

Filter City
by Knut Åsdam

Filter City

A film by Knut Åsdam (Norway)
Produced by Fine Arts Unternehmen Film



Knut Åsdam, walk way Crop, photo, 2003

Filter City, 2003 - 35mm film and DVD. 21 min. Colour, English speaking, stereo.

One of Åsdam's most major film/video works to date, Filter City focuses on two women their relation to each other, to a larger social group and to a city that is in transformation –architecturally, socially and politically. The film is mostly shot outdoors in modern apartment/housing complexes, using scenes that are interchangeable with different western cities. Through dialogue and filmic descriptions of places and bodies, Åsdam brings the characters into a narration of the city and a complex of desires for friendship, intimacy and meaning through language.

Knut Åsdam lives and works in New York. He has exhibited extensively in Europe and the Americas. He has shown large scale installations or solo shows at; the Nordic pavilion in the 1999 Venice Biennale; the 1999 Melbourne International Biennale; Kunsthalle Vienna; the Tate Britain, London; the Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; PS1... 2003 he had major presentations at the Istanbul Biennale and the Irish Museum of Modern Art among others.

Knut Åsdam about "Filter City", 2003:

"The film deals with the relationship between individuals, groups and space/place in a city that is like both an agent and object for change itself (here represented through architecture and through implications in narrative). It will use real spaces of a city architecture and a narrative that seems contemporary in language and that ties in the bodies and the architectural spaces as social and political.

It combines the narrative sense of space from my installations (i.e. Venice Biennial) with the "conventional" poetic narrative strategies from my audio works and later videos. It brings together critical elaborations on social and historical space to themes of boundaries of the body and subjectivity, -the political spaces of architecture and the body.

In order to do this it uses subtle interweavings of experimental narrative and filmic descriptions of place and the relationship between bodies and place.

What is unique in this piece is how it becomes an intersection of all the main strands in my work, and how it builds on my installations (history of place, spaces of crisis and deviation, and my development in the end of the 90's of narrative installations), my audio works (working through conventions of the radio play to more "inventive" forms of audio narrative both in terms of text and in terms of active sound- and noise-scapes), and my videos (the early speech and body driven pieces, the architectural projection pieces, and the later composite monologue driven works).

My work has critical and issue based implications and subtexts, but are strongly experience-based. The issues are at play in the experience of the viewer rather than the other way. In this video work, I have maintained an orientation around the viewer as an experiencing and bodily subject, so prevalent in my installation works."

(Knut Åsdam)

Filter City — An Introduction to Everyday Living in the City. Simon Sheikh

A keener awareness of everyday life will replace the myths of 'thought' and 'sincerity' — deliberate, proven 'lies' — with the richer, more complex idea of thought-action. Henri Lefebvre¹

Life in the modern city has formed the backdrop for most modern films. This is hardly surprising, considering that cinema historically was an urban phenomenon, made for consumption in the city by the subjects in the city. However, what would a film look like that had the city life itself as its subject? One such film is, arguably, Jean-Luc Godard's **Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle** (1966) where the 'she' of the title is actually not the woman that you follow in the film, but the city she lives in: modern Paris. Investigating the impact of an economically and architecturally changing Paris on its inhabitants, the film focused on the correlation between consumerism and prostitution within the 'new' city, the modern high-rises. The subjects in the film are contingent on the architecture and economy around them, caught between the high-rises and the cost of living within them. The city is both frame and matrix, as it is in Knut Åsdam's **Filter City**.

Throughout Åsdam's work we find a continuous investigation into urbanity and subjectivity. What he has described as his interest in 'contemporary subjectivity' encompasses the structures of the contemporary urban environment and the modes of behavior they indicate, exploring how these in turn structure the formation of subjectivity including our use and understanding of language, sexuality and gender. Here, the production of space leads to the production of (certain) subjectivities, of possibilities and impossibilities. Indeed, the correlations between architecture and language seem to lie at the heart of **Filter City**, whose protagonists negotiate their surroundings, themselves and each other through language and buildings. Life between buildings, it would seem, is a constant negotiation of a double language, spoken through the buildings and through the body. Neither seems to run smoothly, however. There are impasses, intersections, redirections, residues, surpluses, misunderstandings as the protagonists constantly struggle to mediate and understand their (urban) condition. Alongside the territorialization of the streets and blocks, there is also always the deterritorialization of the subjects. Through and against. Back and forth. **Fort da**.

In **Filter City**, Åsdam's first foray into film, we principally follow two female characters who inhabit public places in a specific but unspecified city over a likewise unspecified period of time. Their relation to each other is unclear, as is their social status. We first meet them in a long establishing shot that places them on a street corner, but what this shot actually establishes in terms of story and subjectivities is unclear — **Filter City** quickly discards filmic conventions of narration and continuity. Where the establishing shot is typically used to establish the characters in a narrative structure and explain just enough to allow the viewer to grasp their situation, Åsdam's shot only establishes the ambiguous

relations and positions themselves. We see that they are hanging out on a street corner in a modern cityscape, but as we get closer the characters seem more **out** of place than **in** their place. They are obviously not teenagers and neither do they affirm any other pre-conceived notion of street persons; they are young women and not easily categorized either as a gang or as vagrants: They are unexplainably **there**. But, at the same time, they seem to belong there — we trace no uneasiness on their part, but familiarity, a strange sense of belonging. Perhaps we can, then, categorize them as 'familiarily strange'.²

While the characters' appearance on screen is a fluctuating signifier, their speech also shifts from narrative, vernacular dialogue to an erosive language of theory-poetry. Through the course of dialogues and monologues, we understand that these characters have some sort of bond, the nature of which we never discover: Are they friends or lovers, or both? In the present tense or the past? We also learn, through their later conversation/territorialization of a playground — crucially, a (deserted) public space not designed for such intimate encounters — that the connection between them clearly is broken, not so much by any particular action taking place between them, but rather by **the space between them**. Rather than being protagonists in a story, with clear-cut agency — a part to play — they are situated, or established if you will, in a space.

Situating subjects in a space rather than in a story is a property of installation art rather than cinema. In installation work we find a spatial set-up that involves the physical movement and placement of the spectator. It is about location, and it employs reflection over representation, as we know from the tradition of minimalism and the architectural installations that have followed. However, with the advent of video installations we are witnessing a (re)introduction of the (moving) image into the reality of the space. Video installation offers — phenomenologically speaking — the possibility of an expansion of the idea of spatiality as (self-) reflexivity and (auto-) critique. With video installation we are experiencing a space for filmic production that can literally surround the viewer, and, through the use of multiple projections, provide several points of view simultaneously. The French theorist Jean-Christophe Royoux has spoken of 'the spatialization of the story' in contemporary video work, that is, a spatialization of film that literally includes the space of the spectator.³ With **Filter City** Åsdam offers us this process in reverse: rather than inserting conventions and methods from film into art he inserts the knowledge from art production into an actual film, which, in turn, is a story of spatialization rather the spatialization of the story!

The protagonists in **Filter City** are, then, not so much part of a story as they are part of a spatial setting or stage. They are immersed in the space, and their agencies and subjectivities cannot be separated clearly from this space. The relationship to the city space may be antagonistic at points, but nevertheless always contingent. The two main characters, S and O, both personify this relationship: S constantly trying to find new ways to interact and engage with the city and its subjects, and O falling seamlessly into a depressed speech and alienated state that merges with the grayness of the city space around her.

S, the most active character, follows a more vitalist line of engagement with the city, walking around it and narrativizing it like private eye or a everyday resistance fighter, figures akin to Michel de Certeau's famous notion of the walker. –Engaged in an urban practice of everyday life, the walker not only experiences control and inaccessibility, but also the joys and freedoms in resisting the technologies of discipline structuralization and control by refusing to be reduced to them.⁴ S follows an unknown woman through some familiar streets, and then through the aisles of a supermarket, musing on her own interest in this person whose identity ultimately remains a mystery.. Except, that is, in one crucial respect. S recognizes this woman, not from somewhere, but from everywhere: she is similar to herself through location. That they inhabit and territorialize the same space, and that they — though spatial practices — are, if not the same, then similar.

In this regard the properties of **Filter City** are similar to Gordon Matta-Clark's strategy of 'anarchitecture' — an amalgam of anarchy and architecture — as seen in the site-specific work **Conical Intersect**, made in Paris in 1975, at the end of the same period of urban renewal that was the subject of Godard's film. **Conical Intersect** consisted of making a hole through an entire block of houses that were about to be demolished. What Matta-Clark's traversal of these private spaces made public was not difference or individuality, but structural similarity, sameness: That all the apartments were similar, not only in their lay-out, but also in their furnishings and arrangements. Matta-Clark crucially showed how privacy didn't produce individuality, only isolation: everyone lived similar lives in similar apartments that nonetheless remained invisible to each other. The implications of visualizing similarity and isolation are profoundly political, and a movement from **practice** to **critique** to **revolution** in everyday life becomes apparent.⁴ Åsdam's work places itself in this trajectory, being both engaged with the cinema of Godard and the 1960s as well as with Matta-Clark and the installation work of the 1970s. Åsdam is also concerned with urban transformations and structuralizations, but, crucially, also with the everyday usages and resistances of the city's inhabitants. He is engaged with **potentialities**.

Even though the desires of S presumably are not met — neither in her meeting with O in the playground or in her following/stalking of the woman — she is at least trying to (inter)act, to make sense, to formulate: a line of least resistance. O, on the other hand, fails to connect and speaks of a feeling of separation or division, not just between her and her surroundings, but also inside herself, as if the compartmentalization of the modern cityscape had been internalized. She is lost in language and lost in space, which, in Åsdam's work often amounts to the very same thing. Thus, when he injects the language of art into cinema and of theory into poetry he is suggesting counter-narratives — counter-memory if you will — and the beginning of thought-as-action.

1. Henri Lefebvre, **Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1: Introduction** (London: Verso, 1991), 135. (Originally published in Paris, 1947/58 as **Critique de la vie quotidienne I: Introduction**).

2. The Freudian notion of the uncanny, the German **Unheimliche**, is sometimes translated into French as **l'étrange familier**, an altogether more evocative and precise phrasing than the English version. Something that is familiarly strange is a reversal of the interpretation of **Unheimlichkeit** as the familiar, the everyday suddenly seeming strange, unfamiliar, and moves towards a notion of the strange as familiar. It is exactly this reversal that brings about anxiety: That the trauma, albeit hidden or forgotten, is always already familiar, and thus integrated. The figures in Åsdam's apparently realistic film also have this function; their being (there) is familiar yet strange.

3. Jean-Christophe Royoux, "The Conflict of Communications," **Stan Douglas**, (Centre Georges Pompidou: Paris, 1993), 56-71.

4. In his seminal essay "Walking in The City", Michel de Certeau pointed to the importance of the act of walking in city life, and how this implies a perception of the city very different from that of the perspective of power — the bird's-eye view and the map, panoramic totalizing views that, ever since the Middle Ages, have been used to transform the city into a clear and readable text. To this he opposes the "blind knowledge" that urban subjects have when walking through the city, creating a kind of narrative as it were, with favorite sites and routes, making shortcuts and stops. This is the everyday practice of living in the city, without an overview of it being possible. See Michel De Certeau, **The Practice of Everyday Life**, (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). (French original published in 1974)

5. The notion of the revolution of the everyday stems from the situationists' take on Lefebvre, most notably Raoul Vaneigem in his book **The Revolution of Everyday Life**, that can be read as a radicalization of Lefebvre's work, not to mention de Certeau's, in its focus on 'spurious opposition', youth, street life, spontaneity, performativity, madness, riots and so on. Raoul Vaneigem, **The Revolution of Everyday Life** (London: Left Bank Books/Rebel Press, 1983). (French original published in 1967).

Knut Åsdam FILTER CITY, 2003. DIALOGUE LIST spoken words and text that appear in the film. With indications of characters (single letter).

S: -When I first came here, it was as if time skipped sideways. People, greed and buildings were being jumbled all over the fucking freaking place.....

S: -I was trying to see where I was at, you know, but my memory always presented things differently than the physical reality of the place.

S: -Even after only one day, things looked different. It was as if the city was a maintenance machinery for capital:

S: -Like in a secret movement of money; a building or a whole section of the city would change slowly, —for then to be left on its own—like a skin that had lost its protective sub-layer of fat.

S: I turned, so did she,
it was as if she was afraid, of me of you of whatever .
I had only followed her down the street when I realised that
she looked a lot like you, like frank like all of us.
—perhaps she was a cop.

I was waiting to see if something could develop
like a story about her,
an explanation about why she kept appearing in our lives.

But I found no leads, nothing developed, —I knew I would never know this person.
There were these flickers of remembrance, from May day, from the barrier, the eyes
and a uniform? Did she see what I saw that day, but from what perspective. How would
we negotiate each other in daytime, in the every day? Are we both professionals, and
then what are our personal involvements in this —what are yours?

S: -I am happy to see you

O: -what, well thank you, why?

S: -we haven't had the chance to really hang recently, will you break it to me,
—why you have been so distant?

O: -No, not really, it doesn't have anything to do with you anyway.
It's something that happens because I am tired and I loose concentration

S: -Have you been to the compound,
the state, the bridge, recently?

O: -well yeah, whatever, why do I suddenly get all this attention from you? when we talked and talked those nights I always had the impression that you were thinking about other things. Like about how bored you were, how you wanted to get laid, or how you couldn't make me shut up, -or accidentally how you really really had to say your point and couldn't wait for me to finish. For fucks sake

S: - (pause)We are not meeting anymore, going anywhere, I feel really alone. I am the only one I know out there in public. Whats up with that, is your time so overvaluable? What about some loyalty O? We don't even know who you are anymore.

O: - I would like to see where you are in relation to me, —all of you, —but I can't tell, —I can't find the spot where I am at or where to place myself. It is not just in my mind anymore either, look at my body for fucks sake, it is splitting lengthwise, from my head down, like a tree hit by a lightening bolt [too many]. I feel fried, —and everywhere I feel that Bushenite glare. It makes me nauseous and disgusted with food and sometimes eat too much —still disgusted.

S: -I hear you, —and you sound like a singular piece of displaced want —a piece of work. —Then what do you do? Why don't you put some more words in your mouth and taste them, see if you feel something, or if they are all cold on you already like you are on them.

S, VOICE OVER: I am often afraid of you, before you wake up I am anticipating what mood you are in as you wake up. From the first sounds you make, I know if you are angry or not.

From the way you move I know if I can meet your eyes or if I can transverse your space —even though of course I cannot help from doing that anyway... And I know I will pathologically try to make you tea, coffee, go and shop what you need or whatever. I will run down the street and feel guilty for what is not even my responsibility, —partly out of care, partly out of an attempt to ease tensions and make the day livable for myself, to avoid already those first moments to tear down the whole day and all I needed to do in my life that day.

I tell myself that I have to be really strong and make myself larger than this in order to not drag myself down or reiterate the problem, but I am worn out too a lot of the time, —or longing for company and intimacy —and I don't have the strength to put myself anywhere except in the middle of the problem and fight it, as irrational as that is.

The funny thing, or what supprises me is that you show no sign of even a little doubt, you are so violently secure, —and anyone else is in your way.

O: Hey, what the fuck, so much stress for something so inconsequential! Why don't you

steal something more, something better, deceive the system or something. You're just a part of everyday economics.

D: Well whatever/ right.....

A, voice over: In one hundred sentences, this book of night stretched halfway between black star and tangle finds no cure for dying love.

O: -In any case, the border is a state of society;

WRITES/SENDS SMS MESSAGE: HERE'S THE PHONE TERRORIST, KISS

O: -Flirt like this, unseen and with unbearable tension in every ambiguity. You become a fiction or just a possibility. If I sit here long enough, perhaps the city will open to me through this border between fiction and reality.

O:crossing one, becoming one, study one, —curse or dream of one or submit to one, —in each case the border is a state of society —which itself is a state of mind, a state of politics.

RECEIVES SMS MESSAGE: KISSES ARE COOL TERRORISM

O: -In the end it is as if it's all driven by seismic activity, deep long waves subtly but forcefully displacing our sense of ground, nothing quite as scary as that, like ripples that are moved by a force that is out of your control.

(Pause) Anyway, this city is the house of these perversities, the money, the exchanges that people do —in their fucking mishaps of ways of trying to deal with their wants..... What sacrifices don't we all do just to negotiate between our different desires (like between the desires of obedience and disobedience), —well but then—not to sound so like self pitying Goth or anything, —suffering is sometimes all we share.

O: These hues of grey and white, people kept hurrying by, not without a great deal of trouble were they achieving a passage from fantasy to reality. Whatever —there are more ruins to this city than to you.

Filter City,

21min, 35mm film and DVD, colour, stereo.

Produced by

Fine Arts Unternehmen Film AG

With the support of Office For Contemporary Art, Oslo,
The Norwegian Film Institute, Oslo
NBK Vederlagsfondet, Norway, and
The Mead Gallery, Coventry, UK.

Cast

(in order of appearance)

Okwui Opkwowasili
Simone White
Angela Tweed
Ravn Norment Åsdam
Rob Martin
David Ries

Written and Directed by

Knut Åsdam

Assistant Director

Maria Joynt

Directors Assistants

Martina Pozzi
Andrea Creutz

Director of Photography

Chung Pai

1st AC

Sander Temlock

2nd AC

Nicola Benizzi

Key Grips

Rob Martin
Mitchell Gross

Sound Recorder

Luke Janik

Editors

Zachary Bennett at GRS

Juan Salvo at GRS

Sound Design

Camille Norment

and The Sound Factory, Oslo

ProTools Engineering

Camille Norment

Sound and Music

Original sounds composed and performed by:

Camille Norment

Raven House Productions, NYC

Excerpts from:

A20.3 (Dub the United Front) by Ultra-Red

Composer and performer: Ultra-Red

Publisher: Listmat (ascap)

Excerpts from:

Walking in Jerusalem by Random_Inc

Composer: Random_Inc/Sebastian Meissner

Performers: Random_Inc/Sebastian Meissner,
Tim Hecker, Sony Mao

Publisher: Mille Plateaux

Negative matching by Nöelle Penraat, NYC

Film by Fuji and Kodak

Colour by Nordisk Film Postproduction, Oslo

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Filmography/videography

- 1993** **Come To Your Own**, 23', Hi8/UMATIC SP, colour, stereo
- 1994** **Play Dead**, 12', UMATIC SP, colour
Untitled: Skipping, w. Michael Curran, 53', UMATIC SP, colour, sound
- 1995** **Citizen**, 7', Hi8/VHS, colour
Untitled: Pissing, 50 – 70 sec sequences on 30 min program, Hi8/Betacam SP, colour
- 1997** **Psychasthenia 2**, 7'. MiniDV/BetaSP, colour
Psychasthenia 3, 7'. MiniDV/BetaSP, colour
- 1998** **Psychasthenia 2+2**, 7'. MiniDV/BetaSP, colour
In a handful of sand, Las Vegas, 4', BetaSP, colour, sound.
- 2000** **Cluster Praxis**, 8'40", DV/DigiBeta/DVD, colour, stereo sound
- 2001** **Notes Towards a Dissipation of Desire**, 3'20", DV/DigiBeta/DVD, colour, stereo sound
The Hollow Space, 3'20", DV/DigiBeta/DVD, colour, stereo sound
- 1998-2001** **Legendary Psychasthenia 1999 Re-Edit video version**, 9'20", stereo, b/w, only titles
- 2003** **Filter City**, 21', 35mm and DVD. Colour, stereo.

Biography

Knut Åsdam was born 1968, in Trondheim, Norway, and educated in London at Wimbledon College of Art (1988-9), Goldsmiths College (1989-92), in Netherlands at the Jan van Eyck Akademie (1992-94), and in NYC at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, NYC (1994-95). He lives and works in New York City. Åsdam has exhibited extensively in Europe and the Americas. He has shown large scale installations or solo shows at; the Nordic pavilion in the 1999 Venice Biennale; the 1999 Melbourne International Biennale; Kunsthalle Vienna; the Tate Britain, London; the Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; Palazzo Delle Papesse, Siena; Musée d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; PS1 ... This year Åsdam has major presentations at the Istanbul Biennale and the Irish Museum of Modern Art among others. Feature articles on Åsdam's work have been widely published internationally, covering much of his 10 years of exhibition activity. This includes the cover article of Artforum, Feb 2000 and the fall issue of MIT Press' "Grey Room" which includes a substantial article on Åsdam's works. His works were reviewed in Artforum, Flashart, Time Out and the Village Voice.

Fine Arts Unternehmen Film-production has produced the new film "filter city", 2003, by Knut Åsdam.

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