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Tilley, C. (Ed.). (2019). *London's Urban Landscape: Another Way of Telling*. UCL Press.

Bored of London, bored of life. The same might go for social research on London. The repeated returns to the same locations and the reiteration of the same machinic concepts might make it seem that there is nothing more to be said by scholars of the city. Yet skilled researchers and writers are clearly able to make the most familiar of cities appear strange. In this collection we learn that the rituals that initiate traders to Smithfield Market involve them being stripped naked and bound before pieces of rotten meat, kidney, eyeballs, and other offal are flung at them (p. 285); that the quintessentially suburban satellite of Surbiton holds an annual parade to celebrate a mythical goat boy who once rid the area of a giant that terrorised villagers (p. 190). And we also learn that in West Hounslow, the streets on one stigmatised pebble-dash estate are all named after small mammals: Mink, Ermine, Racoon, Badger, Opossum, Chinchilla, Sable and Marmot (p.185). In its attention to these details, the collection lands at an important moment for urban research. In the post-crisis, mid-pandemic city the trend in urban studies for faceless abstraction is reaching a zenith. As Tilley notes in his introduction, this trend, which has been developing for some time, results in a situation wherein ostensibly empirical studies of urban life are increasingly framed through the lens of desk-based treatise about the "forces that frame the […] urban experience under capitalism" (Harvey, 1989, p. 164). At best the

trend habitually leaves readers with little sense beyond caricature as to whose experience is being spoken about. At worst, the marriage between orthodox political economy and urban theory has thoroughly anaesthetised urbanists to the complexity of processes through which urban life is transformed.

Pitted against meta-abstraction from the start, this is not, however, a naïve celebration of the agency of town folk. Rather, each chapter reveals Londoners lives as grounded in the material landscapes bequeathed to them. Whether it is in over-occupied Victorian apartments of Kensington, in the shadows of avant-garde brutalist housing or the in the dusty corners of antiques markets, the reader is introduced to social lives of Londoners as products of material space. Yet, at the same time, their experiences are also presented as productive forces in and of themselves. Details of putrid initiation ceremonies or postmodern-pagan rituals in suburbia are not merely presented as novel manifestations of urban culture. Rather they emphasise the *centrality* of participants' experiences to the construction of London's landscape. David Yates chapter on the Beavers Estate in West Hounslow offers a particularly overwhelming sense of the dialogical to-and-fro between the concrete and tarmac infrastructure of the mid-twentieth century and the cultures that spawned from it. Elsewhere Carolin Wilson paints a vivid portrait of the butchers and porters of Smithfield meat market constructing their identity against the brush steel aesthetics and suited culture of the corporate world that breathes down their neck (p. 266). While it shows a community responding to the city, this chapter also speaks loudly of a broader story of the modernity, the sequestration of

animal slaughter and the people associated with it being central to 'civilizing' processes (Elias et al., 2000, pp. 118–119). Like Bourdieu's Berber house, the landscapes that are presented in this collection are inseparable from the lives that have developed within them, both reflective and productive of one another. With a phenomenological accent binding the collection it is refreshing to see representations of people at once touching, and being touched by, the world around them (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 143).

As with any collection rooted in the ethnographic tradition, the reflexivity of its contributors is integral to its value. Always a tight rope, the contributors here reflect on their own position with purpose and without conceit. Schacter's auto-ethnographic chapter on his movement through the spaces of London's street art scene offers some of the most extensive personal reflection. In between the vignettes, the chapter works hard to critically discusses the loss of the aura from a once-radical practice. Although he insists maybe one too many times that it is not, between the lines this chapter also – and quite charmingly – provides the reader with a phenomenology of ageing within a conservative subculture. That we might read that into the text is also precisely the reason that this 'way of telling', marked by humility and humanity, is so important.

731 words.

Elias, N., Dunning, E., Goudsblom, J., & Mennell, S. (2000). *The Civilizing Process*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Harvey, P. D. (1989). *The Urban Experience*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M., & Lefort, C. (1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Northwestern University Press.