



Cinematic city of cultural coexistence? Perspectives on intercultural encounters in New York

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Abstract The paper examines how U.S.-American movies stage and convey intercultural encounters. Drawing from the case study of cinematic New York City, it tackles intercultural encounters and spaces emerging from interactions of protagonists that are staged as being ‘culturally different’. Theoretical ideas on urban encounters, interculturality, and boundaries are intertwined. A comparative analysis 17 movies reveals three key dimensions of intercultural spaces: boundary drawing, boundary crossing, and boundary commuting. As polysemous staging strategies these provide insight into how movies display everyday intercultural encounters in an urban context. The paper concludes that New York City is imagined as a place in which intercultural encounters are consciously reflected as cultural coexistence—the cinematic city serves as canvas for a culturally separated society. This finding disenchants the medially widespread urban myth of New York City being a harmonious intercultural metropolis.

Keywords Cinematic geography · Encounter · Intercultural film · Cultural differences · Cross-cultural boundary · New York City

Intercultural encounters and the cinematic city

Interculturality, difference and diversity are a distinctive characteristic of cities. The topos of cities as “locations of difference” (Georgiou, 2008, p. 229) manifests itself particularly clearly in global cities, which are characterized by cosmopolitan qualities and a vivid intercultural diversity. A city for which this is particularly applicable is New York City—“possibly the most diverse city (...) in the world” (Clayman & Lee, 2010, p. 8). This statement serves as a popular image of New York—a city that stands out as a harmonious intercultural place. The mythically charged topos of New York as a harmonious intercultural metropolis is taken up and processed in the media—in pop-culture books, on digital platforms, through tourism offerings, and especially in television series and movies. With their highly complex audiovisual images, feature films contribute to geographical ideas and perceptions: “Films (...) often evoke a sense of place—a feeling that we the (...) viewer know what it is like to ‘be there’” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 14). Movies do not simply function as images or mere reflections of everyday life. Rather, they perpetuate, constitute and reconstruct social and everyday realities (Escher, 2006; Sharp & Lukinbeal, 2015; Sommerlad, 2021a). Cinematic imaginations generate reality and develop meanings, making them accessible for everyday discourses. Furthermore, they correlate with phenomena of everyday life, they shape our perceptions and actions and thereby contribute to the construction of world views.

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The study of cinematic cities has become a prominent field of study in film geography (e.g. Clarke, 1997; Lukinbeal & Sharp, 2019; Sommerlad, 2019). Geographical examinations of cinematic representations of cities, however, often focus on the locations and places displayed and the spatial meanings they are assigned. The depicted characters who are essential to the overall fabric of the cinematic city are often omitted. Thereby this dimension is of particular relevance—for movies create social identities and convey images of social realities (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 179). Numerous studies explore how movies stage different cultural, ethnic, and racial groups (Benschhoff and Griffin, 2009; Budd, 2002; Ginneken, 2007; Clapp, 2013). While intercultural questions in media contexts have been challenged for some time on an interdisciplinary level, a decided decoding of cinematically staged intercultural motifs is often named a desideratum (Jacobson, 2017). The paper takes up this concern and addresses how movies stage and convey intercultural encounters in the context of the cinematic city of New York.¹ Attention is drawn in particular to recurring narrative strategies.

Theoretical framework: Intercultural encounters

Cities are places of interculturality, where people from various cultural backgrounds meet in the context of everyday encounters. A theoretical basis for this preliminary assumption is found in the research field of *geographies of encounter* (e.g. Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2010; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017) that emphasizes the relevance of spatial processes taking place in cities as “sites[s] of constitutive heterogeneity and encounter” (Wilson & Darling, 2016, p. 11). Cities are approached from a micro-perspective level and considered a spatial network of meaning that is constructed through interpersonal encounters. In the following, I argue for a theoretical framework that combines this perspective with concepts of interculturality, cultural difference, and boundaries. The perspective proposed in the following paragraph will be applied later to the subject of the cinematic city.

Initially it is assumed that intercultural encounters are interpersonal interaction contexts between people who pursue different everyday practices based

on varying cultural perspectives (Escher, 2018). In the context of these encounters, interactants might interpret different cultural elements as familiar or unfamiliar—for example, in terms of everyday practices, norms, expectations, or lifestyles. However, any cultural differences negotiated in these encounters do not exist per se, but are constructed interactively—for instance in relation to intersectional variables including ethnicity, race, gender, religion, origin, or nationality (cf. Eller, 2015; Hirschauer, 2014). Thereby, encounters situatively induce spaces of cultural in-between that serve as an arena where individuals perform cultural differentiations.

A crucial element in this complex process are cultural boundaries—understood as a processually constructed phenomenon that emerges in intercultural interactions as an arena of negotiation (Zimmermann & Escher, 2005). The reflections of literary scholar Jurij Lotman ([1970] 1993), who defines the boundary as a topological figure and a foremost spatial feature, are thereby of particular relevance. While in his earlier writings imagines the boundary as a linear, distinct borderline, he later conceptualizes it in terms of a *semiosphere* as contact or intermediate spaces between semantic subspaces:

Each semiosphere is characterized by its individuality and homogeneity, by its opposition to the exterior, and by irregularity in its internal structure. The border between the interior and the exterior (...) is maintained by the mutual strangeness of sign users, texts, and codes and is partially overcome through processes of translation (...). The exchange that takes place between interior and exterior (...) leads to the emergence of new codes, the production of new types of texts, and changes in the sign users which make them receptive to new meaning (Lotman [1984], 1990, p. 267).

Through translation processes, boundaries can thus be partially overcome. In this sense, a boundary becomes a “metaphor, which offers a spatial model for the interpretation of culture” (Nöth, 2014, p. 11).

In order for intercultural spaces to evolve, individuals need to first encounter and then interact with each other at a certain site. Such settings for intercultural interaction hold potential to be accessible for people of different cultural backgrounds and are thoroughly shaped by a multifaceted dynamism and tension resulting from the encounter of culturally heterogeneous action patterns. Subsequently,

¹ The paper is based on my dissertation on the topic of intercultural spaces in feature films, which has meanwhile been published as a book (Sommerlad 2021b).

this theoretical lens is applied to intercultural spaces staged on film, through a case study of New York City. Cinematic representations of the city have repeatedly spotlighted intercultural encounters, thus providing a rich framework for this study.

Film selection and methodical approach

The analysis focuses on key sequences from 17 U.S. Independent films (1987–2015) set in New York City (Table 1). Contemporary U.S. Independent films were chosen for analysis because they are understood as *seismographs of social tensions* (Sudmann, 2018, p. 2), or “cultural arenas where, through representational discourses, a number of concepts and strategies for multicultural existence are experimented with and experienced” (Pribram, 2002, p. 81).

Key sequences were examined with regard to central construction elements of intercultural encounters. (1) Places of action and protagonists, (2) film techniques and stylistic devices, (3) interaction events and attributions of meaning.

Table 1 Overview of movie selection (IMDb.com 2020)

Title	Year	Director
China Girl	1987	Abel Ferrara
Do the Right Thing	1989	Spike Lee
Night on Earth	1991	Jim Jarmusch
Kyoko	1996	Ryū Murakami
Brooklyn Babylon	2001	Marc Levin
Pieces of April	2003	Peter Hedges
David and Layla	2005	J.J. Alani (Jay Jonroy)
The Namesake	2006	Mira Nair
Arranged	2007	Diane Crespo, Stefan C. Schaefer
The Visitor	2007	Tom McCarthy
New York, I Love You	2008	different directors (anthology film)
Today's Special	2009	David Kaplan
My Last Day without You	2011	Stefan C. Schaefer
2 Days in New York	2012	Julie Delpy
Fading Gigolo	2013	John Turturro
Learning to Drive	2104	Isabel Coixet
Brooklyn	2015	John Crowley

Setting the scene for intercultural encounters

Intercultural encounters are staged at a variety of settings. The analyzed sequences show that respective cinematic places of action are highly charged with cultural symbols—through set design, often simplified and flashy, stereotypical audiovisual markings and verbal attributions. At the same time, they are often ascribed to a specific protagonist with a ‘corresponding’ cultural identity. Very often, the references are national and ethnic categories. Places of action have a reciprocal relationship with a certain protagonist, which communicatively expresses and attributes cultural meanings to the place. Such attributions can stimulate specific patterns of action—thus, places of action are charged with certain plot potential.

For example, in *Arranged*, the furniture of the Khaldi family’s house refers to their ascribed Syrian origin. When Nasira introduces the place to her friend Rochel, a haredi woman, she explains that most of the objects come from “all over the Middle East” (#00:45:32). Nasira’s mother charges the place with additional meaning by referring to the family’s religious identity as she is sitting in the entrance hall, reading the Koran. Similar elements can be found in any other sequence—whether they are in private apartments or the public sphere. Thus, entire streets can be charged with audio-visual features such as decorative elements, music, or background sounds (e.g. ethnic neighborhood streets in *China Girl*). The same applies to gastronomic venues, educational institutions, or social and religious institutions (e.g. Irish community center in *Brooklyn*).

Attributions like these don’t yet transform the place into an intercultural space. The setting only acquires an intercultural potential when an additional actor is placed there, who is attributed with a different cultural background on the cinematic level. The added protagonist challenges cultural semantics and place-specific rules and, if applicable, territorial claims to power. It is through their presence that an unstable communication situation develops, providing a basis for the unfolding of intercultural spaces.

Cinematic staging of intercultural encounters: drawing, crossing, and commuting cultural boundaries

Crucial elements are important for the cinematic staging of intercultural encounters including the protagonist(s), the location/setting, and the stylistic devices that are used in the context of an encounter scenario. Their complex interplay derives from recurring ways of the cinematic staging of intercultural encounters. In the following, three staging strategies are explored. The motif of the boundary is an inherent characteristic of these. As the analysis shows, boundaries are constantly explored, drawn and crossed through differentiating communication processes. On the grounds of a comparative sequence analysis, three dimensions of intercultural spaces can be highlighted across films: (1) restrictive boundary drawing, (2) impossible boundary crossing, and (3) enabling boundary commuting. These staging strategies overlap in the context of the narrative. In their simultaneously interplay, they generate the cinematically staged image of New York City in which encountering people engender the phenomenon of interculturality.

Restrictive boundary drawing: “I don’t shake hands—it is not allowed”

Processes of differentiation and delineation between the interacting protagonists are essential features of intercultural encounters. This can be particularly well observed in situations that emphasize corresponding processes of distinction, explicitly highlight the boundary within the interaction context. Such situations result in contexts described herein as *intercultural spaces of restrictive boundary drawing*: Within interactions, cultural differences are explicitly pointed out and articulated as limitations of interaction—differentiating boundaries are drawn. Boundaries can be communicated materially, symbolically or verbally.

This happens frequently when protagonists refer to their values by pointing out the limits of their actions. A vivid example of this is taxi driver Darwan in *Learning to Drive*. In his interactions with his student driver Wendy, he repeatedly refers to his beliefs and values as Sikh—his *Sikh Way of Life*. This differs very much from Wendy’s lifestyle and continually interrupts their interaction. This circumstance can be seen in very small details like the fact that Darwan

cannot accept a tip from Wendy (“I don’t want your money, I like to help”, #00:13:17; “I cannot take your money. That is not how I am”, #00:45:20), or when he puts the well-being of his student driver before his own (“We are doing everything for our guests before thinking about ourselves. That is the Sikh Way”, #00:49:11). Boundaries are drawn here as only vague verbal references to contradictory values and norms, which confine intercultural interaction only fuzzily.

Cultural boundaries are drawn more clearly when it becomes obvious that at least one person is not able to perform certain actions due to cultural constraints. This is vividly demonstrated through highlighting normative dietary rules as in the film *Arranged*. The Jewish ultra-Orthodox Rochel repeatedly refuses the offer to eat and drink because she fears a conflict with her kosher dietary laws. The Rabbi’s widow Avigal in *Fading Gigolo* similarly refuses hospitality while referring to her strict dietary laws. Dietary laws are not always religious as in *Pieces of April* where other cultural influences play the driving role in the differentiation process. Looking for a working oven to cook her Thanksgiving meal (a turkey), April asks her neighbor Tish if she can use hers. Tish rejects her at the apartment door. As a vegan she would not tolerate anything being prepared in her kitchen, that “once (was) a living, breathing soul” (#00:32:40). Her ideologically charged standpoint, which is here interpreted as a cultural constraint, becomes visible in the design of the setting: Her door is decorated with stickers of NGOs like the World Wide Fund for Nature as well as, among others, the Green Party of the United States, illustrating her political stance and her life philosophy.

Daily habits and behavior rules can limit intercultural interaction. Broszinsky-Schwabe (2017, p. 153) argues that there are diverse, culturally varying forms of contact, as well as conventions about who may touch whom under which circumstances. In this regard, movies negotiate manners as behavioral norms—as particular components of (non- verbal) communication. This strategy can be observed particularly well in the context of welcoming situations and the demonstration of etiquette rules, as for example the first encounter between Avigal and Fioravante (*Fading Gigolo*) illustrates. Even before Fioravante can welcome his visitor, Avigal makes a clear rule: “I don’t shake hands—it is not allowed” (#00:34:50). Rochel in *Arranged* and Rifka in *New York, I Love*

You show similarities in their behavioral patterns towards their (mostly male) interaction partners. In *2 Days in New York* there is a need for Jeannot, who just flew in from France, to explain his greeting practices to Mingus: “En Bretagne, trois fois” (#00:07:15). Yet, his future son-in-law is taken by surprise by being enthusiastically kissed on the cheek three times—a practice Jeannot declares as being typical for people originating from the Brittany in France, like himself.

Irrespective of the way in which cultural boundaries are cinematically communicated—these examples have in common that restrictions on action are highlighted, negotiated and thus reified as cultural boundaries, limiting the scope for action but also preventing the protagonists from crossing cultural boundaries in a conflictual manner.

Impossible boundary crossing: “That’s a dividing line right here!”

If these symbolically or communicatively cultural boundaries that are not respected, *intercultural spaces of impossible boundary crossing* emerge. In *The Namesake*, Nikhil Ganguli explains to his girlfriend Maxine that she has to follow some rules of conduct when introducing herself to his Bengali-born parents: “No kissing, no holding hands—my parents are not Lydia and Gerald. I’ve never seen them touch” (#00:56:51). As the sequence continues, the motif of social boundary crossing is illustrated: Maxine hugs and kisses his parents during her self-introduction. She also does not refrain from tender physical contact with her boyfriend during her stay at the Gangulis house. She ignores the rules of conduct that have been communicated to her and thus repeatedly exceeds communicative boundaries. Her actions result in irritating moments between all four protagonists and ultimately contribute to the break-up of the relationship between her and Nikhil. Similar social transgressions can be identified in other sequences. For example, when Rochel Meshenberg (*Arranged*), who is introduced to Matthew at a party, is offered alcohol and drugs, she escapes from the event.

Furthermore, boundary crossings are sometimes staged much more subtly—that is, when the restrictions are less clearly articulated: In *Arranged*, a family friend joins the Khaldi family for dinner. While Nasira and her parents eat their food with cutlery, the friend consumes it manually—a usual practice in

some Arab countries. Nasira finds this eating technique unbearable. At least the camera’s gaze suggests such a reading, which conveys that these, strange to her, table manners are forcing her to leave the table: She repeatedly gazes with a disgusted facial expression towards the guest, whose greasy hands covered in food particles are prominently captured by the camera. She hastily leaves the table and escapes to the bathroom.

Another motif is the staged crossing of physical or topographical boundaries. Movies often illustrate ethnic neighborhoods in NYC, which are divided from each other by specific streets. One such example is *Canal Street (China Girl)*, which is drawn as a non-negotiable demarcation line between China Town and Little Italy. An overstepping causes battles between ethnic gangs and finally the violent death of the main protagonists.

In other movies, such deliberate violations of cultural boundaries are resulting in physical collisions, such as car accidents (e.g. *Fading Gigolo, Brooklyn Babylon*). In the actual staging, two cars, which are driven by members of different ethnic communities, cross red traffic lights at an intersection. Their cars collide, sparks fly. This symbolically equates to territorial, albeit not directly visible, border crossing: “You shouldn’t even be on this side, man. That’s a dividing line right here! (...) You know the rules! You stay on your fuckin’ side, we stay on our side” (Scratch in *Brooklyn Babylon*, #00:13:00). In *Do the Right Thing*, protagonists collide when crossing topographically defined community boundaries—for example, when yuppie Clifton crashes his bicycle into Buggin’ Out. The latter clearly assigns himself a dominant position over *his* neighborhood: “Who told you to step on my sneakers? Who told you to walk on my side of the block? (...) Who told you to buy a brownstone on my block, in my neighborhood, on my side of the street?” (#00:33:50).

A further sequence from *Do the Right Thing* is additionally suitable for demonstrating another strategy of boundary crossing in the context of *Urban Turf*-narratives: the attempted re-coding of ethnically defined places. There are several settings that are coded as ‘ethnic places’ by means of symbolic-metaphorical labelling and in some episodes, are challenged: For instance, Radio Raheem flags ‘his hood’ with loud music (*Fight the Power* by Public Enemy) that resounds from a ghetto blaster. Stevie, a young

Puerto Rican, challenges him to a music-battle with Latin American salsa music. In doing so, he is obviously pursuing the goal of shifting previously established power relations towards his own community.

Enabling boundary commuting: “Ashima means without borders, limitless”

A third staging strategy appears in situations in which individual agents move back and forth between two semiotic zones as boundary-commuters—enabling a short-term intercultural cohabitation. These *intercultural spaces of enabling boundary commuting* serve as a counter-model to the intercultural spaces described above. In their context, cultural boundaries are staged as flexible boundary zones that can be temporarily overcome by specific protagonists. As in the previous staging strategies, such cultural transgressions are expressed in different ways.

First, individual adaptation strategies can be accomplished, for example, by adjusting the outer appearance, as an exemplary sequence from *Arranged* shows: In order to help her friend Rochel to find a partner, Nasira visits wedding broker Miriam at her house. Conscious of not being particularly welcome as a Muslim woman in the isolated Jewish ultra-orthodox community, she knots her veil differently—looking more like a *tichel* instead of a *hijāb*. The *Shadchen* subsequently identifies Nasira as part of her own community.

The acquisition of a new cultural technique also describes a partial overcoming of cultural boundaries. Before visiting her boyfriend Tony’s family that he himself describes as being *typically Italian*, Irish-born Eilis (*Brooklyn*) first takes lessons in the practice of eating spaghetti ‘correctly’, much to the delight of Tony’s parents. Eilis manages to thereby break the ice and is immediately accepted into the family.

The bridging of cultural differences becomes less striking when protagonists interpret presumed elements of difference not as dividing but unifying elements—integrating them as mutually connectable aspects into their interaction. In *David and Layla*, the two main protagonists are having a relationship against the will of their families. Layla’s austere Muslim uncle and David’s Jewish father strictly disapprove of their liaison. It is only near the end of the story that they manage to put their religious dissonances aside. They approve of the young people’s

marriage by stating: “Why can’t we focus on what unites us” (#01:29:11). At the wedding ceremony both Kurdish and Jewish traditions are then intertwined. The preceding examples demonstrate that intercultural boundary commuting is associated with individuals who act as cultural intermediaries. While some characters remain immobile in the context of intercultural interactions, such agents have the capacity to transcend from one subspace to another, enabled to cross semiotic boundaries. In doing so, they stretch out a threshold—an intercultural space in which they can move freely between both worlds.

Certain movies emphasize this perspective in that personified intermediaries virtually embody cultural diversity, promoting characters who explicitly develop into transcultural figures. Ashima Ganguli (*The Namesake*) appears to have this quality already inscribed in her name: “Ashima means without borders, limitless” (#01:42:03). As the child of a Muslim mother and a Jewish father, the son of David and Layla in the eponymous movie is capable of navigating between cultural spheres, as the film’s closing sequence implies: The boy at Seder evening confidently quotes the traditional Jewish song *Chad Gadya* in one moment, only to dance to a Kurdish traditional song in the living room with his parents the next. To underline his religious hybridity, he symbolically wears a kippah at the beginning of the sequence, which is then exchanged by his mother for a taqiyah. He seems to move effortlessly between the two religious’ affiliations of his parents, transforming the family home into a trans-religious place.

The imagination of creating transcultural spaces is carried further in movies that communicate illusions of cultural diversity on a more metaphorical level. An illustrative example is the relationship between Mansukhbhai and Rifka (*New York, I Love You*). They encounter each other as traders in the back room of a diamond-selling business. However, their conversation drifts away from a professional to a truly personal layer. Mansukhbhai tells the story of his wife, who lives as a nun in a Jain monastery in India. He shows Rifka a photo of his wife who has her head shaved. Rifka reveals to him that she, being a Jewish ultra-orthodox female about to get married, also had her head shaved and is wearing a wig. Mansukhbhai states: “For all I know, you could be wearing my wife’s hair now” (#00:12:23) as large number of wigs sold in the USA are made from the hair of Indian

women. Rifka takes off her wig and a brief moment of closeness occurs between them, culminating in an almost tender embrace. The circumstance that Rifka might be wearing the hair of a woman committed to Jainism forces the emergence of a space that completely dissolves cultural boundaries between them. This is further enhanced by a subsequent dream-like sequence: Thinking about their encounter, Rifka imagines Mansukhbhai as her husband. Rifka, in turn, is mirrored in a small diamond pendant hanging from the rearview mirror in Mansukhbhai's car—in an imaginative reflection, both appear as a couple, dressed in a traditional wedding outfit, being united across cultural differences for a short glimpse. This allegory is to be decoded as utopian fantasy that only persists in their dreamy thoughts.

Discussion

The analysis revealed several ways in which movies stage intercultural encounters. The elaborated intercultural spaces are polysemous spatial forms of meaning-making and the inscribed staging patterns emerge as multilayered phenomena. If one contrasts the exemplified staging strategies, it becomes apparent that the way the cinematic protagonists deal with moments of interculturality reveals itself in two ways: As *intercultural spaces of coexistence* and *intercultural spaces of togetherness*: If the interaction partners succeed in negotiating their viewpoints in such a way that categories of the *Own* and the *Other* dissolve as unambiguous categories, one can speak of an intercultural space of togetherness. In this case, it leads to a successful understanding between the two parties, new possibilities of action emerge and new visions of social coexistence might evolve. Otherwise, the interacting subjects solely interpret respective unknown actions according to already familiar conventions and codes, resulting in intercultural space of coexistence. The unknown remains unknown, resulting in misunderstandings or a complete lack of understanding. In movies, *intercultural togetherness* and *intercultural coexistence* form a continuum.

Three aspects are pivotal for the staging of intercultural encounters in movies: Firstly, cinematic staging of everyday encounters highlights that intercultural interactions are dominated by processes of cultural differentiation. In the context of these staged

processes, the protagonists negotiate and emphasize cultural differences mainly in relation to the intersecting categories of ethnicity, race and religion, very often in reference to essentializing or racializing markers. Closely related to this is, secondly, that intercultural encounter situations are dominated by mutual—both social and local—processes of dissociation and boundary crossing. A key figure is the cultural boundary, understood as an arena stretching out in communication between protagonists. If such culturally defined boundaries are not respected, they become fragile lines of conflict. The continual marking, crossing and balancing of borders results, thirdly, in intercultural encounters usually only being possible by means of *intercultural coexistence*. As exemplified, one can detect moments of *boundary drawing*, *boundary crossing*, and *boundary commuting* within the context of cinematically staged encounters. The analyzed sequences indicate that intercultural encounters usually *emphasizes* cultural differences. A transgression of those puts the fragile togetherness at risk. Intercultural togetherness is closely related to the willingness of single actors to adjust to a new cultural context, e.g. as a strategy to avoid conflict. Furthermore, through the use of film-aesthetic means, films generate metaphorical illusions of intercultural harmony. In their everyday interactions, the culturally different imagined protagonists distinguish themselves categorically from one another—deliberately or not. Any form of boundary crossing leads to exclusion processes. An intermediate state, in which the involved parties can really live out aspects of a social cultural diversity, rarely is depicted.

New York as cinematic city of cultural coexistence

The analyzed movies address the topos of New York City as a place in which people from heterogeneous cultural contexts engage with each other withing everyday encounters. Nevertheless, cultural differences don't disappear in an assimilatory manner, nor does a harmonious intercultural interaction take place. Rather, the encountering individuals emphasize seemingly cultural differences as meaningful elements. Most of the protagonists remain in an isolated coexistence—resurrecting the metaphor of the so-called *cultural mosaic* (cf. Foner, 2007). These differences have a socially differentiating effect, since

they exclude, enclose, isolate, and ultimately prevent almost any harmonious intercultural communication. Movies thereby (re)construct a *geography of difference*, as Goldschmidt (2006, p. 76f) describes for everyday New York City. He points out that the city would be a highly spatially differentiated city in which communities establish specific identities based on ethnic, racial and religious indicators. Finally, the cinematic city reveals itself as urban space, in whose context the phenomenon and the relevance of cultural differences can be observed and investigated. The findings disenchant the mediated urban myth of New York City being a culturally diverse metropolis. Hence, New York City is projected as *cinematic city of tolerated cultural coexistence*—a city in which cultural differences are an integral part of urban culture, comprehensively permeating the way of life of the staged urban society.

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