

# Approaches to urban representations on film: a research overview

By Ingrid Stigsdotter ([ingrid.stigsdotter@ims.su.se](mailto:ingrid.stigsdotter@ims.su.se)) and Maaret Koskinen ([maaret.koskinen@ims.su.se](mailto:maaret.koskinen@ims.su.se))

## Introduction

It goes without saying that a complex nexus like “film and cities” is an impossible task to navigate, even less to present in the form of a written overview.

Indeed, this relation constitutes almost a ‘riches embarrassment’, alternatively an “elusive” one, to cite an early study.<sup>1</sup> But whereas before, the relation between films and cities was elusive because it had not been researched enough, now – ironically – it remains hard to pin down for diametrically opposite reasons. In one of the more recent collections that offers a research survey, editors Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan note that already twenty-five years ago, in the special issue of *Screen* on Space/Place/City in 1999, Karen Lury and Doreen Massey identified space, place and film as an important emerging ‘subfield of enquiry’.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, they add, since then the literature has become replete with edited collections, revealing a breadth of all possible engagements between cities and cinematic factors.

We, too, will add to the list of approaches below. In a recently published case study, we focussed on the idea of using archival film to perform a kind of critical excavation of urban space, and the representation of a particular city – Stockholm – that this ‘film archeology’ uncovers.<sup>3</sup> In this article, we wish to elaborate on some of the theoretical material that have inspired us to explore the relationship between “city” and “film”. We wish to emphasize, however, that what follows will have to be highly select, almost by default, since this relationship by now is covered in most areas and disciplines in academia – from the humanities to the social sciences to neurosciences. The list is virtually endless: Besides Urban studies and Media/Film Studies ‘proper’ one can throw into the mix History, Cultural Geography, Architecture, Art, Design, Visual Culture, Archival Science, Transnational

---

<sup>1</sup> David B. Clarke (ed) (1997). *The Cinematic City*. London and New York, Routledge, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan (ed) (2014). *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 5, note 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ingrid Stigsdotter and Maaret Koskinen (2018). ”Real and Reel Stockholm – Representations of Stockholm in I-Media-Cities, and current issues in archival film access”. *Kosmorama*, 2018, no. 272. <https://www.kosmorama.org/real-and-reel> (accessed 2018-10-12).

studies, Area Studies, Borderland studies – all of which have been augmented in innumerable ways and dimensions as the result of globalization, digitization and invisibility/surveillance culture (the panoptic city, drone surveillance, remote warfare – and so on). On top of it, there are a multitude of various crossroads amongst all these different disciplines.

Thus, for instance, the collection *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* has its origins in an interdisciplinary conference with scholars from Film Studies, Sociology, Urban Studies, Geography, and Architecture, and significantly, has an introduction each by the two editors. The fundamental premise of the book may be a sociological one, as it aims “to contribute to the study of the cinema and to the study of society by focusing on the relationship between cinema and the city as *lived social realities* [the author’s own emphasis] in a range of urban societies of the present and recent pasts.”<sup>4</sup> Still, its overarching aim is “a renegotiation of concepts of place, location, home, region, territory, nation, and, most particularly, city and suburb.”<sup>5</sup>

Ten years later Yomi Braester and James Tweedie note on the issue of interdisciplinarity that over the past several decades, and especially from the 1990s on, “the relentless process of urbanization has inspired an outpouring of empirical research and theory-building from scholars in disciplines ranging from urban studies to sociology, from art history and cinema studies to history and political science. But the most insightful of these studies begin by acknowledging the limits of historical analogy when describing recent trends in urbanization”.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein we wish to stress our limitations – neither we can, with any certainty, make claim to awareness of publications in every possible adjacent field. Nonetheless, the issue – but most of all the rich opportunities – of interdisciplinary approaches and concepts will be touched upon in the pages to come, most importantly through the notion of *space*, grounded in the spatial turn of Henri Lefebvre and his *The Production of Space* (1974).

Such caveats aside, our aim firstly is to offer a hands-on overview, based on browsing select academic publications in English, and from roughly the last two decades, in order to highlight certain themes, trends, thematic clusters, and developments. By default or by design, our research overview will deal mainly with features and fiction film.

---

<sup>4</sup> Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (ed) (2001). *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Shiel and Fitzmaurice, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Yomi Braester and James Tweedie (ed) (2010), *Cinema at the City’s Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, p.3.

As mentioned, this overview has served as a background and theoretical frame for our second objective – a presentation and discussion around archival films depicting Stockholm, the Swedish capital, where the empirical material consists of films from the interdisciplinary research project I-Media-Cities.<sup>7</sup> This project is a collaboration between archives and research institutions in eight European countries which aims to provide digital access to primarily moving image material relating to the history of nine European cities (Athens, Barcelona, Bologna, Brussels, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Turin and Vienna) through an interactive website providing users with advanced search functions, including tools for automatic video analysis, such as automatic detection of shots and camera movements and recognition of buildings and people. Stockholm is represented in I-Media-Cities through a diverse body of archival films, many of which fall within the broad category of non-fiction film.

### **Real and reel cities: Location and representation of individual cities on film**

The most prolific and remaining constant area of interest in research on the relationship between films and cities is quite simply actual location (of the shoot) – ‘cities on film’. In the collection *City + Cinema: Essays on the Specificity of Location in Film* (2007) for instance, it is argued that each city and “each place has its own uniqueness, its own history, and its own physical structure, irrespective of global modes of architectural and urban design”.<sup>8</sup> In recent years the trend of mapping individual cities in terms of location and representation has remained strong, from *Lonely Planet* travel guides to the *World Film Location*-series by Intellect, which now has reached more than forty volumes.<sup>9</sup>

In her study *London in Cinema. The Cinematic City Since 1945*, Charlotte Brunsdon, while referring to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s notion of “a sense of place” and “the recalcitrance of the city to being textualised”, still takes (mere) representation of the individual city further by differentiating between the real city and the reel city – the city as a fictional construct.<sup>10</sup> Through individual films, her book traces “the cinematic geography of post-war London, to investigate how the spaces that are, in the cinema, created through *mise*

---

<sup>7</sup> I-Media-Cities Project website: <https://imediacity.eu/> (accessed 2018-04-25).

<sup>8</sup> Gareth Griffiths and Minna Chudoba (ed) (2007). *City + Cinema: Essays on the Specificity of Location in Film*. Tampere: Tampere University of Technology (Series DATUTOP 29), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> For a list of publications so far, see Intellect’s home page: [https://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/books/view-Series\\_id=27](https://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/books/view-Series_id=27) (accessed 2018-10-12).

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Brunsdon (2007). *London in Cinema. The Cinematic City Since 1945* (London: BFI), p 13.

*en scène*, cinematography and editing, invoke and stage this city.”<sup>11</sup> Yet she too notes that whatever categories are employed, still “no one system of classification or approach is adequate. London in the cinema is interesting in different ways in different films at different historical moments. It can’t be unified.”<sup>12</sup>

Historically, studies on location and representation of cities have tended to cluster around certain auteur directors, and there has been an emphasis on Hollywood cinema, Weimar Germany and post-war European cities. Examples abound, from well-known German expressionist forms of representations of futuristic imaginary cities in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), and the comedic antics of Jacques Tati in *Playtime* (1967), to the Rome of Italian Neorealism and the intimate relation between the ennui and alienation of real post-war growth of cityscapes.<sup>13</sup>

But the focus on auteurs and their particular themes and aesthetics is a remaining trend for more recent research as well. In the collection *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (2011), featuring essays on a wide range of directors, John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel attempt to widen the notion of locality in relation to the notion of place. They note that place “can be experienced or understood both as the ultimate, entirely natural a priori [...] and as a fabrication – a product of human artifice, cultural construction, and ideology” [...]. The theorizations of cinema and place are therefore both replete with the tensions between ontology and codedness.” Thus place can be seen as “a term heroically opposed to *space*, the local in opposition to the global”.<sup>14</sup>

A notable trend in recent studies on city and location are social and political concerns, such as migration. For instance, Malini Guha’s historical study *From Empire to the World* (2015) deals with global cinematic cities within the context of world cinema, detecting in the contemporary cinematic urban landscapes of certain auteurs a “tension between an imperial past and a ‘global’ present”<sup>15</sup> in ‘othered’ migrant communities such as London’s East End. As noted in the previously mentioned volume by Pratt and San Juan, in the city many worlds, literally people, ideas and goods from around the globe come and go and collide, and thus urban space is “necessarily in the middle of and shaped by distinctive

---

<sup>11</sup> Brunson, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Brunson, p.14.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Mark Shiel (2006). *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City*, London: Wallflower Press. Certain stock or cliché themes also tend to cluster around certain cities. See eg chapter names in Barbara Menel’s (2008) *Cities and Cinema*: “Modernity and the city film: Berlin”, “The dark city and film noir: Los Angeles”, “The city of love: Paris”, etc. (New York: Routledge).

<sup>14</sup> John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (ed) (2011). *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, Minneapolis, Minn: U of Minnesota Press, pp. x and xii.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Newland (2015), book review in *Transnational Cinemas* Vol. 6 (2), pp. 207-209.

histories of colonialism, imperialism and globalization”, forming “distinctive sedimentations of crossings, collisions and histories of settlement”.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the themes and approaches noted above are relevant for the study of Stockholm on film as well. The only book-length study of Stockholm on film to date is *Våra drömmars stad: Stockholm i filmen*.<sup>17</sup> In this book, Mikaela Kindblom introduces the notion of “Stockholm-ness”<sup>18</sup> to discuss portraits of Stockholm on film. This concept is derived from Robert Kolker’s discussion of “New York-ness” on film: “a shared image and collective signifier of New York that has little to do with the city itself but rather expresses what everyone, including many who live there, have decided New York should look like”.<sup>19</sup> Kindblom selects the summery boat trip on glimmering waters past the large bridge of Västerbron and Stockholm’s City Hall in Ingmar Bergman’s *Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1953) as an example of a filmic signifier of “Stockholm-ness” in the 1950s. Indeed, the same scene features in Maaret Koskinen’s article “The ‘Capital of Scandinavia?’ Imaginary Cityscapes and the Art of Creating an Appetite for Nordic Cinematic Spaces”, where she discusses how Bergman’s films have contributed to shaping the international image of Stockholm.<sup>20</sup>

Auteur branded cinema, like the films by Ingmar Bergman, play an important part in Kindblom’s book, as well in other writings on Stockholm on film.<sup>21</sup> Kindblom does not pretend to have made a representative selection of “Stockholm films”; as the author acknowledges, the films featured in *Våra drömmars stad* reflect her personal taste, not how Stockholm in general has been depicted on film.<sup>22</sup> Kindblom implies that documentary film has been overvalued in Swedish film culture,<sup>23</sup> and she is more interested in what Koskinen

---

<sup>16</sup> Pratt and San Juan, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> Mikaela Kindblom (2006). *Våra drömmars stad. Stockholm i filmen* [The city of our dreams: Stockholm on film]. Stockholm: Stockholmia Förlag.

<sup>18</sup> Kindblom (2006), pp. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Kolker (2011) *A Cinema of Loneliness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.), p.195. Kindblom writes that Roland Barthes discusses “new yorkness”, but refers only to Kolker. Kolker in his turn refers to a 1988 edition of *Mythologies*, but does not provide a page number. However, Kolker’s “New York-ness” appears to be a paraphrase of Barthes’ discussion of “Frenchness” (p.116) and “basquity” (p. 125) in “Myth Today” (*Mythologies*, 2000 ed. transl. by Annette Lavers, London: Virago, pp. 109-159).

<sup>20</sup> Maaret Koskinen (2016). “The ‘Capital of Scandinavia?’ Imaginary Cityscapes and the Art of Creating an Appetite for Nordic Cinematic Spaces, in *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*. Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (ed). Oxford: Blackwell/John Wiley & sons, p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> See for example film critic Mårten Blomqvist’s description of Stockholm as one of the protagonists of *The Man on the Roof* (*Mannen på taket*, 1976) in his biography of the auteur director Bo Widerberg from 2011, *Höggradigt jävla excentrisk: en biografi över Bo Widerberg* [Eccentric to a bloody high degree: a biography over Bo Widerberg] (Stockholm: Norstedts), p. 369.

<sup>22</sup> Kindblom (2006) p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Kindblom (2006) p. 167.

terms an “imagined urban memoryscape”<sup>24</sup> of Stockholm created through fiction film, which means that documentaries are largely absent from her book, with the notable exception of Stefan Jarl’s “Mods trilogy”.<sup>25</sup> In other words, she emphasizes the “reel city” of Stockholm, rather than filmic representations of “real spaces”.

### **Modernity, architecture, design**

The close link between film and the city is a reiterated truth of modernity. Indeed, as noted in *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*, “the city and the moving image have, from the very outset, remained inseparable constituents of the modern urban imaginary”.<sup>26</sup> If nothing else, there is, as the book’s subtitle suggests, a decidedly scopic affinity between place/space and film, besides other shared properties, for instance technology and movement.<sup>27</sup> In his *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern From Reel to Real* (2006), architect Nezar Al Sayyad presents an urban history of modernity and postmodernity through the lens of cinema, and through a number of iconic films, arguing “the dissolution of the boundary between real and reel through time and space” or, more specifically, “how the real city and the reel city reference each other in an act of mutual representation and definition”.<sup>28</sup>

The constellation film-city-modernity in turn can be listed into so many subcategories. One of the most prominent is the cluster film/architecture and design. Indeed the relationship film-architecture is sometimes even referred to as a ‘symbiotic’ one, and has given rise to the neologism “cine-itecture”.<sup>29</sup> Among the more recent publications on film, design and architecture is Lucy Fischer’s *Cinema by Design. Art Nouveau, Modernism, and Film History*, the focus of which is the use of Barcelona’s architecture as filmic mise-en-scène, in films like Michelangelo Antonioni’s *The Passenger (Professione: reporter, 1975)* and Woody Allen’s *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (2008). Fischer highlights, for instance, how the ambivalent identity of *The Passenger*’s protagonist mirrors the “sense of irrationality” in Gaudi’s “phantasmagoric” Art Nouveau structures.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Koskinen (2016) “The ‘Capital of Scandinavia?’”, p. 200.

<sup>25</sup> *They call us Misfits (Dom kallar oss mods, 1968)*; *A Respectable Life (Ett anständigt liv, 1979)*; *Misfits to Yuppies* AKA *The Social Contract (Det sociala arvet, 1993)*.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Koeck and Les Roberts (2010) (ed). *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Koeck and Roberts, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Nezar AlSayyad (2006). *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern From Reel to Real*, New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>29</sup> Kock and Roberts, 2010, p. 2 f.

<sup>30</sup> Lucy Fischer (2017). *Cinema by Design. Art Nouveau, Modernism, and Film History*. New York: Columbia

A recent example of a more socially and politically expanded, interdisciplinary approach to design can be found in the Mediated City Research Programme, coordinated by the research group AMPS (Architecture, Media, Politics, Society) and their publication, *Filming the City* 2016. This programme aims to resist “static discipline categorizations”, and by “explicitly overlaying and interlacing ideas and working practices”, their book brings together “filmmakers, architects, designers, media specialists and video artists” and “film as an arena of architectural/urban theory and analysis”.<sup>31</sup>

As for the architectural iconography of Stockholm on film, the previously mentioned Kindblom reflects on memories of experiencing Sergel’s torg, the central square in Stockholm’s modern city area, as an “exciting, beautiful place” as a child. She notes how the connotations of this modernist square, with its pattern of large black and white triangle shapes, would later change to evoke “drugs, misery and lost souls”,<sup>32</sup> as it became the centre of a new drug culture, famously depicted in Jarl’s “Mods trilogy”.<sup>33</sup> Kindblom asks herself whether she really perceived the square as threatening before having seen Jarl’s second film in 1979,<sup>34</sup> thus raising questions about to what extent representations of the city affect our experiences of real urban spaces.

As previously mentioned, Kindblom is interested in identifying film imagery that signify “Stockholm-ness”, and recognizable architectural structures feature among the visual signifiers that make up a credible representation of Stockholm. Kindblom notes that collective signifiers of “Stockholm-ness” change over time. Film productions set in contemporary Stockholm are likely to incorporate newer urban iconography; nonetheless older architectural landmarks are arguably just as crucial to audiences’ recognition of “Stockholm-ness” in contemporary film and television culture. For example, Stockholm’s City Hall, designed by Ragnar Östberg in the architectural style known as national romanticism and inaugurated in 1923, is visible in many filmic representations of Stockholm from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the sequence from *Summer with Monika* mentioned above, but the same building also features in many contemporary film productions. Furthermore,

---

University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Foreword (xi-xii), in Edward M. Clift, Mirko Guaralda and Ari Mattes (2016) (ed). *Filming the City: Urban Documents, Design Practices and Social Criticism Through the Lens*. Bristol: Intellect.

<sup>32</sup> Kindblom (2006), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> The continued association between Sergel’s torg, colloquially known as “Plattan” (“The Slab”), and drug addiction are reflected in the title of a news item published in the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* in 2004: “The Slab – an open wound in the middle of Stockholm”. Peter Letmark (2004), “Plattan – ett öppet sår mitt i Stockholm”, *Dagens Nyheter*, Stockholm section, 13 March, <https://www.dn.se/sthlm/plattan-ett-oppet-sar-mitt-i-stockholm/> (accessed 2018-10-12).

<sup>34</sup> Kindblom (2006), p. 9.

while shots of recognizable architectural structures can function as a visual shorthand for a particular city – the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Saint Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Sydney Opera House and so on – such buildings generally constitute a backdrop, in front of which the (documentary or fictional) life of the city take place. In order to potentially create the sense of a shared, collective signifier that can work as an expression of a city like Stockholm, we need to address not just recognizable buildings, but also spatial tropes in a broader sense.

### **Exteriors and interiors: urban space**

Pratt and San Juan assert that cities and the notion of the urban are not most usefully conceived as mere context, content, setting or narrative support. Instead, they are interested mainly in the more closely entwined workings of cinematic and urban *space*, both within films and the material spaces of concrete cities. In their case, this means specifically the political potential in the continual openness of space – the capacity to create unexpected juxtapositions – as well as spaces of distribution and viewership.<sup>35</sup>

An example of a study of space within films is Edward Dimendberg’s *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, which encompasses “geography, city planning, architectural theory, and urban and cultural history”, in order to show that “film noir needs to be grasped not simply as a body of films but as a set of representational conventions and spatial tropes.”<sup>36</sup>

One of the most prolific research trends dealing with urban space is the theoretical work on cartography and viewership, as in Tom Conley’s *Cartographic Cinema*. While focusing individual films and cities the book explores movies and mental mapping, mobile topography, arguing that films “are” maps if regarded from the point of view of the cartographic concept “locational imaging”: “As the person who gazes upon a map works through a welter of impressions about the geographical information it puts forward – along with his or her own fantasies or pieces of past or anticipated memory in dialogue with the names, places, and forms on the map – so also do spectators of a film who see moving pictures on a screen mix and sift through souvenirs and images of other films and personal memories.” In this context, it is argued, a “welter of issues come forward, including perspective, visual style, narrative economy, scale, cinema, and history, the stakes of mimesis

---

<sup>35</sup> Pratt and San Juan, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Dimendberg (2004). *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University press, pp. 9 and 12.



and reception. Involved, too, are the vital components of projection and ideology” which for Conley represents “the imaginary relation that we hold with real modes of production.”<sup>37</sup>

In his paper “Postmodern High Noon: 24 and the Shifting Landscape of Television” Jan Olsson also hones in on the question of how shifting spatial representation shifts viewership as well. “The shift in representing land- and-cityscape devised by 24”, he writes, is indicative of novel paths “for capturing and making sense out of” the spatial constellation of a large-scale city region. This is because the moving image “engages with – and perhaps even shifts our perception of – land- and cityscapes in numerous ways. Depending on the tools at hand for capturing and transferring spatio-temporal imagery to different types of screens, places, sites, vistas, and nature take on novel, more or less abstract, screen figurations in relation to the phenomenal world, which audiences are often familiar with in the form of previous representations prompting fantasies along the lines of mediascapes”.<sup>38</sup>

As intimated already, in the nexus of city-space the issue of movement and mobility is inevitably part of the package. For as noted in *Cities in Transition*, “the city is understandable both as a spatial structure, a more or less fixed system of spaces and places, and as the motions or transitions that traverse that structure”.<sup>39</sup> The issue of movement naturally brings us into the footsteps of Walter Benjamin and his “passage” works, as these deal precisely with cities “in transition”, in his case those movements passing between space, time and memory – in short, exteriors and interiors.

This, in turn, is related to those affective and emotional properties of urban space, which Giuliana Bruno has mapped out so eloquently in terms of haptic routes, her aim being “the act of joining architecture and cinema, not optically but haptically”, amounting to a kind of “psychogeography” characterized by the connection between affect and space, and movement between exterior and interior landscapes. For as she so elegantly encapsulates it, “motion” is “emotion”, and “wandering” is tantamount to “wondering”: one’s movement in space is always a mobilisation of one’s emotions, memories and experiences. For Bruno, then, as for Benjamin, psychic interiors are as much a question of space as they are of time.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Tom Conley (2007). *Cartographic Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.2.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Olsson (2008). “Postmodern High Noon: 24 and the Shifting Landscape of Television, 262-286. In Miyase Christensen and Nezih Erdogan (ed). *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 266-67.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (ed) (2008), *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*. London: Wallflower Press p. 2. See also Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon (2002) (ed). *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* (Lanham (Maryland): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc) as an example of the spatial turn, and specifically cartography, cultural geography, and mobility.

<sup>40</sup> Giuliana Bruno (2002). *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*. New York: Verso, passim.

The city and the moving image share not only spatial extension – exteriors and interiors – but also temporal duration, more specifically individual and collective memory. Indeed, as noted in *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City*, with the suggestively ambivalent subtitle *Building Sites*, to “write on memory and the city is to enter into a densely populated scholarly terrain”. The reason is of course that memory not only extends across a number of disciplines but one that, taken together, by now has turned into a kind of memory culture – a “cultural obsession”.<sup>41</sup> Regardless, memory itself can be seen as spatial, and seems innately or naturally place-oriented or at least place supported.<sup>42</sup>

A major part of the abovementioned volume by Pratt and San Juan too is structured around how film and urban space have produced particular kinds of memories – and how film itself has become an archive of urban space. Memory, however, is never in the archive, it has to be produced. Thus the constellation of film and urban space serves to challenge traditional ideas of the archive as the repository of memory. Production of memory always occurs in the present.<sup>43</sup>

Both Kindblom’s previously mentioned *Våra drömmars stad* and the architecture writer Dan Hallemar’s article “Filmstaden”<sup>44</sup> are examples of writing on filmic portrayals of Stockholm that relate to personal memories and nostalgia. And Koskinen’s previously mentioned article “The ‘Capital of Scandinavia?’” focuses issues such as imaginary Nordic cityscapes, memory-scapes and psycho-geography.<sup>45</sup> While including the Danish and Norwegian capitals, Koskinen mainly deals with Stockholm, noting that like most capitals, this city is marked by traces of the past and, as such, charged with cinematic memory, and so has contributed to forming its particular memory-scape, as preserved in those virtual memory zones of film. Over time this “scape”, then, has become more or less related to national identity, as can be seen in the representation of the city in for instance the films based on Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* book trilogy (2004-2007).<sup>46</sup>

---

For film examples, see mainly chapters 1–3. For a summary of her main concepts, see Guiliiana Bruno (2008), “Motion and Emotion: Film and the Urban Fabric”, in Webber and Wilson, particularly pp. 25–26.

<sup>41</sup> Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber (2009) (ed). *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City: Building Sites*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1 and 3.

<sup>42</sup> Staiger, Steiner and Webber, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Pratt and San Juan, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Dan Hallemar (2011). “Filmstaden”, *FLM* 13/14, Available online: <http://flm.nu/2011/09/filmstaden/> (accessed 2018-10-12).

<sup>45</sup> Koskinen (2016) “The ‘Capital of Scandinavia?’”, pp. 199-223.

<sup>46</sup> The most important Swedish film scholar on Swedish geography and national identity is Per Olov Qvist. (1986) *Jorden är vår arvedel. Landsbygden i svensk spelfilm 1940-1959* [The earth belongs to us. The countryside in Swedish fiction film 1940-1959]. Uppsala: Filmhäftet, and (1995) *Folkhemmets bilder. Modernisering, motstånd och mentalitet i den svenska 30-talsfilmen* [The images of the ‘people’s home’. Modernity, resistance and mentality]. Lund: Arkiv Förlag/Studentlitteratur.

In discussions of urban space, there is often a focus on the exterior side of buildings, representations of architecture from various outside angles and distances, but in Stockholm City Museum's ongoing research project *Gendered Spaces*, the history of Stockholm is being explored through five specific city spaces: the café, the park, the brothel, the display window and the domestic kitchen.<sup>47</sup> Out of these five locations, only one, the park, is generally located outdoors – even though there are outdoor cafés, and the liminal space of the display window is usually designed to be experienced from an exterior point of view. The interior/exterior binary is of interest not only when discussing the contrast between psychological or physical experiences, but also as concepts that describe different kinds of city spaces on film.

### **Beyond the city limits: the non-urban, the regional, the transnational, the global**

A potential criticism that could be aimed at our overview is that given the increasing interest in the divide between more or less celebrated central areas of many European capitals, and their suburbs, as well as in the relationship between urban and rural landscapes, the borders of a particular city might constitute an unnecessarily narrow scope. As Judith Thissen explains in her and Clemens Zimmerman's volume *Cinema Beyond the City – Small Town and Rural Film Culture in Europe*, the roots of the film medium in late 19<sup>th</sup> century urban mass culture, and close associations between film innovations and particular city centres like Paris, Berlin and Los Angeles means that film scholars have been squarely focussed on urban cinema culture, ignoring “the history of moviegoing in the hinterlands”, and making it difficult to account for “regional or demographic differences as anything other than aberrations or the result of a lag in the pace of modernization.”<sup>48</sup>

However, as Thissen and Zimmerman themselves note, even a study such as theirs that focuses film culture on the European countryside, still has to keep ‘the city’ in focus, as “the flows back and forth between city and countryside, the common ground

---

<sup>47</sup> “Bekönade rum”, <http://stadsmuseet.stockholm.se/utforska/stadsmuseet-forskar/bekonade-rum/> (accessed 2018-10-12).

<sup>48</sup> Judith Thissen and Clemens Zimmerman (2016) (ed). *Cinema Beyond the City – Small Town and Rural Film Culture in Europe* (London: BFI). p 1. A Swedish contribution to the volume, “Cinemagoing in Sweden in the 1940s: Civil society organisations and the expansion of rural film exhibition” by Åsa Jernudd and Mats Lundmark addresses the question how the moviegoing experiences differed between rural and metropolitan audiences.

between centres and peripheries, as well as the regional dynamics within national borders, are essential to understanding the meaning of filmgoing as a sociocultural experience.”<sup>49</sup>

A related approach, albeit expanded through the concept of transnationality, is represented by *Cinema at the City's Edge* (2010).<sup>50</sup> Here the editors define ‘the city’s edge’ as “the place where the urban environment encounters its limits, a site where existing conceptions of the city are challenged and redefined”, thus arguing that “the once-fundamental dichotomy between urban and rural has been displaced”, as the “key terms – ‘cinema’ and the ‘city’ – no longer mean what they did even two decades ago.”<sup>51</sup>

An issue of the Swedish film magazine *FLM* addresses the politically charged topic of the relationship between center and periphery, with participants in a panel discussion highlighting similarities between how rural and suburban areas are portrayed in film, suggesting that an outsider filmmaker’s gaze tends to reduce characters residing in the countryside or suburban neighbourhoods – in particular suburbs associated with high rise buildings and economic deprivation – to social types determined by their geographical location.<sup>52</sup>

The relation between city centres and outskirts, between the urban and the suburban can be connected to migratory flows, globalization and transnational perspectives. In *Documenting Cityscapes: Urban Change in Contemporary Non-Fiction Film*, Iván Villarrea Álvarez analyses representations of urban space in documentary films from several different countries, arguing with reference to Dudley Andrew for a “world systems” approach to films, “mapping the transnational network of mutual influences in terms of approach, narrative and visual style that has always existed in filmmaking”.<sup>53</sup> Villarrea Álvarez’ point is highly relevant to the aims of I-Media-Cities, which will facilitate comparisons between films depicting several different European cities, and is oriented towards non-fiction film, a label encompassing information films, newsreels, documentaries and short films of various kinds, including amateur filmmaking. In short, a heterogeneous film culture, which has in recent years generated increasing interest from film scholars.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Thissen and Zimmerman, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Braester and Tweedie, pp. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Braester and Tweedie, pp. 2 and 4.

<sup>52</sup> Jacob Lundström in discussion with Dan Hallemar, Aida Paridad and Rojda Sekersöz (2014) “Flytta centrum!” in *FLM* No. 27/28 <http://flm.nu/2014/11/flytta-centrum/> (accessed 2018-10-12). The center-periphery issue is also studied in urban historian Håkan Forsell’s (2006) dissertation *Property, Tenancy, and Urban Growth in Stockholm and Berlin, 1860-1920*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate (originally in Swedish 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Iván Villarrea Álvarez (2015), *Documenting Cityscapes: Urban Change in Contemporary Non-Fiction Film*. London: Wallflower Press, p.9.

<sup>54</sup> A few recent examples include Erik Florin Persson (2017). “Useful cinema and the dynamic film history beyond the national archive – Locating municipally sponsored Swedish city films in local archives” in *Journal of*

## Urban Space through Film, Photography and Social Media: Memories and Experiences

Film now reaches a wide range of spaces, and as noted in Pratt and San Juan – cinema itself is a public urban space.<sup>55</sup> In *Filming the City: Urban Documents, Design Practices and Social Criticism Through the Lens*, Edward M. Clift points out that social media has enabled ever larger numbers of people “to essentially treat the city as the visual backdrop of their lives [...] self-reflexively understood as the *mise-en-scène* for a multitude of micro-stagings.” Social media thus reconfigures the city into what has been called an ‘informational overlay’, and so arguably “social media continues to play upon the built environment of the city in many of the same ways as film since its invention.”<sup>56</sup>

There is virtually a slew of ongoing studies in this vein. To mention but a few, the paper “Urban Cartographies: Mapping Mobility and Presence”, addresses “how new media technologies have the potential to re-orient us and, by extension, radically intervene in our understanding of place – specifically the places of the city – and in our place in it.” Thus it “explores the paradoxes of presence, co-presence and absence as represented on and generated by our living, mediated screens,” and how “temporary, mobile, and connected interfaces produce urban cartographies in the very act and process of navigation”, constituting “a performative cartography of ambulant presence” and a “multiplicity of connections between locations and other subjects.”<sup>57</sup> In the same issue the paper “Urban Interfaces: The Cartographies of Screen-Based Installations” studies “the way media technologies provide interfaces for the complexity of cities as historically layered, continuously changing, and intricately connected spaces.”<sup>58</sup>

Thus perhaps one can conclude, with Braester and Tweedie, that while Miriam Hansen wrote that cinema provided a “horizon for the experience of modernization and modernity”, the horizon in the present world “has at once drawn closer and grown hazy, as flourishing screen technologies support portable and private experiences rather than he

---

*Scandinavian Cinema* Vol. 7(2), pp.121-134; Mats Jönsson, (2016). “Non-Fiction Film Culture in Sweden circa 1920-1960. ”Pragmatic Governance and Consensual Solidarity in a Welfare State” in Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (eds), *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*. Oxford: Blackwell/John Wiley & sons, pp. 125-147. Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk and Patrick Vonderau (2016) (ed). *Films That Sell*. London: Palgrave.

<sup>55</sup> Pratt and San Juan, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Edward M. Clift, “Introduction” in Clift, Guaralda and Mattes (2016) (ed). *Filming the City*, p 6.

<sup>57</sup> Heather Zwicker, Heidi Rae Cooley and Nanna Verhoeff (2017). “Urban Cartographies: Mapping Mobility and Presence”, *Television and New Media*. Vol. 18 (4), pp. 298-304. Quotation from abstract.

<sup>58</sup> Nanna Verhoeff (2017). “Urban Interfaces: The Cartographies of Screen-Based Installations” in *Television and New Media*. Vol. 18 (4), pp. 305-319.

collective interactions of the theater.” That is, the audience is now fragmented, “a less concentrated and geographically located community.” Therefore both the place of the viewing subject and “inherited notions of the public sphere” is called into question.<sup>59</sup>

The Facebook group “Det gamla Stockholm” (Old Stockholm) is an example of media technology changing people’s understanding of the relationship between urban space, memory and social media.<sup>60</sup> It represents a memory culture associated with a particular urban place – the city of Stockholm – which is constantly developing, and engaging large numbers of individuals whose “encounters” with each other and experiences of historical representations of the city take place online, and whose interventions on the Facebook page can be understood as interactive performances connected with the city. There is thus good reason to return to this community, to consider whether its members may contribute in some way to the interactive aspects of the I-Media-Cities e-environment.

---

<sup>59</sup> Braester & Tweedie, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> Described as “a meeting place for info an images from old Stockholm (“En samlingsplats for info och bilder från det gamla Stockholm”) with, at the time of writing, over 75 000 members <https://www.facebook.com/groups/44427853430/> (accessed 2018-10-12)

## References

- Barthes, Roland (2000 ed.) *Mythologies*, transl. by Annette Lavers, London: Virago.
- Blomqvist, Mårten (2011) *Höggradigt jävla excentrisk: en biografi över Bo Widerberg* [Eccentric to a bloody high degree: a biography over Bo Widerberg] (Stockholm: Norstedts).
- Braester, Yomi and James Tweedie (ed) (2010), *Cinema at the City's Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Bruno, Giuliana (2002). *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*. New York: Verso.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte (2007). *London in Cinema. The Cinematic City Since 1945* (London: BFI).
- Clarke, David B. (ed) (1997). *The Cinematic City*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Clift, Edward M. Mirko Guaralda and Ari Mattes (2016) (ed). *Filming the City: Urban Documents, Design Practices and Social Criticism Through the Lens*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Conley, Tom (2007). *Cartographic Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.2.
- Cresswell, Tim and Deborah Dixon (2002) (ed). *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* (Lanham (Maryland): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc)
- Dimendberg, Edward (2004). *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University press.
- Fischer, Lucy (2017). *Cinema by Design. Art Nouveau, Modernism, and Film History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Florin Persson, Erik (2017). "Useful cinema and the dynamic film history beyond the national archive – Locating municipally sponsored Swedish city films in local archives" in *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* Vol. 7(2), pp.121-134.
- Florin, Bo, Nico de Klerk and Patrick Vonderau (2016) (ed). *Films That Sell*. London: Palgrave.
- Forsell, Håkan (2006) *Property, Tenancy, and Urban Growth in Stockholm and Berlin, 1860-1920*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Griffiths, Gareth and Minna Chudoba (ed) (2007). *City + Cinema: Essays on the Specificity of Location in Film*. Tampere: Tampere University of Technology (Series DATUTOP 29).

- Hallemar, Dan (2011). "Filmstaden", *FLM* 13/14, Available online: <http://flm.nu/2011/09/filmstaden/> (accessed 2018-10-12).
- Jönsson, Mats (2016). "Non-Fiction Film Culture in Sweden circa 1920-1960. "Pragmatic Governance and Consensual Solidarity in a Welfare State" in Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (eds), *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*. Oxford: Blackwell/John Wiley & sons, pp. 125-147.
- Kindblom, Mikaela (2006). *Våra drömmars stad. Stockholm i filmen* [The city of our dreams: Stockholm on film]. Stockholm: Stockholmia Förlag,.
- Koeck, Richard and Les Roberts (2010) (ed). *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kolker, Robert (2011) *A Cinema of Loneliness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.)
- Koskinen, Maaret, (2016). "The 'Capital of Scandinavia?' Imaginary Cityscapes and the Art of Creating an Appetite for Nordic Cinematic Spaces, in *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*. Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (ed). Oxford: Blackwell/John Wiley & sons.
- Letmark, Peter (2004), "Plattan – ett öppet sår mitt i Stockholm", *Dagens Nyheter*, Stockholm section, 13 March, <https://www.dn.se/sthlm/plattan-ett-oppet-sar-mitt-i-stockholm/> (accessed 2018-10-12).
- Lundström, Jacob in discussion with Dan Hallemar, Aida Paridad and Rojda Sekersöz (2014) "Flytta centrum!" in *FLM* No. 27/28 <http://flm.nu/2014/11/flytta-centrum/> (accessed 2018-10-12).
- Mennel, Barbara (2008), *Cities and Cinema*. New York: Routledge. Minneapolis, Minn: U of Minnesota Press.
- Newland, Paul (2015), book review in *Transnational Cinemas* Vol. 6 (2).
- Nezar AlSayyad (2006). *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern From Reel to Real*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Olsson, Jan (2008). "Postmodern High Noon: 24 and the Shifting Landscape of Television, 262-286. In Miyase Christensen and Nezih Erdogan (ed). *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Pratt, Geraldine and Rose Marie San Juan (ed) (2014). *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.



Qvist, Per Olov (1986) *Jorden är vår arvedel. Landsbygden i svensk spelfilm 1940-1959* [The earth belongs to us. The countryside in Swedish fiction film 1940-1959]. Uppsala: Filmhäftet.

Qvist, Per Olov (1995) *Folkhemmets bilder. Modernisering, motstånd och mentalitet i den svenska 30-talsfilmen* [The images of the 'people's home'. Modernity, resistance and mentality]. Lund: Arkiv Förlag/Studentlitteratur.

Rhodes, John David and Elena Gorfinkel (ed) (2011). *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*,

Shiel, Mark (2006). *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City*, London: Wallflower Press.

Shiel, Mark and Tony Fitzmaurice (ed) (2001). *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Staiger, Uta, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber (2009) (ed). *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City: Building Sites*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stigsdotter, Ingrid and Maaret Koskinen (2018). "Real and Reel Stockholm – Representations of Stockholm in I-Media-Cities, and current issues in archival film access". *Kosmorama*, 2018, no. 272. <https://www.kosmorama.org/real-and-reel> (accessed 2018-10-12).

Thissen, Judith and Clemens Zimmerman (2016) (ed). *Cinema Beyond the City – Small Town and Rural Film Culture in Europe* (London: BFI).

Verhoeff, Nanna (2017). "Urban Interfaces: The Cartographies of Screen-Based Installations" in *Television and New Media*. Vol. 18 (4), pp. 305-319.

Villarme Álvarez, Iván (2015), *Documenting Cityscapes: Urban Change in Contemporary Non-Fiction Film*. London: Wallflower Press.

Webber, Andrew and Emma Wilson (ed) (2008), *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*. London: Wallflower Press

Zwicker, Heather, Heidi Rae Cooley and Nanna Verhoeff (2017). "Urban Cartographies: Mapping Mobility and Presence", *Television and New Media*. Vol. 18 (4), pp. 298-304.

### **Web pages**

Facebook group "Det gamla Stockholm" [The old Stockholm]:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/44427853430/> (accessed 2018-10-12)

I-Media-Cities project homepage: <https://imediacities.eu/> (accessed 2018-10-12).

Intellect World Film Location page: <https://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/books/view-Series,id=27> (accessed 2018-10-12).

Stockholm City Museum research project “Bekönade rum” [Gendered Spaces]: <http://stadsmuseet.stockholm.se/utforska/stadsmuseet-forskar/bekonade-rum/> (accessed 2018-10-12).

## **Filmography**

Allen, Woody (2008) *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

Antonioni, Michelangelo (1975), *The Passenger/Professione: reporter*

Bergman, Ingmar (1953), *Summer with Monika/Sommaren med Monika*.

Lang, Fritz (1927), *Metropolis*.

Jarl, Stefan (1968) *They call us Misfits/Dom kallar oss mods*.

Jarl, Stefan (1979), *A Respectable Life/Ett anständigt liv*.

Jarl, Stefan (1993), *Misfits to Yuppies AKA The Social Contract/Det sociala arvet*.

Tati, Jacques, (1967) *Playtime*.