Cityscapes
cultural readings in the material and symbolic city

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For Molly and Zebedee

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The city, according to Michel de Certeau, is that 'most immoderate of
human texts' (de Certeau 1984: 92). Responses to this immoderate text, in
the shape of academic books or aesthetic objects, have often sought a form
of moderation, a way of managing the superabundance of the city. No
doubt this is itself a sign of the strategies we generate to cope with the city.
This book 'manages' the city in a less manageable way: it tries to keep the
immoderation of the city near the forefront of the study. Perhaps another
sign of immoderation, though, is the plethora of books that continue to take
the city as its theme. The current proliferation of books about the modern
city, its literary and artistic productions, its life-worlds, its planned and
unplanned environments, seems to grow exponentially. Such ceaseless
production could well be taken as a sign of the attractions that the creative
and destructive energies of the city exert. But it also poses a question: why
another book on the city, why *this* book?

Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City doesn't
attempt to offer a thorough account of the city. It is piecemeal and rela-
tively ad hoc in its range of examples. Vast expanses of the urban world fall
outside its sway. But then the intention hasn't been to suggest that exhaus-
tiveness is a particularly worthwhile response to the city. Indeed this book
is designed to question some of the fundamental operations of cultural
inquiry, in particular the rush to explain and summarize. Instead of privi-
leging explanation and legibility, this book wants to prevaricate and
procrastinate, to abstain from assessment and interpretation – if only for a
while. It wants to argue for the critical and analytic value of description;
description that isn't immediately translatable into assessment, valuation
and judgement. The politics of this are obviously problematic, but then so
are the politics of assessment, solution and urban planning.

Instead of taking positions in relation to urban issues ('globalization', for
instance), I have chosen instead to concentrate on questions of how cultural
studies can attend to the city and suggest that rhythm and circulation
provide a productive form of attention. It is not that I see social and politi-
cal urban issues as unimportant (far from it), just that I also see the need for
more inventive and exploratory *preliminary* investigations into how cities
have been experienced, how the city has a hold on the imagination and
what some of the coordinates of this 'lived imaginary' are. Methodology,

then, is a central concern, and my priority has been to fashion method-
ological approaches that are appropriate to these questions. Methodology
is often associated with the social sciences, with either their abstract gener-
alizations or their insistence on fashioning rigorous and testable 'methods'
for collecting and collating data. Here, though, I want to make a claim for
another orientation for methodology. Methodology here is practice; the
'practice of doing' urban cultural studies, reading various textual objects
and getting them to reflect and refract the cultural material out of which
they are made. This methodology is not directed at a world of facts and
testable data; it is a methodology that has to adjust to the peculiar and
particular forms of the cultural objects being investigated. It is not a toolkit
that can be pulled off the shelf and put to work.

In his essay 'Semiology and Urbanism' from 1967, Roland Barthes starts
by listing the disciplinary requirements for someone wanting to 'sketch a
semiotics of the city': they 'must be at once a semiologist (a specialist in
signs), a geographer, an historian, an urbanist, an architect, and probably a
psychoanalyst' (Barthes [1967] 1988: 191). This unfeasibly wide range of
disciplinary knowledges posits the city as an object of multidisciplinary
studies or perhaps, better still, an object that is fundamentally anti-
disciplinary. Anyone studying the city would be hard pressed to claim
expertise in all these areas, and Barthes himself makes a virtue of his
amateur status. The list that Barthes makes is interesting, not to say
provocative: why, for instance, 'a psychoanalyst'? History and geography
are immediately understandable, and insist on the need to recognize the
city both as a spatial and temporal practice. Architecture suggests a
concern with the physical materiality of the city, just as semiology insists
on the signifying materiality of the urban. Perhaps, then, psychoanalysis,
for Barthes, is there to foreground group dynamics, urban pathologies or
traumas and desires involved in city life? Perhaps it just suggestively
insists on the need to recognize the city as an entity that is experienced, and
experienced emotionally.

If Barthes begins his essay by burdening the nascent urban semiologist
with a vast quantity of learning, by the end he has shifted the emphasis;
now the requirements are not disciplinary knowledge, but a certain canny
inventiveness, and a facility for description:

> If we seek to undertake a semiology of the city, the best approach, in my
> opinion, as indeed for any semantic enterprise, will be a certain ingenu-
> ity on the reader's part. It will require many of us to attempt to decipher
> the city where we are, beginning, if necessary, with a personal report. . . .
> the most important thing is not so much to multiply investigations or
> functional studies of the city as to multiply the readings of the city, of
> which, unfortunately, till now, only the writers have given us some
> examples.
>
> (Barthes [1967] 1988: 201)

Barthes ends up privileging the methodological and theoretical accom-
plishments of novelists and poets (Victor Hugo and Raymond Queneau,
for instance) over historians, urban planners, geographers and the like.
Such a manoeuvre is itself methodological: it means treating cultural texts
not as texts *requiring* analysis but as *analytic* texts; it also means that while
the urban context requires interdisciplinary knowledge, such knowledge
has to be utilized by a creative and ingenious attitude. While this book
doesn't share Barthes' ambition of mapping out a structural linguistics of
the city, it does share his methodological incentives: namely the refusal to
find 'theory and method' only in the academy; the serious consideration of
literary and artistic work as sophisticated ethnographic material; and the
desire to multiply accounts of the city (which is also to recognize the
impossibility of any particular account, including this one, as being
adequate).

This book is structured around two methodology chapters that open and
close the book: sandwiched between these are a series of micro-studies of
urban culture. These micro-studies work centrifugally; they take a text, a
cultural form or a genre and endeavour to connect these objects to a larger
social and cultural urban world. In various different ways they all take
mobility and movement as their central thematic orientation, and seek to
generate accounts of urban culture that are sensitive to the various rhythms
that animate urban life.

Foregrounding movement, mobility and rhythm is a way of continually
reminding yourself that the city is a dynamic and living object that orches-
trates a variety of competing rhythms. It is also a way of creating a vivid
bridge between the physical world and the signifying, textual world (both
roads and novels can be pacey, for instance).

Cityscapes can be read in a number of ways. If your preference is for
practical demonstrations of methodology (implicit rather than explicit),
you might want to start with Chapter Two and read to Chapter Six, and
then read the two methodology chapters. If, however, you want to get to
grips with the methodological coordinates prior to delving into concrete
case studies, you might want to begin by reading both Chapter One and
Chapter Seven before you read the middle chapters. Alternatively you
might want to follow the structure as it is laid out here (this, of course, is
my preference), and begin with some methodological matters, but hold
back on the discussion of rhythmanalysis until it crops up in the final chap-
ter, after you have seen it at work in the preceding chapters. The choice is
yours.

This book is dedicated to Molly and Zebedee. Molly's random reading
of bits of city script and Zebedee's deep love of diggers, bulldozers, cranes,
trucks and building sites constantly reminded me that if the city is a text, it
is a fairly provisional one, and one that often looks more like a demolition
site than a decipherable message. Molly and Zebedee weren't simply
bystanders in the production of this book; they were theoretical and

Chapter One
Introduction – Methodology I: Culture, Cities and Legibility

Metaphor City

Carol Reed's 1949 film *The Third Man* takes place amongst the ruins of post-war Vienna. The city's nineteenth-century baroque grandeur is still evident, but it has faded and crumbled. The streets are dark and dank and the shadows of solitary figures loom large over the façades of buildings. Here corruption orchestrates the city and watered-down penicillin circulates for the profit of black marketeers and the destruction of those already suffering; dereliction consumes the city both physically and morally. Occupied and divided, Vienna plays host to an emergent Cold War struggle for domination. Split into five zones, it is policed by Russian (Soviet), French, British and American forces, with an 'international zone' governed by all four occupying armies. In the streets German is spoken, but the language of power speaks many languages.

The Third Man is the story of a penniless pulp novelist, Holly Martins, an American, who comes to Vienna on the invitation of an old school friend, Harry Lime. On arriving in Vienna, Martins discovers that Lime has been killed, run down by a car. The story that unfolds (which need not concern us too much here) is of Martins falling in love with Lime's Czechoslovakian girlfriend Anna Schmidt, Martins trying to uncover what happened to Lime and Martins' realization that his school friend is a racketeer selling the lethal penicillin. Harry Lime, it transpires, is not dead and, in a revelatory moment, Martins sees Lime temporarily illuminated in the deep shadows of a bricked-up doorway. The film concludes with Harry Lime's death, shot by Martins in the sewer, and Anna Schmidt, walking unhesitatingly past Martins after Lime's funeral.

'It is the images of desolation which we remember best from *The Third Man*', writes Peter Wollen, 'the ruins, the Big Wheel and the sewers' (Wollen 1999: 17). Sewers, ruins and a fairground wheel make up the crucial ingredients of the metaphoricity of this pictured city; the metaphor

city of *The Third Man*. Ruins are everywhere, obliterating the usual Viennese landmarks (the Ringstrasse, for instance, or the zigzag roof of the Stephans-Dom). Vienna's sewers are the conduits through which Lime is able to move about the city unseen; they also turn out to be the site of his ill-fated attempt to escape from the international military police (Plate 1.1). The big wheel is the setting of perhaps the film's most famous scene (Plate 1.2). It is situated in the Prater, an amusement park in a working-class district of the city. Riding the Ferris wheel, Martins confronts Lime with the knowledge of his erstwhile friend's racketeering, and asks if he has ever seen any of his victims. Lime's reply depends for its effect on their being at the top of the wheel's rotation:

> Don't be melodramatic. Look down there. Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving for ever? If I said you can have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money – or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare?

<div align="right">(Greene 1988: 97)</div>
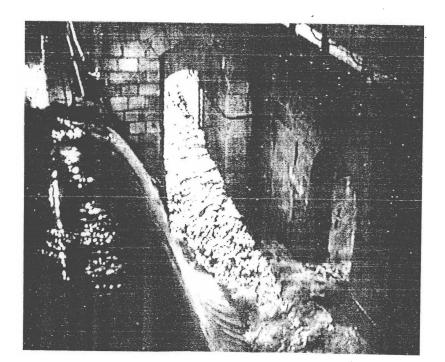
Plate 1.2 The Ferris wheel (the Reisenrad) *The Third Man*, Carol Reed, 1949

The figure of Harry Lime (played by Orson Welles) exists in the shadows of ruins, his amoral perspective premised on his distance from the daily culture of the street; literally and metaphorically he stands out from the crowd. His navigation of the city is premised, appropriately enough, on his familiarity with the sewers. And it is this that connects *The Third Man* not simply with the Vienna of the late 1940s but with a whole history of the metaphoricity of urban culture.

The 'view from above' (from the top of a Ferris wheel or tower) has been associated with the planner's perspective, privileging the demands of a generalized urbanism over the lives and needs of the city's inhabitants. This is the perspective of military geographers, city surveyors, planners; those the social philosopher Henri Lefebvre called 'technocratic subdividers and social engineers' (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 38). From here it is easy to turn people into numbers, to imagine decisive solutions for complexly experienced problems. The sewer also conjures up a constant preoccupation; underground space, circulation and waste. Sewers not only signal the feats of nineteenth-century engineering, but an understanding of the city as something like a body, requiring lungs (parks, for instance), good circulation (roads, pavements,

traffic lights and so on) and efficient expulsion of waste (drains and sewers). For the social historian Richard Sennett, this city-body metaphor is bound up with the establishment of various ideologies of trade ('free' trade where money and commodities ceaselessly circulate) and subjectivity (the individualism of mobile monads). It figures the urban environment as a containable and controllable space (Sennett 1994).

Traditionally the understanding of cities as bodylike has tended to align itself with the city as seen from above. To envisage the urban as composed of arteries and veins requires a perspective removed from the densely populated streets of the city. And it is a small step from claiming that the health of a city depends on efficient circulatory systems, to suggesting forms of aggressive surgery (slum clearance, new arterial roads and so on) when these systems appear blocked or broken. But the density of such urban figurations as the city-body, or the elevated and disembodied view from above are not limited to the imaginings of those who plan and govern cities. Sewers and subway systems, as well as aerial perspectives, function as material elements in any number of representations of modern urbanism. Watching *The Third Man*, it is hard not to connect Lime's scuttling about in Vienna's sewer with a vast number of filmic representations of subways and sewers, of escape and capture. Dark and dripping, the underground of the city becomes densely metaphoric.

The disembodied voice that starts *The Third Man* states: 'I never knew the old Vienna before the war, with its Strauss music, its glamour and easy charm' (Greene 1988: 12). But if the Vienna of Strauss has been lost, the Vienna of Freud may not be far away. Freud writes that dreams

> stand in much the same relation to the childhood memories from which they are derived as do some of the Baroque palaces of Rome to the ancient ruins whose pavements and columns have provided the material for the more recent structures.
>
> (Freud [1900] 1976: 633)

A city (usually Rome), built on the ruins of its past, with history accumulating but not quite adding up, is a constant analogy for the unconscious in Freud. (For Freud, it also continually falls short of fully articulating the conception of psychic space that he is trying to describe.) Ruins, monuments and urban architecture point to an environment where the past continually impinges on the present. Ruins signal the trauma of history, as the past remains in the present as a reminder of violence and destruction. Ruins, because they are fragments of the past, physical debris cluttering up the present, make the actuality of urban culture vividly evident; here the past haunts the present. And just as psychoanalysis is dedicated to uncovering the power of the past as it acts on the lives of the present, so a study of urban culture must look to history to understand the power of an urban imaginary. Cities as bodies, the disembodied perspective, and the

metaphorics of underground spaces exist like debris in the present. In this sense all cities are haunted; they are the ghostly accumulations of past lives, past cities.

It is here in this metaphor city that we must begin and it is here that we must make an initial claim: to privilege the metaphorics of the city is not to leave the real city behind. It is not to privilege a fictional Vienna over a real Vienna, but to insist that our real experiences of cities are 'caught' in networks of dense metaphorical meanings. Or, perhaps more optimistically, it is to insist that experiences are syncopated or punctuated by an accumulation of images and signs. It is the tangle of physicality and symbolism, the sedimentation of various histories, the mingling of imaginings and experience that constitute the urban. It is this messy actuality (which might be understood as the experience of an urban social imaginary) that must be the point of departure. I want to claim that the *real* of the urban is that density of meaning which suggests not a coded poetics but a thickly allusive and illusive reality. Metaphors in this sense are not stand-ins for something else; they are the reality of this lived density. To claim that the city is metaphorical is not then to claim that it is overlaid with poetic codes (the city as body, for instance) that can be unpicked to reveal a truth free of cultural tampering. The city as 'jungle', 'labyrinth', 'body', 'network', 'unconscious', 'crime scene', 'phantasmagoria' and so on are not just literary devices, they constitute part of the material out of which we experience the urban. And they have a history. The actual thickness of experience (so to speak) is dependent on the fact that we inhabit what the sociologist C. Wright Mills calls 'second-hand worlds': worlds 'determined by meanings ... received from others' (Mills [1959] 1963: 405). It is the 'second-handness' of the world that is indicated by the term 'culture': not just some distant realm of complex representations (produced in the dream factories of Hollywood, for instance) but the actuality of experiences shaped by, and propped up on, a world laced with meanings. The actuality of the city is its lived metaphoricity.

To watch Holly Martins stumbling among the ruins of Vienna, or a fearful Harry Lime trying to escape capture in the city's sewers, is to recognize both the opacity and the resonance of urban culture. It is a recognition that the city exists not simply in the physical environment of the urban but also in its material imaginary. To witness Anna Schmidt's struggle with the authorities over her nationality (her passport is forged, her 'national origin' means she officially belongs to the Soviet authorities) is to be thrust into a world where 'imaginary' and textual meanings have profound material consequences.

Two problems animate this book and determine much of what follows. They might already be visible. The first can be best thought of as a *question of legibility*; the second concerns the *intractability of the actual and the imaginary*. This book argues that the figuration of the urban (its existence as a network of metaphors, metonyms, symbols and the like) not only accounts

for a variety of representations of city life, but is also a crucial aspect of the material experience of the urban – its actuality. Actual urban experiences, of course, are never reducible to this figural dimension, yet the *work* of urban culture is the proliferation of these complex figures to the point where it makes no sense to talk about urban experience as being free from the figural. But, as I have been suggesting, to treat texts as coinciding with experience in this way doesn't mean that such figuration can simply be undone, decoded, and underlying meanings revealed. To pursue urban culture as 'lived figuration' is to attend to it as peculiarly condensed material. In this sense poetics is not the ornamental 'froth' perched on a more fundamental reality; it is rather the experience of ambiguity, of thickly compressed meanings, that can't be untangled and arranged into neat legible patterns.

In many ways, then, it could be suggested that to refuse to separate 'fictions' and 'reality' and insist that we live our lives in the wake of our own and others' imagination causes a problem about legibility. After all, isn't the separation of 'fiction' and 'actuality' one of the first tasks of making legible? Similarly, to promote urban culture and urban experience as accumulations that don't add up (for instance the city as body metaphor is both extensive and ambiguous) is not to assume that the outcome of urban cultural study is the deciphering of the city. Indeed it may be that the point of such investigation is precisely the *making vivid* of cultural ciphers. In this introduction, I want to explain these problems, why they matter and why they motivate a discussion of urban culture. I also want to begin to outline the orientation and themes that I will be pursuing in this book, as a way of responding to the challenge posed by these problems.

The Question of Legibility

Any project is liable to be questioned about its motivation, and what its aims and objectives are, and the study of urban cultures can't exempt itself from this. In the nineteenth century to study the urban was to attempt to make the city legible. What nineteenth-century social explorers perceived in the rapidly expanding and modernizing city was an unreadable environment, peopled by diverse social groups, generating new and unregulated social and sexual identities and producing unforeseen experiences and practices. Such an explosion of heterogeneity, of diversity, produced an anxiety amongst those who saw it as their duty to regulate and plan metropolitan culture. In many respects the study of urban culture walked hand in hand with forces setting out to modernize and regulate the city. To make urban culture intelligible and legible meant policing it: encouraging particular metropolitan attitudes and outlawing others; bringing assumed 'rogue' elements under control; and planning a regulated form of modernization.

At the start of the twenty-first century such attitudes have been the object of several decades of criticism. This urban 'paternalism', often ruthless in its effects, can be exposed as motivated by explicit vested interests – those of profit and religious disciplining, for example. Its moral mission to save the 'mass' from the social poisons that are seen to propagate in the metropolis can be recognized as grounded in a highly ideological understanding of social classes, sexual desires and 'racial' characteristics. Yet the desire to plan the city, regulate it and control it is as much a feature of present-day urbanism as it was in the middle of the nineteenth century. And while present-day urban planners might well have prioritized 'social diversity' in their mission statements, such an image of diversity is usually highly regulated and continues to necessitate the control and outlawing of perceived rogue elements. So while in some cities the local council might encourage specifically gay-oriented businesses and designate specific areas of the city as 'gay zones', those who seek more casual and less commodified pleasures in the city's parks at night might find that social inclusion still doesn't extend to them. Similarly, 'diversity' still finds it impossible to include those who don't have the financial means or interests to take part in property exchange or renting arrangements. In an environment where every square foot of land is owned and controlled, and where 'common ground' doesn't seem to mean common ownership, the juxtaposition of empty buildings and homeless people should make clear the limitations of terms like 'diversity'.

Given the history of urban legibility and the continued will to legibility of urban planners and other social and cultural managers, we might want to ask about the motivation for a cultural studies' approach to the urban. Does cultural studies' attention to the urban constitute a continuation in the attempt to render the city legible? And if so, isn't it open to the same kind of criticism that I have been briefly rehearsing here, namely that its motivation is to regulate and order the heterogeneity of the social? But if, on the other hand, cultural studies wants to distance itself from such a project, aren't we entitled to ask what its goal is? After all it might be implicit in the very idea of *studying* the urban, that intelligibility and legibility are an expected outcome.

I want to think of the study of urban cultures slightly differently. Instead of setting out to make the urban legible (and necessarily erasing the exceptional and the wayward), the study of urban cultures could declare its object to be the social anxiety caused by the city's perceived illegibility (indeed some of the best writing on urban culture does exactly that). Here then the project's motivation is not to render the city legible, but to render its illegibility legible (so to speak) or make legible the effects and affects of illegibility. But alongside this I'd like to think of the study of urban cultures as doing something else. For if it is the heterogeneity (and waywardness) of the city that is the cause of anxiety for some, for others it is precisely the social promiscuity of the urban that makes the city a source of possibility

and hope. Urban cultural studies then might want to side with the wayward and diverse against the forces of legibility (this is the vision of urban cultural studies that I want to give some space to here). This would mean that urban cultural studies would have some obligation to recover heterogeneity, to rescue 'illegibility' at the point where it was about to be subsumed by the forces of order (be they academic or governmental).

I should note, however, that this doesn't translate into a pragmatic politics of the city (nor is it meant to); it leaves unasked political questions about the necessity of some forms of control (for instance in relation to crime). Nor do I mean to romanticize the role of the social outcast or 'rogue' element, or glorify such social positioning. You might want to see such an approach as partly a prevarication in the endless rush to offer new solutions to social situations. This isn't to suggest that the study of urban culture isn't political (far from it) but it is to suggest that studying urban culture is not the same as studying to become an urban planner.

To study urban cultures doesn't necessarily require that you shine *light* into areas of darkness. As the film *The Third Man* seems to suggest, meaning often lives in the shadows. To make such a film part of an archive for urban culture doesn't require that we simply explain what it means and show how it works. A more productive approach (to my way of thinking at least) would be to start by connecting it to other cultural material, to get it to resonate within a more general urban culture. This is to pursue such material centrifugally; to work outwards, from the close and detailed attention of specific texts and experiences (like *The Third Man*), to other texts, other articulations. This approach wouldn't require unquestioned allegiance to legibility. Its aim would be more descriptive than analytic, and it would place value on the ability to register the complex density of the urban. This is what I take to be the productivity of foregrounding culture as the perspective *from which* to attend to the urban. Culture, for this book at least, is the materially real world of meanings. Wherever you locate it – in libraries, on the street, in cinemas and so on – culture is forceful, sometimes vengeful, always animating and promiscuous, not safely tucked away in discrete enclaves.

Movement and Rhythmanalysis

The thematic focus of this book is going to be movement; more particularly forms of circulation and urban rhythms. I should point out, though, that I am not using this theme as an ideological springboard for an assessment of the very real divisiveness that differences of access and mobility generate in cities. Such assessments, while they might be implied in what follows, are the byproduct of a more explicit concentration on movement as a theme for producing forceful descriptions of urban culture. Movement and the rhythmicity of the urban are chosen as themes for a number of reasons.

Firstly, but by no means primarily, the urban is such an unmanageable cultural terrain that, without some form of thematic orientation, discussions of the urban will simply end up courting the worst kind of academic inconsequentiality – the ultra-fragmentation of the cultural field. Secondly, and more importantly, movement and rhythmicity are chosen because they have the ability to overcome some of the problems I have been discussing: they problematize any fixed division of labour between attending to the physical and the signifying. If cities have rhythms, so do all accounts of cities: movement is as essential to film, for instance, as it is to the actuality of the street. Thirdly, and following on from this, a concentration on movement and rhythm insist on figuring the city as a dynamic and living entity, thus curtailing the tendency towards fixed interpretative accounts of historical materials. Foregrounding movement is one of the ways I'm trying to inoculate myself against ignoring the forceful descriptive powers of cultural material. The final chapter to this book offers a more thorough account of rhythmanalysis as a methodological orientation towards urban culture, but since the rest of the book is attempting to *do* a form of rhythmanalysis, it is worth outlining some of the ideas involved.

Rhythmanalysis is not a fully fledged theory or systematic and structured method, which may well turn out to be one of its most attractive and productive features. At a minimum, though, it can be seen as an invitation to consider the speeding-up and slowing-down of social life. It might also require a predilection for complex orchestrations of time and space, a desire to pick out the different beats and pulses of urban experience and find ways of registering their syncopated arrangements. Rhythm is useful not simply in its foregrounding of the dynamics of urban life: rhythm might well be considered as the third term in a number of dualisms, a third term that supplies the active ingredient for thinking through a dialectical relationship. So rhythm overcomes the separation of time and space – rhythm is on the side of *spacing*, on the side of the durational aspects of place and the spatial arrangements of tempo. Rhythmic terms such as 'circulation' overcome the sort of fixity that comes from studying production and consumption in isolation from each other: circulation is the articulation of their relationship. Rhythm isn't simply speed; it is the measure of dynamic relationships and it insists on the plural rhythmicity of the city.

Rhythmanalysis is about the relationships between different forms of movement and spatial arrangements, between durations and moments. It will be interested in direction as well as pace. Urban rhythmanalysis will be concerned with the rhythms of traffic and transport systems, but also communication networks: it will want to be able to describe crowds and individuals, as well as the movements of goods, energy supplies, liquids and waste. It will be interested in the slowest rhythms: the gradual changes in the social geology of the city, the epochal histories of migrations, the almost invariable rhythm of the seasons. And crucially it will be interested in these rhythms as articulated in texts.

While the most elaborated theoretical discussion of rhythmanalysis is to be found in the posthumously published writing of the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, it is not my intention to simply try to be true to Lefebvre. One of the elements that Lefebvre doesn't consider is how a form of rhythmanalysis might be possible that isn't simply dedicated to the analytic description of the urban present. Lefebvre doesn't consider the possibility of writing historically about the rhythmicity of the city, whereas here the articulation of rhythmicity through historical materials (even recent ones) is of central concern. One way of exploring rhythmanalysis in more historical ways is to recognize that rhythmanalysis isn't simply going to be a practice owned by sociological or humanistic scholars. It is a practice that is central to the cultural practices that have shaped the twentieth century.

One of the places where we can find rhythmanalysis is in the varied practices that go by the name of modernism. Modernism, in some of its most characteristic forms, is a kind of rhythmanalysis: it is often addicted to the thickness of description, and hooked on the kind of intricate pulsings to be found at the movies or in the street. Rhythmanalysis is what many kinds of cultural works do by dint of their orientation to the flows and movements of urban life. For example, Robert Musil's epic and unfinished novel *The Man Without Qualities* begins with a rhythmanalytic description of a street scene in early twentieth-century Vienna:

> Motor-cars came shooting out of deep, narrow streets into the shallows of bright squares. Dark patches of pedestrian bustle formed into cloudy streams. Where stronger lines of speed transacted their loose-woven hurrying, they clotted up – only to trickle on all the faster then and after a few ripples regain their regular pulse-beat. Hundreds of sounds were intertwined into a coil of wiry noise, with single barbs projecting, sharp edges running along it and submerging again, and clear notes splintering off – flying and scattering.
>
> (Musil [1930] 1995: 3)

This busy street scene presents a cacophony of noises and moving objects that are described in terms of competing force fields of energy. The description pictures the city as a frenetic space of activities. This capturing of the city as a frantic *mélange* of movement is tempered somewhat a few paragraphs later:

> Like all big cities, it consisted of irregularity, change, sliding forward, not keeping in step, collisions of things and affairs, and fathomless points of silence in between, of paved ways and wilderness, of one great rhythmic throb and the perpetual discord and dislocation of all opposing rhythms, and as a whole resembled a seething, bubbling fluid in a vessel consisting of the solid material of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions.
>
> (Musil [1930] 1995: 4)

Musil's Vienna is made up of plural rhythms: the rhythmic throb of the inhabitants and the sedentary pace of its heritage (its laws and traditions, for instance). And between frenetic activity and the stasis of law is, presumably, an entire range of pace. To suggest that Musil, a novelist, is also a theorist of rhythmanalysis should suggest the broad range of accounts that might count as rhythmanalysis; it certainly should guard against the notion that cultural theory is limited to 'theorists'. But even here the emphasis is clearly on the frenzy of movement rather than the stasis represented by the solidity of the buildings. Tradition is merely the container of a sort of chronic restlessness.

It is this insistence on urban modernity as a constant quickening of pace that links many forms of modernism with significant social theorists of the twentieth century. For Georg Simmel, in his well-known essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', the psychological foundations for metropolitan individuality are to be found 'with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life' (Simmel [1903] 1971: 325). Modernity thus provides an insistent and ferocious rhythm, a rapid tempo of circulation that the metropolitan type must either adapt to (by adopting a blasé attitude) or suffer from (neurasthenia, agoraphobia and other dis-eases of modernity) (see Vidler 2000). For Simmel the rhythm of the modern metropolis moves at a helter-skelter pace that is most apparent in the increasing quantity and speed of traffic, the extensiveness of financial exchange and the spectacular displays of the commodity. For Walter Benjamin, clearly writing in the wake of Simmel, urban modernity is similarly characterized by increases of nervous energy caused by the shocks that emanate from a sensory bombardment by both physical (traffic, factory work) and textual (advertising, newspapers) material (Benjamin [1939] 1983: 131–4). Benjamin's modernity is one in which technological developments have penetrated everyday life in the guise of innovations such as matches, telephones, cameras and so on. His is an understanding of urban modernity that is perhaps best characterized by what the writer Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1986, 1995) refers to as the 'industrialization' of experience. But Benjamin's perspective is also one that usefully foregrounds some of the slower aspects of modernity and reminds us that acceleration is not a universal condition of modernization.

It is the late work of Henri Lefebvre that will be the main touchstone for the rhythmanalysis that I want to acknowledge in this book. For Lefebvre, rhythmanalysis is an orientation towards the *multiple* rhythms of modernity: the various speeds of circulation; the different spacings of movement; and the varied directions of flows. Its ultimate potential (like most of Lefebvre's writing) is to achieve a complex orchestration of the totality, one that doesn't subsume variety and contradiction in its wake. The project of rhythmanalysis is endlessly ambitious: the view from his apartment window allows Lefebvre to consider not just the rhythms of pedestrians and traffic, but also the rhythms of street entertainers, the rhythms of the

body, the rhythms of plants, the cyclical rhythms of the seasons and night and day, the rhythms of international finance, laws and so on. As Lefebvre (1996: 228) puts it, rhythmanalysis concerns itself with everything 'from particles to galaxies'. And if he insists on an economic determinism for urban rhythms, he is also sure that such forces are always articulated in elaborate and illusive ways: 'the essential and determinant factor is money. But money does not make itself obvious as such' (Lefebvre 1996: 225). All the senses are called upon to provide an analysis of the urban with the aim of 'the least possible separation of the scientific from the poetic' (Lefebvre 1996: 228).

Rhythmanalysis is then a number of things; it is a refusal to privilege either the scientific or the poetic but to insist on both; it insists that slower rhythms always exist side by side with faster ones. In this it becomes a useful antidote to modernism's overprivileging of the acceleration of urban culture. It is of course true that cars move more quickly now than they did a 100 years ago, but it is also true that nowadays you are more likely to spend large amounts of time stuck in a traffic jam. In its orientation towards plural rhythms and their orchestration, rhythmanalysis is a useful counter to overzealous declarations that slower forms of urban life have simply disappeared. In Lefebvre's work, rhythmanalysis is an attempt to attend to the experiential side of urban life and it recruits all the senses for doing this. We, however, will be limited in the range of sensory materials that we can bring into account, because, unlike Lefebvre, I will be observing observations (observations that take the form of written and visual text) rather than putting my head out of a Paris window and smelling and hearing the hubbub below.

Cities and Modernity

Much of this book is concerned with the nature of modernity as it impacts on the lives of urban dwellers and shapes and generates the symbolic and material city, so it is worth writing a few words here about modernity. Modernity, as I understand it, is the experience of being caught up in, and at times overtaken by, dramatic changes. Although related to an idea of being modern, reaching for the unattainable dream of total modernization, modernity is a more precarious affair, a *friction* produced when a desire for the new makes contact with local and traditional conditions. Thus, modernity is not the smoothed-out worldscape of so much science fiction but the ad hoc montage of the old rubbing shoulders with the new. And it is this rubbing, which is both a rubbing along and a rubbing against, where modernity is to be found.

Crucially, though, what counts as new, what is experienced as new, is not always the latest gizmo, but more often the foreign, the exotic. The history of modern urban life, though, has been structured by racism and

xenophobia in constitutive ways. For example, the modernity of Indian cities is often positioned as the *result* of colonial rule, as if India could only subsist as pre-modern until Western colonial forces arrived with their dual imperatives of industrial control and the promotion of Christianity. Another version of this tale, told from a different angle, might well suggest that, conversely, imperial centres like London fashioned their modernity on the back of colonial wealth and labour. London's modernity, therefore, was dependent on India's. The crucial point to remember here is that urban modernity is international but asymmetrically international. Crucially, from an analytic point of view, it makes little sense to talk about 'modernity' as an order of measurement, whereby one city is assessed as having more modernity than another. More productively, modernity should be seen as an experiential realm that can be described in terms of its intensities, which might be similar and different to the intensities found in other urban centres.

So, while the internationalism of urban modernity is structured by an uneven and unequal patterning that reflects a global distribution of power, any assumption that modernity is an urban condition, which during the nineteenth century (the century that is classically seen as witnessing the birth of modernity) was limited to the 'West', needs to be countered. One way of doing this is by pointing to the nations that included themselves in international exhibitions in the nineteenth century. International exhibitions are a useful index of modern desires as they acted as a competitive field for nations to demonstrate the results of their own particular forms of modernization. The first exhibition, named the Great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations, was housed in the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park in 1851, and was a showcase for displaying the spectacle of modernized production. Accepting the invitation to participate in such an exhibition, especially in the heart of imperial London, was to declare yourself a modern nation, often with your own imperial ambitions, certainly with a sense of a modernizing programme, as well as a sense of past achievements. Those that accepted the invitation to display in 1851 were:

> Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bremen, Chile, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany (the States of the Zollervein), Greece, Hamburg, Hanover, Holland, Lubeck, Mexico, Mecklenburg-Strelitz, New Grananda, Oldenburg, Persia, Peru, Portugal, Rome, Russia, Sardinia, Schleswig-Holstein, Society Islands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunis, Turkey, Tuscany and the United States of America.
>
> (Greenhalgh 1988: 12)

Here the international range of nations and states articulates a whole panoply of different modernities, modernities which alongside their differences are connected by a common desire to, for instance, display their modern wares in an international context.

As well as evidencing forms of racism and xenophobia, urban modernity has also articulated a corresponding cross-cultural pollination, often as a central characteristic of the culture of the modern. In many ways, to be modern, to experience modernity, was something that no nation could do alone. Internationalism, and the varied responses to it (which includes racism as well as creative cosmopolitanism), has been a driving force for modernity. Certainly it has be a driving force for the production of cultural practices attempting to be modern and register the experience of modernity.

In Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, artists attempting to fashion a visual practice that was modern, urban, cosmopolitan and aesthetically progressive looked to Japan. In the 1860s and 70s, via Japanese displays in international exhibitions and the agency of Parisian galleries, Japanese prints became available and were avidly collected by the modernist cognoscenti. Artists such as Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Vincent van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and others explicitly used and retooled the perspectival protocols and practices of rendering that they had seen demonstrated in the woodcuts of Japanese artists like Andō Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai (see Wichmann 1981; Sullivan 1997). Hokusai's book of woodblock prints, *Manga*, became an essential ingredient for the so-called French impressionists. Artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec used Japanese ways of rendering (*japonisme*) to register vividly something of the intensity of Parisian urban modernity.

But if Western visual art practice evidences a considerable debt to Japan (so much so that it would be hard to imagine Western visual modernism developing in the way it did without it), the debt within Western modernist architecture is even more profound. The architects who laid out the blueprints to the modern city, architects who fashioned the modular, blocklike structures that fill our cities, did so by looking at Japanese building and adopting and adapting their aesthetic strategies. Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson and most other modernist architects of the twentieth century deployed an architectural language that would be impossible were it not for the examples of Japanese practices.

Yet this story of cross-cultural pollination remains incomplete if we only look at what is happening in Western metropolitan centres. Just as French intellectuals are enthusiastically embracing *japonisme*, artists and intellectuals in Tokyo are busy devouring the lessons to be learnt from the French salon:

> The enthusiasm for Western art in Japan reached a climax in the late 1870s – precisely at the moment, in fact, when the fashion for japonaiserie was at its height in Paris. Regular exhibitions of oil painting and sculpture were being held in Tōkyō and Kyōto, at which Western-style artists could be sure of selling everything they showed.
>
> (Sullivan 1997: 124)

In the later decades of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, Japanese artists absorbed Western styles of picturing (particularly perspectival naturalism and detailed realism). But this pictorial technology didn't result in the production of 'Western' imagery, but in a continuation of Japanese art adapting new regimes of visual language to specific cultural ends. In the case of Tokyo, as in the case of Paris, what makes the response to modernity specific is the way that outside cultural practices are adapted and refashioned in particular, local contexts.

The complexity of modernity as a cross-cultural experience under local conditions is exemplified by the practices of Chinese artists and writers working in the early decades of the twentieth century in Shanghai, China. Shanghai itself was a complex amalgam of competing forces existing under conditions of semi-colonialism. From 1843–1943 Shanghai was a treaty port divided into various territories: a French concession, an international settlement (which was a joint British and American concession), an informal Japanese zone, as well as 'official' Chinese zones (although Chinese citizens lived across all these distinct city quarters). We get a sense of the structural racism at work in Shanghai when looking at the prohibitions placed on the public gardens in the international settlement. The following regulations were implemented from 1916 until 1927 (when Chiang Kai-shek took control of Shanghai):

> The second regulation stipulated that 'dogs and bicycles are not admitted,' which was followed by the third: 'Chinese are not admitted' except 'in the case of native servants accompanying their white employers.' The fourth and fifth regulations, respectively, excluded Indians (except for those in dignified attire) and Japanese (except those wearing Western clothing).
>
> (Ou-fan Lee 1999: 91)

This is a complex piece of racism and racialism separating 'races' by class differentiation: Japanese are permissible when westernized; Indians when they evidence high social rank; but Chinese only as servants.

Nevertheless, Western culture (as imported literature and as cultural spaces within the different quarters of Shanghai) was hugely important for Chinese writers wanting to register their particular modernity. Again this points to a complexity of cross-cultural negotiations: for example, one of the most popular cafés for the writer Zhang Ruogu's literary salon was the Balkan Milk Store, a café in the French concession, run by Russians (Ou-fan Lee 1999: 86). Such spaces of complex cosmopolitanism were where young Chinese modernists could discuss newly acquired works by Western modernists such as James Joyce. But, as Leo Ou-fan Lee suggests, even this absorption of Western literature is never geographically simple: 'most of the seminal terms and concepts from Western literature came from Japanese translations which were adopted or retranslated into Chinese'

(1999: 105). Nor should we see this interest in the West as a desire to become Western:

> It was the Chinese writers' fervent espousal of a Western or occidental exoticism that had turned Western culture itself into an other in the process of constructing their own modern imaginary. This process of appropriation was crucial to their own quest for modernity – a quest conducted with full confidence in their own identity as Chinese nationalists; in fact, in their minds, modernity itself was in the service of nationalism.
>
> (Ou-fan Lee 1999: 102)

For Ou-fan Lee, it is this sense of nationalism, coupled with the complex cosmopolitanism practised in Shanghai, that results in the particularity of a Chinese modernism emerging in Shanghai in the 1920s and 30s.

Such examples are useful reminders that modernity, even though it is propelled by the forces of global capitalism and is the result of cross-cultural connections, is always experienced within particular localities. While the majority of this book will be situated in Western metropolitan centres, I hope that something of the international connectivity of modernity is always present. Perhaps more importantly, though, I would hope that the term 'urban modernity' is always used to point to local and particular conditions, rather than carrying the arrogance of the West's ability to imagine its particularity as the general condition which others never quite attain. For this book, the metropolitan centres of Paris and London, but also Algiers, are always peculiar and their peculiarity is most vividly evidenced as the more general conditions of modernization are negotiated.

To be concerned with urban modernity then is to be concerned with the particularity of the general, with the complex connectivity of city life and with the often contradictory density of experience. It is because I am interested in what this feels like, the experience of urban modernity, that this book is grounded in a study of culture.

Situating Culture in the City

It was anthropology that first used the term 'culture' to point to the entirety of meaningful or signifying elements within social life. Thus, in his book *Primitive Culture*, Tylor could say that culture includes 'knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor 1871: 1). Since then, of course, the idea of 'culture' hasn't settled into a stable meaning, but has been a continual site of conflict. Today, arguments about the limits of culture, from a small canon of 'great works', through a more expansive array of 'popular culture', to Tylor's all-inclusive definition, are routinely rehearsed in

response to the latest art polemic, or in discussion of the illegitimacy (or not) of projects like cultural studies. Leaving aside for the moment such local and repetitive debates, it might seem that Tylor's inclusiveness has much to offer the study of urban culture. In its very ambitiousness it might be able to point to the expansiveness of what can be meant by the term 'urban'. If, as I have been suggesting, the urban is experienced as a lived imaginary (or imaginaries), then belief, art, knowledge and so on will be the very material of this experience.

In so far as Tylor's inclusiveness points to a vast array of items, it might be seen to eschew questions of value. Tylor's list not only doesn't limit what culture is, it doesn't give us any indication that one element of a culture might be more or less important than any other. An anthropological understanding like Tylor's might simply begin by multiplying the sites of culture. For the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (similarly working with a radically inclusive understanding of the term 'culture'), both 'rocks' and 'dreams' exist as 'things of this world' (Geertz 1973: 10). 'Rocks' and 'dreams' stand at either end of a continuum that is so all-encompassing that the ability to attend to culture (exhaustively or, in Tylor's words, as 'a complex whole') is seriously undermined by the extensiveness of the field. By suggesting that the social world would include fantasy (dreams) as well as physicality (rocks) and that fantasy is a social fact, anthropological attention would need to be impossibly extensive (what couldn't be included in its purview?). Here the question of value might need to be raised simply as a practical question: if 'culture' is so vast an ensemble, where might it be *best* to look for meaning? Should 'culture' be sought through questionnaires, or observed in the uses of shopping malls? Should a study begin by outlining a discourse of dominant meanings (by scrutinizing urban planning records, for instance) or plundering the available archive of popular culture? Where would novels, films and so on (all the textuality that coincides with a relatively limited understanding of culture) fit into a study of urban culture?

An anthropological understanding of culture doesn't simply reorder cultural texts (as might be the case in debates about the validity of treating pop lyrics as 'artistic culture', for instance), it alters the very ground of value. If anthropology is to play a part in rethinking the study of (urban) culture, it is because it allows for a thorough transvaluation of culture. By this I mean that it starts out with a different order of value. As I have been suggesting, I want to treat the 'urban' as a *densely* experienced culture. 'Density', 'thickness' and 'complexity' might also be considered as some of the values that cultural describers would want to promote in any attempt to register the social in the cultural. This is the value that Clifford Geertz privileges in ethnographic work in the hope of generating 'eloquence' from mere occurrence (Geertz 1973: 28). 'Thick description' (the term that Geertz, borrowing from Gilbert Ryle, uses to designate productive ethnographic work) means finely differentiating the registers and modalities of

meaning – recognizing irony, for instance, not simply bluntly recording practices and symbols. But if thickness is something to be sought in the business of ethnographic description, can we use it as a value for differentiating source materials; for instance by asking which texts are likely to be the 'thickest', culturally speaking?

Before answering this we might do well to pause. Given the extensiveness of an anthropological understanding of culture, 'thickness' might not be a property of individual texts, but of the *accumulated* field of culture (for instance a multiplicity of 'thin' texts knitted together). While this is often true, the fact that anthropologists like Geertz value certain sorts of *ethnographic* work in terms of thickness should allow us to ask about the thickness of other kinds of cultural accounts not immediately understood as ethnographic. The point I am making is that 'culture' is not simply something that demands explanation (by ethnographers and cultural historians, for example), it is itself a form of explanation and as such can be judged in terms of its ability to register complex and contradictory experience. Given this, it might be that the study of urban culture can recover complex texts (including but not limited to those that have been designated as high culture, novels for instance) for the field of cultural studies, claiming them as forms of 'thick description'. Thick description might be found in a pop lyric, the account of a dream, an act of legislation and so on. An ethnographic perspective doesn't simply revalue texts but performs a thorough transvaluation of cultural texts: the very premise of value changes from aesthetic quality to thickness.

An objection to this blurring (of ethnography and fictional texts and so on) might start out from the claim that anthropologists who practise ethnography do so by attending to empirically 'lived' culture and that they base their findings on evidence. A novelist or a film maker doesn't have to work according to this constraining, or enabling, condition. But to assume that this means anthropologists (or other kinds of social scientists) deal in the actuality of experience, while novelists conjure up fabrications of the imagination, misses out on what fictional and anthropological writing share. Despite the obvious differences in generic conventions, both anthropology and many novels and films attempt to show culture from the 'inside', culture as it is experienced from 'the native's point of view', to quote Malinowski's famous dictum (Malinowski 1922: 25). If one of the goals of ethnographic description is to ascertain what it *feels like* to inhabit certain cultural forms, it might be fair to say that the writers of pop lyrics or novels, for instance, have succeeded in providing just such accounts of urban life.

It has become a reflex within academia, though, to insist on the 'second-orderness' of cultural texts; to insist, for instance, that Joyce's *Ulysses* ([1922] 1971) is not a transparent account of Dublin in the early years of the twentieth century, but a mediation of urban experience through language and literary conventions. In adopting and adapting certain conventions of

description and by referencing a whole host of literary and other cultural texts, Joyce's work must be read as a 're-presentation' of Dublin life, relating as much to other works of literature as to the actuality of Dublin life. Such an attitude to texts might well seem to be simply common sense, and the demand that we treat cultural texts as 'representations' is of course a useful inoculation against taking them at face value. It acts as a general warning that we shouldn't treat such accounts of urban life as simply transparent, that we inquire about who is doing the representing, who the representation is directed towards and so on. But if *Ulysses* has an obvious second-orderness about it, is there a form of attention, or description, that doesn't?

For Clifford Geertz, what goes by the name of ethnographic data is clearly not 'first-order' (unmediated) description: 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (Geertz 1973: 9). Similarly, what we call 'experience' can't simply be 'first-order' if, as Mills suggests, we inhabit 'second-hand' or second-order worlds. Accounts of experience (even if they are accounts we tell to ourselves), like ethnographic description or complexly constructed novels and films, are all necessarily second-order in that they rely on certain modes of representation. This might include the basic mediation of language, as well as more form-determining elements like genre conventions, narrative patterns and so on.

Now the point of all this is not to bemoan the lack of direct contact with the world, it is rather to raise some questions about how we go about the business of attending to culture. Indeed, one short-circuiting of this argument is to simply say that the world we most intimately and often meet is a world composed of textuality as much as physicality. We need, though, to judge both the problems and the potential of treating culture as representation. On the positive side is the way that the idea of representation sets out as a caution, a warning to tread carefully, to 'look into the mouth of the gift horse'. As far as this goes it might be worth extending such precautionary measures to all forms of description of cultural experience, including our own (after all, the dogmatist's 'mistake' is to simply assume that his or her experience of the world is *the* experience of the world).

But there is a more insidious effect in treating the world as 'representational' – one that is decidedly unhelpful in studying urban culture. The foregrounding of representation often seems to insist that we treat description first and foremost in relation to limited and specific 'worlds' of description: for example, that we treat a detective novel in relation to other detective novels and look to see how it adjusts the conventions of the genre and so on. Of course, the cultural explanation of such adjustments might necessarily need to include a broader attention to the world, but the immediate context has been set. It is this that is problematic for urban cultural studies. It strikes me that one of the main effects of foregrounding the 'representational' is to ring-fence the force and extensiveness of cultural

descriptions like detective fiction. A form of attention that continually insists on the representational confines of cultural description might practise, albeit unwittingly, the cultural equivalent of 'traffic calming'. What I am interested in is precisely the obverse of this.

If *everything* that we can communicate is second-order, then first-orderness becomes a 'theoretical fiction'; a nonexistent fantasy used to provoke all kinds of suspicion about the validity and extensiveness of textual meaning. If this is so, then to claim that a specific account of urban life is 'mediated' is misleading, precisely because it might seem to suggest that there are accounts of experience that are not. And if all accounts of experience are mediated or second-ordered, then the issue at stake doesn't have to be pitched at the level of separating fictions from facts (not if both 'rocks' and 'dreams' are things of the world). To necessarily couch talk of urban modernity in the language of mediation and representation fails to get to grips with the way in which the culture of the urban presses on us. Mediation or representation, then, ends up simply including everything in its wake (everything, that is, that we can count as meaningful), and I think that we have a right to be suspicious about the usefulness of such indiscriminate inclusivity. But if we don't treat cultural description as 'representational', how do we treat it? Again, we might want to take as a guide the metaphor that Geertz uses to designate productive ethnography – thickness.

Not only might 'thickness' be a value for producing cultural histories and ethnographies, but it might also be a value to be found in less scholarly accounts of the world. And while we might designate certain descriptions as denser than others, thickness might be found where we least expect it or in those texts that on first glance seem to be either thin on ethnographic detail or provide *unreliable* accounts of urban modernity. Thickness might be another name for an *unresolved* aspect of cultural accounts, an active struggle over meaning. This would suggest that material that is heavily allegorical or symbolic is probably more likely (or at least as likely) to be 'thick' as more passively naturalistic material. Steve Edwards suggests that:

> the figural pulse of a text rises when a thinker attempts to grapple with a difficult ideological problem, when they try to make their conceptions fit awkward, or novel, phenomena. Heavily tropic language can be seen as an index, or symptom, of ideological upheaval.
>
> (Edwards 2001: 38)

This means that we shouldn't just look for ethnographic materials in those descriptions of manners and social propriety that often fill the pages of classic realist fiction; we should also look for it in those more denaturalized and allusive fictions. From this point of view, a detective novel, a symbolist poem, a science fiction film or a documentary may all have the potential to provide the cultural historian with ethnographic materials. From this point of view arguments about high culture versus 'mass' culture are short-circuited: the snobbish exclusion of mass culture becomes as myopic as cultural studies' historical aversion to canonical texts.

The fact that such materials (novels, films and so on) often *dramatize* culture also points to another way of locating useful materials for study. The dramatization of culture is a way of figuring the effects and affects of culture: the way that practices and protocols matter or not; of recognizing the *force* of culture. The anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, in his essential book *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, suggests that thickness on its own does not tell us how culture *matters*:

> By and large, cultural analysts use not *force* but such terms as *thick description*, *multivocality*, *polysemy*, *richness*, and *texture*. The notion of force, among other things, opens to question the common anthropological assumption that the greatest human import resides in the densest forest of symbols and that analytic detail, or 'cultural depth', equals enhanced explanation of a culture, or 'cultural elaboration'.
>
> (Rosaldo 1993: 2)

Rosaldo provides a much-needed corrective to the assumption that 'thickness' is of itself a sign of how much culture matters. Densely elaborate cultural material without force is, for Rosaldo, of little interest:

> Cultural depth does not always equal cultural elaboration. Think simply of the speaker who is filibustering. The language used can sound elaborate as it heaps word on word, but surely it is not deep. Depth should be separated from the presence or absence of elaboration. By the same token, one-line explanations can be vacuous or pithy. The concept of force calls attention to an enduring intensity in human conduct that can occur with or without the dense elaboration conventionally associated with cultural depth.
>
> (Rosaldo 1993: 20)

In the studies that follow I try and unite both thickness and force and I do this by picking material that *dramatizes* culture. Drama, in the very loose sense that I am using, works to give force to thick culture: it will be my starting point as I endeavour to connect a dramatic figuring of the urban to the thickness and force that is the living aspect of urban culture. My reason for starting out with novels and films is because of their potential for combining thickness with a figuring of the dramatic force of culture (the way aspects of the urban life-world matter).

Chapters and Structure

The *promotion*, so to speak, of cultural texts from work in need of analysis