

Preface to Cities | Scenes

This issue of *Public* is devoted to the study of ‘scenes,’ treating these as phenomenal elements in the cultural life of cities. Both memorable and ephemeral, scenes conjugate a history of urban places by enacting a dramatic visibility. They are a measure of the decline, vitality and distinctness of a city. A century or more of theorizing has subdivided city cultures into communities, subcultures, networks and innumerable other unities. ‘Scenes’ are both the haziest of such unities and some of the most productive. Amidst an explosion of writing on all aspects of urban culture, our focus on scenes has served to constrain and inspire the studies contained in this issue.

Our aim in organizing this issue of *Public* was to create a framework that encompasses the material specificities of local urban cultures as well as more general theorizations of global place building and urban experience. All of the essays collected here, originate from “The Culture of Cities Project,” a new interdisciplinary research endeavour committed to carrying out urban research on four cities—Berlin, Montréal, Dublin and Toronto. Over a five-year period, the project will produce a series of comparative studies on a wide range of topics. These include the building and rebuilding of city structures, the circulation of objects and artefacts, representations of locality, the status of the arts, and the character of urban citizenship. These themes are themselves approached through the lenses of different conceptual frameworks. We are concerned with the character of individual cities and the status of claims made about such character. Researchers are investigating the rhythms and intensities of city life as these resonate through all levels of cultural, social and economic activity. The project is concerned with the dissemination of collective purpose throughout urban cultural life, and the place of the local and global within a sense of urban belonging.

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