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City, Author, Reader
(A Critique of the Relationship between the Citizen and the Creation and Reading of the Urban Text)

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Abstract
This article examines the relationship between the city, the citizen, and the production of meaning by questioning whether the citizen is the author or the reader of the city. Critiquing reductive dualisms in urban theory, it argues that the city cannot be understood solely through the opposition of production and interpretation. Drawing on the metaphor of the city as text and Michel Foucault's concept of the author function, the article conceptualizes the author of the city as a structural and discursive function rather than an individual or institution. From this perspective, the citizen is neither the author nor a passive reader, but simultaneously a limited writer and an interpreter of urban meaning. The article concludes that the city emerges through the tension between structural authorial functions and the situated practices of urban subjects, and that critical urban analysis must foreground the power relations that condition possibilities of meaning-making.

Keywords: City, Citizen, Author, Reader, Power.

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Is the citizen the author of the city, its reader, or the narrator of its stories?

Extended Abstract

This article critically examines the relationship between the city, the citizen, and the production of meaning by addressing the central question: Is the citizen the author of the city or its reader? The primary aim is to challenge the simplifying dualisms prevalent in urban studies that conceptualize the citizen either as the producer of the city or merely as a passive reader of urban space. Drawing on the metaphor of the "city as text" and its roots in literary theory and semiotics, the article argues that while this metaphor enables an understanding of the city as a multilayered, open, and meaning-generating phenomenon, it becomes misleading when detached from the city's entanglement with power, politics, and economic structures. Unlike a literary text, the city is a processual and historical phenomenon formed within a complex network of structural and discursive forces. Employing Michel Foucault's concept of the "author function," the article contends that the author of the city is neither an individual nor a discrete institution, but a structural function operating through discourses, legal frameworks, economic logics, and mechanisms of power that delineate the boundaries of what is possible and impossible in the urban realm. From this perspective, the citizen cannot occupy the position of the author; however, reducing the citizen to a passive reader is equally inadequate. The citizen is simultaneously a writer of the city, insofar as everyday practices, movement, presence, resistance, and narrative acts inscribe layers of meaning onto urban space. This form of writing is local, dispersed, and tactical, lacking the structural capacity to delimit the city as a whole. At the same time, the citizen is a reader of the city, as lived experience and interpretation constitute integral components of the process of meaning production. The article concludes that the city emerges through the tension among three positions: the author as a structural function, the citizen as a limited writer, and the citizen as a reader. A critical understanding of the city therefore requires an analysis of these mediating relations and the power structures that condition the possibilities of urban narration and meaning-making.

Authorship should not be understood as a fixed relation to a work—here, the city—but as a socially and politically constituted function that delineates its conditions of possibility. Immanent to the text, this function regulates its boundaries and modes of existence and changes historically with society. It is therefore mistaken to equate the author of the city with the writer of its text. The citizen writes the city through situated practices but does not occupy the position of authorship, nor should the citizen be identified as the narrator of the city.

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