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Cinematic Rotterdam: the times and tides of a modern city

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CONCLUSION

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The starting point of this thesis has been the observation that audiovisual media have become ubiquitous in modern life. Within this perspective I have asked the question how film has contributed to urban development. I opted for Rotterdam to carry out a case-study; an estimated five to six thousand publicly released audiovisual productions dealing with Rotterdam were made from the 1920s to the 1970s. I have asked the question why these films were made, what functions they fulfilled, and how they participated and intervened in social and spatial processes. The purpose of this research has been twofold: to write the film history of Rotterdam, in order to show how films about the city have participated in its development, and by doing so, to provide theoretical insights and concepts regarding the relationship between film and the built environment. The main strands of this thesis have been informed by audiovisual productions related to news practices, the port, the industry, construction works, social engagement (and housing), and events, next to a field that includes amateur films, avant-garde experiments and features. I will first recapitulate these strands, and subsequently the networks and some of the people associated with them, before I consider further theoretical implications.

the appearance of a modern city – main film practices and forces

The first film recordings of Rotterdam were made in 1898, by Stefan Hofbauer, for *Casino Variété*, which were early ‘newsreels’. Among those following were Tuschinski and Weisbard, who are known for their theatres, but since the 1910s, they also produced local newsreels. It caused a competition and then a collaboration with the nationally operating newsreel producers Polygoon and Profilti (1920s and 1930s). It implied a shift, since the city was no longer the focus of attention. However, companies could buy screentime, by commissioning promotion films of which newsreels were made too. Polygoon experienced its heydays in the 1950s. Instead of a reification of ‘the media’, it appeared that many of its (anonymous) reports about Rotterdam were made by Joop Burcksen, who came from Rotterdam. Once television news took command, Rotterdam was presented for formal events to indicate national growth; the monitoring of local developments was left to the press. This changed in the 1960s, because television news started to work with freelance correspondent-cameramen. In Rotterdam Pim Korver became the main figure, for the next forty years. This practice was possible since Korver could combine it with the production of promotion films, especially for companies in the port. It also gave him access to both realms, and interrelations existed as a result. When Korver was not available, freelancers from other cities came instead. A network of correspondents was established, also abroad, which enabled international exchange. It implied both globalisation and localisation. City news was eventually produced through local television, in which the city itself became of primary interest again – a full circle.

Newsreels have monitored all kinds of events in Rotterdam, and its port in particular. When cinema became increasingly popular, it also offered opportunities to promote the port, in order to raise general support, and to attract clients and investors. Since 1913, the municipality commissioned port promotion films, all made by talented filmmakers. Among them was Andor von Bary, who played a major role, especially through *THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS* (1928). Such films were supplemented by equally well-made films for private companies, through detailed views of particular businesses in the port, from transshipment and engineering to logistics and training. Altogether these films, as the counterpart of the port, have constituted an audiovisual web, which as such has a surplus value. Belonging to it are also harbour reports, which outnumbered other reports on Rotterdam. This was especially the case at the time of the reconstruction, but later too, in the 1960s and 1970s, when rapid changes took place in the port, which were accompanied by increasing criticism and large strikes. This resulted in interferences between promotional films and critical television reports. As part of a sophisticated marketing strategy, the authorities asked Ivens to make the promotion film *ROTTERDAM-EUROPOORT*

(1966). Also challenging were films made for private companies such as container terminal ECT, whose presence was decisive for the development of the port. While the media articulated the port's priority, the port has propelled the cinematic city, reinforced by entrepreneurs like Veder and Verolme through their investments in media practices.

Closely related to films about the port were industrial films, which were presented at factories, to employees and visitors, at conferences, schools and at large exhibitions. The first ones were made for yards and engineering factories, followed by shipping enterprises, next to 'food and fuel' companies, among others, which provide an audiovisual map of the city's subsistence arrangements. The films ranged from recordings of production processes, to commercials, to annual reports, and some companies had their own film services to make such recordings. Promotion films were often part of larger campaigns, including other media, and targeted at different audiences, so that straight and experimental productions existed next to one another. Films rendered production processes into comprehensive accounts, they facilitated exchange, and gave expression to corporate identity (e.g. Shell, Adriaan Volker, ECT). In this way films linked up with architecture serving similar purposes. Moreover, in terms of design and production practices, industrial films have also shown structural correspondences to architecture.

A particular kind of industrial films concerned the creation of large buildings. This 'genre' emerged in the 1920s, flourished in the 1950s, and remained important until the 1980s. Gemeentewerken ("Public Works") was particularly important in this respect, through films that it commissioned and films that were made by its own photographic service. All construction films expressed the idea that 'the future can be built', but they served different purposes, including promotion, documentation, instruction, and recruitment. Until the 1960s, many of them were made by Polygoon, often related to its newsreels. An important name in the following period became Peter Alsemgeest. From the early 1960s until the 1990s he recorded the construction of the metro, including its extension, which resulted in various 'episode films'. Different language versions were released, to be shown to foreign guests, and at community centres to inform residents. Alsemgeest maintained close connections with the engineers of Gemeentewerken; his work was actually a kind of engineering itself. Something similar applies to former Polygoon cameraman Joop Burcksen, who made such films about the creation of the Europoort. The films served discussions between engineers and managers, informed the public, and provided a record to attract (foreign) clients and investors.

Along with the forces of modernisation, all kinds of social-cultural programmes took place. Unique in Rotterdam was the *Gemeentelijke Schoolbioscoop* (1920-1933), since it not only showed but also produced films, often dealing with Rotterdam. In this way children learnt about the environment and nature, which linked up, also politically, with the agenda of modern architecture and planning, especially in respect of social housing. After WWII, Rotterdam and its port became the subject of several educational films, to be shown at schools or on television, while films from companies such as Shell and Unilever were also used for educational purposes. These cross-connections between education and industry existed through a common interest in appropriating modern conditions.

Modernisation was also accompanied by socially motivated film reports, avant-garde shorts and union films, which often showed close connections between the public and the commissioners. Of particular interest has been the feature length propaganda film *EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?* (1928, Joannes Ratté), which recruited people for the union of transportation workers. This successful but now largely forgotten film was inspired by Soviet cinema. It was not the work of an *auteur*, but of a scene or 'scenius'²⁰⁰⁹. Besides the film, other media were used too, which is exemplified by a poster designed by Schuitema (1930). In his turn, Schuitema made also the experimental film *BETOGINGEN* (1935), about the crisis, while he explicitly called for social engagement. Through films such as Ivens's *WE ARE BUILDING* (1930), for the union of

²⁰⁰⁹ Cf. De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006, after Eno.

construction workers, and DE STEEG (1932, Jan Koelinga), which addressed the condition of the slums, a social realism developed in the 1930s. It continued after WWII, especially regarding modern housing and prefabricated construction methods. While large-scale planning accelerated in the 1960s, resistance increased too. It resulted in a critical monitoring through television, and, in the 1970s, promoted small-scale developments in respect of both housing and media practices. Urban renewal became a priority, which was accompanied by the emergence of video. Rotterdam was a frontrunner in this field. While the artistic video experiments of the Lijnbaancentrum gained critical attention, the social explorations by the Videocentrum (a.o.) were experimental in their own right. In interaction with film practices (e.g. in the case of Mediafront), this recreated ideas from the 1930s, in respect of collective action, social empowerment and participation of residents. Such local productions complemented national television reports on Rotterdam, although television became also increasingly concerned with all kinds of pressing social issues, including the deterioration of the old quarters and their abominable housing conditions, as well as immigration, labour conditions (in the port), and prostitution.

In between, or as part of the different strands, appeared various other films, from ‘city symphonies’ that heralded the modern city from before WWII, and amateur films that helped to appropriate the modern values after WWII, to features that addressed the uncanny side of the modern city in the 1970s and 1980s. These films were not made in isolation; there were various interrelations and interferences between them and other classes of films, along with similar exchanges between different social-economic areas – between art and industry, media and architecture, journalism and commerce, a.o. – due to common attractors of modernity and modernisation. It is exemplified by the link between amateur and art films (e.g. in the case of Rien Peeters, 1970s), between Ivens’s avant-garde short THE BRIDGE (1928) and his port promotion film ROTTERDAM-EUROPOORT (1966), and by the fiction short TROS (1956) that was made by Jan Schaper and Wim van der Velde, who also made (port) promotion films as well as critical television documentaries about the city and its port. The urban system creates social-economic paths, which these films follow and reinforce, from which they split, or that they cross.

The networks and institutions that enabled various kinds of film productions have been related to Steward’s (1955) ‘levels of socio-cultural integration’, which indicate the degree of cultural ecological interdependence. At one end of the spectrum are home movies, with common values and ‘institutions’ to be found within single families, which embody the most elementary level of integration. At the other end are feature films such as LENTELIED (1936, Simon Koster), which praised the modern city, or BOEFJE (1939, Detlef Sierck), which addressed the problems of the slums; these films were made with the support of foreigners, which revealed extensive networks with socio-cultural integration at an international level.

Most of the films about Rotterdam were rarely part of regular cinema programmes. Instead, they were often shown at large events, which, alternatively, gave also rise to new media practices that I have approached through the concept of *Medienverbund*. In 1928, the international industry exhibition Nenijs took place in Rotterdam. Besides industrial presentations, including those of sound systems (Philips) and television (Baird), and presentations by the press, various films were shown here. It had actually been the reason for Transfilma to be established in Rotterdam. After WWII, the main hall of the Nenijs was replaced to Het Park. It was extended by architect Bakema to accommodate the Ahoy’ (1950), which celebrated the reconstruction of the port. It offered a context for the rhetoric reconstruction film EN TOCH... ROTTERDAM (1950, Polygoon). Evaluating the Ahoy’ it was said that its film presentations had largely contributed to its success. Films presented here articulated the event’s ‘intentions’; newsreels of it served as ‘extensions’; and visitors recorded their experiences that became ‘retentions’. This also applies to other events, like the E55, which was dedicated to the reconstruction of the country. Part of it was an experiment with commercial television, supported by Philips, which affected later developments in this direction. Finally, the Floriade (1960), on horticulture, directly served city marketing purposes, while it made clever use of media attention.

Subsequent events took place elsewhere in the city, like *Stad in Beweging* (1965), which was hosted by the Bouwcentrum. It cheered the new city, supported by a remake of EN TOCH... ROTTERDAM (Polygoon). The five-yearly events ended with C'70, which took place all over the city, to 'communicate the city' to its residents. Rotterdam became literally a spectacle. While these events served as testing grounds, they also animated the city. In the following years an increasing number of events took place, including pop festivals and, above all, the international film festival: now film had become the subject itself, which also affected film production in the city.

spiders in a multitude of webs

It was already known that the elite of Rotterdam actively supported social and cultural organisations, including the Filmliga Rotterdam (1927-1933). Its chairman, secretary and treasurer were respectively the architect J.J.P. Oud, NRC journalist Johan Huijts, and banker Jacob Mees, but its network turned out to be much more extensive. It was interrelated with other organisations, including the business association Club Rotterdam and architecture association Opbouw, and it became important for cross-disciplinary developments. It gave rise, for example, to Ivens's *THE BRIDGE* (1928), and it motivated designer Paul Schuitema – a member of both Opbouw and the Filmliga – to make films himself. It also appeared that Oud's collaborators, the architects Pali Meller and especially Ida Liefrinck, were active supporters of the Filmliga. After Oud withdrew as its chairman, Liefrinck became its secretary, for several years, before she fulfilled a similar role for the magazine *De 8 & Opbouw*.

Jan Brinkman, the architect of the Van Nelle factory, was also a member of the board, while Kees van der Leeuw, director of Van Nelle, was a supporter behind the scenes. It offers a perspective to Van Nelle's media practice, comparable to that of *Das Neue Frankfurt* (Elsaesser, 2005b). Different films, and other media too, fulfilled complementary functions of documentation, information, recruitment, and exploration, aimed at different groups to promote the factory and its values of transparency, openness, efficiency, social responsibility, and innovation. Within this *Medienverbund*, which served a common agenda, there was not necessarily a convergence of styles and approaches between the modern architecture and the accompanying films. Instead of being avant-gardist in aesthetic terms, the films were part of avant-garde strategies to achieve modernisation. It also draws a link to the strategy that Van der Leeuw conducted during WWII regarding the city's reconstruction.

Another discovery is the fact that, during the last years of the Filmliga, the later city planner Cornelis van Traa succeeded Liefrinck as its secretary. It sheds a light on his *Basisplan* for the reconstruction (1946), as a kind of scenario, also literally for the films that were made about the city's reconstruction, often in collaboration with Van Traa himself. It also sheds light on his designs for spatial sequences, scenes, and perspectives such as 'the window on the river'. In terms of interactions, moreover, the Filmliga had been part of a network that enabled the city's reconstruction, due to the Club Rotterdam, and especially Van der Leeuw, who was supported by state planner – and film enthusiast – Ringers. One of the advisers for the reconstruction was Amsterdam's city planner Van Eesteren, who had also been a member of the Filmliga, just like many architects that would be involved with the actual reconstruction works. In order to promote the reconstruction plans, moreover, the Office for Information and Publicity was established. Its rhetoric is best illustrated by the film EN TOCH... ROTTERDAM (1950, Polygoon). It was the expression of a 'conspiracy' that developed during WWII, propelled by Van der Leeuw, Ringers and Van Traa, who are all present in the film.

More people, among them Alexander Bos, director of the housing department, and Jan Backx, the enlightened director of *Thomsen's Havenbedrijf*, as well as architects like Groosman, Van Tijen and Bakema were interested in film, as it promised to project new urban prospects, educate and mobilise people, and by doing so, effect public participation. Van der Leeuw, Backx and other members of the Club Rotterdam, initiated also organisations such as the "Rotterdam

Arts Council” (RKS) and the Bouwcentrum, which also supported media practices. Across the century, mayors and aldermen were interested in film and media too, from Mayor Droogleevert-Fortuyn before WWII (who supported the Filmliga) to Mayor Van der Louw in the 1970s (who previously worked for VARA), while the municipality also supported a range of productions (through Ivo Blom, 1960s-1970s).

The institutionalisation of media practices to support the modern city is explained through Heynen’s (1999) distinction between transitory and programmatic modernity. Whereas the transitory highlights temporality and the unknown, which is shown by the avant-garde experiments from before WWII, programmatic modernity implies modernisation as a project, through planning and institutionalisation. Regarding municipal filmmaking in Britain, Lebas (2000 e.a.) has said that many films were made for modernity, instead of being about modernity; municipal films supported a progressive social policy by explaining the opportunities and benefits of modern plans and institutions.

The transitory and the programmatic became closely connected through the work of film producer Joop Landré, who was born and raised in Rotterdam himself. In the 1950s, when he was the director of Polygoon, various films were made about Rotterdam that belonged to a programmatic modernity. Through his Rotterdam based production company NFM, established with the support of shipping entrepreneur Veder, various challenging films were made (e.g. by Huguenot van der Linden, Ivens, Tholen), which fuelled a transitory modernity. This also applies, although with a different impact, to his involvement with commercial television (E55, REM / TROS).

Many people acted like spiders in the numerous webs that were woven between the city and its cinematic counterpart. As such I have highlighted two names in particular: Von Barys and Schaper.

Important before WWII was the Hungarian filmmaker Andor von Barys. He is known for his avant-garde short HOOGSTRAAT (1929), which was shown by the Filmliga, of which he was a member too, and for his cinematography of various feature films. Although he worked in Rotterdam for about fourteen years, little was known about him. Looking for biographical data, an extensive network came to the fore, which also related Rotterdam to cities abroad. Important connections had been the directors Güsten, Koster and Rutten, as well as people like Ivens, Dudow, Richter, and Riefenstahl. Next to them were various cameramen, musicians and designers, among them the Hungarians Pali Meller, Lajos von Ébneth, Vilmos Huszár and László Moholy-Nagy. Von Barys’s most important film about Rotterdam was THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS (1928), made for the municipality, which accurately mapped the city and its port, while Von Barys always kept an eye for human details. Producer Transfilma made several other films for companies in the city and the port. Von Barys shot all of them, and his role as a cameraman was more important than that of the director. His work is a matter of ‘functional cinematography’, akin to functionalism in architecture, which became characteristic for Rotterdam. Its cinematic counterpart, based on the same values, is similarly characteristic for the city. By revealing his role in various unknown or forgotten productions, links appeared between industrial films, port promotion films, avant-garde shorts, commercials, features, and photography too. In fact, much of this is related to the contingent history of Transfilma and THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS, which was decisive for the career of Von Barys. When Transfilma was dissolved, in 1929, he took over its studio. In 1934 and 1938 he made, again for the municipality, two short ‘port symphonies’. His work set the standards for port films after WWII.

During the decades after WWII, Jan Schaper was especially important as a filmmaker in (greater) Rotterdam. He started as a cameraman at the E55, established his name as a script writer with the short fiction film TROS, and as the director of a film about Vlaardingen. The latter was shown at the world exhibition in Brussels in 1958, to express the achievements of modern town planning in the Netherlands. Connected to it were various photographic series made by Schaper as well, who became a kind of (self-appointed) adviser to his commissioners. He subsequently

established the Open Studio in Rotterdam, which worked mainly for television. Schaper and his colleagues travelled around the world to make recordings, but often they also made recordings in Rotterdam, which enabled a critical monitoring of the city's development. Most important has been the (television) documentary *STAD ZONDER HART* (1966), which highlighted human encounters, instead of urban functions. Partly due to Schaper's (never fulfilled) ambitions to make feature films, the Open Studio attracted all kinds of people to collaborate with him. They made up a reservoir of workers. Several of them continued to work in the media industry and contributed to the development of cinematic Rotterdam.

A close observation of the Open Studio makes clear that it could only exist through the support of Schaper's wife Christine van Roon, who worked as a soundwoman, producer, and manager at the same time. This hidden role of the director's partner can be found more often. One can just consider some important films, like those by Van der Horst, Huguenot van der Linden and Ivens. The case of *THE BRIDGE* is exemplary. Besides it being the result of a cross-disciplinary exchange, Ivens's partner, Germaine Krull, played a crucial role in its realisation. Her photographs of the bridge were not secondary to the film, but part of a broader project that she started before, in which Ivens's film neatly fits. Besides explicit contributions, like sound recording and editing, the informal contributions of women are hardly credited, while they are also hard to trace and to evaluate. After all, women were also important for general organisational roles (e.g. Ida Liefrinck, Ida van Dugteren).

In terms of cultural connectionism, an individual cognitive network links up with a social network of a scene, which is a cluster of nodes in yet another network. It is illustrated by the cases of Van der Leeuw, Von Barsy, and Schaper; their connections helped to constitute the urban fabric, while they also extended to other places, within the Rijnmond, the Randstad, and within an international metropolitan network. Such intertwined networks of different levels match Hannerz's concept of the 'global ecumene', as 'an open fairly densely networked landscape' (1996: 50). In this 'ecumene' the city is a 'switchboard of culture' (ibid: 149). Products and ideas enter it, are locally elaborated and sent into the world again.

environment and information: stigmergy

The urban habitat, as a cluster within a 'networked landscape', encompasses a multitude of 'paths'. While following paths, people leave traces, which provide information to others. This includes spatial interventions and markers, such as buildings, as well as graphic signs and symbols. As 'stigmas' they become points of reference and fulfil a memory function. The remembered information is thus not just stored in individual heads, but also in networks, built structures and institutions²⁰¹⁰. Such a relationship between environment and information corresponds to the notion of 'stigmergy'²⁰¹¹.

Information is used to adapt to the environment or to appropriate it, which in turn provides new information, and so on. In modern society, such traces, markers and signs have become complex systems of information and communication. This is the 'augmented space' addressed by Manovich (2006). I have articulated the notion of stigmergy through the examples of the *Schoolbioscoop*, amateur films of the ruined city and the reconstruction, and productions by the Videocentrum that served urban renewal, among other. They are about collective learning and the appropriation of the environment, in order to improve it. Besides such small-scale practices, other productions have also been regarded in this way, for example films that accompanied the creation of infrastructural projects – literally a matter of paths.

The notion of stigmergy applies more generally to media and the city. It is exemplified by the reconstruction period, which has shown how the empty city became inscribed by buildings and media that provided spatial markers and temporal references. Paths were established that

²⁰¹⁰ Cf. Susi & Ziemke, 2001: 29; Conti, 2005: 30; Salingeros, 2005: 230-231.

²⁰¹¹ cf. CALResCo, 2004: §6.12; Susi & Ziemke, 2001; Bonabeau, Dorigo, Theraulaz, 1999.

caused various filmmakers to shoot, at different moments, the same subjects at the same places, to be transmitted through the same channels. This created layers of moments in space. Or rather, time has appeared through patterns of movements in space. It is a matter of mapping network transmissions that have their own coordinates within a concrete environment. Through such spatial charts, of a conceptual nature, I come back to one of the aims of this research, to contribute to a historiography that can grasp complex network dynamics as spatial configurations framing time.

Since audiovisual data dissolve into the environment, the role of film in urban development cannot be explained in terms of an immediate cause-and-effect relationship. Films added value to objects, enabled exchange, or modified visions, but in general one cannot claim that a film was preconditional for policy measures to be taken, for a planning process to become successful, for a spatial or social project to be carried out, for a company to increase its turnover, or for school children to learn, etc. At the individual level, all of this also happened without the intervention of a film, as other media were sometimes used to fulfil collective cognitive functions. Not every social or spatial project needs a film, but film has been an indispensable factor at the level of the modern city as a whole. It is a matter of emergence.

Film is not just an element in a collection of cultural forms; one can easily take away such an element, but taking away an element from a system affects the entire constellation. The urban system, understood as a cultural ecology, is not an accumulation of forms, but a composed entity in which different elements are integrated. Audiovisual media, together with other aesthetic forms, appeal to and are part of the cognitive dimension of the modern city, its institutions, its planning and architecture.

media and culture, times and tides

According to Urry (2003: 139), contemporary society is characterised by 'reflexive modernisation' and monitoring through aesthetic-expressive systems. Audiovisual media have been well equipped in this respect. They monitor development, in order to continue or to adjust its course, which is, moreover, pivotal to stigmery. But many films do not just follow events; they testify to different possibilities of use and interpretation, they preview developments, outline visions or propose alternatives. To articulate this I have spoken of 'projective reflexivity'.

Beyond monitoring are the ways in which the information links back to the environment. These 'effects' relate to classic social studies on cybernetics, complex adaptive systems, and collective learning. In all of them feedback is addressed, but often in general terms. Luhmann (1997) has explained that the output of a social system serves as input again, for the system to be able to develop. This is enabled through culture, which fulfils a collective memory function. Cultural products are needed to match the output of the system with its previous situation. Next to memory is oscillation: to cross boundaries in order to propose new states to move to. In this way culture is what marks the difference between past and future, and as such, generates conceptions of time. I have applied this general understanding to film as a modern and powerful medium, with its own characteristics. It has been exemplified, first of all, by the case of NUL UUR NUL (1927-1928, Simon Koster). Through techniques such as double exposure, montage (a.o. of found footage), and looping, and by using film on stage, this production presented urbanism and modernity as a continuously changing assemblage of various forms of communication, leisure, mobility and industry. By doing so it addressed the problem of separating past, present and future.

Various other films have been highlighted regarding memory and oscillation. Some of them previewed events, such as BESCHERM UW STAD (1939, Profilti) that 'premediated' the bombardment, which would eventually take place and be recorded too (ANGRIFF AUF ROTTERDAM, 1940, UFA). These UFA recordings have subsequently been used in other productions, including the reconstruction film EN TOCH...ROTTERDAM (1950, Polygoon-Profilti). The latter also contained images of the lively old city, from THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS (1928,

Andor von Barys). In this way it constructed a history, to motivate a particular vision of the future city, which would then be built, and shown by a remake of *EN TOCH...* (1965). Although this was intended to provide positive feedback, the new city was criticised, first of all by *STAD ZONDER HART* (1966, Jan Schaper). It interfered with *EN TOCH...*, from which it also used fragments, including shots from *THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS*. While sharing the premise of a lively city, it reframed history again.

With the emergence of television, footage has increasingly been re-used. A particular case is a report on the Van Brienoordbrug (*OPENBAAR KUNSTBEZIT*, 1969, Aarden & Odufré), which included images of *THE BRIDGE* (1928, Joris Ivens). Whereas Ivens's film presented a new vision (an instance of 'oscillation'), its re-used extracts served a memory function and a media reflexivity forty years later. Other films affected conceptions of the past by being re-edited²⁰¹², or by applying approaches and styles from before²⁰¹³. Even once abandoned practices reappeared, such as local newsreel production. Moreover, themes like unionism, community development, slum dwelling, or traffic safety, have been recurrent. With film being a tidal force that enables feedback, the resulting tides caused old views to be reactivated and certain assumptions about the future to disappear.

Feedback implies a full circle that links back to an initial setting. It follows a circuit in a network. This can be short, when there are tight connections between commissioners, filmmakers and the public. This has been observed, for example, in the case of the union film *EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?* (1928, Joannes Ratté); its feedback resulted quickly in growing numbers of union members. Within extensive networks, feedback loops can be long, and information eventually dissolves into a broad cultural field, to link up with information from other media (e.g. in the case of *ANGRIFF AUF ROTTERDAM*). A feedback loop can also be extensive, but fast, because of preconstituted channels. This concerns television news in particular, such as the reports on the harbour strike in 1979, which immediately resulted in support from all over the country, which affected the situation that was reported again. When reports are part of what I have called 'developing compositions', which have longer time spans, loops of different duration may co-exist. Loops can also become recurrent, over long periods, they can interfere or merge with one another. This affects conceptions of time, since different moments become cognitively intertwined.

The complexity of feedback loops, and of the different temporalities that result from them, is made comprehensible through space. Feedback loops start at certain points in space, to which they will return after a series of interventions and transformations. They make the times and tides of the modern city.

hidden dimension

Media have contributed to the development of the city, but as tools they remained hidden for a long time. The city's toolbox has recently been turned inside out; the media used for marketing purposes have now become a focus of that marketing, while media productions today often refer to and reflect upon other media too, if it were just for the use of archival footage²⁰¹⁴. However, media have not become an end in themselves. They are still tools to promote the city's culture and economy, which are increasingly interwoven with media practices, but still (to come back to Steward) with a 'culture core' that is informed by the port. The culture core causes what economic geographers call 'path dependency', which has also informed Scott (2005) in his study of Hollywood's industrial clustering. Clustering gives rise to institutions that provide the urban

²⁰¹² e.g. *THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS*, 1928 & *ROTTERDAM*, 1934, Andor von Barys; *VLAARDINGEN KOERST OP MORGEN*, 1955/1958, Jan Schaper; *THE RESTLESS PORT*, 1967/1969, Charles Huguenot van der Linden e.a.

²⁰¹³ E.g. *WIJK 20* (1974, Staal & Verheijen) that shows resemblances to *DE STEEG* (1932, Jan Koelinga).

²⁰¹⁴ This concerns all kinds of reports and documentaries as well as television programmes such as *HET WAS* (1993-2004, Peter Scholten), and *VERGETEN VERHALEN* (2000s, Harm Korst); an example of a fiction film that includes historical footage is *DE ARM VAN JEZUS* (2003, André van der Hout).

system with an identity and a memory, which confer reflexivity on the system (cf. Conti, 2005). In the case of Rotterdam this applies only marginally to the film business as such, but all the more to its 'culture core' that gives rise to media practices.

Rather than thinking of Rotterdam as a 'city of labour' or as a 'city of culture', there is a particular culture typified by artefacts such as industrial architecture and social housing, as well as by (commissioned) films that articulate the system's reflexivity. Such products are not the output of specialised 'cultural industries', but the manifestations of a general culture of industries in which filmmakers – like designers and architects – take their share. Many of the media practices, however, have remained invisible since they were an integrated part of regular business activities in Rotterdam.

Both commercial and municipal companies were somehow involved with media practices. Besides sponsoring, this encompassed preparations for productions, coordination, collaborations on the actual production, providing facilities, and once a film was ready, the organisation of screenings. Most companies appointed officers to supervise or to guide productions, and at certain moments, chief executives were involved too. These practices became gradually subject to specialisation. When professional filmmakers established themselves in Rotterdam, production tasks became more integrated, which created new clusters of media activities.

Film has been a hidden dimension within the history of Rotterdam – and I believe in that of many other cities too. The history of Rotterdam in the 20th century can no longer be thought of without the role that audiovisual media have played in it. Today, media have come to permeate urban life and virtually any business in Rotterdam. However, the times and tides of the modern city cause similar situations to appear, disappear, and to reappear. One may therefore consider the possibility that beyond a specialised media industry, and beyond media as an end in themselves, media practices may become, due to their ubiquity, once again an integrated and virtually unnoticeable part of social-economic activities in the city.

ontology – a prospect

In the 1920s and 1930s, the application of film was still explorative, but already substantial, in respect of urban development. After the destruction of the city in 1940, and the vanishing of its cultural infrastructure, film became ever more part of an institutionalised modernisation. Since the 1960s, a proliferation of cinematic productions took place. In this respect I have used Helga Nowotny's (2005) concept of 'emergent interfaces'. They are the new borders between different social groups and organisations that come into being. This applies to the city, and to private enterprises growing bigger, with increasing internal divisions as a result. For different branches to communicate with one another, new forms of mediations appear, including audiovisual media. In ontological terms, the concept of 'emergent interface' establishes a direct relationship between social organisation and media.

I have related my findings to the case studies of Frankfurt, Glasgow and Hollywood, in order to present Rotterdam as a template next to them. By doing so I have made an attempt to contribute to a film theory and methodology that relates *content* to *conditions*, while paying special attention to *connections* between people and productions across different social-cultural fields. Through these three Cs and the issue of feedback, now understood more broadly as encompassing culture as memory function, but also including the potential of film as 'oscillation', I have extended Elsaesser's three As. Moreover, I have amplified the concept of *Medienverbund* to become part of cultural ecology, itself refigured as the culture core. It operates through extensive social and spatial networks that relate different cultural forms, which are interdependent in respect of common attractors. By taking the three Cs into account I have added to Steward's theory of cultural ecology the intrinsic values, ideas and visions of cultural forms, films in particular, and with it the self-reflexivity of the urban system.

The history of Rotterdam in film (as an instance of ‘memory’) has been the precondition for this conceptualisation (as an instance of ‘oscillation’) of the role of film in urban development and society at large. As my study has shown, this approach provides an alternative to the paradigms of the art film, the *auteur*, and national cinema. It implies another ontology of cinema, which offers a new prospect to media studies – and regarding films about the city also to the spatial disciplines. Rather than reflections or representations of an experienced or imagined reality, films are part of a concrete environment. Beyond the ‘photographic traces’ that constitute the realist ontology of film, and beyond the constructions of space and time that are effected through cinematography and montage, films are part of transformations of resources, structures, ideas and values, through networks with particular coordinates, as part of the world, and the modern city in particular.

The ontology of media and that of the modern city are interrelated, like the sea and the shore when speaking of tides. Written back into the urban history of the 20th century, whose temporal horizon has been augmented by media, the ontological convergence provides critical feedback to understand the media saturated city of the 21st century. The collective cognitive functions of media may thus reinforce the development of the city’s culture core as a configuration of environment, institutions and values, as media continue to catalyse both the culture core’s radiating and integrative forces within the city’s cultural ecology.