

Susanna Paasonen Metropolitan desires: Forum as site of urban experience

Cinema theatres, like other urban spaces, have been sites for producing and enciphering signs of metropolitan consumer culture for over a century. This article focuses on one such site, namely the shopping centre Forum, and its adjoining cinema theatre, Forum 7 – formerly known as Capitol –, located in central Helsinki. The article addresses the publicity discourses surrounding Forum during its (re)opening in 1985, and reads them as productive in the performative sense: as ones producing different horizons of experience and frames for experiencing and using urban space.

In 1985, Forum shopping centre was read as a sign of “city culture,” of vibrant and affluent urban activities, as were the contemporaneous club Metropol, *City* magazine, or Radio City. The “international atmosphere” found at the shopping centre itself was complemented by the cinema theatre, which premiered *Da Capo*, also titled “the first Finnish Hollywood film.” Six decades earlier, Capitol had been opened in the midst of 1920s city discourse, during which metropolitan signs were located in department stores, modern buildings and lavish cinema theatres.

It appears that things thought of as international, or even European, have been present in the Finnish context as fantasies or ideals which – like metropolitan desires – have remained persistently instances of otherness, or been present merely as temporary and evasive “feeling”, atmosphere or per-

formance. Metropolitan dreams have been anchored to urban spaces such as department stores, cafés, cinemas or shopping centres through comparisons and naming (as with the English word “city”). The feeling of being in an international city has meant being as if “somewhere else.”

Kimmo Laine Fire at the Imatra- Theatre 23rd October 1927, The Cinema- tograph Act, and the Unruly Audience

This article focuses on the historical interconnections between the material conditions of film exhibition, the duties imposed on the personnel (projectionist, floor manager, ushers etc.), and the behaviour of the audience. The point of departure is the most disastrous accident in the history of Finnish cinema, the 1927 fire at the Imatra-theatre in Tampere. The fire started in the projection room and spread in a few minutes all around the auditorium, causing the death of 21 patrons.

Although not the only fatal accident in Finnish cinemas at the time, due to its nation wide media coverage the Imatra fire had more or less direct effects on: 1) how film theatres and film projection were regulated; 2) what was required of the personnel; and 3) how the audience was expected to behave. Some of these consequences were legislative by nature. An act was given in 1929, which gave detailed orders concerning the planning of film theatres (especially the projection room but also the lobby, entrances, lighting of the auditorium etc.), the professional requirements of the per-

sonnel (especially the projectionist who henceforth had to be licensed). Furthermore, general discipline was expected to be observed in the auditorium (the main fear in case of accident being, after all, panic among audience).

I will focus on the disparity between the regulations and what actually went on at the cinemas. In spite of all instructions patrons kept on talking during screenings and disregarded the regular starting hours. In fact, for many years most theatres were still equipped with one projector only, which meant that, excluding the first run theatres in the largest cities, an uninterrupted and quiet screening wasn't even within the bounds of possibility.

Silja Laine

Two Kino-Palatsi – theatres and Modern Cityscape in Helsinki in the 1920's

By the 1920's films had already been a part of Helsinki city life for more than twenty years, but during the twenties cinema started to gain an independent status apart from other forms of entertainment. How did this show in the cityscape of Helsinki? How did the movie theatres of the twenties adjust to the modernising city and how did they themselves affect the city?

I approach the question by examining the status of Kino-Palatsi, Finland's most famous movie theatre of all times, torn down in 1965. In the late twenties it was run by Suomi-Filmi, Finland's biggest film company at the time. The company was planning to replace Kino-Palatsi with an even more

glamorous building, a skyscraper with a movie palace on the ground floor. The skyscraper was never built, but the project caused a vivid debate on which the analysis of the status of cinema in this article is based.

It appears that the development of advertising and electric lighting, as well as the emphasis on the facades and entrances made the cinema more visible in the cityscape than ever before. More generally, the material conditions of watching films should be considered as an important part of the cinematic experience, especially in the first decades of cinema. The newspaper material from the first three decades of the 20th century supports this argument, as the movie theatres could, at times, get almost as much media coverage as the films themselves. Moreover, Helsinki had – on a European level – very luxurious movie theatres much before there was any large scale film production in Finland.