

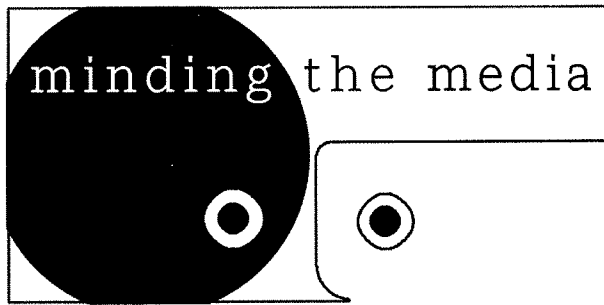
CITIES OF SIGNS

learning the logic of urban spaces



ANDREW T. HICKEY

CITIES OF SIGNS



CRITICAL ISSUES FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

Shirley R. Steinberg and Pepi Leistyna
General Editors

Vol. 5

The Minding the Media series is part of both
the Peter Lang Education list and the Media and Communication list.
Every volume is peer reviewed and meets
the highest quality standards for content and production.



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Andrew T. Hickey

CITIES OF SIGNS

learning the logic of urban spaces



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hickey, Andrew T.

Cities of signs: learning the logic of urban spaces / Andrew T. Hickey.
p. cm. — (Minding the media: critical issues for learning and teaching; v. 5)
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Sociology, Urban. 2. Urban anthropology. 3. Cities and towns—Growth.
4. Signs and symbols. I. Title.

HT151.H46 307.76—dc23 2011046856

ISBN 978-1-4331-1120-4 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4331-1119-8 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-4539-0541-8 (e-book)

ISSN 2151-2949

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the “Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available
on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

Cover photo and concept by Andrew T. Hickey

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council of Library Resources.



© 2012 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

All rights reserved.

Reprint or reproduction, even partially, in all forms such as microfilm,
xerography, microfiche, microcard, and offset strictly prohibited.

Printed in the United States of America

To Shelly, my love and motivation.

For my boys, who I hope will continue to find this world a source of wonder and creativity. It is for you that I undertake this work in order to understand those places we inhabit that little better.

To Shirley and the memory of Joe, whose work as academics, activists and engaged human beings demonstrates that the things we do as scholars must always result in something positive.

In the postmodern context, individuals are rendered more vulnerable than ever to the power of the image.

—Joe L. Kincheloe, *The Sign of the Burger*

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction: The Logic of the Now	xiii
1 Signs and Cities: The Contemporary Cityscape and the Nature of Symbolism	1
2 Looking Again: Reviewing the City with Fresh Eyes	29
3 What the Signs Said: The Public Pedagogies of Signage	41
4 Living with Signs: Community, Individualism and Urban Space	93
5 Tying It All Together: Public Pedagogy, Urban Space and the Logic of the Now	125
References	137
Index	141
About the Author	145

Acknowledgments

A number of people have been crucial to the production of this book. Firstly, my colleague Jon Austin graciously gave his time to read and comment on those various drafts that culminated in what is before you. He was also a guiding influence as I first set out on my explorations of urban space and public pedagogy several years ago. His considered responses as a critical friend, fellow traveller and expert field researcher have made this book a far stronger one than it otherwise would have been.

To my partner, Shelly, and my boys, Dylan and Zac, whose interest, support and patience while I was preparing this book cannot go without mention. Your love and support are cherished and it is for you that I do the work that I do.

The publisher of this book, *Peter Lang Publishing*, must also be recognized for their willingness (and the risk taken) to publish a work written by an Australian academic on evidence drawn from fieldwork undertaken in the global 'south'. A friend and colleague of mine at another Australian university noted how difficult it is to find publishers willing to take on books without a 'northern', mass market appeal; '*the potential market is too small*' is a familiar response. In particular, Chris Myers and Sophie Appel in the New York office provided sound advice and support from the very beginning and made the production of this book an entirely enjoyable process. So to these ends, I thank *Peter Lang Publishing* for taking me on.

Finally, I must acknowledge the influence that Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe have had on my thinking and my work as an academic. Both Shirley and Joe have taught me that one must remain humble whilst undertaking work of significance and meaningfulness, and it is in their image that I have attempted to do just this. I hope that this book goes somehow to living up to these ideals. To Shirley especially, who (with Pepi Leistyna) secured the publication of the series within which this book resides, I am indebted to you.

Introduction

The Logic of the Now

The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.

—Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

Nothing is as it seems in the urban landscapes of our contemporary world. Towering images of airbrushed promise rise from every corner. Elusive détournements find overlaid (but usually temporary) refuge on authorised surfaces. Prescriptions on how to travel, eat, live and have fun confront at the slightest opportunity, whilst directives on where to walk, talk and *be* hint at the underlying sanctions present in those spaces we encounter. This is the contemporary city; a space of signs and symbolism at once rich and prescriptive, ideal and imagined. A space of visually broadcast pronouncements, transmitted from the fronts of billboards, traffic signs, itinerant graffiti and similar other public communiqué, all made meaningful in acts of interpretation engaged in by those who read and consume the messages sent.

The mediated messages of signs—of *who* we are, who we *might* be—find purpose in the urban streetscape. The promises they contain read according to who it is we want to be, who it is we can be. Meanings produced as we negotiate our urban habitats conflate with larger cultural assumptions. The signscape reflects back to us ourselves as it reveals the logics of our culture. In the communicative interplay that occurs between us, the sign and those shadier intentions that exist behind them, we see the rules of the game. Here is where the cultural logic of a space forms and makes itself apparent. Here is where those deep desires of our collective union find expression and interpretation. Here is where we learn about ourselves and the conditions by which we must operate.

The variously pragmatic or directive intent of the sign does not matter so much as its interpreted purpose. It is how the sign comes to gain meaning as

an interlocutor of deeper cultural intentions that is important. The sign provides the context upon which the interplay of social communication occurs. As a site that exposes the deepest values of our societies (and one in which we are inculcated as readers whether we realise it or not) the sign exerts an intent and purpose that goes beyond any direct, immediately recognizable 'message' alone. A traffic sign does more than simply direct traffic flows. An advertising billboard does more than simply market a product. An act of graffiti does more than simply *détourné* an authorised surface. These signs also point to deeper cultural logics. They say something of the very parameters by which a space and its peoples are ordered and function.

Signs do this through the everyday mediation of meanings. As ubiquitous elements of contemporary cities, they stand as fundamental and 'ordinary' markers of urban landscapes. The very *everyday-ness* they carry brings them into unquestioned contact with their consumers; that is, any street-going viewer who happens to cross them. We might find ourselves variously entertained or outraged by the messages they contain, but rarely question the existence of the sign itself. As core components of the mass-communication apparatus of our global world, there is little to be considered *extraordinary* in the presence of a sign. It is as much a part of urban streetscape as the street itself, and from this basis at least, is a largely accepted aspect of the contemporary city.¹

But this ordinariness shouldn't be confused as incapacity. As much as it might be that the cities of our world are shaped around the road-ways and transportation networks of our oil-powered industrialism, it is via signage that these spaces come to be understood and convey meaning. This is a visual-symbolic era, with signs authorising the practices of urban space according to their visual form. Signs configure the symbolic ordering of the urban space as a *cultured* space; ordering its interpretive limits and framing the gaze of the interpreting viewer. The sign is a site upon which something might be learned through the visual encounter it provokes. They are active enculturators, speaking of the ways of culture, the limits of acceptability and the nature and sensibilities of a space. For this reason, they must be noticed—this is where culture manifests, is made meaningful and finds transmission.

It doesn't matter that the promises made by signage are often inflated,

¹ This normality extends in some instances to the urban space being defined precisely by its signs; to the point that in some cases, such as Times Square or Las Vegas, the very identity of the urban space is *the* sign. Signs in these cases become a little extraordinary because they are indeed so ordinary—but it is the *amount*, and not the signs themselves, that makes these urban spaces that little bit extraordinary.

hyper-real and fantastic. This is not the point. We as viewers, in the sort of way that Barthes (1972) notes, accept these contrivances (and perhaps come to expect them). This is the nature of the interplay; the fantastical hyper-reality of the sign doesn't need to translate into reality. All the sign need do is point to our hopes and desires, fears and anguishes, to do its job. Signs speak symbolically of what is *underneath*; they point to the cultural *id* that we know is there, but which we symbolically obfuscate. Ignoring the sign isn't an option; the logic of the sign has been established already in the consciousness of the viewer. We know what the imagery says long before the sign is even crafted, before it casts its view over the world. It has to make sense; its meanings are already formed in the cultural logic that powers the sign's creation. The sign is merely the manifestation of something culturally much deeper.

Even the most benign of signs hints at the ways we understand our social world and move to structure it (and ourselves). Signs carry the purpose of those individuals or groups that put them in place, and must be viewed as core elements of the communication apparatus of urban space. Of course, different signs will carry different purposes, and will mean different things to different people, but within that range of interpretive possibilities, and from the multitude of purposes the *sign-as-communication artifact* might carry, something can be understood about the nature of the space in which the sign makes its appearance. Signs provide a tangible form upon which the deep workings of culture might be explored.

It is from this basis that this book draws its motivation.

Chapter 1

Signs and Cities: The Contemporary Cityscape and the Nature of Symbolism

The construction of consumer subjectivity and desire must move beyond some simple, direct appeal to the individual; it must rearrange larger social structures and cultural forms.

—Joe L. Kincheloe, *The Sign of the Burger*

The Surface of Things

A quick look down any urban streetscape will reveal an array of signs in one form or other. Directional and 'traffic' signs stand as a feature of most traffic-oriented urban spaces, whilst billboards and similar advertisements provide an insight into the sorts of consumption habits that are practiced in our economically globalized world (Figure 1). Graffiti and other détournements (such as illicitly pasted posters and stencils (Figure 2) might also be noticed, as well as the very architecture by which the streetscape is arranged (Figure 3). The uses to which urban space is put (this too should be considered a 'sign'), and the way physical space configures action by people¹ (Figure 4) are also important, and will suggest something of the social practices and conventions local to that space. Whether operating explicitly (such as traffic signs) or in more symbolically implicit ways (such as the usage of a streetscape), all of these things stand as a *sign* of a space and provide symbolic reference to the underlying *logic* maintained within it. It is through signs, and what they mean to those who encounter them, that something about the distinctiveness and identity of a space might be learned.

¹ The operations of the decreasingly seen traffic warden provide an obvious example of the human being as sign. But so too should any individual who exists, as they are, where they are in the streetscape. The very act of being where one is contributes to the meaning of the space. These operations of being contain symbolic complexity and richness, just as a billboard, work of graffiti or traffic sign might also.

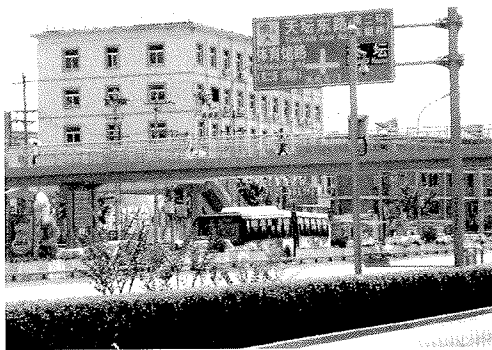


Figure 1: A typical streetscape. Photo: Andrew Hickey.



Figure 2: Illicitly pasted posters in one downtown space. Photo: Andrew Hickey.



Figure 3: *Détournement*: The reworking of space as signified via signage. Photo: Andrew Hickey.



Figure 4: The typical shapes and forms that signify a typical city. Photo: Andrew Hickey.

From this, we might say that the logics of culture find expression in signs. Signs convey cultural meaning; that is, they indicate what is central to a culture and the manner by which understandings of the world come to be framed and understood. As mediators of the cultural logic, signs present a surface upon which negotiations between the underlying symbolic codes of cultural meaning and the physicality of space (because all cultures are 'located') might be interpreted. This is important, as it is with signs that physically situated interlocation of deep-held cultural logics find expression, ready for consumption by those who read them. The way signs come to mean and what they represent provide insight into the way culture is produced and framed, as it accords to the *situatedness* of its location.

Herein lies the central intent of signs; they interpret those underlying cultural logics of a space, whilst simultaneously articulating assertions of what that space *is*. Signs stand as manifestations of the symbolic codes that order a space, but similarly act as messengers for what it might be. Conveyed by signs are suggestions and directives, hints and pronouncements that order the space and maintain its logics for all who read its messages. This very much makes them important sites of investigation for any analysis of culture and its constituent practices.

A Case in Point

One such example of this signed insight into the cultural logic of a space exists not far from my home city, in a rural valley district located between two large urban centers. Signage (Figure 5) on the side of the highway that cuts through the district suggests that strong religious affiliations are held—*Christian* as it happens, in what might be called an 'evangelical' flavor.

4 Cities of Signs

Amongst a group of signs that variously denote the presence of churches in the area and encourage passing motorists to engage with this brand of religion stand a series of three signs that broach the controversial topic of abortion and 'right to life' (Figures 6, 7 and 8).

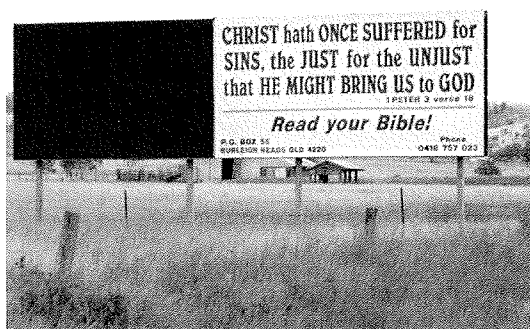


Figure 5: Proclamation by roadside. Photo: Andrew Hickey.



Figure 6: A roadside billboard containing a culturally rich message. Photo: Andrew Hickey.

On the surface of things—or at least, on the surface of these billboards—it might be accepted that this district has a clear sense of itself, is unified by religion and maintains an image of self powerful enough to activate public roadside pronouncements on issues as complex and controversial as abortion. From these signs and the intent of their message, an indication of this district's philosophical and moral logic might be gathered—*here is a community that presents a strong affiliation to a particular brand of Christianity and subsequently feels it necessary to comment publicly, via the*

mobilization of signage, on an issue it feels to be significant. These are the sorts of assumptions that might be gained about this space and its inhabitants, as suggested by its signs.

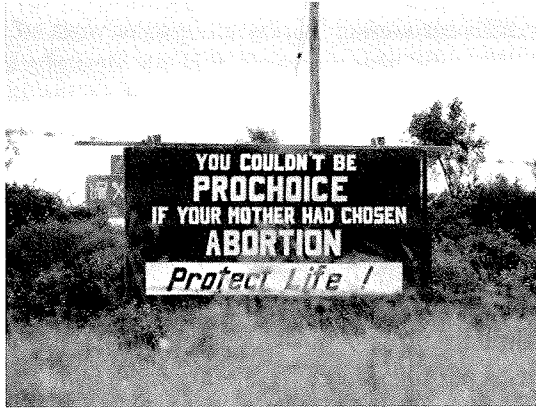


Figure 7: An accompanying billboard. Photo: Andrew Hickey.

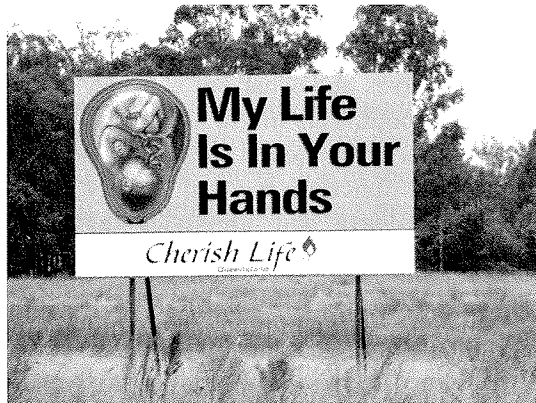


Figure 8: The most recent addition to the roadside pronouncement. Photo: Andrew Hickey.

But the signs themselves didn't tell everything there is to know about this community. I realised this as I happened to be traveling past one day and noticed that one of the signs had been vandalized, with the principal text of the original sign spray-painted over in black, and new text added; '*its your choice*'. All of a sudden my initial views of this community were overthrown and the emergence of an alternative world-view voiced. Here stood an active response to the sign (and its underlying logic), albeit one that was unauthorised and illegally overwritten (this was by definition 'graffiti' and

'vandalism'). What this now suggested was that an alternative viewpoint was present within this community; that a monological framing of this issue no longer maintained primacy. A series of questions immediately struck me; was this *détournement* the work of an outsider, a passer-by from some other community with different views? Was it indeed the work of someone within the community? Why did this person/s feel so strongly as to risk being caught in order to alter the original sign? This is where the sign stopped short in telling me something about this space. I was left guessing as to *exactly* what was going on.

While it was clear to me that signs such as the '*right to life*' signs could convey certain ideas about the cultural logic of the community within which they stood, the story was far from complete. A closer, *ethnographic* look would be required in accompaniment with an analysis of the signs themselves. While the signs provided clues—as outwardly physical expressions of ideas, attitudes and beliefs—an analysis of those operations of power and agency that authorised the hosting of these signs and their messages would also be required.

Signs as Documents

Of course, presenting a certain view of things is what signs do. They do indeed tell us about ourselves and what we consider significant enough in culture to say something about. This might not always be blatant and active; some signs might carry far more coded messages, or capture the logic of cultural assumptions that function inconspicuously as taken-for-granted aspects of 'ordinary' life-ways and life-styles (assumptions concerning leisure, consumption habits and certain gender roles stand as examples of things that are often presented and accepted according to wider cultural assumptions of what is *normal*). Even the most seemingly inconsequential of signs—those accepted without any fuss or controversy—have something to say beyond what their explicit message might initially suggest.

It occurs that to know something about the operation of signs as cultural artifacts—their intent, the manner by which they are interpreted and how they come to be understood—a larger inquiry than that provided by the reading of signs alone is needed. To understand the manner by which signage is produced and consumed requires an investigation of the workings of both signs as artifacts of culture *and* the role they play in those spaces in which they operate. The purposes to which they are put and the ways that they are 'read' and considered is a vital aspect of this process of *reading* signs.

It is how signs as documents provide a sense of what exists within the

*boundary*² of social understanding that is at stake here. Although we see reflected back from the front of signs deep-held assumptions of the world and the logics by which we understand it, to have an impact and in order to hold their end of the bargain, signs must make 'sense' according to the logics of their settings. So that we might read and gain some idea of what has been intended in their message, the sign must connect to what it is we expect to find signaled by them. In the acts of communication they deploy, signs must retain connection with the sensibilities of the culture in which they operate; the sign is as much a representative of our deep cultural logics as it is a reinforcer of these. The specifics in the detail of the message presented by the sign might well be new and prompt a reconfiguration of our understandings (of all manner of phenomena encountered in culture), but in conveying this message, it must still work within the bounds of the cultural logics of that space.

An example of how the overreach of cultural sensibilities might be provoked within signage occurred on a set of billboards that advertised (of all things) a specific brand of shoe in Australia through 2002. A sort of national debate (which involved federal ministers of government) ensued when two billboards advertising a line of men's shoes included seductively posing young women with a double-entendre-ridden slogan that suggested that excesses of heterosexual pleasure would befall any man who purchased a pair. This clearly wasn't an expression of *reality* (the shoes weren't that good), but the production of a certain type of desire (an age-old advertising mechanism) that sparked public outcry due to the extent that women's (and for that matter, men's) identities were being presented in a contrived and outwardly sexualized way. This wasn't what people wanted to (or indeed *should*) see, argued the billboards' critics, and the adverts were eventually withdrawn and the contract between the shoe manufacturer and billboard advertising agency ceased. In this case, the logic by which these signs presented and situated their view of the world extended beyond what the community expected of them; signs must operate within the boundaries of our understanding and the sensibilities of culture in order to work. If they extend the cultural logic too far, they cease to mean. What can be said then, is that signs, if they function within the boundary of cultural sensibility, provide insight into the logic of culture due to their very acceptability and the display of ideals they capture in their messages.

Reading Signs

To suggest that signs are 'read', and that meaning comes from those acts of

² As Anthony Cohen (2004) would see it.

interpretation engaged in as a part of this practice (a *cultural literacy* of sorts), isn't itself a new proposition. Any sign producer will note that the provocation to produce a sign is to have others read it. But how signs capture, in a deep epistemological sense, the nature of our culture and then work to reinforce its central logics is significant and the focus of scrutiny in this book. I wish to explore the *public pedagogical* intent of signs and signage, specifically as it occurs in urban space (a site in which signage is at its most prolific and exposed). How we *learn* from signs and what this says about who we are, both as individuals and members of cultures in this visually saturated twenty-first century, will form the core intent of the inquiry contained here.

In this book, I draw attention to urban spaces specifically, but in doing so, do not intend to suggest that signs are significant to urban spaces alone (signs clearly also work in regional and non-urban spaces). But due to the sheer intensity and frequency with which we see signs in urban spaces, it follows that for any inquiry interested in understanding how signs work, exploring sites where signs are both prolific and blatant in their operation will provide fertile locations of study. Equally, this of course isn't to suggest that all urban spaces operate in the same way; clearly, they do not. But it is within urban space *generally*, as it is configured and shaped in most parts of the increasingly globalised and inter-connected world, that one is likely to see, amongst the visual culture contained within urban space, the presence and operation of signs. Signs work from a primarily visual medium. Cities are visual spaces. It makes sense to investigate signs in these highly visual settings.

In doing this, I apply a tripartite theoretical basis for establishing signage as a point of sociological analysis. Firstly, it is of signs themselves that I am principally concerned. Whether in the form of simple street signs offering directions, the re-touched promises of billboard advertising or the vandalizing *détournements* of street-art, through to the formations of urban space via architectural arrangement and the social practices engaged in by people inhabiting these spaces, signs pervade urban space and provide a tangible text upon which the logics of both cities and ourselves are written. Signs, and the communication interplay they are there to fulfill, are both manifestations of those logics we configure our culture against, and expressions of culture in production. It is this insight into the workings of culture, via the symbolic manifestations that signs provide, that I am principally interested with here.

Secondly, the space within which these cultural artifacts reside is as important to the meanings made of them as the signs themselves. Without a context, signs are emptied of their purpose and meaning; it follows that

knowing something of the spaces in which they exist is essential if any reasonable attempt to understand the significance of signs is to proceed. This includes, of course, the operations and practices engaged in by those people present in these spaces, and the multitude of ways in which they react to the signs they confront.

The third concern drawn upon in this book builds on both of these theoretical bases and focuses attention to the ways that we, as human beings, relate to these signs. While the production of signs and the intentions behind their meanings are a significant concern, so too is the way that signs are consumed and read. More specifically, focus will be given to the public pedagogical intent of signs. What is it that signs intend and how is it that they come to be read? There is a phenomenological concern suggested here, as it taps into the bases of understanding and the hermeneutics engaged in by those who read the signed urban landscape.

Taken together, these three focus areas situate the theoretical orientation taken in this book. I will suggest that urban space is, at least in part, identifiable due to its signage, and that signage itself is authorised and validated by its placement in urban space. It is within this mix, and the communication channels that signs generate (signs require readers, readers require signs), that pedagogical intentions exist. We inhabitants of urban space not only *read* but also *learn* our way through the signscapes of urban space. The significance here is not simply to do with the manner by which signs clutter public spaces, or even in the extent of the ideas they present, but (more precisely) in how signs position our understandings of the world and each other. The experiences from a selection of case examples drawn on in the later chapters of this book will work to demonstrate the educative nature of urban space, and the operations signs play as key elements of the urban communication apparatus.

Empirical Groundings

This book charts explorations of public signage drawn from fieldwork undertaken in Australia. In the explorations presented later of *Greater Springfield*—that master-planned edge city located in south-east Queensland, Australia, that with much fanfare through the late 1990s and 2000s created suburban spaces including *Springfield Lakes* and *Brookwater*—I chart an analysis of the way in which signs *create* spaces (and, more intrinsically the identities of those who live there). These case locations offered key examples of the way contemporary (sub)urban developments go about transforming space.

These locations also have the distinction of being locations far less

exposed to the academic gaze of 'northern' (Connell 2007) urban theory, and provided me with a view of urbanity and city life perhaps different to those from the 'great' cities of the ethnographic imagination—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, London and Paris, principally. Although I am not at all suggesting that work in these classical locations has 'been done', or indeed should finish, it is the case that the locations drawn on in this book haven't been theorized anywhere near as heavily as those staple spaces of urban sociology, and as such, may prove to be refreshing sites of sociological inquiry.

What is contained here is the culmination of experiences in these urban spaces, and my own theorizations and thinking on how we, as human beings existing in a world of global flows and large-scale urbanization, come to mark and make sense of our urban habitats. Concerns for signs and their existence might seem somewhat like a sociology of desperation (a project to explore something, *anything* connected with human existence), but it is to what signs refer, and how they mediate a pedagogical influence, that is important. This is a project that seeks to uncover the very workings of culture—these signs situate a point of rupturing from which underlying cultural logics break through and manifest as *artifacts* (for sociological analysis) on the physical surface of culture.

As part of the built environment, signs exist in two senses; i. as physical artifacts, designed with purposeful intent and aesthetic characteristics, but also ii. as points of symbolic transmission, of ideals and values, practices and mores. As I referred to above, the significance of signs isn't simply in the existence of the signs themselves—it is not solely in how these artifacts of culture beam back to us certain messages. The concerns presented in this book are for how we, as citizens of the most highly urbanized epoch of human existence, come to relate to these spaces and the educative effects of signage within this dynamic. In short, this is a book about the functioning of culture, and the way that signs provide a physical *guidebook for living* by tapping into and making apparent the core logic of culture.

The Limits of Theory

The ideas presented in this book do not claim to function as grand theorizations. The case examples, instances and situations reported will be presented according to the contexts in which those examples, instances and situations made sense to me; the unique contexts from which they emerged during my time in them as ethnographer. This sort of theorization is grounded in the specific experience derived from those sites *imprecisely* reported on. I say 'imprecisely' because it was via an interpretive process,

driven by my observations and experiences (as epistemologically grounded in my own way of viewing the world) that the selection, analysis and translation processes typical of sociological/ethnographic inquiry came to be presented here for you to read and make some sense of. While I sincerely hope that the experiences reported here may be of use to sociological theorizations of space more generally, I will not attempt to claim that the lessons drawn from the case sites examined should in any way be understood as standing for *all* situations. With this I take Denzin and Lincoln's suggestion that:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations... (2005:3)

To the reader of this book I say this: read this work as a portrait of specific case sites produced according to the confines of specific contextual conditions that are now abstracted within this book by an ethnographer who shaped his understandings of these spaces against his own epistemological predilections. As a sociologist and ethnographer, I will stand by the rigor with which the fieldwork underpinning the evidence-set presented here draws its impetus (and the analysis of evidence provided later should demonstrate a strength of methodological design and process). But I will also stress that the way I came to view and frame what was seen and what was interrogated 'in the field' speaks both to the uniqueness of the case sites as cultured locations and the bounds of my own interpretive gaze. As such, I suggest that the reader do with these findings as she or he sees fit. There is nothing universal contained here, but simply a report on various case sites as they appeared to me at the time that I was a part of them. Again, this should by no means diminish the significance of this work; I hope that it is still entirely valuable in what it has to say about the way urban space functions. But in doing so, it acknowledges that ethnographies derived from partial visions of case sites developed by ethnographers who 'write' the world as much as they report on it will never speak *Truth*. I discuss these concerns further in *Chapter 2*.

Theoretical Groundings

Just as the methodological practices applied here are framed around certain agreed upon 'ethnographic' processes for reading the world sociologically, so too are the theoretical foundations drawn on to contextualize the ideas captured in this book. In order to lay bare some of the ideas and traditions

drawn on in the later chapters, a survey of the key literature that informs this book follows.

Urban Space: The City and the Sociological Imagination

Although more comprehensive and authoritative surveys of the development of urban sociology can be found elsewhere (Gottdiener and Hutchison 2006; Flanagan 2001; Borer 2006), a few points detailing the way *The City* has been conceptualised and theorized in sociology should be stated. Interest in both the idea of the city and the spaces that constitute its geography have a history in sociology almost as long as sociology itself. The first generation of sociologists, including such heavyweights in the Western intellectual tradition as Durkheim, Weber and Marx, to varying degrees each drew on the idea of the city by situating it as the location in which that great preoccupation for the early sociologists—*modernity*—was most visible. For these theorists, the mid-nineteenth-century city represented a site in which the bonds and life-ways of large groups of individuals (and more specifically, where the operations of such things as bureaucracies and industrialization took place) might suitably point to the orientation and rise of modern ways-of-life. The way people functioned according to the scale and forms of organization prescribed by cities hence formed the backdrop to grand theories on humanity and the nature of modern life; including the locations in which Durkheim's 'solidarities' might be seen to occur, or the tensions between Toennies's 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gessellschaft', for example. These studies situated the city as a key site of new forms of human habitation, heralded by modernity and the industrialization that was taking place in those European cities of which they wrote. The city was a site of complexity and modern life practices that stood in contrast to older, agrarian, non-urban life-ways witnessed in the not too distant past.

Moving beyond the concerns for the city as a site of macro-level workings of modernity and industrialization, more specific attention was afforded the city by Georg Simmel. Beyond being simply the location within which new forms of human group behaviour might be explored, Simmel saw the city as a phenomenon in itself, and set about charting a more genuinely 'urban' sociology through an urbanism interested in individual human responses to city life. Simmel's classic work 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1997a) set about explaining the psycho-social conditions of the city, and introduced influential ideas to explain the urban experience—the city dweller's 'blasé' attitude stands as a key example. For Simmel, human beings were capable of processing only so much sensory input, whilst the city on the other hand was saturated with potentially overwhelming sensory

stimulants. To cope, the urbanite must learn to filter out 'the loud and impinging but also irrelevant' (Gottdiener and Hutchison 2006:47) aspects of city life by focusing on only that which is *required* and *needed*. Simmel notes:

The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man [*sic*] is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which only differ slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—**all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.** (1997a:175 *emphasis added*)

Unable to cope with the totality of the sensorium of city life, the city dweller, unlike his rural cousin, must pick and choose according to what is needed and required from the complex of inputs available in the city. The city dweller only has so much cognitive space to fill, so must choose according to a blasé attitude what is let-in and what is let-pass by the 'conscious layers of the psyche' (175). This was an important development in early urban sociology. Apart from attempting to make some sense of the human response to the city, it also provides an indication as to what a profound effect industrialization and modernity were having in the cities of the 1800s—we get a sense in Simmel's work that the modern industrial city was an overwhelming leviathan that directly impinged on the psycho-social stability of its inhabitants. The city was bigger than humanity itself.

Simmel also positioned the urbanite on an evolutionary scale of human development. When founding member of the Chicago School Robert Park announced that the city 'is the natural habitat of the civilized man [*sic*]' (1967:3), he drew upon Simmel's suggestions that the pace and flurry of urban life gave rise to a sophistication of being—a refinement of humanity and intellect. This sentiment is captured when he notes:

Thus the metropolitan type of man [*sic*]*—*which, of course, exist in a thousand individual variants—develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart. In this an increased awareness assumes the psychic prerogative. Metropolitan life, thus, underlies a heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence in metropolitan man. (Simmel 1997a:176)

City life, as it was for Simmel, not only kept one on one's toes, but also refined the senses as it sharpened the wit.

Although Simmel's ideas carried favor for the next half-century and represented (along with the social theory of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Ferdinand Toennies) some of the most dynamic and important work in the (then) fledgling discipline of sociology, it was in the highly urbanized, completely modern and heavily industrialized new world of the United States that the next development in urban sociology emerged. Whereas the first generation of European sociologists situated the city as a site from which questions of social organization, industrialization and modernity might be examined, it was with the Chicago School and the ethnographic explorations by its founding sociologists during the first half of the twentieth century that a sense of the intricacies of life within the city were made. By getting out and getting 'the seat of the pants dirty' as Robert Park (1927) famously implored his students to do, the Chicago School sociologists identified the role of close observation for understanding patterns of urban life. Drawing on the theoretical insights of the first generation of sociologists (particularly Simmel) and the idea that 'every portion of space possesses a kind of uniqueness, for which there is almost no analogy' (Simmel 1997b:138), the uniqueness and vagaries of living within urban space became the focus for Chicago urban sociology.

Applying a *human ecology* approach, Park suggested that city life represented a microcosm within which human behavior could be understood according to *biotic* and *cultural* factors. Within this ecological model, the biotic referred to factors such as competition and survival, whilst the cultural contained the processes of symbolic exchange that occurred within these spaces. Mobilizing this approach, Park set about exploring the city—down to the way that people came to live and conduct themselves within it—according to the ecological conditions it presented. Spaces within the city were presented as microcosmic elements of the larger urban ecology, and it is from this work that we see development in the conceptualisation of the city as an entity made up of inter-connected parts.

This *contextualized situatedness*, as I call it, of urban investigation was a defining feature of the Chicago School approach, and is what draws together a large and disparate body of work under the title *Chicago School Sociology*. The approach gave prominence not only to the city-space as an organic entity in its own right, but also to the primacy of those local practices that occurred within it. It was an interest in what occurred within the unique 'local' settings of the city that features as a common thread in studies such as Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang*, Wirth's (1928) *The Ghetto*, Zorbaugh's (1929) *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, Frazier's (1932) *The Negro Family in Chicago* and

Hayner's (1936) *Hotel Life*. These definitive Chicago School studies continue to be cited as seminal works in urban sociology.

Whilst the *modus operandi* and design of these studies were familiar (Gottdiener and Hutchison note that '*this marvellous output was produced with a similar stamp*' (2006:56), they showed that the intra-urban complex was something worthy of investigation. It wasn't so much that the city was influenced and shaped by outside forces (such as the macro-economic and industrial societal formation concerns of the first generation sociologists), but that the city framed its own ecologies, and hence contained its own patterns and logics. Here was a paradigm for exploring the city that saw the city in and of itself, according to the uniqueness of its ecology. As Wohl and Strauss note, 'even the oldest resident, and the best informed citizen, can scarcely hope to know even a fair sized city in all its rich and subtle detail' (1958:524). These familiar places turned out not to be so familiar at all; the complexity and scale (both symbolic and physical) of the city became the terrain for significant social research.

Following not long after the golden era of the Chicago School (an era that extended into the 1940s) came the development of the urban *political-economy approach* of the late 1960s. Drawing on theoretical foundations provided by Marx and Weber, the political economy approach focused on the city in terms of its evolutionary supplanting of agrarian society through capitalist, industrial-economic growth. Here the modern city represented the location—a physical manifestation—of processes of capitalist economic development. Hence, its theorists argued, the contemporary city took on a form unique to capitalist development and became a site in which the methods of exchange, operations of power, structural shape and societal organization core to capitalist economics might be witnessed.

Frederick Engels's (1887/2009) studies of the industrial cities of 1800s England, written a century before political-economy urban sociology formed, stand as a key point of origin for many of the later works in this area. Engels demonstrated how the dynamic of capitalist expansion in the formation of industrial cities (particularly his study of Manchester) established a concentration of both capital investment and labor within the same spatial zones. But it was the manner in which wealth could coexist with extreme poverty and social dysfunction that caused him to question the human costs of this expansion. Beyond the 'extended conditions' of the industrial city, Engels drew attention to the division of class by location within the intra-urban space, and the manner with which social practices were maintained and reproduced across generations (themes that sociologists including Paul Willis (1977) and Pierre Bourdieu (1987) would engage a century later). The city for Engels was a place of vast division and concentration at once; a

location established to service the needs of industrial capitalism via the close proximity of money and labor, and through the spatial practices of class segregation and enclave neighbourhoods.

It was from this basis that Henri Lefebvre's work emerges. Grounded heavily in a Marxist reading of capitalist economics and via an interest in the mechanisms by which appropriations of space occur, Lefebvre draws attention to the way space is named and used. Core to this are ideas that have been influential in sociologies of space since; in particular his idea of *détournement* (borrowed from the *Situationists*), the *circuits of capital* that mobilize possibilities for the way space is constructed and used, and *abstract* and *social space* that signify different perspectives for considering the role of space. These provided Lefebvre with the foundations to explore the construction, manifestations and uses of urban space, with his interpretations of *détournement* particularly distinguishing his sociology. As he notes:

An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one. (1991:167)

It is the idea of appropriation that holds significance for Lefebvre. Appropriated spaces open opportunities for the re-appraisal of the production and utilisation of space, and hence, open opportunities for resistance and demonstrations of agency:

The diversion and reappropriation of space are of great significance, for they teach us much about the production of new spaces. During a period as difficult as the present one is for a (capitalist) mode of production which is threatened with extinction yet struggling to win a new lease on life (through reproduction of the means of production), it may even be that such techniques of diversion have greater import than attempts at creation (production). Be that as it may, one upshot of such tactics is that groups take up residence in spaces whose pre-existing form, having been designed for some other purpose, is inappropriate to the needs of their would be communal life. (1991:167-8)

The value of Lefebvre's ideas lay in his identification of the way space is 'produced' and invested with meaning. He offers an opportunity to conceptualise space outside of (what he calls) its 'geometrical meaning' (1991:1), and opens the possibility of critiquing the function of space and the implications of power relationships in those 'spatial practices' (1991:8) that occur within any space.

It is from the work of a group of social geographers loosely banded under the term *postmodern geography* that some of the more dynamic recent

theoretical developments in urban sociology reside. Engaging postmodernity's multiplicities that 'allow new possibilities to emerge that were hidden behind traditional ways of explaining the world' (Malpas 2001: 10), postmodern geography marks a significant break with earlier models for understanding urban (as well as sub-urban and inter-urban) forms. In these new terms, considerations of urban space are reconfigured so that:

...the sprawling metropolis has become much less monocentric, less focused on a singular downtown; and is no longer as easily describable in terms of distinctively urban, suburban and non-urban ways of life. (Minca 2001:43)

Following these sentiments, Edward Soja notes:

In my view, there has been a significant transition, if not transformation, taking place in what we familiarly describe as the modern metropolis, as well as in the ways we understand, experience, and study cities. (2000:xii)

Drawing heavily on his experiences in Los Angeles and the megacities of the United States, Soja highlights that with the evolution of post-industrial and increasingly global society, the corollary change and transformation of cities has resulted in shifted conceptualisations of what cities *are* and how they function. He suggests that these new urban spaces represent a 'postmetropolis', a new formation of urban space that carries with it reconfigured ideas about the built environment and the interactions humans might have. In a similar manner to the way political-economy urban sociology viewed the city as a manifestation of capitalist economics, the city for Soja stands as an expression of 'the globalization discourse...an encompassing paradigm for all studies of the contemporary' (41). As he continues:

The more specific globalizations of capital, labor, and culture have had the cumulative effect of producing the most heterogeneous cities in history, and this extraordinary diversity (often too simply labeled multiculturalism) has become the hallmark of postmodern urbanism. Such heterogeneity is expressed in architecture and the design of the built environment, in the organization of urban labor markets, in the formation of local community and identity, in urban politics and the planning process, and in almost every facet of everyday life.... (41)

The postmetropolis is thus an expression of the globalized world order of the late twentieth century.

Other recent work in urban sociology focuses variously on the 'experience' of city life (Merry 1981; Colombijn and Erdentug 2002; Parker

2004; Bridge 2005), the role of the city as a spatio-political location (Karp, Stone and Yoels 1991; Holston 1999; Davis 2000; Soja 2000; Tajbakhsh 2001; Hall and Miles 2003), the globalized nature of contemporary cities (Light 1983; Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler and Mayer 2000; Clark 2003) and the design and function of urban space (Merry 1981; Brower 1996; Rodruigez 1999). As Soja (2000) notes, this literature represents a shift in thinking about cities that '[p]erhaps more than ever before...is consciously aware of ourselves as intrinsically spatial beings' (6) and that '...for the most part even the field of urban studies has been underspatialised until recently' (7). Drawing on the stock of ideas and theory preceding it, current urban sociology is giving significant attention to the spatial practices and experience of urban (and sub-urban) life as lived by its inhabitants.

Methodologically, Michael Borer's (2006) articulations of the *urban culturalist perspective* that seek to explore 'the lived culture of cities and not merely their economic or political structures and demographic profiles' (174), and Gottdiener and Hutchison's (2006) *socio-spatial approach* both draw into question the experience of the city and the production of meanings engaged in by its inhabitants. Similarly (and somewhat reminiscent of Baudellaire's flâneur), the ethnographic work on the experience of *walking* in the city as charted by Demerath and Levinger (2003), as well as Mommaas's (2004) discussion on the politics of 'cultural clusters' in the post-industrial city and Frers and Meier's (2007) exploration of the manner by which a city's visuality is ordered and produced each represent this concern for the lived-experience of the city and its spatiality. Common to these works is a focus on those practices of meaning production engaged in by inhabitants of urban spaces.

Urban (and) Community

A key point of focus for this book (and ongoing attention in urban sociology generally) is the relationship between community and the city. The complexity of urban space and the transformations in human inter-relationships these spaces prompt caused early theorists such as Durkheim and Toennies to suggest that *community*, as it was understood in the non-urban, agrarian settings they explored, would be impossible to maintain within the city. This is a theme that carries on to the present.

In 2005 the Australian financial services group *Australian Unity* in conjunction with Deakin University's *Centre for Quality of Life* released the *Wellbeing Index: Report 12.1 Special Report on City and Country Living*. The report sought to identify '...how satisfied Australians are with their lives and life in Australia' by investigating '...satisfaction with economic,

environmental and social conditions in Australia, as well as giving ongoing insights into our perceptions of individual wellbeing' (Australian Unity 2007:1). A large portion of this report examined the relationship of place to personal wellbeing and emphasized the role physical spaces play in the creation of feelings of happiness. Various urban and non-urban places were examined according to the feelings of connectedness individuals had within them, with *Chapter 4: Community* dealing specifically with the function of community in the maintenance of personal wellbeing. Within this, community was understood as both a 'structure of feeling' and a physical location. It was something that came to represent a point of interpersonal connectedness where satisfaction and wellbeing were intimately associated with physical spatiality and locatedness—a theme similarly picked up by Bauman (2001) when he suggests that '[i]t feels good...it is good to have a community, to be in a community' (1).

One of the outcomes of the report suggested that:

In terms of satisfaction with safety and community connection, the values for people living in cities is lower than for people living in all other locations. It is evident that high density living produces less interpersonal connection and a diminished sense of safety. (Cummins, Davern, Okerstrom, Lo and Eckersley 2005: 2)

The widely publicized results of this report identified that city life doesn't yield connections to community, interpersonal bonds and senses of wellbeing that otherwise occur in less urbanized locations (Cummins, Davern, Okerstrom, Lo and Eckersley 2005). Whilst cities may provide the potential for access to services and complex social networks, they do (at least in the contemporary Australian context as the report notes) promote a sense of disconnection and impersonal ties between individuals.

These results are by no means unique to Australia, with recent studies from the United Kingdom and United States identifying similar outcomes.³ Feelings of dissatisfaction with city life correlate with popular but largely romanticised ideas of urban decay and declining personal safety, with these feelings further represented by trends such as the 'sea change'—that escape from the urban maze in search of richer, therapeutic and more interpersonal associations supposedly found in archetypally imagined coastal and rural communities. Cities, in these manifestations of the public imagination, operate as locations of alienation and entities that are perceived as '...either

³ See particularly Amanda Crook's article from the *Manchester Evening News* (13th March 2005), Nilary Duncanson's article from the *Daily Record* (28th April 2006) and Glasser and Shapiro's (2003) survey of urban living in the United States, as well as Lebo's (2007) accounts of neighbourhood ties within cities.

dangerous and alien to the men and women who try to live there, or lacking in substance, paradoxical, and unbelievable' (Timms and Kelly 1985:152). Addington (2002) continues these themes by noting that he '...felt it somewhat paradoxical that one can get a feeling of isolation even when surrounded by people' (3).

The city becomes an 'unreal' location; one in which 'bad' things happen. Popcorn (1992) suggests that due to fears held about urban spaces, the nature of contemporary consumer lifestyles and increasing individualism, the phenomenon of 'cocooning' features as an important aspect of collective, urban living. For Popcorn, cocooning says much about the nature of urban space and the way that individuals conceptualise themselves and others within an environment that contains perceived dangers on every corner:

The daily news is worse today than a year ago. Headlines scream out tales of horror and violence. Home remains our only safe haven, our sane retreat from all this chaos. City streets are dim and dangerous, very 'Clockwork Orange'—with wilding gangs of bandits and hordes of homeless and the mentally deranged. (Popcorn 1992:201)

Mike Davis (2000) has theorized what he notes as 'an ecology of fear' operating in the sorts of locations Caldeira (2005) terms the 'fortified enclaves' of the post-metropolitan city; a fear marked by security obsession and materializing in the form of fortified neighbourhoods, gated communities and privatized residential authorities. This joins with Soja's (2000) idea of the 'carceral city' in which 'post metropolitan modes of social and spatial regulation' mark a new 'regime' of urbanization (44). This is a setting ripe for Zygmunt Bauman's condition of 'mixophobia':

'Mixophobia' is a highly predictable and widespread reaction to the mind boggling, spine-chilling and nerve-breaking variety of human types and lifestyles that meet and rub elbows and shoulders in the streets of contemporary cities not only in the officially proclaimed (and for that reason avoided) 'rough districts' or 'mean streets', but in their 'ordinary' (read: unprotected by 'interdictory spaces') living areas. (2007:86)

Connecting with Richard Sennett's (1996) idea of the 'community of similarity', Bauman (2007) notes that '*mixophobia manifests itself in the drive towards islands of similarity and sameness amidst a sea of variety and difference*' (87).

Urban space, according to these visions, isn't something to be engaged. Rather, it is something to be mistrusted, avoided and as much as possible barricaded out. The city is filled with Simmel's (1950) *strangers*, all perceived as doing strange and untrustable things. The underlying theme in

these views of cities and city life relates to the inability of community—as a necessary expression of human group interaction—to function in urban spaces. Whilst cities are spaces of dense population and ‘busy’ individualism, at least in terms of the *Gessellschaft*-like nature of ‘...our rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world’ that Bauman (2001:15) notes, communities are thought to operate as entities of a ‘slower’ *Gemeinschaft* of human interpersonal connection. This divide between the impersonality of the city and the close bonds of community is a feature theme in prominent sociologies of city and community, and provides a dualism from which assumptions about human group organization find articulation. Cities as built environments may well be entirely possible without a sense of community, but the belonging, interpersonal connections and sense of value provided by community promote a viability of rich human interaction that cities are (according to the literature at least) in seeming need of. The blasé city dweller simply cannot afford, through fears for personal safety or the over-stimulation of sensory input, to engage too closely with the city for fear that all sorts of *bad* things might happen.

But whether or not cities represent the ‘perfect form of human organization’ as Park (1967) boldly declared, or are fundamentally dangerous and isolating locations, it must be pointed out that the theme of dysfunction isn’t new—as Borer (2006) notes, ideas of dysfunction and alienation have been key aspects in sociological writings of cities since the beginning (177). But yet, people continue to find cities worth living in, and as statistical trends show, the bulk of us now live in urban environments.⁴ Whether good or bad, conducive or not to human existence, the city is and will remain a fundamental marker of the human spatial experience. Borer’s (2006) point that the ‘study of urban cultures is an important and worthwhile task’ (173–4) holds true on this count at the very least. It follows that the way the city is thought of, used, constructed and appropriated must also be understood if any sense of what the city *is* might be gained.

Ideas of the City from Outside of the Metropole

In her groundbreaking analysis of disciplinary sociology, Raewyn Connell (2007) explores the politics and cultured nature of knowledge production present in social theory and in doing so identifies a split between ‘northern’ knowledge, constructed in the global ‘metropole’, and that of the antipodean ‘southern’ periphery. As she notes in the introduction to *Southern Theory*:

⁴ As detailed by a United Nations report (2009), by 2030 the majority of the world’s populations will reside in cities.

22 Cities of Signs

...social science is, at best, ambiguously democratic. Its dominant genres picture the world as it is seen by men, by capitalists, by the educated and affluent. Most importantly, they picture the world as seen from the rich capital-exporting countries of Europe and North America—the global metropole. To ground knowledge of society in other experiences remains a fragile project. (2007:vii)

The problem is that the knowledge created from such a perspective, when presented as generalizable, forgets the experience of the bulk of the world's populations; populations for whom the metropole isn't home. As Connell continues:

In this light, the making of sociology takes on a new significance. The places where the discipline was created were the urban and cultural centers of the major imperial powers at the high tide of modern imperialism. They were the 'metropole', in the useful French term, to a larger colonial world. The intellectuals who created sociology were very much aware of this... This fact is crucial in understanding the content and method of sociology, as well as the discipline's wider cultural significance. (2007: 9)

The 'making' of urban sociology, and the locations it studied, was no different. As with much of the knowledge that is generated from the metropole, urban sociology has similarly prefigured the experiences of urban life from the centers of the (post)industrialized Western world. The consequences of the generation of such knowledge are, as Connell notes, seen 'in four characteristic textual moves: the claim of universality; reading from the centre; gestures of exclusion; and grand erasure' (44). By situating the concerns of urban sociological theory on experiences drawn from those well-worn sites of inquiry (the London, Paris, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles case sites so often figured) and then proceeding with an assumption that the experiences derived from these locations will speak for the experiences of *all* locations, urban sociology has developed a specific flavor; one of the Western, industrialized and post-industrialized metropolis.

But as Roy and Al Sayyad cogently note:

Despite the origins of this pre-existing discourse, the phenomenal growth of cities around the Third World in the last four decades indicates that the urban future does not lie in Chicago or L.A., and that it will not be shaped according to the schools of thought named after them. Rather, the future lies in cities like Cairo, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, and Bombay, and can best be investigated by looking at them. One important and common characteristic of these places is that older models of urbanism are being replaced by 'new' forms of urban informality that challenge the relevance of previous thinking about 'blasé' urbanites. (2004:9)

Roy and Al Sayyad locate their analysis in the 'informal' urban experience—that experience of urban space that has been referred to broadly as 'a temporary manifestation of underdevelopment characterized by survival activities of the urban poor' (Roy and Al Sayyad 2004:11). Work in 'urban informality' has centered on the experiences of urban space in locations away from the metropole—in the megalopolises of Latin America, Africa and South Asia. The realities of 'extra legal housing and unregistered economic activities' that account for 'up to 90 per cent of the new housing stock' and 'more than half of the adult population's... employment' (Tranberg Hansen and Vaa 2004: 7) in these locations point to the vestiges and legacies of colonialism now manifest in globalized economic regimes. Asef Bayat (1997) similarly notes that the existence and location within the economic complex of the informal urban space situates the 'urban informal' within a system that both marginalizes and exploits whilst retaining as necessary in the operations of the urban economy this subject position. This is where urban sociology must now turn—to the experiences of the bulk of the world's populations who live in urban settings uniquely different from those of the metropole.

This conceptualisation and reporting of the experience of the informal urban space marks a fundamentally different approach to the ecological culturalism of the Chicago School, class divisions of political-economy and spatialized practices of postmodern geography. From analyses of informal urbanism, a stark and direct accounting of the urban experience from the position of the world's *Others* emerges, and with it, a new suite of theoretical bases that question the politico-economic operations of the metropole when explaining and making sense of the city. As Roy and Al Sayyad note, 'what we are talking about are not only different geographies of informality but also different geographies of knowledge' (2004: 4).

In a similar manner, work on exploring the experiences of women and views of the city from indigenous perspectives has also prompted a renewal in understanding the city. O'Connor's explorations of Southeast Asian urbanism challenges dichotomies of urban/rural by situating the Asian experience as 'relations of parts' between urban and rural societal structures:

Southeast Asia's cities have always brought diverse peoples and societies together. Urbanism is neither the sum of this diversity nor its common denominator but a society of societies, a culture of cultures. (1995:36)

It isn't that a fundamental dichotomy between antagonistic mechanical and organic solidarities (as Durkheim would see them) is in operation, or that structures of *Gessellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* (in Toennies's sense) are

dialectically opposed in this new conceptualisation, but that the workings of urban space are understood as being contingent upon the operation of intrinsically inter-connected rural spaces. This conceptualisation of the city speaks of relations of parts to a broader whole; parts that are not, in and of themselves, discrete societal structures.

A similar theme also emerges in Graham and Peters's (2002) and Peters's (1998, 2001) exploration of the experience of first nations women in the city. By situating the city as a site of gendered, racialized and sexualized practices, and drawing on critiques of the historical legacies of colonialism and racial marginalization, Peters poses an 'alternative geography' for situating the urban experience from both a first nation and female perspective. In a similar way to Hosagrahar's (2005) survey of colonial modernity in India, this approach draws attention to the way that space is mediated according to certain identity characteristics, and calls for the deployment of alternative approaches for understanding the experience of urban space as it responds to its situatedness and contextualization.

Appadurai (1996) makes the point that 'modernity is decisively at large, irregularly self conscious, and unevenly experienced' (3), and in the case of the colonial urban experience, conflates the idea of urban development and progress (as marked initially by industrialization, and more recently the post-industrial, information societal transformation of the global metropole) in antithesis to indigenous life-ways found in the antipodean south. As Hosagrahar explains:

Appropriating history and historiography, Europe constructed itself as the prototypical 'modern' subject. To be 'modern' was the prerogative of European rulers who claimed the right to define its meaning and assert its forms. The definition was based on difference: to be 'modern' was to be not 'traditional'... This fundamental opposition has been the premise of both scholarship and professional intervention in city planning and architecture. (2005:1)

It is clear that the explanations of urban life and urbanism presented by theorists of the metropole don't quite tell the full story. As the work just noted demonstrates, the experience in peripheral locations (focused specifically on identity characteristics and spatial practices that haven't been the focus of the metropole's gaze) provides a set of alternative readings and conceptualisations of the city that might more fully explain the experience of the city in this increasingly urbanized world.

Core Ideas for Conceptualising the City and This Book

Whilst a number of core ideas and explanatory concepts drawn from the

discussion above will be applied in this book, two underlying themes will re-emerge regularly. Firstly, and in presenting the experience of *Greater Springfield* in the later sections, I will make a connection between the urban experience and community. As I noted above, for more than a few sociologists and theorists of urban life, community is viewed as being either in serious need of attention and reclamation, or indeed is extinct. I look at community according to the way that Anthony Cohen (2004) saw it working in the villages of Scotland—according to the operation of a symbolic logic that orders and defines the manifestation of culture. It is via the limits of this symbolic logic—the *boundary* as Cohen called it—that a sense of what the community *is* might be gathered. This boundary speaks to the identity of the community and the deep epistemological bases upon which this identity rests.

As Cohen notes, the ‘boundary’ exists as that point of symbolic exchange that refers to:

...an entity, a reality, invested with all the sentiment attached to kinship, friendship, neighboring, rivalry, familiarity, jealousy, as they inform the social processes of everyday life...[it] **is more than oratorical abstraction: it hinges crucially on consciousness.** (2004:13 *emphasis added*)

This is foundational to the idea of community presented here. It is from the *intent* of the boundary that a sense of a community can be gathered, and it is via the operations of the boundary as they manifest in culture that attention will be focused in the explorations presented later.

From this basis, a second theme core to this book emerges; *public pedagogies*. I will argue, from the experiences I had in the case sites reported later, that community functions from both physical and symbolic bases and exerts an educative influence in relaying and affirming cultural logics. As Thrasher (1927) famously noted (albeit somewhat out of context here), ‘the street educates with fatal precision’ (476); indeed it does, if the examples detailed later are any indication. In particular, it is via signs, and the role they play in the communication apparatus of the contemporary city, that pedagogical intentions will be uncovered and scrutinized. Culture bubbles up from the boundary and presents itself in the workings of culture and its physical forms. It is via signs as one specific but highly intentioned manifestation of the cultural logic that attention will be given in this book.

Signs seek to tell us something of the societies in which they are placed, and hence carry with them intent to instruct. This happens in a variety of ways. In a late-capitalist context, for instance, we might see signage, whether it be ‘official’ or not, connected to the concerns of global capitalism and subsequently the manufacturing of desire via the mobilization of markets