

Abstract

Colonial and apartheid policies imposed a segregated urban form on Johannesburg and have led to a limited and generally incoherent knowledge of the city across most segments of the population. Representations of the city in cultural mediums including film allow residents to cross boundaries and make conceptual and practical connections and are therefore important in addressing past legacies.

Johannesburg's moving image history is only ten years younger than the city and over this time the representation of the city in film has provided insight into the nature of this urban agglomeration. But the representation of the city in film has been inconsistent and erratic and requires close analysis. It is important to understand the ways in which the city has been represented and how it features in popular mediums of culture and also how it contributes to the discourse of the city. There is very little understanding of how films are being received by *residents* of the spaces and places depicted on the screen, and even less on how these films influence the everyday practices of these residents.

This thesis draws on the idea of a 'circuit of culture' to explore both the representation of the city through film, and the impact of this representation on urban practice. To structure this analysis the thesis makes use of four lenses: materiality; identity; mobility; and crime. It provides an analysis of films with Johannesburg as a major location that were produced and screened after 1994. Surveys and interviews were conducted in four different locations in the city, each of which have been the site of film production and have been distinctly represented on the screen: Chiawelo; CBD; Fordsburg; and, Melville.

The study concludes that film can facilitate a greater understanding of the complex city for the residents of Johannesburg but that there are nevertheless clear limitations to what film can achieve. Films provide information and 'accessibility' to unknown spaces, encouraging interaction with the city, through exploration, familiarity and comfort but film can also be a conservative medium that reduces and typecasts complexity. Films often reinforce spatial stereotypes but they can also produce a "resistant reading" that helps transgress spatial boundaries.