, although it remains in an extra-terrestrial world. Since there is not the possibility for the protagonist to recognize a personal identity in communion with the city's identity, desire is relocated to some idealized and distant space like the Zone's room where desires are fulfilled. Theme here seems to be the opposition between dystopia and utopia, between oppressive city and idealized spatial metaphor.

But how does the Zone situate itself in the paradigm of oppressive city and idealized utopia? May we precipitate an answer, and assume that the Zone is the absolute opposite of city's dystopia, almost the mirrored space where identity and desire can flourish? Or is this space an inseparable fragment of its dystopia, of its city? Dissimilarities between the Zone and the city are not

absolute, an alienation feeling persists among the first one, despite colour and natural predominance, despite the apparent harmony between the protagonist and its idealized space. It is the “first myth of outside and inside” (Bachelard 212): when a limit or frontier is imposed, the consequent dichotomy appears. “Simple geometrical opposition becomes tinged with aggressivity” (212), introduces a violent contrast, essentially absolute, in which we only distinguish their contraries, never their intersections: if the city is oppressive, then the Zone is liberating, if the Zone is mysterious, then the city is obvious. Slavoj Žižek approach to the limit is more definitive, when he demystifies the Zone: “what confers on it the aura of mystery is the Limit itself, i.e. the fact that the Zone is designated as inaccessible, as prohibited” (“The Thing from Outer Space”).

In this sense we may want to invoke the element of the ruin, the link that fades away the illusions of the limit. If in the city all the elements of physical conformation were in a damaged state, amplified by the black and white contrasts, in the Zone – despite colour – the few humanized elements, as electric posts, unfinished foundations or abandoned tanks in the grass, seems to evidence some sort of echo from the external city. This invasion unfiltered by the limit, besides having a physical association with the city, seems to want to alert us to the illusion of the Zone, revealing an incomplete staging, a restricted fantasy, as Requena comments:

And here we have the tragedy, in its deepest metaphysical dimension: travellers enter the zone with nothing allowing them to recognize its edges; the space we access is essentially the same we want to abandon, equally deteriorate, disorganized, rusted, soulless: an immense garbage, accumulation of remnants, waste, deteriorated objects that has definitely lost their place. (Requena 318)

The ruin is the evidence of the object disassociated from its primary function, useless for the present time, but it is also a sign of time itself, an imprint on matter that claims its entire course. We do not evade time (*La Jetée*): in the same way *Stalker's* characters cannot evade time's omnipresence. Time evens the meaning of the city and the Zone, uncovering the idealized utopia and inevitably reinforcing the city's dystopia. This brings us closer to Žižek's idea that the limit itself provides the magical factor to the Zone. Tarkovsky seems to support this claim: “The Zone doesn't symbolise anything, any more than anything else does in my films: the zone is a zone, it's life” (200). Time presents itself here as a confirmation of the Real, “this inert insistence of time as Real” (Žižek, “The Thing from Outer Space”) that infiltrates and attests its presence in the Zone, preventing the existence of the unreal, and therefore of the character's hopes. “Bereft of memory, a person becomes the prisoner of an illusory existence; falling out of time he is unable

to seize his own link with the outside world” (Tarkovsky 57), which in this context means assuming the reality of this external world where identity has been denied.

So, in which way is it possible for characters to pursue an identity? Tarkovsky’s ruin’s theme is, besides symbolical in its relation to time, a visually dense motif (time marks matter) reinforced by his cinematographic choices. Prolonged close-shots, dilated on surrounding’s details, stimulates our perception, challenging it to reveal some veiled meaning. These elements are always organic in the sense that they translate some “veracity of matter” (Pallasmaa 34): they either are natural components, and veracity is implied in that characteristic, or they are natural materials that reveal in its physical erosion the “continuum of time” (34).

We apprehend this organic reality presented in the picture through vision, from our spectator’s condition. Nonetheless, “vision reveals what the touch already knows” (Pallasmaa 46), it’s a sense related to the other senses, it activates the memory of matter already known. When we see a granite stone or a moving lake, we recognize the stone’s shape or texture, the water’s motion; but the image must be stimulant enough to evoke the haptic characteristics of what is being represented. It is the saturated presentation of texture, reinforced by black and white cinematography, that brings to us the tactile sensation of image, to an almost corporeal relation with the elements portrayed in frame. Our body also is a spectator of the picture from the moment that image appeals to our body’s images. And this evidence conditions our relationship with the picture, in the way it may expand perception to some unconscious meanings: “the eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection” (Pallasmaa 50). We step back from an ocular centrist perspective and we place the body in the centre of experience; “our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism” (Merleau-Ponty qtd. in Pallasmaa 44). And this interpretation is not valid only from a spectator’s point of view, it seems to be also valid in Tarkovsky’s narrative universe:

[in] Tarkovsky’s universe, we enter the spiritual dimension only via intense direct physical contact with the humid heaviness of earth (or stale water) - the ultimate Tarkovskian spiritual experience takes place when a subject is lying stretched out on the earth’s surface, half submerged in stale water (Žižek, “The Thing from Outer Space”)

The body emerges as the ultimate Tarkovskian spiritual experience, and the term spirituality should not be interpreted in its doubtful sense, but in the sense in which “Art does not think logically, or formulate a logic of behaviour; it expresses its own postulate of faith” (Tarkovsky 41). And in this internal meaning, Arseny Tarkovsky’s verse (Andrei’s father) “a bodiless soul is sinful” (157) acquires deeper signification. If every artistic work presents its own internal belief,

a series of intangible values whose order functions within its internal mechanism, the body appears, in Tarkovsky's work, as the ultimate redemption of that belief, with a nearly hedonistic echo – not in the sense of the pleasure of the flesh, but the recognition of the body as the sensitive factor in contact with matter. Therefore, the Zone is not the ultimate utopia, but the body is, implying an introspective reflection: an haptic utopia. If the body brings us near matter, and matter states the world, then the body brings us closer to the world. “We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the self from its spatial and situational existence” (Pallasmaa 69). Addressing the relationship between the religious man and the world Mircea Eliade adds that his “body is ritually homologized to the cosmos” (173), which means that he is assuming an osmotic association between the body and its surroundings.

But it would be precipitous to assume a correlation between identity's construction and religious conception of existence in Tarkovsky's characters, despite the spiritual aura of his work. As mentioned before, the haptic utopia alludes to the nature of matter and its correspondence with time. Again, Eliade presents two conceptions of time: a sacred one and a profane one. The religious man conceives a time that “does not ‘pass’, that it does not constitute an irreversible duration” (69), because for him it represents a “primordial mythical time made present” (68). Therefore, the nonreligious man sees time as a continuum related to his own life and mortality, representing his “deepest existential dimension” (Eliade 71). In Tarkovsky's work, the irreversible nature of time is a certainty, and may be interpreted as a central motif in many of his films. Movies such as *The Mirror* (1975) or *Solaris* (1972) explore this conflict of time never returning, of a past whose present occurrence is only justified by its own unviability. In this case, the Tarkovskian perception of time is deeply profane due to its irreversibility, and time presents itself in its most existential form, claiming matter as the primordial element and the body as the evidence of our relationship with it.

This idea of profane conception of time might shed some light on the issue of the character's identity construction, in the sense that, denying the transcendental element, they face the responsibility of their own identity: “time is necessary to man, so that, made flesh, he may be able to realise himself as a personality” (Tarkovsky 57). Could this be the meaning of the last scene in the Zone, where the characters, sited on the threshold of the room where supernatural desires are told to be fulfilled, are incapable of entering it, aware of the profane inevitability of the world and conscious of their own responsibility in the construction of their personality? Eliade concludes stating that the “modern nonreligious man assumes a tragic existence and his existential choice is not without its greatness” (203).



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## (Re)emerging from Ruins: Screening the American Postindustrial Urban Landscape of the 80's

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Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32pm [...] when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final “coup de grace” by dynamite. (Jencks 23)



1. “Pruitt Igoe” Demolition, in *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, Chad Freidrichs, 2011

As the demolition of the housing complex of Pruitt-Igoe became an icon, it also became a symbol of the Modern Movement architecture failure.

Designed by Minoru Yamasaki in 1950, the housing complex of Pruitt-Igoe was constructed in the northern zone of the city of St. Louis, Missouri, with the purpose of finding a solution to the increasingly dirty and squalid housing that proliferated in that period. The large-scale project

included 2870 apartments spread over thirty-three buildings each one with eleven floors. The project was designed according to the doctrines of the Modern Movement and completed in 1955. Being occupied by families of low income during more than one decade, in the end of the sixties Pruitt-Igoe was in profound decadence and ended up being transformed into a site of violent crime.



2. "Pruitt Igoe," *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, Chad Freidrichs, 2011

The reasons of the decline are complex, diverse and are open to much debate. Although the architecture was not the only and exclusive cause of social problems that arose from the construction of Pruitt-Igoe, as was believed for quite a long time<sup>1</sup> the demolition of 1972 constitutes, on a symbolic level, the dismantling of the aforementioned idea of a possible and desirable "unity" on a pragmatic, rational, scientific and moral plane of the Modern Movement.

The implementation of a holistic plan for the *integral city* and the *integral person* would suggest an imperative historical discontinuity, and brings this big and ambitious desire of unity to a range of paradoxes and fragmented realities. Berman (15) defines the "modern being" as "a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."



### 3. “Pruitt Igoe,” *Koyaanisqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio, 1982

In 1982, Philip Glass composed the theme “Pruit Igoe” to accompany seven minutes and thirty-three seconds of the feature film *Koyaanisqatsi*. The excerpt of the film corresponding with the track consists of a sequence of images of the cities of St. Louis, Chicago and New York. There is a crescendo, which starts in the sane city and goes on to illuminate step-by-step areas and focal points of deterritorialisation and urban ruin. Between abandoned and vandalized buildings, the takes dwell on specific details of ruins: a broken street light, an abandoned slide on a heap of debris, a frayed curtain moving between ruins, or a girl in the window of an abandoned building.

The city in ruins is, indeed, a phenomenon of a great part of Northern American cities in the Post-War period. The changes to the industrial paradigm, based on micro-technology rather than on labour, placed a great swathe of the middle class in the tertiary sector and left the unskilled work to more disadvantaged classes. As a consequence, there was an exodus of the middle classes to the periphery, provoked by the propagation of the car, the development of express roads and the call towards the “modern” with easier access to a suburban and comfortable life-style in new houses with their own gardens. In the documentary *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011) this situation is synthesized in the following way: “The sunrise of the suburb, for good or real, re-shaped the American City.”

The city centers were left in a half-abandoned state, ready to host classes with little income. This process segmented a privileged population that has lived and profited from the facilities provided by the technology advances, from the other half of the population, for whom it was only possible to occupy the debris of industrialization. Margaret A. Rose (29), paraphrasing Daniel Bell, refers to this divide as “one of the characteristics of the post-industrial society [...] [that] will [represent] an increase in the divisions of mental labour, and information-sector work.”

The post-industrial society created a gigantic emptiness in the sites, which were occupied by the obsolescence of the modern industrial machine. Because of Auschwitz, because of the atomic bomb and mainly because of the orthodox and infallible doctrines of Modernity, the world has lost its faith in the rational and in science. Progress was supposed to make life better. At the same time, it was realized that logic, science, proofs, political doctrines and institutions were unreliable, so there was a loss of trust in Modernity's absolute certainties.

Just like in *Koyaanisqatsi*, the first scenes of *Permanent Vacation* wander serenely, dealing with what is left from Modernity. In *Koyaanisqatsi*, the music that accompanies the images of "Pruitt Igoe" is a tenuous, whispering orchestra, with an implicit nostalgia and weight. Also at the beginning of Jarmusch's film it is silence that accompanies the post-industrial city.

The sensation of drifting and a posthumous non-sense underlie the images of both films. If in *Koyaanisqatsi* the drift culminates in a glorified moment of destruction (the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe), in *Permanent Vacation* the drift of Aloysius leads us to a displacement, and to a kind of spontaneous and occasional exile.

At the same time, in *Permanent Vacation* the images of a post-industrial New York, empty, worn out and in ruins, serve as the setting for Aloysius, a young stray man, without a home, without a job, without qualifications, without ambition, deprived of and disinterested in the world. It never becomes clear where he is from or where he is heading to, being alienated, a symptom associated with notions of exile, deterritorialization and itinerancy, "Now that I am far away, I would like to be there, more than when I was there," he says, which can be translated into a total alienation of the human being in relation to himself and to society.



4. *Permanent Vacation*, Jim Jarmusch, 1980



In this sense, there is an exhaustion and disbelief in the modern world that is tired of attempting to be new. All these are ideas that society started to reject, ended up being replaced by abandonment, ruin, and a transcendental absence of meaning. There was a kind of end of hope in the challenge. According to Berman (“Emerging from Ruins”), this sensation is the result of the confrontation with the disappointment of the promise of something that heals everything as the author explains:

When I saw the Bronx in ruins, I saw how modern life, itself full of ruins and the terror of ruins, was still biblical. I didn’t think the Bible was special in offering divine solutions to human problems, but it was special in saying very clearly what the problems were. Modern rhetoric often talked as if mankind had transcended troubles that we really hadn’t transcended at all, that were still there for us to face. (unpaginated)

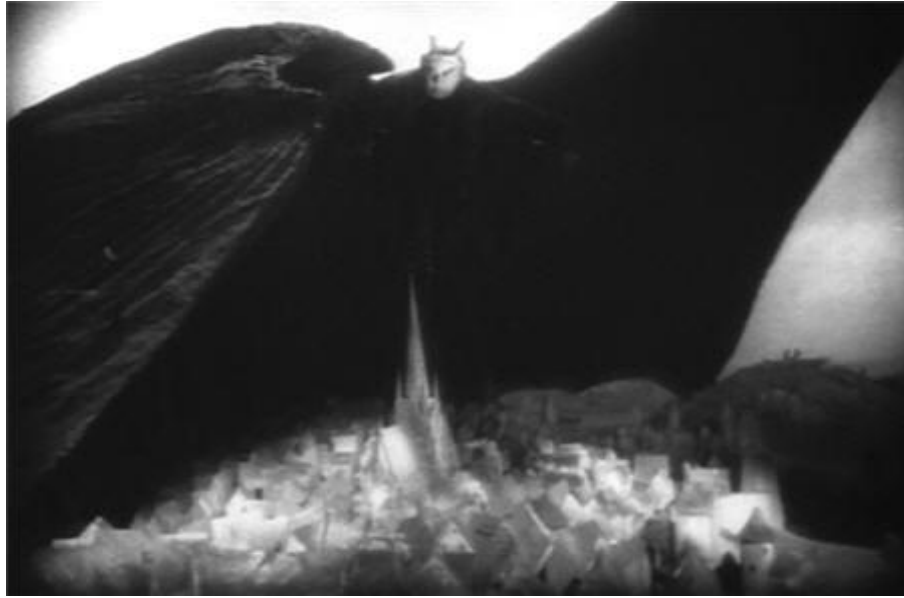
In *Koyaanisqatsi*, the theme “Pruitt Igoe” by Glass changes gradually from a choir of sibilant violins to an orchestra in apotheosis with French horns, cellos, violins and clarinets just as the camera overflies the housing complex. The thirty-three buildings, each consisting of eleven floors set in an area of twenty-three hectares in the north of St. Louis, are seen from above in a floating image accompanied by the galloping symphony by Philip Glass.



5. “Pruitt Igoe,” in *Koyaanisqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio, 1982

The total comprehension, the “view from above,” a privileged and almost metaphysical vision, evokes a divine and/or supernatural vision that refers in this context to the flight of Faust with

Mephistopheles over the city and the world, as seen in *Murnau* (1926). Overflying Pruitt-Igoe in the moment that precedes its implosion consists thus in a reconfiguration of the flight of the magician immediately after his pact with the Devil, something that Berman summarizes as follows: “[T]he tragedy [...] comes when Faust ‘looses control’ of the energies of his mind, which then proceed to take on a dynamic and highly explosive life of their own” (38).



6. *Faust* F. W. Murnau, 1926

However, an absolute apotheosis (musical, visual and ideological) happens when two following and distinct views frame the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe. Bristol (163) states here that: “[f]ew architectural images are more powerful than the spectacle of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project crashing to the ground.”



7. “Pruitt Igoe,” in *Koyaanisqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio, 1982

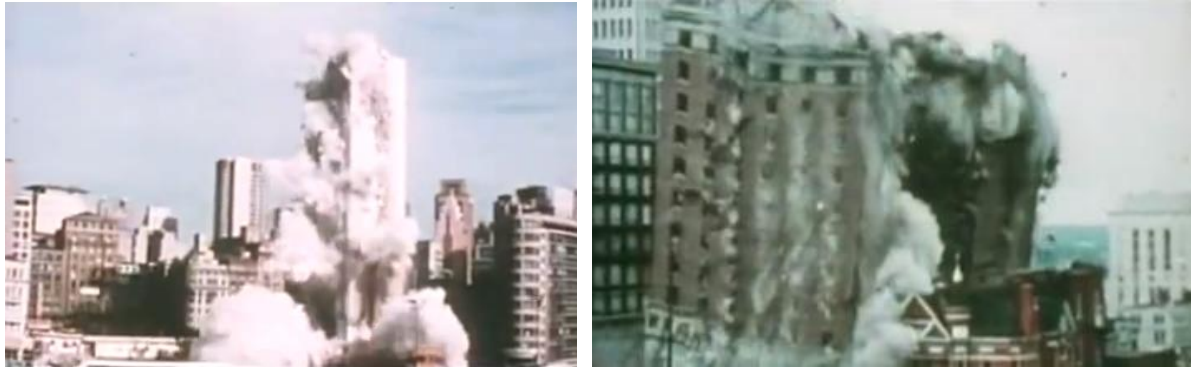
This image subverts all the images related to the Modern Movement of massive demolitions and of the total destruction of neighbourhoods and zones of the city, which were considered unsanitary, degenerate and inappropriate. Pruitt-Igoe is one of those examples, where there is an implosion but nothing constructed, or it is not yet known what will take its place, a Modernist housing complex that is demolished simply because nobody could live in it anymore. In Berman's words (8),

It can be a creative adventure for modern men to build a palace, and yet a nightmare to have to live in it. This problem is especially acute for a modernism that forecloses or is hostile to change – or, rather, a modernism that seeks one great change, and then no more.

According to the documentary *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, the complex was constructed with government funds, but under the condition that the maintenance costs would be paid for by the tenants' rents. Promoters, administrators, social assistants and mayors did not contemplate the difficulty of the project, which was dependent upon the income of its inhabitants. The families that inhabited the building were disadvantaged to such extent that their payments were insufficient to maintain and keep the architectural characteristics functioning, as well as the programming and structural complexity of this agglomerate and necessary utilities such as elevators, gardens and exterior areas, security, laundries, trash, distribution networks of water, light and gas, among others. Regarding this issue, Robert Fishman (*Pruitt-Igoe Myth*) mentions that: "In this very basic way, I think the public sector failed the people who were living in these buildings." Thus, on a symbolic level, one could pose the hypothesis that the collapse of Pruitt-Igoe allows the observation of the shattering of a system, as well as in the consideration that "unity" is impossible to achieve in a world that is already fragmented by industrialization.

In 1981, David Mallet directed the music video "Under Pressure" (Queen & David Bowie), praising the culture of the individual, of the fragment, of diversity and the agglomeration of debris that the City represents. The sequence of images showing explosions, implosions and demolitions imply the scream of rupture: a *Goodbye* to the Modernist "unity" and a *Hello!* to whatever is to come next.





8. “Under Pressure,” Queen & David Bowie, 1981

The period defined by the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties is marked by a feeling of disillusion towards the urban, political and social collapse of post-industrial America. Gil Troy (12) describes “the sad tale of America in the 1960’s and 1970’s” as follows:

[A] country demoralized, wracked by inflation, strangled by big government, humiliated by Iranian fundamentalists, outmanoeuvred by Soviet communists, betrayed by its best educated and most affluent youth. The result was four failed presidents: Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. (12)

Troy’s description points to a Postmodernity that, according to Harvey (7), “represents some kind of reaction to, or departure from, ‘modernism’” consisting not only in the extension (and extinction) of the Modern Movement, but also in its subversion, “we see postmodernism emerge as a full-blown though still incoherent movement out of the chrysalis of the anti-modern movement of the 1960s” (38).



9. “Under Pressure,” Queen & David Bowie, 1981

It is in this context that the music video of “Under Pressure” reflects, through a mosaic of very different images, various connotations and different situations that echo (in accordance with the musical score), a tension of apotheosis ready to explode and an oppressed anxiety ready to be liberated. Images of a post-industrial city are combined with images of expressionist cinema of the beginning of the twentieth century. The image of multitudes pouring out of trains during rush hour and the flux of innumerable persons on the pavements and bridges is punctuated by glimpses of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1931), of *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922), of *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), as well as archival images of the post-Great Depression period.

The sequence of images of traffic, of endless queues in streets (with five lanes of traffic), and of cars and trucks and destroyed vehicles on a heap of old metal highlights the importance of cars in North American dynamics and economy since the fifties (in 1956 Eisenhower referred to the car industry as the backbone of the American economy). The series of massive and industrious demolitions in the video announce that “[i]n order do accommodate more automobiles we must build roads and destroy houses.”



10. “Under Pressure,” Queen & David Bowie, 1981

The sequence of images continues with implosions of buildings, vampires and werewolves, heaps of old metal, furious crowds, excerpts of terror, burning cars, demonstrations and confrontations, passionate kisses between film characters from the 1920-30s, open-air concerts with crowds of angry people, and exploding projectiles.

There is an impetus of hope in all this atmosphere of ruin and deception which anticipates that something could be reborn out of the debris of a system and the bitterness of the disillusioned

multitudes. Concerning the music video, Berman (“Emerging From Ruins”) suggests that the artists “[n]ot only had their suffering not destroyed their idealism; in some mysterious way, it had *created* idealism. They could tell the world, ‘*we come from ruins, but we are not ruined*’.” The lines “It’s the terror of knowing what this world is about/ Watching some good friends screaming ‘Let me out!’/ ‘Tomorrow gets me higher’” emphasize this idea of a redemptive *tomorrow* after an apocalyptic *today*. The post-industrial city is indeed characterized by the interruption between progress and decay.

The city thriving and the urban bustle of suits and ties transmit an imminent prosperity provoked by the advances of a technological and scientific codification. However, there is a destruction of the industrial city which is not complete and in which its ruins dissolve gradually, instead of disappearing with the end of industrialization.



#### 11. “Under Pressure,” Queen & David Bowie, 1981

The post-industrial city is a place where the factory is a ghost, an obsolete and useless building but that is present and obligatory in the landscape nonetheless. The industrial building consists now of a ghost-like and abandoned element that was reappropriated, inhabited and adapted to new uses. Factories, warehouses, garages and depots become places to live, occupied houses, associations, concert halls or scenic objects in the desert-like landscape of the city in decline.



#### 12. “Don’t Leave me This Way,” The Communards, 1986

Warehouses turn into lofts for living: in *Flashdance*, Adrian Lyne, 1983, the industrial urban spaces are occupied, as well as in *Permanent Vacation*, Jim Jarmusch, 1980, and even the sewage network is inhabited in *Ninja Turtles*, Steve Barron, 1990. The factory becomes a pop cathedral in “Don’t Leave me This Way,” The Communards, 1986, or the setting for an apocalyptic party as in “Atomic,” Blondie, 1981.



13. “Atomic,” Blondie, 1980

According to Julia Kristeva (24), the debris (or the abject, in her expression) is a resurrection of the object. The “re-inhabitation” of the abandoned and obsolete rests of industrialization implies its re-interpretation and the observation that the ruin consists in the inevitable possibility of a (new) beginning:

The abject is the violence of mourning for an “object” that has always already been lost. [...] is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance.

In Modernism, the ruin was an element to be eliminated – “That ‘abjection’, which modernity has learned to repress, dodge, or fake” (Kristeva 26) – and a pretext to construct something new in its place. In Post-Modernity the debris is regarded as a set of possibilities and significant places that are potentially inhabitable. Out of the ruins of Modernity emerges what Berman (“Emerging from Ruins”) names as “[a] rainbow where nobody expected to see one”:

Their capacity for soul-making in the midst of horror gave the city a new aura, a new tincture of bright lights. They succeeded in the task Hegel defined two hundred years ago: if we can ‘look the negative in the face and live with it’, we can achieve a ‘magical power’ and convert



the negative into being'. They, [...] in the midst of falling apart, found ways to rise. A rainbow, where who would expect one?

The ruin, then, is situated on this undefined borderline, between what-is and what-is-not; an inanimate architecture with signs of what was already alive. In "Under Pressure" the integrity of the city is questioned by the brutality of a sequence of implosions, explosions and collapses. The gesture of destruction of the limits and of the organized form challenge the orthodoxies based on a Body, a Centre and a Totality. According to Anthony Vidler (69) "As described in architectural form, it seems to be a body in pieces, fragmented, if not deliberately torn apart and mutilated almost beyond recognition." The *disintegration* of which constituted the beginning of something and, simultaneously, the end of *Totality* dictated by Modernity of the Sixteenth Century and the end of the Modernist *Unity*.



14. *Permanent Vacation*, Jim Jarmusch, 1980

The destruction evokes a negation and the establishing of a rupture with something that is considered *despicable*. In the words of Kristeva, the *abject*<sup>4</sup> consists precisely in the element that is neither the subject nor the object, but that pertains to both, situated in a middle course, which is unwelcome, ambiguous and appalling, in other words:

[W]hat disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. [...] Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you... (Kristeva 4)

The abject is intrinsic to the “I” – “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (Kristeva 2) and finds itself at a place, from which it is systematically expelled. The abjection is the “strangely unsettling” observation of a desired and necessary emptiness left by the rejected abject: “A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in a opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome” (Kristeva 1).

There is a tendency of flight underlying the whole succession of images of “Under Pressure,” a flight-towards-the-outside, in an exterior sense where:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. [...] Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Kristeva 1)

The flashbacks of a more morbid imaginary of *noir* and expressionist films constitute the preliminary impetus of an interior and disconcerting universe, which precedes the expelling of specters of a *non-sense* of Industrialization, through successive and magnificent implosions. These images are the assumed and literal fragmentation of a society that is condemned to contradiction – “[W]hat is abject, [...] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place – where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 2).

The destruction alludes to an essential emptiness, the disintegration of the structure of *Home* and, as a consequence, the tremendous observation of an incomplete *I*. In a world that is shattered by Industrialization, the structure of *locus* is reconfigured by the alterations of paradigms of time and space, in Royle’s words (2), “its happening is always a kind of un-happening. Its ‘un’- unsettles time and space, order and sense.”

In this sense, the expulsion is, more than inevitable, necessary to consume *my* incongruence and the incongruence of the *World* – “There, abject and abjection are my safe-guards. The primers of my culture.” (Kristeva 2) The urgency of an evacuation of the abject constitutes a liberation and, once more, a flight-towards-the-outside: “Under pressure that burns a building down/ Splits a family in two/Puts people on streets.”

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<sup>1</sup> In her article entitled “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” Katherine Bristol publishes the result of research that she carried out about this housing complex. In it she concludes that the reasons for its failure were much more associated with political and social issues than with the architecture as such, thus confirming the ideas of Jane Jacobs,

By placing the responsibility for the failure of public housing on designers, the myth shifts attention from the institutional or structural sources of public housing problems. Simultaneously it legitimates the archi-

texture profession by implying that deeply embedded social problems are caused, and therefore solved, by architectural design. (Bristol 163)

The article lists and specifies different issues, namely the dynamics of the North American city of the Post-War era. The fact that the city center of St Louis, Missouri has been inhabited exclusively by highly disadvantaged classes who live in housing complexes of urban rehabilitation (like this one), of a society with rigid politics, of control and surveillance, with differing requirements, forced racial segregation, regular questionnaires and visits from tax officers and social workers, led *Pruitt-Igoe* to an irreparable decline. "The residents did not feel that these spaces "belonged" to them and so made no effort to maintain or police them." (Bristol 167)

<sup>2</sup> The feature film *Koyaanisqatsi* from 1982 consists of eighty-six minutes of collages in slow camera moves and *time-lapses*, in a form of a poem of sound and images, devoid of dialogues and/or verbal narrative. A soundtrack composed by Phillip Glass accompanies the whole film. *Koyaanisqatsi* consists of a images accompanied by music, a compilation of images from archives, with shots gathered by the director that depict the city, urban dynamics and the nature and technology of North America in the seventies. The word *Koyaanisqatsi* has its origins in the language of the native tribe of the Hopi and signifies "life in unbalance, in disintegration." The feature film constitutes the first part of the trilogy *Qatsi*.

<sup>3</sup> Sentence taken from the activist and documentary video of Marshal McLuhan and Jane Jacobs *The Burning Would*, produced in 1970 in order to prevent the construction of the Spadina Expressway in Toronto.

<sup>4</sup> In the perspective of Julia Kristeva, the term abject defines the element that, being intrinsic to myself, causes disgust and an extreme necessity to expel it. Kristeva uses the example of faeces, of vomit, of a body in decomposition or an unborn being about to come into the world.

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## Representing the *Banlieue*'s Space: An Investigation Into French Cinema

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### Introduction

“The problem is that films about the suburbs should be made by the people who live there” (Esltob 49). This is how Jean-François Richet, a French director who grew up in a Parisian suburb, denounces Mathieu Kassovitz, the son of the well-established film director and writer Peter Kassovitz, criticizing his film *La Haine* (1995) for its perceived lack of authenticity. “The problem” that Richet refers to here is the representation of the *banlieue* in films. This is a key issue as the Parisian *banlieue*, while being a much fetishized place, is not represented in the same way as the rest of the Parisian region. It is precisely the differences of treatment that this essay seeks to explore. Films are a major medium of representation of the *banlieue*, as such they hold a crucial part in the perception of the *banlieue* and its inhabitants by the outside world. I argue that these representations are both products and producers of the preconceived ideas and popular perceptions of the *banlieue*. This essay analyses the depiction of the space of the *banlieue* in films to get a better understanding of the *banlieue*'s spatial identity perceived by those who do not live in it. For this sake the analysis will be divided in three parts corresponding to three characteristics of space distinguishable in cinematographic representations of the *banlieue*.

The first part will delve into what makes the *banlieue* a peculiar place in French cinema. Investigating the very fact that there is such a thing as a “*banlieue* film” it will try to show how the *banlieue* is filmed as a place excluded from the rest of France and particularly Paris.

The second part will be dedicated to highlighting the fact that the *banlieue* is often treated as a single entity and as a collective place where individuals live and impact their environment as a group, leaving little space for individuality. In the third part, this work will explore the reciprocal relation of representation between the *banlieue* and its, mostly non-white, male youth. While the *banlieue* is the spatial incarnation of the young men painted as a threat to society by the dominant public discourse, those same young men suffer from being the embodiment of the *banlieue* everywhere they go. Before concluding, the essay will look at the risk and consequences of representing the *banlieue* as a threatening and violent place.

### The *Banlieue* as a Place of Exclusion

In 1995 after the acclaimed release of *La Haine*, Thierry Jousse wrote in the well-established French cinema review *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* about the emergence of a new genre, the “banlieue film” (Jousse). The very idea that such a genre exists is telling of how the *banlieue* is considered as a clear delimited space as it is one of the very few cinematographic genres to be defined primarily by its geographical location (Konstantakaros). As Dikeç remarks *banlieue* in French should not be understood as its English translation “suburb.” While it can mean no more than the urban periphery, another conventional use of the term, which will be used in this essay, refers to the socio-economically marginalised urban areas with a particularly high concentration of population from former French colonies (Dikeç 7). Rather than the content of its plot the film is categorized by its protagonists and the places where the action is meant to happen. This particularity of treatment goes to show the specificity of the *banlieue* in the public discourse in France. The *banlieue* is first and foremost referred to as a place where common rules and norms do not apply. It is mostly referred to as an area of insecurity and disrespect of rules (Ibid 16). This branding has led film-makers to reject the “banlieue film” label. Film director Uda Benyamina argues that it “stigmatizes more than it serves its subject. Because directors adopt, against their will, an external and necessarily moralistic sociological point of view.” (Briand Rautenberg). On this ground, the justification of “banlieue film” as a genre is questionable for it provides a limited coherence and limiting lens for observation. As such, the corpus in this essay is drawn from films where a significant part of the plot is set in areas dominated by big council housing blocks and below average economic conditions in the Parisian suburbs, rather than those recognised as “banlieue-film” (although these criteria are not mutually exclusive and films often fall under both).

The heavy implications of representing the *banlieue* also raise the issue of the legitimacy of those who attempt to represent it. Representation of the other, even more so when they belong to socio-economically discriminated groups, is a delicate matter as film-makers cannot help but impose their own subjectivity to the representation they produce. While being dependent on its image in the dominant discourse, the population of the *banlieue* has very little in control of how that discourse is shaped because it is under-represented in the media staff and the cultural milieu (Hargreaves). In such a context the *banlieue* is often a sensitive topic and critically praised realisations are often disapproved by the “*banlieusards*”<sup>1</sup> for they are seen as film made by a Parisian elite and targeted at that same Parisian elite, as is the case of *La Haine* by Mathieu Kassovitz. Ginette Vincendeau points towards Kassovitz's questionable legitimacy in filming the *banlieue*, especially as he explains that he chose a location where the film crew “would not get shot at” (Vincendeau).

The reproduction of a common Parisian fear about the *banlieue* justifies scepticism towards Kassovitz's depiction of the *banlieue* when he seems to be influenced by such prejudices. While filming the *banlieue* without being from it, one adopts a status of observer which can grant one the possibility of an outside and impartial eye but at the same time carries the risk of perpetuating the idea of the *banlieue* as an exotic place to be studied and observed. Paradoxically *La Haine* seems to be aware of this phenomenon as at one point, one of the three main protagonist, Hubert, tells a TV reporter who came in the *cité*<sup>2</sup>: "It's not 'Thoiry [a French zoo] here!" which could be interpreted as being self-critical of the limited authenticity of the depiction that the film has (Ibid).

It is easier to identify the characteristics of the representation of the space of the *banlieue* by opposing it to that of Paris, often present also in films about *banlieues*. The first striking difference is the dichotomy of the places where the plot unveils, the action in Paris is focused on *cafés*, restaurants or well-furnished flats, whereas in the *banlieue* the action mostly takes place in staircases, cramped housing flats or rooftops. The stark contrast between the two illustrates the economic inequalities but also conveys the idea that Paris is somehow more ordered and cleaner. Parisian homes are tidy, homogeneous and elegant but their counter parts in the big tower blocks are much smaller and narrower and usually messier. Those contribute to the conception of the *banlieue* as a chaotic and undisciplined space.

In *La Haine* the viewer sees two police stations, a well ordered one in Paris and another one in the *cité* right after a riot, the second is heavily defended outside by officers in riot gear and the inside has been pillaged and graffitied. The space in Paris is mostly two dimensional, the camera is always on the ground; in the *banlieue* the emphasis is much more on the towers' height, they are more outstanding and do not fade in the landscape as Parisian buildings do. Another major distinction is the way characters progress in space of Paris and of the *banlieue*. In Paris even when the protagonists are wandering aimlessly they do so in linear fashion, going from one place to the other; in the *cité* walking, most of time seems to be an activity of its own rather than a way to get from a determined place to another, the characters wander aimlessly and the camera, often following them rather than staying on a fixed point, furthers the feeling of disorientation (Fielder 278). Furthermore, a fixed camera is often used in Paris and it makes the protagonists on screen "stick out" of the picture, whereas when it moves to follow them it makes them central and the background, the location, secondary. An interesting exception is the film *Yamakasi* (2001), in which a group of young men from the suburbs commit burglaries and escape through rooftops while parkouring, as a rebellious act they impose their own way of moving to Parisian bourgeois

neighbourhood, breaking the linear restrictive network of streets, the order, by jumping from one building to the other. It is in that regard a Certeauian tactic of redefining space (Pettersen 27).

The perception of space in cinema does not only depend on what is shown but on the way it is shown. To convey their message film-makers use different techniques, shots in the *banlieue* are often in large open spaces like in *Wesh Wesh qu'est ce qu'il se passe?* (Ameur-Zäimeche 2001) or *Banlieue 13* (Morel 2004) to show how the *cité* appears like a rather homogeneous places including everything that is in the frame; when the action moves from the *banlieue* to Paris the angle usually becomes narrower, it produces a feeling of discomfort as if the protagonists were trapped in a hostile environment. Mathieu Kassovitz pushes this further in *La Haine*, when Saïd, Vinz and Hubert are in Paris the background is out of focus, giving the impression that the three young men stand out (Konstantakaros).

Not only excluded the *banlieue* is isolated. Whether by train, motorcycle or stolen car getting out of the *banlieue* is often a difficult task. Exiting the space of the *banlieue* surrounded by the housing blocks like prison walls is always an adventure. Protagonists are often met with adversity when they attempt to do so, a police control in *État des Lieux* (1995), the lack of gas in *Rai* (1995) or the long RER (suburb train) ride in *La Haine*. Going to Paris is not an anodyne act, rather it is an expedition often planned in advance, it is a part of its own in the plot. The car holds a particular symbolic value in the *banlieue*, it represents the getaway and the spatial autonomy to get out of the *banlieue* (Arfvidsson). In *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (1997) the car holds a central role. It is a place where many important dialogues happen and it is also two stolen cars, one burnt and another driven at a police vehicle, that lead to the death of one of the main characters. The impediment to the mobility of the *banlieue* is at its pinnacle in *Banlieue 13* and its sequel *Banlieue 13: Ultimatum* (2009) two fiction films in which an area whose location on a map corresponds to the area notorious for hosting many different *cités* in real life, the “Banlieue 13” is surrounded by walls and the openings are monitored by militarized police station. This fiction incarnates a heterotopia in which different rules apply and abnormal behavior takes place, this is both the cause and the consequence of the state deciding to isolate it by a wall (Lambert). *Banlieues* are the spatial incarnations of the social and racial exclusions carried on by the French state.

### **The *Banlieue* as Reappropriated Space**

The *banlieues* are designed through bureaucratic processes based on statistics without consultation of those meant to live in them. Resulting from this, is the disconnection between the inhabitants and the materiality of their environment (Dikeç 69), an eye-catching example of this disconnec-

tion are the massive unbecoming portraits of Baudelaire and Rimbaud on the walls of the building in *La Haine*'s last scene (Konstantakaros). Two eloquent and complementary examples of diverted use of space illustrated in films are staircases and rooftops. Rooftops supposedly barred from access are occupied by the youth as seen in *La Haine* or *Rai*. They are the place where the usually monitored young men become the monitoring of "their" neighbourhood, by standing on high up point from which they can see all their surroundings (Sharma & Sharma 109-110). Doing so they create a sort of panopticon where they exercise their omniscient power at the scale of a few blocks. Staircases are a contentious point in the French political discourse and are part of the imagery surrounding *banlieues*. In 2003 the "Sarkozy" laws specifically targeted this issue and made the occupation of buildings lobbies illegal (Herdhuin). It is not surprising then for them to be a recurrent scenery of films about the *banlieue*, in *Rai*, *Wesh Wesh Qu'est ce qui se passe?* and *Ma 6-T va crack-er* the main protagonists are regularly found hanging out there, or according to the French dedicated terms "zoner" or "tenir la dalle" (respectively "wandering" derived from "zone" and "hold the pavement") and their clear relations to spatial items (Sauvadet 115). Places chosen by the young men to gather are normally meant as transition places which one goes through; by staying static in area dedicated to movement the *banlieusards* express a rejection of the way their environment is designed. The *banlieue* youth therefore create its own links with the buildings and the streets, notably through graffiti that can be seen everywhere. All the visual "degradations" (burned cars, graffiti...) blamed on the *banlieusards* are as many markers of the appropriation of space, they set a cityscape over which the young men finally have a grasp (Austin). Yet the appropriation is not limited to concrete walls and buildings, the control of the sound space is also shown to be seized, the music often blasts through the *cité* and people shout from the street in hope to be heard from their friends in buildings. Finally the space is appropriated by its sheltering of the sub-cultures that emerge in the *banlieue*. Its nature of exclusion leads the *banlieue* to create its own set of counter-cultures. All these cultures rarely have a central part in films, yet they are omnipresent, rap music, break dancing or street football, all make more or less surreptitious appearances in the images of the *banlieue*.

The specificity of the appropriation of space in the *banlieue* is that it happens as a collective process, the community, and not the individual is put forward. The issue with this unifying discourse is that it tends to erase individuality under a monolithic collective identity. Some of the films about the *banlieue* commonly have a group or several main characters rather than one, Jean-François justifies it: "*la cité n'est pas une masse*" ("the *cité* is not a mass") rather it is a network of groups (Richet "Il y a deux camps"). Conversations are often held in groups of more than four protagonists in which they talk over each other, uncommon in cinema because it makes for more

confusing exchanges, here it illustrates well the perception of the *banlieusards* as groups rather than individuals. *Ma 6-T va crack-er* presents the *banlieue* not as a monolithic entity but a network of groups where the geographical sense of belonging plays a key role in the conflicts that erupt.

### **The *Banlieue* as a Masculine and “Racialized” Space**

Films are as telling of their makers’ vision with what they show as they are with what they do not. The main absence that one notices when seeing the *banlieue* represented in a film is that of the women. By having overwhelmingly male casts, films reproduce the idea according to which women are silenced and oppressed in *banlieues* (Coutras). When they do appear, women are more often than not mothers, wives or sisters, rarely girlfriends and even less so independent agents in the plot. It creates a space where male figures dominate and in which women are absent or submissive. It is not a masculine world only by the on-screen demographics but also through the dialogues, most of them use forms of slang that include misogynistic and homophobic verbal abuses. In the recent award winning *Divines* (Uda Benyamina, 2016) the cast is exceptionally dominated by women as they are the three main characters, yet it remains problematic as all the male figures of the *banlieue* in that film are abusive and/or violent. In every film about the *banlieue* policemen have an antagonistic role, and this treatment implies that the *banlieue* is not a place policed like the others. The clash between individuals reflects a masculinized violence where one’s ability to fight testifies of his virility. Thomas Sauvadet talks about the “warrior capital” (his personal extension of the notorious Bourdieusian capitals) which is, according to him, one of the main sociological factors in those groups of young *banlieusards* or as he refers to them “*jeunes de la cité*” (“youth from the hood”) (Sauvadet 123-6). Similarly, Paul Silverstein highlights the “masculinized violence” that is characteristic to the *banlieue* (Silverstein 16). Young men from the deprived suburbs cannot detach themselves from this violent identity echoed in the criminality, “riot culture,” terrorism or “macho culture” they are repeatedly associated with. This is completed by the representation of police abuses during which police officers seek to humiliate young men by attacking their masculinity through insults or even sexual assault like in scenes of *La Haine* or *Ma 6-T va crack-er* which echo sadly with, among others, the recent case of Théo a young man raped by a policeman (François).

Masculinizing the space of the *banlieue* paves the way for an essentialization of its inhabitants; the *banlieue* becomes embodied by young mostly black and brown men (Gabin & Millington). They seem to carry with them the violent image of the *banlieue* even outside of it, as if they were exporting the space of the *banlieue* everywhere they go, reciprocally the *banlieue* seems to incarnate

them even in their absence. This is emphasised by the previously mentioned mobility, or lack of, the camera. When the action happens out of the *banlieue* the camera follows the characters because they “are” the *banlieue* the background itself barely matters, but when the scene is set in the young men’s neighbourhood the camera is fixed and with a much wider angle, the place of the action has almost become a protagonist itself, the *banlieue* is a character in the story. The violent image of the *banlieusard* is associated with his race. Film-makers show how, as described by Judith Butler, there are conflicting perceptions, different levels of “seeing.” The body of the young non-white man is read as a threat, it is identified by its skin colour and geographical belonging (Butler). In that sense the recurrent rejections these young men face, by women and from nightclubs are illustrative of them being perceived a sexual threat for the rest of society. In a scene from *La Haine* the three heroes approach two women in an attempt to seduce them but ultimately fail, because their attitude is at odds with the context of the art gallery they are in and the women’s expectations. Those rejections symbolize the social and sexual exclusion of the *banlieue* incarnated in its youth.

*Banlieue 13: Ultimatum* also presents an exacerbated vision of the supposed and often denounced communitarianism of the *banlieues*. The movie shows the fictional *banlieue* divided in five areas all caricaturing a community the writers thought representative of marginalised groups in France: Asians, Romani people, Sub-Saharan Africans, Muslims and White supremacists. Beyond the obvious racism of the essentialisation of minorities (and their equivalency to a racist ideology – white supremacy), it reflects the framing of the *banlieues* made by mainstream medias and the political sphere. The younger generations of North-Africans and Sub-Sharan Africans are stigmatised as culturally incompatible with the French nationhood. Following the 2005 riots in France for example, several political or intellectual figures thought the causes of the unrest were to be found in the polygamy supposedly widely practiced among African immigrants and their descent, or in Islamism, thought to be a rising threat to France’s security breeding in clandestine cellars of big building blocks (Schneider 136-7). Yet Julie Sédel demonstrated through ethnographic studies that those accusations were fantasized and far from reality (Sédel).

### **Justifying Repression through Demonization**

The conditioning of the perception of the *banlieusards* is used as a political tool to justify exceptional policies for the *banlieue*. By supporting and using framing of the Parisian deprived suburbs as places of inherent insecurity where people lack the values that would make them fit for society, authorities shape the public opinion in a way that enables them to take specific measures that

would otherwise have been contested. The State deploys severe repressive and disciplinary structures. Jayson Harsin shows that the response stemming from the framing of *banlieues* is twofold: one is the securitization aspect to respond to the perceived violence (we see an extreme dystopic vision of the militarization of the *banlieues* in Luc Besson's two films *Banlieue 13* and *Banlieue 13: Ultimatum*), the other is what Harsin qualifies "cultural re-programing" (Harsin 68), a process that aims at remodelling of the *banlieue's* population behaviour. It is hard not to read neo-colonial overtones in such a combined approach. *Banlieues* are depicted to be the "Badlands" or the "lost territories" of the Republic (Dikeç; Tissot & Poupeau 6), their space incarnates otherness. They become places outside of the French society therefore the government is under the duty of claiming them back but at the same time it is not bound to abide by the same rules and caution as it would in the rest of France.

Consequently law enforcement tends to become more of an occupying force rather than a strictly policing one. Mathieu Rigouste suggests that the French police's tactics and attitude are a direct legacy from French colonial methods, he calls this "imported back" colonialism, "endocolonialism" (Rigouste 52-3).

A tangible illustration of the exceptionalism created by the discourse surrounding the *banlieue* is the reaction of the state and the public opinion to the 2005 riots. In November 2005 following the death of two teenagers fleeing from the police, riots erupted in *cités* all over France. On November 8<sup>th</sup> Jacques Chirac, then president (with the support of his Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy), declared a state of emergency with an application limited to certain urban areas considered to be prone to riots and violent outbreaks. Those located measures already show the distinction in consideration between France and its *banlieues*, the legal structure is not spatially consistent, and there is a state of exception only in certain places. Interestingly the only preceding occurrence of the promulgation of the state of emergency in the French 5<sup>th</sup> Republic had been during the decolonisation war of Algeria. The grim picture painted by the *Banlieue 13* movie and its sequel might seem far off the reality when they show *banlieues* sealed off from the outside by giant concrete walls and military checkpoints but the sight of *banlieue* during the state of emergency might have seemed oddly similar: regular police checkpoints were placed at crossroads for pedestrians and cars alike, police in heavy riot gear patrolled the *banlieue* and search the buildings and helicopters flew around with searching lights at night to enforce the curfew. The treatment of the *banlieue* as a place to be secured that provides governments with popular approval is partly a product of the discourse of insecurity and threat that some movies wrap the *banlieue* in. This discursive power paved the way for Manuel Valls decision to create the *Zones de Sécurité Prioritaires* ("Priority security zones"), delimited geographical with reinforced police forces and power (Lazard).



## Conclusion

The *banlieue* in France is among the most stigmatized and pilloried places of the country hence its constant presence in public political debates. Such a status forces film-makers into a position to make particularly contentious statements, explicit or not, in their representation of such places. Those depictions testify of common perceptions as much as they shape them. Yet their making is almost systematically kept away from the first concerned, the people inhabiting the *banlieues*. This is problematic because the perception of the people of the *banlieue* depends on its representation as a place. By outing the *banlieue* as an abnormal place, film-makers specify this place as out of the rest. They exclude it and reinforce an othering process targeted at *banlieusards*. This exclusion is further emphasised deliberately by the filming methods and the opposition between Paris and its *banlieue*. Films also show the clash in space between the urban planners who designed the *banlieue* and the youth who create new usages of space. Finally the *banlieue* is pictured as a place of exuberant masculinity, and racial identity incarnated in its young male population stigmatized as violent and sexist. The addition of all those factors when representing the *banlieue* sustains through popular culture the discrimination and isolation of Paris' already marginalised suburbs. The lack of control of the *banlieue's* inhabitants over their image in one of their biggest, and only medium of representation creates a dangerous setting prone to furthering the prejudices they suffer. At the same time those films can be taken as indicators of already existing ideas and imagery of the *banlieue*. With this dual relation to the perception of the *banlieue* making them both producers and indicators of preconceived ideas about the *banlieue*, films play a major part in the self-perpetuating stigma surrounding the *cités* and their inhabitants. This responsibility is particularly great when one observes how the "othering" of the *banlieue* serves the furthering of securitization and militarization policies. Filming the *banlieue* as inexplicably prone to crime, violence and radicalism, without offering a historical or social contextualisation, justifies the repressive methods of disciplining that created such a delicate situation in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> "banlieusard" is the term derived from "banlieue" that designate the young men who inhabit it.

<sup>2</sup> "cité" is a commonly used term to refer to the *banlieue*, it is the shortened version of "cité HLM" which is an equivalent of "housing projects" in the United States.

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## Places of Otherness. Strategies of Urban Representation in *Foreign Parts*

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Marginal places do not usually appear in pictures. Their residents have historically been deprived of representation, because they do not fit in the ideal profile of ordinary citizens. Post-modern ethnography, however, argues that the cultural other has always been within ourselves, so many people – especially artists – have understood that those marginal perspectives must be included in any work attempting to address the urban experience in all its complexity and plurality. This is the reason why many filmmakers have lately become interested in what I call places of otherness: marginal areas in which cultural others, such as immigrants, refugees, homeless, ethnic minorities and other excluded groups, can feel at home in a foreign city, at least for a while.

These places are extremely fragile within the urban fabric, since its residents are seldom its owners. In fact, most places of otherness only exist for a limited time. Such volatility has led some filmmakers to document them before they vanish, giving rise to a series of non-fiction works focused on dematerialization processes. Most of these films address the disappearance of entire neighbourhoods, such as *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, Pedro Costa, 2000), *Can Tunis* (Paco Toledo & José González Morandi, 2007) or *Foreign Parts* (Véréna Paravel & J. P. Sniadecki, 2010), but they can also deal with smaller or larger places, from a single plot – *Le Terrain* (Bijan Anquetil, 2013) – to a refugee camp – *The Wild Frontier* (*L'héroïque lande – La frontière brûle*, Nicolas Klotz & Elisabeth Perceval, 2017).

All these works develop participatory strategies that seem inspired by *cinéma-vérité*: their directors practice what Jean Rouch called participatory or shared ethnography, which is not far away from Catherine Russell's concept of "experimental ethnography", given that these films attempt "to overcome the binary oppositions of us and them, self and other, along with the tension between the profilmic and the textual operations of aesthetic form" (19). In order to be closer to the filmed subjects, some filmmakers even arrive to include themselves in the footage, at least as a voice behind the camera: they give up their omniscient position and expose their relationship with the characters to reinforce their role as mediators between the audience and the depicted community. One way or another, they manage to capture the feelings and emotions of these

people towards their environment, thus allowing the audience to experience these places from within, that is, from their residents' perspective instead of from a visitor's.

The continuous interplay at both sides of the camera is therefore an important part of these documentaries on places of otherness: by means of these interferences, they expose a clear self-awareness regarding their respective film devices that ultimately serves to establish a distinction between the aestheticisation of otherness and a politics of representation based on the shared intimacy and mutual respect between filmmakers and characters. Arguably, then, participatory strategies are changing the usual perception of marginal places by giving them alternative meanings to those imposed by the power discourse. Without going any further, *Foreign Parts*, the film that will be fully discussed below, depicts an unhealthy junkyard threatened by gentrification in Queens, New York, as a profitable and supportive community.

The name of this place is Willets Point, and it is located between the Citi Field baseball stadium and the Van Wyck overpass: until a few years ago, hundreds of Latino immigrants strove to make a living here by recycling cars. The whole area was like a reverse assembly line, in which the workers were experts at scrapping cars and storing their parts. The place appeared in a fiction film, *Chop Shop* (Ramin Bahrani, 2007), and much earlier, in the 1920s, when it was known as the Corona Ash Dumps, it served as inspiration for the valley of ashes near which F. Scott Fitzgerald located George B. Wilson's garage in *The Great Gatsby*. According to journalist Phil Patton, "the area was full of garages even then," but it did not seem to be at its best in 2010, when *Foreign Parts* was filmed: at the time, Willets Point had no sewers or pavements, there were puddles and mud everywhere, its warehouses threatened to collapse under the weight of snow in winter, and the permanent roar of planes landing in the nearby LaGuardia airport drowned the noisiest sounds in the junkyard.

The New York government has been devising ways to redevelop the neighbourhood since the 1940s: among many failed plans, Willets Point might have been the site for the Olympic Stadium and press centre if New York had been chosen to host the 2012 Summer Olympics instead of London. On May 1, 2007, however, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced the Willets Point Development Plan, which included 5,500 residential units, 1,7 million square feet of retail space, nearly one million square feet of office space, a convention centre, a hotel, a school, a park and, of course, the installation of sewers. The main business and land owners in the area fought against this plan for years, but their efforts were finally unsuccessful: the plan was definitely approved by the City Council on October 9, 2013, and the demolition of the junkyard finally began

in 2016. In the next years, if everything goes as planned, the place will become what Francesc Muñoz has called a “banalscape”:

A specific kind of cityscape that, despite being offered to city dwellers, has been produced to serve the interests, needs and requirements of the global economy. It is a hybrid cityscape that, on the one hand, has local character, because it retains some elements of the physical and social space, but on the other hand its appearance allows its standardised consumption by global audiences. This is the device whereby the final outcome of urban renewal looks similar everywhere (195, my translation).

Banalscapes – which are right the opposite of places of otherness – result from the recent thematisation and brandification of central and peripheral areas of the city, a process that follows the logic of what anthropologist Manuel Delgado has termed “the capitalist reappropriation of the city” (219, my translation). A key element of this process is gentrification, which was defined by urban planner Peter Marcuse in the 1980s as follows:

Gentrification occurs when new residents – who disproportionately are young, white, professional, technical, and managerial workers with higher education and income levels – replace older residents – who disproportionately are low-income, working-class and poor, minority and ethnic group members, and elderly – from older and previously deteriorated inner-city housing in a spatially concentrated manner, that is, to a degree differing substantially from the general level of change in the community or region as a whole (198-199).

In the case of New York, Marcuse established a parallelism between the economic and social shifts undergone by the city in the 1980s: according to him, as the manufacturing industry declined, the FIRE sectors – finances, insurances and real estate – brought qualified professionals back to the city, who could pay much higher rents than blue-collar workers (200). Consequently, the terrain of the inner city became valuable again, causing what geographer Neil Smith has described as “a geographical, economic, and cultural reversal of post-war urban decline and abandonment” (64). The only problem was that urban decline did not disappear: on the contrary, as Marcuse has written, abandonment and gentrification are “reflections of a single long-term process” that have been changing places for decades in a vicious circle “in which the poor are continuously under pressure of displacement and the wealthy continuously seek to wall themselves within gentrified neighbourhoods” (200, 196). The usual pattern establishes that a process of abandonment is followed by a process of gentrification, which ultimately guarantees the destruction of endangered communities: the residents who stayed in a neighbourhood despite its abandonment will probably not survive to its later gentrification. This tendency explains why the

characters of *Foreign Parts* are so worried with the Willets Point redevelopment plan: once Manhattan has been almost completely gentrified, they already know what awaits their neighbourhood.

Véréna Paravel, one of the directors of *Foreign Parts*, found the junkyard by chance while she was filming *7 Queens* (2009), a short documentary about the areas traversed by the elevated subway line that connects Times Square with Flushing Main Street through the north side of Queens. The film mainly dealt with the representation of the cultural other: its characters are Asians, African-Americans and, above all, Latinos, an ethnoscape that renders visible the demographic statistics – according to the 2010 US Census, 22.8% of Queen’s population was Asian, 17.7% non-Hispanic Black and 27.5% Latina. Paravel’s short film is made of brief encounters with these people, although the real cultural other in the area was herself, inasmuch as only 27.6% of the Queens’s population was non-Hispanic White in 2010.

In this sense, *7 Queens* can be regarded as a white woman’s travelogue through a multicultural neighbourhood in which the continuous interplay at both sides of the camera puts the filmmaker at the same level that filmed subjects. Nevertheless, once she found Willets Points, she immediately realised that there was another film there, so she invited her colleague J. P. Sniadecki at the Harvard University Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) to make *Foreign Parts* together.

Sniadecki had already directed a few documentary features in China before discovering the junkyard. One of them, *Demolition* (拆迁, J.P. Sniadecki, 2008), was focused on migrant workers and urban space, the same issues addressed in an specific Chinese subgenre devoted to documenting the process of *chaiqian*, that is, the demolition of old neighbourhoods –*hutongs*– and the subsequent relocation of their inhabitants: a few examples of *chaiqian* films are *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks* (铁西区, Wang Bing, 2003), *Still Life* (三峡好人, Jia Zhang-ke, 2006), *Meishi Street* (煤市街, Ou Ning, 2006), *24 City* (二十四城记, Jia Zhang-ke, 2008) and *A Disappearance Foretold* (前门 / Dans les Décombres, Olivier Meys & Zhang Yaxuan, 2008), among others. This link reveals a feedback between Chinese and American documentaries that this time goes from East to West: Paravel and Sniadecki adapted the usual narratives and techniques of *chaiqian* films to the western tradition of visual anthropology in order to depict a process of gentrification, replacing *hutongs* with a junkyard but preserving the same conflict between old and new spaces. In this context, the scrapped cars become a metaphor for the dismantling of the American Dream: several critics have compared the opening sequence of *Foreign Parts*, in which a forklift truck noisily destroys a minivan, with the ritual slaughter of a sacrificial animal or with a



grisly surgery operation (see Maza, Scott), suggesting that what happens to the cars will soon also happen to Willets Point (see Giménez).

For the first ten or fifteen minutes, *Foreign Parts* develops an observational strategy of representation, after which the camera begins to interact with certain characters: Julia, a mentally disabled homeless woman who lives in the junkyard; Joe, a man in his seventies and the single legal resident of Willets Point at the time; and the couple formed by Sarah and Luis, who also live there in an abandoned van. These four people embody the ethnical mixing of the neighbourhood: Julia is African-American, Joe is white – and perhaps of Italian origin, judging by his surname, Ardizzone –, Luis is Latino and Sarah is “the only white girl in the junkyard”, as she calls herself. Although English is the most heard language in the film, there are a couple of sequences talked in Hebrew and many others in Spanish: for example, in a especially beautiful sequence, two Puerto Rican men, one white and another black, sing together Frankie Ruiz’s song ‘Puerto Rico’ over the noise of planes. Nevertheless, Paravel and Sniadecki have been criticised for their Anglo-Saxon approach: Edward Champion considered that their clear preference to talk to people who speak English instead of those who speak Spanish seems “a glaring and elitist omission for a community in which 80% of the people don’t speak a word of English”. Obviously, as none of the filmmakers speaks Spanish, the language barrier conditioned their possibilities of meeting the cultural other, but they developed other abilities: according to Paravel, “the skill you have to have if you want to be part of them is not holding a camera. It’s holding a bottle of Corona. (...) We spent a lot of time in the diner drinking a lot” (quoted in Rapold).

The intimacy between filmmakers and filmed subjects is reflected in the continuous transgression of the observational device, as when the camera literally dances with Julia in the local diner. Talking about these participatory strategies, in a question-and-answer session at the New York Film Festival, Sniadecki expressed “[his] unwillingness to pretend that there is not a person behind the camera, saying that in some instances directors have to interact on-screen with their subjects”, as gathered by Ariana Costakes. In a later interview, he defined the act of shooting as an “intuitive and instinctual response” to the dynamics established between filmmakers and filmed subjects at the time of shooting, the camera being “this activator and provoker of different kinds of social reality” (quoted in Cayuela, G. Ambrunheiras & Gómez Viñas). To give an example, Sarah’s confessional sequence inside her home-van while Luis is imprisoned is filmed with a low-angle shot, in which the camera is placed in Paravel’s lap, away from the eye-contact between both women, in order not to spoil the moment’s climate of empathy. In other sequences, the camera even records some performances, as when a “touter” – a middleman who helps customers to find the place where their particular model of car can be serviced – dances to the

hypnotic music of an ice cream van like a rider on his horse, and later says “thank you” when he walks past the camera.

According to another chronicle of the New York Film Festival, Paravel and Sniadecki noted in their press conference that “the instances in which a documentary subject becomes aware of the camera and begins to play to it, can be as valid and worthy of capture as the totally natural moments,” especially because they reveal “the subject’s development of a (...) self-reflexive awareness” (quoted in Vázquez). In these cases, Willets Point’s workers take advantage of Paravel’s and Sniadecki’s complicity to create different versions of themselves, becoming singers or dancers for the occasion. This kind of performances, as Catherine Russell has suggested, can be read as “forms of cultural resistance” able to subvert the stereotypes imposed by media on primitive or marginal communities (99). In fact, *Foreign Parts* also includes a poisoned example of television representation: the directors record a TV reporter talking about the plight of the junkyard on location, although the journalist’s working conditions do not seem the best either. She is talking to a camera that is not seen at first, but when she finishes her speech and the filmmakers modify the framing the audience realises that there is nobody behind her camera: she has to record herself without the help of a camera operator.

The highest betrayal of the old paradigm of documentary objectivity is the filmmaker’s on-screen appearance: the conventions of Direct Cinema banned it completely, although it has gradually become a common feature of performative documentaries since Edgar Morin’s and Jean Rouch’s inaugural transgression in *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d’un été*, 1961). In the most moving sequence of *Foreign Parts*, when Sarah is waiting for Luis after his release from prison, Paravel is seen twice on the screen. The first time, she receives a call from Luis on her mobile phone and gives it to Sarah, who asks for help when the call suddenly drops: then, Sniadecki, who was filming the sequence, pans to follow the phone and accidentally captures Paravel on the frame. The second time is also spontaneous, but much more transparent: when Luis finally arrives, he first embraces Sarah, then shakes hands with Sniadecki – who is still behind the camera – and finally hugs Paravel, who comes out from behind some parked cars to welcome him.

Throughout the sequence, the filmmakers do not behave as impartial observers, but as friends: they are in and out the film device at the same time, even when they are not on screen. Indeed, the sequence ends with a conversation between the two couples in which the film hierarchy is only apparently respected: Luis and Sarah are before the camera, as filmed subjects, and Paravel and Sniadecki are behind, as filmmakers, but they all talk on equal terms, without adopting rigid roles that condition their turns to speak. This conversation could probably have taken place

without the camera, but not without the filmmakers: thus, by including themselves in the film through participatory strategies, they achieve the basic goal of the observational mode – “what we see is what would have occurred were the camera not there to observe it,” as summarized by Bill Nichols (113). Arguably, contemporary ethnographic documentaries demand the filmmaker’s subjective involvement in order to be perceived as truthful films, as Jim Lane already said regarding *David Holzman’s Diary* (Jim McBride, 1967): “the new mode of filmmaking purports that once the other side of the camera is exposed and the filmmaker implicated, the documentary can more truthfully depict reality” (35).

The political background of the film, meanwhile, emerges as a contradiction in most sequences. On the one hand, Willets Point embodies the American Dream, because there “you gotta go out every day and make what you can”, as a touter says – Sniadecki has gone even further by describing the junkyard as “a wonderful example of free market capitalism” (quoted in Rapold). On the other hand, the immigrant workers lack the most basic comfort associated with that dream, at least in terms of public facilities, and if that were not enough, they all lost their jobs when the redevelopment of the area began. In 2010, the only person able to struggle against the city council was Joe, whose on-screen appearances usually include some kind of vindictory speech: the most furious one begins at the end of Sarah’s confessional sequence, when the camera is still inside her van. At first, Paravel frames Joe through the van window as he argues loudly with two other men, and after a match cut she is already filming the argument in front of the group. As soon as the two men notice the camera’s presence, they get out of the frame and leave Joe speaking alone. This instinctive reaction emphasises Joe’s solitude against the City, because he loses his audience when explaining the most obvious flaws of the project: he continuously insists that the politicians voted the redevelopment project without knowing what it entailed, and as example offers their ignorance about how to fit the future rail line, which will link the JFK and LaGuardia airports through Jamaica and Willets Point, in the new urban plan of the area. All along his crusty speech, it is not completely clear if he is actually talking to the two men or performing an imaginary conversation with the politicians:

Where you’ve put that [the new Willets Point station]? It’s been founded already! You don’t even know about that? What kind of plan do you have? You have nothing. And how is everybody gonna make a decision on nothing? There is no decision to be made. No way. No how.

Once again, the level of complicity between filmmakers and filmed subjects becomes clear in this sequence: while speaking, Joe holds a tripod in his hands that probably belongs to the filmmakers, as he does not look like a techno geek at all – some sequences before, he has admitted that,

contrary to the future residents of the area, he has no computer at home. Accordingly, the film device becomes part of the depicted reality just as the filmmakers became part of the Willets Point community.

Paravel and Sniadecki's political criticism reaches its peak in the penultimate shot of the film, a high angle overview of the area taken at the crossroads of 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Willets Point Boulevard with the American flag framed in the centre. The view from there looks like "the surface of the moon" due to the puddles-like-craters that are seen everywhere, as Robert Koehler has pointed out, while the premeditated presence of the flag "expands a city block's problems into a national dilemma", in which "Willets Point's issues are America's issues". For once, this image does not show the newly opened Citi Field, a baseball park built between 2006 and 2009 as a replacement for the adjacent Shea Stadium. The way the directors usually frame its façade as a challenging threat against the junkyard recalls "an exact duplicate of the landowners' ancient palaces looking down on the serfs," quoting Koehler again, given that its single presence reminds the power of corporate capitalism to reshape cityscapes. The contrast between the humble signs of the auto shops and the stadium's giant neon signs advertising brands such as Budweiser or Pepsi-Cola establishes a dialectical relation between making a living and making profit, as well as between local and global places.

There are many other neglected areas like Willets Point all over the world. In the 1980s, for example, Kevin Lynch and Michael Southworth described a similar junkyard near Boston – Linwood Street, in Somerville – as "an ugly, polluted, yet tolerant place, where the workers seem at ease (a remnant left by a carelessly planned highway)" (113-114). According to them, "these urban remnants are also freer places, where one is momentarily relieved of the pressures of status, power, explicit purpose, and strict control" (Lynch & Southworth 114). Contrary to the teleological narrative of capitalism, in which the old always has to make way for the new, *Foreign Parts* explores the delights of these shabby backsides, implicitly suggesting a utopian counter-narrative: what if the City improved Willets Point's infrastructures instead of turning it into a banalscape? Might the local prevail over the global? This approach has appeared in most ethnographic documentaries since the colonial period, when western filmmakers developed a naïve nostalgia for the filmed subjects' primitivism, but Paravel and Sniadecki are subtle enough to resist "the temptation to editorialize too much," as Adam Nayman has written. In fact, the details of the redevelopment plan only appear in a couple of brief intertitles at the end of the film. This choice, however, has not satisfied all critics, beginning with Edward Champion, who misses "the full picture of Bloomberg's avaricious intent" and considers that "a documentary that con-

cerns itself with the outskirts of life has the obligation to make more concrete connections to its privileged audience.”

Overall, participatory documentaries on places of otherness avoid both the omniscient perspective of expository documentaries and the witness camera of direct cinema in order to include the filmmaker’s standpoint in the film: thus, by placing filmmakers and filmed subjects in the same political arena, the tradition of the victim (see Winston), as well as porno-misery, are deactivated. Paravel and Sniadecki never hide their fondness for Willets Point in *Foreign Parts*, but they give the filmed subjects the right to defend the area as both a profitable community and a place of memory. For instance, at the end of the day a worker explains that the synergies among the different shops in the junkyard allow its smooth operation, because customers can fix any problem of their cars in just a few blocks. Similarly, Joe not only appears showing his anger against politicians, but also enjoying the small pleasures of the neighbourhood, as when he walks by the deposits of auto parts as if he were inside a cathedral, as Paravel has said (quoted in Patton), or when he marvels at the migratory dynamics of a flock of swallows that nest every year in the nearby trees. Finally, Julia does not need many words to express her sense of belonging to Willets Point: “There’s water, mud every day”, she says. “I don’t mind it though. This is my people”. These flashes of topophilia give an emotional dimension to the junkyard that might have been expressed directly by the filmmakers themselves, although in that case the film would have exceeded the boundaries of participatory ethnography. This strategy arises from a specific context marked by the impermanence of those places threatened by their imminent disappearance, in which the critical discourse about urban renewal must be constructed from intersubjectivity. In this liminal state, the author’s self, despite being present, steps back to embrace the cultural other’s perspective, thereby combining an external and internal point of view in a conscious show of respect and empathy.

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