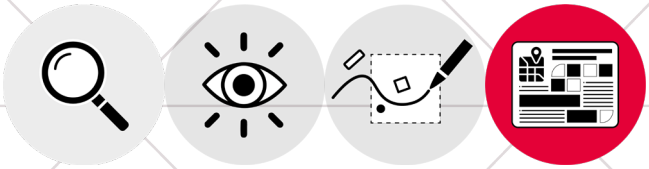
THE BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING

UCL

Graphic Skills Lab

Handout series

Urban Photography & Film



URBAN GRAPHICS SKILLS

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BUPS – Bartlett Urban Planning Society (Established in 2012, the Bartlett Urban Planning Society (BUPS) is a student-run organisation, subsumed under the Bartlett School of Planning (BSP). BUPS represents, reinforces and protects the interests of planning students while inspiring the community-at-large of our role in the Built Environment.)

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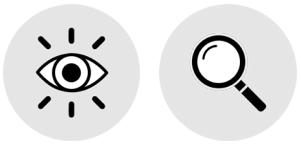
1. Introduction



Photographs are widely used in planning and urban design:

- In recording places and buildings.
- In measuring buildings.
- In working with people to create a vision of a place. Photographs can provide references or benchmarks for future projects, and help people to think about what sort of buildings and places they value.
- In appraisal and analysis, taking photographs that show the place's strengths and weaknesses.
- Illustrating the design process and telling the story of how the design was developed as a response to its context.
- As a basis for creating sketches and measured drawings.
- In accurate visual representation, creating pictures showing a proposed building or structure alongside what already exists, for use in evaluating a development proposal.

Film and video are increasingly used in planning and urban design:

- In recording places and buildings.
- In appraisal and analysis, showing a place's strengths and weaknesses.
- Illustrating the design process and telling the story of how the design was developed as a response to its context.
- Keeping a record of a large amount of information about a place and its people for analysis later.
- In consultation, showing people the place where they live or have an interest in, and allowing them to portray the place, and illustrate its strengths and weaknesses.
- Using archives to show a place as it used to be, triggering thoughts about what is valued, and what people want to change or reinstate.
- In promoting potential developments, to attract potential investors or developers, or later to attract potential buyers or tenants.

2. Urban photography

Photographs are widely used in built environment projects:

- In recording places and buildings
- In working with people to create a vision of a place. Photographs can provide references or benchmarks for future projects, and help people to think about what sort of buildings and places they value.
- In appraisal and analysis, taking photographs that show the place's strengths and weaknesses.
- Illustrating the design process and telling the story of how the design was developed as a response to its context.
- As a basis for creating sketches and measured drawings.
- In accurate visual representation, creating pictures showing a proposed building or structure alongside what already exists, for use in evaluating a development proposal.

Recording and measuring:

Built environment students and professionals are constantly photographing, with a wide variety of types of camera and phone. They photograph, among other reasons, to record places, buildings and features of the world around them. They use their photographs in presentations and reports, and as a personal record.

They also use photographs to measure buildings, comparing the scale of different buildings and judging scale by comparison with objects of known size, such as a car, a person or a brick. For example, knowing the size of a brick, we can estimate the height or length of a building by counting the number of bricks.

Representing buildings and places:

Any view can be photographed in many different ways, according to the message that the photographer wants to convey.

Buildings can be made to look larger or smaller, closer together or further away; attractive or less attractive; threatening or friendly; busy or unused. The scene can be manipulated by where the camera is pointed; how the composition is chosen; how the scene is framed; how the photograph is cropped; and how the image is manipulated digitally.

There is no such thing as a photograph showing

a completely objective reality: someone has always made choices. We need to be aware of this both in taking photographs, in preparing them for publication and display, and in viewing other people's photographs.

Photography in the planning and design process:

Photography is an important element of three distinct stages of the planning and design process: vision; appraisal and analysis; and design.

Vision:

Take photographs of places you visit as references or benchmarks for future projects. You, other professionals you are working with, or local residents who you are consulting, can look at photographs from other places and think about what sort of development they like. This can help them to decide and communicate about some of their basic values at the start of a planning or design exercise.

A visioning process using photographs can help to lift people's horizons from what is around them or what they are familiar with, and towards ways of building that they might not have thought of. The photographs might show different sizes, styles, details and types of building; layouts, landscapes and townscapes; and anything else. The photographs may be used in publications or presentations, or photographs may be passed around at meetings and pinned up with comments.

Local people can take photographs of where they live to highlight what they value or what they would like to change.

This used to be done by giving people disposable cameras. Today most people have mobile phones or other devices with cameras.

Appraisal and analysis:

Take photographs that show the place's strengths and weaknesses. Your photographs might illustrate the place under the following four headings. (The headings are taken from the Placecheck method – see ***www.placecheck.info***).

A special place

- What makes this place special? What can we make more of?
- What potential is there to enhance the place?

A well-connected, accessible and welcoming place

- How well-connected and accessible is the place? What limits how accessible it is?
- How welcoming is the place? Does anything make it confusing?
- How well does the parking work?
- How can the place be made better connected,more accessible and more welcoming?

A safe and pleasant place

- What makes this place – and its street(s) and public spaces – safe and pleasant? What detracts from that?
- How successful are the streets and spaces underfoot? What could be improved?
- How can the place be made safer and more pleasant?

A planet-friendly place

What makes this place planet-friendly?

- How are scarce resources wasted?
- How could the place make better usen of resources?

The longer list (below) provides more suggestions (also from www.placecheck.info) that your photographs might illustrate to show the place's strengths and weaknesses. Don't cover them all: just choose the ones that seem to you to be important in the particular context.

Your photographs will show things that can be seen, of course. There may also be aspects of the place that are important to consider that can not be seen – noise and smell, for example. But you may be able to photograph the source of the noise or smell, if they are important considerations in planning and designing the place.

Design:

Many masterplans and other planning and design documents are illustrated by photographs of the local context. The photographs may show the form of the land, the townscape, and characteristic methods of vernacular building or architectural detail, among other things.

If the photographs are to communicate effectively, they will probably need captions. Sometimes a photograph can be used without a caption in a document to create a particular atmosphere, but usually the viewer is left wondering: what's the message? The combination of a photograph and a caption can work well in telling a story. The two reinforce each other.

After taking the trouble to examine and photograph the development site's context, the architects, planners or urban designers should ensure that they make use of those images and that information in designing the proposed development.

They should look carefully at the images, interpret them, decide what aspects of what is shown is most important, and think creatively about how to respond to the context in designing the development.

Should the design reinterpret some of the historic features? How will the new buildings fit into the townscape? How can the new development make the most of existing and potential views? Taking photographs, analysing them and using them in the design process can all help you to answer such questions.

2.1. Exercise description and information on photographing places and people. Overview of relevant technical considerations

Exercise:

Take a series of photographs appraising a street of your choice in terms of these four headings:

- A special place
- A well-connected, accessible and welcoming place.
- A safe and pleasant place
- A planet-friendly place

Places:

(Note: this guidance applies to the UK)

Public places:

If you are on a public right of way (such as a public pavement, footpath or public highway) you are free to take photographs for personal and commercial use so long as you do not cause an obstruction to other users.

Property owners do not have the right to stop people taking photos of their buildings, so long as the photographer is standing in a public place, such as on the pavement. Representatives of property owners do sometimes forbid photography on the grounds that the buildings are 'copyright'. It is not an infringement of copyright to take, publish or sell photographs of buildings, sculptures and works of craftsmanship that are permanently sited in a public place or in premises that are open to the public.

Private land:

If you are on private land (which might include some places such as piazzas or malls that in many ways feel as though they are part of the public realm), the landowner or occupier may have a right to forbid you from taking photographs.

It is usually impossible to imagine why you should not take photos, and often fun to find out what excuse the security people come up with.

Stations

Taking photographs on stations for personal use is permitted. But do not use flash photography on platforms as it may distract the attention of train drivers and other staff.

Subjects:

People

People generally give a sense of life to a photograph of an urban scene.

Formal architectural photography, on the other hand, often shows buildings without any people, so as to concentrate on the architecture without any distraction.

This is achieved either by photographing when no one is there, or using such a slow shutter speed (at least several seconds) that there is no time for moving people to register on the image. Whether it is appropriate to show buildings without people depends on the purpose of the photograph, for example whether the photograph is intended to evoke the character of a place, or whether it is intended as a dispassionate record of some features of the scene, or as the basis for preparing technical drawings.

Children

Children in particular can give life to photographs of urban scenes. These days it is not uncommon for people photographing children in public places to be told by the police or by passersby that they should not do this.

The idea is that some paedophiles photograph children for their sexual gratification.

In fact there is no law against taking photographs of children, and there is a danger that the panic about doing so helps to fuel a culture of suspicion that magnifies paedophilia's corrupting influence.

If you want to photograph children whose parents are around, ask them for permission.

Do not photograph children in a way that identifies where they live or go to school unless you have permission.

Dodgy folk

Be careful if you photograph people's houses or people who might be breaking the law. You might be photographing the building for its distinctive architecture or its evocative decay, but its occupants might think you are snooping on them on behalf of the authorities. Similarly your photograph of a lively urban scene might be seen by some of the people in it as an unwelcome record of a drug deal. Taking photos in such circumstances could put you in danger.

Composition:

Think about the composition and character of the photograph.

- Rhythm and repetition: Emphasising repetitive forms, such as doorways viewed down a street, can create an attractive sense of rhythm. The compressing effect of a long lens can make this more pronounced.
- Leading lines: Make a feature of lines (such as a kerb or a roofline) that will lead the viewer's eye into the picture. The depth provided by a wide-angle lens can emphasise this effect.
- Framing: Look for elements, such as doorways, windows, structures or the shapes made by tree branches to frame the image.
- Layering: Show distinct elements in the foreground, middle ground and background to give your photograph depth and interest.
- Camera height: Taking a photograph from a high point (up a tall building, for example) can enable you to show patterns of development and movement on the ground that would be less obvious when seen from ground level.

Using photography:

Sketches

A large proportion of sketches by urban designers, planners and architects are based on a photograph, often by tracing over it. This can create an image that appears creative, personal and informal, yet is based on a more-or-less accurate form and perspective. The sketch will look less convincing (and probably rather odd) if it reproduces features such as converging verticals and other distortions that are characteristic of photography.

Accurate visual representation

An accurate visual representation (AVR) (also known as a verified view) is a picture showing a proposed building or structure alongside what already exists, for use in evaluating a development proposal.

Types of AVR include a visibility study (a simple depiction of the shape of a proposal shown on digital photographs), approximate photomontage (a rendered computer model of a proposed building or structure combined with a photograph of its surroundings), accurate silhouette (an accurate description of the position, shape and size of a proposal, shown on a high-resolution photograph), accurate photomontage (an accurate depiction of the position, shape and size of a proposal but with selected architectural details shown on a high-resolution photograph), and accurate photo-reality (an accurate depiction of the position, size, shape and external appearance of a development proposal).

Without AVR it may be impossible to get a clear and accurate idea of what the impact of a development will be. Some designers and developers exploit this in their use of misleading photographs and photomontages. Their techniques include simulating the

view from a position that does not actually exist; distorting the scale of some buildings or structures; and hiding buildings behind imaginary trees.

Viewpoints plan

Where you are presenting a series of photographs of a site, it is useful to show where each photograph was taken from and the direction the photographer was facing. A viewpoints plan shows a series of v-shaped arrows pointing to the direction of each photograph, each with a number corresponding to a numbered photograph.

Technical

Lenses

A zoom lens (or the camera's digital zoom facility) provides the qualities of whichever focal length it is set to, without you having to change lenses or cameras.

A normal lens represents perspective in similar way to the human eye. For photographing street scenes this can be rather limiting: it may be difficult to include all we want to and we may need to tilt the camera to get the tops of buildings in.

A wide-angle lens pushes the view away, making everything smaller and getting a great deal in. This can be very useful in photographing buildings and street scenes. A wide-angle lens tends to distort depth: features close to the camera look relatively larger and those further away relatively smaller. You may be able to exploit this to make an interesting image and to concentrate it on the most important feature.

A long lens brings the view closer, so the photograph will show things close up, but with a very narrow field of vision and little depth of focus.

This can be useful for photographing architectural features, for example. A long lens has the effect of flattening perspective, so that near and far objects appear close together and of similar same size. Buildings and structures appear as flat, abstract shapes, even if they are in front of each other. This can produce interesting images that emphasise patterns and shapes.

The longer the lens, the more risk there is of camera-shake, particularly in poor light (when you will need a relatively long exposure). You can remedy this by using a tripod or resting the camera on something.

Converging verticals

If you photograph a building with the camera tilted upwards, the verticals will converge: the vertical sides of buildings and structures will appear to lean inwards.

Experiment to find out when that produces a good effect, and when it just makes the photo look poorly composed. Sometimes if you are pointing the camera quite steeply up, it can create a dramatic effect. On the other hand, the photo may look messy if the verticals are converging just a little.

Verticals will appear parallel if the back of your camera is parallel with the building. On flat ground you can usually achieve this by pointing the centre of the viewfinder at something that is at roughly the same height as the camera, such as the top of a door at the other side of the street. You may have to move further away from the building to fit the top if it within the frame. This may result in a photo with a lot of foreground (usually road surface) that you are not interested in, and that does not contribute to the photo's interest. No problem: you can crop this out later. If your verticals do converge, you can correct them later (if the convergence is not too severe) using software such as

Photoshop or GIMP.

For professional architectural photography verticals must be exactly parallel. Photographers achieve this by using a rising-front or tilt shift lens. These are very expensive and you are unlikely to need one.

Depth of focus

With an adjustable camera you can choose what the focus on: what element in the picture will be most sharply in focus. With a long lens and in poor light this will be particularly important: some of the view will be in focus and some will not be. With a wide-angle lens in good light this will be less important: probably all of the view will be sharply in focus anyway.

Another matter to consider is the depth of focus: how much of the view is in focus. Usually you will want as much of the view to be in focus as possible. But sometimes you will want to have one part of the view in focus, and therefore attracting the viewer's attention, and the rest out of focus, providing the context for the sharply focused part but not asking to be scrutinised. The effect is rather like human vision, where the object we are looking at directly is in sharp focus and the rest of the field of vision is less distinct. To achieve shallow focus, set the camera's aperture priority mode to make it use a wide setting. It will then adjust the shutter speed as the available light demands.

Daylight

Strong sunshine will cast deep shadows.

If you want to capture all the detail of an urban scene, photograph when the sky is overcast, or wait for the sun to go behind a cloud. On the other hand, sunshine will make the place look more attractive, and it will be easier to get everything in sharp focus and digitally at high resolution.

Flash

Flash is of only limited use in urban photography. It can be used to highlight something fairly close to you, but the light of the flash will not be strong enough to illuminate anything further away.

3. Urban photography: Ideas and references

Photographers and ideas: extracts from The Dictionary of Urbanism

- Annan, Thomas (1829–87) Photographer. He documented the slums of Glasgow in the 1860s and 70s.
- Atget, Eugène (1856–1927) Photographer. He is remembered for his photographs of Paris.
- Barnard, George (1819–1902) Photographer. He recorded the devastation of cities in the American Civil War.
- Brassaï (pseudonym of Gyula Halász) (1899-1984) Photographer of Paris in the years after 1932. His favourite subjects included graffiti. Brassaï was a pseudonym taken from his home town of Brassó in Hungary.
- Creeping Exploring forbidden urban structures such as disused buildings, storm drains or catacombs. Practitioners claim to 'take only photographs and leave behind only footprints'. Also known as urban exploration, a term said to have been coined by the US pioneer called Ninjalicious.
- Hardman, Edward Chambré (1898– 1988) A portrait and landscape photographer, he chronicled Liverpool. One of his best-known photographs was his 1950 'Birth of the Ark Royal', in which the giant aircraft carrier in a forest of cranes looms over a street of terraced houses.
- Henderson, Nigel (1917–85) Photographer. His work included many evocative images of the street life of East London, where he lived from 1945 to 1953.
- Konttinen, Sirkka-Liisa (b1948) Finnish-born photographer. From 1969-81 she lived in the old Byker area of Newcastle, documenting life there in photographs and taped conversations. During that time the terraced streets were demolished and replaced by the Byker Estate.
- Magazine architecture Designed primarily to look good in photographs in glossy magazines, rather than to meet the needs of its users (Brand, 1994).
- Marzaroli, Oscar (1933–88) Photographer. His black and white photographs of Glasgow document the transformations being wrought upon the city by postwar developments, especially the clearance of large areas of working class tenements and their replacement by high-rise blocks of flats.
- Photomontage An image or images super-imposed on to a photograph to show the visual effect of a proposed development or other change.
- Public realm The parts of a village, town or city (whether publicly or privately owned) that are available, without charge, for everyone to see, use and enjoy, including streets, squares and parks; all land to which everyone has ready, free and legal access 24 hours a day. There are many alternative ways of classifying what is or is not public realm, and assessing its quality. Criteria include whether or when people are charged for being there; whether it is publicly or privately owned; whether there are restrictions on when or how it is used (whether photography is allowed or whether people are welcome who are not engaged in the space's primary function, for example, such as in the case

of shopping malls or exclusive housing developments); and whether it is privately or publicly managed. In many shopping malls photography is banned, for reasons few people understand. The shopping malls themselves, though, photograph the people who come to them (Bluewater shopping centre in Kent, for example, has 400 CCTV cameras).

- Riis, Jacob (1849-1914) Social reformer, campaigning journalist and photographer. He emigrated to the USA from Denmark in 1870. His 1890 book How The Other Half Lives was effective in drawing attention to appalling housing conditions in New York City.
- Ruin porn (pejorative) The depiction of ruined and abandoned buildings, structures and areas for the pleasure or excitement of viewing them. John Patrick Leary (2011), a resident of Detroit, which has suffered more ruin porn than any other city, describes what he sees as its defects. He writes: 'So much ruin photography and ruin film aestheticizes poverty without inquiring of its origins, dramatizes spaces but never seeks out the people that inhabit and transform them, and romanticizes isolated acts of resistance without acknowledging the massive political and social forces aligned against the real transformation, and not just stubborn survival, of the city.'
- Sampling Collecting examples (of building materials or photographs of buildings or places, for example) to help discussion of design options.
- Snap and say A community consultation event in which local people take photographs of a place and express their opinions about it.
- Stollerised Recorded in a photograph Urban Skills Portal by the architectural photographer Ezra Stoller (1915-2004). Modernist architects were keen to have their buildings 'Stollerised' as the photographs, often widely published, showed the buildings at their best (and often made them look a great deal better that they were in reality).
- Vergara, Camilo Chilean-born writer and photographer. His New American Ghetto Archive chronicles the process of urban decay in the ghettos of New York, Chicago, Detroit and New Jersey (Davis, 2002).
- Visualisation A representation (such as a drawing, photomontage or computer simulation) of a proposed development or other change.
- Worktown The study of the everyday lives of Britons, carried out by Tom Harrisson's organisation Mass-Observation in the 1930s and illustrated by photographs by Humphrey Jennings. Worktown was Bolton, Lancashire.
- Worm's-eye view The view from absolute ground level. The term was coined by Hubert de Cronin Hastings around 1932 in a caption to a photograph in the Architectural Review.
- Zoomscape Buildings and cities seen from moving vehicles or as portrayed in photographs, film or on television. The term is used by Mitchell Schwarzer (2004), who argues that since the advent of rail, car and air travel and the development of photography, people have become familiar with more and more buildings, but increasingly superficially.

4. Urban film and video

Film and video are increasingly used by students of the built environment and professionals:

- In recording places and buildings.
- In appraisal and analysis, showing a place's strengths and weaknesses.
- Illustrating the design process and telling the story of how the design was developed as a response to its context.
- Keeping a record of a large amount of information about a place and its people for analysis later.
- In consultation, showing people the place where they live or have an interest in, and allowing them to portray the place, and illustrate its strengths and weaknesses.
- In children (or others) being recorded interviewing local decision-makers.
- Using archives to show a place as it used to be, triggering thoughts about what is valued, and what people want to change or reinstate.
- In promoting potential developments, to attract potential investors or developers, or later to attract potential buyers or tenants.

Keeping a record

Film or video can be a good way of recording a large amount of information about a place and its people for analysis later. The film or video can record in detail the state of buildings and streets, and interviews with people who have a stake in the area. This information can be analysed later to extract the most important details, or to incorporate some of the footage in film or video reports.

Consultation

Film and video is often used in consultations. They can be an effective means of communication, showing people the place where they live or have an interest in, and allowing them to portray the place and illustrate its strengths and weaknesses. Filmed interviews (cut with filmed images of the place) can record residents' views about the place and how they would like to see it changed.

Changing minds

Children (and others) can be recorded interviewing local decision-makers.

Impressive results have been achieved when challenging questions have been asked, which the decision-makers seem particularly reluctant to evade when the interviewer is a child. It can also be illuminating to learn about the very different perspectives that children often have.

Promotion

Film and video are used widely in promoting potential developments, either at an early stage, perhaps to attract potential investors or developers, or at a later stage, to attract potential buyers or tenants. Some such films and videos can be highly misleading, giving an erroneous impression of what the place will be like through the use of computer-generated images or other technical means. But all means of communication can be misleading: it is just that it can be more noticeable with film and video as they are such effective and seductive media.

As with any medium, we need to use our integrity and communicate a message that is as far as possible true.

Editing

You can edit your video on your computer using free editing software such as

Microsoft's Movie Maker for a PC or Apple's iMovie for a Mac. This involves selecting still images and video files, and putting them on to the timeline in the order that best tells your story and conveys your messages. It will probably be best to use a 16:9 ratio widescreen format. You can add on-screen text, graphics and music as necessary. Usually it will be best to keep the video or film fairly simple, resisting the temptation to confuse matters by using a large variety of special effects. You can upload the video on to a video-sharing site such as YouTube .

Archives

Local residents can be encouraged to look out old film images recorded digitally or in some other retrievable form.

These can show the place as it used to be, triggering thoughts about what is valued, and what people want to change or reinstate. Archive footage of familiar places, or of similar places, can inspire thoughts about how the place could be: a street where children could play safely, for example.

Bringing history to life

Towns and cities have been filmed since the end of the nineteenth century.

Students of the built environment and professionals can use this coverage of places with which they may or may not be familiar to reflect on the place's past, present and future development.

Films create an invaluable record of cities. Some of Alfred Hitchcock's films, for example, show what parts of London were like as early as the 1930s. His 1972 thriller 'Frenzy' is set against the background of Covent Garden, which was then still London's wholesale fruit and vegetable market.

The impression given in a film may not be accurate, though. The 1955 black comedy 'The Ladykillers', directed by Alexander Mackendrick, includes what are now valuable records of the streets of London's Kings Cross area, but the front and back of the house that is the centre of the action, though they are both at real locations, are several miles apart.

Car journeys in well-known cities are particularly notable in this regard: many a film includes a journey around a city that passes famous landmarks, but rarely in any logical order than would add up to a sensible route from one place to another.

Such instances are evidence that the filmmakers have in mind an audience that is unfamiliar with the location, or possibly disoriented by the speed of the action.

Film archives provide rare insights into places and the lives of their people. In 2005, for example, 800 reels of film found in milk urns in Blackburn, Lancashire, turned out to be the archive of the prefirst world war film-makers Mitchell and Kenyon. The archive included large numbers of short 'actuality films' (footage of real urban life, without commentary) of northern cities. They provide valuable and fascinating information about streets, buildings, transport, how people used streets and how they dressed, among much else.

Documentaries

Documentary films try to document the real world. One of the most watched was 'An Inconvenient Truth', made in 2006.

Directed by Davis Guggenheim and presented by former US vice-president Al Gore, it attempted to educate viewers about global warming. The film was adapted from Gore's frequently shown slide presentation.

Structuring an urban film or video In making a film or video, you first need to decide what it is for. Consider:

- Who is the potential audience?
- How do you want to inform them?
- What response or emotions do you want to provoke from them?
- What is the role of the film or video in the planning or design process?
- What is your budget?

Decide whether the film or video is intended to have a role in one of these aspects (discussed in the paragraphs above):

- Showing the past
- Keeping a record
- Consultation
- Changing minds
- Promotion

Think about what images (moving or still) would best convey your message. Here are some of the categories to consider:

Buildings

- Individual buildings and spaces
- Details of buildings and spaces

Places

- Street scenes
- Parks
- Other public spaces

People

- People using streets and spaces
- Individual people
- People being interviewed
- People walking and talking to each other
- People making short statements to camera
- A narrator speaking to camera

Other images

- Maps and plans
- Computer-generated images
- Computer-generated fl y-through
- Images from Google Earth and Google Streetview (if for a use that does not require copyright)

Think about whether the footage you are filming might be used for other purposes in addition to the film or video you are currently making.

Keep it simple.

You may be showing a complex situation involving complicated process of planning, design and development. Concentrate on telling a simple story. Use language that will make the film or video accessible to the widest possible audience.

Technical

For guidance of technical aspects of making films and videos, see the many tutorials on YouTube and other videosharing websites.

References

Consider whether you need to tell viewers:

- Who you are
- The purpose of the film or video
- How they can find out more about you, or about the subject of the film or video

Places:

(Note: this guidance applies to the UK)

Public places

If you are on a public right of way (such as a public pavement, footpath or public highway) you are free to film for personal or commercial use so long as you do not cause an obstruction to other users.

Property owners do not have the right to stop people filming their buildings, so long as the camera is in a public place, such as on the pavement.

Private land

If you are on private land (which might include some places such as piazzas or malls that in many ways feel as though they are part of the public realm), the landowner or occupier may have a right to forbid you from filming.

People:

You do not need to ask passers-by for permission to show their faces in a film, unless you intend to use the footage for commercial purposes.

Dodgy folk

Be careful if you might be filming people who might be breaking the law, or of their houses. You might be filming the building for its distinctive architecture or its evocative decay, but its occupants might think you are snooping on them on behalf of the authorities. Similarly your footage of a lively urban scene might be seen by some of the people in it as an unwelcome record of a drug deal. Filming in such circumstances could put you in danger.

4.1 Films inspired by towns and cities

Creative people are inspired by towns and cities. Some decide to become planners and urban designers. Some make films. Some may become planners and urban designers and also make films. After all, successful planning and urban design depends on communication, and there is no more effective way of communicating than through vision and movement: through film. Many filmmakers are fascinated by the idea of dystopias – places so bad that extreme things happen there. In some films these places are fairly ordinary suburbs, but people who feel that they are trapped there (by social pressures perhaps) try to escape, sometimes leading to disaster. Such extremes of urban life are portrayed in a wide range of films.

- In 'Metropolis', a 1927 classic silent science fiction film, directed by Fritz Lang, presents a dystopian vision of the twenty-first century. The ruling elite lives in a futuristic city, beneath which an enslaved underclass toils in an underground realm of giant machines, of which the workers seem to have become almost a part.
- 'Things to Come', a film adaptation of the book by HG Wells, released in 1936, tells of a war that destroys Everytown (based on London) in 1940. In the 1936 film 'Things To Come', directed by Alexander Korda, the centre of the fictional city of Everytown is destroyed by bombs.
- In Frank Capra's 1946 film 'It's a Wonderful Life' an idyllic, small town is taken over by a slum landlord, who is eventually foiled by the hero, whose thwarted ambition had been to plan cities. The 1948 film 'Berlin Express', directed by Jacques Tourneur, was shot on location in war-ruined European cities.
- Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 film 'Alphaville' depicts the Paris of a dystopian future, populated by automatons controlled by a supercomputer.
- 'The Prisoner', a cult television series set in Portmeirion, North Wales, filmed in 1966–1967, portrays a repressive, self-contained village from which no one can escape. One villager repeatedly tries to escape. The others seem to accept with docility their lack of liberty, which has been destroyed by technology. In
- 'Playtime', a 1967 film comedy directed by and starring Jacques Tati, Monsieur Hulot (Tati) and a group of American tourists attempt to find their way round a colourless, alienating modernist Paris.
- In 'Zabriskie Point', a film directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, released in 1970, the grim face of urban dysfunction in Los Angeles is presented as a metaphor for the exploitative capitalist consumer society that the protagonists rebel against.
- The 1971 film A Clockwork Orange, directed by Stanley Kubrick, depicts a violent, dystopian future Britain.
- 'Soylent Green', a 1973 film directed by Richard Fleischer, a future Los Angeles is desperately overcrowded and short of food. Aged citizens are encouraged to die to reduce overcrowding, and their bodies are processed to provide a rich source of protein (Soylent Green) for the rest of the population.
- The classic film 'The Stepford Wives' (made in 1975, directed by Bryan Forbes, and remade in 2004, directed by Frank Oz), is set in a town that seems the ideal of the American dream: well-manicured, peaceful, prosperous and happy. It turns out that Stepford's men have had their wives turned into automatons with no purpose but to gratify their husbands. 'Assault on Precinct 13', directed by John Carpenter in 1976 and remade in 2005, exploits its setting of

gang-ridden urban wastelands of east Los Angeles.

- Ridley Scott's 1982 film 'Blade Runner' presents a dystopian future set in Los Angeles, with crumbling nineteenth-century buildings and unremitting urban squalor at ground level, and modernistic ziggurats above. The 1995 Japanese film 'Tokyo Fist', directed by Shinya Tsukamoto, shows a city whose population has been degraded by their inhuman surroundings.
- 'Trainspotting', a 1996 film directed by Danny Boyle, based on a novel by Irvine Welsh, is set against a background of urban squalor and drug abuse in the author's home city of Edinburgh.
- In 'Independence Day', directed by Roland Emmerich and released in 1996, gigantic alien spacecraft hover over major cities before destroying them – until the American good guys find the aliens' weakness and annihilate them.
- 'Escape from New York', directed by John Carpenter and released in 1981, is, set in a derelict Manhattan of the near future (1997), controlled by a criminal underclass.
- The film 'The Truman Show, directed by Peter Weir and released in 1998, is set a fictional idyllic island community of Seahaven Island, for which the location was the new urbanist community of Seaside in Florida. Truman Burbank is the star of the world's most popular soap opera, broadcast 24 hours a day, and he has been ever since he was born. He is oblivious of that fact, unlike everyone else who appears in the programme, who are all actors. Seahaven Island is a vast film set, covered by a dome, and even the weather is artificial.
- In the 1998 film 'Pleasantville', directed by Gary Ross, two 1990s teenagers get trapped in a black-and-white 1950s soap opera called 'Pleasantville', featuring a small-minded American community where a woman's place is in the kitchen. The newcomers have a dramatic influence on the people of Pleasantville.
- 'American Beauty', directed by Sam Mendes and released in 1999, depicts the residents of suburbia living a lie and failing to escape to a new life.
- 'Get Carter', a celebrated British gangster film directed by Mike Hodges and released in 1971, was made on location in Gateshead and Newcastle and is memorable for its evocation of urban Tyneside. The Get Carter Appreciation Society still visits its gritty urban locations and stages word-for-word re-enactments of the film. The society protested when in 2000 a multi-storey car park, one of the film's notable locations, was threatened with demolition (it was finally demolished in 2010).
- 'Twenty-eight Days Later', a film directed by Danny Boyle and made in 2002, is set in an abandoned city whose population has been devasted by a virus. It was filmed in London in the early mornings.
- 'Equilibrium', directed by Kurt Wimmer and released in 2003, is set in the totalitarian, walled state of Libria, a superpower born in the aftermath of a nuclear war. The architecture is bare and austere, and all forms of art have been prohibited, though a rebel group has preserved some works of art underground. The film was shot in Berlin, where Wimmer found a suitable range of uncompromising settings, provided by buildings ranging from those of the Nazis to examples of modernism.
- In the 2003 film 'City by the Sea', directed by Michael Caton-Jones, seaside ruins at Long Beach, Long Island, provide a metaphorical backdrop to derelict lives.
- The 2008 film 'Revolutionary Road' tells the story a Connecticut couple with two children who decide to escape from suburbia by moving to Paris, and fail tragically.

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