

MIT Student

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Film Notes: *London*

The director of *London* is Patrick Keiller and was set in the year 1992. The film was released in 1994 and was shot on location in the city.

Five phrases or adjectives to describe the sense of the city portrayed in the film: detached (the focus was more on decaying buildings and construction sites intercut with scenes of nature than actual people or characters, with Robinson serving as the 'character' the narrator used as a device to maintain our interest and give us a narrative as the two 'characters' explored the city and ruminated on it.), yet contradictorily so touched by the effects of humans, dour, labeled (by graffiti, logos, signs), brownish gray.

One memorable filmic trick/scene Keiller uses is anthropomorphizing the gateposts of the park near Robinson's flat in Vauxhall. We've discussed pareidolia in class before, but it was done so matter-of-factly through the power of suggestion, simply by positioning the camera and allowing it to remain on the gateposts for a longer comedic beat than necessary that made it funny\*. When the same shots were replicated upon their return home, when the gateposts no longer "spoke" to Robinson, that suggested how closely mood and environment are tied together, especially in an urban environment that is so manipulated by human living.

Questions: Just WHO is Robinson and what is his function in the film (a surrogate via which the director can impart his ideas about the city of London)? Does the locked-down documentary-style camera aid or hinder the film's *dérive* intentions?

Parallel to real life: I spent 2 weeks in London last summer, mainly just wandering around with my sister as a tourist. I encountered a lot more impatience from locals than there appears in this film, though I did see the same disregard for others and a tendency to keep to oneself in public spaces. I blame the lack of a rigorous customer service culture and stingy tipping at restaurants.

\* Unfortunately, something I have internalized over time is blind acceptance of the narrator as Truth-teller for the universe of the film/novel/etc. I am vulnerable to didacticism, no matter how surreal or absurd the tone or subject matter. This means that I tend to get duped by unreliable narrators, and lulled into a false sense of security by gently sardonic narrators who speak of such bleak realities of urban living that it's difficult for me to find their sense of humor explicitly hilarious. This was made especially apparent during the screening on Thursday, when many students laughed aloud many times throughout the film, but I felt like I was missing something from the experience. Intellectually, from an out-of-body perspective, I understood that the words were meant to invoke laughter. But it was hard not to be affected by what Paul Scofield was saying about modern society, homelessness, pollution, infrastructure failure, and people's apathy to terrorism and political conflicts that do not directly affect their way of life. More than anything, the film felt meditative and melancholic. I could appreciate it objectively and from a technical standpoint, but I did not enjoy it.

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