

“For rationalist methodology, therefore, function was the vector directly connecting method to form, and the aesthetic projection of beauty depended on how well this process was accomplished.”(p.216)

He argues that design guidelines in aesthetic governance provide the power to assert a particular taste, morality and right over aesthetic judgement.

Cuthbert concludes his final chapter *Pragmatics* by reinforcing the agenda of the text to get urban designers to think about the ideas that inform their practice.

He asserts

“The understanding that comes from deconstruction becomes the complex knowledge that is required to infuse urban space with structures of symbolic meaning that enhance social life”

He quotes Corbusier who, when asked if his analysis of his proportional system the *Modular* would guarantee good architecture, said,

“no it would not. But it would make bad architecture more difficult.” (p.290)

Understanding Cities is a scholarly, stimulating and informative text. It is a guide to method in urban design and a challenge to urban designers to reflect on their practice, to understand what informs them and to grow as a profession.

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CITY LIFE, by Adrian Franklin. London: Sage, 2010.

The triumph of the city is undeniable. It is evident in the ever-growing rate of urbanization, where absolute numbers and percentages prove that the future of humankind is overwhelmingly linked to the future of cities. Yet cities are not self-evident and their appraisal is often imbued with doubt and even negativity. In the ancient world the genesis of cities was shrouded with myth. Notably, both Hebrew myth and Roman lore make the point that the foundation of cities was associated with fratricide. Genesis 4:17 attributed the founding the first city to Cain, who had murdered his brother Abel. Roman lore attributed the foundation of the city that later on became an Empire to Romulus and Remus. However, following the dispute between the two brothers about the exact location of the new foundation Remus was killed. These mythic renditions suggest human skepticism towards cities, expressed in the idea that the building of cities followed atrocious acts of bloodshed that cast their shadow on the city as a human endeavor. The idea that cities defy and violate the moral order resurfaced in modern times in entrenched notions of the city as a place of transgression and alienation, the epitome of all that is lost in the course of the transformation of the pristine *Gemeinschaft* into a (post)modern

Gesellschaft. Concurrently cities are celebrated as hubs of creativity and generators of progress and as a unique contribution to the further development of human civilization. The alternating evaluations of the city show that the city refracts different, at times conflicting ideas about the human condition and its possible trajectories.

The enduring fascination with cities is reflected in the continuous attempt to decipher the genetic code of the city as evinced in the vast literature on various aspects of the city, its constitution, history and development. Adrian Franklin's *City Life* is a successful attempt to make sense of the city and therefore a welcome and to an extent refreshing contribution to the academic literature on cities. The cover page depicts an enigmatic scene in black and white: a paved road with a few human figures and their shadows, a silhouette of a seated man playing a saxophone. Suggestive of a film noire, the seemingly sinister image, however, is in stark contrast with Franklin's approach to the city, which emphasizes how the city "offers us alternative, multiple paths and becomings".

Unlike criticisms of the city that prevail in the literature that are imbued with a sense of impending doom and the urgency of irreversible decline, Franklin's *City Life* focuses its attention on the "exciting potential...unfoldings" that the city offers and actuate. A main argument is that cities represent variations on the theme of city life. In this sense, this book celebrates the diversity and excitement of cities. An underlying idea of the book is that cities are in a permanent flux and that cities are not necessarily clones of each other but rather follow their own unique paths: despite globalization and the economic and cultural flows that sustain it, cities further preserve and often cultivate a measure of cultural and performative coherence.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part offers a historical context for the discussion of the contemporary city. It opens with Canterbury and proceeds to discuss the transformation of the traditional city into the 'mechanic', largely unplanned cities in the 19th century and the emergence of the rational(ized) modern cities e.g. Paris and London based on the idea that 'good' cities could and should be planned and designed according to certain criteria. The second part of the book examines different aspects of contemporary cities in the English-speaking world. The first chapter deals with how new social movements and patterns of consumption and consumerism reshape the contemporary city as a cultural and performative arena. The second chapter addresses how carnival and spectacle in the contemporary city represent continuity with the pre-Victorian city. The third chapter deals with relationships with nature evinced in ecological concerns and sentiments and the growing readiness to share the city with non-humans as well as relationships between cities and the elements e.g. floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.

Well-argued and well-written, immersed in the literature and often thought-provoking, Adrian Franklin's *City Life* is a worthy and welcome contribution to the literature on cities.

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