Urban Space and Cityscapes
Perspectives from modern and contemporary culture

Edited by Christoph Lindner

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From the verticals of New York, Hong Kong, and Australia’s Gold Coast to the sprauls of London, Paris, and Jakarta, this cross-disciplinary volume of new writing examines constructions, representations, imaginations, and theorizations of urban space and cityscapes in modern and contemporary culture. Linked by a shared concern for issues of spatiality, the topics are organized around three interrelated themes – image, text, and form – and range from the examination of cyberpunk skylines, postcolonial urbanism, and the cinema of urban disaster, to the analysis of iconic city landmarks such as the Twin Towers, the London Eye, and the Jewish Museum Berlin.

Working at the intersections of visual, material, and literary culture, Urban Space and Cityscapes seeks in particular:

- to provide new critical and theoretical perspectives on the city at a time when the condition and future of urbanism are major subjects of international and public concern.
- to examine the aesthetic, narrative, and representational strategies used to interpret the dynamic space of cities.
- to explore the relationship between urban space and a variety of pressing cultural concerns, including issues of identity, memory, technology, class, gender, nation, and ethnicity.

With original essays from the fields of architecture, cultural theory, film, geography, literature, and visual art, Urban Space and Cityscapes offers fresh insight into the increasingly complex relationship between urban space, cultural production, and everyday life.

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Edited by Gary Bridge, University of Bristol, UK and Sophie Watson, The Open University, UK

The ‘Questioning Cities’ series brings together an unusual mix of urban scholars. Rather than taking a broadly economic approach, planning approach or more socio-cultural approach, it aims to include titles from a multi-disciplinary field of those interested in critical urban analysis. The series thus includes authors who draw on contemporary social, urban and critical theory to explore different aspects of the city. It is not therefore a series made up of books which are largely case studies of different cities and predominantly descriptive. It seeks instead to extend current debates through, in most cases, excellent empirical work, and to develop sophisticated understandings of the city from a number of disciplines, including geography, sociology, politics, planning, cultural studies, philosophy and literature. The series also aims to be thoroughly international where possible, to be innovative, to surprise, and to challenge received wisdom in urban studies. Overall it will encourage a multi-disciplinary and international dialogue, always bearing in mind that simple description or empirical observation which is not located within a broader theoretical framework would not – for this series at least – be enough.

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Edited by Christoph Lindner
To Nicole, Gretchen, and Scott
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Christoph Lindner
The suffix -scape, coupled with city- in this far-reaching book, deserves some attention on its own. To appreciate its extraordinary versatility in word combinations, plug SCAPE into your Google search engine and it will generate more than 700,000 hits, with multiplying prefixes such as vision-, liquid-, wet-, soul-, gay-, viet-, sci-, skill-, solid-, art-, hero-, teen-, as well as the more worldly sea-, sun-, moon-, land-, city-, and town-. The abounding adaptability of -scape seems limitless. Adding an ‘e’ in front leads to escape. Changing the ‘c’ to ‘h’ produces the blunter quasi-synonym of shape, while changing the vowel in the middle gives us scope.

In a now well known riff on the suffix, the cultural critic Arjun Appadurai adds further to these creative permutations, inventively exploring the global cultural economy through its ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Not only for Appadurai, appending -scape seems to evoke a visual and panoramic sensitivity, an invitation to explore the globality of whatever is attached to it. What better way is there then to capture the contemporary cross-disciplinary resurgence of interest in cities and the urban imaginary than to thematically spin around the multi-faceted concept of cityscape, a term that on its own now generates more than 600,000 hits on Google, which also provides a stunning electronic bonus, a file of 57,000 images of real and imagined cities to peruse.

Yet there is one more terminological twist I feel needs to be added right from the start, a simple reversal of the letters ‘c’ and ‘p’ to symbolize and keep in mind the need to think, write, and read about cityscapes as cityspaces. Seeing cityscapes as cityspaces not only retains the latter’s evocations of panoramic visuality and global scope, as well as the rich associations with the much more familiar concept of landscape, it opens insightful new directions that explicitly embed the interpretation of cityscapes in the wider framework of critical spatial thinking and analysis. In many ways, the spread of interest in cities across the humanities and the social sciences is part of a broader ‘spatial turn’ that has carried critical spatial thinking and writing into a wider range of disciplinary practices than at any time in the past 150 years. Recovering and exploring the interpretive significance of the spatiality of human life have sparked many new critical and theoretical perspectives on the city and contemporary culture, and underpin, in one way or another, nearly every contribution to this volume.
Seeing cityscapes as cityspaces roots the analysis of cities and contemporary culture in one of the most remarkable intellectual developments of the late twentieth century. Western social thought since at least the middle of the nineteenth century was primarily focused on understanding the historical unfolding of societies, or what can be described as the interactive historicality and sociality of human life. Time tended to be seen as the dynamic carrier of societal development, of social processes and the making of history. Space, on the other hand, was often reduced to a fixed and neutral background, an extra-social environment, a mere container or stage for the human drama that was carried forward by and as history. Today, however, there is a slow rebalancing taking place, as scholars from nearly every discipline explore the social production of space with the same critical attention they have traditionally given to the making of history and the constitution of society.

The spatial turn received its initial impetus in the 1960s, not coincidentally a time of explosive urban crises. It was only in the 1990s, however, that critical spatial thinking expanded well beyond the boundaries of the core spatial disciplines of geography, architecture, and urban studies to infiltrate such fields as art history, literature and literary criticism, anthropology, and cinema studies; fields for the most part dominated much more by a historical rather than geographical or spatial imagination. Critical spatial thinking, and along with it critical approaches to urban and regional studies, have become, to an unprecedented extent, transdisciplinary, with the diffusion of these approaches being especially widespread throughout the humanities. Urban space, as invoked in the title and substance of this book, has emerged from this process as an intellectual focus and meeting ground for an extraordinary variety of scholars and scholarship. Reflecting the city itself, this heterogeneous proximity and agglomeration of interests has become a source of interpretive innovation and creativity.

Drawing from my own writings, let me briefly recount just a few of the earlier pathways that have most creatively defined the spatial turn and currently inform the interpretation of cityscapes as cityspaces. I start with Michel Foucault, whose brilliant spatial imagination immersed our consciousness in the little tactics of the habitat and the micro-technologies of control arising from the interplay of space–knowledge–power, his insistent and endlessly provocative triad. He made us aware of heterotopologies and heterotopias, revealing different ways of understanding the ‘other spaces’ of experience. Via Foucault (and many ‘others’), cityspace became connected with the space of the body, what the poet Adrienne Rich once called the ‘geography closest in’. The body and the city in turn become positioned within a larger nesting of regions of attachment, identity, and discipline that stretch in scale from the corporeal and the local to the outer reaches of global geopolitics, with lots of pertinent spaces of representation in between.

The cultural critic John Berger enabled us to see the crisis of the modern novel, and that of all contemporary literature (and culture?), as arising from a change in the mode of narration, a radical shift from seeing the world through the diachronic flow of temporal sequencing to a more spatialized viewpoint shaped by simultaneities, lateral connections, and transgressive disorderliness. He helped us realize that in the contemporary world it may be space more than time that ‘hides
consequences’ from us. Seeing the future, as well as understanding the past and the present, is no longer just a matter of historical projection. Any contemporary narrative, on cities or otherwise, that ignores the urgency of this spatial dimension is incomplete and reduced to the character of a fable.

Henri Lefebvre takes us further still, into a triple dialectic of perceived, conceived, and lived cityspaces, each standing apart yet vitally interconnected. Lefebvre rewrites social theory and philosophy around the social production of cityspace and the powerful effects of the spatial specificity of urbanism. The social and spatial relations that are inscribed in cityspace are seen as mutually constructed, with neither the social nor the spatial taking precedence. For Lefebvre, the development of human society from the very beginning has been realized only as urban society, that is, concretely grounded and creatively generated through the stimulating effects of the (socially constructed) urban habitat. The repercussions of this view are enormous. It calls for seeing all societies, social relations, sociality itself, as not just spatial but inherently and generatively urban. To ignore this crucial urban dimension, as so much social theory and philosophy have done, is to create more fables.

With the assistance of another renowned urbanist, Jane Jacobs, I will conclude with a journey back nearly 12,000 years to celebrate not just the first socially constructed cityspaces but also a revolutionary work of art, the world’s first known artistically rendered cityscape image. Permanent urban settlements began to be created in what is today known as the Levant and in a highland zone stretching along the southern part of Anatolia and northern Syria and Iraq to Iran, an area now in unusual and destructive turmoil. The oldest known of these early cityspaces was Jericho but the largest and most revelatory centre was Çatalhöyük, in south central Anatolia, a dense settlement that may have reached a population size of more than 12,000.

Most established experts continue to deny that Jericho and Çatalhöyük were cities, for they do not fit traditional definitions devised by Western scholars seeking to identify the origins of civilization. These definitions, however, are products of a Eurocentric historical imagination that persists in privileging time over space. What Jane Jacobs did in a remarkable book published in 1969 was to ‘put cities first’ as the active progenitors of an astounding array of major cultural and economic innovations, including the first woven textiles and rugs, the first successful metalworking and pottery making, the first known tooling of hand-made mirrors for personal reflection, the creation of a shared religious culture, and two additional breakthroughs, the revolutionary development of full-scale agrarian society and the invention of specifically urban art.

The artistic breakthrough is a wall painting found on three interior walls of a house in Çatalhöyük and dated to roughly 6,150 BC. It vividly portrays an erupting volcano in the distance, the invaluable source of obsidian, or volcanic glass, which was a vital part of Stone Age technology. In the foreground is a bird’s-eye panorama of more than seventy household compounds, the first real and imagined cityscape painting. All previous wall painting that we know of showed hunting scenes with men and animals, or else simple geometric designs. Rather than depicting the
‘raw’ of nature or a simple landscape, what was found in Çatalhöyük was a representation of the ‘cooked’, the world’s first representation of socially produced cityspace.

In a wonderful comment on what was happening 12,000 years ago and continues to happen in the present, Jacobs stated bluntly that without cities we would all be poor! There would be no societal development, since we would have remained hunters and gatherers much as we were for most of our evolutionary existence. With this astounding recognition of the generative and developmental effects that can be found in the space of cities, we can fast-forward to the present moment, as the world enters what some have called a new urban age. For the first time, it can be said that the majority of the world’s population lives not just in cities of various sizes but in around 400 giant metropolises of more than a million people.

But this new urban age is not just a matter of statistics. More than ever before, understanding cities, especially from a critical spatial perspective, is fundamental and necessary to understanding all aspects of the contemporary world. And also more than ever before, building on the transformative insights of Foucault, Berger, Lefebvre, Jacobs, and so many others, we are beginning to see and study the extraordinary array of positive and negative forces that emanate from cityspace and from the stimulus of urban agglomeration. We have been living an urban-generated history for twelve millennia, but only now has this entered significantly into our popular and intellectual consciousness. The chapters that follow build on these new foundations.
1 Revisioning urban space and cityscapes

Christoph Lindner

URBAN NEOLITHIC

In his foreword to this book, Edward Soja cites a wall painting from the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük in central Turkey as an important artistic breakthrough in urban culture. Showing a volcano erupting behind terraces of densely packed houses, the 8,000-year-old painting not only marks the emergence of specifically urban art, but also presents the earliest known panorama of an urban landscape. Commenting on the geohistory of cityspace in *Postmetropolis*, Soja elaborates on the significance of the Çatalhöyük mural, suggesting that this 'original example of a distinctively and self-consciously panoramic urban art form . . . expresses a popular awareness of the spatial specificity of urbanism' (Soja 2000: 40). When understood in Soja’s terms as a graphic record of the social production of urban space – one, moreover, that is rendered from a panoramic cityscape perspective – the Çatalhöyük mural resonates powerfully with the subject of this book. So much so, in fact, that further close analysis of the image brings into focus some of the key concerns underpinning the chapters that follow. As such, I would like to pursue a few additional speculations extending from Soja’s insights into Çatalhöyük.

Among the mural’s most distinctive features is the geometric abstraction of the built environment of the city. The evenly spaced houses are homogenized into nearly identical cubes, which in turn are stacked into larger, linear blocks. The negative space between the houses creates a grid of perpendicular lines. And the twin peaks of the towering volcano, which dominate the background of the mural, are composed of symmetrical triangular forms. For Soja, this ‘creatively cartographic representation of cityspace’ suggests an ‘egalitarian yet individualized built environment’ (Soja 2000: 40), a view that is supported by James Mellaart’s (1967) original archaeological excavations of the site in the 1960s.

Yet, looking at the image from a twenty-first-century perspective, I cannot help but see certain aesthetic affinities between the cubed city of Çatalhöyük and any number of modernist pictorial representations of urban space, ranging from the early cubist compositions of Braque and Picasso to the industrial landscapes of L.S. Lowry, and even to some of Le Corbusier’s imaginative city sketches. It would be wrong, of course, to suggest that such affinities are anything but accidental, but it is none the less interesting to consider the possibility that the project of rationalizing
urban landscape and architecture, which has dominated so much artistic and intellectual engagement with the modern city, was already an integral part of urban culture in the neolithic period.

Gary Bridge begins his book *Reason in the City of Difference* by observing that ‘the city has always been the home of reason’ (Bridge 2005: 1). Çatalhöyük’s urban volcanoscape, which could be interpreted as a sort of gridded urban master plan, certainly appears to illustrate this point. Yet in its subtle evocation of an ‘individualized built environment’ – suggested not only by the clear demarcation of each building’s boundaries but also by the slight variations in the size and appearance of the houses – the image also presents a register of difference. Difference is something that modern urbanism has often sought to pave over (sometimes literally), favouring instead an exclusive and homogenized ‘space of reason’ (Bridge 2005: 1). Reclaiming the place of difference within the discourse of urban rationalization is, as Gary Bridge argues, ‘central to current understandings of the directions of urbanism’ (Bridge 2005: 2). It is also a recurring concern for the contributors to this book. From the cartographic blind spots of postmodern Jakarta to the skyrocketing urban shoreline of Australia’s Gold Coast, many of the interstitial cityspaces examined in the following pages positively demand new critical and theoretical frameworks for conceiving and analysing difference.

The other striking feature of the Çatalhöyük mural is its vivid depiction of a volcanic eruption in process. The image shows fire exploding from the summit, lava flowing from the mountain base, smoke and ash choking the air, and pyroclastic...
debris hurtling through the sky. While the reason for including the eruption in the mural was almost certainly to mark the volcano’s economic status as a producer of obsidian (Mellaart 1967: 177), the presence of the towering inferno could none the less be read in a more sinister way as an emblem of violence and destruction. This idea is reinforced if we consider the volcano’s probable religious significance as a link to ‘the underworld, the place of the dead’ (Mellaart 1967: 177). This additional symbolic valence might further explain why the spectacle of volcanic eruption proved so captivating to the neolithic urban imaginary.

What I find particularly fascinating about this aspect of the mural is the explicit link it makes between violence and the city. In fact, with the absence of perspectival realism, depth in the painting is flattened to the extent that the volcano appears to be resting directly on top of – rather than behind – the houses. Viewed in this way, the volcano suddenly becomes an immediate threat to the city – no longer just a distant firework display. Given the volatile and often violent history of urban morphology, it is somewhat fitting – as well as just a little prophetic – that the world’s first cityscape painting should also contain the world’s first image of urban destruction.

In the last few decades, such images of the city have achieved a new pre-eminence in our global media culture. In addition to natural disasters like the Mexico City and Kobe earthquakes, we have begun to experience a surge in images of other, man-made forms of urban violence such as inner-city race riots, gang warfare, and sectarian violence. The decades around the turn of the millennium have further witnessed a growing number of terrorist explosions in buildings and public spaces in cities throughout the world, including Barcelona, Beirut, Casablanca, Istanbul, London, Madrid, Manchester, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Omagh, Paris, Riyadh, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Washington, DC. While this sort of violent politicization of urban space is by no means a development unique to the present age of globalization, it has arguably acquired a new, heightened significance in the aftermath of 9/11. Never before have cityscapes and cityspaces occupied such a prominent and symbolically charged place in political, critical, and cultural debate. It is not surprising, therefore, that the relationship between violence and the city – a link established pictorially some 8,000 years ago on the high plains of Anatolia – is another of this book’s key concerns, informing chapters on topics as diverse as the cinema of urban disaster, the architectural redevelopment of Ground Zero, the psychogeography of underground Paris, and the virtual landscape of post-war Berlin.

**Urban Groundswell**

The extent to which urban space and cityscapes continue to engage our cultural imagination in the twenty-first century was exhibited in a quite literal way at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 2005. Following several years of major redesign and reconstruction – an architectural project which in itself sought to reinforce the spatial connections between the museum and the surrounding cityscape (Figure 1.2) – the MoMA reopened with a series of innovative exhibitions that included
a showcase of contemporary landscape design entitled ‘Groundswell’. The idea behind ‘Groundswell’, as the exhibition’s curator explains, was to portray ‘the surge of creativity and critical commentary surrounding contemporary created landscape’ (Reed 2005: 15). To this end, the exhibition offered an international survey of constructed landscapes ranging from reinterpretations of public parks, walkways, and plazas to reimaginations of industrial wastelands and coastal landfills. Significantly,
all twenty-three of the projects featured in the exhibition are either located within or directly linked to cities. In other words, what the exhibition placed on display were not just constructed landscapes, but specifically urban forms of constructed landscape – forms reclaimed from or generated by the wide array of transitional open spaces (such as parking lots, rooftops, and bomb sites) contained within contemporary cities. Each of these projects, moreover, shows an attentiveness not only to the transformative potential of urban space, but also to the ways in which that space relates to a wider citiescape.

In the case of the Schouwburgplein (Theatre Square) project in central Rotterdam, for example, the conventionally static space of the public square is redesigned as an active stage for outdoor events conceived to consolidate the nearby performance spaces of the municipal theatre, cinema, and concert hall (Figure 1.3). However, the design is also intended to encourage public participation in spontaneous performative activities. To enable this, the square incorporates a row of towering, coin-operated hydraulic light masts, creating ‘a sort of kinetic sculpture recalling the steel cranes that unload shipping containers’ (Reed 2005: 34). During the day, these oversized industrial lamp-posts perform an improvised ‘mechanical ballet’ (Reed 2005: 34). At night, they illuminate the space, casting circles of light around the square. The overall effect is not only to enliven the form and function of the public square, but also to bring the space itself into dialogue with the city and its inhabitants.

A similar concern for the interrelation of city and public space underlies the redevelopment of Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester (Figure 1.4) – another of the constructed landscapes featured in ‘Groundswell’. The main challenge facing this project was to contribute to the regeneration of Manchester city centre in the aftermath of the 1996 IRA bombing, which destroyed over a million square feet of retail and office space. The related challenge was to reclaim green space from the city’s growing transport infrastructure in such a way as to facilitate pedestrian

Figure 1.3 Rotterdam: Schouwburgplein at night (courtesy of West 8 Landscape Architects)
Figure 1.4 Manchester: Piccadilly Gardens at night (courtesy of EDAW, photo by Dixi Carrillo)