

Mapping the City video programme (reprise) / EN

SMCS.11

Thursday 10 / 17 May:
Mapping the City video programme (reprise)
Starts both days at 9 p.m.
Free entrance
Reservations: desk@stedelijk.nl

This video programme in two parts complements the 'Mapping the City' exhibition in Stedelijk Museum CS. It shows a selection of current videos and films by artists that relate to the city. Two theoretical concepts which are applicable to the exhibition are also relevant for the videos. The first is that of the *flâneur*, introduced and developed by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, respectively, and the second is Guy Debord's concept of *dérive*. The *flâneur* has claimed the streets of the city as his domain. There he enjoys observing people and events, and merges into the masses. Debord introduced his concept of the *dérive* (or 'drifting') in 1958, as 'a technique of rapid passage through various ambiances'.

The movements and attitudes of the *flâneur* can be found again in street photography, as it was for instance practised in the work of Ed van der Elsken. A short film he made in Amsterdam is being screened - the only 'old' work in this programme. But in current videos the city is also sometimes portrayed from the perspective of the *flâneur*. When this is the case, however, it is striking that the element of interaction is often absent now. It would seem that people are so used to cameras that they no longer take notice of them. Thus the lens often wanders away to the architecture or the infrastructure of the city, or to the mass as a whole, instead of concentrating on the individual. The goal of Debord's *dérive* was 'the recognition of effects that are psychogeographical in nature and the affirmation of a ludic-constructive behaviour'. According to Debord, one achieved that by not just wandering around obtusely, but by making connections with the social morphology of the city. The contemporary artist however does that not so much by only recording such connections, but more by reflecting on them.

The points of departure for both the *flâneur* and *dérive* are still recognisable in almost all the films shown. Film and video are however in their turn specific, contemporary media that place their own layers of meaning over these points of departure. That is in part because we often know cities better through feature films and documentaries than out of our own observation, but also because presently, as a result of 'city branding', certain images of cities have been created, based on their history or otherwise, that impose a particular identity on the city - certainly in the case of Western tourist destinations. The artists in this programme are conscious of these new layers of urbanity. Still, the specific point of departure, namely the city where the *artist/flâneur* finds himself or herself, or where the *dérive* takes place, often reveals itself through everything.

PROGRAMME May 10
Starting 9 p.m.

Ed van der Elsken (NL, 1925-1990) - A Photographer Films Amsterdam - 1982 - 10'

Amsterdam was often Van der Elsken's 'hunting ground'. In this short version of *A Photographer Films Amsterdam* the camera flies into the city like an arrow. Once in the midst of the bustle of the Dam or the Leidseplein it encounters the most remarkable and attractive characters: punks, disciples of the Bhagwan, fathers with babies, girls in the fashions of the 1980s. Before he leaves the city with an aerial view, Van der Elsken has caught the atmosphere of Amsterdam in the early 1980s on film. Now, a quarter century later, one realises how much has changed because of gentrification and commercialisation. (Courtesy Anneke van der Elsken)

Matthew Buckingham (US, b. 1963) - Obscure Moorings - 2006 - 23'

Buckingham generally bases his work on sources from collective memory, such as history or literature. For *Obscure Moorings* he sought his inspiration in Herman Melville's 1849 novel *Redburn*, in which an old seaman must accustom himself to life in a boarding house in a city during the era of industrialisation. Buckingham has translated this character to contemporary Liverpool. But the 19th century harbours now renovated for the tourists are no longer the bustling sites of yore. Once again the seaman proves unable to find his place. (Courtesy Murray Guy Gallery, New York)

Volko Kamensky (Ger, b. 1972) - Everything We Have - 2004 - 22'

The small North German city of Rotenburg, dating from the 12th century, has been destroyed by fire many times in its history. Nor, thanks to many a deranged citizen of the city, has the local historical museum escaped that fate. Because of the lack of historical artefacts, the good burgers of Rotenburg are suffering an identity crisis. Kamensky sympathised with the population and presented them with his documentary that visualises their city, the historical document that they have so fiercely desired.

Frank Hesse (Ger, b. 1970) - Florence, From St. Croce to the Institute of Art History - 2006 - 12'12"

After a visit to St. Croce in Florence in 1817 Stendhal, the prototype of the modern cultural tourist, experienced a nervous breakdown, brought about by looking at art. While recording a night-time walk from St. Croce to the Institute of Art History in Florence with his camera, in the subtitles Hesse reflects on this event. He makes a connection with the fate of the art historian Aby Warburg, the founder of the Institute, who in 1914 also experienced a nervous breakdown from which he did not recover for the following decade. Did he sometimes suffer from Stendhal syndrome?



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Gabriel Lester (NL, b. 1972) - Urban Surface - 2005 - 10'40"

Atmospheric night shots of Stockholm are accompanied by music from Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965). While the images evoke the requisite suspense and suggest the setting for a thriller, ultimately very little happens on the locations. Streetlights flicker, an old newspaper blows down an empty street and dry leaves rustle in the wind. It would seem the city sleeps with one eye open - although there is no reason for its disquiet. (Thanks to Museum De Paviljoens, Almere)

Sarah Morris (US, b. 1967) - Capital - 2000 - 18'18"

In *Capital* Morris provides an observation of Washington, D.C., the power centre of the United States, in the last days of Bill Clinton's presidency. Capitol Hill, the White House, the Ministry of Defence and Clinton himself are prominently in the picture - as is the security apparatus, omnipresent in the city. Even the common people on the street seem alert, always looking around. A distanced camera perspective, the lack of a commentator's voiceover, and the electronic music by Liam Gillick neutralise the paranoid feeling somewhat. (Courtesy White Cube Gallery, London)

Aukje Dekker (NL, b. 1983) - Stuck - 2006 - 4'

A woman in a theatrical white cloak and white pumps moves rather strangely through the daytime and evening streets of San Francisco. Apparently she is following the beat of the music on her discman. When the music gets stuck, so do her movements, and suddenly it seems there is room for social interaction on the street.

Marc Bijl (NL, b. 1970) - Good Things - 2004 - 3'45"

The various parts of the song text of *Good Things*, a 1982 song by the gothic band Sisters of Mercy, are performed like graffiti at the same number of sites around Rotterdam. As in a video clip the camera follows the texts in time with the music, in a cover version performed by Marc Bijl's own band, Götterdämmerung. Using the images and music from an era of doom and gloom, the viewer has a no less black side of the Port City in the post-Fortuyn era served up for him. (Courtesy Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam)

PROGRAMME May 17

Starting 9 p.m.

Aleksander Komarov (Belarus, b. 1971) - Psychogeographical investigation, taxi guide - 2005 - 15'19"

Nobody knows a city better than do its taxi drivers. At least, they themselves generally think so. During a visit to Vienna Komarov made use of their knowledge. While none of the cab drivers themselves came from Vienna, each had his own personal links with the city. With the video camera in his hand, Komarov had each one drive him to his favourite place outside the city centre. In this way, with the drivers' collaboration, he put together a guide to the city that is totally different from the usual tourist guides.

Valérie Jouve (Fra, b. 1964) - Grand Littoral - 2003 - 25'

The residents of this suburb of Marseille are faced with a difficult task if they wish to reach the local shopping mall on foot. Like the main figure in J.G. Ballard's short novel *Concrete Island* (1974), they find themselves imprisoned by a network of motorways, concrete obstacles and autos racing past. But although they are thrown back on their own resourcefulness, they do not suffer for that. (Courtesy Galerie Xippas, Paris)

Cao Fei (China, b. 1978) - COSplayers - 2004 - 8'23"

Cao Fei's *cosplay* (an abbreviation for 'costume play') takes place against the background of Guangzhou (formerly Canton). The urban image of the fast-growing metropolis is defined by its pretentious skyscrapers, on which Fei has his characters balance. They are clad in the outfits of their favourite computer game characters, and pursue one another. The camera observes them during staged fight scenes, and follows them into the living rooms of their parents' - who don't seem to notice their mysteriously dressed offspring.

Tintin Wulia (Indonesia, b. 1970) - Everything's OK - 2003 - 5'10"

This filmmaker and architect experiments with a combination of methods from animation and documentary. In *Everything's OK* polystyrene houses symbolise the city of Jakarta, which is coming apart at the seams as a result of its uncontrolled growth - and apparently without seeing the problems this brings. In real estate projects capitalism-turned-to-steel-and-glass thrusts the small man onto the sidelines.

Hala Elkoussy (Egypt, b. 1974) - Peripheral Stories - 2005 - 28'

In a swirling visual essay, *Peripheral Stories* carries the viewer along through the suburbs of Cairo, simultaneously illuminating them with testimonies from various residents of the city and texts from media reportage and advertising messages. During the video a picture is gradually sketched of the relation of today's resident of Cairo and changing social values: the frustration and alienation that go with the process, but also acceptance; doubts about and expectations for a future in which a modern consumer lifestyle beckons in the numerous new neighbourhoods around the city.

Rodney Graham (Canada, b. 1949) - City Self / Country Self - 2000 - 4' (looped about 8')

The tragicomic *City Self / Country Self* (2000) reveals the two sides of a split personality. The two protagonists, 19th century men, are both played by Graham. The one is unmistakably an urban dandy, the other a country bumpkin. They move through the streets of a medieval city where they have agreed to meet. Then a scene takes place that establishes their distinctive roll patterns: high/low, culture/nature, urban/rural. They accept this distinction without complaint. (Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London)

Mark Leckey (UK, b. 1964) - This Thing in Regent's Park - 2007 - 8'47"

In 1991 the painter J.D. Williams produced a small, colourful figure-sculpture from oil paint that was simultaneously squeezed onto a canvas. Mark Leckey has had that figure animated for his video. In this video one sees how it carries out a wobbly *dérive* through a deserted Regent's Park, the place where the annual spectacle of the *Frieze Art Fair* takes place. (Courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne)

Note: *A Photographer Films Amsterdam* was shot on 16 mm film; *Grand Littoral* was filmed on 35 mm; *Capital* was filmed on 16 mm; *City Self / Country Self* was filmed 35 mm. All the works are here shown from dvd.

All works are shown with thanks to the artists involved.

Curating and text: Jelle Bouwhuis, Kerstin Winking
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