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Projecting American Studies

Essays on Theory,
Method,
and Practice

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BARBARA BUCHENAU & JENS MARTIN GURR

On the Textuality of American Cities and Their Others: A Disputation

This city which cannot be expunged from the mind is like an armature, a honeycomb in whose cells each of us can place the things he wants to remember . . . But in vain I set out to visit the city: forced to remain motionless and always the same, in order to be more easily remembered, [it] has languished, disintegrated, disappeared.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Somewhere in the wide expanses of Asia, a beautiful city disappears because it withstands no longer the constant overflow of commemoration.¹ In Italo Calvino's fictional non-fiction *Le città invisibili* (1972), Marco Polo's commemorative imaginaries of expansion celebrate the most important cities he has visited. But the descriptive encounters also suffocate the very cities brought alive in the text. Polo's urban vignettes have a stifling effect on the objects of description, because they are most importantly creations of the haunted mind of the explorer: his narrative voice superimposes diminished replications of his hometown Venice on all human agglomerations ever travelled. *Le città invisibili* thus dramatizes the resilience that is at home both

¹ This essay moves forward from a collaborative project directed by Walter Grünzweig and funded by the Mercator Research Center Ruhr from 2012 to 2015 at the Ruhr Center of American Studies. First results of this joint effort to better understand modern US-American urban spaces, communities, and representations can be found in Sattler, Buchenau and Gurr is this essay's companion piece on urban American Studies. We thank our long-term collaborators Kornelia Freitag, Walter Grünzweig, Randi Gunzenhäuser, Josef Raab, Julia Sattler, and Michael Wala for their invaluable insights into the power of narrative and media in urban environments and their comments on this paper. Additional thanks go to the members of the Duisburg-Essen Research Colloquium in British and American Studies and especially to Courtney Moffett-Bateau, Georg Drenning, Lena Mattheis, and Dietmar Meinel for their attentive reading of an earlier draft. Stephanie Leigh Batiste, Thomas Heise, Paula M. L. Moya, Heike Paul, Ramón Saldivar, Diane Van Buren, and Ernest Zachary have made crucial suggestions that have helped to improve the project to be defended here.

in specific geographical locations *and* the human mind. Since each ultimately refuses “to remain motionless and always the same” (Calvino 13), change is certain to occur wherever geographical spaces and human minds interact under the auspices of memory, desire, and expanding sign systems. Calvino’s depiction of the human ambition to see, read, and narrativize the country and the city is an instructive example of the hermeneutical drama which ensues when texts and cities meet, when geographical location and the human imagination work together with varying degrees of productivity. His descriptions of (in)visible cities call attention to a connection that American Studies scholarship accepts as a given, while city managements have long sought to mine it as a source of additional income. In our field, too little is made of the fact that American cities sprawl and disperse through texts, just as texts need urban agglomerations for their production, distribution and reception.

This link between text and city, between textuality and urbanity, becomes the subject of disputation once we move beyond the field of literature proper and look at significance of non-fictional literature for the making and breaking of cities and their others. The testaments of shrinking, failing, and dying cities include references to elusive memories and desires of model cities once admired. The language of these testaments is often highly literary and full of figurative speech, though only ground zero texts have fully caught the attention of Americanists. Manifestos or designs for future cities borrow heavily from literature, music, TV culture, and the arts. They include descriptions of imaginary lands as well as competing designs for rival cities. Whenever these place-making texts are recycled and reused in cities, they acquire additional meaning and they usually also serve new purposes and assume further functions. Inspired by current research on global urbanization which pays increasing attention to the materiality and textuality of urban things, we want to distinguish two scenarios in which texts become pivotal tools of urban change. As *scripts*, texts contribute to unconscious and collectively shared building blocks of understanding and behavior. In addition, texts also have the potential to assume the role of *scriptures* in the old sense of the term: as

² The notorious example of the restaurant script is described by artificial intelligence researchers Roger Schank and Robert Paul Abelson in *Scripts*. Going to a restaurant involves a fairly fixed sequence of actions: sitting down, choosing from the menu, ordering, eating, paying the bill, leaving. Based on this notion, *script* also came to be used to refer to cultural models as powerful unconscious or semi-conscious guides of individual and collective human behavior (see Quinn and Holland). In urban spaces it is not only infrastructure that scripts human behavior. There are also detailed guidelines about proper usage of standard urban commodities and amenities that script what urban dwellers do and don’t do. In the realm of textuality, it is especially films and computers that depend quite literally on scripts, but human beings and animals are similarly said to follow preset scripts, hence psychological studies introduce multiple subcategories that help to explain how people follow certain patterns, develop schemes and acquire habits.

declared foundational texts of a shared faith, they might become canonical, authoritative, communally binding, and prescriptive.³

In our contribution to an emerging field of urban and anti-urban hermeneutics as it has recently been sketched, among others, by the sociologist Dieter Hassenpflug or the ethnologist Rolf Lindner, we need to refute substantial critiques about the timeliness of a turn to urban American Studies and we would like to do so by claiming—with purposeful exaggeration—that texts can, and have been, used to build an exemplary city *and* to bring it down. For reasons outlined in a previous essay (Buchenau and Gurr, “City Scripts”), the textuality of cities and their often anti-urban surroundings, as well as the (anti-)urbanity of texts calls for inquiries from a distinctly Americanist perspective. As we finish the revisions of this essay, we observe how a presidential candidate and now president-elect is monopolizing the media with miniature texts that refresh anti-urban sentiments as much as racist fears while bringing rural voters to the polls in great numbers. When Donald Trump recycles the 1970s trope of the decaying *inner city*, his calls for a deglobalization and a racializing rearmament of American politics and society take a very concrete post-urban shape. As we further watch and read about sanctuary cities such as San Francisco or Los Angeles seeking to refute the incoming administration’s plan for mass deportation of *sin papeles*, we note the political acuteness of timeworn and outmoded North American scripts and scriptures of cities and their others.

In what follows, we leave behind the topicality of anti-urban city scripts in the times of the present US election and engage instead with three objections against the concentrated involvements of American Studies scholars in the interdisciplinary research on anti/urban pasts and futures:

1. North America is no longer the urban frontier—urbanization happens elsewhere.
2. Literature and culture are overrated—efforts to understand cities and their others must rely on the social sciences.
3. Urbanity in North America is historically shallow.

³ The notorious example of a scripture is of course the Bible, but it also makes sense to discuss the US Constitution or the Declaration of Independence in scriptural terms. Beyond the fascinating field of biblical hermeneutics with its investigations into figuration as both an art of understanding and a theory of knowledge formation there is a broadening school of thought about textual cultures that notes how important scripture in the broader sense of *Schrift / writing* is for widely shared views on publicity and publication as access to a mental space of laws, rules, and regulations rather than to an imaginary space of representations: “The space opened by script/the written text is the space of the laws that need to be remembered, heeded and realized in the world” (“Der Raum, den die Schrift öffnet, ist der Raum der Gesetze, die es zu erinnern, zu beherzigen und in der Welt zu verwirklichen gilt”; Assmann and Assmann 8, our translation). Public spaces in cities abound with scriptures that regulate how people are meant to act and interact in these spaces.

Objection 1: North America is no Longer the Urban Frontier— Urbanization Happens Elsewhere

In the twenty-first century, the urban revolution has come full circle. Today, urbanization is a planetary, not an American phenomenon. Humankind is relocating, while rurality becomes a nostalgic fiction of the past. As anticipated by Lefebvre in 1970, the revolution of lifestyles—even those that are far removed from the big cities—has left the West for new homes in the global South, where it sparks spatial and textual processes of self-perpetuating condensation, inversion, and assemblage that appear to be hardly connected to Western forms of urbanization.⁴ The most daring architectural trends in cityscapes are today found in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, or Oman, where urban lands and sublime skylines continue to rise from deserts and seas with little consideration of the needs and desires of local populations and homegrown ecosystems. Dubai's Burj Khalifa has been the tallest building in the world since 2008 (828m); Saudi Arabia's Kingdom Tower, to be completed in 2019, will scrape the mark of 1000 meters; Oman is responding to an urbanization rate of 84% by building brand-new cities from scratch; ambitious plans for eco-districts or even entire eco-cities in China or Korea have attracted the attention of architects and students of architecture worldwide. These are pioneering efforts in the truest sense of the term, since they displace and erase older settlement patterns, while colonizing local lands as much as local people, a procedure familiar from much of the history of the Americas.

While the frontier has thus moved on, the North American city can no longer claim to be paradigmatic in quantitative terms either: While eight out of ten of the world's largest cities are now located in Asia (New York City only faring as the eighth-largest), growth rates such as that of Shenzhen—which grew from 30,000 to over 14 million inhabitants within some thirty-five years since 1979—make Western urbanization and its challenges appear marginal in quite another sense, too.

The audacity and ruthlessness of city planning and architectural design as well as the sheer growth and density of cities are not the only booms that are migrating east- and southward. Metropolitan labor economies, media cities, and cosmopolitan consumption have certainly had dramatic effects beyond the old West (e.g. Rothfuß). After urban population explosions have been documented for continental Africa and Asia since the later twentieth century, the most dramatic changes are generally expected to occur in urban spaces and urban lives in the global South rather than the global North. In this vein,

⁴ In light of the fact that the majority of the global population lives in cities today, Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen (WBGU) has spoken of “the relocation of humanity.” On condensation, inversion, and assemblage as pivotal urban processes that have both a textual and a spatial dimension, see Buchenau and Gurr.

a number of scholars have, in one way or another, declared or called for the “provincialization” of—variously—the US or the Western city generally as well as of Western approaches to urban theory, suggesting in fact that an inversion of urbanization patterns is taking place that will turn the old West into the rearguard of urban innovation.⁵

If urbanization is happening elsewhere, if the proliferation of slums and other offspring of the marriage of globalization and population growth such as rural depletion and urban blight are to be witnessed in Latin America, Africa, and Asia rather than North America, why should we still look at the North American city?

There are at least five reasons why North America as a region remains a necessary site for scholarly inquiry into processes of urbanization and deurbanization. These reasons matter precisely *because* the continent is neither exceptional nor paradigmatic in its physical and discursive urban developments. Instead, it is a challenging realm for comparative inquiries. For one thing, (1) urbanization in North America occurred under similar economic and political auspices of “emergent geographies of dispossession, catastrophe and possibility” (Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth 237) as does the urbanization of the global South today. Hence North American examples can be regarded as dated precursors of current urban trends: here, the urbanization of rural lifestyles as well as the reintroduction of rural, agrarian, and frontier traditions and ideals into urban scenarios have reached levels of comparative stability. A detailed inquiry into the institutionalization of the urban revolution thus becomes possible. At the same time, (2) a better understanding is needed of the multiple ways in which the cosmopolis of the global South extend their influence to the fringes and the centers of North American de/urbanization. Patterns of mimicry and imitation and practices of migration and integration deserve critical attention. (3) North American and especially US-American urban planners, architects, businessmen, and intellectuals (but also whole districts and municipalities) are heavily involved in the current turn to planetary urbanization—leading to the frequently voiced claim that global urbanization ultimately means Americanization; this involvement deserves to be critically explored. Furthermore, (4) global investors, politicians, and workers have always been crucial to North American urbanization, even though this fact has been acknowledged only for two disconnected historical periods: the time of European colonization and the present era of late modernity with its provincialization of the West. Finally, (5) the scriptures of North America that conjoin the urban, the rural, and the wild point toward forms of pastoralizing, repurposing, and recycling which give fresh meanings to defunct postindustrial locations. The resulting assemblages might not be

⁵ See esp. Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti as well as several contributions in Mirafab and Kudva.

altogether new, but they differ from both the vertical and the flat add-on urbanization in the shape of ever taller skyscrapers and self-replicating suburbs that is the focus of much global critical inquiry today.

The objection that North America might no longer be the frontier of urban change thus does not suffice to discourage sustained collaborative inquiry into the transformative dynamics which interlink the urban, the rural, and the wild on this continent. A well-saturated North American urbanity and its anti-urbanist twin pose questions hitherto understudied. Since these are fundamentally transnational questions, comparative methodologies must be advanced.

Objection 2: Literature and Culture are Overrated—Efforts to Understand Cities and their Others Must Rely on the Social Sciences.

This is an all too persuasive objection. The postmodern theories of social production and cultural construction built on the thoughts of Henri Lefebvre and his peers might have granted too much power to literature, the media, and the arts as fields of expression in which space is *lived* and *perceived* rather than *conceived* (Lefebvre, *Production*). Lefebvre's central categories for the production of geographical space usually are understood to support the view that imaginary worlds can mirror and might heal the wounds inflicted by the social interaction between people who do not have the same right to the city because they are not equal before either the law or the dominant creed. Yet, there have been many justified doubts about disciplinary inclinations to treat literature, popular culture, and the arts as autonomous and thus ethically superior fields of human interaction with the material world. In fact, the readiness to celebrate literature does not preclude the willingness to disempower it as a field of legitimate urbanist inquiry. Literary studies play a minor role in the politics of and the academic debates about urban change, even as critics acknowledge that literature serves crucial functions in the fragmentation and segregation of public space. In the field of urban sociology and urban theory, literature has a prominent place, but it is not studied for its portrayal of and intervention into hermeneutical dramas. Sociologists take literature as one path among many others that can lead to successful city branding, urban self-narrativization, and communication.⁶ Moreover, urban theory uses literature and culture as analogies of the city, as in the notion of "the city as a text." Both endorsements of literature and culture, however, say little about the methodological and theoretical implications of these objects of study and they hardly consider the literary and cultural logics of scenario-building.⁷

⁶ On this topic, see, e.g., Berking and Löw.

⁷ For this, see Paula Moya's argument about literature and schemata in *The Social Imperative*, or Rita Felski's thesis about attachment in this volume.

When urban sociology places literature in the service of a city's self-description and inter- or anti-urban differentiation, the inventive and imaginative component of urbanization processes is mostly obscured and rarely studied in its own right. Sociologists often treat cities as textures which invite readings as well as misreadings, but this metaphorical relation between city and text does not lead to a hermeneutical inquiry into the precise (anti-)urban functions of distinctive tropes, genres, and types of texts. As Andreas Huyssen has argued with regard to history's equally prominent turn to narrative and imagination, the current "desire for narratives . . . for recreations, re-readings, re-productions" is not necessarily a sign that citizens and denizens finally become author figures (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 5). Nor does the growing public presence of literature indicate that there is a "class war" waged against Wall Street capitalists and their "huge range of captive expert opinion . . . employed in the think tanks and universities they fund and splattered throughout the media they control," as David Harvey has it in *Rebel Cities* (161). Instead, the embrace of story-telling for city branding and against the many traumas of modernization and urbanization, according to Huyssen, is indicative of a notable disengagement from the obligation to envision a better, more humane future; it might even be said to abandon the need to learn from the past (1-10).⁸ With regard to the transformation of cities and countrysides, this means that textuality "partakes in the force play of remembrance and forgetting, vision and blindness, transparency and opaqueness of the world," thus serving as substantial instrument of power and control that permits selective commemoration as well as amnesia (Huyssen 10).

In the field of urban theory, the common conjunction of text and city or country is prone to erase the epistemological and hermeneutical impact of texts, media, and scripts. It spends little time on the contradictory ways in which texts and media shape the processes through which knowledge is built and understanding is reached. Speaking of urban textures also obscures the urban and anti-urban rationales of specific generic formula employed for the discussion of crime, expansion, or transformation (borrowing from detective fiction, the Western, or the jeremiad, for instance). Yes, texts and cities do collaborate and collide on many different levels, as do the practices involved in the production and usage of either one: Thus, literature arguably unfolds the complications that accompany, for instance, de Certeau's smug and all-too-easy equation of walking with writing in his notorious "Walking in the City" chapter (91-110). The protagonist Daniel Quinn in Paul Auster's *The City of Glass* (1987), for instance, struggles to learn how to write while he is walking, because "walking and writing [are] not easily compatible activities" (62). Auster's Quinn is the paradigmatic figure of the successful author

⁸ For a good example that disproves Huyssen, indicating that narrativization in planning can bring in lessons from the past, see Sandercock, to be discussed below.

despairing over the monotony of producing popular literature. His nonchalant variation on de Certeau's text-city metaphor draws attention to the fact that metaphors do not only serve to compare distinct elements and to substitute one for the other, but that they also *differentiate* by linking "the sensual and the conceptual," as the New Critics had it in their discussions of metaphoric relations (Martin 761).

Arguably, the pet trope of urban theory and urban sociology—the idea of an urban textureology—does more than link the sensual and the conceptual. It invites a move into the realm of the conceptual altogether. The current fascination with the literary and cultural logic of any given city can easily turn the idea of a unique city culture into a political concept. "Political concepts," as Ann Laura Stoler points out, "impose their authority over our thinking and actions because they saturate our environment, incanted strategically, or wondrously shorn of reflection on the public stage." In these politicized contexts, it might help to think of literature, writing, and text as the conceptual layers enveloping the sensual experience of walking the city and the countryside. These conceptual layers can serve as the sequentially organized rearguards and reflectors of sensual perception, but texts can just as well delineate the potential scope and intensity of a vision, a sound, a bodily encounter, since they often operate as prescriptive or prognostic vanguards and harbingers.

The theoretical tropes of the city as text and of walking as writing unite distinctive acts, fuse different forms of agency and conflate patterns of micro- as well as mesospacial arrangements that are not in the least alike. How can the stasis of most body parts be reasonably compared to the mobility of almost all limbs? Why should a room of one's own be substituted for main street or the prairie? As the protracted dying of Auster's author figure Quinn shows, the spaces and practices involved in walking and writing rule each other out. But the effect of the popular conflation of walking and writing is substantial: actual texts and textual practices disappear in infrastructure space, figuration is translated directly and literally into urban matter—writing now comes across as a territorializing practice parodied in the attempt of Auster's character to write by walking within the gridded borders of Manhattan. What is obliterated by the immediate text-city collocation—and what we believe is still worth investigating—is the extent to which texts, letters, and scribal practices (and their generic conventions) assume and provide authority, hegemony, and guidance in crises of faith, interpretation, vision, and perception.

The objection that literature and culture are overrated elements of global and North American trajectories of urbanization and deurbanization misses the point, since it does not address the ambivalent status of literature in urban inquiry: Core urbanist thoughts assume a role for literature and culture that is not cognizant enough of the immense self-reflexivity, the reductions and anxieties, and the multiple maps of misreadings that the masters of literary

criticism have taught us to acknowledge in texts and media, their production, distribution, reception, and usage. Urban hermeneutics as they have been proposed by Dieter Hassenpflug apply the art and theory of understanding literature a bit too directly to the built environment, for our taste, whereas the intrinsic logic paradigm developed by the urban sociologists Helmut Berking and Martina Löw discusses the "texture, habitus and imaginary" of a given city, but could take more detailed note of the praxeological, epistemological, and hermeneutical processes attached to each one of these theoretical concepts (Lindner). Texts neither produce cities, nor can they be separated from urban transformations. It is the incompatibility, the incommensurability, and the competition between texts and the (built) environment that must receive greater attention.

Objection 3: Urbanity in North America is Historically Shallow

This final, usually muted, objection brings us back to stories of origins and beginnings. It is grounded in the settler myths that are at home in both North and South America, coming back with a vengeance in the era of Donald Trump. In these tales of humble beginnings, the city is often branded as the unwanted accident of settlement and nation building—formidably expressed in the report of the *Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen*, which holds that urbanization in North America begins only in the 1820s (WBGU 66). For the longest time, the urban realm did not seem to serve as the major place of imaginative dwelling in the cultural histories of the Americas. Pervasive literary tropes demanded that people rough it in the bush (Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush*, 1856), civilize the backwoods (Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada*, 1836), or defend the settler outpost (Northrop Frye, "Garrison Mentality," 1965). Imagining survival appeared to be the Canadian task (Margaret Atwood, *Survival*, 1972), while US-Americans were expected to celebrate rustic life on the prairie or to revamp masculinity, political protocol, and community on the frontier (James Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Jackson Turner come to mind, as does L. Frank Baum and the multi-media universe created from his Oz books). Given the immense economic and political importance of urban centers throughout the history of Central and Latin America, the city does not loom large enough in literary settings that de-romanticize the Caribbean plantation and its creole afterlives (as in the work of V.S. Naipaul or Olive Senior), that validate the Mexican *campesino* and the Mexican-American *bracero*, or critique the Latin American systems of large-scale landownership and exploitation, while equally denouncing rural guerilla and bandit figures such as the *gaucho*, the *caudillo* or the *vigilante* (see Dabove).

Arguing, then, that the history of urbanity in North America is not deep or not deep enough (as the report of the WBGU indicates) legitimizes the

canonized imaginative literature of the Americas and its fascination with imperial expansion while also fostering the assumption that the only decades worth studying for questions of globally relevant urbanization are those between the latter part of the nineteenth century and the 1940s, when cities in North America exploded under the impact of immigration and internal migration. Side glances would then be dedicated to the decades since WWII to understand how deindustrialization and globalization lead to shrinking cities and a much less passionate faith in cities in general.

But this objection against a short and possibly shallow history of urban America is not accurate, neither empirically, nor normatively, nor even affectively speaking. For one thing, rural and anti-urban America has survived in our urban century as an eerie cradle that slowly rocks concrete political, social, and economic struggles into cultural substance. Apparently, rural demographic implosion and high tech industrialization spark ever new variations of the presumably passé themes of cultural, political, and ecological rebirth and rejuvenation. At the same time, it is the field of canonized imaginative literature that obscures the extent to which cities in the Americas have hailed the imagination even before and definitely after Columbus. The planned and unplanned cities of the Americas are the imagination's most palpable product. Finally, discussions of North American urbanization (today usually prefixed by a post-, de-, re-, con-, ex-, or pen-) themselves are expressive of thoroughly modern mindscapes which have set new norms to leave behind non-urban settlement histories and ideologies. As vital parts of these learned descriptions and prescriptions, old affects of anti-urban lifestyles will continue to trail along.

The historically pervasive interpenetration of the modern city and the non-urban and often anti-urban imagination has turned out to be far more complicated than Kevin Lynch envisioned in 1960 when he spoke of the "legibility" of the cityscape" (2). Despite an increasing awareness of the ensuing hermeneutical complexities in much recent work in the field, there is still a remarkable tendency to focus on the past 150 years alone. As a consequence, the apparent dichotomy of modern urban enthusiasm and non-modern anti-urbanism has become a crucial ingredient to urban theories and practices throughout North America. The assumption of an exceptional "American" hiatus between cities and what they exclude has produced a large body of work that is built on the rural/urban divide in North American cultures. But these diagnoses and prognoses are germane to North American urban theory and practice and thus deserve to be *studied* and *explained* as influential scripts rather than *critiqued* as scriptures that exact the wrong kind of faith.

Obviously the conjecture about the shallowness of American urbanization also disregards the rich and very deep history of urbanity and urbanization in the Americas, both South and North. Besides the densely populated indigenous cities and complex urban systems initially described and raided

by European explorers (such as Tenochtitlán or the many smaller centers along the North American coastlines and waterways) as well as the pre-Columbian proto-urban agglomerations much later dug up by archeologists (such as Cahokia on the Mississippi), there were of course the verbal accounts of golden cities the explorers never found—such as the Kingdom of Saguenay sought by Jacques Cartier in New France, the El Dorado of Latin America envisioned by Sir Walter Raleigh, or the Mexican Aztlán that explorers might not yet have known, though post-revolutionary activists revel in its mythical existence until today. From the first contact onwards, European settlers not only closely followed indigenous settlement patterns, they also sought to lay out new cities and settlements on the etched-out sites of indigenous urbanity. The Aztec Tenochtitlán, for instance, served as the foundation for Ciudad de México as soon as Hernán Cortés and his men had broken Aztec resistance, in the process levelling the buildings of this early modern indigenous metropolis.

This style of building colonial urban centers on the site of indigenous metropolises first documented in the Law of the Indies is rather characteristic of European urban planning in the New World. In the immediate wake of the destruction of centuries-old Mexican cities, indigenous city planning was erased and patterns of imperial urban planning were inscribed instead. In North America, a similar process of palimpsestic re-inscription took place. John Locke, for instance, used his employment as the assistant of Anthony Ashley Cooper, later known as the first Earl of Shaftesbury, to design the *Grand Model for the Province of Carolina*, a basis for the foundation of Carolina in 1670. Here, the two men created a design later emulated in colonial city planning (first implemented in Savannah, Georgia and in Philadelphia) that not only included planned settlements of town, suburban area, and countryside, but also anticipated the preplanning of entire towns built upon the square mile grid, featuring wide streets, lots with a standard size and shape, public squares, and civic lots. As in so many urban designs to come, Locke sought to separate the town and the countryside by a green belt. This rural-urban model of "class-structured" social "reciprocity" was adapted and significantly revised by slave-owners from the Caribbean and especially Barbados who moved to the Carolinas in the late eighteenth century (Wilson, *Ashley* iii and v).

Other major plans for decidedly *urban* American environments included, for instance, James Oglethorpe's 1730s plan for Savannah, Georgia, that unsuccessfully sought to resettle a substantial part of Britain's poor and the inmates of the debtors' prisons in the New World. Oglethorpe's system of agrarian equality is in many ways far more interesting than the much discussed and often defamed L'Enfant plan for Washington (1791) as an imperial city built from scratch in unsuitable, but geopolitically acceptable terrains. Whereas L'Enfant's Washington is said to have set the standards

for US-American anti-urbanism, Oglethorpe's Savannah is the most illustrative of many lesser known proprietary visions of enhancing one's political standing through ownership of land and self-sustenance. These utopian models of land ownership tended to include progressive thinking on liberation, faith and representation and they also enhanced concepts of publicity, participation, and good stewardship (Wilson, *Oglethorpe*). Ideas of territorial expansion and settlement were thus closely linked to the programmatic condensation of the population and the simultaneous intensification of public communication.

The objection that American urbanization is historically and conceptually too shallow is hardly tenable, it appears. Moreover, the subdivision of the discipline into Early American Studies and American Studies has had both theoretical and methodological consequences which explain why the history of North American urbanization is usually so dramatically curtailed and driven by a strong faith in size rather than detailed empirical data. This final objection might be easy to dismiss by pointing to the importance of small but powerful, inventive, and globally connected frontier cities as many cultural historians currently do, but a better integration of colonial and postcolonial urbanity and its others will require profound re-negotiations of comparative methodologies and constructivist theories.

Projecting a Textual Inquiry into the Urban and Its Others

Moving forward from these objections and the conundrums caused by persuasive but misleading certainties, we propose to do what we have been trained to do as textual scholars specialized on work in the archives and the repertoires of the lettered and imperially minded *terranglia*.⁹ Noting the convergence between urban transformations and processes of narrativization, mediation, and scripting, we suggest that these three aspects of the social production of cities and their others can be fruitfully distinguished and described with regard to their role in de/urbanization.

Narrativization: On a daily basis we can observe how acts of storytelling with their discursive and elocutionary conventions catalyze the popularity of certain cities or parts of a city as much as they propel the economic and social decline of others (Berking and Löw). This new emphasis on narrativization recycles a potentially self-contradictory research logic that Thomas Gieryn has critiqued in "Cities as Truth Spots." Ever since the work of the Chicago School of urban sociology in the early twentieth century, cities have been studied with methods that address a specific place as both a clean, hermetically controlled laboratory and a messy, uncontrollable field site. The latter methodology is particularly important in research on the intrinsic logic

⁹ For the concepts of archive and repertoire, see Taylor; for the *terranglia*, see Prielznitz.

of cities, where daily routines, habits, and collective practices, local forms of knowledge and expression and their underlying social networks are at the center of attention (Frank et al.). Simultaneously, urban planners are employing stories to market new urban designs to the population of the quarter undergoing reconstruction (Eckstein and Throgmorton; Sandercock). These methodological innovations promise a better grip on dynamics of upward and downward mobility and forms of spatial disintegration and discrimination.

But as narratology knows, stories matter in more complicated ways on a continent that was measured through narratives and the ensuing normalizing scripts as well as norm-producing scriptures, even as it was subjected to an extended and complex history of deliberately gridding settlements onto landscapes and grafting new forms of *culture* onto indigenous patterns of land use and possession. In North America, condensing stories of cities upon hills, of wilderness struggles and bush citizenship have profoundly shaped the fields of urban and rural planning and design; they can also be traced in political concepts of an urbanity that sought to distinguish itself from European models of class-, faith- and education-based ideals of urban manners and habits. These narratives ostensibly promoted anti-urbanism as the only good way of life, but as the 2016 US presidential campaign between two inimical urbanites amply demonstrated, they are powerfully at work in the political and ideational conceptualization of American cities. These mythical stories have been criticized often in American Studies scholarship, but they can neither be deleted nor can they be overwritten easily. Given a history of colonization, imperial competition, and post-empire trajectories in which port cities have served as the most important spaces of transit, transfer, and change, a very concrete economic and political logic is involved in the traditional narrative about the modern city as "the dominant theme in political legends," in which it serves "as a totalizing and almost mythical landmark for socio-economic and political strategies" (de Certeau 95). In the future, urban research will need to account more fully for the specific functions and effects of specific plotlines, for the strictures of narrative formula, as much as for the multiple feedback loops of stories and their nevertheless extensive ambition to comment on present and past events and to shape future social interactions—and who but literary and cultural scholars should develop such an urban narratology?

Mediation: Similarly, forms and structures of (re- as well as pre-) mediation with their community-building and -restraining logics of communication among strangers are erasing the differences between city and countryside, even as they celebrate the urban realm as the perfect location for the kind of mediation that embodies social transformation because it permeates traditional political and cultural institutions as much as social

movements.¹⁰ Urban sociologists have expanded on Richard Florida's shockingly simplistic but influential notion of the creative city and on the technology-driven label of the *smart city* by investigating a broad range of issues such as the link between Internet access and economic status (as in Robert Sampson's research on Chicago in *The Great American City*, 2014), the political and legal impact of deterritorialized media infrastructure (as discussed in Keller Easterling's *Extrastatecraft*, 2016), concerns for the loss of community and history through mediated forms of commemoration and musealization (Huysen), or the degree of censorship and control exercised in cities in which the public and the private realm are media-saturated. While cities begin to brand their commercial centers as media cities, often reframing consumption as participation and community engagement (e.g. Leipzig or Dubai), media scholars have drawn attention to the layers of simulation, anticipation, and premediation that envelop the built environment and political constituents alike (e.g. Mattern). When projects such as *Venture for America* use social media to craft and spread their mission of revitalization, calling out to young urban professionals to come to Detroit as new venture capitalists, Richard Grusin's recent observations on the new anticipatory and premeditated function of the media seem to apply.¹¹ If, as Fabler has argued, "urban developments are historically inseparable from media evolutions" (21, our translation), and if research is to go beyond providing purely instrumental "how to" toolboxes for urban imagineers and boosters, the specific competence of American cultural studies may well be called for.

Scripting: Modes of scripting with their rules of encoding and decoding initiate various sets of actions, but there is as yet too little insight into how they have affected cities in distinct historical and regional settings. Most urban researchers use the concept of the script either in the specific sense of a film script that organizes the cinematic action and conversation or in terms of a computer script that implements a rule-driven technological language. Generally speaking, the idea of the script is used to think of regulations that are communally binding and restricting, but that serve to build a widely shared consensus on possible styles of interpretation. To speak of scripting is to insinuate a high degree of predictive reliability, even a strong sense of determinism. Closer attention to detailed textual processes can show how scribal agency and modes of scripting are usually bound rather strictly by legal codes which regulate the underlying obligations and rights (Ott, Sauer,

¹⁰ For an exemplary case, see the projects introduced in the June 15, 2016 special issue on "The Future of Cities" in *Guernica / A Magazine of Art & Politics*.

¹¹ The *Venture for America* website explains that it is "a fellowship program for recent grads who want to learn how to build a business while making an impact. VFA Fellows get training and join a startup in US cities with emerging startup ecosystems, where they learn hands-on what it takes to build a company and become a successful entrepreneur."

and Meier). Their products should not only be studied for their informational content, but also for their authorizing functions.

A formidable case of scripting can be studied in the call of architect Vishaan Chakrabarti for a *country of cities*, a thoroughly urbanized nation that is nevertheless resonating with Steven Conn's sense of a nationally defining "anti-urbanism" (3). Chakrabarti envisions cities that work like updated global villages: they are walkable, feature many micro-centers, and are vitalized by a multiplied creative class; metropolises that feel like country towns unite the shaken old dream of nature's nation with the new uncertain longing for a cosmopolis. As Chakrabarti notes in a language that recalls the *Charter of the New Urbanism* (1999), one of the most influential American urban design movements:

The cosmopolis demands an ecological network of empowered citizens, generous buildings, discursive public space, a thriving natural environment, and an infrastructure of opportunity. True cities—as opposed to the vertical suburbs often mistaken for cities globally today—are built upon a well-designed set of networks, be they social networks, street networks, public space networks, or the extensive network of space, materials and systems that constitute architecture. Such networks provide the social glue that differentiates the cosmopolis from the mere metropolis, and bring us the collisions of joy, exuberance, exasperation and surprise we experience as dwellers of the city. ("Profile")

This advent of a flat, horizontally organized, networking American country of cities is to demarcate the ultimate erosion of the liminal space between the country and the city as two famous places of belonging.¹² Scripting the demise of an established socio-spatial order, Chakrabarti here also turns the formerly identitarian country/city divide into the cradle of a strongly ruralized urbanity in which the best metropolis is the one that is disappearing in the bush—*eine Großstadt im Gebüsch*.¹³

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¹² V. Gordon Childe's 1950 typology of the transition to a thoroughly urbanized society thus seems to be complete, while Henri Lefebvre's 1970 critique of the capitalist logic driving twentieth-century urbanization continues to be valid.

¹³ For a discussion of a German version of this kind of urban change, in which industrial, postindustrial, urban and rural landscapes and lifestyles are overlapping and mingling, see Landmack, Reicher, and Davy. The Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen (WBGU), a national scientific consortium advising German governmental institutions on the state and national level, speaks of the Ruhr Area as a "post-mining model region" ("postmontane Modellregion," WBGU 297). In this model region, an anthropogenic deindustrializing regional landscape created by coal mining and steel production is transformed into a flat, expansive greening polycentric metropolitan city that is reindustrialized by the 'internet of things,' the 'creative industry,' 'urban agriculture,' sustainable enterprises, and green/wildlife tourism (WBGU 278-97).

To conclude, we search for a better understanding of how narrative acts, generic formulae, medial forms and structures, and scriptural modes affect distinguishable urban, rural, and anti-urban imaginaries, economies, and infrastructures. How does the convergence of narrativization, mediation and scripting contribute to assemblages in which the urban and its others are equally functional and influential? How do these traditional objects of literary, cultural, and historical studies stimulate the collectivities that dwell in cities and the countryside? As literary and cultural scholars with interests in narratology, media change, and figuration we believe that these acts, genres, forms, and modes deserve sustained *disciplinary* attention. The consensus about the social production of the city and its wilderness companion too often includes either an inaccurate genre-based division of labor in which literature proper writes from below while urban planning determines change from above, or a purely instrumental understanding of literature as a tool of persuasion in planning and (re-)branding efforts. Expanding Andreas Huyssen's argument about the social and political functions of literary memory, we want to keep in mind that narrative, media, and scripting live "off repetitions, reinscriptions, and rewritings" which disable all straightforward instrumentalizations, since their "relationship . . . to politics and history is not captured by the notion of political turns or new beginnings, nor is it adequately discussed in the notion of an autonomy of the aesthetic sphere" (Huyssen 156). Throughout history, innovative media, new styles of narrative, a plethora of old and new texts, but also regulatory scripts as well as convention-bound scriptures have fostered the formation of countless social movements and planning initiatives (Donald Trump's "movement" included) and we are only beginning to understand how they have, quite literally, changed the ritualized ways in which cities and countrysides are managed and (re)built.

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