

urbanists, photographers, doctors, and philosophers. Their writing is easy to read, but not supported with extensive literature reviews and documented with long lists of references. Instead what is offered is a collection of powerful impressions of a particular world, from people who have inhabited that world, if only briefly, and worked to change it in some way. It is at times both shocking and heartening, but you will leave the book with a shift in perception, and perhaps knowing something new.

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Sloan, Johanne, Ed.

Urban Enigmas: Montreal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities.

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Students of urban studies and cultural studies alike will welcome this book, which is a collection of writings on the urban cultural experience in Montreal and Toronto. The book is part of a larger research project called "The Culture of Cities," which critically examines Berlin, Dublin, Montreal, and Toronto in a comparative context. This particular book resulted from a five-year project from 2000-2005, the goal of which was to better understand everyday life and its populations, functions, and symbols using the city as a lens, to learn how these intersections of culture shape the urban setting.

To tackle these issues, editor Johanne Sloan (an art historian at Concordia University) assembled a first-rate, multidisciplinary group of contributors to analyze the urban cultural differences of two large urbanized centers in Canada. The book opens with an introductory chapter written by Sloan in which he discusses the project and lays out the thesis of comparison. The strength of the book, and the common tie among all of the chapters, is the methodology of comparative urban analysis: Sloan and his colleagues ask the simple question, what is the urban experience? As Sloan asserts that we collectively and implicitly make relative comparisons to other cities, each of the chapters are delicately woven together to make comparisons among one another. The editor accomplishes this through the division of the book into three parts: 1) practising comparison; 2) fragmented cities; and 3) global narratives.

In part one, the first three chapters establish the methodological and theoretical aspects of urban cultural comparison. Alan Blum, the principal investigator

of the project, contributes the first—and perhaps the most theoretically stimulating—chapter on “Comparing Cities.” Blum proposes that governments and public experts not only compare cities but also that everyday people make regular comparisons among cities, such that it is an “everyday social practice” (p. 5). In chapter two, Jean-François Côte draws on Lewis Mumford’s 1938 *Culture of Cities* to establish the epistemological framework for the book’s study. Côte argues that cities should not only be compared to themselves but also with a reference to their historical cultural expressions. Next, in chapter three, Kevin Dowler provides an interesting comparison of the language of cultural experience through an examination of Walter Benjamin’s essay on Marseilles.

In part two, a series of case studies are presented to address the theme of fragmentation and comparison among cities and culture. The editor’s goal is not to provide an exhaustive discourse on the two cities’ cultural activities but rather a highlight of exchange and transformation of culture. The contributors accomplish this through the presentation of vivid, well-written, and thoroughly investigated case studies on theatrical performances (Michael Darroch and Jean-François Côte); urban media (Greg M. Nielsen); ethnic festivals (Nicholas Demaria Harney); and public art (Johanne Sloan). In part three, further case studies the global influences of urban culture in the city are explored. Dipti Gupta and Janine Marchessault present a well-documented case of film festivals and cultural traffic, and then Jenny Burman reflects on diasporic communities and global diversity. Kieran Bonner closes the book with a calling for a reflexive theory on global city discourse and world travel.

Sloan appropriately recognizes the limits of the work. Indeed, he notes in the introductory chapter that there is no true balance or unbiased approach that can compare Montreal and Toronto without a native perspective, or “a heightened consciousness” (p. 11). Thus, the contributors use their homefield advantage—as participant observers—to immerse themselves deep into the urban fabric and cultural heritage of these cities. As such, they produced a piece of scholarship that few outsiders would have been able to produce. They should be congratulated for this product as it stands for a model contribution of comparative urban studies.

However, a couple observations regarding the book’s utility should be noted. The editor failed to include biographical information, institutional affiliations or disciplinary backgrounds of the individual contributors. Plus, the book lacks an index. Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, *Urban Enigmas* is a highly readable and original collection of writings on the city.

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