Urban Signs/Signs of the Urban:
Of Scenes and Streetscapes

By Geoff Stahl

> The window on the street is not a mental place from which the interior gaze would be following abstract perspectives. A practical site, private and concrete, the window offers views that are more than spectacles. Perspectives which are mentally prolonged so that the implication of this spectacle carries its explanation. Familiarity preserves it as it disappears and is reborn, with the everyday life of inside and out. Opacity and horizons, obstacles and perspectives are implicated, for they become complicated, imbricate themselves to the point of allowing the Unknown, the giant city, to be perceived or guessed at. With its diverse spaces affected by diverse temporalities—rhythms. (Henri Lefebvre 1996: 224)

Let me set the scene for this thematic section of *Culture Unbound*, a collection of essays dedicated to signs in the city/city of signs, by drawing on a personal reflection on aspects of two streets I've lived on: Montréal's Boulevard St. Laurent and Berlin's Kastanienallee. In both cases, they speak to issues that are germane to the semiotic power of the city, and do so in ways that frame many of the issues this section explores in number of different ways.

Between 1997 and 2003, I lived on Blvd St. Laurent, the "Main", just north of Pine Ave, which put me at the lower end of the Montréal's renowned Plateau. For those unaware of this part of Montréal, this particular intersection can be read as a symbolic and material incarnation of the social and economic life in Montréal for a number of reasons. During that time, the shape of the neighbourhood changed gradually but dramatically. I witnessed these changes through my office window, from which I could gaze down onto St. Laurent. From there, I watched the steady rotation of shops, with old stores replaced by new restaurants, discount computer shops, book stores, and clothing shops. I lived in an area (briefly) nicknamed "Little Asia", an appellation that referred to the many Asian fast food joints that had appeared on the Main in recent years. Some people lament the disappearance of the mom and pop shops, delis, kitchenware stores, and bakeries while others see a street reinvigorated by new waves of immigrant entrepreneurs which have moved in to stake their claim to the mythical promise the Main has consistently offered newcomers to the city. Whether negative or positive, these sentiments reiterate the rich history inscribed into the both the built and imaginary landscape of St. Laurent.

From my vantage point, further lingering over the streetscape gave up more evidence of the changes begin wrought on the Main. Although I couldn't see them from my window, the three buildings just south of where I lived spoke to the street's history and its myths as well. Abandoned as apartments, their first floors--

all commercial spaces--eked out an existence that seemed astoundingly resilient given the apparent lack of interest in their wares. The apartment directly adjacent to mine was, when I moved in, a punk squat, its first floor occupied by an antique dealer. About ten years ago, it was renovated, the punks had to find a new home and the first floor has since become a jewellery shop. Two doors down was the Pecker Brothers' kitchenware store, a modest yet cluttered shop filled from floor to ceiling with poppy seed grinders, teakettles, mops, espresso makers, and other sundry domestic items, many of which catered to the European shop owners who used to be regular customers. When Louis Pecker, the last surviving brother and a man who would gladly regale you with stories of life on the Main during the thirties, retired in 2001, rumours of renovation and condo conversion circulated rapidly among the neighbours (which proved to be true). Some years ago, three doors down, above the now-defunct Mr. Falafel, with its iconic neon sign, the two-storey apartment abandoned for nearly twenty-five years was gutted by fire, the result of the ad hoc wiring used to electrify a marijuana "grow room" (run by yet more squatters). These and other changes are often read as signs, portents some would say, of things to come for the Main.

After living on St. Laurent, I moved to Prenzlauerberg in Berlin's former East, where I settled onto a remarkably similar street. I lived for a year on Kasta-nienalle, once a modest residential strip, but a street that has lately come to symbolize the strength and vitality of the city's cultural, entrepreneurial economy. From this new window, I could see the goings on at the gallery across the street, the bar life on Schwedter Str., and catch the city's fashion parade as young people came and went from local bars, cafés, *flohmarkts* (fleamarkets), and second-hand shops. My room was in an old set of flats, the neighbours, former East Berliners (often called *Ossis*, or "Easterners") who could sometimes be seen peering out onto the street, in seeming awe of the pace of its almost daily transformation. Many of the other neighbours were involved in the city's vibrant cultural life, running record labels, offering graphic design services, curating gallery shows, or making art and music, such that the building itself seemed to house a microcosm of the competing and complementary life stories and living ideologies found in post-Wall Berlin. Even in its layout, the building spoke to the diversity of the street and by extension the city. The *Hinterhof*, the rear section of the *Mietz-kaserne* which formed the other side of the building's courtyard, was home to an odd religious group, who performed shadowy ceremonies on select evenings. In the front, the cycles of the city's entrepreneurial economy played out in the café below and the tiny shop directly beneath my room, changing hands a number of times in the brief period I was there, the shop transforming itself from tiny record shop, to a craft shop and most recently to a Vespa store (which it remains). Next door, on the ground floor still sits a brothel, nestled next to an Asian *Imbiss*. To this day, new and used record shops sit alongside cafés that neighbour industrial design shops which bump up against galleries that sandwich the few remaining

squats, a density of activity exemplifying the furtive spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism (and resistance to it) that has marked Berlin for nearly two decades after the fall of the Wall.

In this respect and others, Kastanienallee and St. Laurent provide the space in which large and small-scale histories entwine to give spatial and social expression to the distinctive sensibilities of their home cities. It is possible to frame many of the stories found on the Main and Kastanienallee as parables which resonate with a similar affective charge, edifying tales that tell us about the resilience of the immigrant entrepreneur, the travails of up-and-coming designers, the tenacious story of French/English or the tensions found in lingering Communist/Capitalist relationships, or, more pointedly, the economic ups and downs of both Montréal and Berlin in which the figure of the divide exerts In different ways, these two streets are emblematic of the social and cultural life of each city. St. Laurent, for example, while it has historically served as the major immigrant corridor in Montréal, also houses a number of cultural institutions (S.A.T., Musée Juste Pour Rire), performance spaces (Cabaret, Jupiter Room, Barfly, La Sala Rosa, Casa del Popolo, among others) and acts as one of the city's primary channels for cultural promotion, with the street's mailboxes, lampposts, abandoned store fronts and sundry blank spaces thickly layered with handbills and posters advertising a range of cultural events, from music to theatre to films to book launches, among others (Allor 1997).

By contrast, Kastanienallee has a more modest history. It originated out of a vineyard, and ran through what was once a modest residential portion of Prenzlauerberg and part of neighbouring Mitte. It played host to cultural institutions as well: the German cinema pioneers the Skladanowsky brothers aired some of their early movie projections here, just prior to the Lumière brothers in Paris, metres away from one of the Prater *Biergarten*, one of the city's oldest which itself sits alongside well-established theatres, communes, etc. It was the main artery during the latter part of the twentieth century that cut through the GDR's bohemian and political underground, housing dissident presses as well as facilitating tales of Stasi intrigue and acts of terror (Brady and Wallace 1995: Boyer 2001). After the *Wende*, it became, along with neighbouring Mitte, a febrile site of renewal, as thousands of young Germans, Europeans and others moved in to colonize empty and abandoned spaces (many vacated by East Berliners forced out due to retrenchment and outward push of industry), and not long after the Wall came down, it was singled out as a site for gentrification by the city of Berlin. Prenzlauerberg as a whole was subjected to a staggered process of renovation that has gradually seen many of the neighbourhood's bullet-ridden facades give way to pastel-hued *Mietzkasernes* (Strom 2001). This vigorous renewal finds an analogue in its young and educated population, as the area has one of the highest birth rates in all of Europe and plays host to many students, artists and entrepreneurs, and wears its fecund youthfulness ostentatiously. Vestiges of socially progressive poli-

tics persist in what few squats remain on the street (one of the most tenacious, 68 Kastanienallee, has been embroiled in legal battles regarding occupancy; the anarchist bar, Morgenrot, is another site of communal activity with music and cheap vegetarian/vegan food), but its current guise is as a polyglot commercial strip, dotted with design stores, cafés, bars, second-hand clothing and record shops and restaurants, well-trod with tourists from around Europe and elsewhere, a shining symbol of the "New Berlin" as cultural consumer's paradise (Till 2005; Binder and Niedermüller 2006).

These narratives of decline, rejuvenation, renovation and gentrification are hardly stories indigenous to Montréal or Berlin; any city will tell these tales. What is perhaps more significant about these particular streets is their semiotic value as repositories of unique histories and experiences which have left their traces on each. Their nicknames are worth noting in this respect: St. Laurent is "The Main"; Kastanienallee is "Casting Alley". St. Laurent and Kastanienallee can be figured as temporal and spatial junctures that tell unique tales about Montréal or Berlin, sites at which numerous trajectories, narratives and biographies meet to produce an area dense with social, temporal and spatial significance for the "giant city", as Lefebvre suggests. The Main, for instance, instantiates and concretizes a number of aspects of social, political, economic and imaginative dimensions of life in Montréal. Martin Allor has described St. Laurent as a chronotope, following from Bakhtin, a text through which can be read "'the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented'" (Allor 1997: 46). He suggests "the Main can be read as both a central production of the past and present politics *l'identitaire* of Montréal and as a way of specifying questions of the politics of place…" (ibid.). More pointedly, Allor claims that

> (t)he places and practices of cultural activity on the Main can function as an exemplar of the relations between the private and the public, the local and the global. Indeed, Augé's oxymoron of intimate alterity should ideally sit alongside Raymond Williams' own oxymoron of mobile privatization as a naming of the structure of feeling of leisure-cultural activity. (51)

The street's structure of feeling is evident at the intersection of Ave. des Pins and St. Laurent, where with a studied gaze one can discern in the hustle and bustle the competing and complementary rhythms that characterize the social life and underpin the broader urban ambiance of Montréal. The built environment and commercial life reveal the economic cycles of Montréal, as do the periodic movements of immigrants who have left countless traces along the Main. Alongside St. Laurent's Arab fruit stand, the Hungarian bakery, the Spanish grocer, the hammock store, the Slovenian deli, the dance clubs, cafés, the piercing and tattoo salon, the Thai take-away, and the noodle shops, you could find here examples of what Lefebvre notes are cyclical and linear rhythms of street life. The cyclical, he suggests, is "social organization manifesting itself", and the linear is "routine, thus the perpetual, made up of chance and encounters" (Lefebvre 1996: 222). The micronarratives of everyday life bump up against the metanarratives of the many

histories found on St. Laurent, a productive tension that allows the Main to serve as an index of the city's exuberant night life, a barometer of its economic state, as well as a measure of its cultural vitality. In all of this, one can find on the Main the complex layering of the rhythms that underscore the variegated tenor of Montréal's cultural and social life taking the form of myriad scenes, extending from well-worn bar to flashy café, from august cultural institution to seedy nightclub.

Berlin's Kastanienallee also lends itself to being read as a chronotope, a locus upon which "*l'identitaire*" of the city unfolds, where the twentieth century's ideological struggles have played themselves out in more dramatic and more quotidian forms, a site of local politics, resistance, and at points forced capitulation (consider the exodus of thousands of *Ossis*, due to job loss, for example). It is now the site also of a vibrant cultural scene, in which all that came before persists as a palimpsest upon which the current cultural economy of Berlin draws its semiotic force. Kastanienallee, in its role as "Casting Alley", is a significant locus for the city's new culturalized economy. Following from Lefebvre, I have suggested elsewhere, you can find here a street "where past and present narratives combine to produce a peculiarly urban arrhythmia". (Stahl 2007, 314). Not unlike St. Laurent, the undulations of entrepreneurial capitalism are clearly evident as part of the street's façade. A litany of shops, bars, restaurants, and cafés open and close with unfailing regularity, stops and starts that speak to larger cycles and histories and give the street what I have referred to as an "ectopic energy" (ibid.). Kastanienallee is a streetscape dotted with "visible acts of subcultural consumption", (ibid.) the social life of the street scene demonstrating what Blum refers to as being "private in public" (Blum 2003). The city's various scenes spill ostentatiously onto its sidewalks, their robustness barely contained by the many bars, restaurants, cafés, *Imbiss*, and shops that define the street's character.

In this capacity and others, scenes help to enunciate what Doreen Massey, following from Barthes, has referred to as a city's "cityness" (Massey, et al. 1999). This is a suggestive way to begin to think about the signifying power of the scene and its relation to the city. Recent work on scenes has attempted to redeem the social power of the scene as a cultural space that cultivates a certain orientation towards the city, to others, and to one's social well-being (Blum 2003; Stahl 2007, 2008; Straw 1991, 2004). While it is possible to read Kastanienallee's scenes as only so much "ornamentation", it would be disingenuous to render them as a wanton or useless, which is often how scenes are dismissed. There is a play of surfaces found in the scene, emphasizing at one level display and performance, gestures and qualities confirm the scene's more ostentatious impulses. However, following from Blum and Janet Ward (2001, 2004) who both engage with the long fascination with urban surfaces exemplified in the work of Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and others, the study of scenes can give way to more substantive urban issues. Framing scenes as spaces bereft of clear purpose and well-

defined politics ignores dimensions of scenic life that only serves to further diminish their social relation to the city:

> (C)haracterizing it as only superficial, filled with the seductive pleasures found in its surface effects, only disparages scenes without getting at why they continue to erupt and effloresce in the way and the places that they do. The scene should not be read as an extraneous urban detail, as frivolous or as mere spectacle, as its detractors would have it, as though there were a truer, more authentic, way of being in the city. (Stahl 312: 2007)

The view that scenes are an effect born out of the dominant logic of capitalism that drives urban economies fails to address certain social facts. To read scenes and their signs in this way suggests, following from Blum, a reductive reading of cultural activity as a superfluous consequence of the larger economic imperatives of the city, a way of classing them as forms of "false consciousness", thereby dismissing them as hollow crucibles for the misguided and alienated and where politics meets its inevitable attenuation (this is, in part, what Blum suggests Sharon Zukin's work does; though the antidote does not necessarily reside in the bohemian indices put forward by Richard Florida (2005) either, for example). The rise over the past decade of the "creative city" gives scenes and issues regarding the culture of cities more salience (O'Connor and Wynne 1996; Scott 2000; Landry 2004). The significance, in a social, semiotic, economic and thus ideological sense, of scenes to cities that have come to rely upon entrepreneurial economies provides us with plenty of examples of the power of culture to sell cities, but also the cultural power borne by artists, entrepreneurs as avatars (and opponents) of neoliberalism (Hall 1997; Hannigan 2003; McRobbie 2004). Scenes in the "creative city" bear, as well as obscure, an ideological baggage in terms of their role in the instrumentalization of culture. We may well view scenes in this context as symptoms of the "creative city" in such a way that their real and imagined virtues and vices invite further analysis, able to enrich our readings of the cultural life of cities as it exists, for example, under new economic orders. The social power of the scenes flourishing on Kastanienallee and St. Laurent cannot be dismissed out of hand, in other words. What has been referred to as their semiotic excess and intensity point towards a complex set of relationships (Shank 1994; Straw 1991). This is a constellation bound up in attachments to place, and to others, as well as to cultural, social, aesthetic, economic and political practices which cannot be easily discounted in terms of their ability to ratify the diversity of individual and collective life possible in the city.

The streetscape and its numerous scenes remain an urban trope, topos and part of its typology that can be made to say a great deal about a city, its people, its histories and its culture. The socio-semiotic value of St. Laurent and Kastanienallee may also be better understood by putting them into relation with one another. There are social, material and symbolic resonances that allow contrast and comparison. This is not least because they often figure as centres of creative life in their respective national imaginaries. They can be thought about together through

the persistence and semiotic power of the figure of the divide. I have alluded to St. Laurent, for example, in its capacity to act not only as an immigrant corridor. Its more significant status is its iconic role as the divide between the city's west and east, which in the urban imaginary means Anglophone and Francophone, respectively; Kastanienallee represents the frontier of the New Berlin, where another kind of occupation unfolded, the triumph of Capitalism over Communism, the point where East meet West, *Ossi* meets *Wessi*, and where tensions and resolutions grand and small announce themselves every with decreasing frequency.

More to the point, as someone who has lived for various stretches of time in each city, I came to realize that living in Montréal was a good way to think about Berlin, and living in Berlin a good place to think about Montréal. We are inclined to think of places relationally, what's different or what's the same, as one way of testifying to our allegiance to this place over that, or as a means to help ameliorate our sense of longing for "home/*Heimat*" if away. Spending time in each city provoked thoughts of the other. The question of how to put these two streets and their cities into some sort of relationship that captures their unique urban identity cannot be easily reduced to a straight comparison. Each of these places is too large, too amorphous, too vast in scale, population and the product of profoundly different histories such that bringing them together for the purpose of comparison seems theoretically suspect and prone to truncations which do both Montréal and Berlin a disservice. As Blum has suggested, however,

> we do compare cities: it is part of social life, a form of life. We compare cities, frequently, typically, and in many ways. The comparison of cities remains a popular activity. Should we say of such an activity that, while popular with the ignorant, it is inaccurate, or impossible, or dependent upon an illusion of mastery that can never by realized? (Blum 2007: 16)

We feel compelled to compare cities, constantly. As Johanne Sloane (2006) has suggested, we speak of cities in shorthand, and do it often by making appeals to pop sociologies, citing national surveys based on proliferating indices of lifestyle, affordability, culture, or claiming a stake in the intimacies born of local knowledge and experience of a city and its secrets. We think about them anecdotally, in fragments, through polling (quality of life, best bars, etc.), through their myths, skylines, icons, public transit, restaurant service, café culture, etc. They come back to us as characters in mediated forms, in newspapers, films, photographs, television shows, and the stories of others. Cities become signs of difference and similarity, resolving in some way into what Rolf Lindner (2007) has referred to as the "mythographies" native to any city, an elaborate web of cultural textures within which a city's population are enmeshed. As a semiotic gloss on the city, these textures serve to paradoxically elucidate and obscure city life. Streetscapes, monuments, bars, stores, etc., are made to matter, making up an urban lexicon that conjures up multifarious associations, memories, experiences, histories that together signal the city's distinctiveness. The signs of the city sediment out along local contours, and prove elusive and allusive in ways that further seduce us into

desiring much more of cities. More layers means more unveiling, the city experienced as a form of revelation. As streets like Kastanienallee and St. Laurent suggest, city signs and signs of the city coalesce to form an important part of the discursive prism refracting the mental and mattering maps through which we imagine, and live, in cities.

City of Signs/Signs of the City

> What kind of meaning is connected to the city and by what kind of mechanisms? (Martin Krampen 1979: 2)

> What is the nature indissolubly, of the city as reality, as image, and as symbol? (Hubert Damisch 2001: 19)

This special section of *Culture Unbound:* "City Signs/Signs of the City" is a collection of essays that deals with the semiotic push and pull of cities, or what Roland Barthes has referred to as the city's "semantic force" (Barthes 1986: 91). It gathers together articles that deal with the city of signs and signs of the city, in the broadest sense of these terms. Each in their own way works through the city as a repository of signs and resident sign systems, as a signifying vehicle itself. As these essays attest, by virtue of its promiscuous generation of meaning the city has long existed as an object constituted by and constitutive of the modern gaze, a communicative device, social medium, and pole around which a diverse range of practices, meaningful acts and acts of meaning, can coalesce.

In terms of the contemporary city, with its shifting value, function and meaning, Lewis Mumford's by-now famous rhetorical question "What is a city?" still resonates as a starting point when it comes to interrogating the city (Mumford 1996). The answer, or answers, can of course only ever be provisional, of the moment, and only provide insight into certain dimensions of city life. As many of these articles indicate, signification in the contemporary city has acquired a different kind of resonance, particularly around issues of culture, urban branding, policies, planning and development, heritage and histories, tourism, media forms, mediated spaces and technologies. This is such that Mumford's question, and those posed by Damisch and Krampen above, are still germane to current debates, discussions and interrogations of urban culture, helping to enunciate in their own way what Alan Blum has referred to as the city's "fundamental ambiguity" (Blum 2003).

While the authors gathered here do not address the topic of urban semiotics directly, this thematic section recalls some of the works collected by Mark Gottdiener and Alexander Lagopoulos' *The City and the Sign* (1986). As an inspiration for this current section, this collection of seminal essays on urban semiotics offers a cogent, and critically reflective, foundation for the study of signs in the city. The work of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, A. J. Greimas, and Raymond Ledrut, among others, forms the basis for what the editors refer to as a socio-semiotics of the city, in which power congeals into a range of sign systems, from monuments,

to street girds, advertising, film and literary representations, etc., media forms and practices dealt with in this collection: As Ledrut reminds us:

> The city is a symbol, and there is symbolization of the city, but it is in the image it-self, apprehended through and by discourse, that what the city represents for man (sic) is revealed and expressed, and that the city and its aspects are manifested in various figures, i.e., symbolized…. (Ledrut 1986: 223)

As a symbol system, the city and its images are produced, in Lefebvre's sense, according to a host of interests whereby denotative and connotative levels of sig-nification are entwined and new species of urban mythologies, mythographies and place-images emerge (Lefebvre 1991, 1996; Lindner 2007; Shields 1991). These representations generate yet more valences, signifying practices flourishing in the city in what Lefebvre refers to as lived, conceived and perceived prisms, or, more specifically, as, experiential, imagined, and ideological frameworks (1991). Within these frameworks, and amid the busyness of urban semiosis, powerful vested interests and myriad practices of resistance work to encode, decode and recode the city's sign systems. Semiotics in this sense acts as an entry point for a focused ideological analysis, out of which can emerge a carefully considered ex-amination of the city and its multifarious signifying practices and systems, aspects of signification tied to power, both top down and bottom up, that are taken up in the following essays.

Culture in the city is the primary object here: lived culture, cultural production, and the consumption of culture. Working through these miscellaneous dimensions of culture, material and symbolic, the authors included in this thematic section have provided a range of approaches to the semiotics of the city. Luc Pauwels offers the first foray into the city, via a photo essay that ruminates on the nature of urban discourse and signification. His semiotic reference points give us a consid-eration of the links and disconnects found between sociology and photography, two practices which are historically linked to the representation of the modern city. Pauwels provides a snapshot, many in fact, of the tension between detach-ment and investment in terms of how the city is framed as both utopia and dysto-pia.

Christopher Kelen's reflection on poetic representations of Macau grapples with the residues of Portuguese presence in China. As he notes, while generally not understood as a colony and more as an enclave, the ways in which space is represented and negotiated in a literary context are telling ones, and he draws upon Auge's notion of "non-place" to explore the distinction between what he calls "Macao space" and "anywhere space". The figures of the gambler and the beggar, as they come through in a selection of poems depicting urban life in Macau, Kelen uses as a preface to a discussion of the specificities of these spaces and the way in which they express a new order of consumption (of images, things, places).

A different, but related form of investment is considered in Sophie Esmann An-dersen and Anne Ellerup Nielsen's conceptual framework, designed to address the

role of stakeholders in the city. For them, the way in which various stakeholders conceptualize the city helps to outline how certain vested interests, such as those tied up in policy making and politics, are founded through the elaboration of select relationships made between the different parties interested in shaping urban experience. This can be best exemplified as test case through the study of climate changes issues in Aarhus, Denmark, where it is suggested stakeholder theory can best grasp the complexity of urban networks and the various agents, institutions, groups and individuals which seek to utilize them to suit their purpose.

Christoph Jacke's piece, "Locating Intermediality: Socialization by Communication and Consumption in the Popular-Cultural Third Places of the Music Club and Football Stadium", draws upon Ray Oldenburg's idea of "third places". By this is meant spaces that facilitate sociability, in contrast to the shopping mall, or either sites that have a primary directive wedded to consumption over pure sociality. Jacke takes this term and applies it to the music club and football stadium, framing each as a site of communication *and* consumption, ripe with visual as well as verbal signifying gestures that complicate what might otherwise be what he refers to as a "culturally pessimistic" reading. Jacke offers a detailed analysis of these two spaces, noting that their transformation into sites of consumption as well as communication ensures that their social value is not entirely overwritten.

The nature of mediation and technologies in the city are taken up in various ways in a number of essays. The first of these, Jason Wasiak's "Being-in-the-City: A Phenomenological Approach to Technological Experience" uses Heidegger and others to consider the nature of technology, embodiment, mobility and the media in the city. The production, distribution and consumption of technology in the city are taken up through the framework of phenomenology. Wasiak argues that urban space is negotiated space, wherein a mass of technologies, a "technological ecology", is at work in ways that insist that "being-in-the-city" must be navigated in particular ways. He highlights, for example, the changing bodily relationship to urban space and mobility affected/effected by different modes of transport, such as walking, cycling and driving.

Martin Zellinger also deals with mobility, in the form of driving, walking and mass transit in the city, examining filmic representations of L.A in "'Quit Stalling…!': Destiny and Destination on L.A.'s Inner City Roads", albeit in addressing a different, but related, set of concerns. He considers the different takes on the legendary city found in Michael Mann's *Collateral* and Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down*. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Virilio, Baudrillard and others, Zellinger explores the tensions between state-based, controlled space versus the motorized discrete "liberated" individual, as played out in what we may well see as ironized and urbanized versions of the classic road movie.

Another form of urban mediation is dealt with in Yasmin Ibrahim's "City Under Siege: Narrating Mumbai Through Non-Stop Capture". Here she details the use of new media and technologies in the wake of the 2008 bombing of Mumbai.

The creation of a spectacle of terrorism in that country's film centre, responsible for producing hundreds of movies a year, is examined in relation to the elaboration of a "media event" , utilizing Dayan and Katz's terminology. The interventions by members of the public countering the privileged spectacular reading of the event by the mainstream media, done through microblogging tools such as Twitter, create an alternative to the dominant readings put forward by the country's media conglomerates. The decentralized resemanticization of such an horrific event means that it takes on a different register for those on the ground, whose use of technology offers an important counterpoint to the monolithic, and preferred, reading produced for mainstream consumption.

Thinking about mediation of urban space on a different scale, Zlatan Krajina's article, "Exploring Urban Screens", looks at the phenomenon of ambient media, as manifest in a variety of urban screens in London. What he refers to as an "anthropology of illumination" guides part of his analysis of the way in which the proliferation of screens shapes city space. He suggests that "(u)rban space is a field of ever-complex spatial relations between its designers and users in a continuous interplay of continuity and flux". Urban screens are multi-purposed and take many different forms, a taxonomy explored by Krajina. Not unlike Wasiak's reading of urban space and mobility, the way movement and experience can be guided according to the tensions found between public and private space in the city points to a spatial order governed by a logic fraught with competing interests and investments.

The monumental finds another analogue in the politics of cultural memory in Agata Lisiak's "Disposable and Usable Pasts in Central European Cities". She addresses the sometimes cavalier and often contested demolition or denigration of public monuments and institutions in Berlin and Warsaw. The erasure of histories is a loaded gesture in cities that are more prone to swoon at the novelty of corporate architecture than contend with the contradictions of history (Calle 1997; Huyssen 2003; Till 2005). The elision of unsavoury or problematic histories either through the renaming of streets or districts, or the transfiguration of Communist or Nazi-era buildings into contemporary institutions in post-Communist cities, does not entirely do away with their residual signifying power; instead, they take on the character of what Lisiak refers to as "urban palimpsests" and thus can persist in different, often troubling or unsettling, ways.

The thematic section is bookended with a final photo essay, taking us out of Europe to Australia, and at first glance away from the monumental via Megan Hicks' consideration of the symbolic role of pavement in the city as site of ad-hoc memorialisation. As a testament to lives lived, a place for eulogizing those who have recently died, the pavement in her article "City of Epitaphs" acts as another monumental figure in the city, albeit more prosaic in form and content. Pavement, she reminds us, can act as both "witness and accomplice to fatality", gaining another meaning as a site reclaimed for memorialisation. As an appropriative gesture

these kinds of memorials in the forms of graffiti sites, ad-hoc death notices and temporary shrines, Hicks contends, exist as markers of the inexorable drama that is the signature of city life.

This section of *Culture Unbound* represents a cross-section of the work being done around urban sign systems in a number of cities around the globe. The authors have presented articles that, directly and indirectly, grapple with what Gottdeiner and Lagapoulos have stated is the value of a socio-semiotic approach to the city, exploring "the articulation between semiotic and non-semiotic social processes in the ideological production and conception of space…" (14). From historical monuments to mobile technologies, from literary to filmic representations, from intimate reflections to theoretical engagements, and from immense outdoor screens to the ground beneath our pedestrian feet, these articles constitute a broad range of possibility with regard to reading the city of signs and signs of the city.

The final word on city signs and signs of the city can best be left with Roland Barthes. The amateur of the city he refers to here, he or she who loves cities, is, if I may speak for the authors here, us, writers and readers of the city. Barthes opens his essay on semiology and the city with a confession that this collection echoes in spirit:

> But I should add that whoever would outline a semiotics of the city needs to be at the same time semiologist (specialist in signs), geographer, historian, planner, architect, and probably psychoanalyst. Since this is clearly not my case… the reflections that I am going to present to you are the reflections of an amateur in the etymological sense of this word: amateur of signs, he who loves signs; amateur of the city, he who loves the city. For I love both city and signs. And this double love (which is probably only one) leads me to believe… in the possibility of a semiotics of the city. (Barthes 1986: 89)

Geoff Stahl is a Lecturer in Media Studies, at Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa-New Zealand. His research involves the study of music scenes and the cultural life of cities, and he has published articles on subcultural theory and music scenes. He is currently writing a book on making music in Montréal and Berlin.

References

Allor, Martin (1997): "Locating Cultural Activity: The 'Main' as Chronotope and Heterotopia", *Topia*, 1, 42–54.

Barthes, Roland (1986): "Semiology and the Urban", *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, M. Gottdiener & Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, (eds), New York, 87–98.

Binder, Beate & Péter Niedermüller (2006): "The 'New Berlin': Reconstructing the Past and Envisioning the Future", *Towards a New Metropolitanism: Reconstituting Public Culture, Urban Citizenship, and the Multicultural Imaginary in New York and Berlin*, Günter H. Lenz, Friedrich Ulfers & Antje Dallmann, (eds), American Studies, 142, Heidelberg, 217–234.

Blum, Alan (2007): "Comparing Cities: On the Mutual Honouring of Pecularities", *Urban Enigmas: Montréal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities*, Johanne Sloane, (ed.), Montréal, 15–51.

—— (2003): *The Imaginative Structure of the City*. Montréal.

Boyer, D. C. (2001): "Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg", *Ethnos*, 66(2), 207–236.

Brady, Phillip & Ian Wallace. (eds). (1995): "Prenzlauer Berg: Bohemia in East Berlin?" *German Monitor*, 35, Amsterdam.

Calle, Sophie (1997): *The Detachment*. Berlin.

Damisch, Hubert (2001): *Skyline: The Narcissistic City*, Stanford.

Florida, Richard (2005): *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge.

Gottdiener, Mark & Alexandros Lagopoulos, (eds) (1986): *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, New York.

Hall, Tim, (ed) (1997): *The Entrepreneurial City*, New York.

Hannigan, John (2003): "Symposium on Branding, the Entertainment Economy and Urban Place Building: Introduction", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(2), 352–360.

Huyssen, Andreas (2003): *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford.

Krampen, Martin (1979): *Meaning in the Urban Environment*, London.

Landry, Charles (2004): *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Innovators*, Gateshead.

Lefebvre, Henri (1991): *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith, New York.

—— (1996): *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas, New York.

Lindner, Rolf (2007): "The Cultural Texture of the City", *Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World*, conference proceedings, from Linköping University, Sweden, 52-58. http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/020/

Massey, Doreen, John Allen & Steve Pile (1999): *City Worlds*, New York.

McRobbie, Angela (2002): "Clubs To Companies: Notes on the Decline Of Political Culture in Speeded Up Creative Worlds", *Cultural Studies*, 16(4), 516–531.

Mumford, Lewis (1996): "What is a City?", *The City Reader*, Richard T. LeGates & Frederic Stout, (eds), New York, 183–188.

O'Connor, Justin & Wynne, Derek, (eds) (1996): *From the Margins to the Centre: Cultural Production and Consumption in the Post-industrial City.* London.

Scott, Alan J. (2000): *The Cultural Economy of Cities*. London.

Shank, Barry (1994): *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin Texas*, Hanover.

Shields, Rob (1991): *Places on the Margins: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, London: Routledge.

Sloane, Johanne (2006): "Introduction" *Urban Enigmas: Montréal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities*, Johanne Sloane, (ed.), Montréal, 3-12.

Straw, Will (2004): "Cultural Scenes", *Society and Leisure*, 27(2), 411–422.

—— (1991): "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music", *Cultural Studies* 5(3), 368–388.

Stahl, Geoff (2008): "Cowboy Capitalism: The Art of Ping Pong Country in the New Berlin", *Space and Culture*, 11(4), 300–324.

—— (2008): "Play at Your Own Risk: Scenes from a Creative City", *SPIEL*, "Populäre Kultur und Soziales Gedächtnis/Popular Culture and Social Memory", 35, 309–324.

Strom, Elizabeth A. (2001): *Building the New Berlin: The Politics of Urban Development in Germany's Capital City*, New York.

Till, Karen E. (2005): *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. Minnesota.

Ward, Janet (2004): "Berlin: The Virtual Global City", *Journal of Visual Culture*, 3(2), 239–256.

—— (2001): *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Berlin*, Los Angeles.