World Cities,
City Worlds

World Cities, City Worlds:

Explorations with Icons, Metaphors and Perspectives

By

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"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

T S Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:
MAKING SENSE OF CITIES

Putting cities in the frame

Imagine you have been kidnapped, blindfolded, driven some distance and then released by your captors in a strange place. How would you know, when the blindfolds came off, that you were in a big city? Probably a busy atmosphere would be the first impression: traffic, people on the move, bright lights, noise. Then you might note that it was all buildings, roads and pavements, little greenery, clearly a man-made place and one with a history. Walking along, the variety of it might strike you next, with many kinds of face in the crowds, all sorts of things going on, big and small vehicles. Before long something novel–odd behaviour, offbeat conversation or bewildering graffiti–could jolt you. Then, if you walked long enough, you would sense that this place seems to have no limits in time or space–it stretches as far as the eye can see and it keeps going 24 hours a day. These sensations–seen, heard, smelled, even touched–would tell you incontrovertibly that you were in one of the world's cities. But which city? One you know? Even the one you live in? One you've read about, seen on TV or in film or photos? Or one you don't recognise at all? Other clues will help you here: the language people speak, maybe their looks and clothing, the street names, the adverts, a familiar monument or building, the livery of the taxis–black, it's London! yellow, it's New York! green?!

We experience, characterise and understand cities in many ways. Most basically, we have to find ways of relating to a city where we live or visit. We need help to get by in our daily lives. As visitors we can buy tourist guides to direct us to the sights, the hotels, the restaurants. As residents we may have the A-Z map and the transport timetable. But our need for guidance will be subtler than that. We need to know a particular geography and temporality, when as well as where to find what or who we may need. We must acquire a working knowledge of the many transactions needed

for our shopping, work, housing, learning, recreation, health and welfare. Beyond these tangible qualities of cities, we also need to grasp its intangible customs and practices: the appropriate forms of address, how to cross the road without mishap, the degrees of trust to be accorded to people and institutions, whether and how to queue, when to be extra mindful of personal safety. It is these things that city outsiders–whether newcomers or visitors–take longest to learn, struggling with them long after they have mastered the bus routes or shop opening hours.

If we are in the work of managing cities we need other kinds of understanding. As city politicians or bureaucrats we need to know how the city functions–its economy, its community, its environment–and what drives changes there: the boom and bust of city economies, the sources of community friction, the decay and renewal of its infrastructure. As professionals in healthcare, education, engineering or architecture we need an understanding of how actions we might take will succeed or fail in our particular city. And as business leaders we need to grasp the opportunities that the city offers and the limits it imposes on our enterprise: the local markets for goods and services, the local supply of labour and capital, the efficiency of energy, telecommunications and transport systems. In short, we need models of how the city works through which we can analyse trends and patterns and test our decisions and actions.

Others of us are observers of the city. As journalists we observe and report, offering our interpretations of what is going on. Researchers seek to understand the city through the prism of particular disciplines, as political scientists, economists, geographers, sociologists, even as psychologists. Over the last two centuries academics have developed paradigms to explore how the experience of city life has shaped people's values and behaviour. Artists are also observers who provide us with images and narratives of the city. City worlds have become a particular inspiration in a whole range of media–painting, photography, fiction, poetry, music, film and video–since cities became so large and absorbed within them so much of social life.

So, as residents and visitors, as politicians, professionals and entrepreneurs, as journalists, researchers and artists, we need help in describing, analysing, designing, governing, living and working within cities. We need guides or models or paradigms or visions–let's call them frames. My dictionary[1] offers two definitions of 'frame.' One is the everyday definition as a 'structure that surrounds a picture, door, windowpane or similar', that is, what you look through or pass through from one position to another. But the dictionary also offers a second definition of 'frame' as 'a basic structure that underlies or supports a

system, concept or text' and says it is short for 'frame of reference'. This captures my use of the term. I am exploring frames of reference to help us make sense of cities, not just particular cities but cities in general, including cities across the world and also cities of the past as much as of the present.

For there are continuities and discontinuities between historic and present-day cities. Clearly such activities and places in cities as airports, general hospitals, energy or recycling plants, and metros did not exist before recent times. On the other hand, other activities and places have always existed in cities–dwellings, workshops, roads, theatres, temples and churches. There are also some extraordinary analogues between ancient and modern cities. The crowds watching gladiator contests in the Roman Colosseum would be at home watching football or a rock concert in today's Wembley stadium. Travellers were similarly accommodated in the *caravanserai* in Islamic cities, the *han* in central Asia, the *choultry* in India, the *gostiniy dvory* in Russia, or the English coaching inn as in the modern motel: with a simple room, secure storage for their goods and somewhere to park their transport, whether camel, horse and cart or car. Today's live/work spaces (to adopt the property agent's term) for home workers with desk space and internet connections are essentially similar to the artisan's accommodation in many pre-industrial cities. And, of course, café life has gone on for ever.

Equally there are similarities and differences between the cities of today's global North and South. Industrialisation and immigration have been features in the histories of both, as have poor housing and tough working conditions and, in the longer run, improved health and welfare and higher incomes. But it is wrong to see them as at different stages on a common development trajectory with, say, Mexico City now where Manchester was in 1850. For there are important contextual differences. Most importantly the new cities of the South have come into a world in which the North and its cities are already globally dominant, in part from their historic colonialist exploitation of the South. They are latecomers and as such the terms of international trade and aid are frequently stacked against them. As well their economies may be weak, dependent on natural resources or farming, with low labour costs that immiserate their population their main competitive advantage, and their governing elites can be corrupt and exploitative. All the while they still act as magnets for immigration from the countryside swelling their populations. But, despite these differences, it is hard to distinguish sharply between the present-day cities of the global North and South. All combine similar elements, though in different proportions, to create their own specific characters. So, many

cities in the South have airports, shopping malls, business centres, freeways, high rise luxury apartments. And equally many cities in the North have street sleepers, shanty towns, sweatshops and rundown public services. In a globalised world the city has become a global phenomenon. Framing cities helps us understand both the history and the geography of cities.

Metaphors, icons and perspectives

In this book I explore three particular ways of framing cities–through metaphors, icons and perspectives. Metaphors use differences to express similarities: thus we might describe a journey as 'hellish', 'chaotic', 'nightmarish' or, on the other hand, as 'a dream.' Icons capture certain essential qualities: in this way film stars, product brands or buildings are often described as iconic. Perspectives are shared ways of seeing or understanding things: exemplified in phrases like 'Muslims believe…' or 'In our experience…' What metaphors, icons and perspectives have in common is that they provide analogies, points of comparison that illuminate both similarities and differences. The use of analogies is an important way in which we make sense of the world around us. We take something familiar as a means of understanding something new, thereby building on what we already know. That is how we commonly learn. With the help of analogies we pick out patterns and recurrences, form concepts that abstract them, and express these concepts in language.

Metaphors, icons and perspectives are all forms of analogy that can be richly expressed in words and images. We have in our minds a mental lexicon of these kinds of analogy that we constantly draw upon. So we might look at a building and think '*Art Nouveau*' (or '*Jugendstil*' or 'Liberty style' in other languages and cultures). We might see and smell some food and recall the occasion, even the companions, when and where it was last experienced. Or we might agree with a friend that the demands of our workplace are turning us into zombies. There is similarly a lexicon of analogies–as metaphors, icons and perspectives–which can capture thoughts and feelings that help us make sense of cities. These city analogies are what this book is about. They are drawn from both real cities and imagined cities, from across the world and through history.

Take metaphors first. In the past linguists often drew a contrast between literal and figurative language. Literal language tells it how it is, coolly, logically, precisely, appealing to reason: it is the language of science or the law. Figurative language, in contrast, is colourful, less precise and uses various tropes–like simile, metaphor, metonymy,

synecdoche–to achieve greater descriptive power, sometimes an emotional impact: the language of fiction, poetry or speech. Literal language was judged superior. Modern linguistics takes a different view. It sees the whole range of tropes as basic to the way language and thought work. We can see many applications in accounts of cities. Simile makes explicit comparisons, as with 'Driving in Shanghai is like a rollercoaster.' With metonymy a name, often a place name, stands for the object–as US examples: Wall Street, The White House, Hollywood. Such metonyms often survive change in the reality on which they rest: thus Fleet Street still signifies the British press though no newspaper offices remain there. With synecdoche a part stands for the whole or vice versa, as when football teams are described just by their home towns: Chelsea v Milan, Barcelona v Eindhoven.

Metaphor is the most common trope. My dictionary describes it as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable." Fowler's *Modern Usage* notes that "our vocabulary is largely built on metaphors; we use them, though perhaps not consciously, whenever we speak or write."[2] Here, for example, is a description of Jakarta in Indonesia with the metaphors italicised–

> "People come to the city *above all* for the sake of livelihood, to labour, in an effort to *make good* the *felt* deficiencies in the rural areas, the *decay* of self-reliance, the *ruined* subsistence. Many migrants *discover* at the end of their journey that *industrial life* is an ambiguous and often *treacherous liberator*. But they learn other *lessons* too. Even the poorest communities *create* informal *networks* and *bondings* to *defend* themselves. In Jakarta workers in the formal and informal *sectors*, slum dwellers, if they are to *create* a decent life for themselves, must do so in some of the most *hostile* conditions, against some of the most *repressive* social *forces* on *earth*; their *triumphs*, however partial and temporary, are the more inspiring for that."[3]

You might dispute whether some of the italicized words are metaphorical. If so, it is because they have become 'dead metaphors', that is, ones that are in such common usage that they go unnoticed.

Metaphors work through juxtaposing two superficially unlike components–which linguists call 'term' and 'analogue'–so that their separate meanings interact to create a new understanding. As in 'The Royal Palace (term) is the heart (analogue) of the city.' The effectiveness of metaphors depends on the power of the analogy. If too weak, then the metaphor may not work at all or may just fail to excite the imagination. 'The Royal Palace is the centre of the city' would have this lesser power. 'Heart' offers us more meaning than 'centre'–it implies not just the Royal

Palace's geographical centrality (as the heart lies in the centre of the human body), but a functional role (the heartbeat on which life depends) and maybe also an emotional attachment (the heart as a symbol of love). How well such a metaphor works for us will depend strongly on prior knowledge–in this case, that we know the palace is home to a ruler, we have a grasp of the role of the heart in the human body, and culturally we share the association of the heart with positive emotion.

Thinking about cities is strongly shaped by metaphors. Five recur in many variations: the city as community, as marketplace, as battleground, as machine and as organism. These are 'extended metaphors', that is, they serve to structure a whole concept of the city with many dimensions and levels of meaning. It is these dimensions and levels that are explored in the chapters below. The city as *community* (Chapter 2) is perhaps the most common and most comforting metaphor, implying a commonality of values, identity and interests that help people to live together. But, shift to the plural–communities–and differences on the basis of location, class, age, income, ethnicity, religion, sexuality are immediately implicit. So we also have the metaphor of the city as a *battleground* (Chapter 4), a place where values and interests are in contest, with enemies perceived within or without the city. Some conflicts become embodied in the structure of the city as property prices, zoning or even the building of walls and ghettos keep people in cities apart. And political battling also tends to be urban: revolutions commonly start and/or finish there, as with the French Revolution in Paris in 1789, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Mubarak regime in Cairo in 2011.

Then there is the city as *marketplace* (Chapter 8). Cities are places of multiple daily transactions, buying and selling goods and services, in street markets, supermarkets, job markets, housing markets, stock markets or on black markets. Economically they may flourish or struggle, their people winners or losers. Increasingly they are caught up in global market trends. Cities may also be perceived metaphorically as *machines* (Chapter 11). Modernist architects and planners embraced a rationalist, mechanical view of the whole city. 'The city of today is dying because it is not geometrical' declared the architect Le Corbusier. But this view of the city as machine has a long pedigree. It is there in new town building through the ages and round the world, it was strengthened by the development of urban networks for efficient water supply, drainage, energy and communications, and it is reinforced by city rulers' wish for order. Lastly, cities can be seen as *organisms* (Chapter 15). The body is a powerful source of metaphors, especially for cities which are seen as having a wide range of body parts (hearts, arteries, lungs, spines) and body functions (eating up land,

excreting waste). Evolutionary thought has also been influential, with a stress on the organic development of cities, recently strengthened through concern with ecological sustainability.

Metaphors like these offer more than just good description. They can give us an easily grasped overall concept of the city. They can provide us with a basis for shared understanding between neighbours, between producers and consumers, between different professions, between rulers and citizens. Metaphors can also help us to analyse problems and find solutions. This arises when the analogue used in the metaphor comes laden with an implicit diagnosis or prescription–as the machine metaphor leads us to think of ways of fixing the city's malfunctions, the organism metaphor to curing the city's ills, and the battleground metaphor to resolving its conflicts. So metaphorical thought, speech and image are pervasive in explorations of cities. But much of our use and interpretation of metaphors is tacit. Often we do not know we are speaking, reading, hearing or seeing metaphors for the city. This apparent invisibility can make them even more powerful.

Using 'icon', as my second way of framing cities, is itself metaphorical. Its original Greek meaning, once more quoting from my dictionary, is "a painting of Christ or another holy figure, typically in a traditional style on wood, venerated and used as an aid to devotion in the Byzantine and other eastern Churches." Many such icons are rich with gold leaf and jewels; some have myths of creation attached to them; others have supposedly miraculous properties. In all respects they are out of the ordinary. This quality has been carried over into the modern, metaphorical usage of the word 'icon' to mean, from the dictionary again, "a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol of something." And thereby, like the original religious icons, to serve as an aid to devotion.

The essential features of an icon are that it is recognisable and it has meaning, both widely shared. Icons are usually strongly visual and their image is what helps us to recognise them. For we remember what we see more readily than what we read or hear. Images help us to imagine–note the common etymology here–more vividly. So film stars may become iconic, writers must settle for just being seminal. This visual quality is what makes cities strong candidates for iconic status, particularly when their image is unique. Before the last century the communication of such city images was rare, experienced directly or in illustration by only a few people, as travellers or art collectors. Even so, some places did acquire a status as fabled cities: Babylon, Timbuktu, Samarkand, Jericho, Constantinople, for example. But most people had no idea what Rome or Los Angeles or Rio de Janeiro or Delhi was like. Photography, film and

video–produced not just for the media but also for themselves by modern day travellers, tourists and migrants–have changed all that. In 2001 all around the world people knew Manhattan's skyline and so could grasp the enormity of the destruction of the World Trade Centre's twin towers on 9/11. It was an act of iconoclasm.

As icons, cities are more than recognisable, they also carry meaning. That meaning has several levels. Most superficially it is the general character or atmosphere of a city, its *genius loci*. More specifically it is the unique attributes of the city, its characteristic activities, buildings and street scenes, for example, the domesticity of London's low rise, terraced housing and green squares; the neon-soaked streets of Tokyo, the dense skyscrapers of New York and Chicago. Beyond appearance, the meaning of a city is to be found in the imagined experience of being there, sharing its daily life with the locals, both its pleasures and frustrations. When the experience of a particular city–even if only in the imagination and without actually having been there–seems to capture something of a more universal experience of cities at large, then that city has become iconic.

The appropriation of city names is evidence of iconic qualities. Both Paris and Venice are strongly celebrated in this way: Budapest, Bucharest, Beirut, Saigon and Shanghai have all been deemed the 'Paris of the East'; St Petersburg and Stockholm have both been called 'the Venice of the North' and Bangkok 'the Venice of the East'; and there is also Little Venice, a canalside London neighbourhood, and Venice, a neighbourhood in Los Angeles. There are 'mini-Manhattans' wherever a clump of skyscrapers has sprung up. Sometimes it is a cultural or spiritual tradition that is borrowed through a city's name. Edinburgh is the 'Athens of the North' and Bogota 'the Athens of South America' because of their intellectual life; Nashville claims to be 'the Athens of the (American) South',but that's more to do with the full-scale replica of the Parthenon originally built there for a 1897 Exposition. There are multiple Romes: 'the second Rome' is Constantinople and 'the third Rome' is Moscow, expressing a claimed historic transfer of Christian authority from the Catholic to the Greek Orthodox and later to the Russian Orthodox Church. In some cases the names of iconic cities may become brands, used commercially to attach valued qualities to products or services, hence the many Hotels de Paris or Oxford language schools round the world. But these references are not always favourable–witness how Babylon has come to symbolise cities of excess, decadence and corruption: at various times London, New York, Las Vegas and Tokyo have all been denounced as 'the modern Babylon'.

There is something of a paradox here. For iconic cities are both unique and universal: unique enough to be recognisable, universal enough to express wider meaning. But it is this dual characteristic that identifies the truly iconic cities. In the book I explore this characteristic in the cases of Venice, Mumbai, New York, Tokyo, Paris and Los Angeles. *Venice* (Chapter 3) is the quintessential 'old city', ancient, elegant, a little unworldly and now largely living on its legacy. *Mumbai* (Chapter 5) represents those post-colonial cities of the global South progressively, and sometimes painfully, transforming itself for a new future. *New York* (Chapter 7) retains a crazy energy and excess fuelled by successive waves of immigration and innovation over the last two centuries. *Tok*yo (Chapter 10) has grown and grown at a phenomenal rate and, partly through the disasters of earthquake and war, repeatedly metamorphosed itself. *Paris* (Chapter 12) is an extreme case of the contradictory variety that often characterise cities: in its politics it is both revolutionary and conservative, in its culture radical and traditional, socially it is home to the bourgeois and the bohemian. Finally, *Los Angeles* (Chapter 14) is, through the products of Hollywood, probably the best known city in the world and one that once represented the dream of urban modernity–rich, fast-living, glossy–but that dream has faded.

These are not the world's only iconic cities. Though, interestingly, four of them–Venice, New York, Paris, Los Angeles–featured in 2007 plans by Pinewood Studios in London to build new, permanent city scene backlots for movie making. (Also included were Rome, Vienna/Prague and Chicago). You might feel that any list of iconic cities should include Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Cairo, London, Rome, Damascus, Shanghai, Sydney or many others. But my chosen six serve as a sample that displays how particular places come to represent urban qualities found more widely in the world's cities.

Perspective is my third way of framing cities. My dictionary offers as a definition: "a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view." Again this is a metaphorical usage. The original use of perspective was in drawing and painting. The ancient Persians and Greeks were aware of the concept. But it was in 15th century Florence that the geometrical rules of perspective were devised to enable an approximately accurate representation on a flat surface of a three dimensional reality. To achieve this, objects are drawn smaller as their distance from the viewer increases, parallel or rectilinear lines meet at vanishing points, objects viewed obliquely are foreshortened; an associated technique is to paint distant objects with softer, cooler colours. The use of such conventions was most apparent in paintings that showed cityscapes in which the

representation of buildings, statuary, figures and ground surfaces brought the three dimensions alive.

As a metaphor, perspective has come to mean reality as understood from a particular viewpoint; 'take' is a contemporary synonym. That different people often appraise the same thing in different ways is a commonplace observation. The same object may appear beautiful to one person, ugly to another; the same personality may be attractive or repellent; the same film may be exciting or dull. In making such contrary assessments, it may be that the two people are focussing on different attributes–say, the acting or the look of the film. Or they may attach different values to the same attribute–the story is judged either fresh or naïve. Such different perspectives are something that we live with in our relations with others all the time. We also find that we have perspectives in common with others: we agree that the object is beautiful, the personality repellent or the film exciting. In fact, we probably agree more often than we disagree. For perspectives come to be shared by groups of people as they engage in the same or similar acts, and use the same or similar words to talk about their ideas and experiences. Language is an important way in which such perspectives are developed and maintained. Much of what is shared in these ways is tacit: self- evident to the group but possibly incomprehensible or bizarre to outsiders.

Cities can be viewed from different perspectives like anything else. I explore four perspectives on cities: those of artists, analysts, rulers and city people themselves. For *artists* (Chapter 6) the city has long provided a setting for their images and narratives and sometimes a subject in itself. City life has been a particular inspiration, and found representation, in those artistic media that have developed in modern times–the novel, film, photography and popular music–to capture new sensations and express new sensibilities. Cities have also attracted the attention of a*nalysts* (Chapter 9) seeking to understand how they function. Their spatial patterns and temporal rhythms have been explored by economists, cartographers, sociologists, travel writers, geographers, historians and others. The perceptions of analysts can be very pervasive and long lasting in their influence through their adoption by city *rulers* (Chapter 13) and their professional helpers. For throughout history rulers have sought–sometimes autocratically, sometimes democratically–to remould cities. It seems to be a universal and irresistible urge for the powerful to create grand urban projects which symbolise their authority in this way: Hausmann's Parisian boulevards, Robert Moses' freeways and bridges in New York, Hitler's planned transformation of Berlin into Germania, even brand new capital cities like Washington, Canberra, and Brasilia. Rulers also exert influence

through regulatory and spending decisions, like restricting street trading, changing permitted building densities, building transport systems, renewing whole districts.

Lastly, let's not ignore the perceptions of city people themselves, expressed in *city life* (Chapter 16). Less and less of the world's population now remains ignorant of the urban experience. Even people living outside cities are connected to them: maybe they have relatives there, possibly sending remittances home; they have lived and studied or worked there previously; they may trade with city enterprises; they may be city tourists from time to time; or they see or read media coverage of city events. The personal experience of everyday urban life is shared with relatives, neighbours and friends, but only occasionally recorded in any public way. Even so, it is not a perception that can be ignored. Common terms like 'street-life', 'street-wise' and 'street-cred' hint at a unique popular perspective on city life.

Real and imagined cities

In the last decade the world became predominantly urban. That is, according to United Nations statisticians, over half of the population–5 billion people in total–now live in cities.[4] Within another generation, by 2030, there may be 5 billion city dwellers, 60% of the world's population. This is a historic shift, changing a balance that had lasted for millennia when most people lived on the land and urban people were the minority. Cities are now the places in which the majority of the world's population, in all the continents, now spends its daily life: the locales of work, home life, entertainment, sickness and health, friendships, crime, learning. Cities are also the motors of national economies, places where the making of goods and the provision of services are concentrated and where innovation–new activities replacing old–occurs. They are man-made artefacts, dense with buildings and networks subject to frequent renewal. These city environments can be both a source of delight and a cause of misery, sometimes in one and the same time and place: every city in the world has its slum housing, pollution, unsafe streets as well as its civic spaces, handsome parks and charming buildings. Cities are seats of power, both political and commercial, where governments sit and where corporate HQs are found and trade fairs are held. As well they often host many of a nation's cultural institutions, its galleries, theatres, museums and universities. Tourists flock to them.

This shift to an urban world fostered the growth of an urban sensibility, so that the city has become a major focus for our thoughts and feelings.

City life is not just there to be experienced in its own, immediate terms. As well, the idea of the city has come to carry all sorts of other associations, both good and bad: with human inventiveness; with money, power and corruption; with poverty and deprivation; with opportunity and advancement; with a sense of shared community; or with danger, stress and isolation. Much is contradictory. An 18[th]century polemic about London captures this well, describing the city as

> "a great wicked, unweildy [sic] overgrown Town, one continued hurry of Vice and Pleasure; where nothing dwells but Absurdities, Abuses, Accidents, Accusations, Admirations, Adventures, Adversities, Advertisements, Adulteries, Afffidavits, Affectations, Affirmations, Afflictions, Affronts, Aggravations, Agitations, Agonies, Airs, Alarms, Ailments, Allurements, Alterations, Ambitions, Amours, Amphitheatres, Anathemas, Animosities, Anxieties, Appointments, Apprehensions, Assemblies, Assessments, Assurances, Assignations, Attainders, Audacities, Aversions ...." [and so on][5]

All this is apparent not just in the real cities of the world, but also in the imagined cities that feature in novels, films, paintings, poetry, song and photography. Very often they present simulacrums of real cities at particular times: the 1930s Los Angeles of Raymond Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe, the street scenes of 1950s Paris by photographer Robert D'Oisneau, the modern Hong Kong of Wong Kar-Wai's movies Chungking Express (1994) and In the Mood for Love (2000). In all cases these are representations, not reproductions. Their verisimilitude varies greatly–compare Canaletto's and Turner's paintings of Venice, the former capturing the richness of the townscape through immaculate topographical detail, the latter offering bold blazes of evanescent light through which the famous landmarks are only dimly seen. Rarer are cities of pure imagination. Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities (1974) (of which more below) is a supreme example in fiction and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982) likewise in film–though some critics maintain that the former is really Venice and the latter Los Angeles.

Both real and imagined cities may also be strongly expressive of cultural values. There is a long history of fictional urban utopias from Plato's Republic of 360 BC to Ebenezer Howard's Garden City of 1898. Particular cities are strongly associated with cultural 'golden ages': Athens in 500 BC, Renaissance Florence in the 15th century, the London of Shakespeare at the turn of the 16th century, Vienna and Paris in the 19th century. And the shared etymology of the words 'urban', 'urbane' and 'urbanity' captures the supposed sophistication of city life, evident too in the popular contrast between the 'city slicker' and the 'country bumpkin'.

The other, similarly Latin-derived terms 'city', 'citizen', 'civility' carry implications of duty and order.

Our perception of any city is bound to be influenced by both real and imagined versions: our personal experience as residents or visitors and/or the pre-conceived views on it that we get from the news media, from novels or films, or through the accounts of our friends. So that cities are hard to see totally afresh when we confront them directly. They can confirm our prior impression and that may be a pleasure. On the other hand, the reality of some cities may take us by surprise–a different kind of pleasure or maybe a shock. This interplay between perception and reality is not just characteristic of the tourist experience of a city. It applies equally to our experience as residents, even the experience of our own familiar neighbourhood. And it applies to those whose work engages them with cities and their inhabitants: architects, social workers, teachers, refuse collectors, journalists and politicians among many others. City visitors, residents and workers all view the everyday reality of their city–making sense of it–in part through others' accounts of that reality.

To make sense of cities, to understand and use them, we need to delve below the surface of the familiar appearance of cities and the commonplace sensations of everyday city life. We need to expose the deeper explanations of why cities are as they seem. Accounts of imagined as well as the experience of real cities can help us to do that.

Origins

My explorations of world cities and city worlds have been long in gestation. My debts will become apparent throughout the text as I raid a wide variety of source material: books on history, travel, urban studies; current journalism; novels and poetry; films; travel guides and atlases; websites; art exhibitions and museums. But four works should be acknowledged for shaping my particular approach to making sense of cities.

The first is Lewis Mumford's book *The City in History* (1961)[6]. This was undoubtedly on the reading list given me as a student town planner. But at that time–occupied in the present with knocking down outworn buildings to replace them with new, shiny schemes for expectedly grateful inhabitants–I had little interest in history. Later, working on urban policy in government in the 1980s, I sought some historical perspective on contemporary urban change and returned to Mumford's grand sweep through five millennia, from "a city that was, symbolically, a world…[to]…a world that has become, in many practical aspects, a city."[7]

What I got from Mumford was that a city is more than the bricks and mortar that still obsess the town planner, the architect and engineer, and many rulers. Rather, it has always been a crucible for the interaction of diverse social, cultural, economic and political influences and is as much the product of that as of city builders.

The next work is also a book, now rather forgotten: Hugh Stretton's *Urban Planning in Rich and Poor Countries* (1978).[8] Stretton, a political scientist, explored the theory and practice of urban planning in the context of different social and political systems. In the second part of the book he analysed the practice of urban planning in poor capitalist cities (his example was Bangkok in Thailand), in poor communist cities (in Cuba and Cambodia, the latter then under the Khmer Rouge regime), rich capitalist cities (in the USA, France and Britain) and rich communist cities (in Hungary and Russia). This was an introduction to a global perspective on cities. But it was also his use of metaphors in the part of the book on theories of urban planning that caught my imagination–cities as communities, cities as marketplaces, cities as battlegrounds and cities as machinery. These and other metaphors have structured my subsequent thinking about cities since and do so in this book.

 Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*[9], my third inspiration*,* was introduced to me in the early 1990s by a young architect friend. Unlike the other two books it is a work of fiction. In it Marco Polo recounts to Kublai Khan the life of the many cities he has visited in his travels. In all, 55 cities are described, grouped as Cities and memory, Cities and signs, Trading cities, Cities and the dead, Thin cities and other such categories. What Calvino captures in these brief descriptions, most no more than a page, are the qualities of what we might call 'cityness.' Marco Polo says in the book:

> "Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else…Cities also believe that they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answers it gives to a question of yours. "[10]

What this book did for me was to open my eyes to the insights that artists–writers, painters, film makers and others–can bring to our understanding of cities.


Three of Calvino's Invisible Cities[9]

"In Chloe, a great city, the people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping…"

"In *Ersilia*, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or grey or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave; the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain…"

"Those who arrive at *Thekla* can see little of the city, beyond the plank fences, the sackcloth screens, the scaffolding, the metal armatures, the wooden catwalks hanging from ropes or supported by saw-horses, the ladders, the trestles. If you ask, 'Why is Thekla's construction taking such a long time?' the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer, 'So that its destruction cannot begin.' And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffolding is removed, the city may crumble and fall to pieces, they add hastily, in a whisper, 'Not only the city…'"

The fourth influence is a cartoon by Saul Steinberg. Steinberg was born in Romania but embraced the USA, where he lived from 1941 to his death in 1999, for its images and slogans, its dark side and its comic spirit. His most famous work, *A View of the World from Ninth Avenue*, was the cover for The New Yorker magazine of March 29, 1976. It represents a common cognitive experience, namely, that the perception of distance from our own part of the world tends to be on a logarithmic scale, shrinking actual kilometres as places recede. So in the cartoon, Manhattan's 10th Avenue is as distant from 9th Avenue as San Francisco is from New York and the Pacific Ocean is just a wide river with Asia on the other side. It was maybe intended by Steinberg–an immigrant outsider–as a comment on native US, or even New York, insularity. But the conceit works from any point of observation. What the cartoon reminds me is that we are inevitably most familiar with what is nearest home. And while I might feel that in this book I wish to treat equally the cities of all four corners of the globe, my knowledge–and certainly my experience–of them is selective. So the book is somewhat Anglo-, Euro-, and global North-centric. It also has a bias towards contemporary cities, though with occasional historical excursions when they can illuminate present day experience.
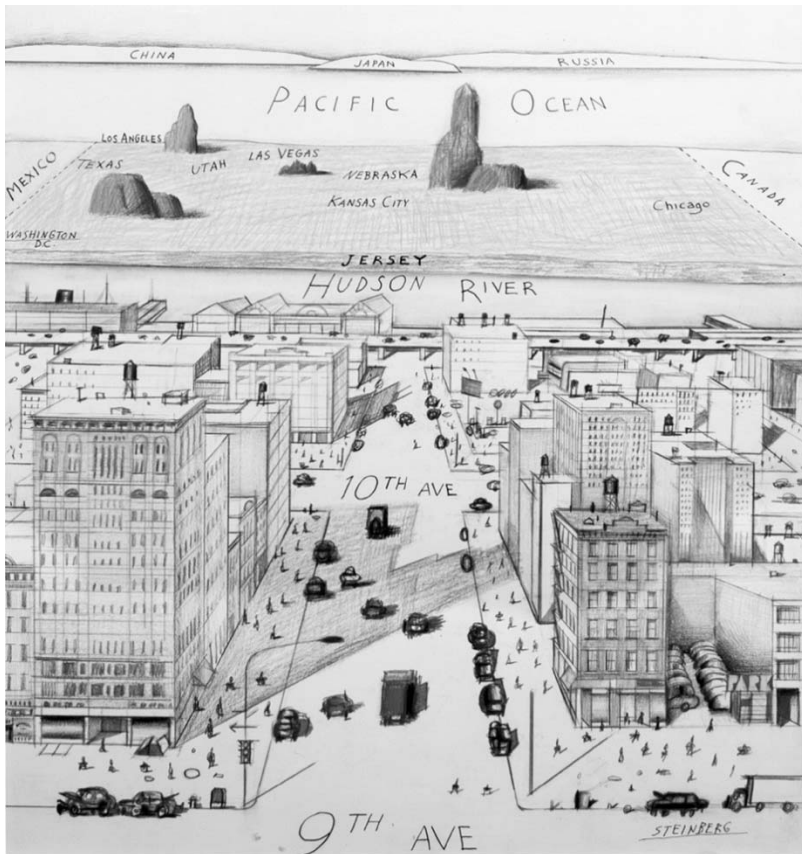
Saul Steinberg's View of the World from 9ᵗʰ Avenue

As well as these four works, my inspiration comes strongly from personal observation of cities around the world. I have lived and worked in Liverpool, Cambridge, London, Munich and the San Francisco Bay Area. I have been to most of the major European cities, sometimes for work, sometimes for pleasure. And elsewhere I have been a visitor in Bangkok, Beijing, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Cape Town, Chicago, Cuzco, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Lima, Los Angeles, Marrakesh, Melbourne, Mexico City, Moscow, Mumbai, New York, Ottawa, Phnom Penh, Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City, St Petersburg, San Francisco, Seattle, Singapore, Sydney, Tashkent, Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Vancouver and Washington. This personal experience of cities serves as a filter through which I interpret the

words and images of others. I preface each chapter with a personal anecdote from one of these cities.

So, this book takes the reader on an exploration of world cities. Like all exploration the purpose is to familiarise and learn, but what will be discovered along the way is initially unknown. Like a map or guide, the book organises its content–as chapters on my chosen metaphors, icons or perspectives–in a particular order. But you as reader must feel free to start anywhere that takes your fancy and–like an explorer–navigate your own way around. In the end, whatever route has been taken, the explorations will hopefully help you make more sense of cities.

CHAPTER TWO

LIVING TOGETHER:
CITIES AS COMMUNITIES

Hong Kong 2002. The prospect of New Year's Eve in Hong Kong arouses our curiosity. What form will local revelry take? Will people don fancy dress? Will there be fireworks? Or will it be low key, since the Chinese New Year comes later in February? We have flown in this afternoon to stay a few days with a Swiss friend who has worked here as a banker for 20 odd years. But our hopes for the celebration are dashed when he announces that he has made no plans for the evening because he knew that I would not have a dinner jacket! Taken aback, I say "Well, let's just go into the streets and see what's happening." "Go into the streets?" he ripostes with obvious alarm. So we stay home, in his luxurious flat on the 20th floor in Mid Levels and have a dinner of expensive bought-in delicacies and a good bottle of wine and watch the celebrations on the TV. I reflect that our friend is part of the Hong Kong ex-pat community, cosmopolitan, well-to-do, served by maids and chauffeurs, living a life quite insulated from the many other, mostly Chinese, communities who inhabit the city. Most of whom would be taking to the streets to celebrate the New Year in their way.

Identities

In the book and film *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her dog Toto, joined by her travelling companions, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion, set off along the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City, where they hope that the Wizard of Oz will help them realise their dreams. A journey is one of the most common plotlines in fiction and a journey to the city like Dorothy's is a variant. Other examples are Christian's journey to the Celestial City in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Pip's journey to London in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. In such cases the journey is also