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### Cinematic Rotterdam: the times and tides of a modern city

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## **PART I.**

### **THE EMERGENCE OF A CINEMATIC CITY ROTTERDAM IN THE 1920s & 1930s**



## PROLOGUE TO PART I

### the position of Rotterdam

In the 1920s and 1930s, Rotterdam had about 550,000 inhabitants, while another 200,000 people or so lived in the rest of the agglomeration<sup>46</sup>. It was the second city of the Netherlands, but the most modern, according to art historian Roman Koot (2001: 21). He has presented various cases to substantiate this claim: the port, the housing projects by J.J.P. Oud, the Van Nelle factory by Brinkman & Van der Vlugt (1925-1930), Joris Ivens's film *THE BRIDGE* (1928), the new typography of Paul Schuitema, Piet Zwart and others, and examples of *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* in literature, such as Ben Stroman's novel *Stad* (1932). Rotterdam came across as a metropolitan whirlpool. Such an image was actively propagated, partly to make a difference with Amsterdam that relied upon its 17<sup>th</sup> century status. We should realise, however, that Rotterdam at that time was as a historic city too, not so refined as Amsterdam, but also with small alleys, canals, old warehouses and mansions – which were certainly not forgotten in promotional booklets. As such, the city was also shown, for example, in the Pathé film *ROTTERDAM, LA VENISE DU NORD* (1923)<sup>47</sup>. Amsterdam, on the other hand, was host to the modern movement as well.

In order to get an appropriate idea of Rotterdam, its character, and how it looked like, I refer to three architects who wrote about Rotterdam in *De 8 & Opbouw* (1936/9). Willem van Tijen remarked that Rotterdam used to be reluctant to implement any kind of regulation. There were extreme contrasts, everything could exist next to each other, and everybody had a chance to express oneself. Vitality is enclosed in this clash of views, which brought Van Tijen to the conclusion that:

Rotterdam is actually too liberal to be really able to organise itself. Maybe it is therefore, that it suffers so fiercely from the crisis. However, it is also freer and more real in its ugliness and unconcernedness than other cities. // Who works here in the sense of order and functionality, will always painfully encounter the diametrically opposed character of the city. However, here as well he will always undergo a spur and an incentive of a vehemence that he will hardly experience anywhere else<sup>48</sup>.

A similar image was drawn by W. van Gelderen, who started with a brief general introduction, in staccato style, like a radio reporter (p100):

Rotterdam, the city without tradition, the city where provincialism reigns supreme, but where sometimes one can descry something of metropolitan radiation. As a big city grown rapidly in a short time, living by the grace of “the harbour”. There is continuously construction next to destruction. Architectural expressions, their time far ahead, next to hovels and ruins, which would be removed even in an expired city. // Rotterdam, where the ideas of *Het Nieuwe Bouwen* found attention: where ‘Oud-Mathenesse’ and ‘De Kiefhoek’ could be built at a time that in other Dutch cities one declared such expressions as the end of art and good taste<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> On 1920-01-01, Rotterdam counted 506,024 inhabitants; 1930-01-01: 586,285; 1940-01-01: 619,527 – ref. *Rotterdams Jaarboekje* (1921, 1931, 1941), W.L. & J. Brusse / Gemeentearchief Rotterdam. The second largest municipality in the agglomeration has been that of Schiedam: 1916-05-31: 37,050 inhabitants; 1942-12-31: 66,262 – ref. Historische Vereniging Schiedam <http://scyedam.delinea.nl/kaleida/pagina.php?id=2002853> (2008-10-22)

<sup>47</sup> Through 9.5mm copies (*Pathé Baby*, 1923), it was distributed for home screenings, in the Netherlands and abroad.

<sup>48</sup> Van Tijen, 1936: 99. Original quote: ‘Rotterdam is wel te liberaal, om zich ooit werkelijk te kunnen ordenen. Misschien is het ook daarom, dat het zoo fel onder de crisis lijdt. Het is echter ook vrijer en waarachtiger in zijn leelijkheid en onbehouwenheid dan andere steden. // Wie hier werkt in de zin van orde en functionaliteit, zal het diametraal tegengestelde karakter van de stad altijd pijnlijk ondervinden. Hij zal hier echter ook altijd een prikkel en een aansporing ondergaan van een heftigheid, die hij vrijwel nergens anders zoo zal ervaren.’

<sup>49</sup> Van Gelderen, 1936: 100. Original quote: ‘Rotterdam, de stad zonder traditie, de stad waar provincialisme hoogtij viert, doch waar af en toe iets van wereld-stad-allure te bespeuren valt. Als grote stad in korte tijd snel gegroeid, levend bij de gratie van “de haven”. Voortdurend is er opbouw naast afbraak. Architectuur-uitingen, hun tijd ver vooruit, naast

Van Gelderen too emphasised that there is no clear direction, which allows for experimentation and innovation. Quite different is the article “The City Without Art”, by Han van Loghem, who was the most critical about public space design and the role of planners. Van Loghem called for another attitude, and to change the relationship between policy and design practice.

Within a circle of kilometres around the centre, Rotterdam has been completely beaten out of its joints. What the water still could connect in the old city centre, what the planting of trees near the harbours still could cover – the bad architecture that was too much present – all of that was not possible anymore in most of our new residential quarters, where water is almost not needed anymore as a functional architectonic motive, and hence stayed away very rightly. But this reflecting surface that has been lost is not compensated by other values. In many cases the street is not much more than a stone tunnel, of which the omission of the roof still makes visible a scarce strip of light<sup>50</sup>.

Even if Rotterdam might offer space for progressive experiments, the general outcome is a different one, Van Loghem concluded:

For one part, Rotterdam is being ruined because of banality, and nobody in the country will grieve, because one will never grieve about the banal. Or would finally, because of the necessity, something be able to wake up, which carries out above the banal?'

These quotes present Rotterdam at best as an urban laboratory, and at worst as an unwarranted, swelling urban mass. It might have been the most modern city of the Netherlands at that time, but it is a particular vision of either modernity or urbanism. So the question is, considering the realms that are important to my research, in which ways Rotterdam appeared as a modern city<sup>51</sup>.

### **the modernity of Rotterdam: harbour...**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rotterdam used to be a ‘transitopolis’ (Van de Laar, 2000: 10). Rotterdam had made a position for itself by its harbour, which was already one of the biggest of the world by the 1920s. This was due to its location in the delta of the rivers Maas and Rhine, which connect it to the European hinterland, and the German Ruhrgebiet in particular. The river that flows through Rotterdam, the *Nieuwe Maas*, used to be part of the Maas (‘Meuse’) until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but due to canalisations and dams it became fed by water from the Rhine<sup>52</sup>. As a sea port Rotterdam became a gateway for the Netherlands for the transportation of people and goods to and from the colonies, America, and the rest of the world. The port affected all other

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krotten en puinhopen, die zelfs in een gestorven stad verwijderd zouden worden. // Rotterdam, waar de ideeën van het Nieuwe Bouwen aandacht vonden: waar Oud-Mathenesse en de Kiefhoek gebouwd konden worden in een tijd, dat men in andere Hollandse steden dergelijke uitingen als het einde van kunst en goede smaak doodverfde.’

<sup>50</sup> Van Loghem, 1936: 104-105.

‘Rotterdam is binnen een kring van kilometres om het centrum geheel uit zijn voegen geslagen. Wat het water nog kon binden in de oude binnenstad, wat de boombeplanting aan de havens nog kon bedekken, wat aan slechte architectuur te veel aanwezig was, dat alles is niet meer mogelijk in de meeste onzer nieuwe wijken, waar het water bijna niet meer als functioneel architectuurmotief nodig is, en dus zeer terecht weg bleef. Maar die verloren spiegelende vlakte is niet gecompenseerd door andere waarden. In veel gevallen is de straat niet veel meer dan een stenen tunnel, waarvan door de weglating van het dak nog een schaarse streep lucht zichtbaar is.’ (p104) Next quote (conclusion):

‘Rotterdam gaat mede door banaliteit ten gronde en niemand in het land zal treuren, want over het banale wordt nooit getreurd. Of zou eindelijk door den nood nog iets wakker kunnen worden, dat boven het banale uitvoert?’ (p105)

<sup>51</sup> Whereas I consider film in connection to architecture and urban development, other realms will get less attention notwithstanding their possible role in the development of Rotterdam. This counts, for example, for painting, and the artist organisations *De Branding* (1917-1926) and R’33 (founded by Hermann Bieling), which also maintained connections with artists abroad (e.g. Kurt Schwitters, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, Alexander Archipenko, Constantin Brancusi) – see: Van de Laar, 2000: 375.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotterdam#Maasstad> > § ‘Maasstad’ (2008-11-17).

businesses in the city. It created an atmosphere of labour, travel and adventure. Moreover, the landscape of cranes, docks, bridges and processing industries appeared as a futuristic city in itself.

The port informs Rotterdam's 'culture core', which is, according to Julian Steward, an elementary configuration of subsistence arrangements within a particular environment. This is clear when we follow the first step in Steward's (1955: 40) theory of cultural ecology, by analyzing 'the interrelationship of exploitative or productive technology and environment'. 'In an industrial world,' Steward said, 'capital and credit arrangements, trade systems and the like are crucial. Socially-derived needs – special tastes in foods, more ample housing and clothing, and a great variety of appurtenances of living – become increasingly important in the productive arrangement as culture develops; and yet these originally were probably more often effects of basic adaptations than causes' (ibid, 40). Major capital and credit arrangements in Rotterdam are related to the developments in the port, which also secure the employment to many people in the city, directly and indirectly, while next to it these developments cause a continuous influx of foreign people and goods. As a whole, this system depends on the way energy is provided. On the one hand, it is an energy concern to keep industrial processes going on. Coal used to be important in this respect, to produce gas and electricity. On the other hand, citizens need to be fed. For dairy products the city depends largely on the surrounding countryside, but for products, like cereals, fruit and coffee, the harbour plays an important role, for the city as well as the hinterland.

Where 'the milk meets the coffee', new modes of production, trade and consumption emerge. The development of different forms of exploitation influence each other, since they join infrastructures and co-evolve within the emerging urban culture. This can be analysed, as Steward has suggested secondly, by regarding 'the behavior patterns involved in the exploitation of a particular area by means of a particular technology' (ibid, 40). The behaviour patterns are derived from values of international trade, industrial progress and modernity, labour movements (unions and political organisations), and social welfare, including ideas on housing and planning. This constellation is accompanied by the development of shipping technologies, engineering, construction and planning methods. It requires specialised knowledge, skills and materials, and the know-how to get them. Media technologies are part of this complex too, linking up to ideas and behaviour patterns of the workers, as well as to those of the managerial elite.

'The third procedure is to ascertain the extent to which the behavior patterns entailed in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of culture' (ibid). In Rotterdam this involves a general culture of modernity. It has been accompanied, on the one hand, by ideas of civic culture, community development, and citizen participation, and on the other by international exchanges. Since Rotterdam has always been part of international networks, through its port and trade connections, it has been exposed to foreign influences, including the influx of immigrants. In turn, the city has exported its products to the world as well. As Hannerz (1992: 197) has it: 'urban cultural process involves a degree of openness', which means 'the entanglement of an urban center with wider systems' (ibid, 198). It concerns interaction with both the nearby countryside and other cities, and hence flows of people, goods and meanings; this is a complicating factor, especially when studying media. With increasing complexity, it is more difficult to understand if changes are caused by the environment or by 'historical factors' (in the words of Steward).

However, the diffusion of ideas, through 'historical factors', also took place *because* of the environment, since the port facilitated international connections. In this way Rotterdam has been open to the ideas of the international modern movement, which became embedded in its own cultural ecology. In its turn, Rotterdam propelled the 'processed' ideas into the world again, as a 'switchboard of culture' (Hannerz, 1996: 149). In either way, the port has offered possibilities for the development of architecture and cinema. I will explore them, and their mutual connections, as ways to observe and to recognise the different steps of the cultural ecology.

*...architecture and design...*

The port has been determinant for the development of Rotterdam's industrial architecture and housing projects. Ideas about it have been elaborated by the architecture association *Opbouw* ("Construction"), which was established in Rotterdam in 1920. Through the contacts of its members (e.g. Han van Loghem, J.J.P. Oud, Mart Stam), Rotterdam became a node within the international networks of the modern movement, which was reinforced by the connections of people like Van Nelle director C.H. van der Leeuw<sup>53</sup>. Ideas circulating in the international arena were 'processed' and sent into the world again. Rotterdam turned into a 'switchboard of culture'.

A famous example of industrial architecture is the 'Van Nelle factory'. The growing demand for its products – coffee, tea and tobacco – allowed Van der Leeuw to actualise a new building (1925-1930), designed by the young architects Jan Brinkman and Leen van der Vlugt, with Mart Stam as a collaborator. This building shows an intertwining of economic, social, spiritual, technical and aesthetic values<sup>54</sup>. With its concrete frame and steel-and-glass façade, it became an icon of Dutch modernism, praised by Le Corbusier a.o.<sup>55</sup>. Brinkman & Van der Vlugt designed also a grain silo, another major industrial food processing facility in the port area, and as such we may also mention the modernist HAKA factory (1931-1932, H. Mertens)<sup>56</sup>.

Regarding housing, important were the privately developed garden village 'Vreewijk' (1913, Granpré Molière e.a.), the municipal housing projects 'Spangen' (1919-1922, M. Brinkman) and those by J.J.P. Oud ('Hoek van Holland', 'De Kiefhoek' a.o.). After housing was left to private developers again, high-rise experiments were carried out (e.g. 'Bergpolderflat', W. van Tijen e.a.), next to experiments with open planning that integrated building and greenery (e.g. 'De Eendracht', 1929-1935, J. van den Broek). The most productive in the 1930s, but little known today, was architect Wim ten Bosch, who pragmatically applied modernist ideas<sup>57</sup>. He and others contributed to a significant volume that enabled the modern cultural ecology to emerge, within the outlines drawn by Rotterdam's city planner Willem Witteveen<sup>58</sup>. Much of it is shown by the film *ROTTERDAM EN HOE HET BOUWDE* ("Rotterdam and how it built", 1940), which Ten Bosch made himself in the late 1930s. It starts with animations and statistics on the growth of the port, emphasizing the need for appropriate social housing. A tribute is paid to Oud, but also to the mayors, city planners, architects, civil servants, and representatives of housing associations and unions. The film accompanied a book, which was co-authored by professor J.G. Wattjes, with photographs by Jan Kamman<sup>59</sup>. This project became an 'officially approved' reading of the recent history of architecture and planning in Rotterdam<sup>60</sup>. It sheds a more diffuse light on the avant-

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<sup>53</sup> For these contacts and the role of Oud, see: Taverne e.a., 2001: 359.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Livesey, 1999; Lamba, 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Koot, 2001: 35.

<sup>56</sup> Due to the economic crisis of the 1910s, Rotterdam tried to reduce its dependence on shipping, by investing in its industry. Cf. Van de Laar, 2000: 323.

<sup>57</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s he designed no less than 7484 dwellings in Rotterdam, besides various other kinds of buildings, see [www.bonas.nl](http://www.bonas.nl) > biografische gegevens > Ten Bosch (2007-09-08). Thanks to Frits Stuurman.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. 'Uitbreidingsplan Zuid' and 'Uitbreiding Blijdorp', to which Ten Bosch contributed too. Witteveen became director of the department for urban development in 1931, where he had worked already, as an architect and as a planner, since 1924 (De Jong, 2001: 233).

<sup>59</sup> The book was partly structured by thematic 'city walks'. Whereas the film was actually kind of a city walk, the book, with photographs by Jan Kamman, provided a kind of storyboard.

<sup>60</sup> Wattjes was an internationally distinguished professor of architecture at Delft University, whose broad interest encompassed modern architecture too. The official status of the project was confirmed by Mayor P.J. Oud, who wrote the foreword of the book, while many other officials were presented in both the book and the film. For additional diagrams and animated maps, which gave the film a reliable appeal as well, Ten Bosch collaborated with film company Profilti. The film had its premiere at Museum Boymans on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1940, as a prelude to an exhibition on the redevelopment of the former zoo area (arch. Jan Wils, see: Ten Bosch & Wattjes, 1940: 125). The film was also shown at *Bouwkunst en Vriendschap* (Atlanta building, 1940-04-05), with an introduction by chairman and city architect A. van der Steur, who mentioned that it 'stimulated voyages of discovery in one's own city' (*Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 1940-04-06, 3/p2). Another show of the film took place in Amsterdam, at the established architects association

garde that got highlighted in later years<sup>61</sup>. Remarkable modernist buildings were presented here too, but also other projects that fulfilled major functions, such as airport ‘Waalhaven’ (1919-1921, Gemeentewerken), and ‘bearers of Rotterdam’s welfare’, particularly docks, sheds and terminals<sup>62</sup>. Attention was also paid to the development of the former private ‘Land van Hoboken’, as the location of the new Boymans Museum, by city architect A. van der Steur, the Unilever headquarters, and an office tower for the municipal electricity works (GEB)<sup>63</sup>.

The evolving urban fabric encompassed various accommodations that contributed to Rotterdam’s modernity. Among them are the railway projects by Sybold van Ravesteyn, the trade centre (‘Beurs’, 1925-1940, J. Staal), the office tower ‘Erasmushuis’ (1938-1939, W. Dudok), as well as many prominent public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, whose designs remained relatively unknown<sup>64</sup>. Rotterdam established its modern image also through its leisure facilities, in spite of its reputation of being a city of labour. Famous is the Feijenoord stadium (1934-1936, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt), which can be considered next to other suburban accommodations, among them various parks, airport ‘Waalhaven’ (for aviation shows), the ‘Nenijto’ complex (1928), and ‘Blijdorp zoo’ (1937-1941, S. van Ravesteyn). Such sites were the counterpart of the cafés and dance halls in the city centre, especially at the Hofplein and at the Coolingsingel (e.g. Loos, Pschorr, De Unie, Atlanta)<sup>65</sup>. Next to them were shops<sup>66</sup>, like those at the Hoogstraat, and department store ‘De Bijenkorf’ (1928-1930, W. Dudok) – another icon of modern Rotterdam. Cinema, finally, was a highly popular form of entertainment. By the mid 1920s there were about twenty-five cinemas in Rotterdam. Although they propelled modernity, their architecture has only marginally been studied<sup>67</sup>. Further investigation in this respect, however, lies beyond the scope of this thesis. They are mentioned here as constituents of a critical mass of modern buildings across different categories, through which the well-known landmarks could emerge.

Along with architecture, Rotterdam became a stage for design. Jacob Jongert, working for Van Nelle, helped to popularise modern graphics. Industrial designer Willem Gispen started his own production company, which became known for its steel-tube furniture, such as Mart Stam’s famous cantilever chair ‘with two legs’. Gispen’s furniture was for sale at ‘De Bijenkorf’, which also organised exhibitions on art and design and had a special show house<sup>68</sup>. Gispen’s

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*Architectura et Amicitia*, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, one day before the German invasion in the Netherlands. General source: [www.bonas.nl](http://www.bonas.nl) > biografische gegevens > Ten Bosch (2008-06-17). Thanks to Frits Stuurman.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Michiel Roding, in his essay on Ten Bosch; [www.bonas.nl](http://www.bonas.nl) > biografische gegevens > Ten Bosch (2007-09-08).

<sup>62</sup> Ten Bosch & Wattjes, 1940: 152-168; the dependency of Rotterdam on the port is elaborated by considering the role of companies like Willem Ruys & Zonen, Rotterdamsche Lloyd, Wilton-Feijenoord, SHV, RDM, HAL, a.o.

<sup>63</sup> Ten Bosch & Wattjes, 1940: 69-82. The ‘Land van Hoboken’ was developed after a plan by Witteveen, and included the new museum Boymans (1928-1935) by city architect A. van der Steur, the Unilever headquarters (1930-1931, H. Mertens), the office of the municipal electricity enterprise (GEB, 1927-1931, Witteveen, Poot, Van der Steur), and various other buildings, among them a number of functionalist white villa’s, by Brinkman & Van der Vlugt, and others. For the development schemes of the Land van Hoboken, see also: Van de Laar: 2000: 298-299 + 355.

<sup>64</sup> See: Ten Bosch & Wattjes, 1940: for railway projects by Van Ravesteyn, see: p116 ‘Station Beurs’ (1930-1934), p91 ‘Station Feyenoord’ (1937), p102 ‘Station Delftsche Poort’ (1930s); for examples of service buildings, see: p54 ‘Raad van Arbeid’ (1932, Lockhorst & Hooykaas), ‘St. Homobonus’ (1938, Gerard Holt), for examples of hospitals, see p39 ‘Sophia Kinderziekenhuis’ (1930-1937, Posthumus Meyjes & Van der Linden), p115 ‘Havenziekenhuis’ (1930s, B.J.K. Cramer), p71 ‘Diaconessenhuis’ (1939, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt / Van den Broek); for schools see e.g.: ‘H.B.S. St. Franciscus’ (1920, P.G. Buskens, H. Sutterland – ref.: Bonas), p40 ‘Christelijke Ambachtsschool’ (1933, Jos de Jonge).

<sup>65</sup> See: Van der Velden, 2001. Well-known are ‘Café Loos’ (1908, J.P. stok Wzn.), a semi-circular building at the Hofplein, and close to it ‘Café Pschorr’ (1921, Willem Kromhout), with an expressive art deco façade and behind it a large glass dome, and furthermore ‘De Unie’, according to the principles of De Stijl (1924-1925, J.J.P. Oud), and ‘Hotel-Restaurant Atlanta’ (1929-1931, F. van der Togt) – ref.: [www.bonas.nl](http://www.bonas.nl) (2008-11-09).

<sup>66</sup> See: Ten Bosch & Wattjes, 1940. Ten Bosch himself built a number of complexes with both housing and shopping accommodations (e.g. ‘Meent’, 1937) which were among his major works, while he and his business partner, interior architect Henri Le Grand, modernised various existing shops as well. For examples of cinemas see: p37 ‘Victoria’ (1934-1935, Jacob van Gelderen), p106: ‘Lumière’ (1939, Krijgsman & Rosendahl).

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Blok, 1985.

<sup>68</sup> See: Merkelbach, 1932: 323; Van Eesteren, 1932: 241.



furniture was used, for example, in the Van Nelle factory, in the GEB building, and in private homes like 'Huis Sonneveld' (1929-1933, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt).

Important were also Paul Schuitema and Piet Zwart, who were respectively secretary and chairman of Opbouw<sup>69</sup>. Both made innovative, constructivist graphic and industrial designs, as well as photographs<sup>70</sup>. With a reference to architecture, Zwart applied the idea of functionalism to photography, in the way he used it for advertisements and, for example, the covers of the series *Monografieën over Filmkunst* (1931-1933, ed. Graadt van Roggen). Schuitema used photography similarly for the covers of *De 8 & Opbouw* and *Filmliga*. Once he had started to experiment with photography, moreover, film followed too. In this way both Zwart and Schuitema became switches within the relationship between architecture and film.

### *and film*

Important for the history of cinema in Rotterdam were people like Jean Desmet and Abraham Tuschinski, who showed the latest foreign fiction films. Others have presented this history, its dynamics, and the perception by the audience<sup>71</sup>. It remains a question, however, how it has affected Rotterdam, which is different from my purpose, which concerns films on Rotterdam. It might nevertheless be noticed that cinema in general affected other artistic practices in the city. A case in point is Stroman's novel *Stad* (1932), which is a witness of cinema in several ways<sup>72</sup>. It was a literary 'city symphony', a counterpart to such avant-garde films, while the book refers also explicitly to film. When the protagonists go to the movies, they unexpectedly see a newsreel about the launching of a ship, which they had attended, and they are excited to discover themselves in the picture (Stroman, 1932: 84). It is a literary and a typographical illustration of cinema being an integral part of urban culture, with a direct link to journalism. Stroman wrote for the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*<sup>73</sup>, while many journalists of the NRC (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*) were involved with the *Filmliga*. Avant-garde films dealing with Rotterdam have therefore also received substantial attention from critics, among them *THE BRIDGE* (1928, Joris Ivens), *HOOGSTRAAT* (1929, Andor von Barsy) and *MAASBRUGGEN* (1937, Schuitema).

Besides avant-garde shorts, Rotterdam was also shown by a number of feature films. Among them are unknown titles, but also classics of Dutch cinema such as *LENTELIED* (1936, Simon Koster) and *BOEFJE* (1939, Detlef Sierck). The former is a love story about two couples changing partners, which takes place in the countryside of Zeeland and in Rotterdam. The city is introduced by a fast montage-sequence (shot by Emiel van Moerkerken), showing images of the port and its industry and of all other icons of modern Rotterdam, like the Coolingsel Boulevard, 'De Bijenkorf', the 'Bergpolderflat', and the 'Van Nelle factory'. While Rotterdam was still an old city, characterised by small alleys, canals and old ware houses, the sequence has taken the icons from the different parts of the city and reassembled them in order to present a modern city<sup>74</sup>. This was not so much a representation of the actual city, but a particular vision of it, a

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<sup>69</sup> Schuitema was secretary in the period 1927-1934, see: Maan, 2006: 133. Zwart, was chairman in the period 1931-1937, see: Brentjens, 2008: 176n12.

<sup>70</sup> Other prominent names in this respect are: Gerrit Kiljan, Wim Brusse, Dick Elffers, Jan Kamman, a.o.

<sup>71</sup> For Desmet, see: Blom, 2003; for Tuschinski, see (a.o.): Van Gelder, 1996. For cinema in Rotterdam in general see: Berg, 1996; Van der Velden, 2001; Romer, 2004. See also the extensive archive on cinemas in Rotterdam, i.e. GAR > Collectie Tj. de Vries betreffende Rotterdamse Bioscopen, toegangsnr.: 1289.

<sup>72</sup> Gerrit Kiljan and Paul Schuitema also thought of the possibility to make it into a film, which did not happen in the end (De Boode & Van Oudheusden, 1985: 81).

<sup>73</sup> In the circle of people around Stroman, one also finds the names of novelists such as Herman Besselaar, Alfred Kossmann, and Wim Wagener a.o. See: Van de Laar, 2000: 379; for Wagener, see: Huygens, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> The sequence starts with an old building, which also appears in other films of that time, like Von Barsy's *THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS*. It is the *Witte Huis*, built in 1898 (arch. W. Molenbroek. Although its construction and style were conventional and even old fashioned at that time, it became a major landmark of the city, since it was, with its 45 meters, the highest office tower of Europe. In fact, it meant the onset of high-rise building in the Netherlands and as such it could not be omitted from a sequence of modern buildings in Rotterdam.

reference how to perceive the city, and how it could be like. Quite different is BOEFJE (“Little Rascal”), which was based on a popular story by Marie Joseph Brusse, and the successful theatre play<sup>75</sup>. It is about a poor boy, played by the actress Annie van Ees, who wanders through the city, mainly the slums and the old alleys, around the corner of cinema Lumière where the film was to be seen, although the slums were reproduced through studio sets. As such it is the opposite of the previous film.

Films on Rotterdam were not only produced in Rotterdam itself, but also in The Hague, Amsterdam, and Haarlem, which were the main centres for film production in the Netherlands. Amsterdam was the most important for feature films, not only *Standort*, the production centre in the words of Elsaesser, but also frequently as *Tatort*, where the films were actually set<sup>76</sup>. However, the shootings were not always done on location, but in studios or even in cities that served as a ‘stand-in’, like Rotterdam in some scenes of ORANJE HEIN (1936, Max Nosseck) – which we could call *Seinort*: where recordings are made. Between 1920 and 1940 about twenty major movies featured Amsterdam<sup>77</sup>. Rotterdam appeared only in about eight fiction films during the same period<sup>78</sup>. As *Standort* for feature film production, The Hague almost equalled Amsterdam, while for documentaries it was important due to the production company Haghe Film (Willy Mullens), which made also a large number of films on Rotterdam<sup>79</sup>. As *Tatort*, The Hague has rarely been shown in fiction films, but still frequently in documentaries. Haarlem, at last, was also an important *Standort*, already since the 1910s when Hollandia produced its internationally famous features. It had also a documentary department, which developed into the company Polygoon in 1919<sup>80</sup>. It became the leading Dutch company for documentaries and newsreels.

Polygoon produced many films that featured Rotterdam, including DE RIJN VAN LOBITH TOT AAN ZEE (1922, A.M. van der Wel), and GROEI (1930, Jo de Haas), which are classics of their genres: the educational and the industrial film. The first was made for the *Gemeentelijke Schoolbioscoop* in Rotterdam (“Municipal School Cinema”), whose director, Van der Wel, soon started to make films himself, often dealing with Rotterdam. The other film, GROEI (“Growth”), shows the construction of ‘De Bijenkorf’. Polygoon made similar productions for other enterprises (e.g. HAKA, Van Nelle). Many of such commissioned films, made for a specific public, have never reached the canons of Dutch film history. They have nevertheless communicated modern values and visions that contributed to the development of Rotterdam.

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Albers e.a., 2004: 42.

<sup>76</sup> Addressed in a lecture for the Rietveld Academy at the NIMK (Montevideo) in Amsterdam, 2004-02-18.

<sup>77</sup> These numbers are based on data by Dittrich (1987), Donaldson (1997), and the website [www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Theater/2180/NF1926.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Theater/2180/NF1926.htm) (2005). Donaldson includes commissioned feature films made for promotional reasons, which I take into account as well.

<sup>78</sup> I.e. MODERNE LANDHAAIEN (1926, Alex Benno), NUL UUR NUL (1927-1928, Simon Koster), DE MAARSCHALKSTAF (1929, Luc Willink), EEN LIED VAN DEN ARBEID (1929, Walter Janssen), JENSEITS DER STRAË (1929), LENTELIED (1936, Simon Koster), BOEFJE (1939, Detlef Sierck), and ERGENS IN NEDERLAND (1940, Ludwig Berger).

<sup>79</sup> E.g. EEN GEZICHT OP DE GROOTE HAVENWERKEN TE ROTTERDAM EN SCHIEDAM, 1920; STEENKOLEN HANDELS VEREENIGING, 1921 and 1923; NV CORNS SWARTTOUW SUWADOORS.

<sup>80</sup> De Haan, 1995: 19.