
Reviews

Cinematic urbanism: a history of the modern from reel to real by N AlSayyad; Routledge, London, 2006, 256 pages, £84.00 cloth, £25.00 paper (US\$148.00, \$50.00) ISBN 9780415700481, 9780415700498

Of the recent publications devoted to the relationship between film and cities (Brunsdon, 2007; Clarke, 1997; Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2001; 2003), this book provides a welcome addition to the field insofar that it successfully demonstrates ways in which the study of the ‘celluloid city’ can inform broader understandings of urbanism, space, and the built environment. As an architect, Nezar AlSayyad builds on work initiated by scholars such as Dietrich Neumann and Francois Penz to map out an urban history of modernity and postmodernity through film. By offering a basic introduction to some of the key theoretical literature on cities AlSayyad is aiming primarily at an undergraduate readership, appealing to an interdisciplinary audience in film and cultural studies, architecture, geography, and urban studies.

Each of the nine chapters in the book provides analysis of two films which AlSayyad selects to illustrate specific thematic areas. These include surveillance, utopia and dystopia, race and ethnicity, industrial modernity, ‘cynical modernity’ (drawing on the films of Jacques Tati), and the impacts of urbanisation on the small town. Although the choice of films for analysis is at times a tad predictable (*Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* being obvious cases in point), they do nevertheless provide for a clear and focused discussion around the themes addressed in each chapter. Some chapters work better than others in this regard; in chapter 8, for example, AlSayyad examines the films *Do the Right Thing* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* to map contested geographies of race and ethnicity in New York and London respectively. By observing, quite rightly, that much of the postcolonial literature on hybridity, identity, and otherness has “paid little attention to the intricacies of race and ethnicity as they play out in space” (page 190), AlSayyad provides an insightful reading of the two films, drawing out some of the commonalities framing their respective geographies of race, while at the same time acknowledging the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts surrounding each film. In contrast in chapter 2 AlSayyad explores the urbanisation of the ‘traditional cinematic small town’, and here the author’s comparative analysis of Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* and Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* is rather less convincing. The pairing of a US film made in 1946 with an Italian film from 1989 set in a “paradigmatically European” (page 7) small town in 1940s Sicily, although perhaps thematically justified, pays insufficient attention to the local and historical specificities that would inform an otherwise more nuanced reading of the films in question.

The major strength of the book lies in its ambition “to make the urban a fundamental part of cinematic discourse and to raise film to its proper status as an *analytical tool of urban discourse*” (page 4, emphasis added). By contextualising film within wider discourses on space, place, and urbanism, books such as *Cinematic Urbanism* provide a much needed corrective to studies which limit themselves to exclusively textual modes of analysis, as is all too often the case in much of the film studies literature. However, although this is to be welcomed, theoretically the book falls well short of the level of conceptual development necessary to render film a viable analytical tool of urban spatial analysis. This is in part illustrated in the title of the book: *A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. Although AlSayyad acknowledges that a clear distinction between the ‘real city’ and the ‘reel city’—the city as “experienced and perceived” (page 4)—presupposes a duality that no longer exists (did it ever?), the foregrounding of these terms nevertheless signals an epistemological weakness in his approach to film and urban space insofar as the correspondence between the two remains underexamined. By way of illustration, in chapter 2 the prospect of the (reel) town of Bedford turning into the sleazy, morally corrupt Pottersville in *It’s a Wonderful Life* is drawn, somewhat problematically, into direct correspondence with the fate of actual (real) small towns in the United States today. For AlSayyad, “[t]he fact that this transformation is depicted in film before it occurs in real life supports the

idea that the real and the reel have become mutually constitutive" (page 66). Such a view would appear to imply some form of causal or mimetic (or indeed prophetic) correspondence between the two which is not adequately supported theoretically. Instead of adopting this rather awkward real–reel distinction, the book would have benefited instead from a closer examination of the multivalent and dialectical spatialities of what Ben Highmore calls "the material and symbolic city" (2005). In this regard, Ed Dimendberg's work on film noir and urban space (2004) offers a far richer exploration of the imbricated geographies of filmic and material space, drawing productively from the work of spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre. AlSayyad does discuss Lefebvre at one point in the book, but his rather puzzling contention that "Lefebvre was not concerned with the individual's existence in urban space" (page 170) would suggest a misreading of or insufficient engagement with the philosopher's work.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the book offers an engaging and illuminating introduction to a growing subject area: one that straddles disciplinary boundaries and which poses new and challenging perspectives on the relationship between cinema and urban space. The clear layout and structure of the book provides a useful template for scholars in architecture, geography, and urban planning looking to employ visual methodologies, such as those offered by the film, as productive analytical and pedagogical tools for the study of urbanism, space, and modernity.

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Land use change: science, policy, and management edited by R J Aspinall, M J Hill; CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2008, 216 pages, \$99.95, ISBN 9781420042962

This book is an interesting addition to the growing literature on land use change based on a paper session at the 6th open meeting of the International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) on Global Environmental Change in Bonn, October 2005. The editors have managed to collect a range of high quality contributions from various parts of the world that provide an illustration of the main research issues in land change science, as documented in the research agenda of the IHDP and International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Global Land Project (<http://www.globallandproject.org>) and recent publications (Rindfuss et al, 2004; Turner et al, 2007). The editors have done their best to go beyond a collection of case studies by providing an introductory and concluding chapter that link the different contributions. In the introductory chapter the editors state that the book addresses spatial theories and methodologies that support an integrated approach to analysis of land use change. Soon after they identify that one overarching theory of land use change may be useful but is nonexistent apart from the listing of a variety of characteristics that need to be incorporated within such a theory. Theory is therefore not a central topic of the book and readers looking for theoretical analysis or expansion of land use theory may be disappointed.

However, the volume provides a useful illustration of the variety and commonality of data sources, methods, and issues faced when studying and developing understanding of land use change. Land systems are exemplars of coupled natural and human systems and the book is therefore also of interest to readers interested in human–environment interactions in general. Although the case studies address very different regions and processes, ranging from salinization of croplands in Australia to urban development in China to deforestation in Colombia, the focus

is on methodological issues. Important topics include: the integration of different data layers representing biophysical and human factors; the analysis of data across different spatial and temporal scales; and linking observations of changes in spatial patterns to a thick understanding of the underlying processes and potential consequences of land use change.

The link between spatial patterns and processes is an important issue addressed in most of the case studies and is the focus of contributions from Etter and McAlpine, Crews, and Millington and Bradley. The topic has previously been addressed in targeted volumes by Fox et al (2002) and Liverman et al (1998). *Land Use Change* shows that incremental research over the years has provided more advanced methods and a strong cross-fertilization across disciplines for the integrated analysis of socioeconomic processes and spatial patterns of remote sensing data.

The formalization of understanding of the land use system in either conceptual or simulation models is an important common factor between the case studies presented—especially in the chapter on urbanization by Fragkias and Seto which is focused on modeling issues. Rather than as a case study, this chapter provides a review of modeling requirements from a planning perspective and presents, based on these requirements, an alternative modeling approach. A similar use of logit models is found in the studies of Babigumira et al for deforestation in Uganda, and Etter and McAlpine for deforestation in Colombia in earlier chapters. This similarity indicates that, although methods are still diverse and originating from different disciplines, we are moving towards a more or less standard toolbox for land use analysis. The observations of methodological similarities and differences is the main value of such a collection of individual case studies in one volume, as pointed out by the editors. In the introductory chapters the editors also claim that case studies are an important mechanism for eliciting general principles and factors of importance in different socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental contexts. However, in the concluding chapter the editors mainly address the methodological and policy related challenges, and a real meta-analysis and synthesis of the conclusions from the different case studies is lacking. Also, the discussion of the science–policy interface is a bit disappointing. The editors write that “the challenge is to use the sophisticated science married to social and soft systems paradigms to weave a path to a landscape that preserves the full dimensions of human desire and aspiration while retaining a fully functional earth system.” I am sure everyone agrees with this statement but the book and case studies discussed do not provide much insight into the policy and management issue beyond identifying the challenges. True, this would be an excellent topic for another volume, but the subtitle “Science, Policy and Management” may put a bit too much emphasis on the policy and management aspects. Overall, the book contains good science and interesting case studies with a great introductory chapter on the challenges of land change science. It is clear documentation of what land change science has achieved and what the remaining challenges are.

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