Taking place, screening place

Studying locations in television drama production

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For long, locations have been tacit knowledge in screen production, but imbedded within the so-called *spatial turn of media studies* (Jansson and Falkheimer, 2006) locations have grown into an important both textual and practical matter for screen studies. In the cross-section between ‘textual’ studies and production studies of film and television, we find *location studies* as a method dealing with how places are screened and why screened narratives are set at specific locations. The relationship between narratives ‘taking’ place and a production ‘screening’ place involves implications on different levels of screen production, including place representation, geographical and media policy implications of production and the commodification of place in a transnational market culture.

In this chapter, we exemplify location studies as a method by a location reading of the Danish television drama *Arvingerne/The Legacy* (DR, 2014-17). In the wake of Nordic Noir, this family drama was distributed internationally, broadcast in the UK on Sky Arts and in the US by MHz Worldview and distributed for both streaming and wholesale with English subtitles. The Danish ‘traditional’ public service broadcaster DR shot the series partly on location and in studios, resulting in a remarkable negotiation of place symbolism and the establishment of the series genre codes. As we will demonstrate, location studies as a method, besides discussing spatial issues of screened drama, may also reveal genre specific functions of place.

Place and locations in film and television
Location studies is an interdisciplinary endeavour that includes studies of geography, tourism, media policy, creative industries, film, television, urban/rural places, literary studies, and arts in general (Hansen and Waade, 2017). As stressed by Jansson and Falkheimer over a decade ago (2006), the methodical combination of theories of media and place has risen, and since then, motivated by people’s use of new locative media, the spatial interest in media has not decreased.
This spatial turn has affected both the so-called non-media centric media approach (Moores, 2012) and theories of specific media, including film and television (Roberts, 2012; Andersson and Webb, 2016). Situated deeply within such research, location studies advances the attention towards the planned use and the cultural context of places in film and television production, and in doing so the method is truly indebted to pioneering work by e.g. Lefebvre on setting and landscape (2006), Cresswell on the ontology of place (2004) and Edensor’s geographic approach to places (2002).

Location studies is a methodical approach to off-screen factors and on-screen features that in different ways influence the choice of location in a film or a television drama. These factors and features of screened place are substantially dynamic, and the different factors and features may greatly affect each other, but particular aspects in a production are often the most important. As Chow shows in her analyses of the relationship between Greater Copenhagen and the Nordic Noir series *Bron/The Bridge* (2011-18), this specific drama can be contextualized by focusing on “imagery of borderlessness and integration” and “transnational Danish-Swedish collaboration” (Chow, 2016, p. 37). Here, it becomes obvious that on-screen features such as urban space and policies of place becomes the centre of attention, including transnational collaboration between the cities of Copenhagen and Malmö mirrored in the series’ narrative of police collaboration across the bridge. For *The Bridge* as well as Nordic Noir, scene-specific locations such as the police station, the home of the investigators and the crime scene become definite articulations of genre.

The method location studies was developed for an analysis of the spatial implications of Nordic Noir, motivated by the specific reference to place in the concept itself (Hansen and Waade, 2017). Nevertheless, theories of locations and the method should be regarded as a general model for studying locations in feature film and television series. For genres, style and narrative may vary and work as a mere window from which to view places on screen, while the genre of a film or a series is also the effect of a specific use of place. We view locations as the specific place where a scene of a film or a series is shot, while the setting is the overall diegetic space of the characters. Of course, here the relationship between real and fictive places may be negotiated, as it was in, for instance, the first three seasons of *Homeland* (2011-) that ‘take’ place in the Washington metropolitan area while it was shot on various locations in North Carolina, mostly around the city Charlotte. In other examples, it is necessary to regard the close connection between location and setting, just as it is in the already mentioned *The Bridge*. Altogether, locations studies deals with precisely this
establishment and negotiation of locative implications in screen production. Now, we go through the different facets of location studies (see figure 1) as well as the genre implications of such an approach before we show the method at work in a television drama.

Figure 1: model of the different layers of location studies.

Factors and features in location studies

*On-screen features* (including scene-specific locations) are the salient, ‘textual’ aspects of location studies with special interest towards how places appear on screen. Through the window of cinematography, editing, CGI and other stylistic aspects of screen production, we claim that especially five screen features are important in the ways that places may feature as representative localities in film and television drama: 1) *shore, inland, island*, 2) *architecture, arts, design*, 3) *mobility, infrastructure*, 4) *climate, weather, season* and 5) the distinction *urban/rural*. The
intention is, however, not to provide a comprehensive list of features, but through such categories, it is possible to cover most characteristics of location appearances on screen. Once again, Nordic Noir and *The Bridge* may be an enlightening example: Many recent Nordic crime dramas take place in urban shoreline areas, during the rainy autumn/winter period, marked by different kinds of mobility through space (police cars, chase scenes, public transport, walking/running), while Nordic modern architecture and design appear remarkably present in the imagery, altogether as locative elements that situate the dramas within a Nordic cultural context. Such categories appear abstract and general, while sensitive descriptions of each may highlight the textual qualities of the spatiality of a screened drama, or what Lukinbeal refers to as “the aesthetics of a location” (Lukinbeal, 2012, p. 171). A location study of the US remake of *The Bridge* (2013-14) will clearly map out the locative differences between the two productions: Placing the remake in El Paso on the border between the US state of Texas and Mexico means that the scene-specific aesthetics become marked by a warm, dry inland climate as well as a different (mostly American) mobility culture and local architectural styles, all of which clearly position the drama within a different setting with different aesthetic characteristics as a result.

There are many different factors influencing the location placement in dramas such as these. According to Meredith Stiehm, co-creator of the US-version of *The Bridge*, the initial intention was to emulate the cold November atmosphere in the original Swedish-Danish version of *The Bridge* by setting the drama in Ontario, Canada, but her co-creator Elwood Reid convinced her to place the drama on ‘the bridge of the Americas’ connecting Mexico and USA. For Stiehm, they “changed the beauty of the winter and the cold and the ice turned into the desert and the sun and the grit of Texas/Mexico” because “there’s not a lot of cultural or political conflict going on between Canada and U.S.” (Sepinwall, 2013). The result appears in both the visual aesthetics and narrative devices in the series with the remake being much more focused on conflicts between the US and Mexico, something that is not nearly as intense in the original version. In other words, the new aesthetics and narrative focus of the US remake of *The Bridge* stems from its relocation to the US/Mexico border.

Such off-screen factors influence the choice of location, and these elements build a methodical bridge from the textual aspects of location studies to production studies as a method considering the creative and financial practices ‘behind the screen’ (Batty and Kerrigan, 2018). For Roberts, a screened location connotes merely “a rationalized economic recourse” rather than “a specificity of
place” (2013, 3), but as we have already indicated, the specific place may deeply influence the end-result of a production. We claim that there are four broad off-screen factors that shape the choice of location before, during and after a production: a) sites of production, b) place as destination, c) geographical place and d) policies of place (see figure 2).

![Figure 2: Off-screen factors influencing the choice of location (Hansen and Waade, 2017, p. 57).](image)

In practice, all four factors are dynamically interlinked, but one may focus on each one of them, including interviewing selected personnel from each section. Sites of production involves analyses of the significant places where production takes place, including the relationship between the location of production companies/broadcasters and the actual shooting location (the more distant a location is, the more expensive the production will be). The geographical place deals with the specificity of the real place, including local topography, and the aesthetic appeal and influence of the place (there is a great difference between the cool-blue shoreline in the original The Bridge and the warm-yellow desert milieu in the US remake). The place as destination considers the way that places have become marketable, especially for screen tourism, and how this may reverberate during the production, including local co-funding interests from commissioners and municipalities. This relationship between screened places, market value and screen tourism indicates that what Sue
Beeton (2005) once called “film-induced tourism” may also be \textit{tourism-induced screen production} in such a way that screened places may not only affect tourism, but the marketability of a place may influence the screening of a place (Waade, 2013; Roesch, 2009). \textit{Policies of place} as a factor deals with how general local, national, regional or transnational place policies influence the production of film and television. Since the 1990s, we have seen a simultaneous increasing interest from both local and transnational players influencing production, e.g. local film commissioners like Screen Flanders and Copenhagen Film Fund alongside transnational funding from Creative Europe in the European co-production \textit{The Team} (2015-).

\textbf{Locations and genre}

Screened places appear differently in various genres. The aesthetics of locations in a film or a television series is a significant part of what Rick Altman refers to as genre semantics, defined as “common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like.” Altman refers to John Cawelti’s classic reading of the western as placed “on a near frontier” in the North American west, “on the border between two lands” (1984, pp. 10-11), as a result clearly defining the western genre through its use of location placement.

Alongside other common traits, other genres may also be defined based on location choices and its use of place. Often, a historical drama or even a biopic rests directly on the creation of an authentic sense of place, often shaped by a combination of on-location shooting, studio shooting and computer generated imagery. For instance, the exact same studio street in the German film-studio in Babelsberg appears in both Roman Polanski’s \textit{The Pianist} (2002) and Ole Christian Madsen’s \textit{Flame & Citron} (2009), both films taking place during the Second World War. However, the differences distinguishing the same studio street as either Warszawa or Copenhagen were created through both production design and visual effects that naturalizes the street as a location in a specific, familiar city. Even if modern cities may make it difficult to use on location shooting in historical dramas, many productions combine studio production and on-location shooting for different reasons. The Danish historical war drama \textit{1864} (2014) included on-location imagery from the Danish island Funen, which may have been influenced by both the aesthetic beauty of the place and the co-financing by the local Film Commission Fyn, while the battle scenes were shot in a studio outside Prague where famous local buildings were re-created for image authenticity.
Besides being a historical war drama, 1864 is also a family drama about growing up in Denmark in the middle of 19th Century. Many central scenes in the drama, then, take place at and around a family estate, screened on-location. The use of a family estate is, however, not only a prevalent setting for historical drama; family houses are frequently used in family sagas that regularly place the narratives in rural areas (which for historical drama may also be an easy way to avoid modern cityscapes). As we will see below, the family estate plays a significant role in The Legacy, but in a number international examples of family drama such a location is a customary narrative focal point. In Denmark, the tradition is indebted to the popular writer Morten Korch whose many novels were adapted into films between 1950-1976, while revived for the television drama Ved stillebækken/Quiet Waters (1999) that also revolves around a family country estate. As a drama with a number of obvious similarities with The Legacy, the Swedish family drama Tjockare än vatten/Thicker Than Water (2014-) also takes place at a family guesthouse inherited by the three children of a sick mother who commits suicide; just like The Legacy this drama deals with literal heritage in a combination with social heritage. Even a famous historical family drama like Downton Abbey (2010-15) has a (royal) family estate as chief location. Altogether, these examples clearly indicate that when the genre changes, location semantics are concurrently altered. In this chapter, historical drama, crime fiction and family drama are clear indications of this theoretical conjecture, and further studies would demonstrate how other genres have different locative traits.

The story in The Legacy is about an internationally renowned artist Veronika Grønnegaard, the old manor Grønnegaard at southern Funen, and Veronika’s four grown-up children. In the first episode, Veronika dies and as an immense surprise to the three oldest children, she has decided to leave the manor to her youngest daughter Signe, who was given up for adoption as a baby and therefore did not grow up with her siblings. According to DR, “The Legacy is a modern family portrait. A description of the ’68 generation and their children” (DR/IMDb). The ‘legacy’ is thus not only the manor and the property, but also the ideology from their parent’s generation in which traditional family models and relationships were replaced with new and sometimes chaotic ways of living, parallel to political and artistic reorientation. The series draws upon the family drama genre, melodrama and what Andrew Higson terms heritage film (Higson, 2003), all genres where the home plays a significant role.
On-screen location features in *The Legacy*

In the series, each character is followed by a significant location underlining their personal character and worldview. Veronika is the matriarch, a strong and acknowledged artist, playing around with her family and her home as if they were puzzle pieces in one big ongoing installation artwork. The manor Grønnegaard is both her studio and her home, and there are no clear demarcations of the difference between her home and her workshop. Veronika’s artworks are huge installations made of wood, paper, plaster and metal, and we mainly see unfinished, parts and sketches of her art pieces. In fact, Grønnegaard is a piece of art itself, a never-ending art project in which the rooms and walls are undertaking ongoing re-construction. For instance, when the family celebrate Christmas, the three turned out to be too high, and the father just cut a hole in the roof. This creative and dynamic process also includes all house visitors, family, social relations are turned upside down, and the home is open, flexible and chaotic. In the final scene of last season, the house is staged as a full-scale art installation with music and moving images projected on the façade, as if the artwork has been finalised at last.

Veronikas’ husband Thomas, a musician and a multimedia artist, lives in a hut in the backyard together with his instruments. He is a tragi-comic reminiscence of the freedom ideals of the late
sixties. Biking on his old bicycle in his Indian costumes, smoking marihuana, he tries to live a simple and pure life, while instead getting more and more lost, having a child with his much younger and mentally vulnerable partner without being capable of taking care of the mother nor the child leaving the responsibility to his grown-up children. In contrast, Veronika’s oldest son Frederik is a lawyer and lives in a modern upper-class villa, married with children in a standard family – until his wife leaves him. Gro, the oldest daughter is a curator at an art museum, she lives in a modern urban apartment and meets with her married lover once in a while. Emil, the youngest brother does not really have a home, he is in-between places, partners and countries, and he finds his home where there is room. He lives occasionally at Grønnegaard and takes care of his father’s little baby girl. Signe decides to live at the manor as well, and to start farming. Signe is not cosmopolitan and urban as the other siblings; rather she grew up in a very traditional family home and spent all her time in the local sports hall where her parents, partner and friends all hang out. In the third and final season we meet new characters, among others the tough neighbour Karin running a biological farm, and the rebellious daughter of Frederik, Hannah, operating as a Greenpeace activist and a political artist. Hannah has no definite place or home affiliated to her character expect for Greenpeace ship going to Greenland. Paradoxically, this place also causes her death.

Even though each character is marked by specific spatial traits, the manor Grønnegaard is the place that links them all together and work as the main setting and narrative anchor of the series. The on-screen features linked to Grønnegard are infused with contradictions and paradoxes that symbolises the family being free-spirited, open-minded and innovative, and also troublesome, fateful and restricting. Architecturally, the estate represents a typical Danish farmhouse. However lively and dynamic the place is, the main buildings are old and shabby. The distinction between life and art, between home and work, is eradicated with the manor and the family as never-ending life-size installations, representing the dissolution of the family. As their individual lives, ambitions and values are challenged, it becomes increasingly difficult to collaborate. The shared home never unites them, rather it causes trouble, disagreement, conflict and contrite memories. The political and artistic freedom ideals of 1968 forms a critical and tragic viewpoint and as the character’s straitjacket. The average Danish local sports hall where Signe and her friends and parents spend their time represents a slightly more optimistic and contemporary mirror of the solidarity ideals of Grønnegaard. Nevertheless, the political and cultural values in the sports community indicates a very traditional gender and family structure, and both locations illustrate close work/life
relationships with social norms restricting the individuals. Accordingly, DR, frames the series around “the sharp traces and consequences left by an intense time of upheaval upon modern family life – whether it takes place in a seemingly liberated and progressive artist's home or in a more traditional community-oriented, provincial and handball-minded environment” (DR/IMDb).

Besides the manor, the main on-screen location features are the salient use of locative landscape aesthetics, including climate conditions and island topography. The narrative is shaped by a basic dramaturgic contradistinction of rural and urban lives, a local and global sense of place, altogether indicating the past’s spatial influence on the present. All characters, except Signe and Thomas, are constantly commuting between urban metropoles and their childhood’s rural fringe. Below the surface of the picturesque and peaceful farmland, the story reveals a landscape full of poisoned water, where the harvest fails and ruins Signe’s life, and the farmers obstruct each other’s work. Figuratively, Grønnegaard becomes a haunted place marked by the late mother’s voice, opinions, ideologies, will (in a double sense) and her fatal decisions (Wille and Waade, 2016). The haunted house symbolism is underlined by the half-finished interior, the scattered sheets, the difficult memories and unfinished artwork hidden in the basement, and not least the spooky artwork that looks like a dead, oversized baby body. Furthermore, flowers work consistently as an ambiguous symbol implying life-death relations and the fleetingness of life; we see flowers in rooms, Signe works in a flower shop, and in the slow motion still-life title sequence, we see a flower bouquet splintering into pieces.

**Off-screen location factors in The Legacy**

Turning to off-screen production factors of *The Legacy*, it is striking how locations played a significant role from the early stages of development. As such, the production may be considered a site-specific television drama similar to what Kaye refers to as site-specific art and performance (Kaye, 2000). In this context, ‘site-specific’ indicates that narratives or artworks are based on – and taking place at – a specific geographical place, reflecting and contributing to the understanding the specific historical, social and physical conditions of the place. This notion of site-specificity is embedded in the site of production as an influential off-screen factor. *The Legacy* mostly takes place on Funen (Grønnegaard), the exterior parts of the series was screened on Funen (Langkildegaard, among other places), and the ideas for the story and not least the visual concepts is developed based on this particular place. The scriptwriter Maya Ilsøe was invited by DR to develop
the drama series in the writer’s room (Redvall, 2013), and at a very early stage, Maya invited the production designer Mia Stensgaard to work with her and the producer Karoline Leth. “This was very unusual,” Stensgaard explains, “they were surprised by how much production design can actually contribute to the development of the story itself” (Stensgaard, 2015). As part of their research, they visited different manors at Funen. “We were looking for an original, old house,” Stensgaard says in our interview, “we wanted the forefathers to be present in the building.” Visiting Langkildegaard, the actual exterior in the series, they fell deeply in love with the place. This specific place was instrumental in the development of both the narrative and the visual characteristics of the series, especially the colour scheme, the doors, and the garden.

This site-specific creative approach is displayed in the series’ concept book, embracing the interior manor as location, the colours inspired by the real peasant farmhouse, the local fauna and the landscape topography (DR Fiktion, 2014). As such, the significance of the locations is clearly articulated already early in the production process. Among other things, they chose locations that offered certain dramaturgic, situational oppositions, such as messy places, common rooms and interior used in unfamiliar ways, with threshold spaces like stairways and hallways used for crucial dialogues. Production designer Stensgaard also wanted to avoid popular Danish design in screening the interior: “This was a very important rule. This should not be like ‘oh, I want this chair at home’, rather, we aimed for something messy, unsightly, and old, more like home – this rule sharpened our creativity, we could not just pick the usual chairs and lamps” (Stensgaard, 2015).

Being a DR production also involves important production conditions that influenced choosing a site of production as well as the way locations were used and exhibited in the series. Above we indicated the opportunity for the creative team to work together over long time to develop different ideas, which is an integral part of DR’s production model (Redvall, 2013). Since DR facilitates larger in-house productions, it was possible to reconstruct, build and design major sets in the studio. Producing The Legacy, they decided to build the estate interior in the studio, while screening the basement, the exterior and the hut in the garden on-location. This gave the producers the opportunity to create an expressive interior where all visions could be realised. The studio-interior of the inherited Gronnegaard was built to look like a house re- and deconstructed as an open family wound and as messy social heritage.
Funen was chosen as the main overall setting of the drama partly due to local investment and support offered by the film commissioner Film Funen, indicating ‘policies of place’ as a very likely off-screen factor. The choice of location follows local and regional film strategic ambitions that include attracting film productions to Funen in order to generate growth in the creative industry, establish place branding as well as screen tourism (Film Funen 2018). Several Danish film and television drama series, including the above-mentioned 1864 and Susanne Bier’s Oscar-winning film Hævnen/In a Better World (2010), were screened on Funen, where the island’s soft landscape curves, pleasant climate conditions and picturesque scenarios are popular attractions, and Film Funen offers financial and practical support. This also relates to ‘place as destination’ as an off-screen factor, when Film Funen’s involvement in the production included local and regional interests that among other things include screen tourism. In general, Funen is an international well-known and popular destination, and Film Funen and Funen Film Commission have worked for decades to strengthen and develop screen tourism in relation to films and television series screened on the island. The emphasis on the authentic and rural Funen landscapes in the series reveals an imagery Funen at play within film and tourism more in general.
In *The Legacy*, the geographical place factor of the island topography as well as the flat, soft Funen farming landscape underlines the nostalgic, forgotten, disguised and rural place in opposition to the urban, hectic and modern life. Nevertheless, the unmaintained estate never produces an essentially positive or romantic landscape gaze. Mia Stensgaard explains that: “We found this old place, almost untouched by humans since the second world war. Perhaps even the 30’s. It had a basement, it was spooky, pristine and raw. We decided to use the basement as location. It was a great gift for us. I think we saved 4 million [Danish kroner, ed.] by shooting on location” (Stensgaard, 2015). Overall, choosing on-location shooting involved acquiring a certain atmospheric and authentic location, but it also implied economic and practical motives.

**Conclusion**

Even though location analysis may include much more in-depth data on productions, we have illustrated that locations and settings are not only a mere backdrop for a narrative. Places matter as a specific, often highly symbolic way to indicate character embedded conflicts or externally motivated debates about society. Besides shifting attention from a narrative and stylistic interest in film and television to an associated interest in locations, location studies as a method ties together the ‘textual’ aspects of film and television studies with the practical and empirical matters of production studies. Indicating the family estate as a generic focal point of family heritage drama, the location studies model and our representative analysis clearly stresses that locations are, besides the aesthetic qualities and practical production matters, also a very significant part of the genre of a film or a television drama.

**References**