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CINEMA AND THE CITY"

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The City Plays Itself – Cinema and the City

Special Issue Guest Edited by

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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 Global 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 Arroyo **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 Villarnea 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; Brunson 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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