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To cite this article: Nitin Bathla & Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou (2021): Reframing the contested city through ethnographic film: beyond the expository on housing and the urban, International Journal of Housing Policy, DOI: [10.1080/19491247.2021.1886028](https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2021.1886028)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2021.1886028>



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Published online: 10 Mar 2021.



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Reframing the contested city through ethnographic film: beyond the expository on housing and the urban

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ABSTRACT

The legacy and future of the ‘ethnographic film’ has been the subject of much scrutiny and refinement in recent decades, mirroring the reinvention of ethnography itself. A number of innovative strands such as observational film, direct cinema, and sensory ethnographic film have attempted to reframe the ‘ethnographic film’ beyond its narrative expository documentary origins. In reinventing the ‘ethnographic film’, filmmakers have addressed important questions regarding representation, the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject, and the need for a more open-ended interpretation and contextualisation to involve the audience. Concomitantly, an ever-increasing number of films direct their focus towards the contested nature of housing and urban redevelopment in cities. Despite this, the use of film in housing and urban studies remains under-examined and in need of urgent critical engagement. In this paper, we discuss the representation of two contested housing and urban redevelopment projects in London, the Robin Hood Gardens public housing estate, and the Seven Sisters Indoor Market. We analyse a relatively large number of films made on these projects and compare their treatment of representation and audience to assess the significance of the ‘ethnographic’ approach, consequently arguing that filmmakers and researchers probing contested cities can benefit from a closer engagement with productive debates with it. We argue that the dialectical engagement between ‘ethnographicness’ and ‘filmicness’ can help realise the immense generative potentials presented by the filmmaking medium, allowing a reality to emerge from the film, rather than reduce the film to a representation of textually reproduced reality. In doing so, we consider the importance of the contested nature of housing and the urban as cinematic subjects. As a conclusion to the paper, we present some reflections on the need for moving towards filmmaking that dwells on the liminal experiences of communities inhabiting contested housing and urban redevelopment projects.

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KEYWORDS Ethnographic film; housing documentaries; London; urban filmmaking; research filmmaking

Introduction

We present this paper from the position of filmmaker-researchers actively attempting to push the boundaries of both research and film through mutually engaging with them at the Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich. This paper emerged at a time when we were collaboratively producing a feature-length ethnographic documentary film entitled 'Not Just Roads' (Bathla & Papanicolaou, 2020). The film attempts to capture the highly contested nature of 'bypass urbanisation' (Bhattacharya & Kalyan, 2011) in India through following the construction of an expressway on the peripheries of Delhi. The film follows the remaking of the territory for middle-class housing projects through the displacement of its current sedentary, non-sedentary, non-human, and more-than-human inhabitants. In allowing for sensory, aural, and visual possibilities, the film serves as a generative medium allowing us to make meaning from the embodied experiences of dwelling, resistance, and contestation.

Through working on the film, we felt that rather than serving as a mere extension of a textual or academic narrative, the film allowed for a unique opportunity for learning from 'the practice of everyday life'. Of learning from 'the ordinary practitioners of the city that live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins' (Certeau, 1984, p. 94). Instead of using visuals and spectacles to fit a spoken or written narrative, we attempted to follow the protagonists as 'liminal beings' (Westerveld, 2010) experiencing and reflecting upon the loss of ecology and dwelling, and projecting into future possibilities of becoming and undoing spatial injustice. Thus, rather than serving as an extension of the academic writing register (the doctoral dissertation¹ of Nitin Bathla in this case), the film opens up temporal and sensorial boundaries of the 'contested urbanity' under formation, extricating possibilities for what Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini (2007) calls 'liminal ethnography' through allowing a mediator between the ontological perspectives of the researcher and the 'researched'.

Some of the tools of 'ethnographic film' (Heider, 2009) that we operationalised in 'Not Just Roads' were developed in continuation to the experiences from two earlier films directed by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou – 'The Seven Sisters Indoor Market'² (Papanicolaou & Kleftakis, 2016; Papanicolaou, 2018) and 'The Disappearance of Robin Hood'³ (Papanicolaou, 2018). These films follow two highly contested projects of housing and urban redevelopment in London. With these films, we join a rapidly growing number of researchers and filmmakers from across the world who are exploring the possibilities of film as a non-textual medium

for researching and representing the increasingly contested nature of housing and the 'urban'. Increasingly, films produced by a diverse range of scholars including geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, planners, and architects converge around the critical investigation of housing and the urban under the ongoing formations of financialisation. This body of work is only expected to grow even further over the coming years with an increasing availability of guidebooks and courses on filmmaking for research and fieldwork, and an increasing accessibility of tools for filmmaking and editing, combined with a rise of forums and film festivals addressing the questions of housing and the built environment.

While the genre of films dealing with housing, urbanisation, and inequalities has been growing steadily, there is a relative scarcity when it comes to literature that critically engages with this genre. These discussions are especially lacking in terms of the role of representation, contextualisation, and sensoriality that the film medium allows over text. This paucity was personally experienced by us while directing the aforementioned films, but especially felt by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou while teaching a course on the use of 'ethnographic film' to architects and designers researching the 'urban' at the Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich (a context in which we initially met in 2017). We feel that in order to develop a critical engagement with the use of film on housing and the urban, it is worthwhile to borrow from rich and generative debates that have emerged in the field of 'ethnographic film'. Moreover, this engagement can also mutually support the current attempts at 'reframing ethnographic film' (Basu, 2008) beyond its encounters with the 'other' and 'the orient'.

We concur with David Madden (2012) that there is an urgent need for films such as 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' (Freidrichs, 2012) that are able to defog our thinking about urbanism, housing and poverty, while also speaking to the emotional experience of urban change. However, as we will argue in this paper, there is also an urgent need to move beyond 'expository', narrative driven films, towards a more open-ended 'ethnographic film' that builds upon the 'emotional', 'sensorial', and 'liminal' experiences of urban change while engaging with the contested nature of housing and the urban today. Such discussions are important as while allowing the possibility for a wide dissemination, filmmaking is not only a highly edited medium, but also a highly collaborative process (Lawton et al., 2019). A collaboration involving, as Sandra Jasper in the same essay rightly notes, 'not only the trust and generosity of human and other-than-human protagonists in front of the camera, but also a larger team of people with highly specialised technical skills, ranging from editing and sound design to logistics, licensing, and distribution'.

This special issue of IJHP on 'housing documentaries and podcasts' thus allows for a much-needed space for critical reflections on filmmaking on

housing and the urban under a rapid and highly contested global transformation. In the following sections, we will discuss some defining characteristics of 'ethnographic film' and contemporary efforts at reframing it. Further, we will attempt to develop a discussion on its relevance and use for filmmaking on housing and urban change. We will present some reflections on representation, contextualisation, and sensoriality through discussing the use of 'ethnographic film' in the work of Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou in two prominent projects of housing and urban redevelopment in London in relation with several other films that have also portrayed these projects. Building upon these reflections, as a conclusion we will attempt at synthesising the generative potentials presented in considering liminality as experienced by communities inhabiting contested projects of housing and urban redevelopment in 'ethnographic film'.

Ethnographic film: a move from the expository to observational and sensorial

The foundational text of Karl Heider, published originally in the year 1976 and in a revised form in 2009, serves as an important and perennial resource to understand the genesis and evolution of the field of 'ethnographic film'. In the book, Heider describes how the term 'ethnographic film' embodies a tension between two ways of seeing and understanding, and bringing order to experience: 'the scientific and the aesthetic'. 'Ethnographic filmmaking' then has been an attempt at reconciling this tension, to achieve a fertile synthesis between the art and skills of the filmmaker with the trained intellect and insights of the ethnographer (2009, IX). While Heider claims that the relative unboundedness of 'ethnography' presents a difficulty in defining the term 'ethnographic film', he offers a note of caution that 'ethnographicness must not be expropriated to cover any film about people'. Instead of attempting to define and foreclose the term 'ethnographic film', Heider offers two useful overriding considerations that can help make explicit 'ethnographicness' of films:

1. How closely can films approach the highest standards and goals of ethnography?
2. How can films present information that written ethnographies cannot?

Conversely, Heider also urges us to consider film not as a passive medium to narrate ethnography or to develop ethnographic understanding. Heider claims – '(that) there is (often) a temptation to load too much information into the narration, further weakening the "filmicness" of the film, and at time even contradicting the visual information. However, when

considered together and not in opposition, better ethnography would make for better cinematography'.

In the revised volume of the book, Heider reflects on the immense changes in the field of 'ethnographic film' since the book's original publication in 1976. He claims that not only have technological advances made filmmaking more accessible and affordable, but that filmmakers have also attempted to explore the visual and aural possibilities of ethnography that go beyond traditional printed text while also being conscious of not filtering out voices of people. This has led to a move beyond the 'expository' within 'ethnographic film' towards what has been described as 'observational cinema', 'transcultural cinema', 'reflexive films', and more recently 'sensory ethnography'.

A handbook for making documentary and ethnographic films and videos by Barbash and Taylor (1997) provide useful encyclopaedic entries to understand these diverse forms of documentary and ethnographic films. They define 'expository documentaries' as addressing the spectators directly, through either an on-screen commentator or a voice-over track (1997, p. 16). They describe that in expository film – 'the commentator seems to comment on the action or the scene, rather than to constitute it or be a part of it, (whereas) the visuals are constructed in accordance, as a compliment, or as a counterpoint to the voice over which has a certain priority. The arguments elaborated by expository documentary need to be didactic; they seek to inform and instruct and leave little room for an open-ended interpretation' (1997, p. 18). This disembodied voice-over however has been the subject of much critique from filmmakers who have characterised it as authoritative, colonial, and a view from nowhere.

Against this tendency to explain what the images mean instead of allowing the viewer to make meaning on their own have emerged genres such as 'impressionist films', 'observational cinema', and more recently 'sensory ethnography films'. While 'impressionist films imply more than they inform, and evoke more than they assert', 'observational cinema emerged as a reaction to both expository and impressionist styles' (1997, pp. 20, 22). 'The idea was to film lived experiences, instead of summaries or reports on it as condensed in interviews'. Moreover, 'observational documentaries let the spectators put the pieces together for themselves: they proceed by implication rather than by demonstration, and so demand a more active viewing experience' (1997, pp. 27, 28). 'Reflexive films', on the other hand while articulating the interactive qualities of the aforementioned categories set the filmmaker in the first person, 'the filmmaker may either appear on-screen, or talk to us (or him- or herself) in voice-over' (1997, p. 31).

Concomitantly, there have been attempts at reframing 'ethnographic film' such as by Paul Basu (2008), who problematises the etymological inclusivity suggested by the term 'ethnographic film' in claiming:

Like their textual counterparts, ethnographic films have (historically) not typically been concerned with representing all peoples equally – they are largely films made by ‘us’ (urban white Westerners) about ‘them’ (our non-urban, non-white, non-Western Other).

Basu attempts to visit historical debates on the relationships between written and filmic ethnography, the power inequalities in representation, and the innovation in filmic techniques in order to relate to the continuing controversies over the ‘framing’ of ethnographic film in televisual, academic and artistic contexts. He claims that parallel to the substantive reframing of ethnography for ‘non-traditional’ fields, there has also been a rejection of ethnographic conventions such as the voice-over commentary and contextualising exposition. He exemplifies this shift through discussing the work of filmmaker Kim Longinotto whose ‘observational films’ have been widely exhibited in the context of ethnographic film festivals. Basu (2008, pp. 101, 102) quotes an interview with Longinotto discussing the critical reception of her films as follows:

‘There’s no context’, they said. ‘You’re making a film in Cameroon and we don’t know anything about Cameroon. What’s the history of the judiciary in Cameroon? How many women judges are there? What’s the colonial history?’ People wanted the film to tell them everything’. Longinotto’s defence is that she is not making educational films, but that she is ‘telling stories through other people’s lives’, and that the objective is to allow ‘deeper truths’ to emerge, ‘truths about you and me, and truths about all sorts of other things ... emotional truths, really’.

Longinotto’s films thus are not about ‘exoticising’ cultural differences, but are for her audience to see beyond apparent cultural differences coupled with a respect for audiences’ ability to contextualise the films’ stories for themselves. Left uninterpreted, the film can be read in multiple ways. Basu urges ethnographic filmmakers to allow multiple readings and transform the audience from passive observers of lives and the world of others into what he calls reflexive researchers – ‘audience-ethnographers’.

Furthermore, the move beyond the expository in ‘ethnographic film’ has been coupled with attempts at addressing the apparent ‘ocularcentrism’ in film through exploring multi-sensory ethnography potentials in film (Nakamura, 2013). Discussing the post-1980s work of Robert Gardner at the ‘Harvard Film Studies Centre’ and the work of its progeny, the ‘Sensory Ethnography Lab’ Karen Nakamura (2013) argues:

The intent is to totally immerse the viewer into the diagetic world of the film and through it convey the emotional feel.

We argue that this ongoing transformation in ‘ethnographic film’ beyond the expository can be helpful for filmmakers researching on housing and the urban just like how the permeation of ‘critical ethnography’ has helped unmask the seemingly contradictory forces shaping contemporary urbanisation (Hart,

2006). In the following section, using concrete examples of films made around two prominent controversies surrounding housing and urban redevelopment in London, we will attempt to demonstrate how filmmakers can draw from developments in 'ethnographic film' in order to address the questions of representation, audience, and contextualisation. We will discuss what 'ethnography' can offer documentary filmmaking, and how films can benefit from a move away from the 'expository' towards 'observational', 'sensorial', and the 'liminal'.

Resistance and disappearance – filmmaking and the contested city

There has been a steady rise in films attempting to critically engage with the contradictory forces and actors shaping the contested city. While the recent film 'Push' (Gerten, 2019) questioning the affordability of housing in cities, best exemplifies this, there has been an ever-increasing number of films that have explicitly attempted to research and represent the contested nature of housing and urban redevelopment. This is evidenced by the increasing popularity of film festivals dealing with the urban, housing, and the architecture of the city. While we do not attempt an exhaustive survey of such festivals, some noteworthy festivals that have emerged in the recent years include: 'Open City Documentary Festival' organised by the Urban Lab at UCL since 2011, the 'Urban Eye' film festival in Bucharest, and the 'Urban Lens' film festival organised by IHS across various cities in India. These festivals span the breadth of the world today and are attended by diverse audiences, which include researchers, policy makers, filmmakers, and members of the public interested in films on housing and urban transformation.

While we agree with David Madden (2012) that such films are urgently required to help defog our thinking about urbanism, housing, and poverty, we would like to add that while doing so these films should also address the questions of representation, audience, and contextualisation as highlighted in the previous section. We attempt to explore these questions through discussing films made around two prominent controversies surrounding housing and urban redevelopment in London; the 'Robin Hood Gardens council housing estate' and the the 'Seven Sisters Indoor Market'. A large number of films have been made around these two controversies; in total six on the former and two on the latter. Moreover, Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou, a co-author of this paper has made a film on both these controversies utilising methods and references from 'ethnographic film'. This allows us to critically engage with the questions of representation, audience, and contextualisation in the films made on these projects while also drawing from the intimate experiences of Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou of having worked on the representation of these two projects.

Directed two years apart with a different set of collaborators, the films 'The Seven Sisters Indoor Market' (2016) and 'The Disappearance of Robin Hood' (2018) by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou capture two important contested housing and urban redevelopment projects in London. On the one hand, the redevelopment of the Seven Sisters Indoor Market in Haringey has been contested for the lack of a relocation strategy for the trading community that dwells in this space, and the loss of a 'cultural landmark' as a 'Latin Village' ('*Pueblito Paisa*' as it is sometimes referred to) in 'cosmopolitan London'. On the other hand, the redevelopment of the Robin Hood Gardens council housing estate in Poplar has been contested on the grounds of ongoing financialisation of affordable public housing in London and the loss of an important landmark of Britain's post-war architectural heritage.

The prominence of these projects has meant that they have garnered significant public attention in terms of their representation through films and media. A number of documentary films, and video installations, especially on Robin Hood Gardens, have emerged over the years. A total of six films and video installation including a film by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou have attempted to capture the contested nature of Robin Hood Gardens. On the other hand, due to its especially politicised nature, the Seven Sisters Indoor Market has not garnered similar attention in film, with only one other short documentary by the BBC featuring it. However, it has been featured in an extensive podcast by City Metric and its redevelopment has been widely discussed and debated through blogs and newspaper articles. Below, we discuss a short anthology of the films and media that have featured and discussed these two housing and urban redevelopment projects. Following this, we will contrast and discuss the potentials and limitations of representation in these relative to the use of elements of 'ethnographic film' in the films by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou. Finally, we will attempt at synthesising a few key elements that point towards the possibilities in exploring 'liminality' while researching and representing the contested nature of housing and urban through 'ethnographic film'.

Being the most iconic building project by one of the most famous British Architects of the post-war period, the Robin Hood Gardens estate has garnered attention from a diverse range of documentary filmmakers, alongside a vast number of books, exhibitions, and conferences. The BBC documentary 'The Smithsons on Housing' (1970) marks the beginning of the representation of Robin Hood Gardens estate in film. The documentary features the architects Peter and Alison Smithson introducing the housing estate as an urban utopia within the noisy metropolis of London. In the film, the architects caricature the future resident of the housing estate and the city through discussing their drawings and models for the project. The clips

from this film have been featured in several recent documentaries discussing the controversy surrounding its redevelopment.

The publication of redevelopment plans for Robin Hood Gardens estate in 2008 reinvigorated interest among filmmakers over its contested future. Foremost of these is a short video feature by The Guardian (2009), in which architectural critic Jonathan Glancey poses the question: 'is London's Robin Hood Gardens an Architectural Masterpiece?' In the film, Glancey strolls around the building and its outdoor spaces talking to its residents in the corridors, peeking into its communal areas while signalling the building's slow decay and typological redundancy. He finally speculates on alternative futures for the site such as its possible conversion into student housing. Following this, a short documentary film by Martin Ginestié (2010), 'Robin Hood Gardens (Or Every Brutalist Structure for Itself)' makes a case for its preservation as a brutalist masterpiece through focusing on the exceptional detailing of the building's façade and corridors. Similarly, the film 'Robin Hood Gardens: Requiem for a Dream' by Tom Wilkinson purportedly takes a 'final look at this landmark of Brutalism' (English, 2014) as by this time the efforts to save the building had started to look like a losing battle. In the words of its makers, the film explores the project 'through exploring the unloved, but not unlovely spaces around it (the building)'. A year later, Joe Gilbert's (2015) 'Streets in the Sky' portrays the building in an eerie black-and-white look. The film focuses on decaying objects in the landscape and in the building juxtaposed by narrative commentaries by prominent architectural critics and historians discussing the building.

Finally, 'Robin Hood Gardens: A Ruin in Reverse', by the famed Korean artist Do Ho Suh (2018) juxtaposes media such as time-lapse photography, drone footage, and photogrammetric scanning as an immersive video installation. The video installation was featured at the 2018 Architecture Biennale in Venice alongside a two-storey original façade ripped from the building through a commission by the V&A museum. The façade is now housed in the private collection of the museum as a relic after the building's eventual demolition between 2017 and 2019. Besides this, the building has been the subject of several photography projects, most noteworthy of which is the project 'Lived Brutalism: Portraits at Robin Hood Gardens' by Kois Miah (2019). Miah's project records the lives of residents at Robin Hood Gardens in the final years before its demolition.

A common thread that runs across the films and video installations discussed above is in their indispensable focus on the architectural object and a celebration of its aesthetic virtues over inhabitation. Architectonic features of the project such as the much famed 'streets in the sky', 'the quiet zone', 'the noise protection walls', and the building's 'brutalist aesthetic' become features that the critics tour and discuss in the films. The residents, often portrayed as a homogenous group of Bengali migrants are almost

exclusively presented as a passive subject whose dwelling and politics of habitation is given little consideration. David Madden (2012) while reviewing the film 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' (2012) describes how such focus on architecture and on the spectacle (of demolition) has perpetuated famous myths regarding failure in the past:

One way, then, to 'remember Pruitt-Igoe' would be to organize and empower tenant unions. Another way would be to understand how the Pruitt-Igoe myth continues to function in debates about today's cities. It doesn't only fail to capture what happened to Pruitt-Igoe itself. It's also a neoliberal fable used to justify dynamiting other social housing developments across the world.

In the films discussed so far, we can observe a similar treatment of the Robin Hood Gardens estate to what characterised the representation of Pruitt-Igoe historically. The exclusive focus on the architecture and on the spectacle of demolition, which fails to bring into picture the agency of its tenants, might perpetuate similar myths through representation. To borrow from Heider, these films lack both in 'ethnographicness' and in 'filmicness', and illustrate how a mutual consideration of these could have enhanced representation in these films. We see the lack of 'ethnographicness' in the neglect of how the tenants dwell in the building, shape its lived reality, how they mobilise, and what they plan to do after the demolition. Inversely, in order to address this lack of 'ethnographicness', with the exception of Suh's installation, the films rely on a narrative voice-over usually by an architecture critic or historian. These authoritative voices usually stitch a linear narrative, and over-contextualise the project to which the images become a subsidiary companion. In disregarding the intelligence of the viewer to contextualise for themselves and make open-ended interpretation, these films become akin to a text, thus losing out on what Heider calls 'filmicness'.

The sole other film on 'Seven Sisters Indoor Market' entitled 'United Nations of Tottenham' (Sankha, 2008) commissioned as part of 'Inside Outside' series by the BBC1, while making good on 'ethnographicness' stumbles on a similar 'expository' voice-over. The film, while showcasing an understanding of the 'superdiversity' (Hall, 2015) of the multiple groups making up the market and their politics of resistance, follows a similar strategy of a narrator attempting to interpret the protagonists that appear on the screen. Moreover, while discussing both the projects, the films remain squarely focused on the local determinants while remaining oblivious to the spectre of neoliberal transformation haunting the city.

Narrative thresholds

Conversely, the films by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou on the two projects discussed above are able to overcome the aforementioned limitations to



Figure 1. Sultana Begum explaining the 'quiet zone' in the film 'The Disappearance of Robin Hood'.

'ethnographicness' and 'filmicness' through employing observational, sensorial, and liminal possibilities of 'ethnographic film'. Instead of relying on authoritative voice-overs in the films, the narrative unfolds through immersing the viewers into the everyday lives of the buildings' inhabitants and their embodied and emotional experiences. The camera follows relational encounters between the inhabitants (and maintenance workers) that unfold in domestic and public spaces. Instead of portraying the famed architecture features of the building as passive objects, the film explores how the residents inhabit them. The representation of the famed 'quiet zone', which is portrayed in most films on Robin Hood Gardens can help illustrate this difference. The 'quiet zone' is often depicted for its novel functional value as a park flanked by tapering residential towers on either sides, and an earth mound on the wider end, which helps reduce noise from the major streets that surround the project. The film 'The Disappearance of Robin Hood' attempts to follow the 'quiet zone' through the lived and embodied experiences of one of its residents, Sultana Begum (Figure 1). In the film, Begum describes the 'quiet zone' as follows:

The park is a big-big-big part of the whole estate, our mums and dads would always let us go down to the park because it was enclosed and you could see over and see where your child was. And enough times, you would call out and say come home. You could hear, you know, or like especially people on the second floor. You could call up to your mom and she could throw an ice-lolly down to you. You could play there for ages and there would never be a problem because your mom could see you.

In using 'ethnographicness' as exemplified above, the film attempts to portray the public housing project through what Michel de Certeau (1984, p. 94) describes as – 'the ordinary practitioners of the city (that) live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins'. This shift in agency and voice in the film to the inhabitant of the building mutually enriches the 'filmicness' as the building suddenly comes to life rather than serving as a neutral backdrop for a narrative. During the interview with Begum, set within her house, the practice of everyday life goes about unperturbed. Begum's nephew and nieces play around in the house, as Begum narrates her lived experiences while growing up in the building. Instead of encountering the tenants through a filmic gaze at their everyday life, the filmmaker is able to transport the viewer beyond the 'narrative threshold' through offering a view into the intimate lives of the residents. The filmmaker achieves this through intertwining the sensitivity of ethnographic methods of observation and interviews with filmmaking. Thus, the shots in the film emerge after a considerable time spent by the filmmaker in gaining an intimate understanding of the lived practices of the tenant protagonists.

Relational narratives and counter-politics

A further limitation among the previously discussed films on Robin Hood Gardens can be ascribed to a lack of consideration for counter-politics and spaces of resistance. Specifically, how (if) everyday encounters are relationally constructed across diverse social and ethnic groups dwelling the building, and what political possibilities for resistance such cross-solidarities offer. The portrayal of Robin Hood Gardens is often reduced to the building being designed for white working classes which were later displaced by 'Bengali' migrants as the requirements of the 'original inhabitants' no longer matched the design of the building. However, what does this cohabitation mean and does this 'superdiversity' (Hall, 2015) offer a scope for 'radical politics of dwelling as difference' (Lancione, 2020)? In 'The Disappearance of the Robin Hood', the filmmaker attempts to explore such encounters through emotional, sensorial, and temporal memories of the protagonist. An illustration of this is in a scene with Begum, where the camera enters the living space of another resident in the building, John Christopher Mulcahy, who Begum describes as 'an old-timer who has been here from a very long time'. Following this, Mulcahy describes - 'how people living here, especially the Bengalis, are quite content with living here', and the scene breaks into the sound of Mulcahy playing his electric organ, breaking the stillness of everyday lives playing out in the building. Is it the aural sensation of listening to Mulcahy's organ that produces relationality between him and Begum? Is it the sound of Begum's nephews and nieces

playing in the corridors, that make Mulcahy relate to his neighbours? These associations are left for the audience to construct.

Protagonists as liminal beings

Furthermore, the building tenants rather than architectural historian/critics offer a more intimate understanding of the building's temporality in terms of not only its past, and present, but also its possible future trajectories. This can be ascribed to the tenants undergoing what Judith Westerveld (2010) describes as a 'liminal phase' where the tenants are 'undergoing a transformation between past and future identities (while navigating uncertainty), and anything can happen'. The tenants act as 'liminal beings' experiencing the conflict, revisiting their associations of dwelling while simultaneously reflecting upon possible future outcomes. While in the illustration above, Begum allows a liminal perspective into the conflict, in the film 'The Seven Sisters Indoor Market', the filmmaker attempts to capture the liminality of the conflict through exploring the practices of dwelling in the market. In the film, depictions of the everyday lives of Colombian butcher, Nelson Martinez, the Jamaican barber, Tony Babason, and the Chilean legal counsellor, Maria Eugenia Grondona, are interwoven with their stories of arrival in London, and with the evolution and futures of the market and its residents. The focus on these protagonists helps understand the practices of dwelling and everyday life in the market below the thresholds of visibility, which are both spatial and intergenerational. Nelson Martinez narrates how the structure of the market allows for his differently-abled son Pacho Martinez to safely experience and participate in the 'normalcy' of everyday life without being cast into institutional spaces at the edges of the society. In this way, the filmmaker gradually shifts the focus from the architectural object to the associations that the residents make with and between spaces, and across cultures, and generations, forums and social hierarchies. The filmmaker is thus able to use the 'liminal phase' as a productive moment not only to narrate the conflict but also speculate upon possible futures through the eyes of the inhabitants.

The city yet to come as a visual metaphor

Another important question that emerges especially when working on films around contested issues such as housing and urban redevelopment regards the relation of these seemingly local contestations with large-scale urban transformations. In other words, how can films portray the relationship to a 'totality' such as financialisation without risking the trap of over interpretation or being 'expository'? One way to approach this question can be to

dodge it altogether, as was done in many of the aforementioned films on Robin Hood Gardens and the Seven Sisters Indoor Market. However, the resistance and disappearance of such buildings and communities are also entangled with structural transformations of the city and thus embody the face of the 'city yet to come' (Simone, 2004). An alternative approach to this could be through 'relational comparison' (Hart, 2018) with other conflicts and places as was achieved in the film 'Push' (Gertten, 2019). However, developing on the 'observational' and 'sensorial' potentials of 'ethnographic film', in the aforementioned films of Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou, visual metaphors are employed to represent the spectre of totality haunting through the forces of financialisation and hegemony. 'The Seven Sisters Market' for example opens with a wide shot directed at an image of a billboard with skyscrapers piercing through clouds that shroud over London juxtaposed by sounds that provoke a sense of contemplation. The metaphor reappears again at the end of the film as Pacho Martinez attempts to traverse the rapidly transforming London in a dizzied state of alienation. Similarly, in the 'Disappearance of Robin Hood', the silhouette of the building disappears in a mist of water spray assisting machinery the buildings' demolition and reemerges as a rendering covering the site presenting a face of 'the city to come'. The film ends in the British Museum where the Robin Hood Gardens estate disappears as a photographic artefact as did the Victorian terraces that existed on the site before it. Through such contextualisation of objects and media as signifiers or 'visual metaphors', the filmmaker is able to ground local conflicts into the larger transformations shaping the city.

Sensory cinematographic encounters

A concluding characteristic which we identified while reviewing the aforementioned films regards the use of cinematographic encounter that largely remains guided by the movements and experiences of the filmmaker in space. While the shift from narrative voice-over to following the tenant protagonists in their everyday relational encounters is useful in the move away from 'expository' representation, the medium allows further unexplored sensorial and emotional possibilities. These possibilities relate to what Nakamura (2013) means through - 'to totally immerse the viewers into the diagetic world of the film and through that convey the emotional feel'. In the inspiring work of artist Do Ho Suh (2018) on Robin Hood Gardens, this cinematographic immersion is achieved through the use of drones which produces the effect of a 'more-than human' walk through the building. Conversely, in the films of Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou, this is achieved through a momentary shift in perspective to how the protagonists

experience and perceive space. For instance, in a scene in 'The Seven Sisters Indoor Market', the market is presented from the vantage point of a child riding his bicycle through the corridors of the market. Through such incorporation of sensory cinematographic encounters, the filmmaker is able to break the distance between the viewer and the 'represented' space thus enhancing the immersive potentials of the film.

Reframing the contested city through ethnographic film

In concluding this section, we would like to summarise some of the characteristics discussed above for consideration that can help reframe the representations of the contested city through the mutually generative potentials of 'ethnographic film'. Foremost, the 'narrative threshold' allows the filmmaker-researcher to draw from the everyday experiences of resident communities instead of employing 'expository' voice-over to impose a narrative. Further, 'relational narratives' both spatial and intergenerational allow for an exploration of 'radical politics of dwelling as difference' (Lancione, 2020) through sensory and emotional encounters between the diverse groups inhabiting space. Exploring the protagonist as 'liminal being' allows alternative futures for contested projects of housing and urban redevelopment to emerge through dwelling on their temporal experiences of uncertainty. The use of 'visual metaphor' allows local conflicts to be embedded into large-scale transformations of the city, without relying on narrative voice-overs or over-contextualisation. Lastly, sensory cinematographic encounters allow the possibility to immerse the audience into the diegetic world of the film and reduce the distance between them and the 'represented'. Such reframing of the contested city through 'ethnographic film' can allow possibilities for diverse audiences to be transformed into what Basu (2008) calls 'audience-ethnographers'.

Ethnographic filmmaking as a mutually constitutive and interdisciplinary practice

As a prelude to the conclusion of this paper, we would like to make a short note on the role of 'interdisciplinarity' in the generative potentials of 'ethnographic filmmaking' that we have discussed in the previous sections. We follow the provocation by Lawton et al. (2019) to consciously consider the inherent interdisciplinarity of filmmaking both in front of and behind the camera. This dialectical relationship of interdisciplinarity can further enhance the generative potential for 'reframing the contested city' through 'ethnographic film' by allowing for other ways of seeing, experiencing, and representing that can bring new insights into research. The two films of

Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou that we have discussed in this paper emerged collaboratively in the context of research conducted at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and ETH Zurich. The film 'The Seven Sisters Indoor Market' (2016) emerged in conjunction with the MSc Sociology dissertation of Papanicolaou (2014) at the LSE. In the thesis, Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou argues against 'methodological cosmopolitanism' through which the market has been tagged as a 'Latin Village' in London, and how the market thrives through superdiversity (Hall, 2015) comprised of people from Caribbean, African, and Asian descent, among others. However, collaborating with Marios Kleftakis, an already-established filmmaker and editor at that time, provided the means to filmicly convey liminal encounters, such as that featuring Pacho Martinez discussed earlier in this text. Such encounters mutually informed Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaous thinking on the topic by allowing sensorial, observational, relational, and liminal possibilities that transcend beyond the violence of abstraction in text. Similarly, the film 'The Disappearance of Robin Hood' (2018) emerged in the context of urban research fostered at the Chair of Urban-Think Tank (U-TT) at ETH Zurich through a collaboration between architects, sociologists and filmmakers. The film follows several successful films produced at the U-TT, such as 'Torre David' (Brillembourg et al., 2013), which have allowed generative possibilities to explore and represent urban informality.

Ultimately, in focusing on the 'liminal', these transdisciplinary modes of film production allow filmmaker-researchers to use principles of ethnographic empiricism rooted in 'Grounded Theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as tools to express not quasi-linear surface-level phenomena (which correspond to expository modes of storytelling), but rather, more broadly interpretable phenomena that eschew fixed meaning. Thus, the fragmentary inputs that collectively form field research undergo an audio-visual translation and filtering process through which, rather than becoming distorted or reduced in meaning, they become more apt for reading. In that sense, through the film production process, filmmaker-researchers do not simply put a story together through film, but combine their expertise to give audiences the tools to have an empirical experience that renders them what Basu calls 'audience-ethnographers'.

These have found pedagogical crossovers for example through the course 'ACTION! On the Real City' at the Department of Architecture of the ETH Zurich, taught by Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou with Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner since 2017. This course has attempted to introduce the generative potentials in considering critical ethnography on the city and filmmaking together. Combined with an easy accessibility of tools such as smart phones, such pedagogical strategies can help democratise new approaches of seeing the city allowing researchers to 'draw from

the stream of experiences of everyday life' (Taussig, 2011) and explore new representations for resistance and activism to counter the hegemonic forces of financialisation.

Conclusion – liminality in the contested city: reframing the ethnographic film

In this paper, we have attempted to explore how researcher-filmmakers researching and representing the contested nature of housing and the urban in cities can draw from the generative potentials of ethnographic film. We especially focused on the potentials presented in moving away from the expository, towards employing 'observational', 'emotional', and 'sensorial' potentials of film. Beyond filmmaking methodologies, we found that the subject itself - the contested nature of housing and the urban - presents generative possibilities that can equally contribute towards the current efforts at reframing 'ethnographic film'. This contribution can be framed in terms of employing the phase of in-betweenness or 'liminality' through which urban communities navigate between past and future identities under ambiguities enforced upon them by the contested nature of contemporary urbanisation. This liminality holds important potentials in serving as a 'narrative threshold' for reframing 'ethnographic film'. Through focusing on 'liminality' under contested urbanisation, films and video works have a possibility to transcend beyond the spectacle of the architectural controversy and generate potentials for resistance against forces of financialisation and hegemony through re-centring the politics of dwelling of inhabitant communities. Franscesca Bargiela-Chiappini (2007) describes 'liminal ethnography' as a new form of ethnographic inquiry which adopts 'liminality' as an ontological perspective on the condition of the researcher and of the researched. While Judith Westerveld (2010) makes profound observations on liminality in reading the work of artists such as William Kentridge as 'liminal beings' reacting to a 'liminal era' through bringing artistic production into conversation with the in-betweenness of political periods. This experience is not very different from the experience of inhabitants of the Robin Hood Gardens estate and the Seven Sisters Indoor Market who react as 'liminal beings' caught in political controversies.

Furthermore, we feel that rather than serving as an extension of textual representation, ethnographic films on the contested city can greatly benefit from the 'observational', 'sensorial', and 'liminal' potentials of the film medium. In the Robin Hood Gardens estate, this could have translated into a consideration for tenant communities inhabiting it, rather than serving as an extension of the textual discourse celebrating the already well-established design genius of two important post-war period British architects

(Powers, 2010). This emphasis on the architects instead of the community ironically ended in the British Conservation Society refusing to register the building, leading into its eventual demolition (Braidwood, 2017). Similarly, the reductive representation of the Seven Sisters Indoor Market into a cosmopolitan assemblage of 'model United Nations' worth conserving on the grounds of cultural conservation (Townsend, 2018) within the larger redevelopment plan of the Haringey Development Vehicle seems equally problematic. Reviewing the film 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth', Madden (2012) argues: 'Many critics of 'indefensible space' or 'high modernist' utopianism don't seem to realise that when tenants organise, they almost always seek to improve, protect and expand public housing rather than privatise or demolish it'. Madden's comment seems to resonate with our observations on essentialist representation discussed above. There is thus an urgent need for filmmaking in the contested city to move away from a focus on the architectural object and expert critics in favour of relational perspectives that bring attention to inhabiting communities and their practices of dwelling.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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