

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

Machine Space

By Stephen Connolly



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Dr Stephen Connolly
Name of Output:	<i>Machine Space</i>
UCARO link:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/5101/
Output Type:	Q – Digital and Visual Media; artist’s film disseminated through screenings, exhibitions and on DVD
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>FILM FESTIVAL AND PROGRAM SCREENINGS</p> <p>Machine Space/WIP, Corktown Cinema, Detroit, 16.12.15</p> <p>Visions, Montréal, 19.12.15</p> <p>Experimenta / Features strand, London Film Festival, 20.10.16</p> <p>Machine Space/Stephen Connolly, Cinematek Oslo, 12.02.17</p> <p>SALT Istanbul, 19.05.18</p> <p>Rencontres Internationales, Paris, 12.04.18</p> <p>Rencontres Internationales, Berlin, 20.06.18</p> <p>GALLERY EXHIBITIONS</p> <p>Wexner Centre Box, Columbus, Ohio, 04.17</p> <p>BEK Bergen, 11.20</p> <p>DVD</p> <p><i>Spatial Cinema</i> (2019) Distributed by LUX, Artists’ Moving Image, London</p>
Key Words:	Moving image, space, landscape, Henri Lefebvre, urban studies, essay film, materiality, inequality, artists’ film
Funding:	<p>University of Kent: £2,000</p> <p>Film London: £1,500</p> <p>Film Residency, Wexner Arts Centre, USA: In-kind accommodation and tech support associated with the residency</p>

Synopsis

Machine Space is a 24-minute film created by Dr Stephen Connolly that animates the built environment of the city of Detroit as a landscape of motion and circulation. The film visualises and offers vocal testimony to the socially contested spaces of this metropolis. It is an artefact of past and present racially unjust socio-spatial relations. In a performative strand of the work, the complicity of the suburban communities with the social-spatial inequities is strongly suggested. *Machine Space* explores how the inequities embedded in everyday urban landscapes in North America can be represented in image and sound.

Machine Space, as a practice-as-research artefact, employs Henri Lefebvre's invocation of representation in his landmark work *The Production of Space* in order to visualise the landscapes and infrastructures of a city built as a machine for capital. A rich and heterogenous mix of archival sources and ethnographic perspectives inform the film, offering new

directions for research in the visualisation of landscape and spatiality in moving image media. The project materialises the representational aspects of Lefebvre's research in spatiality not undertaken in film practice before.

The film was publicly screened at media festivals and in arts exhibition contexts between 2015 and 2020. As a research artefact, its methods and findings have been presented and discussed at numerous academic conferences, winning first prize in the 2018 BAFTSS film practice award. The film was also included alongside a number of Connolly's other works on the *Spatial Cinema* DVD, distributed in 2019 by LUX.

This portfolio outlines the underpinning research context, aims and methods and includes images of both the making and realisation of *Machine Space*. It also includes a transcript of the dialogue and a booklet which accompanied the film screening at the Wexner Arts Centre.

Context

Machine Space has two contexts: the portrayal of the metropolis in film; and the unfolding of theories of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]) a foundational work in Urban Studies.

Firstly, as regards the metropolis in film, a trio of films retrospectively called the 'City Symphonies' (most noteworthy is *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov, 1929) portrayed the cities of Paris, Berlin and Leningrad as ensembles of social activity. In this work, the city is a material, spatial object and its built environment is a significant focus of the depiction. The city is also portrayed as in motion; as a visual spectacle it is fluid, dynamic and kinetic. In more recent artists' cinema, Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977) and *D'Est* (1995) interrogate the city as a space of motion and movement, her roving camera documenting the circulation of bodies and vehicles. James Benning's 'California Trilogy' (1999 – 2001) frames sites of material and infrastructural production in a visual conversation with the landscape traditions of fine art. Connolly's research brings together the city symphony and the depictive emphases of artists on infrastructure, to portray the city as a machine fuelled by capital, with significant, engineered outcomes of economic and spatial inequality.

The second context of Connolly's research is Lefebvre's *The*

Production of Space, a landmark text in Urban Studies. The work of David Harvey (2001) and Edward Soja (1989) has been significantly influenced by it. More recent work understands Lefebvre as making claims for the spatiality of architecture, urban planning and everyday life (e.g. Stanek, Moravánszky and Schmid, 2014). Lefebvre's is a study in spatial representation, arguing that spatiality (the relations around space) is made known to us by cognitive, affective and perceptive means. However, little research has been undertaken in exploring how Lefebvrian spatial representation could be realised beyond theory. The multi-disciplinary approach of this research using the moving image breaks this ground.

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- Vertov, D. (2017). *Man with a Movie Camera* (and other works by Dziga Vertov)

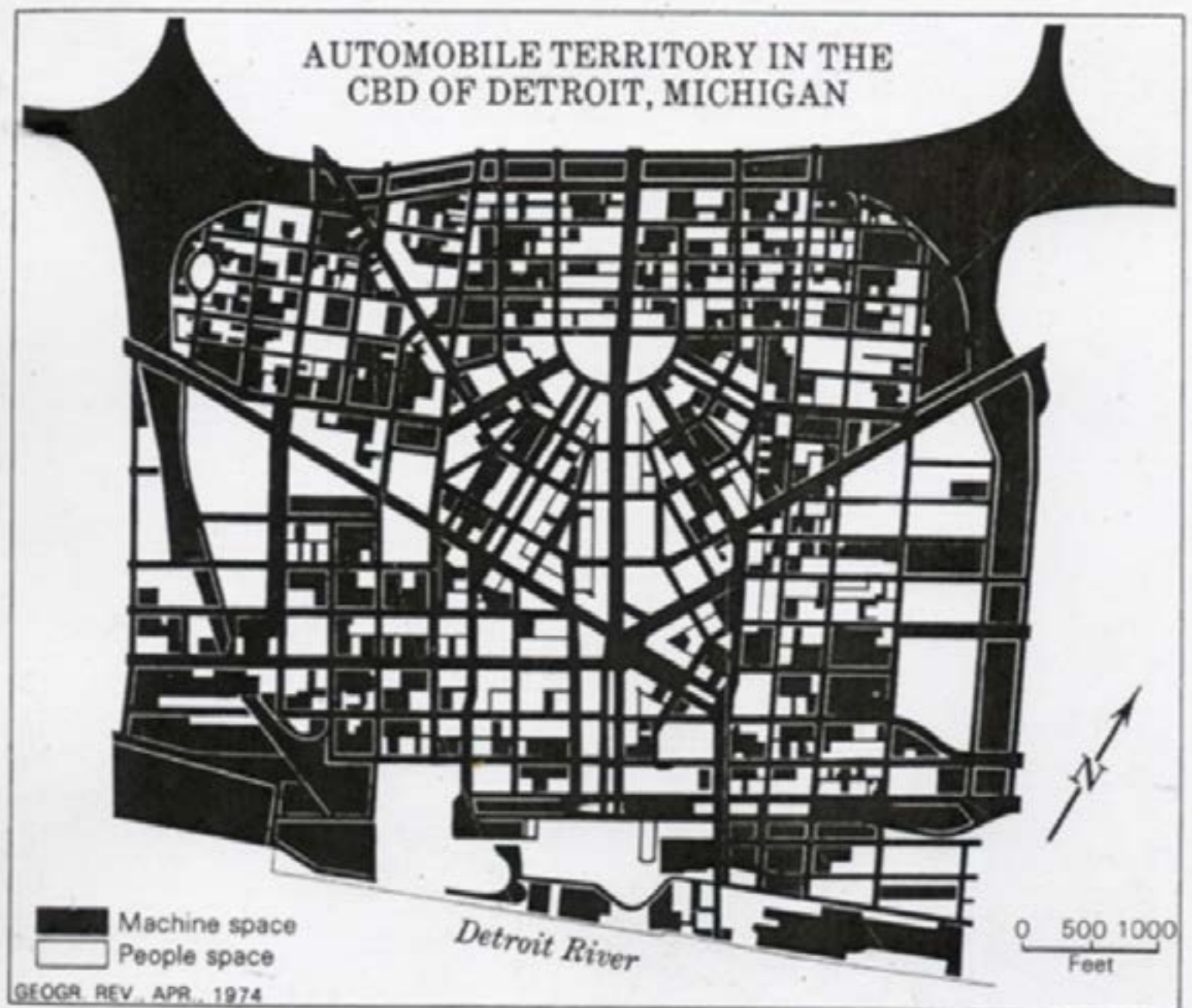
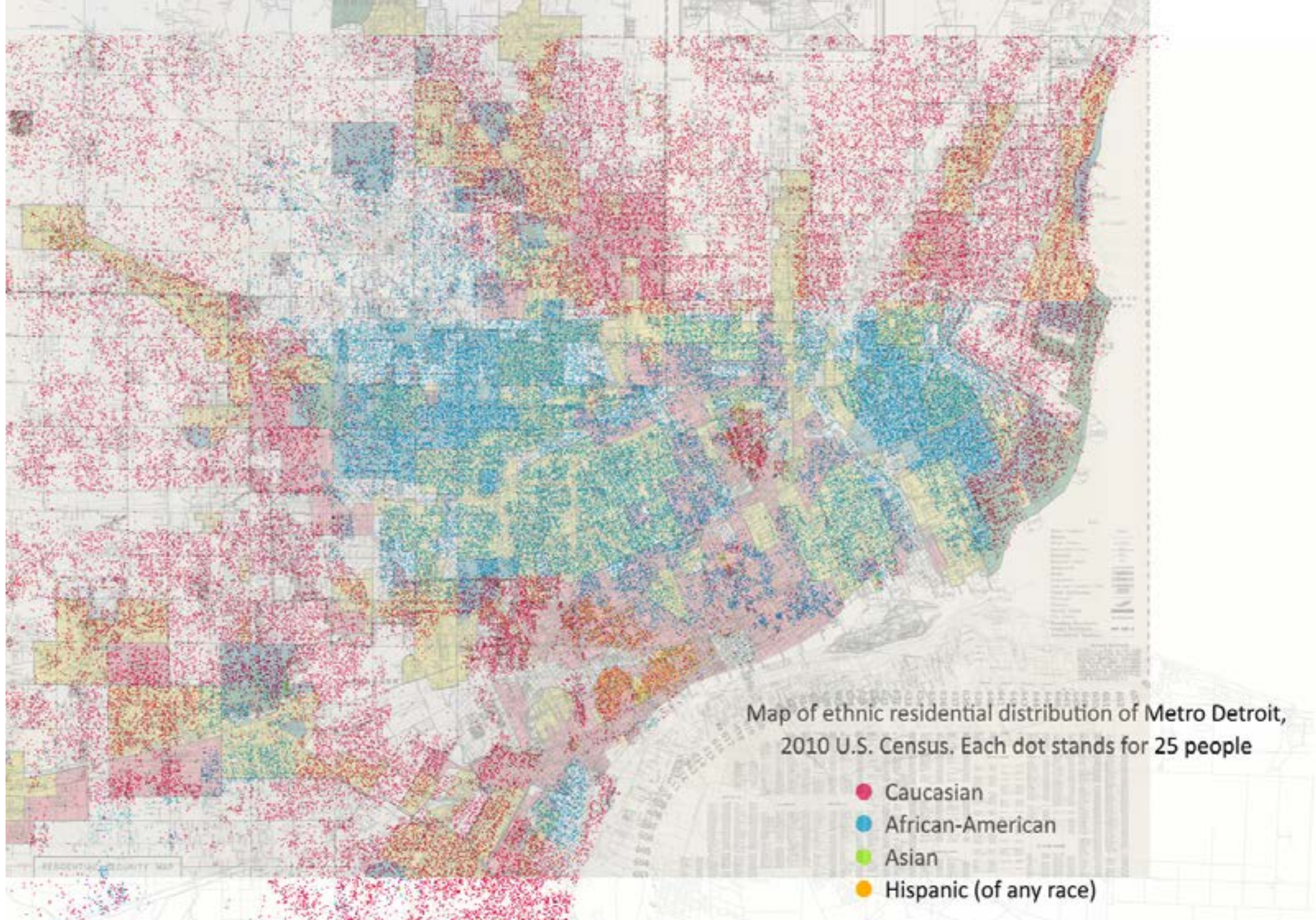


FIG. 2 — Machine space (automobile territory) in downtown Detroit, 1971, at ground level. Prepared from field maps, and with the assistance of T. J. Walters, city planner for the city of Detroit.

Machine Space is a framing of the spatial implications of a technology of movement, suggested by geographer Ronald Horvath (1974). He defined it as devoted to the movement, storage or servicing of automobiles. In the binary opposition of machine and people space, areas of conflicting use are classified as machine space when the machine is given the right of way.



HOLC 1937 Residential Risk Map superimposed on 2010 mapping of ethnicity of residential population of Metro Detroit, Michigan, USA, courtesy of University of Michigan Library (Stephen S. Clark Library)

GENERAL LIBRARY,
UNIV. OF MICH.
MAR 10 1900

IN DETROIT—Life is Worth Living



DETROIT 1816

HISTORICALLY CORRECT IN EVERY POINT OF DETAIL



FACTORY ILLUSTRATIONS

WITH COMPLIMENTS OF
HURD-MARTIN CO.

(FORMERLY HURD-WHEELER COMPANY)

DETROIT, MICH.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEWS

DETROIT 1900—SAME AREA AS VIEW ABOVE



WHAT DETROIT HAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PAST, IS THE
BEST EVIDENCE OF ITS FUTURE PROSPERITY

GENERAL LIBRARY
UNIV. OF MICH.

MAPS AND CHARTS
Acquired 1900

*Hurd-Martin advertisement 1909,
courtesy of University of Michigan
Library (Stephen S. Clark Library)*

Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

How can the socio-economic framings of landscapes be visualised?

How can a moving image practice address questions of space?

How can the urban theorist Lefebvre inform a spatial-visual moving image practice?

Research aims:

To use aspects of urban spatial form in a moving image portrait of a city

To visualise and explore the contested nature of the city's spatiality

Research Methods and Process

Connolly's initial, archival, research focused on the development of the city as an urban form in space. As visualised in maps, charts and diagrams, the urban practices in the city were gathered from its history and sociology. More informal accounts were gathered from respondents known to the researcher.

Connolly compiled this information as a cartographic palimpsest and synthesised strategies for movement and the animation of the city by the camera. The urban landscape was thus visualised as a set of automotive and financial spatial prohibitions. The layering of the archive programmed the journeys made by the camera; presented as habitual trajectories of circulation in the city. This means of visualising the city frames it as a material environment subject to underlying infrastructural and economic forces. These forces are invested in racial discrimination that have significant social impacts on the majority black community in Detroit. In combination with a voiceover offering a personal perspective on this topic, the film visualises social inequalities as constraints embedded in the material fabric of the city.

The unique ability of montage cinema to infer that discrete and distant spaces are related matched the claims of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*; the representational lens of this theory informs the three strands of the work. These three visualisations after Lefebvre are: 1. spatial practice, 2.

spaces of representation and 3. the representation of space. The montage of these visualisations in the film is suggestive of the co-existence of these spatial representations; conforming with Lefebvre's theory.

Connolly solicited spoken contributions from an academic, an activist and a poet/historian from the city. Given that the city of Detroit in the cultural imaginary (cars, manufacturing, industry, techno) is heavily inflected by gender, these contributors were women; 2 of the 3 reflecting the black majority in the city. These contributors were prompted to speak about the jeopardy of the spaces of the city in terms of infrastructure; related as experience. Male interlocutors on the contrary would offer perspectives on the jeopardy of spaces as direct human-on-human violence; rather than the history and practices of built environment and finance that were the subject of the film.

The project was supported by a film/video residency at the Wexner Arts Centre, Columbus, Ohio. The residency enabled the development of the board game strand of commentary in the film. This key performative element situates infrastructural and spatial imperatives as uncritically embedded within the everyday economic socialisation of children in the US. Part of the power of this work is its visualisation of these abstract forces informing everyday understandings and framings of our surroundings.

Insights and Contribution

Research insights:

Machine Space makes several original contributions. It realises the widely cited Lefebvrian framework of the (social) production of space as a depictive strategy in cinema. This spatially emplaces the audience in the auditorium through the layered, visual registers created by movement through the city. This expressive cinematography is a means of exploring responses to the metropolis freighted with restrictions on movement and circulation, attributes of uneven resource possession. A further insight is thus that the moving image depiction can be expressive of contested landscapes of inequality and social strife. These insights build on Connolly's previous work and stake out a subfield for **Spatial Cinema**, a rich and expansive future research trajectory.

Influence of research:

Machine Space won BAFTSS First Prize for Best Practice Research Portfolio 2018. Comments by the panel included: 'a beautifully constructed, nuanced, multi-layered view of a contested city, Detroit, mediating space as a social construct, and eschewing the "ruin porn" aesthetic approach of so many other contemporary film-makers. This is an original and moving film, well deserving of critical attention and further successes.'

*Artist researcher Stephen Connolly
in Detroit, 2015*





*Machine Space 2016-18
Spatial practice
(framegrabs)*



*Machine Space 2016-18
Spaces of representation
(framegrabs)*



*Machine Space 2016-18
The representation of space
(framegrabs)*

Research Dissemination and Activities

Dissemination details: Audience figures for screenings have totalled approximately 400. Sales of the DVD are approximately 50, with many going to university libraries.

Follow-on activities: MONOGRAPH (IN PROGRESS)
Machine Space: An encounter of Cinema, Space and Lefebvre in Detroit
To be published by University of Michigan Press/Fulcrum in 2021

CO-ORGANISED ACADEMIC SYMPOSIA

‘Visualising Spatial Injustice’, University of Kent, 08.06.18

The aim of this symposium was to examine how moving image can play a key role in exposing spatial injustices and exploitations.

‘Space and Belonging Symposium: Narratives of Migration, Materials and Gentrification’, UCA Farnham, 23.05.19

‘From Counter-culture to the Capitalocene: Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point* at 50’, UCA Farnham, 14.02.20

This symposium revisited Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point* as a precursor of cultural and environmental critique in the cinema.

ARTIST’S PRESENTATIONS

Times and Movements of the Image, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, 11.18

‘Spatial Cinema DVD Launch’, LUX, London, 04.19

SALT Istanbul, 05.18

BEK Bergen, 11.20

Research Dissemination and Activities

Follow-on activities:

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2014

'Red-lining Detroit, Beside The Screen', PUC São Paulo

2015

'Cinematic Mapping of Spatio-Captial, Critical Spaces:
Disorienting the Topological', Kingston University

2018

'Spatial Cinema', *MeCCSA*, London South Bank University

'Visualising Spatial Injustice in Moving Image', University of
Kent

'Spatial Cinema, Arrivals and Departures', LCC, University of
the Arts, London

'*Machine Space*, Skirting the Shadows of Ruins...', Creative
Practice in an age of Neoliberal Hopelessness', University of
Bedfordshire

'Beyond Landscape - Multidisciplinary practice as spatial
research', *MeCCSA Practice Network*, University of Lincoln

'*Machine Space*; an interdisciplinary moving image portrait
of Detroit', *Times and Movements of the Image*, Universidade
NOVA, Lisbon

2019

'Practice-as-Research as Words as Discursive Object',
MeCCSA, University of Kent

'Approaching Documentary as Art', *CHASE* (Panel member),
ICA London

'Spatial Cinema - Artist Presentation', *Visible Evidence XXVI*,
USC Los Angeles

'*Machine Space* - Screening', *Sightlines*, RMIT Melbourne

Research Dissemination and Activities

Follow-on activities:

MEDIA COVERAGE

BFI Sight & Sound article (<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/november-2016-issue> and text available at http://www.bubblefilm.net/texts/pdf_texts/S_Connolly_Sight_Sound_Nov_2016.pdf)

Comments include: Connolly's 'inquisitive, self-reflexive films take experimental cinema in new directions'.

Edgework article (<https://www.edgework.co.uk/single-post/Ground-Truthing-near-downtown-Detroit>)

A summary of the *Machine Space* project written by Connolly for an artist audience.

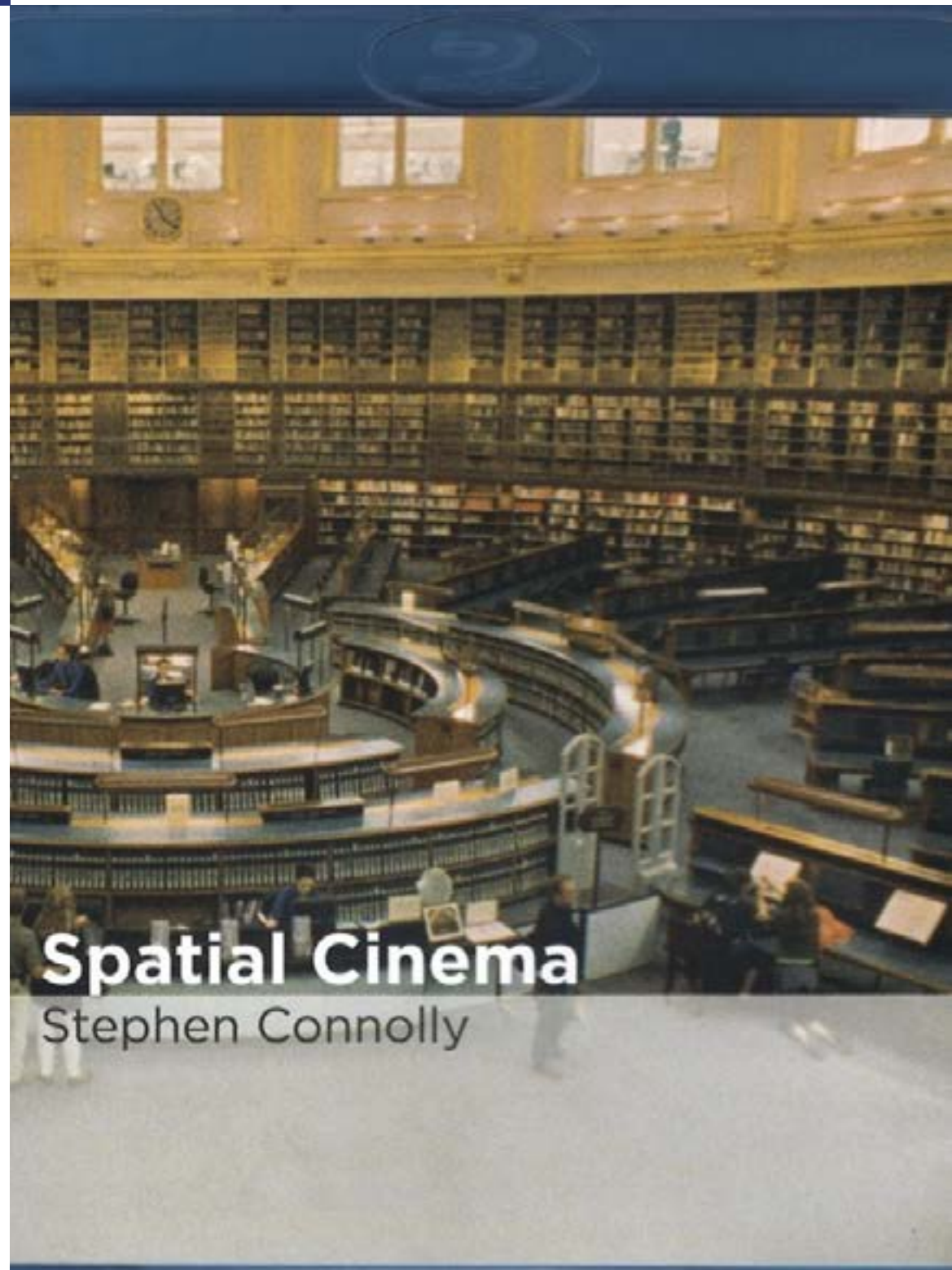
RESEARCH GRANT

2019-20 Geohumanities Creative Commission - EU 2,000

'Flying Boat' is a GeoHumanities project concerned with the spatial and mobile imaginary of trans-global travel in this uncertain time for aviation. Funded by Royal Holloway University of London/ University of Padua, Italy

Machine Space has informed Connolly's work on the Geohumanities Creative Commission, a joint project with the artist Layla Curtis, which looks at global mobility between the cities of London and Hong Kong. Beginning as a retro-future speculative fiction project, it has pivoted in response to the pandemic to look at the multiple spatial imaginaries of the asian city.

Website: <http://geohumanitiesforum.org/>



Spatial Cinema

Stephen Connolly

*Spatial Cinema Bluray DVD with
essay and commentaries*



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FRONT COVER

*Machine Space (24' 2018), concept
illustration, 2016*

BACK COVER

*Traffic Flow in Detroit, Traffic Audit
Bureau 1934, courtesy of University
of Michigan Library (Stephen S.
Clark Library)*

TRAFFIC FLOW IN DETROIT AS DETERMINED BY THE TRAFFIC AUDIT BUREAU, INC.

