Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media

Edited by Johan Andersson and Laurence Webb

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Conceptions of the term *cinematic city* tend to be predicated on the notion that 'the city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city'[1]. Johan Andersson and Laurence Webb's edited collection, *Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media* (Wallflower Press, 2016), seeks to broaden and challenge our understanding of current formulations of the cinematic city in an age of accelerated global media flows, globalisation and rapidly transforming cityscapes.

Andersson and Webb's collection is as diverse as the rapidly changing constructs that it seeks to interrogate. In seeking to move beyond previous Euro-American centric conceptions of the cinematic city, the collection presents a myriad of case studies interrogating the role of screen culture as part of daily life in cities such as Buenos Aires, Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Copenhagen, Delhi, Kolkata, Lagos, Los Angeles, Malmö, Manila, Paris, Rome, and Shanghai. This approach creates a transnational perspective that challenges the notion that globalisation has necessarily resulted in a homogenisation of how the audience relates to the screen and its content.

In their introduction, the editors frame subsequent analyses by questioning if it is even possible 'to speak of a "cinematic city"' (p3) in light of the spatial transformation between 'audience, moving image and urban environment' (p3) in recent years. Instead, the collection engages with this question by expanding the notion of the cinematic city beyond on-screen representations of the city to interrogate the screen's representational and material role within the contemporary global city. Drawing on a range of perspectives contributors address screen culture by examining film festivals, video art, television and found footage, as well as considering the role of public screens and small screen formats within the city. By doing this the collection highlights the specificity of local practices and demonstrate that global media practices can be considered to be far from ubiquitous practices.

Global Cinematic Cities is divided into four distinct themes; Transnational

Screen Cities, Global City Imaginaries, Public Screens and New Media Landscapes and New Narrative Topographies. Thomas Elsaesser sets the tone for the first section, Transnational Screen Cities, with an entreaty to rescue the notion of the cinematic city. Elsaesser suggests that we need to radically rethink what the global city of postmodernity might entail for screen culture (p26). Elsaesser goes on to situate the global city as being an heir to the cinematic city arguing that new forms of sociability and social interaction now articulate themselves differently in the urban space. In this chapter, Elsaesser posits the international film festival as an emblematic phenomenon of the global city that enables spatial relationships to be remapped in order to provide a clearer understanding of the notion 'world cinema' (p24) as a relational concept rather than a term that denotes a binary opposition to Hollywood film.

Drawing our attention to mobile contemporary industrial practices, Pei-Sze Chow, discusses how the popular TV show *Bron/Broen/The Bridge* (2011) co-produced by Denmark and Sweden mediates and resituates recently formed transnational borders to help formulate new urban-regional identities. Also addressing an industrial perspective of the global media environment Jonathan Hayes discusses the rapid reshaping of Nollywood from a grassroots industry to one that is dominated by transnational corporations such as Netflix. Hayes discussion particularly draws our attention to how these corporations specifically target diasporic expatriate audiences across the globe illustrating the complex nature of contemporary national audiences and national cinema that can now be understood to be unbounded entities.

The Global City Imaginaries section of the book addresses how both digital and real-life interactions are represented on-screen to show how displacement, isolation and social anxiety plays out in in the digitalized city. By presenting a close reading of Gustavo's Taretto's rom-com *Medianeras* (*Sidewalls*, 2011) Joanna Page draws a parallel between media and urban ecologies in Buenos Aires. Page's analysis explores the virtual and physical relationship between the people of the city and the material space that they inhabit. In the following chapter, Lawrence Webb discusses Spike Jonze's critically acclaimed film *Her* (2013). Webb argues that *Her's* 'near-future' (p 95) visualisation of the Los Angeles cityscape acts as a dialogue with the contemporary reality of the city. He suggests that the film offers an intervention into urban discourses through it's much reviewed and discussed visualisation of a potential Los Angeles of the future. Webb also argues that the film brings a number of the city's concerns, such as the impact of digital technologies on social interaction and public space along with anxieties about accelerated gentrification and downtown redevelopment, into relief by reworking the linkage with the cinematic city.

In the final chapter of this section Malini Guha questions what is at stake for aspirational and rapidly developing cities such as Kolkata. Guha examines recent Bengali films *The Future of the Past* (Anik Dutta, 2012) and *Maach, Mishti and More* (Mainak Bhaumik, 2013) that address the politics of place by foregrounding thematic concerns through a nostalgia for the city's past that is combined with new and emerging facets of the city.

The third section of the book expands beyond the confines of the film text to consider the engagement between varying types of screens and their participation in public life. In the first chapter of this section, Chris Berry compares the use of public screens in Shanghai and Cairo. Berry concludes that the way that public screens are used in both cities diverges considerably that signals different and localised patterns of behaviour and sociality in relation to screen culture. Yomi Braester follows this up by analysing the role of the moving image as an intrinsic component of both public and private spheres. By examining the use of selfies, surveillance and video art by Tan Tan, Li Juachan and Ai Wei Wei, Braester posits that public space and urban citizenship is constantly being redefined and redeveloped in a mutually constitutive process. In the final chapter of this section Igor Kristic analyses Magnum photographer, Jonas Bendickson's, interactive web documentary and immersive video installation, *The Places we Live* (2008). The project began life as a photo book depicting the slums of Caracas, Jakarta, Mumbai and Nairobi. Kristic's analysis questions if Bendickson's use of remediation can provide an alternative critical approach to this issue or if it can, in fact, be more closely aligned with slum tourism?

The fourth and final section of the book entitled New Narrative Topographies is concerned with spatial trajectories within contemporary cinema. Will Higbee demonstrates how narrative space is challenged and resituated as a result of the recent immigrant experience in France. Using the Cote d'Azur setting for *Rust and Bone* (Jacques Audiard, 2012*)* as an example Higbee shows how place identification is reformulated as a result of social exclusion. Meanwhile, Jinhee Choi challenges conceptions of cinematic space in South Korean gangster films. Choi draws attention to a shift in the use of Busan as a key location in the 2000s rather than the traditionally used Seoul as a result of a government initiative to boost the local film industry. Finally, Christian B Long interrogates what he terms the 'transport infrastructure' (p. 235) in Hollywood action thrillers. Long calls attention to the deeply embedded tradition of situating chase sequences in cities around the world. However, Long advances this argument by identifying a trend within Bond and Bourne franchises toward an increasingly using developing cities as locations for chase sequences in order to stay valid for contemporary global audiences.

Rather than providing a clear definition of what constitutes a contemporary global cinematic city Andersson and Webb's collection demonstrates it to be a rapidly evolving entity. As Elsaesser suggests it is necessary for us to abandon previous conceptions of both cinema and city in order to even begin to engage with a notion of what might constitute an understanding of the global cinematic city. While both city and cinema are transforming at an unprecedented level one thing that Andersson and Webb's collection makes clear is the intrinsic role that screen culture plays as part of global culture both materially and representationally. *Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media* encourages us to take a multi-faceted view of the global media landscape illuminating a diversification of screen practices and reflections of contemporary cultural life.

[1] Clarke, David, ed. *The cinematic city*. Routledge, 2005, p2.