

Book Review: Backward glances: cruising the queer streets of New York and London. By Mark Turner. London: Reaktion 2003. ISBN 1-86189-180-6 Houlbrook, Matt

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explicitly pulled the two sections of the book together. Despite these caveats, however, the author has written an intellectually stimulating work, which critically combines an assessment of ideas with an evaluation of policies at the interface of media, culture and democracy.

Queen Mary, University of London

RAYMOND KUHN

Backward glances: cruising the queer streets of New York and London. By Mark Turner. London: Reaktion. 2003. 191 pp. £16.95 paper. ISBN 1 86189 180 6.

Mark Turner's basic premise is simple: 'the city is an active force, an agent that creates certain kinds of behaviour, true to the modern urban sensibility' (p. 127). His focus is one such 'behaviour': cruising – the glances exchanged between men on New York and London's streets.

The idea that modern urban life actuates particular social practices is well established. The streets' erotics have their literary and academic canon. But *Backward glances* compels us to rethink how we understand *both* ways of being in the city *and* what makes cities sexy. Its distinctiveness is twofold. First, Turner locates the pleasures of 'mutual recognition' in precisely the fragmentation and anonymity of urban culture. Cruising, indeed, 'exploits the ambivalences and uncertainties inherent in the city' (p. 7). It is, as such, characteristic of urban modernity. Ranging from Whitman to Hockney, Turner moves to evoke the erotic 'excitement of the passing moment' (p. 118). Second: Turner's cruiser disrupts the dominant status of the 'Ur-man of urban modernity' – the ever-watching *flâneur* (p. 29). If the *flâneur* is outside the crowd, the cruiser is immersed in it. Reciprocal glances are 'a vital point of interaction, an expression of togetherness rather than of alienation, of connection rather than separation' (p. 59). Turner highlights those everyday fleeting connections when individuals look at those around them. The cruiser suggests alternative modes of urban movement.

Backward glances thus challenges us to think about the erotics of the city, and the relationship between social formation and subject formation more generally. More problematically, it raises questions about how we write the history of sex and the city. Turner's 'backward glance' signifies his engagement with the past. But what's he glancing at? 'I look to the past to help me understand something about cruising, and our cities, and sexuality, and the ways we have of representing all of these, in the present, *now*' (p. 9). This only gets us so far: how are 'now' and 'then' related? Cruising, Turner states, 'is not transhistorical' (p. 9). Moreover, he repeatedly defines his as a queer history, not the 'recovery' of hidden 'gay' cruisers (pp. 42–6, 112).

Strangely, however, Turner's analysis effaces these points. Turner works by laying fragments from different times alongside one another – moving between 1880s porn and Jarman's journals in one paragraph (pp. 50–1). Sometimes this highlights

dissonances; more often, it renders cruising ahistorical. The epilogue recognizes how 'cruising the streets of our cities isn't what it used to be' (p. 162). Again, this is disengaged from what comes before: 'change' is equated with cyberspace. Sure, the internet has reconfigured sexual geographies, but what about the changing nature of the city itself? For Turner, the 'modern city' remains almost static over 150 years. But the city is an organic entity that changes over time – London 1885 isn't London 2005. To map those differences would also allow us to trace how the ways we walk the city – the stories we tell about our backward glances – have themselves changed over time. That's my challenge.

University of Liverpool

MATT HOULBROOK

The landscape of Stalinism: the art and ideology of Soviet space. Edited by Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2003. 315 pp. \$50.00 (£38.00) cloth. ISBN 0 295 98333 7.

In the early 1940s, the cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argued that each historical epoch created its own distinctive 'chronotype', or conception of space. In loose pursuit of this Bakhtinian inspiration, the collection of essays under review sets out to identify and explore the chronotype of the Stalin period of Soviet history, from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. The sort of generalized formula for the understanding and deployment of spatiality that might constitute a chronotype does not ultimately emerge, it must be said; but the essays do succeed quite brilliantly in illustrating the diversity, richness, and overall importance of space and the geographical landscape for the political aesthetics of Stalinist culture. And because culture, in the Nietzschean spirit of interwar European totalitarianism, constituted a carefully managed part of a larger project of political manipulation and control, the essays provide important insight into the political mind of Stalinism as well.

For the most part, they deal with representations of space and landscape in Soviet popular culture, including Socialist-Realist art and literature, songs, advertising, theatre, cinema, magazines and even postage stamps. The cohesiveness of the collection is unsettled by a certain ambivalent tension between the alternative kinds of spatiality under analysis, captured in the juxtaposition of 'space' and 'landscape' in the volume's title and subtitle. Although clearly related, these terms refer in fact to very different things: the abstract *space* of physics and geometry (the arrangement of figures in paintings, for example, or of buildings in architectural ensembles), as opposed to the real-existing *natural* and *cultural landscapes* of the physical-geographical world. Both alternatives form an integral part of the book's larger subject, to be sure, but the conceptual and material disjuncture between them might well have been more carefully problematized. Overall, the essays gathered in *The landscape of Stalinism* are well conceived, probing and stimulating, and demonstrate how successfully geographical concerns with the representation