



Floris Paalman, *Cinematic Rotterdam: The Times and Tides of a Modern City* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011, 687 pp., ISBN 978 90 6450 766 3).

Floris Paalman's book *Cinematic Rotterdam: The Times and Tides of a Modern City* focuses on the emergence and unique development of film-making in Rotterdam and its relationship to the spatial and physical form of the city. The book is structured chronologically in three parts each covering a twenty year period. The first section examines narrative and documentary film-making in the 1920s and 1930s and the use of early modernist architecture in the city as a dominant visual form in these films. The second section focuses directly on the role of documentary film in recording the reconstruction of the city, in particular the port, in the decades following the Second World War. The final section explores the transition from films produced for cinema audiences to those made for television in the 1960s and 1970s, and how these represented the regeneration of the city and issues of social unrest.

This book is based on extensive archival research and provides a wealth of detail on films produced and shot in Rotterdam in this period. This primary source material is outlined in an appended forty-six pages filmography that gives information on key distributors and production companies as well as individual filmmakers active in the city. Using these sources the book provides a clear outline of cinematic developments in Rotterdam in terms of production and distribution and how these two networks interconnected with each other. However, there are some problems with the arguments presented on these issues. They take no account of significant differences between the production and consumption of narrative and documentary films, and in turn what this might mean for interpretations of the representation of Rotterdam in such films.

There are also some problems with the theoretical framework used throughout this study. Although key aspects of network theory are used to interpret both cinematic practices and the spatial planning of the city this material is too dispersed throughout the book and inconsistent in its application. Different network theorists, and different aspects of the theories they employ, are used in different parts of the book and these are not drawn together effectively in either the three main sections or the overall conclusion. Other key concepts used throughout the study are 'Standort' and 'Tatort' which respectively mean location of production and location of action in a film. These are noted in a single paragraph in the introduction with no elaboration on their significance for the

rest of the book even in the supporting footnote referencing film theorist Thomas Elsaesser's work in the field. Overall Paalman is perhaps too reliant on Elsaesser's comparable study of cinema in Frankfurt to provide the theoretical framework for his exploration of Rotterdam. For example, Paalman follows Elsaesser in using the concept of 'Medienverbund', a media convergence theory, to bring together the cinematic and environmental aspects of his study. However, he does not then explain why this approach is suitable to exploring the relationship between cinema and the built environment in the specific case of Rotterdam.

One major theoretical problem with the argument presented in this book is the critical focus on the *auteur* as a mode of analysis for cinematic productions. Both the introduction and the conclusion examine film theory from the perspective of authorship and suggest that this study of Rotterdam provides an alternative approach by focusing on networks rather than individuals. To some extent this is true and the outline of film networks operating in the city is historically well handled throughout. However, important individuals are given prime position within this network based discourse and this causes some problems in balancing the relative contributions of individuals and organisations.

In the first section of the book a whole chapter is devoted to the work of Andor von Bary which privileges him as the author of key films and as rising above the networks he worked within. Similarly, in the second section of the book there is a subsection on the work of photographer and filmmaker Jan Schaper who introduced method acting to the Netherlands, an area of cinematic practice clearly linked to the concept of the *auteur* albeit in terms of acting rather than film making. The contributions of Von Bary and Schaper are also highlighted in the conclusion to the book, again stressing the importance of the individual above the networks in operation.

It is remarkable that reception theory is not considered as a form of analysis in this work given the focus on the relationship between cinema and place in terms of presentation as well as the making of films. From the outset Paalman notes the importance of the places in which documentary films about Rotterdam were shown beyond the confines of the commercial cinema. Many examples of such alternative places and modes of presentation are noted in this study. These include the *Schoolbioscoop* programme which used a purpose built theatre to show educational documentaries to school children in the 1920s and the use of television screens, provided by Philips, at the *Energie 55* exhibition in 1955. Yet Paalman does not go on to use the work of key film theorists in the field of reception studies, such as Janet Staiger and Miriam Hansen, to examine the importance of place in determining the viewing experience. It is clear from the archival material consulted in this book that the reactions of audiences to film showings were recorded in news reports in print and somewhat more reflexively film. If these viewpoints had been taken into account we would have a sense of the reaction of *Rotterdamers* to the display of film in these alternative locations and the impact this had on their understanding of the city throughout the twentieth century.

Ian Horton, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London