



Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City

Malcolm Miles

Cities and Cultures

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Cities and Cultures is a critical account of the relations between contemporary cities and the cultures they produce and which in turn shape them. The book questions perceived ideas of what constitutes a city's culture through case studies in which different kinds of culture – the arts, cultural institutions and heritage, distinctive ways of life – are seen to be differently used in or affected by the development of particular cities. The book does not mask the complexity of this, but explains it in ways accessible to undergraduates.

The book begins with introductory chapters on the concepts of a city and a culture (the latter in the anthropological sense as well as denoting the arts), citing cases from modern literature. The book then moves from a critical account of cultural production in a metropolitan setting to the idea that a city, too, is produced through the characteristic ways of life of its inhabitants. The cultural industries are scrutinised for their relation to such cultures as well as to city marketing, and attention is given to the European Cities of Culture initiative, and to the hybridity of contemporary urban cultures in a period of globalisation and migration. In its penultimate chapter the book looks at incidental cultural forms and cultural means to identity formation; and in its final chapter examines the permeability of urban cultures and cultural forms. Sources are introduced, positions clarified and contrasted, and notes given for selective further reading.

Playing on the two meanings of culture, Miles takes a unique approach by relating arguments around these meanings to specific cases of urban development today. The book includes both critical comment on a range of literatures – being a truly interdisciplinary study – and the outcome of the author's field research into urban cultures.

Malcolm Miles is Reader in Cultural Theory at the University of Plymouth, UK, where he convenes the Critical Spaces Research Group and co-ordinates the doctoral research methods programme for the Faculty of Arts.

Routledge critical introductions to urbanism and the city

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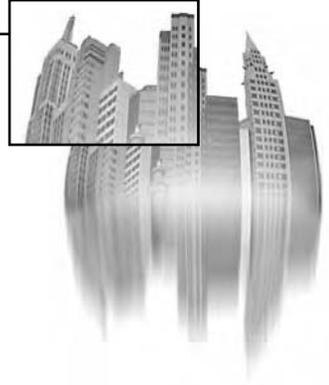
Published:

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First published 2007

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-00109-5 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-35442-0 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-415-35443-9 (pbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-00109-5 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-35442-4 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-35443-1 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-00109-7 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	vii
<i>List of case studies</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
General introduction	1
Part One: Definitions	5
1 Cities	7
2 Cultures	29
Notes for further reading: Chapters 1 and 2	48
Part Two: Interactions	51
3 Cities producing culture	53
4 Culture re-producing cities	75
Notes for further reading: Chapters 3 and 4	95
Part Three: Culture industries and cultural policies	97
5 The culture industries	99
6 Cities of culture	121
Notes for further reading: Chapters 5 and 6	143

Part Four: Interventions	145
7 Cultural cross-currents	147
8 Cultural identities	171
9 Permeable cultures	193
Notes for further reading: Chapters 7–9	211
<i>Bibliography</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	240

Illustrations

Figures

1.1	New Bariz, designed by Hassan Fathy (1965–67), now deserted	24
2.1	Tate Modern	37
2.2	Pigeon lofts at Skinningrove, Cleveland, 2001	42
3.1	Lisbon, statue of Pessoa outside Café Brasileiro	56
3.2	Men's lavatory, waterfront, Hull	70
4.1	Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, <i>Bookmatches</i> , 1992	86
4.2	Josep Sert, Spanish pavilion for the 1937 Paris World Exposition, reconstructed 1992	86
4.3	Dosh, Egypt, <i>hajj</i> painting, 2004	90
5.1	Hewitt + Jordan, <i>The Neo-Imperial Function</i> , billboard, Guangzhou triennial exhibition, 2005	116
6.1	Bergen, Bryggen waterfront – UNESCO World Heritage site	134
6.2	Daniela Brasil, <i>Folge mir</i> , spoof traffic sign, Weimar, 2004	140
7.1	Yerevan, building on Republic Street prepared for removal	156
7.2	CCCP – restaurant sign, Yerevan, 2005	157
7.3	Grūtas, statue of Lenin	163
7.4	Arcosanti, Arizona	168
8.1	José Maças de Carvalho, <i>porque é existe o ser em vez do nada?</i> , Marvila, 2001	185
8.2	Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia, Rajasthan, India: puppet-making	188
9.1	Soviet War Memorial (1946), Tiergarten, Berlin, 2005	206

Tables

6.1	European Cities of Culture, 1985–99, and Capitals of Culture, 2000–06	123
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viii • Illustrations

6.2	European Capitals of Culture, 2007–10	123
6.3	European Capitals of Culture host states, 2011–19	123
6.4	Thematic descriptions of Capitals of Culture for 2000	126

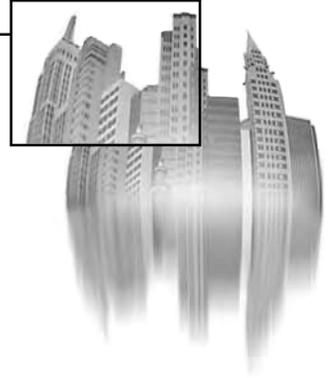
Case studies

1.1	From Ian Sinclair, <i>London Orbital</i>	14
1.2	From Jennifer Robinson, <i>Ordinary Cities</i>	18
1.3	New Bariz, Egypt	24
2.1	From Octavio Paz, <i>The Labyrinth of Solitude</i>	34
2.2	From Samuel Mockbee, 'The Rural Studio'	38
2.3	Skinningrove, Cleveland, UK	42
3.1	From Fernando Pessoa, <i>The Book of Disquiet</i>	56
3.2	From David Crouch, <i>The Art of Allotments</i>	66
3.3	Men's lavatory, Hull	70
4.1	From Joan Didion, <i>Slouching Towards Bethlehem</i>	78
4.2	From Kim Dovey, <i>Framing Places</i>	84
4.3	<i>Hajj</i> painting, Dosh, Egypt	90
5.1	Sgt Lynne Steely, 'Abu Graib Detainees Enter Art Contest'	104
5.2	From Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings, <i>Enthusiasts</i>	110
5.3	Hewitt + Jordan, <i>The Neo-Imperial Function</i>	116
6.1	From Amrit Wilson, 'Eritrea: The Experience of Creating a New Culture'	130
6.2	From Serene Tan and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, 'Negotiating Cosmopolitanism in Singapore's Fictional Landscape'	136
6.3	Daniela Brasil, <i>Folge mir</i>	140
7.1	From Jeanne Hyvrard, <i>Les Prunes de Cythère</i>	160
7.2	From Jyoti Hosagrahar, <i>Indigenous Modernities</i>	164
7.3	Arcosanti, Arizona	168
8.1	From Arundhati Roy, <i>Power Politics</i>	174
8.2	From bel hooks, 'Beauty Laid Bare; Aesthetics in the Ordinary'	178
8.3	Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia, Rajasthan	188
9.1	From Michel Tournier, <i>Friday</i>	198
9.2	From Nitin Govil, 'The Metropolis and Mental Strife'	202
9.3	Soviet War Memorial, Berlin	206

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for support from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) which enabled me to visit sites and projects in researching this book. I am grateful also for the time and expertise of those with whom I have had conversations while writing the book. Among them are Vardan Azatyan, Sarah Bennett, Franco Bianchini, Iain Borden, Daniela Brasil, David Butler, Mario Caeiro, Sarah Carrington, Paul Chatterton, Tim Collins, Matthew Cornford, David Cross, Graeme Evans, Murray Fraser, Freee, John Goto, Reiko Goto, Paul Gough, Tim Hall, Angela Harutyunyan, William Hazell, Andy Hewitt, Sophie Hope, Mark Jayne, Mel Jordan, Nazareth Karoyan, Nicola Kirkham, Laima Kreivyte, Katy MacLeod, James Marriott, Steven Miles, Lucy Milton, Mindaugas Navakas, Barbara Penner, Jane Rendell, Marion Roberts, Judith Rugg, Esther Salamon, Gregory Scholette and Jane Trowell. I would also like to thank my series co-editor John Rennie Short and Commissioning Editor Andrew Mould and his assistants for their help and encouragement.

General introduction



Rationale and scope

The terms *city* and *culture* indicate complex conceptual fields. Each figures in several academic disciplines, has its own history as a concept apart from the histories of specific cities and cultures and is used in various and at times conflicting ways. One of my aims in this book is to clarify how different uses of such terms indicate different assumptions. A second is to introduce readers in a range of academic fields to literature from fields other than their own. A third is to complement existing sources by adding a volume which is critical and introductory, and accessible without masking complexities. The book is intended for undergraduates in years 2 and 3 in urban studies, architecture, art and design, heritage, cultural studies, cultural policy, urban planning and sociology as well as cultural, human and urban geography; and postgraduates in interdisciplinary fields. I hope its juxtaposition of diverse sources, cases and ideas will enable new insights among readers, encourage reflexivity and contribute to discussion of urban conditions and future prospects.

The book plays on several ambivalences, and I address these in the first two chapters, on cities and cultures – which together act as a foundation for the rest of the book. Part of my aim is to draw out the mutability of such terms. The term *culture*, for instance, can mean the arts or a way of life. In culturally led re-development the arts are used to rebrand the built environment of city after city in the affluent world, but with mixed impacts on the broader cultures of dwellers. This is discussed in general terms, with the concept of the culture industries, in Chapter 5; and in a specifically European context in Chapter 6. Before that, in Chapters 3 and 4, I consider cities as sites of innovative cultural production, and how a city's image trades on selective cultural histories. In the last section of the book I move to questions of transition in the cities of the former East bloc after the end of the Soviet Union, of urban cultural identities, and of the permeability of built, social, economic, political and cultural environments.

2 • General introduction

Relations between the form of a city, its image in the arts and media, and the lives of dwellers may be conflictual. I show the complexities of this through contrasting cases, and include cases from a wide geographical spectrum as well as from different periods. Although there is a bias towards recent Western cases within the main texts of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6, Chapter 1 refers to one of the earliest cities in archaic Anatolia while other chapters look to the Americas and Eastern Europe as well as a peripheral, multi-ethnic zone in a Western European city. In case studies within each chapter (in a structure explained below) I balance eight examples from European cities (four dealing with popular culture) with five from the Americas, seven from Asia and the Near East, three from Africa, one from Australia and three relating to non-specific, literary sites. In case studies citing the work of other writers I have achieved an approximate gender balance, with significant representation of non-white commentators (within the book's anglophone scope). I use material from the media, fiction and personal accounts as well as from more academic sources in the arts, humanities and social sciences because each kind of source offers a specific kind of insight into a place or set of circumstances, and to tacitly raise the question of what is imparted in a particular (first- or third-person) voice.

The range of cases and theoretical material in the book reflects a diversity of cities in contemporary experience. I have tried to avoid a privileging of urban form in favour of recognition that the event of a city, so to speak, is produced in the continuing and always incomplete occupation of its built environment for dwelling, working, playing, buying and selling, social activity and political life. A city is, then, a location of daily life influenced by economic, political, social and cultural conditions. I provide no ultimate definitions but argue that the relation between cities and cultures is dialectical. That is, the conditions constituted by built, social, economic, political and cultural environments are influential on how people act in but also react to them, so that their reactions may re-order the conditions by which they are conditioned.

Structure

The book is arranged in four sections. Part One (Chapters 1 and 2) deals with the concepts of city and culture, playing on the dualities of meaning produced by their singular and plural forms while referencing a breadth of sources and intellectual frameworks relevant to the book as a whole. I link an account of the archaeological evidence of Çatal Hüyük, one of the first cities, to current discussion of the primacy of cities as human settlements. In Chapter 2 I outline a history of the term *culture*, and anchor discussion through the case of Tate Modern as a major cultural institution. Case studies range from an account of the

Spanish conquest of Mexico to a case for ordinary cities and a commentary on a photograph of pigeon lofts in north-east England.

Part Two (Chapters 3 and 4) reconsiders the role of cities as nodes of cultural innovation. Most cultural production and reception takes place in cities, and I relate this to the condition of proximity discussed in Chapter 1. I take the example of Paris because this is where key currents in modernism occurred, but ask if this is a relation specific to modernism and whether new patterns now emerge. Chapter 4 complements this by asking how cities are re-presented culturally, taking the case of Barcelona as a city which has transformed its image through cultural means. Case studies include accounts of allotment culture, San Francisco in the 1960s and the impact of gambling on Melbourne's recent waterfront development.

Part Three (Chapters 5 and 6) concerns the culture (or cultural and creative) industries. I compare the positions of contributors to debate over the past two decades in Europe and North America as well as with the arguments of critical theory from the 1930s to 1960s, and look at Disney's venture into urban design and management at Celebration, Florida. In Chapter 6 I move to the specifics of the European Union's programme of Cities (or Capitals) of Culture, citing Glasgow and Bergen. In case studies I cite writing on amateur film clubs in Poland, theatre in Eritrea's struggle for national liberation and the use of fiction for cultural aspirations in Singapore.

Part Four (Chapters 7 to 9) investigates everyday creativity and identity formation in local and global contexts, and the impacts of collisions between cultural frameworks. In Chapter 7 I focus on the cultural ferment of eastern Europe after the cultural, economic and political mechanisms of the Soviet era were abandoned. The survival of cultural signifiers, such as the Soviet-period statues transported to a forest park in Lithuania, raises questions as to how readings of a regime's public monuments shift when its power is over. Chapter 8 moves to a project in a multi-ethnic social housing neighbourhood of Lisbon, to ask how people use cultural means to construct identities outside mainstream cultural consumption. In Chapter 9 I emphasise the permeability of cultural forms through the derivation of the urban grid, looking at its development in Latin America and Spain. In case studies I cite cases from India, Armenia and North America as well as a reworking of the Robinson Crusoe story as a critique of received ideas of culture and building as vehicles of civilisation.

Format

Each chapter has the same format: a key question is addressed through theories and histories; a main case based on an urban site is discussed through the work

4 • General introduction

of several authors and sometimes my own research. Three case studies offer 500-word commentaries neither to add to the arguments advanced nor to question them. The first is from journalism, fiction or a personal account. The second is an extract from an academic text. The third is a photograph, in most cases one of mine but in two chapters provided by artists. The oblique or contesting relation of case studies to the main texts is a tactic to encourage readers to reassess their own ideas and enliven seminar discussions based on the book. Each chapter begins with a set of learning objectives, and ends with a brief summary of its main points. I do not predict the learning outcomes of readers, seeing such an exercise as an unnecessary closure. Notes for further reading are collated at the end of each section, many of the titles cited being relevant to the section as a whole. A bibliography appears at the end of the book, with an index.

Approach

I write in the first person and use quotations to bring in the voices of other writers. This allows me to have a position within the field while acquainting readers with positions other than my own. Because I keep the text concise some compression is unavoidable, and at times reference will be necessary to the further reading suggested. I avoid notes because it seems better in an introductory work to decide whether to include material or leave it out, rather than add the qualifying remarks and asides I would use in a longer or more specialised book.

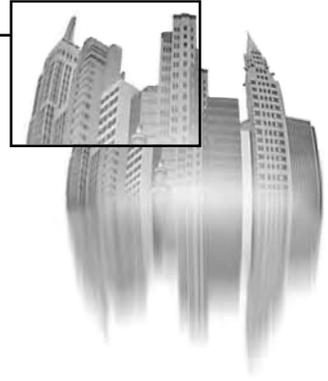
The book is an introduction but I have tried to avoid a reductive account. The term *city*, for instance, universalises aspects of cities as they are or might have been, often to normalise certain readings of the present. Since I have no belief in objective knowledge and want to avoid such normalisations, I use the plural of a concept to offer an open-ended reading of it. By asking what is distinctive about city lives rather than city forms, too, I emphasise habitation over design, on the grounds that meanings are negotiated in a city as well as streets, prices and living arrangements. Similarly, perceptions are moulded by values which dwellers as well as designers, authorities and commercial interests articulate. A site represents the outcome of a specific negotiation of space, technology, power and capital but there are always incomplete renegotiations in social, economic, political and cultural urban interactions. These are a few of the complexities within which I have attempted to produce a clear and concise but also critical introduction to cities and cultures. I hope that it will be informative and sometimes provocative, that it will encourage further reading (not only from the sources I suggest) and that reading it will be engaging.

Part One

Definitions



1 Cities



Learning objectives

- To understand what is distinctive about living in a city
- To outline some theories and histories which draw out particular qualities in urban living
- To refine the above by looking at a specific case, in which the quality of proximity appears a defining condition

Introduction

In this chapter I ask what is distinctive about living in cities. My concern is for qualitative rather than quantitative issues, and I dispense quickly with issues of data such as a city's size or the density of its population. But density leads me to the idea of proximity as the condition of a large mass of people from different backgrounds inhabiting a single site, which I develop through Edward Soja's account from archaeological evidence of Çatal Hüyük, one of the first cities, in Sumeria. Soja argues that at Çatal Hüyük the city was a primary form of settlement established before villages in its environs. Before looking at this I note the differentiation of urban from rural patterns of sociation in the work of early sociologists Emile Durkheim and Fernand Tönnies, and in Georg Simmel's view of metropolitan life; and contrast the work of Ernest W. Burgess and Louis Wirth in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s with that of feminist writers such as Elizabeth Wilson (1991). Finally I ask if there is any substance in the idea that city air is liberating, looking to the writing of Henri Lefebvre. In case studies I cite Iain Sinclair's story of London's orbital motorway (2003); Jennifer Robinson's case for ordinary cities (2006); and an image of Hassan Fathy's experimental settlement at New Bariz, Egypt (constructed 1967, photographed 2005).