

Ewa Mazierska &
Laura Rascaroli

FROM MOSCOW TO MADRID

Postmodern Cities, European Cinema



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To Gifford and Kamila, to Tom and
Alice, with love

The great cities are false
Jean-Luc Godard

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Ewa Mazierska and
Laura Rascaroli

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General Editor's Introduction

The cinema has from its earliest days been fascinated by the city – as setting, subject and symbol. The city has featured as a living organism in a wide variety of genres – comedy, drama, science fiction, documentary – from *Metropolis* to *Night and the City*, from *City Lights* to *A City Speaks*, from *While the City Sleeps* to *Blade Runner*. We are now in the era of the postmodern city, an era that has seen the overthrow of communism, the expansion of the European Union, the simultaneous rise of nationalism and globalization and the return of war to Western Europe.

In their absorbing and wide-ranging study, Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli explore the postmodern city in the context of European cinema. They divide their study into three parts: 'Old Europe' where their focus is on the Latin countries, Italy (Naples), Spain (Madrid) and France (Marseilles); 'Postcommunist Europe' which takes us to Russia (Moscow), Poland (Warsaw) and Germany (Berlin); and 'Great Britain' which features the capital (London), the northern seaside (Blackpool) and the Celtic city (Edinburgh, Swansea).

In each section, after carefully establishing the social, political, architectural and artistic histories of particular cities, they give close textual readings of key films set in those cities, films such as *The Flower of My Secret*, *Luna Park*, *Trainspotting*, *Bye-Bye*, *Girl Guide* and *Bhaji on the Beach*. They also analyse the distinctive urban visions of such significant directors as Pedro Almodóvar, Pavel Lungin, Juliusz Machulski and

Michael Winterbottom. In so doing, they examine the issues of reality versus artifice, modernism and postmodernism, fragmentation and alienation, ethnicity and gender, place and space. The whole adds up to a fascinating, thought-provoking and ground-breaking study which is essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary European cinema, the city and the postmodern condition.

Jeffrey Richards

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Introduction

The City-text

In the introductory notes to a special issue of *Screen* on Space/Place/City published in 1999, editor Karen Lury pointed to the emphasis on the concepts of 'space' and 'place' that has emerged in film and television studies in recent years. With particular reference to the relationship between the cinema and the city, Lury wrote:

An expanding body of literature ... uses historical and critical material related to the 'city' and discusses the way in which certain films have represented the modern or postmodern city. Furthermore, in relation to early cinema, for example, such work has also attempted to understand the representation of the city by cinema as a fundamental part of the construction of actual cities themselves, and the lived experience of individuals who inhabit these particular places. The 'city', or the characteristics of city life, then becomes a way of interpreting identity and living practices within the modern and/or postmodern world. (Lury and Massey 1999)

This ever more diffused critical and analytical practice is, on the one hand, an example of that growing interest in interdisciplinarity and in cultural studies that has become a characteristic feature of film studies among other disciplines; on the other hand, it can be seen as a response to Henri Lefebvre's seminal work on the concept of space (Lefebvre 1974), and specifically to his call for 'a new kind of spatial imagination capable of confronting the past in a new way and reading its less tangible

2 From Moscow to Madrid

secrets off the template of its spatial structures – body, cosmos, city’ (Jameson 1991: 364–5).

A number of volumes and essays have established the pair city/cinema as an object of scientific inquiry.¹ Together they form a body of work that is significant but at the same time deficient, considering the paramount importance and complexity of the history of the relationships between film and city – a history that for the most part still has to be written. From this perspective, David B. Clarke rightly lamented, only two years before the publication of *Screen’s* special issue, the scarcity of academic reflection on the cinematic city: ‘Despite the immediately perceptible cinematic qualities that cities frequently seem to possess, and despite the uncredited role played by the city in so many films, relatively little theoretical attention has been directed towards understanding the relationship between urban and cinematic space’ (Clarke 1997: 1).

Though different approaches are adopted, the existing (and expanding) literature on the relationship between city and cinema is dominated by the study of the city as a text and as a representation, a perspective that is common in much contemporary writing. This is because ‘city’ is not only a built environment, but also ‘the space produced by the interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communication, and so forth’ (Donald 1992: 422). Furthermore, the same built environment can hardly be conceived independently of the concept of representation, since ‘spatial, building and architectural practices are representations, as also are the material, physical and spatial forms that result’ (King 1996: 5).

This book situates itself within this scientific framework, and consequently addresses the ‘city’ as an ever-shifting text, as the mutating product of a complex series of relations and of representations, one that can be investigated by means of specific discursive regimes. Accordingly, when discussing the cinematic representations of a city we refer not only to the ‘real’ city, (semi)permanently sited and described by its map, but also, and more interestingly, to the city-text (the product of countless and intermingled instances of representation), and to the lived-city (the experience of urban life and of its representations that an inhabitant or a visitor may have). Adopting these perspectives, we hope to find ourselves beyond the edges of the map.

Beyond the edges of the map we enter the localities of the vibrant,

everyday world and the disturbance of complexity. Here we find ourselves in the gendered city, the city of ethnicities, the territories of different social groups, shifting centres and peripheries – the city that is a fixed object of design (architecture, commerce, urban planning, state administration) and yet simultaneously plastic and mutable: the site of transitory events, movements, memories. This is therefore also a significant space for analysis, critical thought and understanding. (Chambers 1994: 92–3)

Cities–Cinemas

Though much of the cinematic city's history is as yet unwritten, past and recent research has shed some light on it. Far from aiming at a detailed description of the relevant literature, our concern here is to draw attention to some examples of this work and to some of the principal images that shape it. The following account will therefore be only partial and generic.

Reaffirming the importance of the city both as a setting for and as a protagonist of early cinema, in his essay on the city in film from the origins of cinema to 1930, Helmut Weihsmann (1997) remembered how pioneering filmmakers such as the Lumière brothers, Skladanowsky, Edison, Friese-Green and Notari regularly positioned their cameras before the urban spectacle. 'The first film shows were primarily "big city" affairs ... Nearly all early film documents present a *mise en abîme* of audiences filling vaudeville halls from busy city streets in order to see projected on the screen – busy city streets' (Gunning, quoted in Weihsmann 1997: 8).

Enthusiasm for the elating spectacle of modernity vanished rapidly, however: 'After 1918, the metropolis is no longer a place for the idler searching for amusement, excitement and diversion, but a horror-scenario for its frightened and threatened inhabitants' (p. 12). German Expressionism epitomizes the changed attitude towards the city and urban life. Films such as Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* [The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari, 1919], with its uncanny and distorted architectures; Boese and Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), with its archaic ghetto; and Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), with its dystopian cityscape, reflect an era's 'haunted, darkened atmosphere of apocalypse and unchained fear' (p. 12). Also the 'street films' genre of 1923–25 in Weimar Germany

mirrored and exploited the concrete fears of an ill-fated democracy, at a time when ‘the streets of German cities actually were the setting for terror and violence’ (p. 13).

A different, more optimistic view of modern urban life was offered in the 1920s by a new genre, the ‘city symphonies’, in which ‘the individual contributions of millions of people (working with technologies that have developed over centuries) are subsumed within the metropolis’s mega-partite movement through the day’ (MacDonald 1997–98: 4). This genre’s foremost examples are Strand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta* (1921); Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Rien que les heures* [Nothing but the Hours, 1926]; Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin, die Sinfonie einer Großstadt* [Berlin, Symphony of a Big City, 1927]; and Dziga Vertov’s *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* [Man with a Movie Camera, 1929]. Despite the significant differences in style and approach, all of these films took as their subject the big city seen as the incarnation of progress and of modernity. The ‘city symphonies’ celebrated the rhythm and fascination of the fast-moving metropolis; a similar view of the city is also found in many Dada and Surrealist films.

A classical way of looking at the representation of the city in film is through the study of specific genres, a perspective that applies primarily to Hollywood cinema. Film noir, gangster film and *film policier* have consistently been discussed with reference to the representation of the city. These, in fact, are typically urban genres, whose narratives and characters stem from a particular urban milieu – that of the night, of crime-plagued streets, and of the city’s underworld. Its expressionist urban iconography is an essential component of film noir, so much so that dark and wet streets, reflecting surfaces and city lighting are its trademark and represent much of its fascination.² As for the gangster movie, one of its forging tensions is the contrast between city and countryside; the same contrast has been traced by Colin McArthur (1997) in many Hollywood films belonging to different genres, from *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), a musical with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, to Capra’s *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) – both examples of films which, according to the author, are representative of America’s reflection on its transition to modernity and to urbanization.

Science fiction, with its utopian and, more often, dystopian urban visions and readings of modernity, is another genre that has often given rise to discussions about the cinematic city. The films that best represent the debate are *Metropolis*, an icon of the apocalyptic vision of modernity;

and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), epitomizing the postindustrial decay, vast immigration and architectural pastiche of the postmodern metropolis. The discourse on the postmodern cinematic city, both in science fiction and in films set in contemporary times (such as *Falling Down*, Joel Schumacher, 1992), has concentrated mainly on Los Angeles, the metropolis that has come to epitomize the urban discontents of our society.

It is not difficult to identify in utopia/dystopia the dichotomy ruling the critical discourse on the city, not only in science fiction but also in all the films and genres quoted above. The idea of the city as spectacle, clearly connected to a utopian vision of modernity, can be traced in discussions of early cinema, of the 'city symphonies' of the 1920s, as well as of specific films, such as *Lost Horizon* and *The Fountainhead*. A dystopian vision of modernity underlies discussions of German Expressionism, of the 'street films' genre of 1923–25, of film noir and, of course, of science fiction.

Other ways of looking at the cinematic city have also been employed, for instance an attention to the contrast between the centre and suburbs. Pierre Sorlin (1994) has traced a history of the city in Western European cinema from 1930 onwards. He has distinguished a first phase characterized by the lack of distinction between the centre and the outskirts; a second phase, beginning in 1930, when this distinction becomes very clear; and, finally, a phase in which the image of cities blurs altogether.³ An article by Chris Darke (1997) applies Sorlin's idea to the 'blurring' of Paris in the cinema of the *nouvelle vague* and of Godard in particular, showing how a dystopian vision of the city is, once again, at the core of Sorlin's thesis. For Darke, it is the modernist urban projects of the 1960s that obscure and blur 'Haussmann's rationally planned centre. It is just such a fear that informs *Alphaville's* image of an architecturally brutal future world in the heart of the city' (Darke 1997: 12).

The Borders of New Europe

The focus of our attention is the contemporary European city as represented in European films of the last two decades. This period is associated with abrupt changes in Europe's economy and its politics, notably the end of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European bloc; the move from a totalitarian system to modern democracy in Spain, facilitated by the death of Franco

in 1975; Thatcherism and the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism in Britain; devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Balkan conflicts. While the European Community strives for political and economic strength and credibility, two opposite tendencies are observed in the socio-political life of this continent: on the one hand globalization, the shedding of national differences and the acquisition of uniform, transnational or postnational identities; on the other hand, a surge in nationalism and even regionalism, particularly in those countries in which the nation-state aspiration was thwarted, such as the former Yugoslavian republic, the former Soviet Union and Scotland. These and other momentous changes are deeply influencing life in European countries, and their effects are often best seen in the cities, where new ideas, aspirations and contradictions are concentrated and erupt. In this book, we examine whether and how these mutations have been mirrored by recent European urban cinema.

Several aspects of this work touch on problematic issues that must be identified and discussed in this Introduction. One of these is the extent and meaning of what we call 'Europe'. Frequently, and also in the context of 'European cinema', this term is used to refer to a relatively small number of Western countries that form a part of post-imperialist Europe, identified with democracy and the market economy: Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain. These countries are perceived as stable (despite the many political, social, economic and cultural changes that they have undergone, even in recent years), and are usually associated with 'high culture', to the detriment of other European countries, marginalized by this vision. As the title of our book suggests, we adopt instead a broader concept, according to which Moscow, Warsaw and Sarajevo are as integral to Europe as Paris and London. This conception is not unproblematic. The reality of the continent has transformed dramatically in the last twenty years, so much so that its identity has changed and is constantly shifting. One novel element is the strengthening of the European Union, and the term 'Europe' today is often used to refer to the states that comprise it. To see Europe simply as the set of member-states of the European Union is, of course, highly unsatisfactory; such a criterion does not necessarily explain what Europe is and what being European means in this postmodern, post-Berlin Wall era of increasing globalization and cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the idea that Europe has changed completely is also easily challenged. Considering that the borders of Europe are shifting and

that communism has ceased to be the Other against which the European identity was shaped, David Morley and Kevin Robins set out to identify contemporary Europe's new Others: America, seen as the intolerable future or the Satan of anti-culture; and particularly the Islamic world, since "The Turk" and "The Moor" have always provided [Europe with] key figures of difference, or of "threat" (and indeed, dread)' (Morley and Robins 1993: 21). Against this backdrop, the authors' discussion of the reactions to Turkey's application to join the EC highlights the perhaps surprising persistent centrality of Christianity in the definition of contemporary Europe's identity and culture.

Without underestimating the thorny question of a contemporary European identity, but with the aim of indicating the transformations that this continent is undergoing, and of highlighting the existence there of different cultures, aspirations and lifestyles, this book includes the cinema of countries that are often neglected – such as Poland – or whose belonging to 'Europe' is problematic – such as Russia. For cognate reasons, rather than privileging the capital cities, which have come to embody the essence of a country in the global imagination but often represent a small or special section of a nation's population and lifestyle, in this book we include studies of cities and towns that are often out of the limelight, for example Marseilles, Naples, Swansea, and Blackpool. We nevertheless have had to be selective for reasons of space and have omitted many other countries and cities that would have offered interesting examples.

We devote one section of the book to France, Italy and Spain, referring to them collectively as 'Old Europe' for their place in the backbone of nineteenth-century Europe, of 'Christendom' Europe. A second section, entitled 'Postcommunist Europe', includes Russia, Poland and Germany, the latter having in Berlin a prominent and controversial symbol of post-'iron curtain' Europe. The blatant absentee in this section is Yugoslavia. It seemed important to us to discuss recent cinematic representations of postmodern Sarajevo, but we found that these almost invariably offer the image of a city torn by war, which with deeper analysis turns out to be, more than anything, an absent city. Sarajevo in recent European film does not seem to have an existence of its own, but frequently becomes a metaphor for an existential condition, as is evident in the portrayals of foreign filmmakers, such as Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997); Robert Guédiguian's *À la place du coeur* (1998); and Mario Martone's *Teatro di guerra* (1998; see Chapter 3).

Perhaps cities such as Sarajevo and Belgrade are best represented in these years by the televisual images that show them to us as torn, bombed and, most recently, in revolt.⁴

With a view to highlighting the differences that exist even among cities of the same country, the last section of the book focuses on a case study. Great Britain was chosen for a series of reasons. It has undergone momentous economic, political and social changes in its recent history, in particular with Thatcherism and the passage from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society on the one hand, and political devolution on the other. Thanks to London, Great Britain belongs, more than any other country in Europe, to a globalized, late-capitalist economy. Furthermore, since Thatcherism, British cities, according to observers such as Bianchini and Schwengel (1991), show remarkable contradictory tendencies (for instance, urbanism and anti-urbanism; Europeanization and Americanization).

The Cinema of the Postmodern Condition

Whereas in several cases academic work on North American metropolises in film has been influenced by theories of postmodernism, research on the European filmic city has often been linked to discourses on modernism.⁵ In this book, in contrast, concepts coming from the literature on postmodernism and the postmodern condition are, for the first time, systematically applied to the investigation of contemporary Europe's cinematic 'city-texts'. Our discussion is developed against the backdrop of ideas and instruments of analysis deriving from several disciplines: postmodernism theory, urban theory, sociology, geography and socio-political history are required, separately or jointly, both to define the postmodern city, and to support the analysis of specific urban films; film theory and criticism are used in the examination of all those aspects of the *mise-en-scène* that contribute to the construction of a cinematic city-text. In this sense, the *mise-en-scène* is broadly considered as being that set of interrelated filmmaking choices that result in the signifying 'being' or 'body' of the film. A precise analysis of such a 'body', with the backdrop of theories of the postmodern city, is our ultimate objective.

We must clarify at this point what is meant in this book by the expressions 'postmodernism', 'postmodernity' and 'postmodern cinema'. 'Postmodernism' is a problematic term, in the same way as is 'Europe'

but even more so. This is not the place to offer a history of the numerous and even contradictory meanings that have been attached to this term, nor of its various incarnations in different areas of the critical discourse.⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to clarify the position of this book in the debate. By 'postmodernity' we mean Western society's current cultural, economic and socio-political condition. This condition is characterized by such interrelated phenomena as an increasingly postindustrial and service-oriented economy, with its characteristics and consequences: the growth of hi-tech and entertainment industries; the increase in social polarization; the fragmentation of the urban habitat; the compression of space and time produced by the information revolution; the increasing cosmopolitanism and multi-ethnicity of our living environments; the globalization of culture and the shedding of barriers that once existed between 'high' and 'low' culture. Whereas in the course of this work we refer, directly or indirectly, to postmodernism theories such as those of Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, the general theoretical framework is the thought of Fredric Jameson and his use of the term 'postmodernism' to refer to the cultural discourse of the third stage of capitalism, that is, late or multinational capitalism.

The other expression that requires clarification is 'postmodern cinema'. Much of the debate has been shaped by Fredric Jameson's ideas on postmodern films as characterized by an obliteration of the historical past and by a strong sense of nostalgia, hiding an inability to understand the past behind the reproduction of stereotypical images (see Jameson 1991). David Harvey has concentrated on ideas related to time-space compression in his analysis of postmodern icons such as *Blade Runner* and *Wings of Desire* (Harvey 1989). An emphasis on time is also present in Norman Denzin's analysis of *Blue Velvet*, whose narrative, according to the author, is impossible to place in time; the film effaces the boundaries between past and present and the viewer is placed in an eternal present (see Denzin 1988). The debate has also extensively focused on the key-words 'pastiche', 'self-reflexivity' and 'intertextuality'. On this front, a distinction between modern and postmodern cinema becomes problematic, as these elements can be seen as characteristic of both. For John Orr, in fact, these are merely 'neo-modern inventions' (Orr 1993: 3). For Maureen Turim postmodernism is often, in cinema as well, 'an unconscious repetition of many principles already used within various forms of modernism' (Turim 1991: 178). Tony Wilson tried to disentangle the question by suggesting a distinction

between modernism's investigation of the transparency of the image and postmodernism's undermining of the image's reference to reality (see Wilson 1990).

Pastiche; a metalinguistic attitude; intertextuality; the abolition of boundaries (between past and present; 'high' and 'low' culture; visible and invisible); an experimental approach to the narrative; and a passion for the surface of the image (for instance, the use of detail shots devoid of a narrative purpose) are all elements that can be attributed to postmodern as well as to modern cinema. The distinction is challenging, all the more so because postmodernism is not a school, and there is a great difference, for instance, between Lynch's postmodernism and Almodóvar's.

By 'postmodern cinema' we intend a cinema that comes after – after the momentous changes of western society specified above, such as the progressive deindustrialization of the economy, the increasing globalization of culture, the decline of the communist ideology and the falling down of the 'iron curtain'. As is clear, there is no inaugurating date, but a long sequence of changes that matured into a new socio-cultural condition. When it learns from modernism, and imitates its characteristics, the cinema linked to such a postmodern condition unavoidably does so with an attitude that can be seen either as more playful or as more sceptical, as is appropriate for a post-ideological, post-'grand narratives' age. Furthermore, we wish to suggest the importance of distinguishing at least between a more marketable form of postmodern cinema, that which absorbed the lesson of modernism, but also of the society of franchising (a cinema of which *Blade Runner*, with its mix of commercial focus and modernistic visuals, is a good example), and a radical form that resumes and continues, within a new milieu and atmosphere, the project of certain modernist filmmakers. Contemporary directors such as Derek Jarman, Atom Egoyan, Abbas Kiarostami and Wong Kar-Wai derive from modern directors – chiefly Godard and Antonioni – such characteristics as a radical self-reflexivity; a political attention to the nature of the cinematic apparatus and the audiovisual language; an unorthodox approach to narration and its parameters, in particular space and time; and a polemical attitude towards modern capitalism and its features, for instance media saturation, political apathy and loss of freedom and authenticity.

Our work, nevertheless, does not engage exclusively with postmodern cinema, but with cinematic representations of postmodern cities. An

important objective of our book is precisely that of investigating the complex relationship between postmodern cinema and the postmodern city. We consider whether cities that can be regarded as postmodern (for example very cosmopolitan, ethnically mixed, with a postindustrial economy and landscape, full of graffiti and franchising logos) are always represented as they are, or whether they tend to lose their postmodern character when shown in films. Furthermore, can the postmodern style of the filmmaking make a city look more postmodern and, conversely, does a postmodern urban setting tend to influence the narrative, characters and style of a film? What role does cinema play in defining the character of contemporary European cities?

With the postmodern city as its subject matter, this work employs postmodernism theory as an instrument of inquiry, and postmodern metadiscourse as a methodological approach. Each chapter adopts a different perspective, uses a different tactic and concentrates on different issues. We do not propose to follow all paths and exhaust all meanings; rather than aiming towards comprehensiveness, we lean towards multiplicity and eclecticism.

The City in Focus

Of the main objectives that guide our work, the principal one is that of understanding whether or not the European cinema of the 1980s and 1990s has mirrored the many transformations that affected European cities in the past twenty years. Do recent European films construct city-texts that carefully try to reflect the social, human and geographical 'reality' of a place, or do they tend to forge cinematic urban habitats that have little in common with an inhabitant's or a visitor's perception of 'reality'? With this question in mind, we intend to explore the complex relationships between Europe's economy and its politics and the cinematic portrayal of European cities, from the viewpoint of postmodernism theory. The objects of our inquiry are a number of European cities and their filmic representations. The approach to each city varies, depending on the issues with which we chose to engage in each chapter. In some cases we concentrate on the portrait of a city given by a number of films by the same filmmaker. For example, Madrid is analysed through the films of Pedro Almodóvar, in particular *Kika* and *The Flower of My Secret*; in the chapter on Moscow we discuss two films by Pavel Lungin: *Taxi Blues* and *Luna Park*. In other cases, we instead consider

the portrayals of the same city in films by different filmmakers. Examples are the chapter on Marseilles, where Robert Guédiguian's *Marius et Jeannette*, Karim Dridi's *Bye-Bye*, and Claire Denis' *Nenette et Boni* are analysed; in the chapter on London, we examine the representation of this city in Roger Michell's *Notting Hill*, Peter Howitt's *Sliding Doors*, Jasmin Dizdar's *Beautiful People* and Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland*.

Despite these different approaches, the analysis of the filmic representation of each city tries to establish whether the city's reality is prevalently mirrored, ignored or altered by the filmmakers. This objective is pursued, for instance, by comparing different representations, both cinematic and non-cinematic, of the same city; by referring to the social, political, architectural and cultural history of a city; and by studying all the relevant elements of the *mise-en-scène*. Our conclusions on this point are, of course, partial as we work on a limited number of European films, all of which engage with contemporary issues, even if they cannot always be called 'realist' in the traditional sense of the term. They are all films that, openly or indirectly, offer insights on life in the city in which they are set, on the way in which that city is perceived and represented by its inhabitants and/or by visitors, immigrants and external observers. Nevertheless, the films analysed in this book cover a wide spectrum. Some are regarded as prominent examples of postmodern cinema, such as Almodóvar's films; others belong to mainstream production, as does *Notting Hill*, or, at the opposite extreme, to a regional and 'artisanal' cinema, for example *Marius et Jeannette*. We hope that our work will help to accomplish a better understanding of the socio-political and aesthetic values of contemporary European cinema, through this limited but variegated sample.⁷ At the same time, we strive to offer useful and accomplished analyses of the films considered, based firmly on postmodernism theories and film theory in general. The study of the representation of cities in this sense is not an end in itself, but becomes a vehicle for reaching a full understanding of the films. Not only the settings, but all aspects of the *mise-en-scène* in the broad sense (cinematography, costumes, narrative structure, characters, dialogues) are considered.

A Postmodern European City?

The last objective that we set for our study is that of establishing whether or not the expression 'postmodern city', which in the con-

temporary imagination and in the relevant literature is strongly connected to the North American metropolis, can be safely borrowed and used in the context of European urban design and city life. This is a moot point, for at least two reasons: because North American cities are widely regarded as the 'home' and natural site of postmodernity; and because most academic studies on the 'postmodern city' refer only to North American metropolises (and chiefly to Los Angeles and Las Vegas).⁸ At the same time, many observers of the development of cities in the United States agree that the changes connected to the new postmodern society 'are happening not only in Los Angeles but, in varying degrees and, to be sure, unevenly developed over space and time, all over the world' (Soja 1997: 20). What interests us is reaching an understanding of the sense and the degree to which such changes apply to the European conurbation. The opening chapter, 'From the USA to Europe: Development of a New City', is devoted to this question.

From the USA to Europe: Development of a New City

The contentious character of the concept of postmodernity, and in particular of its application to the description of contemporary urban life and fabric, necessitates a discussion of the city in contemporary Europe. Whereas it is customary to refer to North American metropolises in terms of postmodernity, the question of whether a similar perspective can be applied to the European conurbation, and to what extent, is still open. Furthermore, observers even disagree on the existence of a European City:

Today, any attempt to identify the common traits of the European city would seem a risky exercise. The influence of states has structured various urban forms. Urbanisation has been through a series of movements, and the city no longer constitutes an integrated and relatively closed system. A portion of the research being done on cities no longer bothers with ... nuances and presents models that are relatively universal, or then again, the diversity within Europe appears in such a way as to rule out any kind of generalisation. (Bagnasco and Le Galès 2000: 8)

Although it may be a risky exercise, it is necessary to identify some common elements in the development of European cities in the past twenty years, in order to lay the foundations for our work on the