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New Hollywood in the Rust Belt: Urban Decline and Downtown Renaissance in *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *Rocky*

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Abstract: This article reviews the geographical dynamics of New Hollywood, arguing that the industrial crisis of 1969-1971 catalyzed further decentralization of location shooting beyond Los Angeles, bringing new types of urban space into view. It examines the parallel crisis and restructuring of the film industry and the inner city via two films, *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972) and *Rocky* (1976), which are emblematic of distinct phases in the development of New Hollywood. Through their aesthetic strategies, narrative structure and mapping of cinematic space, these films produce allegories of urban decline and renewal that closely engaged with the transformation of the American city, from the urban crisis of the late 1960s to neoliberal programmes of renewal in the late 1970s.

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At the end of the 1960s, the Hollywood studios and the American inner city faced historic crises that seemed to threaten their very existence. While the studios recorded substantial losses, estimated at a combined figure of \$600 million between 1969 and 1971, the formerly prosperous centers of American cities were mired in an urban social crisis that was fast transforming into a widespread economic crisis.¹ Although both situations were products of complex and distinctive historical factors, there are nevertheless important ways in which the two crises not only occurred in parallel but were necessarily intertwined. This article explores the simultaneous crisis and restructuring of the motion picture industry and the American inner city, arguing that taking an explicitly spatial perspective opens up new avenues for conceptualizing an apparently well-understood period of Hollywood history.²

The crisis and reorganization of the Hollywood film industry at the end of the 1960s had important and as yet under-examined geographical dynamics. While the industrial crisis accelerated the long-term shift towards package deals and independent production, it also had a significant impact on the volume and geographical pattern of location shooting. This opened up new cinematic terrain for Hollywood, expanding location shooting beyond its established co-ordinates — for example, Manhattan or parts of the American West — into new locales, from small towns and rural landscapes to the (post)industrial cities of the so-called ‘rust belt’. In this piece, I focus in detail on two films that are emblematic of two phases of New Hollywood and which illuminate different aspects of this historic transition. The first, Bob Rafelson’s melancholy, autumnal *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), made in Atlantic City and produced on a low budget for BBS, epitomizes the small-scale, personal cinema that emerged from the industrial crisis of 1969-1971. In contrast, *Rocky* (John G Avildsen, 1976), shot on location in Philadelphia, stands at a key transition point in the late 1970s, when a second wave of New Hollywood, best exemplified by the more commercially-oriented and accessible work of the so-called ‘movie brats’, was radically departing from (and for many critics, vanquishing) the artistic and political possibilities of the first wave.³ Through close

analysis of the films' locations and construction of cinematic space, I propose to reframe our understanding of their political meanings within the specific context of urban crisis and neoliberal paradigms of redevelopment that emerged in the 1970s.

My aim here is to combine an industrial and economic perspective with fine grained analysis of the spatial and textual dynamics of seventies cinema. In doing so, I draw on Fredric Jameson's notion of 'cognitive mapping' and its lineage in the work of the American urbanist Kevin Lynch, whose classic book *The Image of the City* (1960) compared the mental cityscapes recalled by citizens of Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles. Analyzing drawings made by local residents, Lynch contrasted the "imageability" of dense, historically layered cityscapes such as Boston with the formlessness and fluidity of the built environment in cities such as Jersey City and especially Los Angeles, where few iconic landmarks were available to orient the user in their surroundings.⁴ For Jameson, this relationship of the individual subject to a wider social structure provided a compelling spatial figure for the problematic of contemporary capitalism, in which a new set of global relationships essentially displaced older forms of political thought and representation.⁵ This was developed in one of Jameson's earlier pieces on film, an essay on *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) which appeared seven years before his seminal piece on postmodernism.⁶ The geographical focus of this piece was later underscored by Jameson's call for a 'spatial analysis of culture', in which a close attention to space was vital in moving beyond the impasses of Marxist aesthetics and the seemingly irresolvable split between realism and modernism (terms, of course, beginning to lose purchase in the media-saturated world of the late 20th century). Films produce cognitive maps both through their formal articulation and engagement with space, and the relationship developed between the protagonist(s) and their diegetic world. Importantly, 'cognitive' here is not understood to exclude embodied spectatorship, but also encompasses a range of affective responses to cinematic space. In this piece, I adapt elements of both Lynch and Jameson's notions of 'cognitive mapping' to establish ways in which a film's spatial form produces relations of visibility, mobility and affectivity within the urban environment, and examine how these produce political meanings in a specific geographical and historical context.

New Hollywood: A Geographical Perspective

Hollywood and the American city were both deeply affected in the mid-twentieth century by large-scale demographic, geographical and cultural shifts. Foremost among these was the historic migration of young, prosperous couples and families from the city to the rapidly expanding suburbs. Suburbanization therefore played a central role in the fate of the inner city and the crisis of Hollywood's mass audience: as urban centers declined, so did their entertainment districts and the first-run theatres that had generated the lion's share of studio profits in the era of vertical integration. Yet even more than this was at stake: no less than a wholesale reorganization of patterns of urban life, of consumption and leisure, and the use and meaning of public and private space. By the late 1960s, the most visible manifestation of the burgeoning crisis in the inner city was the series of urban uprisings or ghetto riots that ripped across African-American neighborhoods from coast to coast, most famously in Watts, Los Angeles (1965), Detroit (1967), and Newark (1967). Yet the riots were not a cause but rather a symptom of a wider malaise.⁷ The 'urban crisis' of the mid-to-late 1960s, closely associated with the ghetto riots and largely understood in the United States as grounded in issues of poverty, racial discrimination and civil rights, developed into a broader, more fundamental second phase in the 1970s. As an editorial for the *Wall Street Journal* outlined in 1975, this 'New Urban Crisis' compounded the familiar symptoms of urban blight and social unrest with mushrooming deficits, decaying infrastructure, faltering public services and fiscal crises

that pushed municipal governments to the brink of bankruptcy.⁸ New York City was an exemplary case, narrowly avoiding default in 1975 despite the Ford administration's famous refusal to extend federal aid and later 'rescued' and restructured by an emergency coalition of investment banks and other corporate interests. Likewise, major cities across the rust belt, such as Philadelphia, Detroit and Cleveland, were pushed near to insolvency by the double whammy of eroding tax bases and spiraling welfare commitments.

From the mid-1970s, a new paradigm began to emerge from the ashes of the urban crisis. The perceived failure of both Keynesian economics and liberal social policy paved the way for a set of neoliberal political strategies at urban and national scales. Building on the economic theories of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School, and reinforced by an ideological commitment to the free market and entrepreneurialism, neoliberal policies advocated fiscal deregulation and retrenchment in social spending, and placed a new emphasis on finance capitalism as the motor of economic growth. Cities were therefore not merely passive subjects of neoliberalism; rather, they were often at the cutting edge, operating as testing grounds for national economic policy. Deregulation, public-private partnerships and property speculation became established, if contested, protocols for downtown and neighbourhood redevelopment.⁹ By the late 1970s, *Time* magazine heralded a 'downtown renaissance'. Conveniently bracketing the deep social problems of American cities, the editorial championed a new skyscraper boom that was transforming central business districts from Cleveland and St Louis to Atlanta and Los Angeles.¹⁰

Of course, the same time span, from roughly 1967 to 1977, also witnessed the first iteration of a 'New Hollywood', during which the so-called 'Hollywood Renaissance' or 'New American Cinema' exploded onto movie screens. Accounts of this celebrated period of American cinema emphasize, in varying degrees, different aspects of the narrative, whether industrial/institutional (package production, corporate takeovers, the demise of the production code), aesthetic (the influence of European cinema, television and exploitation film), auteurist (a new 'film school generation'), or cultural/historical (the New Left and the counterculture).¹¹ Nevertheless, most commentators agree that the preconditions for a 'new' Hollywood were generated by industrial instability, opening up a relatively brief period of innovation and experimentation that would be foreclosed by the emergence and triumph of the blockbuster logic in the second half of the decade.

The origins of the crisis can be traced back to the late 1940s, when post-Paramount Decree Hollywood sought resolutions to its various problems, whether through production differentiation, technological innovation, or accommodation with (and expansion into) the new medium of television. At the same time, geographical expansion provided a vital lifeline in the struggle to maintain profitability and market dominance. While distribution and marketing further saturated Hollywood's international market coverage, increasing amounts of runaway production capitalized on cheap European studios, locations and labor. But runaways became less attractive in the face of an emerging global recession, industrial unrest in Europe, and Nixon's devaluation of the dollar in 1971. In contrast, the industry's "spatial fix" of the 1970s would involve the reorganization of production within the United States, with the increased mobility and territorial flexibility offered by location shooting becoming central to the new business structure.¹²

The break-up of the studio system and its passage towards a flexible and characteristically post-Fordist model had been developing throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but accelerated during the intensive period of change between 1969 and 1971.¹³ At the end of the sixties, the structural flaws in the industry's business model were brought to the surface by a series of expensive flops, largely studio-based musicals such as *Doctor*

Doolittle (Richard Fleischer, 1967) and *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969). The studios fell deep into the red: in 1969, the Hollywood majors recorded combined losses of \$200 million, while over the following two years, the industry suffered total losses of some \$600 million.¹⁴ In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the studios (and their new corporate owners) responded with efforts to restructure and reorganize the business.¹⁵ At Fox, often viewed as the bellwether of the film industry, August 1970 saw the studio in what *Variety* described as “throes of economic uncertainty”, with Darryl Zanuck and his son Richard initiating “a restructuring program of perhaps unprecedented proportions” in order to “redesign the make-up of 20th to bring it in tune with today’s film business and national economy”. Streamlining of payroll and the production slate was combined with further exploitation of real estate assets, especially continuing development at Century City (which had been underway since the early 1960s).¹⁶ The studios made broadly similar cost-cutting moves, cutting headcount, shaking up creative and management structures, placing limits on production budgets, and making further divestitures of land and other fixed assets.¹⁷ MGM was perhaps the most extreme case. A year after posting losses of \$35 million in 1969, new owner Kirk Kerkorian sold the entirety of MGM’s soundstages in Culver City to real estate developers for \$7.3 million, saved a further \$8.3 million by shifting their head office from New York to Culver City, and closed 22 of their 32 sales offices.¹⁸ By early 1971, their withdrawal from Los Angeles was complete, with the small slate of forthcoming MGM features shooting either in New York City or overseas.¹⁹

Stanley R. Jaffe, Chief Operating Officer at Paramount, described their restructuring strategy to *Life* magazine in 1970:

We intend to cut down this company until we have an organization that can support 12 to 15 pictures a year. In a small building in Beverly Hills our whole feature production staff will be just 25 people including secretaries. As for the studio, we’re going to get rid of it. That delights me personally. Without that tremendous overhead we will finally have flexibility. It’s like the army. A general can move ten men more easily than a thousand. In the future we can be more receptive to changes in the marketplace without the studio hanging around our necks.²⁰

While Paramount did not quite go as far as Jaffe suggests, his comments give a sense of the prevailing corporate attitude in Hollywood at the time. The picture painted here indicates a new ideal conception of the ‘studio’ as a streamlined operation, outsourcing everything but core financial and managerial functions in order to remain flexible and receptive to changes in the audience. From this point onwards, the Hollywood majors became primarily financiers and distributors, with the greater share of production subcontracted to independent companies, who could operate more efficiently, flexibly and innovatively than the studios. Without in-house production space, nor the economies of scale involved in serial production, independent production companies increasingly used non-studio locations for the majority of exterior and interior scenes. This was made possible by technological innovation in more sensitive film stocks, lightweight cameras such as the Arriflex 35BL and the Panaflex, faster lenses, and other mobile filming equipment such as the Cinemobile, a portable, self-contained film studio in a van.²¹

Between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, location shooting shifted from being an important component part of what was essentially still a studio-based production process to become the dominant production technique Hollywood filmmaking.²² If the Hollywood sound stages were often empty at the end of the 1960s, it was in part due to a

new generation of filmmakers for whom the authenticity and directness of location shooting was fundamental to their artistic vision. However, it might have remained a minority technique without the economic pressures of the 1969-1971 crisis; following the restructuring of the studios, location shooting became a necessity rather than a choice. As Don Haggerty, President of the AFL-CIO Film Council, made clear, the benefits of location shooting meshed with the cost-cutting imperatives of the studios' corporate management, with incentives including "avoidance of studio overhead, avoidance of state corporate taxes on production, free or cheap city and state licensing, the ability to dodge payment on fringe benefits, cheaper extras, and loose or non-existent union regulations that allow production savings."²³ The increased mobility of production also allowed the studios to evade direct confrontation with labour. If disputes flared up, shooting could now be relocated with little difficulty, as Paramount had done with the Woody Allen project *Play it Again, Sam* (Herbert Ross, 1972), one of three films pulled from production in Manhattan as a result of what Paramount President Frank Yablans deemed "intransigence" on the part of local unions.²⁴

During the 1970s, the turn to flexible specialisation developed in what Michael Storper and Susan Christopherson describe as a "split-locational pattern".²⁵ While corporate headquarters and the majority of the new independent pre- and post-production facilities remained in Southern California, shooting itself became widely dispersed across the United States. Though this is necessarily difficult to quantify, contemporary estimates suggested that around 70% of production was being filmed on location outside Los Angeles by 1974.²⁶ If this was due in part to Hollywood's search for cheap and novel locations, there were also forces pulling from the other direction. In the face of industrial decline and eroding tax bases, cash-starved municipal governments were beginning to turn away from publicly funded construction projects in favor of public-private partnerships and new policies of culture-led regeneration that would become widespread in the decades to come. As a result, from the late 1960s, cities and states began to compete at a new level of intensity for the expanding location shooting dollar, luring production companies with tax breaks, minimal regulation, and non-unionized workforces. Such incentives were increasingly coordinated by city and state film commissions, leading to what the *Hollywood Reporter* called a "scramble for the now fragmented lodes of movie gold" and the *New York Times* referred to as "an ever spreading though undeclared war for location shooting."²⁷ New York City was a trendsetter in this respect. The Mayor's Office of Motion Pictures and Television, established 1966 by Mayor John V Lindsay, effectively provided a blueprint for city and state film commissions across the world in coordinating permits, streamlining procedures and promoting the city as a destination for Hollywood productions.²⁸ By 1976, when the first convention of film commissions or "Cineposium" was held in Denver, thirty city and state governments had departments or associated organizations dedicated to promoting location shooting.²⁹

This decentralization of production was widely reported in the trade press and in local newspapers, often mixed with a shot of civic boosterism. For example, in 1976, *Chicago Times* film critic Gene Siskel summed up the benefits of location filming for the Windy City: "To put it simply, this moviemaking boomlet is one very nice development. Nice, because our town and state are benefitting financially. Nice, because our town's talented film crews are getting work. And nice, because a variety of public and private citizens are working together to freshen our city and state images by exposing them to display on wide and small screens throughout the world."³⁰ As Siskel's comments suggest, while in the first instance, the promotion of urban location shooting was motivated by economic imperatives, the cultural representation of the city was also becoming an increasingly

important commodity itself during the 1970s. In this way, the rise in location filming during the period was also congruent with the strategic aspiration of city governments to manage and project an image of their city for a global marketplace. As cities adapted to a predominantly service-sector economy, they began to position themselves as global financial centres and tourist destinations, hubs of leisure and consumerism. This reflects David Harvey's assertion that modes of urban governance had begun to shift during the 1970s from what he terms a "managerial" to an "entrepreneurial" paradigm, whereby cities and regions have been increasingly compelled to compete on the open market for mobile flows of capital and labour.³¹ The cinematic representation of the city thus developed alongside and in tandem with new schemes for city branding during this period.³² Film commissions were therefore one of a number of quasi-public bodies at municipal level, such as redevelopment agencies and convention and visitors bureaus, that sought to promote the city and its revitalized downtown as a safe place for tourists and as an attractive location for company headquarters. In this way, two simultaneous processes — the terminal crisis of the studio system and the rise of cultural strategies for redeveloping and rebranding the post-industrial city — provided the institutional and economic framework for the decentralization and dispersal of Hollywood location shooting.

The postindustrial city therefore emerged not only as an artistic inspiration for New Hollywood, but also as a production resource and visual commodity. As a result, American cinema of the 1970s displayed a new authenticity or verisimilitude in its images of the urban landscape; not since the heyday of film noir in the late 1940s had Hollywood film engaged so closely with the American city.³³ The most prominent production centres were undoubtedly New York and San Francisco, both of which experienced a film industry boom in the early to mid-1970s.³⁴ Both cities could capitalize on distinctive, instantly recognizable and often beautiful cityscapes, were long-standing cultural hubs, and had pro-active local government support for filmmaking. But equally importantly, Hollywood location shooting moved beyond these established cinematic cities. In the late 1960s and 1970s, films were shot in cities — and importantly, specific *areas* of cities — that had been rarely, if ever, seen in mainstream feature films before. Previously peripheral or marginal spaces came into view. Cinematic New York now extended beyond its traditional Manhattan base into as-yet-unexplored parts of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. Hollywood made new forays into Brooklyn, taking in gentrifying areas such as Park Slope in *The Landlord* (Hal Ashby, 1970) and Brooklyn Heights in *Desperate Characters* (Frank Gilroy, 1971), as well as working class districts such as Bay Ridge in *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977). African-American filmmaking and the so-called 'blaxploitation' genre capitalized on authentic locations in Harlem, in films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (Ossie Davis, 1970) and *Super Fly* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972). Further afield than New York, the streets, buildings and neighborhoods of declining industrial cities began to assume a new prominence on screen: for example, Philadelphia in *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976), Chicago in *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, 1968), blue-collar Boston in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (Peter Yates, 1973) and *The Last Detail* (Hal Ashby, 1973), Detroit in *Scarecrow* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1973) and *Blue Collar* (Paul Schrader, 1978), and the steel town of Clairton, PA in *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978). In the remainder of this piece, I analyze two of these films in detail and consider the ways in which their cinematic mapping of urban space engaged with contemporary political concerns, generating what I define as allegories of urban decline and renaissance.

***The King of Marvin Gardens* (Bob Rafelson, 1972): urban crisis on the Monopoly board**

The King of Marvin Gardens was produced by BBS and financed by Columbia as part of a six-picture deal.³⁵ Alongside films such as *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970), *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971), and *A Safe Place* (Henry Jaglom, 1971), *Marvin Gardens* exemplified a new trend towards small scale, auteur filmmaking and flexible production strategies within Hollywood. Budgeted at less than \$1 million a piece, these productions were able to take advantage of IATSE concessions that allowed location filming with smaller crews.³⁶ As Andrew Schaefer argues, the filmmakers and writers clustered around BBS were the most closely associated with the counterculture and the New Left of all the New Hollywood generation.³⁷ Bob Rafelson has since described how part of the political outlook and realist ethos of BBS was to explore the hidden corners of the American urban landscape, focusing on what he refers to as ‘backwater cities’ such as Taft, Bakersfield, and Birmingham (AL).³⁸ *Marvin Gardens* was shot entirely on location, predominantly in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where the screenwriter Jacob Brackman had grown up, with some material filmed in nearby Philadelphia. Though neither city had opened an official film bureau at this stage, permission to film in Atlantic City, including interior scenes at the jail and the Convention Hall, was directly granted by Mayor William T. Somers, who had reviewed the script and deemed (perhaps somewhat optimistically) that the film would generate “good publicity” for the city.³⁹ As the inspiration for the original Monopoly board layout and home of the Miss America pageant, Atlantic City has a symbolic presence and especially representational quality that Brackman and Rafelson explored, allowing the film to work both as a document of a specific city in decline as well as a self-reflexive, allegorical piece about the fortunes of America (and Hollywood) at the turn of the 1970s.

Atlantic City was established by real estate speculators in the 1880s and first rose to prominence as a holiday resort in the 1900s. It remained a successful, even affluent seaside town throughout the 1920s and 1930s; its Prohibition-era heyday has, of course, recently been carefully recreated on screen in *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010–). But its glamour had already begun to fade in the 1950s, with the rise of international tourism, jet travel, and new domestic destinations such as Disneyland. By the sixties, it had become an exemplar for urban decay. From this perspective, the rise and fall of Atlantic City, a booming resort town from the early 1900s until the late 1940s, roughly paralleled the fortunes of the Hollywood studio system itself. As products of American industrial and economic expansion, both capitalized on the emergence of a new urban consumer to produce new kinds of entertainment and leisure. Similarly, the relative decline of both Atlantic City and the Hollywood studios from the 1950s onwards was to a large extent caused by similar factors: suburbanization, ‘white flight’, and the rise of new forms of leisure and consumption, whether television, out-of-town malls or theme parks. Indeed, as Bryant Simon has documented, Atlantic City itself had no less than 15 movie theatres in the mid-1950s, the majority of which had closed their doors only a decade later, a microcosm of the wider decline in inner city exhibition that was so influential in the demise of the studio system.⁴⁰

The King of Marvin Gardens captures Atlantic City in the grip of an economic downturn that had left it permanently out-of-season. In a *New Yorker* article of 1972, John McPhee captured the extent of its decay, making striking connections between the American urban crisis and the ruins of post-war Europe:

The physical profile of streets perpendicular to the shore is something like a playground slide. It begins in the high skyline of Boardwalk hotels, plummets

into warrens of “side-avenue” motels, crosses Pacific, slopes through church missions, convalescent homes, burlesque houses, rooming houses, and liquor stores, crosses Atlantic, and runs level through the bombed-out ghettos as far – Baltic, Mediterranean – as the eye can see... Then beyond Atlantic Avenue, North Carolina moves on into the vast ghetto, the bulk of the city, and it looks like Metz in 1919, Cologne in 1944. Nothing has actually exploded. It is not bomb damage. It is deep and complex decay. Roofs are off. Bricks are scattered in the street. People sit on porches, six deep, at nine on a Monday morning.⁴¹

However, the film commences not in Atlantic City but in Philadelphia, where bespectacled, bookish radio DJ David Staebler (Jack Nicholson) is delivering one of his trademark semi-fictionalized autobiographical monologues. Leaving the radio station at 3am, he walks back through anonymous streets, taking the deserted subway back to his grandfather’s house. The next morning, David receives a call from his brother summoning him to Atlantic City. Jason Staebler (Bruce Dern) is a small-time hustler with outsized entrepreneurial ambitions; on his arrival, David finds Jason temporarily jailed on a trumped-up automobile offence. Jason lives with two women in a suite at the Marlborough Blenheim hotel: Sally, “a middle-aged Kewpie doll” (Ellen Burstyn) and her stepdaughter, Jessica (Julia Ann Robinson). David soon becomes drawn into Jason’s latest scheme: a flawed real-estate venture to develop a casino resort on a tiny Pacific island, Tiki. Meanwhile, the two women are obsessed with the Miss America pageant, and rehearse their routines in empty club venues on the Boardwalk. The fruitless entrepreneurial schemes of Jason and David unravel against a drama of family psychology that operates on two intersecting levels, the resentment and reconciliation between the Staebler brothers on the one hand, and the growing rivalry and antipathy between mother and daughter on the other.

The film ends with a climactic, yet pointless, act of violence, which resolves nothing; ultimately, it reads as a satire on the American dream, entrepreneurship, and individual success. As such, the film is emblematic of a particular strand of early 1970s American cinema in which a mood of inertia, disillusionment, and regret predominates. In his landmark 1975 piece on the New Hollywood, Thomas Elsaesser memorably described this tendency as “the pathos of failure”. These were films that rejected the affirmative, goal-oriented narrative causality of the classical cinema, its action-hero protagonists and their implicit ideological functions.⁴² Instead, this broadly left-oriented cinema crystallized this moment of cultural and political aporia through the figure of the “unmotivated hero,” whose trajectory was followed either through unresolved, meandering journeys — in road movies such as *Two Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971) — or else, as in *Marvin Gardens*, through recourse to “dramatic situations that have a kind of negative, self-demolishing dynamic.”⁴³ While the Staebler brothers are not, strictly speaking, “unmotivated” — Jason in particular is propelled by the manic entrepreneurial zeal of the con-artist — the film is nevertheless marked by various failures, from the brothers’ doomed real-estate venture to the more personal and psychological blockages that lead to the film’s tragic conclusion.

The ‘Marvin Gardens’ of the title is, of course, a direct allusion to the Monopoly board, which took the names of Atlantic City’s streets when it was first mass-manufactured by Parker Brothers during the 1930s.⁴⁴ This provides a symbolic map — one closely associated with a specific period of American capitalism — which Rafelson juxtaposes with the real geography of the city in order to explore his themes of crisis and failure. As the director confirmed, “Monopoly and Atlantic City are very clear metaphors for the American Dream.”⁴⁵ Each block of the original Monopoly board corresponded to a genuine location in Atlantic City, with the exception of Marvin Gardens. This property is

a misspelling of a real suburb just outside the city, Marven Gardens, its name a composite of two neighbouring areas, Margate and Ventnor. The film's use of the Monopoly spelling therefore opens up a split or opposition between Marven/Marvin – the symbiotic relationship between a “real” place and its representation – while at the same time, setting up the Monopoly board as an organizing metaphor for the film as a whole. The title therefore makes an allusion to a particular phase of American capitalism — “monopoly capitalism” — then entering into a period of crisis.⁴⁶ The film's Monopoly board metaphor therefore offers a useful way to frame some of the relationships between the crisis of classical Hollywood narrative and the spatial reorganization of American cities in the 1970s.

The Monopoly board is not only an implicit narrative form – Horatio Alger reformatted as financial *bildungsroman* – but also a diagram of the American city. Significantly, it schematizes the urban basis of capital accumulation: making a fortune is directly related to the player's ability to invest in real estate, build housing and speculate on hotel construction. The central irony of *Marvin Gardens* is, of course, that the blighted urban landscape of Atlantic City seems to offer no possibility of success for those ‘playing’ the game. Indeed, by the 1970s, the Monopoly diagram of the city was looking increasingly anachronistic, as global market forces reconfigured the relative relationship between cities and regions at national and international scales. In short, the symbolic space of the Monopoly board had become fundamentally estranged by the influence of places and processes not visible on the board — that is to say, beyond the city or the macro-economy of the nation state.

As Franco Moretti has argued, narrative forms have often been strongly influenced by their geographical context. For example, Moretti maps connections between narrative conventions in the 19th century realist novel (Dickens, Balzac) and the geography, complexity and class structure of the rapidly expanding cities of London and Paris.⁴⁷ Similarly, Fredric Jameson has argued that the modernist breakdown of realist narrative in the early 20th century crystallized a schism between the lived experience of the individual and the increasingly complex and abstract structures that defined and organized that experience.⁴⁸ Postmodernism stages this same problematic at a higher order, for the global financial and technological networks of advanced capitalism have developed a hitherto unimaginable level of complexity, scale and abstraction such that traditional narrative forms have been faced with incommensurable representational crises.⁴⁹ As he succinctly put it in an interview:

Narrative seems supremely able to deal with the way in which the truth of individual life was constructed by smaller environments. In the nineteenth-century novel, the narrative apparatus became much more complex in order to deal with the truth of individual experience in a national setting, and of course even more so in imperial settings. But in the global perspective of late capitalism, there's a real crisis in this older narrative machinery.⁵⁰

This crisis of the “narrative machinery” of classical Hollywood is, of course, one of the key characteristics of 1970s cinema, in which we often find narratives that are episodic, dedramatized, and essentially unresolved.⁵¹ In these terms, Elsaesser's “pathos of failure” can be closely linked to a crisis of cognitive mapping, of space and political subjectivity. as films such as *The King of Marvin Gardens* demonstrate, this problematic relationship between the individual and their cognitive mapping of social space is not only evident in overtly postmodernist “hyperspaces” such as Portman's Bonaventure Hotel, but is also applicable to the decaying cities of the rustbelt.⁵²



Figure 1: The Staebler brothers attempt to map their offshore casino development. *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Columbia Pictures, 1972).

This inability to effectively map the global and the local is articulated in the film through the disparity between the protagonists' point of view and the spatial or cartographic imagery offered to the spectator. While the film's locations document the effects of disinvestment in the urban environment, the narrative provides little means of historical contextualization. The Staebler brothers' plan to open a holiday resort on a deserted island off Hawaii gestures at the new global realities of the 1970s, as do the now-dated scenes with the Japanese businessmen. Their attempts at offshore expansion inevitably fall flat, and the narrative remains largely contained within the boundaries of the seaside town. Two specific moments in the film underscore the Staebler brothers' attempts at 'cognitive mapping'. In an extended scene in the hotel suite, they spread out maps of the Pacific on the floor, projecting their dreams for success beyond the city and into global space (figure 1). Later, they survey their surroundings from the panoramic viewpoint of a fairground ride, which offers a broader view of the cityscape uncharacteristic of the film's largely contained *mise-en-scène*. Jason's dialogue here also acknowledges the lamentable decline of Atlantic City itself, which he promises will not be allowed to happen on Tiki: "This could have been a fantastic island right here. It was full-out class until about 1930 – until you could hop a plane out to Bermuda for the weekend... Let that be a lesson to us. I promise you – strict controls on Tiki. We can't ever let it go downhill. That's why I won't let anyone build on anything less than 10 acres. No Pokerino, no frozen custard, no Salt Water Taffy." Beyond Atlantic City, the film is bookended with scenes of Nicholson in Philadelphia, which outside the family home is chiefly figured through two carefully framed shots of the neon-lit curtain wall of the "Industrial Valley Bank". These brief, silent images hint at another architectural and social world — of global finance, downtown redevelopment, International Style modernism — visual signifiers of the wider economic and urban processes in which Atlantic City is implicated.

While linear narrative became arguably less central to Hollywood narrative in the early seventies, this was arguably counterbalanced by the heightened importance of location and place. In *Marvin Gardens*, Rafelson and cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs used a series of specific aesthetic strategies to depict the urban environment. Shots linger on the empty space of the windswept Boardwalk, a starkly depopulated locale in which the

teeming crowd of the modern city has disappeared (figure 2). Kovacs's deep focus cinematography makes subtle use of the affective properties of winter light to give the deserted cityscape a melancholy quality that Rafelson likened to the work of painter Maurice Utrillo. Throughout, the material presence of the built environment takes precedence over the classical Hollywood emphasis on narrative. This sense of dedramatized narrative is accentuated by Rafelson's decision to keep the camera entirely still in all the exterior shots, a technique he borrowed from the films of Yasujiro Ozu.⁵³ This languid temporality and sense of stillness or stasis is further emphasised by insistent long takes and the complete absence of non-diegetic music. Such non-classical stylistic patterns were picked up by contemporary critics, who found strong echoes of European cinematic modernism in *Marvin Gardens*. For example, Foster Hirsch in the *New York Times* drew a comparison between the desolate backdrop of Atlantic City and the empty landscapes of Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. Hirsch also noted other formal motifs with European resonances: "there are Antonioni shadows, as well, in the languorous and rhythmic pacing, and in the device of allowing the camera to remain, fleetingly, on the scene after the action proper has been completed."⁵⁴



Figure 2: The Atlantic City Boardwalk in *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Columbia Pictures, 1972)

Rafelson has recently described how the properties of Atlantic City inspired this stylistic approach, recalling how he had fallen in love with "the geometry of the place". The Monopoly board metaphor also influenced his construction of cinematic space, leading him to place the camera at an unusually diagonal or perpendicular angle to the actors as if they were pieces in the board game itself:⁵⁵ "The way the board is organized fascinates me: it's very linear, very geometric. The pieces can only move in straight lines and right angles... I thought this peculiar way of moving the pieces could be used as a style of movement for the film images."⁵⁶ This style is perhaps most clearly articulated in a sustained two-shot where the Staebler brothers talk to each other while mounted on horseback at 90 degrees to the camera (figure 3). This slightly mannered and self-conscious construction of space also operates through what Rafelson referred to as "creative geography" in exterior scenes: a set of framing and editing strategies for emphasizing and amplifying certain elements of the pro-filmic space in relation to the characters, so that shots would alternately frame the protagonists against the boundless, open natural space of the beach and the ocean, and the decaying hotel façades.⁵⁷



Figure 3: Geometrical framing replicates board game pieces. *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Columbia Pictures, 1972)

One further element of the Monopoly board metaphor needs to be illuminated. When considering how geographical locations operate within the spatial system of a film, we must always also ask: what spaces are not represented, remaining invisible and implicitly marginalized, and what logic of exclusion might govern such choices or render them possible? Such missing spaces can be seen to operate as structuring absences, implicitly framing, stabilizing, or de-stabilizing the meaning of the visible screen space. In the case of Rafelson's film, the Marvin (Marven) Gardens of the title is such a missing location, neither referred to nor physically present in the film. As Jay Boyer puts it in his study of Bob Rafelson, "much of the board game Monopoly has a basis in the actual geography and street system of Atlantic City; not so Marvin Gardens. This most valuable piece of property is purely fictitious, and for Jason to be its monarch is to be an emperor of air."⁵⁸ Though technically, this is true — Marvin Gardens, following the Monopoly board spelling, is indeed a fabrication — the real location and meaning of Marven Gardens has a further resonance which is worth some consideration.

In his *New Yorker* piece, 'The Search for Marven Gardens', John McPhee develops a running joke: nobody in Atlantic City appears to have heard of this elusive area, or knows of its whereabouts. Finally, he discovers its location: a couple of miles south of the city, it lies between the suburbs of Margate and Ventnor. The area "consists of solid buildings of stucco, brick, and wood, with slate roofs, tile roofs, multi-mullioned porches, Giraldic towers, and Spanish grilles." Marvin Gardens, we are told, is "the ultimate outwash of Monopoly... a citadel and sanctuary of the middle class." Interviewing a local resident, he elicits a clear expression of suburban fear: "We're heavily patrolled by police here. We don't take no chances."⁵⁹ An exclusive suburban development, Marven Gardens is emblematic of one of the crucial factors behind the urban crisis: that the mass disinvestment from inner city areas was predicated upon the migration of the white middle-classes away from the increasingly plural, democratic public spaces of the city towards secluded and implicitly segregated private spaces that could be safely monitored and controlled. As Bryant Simon explains, the historical development and decline of Atlantic City can be elucidated through an understanding of the role of the white middle-class and its attitudes to race and public space:

Beginning in the 1960s, Atlantic City stopped being a place where people lived their lives on the streets and on their porches. Many families retreated inside behind lace curtains, barred windows, and double-locked doors, and then out to the suburbs. Foregoing sidewalks, parks, corner stores, and movie houses, they looked inwards, and in so doing, they exchanged the close quarters and intense daily interactions of the neighborhood for the more controlled, easily protected, yet less stimulating life of private homes in segregated, middle-class sanctuaries like Marven Gardens.⁶⁰

As Simon demonstrates, the type of public space represented by Atlantic City was “never about democracy; it was about exclusion... During its heyday, Atlantic City was a Jim Crow town.”⁶¹ The decline of Atlantic City as a holiday destination was determined to a large extent by two external factors: firstly, the advent of cheap intercontinental jet travel had made foreign holidays accessible to many for the first time, against which traditional resorts such as Atlantic City seemed pedestrian and outdated; secondly, the development of two new holiday resorts: Disneyland (opened in Anaheim, California in 1955) and Las Vegas, both of which represented new forms of proto-postmodern consumer space, selling differing sorts of fantasies to holidaymakers. As Bryant Simon observes, Disneyland capitalized on a desire for “long-lost, safe public places,” precisely that type of public experience which had once been provided by the Boardwalk itself: “Behind its thick fortress walls, Disney created a public sphere, much like the Boardwalk, the shopping mall, and the casino, based on the economically viable principles of exclusion mixed with the illusion of equal access and democracy.”⁶²

Tellingly, the issue of race was little discussed in the US reception of the film, though the French critic Michel Grisolia went so far as to suggest to Rafelson that *Marvin Gardens* might be seen as “a political film about the rise of black power.”⁶³ While the director remained equivocal on this point, he nevertheless recognized elements of truth to the critic’s overstatement. Though it is relatively submerged, *Marvin Gardens* does suggest that a certain kind of white middle-class space has been displaced or decentred. The real centre of power in the Staebler’s world is, in fact, the sharply attired mob boss Lewis (Scatman Crothers), who appears to have the power to keep Jason in or out of prison. Beginning with David’s initial meeting with Lewis, during which a heated argument is taking place in the adjacent room, we are left with the sensation that a more exciting and conventional crime film is unfolding off-screen. This notion is redoubled by the sudden appearance of two of Lewis’s associates in the hotel, who appear to have stepped straight out of a blaxploitation movie (a genre then in its first flush of success), and in the representation of Lewis’s nightclub, the only public space represented as having any vitality in the entire city (figure 4).⁶⁴



Figure 4: David is threatened by one of Lewis's associates in *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Columbia Pictures, 1972)

While the Staebler brothers' casino development and real estate speculation remained a pipe-dream in the film, it was shortly to take on a new topicality. Following a referendum in November 1976, the state of New Jersey passed an amendment to legalize gambling within the boundaries of Atlantic City. This rapid change was captured on film by Louis Malle, in his 1979 film *Atlantic City*. The opening and closing credits of Malle's film show documentary footage of the empty hotels that dominated the mise-en-scène of *The King of Marvin Gardens* being dynamited to make way for new casino-hotel developments. Intended as a 'magic bullet', the legislation aimed to revitalize the flagging resort town by stimulating economic growth, creating employment, and driving urban redevelopment. Described by the architectural historian Thomas Hines as "radical therapy for a dying city", the gambling experiment in Atlantic City stands not only as a prototypical neoliberal restructuring strategy but also as a microcosm of the wider transition of the American economy towards "casino capitalism".⁶⁵

***Rocky* (John G Avildsen, 1976): Steadicam aesthetics and downtown renaissance**

While *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *Atlantic City* both contained brief scenes filmed in Philadelphia, these presented the city relatively anonymously, a generic big city in contrast to the seaside town of Atlantic City. Indeed, despite the historical and cultural importance of Philadelphia to the United States, the city's rich architectural heritage was relatively rarely seen on screen throughout the classical period, a situation perhaps best exemplified by the fact that *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940) was not shot in the city but entirely at the MGM studios in Culver City. However, from the late 1970s onwards, increasing amounts of location shoots were drawn to the city. This built on the runaway success of *Rocky*, which played a vital role in bringing Hollywood productions to the city; despite being shot without municipal permits, *Rocky* is now fêted by the Greater Philadelphia Film Office as the inaugural picture in a sequence of films that would use Philadelphia as a backlot during the 1980s and beyond.⁶⁶ The character's transformation and triumph was, of course, also paralleled by the film's own extraordinary box-office success — returning \$117 million in domestic rentals against production costs under \$1 million — and the rise of Sylvester Stallone as a self-made Hollywood entrepreneur.⁶⁷

Though *Rocky* is arguably one of the key films in which American cinema regained its confidence in linear, goal-oriented narrative, it remains fundamentally split between the urban realist tendencies that characterized certain strands of early 1970s cinema and an individualist, rise-to-success plot that would become commonplace in 1980s Hollywood. In this regard, *Rocky* reworks the boxing genre's social realist traditions: while its use of the authentic urban locations of Philadelphia's working class districts suggests a critical and potentially progressive stance on the urban crisis, this is countered by a narrative paradigm which allows collective renewal only on individualist terms through self-help and free enterprise. Further, *Rocky* was one of several films of the mid-1970s that developed new relationships to screen space through their then-innovative use of the Steadicam, and it is precisely this new spatial mobility in *Rocky* that provides not only a compelling figure for social mobility but also an enduring symbol for the fiscal "disciplining" and revitalization of the city itself at the end of the decade.

Like other rust belt cities, Philadelphia had entered into a state of precipitous decline by the late 1960s. Rapid suburbanization led to extensive population loss from the central city, with processes of deindustrialization, suburbanization and containerization producing devastating effects on the city's economic well-being. Though New York's famous fiscal crisis and near-default of 1975 is more widely remembered, former industrial hubs such as Philadelphia, Detroit and Cleveland were also in dire financial straits by the mid-1970s. A substantial decline in industrial output, the erosion of the city's tax base through population outflow, and the increased spending commitments concomitant with high unemployment were compounded both by the worldwide economic downturn of 1973-4 and the retrenchment in urban welfare programs enacted by the Nixon administration.⁶⁸ In the year that *Rocky* was released the city recorded municipal debts of \$86 million and the city's credit status was subsequently downgraded by rating agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's. Cuts ensued in public services, jobs, and public sector wages, alongside a punitive 30% rise in local tax rates, leading the *New York Times* to reflect on the disparity between the state of the city and its new-found cinematic icon: "In the movie, Rocky lost the championship fight, but it didn't matter. In Philadelphia, there are plenty of real life losers. Some of the problems here are a school fund crisis, dilapidated housing, a federal investigation of the police department for alleged brutality and friction between the one third of the population that is black and the two thirds that is white."⁶⁹

Yet 1976 was also the year that America celebrated the bicentennial anniversary of its foundation, an occasion which offered its oldest city an opportunity to reposition itself on the global stage as a revitalized centre of tourism, entertainment and commerce. As Andrew Feffer explains, "the staging of the Bicentennial underscored the spectacular nature of redevelopment, in which the visual makeover of private and public spaces served efforts to improve the city's 'symbolic economy' — to reshape the urban landscape as a marketable commodity and to advertise the downtown as an attractive destination for tourism, consumerism, and resettlement."⁷⁰ Indeed, city officials of all stripes were quick to seize on Rocky as a local icon and symbol for the city's renewed vitality and projected renaissance.⁷¹ In this sense, *Rocky* engages with the city at a distinctive watershed moment, when a neoliberal paradigm of redevelopment was emerging from the ashes of the urban crisis. As I will explore further through an analysis of two key moments in the film, *Rocky* allegorizes the city's crisis and revitalization through its central narrative of individual discipline and achievement and its construction of cinematic space.

The first half of the film develops a strong sense of containment within the Italian neighborhood through a series of distinctive locations: the boxing gym and the pet shop,

the docks and peripheral industrial spaces, the characteristic Philadelphia row-houses and street corners. The financial opportunities of such an environment are limited and on the edge of legality: as a small-time boxer, Rocky's physical labor is unrewarding (he wins just \$40 for a fight in the opening sequence); as a debt collector for the mafia, he hassles hard-up dock workers, themselves struggling against inflation and wage-freezes. The exterior street scenes in Rocky's neighborhood were filmed in Kensington, one of the city's declining inner-ring areas, which contemporary accounts described as a desolate landscape of empty factories, derelict stores and rubble-strewn lots.⁷² The earlier sections of the film focus closely on the decay of the Italian neighborhood and the industrial zone surrounding the docks — still operating but, it is suggested, affected by containerization — which unlike the busy New Jersey docks portrayed in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), are almost empty of workers. Camera viewpoints are on the whole pedestrian and largely static; the only cars belong to Rocky's mafia employers. Wide shots predominate, situating Rocky as an isolated figure in the industrial landscape. In one particularly notable sequence, Stallone walks into the distance along a railway siding, the camera remaining fixed. The railings and sidewalk bisect the frame diagonally, converging towards the vanishing point in a geometrical composition, a muted, wintry palette of greys, browns and blacks (figure 5). Elsewhere, the camera lingers on wasteland and the decaying infrastructure of the industrial city, paying close attention to the material decline of the built environment.



Figure 5: Images of stasis and decay in the first half of *Rocky* (United Artists, 1976).

While the first half of the film is characterized by a sense of stasis and immobility, drawing on the 'pathos of failure' of early 1970s Hollywood and its evocation of postindustrial masculinity in crisis, it is in the later sections, as Rocky Balboa begins his training, that the film's relationship to space is transformed by the introduction of the Steadicam, through which the film finds a new mobility around the city. The famous rise-to-success montage is, crucially, constructed as a journey through Philadelphia, linking Rocky's physical and psychological transformation directly to the urban environment and, as I will argue, producing an allegory or spatial metaphor for urban renaissance.

As the Steadicam is central to producing the speed, fluidity and mobility of Rocky's training sequences, it is worth briefly considering the development of the technology itself and its relationship to this specific historical conjuncture. Though the first feature to use the Steadicam was Hal Ashby's decidedly non-urban Woodie Guthrie biopic *Bound*

For Glory (1976), it came to prominence in two films from the same year, *Rocky* and *Marathon Man* (John Schlesinger, 1976), both of which memorably focused on the motif of running and movement through urban space. Developed by the cameraman and inventor Garrett Brown in the early 1970s and first marketed by Cinema Products Corporation in 1975, the Steadicam was one of a number of technological innovations that helped to develop new practices in location shooting during the decade. A camera stabilizing device that attaches to the operator's body, enabling fluid, mobile shots without the unevenness and bumpiness of handheld camerawork, the Steadicam opened up new possibilities for location filming and the presentation of screen space, allowing for lengthy sequence shots without laying dolly track and novel camera movements such as 360-degree pans.⁷³

As John Belton has argued with respect to the introduction of CinemaScope and colour processes, technological innovation in Hollywood is not necessarily the primary driver of change; rather, new technologies have tended to be adopted only when they also fulfill economic and ideological functions for the industry.⁷⁴ The economic and logistical benefits of the Steadicam were clearly articulated across a series of promotional features in the trade press at the time, which emphasized its ability to reduce costs, cut down on crew, and to enable shooting in difficult locations, especially city streets. Writing in *American Cinematographer*, experienced Steadicam operator Ted Churchill described the usefulness of Steadicam for working in urban locations, allowing film crews to operate relatively unobtrusively among city crowds and respond to the contingencies of such situations. As he put it, "it's indispensable when it becomes impossible to 'own' the territory in which one is shooting".⁷⁵ Avildsen exploited this territorial flexibility on the production of *Rocky*, which minimized costs by shooting rapidly in Philadelphia with a non-union crew and without city permits.⁷⁶ The director explained how he would use the neighborhood as a kind of filmmaking resource: "We went in low profile and did it like the old days, operating in the poor section of town and getting people into the spirit of things."⁷⁷ Avildsen's reference here to the "old days" refers to his early days making low-budget exploitation films for Lloyd Kaufman's Troma, an experience that informed the style and production values of *Rocky*.⁷⁸ Kaufman assisted on the shoot, and later recalled himself and Avildsen "zipping around the city in eight days making sure his non-union crew wasn't spotted by union representatives. At a Los Angeles screening of *Rocky*, Kaufman said, 'union guys were trying to remember when they shot that footage.'"⁷⁹ Philadelphia was also central to the development of the training sequence, which drew direct inspiration from Garrett Brown's original test film for the Steadicam prototype, in which he filmed his partner running up and down the steps of the Art Museum.⁸⁰

While Steadicam therefore fitted the new mobile and flexible production regime of New Hollywood, its aesthetic properties also fulfilled what we might describe as ideological functions for the industry. At a time when Hollywood's continuity codes and conventions of screen space had been seriously challenged and destabilized, Steadicam provided a way of absorbing and smoothing out some of the more disruptive elements of the first wave of New Hollywood. On the one hand, it enabled freedom of movement, spatial dynamism and the kind of restless, excessive visuality now associated with post-classical style. Yet at the same time, it ensured stability, smoothness, continuity, and, as was argued at the time, an enhanced realism. As Churchill explained, "Steadicam was designed to solve a persistent problem which had plagued cinematographers for quite a few years: how to make the camera as mobile and versatile as a human being while rendering a stable and accurate frame competitive with traditional, but more complicated, techniques."⁸¹ While freeing up radical new possibilities, the Steadicam and its aesthetics were also consonant with essentially classical values, such as the stability of

the frame and the accentuation of a human subjectivity allied to the camera's viewpoint or embodiment of space. Ed DiGiulio, president of Cinema Products Corporation, also argued that it increased realism by eliminating the shaky footage associated with handheld shooting; as he put it, "the human eye does not rock-and-roll and bump the way the hand-held camera of Cinéma Verité was wont to do".⁸² The Steadicam therefore operated both literally and figuratively as a 'shock absorber', allowing post-classical cinema to incorporate a new fluidity and complexity of movement within the shot while eliminating the more disruptive, imperfect and essentially modernist properties associated with films of the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸³

In *Rocky*, Steadicam is central in producing the formal and affective properties of the training sequences and in their engagement with the city. Rocky's physical transformation, the self-discipline of the body — symbolically, the self-discipline of the body politic of the city — is mapped out as a journey across urban space. Starting in the industrial wasteland surrounding the docks (figure 6), we are reminded of Gilles Deleuze's "any-space-whatever": spaces that are "deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction."⁸⁴ Moving fluidly through the litter-strewn streets of the 9th Street Market, the camera follows Rocky in smooth, uninterrupted takes, through the park, along the waterfront, and then, famously and triumphantly, up the steps towards the monumental neo-classical edifice of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, looking out across the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and downtown Philadelphia (figures 7 and 8). Here, we are presented with a set of spatial oppositions to the confinement and stasis of the docks and the Italian neighborhood: this is open, classical, public space; highly iconic; and elevated above the city. The architecture associated with Rocky's transformation — the Greek-revival museum, designed by Horace Trumbauer (1919-1928) — is pointedly not the International Style modernism of Philadelphia's Central Business District, but rather leaps further back to draw on the city's status as the birthplace of American democracy. Through identification with this monumental space and its elevated position, the viewpoint suggests a newly acquired ability to produce a cognitive map of the spatial and social surroundings of Philadelphia.





Figures 6-8: Rocky's mobility through urban space as symbol of urban regeneration. *Rocky* (United Artists, 1976).

Through his paradigmatic movement from the old neighborhood to the monumental space of American democracy, Rocky's "urban voyage" becomes a figure for upward social mobility and the revitalization and renewal of the city more generally. Through this celebratory, highly influential rise-to-success montage sequence, Hollywood film can be seen to have regained its "action image," which is here aligned with individual enterprise and entrepreneurship. Steadicam not only enables this new mobility through urban space, but is also central in producing the affective charge and euphoric rush of Rocky's transformation for the spectator. This moment marks an implicit move away from the 'pathos of failure' associated with American cinema in first half of the 1970s — and from the crisis both in Hollywood and in the American inner city — and points forward to the renewed dominance of the blockbuster and the neoliberal downtown renaissance of the 1980s and beyond.

The film's politics are broadly populist, reflecting Avildsen's notion of the film as a "classic, Frank Capra type story".⁸⁵ Indeed, Capra himself is known to have admired the picture, and its relationship to Capra's Depression-era populism is clear at the level of ideology as well as narrative form.⁸⁶ Yet the values which constituted the ideological backbone of Capra's work — individualism, enterprise, and "self-help" in the economic sphere, alongside a distrust of both corporate power and federal government — take on different resonances in the context of neoliberal economic policy and urban redevelopment in the 1970s. As Leger Grindon argues, the revitalized boxing movies of the late 1970s constructed "the boxer as a white-working class hero no longer under allegiance to New Deal liberalism but as spokesman for the 'silent majority'".⁸⁷ Rocky's chance at the title is explicitly associated with American individualist ideology. As Rocky's adversary Apollo Creed puts it, "American history proves that everybody's got a chance to win." This viewpoint resonates with emerging right-wing positions on the urban and economic crisis, exemplified by influential studies such as Edward Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* (1970).⁸⁸ For Banfield and other neoconservative thinkers such as Irving Kristol and George Gilder, urban renewal programs, and social welfare policies more generally, were not only misguided but damaging and ideologically suspect. It was to become a totemic belief for the right that renewal policies and social welfare had not only failed to solve the urban crisis; they had, it was argued, helped to cause the crisis

through fostering a sense of dependency and a ghetto mentality which worked against their ideal, equality of opportunity — an equality best offered by a deregulated free-market consumer society.⁸⁹

The film's submerged anti-corporate sentiments are implicitly mobilized against Apollo Creed, who is consistently identified with big business: sharp suits, downtown office space, and an immaculately managed media profile. In contrast, Rocky is a self-styled "ham-and-egger". As Peter Biskind and Barbara Ehrenreich have argued, Rocky symbolized a beleaguered, white-working class masculinity under siege from the advances of feminism and civil rights.⁹⁰ *Rocky* is also notably based around a white protagonist in a period where both boxing and the inner city had become to a large extent African-American. The film imagines African-Americans gaining political and economic ascendancy, whether the up-and-coming black fighter displacing Rocky in the gym, or through the figure of Apollo Creed himself. Yet despite the obvious racial significance of the confrontation between Balboa and Creed, the film skirts around the issue of racial politics, arguably concealing or seeking to downplay the real extent of racial tensions within the city. Since WWII, Philadelphia had undergone a substantive demographic shift that reordered its racial profile: while ethnic minorities made up 18.3% of the total in 1950, African-Americans alone constituted 37.8% of the city's population by 1980.⁹¹ The race riots that exploded in 1964 were one of the first signals of a widespread escalation of the urban crisis during the 1960s, reflecting the fact that urban disinvestment and destructive renewal policies had made a disproportionate impact on black neighborhoods in central and north Philadelphia. Racial tension in the city was further escalated by the election of so-called "supercop" Mayor Frank Rizzo (Chief of Police from 1967-71 and Mayor from 1972-1980). Indeed, Rocky's celebration of "white-ethnic", working-class identity tallies with the rise to power of Rizzo, whose law-and-order rhetoric, reputation for brutality and racist policing tactics frayed race relations in the city throughout the 1970s.

Conclusion

Across these two films, I have traced the ways in which substantial realignments in Hollywood's spatial and affective landscape – from the sensations of stasis, failure, and immobility evoked by much of the the lower-budget output of the early 1970s, to mobility, flexibility and euphoria in the later part of the decade – can be linked to the wider economic-industrial shifts both in Hollywood and the American city. As Hollywood's new production practices and developments in urban public policy catalyzed a new engagement with urban space, New Hollywood cinema established what Thomas Elsaesser has referred to as "a new iconography of place alongside a new emotional topography".⁹² However, the first phase of New Hollywood was only a brief interregnum, and the dominating legacy of the 1970s is, of course, the second phase and the revitalized blockbuster format. Yet the mobile and flexible production strategies developed in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside the series of tax breaks and incentives that lure location shooting, remain central to the political economy of contemporary Hollywood. Indeed, since a new global economic crisis emerged in 2008, following a collapse in property markets and 'subprime' lending in the United States, the streets of the post-industrial, rust belt city have become, perhaps paradoxically, ever more visible on screen and increasingly popular as a location shooting destination. The municipal advocacy for location shooting that developed in the 1970s, though recently tested by fiscal restraints, is still strong, with aggressive tax breaks providing persuasive financial incentives for Hollywood, while the paradigm of the cultural or 'creative' city remains an enduring ideology for city governments. In particular, there has been a sharp increase in location shooting in recent years in so-called 'second tier' cities such as Philadelphia, in

Baby Mama (Michael McCullers, 2008), *How do you Know* (James L Brooks, 2010), and *Silver Linings Playbook* (David O Russell, 2012); Pittsburgh in *Adventureland* (Greg Mottola, 2009), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chbosky, 2012) and *The Next Three Days* (Paul Haggis, 2010); Detroit in *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008); or Boston in *The Company Men* (John Wells, 2010) and *The Town* (Ben Affleck, 2010). The streets of the post-industrial city therefore remain a vital artistic inspiration and production resource for the motion picture industry: whether gentrified and redeveloped (Brooklyn) or seemingly stuck in seventies-era crisis (Detroit), rust belt cities have since become firmly established facets of the landscape and iconography of Hollywood cinema.

¹ David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970–1979* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 9.

² Despite the large volume of work on the New Hollywood, much of the existing literature privileges the cultural impact of Watergate and the Vietnam War, displacing other important concerns such as deindustrialization, globalization and urban decline.

³ On the two phases of New Hollywood, see Derek Nystrom, “The New Hollywood”, in Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, Art Simon, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (Blackwell, 2012), vol. 4, 409–434.

⁴ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1992).

⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film”, *College English*, Vol. 38, no. 8 (April 1977): 843–859.

⁷ On the urban crisis, see Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ “The New Urban Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 23, 1975, 10.

⁹ Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, eds., *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), ix.

¹⁰ “Downtown is Looking Up”, *Time*, July 5, 1976.

¹¹ The critical literature is extensive. See, for example: David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970–1979* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horvath and Noel King, eds., *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2004); Jon Lewis, ed., *The New American Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹² Here I am adapting “spatial fix” from the work of geographer David Harvey. See Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

¹³ Michael Storper, “The Transition to Flexible Specialization in the US Film Industry: External Economies, the Division of Labour, and the Crossing of Industrial Divides”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* vol. 13, no. 2 (1989): 273–305.

¹⁴ David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 9. See also “Red Sunset on Writedowns”, *Variety*, November 26 1969, 3.

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