# The Blackwell City Reader

## Second Edition

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and

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its meaning emerge in an exemplary and, as it were, definitive form. Why not accept the idea that – as far as the experience of the city goes – this moment has escaped us for the very good reason that it took place more than a hundred years ago?

## Notes

1 Balzac demonstrates this perfectly. Vautrin – the great criminal, the man of the submerged city, of the mysteries of Paris – contributes to the plot negligibly both in *Père Goriot* and in *Lost Illusions* (and when his role is enlarged, as in *A Harlot High and Low*, the effect is really boring). Although he often affirms that he wants to take the place of fate, Vautrin gives his best not in the production of the story (as is the rule with the other monsters) but in the *comment* on it (a role usually not bestowed upon his confrères): his observations are among the most memorable pages of Balzac's work.

2 'Normal' embodies two different meanings which are perfectly symmetrical to those of 'unheard-of': whereas the latter refers to the 'rare' and the 'deplorable', normal indicates what is both 'widespread' and 'commendable'.

3 Simmel, and later, Park, insisted on the essentially 'intellectual' or 'rational' character of the urban personality. This is not entirely apt. Certainly, lasting feelings weaken in the city, and even the most sacred customs, under the corrosive effects of an ever quicker transformation, find themselves cast off and exposed to rational and disenchanted criticism. Still – leaving strictly professional activity aside – it would appear that urban life is marked by an uninterrupted succession of sudden and short-lived emotional choices. The city dweller's typical sensation of never having enough time is itself a stimulus to choose impulsively and irrationally. That haste gives bad counsel is especially true in the city, as that exquisitely urban game, roulette, proves. As anyone knows, it is extremely easy to win at roulette: just wait for black to come up four or five times in a row and then play red, doubling at every loss. Except for suspect coincidences, within a few bets one wins, and if one repeats the system about ten times one earns about 25% on the necessary overall capital, which isn't at all bad. So why does one always lose at roulette? Because one wants to win too quickly, too hastily . . .

4 In his essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, Chicago 1971, p. 325), Georg Simmel wonders how the city dweller manages to resist 'the swift and continuous shift of external stimuli . . . the rapid telescoping of changing images . . . the unexpectedness of violent stimuli'. His answer is that the city dweller underrates all external stimuli and thus becomes indifferent to their phantasmagoria. Yet the real answer lies in his own words: to 'the *rapid* telescoping of changing images' one responds with *rapidity* – of the glance, but especially of life. Precisely because he knows that 'one life is not enough' to do and see everything he wants, the city dweller limits his expectations and makes a continuous and unconscious *selection* of them. Once more, urban space is divided and classified on the basis of a personal-temporal sequence.

5 Walter Benjamin, 'Paris – The Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London 1973, p. 174.

6 Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 330.

7 I deal with this problem in 'The Long Goodbye: *Ulysses* and the End of Liberal Capitalism' and 'From *The Waste Land* to the Artificial Paradise'.

# Chapter 35

# Writing the City

Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley

## 1 Introduction

Saul Bellow calls the city "the expression of the human experience it embodies, and this includes all personal history."[1] This is to see the city from a viewpoint different from that of classic geographical descriptions. Urban geographers have developed models to predict phenomena such as growth or decline, demographic patterns, traffic flows and economic potential. Some have taken a mechanistic view of cities and used mathematical formulae to solve urban problems. Others, notably Mumford, have been more conscious of cities as places of human habitation, while some, such as Griffith Taylor, view cities in terms of historical development.[2] Different ideological viewpoints have informed these descriptive–predictive analyses of the city; logical empiricism has dominated the debate, but Marxist-inspired work, such as that by David Harvey on the bid–rent curve, has recently made its impact.[3]

Such empirically conceived models, however, fail to accommodate that aspect of city life emphasized by Saul Bellow: the human experience, both individual and collective, contained by the city. Philip Larkin, meditating on the appeal of a country church for a secular, agnostic age, asks if he is drawn to the church

> because it held unspilt
> So long and equably what since is found
> Only in separation – marriage, and birth,
> And death, and thoughts of these

and concludes that the building itself contains something that acts as an irresistible magnet even for the casual visitor:

> A serious house, on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognised, and robed as destinies.[4]

The city's air, too, may be blent, composed of the hopes, aspirations, disappointments and pain of those who live in it; like Larkin's church, it is a kind of vessel, filled with human experience. The city is an aggregation or accumulation, not just in demographic, economic or planning terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion. Cities thus become more than their built environment, more than a set of class or economic relationships; they are also an experience to be lived, suffered, undergone. . . .

The city has always been an important literary symbol, and the ways in which a culture writes about its cities is one means by which we may understand its fears and aspirations. The New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation or St. Augustine's City of God are types of the ideal city whose perfections only serve to highlight the shortcomings of all earthly cities. In Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Thomas Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623) we find representations of the ideal

Renaissance city-state, which themselves look back to Plato's ideal republic. Indeed, the frequency with which the city appears as the physical embodiment of the Utopian community reminds us of its perceived potential to achieve a kind of contained perfection, always in a desirable and sustaining equipoise and forming a refuge from the chaos that lies outside its walls. Such powerful fictional images have their roots in the real politics of earlier centuries, when there may indeed have been a pressing need to place clear boundaries around the state; boundaries which also served as defenses and were therefore a means of maintaining political power as well as protecting the inhabitants against aggressors and controlling the movement of people and goods. It is rare to find a utopia – even at its most idealistic – that does not specify or imply this element of containment and control.

Negative literary images of the city also often have their roots in its political nature. In a wide variety of texts from the classical period to the present day the urban and the rural have been placed in diametric opposition, to the advantage of the latter. In this view the city is seen as the site of guile, corruption, intrigue and false values, as against the positive, natural, straightforward values of the countryside.[5] To escape from the city and live far from courts and princes is to make a choice in favor of a kind of authenticity that can only be found in the pastoral life. Yet the pastoral contains its own ambivalence, as is famously exemplified by Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (*c.* 1599). In that play, Shakespeare adds to the established terms of the pastoral argument – here represented by the court and the forest – a third term which stands back from and offers a critique of both. . . . For Jaques, the pastoral gesture is in its way as false as the life of the court and city, no more likely to lead to an authentic way of life than the world that has been rejected. The forest is populated by actors.

Implicit in Jaques' attitude is a profound ambivalence towards the life of city and court. The city comedies of Shakespeare's contemporaries offer savage attacks on the vanity, greed, malice and deceit of city-dwellers, particularly those who represent a decaying courtier class and those who belong to a burgeoning trader-*rentier* class. Yet, in the work of Ben Jonson, for instance, it is undeniable that the experience of city life – its variety of character and language, the never-failing resourcefulness of its inhabitants in finding new ways of gulling and exploiting their neighbours – provides a kind of energizing force for the drama. Bartholomew Fair, like Vanity Fair, has its allure. The words of another Johnson – that a man who is tired of London is tired of life – are relevant here. Samuel Johnson is a sharp satirist of the human vanity he found in eighteenth-century London; yet it is impossible to imagine his career as a writer having developed outside the metropolis, for his imagination is fired and nourished by the very material it excoriates.

Such ambivalence is carried through into the following periods of literature. As industrialization developed in Europe, what might be called the pastoral debate – city vs. country, culture vs. nature, mechanical vs. organic – took on a greater urgency as the city came to be regarded as the most obvious symbol of a new and pressing reality. But the ways in which that symbol may be employed and its potency in imaginative terms vary enormously. Wordsworth, for instance, in Book VII of *The Prelude*, finds in London some of the delights of variety and energy, but ultimately finds no difficulty in rejecting its *mélange* of sights, sounds and inhabitants. His images for London are sometimes of confusion; he writes of its "Babel din" (line 157), or "the thickening hubbub" (227). Equally significant, however, is the sense of falsity of so much that he sees in London: "those mimic sights that ape / The absolute presence of reality . . . imitations, fondly made in plain / Confession of man's weakness and his loves" (247–8, 254–5). Wordsworth concedes the allure of such sights and the other entertainments, from theater to lawcourts, that London offered him, culminating in the description of the crowded variety of Bartholomew Fair (648–94). But his summing-up of the Fair becomes a summing-up of what the city means to him:

> Oh, blank confusion! and a type not false
> Of what the mighty City is itself
> To all except a straggler here and there,
> To the whole swarm of its inhabitants;
> An undistinguishable world to men,
> The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,
> Living amid the same perpetual flow
> Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
> To one identity, by differences
> That have no law, no meaning, and no end. (695–704)



. . . Ultimately, it is not difficult for Wordsworth to reject the city and return to a different way of life. For a writer like Dickens, however, the city may be a location both threatening and alluring, menacing and exciting. The very aggregation of experience that finally appals Wordsworth, offers to Dickens rich material, and his characters' experience of the city may be a mixed one. Nicholas Nickleby's first sight of London, for instance, offers a vision of chaos as telling as anything in *The Prelude*:

> Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.
>
> As they dashed by the quickly-changing and ever-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, churchyards for the buried – all these jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Like Wordsworth in his description of Bartholomew Fair, Dickens achieves his effect in part by accumulation, by the sheer number of people and things to be seen and acquired in the city; but although the paragraph ends with a reminder of "the . . . stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd," Dickens's excitement at the city's sense of promise is evident in the rhetoric of his long, cumulative sentence.

It is in this London that Nicholas's hapless father looks "among the crowd without discovering the face of a friend,"[7] and it is in this London that Nicholas, too, will experience a sense of loss and alienation, finding that the plenitude of London is formless and meaningless. Yet Nicholas is discovered by the tirelessly benevolent Cheeryble brothers in the midst of this same London – a place where the reader would hardly expect two strangers to notice each other, let alone that one should offer the other a job. This is in a sense special pleading on Dickens's part; he is beginning to occlude the portrait in the first half of the novel of a hostile dehumanizing city and to replace it by one in which he can create small havens of retreat and redemption. . . .

The question of what the nineteenth-century writer, and particularly the novelist, does with the experience of the city is of some importance, because of the special relationship between the rise of the city and the rise of the novel. The aggrandizing potential of the realist novel, which quickly showed itself to be a suitable vehicle for addressing the full range of contemporary issues, personal and political, local and national, may be compared to the development of the city as a location for an enormous range of people and activities. Thus, as Malcolm Bradbury points out, the urban experience may have had its effect on the form as well as the content of fiction: "one might argue that the unutterable contingency of the modern city has much to do with the rise of that most realistic, loose and pragmatic of literary forms, the novel."[8]

Bradbury's comment appears in an essay on the centrality of the city to modernist writing. Cities may have been seen as a kind of purgatory or hell, as in Eliot's "unreal city" where death has "undone so many,"[9] but they were also "generative environments" for intellectual debate and artistic experimentation, as well as "novel environments, carrying within themselves the complexity and tension of modern consciousness and modern writing."[10] Eliot may have heard

> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London[11]

but it was in some of those towers that the aesthetic of modernism was forged, and it is no accident that such key modernist texts as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1924) use the city as both setting and protagonist.

The need both to render and to comprehend the multiplicity of the city persists in contemporary fiction. Consider the following passage from *City of the Mind* (1991) by the British novelist Penelope Lively. Two of the characters, Matthew and Alice, emerge from a London restaurant:

> And so, presently, they are out in the London night. It is a blaze, a swirl of light and colour, sound and smell. They pass from the intimacies of the Soho streets to the frontier of Charing Cross Road, streaming with people and traffic. Matthew takes Alice's arm; an advancing gang of tipsy youths divides around them, goes whooping into the tube station. Everyone is talking, shouting. Language hangs in the night air and throbs in giant lettering above shops and theatres. A column of buses stands pulsing in a traffic jam: Gospel Oak, Putney Heath, Clapton Pond, Wood Green. Matthew and Alice pause on the pavement and he thinks of the city flung out all around, invisible and inviolate. He forgets, for an instant his own concerns, and feels the power of the place, its resonances, its charge of life, its coded narrative. He reads the buses and sees that the words are the silt of all that has been here – hills and rivers, woods and fields, trade, worship, customs and events, and the unquenchable evidence of language. The city mutters still in Anglo-Saxon; it remembers the hills that have become Neasden and Islington and Hendon, the marshy islands of Bermondsey and Battersea. The ghost of another topography lingers: the uplands and the streams, the woodland and fords are inscribed still on the London Streetfinder, on the ubiquitous geometry of the Underground map, in the destinations of buses. The Fleet River, its last physical trickle locked away underground in a cast iron pipe, leaves its name defiant and untamed upon the surface. The whole place is one babble of allusions, all chronology subsumed into the distortions and mutations of today, so that in the end what is visible and what is uttered are complementary. . . .

Here, Penelope Lively attempts to read – or listen to – the narrative that is inscribed in and spoken by the city. . . .

A number of our contributors comment in general terms on the importance of taking into account literary renderings of city experience. Jonathan Crush, for instance, writes of Johannesburg as "a city of signs, of moral coherence, of essences. Its landscape encodes stories about its origins, its inhabitants and the broader society in which it is set. The traveler's task is to discover and write these truths." As in the Penelope Lively passage quoted above, the city is a text, waiting to be read and written or rewritten in literary terms. Pauli Karjalainen and Anssi Paasi, indeed, emphasize that the essential elements of "cityness" are "manifested only through feelings: the experience of the environment is always a fusion of the external physical realm and the human being's internal capacities"; while for Yossi Katz, much of the interest of Agnon's fictions about Jerusalem lies in the tension between empirical description and imaginative experience. This can be linked with William Gilmore Simms's belief, shared with the English Romantic poets, that the landscape itself exists only as perceived and becomes a metaphor for the observer's state of mind. As Rana Singh argues, in relation to the work of Shivprasad Singh, we see the city through the filter of the writer's imagination, which produces a very particular and idiosyncratic way of seeing.

This individual mode of regard is the key element to emerge from these chapters. Yet even within this variety and plurality of viewpoints, and without imposing rigid and constricting taxonomies on the range of city experience, it is possible to discern some common and recurrent groups of themes or motifs.

A first group gathers around the ideas of alienation and oppression, the sense of how individual lives may be lost in the busy aggregation of the city. Of course, that very aggregation, with its opportunities for losing oneself in the crowd and living one's life untrammelled by the intrusiveness and narrowness that may exist in smaller communities, may offer a kind of freedom and possibility. But, for many of the writers discussed in this volume, that freedom proves to be illusory. Isabel Allende's characters, who move from the country to Santiago, or those who move into Helsinki in anticipation of a new life find that their initial experience of hope and liberation is quickly replaced by a sense of alienation and despair. Willa Cather's Rosicky finds an emptiness at the heart of New York life, while others, as in Singh's Varanasi, find themselves the victims of tricksters and other forms of exploitation. In a different way, the inhabitants of Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester, only one or two generations removed from a different mode of living, have to accommodate themselves to new topographies and a new pace and rhythm of life. By presenting us with Manchester people of three generations, with varying degrees of attachment to the city, she shows how that adaptation may take place.

For many of the writers discussed here, the city is an active organism, which may prove to be a site of culture and inspiration, like Pushkin's Odessa, but is more likely to be seen as oppressing its inhabitants and creating or exacerbating divisions within individuals. The Montreal novelist Hugh MacLennan provides an exact image for this phenomenon when one of his characters contemplates "the immense empty street, and has the impression that it is his own interior life that he is contemplating." . . .

The city is perhaps seen at its most violent and alienating in Elmore Leonard's Detroit and Bernard Mac Laverty's Belfast. As Lorne Foster writes, Detroit is a metaphor in the post-modern war, a city of Hobbesian brutes in business suits, where civility in its full sense had broken down and the social contract is radically breached. Only the rules of confidence tricksters and casual violence apply; cops and robbers, operators and their narks are caught in an eternal dance. In Bernard Mac Laverty's *Cal*, the eponymous central character is drawn into a world of violence by the city's sectarian conflicts, and in this sense he is both oppressed and victimized by the spirit of the city. That spirit of murderous violence is personified in its politically active inhabitants, driven by ideological arguments that are exposed as spurious and dehumanizing. The violence is also responsible for disintegration at every level – in individuals, in families and in communities – which in themselves become microcosmic symbols of the city's larger divisions. In Detroit, in Belfast, as well as in St. Petersburg and many of the other locations discussed here, the cities have, in both moral and topographical terms, lost their human scale. Far from presenting the Renaissance Utopian ideal of the protecting city state, they have become, as Rana Singh puts it, symbols of disorder that offend a sacred cosmic order.

Cities are not homogeneous places, one and indivisible. As most city inhabitants recognize, they have their zones, with boundaries, both visible and invisible. Urban geographers have long recognized the existence and importance of such boundaries. In particular, they have used a model employing the concentric circles of a central core, containing the commercial and entertainment districts, surrounded by a "twilight zone" of poor housing, which in turn succeeds to an outer suburban circle of more affluent houses with smaller pockets of commercial activity.[12] Crossing the boundaries will be easier for some individuals than others, and that crossing will often involve more than the exchange of one style of housing for another. Emily Gilbert makes a useful distinction: the spatial distance between city and country is subordinate to the social distance created by the historic and economic dialectic of city and country. . . .

For the inhabitants of Belfast. . . . there is a link between urban decay and inner breakdown, and the presence in a community of one family from the "wrong" side of the sectarian divide leads to persecution and violence. Elizabeth Gaskell makes clear the sharp differences between the dwellings of the rich and of the poor in Manchester in the 1840s, while other visitors to the city remarked on how the physical distances between these areas led to ignorance, incomprehension and conflict between the classes. Raskolnikov wonders why "in all great towns men are not simply driven by necessity, but in some peculiar way inclined to live in those parts of town where there are no gardens or fountains; where there are most dirt and smell and all sorts of nastiness." . . .

A third area of common interest is gender. Not only are women the protagonists of many of the works covered in these essays – in Cather, the Helsinki novels, and in the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and Christina Stead – but women may also be seen as fulfilling two key functions. The first is to suffer at the hands of the city's violence and indifference; the other is to offer some kind of redemptive escape from its worst excesses. In Mrs Pyy, the alienated middle-class housewife, we see the damage caused to a woman who comes to the city, but plays no part in its active life and is driven into breakdown. Catherine, in Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, wanders among the city's poor and vagrant women when she herself feels confused. Rachel in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* finds it impossible to adjust to the move to the city and slips into its lowest depths. In *Crime and Punishment* Sonia becomes a prostitute in order to keep her family,

while the self-sacrificing marriage of Raskolnikov's sister Dounia to Luzhin is seen as little more than a kind of prostitution. In the work of Shivprasad Singh and Isabel Allende, women are similarly driven into prostitution by a poverty that the indifferent city offers no way of relieving. In Detroit, many of the women seem to be no more than bit players in the larger drama of macho wiliness and violence that is being played out in Leonard's city. Willa Cather's Thea Kronberg in *The Song of the Lark* must find some way of surviving in a Chicago that is largely fuelled by what are seen as male drives of material possession and professional ambition.

Against this, however, as Thea herself finds when she visits a different kind of city in Panther Canyon, it is possible to find a kind of redemption. As Susan Rosowski shows, the alternative values of Panther Canyon are very much associated with its women, and Thea "awakens to an alternate city consciousness inside the domestic spaces that she has entered on the most personal and private terms." In doing so, she sheds the competitive drives that she has acquired along with her Chicago "city consciousness." At the end of *Crime and Punishment* it is through his relationship with Sonia that Raskolnikov can hope to discover a new life. For Cal in Bernard Mac Laverty's novel, it is in the rural idyll that he enjoys with Marcella, widow of the man in whose murder he has participated, that he finds a sense of peace; but even here the logic of the novel – a combination of the city's sectarian divisions and those within Cal's own nature – makes that idyll fragile and short-lived. . . .

## Notes

1 Saul Bellow, *More Die of Heartbreak* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), p. 124.
2 Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961); Griffith Taylor, *Urban Geography* (orig. 1949; London: Methuen, 1951).
3 David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973).
4 Philip Larkin, "Church Going," in *The Less Deceived* (Hessle: The Marvell Press, 1955), p. 28.
5 See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) for an excellent survey and discussion of the topic.
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II. v. 52–9, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. C. J. Sisson (London: Odhams Press, n.d. [1953?]), p. 270.
William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805–6 text), Book VII, "Residence in London," in *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. J. C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 258, 262, 264, 288, 290, 292, 294.
6 Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 408–9.
7 ibid., p. 1.
8 Malcolm Bradbury, "The cities of modernism," in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 99.
9 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922) lines 60 and 63, in *Collected Poems, 1909–62* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 65.
10 Bradbury, "Cities," p. 96.
11 *The Waste Land*, lines 373–5, p. 77.
12 See Robert E. Park and Roderick D. Mackenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925; repr. with an introduction by Morris Janowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

# Chapter 36

# Imagining the Modern City

## Light in Dark Spaces

James Donald

. . .

It was certainly the case that in its early days . . . the cinema was almost exclusively an urban phenomenon. Both in Europe and the US, cinemas were first located in cities. In the US, they were mostly to be found in working-class and immigrant ghettos. Between the mid-nineteen tens and the nineteen thirties, the explosion in the number of cinemas, and their glorious transformation into picture palaces, took place not only in central entertainment districts but, especially, in the new suburbs springing up around major cities as mass public transportation made travel easier. The art of locating cinemas to attract the maximum possible audience, especially in the more affluent suburbs of cities like Chicago and New York, was to ensure that no potential patron needed to travel for more than half an hour to reach the theatre, and then to offer an experience not just of the film, but of stage shows, luxurious surroundings, air conditioning, and even baby sitting. Along with the national chains of department stores and grocery stores from which they learned many of their marketing techniques, the cinemas helped to give a sense of place to the growing suburban agglomerations around twentieth-century cities.[1] In the emerging geography of twentieth-century urbanism, the cinema thus plays a transitional role. In one sense, its theatres helped to sustain and reinvigorate entertainment districts in the city centre. But cinema also helped to consolidate the suburbs. It did so by bringing the experience of 'going out' to a way of life primarily built around 'staying in', a way of life mediated increasingly through a privatised experience of telephone, radio, and television.[2]

The cinema's own geography of exhibition was a key factor in making film a genuinely mass medium. It helped to extend its appeal beyond a working-class audience to one that incorporated the middle classes. . . . But the *mass* nature of cinema was not just about selling itself to a market far larger and less socially discriminated than before. It also implies a homology between cinematic spectatorship and urban experience, with both being characterised by distraction, diffusion and anonymity.[3]

How and why did this come about? One premise of my whole argument is Simmel's observation that the dramatic changes to the great nineteenth-century European cities had an impact on what he called mental life. Established forms of perception were disordered and reconfigured. We have already seen the causes, or at least some of them: new methods of industrial production; new cityscapes and the anonymity of the crowds encountered in them; new techniques of government and social regulation; new means of transport, especially the unprecedented and disorientating speed of the railway and the automobile; and instant, long-distance communication through telegraph and telephone. . . .

From its beginnings in the eighteen nineties until the end of the silent era towards the end of