

Urban Aestheticization Processes: Cityscape, Landscape and Image

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Abstract

This paper focuses on cityscapes, city image, urban experience and aestheticization processes. These themes were addressed by David Frisby in his detailed analysis of Georg Simmel's writings on the money economy, the expanding metropolis and aesthetics. Simmel also examined the city as a work of art and the landscape. Frisby builds on these insights, as well as the immersive street life of the modern city influenced by Simmel's 'Metropolis and Mental Life' essay, to develop the notions of the cityscape and the streetscape. Simmel's work, then, helps us consider two main forms of experiencing the city. The first is the cityscape considered as an adjunct of the landscape, in which a significant vista of the city is considered from a distance: the cityscape is effectively the urban landscape. The second is more directly located in the life of the city, the cityscape perceived from within the streetscape: the melee of signs, sounds, shocks and shifting impressions of street life. The paper concludes with a discussion of urban infrastructure and mediascapes and their relationship to the continual process of formation of the city image.

Introduction

This paper brings together a discussion of cityscapes, city image, urban experience and aestheticization processes, themes that were addressed by David Frisby in a number of his books and essays.¹ In particular, his *Cityscapes of Modernity* (Frisby, 2001) collection, provides detailed analysis and background to the urban writings of Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer and Otto Wagner as well as focusing on urban types such as the *flâneur* and detective. Frisby was also interested in Simmel's aesthetic writings and the ways in which a range of aestheticization processes became increasingly significant in turn of the 20th-century modernity, especially evident in the money economy and the expanding metropolis.² Simmel wrote a

number of pieces directly on aesthetics as well as essays on a range of related topics such as the picture frame, the art exhibition, the adventure, style, adornment, landscape. He also focused on the city as a work of art with essays on Rome, Venice and Florence. This capacity to see the city from a distance, more detached perspective contrasts with the attempt to depict the particular quality of experience from the perspective of those immersed in the street life of the modern city as we find in Simmel's acclaimed 'The Metropolis and Mental Life.'

Simmel's work helps us consider two main forms of experiencing the city. The first is the cityscape considered as an adjunct of the landscape, in which a significant vista of the city is considered from a distance, with the view summoning up an affective response. The cityscape is effectively the urban landscape. The second is more directly located in the life of the city, the cityscape seen from within the street-life, or streetscape amidst the melee of signs, sounds, shocks and shifting impressions. Here it is no longer the dominance of the eye, for the movement through the more confined space of the streets with their crowds of people, demands attunement to other sensory registers than vision: aural, tactile and proprioceptive, along with the capacity to pick up the feeling of mood and atmosphere. At the same time, the overwhelming enervating stimulation, can lead to self-protective withdrawal, Simmel's indifferent blasé response. These two aspects of the city are central to Frisby's discussion in *Cityscapes of Modernity*.

There is a further sense we can think about the city image: the image of the city that stands for the city as a whole, the iconic image that represents the city. Here we think of a particular dominant image which has penetrated into the general

consciousness to the extent that it has become a symbol to stand for the city. While some cities have several competing images, others have a single image which effectively stands for or captures the city and attains pretty much universal recognition. The Eiffel Tower is one such image, which Roland Barthes (1997) reminds us is visible from practically all of Paris with its presence overseeing all urban life. A virtually empty sign which can mean anything and yet also, something which can become commonplace and flip over into an irritant. A sentiment captured by the novelist Guy de Maupassant who often lunched in the tower even though he didn't much care for the food, because it was 'the only place in Paris where you don't have to see it' (Barthes, 1997:3). The tower has a dual focus – an object of impressive height seen from everywhere in the city, but also a platform for viewing the city as a whole, and, atmospheric conditions permitting, for seeing the countryside beyond, even as far as the Alps, as Jacques Cousteau reminded us with reference to his pre-war childhood.³ At the same time, the impressive size and memorable design meant that the tower became celebrated as the object that signified Paris around the world.

The Eiffel tower also became a challenge to other city promoters and marketers, who struggled to find an equivalent image that possessed the same power and impact to represent their city. In effect, this image that stands for the city could be seen as a made-up public face, or façade of the city, the equivalent to that of a celebrity or star, that would be instantly recognised on the world stage.⁴ Here, we can also note that the largest city in the world, Tokyo, still struggles to develop a suitable powerful image. The 'Skytree' tower built in 2012, at 630 metres is almost double the height of the Eiffel Tower, yet it has not yet been adopted by the public as the image of Tokyo.

Rather, the Shibuya Crossing, a multiple crossing invariably crowded with pedestrians and overseen by giant video screens, has been described as the busiest intersection in the world and is the media image television news editors and the tourist industry use to represent Tokyo.

It is also possible for some cities to lack an image. This could be the case with 'generic cities' (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995; Hajer, 1999) where anonymous modular buildings which are ruthlessly torn down and rebuilt without planning, to produce a 'city without a memory,' an anonymous urban sprawl,' the 'Bladerunner' type of city which lacks dominant or memorable features. In the generic city both the cityscape and the streetscape assume a certain anonymity, they lack markings which have been accorded cultural significance, inscriptions that become narrated and taken up by various cultural agencies and cultural industries and promoted to wider audiences.⁵ They are effectively non-places that capture Gertrude Stein's remark on Oakland 'there is no there, there.' Or places built with functionality to the fore that eschew elaborate or stylish design as in the concept of 'no-place spaces' addressed by Marc Augé (2009). In effect, some cities or urban districts are faceless or expressionless, they lack expression in the sense of memorable adornment, decoration and style that 'catch the eye.' They are comprised of buildings, not architecture.

The question becomes more complex when we introduce the term 'mediascapes,' and consider the media flows which constantly feature and promote images of certain cities: 'the cultural capitals of the world', 'the top ten tourist city destinations' and so on. Cities which become strong attractors, that not only have their potent

promotional images, but also generate new sets of images through the flows of visitors and tourists who take photos with their mobile phones and exchange them on social media - especially the 'selfies' in which the iconic tourist buildings and sites feature as 'I've been there' evidential background. The city becomes already seen via the mediascapes, and then becomes further mediated through the flow of new images. The question arises how does the use of cameras and photographic devices affect our way of seeing and perceiving the city? Clearly, for some, the prosthetic visual device can act as an enhancer, a focus and intensification of the gaze, and the aestheticization process. At the same time, we also become aware that we not only see the city, the city has cameras that see us, our images are recorded, our faces scanned as part of the urban surveillance security apparatus. In this paper the initial focus will be on cityscapes, streetscapes and urban aestheticization processes. This will be followed by a discussion of the city as a work of art and the similarities between cityscape and landscape. Finally, a more detailed analysis of the affective qualities of landscape is then followed by a brief consideration of urban mediascapes.

Cityscapes and Urban Aestheticization

In Simmel's (1990) major work *The Philosophy of Money*, the increasing dominance of quantitative exchange value and calculation of things is emphasised. The 'culture of things as the culture of human beings' (Simmel, 1990, Frisby, 1991b:79) through the extension of exchange value and the money form, creates a 'labyrinth of means' that threatens the survival of the aesthetic world and the sphere of values.⁶ On one level, the money form can be seen as a parallel to the aesthetic sphere, with the

relentless expansion of the circulation and exchange of commodities creating a 'beautiful illusion,' an illusory world of inverted value through distanced quantification.⁷ A world in which the aesthetic mood can thrive through the constant use of calculation through the money form to assess the things that surround us. On the other hand, the danger is that consumer commodities tend to be designed to highlight an enticing external appearance over their usefulness. Simmel terms this process 'aesthetic productivity,' and sees it as entailing the ethos of transitoriness and need to create an alluring appearance via 'the shop-window quality of things' (1991; Frisby, 1991:88). This is a process central to consumer culture, which favours the move from aesthetics into style and then the descent into a plurality of styles.

The plethora of transitory ephemeral styles can, in turn, lead to the opposite reaction: a retreat deeper into the aesthetic realm such as in the case of *art nouveau's* conception of a total work of art in which not only the exterior building and interiors are transformed into works of art, but all their contents too (furniture etc.). A tendency which Simmel bridled against given his Kantian view that the work of art should be something for itself, whereas furniture is something for us (Frisby, 1991:88; Simmel, 1994). In general, Simmel was pessimistic about overcoming the dominance of objective culture with its accompanying dissolution of forms and fragmentation of experience. This is also evident in his discussion of subjective and objective culture; the accumulation of commodities via the expanding money economy could be seen as part of a more general long-term process whereby the generation and search for new information over the centuries has led to the massive expansion of the archive of 'objective culture' (Simmel, 1997e, 1997f; Featherstone, 2000; 2018). Given the limits of our human life course, the sheer quantity and

diversity of objective culture clearly becomes beyond the capacity of any individual to assimilate into their own 'subjective culture'. Yet, this limitation has been labelled tragic, given that our own chosen route amounts to a wager that necessarily involves an investment of precious life-time that obviates other possible selections. At the same time, for Simmel, this does not rule out meaningful aestheticized encounters or the lure of forming a life beyond the 'flatness of daily life'; these remain powerful themes, evident in Simmel's celebration of the adventure.

Simmel's essay on the adventure (1997b) is given a prominent place in Frisby's *Cityscapes of Modernity* (1991:10ff), initially from an unexpected aside to Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* thesis, where, following Rachfahl, Frisby suggests that adventure capitalism does not simply disappear with the development of modern capitalism. Indeed, the current phase of globalization and neoliberalism would seem to bear out the continuing importance of adventure capitalism (especially in the financial markets), as opposed to the steady systematic mode of accumulation that Weber highlighted. In some ways then, the image of the adventurer, who works on short-term projects, like that of the *flâneur* who wanders the city drifting along fortuitous unplanned routes, deliberately opens the self to what life throws up, with an openness to new directions, contingency and fatefulness. The need to follow creative impulses means the rejection of the careful rational planning associated with systematic capital accumulation. Indeed, planning itself can be seen as stultifying and lacking imagination. Frisby (1991:19) discusses the late 19th-century debates around Otto Wagner's plans for a New Vienna. City planning had become far too dominated by the infrastructural imperatives of traffic circulation, public hygiene (sewers), the merits of straight as opposed to crooked streets etc. Camillo Sitte, in

one of his many newspaper attacks on the new Viennese city planning, bemoaned the eclipse of the aesthetic dimension and the worry that the planners wanted to create the metropolis as 'a human storehouse,' rather than 'a work of art' (Frisby, 1991:19).

The preservation of the city as a work of art, is an aesthetic process? that, given his openness to the aesthetic possibilities revealed by the new urban processes, Simmel would have been ambivalent about,. The alternative basis for an urban aesthetic is documented in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' which takes into account the intensification of nervous stimuli, the rapid crowding, the changing images and onrushing impressions (Simmel, 1997a). The modern metropolis had brought forth a range of new traits: the demand for calculative exactness and punctuality, freedom of movement, self-protective reserve and impersonality, the blasé attitude as a reaction to the overload of shocks and sensations, a world of flowing impressions and disjunctures. The speed and intensity of new sensations and powerful life currents on the street level, discouraged stable forms to capture the experience of the city. Simmel has often been depicted as a 'formal sociologist,' as particularly attuned to the range of forms, especially those near to life, that emerge in the modern metropolis: forms which rapidly deform and reform and fall back into the flow of life. It is to be expected that a new urban aesthetic might be developed to capture this process. Frisby outlines this both in *Sociological Impressionism* (1981) and *Cityscapes of Modernity* (1991). In the latter he develops the connection between the city as depicted by Expressionist artists and writers who focused on the street level chaos of impressions that bombard the fragile human subject overwhelmed by crowds, traffic, intimidating buildings and ceaseless construction.

According to Ludwig Meidner, the modern painter must endeavour to capture the multiplicity of urban life and endeavour to paint 'life in its plenitude: space, light and dark, heaviness and lightness, and movement of things – in short to achieve a deeper penetration of reality' (Frisby, 2001:239). The city is in motion: 'light sets all things in space in motion. Towers, dwellings, street-lamps seem to hang or to swim' (Frisby, 2001:239). A fascinating, shifting aesthetic disorder in which beauty was discovered in ugliness. Or rather, we could even argue that this opened up aesthetic perceptions that struggled beyond beauty and sought to grapple with the urban sublime of not just darkness and ugliness, but the shifting scales and colliding viewpoints that took the viewer beyond visual order and into a confusing unformed melee of sense-impressions. It is possible to see this as part the larger struggle between life and form which takes place in the cultural sphere that the particularly distinctively metropolitan life form throws up as an intensification of life, an immediacy of life impressions and elusive dynamic rhythms which the artist and writer struggle to capture in adequate art forms. For Frisby, these are forms, necessarily constructed closer to life as Expressionism and the new art forms struggle to 'give expression to lived experience (*Erlebnis*) in its naked givenness as much as possible' (1991:256).

Expressionism with its impulse to follow down the modern circuits of life to the shifting street level, to find adequate forms to render the dissolution of forms back into life, sought to play with the dynamics of immersion and distancing, the cool eye of vision and multiple sensory overload. This did not, of course, exhaust the artistic impulse to represent the city. Within art galleries and museums, there were ordered

tranquil institutional spaces that sought to further a more disciplined mode of aesthetic contemplation. Simmel draws attention to the ways in which the art museum, with its archive of paintings and exhibitions tended to provide a conservative order that often lagged behind, or refused, the challenge of the contemporary struggles to paint the vibrant street-level city as found in Expressionism. Simmel (2014) makes some interesting observations on art exhibitions, which similarly to the more elaborate world fairs such as the Berlin Trade Exhibition 1896 (Simmel, 1991), attempted to grapple with the questions of diversity and unity in endeavouring to house together a particular totality of cultural production. Both types of exhibition facilitated the crystallization of a wealth of impressions within a confined space. Yet be it the extensive display of the world of goods and excitement in simulations of the exotica of distant parts of the world as in the case of the fairs, or the bewildering range of artistic productions in the art museum, there was a similar problem in handling the body impact. As Simmel (1990:477; cited in Frisby, 1991a:113) remarks ‘in the bodily realm, too, the over-excitement of the nerves leads, on the one hand to *hyperaesthesia*, the unhealthily accentuated impact of every impression, and on the other, to *anaesthesia*, the equally unhealthily reduced receptivity.’ In this, Simmel held that art exhibitions amounted to a miniature image of the intellectual currents of his age, with the fleeting haste and excited hunt for impression, the lack of sharply formed personalities and the abundance of groups striving to carry forward stylistic genres.⁸ For Simmel (2014), the art exhibition should not just be seen as a reflection of larger urban processes, for it generated its own impulses, in terms of aesthetic sensibility, sensory responses and blasé attitude which made their way out into the city to become forces in their own right.

While Simmel focuses on the form and content of the art exhibition, he does not seem to pay attention to the building which houses the exhibition. The art museum should also be considered within the cityscape, especially when the building is seen as necessitating aesthetic significance to the extent that the architecture should carry the same prestige as the art museum contents. Today we are accustomed to seeing bold projects designed by global star architects, such as the Guggenheim Bilbao museum (Frank Gehry), The Jewish Museum of Berlin (Daniel Libeskind). Likewise, in global spectacle events, such as the Olympic Games, stadia are often conceived and built employing similar global prestige criteria (Tamari, 2019).⁹ Clearly cities aspiring to global status will often invest in striking architectural projects which can be made to stand for their public image. On one level, this could be seen as part of a self-conscious assessment by city politicians and cultural authorities to stamp or re-stamp the image. But the question arises how far can a building enhance a landscape, or overcome a negative image of a city? It may temporarily attract global media attention, but there is also the danger that if it is deemed an ill-judged gamble, it will attract notoriety.

The City as a Work of Art

The term cityscape proves difficult to pin down: it at once suggests something similar to the landscape, a natural view which has pleasing attractiveness; but it may not involve a view – some cities are flat and offer little in the way of vantage points from which to view them. There are of course notable exceptions: Rio de Janeiro, has an amazing natural setting which seems to offer memorable vistas at every turn, especially when some elevation is attained – as the Cariocas love to say ‘God

created the world in seven days and on the eighth he built Rio'. Athens too, has the dominant outcrop of rock, the Acropolis on which the Parthenon is built, and the absence of high-rise buildings in proximity means the eye constantly returns to it.

Simmel addressed this type of question in his writings on the landscape and Italian cities. In the landscape paper (2007a) Simmel remarks that the awareness of landscape is a relatively modern phenomenon beginning with the Renaissance. To perceive a landscape involves the tearing away of a part, from the whole of nature, which had tended to be apprehended with a unity feeling. Important here is the demarcation process, the encapsulation in a momentary glance from within our field of vision of the raw materials to a landscape, which then become transposed into its own unity. This is particularly the case with landscape art where the artist tends to see a landscape as an integral form and not just an aggregate of separate objects. In this sense, the capacity to become aware of a particular view as a landscape 'lies on the road towards a work of art as a proto-form of it' (Simmel, 2007a:26). The formation of this unity may well involve 'the mood' of a landscape, something which permeates all its separate components and we feel is projected out to us, something which is characteristic of this particular landscape only.¹⁰ An artist is someone who carries out the formative act of perception and feeling, to see and create anew the landscape through art. And yet, although the artistic dynamic is central to the capture of the landscape, the potential artistic form, however embryonic it is, is also alive within all of us. Simmel, however, remarks that the city is seldom viewed as a landscape (Frisby, 1991a:116). In part this is a consequence of the nature of urban life, especially at the street level with its shocks, speed and bombardment of impressions. This requires an immediate focus which enmeshes us in events, making

it difficult to attain the contemplative distance to feel the mood formation process that could unify a particular view of the city into a landscape or cityscape.

At the same time, Simmel is clear that certain cities can be regarded as works of art. In his essays on Florence, Rome and Venice, Simmel (2007d:31) uses the term cityscape (*Stadtbild*) positively and finds that particular old cities exemplify a rare aesthetic process. Unlike works of art which are fashioned to deliberately bring various elements together to provide the appearance of beauty, the city as a work of art has grown without preconceived design, exhibiting considerable contingency in the way the various arbitrary elements have been brought together to achieve the chance effect of beauty. Rome in particular, is seen as having a unity based on multiplicity in this way through the tension between the hilly landscape and older and newer buildings along with ruins, which gives the city great dynamism. Florence, on the other hand, exhibits a mysterious unity and grace in which nature and culture, through the natural setting, the range of buildings and urban layout, worked together to achieve an aesthetic perfection. From this perspective, it is possible to see a beautiful city such as Florence as resembling the individuality, we see in the type of *Bildung* found in certain great artistic figures such as Goethe whose personality formation process reveals an empathy and capacity to lose himself in all men and integrate the traits of others in his unity (Podoksik, 2012). Simmel comments

As the tension between nature and mind is thereby resolved, an aesthetic mood emerges: the feeling of standing before a work of art. There is perhaps no other city in which the overall impression, vividness and memory, and in

which nature and culture working in unison, create in the viewer so strong an impression of a work of art...' (2007d:39)

Venice on the other hand, is a city of appearances and artifice, for 'the city's decline has left behind a merely lifeless stage-set, displaying the 'mendacious beauty of the mask' (Simmel, 2007e:44). In this, Venice is a dream-like city where the things themselves have retreated, to be replaced by monotonous appearances to produce an aesthetically complete form disconnected from life. It can never offer us home, but rather is 'the classical city of adventure,' a city which is a perfect work of art with its narcissistic illusory beauty (Simmel, 2007e:46; Podoksik, 2012).

Simmel was very much aware of the continuing struggle between life and form and the ways in which art and all forms inevitably sink back into life – in the case of Venice, the city as a work of art, this sinking is literally taking place. The relentless growth of cities under the pressure of renewal and urban redevelopment threatens to constantly reframe and even destroy the aesthetics of a particular cityscape and its potential to remain secure as a work of art. How to repair a city whose natural landscape and built cityscape lacked impact, was something a contemporary of Simmel, Walther Rathenau discussed in 'The Most Beautiful City in the World.' Rathenau, as Frisby discusses, sought to redefine the image of the city, especially in the case where there was no beautiful landscape, sea or river setting, to focus on creating beautiful buildings or renovating the street landscape (2001:6). Yet, the danger was that this would entail the planned destruction of the existing city. As Frisby (2001:119) remarks, while Simmel (1997c) had written an influential essay on the ruin, he neglected to consider the everyday ruination and destruction that was

part of the urban process. The constant reconstruction of the metropolis, the tearing down and building up process generated ruins. But today, the ruins are rapidly sealed off and hidden, with the rubble quickly dispersed to provide hardcore for other building sites. Significant buildings disappear in a matter of days without trace or memorialization in the rapid urban succession process.

One of the problems Rathenau was preoccupied with, was that in contrast to the beauty of Paris and Vienna, Berlin seemed to possess a purely modern ugliness (Frisby, 2001:243). It seemed to be more of a factory city and was referred to as exhibiting more the unrestrained modernity that characterised American cities, 'a Chicago on the Spree', in lacking notable or memorable features. Berlin, according to Kracauer was 'the place in which one quickly forgets. Indeed, it appears as if this city has control of the magical means of eradicating all memories' (cited in Frisby, 2001:264). Theodor W. Adorno talked about the 'man without a memory,' here we have 'the city without a memory.' Yet Adorno's aesthetics exemplified by the modern music of Schoenberg and Berg, looked more to abstract and formal innovation, as opposed to finding a new type of beauty within the detritus of urban life: the discovery of a beauty within ugliness (Nuttall, 2006; Bayley, 2012, Geyer, 2004). Benjamin (1999) on the other hand, could be more open to this sensibility with his account of the rejected junk material and detritus of the burgeoning consumer culture in 19th-century Paris. Everyday banal consumer objects, such as the discarded handbill and tram ticket, still had the capacity, through their design, packaging and imagery to awaken in us something akin to aura, albeit in a fragmentary and allegorical way. They could stimulate half-formed memories, or prompt utopian longing (Benjamin 1999; Buck-Morss, 1989; Hansen, 2008). Aura, then, was not just

lost with the decline of the work of art and mass reproducibility. Discarded worthless, ugly mass objects could work in allegorical ways, and effectively re-enchant the urban cityscape. For those who know how to look and value cultivating a variant of the artistic gaze, beauty can be found in the detritus and dark corners of the city as well as the industrial landscape.

The ugly detritus of consumer culture, the tattered advertising posters that accumulated to form a palimpsest on the side of a building, the metal signs and flickering neon which were forgotten and never taken down, can potentially remain half-seen, yet are capable of summing up half-forgotten memories which may refuse to configure into coherent thought, yet instead create an atmosphere or mood. Can the same be said for the modern planned city, as found in the Soviet Union or People's Republic of China? Or cities like Brasilia whose cityscape of monumental buildings seem to display a fixation with geometric shape and form laid out over an extensive flat landscape, with people's accustomed form of locomotion, seemingly forgotten, given the unwalkable distances between building clusters. Rather, the city seems designed to be glimpsed by car or bus as one speeds along the intervening straight roads, with saving time the major imperative. Not quite the Generic City, vaunted by Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995), but on the way. Koolhaas celebrates the freedom of plain faceless buildings, against the over-reverence and inflexible conservation ethos that surrounds so-called 'buildings of character.' He was also an admirer of the Japanese Metabolist Group and wrote a book on the topic (Koolhaas & Obrist, 2011; Tamari, 2014). The generic city and the Metabolists vision is for a city dominated by the plan for a uniform, modular building-form. A city without decoration, accidents and human traces, in which the city space still retains

the features of the drawing board and models where scale and functionality dominate. The space-station style, container modular city, easy and cheap to build, clean and sleek with no nooks and crannies to accumulate human and living waste and detritus.

But it does accumulate waste and decay. The run-down dystopian version of this vision is the Blade Runner city, which derive from the movies loosely based on the Phillip Dick story. It is interesting to note that there have been a number of attempts to view Tokyo through this lens on the part of some cineasts and those wishing to stimulate movie tourism (see Mallonnee, 2018). This is the faceless urban sprawl, the city without a plan, where new agglomerations just seem to add themselves in a self-organizing urban process. The city where respectable knowledgeable people choose not to go; the 'noir city,'.

Of course, this is not the only form of cinema-city, tourist and culture industries more readily produce images the city which emphasise its positive experiential dimension. New York's famous Chrysler Building with its art décor façades and Gothic decorations has captured the imagination of numerous movie-makers in films such as 'Sleepless in Seattle' (Billson, 2014). This and other Manhattan buildings have become easily recognisable through their use as locations for movie footage and have become tourist attractions in their own right. These places have become memorable, for visitors who want to go to stand in exactly the same location to see the same view as the movie heroes and heroines. But what do they see when they look at the city?

The same question could be said for the tourists who journey to the top of Paris's Eiffel Tower, or Skytree in Tokyo. This raises question of the basis of the iconic power of these vantage points? The Eiffel Tower clearly possesses particular qualities as a powerful attractor, but although at the time proclaimed as the tallest tower in the world, the same cannot yet be said of Skytree, which for a while held the title. Over time, the material fabric of the building seemingly becomes saturated with memories and sentiments, but it is also a sign open to contain countless memories and sentiments projected onto it. This density of cultural associations and cultural appropriations makes it a powerful image. Such sites offer prime tourist experiences that are regarded as central to contemporary leisure consumption. With travel and tourism having recently been defined as the world's largest industry (Spinks and Kopf, 2018), the demand for memorable experiences and learning how to mobilize the tourist gaze, become important not only for the traditional recreational and pleasure sectors (beach and resort vacations etc.), but more experiential forms of tourism which includes not just adventure travel to the world's wild places, but cultural travel that entices us to know better the qualities of 'fascinating' global cities and world heritage sites (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The city image, then, becomes an important revenue generator, not only for the tourist and leisure sectors, but indeed for promoting the full range of industrial, business, financial, property and other opportunities that reside within the city.

There is a whole sector of cultural intermediaries and cultural specialists devoted to producing the narratives and images for a particular city. Local city governments tend to have their own publicity and image departments, to constantly update narratives and produce human interest stories of typical encounters with the city that

are targeted to specific audiences. Potential visitors are also encouraged to read up by purchasing from the expanding series of city guidebooks of the Lonely Planet type, as well as visiting the countless websites that provide advice on where to go, what to see, what to consume, and what to record. More recently with internet social media, there has been the development of the 'recommendation economy,' in which ordinary people are encouraged to become intermediaries to rate and rank their experiences from hotels and meals, entertainment venues, cultural programmes etc. Facebook, TripAdvisor, Lastminute.com, Airbnb, all employ algorithms to instantly furnish data to help those who seek to customise their city experience (Esposito and Stark, 2019). For major global cities such as Tokyo, London, New York, and Paris, there is a vast range of information and advice available. In short, the visitors are encouraged to do their homework, to embark on a multi-layered learning process to maximise their urban experience.

But, again, what do people see in the city, how do they engage the urban landscape or cityscape? Clearly, one significant way is to see through the guidebooks, visit the top recommended venues and sites, to seemingly tick off the stars from the list. People may go on a guided tour, or listen to a commentary via headsets, and gaze at what they are directed to see while inculcating the background story. This provides economical cultural encounters which have been designed by cultural specialists and intermediaries which have been deliberately designed for maximum impact and time-money economizing. Some visitors will eschew the organized schedules and elect to experience the city in different ways. One danger is that the streetscape encounter becomes foregone, relegated to a mere means, an impediment to be endured, as visitors walk the city with their eyes focused on the

screen map on their mobile phones. Some will be listening to music or commentaries on earphones as they walk. The journey to the ranked memorable place to visit may become opaque or blanked out.

This is the opposite of urban experience envisaged by Guy Debord (1956) and the Situationists, where one ventured out into the urban crowds and streetscapes without an end plan or destination, turning left at right at intervals in a random manner. This urban journey without maps, was held to enable one to experience the city afresh, to find new angles of viewing, new sensory experiences through abandoning oneself to contingency. Of course, the whole process depended on open access to the streets, if one turns into a gated area – or skyscraper complex, one may encounter security guards barring the way. It depends on what Richard Sennett (2016) refers to as the open city, the walkable city of human-scale blocks, streets with pavements etc. This is one reason Sennett continually attacks the no-places spaces of the vertical city, in which vouched-for people are confined within the protective glass and steel architecture. The lift becomes the main device for mobility within high-rise buildings and indeed, there are developments for not only ultra-fast elevators for the new generation of ‘super-tall’ skyscrapers of over 100 storeys, but elevators that can travel horizontally through a building too and then resume vertical movement (Graham, 2014). The lack of capacity to engage the visible outside can also be found in travel by bus where one cannot see outside the windows because they are full of semi-transparent advertisements, or the travel by subway and metro and railway systems underground. Here the trade off, especially for commuters, is speed, the saving in journey time, despite sensory insulation from the surroundings. There is also the labyrinth city of tunnels, granting seemingly safe and dependable

rapid access to network the city. Every large city has some form of underground infrastructure, not only transport systems, but communication tunnels, utilities, sewers, and in some cases below ground malls and entertainment areas. This is not the city for the *flâneur* or derive drifting, for many parts offer only limited access to maintenance engineers and service personnel. There is little sense of vista, or things for the eye to behold in the subground-scapes.

But the urban infrastructure below and the wireless systems above the city, are both essential for the communicative city. We may not see the city, when you are riding underground transport, or walking the streets, but the city sees us. The surveillance city with its mass of video-cameras is constantly transmitting and recording us as we move through the streetscapes. As are the mobile devices we possess, such as smartphones we use to navigate the city, which harvest the data of our locations and journeys, to constantly update everyone's digital profile to enable better targeting and marketing of information and access to advertising, as part of the like/recommendation economy. The digital information networks, then, have an interest in tracking people's range of movements and purchases, which can be made revenue productive by instantly targeting to them relevant ancillary consumer information and advertisements in real time (Crandall, 2010).

The city is a multiplicity which can unfold numerous images, cityscapes and perspective in terms of the use we make of it and the sense of relevance we bring to it. There is a strong sense that the city is readable and writeable. This is most clear in the streetscapes of the walkable city as we make our way along the pavements, but also in the slow-moving traffic, the views from taxi windows and buses, as we

attempt to decipher the 'hieroglyphics' of street signs, neon and the proprioceptive buildings which add to the mood. All this, as Frisby (2017) indicates is overlaid by the myths, delusions and memories which are sedimented into the streetscape (Giannakopoulou, 2017). In many ways, the city can be seen as a battlefield and work in progress, in which the constant destruction and reconstruction of the cityscape, forms layers of sedimentation, waiting for archaeological and sociological excavation to bring to life again, albeit briefly, another façade of the city. Yet, if the key textual information about the city and compilation of images are constantly being renovated in line with today's set of relevances pushed by powerful social groups, then, there are always other groups with different relevances who value different aspects of the city. As we find, for example, in the International Situationists penchant for drifting randomly through the city and valuation of the neglected, abandoned, forgotten aspects of the city. In effect, the city can offer the adventure of discovery amidst the rich urban fabric; to follow Frisby's phrase we can seek to 'escape from the everyday into the everyday' (cited in Giannakopoulou, 2017) streetscapes since the street, too, is where society is 'made,' then it too, can be studied as society (Giannakopoulou 2017).¹¹ At the same time, despite the immersive aspect of the streetscapes with their bombardment of impressions which feeds aestheticization processes, there is also the pull of another form of representation: the sublime (Giannakopoulou, 2017). Yet, where are the key vantage points to experience the sublime in the city? Is it something we can discover in all major cities, or is it best found in cities with a stunning combination of landscape and cityscape as occurs, say in Rio de Janeiro? In cities with districts that have a preponderance of skyscraper and high-rise buildings, as in New York, Tokyo, London, Dubai or Shanghai, does the agglomeration of vertigo-inducing super-tall

towers provide new aesthetic experiences - for both looking up at, as well as viewpoints to look down from?

Is there the sense that the capacity to dominate the cityscape, is akin to the capacity of a mountain to dominate the landscape? Does this mean however much the city is writeable and readable, however much we inculcate the narratives, images and pedagogies furnished by cultural intermediaries, something escapes? There is something which can impact with immediacy: there is a *there there*, which can allow the cityscape, not to be just the passive object of our inscription process, but to actively speak back to us.¹²

Mediascapes

Arjun Appadurai (1990) suggests that today's global culture involves a range of flows (money, people, technology, ideas, images etc.) within various -scapes (financescapes, ethnoscapes, technoscape, ideoscapes and mediascapes).

Mediascapes can be seen as furthering the circulation of cultural images and stereotypes, initially through the cinema and television, but increasingly through the internet and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc. Social media platforms encourage people to develop their online profiles as part of the sharing economy, by uploading photographs, clips and personal information. With the advent of more sophisticated mobile 'phones, we have become familiar with the obsession with recording experiences. The visitors to tourist site and museums, who snap each treasure and rapidly move on. The people who want to record themselves in the foreground in a particular famous tourist site, iconic monuments etc. Or those who in striving to capture key moments at sporting events, only to miss the action

happening in front of them. The city of course, offers a multiplicity of sites and opportunities to use advanced digital mobile technologies, that are user-friendly, relatively low-cost, with enhanced capacities for recording and storage. This means the city is frequently viewed through the screen image produced by digital mobile devices. Or if, the eye is allowed to look itself, it is hard to avoid looking through glass – the windowed platform of super-tall buildings, the windows of automobiles, buses and trains (Friedberg, 1994; Simpson, 2013). Windows that reflect and refract, that create various forms of doubling and uncanny effects. Windows that invariably cannot be opened, which insulate the spectators or passengers from the proprioceptive sensations of heat, breeze and atmosphere outside. Windows that may be tinted or inscribed with advertisements. All of which mediate and filter the visual experience. Wonderful!

On the other hand, some may wish to mobilise the tactile eye and attempt to simulate different synesthetic forms of engagement through various modes of recording. As Benjamin indicates, new technologies can be seen to enhance the range of possibilities open to us (2010; Hansen, 2008). For example, we have become accustomed to seeing reproductions of aerial views of the city.¹³ The bird's eye view becomes part of the urban imaginary alongside the mole's eye image of the city below ground. Potentially enhancing our sense of the 3D space which includes, the below ground and the sky as well as the accustomed earth surface that is routinely mapped and the basis for our everyday navigation.¹⁴

Conclusion

In his discussion of the Berlin Trade Exhibition Simmel argues that one of the attractions of world fairs is that a single city has gathered together the products of the entire world in a single place, as if to present a single picture. The cultural contents of the world are on display, as the 'world city' presents the products and styles of the existing cultural world in concentrated form. It can be argued that not only world fairs, but global spectacular events such as the Olympics and the World Cup feature similar attempts to display a certain 'cosmopolitan' orientation to take in and represent the world. At the same time, the host cities are also engaged in prestige contexts, to present the stadia and facilities as embodying the latest architectural technologies and futuristic styles. In some instances this is accompanied by major redevelopment projects, modernising infrastructure or housing facilities in certain districts. The changing cityscape becomes quickly transmitted to the mediascape to provide a backcloth for broadcast events. Yet the increasing numbers of people independently producing and transmitting images via social media means that for many of the spectators, the event becomes seen through their own camera lens. The tactile quality of the device in the hand when the event is viewed via the screen, coupled with the choice of the spectator in assuming relevance and making the selection, adds to the process of memorialization. An excess of images become produced which open up new angles of view on the cityscape and streetscape.

If we return to the metaphor of the face of the city, rather than having a single image, the face of the city possesses a multiplicity of expressions. In effect, the face ceases to be a mask or object, but an event, an event which animates the city (Brighenti, 2019).¹⁵ Yet this multiplicity of expressions of the city as a whole, with its different

rhythms needs to be linked to the faces of the people in the streets. The accustomed everyday inexpressive blank faces of urbanites on the streets (seemingly indifferent and blasé) or displaying what Mattenklott termed the typical 'cold eye,' relevant for reading faces in the crowd (cited in Frisby, 2017:12), is just one possible, although for many a habitual, occurrence in a shifting process. On the occasion of a major event, especially one which involves various parts of the urban area such as the Olympic Games marathon, the face of the cityscape changes. Yet the actual streetscape faces along the route also changes. The faces in such festive occasions, often express joy, they are alive in the moment, they become animated through participation in a memorable event. Of course, such occasions are rare and become anticipated and memorable for this very reason. Unlike most city images that focus on more general features perceived from a distance, on building not people, the descent to the streetscape level makes faces visible and hard to avoid. But the streetscape is not the face of the city but the city of faces. The streetscape is not settled, it is in motion.

Except in the very early hours of the morning when there are few people on the streets, the streetscape generally is dominated by the crowds of people struggling to see and not see each other. The streetscape then has rhythms, periods of congestion and intensity, periods when people need to hold onto their mask. At the weekend or on festive occasions, the faces take on a different register of expression. The potential of the city to deliver these palpable shifts in rhythm and intensity continues to fascinate theorists such as Simmel and Frisby, not only through the immersive being there of the streetscape, but through the ways in which the generated sentiments and ethos percolate upwards into the cityscape; to produce

the atmosphere we anticipate when we look at the city from afar, but also become incorporated into the very image of the city, the city image itself.

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Mike, a small favour. Can you please add complete page numbers for essays here?

Notes

¹ David Frisby made an important contribution to the English-language reception of Simmel. He also translated and commented on Simmel's writings, including numerous pieces for *Theory, Culture & Society*. Many of these pieces were included in the TCS Books Series *Simmel on Culture* (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997), which we co-edited.

² Simmel's methodology was also important here in his capacity to work concepts both ways, through his *Wechselwirkung* method which highlighted reciprocal effects and exchange as opposed to one-way causality. This helped generate a distance and alternative perspectives, which gave a key role to culture and aesthetics in social life. This emphasis suggests we should recall Roland Robertson's (1982) remark in a review of Frisby's *Sociological Impressionism* (1981): 'Simmel sought to do with aestheticism what he tried to do with materialism – build a storey *beneath* it.'

³ *New York Times* March 11, 1973; <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/03/11/archives/notes-antarctica-a-la-jacques-cousteau-pigeon-depopulation-saying.html>

⁴ While there are dangers in trying to think the city image in a similar way to the body image, there can be some productive similarities, especially through consideration of the face and the ‘face of the city’ (Brighenti, 2019; Featherstone, 2010). Indeed!

⁵ Consumer and tourist industries are now dominant in the global economy (Featherstone, 2007, 2018). In some instances, cities like Las Vegas provide ‘landscapes of consumption’ dominated by the consumption and entertainment industries (Zukin, 1998; Ryan, 2017; Simpson, 2013).

⁶ This tension between the economy and the aesthetic world is arguably even more relevant today. This rediscovery of the aesthetic chimes with what Olcese and Savage (2016) describe as the current ‘aesthetic turn,’ that they see as having overcome sociology’s antipathy towards the aesthetic. In their survey of ‘social aesthetics’ for a special section of the *British Journal of Sociology* their focus is on Rancière, Bourdieu and Deleuze. Apart from a single passing reference to Simmel’s writings on fashion and beauty, there is no discussion of Simmel or place for him in the references. Interesting point.

⁷ The notion of distance is central to Simmel’s notion of aesthetics (Simmel, 1968: 78; cited in Swedberg and Reich, 2010:38). For examples of his fragmentary style in relation to aesthetics see his essays in *Jugend* (Simmel, 2013a; Rammstedt, 1991).

⁸ This capacity, to advance an insight and then go back to it and explore it from the other direction, has been a source of frustration for some commentators on Simmel, especially those who favoured a more monological, ordered ideal type method to access the world, as we find in some of the followers of Weber and Parsons (see Lichtblau, 1991). Simmel was sensitive to not just create an abstract typology of pure forms, but in attuning to the actual forms used in social life along with their dynamics, the way they are constantly deformed, reformed and discarded. He saw many aspects of urban life, and indeed, social and cultural forms and arrangements, as simultaneously cause and effect. This reciprocal relationship is a key feature of the *Wechselwirkung* methodological approach he employed to bring out the contradictory and dualistic nature of social phenomena. While metropolitan mental life may encourage a highly personal form of subjectivity, it also encouraged its

opposite reaction, the blasé attitude (Frisby, 2001:151). Yet Simmel was aware that blasé indifference could readily be amplified into active distrust, reserve and even hostility.

⁹ The process of competitive bidding on the part of host cities to the International Olympics Committee places the focus on the city image, with city marketing departments putting considerable energy into refurbishing and even rebranding the city. From the very start of the modern Olympics moving images of the city, or the city as the backcloth to the Games have been important. As Takeshi Nakerji (2019; Featherstone and Tamari, 2019) suggests, there is an extraordinary coincidence between the birth of the modern Olympic Games in April 1896 and the birth of the cinema in December 1895.

¹⁰ The mood of the landscape is taken up by Francois Jullien (2018) who focuses on ancient Chinese philosophy. He remarks that Chinese formulations value the absence of a point of view and impulse to aestheticize. Rather, in China the landscape is seen as providing a milieu that encourages an affective mood in which we ‘uncontemplate’ objects and attune to the ambience and atmosphere.

¹¹ In his discussion of Simmel’s streetscapes of modernity, Frisby (2017) emphasises the compounding effect of the modern metropolis in its intensification of the features of modernity through not only the generation of new forms of urban life, but also its role as the site of the money economy. The increasing circulation of individuals, traffic, commodities and money moves the emphasis away from production to exchange, circulation and consumption. On the street level the bodily shocks lead to over-stimulation and ‘psychologism,’ the dissolution of experience encourages the psychological conditions of hyperaesthesia, anaesthesia and the blasé attitude, that Simmel (1997a) refers to in his ‘metropolis and mental life’ essay. On the social level it involves the circulation of individuals with different temporal agendas and sets of interests and relevances on the street. The figures on the urban streetscapes include not only the blasé person, but also the fashion addict and the eccentric person as well as the stranger, the poor, the adventurer, the cosmopolitan and the prostitute. Both those who exemplify greater calculation and those who resist the world of calculability through indifference.

¹² In this context it is interesting to note the profusion of glass architecture in financial centres and entertainment areas and the ways in which it enables various gradations of simulation and dissimulation, inside and outside, writing and reading (see Simpson, 2013).

¹³ While there were earlier views of the city from balloons, after the invention of photography, the WWI development of air warfare, meant the value of reconnaissance photographs and moving mages dramatically increased the technological investment (Adey, 2013; Beck 2012). The view from the air soon became featured in movies. In the post-World War II era, Hao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli anime frequently featured aircraft with views from above and people in flight. Drones are the latest technology to provide the view from above – often used to contextualise 'selfies' style photos from above. Their use in the city raises a host of questions about security, surveillance, privacy and nuisance. A number of countries are currently in the process of initiating legislation and codes of practice.

¹⁴ See Eyal Weitzman's (2017) focus on the full 3D space within which we dwell and the capacity of the various materials within it to capture the traces we leave behind when we pass through.

¹⁵ Brighenti (2019) mentions the similarities between the face and landscape as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987:172-173) who emphasise the dynamic aspect of the face as ongoing, as lacking fixity. They comment: 'All faces envelop an unknown, unexplored landscape; all landscapes are populated by a loved or dreamed-of face, develop a face to come or already past. What face has not called upon the landscapes it amalgamated, sea and hill; what landscape has not evoked the face that would have completed it, providing an unexpected complement for its lines and traits?' maybe delete this? [OK to delete]