

## IMAGINING GEOGRAPHIES OF FILM

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*Zusammenfassung:* Da die Geographie des Films mittlerweile erwachsen geworden ist, ist es an der Zeit, nicht mehr nur fachspezifische Fragen zu erörtern, sondern bestehende theoretische Grenzen auszuweiten. Geographischem Interesse für das Thema Film fehlt häufig die notwendige kritische Perspektive; Hauptaugenmerk liegt bislang auf dem geographischen Realismus der Filme und weniger auf der Art und Weise, wie diese Bedeutung erzeugen. Geographen sollten durch den Einsatz räumlicher Theorien Einblicke erarbeiten, die über die reine Repräsentation filmischen Raums hinausreicht und vielmehr materielle Niederschläge lebensweltlicher Erfahrung und alltägliche soziale Praktiken in den Fokus rücken. Mit diesem Essay fordern wir mehr kritische Filmgeographien. Indem wir dieser Forderung nachkommen, beobachten wir, wie eine Reihe traditioneller und auftauchender geographischer Betätigungsfelder – Landschaft, Raum/Räumlichkeiten, Mobilität, Maßstab und Netzwerke – neu bewertet werden müssen und auf diese Weise nicht nur Disziplingrenzen der Geographie ausweiten, sondern auch die der Filmwissenschaften.

*Summary:* To the extent that the geographic study of film has come of age, it is important to not only tie it to disciplinary issues but also to push theoretical boundaries. Geographic concern is often lacking a critical perspective, focusing primarily on the geographic realism of films rather than how they produce meaning. Geographers needed to elaborate insights through critical spatial theories, so that our studies are not only about filmic representations of space but are also about the material conditions of lived experience and everyday social practices. With this essay, we argue for more critical film geographies. In doing so, we note how a series of traditional and emergent geographic ‘primitives’ – landscapes, spaces/spatialities, mobilities, scales and networks – are reappraised and push disciplinary boundaries for geography and film studies in general.

*A Introduction*

Allow us the indulgence to begin this essay with the proclamation that the study of film within the discipline of geography has now come of age. Certainly, in terms of the number of articles and books published over the last decade or so, it seems reasonable to argue that the subfield has reached a critical mass (cf. AITKEN a. ZONN 1994a; KENNEDY a. LUKINBEAL 1997; CLARKE 1997; CRESWELL a. DIXON 2002). Moreover, and importantly in terms of imagining the subfield, invigorated theoretical debates on the character of representation and meaning production have resulted in the development of both spatial ontologies of film and filmic ontologies of space. This theoretical sophistication offsets the narrow empiricism of earlier work, dispelling notions that geographers either naively embrace certain films as tools for representing geographic concepts (landscape, space, place and so forth) or they unabashedly borrow from film theory to help elaborate geographic questions (BROWNE 1994; CLARKE 1997; CRESWELL a. DIXON 2002).

Indeed, this series of recent developments, loosely held under the rubric of anti-essentialism, are sufficiently complex that an overview of the kind we have

written here does not do justice to the theoretical and empirical nuances of the subfield. In a halting attempt to capture some current concerns over the production and consumption of meanings, we outline a number of ‘key’ geographic concepts – landscapes, spaces/spatialities, mobilities, scales and networks – that have been put to work by film geographers, but which, as part and parcel of broader disciplinary debates, have also been themselves re-imagined through an engagement with film.

The following, then, is not a review of the literature, but rather the articulation of what we consider to be an important agenda. Before we undertake such a project, however, it is a swell to outline the emergence of this area of specialization called ‘film geographies’.

*B How did the subfield of ‘Film Geographies’ emerge and develop?*

As intimated above, it is only in the last ten years or so that sufficient quantities of research articles and books have been produced to allow for a disciplinary subfield. Though the earliest writings on film were produced in the 1950s for *The Geographical Magazine*, these

were simply aimed at elucidating the usefulness of film for teaching purposes. Geographers should be encouraged, so the argument went, to use clips from those films which represented landscapes in as faithful manner as possible, such that the students could gain a sense of what it would be like to experience those places first hand, just as if they were in the 'field' (e.g. KNIGHT 1957; MANVELL 1956). In this regard, film was understood to be more successful in its mimeticism than other media such as photography, in that it managed to capture *movement* as well as *form*, and so could be used to capture both natural processes, such as erosion and its resulting landscapes, and social processes, such as transportation and its networks.

With the publication of AITKEN and ZONN's (1994) *Place, Power, Situation and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*, however, a new era was heralded that addressed this assumption that film should and could provide a transparent 'window' on to the real world. As geographers in general engaged with broader-scale academic debates over the 'crisis of representation',<sup>1)</sup> so those interested in film began to address the relationship between the 'real,' as in that which the camera has filmed, and the 'reel,' by which they mean the image on the screen (e.g. BENTON 1995).

Two major lines of research emerged from this examination of the real and the reel. The first stems from political economy – particularly the work of the Frankfurt School in 1930s Germany – and emphasizes the way in which film is part and parcel of capitalism. Here, emphasis is placed on the fact that film is the product of a highly successful industry; as such, one can trace the form and impact of successive rounds of investment and disinvestment across the globe, as well as relations of exploitation between those who gain profits from the sale and exhibition of film and those who work to produce film (e.g. SCOTT 2004). Moreover, it is argued, the content of such films more often than not serves to divert attention from the broader effects of capitalism, including poverty, crime and environmental degradation. Instead, film panders to a voyeuristic interest in sex and violence, or a more benign concern with the melodramatic plight of the individual (e.g. HARVEY 1989). Last but not least, film works to commodify both people and place, in the sense that as each becomes a part of the film project, their individuality and uniqueness are reduced to a standard, marketable

package. The sum effect is to destroy critical thinking in film-watching as well as film-making.

And yet, not all political economic analyses are so pessimistic. Frankfurt School member WALTER BENJAMIN (1937) famously argued that film offers escapism for its audience; it offers up new horizons outside of their daily existence. This feeling of liberation may not be realized through the actual overthrow of capitalism, but it is nevertheless indicative of the dreams, myths and expectations that are integral part of the complex and subtle process of film spectatorship (see NATTER a. JONES 1993).

The second line of research that has emerged ensues from an anti-essentialist (sometimes called poststructuralist) perspective. Anti-essentialism emphasizes the fact that objects do not exist in a vacuum; instead, they are given meaning through the actions and thoughts of people. We cannot point to one particular meaning as being somehow 'True', the argument goes, even if there are commonalities across a range of viewpoints as to the nature of a particular object, or if one perspective seems to work better than others when attempting to manipulate an object or series of objects. This is because we cannot escape our own subjectivity; we can hypothesize, but never realize, what an object is like outside of those meanings ascribed to it. Truth will always be a social construct, as opposed to a transcendental fact. Furthermore, we as individuals cannot access someone else's view of the world, and so can make no 'truth' claim about accurately representing those views.

The significance of this for film geography is that we can no longer talk of film representing, or mimicking, reality, because we can no longer assume that there is a single, coherent reality waiting out there to be filmed (e.g. AITKEN a. ZONN 1994b; CRESSWELL a. DIXON 2002; DIXON a. GRIMES 2004; DIXON a. ZONN 2005; HANNA 2000). To be sure, the camera records mass and motion, but the 'nature' of those objects that appear of screen is firmly located in the social realm, wherein meaning is ascribed to them. Similarly, the nature of those objects viewed on screen is just as full of signification. Accordingly, film geographers have developed research into: (1) how particular meanings are indeed ascribed to people and place as they appear on screen. This requires an appraisal of how cinematic techniques are used to convey action, narrative and emotion (e.g. BRIGHAM a. MARSTON 2002; FORD 1994; KIRSCH 2002); (2), how the meanings of on-screen peoples and places interconnect with meanings asserted by other mediums, such as the TV, media and advertising (e.g. SMITH 2002); and (3), the interplay between technology and the sensory environment. Here, an emphasis is placed on the manner in which filmic apparatus

<sup>1)</sup> For BAUDRILLARD, the widespread public loss of faith in the authentic can be laid at the door of the media. "Such is the watershed of a hyperreal society, in which the real is confused with the model" (2001, 19).

stimulates the body's array of sensory equipment (e.g. CRANG 2002), but also how prevailing modes of perception in turn propel how technology is used and adapted (e.g. DOEL a. CLARKE 2002).

Underpinning all three of these research areas is an interest in the power relations behind the construction of meaning and the practices of viewing, as some notions of what people and place are like, as well as notions of how, where and when to watch, become much more taken for granted than others. The pervasive characterization of the desert as a space of and for male heroism, for example, has been the subject of debate in geography (e.g. KENNEDY 1994), as has the association of small town America with reactionary ideology and practice (e.g. CRAVEY et al. 2004).

And yet, it is as well to remember that these are held to be social constructions, and hence are much more complex than our depiction of them. Moreover, they are very much open to transformation. In a move that harkens back to the work of WALTER BENJAMIN, mentioned earlier, much is now being made of the engagement between the film and the audience, and in particular the issue of how the meanings of those places within which film-watching occurs – including the home, the car and even the bus or train as well as the cinema – are themselves transformed through the practice of film-watching, a practice that is just as much about taste, touch and smell as it is about sound and sight (e.g. HUBBARD 2002).

From a simple exercise in pedagogy, then, film has become one of the key mediums through which geographers have explored a host of research questions regarding the way in which we understand and reflect on the meanings we ascribe to ourselves, others and the world at large. And yet, the question must be asked: does this geographic research have significance to those outside of our discipline?

### *C Why do we need critical geographic appraisals?*

By focusing on landscapes, spaces/spatialities, mobilities, scales and networks, we want to argue that a geographic appraisal of films is not only an appropriate endeavour but a vital one not just for geography but also for the film studies. In film studies, history rather than geography has mattered in analysis of film as a key representational form. In the early years of the industry, hagiographies noted the emergence, development and eclipse of particular technologies, genres and careers, while implicitly affirming the film industry's significance as an economic product and of film viewing as an emergent set of social practices (e.g. FIELDING

1967; GRAU 1914; HAMPTON 1931; JACOBS 1939; MACGOWAN 1965; RAMSAYE 1926). The development of historical materialist accounts in the 1970s broadened the field of inquiry, revealing the socio-economic context within which key stages in the development of the industry, such as the introduction of the Hollywood system, were embedded (e.g. ALLEN 1977; BRANIGAN 1979; BUSCOMBE 1977, 1978; COMOLLI 1971; SPELLERBERG 1979). Important as these insights were, they belied a narrow developmental approach to the study of film that missed the circularity and spatiality of meaning production and consumption.

Unfortunately, as noted above, well into the 1990s geographic concern was also lacking a critical perspective, focusing primarily on articulating how certain films portrayed a quirky geographic realism rather than more pithy issues of how they produced meaning. It became clear that film geographies as a subfield had to invigorate and reinforce geographic insights that are not just about mapping spatial metaphors onto films. Geographers needed to elaborate insights through critical spatial theories, so that our studies are not only about filmic representations of space but are also about the material conditions of lived experience and everyday social practices. In the following, we map out in more detail how geographers have dealt with these areas of concern. In doing so, we note how a series of traditional and emergent geographic 'primitives' – landscapes, spaces/spatialities, mobilities, scales and networks – have been reappraised, and the potential of this for film studies more generally.

## *1 Landscapes*

### *1.1 Landscape as a medium*

Since the 1920s, if not before, landscape interpretation has been an Anglo-American geographic mainstay. A keen observation of landscape revealed the essence of people's interactions with the environment. Surely then, filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Fritz Lang, David Lean, Peter Weir or Sophia Coppola – all noted for the painstaking way they create screen landscapes – are doing truly geographic work, at least in a phenomenological sense, when they lay bare the souls of men and women embroiled in spectacular landscapes? Can we say this also of Quentin Tarantino? To answer yes to this question requires a fuller appreciation of the power of landscapes.

As we noted above, films, and particularly those that spectacularly display natural landscapes, have long been used in geography as pedagogic devices. As far as

we are aware, the first writing about the use of film in Anglo-American geography dates from a series of articles in *The Geographical Magazine* in the 1950s. In collaboration with Dr. ROGER MANVELL, Director of the British Film Academy, the series' writers emphasized the national character and the factual-basis of filmmaking. Even although the articles did not preclude the geographical use of narrative films, their primary focus was on documentary films (KNIGHT 1957; MANVELL 1956; WRIGHT 1956). The articles on narrative cinema in *The Geographical Magazine* series focus specifically on the realism of the images of landscapes in terms of a diegetic representation of national cultures.<sup>2)</sup>

The focus, here, and in film articles that appear in some geography is about the accurate depiction of landscapes that say something about culture from a very Sauerian interpretative model (e.g. BENTON 1995; KENNEDY 1994). This is not necessarily articulating landscape as a passive stage upon which culture struts its stuff. Rather, the morphology of landscape is seemingly depicted accurately in the ways it actively connects with culture. In this interpretative gambit, culture is a factor and landscape is a medium.

### 1.2 *Landscapes as actors*

The plea to representational *accuracy* has, however, come under scrutiny, as the discipline of geography continues to engage with the broader, academic debates on what has been termed the 'crisis of representation'. As AITKEN and ZONN (1994b), HANNA (2000) and CRESSWELL and DIXON (2002) make clear, we can no longer ascribe an ontological depth and security – in other words, an essence – to the off screen world, as opposed to an onscreen artificiality that can serve to illuminate or obscure the real.<sup>3)</sup> Rather, it has been argued, both are very much constructed, in the sense that they are the product of social practices shot through with unequal power relations, are imbued with conflicting social meanings and are effective means through which often contentious social relations, iden-

ties and practices are in themselves constructed. As such, both off screen and on screen landscapes simply cannot be taken at face value; instead, their analysis is dependent upon the epistemological assumptions brought to bear by the filmmaker and researcher and in particular their understanding of the 'social' and the ways it co-constructs and imagines the 'spatial'. One early way of exploring the embeddedness of film landscapes was to focus on the ways that landscapes were represented.

Although it is certainly problematic, it is fairly easy to see how filmmakers use landscapes as characters or as foils for characters' emotions. When geographers first started focusing on narrative film from a theoretical perspective in the 1980s, many were intrigued with the notion of portrayed landscapes as part of the psyche of the protagonists. The vast sweeping deserts of Utah of John Ford's Westerns (it did not matter that the action was supposed to be taking place further East) fore-fronted John Wayne's rugged individualism and indomitable spirit. David Lean made his landscapes do work in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) when they resonated with the emotions of the central character, played powerfully by Peter O'Toole. At the beginning of the film, Lawrence is in love with the desert and he has a grand plan for the Arab revolt. Lean portrays sensual dunes and symmetrical open vistas. By the end of the movie, the Arab uprising is in tatters and Lawrence in falling into his own psychosis. The desert is portrayed as rocky and uninviting and the scenes framed by the camera are unbalanced (KENNEDY 1994, 166).

Another great example of this kind of animation is Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) where the landscape comes alive through narcoleptic dreams reflecting the Freudian journey in search of mother-love embarked upon by the River Phoenix character. Similarly, although in a wholly different psychological context, the portrayed landscapes of New York and Los Angeles mirror the contrasting moods of Alvy Singer, Woody Allen's self-played character in *Annie Hall* (1977). The antipathy that Alvy Singer has for Los Angeles is represented on location with a pervasive, glaring sunlight. Sunlight is reflected off bland buildings, car windshields, and residential patios. Characters are backlit as they stand in front of windows or patio doorways, seemingly one dimensional or washed out by the sunlight (FORD 1994). Reflected sunlight represents Allen's view of the lack of depth of Los Angeles culture in contrast to New York, which is filmed in warm earth-tones. A similar technique is seen in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996) where Edinburgh, the setting for drug addiction and urban dilapidation, is filmed pri-

<sup>2)</sup> The world evoked by narrative film is known as the film's *diegesis*, from the Greek word for narrated story. Diegetic components of films include both the activities and places that make up the fictional world of film (see PECKHAM 2004).

<sup>3)</sup> This emphasis on the superficiality of representation can also be found, of course, in film studies. SERGEI EISENSTEIN (1989), for example, animates architectural space at the expense of the cinematic; the observer can pass through and engage with the former, while the latter merely offers a passing spectacle.

marily in gray-tones and London, the setting for the main character's seeming renewal, is filmed in bright colors accompanied by up-beat music. In all of these examples, the landscape is understood to be a projection of the sentiment or spirit of the protagonist.

### 1.3 *Landscapes as work and doing work*

Another way to explore the social embeddedness of filmic landscapes is, as DON MITCHELL (2000, 2003) points out, to address: (1) the notion of landscape as both *a work* (a product of human labor that encapsulates the dreams, desires and all the injustices of the people and social systems that make it); and (2) the notion of landscape as something that *does work* (it acts as a social agent in the further development of a place).

The British 'kitchen sink' movies of the 1950s and 1960s are good examples of the kind of landscape as *work* and *doing*. These 'surface-realism' movies represent the everyday landscapes and places of working-class people as integrally part of cultural politics in post-WWII Britain. In contrast to Classic Hollywood Cinema, which lasted from 1920–1960, producing Ford's Westerns and other melodramatic fantasies as commodities in a highly centralized production process (cf. BYARS 1991; NAFICY 1999), the British 'kitchen sink' phenomenon was focused on everyday working-class life. The work of the portrayed landscape (its drabness and kitchen sink feel) was to bring the protagonist down as he attempted to rise above the drudgery of everyday life. As ANDREW HIGSON (1984, 3) puts it, the "Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill" becomes an iconographic cliché for this cycle of films because it was the setting that the protagonist most wanted. It was the god-trick, the controlling bird's eye view of landscape. And yet, the everyday world, the gritty urban environment, conspires to mire the protagonist who achieves his ends with misogyny and violence. Embodied within this landscape is all the embattled frustrations of post-WWII working class life for both men and women.

And then there is Quentin Tarantino. His movies (and particularly *Pulp Fiction*, 1994) provide a direct contrast to those noted above, but are also examples of landscapes as works. Drawing on the work of SCOTT KIRSCH (2002), we argue that Tarantino contrives a relentless disconnect between emotions and violence in a seemingly placeless world of movement where landscapes do not seem to fit at all. In *Pulp Fiction*, the action often moves forward while protagonists drive in cars and, importantly for KIRSCH, the outside world of Los Angeles is only vaguely seen as it passes by. KIRSCH (2002, 33) argues that it is the peculiar spatial nature of Tarantino's aesthetic and, particularly, his barest

intimation of the place Los Angeles in *Pulp Fiction* that highlights a quirky morality and social order:

"The spaces of *Pulp Fiction* are not the stuff of traditional geographical analyses. Like the world scrolling by but barely visible outside Jules and Vincent's car window, it is a film virtually without landscape. There is almost no time in *Pulp Fiction* for the traditional, well-ordered views of the landscape perspective that serve to set meaning in place or fix a moral frame of reference through the composition of relatively static visual scenes."

KIRSCH points out that this lack of a fixed, familiar geography sustains a different, and yet nonetheless illuminating, hyper-geography that is akin to ED SOJA's (1996) and MICHAEL DEAR's (2000) fragmented Los Angeles. KIRSCH goes on to elaborate the effects of Tarantino's use of traveling through space in cars to push his narrative, of his exaggerated boundary between public and private space, and of his use of private space to resolve all problems. This mobile and complex spatiality makes the film's morality especially difficult to fix in place. Instead, the viewer is treated to a set of mobile, transient, unstable and barely constructed public and private spaces into which and out of which Jules and Vincent flow. This is a fragmented, intermittent, uprooted notion of landscape that is matched by the circular, interrupted style of the film's narrative.

In similar fashion, FREDRIC JAMESON (1992) points to the creation of a hyper-geography in Kidlat Tahimik's (1977) *The Perfumed Nightmare*. It may be assumed from this sequential placement of the film's protagonist in a series of increasingly 'First World' locales – from Balian to Manila, Paris and Munich – that the film is actually 'modernist' in its representation of landscape, wherein each works to symbolize a particular socio-economic, political and cultural condition. But, JAMESON argues, this is a thoroughly postmodern (if not post-structural) representation in that each space is inextricably linked with the others through the symbol of the bridge. Throughout the film reference is made to efforts at 'bridging' – rural and urban, earth and moon, nature and culture – while examples of various bridges are shot *in situ* or as pictures within other texts.

"All of these [landscapes] are then in constant decomposition and modernization, including each other heterogeneously, in such a way that narrative progression becomes unthinkable, except as a bus ride, and we learn to substitute for it the discontinuous series of spatial exhibits that might be offered by a collection of snapshots [...]" (JAMESON 1992, 197–8).

The bridge, then, does not work to take us from A to B in some logical, sequential progression either over



space or through time, but rather serves to dissolve the self-contained character of each locale. This experience of a hyper-geography is, of course, a key hallmark of the ‘postmodern condition’ (JAMESON 1991). Thus, for JAMESON (1992, 197) the bridge itself operates as an effective postmodern symbol of the disorientating impacts of late capitalism.

To sum up at this point, the concept of landscape has undergone transformation over time and, hence, the role of the landscape in film has been re-imagined. Initially, the question was to what extent film was able to ‘capture’ the essence of a particular landscape, itself understood to be the physical imprint of a cultural group. Within broader debates on the crisis of representation, however, this simple distinction ‘true’ and ‘false’ representations has been increasingly problematized. Within film geography, researchers began to delve into the manner in which the character of the hero can be seen to be projected onto the landscape. And, research began to emerge on the issue of landscape as work, wherein the on-screen milieu is seen to have an agency in the construction of characters, narratives and all manner of ideas, attitudes and sentiments. This is a more complex view of landscape as both product and agent of change, one which, because of the associated concerns over representation, is explored through the medium of film.

## 2 *Spaces and spatialities*

It may be argued, and we do so with some trepidation, that spaces are a structure within which images are created. It follows, then that the framing of landscapes is about the construction of filmic spaces. Film space is often referred to in film studies as its *mise-en-scène*, but this is, as we hope to show, a bit of a set up.

### 2.1 *Space: it’s a frame, it’s a setup!*

Audiences have come to accept a variety of film techniques as forms of film space. These narrative conventions are part of the art of cinematic story-telling. Film meaning is constituted through a variety of representational techniques (and, importantly, some of these have non-representational impacts) that encourage us, as viewers, to suspend our disbelief, and our knowledge that this is simply 24 still-images passing by the lens of the camera every second. Narrative conventions co-conspire with various technological developments and camera techniques that obscure the filmic apparatus and create the filmic space, or what ROLAND BARTHES (1989) termed the ‘reality effect’. For CHRISTIAN METZ (1974) – the film theorist who famously introduced

psychoanalytic theory to film studies – understanding image events and sequence is sufficient for most film analysis. Film images are always in motion over time through space with sequence (e.g. AITKEN 1991). This is clearly problematic from a Lefebvrian perspective that attempts to get beneath, within and beyond this structure. In fact, this is precisely what we want to do, and so we will return to LEFEBVRE with some force in a moment.

But before we can talk about the politics of the what goes on beneath, within and beyond the *mise-en-scène*, it is worthwhile stating that the space of a shot, or how the frame holds the action and its affect (and our perceptions), is of great importance to film narrative, sequence and rhythm. Camera techniques such as panning, tilting and tracking define not only the space of the image but also our perceptual position and our perspective. For Ethiopian film-maker TESHOME GABRIEL (1982), the production of meaning via the careful consideration of cinematic technique is of immense importance for the genre known as Third Cinema. Via its own particular codes and conventions, he argues, Third Cinema can communicate an ideological position that undercuts the normative Western stance of First World films. For example, GABRIEL points to how: high/low camera angles can emphasize the socio-spatial disparities of subjects; the use of wide-angle shots can emphasize the communitarian context of subjects; straight-to-camera dialogues can bridge the subject-viewer divide; the juxtaposition of times and spaces via dynamic editing can delineate socio-spatial contrasts between groups; and the dissonant overlay of non-synchronized English over indigenous languages can critically portray the colonial imposition of cultures.

From a variety of standpoints, one of the most effective, and the most talked about, uses of framing are facial close-ups. From a Deleuzian perspective, for example, close-up shots are almost always about affect and emotion, and they are quintessentially geographic: “The close-up extracts the face (or its equivalent) from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates, it can carry with it its own space time – a scrap of sky, countryside or background [...] the affect obtains a space for itself in this way” (DELEUZE 1986, 108).

Similarly, SERGEI EISENSTEIN (1949) noted some time ago that close-ups are not simply one type of image amongst many; they can give an affective reading on a whole film. This focus on space and its production is not just about places. As FREDRIC JAMESON (1992, 64) notes, a film shot mainly in close-ups of faces and expressions can give an uneasy feeling of claustrophobia because it decenters place and setting in favor of emotion.

## 2.2 Spatialities

Our discussion above narrowly describes film space as some kind of co-joining of *mise-en-scène* and the frame of a shot, and how those are influenced and manipulated by cinematic techniques. Of course, the *mise-en-scène* is more than just the frame of a shot. It is a continuous space that is a positioned and a positioning movement. This too, of course, problematically puts the creation of space in the hands of the filmmaker to do with as he or she wishes. The idea that film space is empty until fixed by the auteur is extremely problematic, however, and ignores a couple of decades of geographic work.

To take one such contrasting view, HENRI LEFEBVRE (1991) argues that the production of space is primarily about performances of power through: (i) spatial practice (ii) representations of space and (iii) representational spaces. His work was hugely influential on geography during the 1990s and, of course, it has since been difficult to look at space as merely a container of behaviors. Rather, we now understand an important symbiosis between the social constructing the spatial and the spatial constructing the social. In geography, it is now commonly accepted that space comprises *multiple* valences that influence its production, manipulation and reproduction. So, for example, for a geographer to study the work of Quentin Tarantino it is not sufficient to simply elaborate his use of mobile and partial landscapes from some focused auteurian perspective. The researcher needs to probe beyond the representations and to ask questions such as why here and why now? What is it about our contemporary moment that enables Tarantino to practice his craft? How does that moment relate to masculinities and violence, as well as a recycling of earlier pulp narratives? Who supports and publicizes his craft?

## 3 Mobilities

### 3.1 Moving images

In similar vein to the notion of filmic space as the *mise-en-scène*, it is possible to explore the mobility of the cinema in a very limited manner as simply the movement of the filmic image. Film is, after all, a particular kind of movement, the movement of the image created by the movement of frames in front of a light, which separated the new art form from its more static predecessors. Indeed film, in its early years as silent film, was technically suited to the representation of the mobile. What was arguably 'revolutionary' about this new medium was its power over the image; film could lay

claim to the authentic portrayal of real world actions and behaviors on the one hand, as well as the ability to manipulate and re-manipulate those same practices, re-arranging time and space in the process. Motion could be captured on film and then speeded up or slowed down through over- and under-cranking. The insights of Edwin S. Porter, who worked out of Edison's studios, is illustrative. He produced two influential works *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), which included the first efforts to follow the action by camera movement, to produce more than one shot for a scene, the fundamental practice of 'ellipsis' (which refers to shooting and editing that collapse of time and space, leaving the viewer to fill in the blanks) and the 'cross cut', which involves the interweaving of two scenes. The manipulation of time was taken even further by New Wave or Second Cinema. EISENSTEIN (1943) describes a successful film montage as one that provides a, "collision of ideas". For EISENSTEIN, this is about arousal and shock.

### 3.2 Mobile ontics and epistemes

Mobility can also be understood, however, as the dissemination of meanings via the circulation of film through a variety of media and venues, from the cinema to the TV and the personal computer. According to PAUL VIRILIO (1989), for example, this mobility of the image is in stark contrast to the immobility of the viewer, in that technologies of vision, such as film-making, transform the landscape into a reservoir of signs, awaiting interpretation from a distanced and fixed point of view. But, as MIKE CRANG (2002, 20) has argued, "Observation is not just optical but haptical – a practice of grabbing hold of, reaching out, apprehending and touching." It follows, then, that the production of film space is intimately connected to the production of other kinds of spaces, those associated with the practice of viewing.

Mobility in this sense refers to a dynamic inter-relation between the viewer and the viewed. As one of us has suggested elsewhere, a Lacanian analysis can be used to draw out an aspect of this particular topology, in that the screen portrays images from which the viewer apprehends the on-screen world as a reflective plane that offers a sense of 'wholeness', that is, a feeling of being complete and secure in one's identity (cf. AITKEN a. ZONN 1994b; AITKEN a. LUKINBEAL 1997). And, as CRANG (2002) notes, the attenuation of other senses within the darkened interiors of theaters is an especial configuration and practice of viewing which sets up the possibility of the illusory eye/I following the camera.<sup>4)</sup>

For CRESSWELL and DIXON (2002), mobility can be thought of in an even broader sense as a certain attitude, at times openly radical and at times quietly critical, towards fixed notions of people and places. That is, an emphasis on mobility suggests a certain skepticism in regard to stability, rootedness, surety, and order. Movement can also be from one scale to another as a way of contextualizing narrative, but this form of mobility may also politically inspired through processes such as NEIL SMITH's (1993) notion of jumping scale, as argued below.

#### 4 Scales

Scales, like spaces and mobilities, are problematized in geography today in appropriately political ways when, for example, certain constituencies (such as factory workers) jump to another scale (from the factory floor to the corporate board room) in order to effect change (cf. HEROD 1991). Before broaching that intrigue, however, let us once more start with some obvious filmic uses of scale.

##### 4.1 Narrative convention, context and the spatial constructions of scale

With the proliferation of computer graphic techniques, scale is used most effectively to contextualize action. For example, zooming in from a bird's eye view to the action of the main characters was first used to great effect in the opening shots of *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *West-Side Story* (1961). In the more recent world calamity film, *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), the action of the characters on America's Eastern seaboard is contextualized from space in scenes that dramatize an advancing ice-sheet. This narrative convention is particularly effective in nature and scientific documentaries: the small scientific camp is found amongst the openness of the glacier or it is perched precariously on a narrow mountain ledge. In the award winning 2001 French "true-story" documentary, *Winged Migration*, computer graphics are used to depict birds seemingly flying in space as their migration routes are delineated below.

In short, the convention works for films with themes involving the juxtaposition of enclosure and openness, or human (bird?) limitations and their potential against the backdrop of a global nature. As the audience enters the scalar conventions of this form, a character enters the space of the film: the scientist steps out of his tent and surveys the panorama; Julie Andrews opens her arms on the mountain top, twirls in one direction as the

camera swings the other way and starts singing. The technique also works nicely the other way around. For example, at the end of award winning *In the Bedroom* (2001), after the otherwise respectable father has killed the killer of his son, director Todd Field departs from his rustic New England home through shots up the spatial hierarchy until we are treated to a picture-perfect postcard bird's eye view of the town, in all its symbolic quaintness.

##### 4.2 From the local to the national

Scales must be understood also in the ways they are used to create and recreate certain kinds of 'reality', understood as a particular way of knowing the world, and how those realities can then be resisted and transformed. The relation between local films, national identities and how those identities are countered is an extremely important way to imagine film geographies. *The Geographical Magazine* 1950s series of articles that focused on narrative films (e.g. GRIFFITHS 1953; KOVAL 1954; MANVELL 1956) evaluated national film industries according to the extent to which their products dealt effectively with the culture, customs and behaviors of the everyday lives of the people in the country portrayed. MANVELL (1956, 420) called this the global development of a, "visual network [...] capable of projecting the indigenous portraiture of mankind through motion picture." Postwar Italian neorealism is elaborated in films such as *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) and *Open City* (1945). Similarly, the 'kitchen sink' films noted earlier were quintessentially British, suggesting a quirky representation of local cultures and everyday life. And, Scottish filmmaker Bill Forsyth uses pseudo-realism to portray the lives of children in Glasgow (*That Sinking Feeling*, 1979; *Comfort & Joy*, 1984) and Cumbernauld (*Gregory's Girl*, 1980) in an amusing way that also undercut the tartanry and kailyard myths that predominate and, it may be argued, depoliticize, Scottish national identity (AITKEN 1991). None of these movies are documentaries in the strict sense of the word, but, as NATTER and JONES (1993) reflect, there is today an intense debate between what constitutes the truth of fiction film and the fiction of documentaries.

The documentary film was seen through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way of mediating "exotic" places and their inhabitants to a global audience (e.g. GRIFFITHS 2002). The British film-maker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in the late 1920s to describe his own work. He derived the term from the French *documentaire*, an adjective used to describe the accuracy of travel films. Grierson felt that this new form of film-making should seek to mirror reality as closely

<sup>4)</sup> See also the work of ANNE FRIEDBERG (1993).



as possible. In the 1930s and 1940s, the French realist, Louis Lumière, took this notion further by suggesting that the space of film is the space of reality, and that the film's ambition is to "reproduce life" (SADOUL 1972). From this, documentary film-making became known in France as *cinéma vérité* (cinema truth), developed with the aim of spontaneously documenting objective, factual information. This was greatly aided in the 1950s and 1960s by the development of hand-held cameras. At the very least, the camera "never lies", it "captures reality" and delivers "nature caught in the act". This lie enables important social advances.

The directors of New Wave cinema in France, such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, were influenced both by the emphasis on contemporary life in Italian neorealism noted earlier, and the ethnographic approaches of filmmakers like Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch. Similar groups emerged all over the world at this time (e.g. Japan & Brazil). ROBERT PECKHAM (2004, 423) points out that in Greece, early realist filmmakers (Alexis Damianos, Theo Angelopoulos, Pantelis Voulgaris) created movies that blurred the line between factual reporting and fiction, challenged the authority of the dictatorship that ruled the country between 1967 and 1974.

Michael Moore is, of course, the most celebrated contemporary American documentary filmmaker to take local nuances and re-write them with global impact (NATTER a. JONES 1993). Perhaps one of his best known gambits was using his film practice to pressure K-mart into dropping certain kinds of bullets from their merchandise in *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). He did so by taking two survivors of the Columbine shooting to K-mart headquarters where they symbolically asked to return the merchandise still lodged in their bodies. A few days later K-mart agreed to withdraw these kinds of bullets from the shelves of their stores. This kind of work perhaps highlights, easier than most, NEIL SMITH's (1993) problematic notion of "jumping scale". In this case, local action changes a global corporate structure.

To sum up at this point, it is important to understand more fully the relations between the production of spaces and the production of scales so that we can exercise the power relations that contrive and constrain political, sexual, racial and ethnic identities. The establishment of scaled boundaries, bird's eye views and real territorial boundaries (from *West Side Story* to *Gangs of New York*) can also be construed as a denial of difference. The idea of spatiality and the production of scales of difference are extended by several contemporary writers who suggest that our previously clear signs of belonging – of the relations between locality participa-

tion and identity politics – are collapsing in favor of new geographies based upon the theme of scale-less mobility (cf. YOUNG 1990).

## 5 Networks

Thinking about scale implies that we also take into consideration some form of 'network'. The elements of a film network can be thought of simply in terms of the flow of elements from place to place over time, such as the transfer of money from one group to another, the training of an apprentice in film lighting techniques, the hiring of an established 'star' from one vehicle to the next, traveling to a movie palace, or the movement of a rental videotape from store to house and back again.

### 5.1 Networking

But, it is more useful, perhaps, to acknowledge how such flows are shaped by and in turn help shape what we might term the 'identity' of those peoples, places, and things. Such flows are made possible by the particular form and character of phenomena, and they also can alter the form and character of phenomena. For example, a 'star' performer such as Clark Gable or Meryl Streep is constructed from a range of knowledges; they have been trained, styled, lighted, choreographed and filmed in a series of prior productions, and it is this particular package that is called upon when a star is placed in a new production (DYER 1986). In turn, the arrival of such a star can transform an everyday B-movie into a classic. Investment capital has its own particular baggage, in that it too is produced under a series of money-making knowledges and techniques; funneling such money into what is seen as a profitable cinema industry can change the character of place from a rural backwater to a thriving economic powerhouse. And, as we have noted above, even sitting in a cinema, watching and listening to film, can have a transformative effect, offering opportunities for escapism, voyeurism, and so on, as well an exposure to a host of ideas, concerns and emotions.

In this sense of the term, the networks within which films are embedded are constituted from a range of ontological phenomena and epistemologies that go well beyond the categories we are using here; moreover, these are differentially related through power. There is an interest here in how people and things are placed in relation to each other, such that issues of inclusion and exclusion, hegemony and dependence, all come into play.

For example, consider the network that is 'global cinema'. For some, globalization is akin to Americanization, in that though, "[...] people of color are the majority filmmakers in the world, with much more diverse ideological projects and patterns of distribution than Hollywood [...] Los Angeles culture and New York commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe" (MILLER 2000, 145). This discourse of cultural homogenization considers globalization as a process that standardizes the demands and products of consumer cultures, creating an increased sense of uniformity, beginning at the level of popular culture. By contrast, one can understand globalization as a particularly complex and dynamic series of networks that produce and cut across scale to produce difference and diversity. In this sense, global cinema is a network of people, things and ideas that stand in numerous, power-laden relationships to each other, albeit some more distanced than others.

#### D *The next take*

That geographies of film have reached a critical mass through the sheer numbers of articles and books on the topic is laudable, but is it enough? We argue here that it is time to look critically at what geographers are doing and, to that end, we suggest an agenda of study that focuses genuinely on filmic spaces of meaning production and consumption. Above all, what we are suggesting here is that rather than a naïve rendering of geographic concepts, geographies of film are now placed to elaborate more general concerns about worthwhile social and spatial practices, and how resistances and transformations may be imagined. Through the quintessential and critical lenses of landscapes, spaces/spatialities, mobilities, scales and networks, geographers offer a way forward that embraces post-structural theorizing while at the same time acknowledging the important ways that filmic techniques are structured.

This perspective moves us beyond narrowly circumscribed developmental arguments about cinema genres, as well as mechanistic notions of how images work, to a more nuanced appraisal that draws heavily from circuitous, flexible and transformative notions of space and time. It enables a liberatory connection with lived experience, both within the cinema theatre and beyond it, to the images and material conditions that continuously produce and reproduce our daily lives and against which we must equally push. Our agenda, when described in brief, is to encourage the tools – the emotions and the imaginations – that enable rage against the structures that would impede the freedom of expres-

sion and creation that comprises our spatial and filmic worlds.

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