

Clemens Zimmermann. *Zentralität und Raumgefüge der Großstädte im 20. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006. 174 S. + 35 Abb. EUR 34.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-08898-5.



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Gathering Places

This collection of essays opens with an intriguing discussion by Clemens Zimmermann on the concept and use of space in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. U.S. scholars in social and historical studies have compared these two theorists by focusing primarily on each author's understanding of the relationship between agency and structure in effecting social change. Most of these works do not develop or integrate Bourdieu's and Giddens's concepts of space into their discussions. Zimmermann's introduction does address space, and is therefore refreshing. Unfortunately, this potentially unifying theoretical framework begins and ends here—neither of these theorists nor their concepts reappear in subsequent articles. In general, a connecting thread, aside from the very broad notion of urban spatial relations, is hard to find in this volume, and the notion of *Raumgefüge* (spatial structures or spatial arrangements) remains undefined. According to Zimmermann, the volume should be understood as an attempt to address “the ahistoricity [present] in a highly relevant social and scientific debate over the spatial dimensions of human action (*Handeln*) in the city” (p. 22). In the essays that follow, emphasis falls on the cultural production of urban space, and several

contributions focus on the role of media.

The essays themselves can be loosely divided into two categories: those that provide a more macro-historical view of urban and suburban space as the outcome of social and cultural processes (economic factors are not ignored, but they are not determinative), as in the contributions from Tilman Harlander, Christoph Bernhardt, and Gerd Kuhn; and those that are investigations of the significance of mass media (radio, newspaper, and film) in shaping urban life and its spatial organization, as offered by Andreas Fickers, Karl Christian Fähr, Brigitte Flickinger, and Nicole Huber. The latter mass media essays are focused on the first half of the twentieth century, which means that there is no consideration of the impact of the Internet on the experience and significance of urban space. Even if, as Zimmermann claims, the power of new media to decentralize and virtualize urban space has been overestimated, given the stated temporal scope of the book and Zimmermann's special focus on media in the introduction, a contribution that argues this point seems oddly missing (p. 18). Additionally, Berlin is overrepresented in the volume and eastern Ger-

man examples are only rarely integrated into the analysis (Harlander, for example, is an exception). These reservations aside, the authors do provide insight into the significance of actors other than urban planners and politicians to the forms and meanings of urban space. The research presented is qualitative and interpretive, using a variety of historical sources including a fair amount of attention to visual resources such as photographs, film, maps, and graphic representations of urban space.

The first three authors examine social and political processes that have shaped German urban space in historical—and, in the case of Christoph Bernhardt, comparative—perspective. Harlander traces the diverse models (*Leitbilder*) that have guided strategies for deagglomeration and decentralization in Germany into the 1960s, as well as efforts at reurbanization from around the 1970s to the end of the century. His essay also functions as general background and context for the subsequent articles. Bernhardt compares suburbanization in Paris and Berlin from 1900 to 1930. He finds that the suburbs in Paris were far more dispersed than in Berlin and far less compact than the usual descriptions of Paris. Weaker development codes in the areas of sanitation and hygiene meant that building on the periphery of the city in Paris was a far more informal process, subject to less active state and community control than in Berlin, where builders could be effectively controlled through city sanitation codes that came into existence already in the pre-World War I period.

The topic of suburbanization is also taken up by Gerd Kuhn, who focuses more on the social significance of the suburbs than on their spatial form. He claims that German suburbanization is characterized by social heterogeneity, not homogeneity (here his implied but undeveloped comparison is with the United States). Furthermore, by broadening the temporal analysis beyond the 1960s, he is able to make the interesting argument that “[s]uburbia was not a refuge, in which an independent middle class culture was formed, it was the place permeated by a privacy defined by a broad spectrum of classes (*Schichtübergreifende*)” (p. 62). Although Kuhn makes a strong case for the importance of privacy in the short space of his article, more evidence of class diversity would make his overall argument more convincing. Kuhn’s work suggests that comparative projects that explain the different ways homogeneity, heterogeneity, refuge, and privacy vary across time and space would be an insightful contribution to the literature on suburbanization.

The remaining four authors each turn their analytical attention to the urban social spaces produced through forms of mass media—in this case, radio, newspapers, and movie theaters. Andreas Fickers offers a cultural history of technology through a focus on radios and their reception in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, during the period in which radio was transformed from hobby medium to mass medium. He understands radios as the link between domestic, urban, and virtual space (“the ether”), which created a modern “communication space.” The sensory aspects of space and material culture are central to Ficker’s analysis. Interesting in this respect is the shifting significance attributed to “thinking visually” (*das Schaudenken*) and “thinking orally” (*das Hördenken*). Fickers successfully demonstrates three ways in which urban space was crucial to the early history of radio. First, in terms of geographical location, cities were the primary locations for radio stations. Due to the stations’ limited transmission power, most listeners were city dwellers. Secondly, cities became a symbol of the modern world, as made evident through early radio program content, station names on the tuner dial, and new social practices associated with listening to the radio. Thirdly, radios and cities functioned as symbolic nodes in an invisible modern communication network that eventually covered the globe. As Fickers notes, the “sender scale” or tuning device represented a kind of world map or early atlas of globalization in which cities of the world were virtually connected in the imaginary space referred to as “the ether” (p. 99). Radios allowed listeners to navigate and experience this space.

Karl Christian Fährer examines the “significance of media locations for urban space in terms of structure, use and perception” (p. 106). In his case study of interwar Hamburg, he finds that locations like newspaper buildings created dense central places within cities and contributed to a sense of urbanity. Media—as he demonstrates through his discussion of newspaper production and movie theaters—have not only a symbolic, but a material presence in cities. In this article, Fährer is particularly interested in the changing significance of the former. He gives a detailed description of the influence of “concrete spatial presence” (such as buildings) of media production and media reception (p. 105). For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, the newspaper production process functioned as an “urban spectacle” that helped to make the sites of production (buildings and surrounding streets or public square) central urban locations. They were places for social and political interaction on both a daily basis and during special events (such as elections).

By the 1950s, however, a shift in public relations strategies of major newspapers led to a decentralized presence of newspapers in Hamburg that no longer relied on the production process or the buildings in which they were housed. Finally, technological developments from the 1970s onward encouraged production to move out of the city into the suburbs.

Brigitte Flickinger examines the comparative cultural importance of movie theaters to daily life in the first third of the twentieth century in London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. In particular, she is interested in the way movie theaters were used by urban dwellers to mediate what she identifies as a central paradox of early-twentieth-century urban life: at the same time that city residents enjoyed better economic conditions and public life (here Flickinger cites the increasing freedom and cultural possibilities offered in cities), they were confronted by a hitherto unknown lack of personal space (*Enge*) in both private and public space (p. 135). Previous research has demonstrated the ways in which films offered the possibility of mental escape from crowded urban space and from the loneliness experienced by many new arrivals to the city. Flickinger, however, shows that movie theaters themselves were significant material and social spaces in everyday early-twentieth-century urban life. She notes that the more crowded housing and cities became, the stricter the rules about public behavior became—the most extreme case was London. As a result, people experienced a greater need for intimate spaces. As she puts it: “The film was not always the main reason for visiting a movie theater, but rather the darkness itself. In [the darkness’s] protection an intimacy was possible that was missing in the crowded conditions at home” (p. 141). At the same time, movie theaters were integrated into existing social milieus and cultural habits that influenced their form and range of social practices that could and did take place within them.

Whereas Flickinger and Flickinger focus on the physical or architectural significance of movie theaters in relation to the social and cultural experience of urban space, Nicole Huber is interested in the way film provided the framework for making connections between urban space, social identity, and individual bodies. Huber argues that in the period 1926–39 (which includes the transition from Weimar to National Socialist Berlin) technologies of representation—specifically film and photography—were integral to the social conception and material form of ur-

ban space (that is, the city of Berlin). The time period Huber analyzes serves to demonstrate that what might be called filmic understanding was a widespread cultural-modern-phenomenon whose influence transcended political periods and the political orientations of urban planners within them. It is also her intention to transcend explanations in urban research based on a “modernity versus anti-modernity” framework. Huber claims that the understanding of urban space through film emerged from the representation of the human body as a process that developed in American and German scientific management studies (Taylorism, Fordism, psychotechnics) with the aid of new technologies like photography and film. She traces the diffusion of this model through film from representations of the productive individual body to a metaphorical productive social (national) body, and also into urban space as a process (urban body). However, as the section of her discussion entitled “social body as media collective” (p. 166) reveals, other mass media like radio and print media were also critical components in forming a unified national body (as “media collectives”) by connecting the “war front” and the “home front.” Unfortunately, Huber’s argument suffers in spots from awkward or incorrect translations. For example, probably only German-English bilingual readers will understand that “trick film” (pp. 159, 161) actually means a “film animation.” Still, Huber’s article is rich in helpful references to secondary literature regarding film, urban space, representations of the body and politics in Germany and Berlin for the time period she examines—even if occasionally, her own argument gets lost in summaries of the existing literature.

If a common message emerges from the diversity of essays, then perhaps it is the argument that throughout the twentieth century, cities continued to offer socially and culturally significant central places, despite any claims or predictions to the contrary, such as those based on what Zimmermann calls the “telematic” thesis or arising through uncontrolled suburbanization. In a variety of examples, the book demonstrates how certain urban locations became gathering places for social and cultural activities. Thus, this volume is a helpful resource for those in the initial stages of a developing interest in cultural treatments of urban spatial relations in Germany. Additionally, individual essays may be of interest to graduate-level German studies courses that examine topics such as the role of mass media in urban space, suburbanization, and twentieth-century urban history.

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