



Scenescapes: how qualities of place shape social life

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BOOK REVIEWS

Scenescapes: how qualities of place shape social life, by Daniel Aaron Silver and Terry Nichols Clark, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016, 441 pp., £ 26 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-226-35699-0

In *Scenescapes* Daniel Aaron Silver and Terry Nichols Clark have set an ambitious goal. The book seeks to analytically capture the complexity of the way in which concrete localities shape different social, cultural and economic lives; they want to trace how spatial diversity has produced social differences across the USA. Moreover, this analytical account of the impact of place on society is supposed to help decision makers. It is difficult to act upon an ephemeral phenomenon like society, but one can act upon concrete localities, and the authors want this study to be used by policy makers to improve people's lives.

The spatial mapping of social and cultural diversity is a method that is at least two centuries old. Silver and Clark, however, introduce a fair amount of complexity in their analysis: their study is based on a large body of previously unused data on amenities, drawn from the US census and zip code business listings, as well as the yellow pages. This data, aggregated and sorted into spatial and typological categories, helps the authors to glimpse the distribution of different American cultural lifestyles as they intersect with social and economic characteristics. The conceptual challenge is to measure the social effects of the physical proximity of different cultural amenities. The spatial approach that is presented in the book is contrasted with existing atomising approaches that follow a particular cultural phenomenon in relation to a trend, e.g. craft beer. This approach reminds us that the spatial and relational analysis of business was popularized by Theodore Porter, who proposed the term 'cluster'. However, the authors propose the concept of 'scene' as offering a more inclusive and intellectually open approach. According to the authors, 'scene' also lends itself better to large-scale studies and possibly international comparisons.

The rationale of *Scenescapes* is to advance the frontier of social scientific knowledge of the ways in which culture and the arts matter in social life. The authors seek to bridge qualitative and quantitative research by creating a new methodology and a new data set. This study mounts a critique of influential approaches, but also of some of the dogmas, that the authors see as characterising cultural sociology. The authors are particularly critical of the idea that cultural consumption is determined by social structure, that is, by the economic and social capital that is available to actors. They question Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and reject outright the application of Thorsten Veblen's thesis of the elite's conspicuous consumption to the life of contemporary Americans, as they find no empirical evidence to demonstrate that the variation of scenes is linked to inequality of income (377). It is important to note that this critique is based on a new methodology that generates new type of data: according to Silver and Clark, both Bourdieu and Veblen ignored the role of materiality and space in the distribution of cultural choices and, subsequently, in their social and economic effects. Bourdieu conceptualized cultural practices as socially conditioned but individually expressed forms of taste. In contrast, Silver and Clark argue that cultural practices of taste are better understood as ecological phenomena (178). However, one can make an obvious counterargument that people select the physical localities where they live on the basis of their cultural, economic and social capital. This said, some of the findings are indeed interesting and counterintuitive. They suggest that it is worthwhile reassessing the explanatory power of the cultural capital model versus the spatial and practice (scene) model. Whereas cultural capital is carried by the individual, scenes are necessarily collective and spatial, constituted not so much by identities, but by a combination of infrastructures and practices. In this way, the book

presents an intriguing combination of theoretical discussion and concrete case studies. The data is presented in a way that is fairly accessible, even to non-specialists. A thorough methodological discussion is presented in the final chapter.

How is the term scene different from other concepts used to map cultural and creative activities? The authors argue that scene captures much better the nuanced and highly interactive, relational character of socially meaningful and significant places than hierarchical and structuralist concepts of culture. 'Scene' can refer to a 'shared interest in a specific activity: the "jazz scene", the "mountain climbing scene",' or to specific places, 'the Nashville scene' (1). An important aspect of 'scene' is that this concept captures not so much types of industries or cultural entities, but people's behavioural reactions. For example, people can coordinate their behaviour on the basis of 'scenes', they can recognise the scenes and differentiate between them and, finally, scenes appear to matter to channelling social and economic success (2). Examples of different scenes include jazz and classical music concerts, different urban neighbourhoods, restaurant scenes or shopping malls. The diversity of such scenes, one would think, is almost inexhaustible. Scenes are also embedded in both stable infrastructures, amenities and social processes. They are felt and embodied by the actors involved, rather than consciously designed like clusters. There are lots of qualitative studies that revealed the fluid character of scenes, like Elizabeth Currid's *The Warhol Economy* (2008). According to the authors 'the concept of scene nicely directs our focus not at "common values" or "ways of life" hermetically sealed from "other cultures" but rather at multiple, loosely binding, more flexible arrays of local meanings,' and, importantly, 'people can choose to enter or leave different scenes; scenes facilitate more choices than "primordial" characteristics like race, class, national origin, and gender' (31). This is a particularly stimulating argument that deserves wide attention.

Defined in this way, scene does emerge as an attractive concept that could potentially be useful for analysing highly transient and heterogeneous yet distinct cultural assemblages. The question, then, is whether scenes can be studied from a macro perspective and with quantitative methods? The authors think that this is possible. They classified existing data on the types of amenities (coffee shops, yoga studios, equestrian clubs, tattoo parlours, art galleries, museums, car garages, and so on) and mapped them across the United States, creating a 'periodic table of cultural elements' (20). Amenities are considered important because they express social and cultural choices and at the same time have a fairly clear economic value attached to them (33). Amenities are scored on the values that they embody, e.g. local, ethnic, glamorous, exhibitionistic or traditionalistic (in all, 15 values are identified). The clustering of amenities is then linked to wholistic categories that classify scenes, such as, for instance, Disney Heaven and Cool Cosmopolitanism.

There are some interesting arguments offered in the book, such as that concerning the relational and spatial character of economic growth, where different types of scenes are linked to different types of economic development (134 and onwards). Some interesting findings are also revealed, for instance, the fact that race and class define only 10% of cultural choice, where the remaining choices can probably be explained by the scene, the effect of presence of a range of amenities and proximities. There is a link between different types of scenes and employment: for example, cultural and art jobs show strong growth and the ability to create further jobs, but this appears to be less evident in those areas which do not feature a culture-friendly scene, be they either well off and conservative or deprived. An important correction is proposed to the gentrification argument, that it is not universal but only applies to those urban areas where there is a germination of culture scenes (for instance, artists have not moved to Detroit to the expected extent). The authors introduce the term 'buzz' to refer to the circulation of a signal that something is happening in a particular locality; there is an expectation that 'buzz' might be a generator of employment and growth (231). A separate chapter analyses the link between types of scenes and political voting preferences. Chapter 7 is dedicated to policy implications; whereas it is difficult to fault suggestions to engage local populations in decisions and to invest public funds locally, this part somewhat ignores the opacity and organizational complexity of policy making processes, which, indeed, could also be analysed as consisting of scenes in their own right.

Scenescapes makes a strong intellectual, as well as a political argument and is a serious contender to occupy the intellectual gap that has emerged since Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) was undermined by both research and reality. The implementation of urban creative policies did not boost local economies as much as Florida's followers expected. Likewise, the book is written in a clear and lucid way; it directs its argument to policy entrepreneurs, and it is relevant for different fields of cultural research. It will be very useful as a textbook for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the sociology of culture, urban sociology, cultural planning and cultural policy. It is easy to agree with the authors that 'scenes inspire the human habitat with meaning' (175). However, it remains to be seen whether scenes could/should be amenable to governmental design.

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The disappearing product: marketing and markets in the creative industries, by Chris Bilton, Cheltenham and Massachusetts, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017, 272 pp., £30.00 (Paperback), £80.00(Hardback), ISBN: 978-1-78536-074-9 (Paperback)

Since the emergence of the 'creative industries' political discourse in 1998, there is a rise of academic attention in studying the structure and nature of commercialised cultural production across different academic disciplines. Unlike other literature which takes a socio-economic or political perspective, *The Disappearing Product* is a book that primarily focuses on the business environment and strategy in the creative industries today.

Chris Bilton, the author of this book, is a regarded expert in researching the nature of creativity and the creative industries from an organisational management perspective. His previous book publications include *Management and Creativity: from creative industries to creative management* (Blackwell's, 2007) and *Creative Strategy: Reconnecting Business and Innovation* (Wiley, 2010, co-author with Stephen Cummings). In this book, the author discusses a new approach of marketing in the creative industries that focus on the consumer *experience*. The argument of this book starts with his observation that content creators and their contents have been devalued and marginalised in creative industries nowadays, this is because of the growing influence of 'new intermediaries' (e.g. Google and Amazon) which they have replaced the old media gatekeepers (e.g. journalists). This structural change in the creative industries requires a new approach in marketing, so that artists and content producers can regain a higher degree of control on their work in the market. The 'disappearing product' is the term he chooses to describe this trend, that the value of the cultural product has been dispersed across a range of services, applications and experiences.

This book can be divided into two parts and nine chapters. In chapter 1, the author introduces the outline of the book, at the same time argues how marketing in the creative industries differs from marketing in other business sectors. He defines that the creative industries make products which convey meanings (e.g. idea, emotions, experience). These products are symbolic goods which value depends primarily on the subjective interpretation of meanings by consumers, and they are more symbolic than products in other business sectors. Therefore, affective and emotional connections with users are key elements in marketing in the creative industries.