
Gray is White, Hispanic, Asian & Other, White is Black, and each dot is 25 residents.

Data from Census 2010

Hurd-Martin & Co Factory Illustrations & Birds Eye Views, Detroit 1909

Clark Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
2. How did Machine Space come into being?

I enjoy traveling to screen my work. I first attended Ann Arbor Film Festival in 2006 and took a trip to Detroit. Each subsequent time I went to the Festival, I’d visit Detroit with a different, knowledgeable local person. These informal visits to the city many times were made at a point when I had also had a deep interest in exploring the connections between power and landscape in my films.

Machine Space is an exploration of how landscapes privilege some activities, and seem against others. The film looks at how a built environment is enacted by people, rather than reporting on what a place looks or sounds like. The camera takes an active role in shaping this enactment, and takes the audience for a ride. The city is imagined as a spatial machine for movement and circulation.

3. Detroit is a very particular city...

The city has a contested history and is a difficult present. In Detroit, we pass from one street to the next to witness the structural violence of a system of political economy that is global, and very visible and present in this city. Machine Space takes this into account and suggests how an understanding of landscape can be presented in filmic form.

In the film, we follow the red cars of the downtown transit – the Detroit People Mover. The route of this transit closely follows the historical and hidden boundary of redlining – the division of a city into areas where mortgages can only be offered at very unfavorable terms, if at all. African American residents of red-lined areas found it very difficult to buy homes, leading to significant barriers to accruing wealth. The map on the reverse is a 1957 HQLC financial security – or isana – map for Detroit, with a contemporary population distribution graphic laid over it.

The landing decisions were taken in the downtown and have significantly shaped the landscape and the lives of people in the city. In the film, the audience are taken on a journey along this boundary.

4. How do you position your work in relation to documentary film?

In the history of Detroit weighs heavily. As Marsha says, it is a place of mourning, of a lost Detroit, of the city and instead I simulate the object of mourning, of a lost Detroit, of a bad new thing is nostalgia. A vision of the past as all good is a pervasive form of this feeling.

Consequently, the film avoids showing ruins. Instead, the past as motion and experience is a theme explicitly addressed by Marsha in Machine Space. She challenges the idea that the old days of this city were good for everyone. In mourning the departure of her white childhood friends from the city, Marsha also turns the usual object of mourning, in a lost Detroit, upside down.

Finaly, although I have framed the film as a portrait of a Machine Space, we can feel that people can overcome the machine. As Marsha says, a way of representing the state of affairs in Detroit has not been arrested yet. I trust the film can be a stop on a path to achieving this.

Stephen Connolly
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