
BOOK REVIEWS

Flavia Cangià (2013). *Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Cultures and Everyday Life In Contemporary Japan*, Lit Verlag

Another volume about minorities in Japan might seem a bit much at the present time, as the field has been well covered in recent years, and there is a large collection of rather detailed anthropological and ethnographic studies available for perusal. This book picks one of the less well covered peoples among those available, however, and the title is intriguing, for those who have been described as *burakumin*, or people of the *buraku*, have rather been portrayed as seeking to hide from, or politically to eliminate their classification as such. The introduction bodes well, then, for it offers a refreshing approach, suggesting a series of ways in which people who have been subjected to discrimination for their status are now finding a pride in the activities which characterize them, and moreover, are working hard to 'perform them' and convince others of their value. To explain further who these people are would go against the author's plea to complicate their definition, and allow their efforts to integrate themselves into the multiplicity of narratives of Japanese cultures, to be demonstrated through objects, images and the engagement of spaces of performance. I will pick instead then some characteristics of the book to describe.

First, the author does set out to introduce herself as an ethnographer in the field. This is a strength of the book, and it starts early on and continues through to the end, though sometimes in rather frustratingly short bursts. It includes personal accounts of the interactions she has with the main characters of the narratives, records in some detail important meetings and discussions they have, and describes activities which succeed in bringing the reader right into their lives. In fact the best ethnography comes in the last chapter, and it is worth waiting for, or cutting through to, for it portrays the lives of monkey trainers and leather tanning workers in a way that offers the most new and interesting part of the volume. Before that, it almost seems as though the writer is still nervous that she hasn't made enough reference to everyone else who has written things relevant to her discourse, and I felt that this sometimes detracted from the value of her own first-hand research.

For example, the second thing that the book does then is to provide very comprehensive coverage of previous work on every subject that seems to be related. This could be seen as a strength too for a reader who is coming to this field for the first time, and perhaps it will prove a stalwart volume for teaching about minority issues in Japan, but I found it a bit tedious. Since there is so much work already published about the history and political activities of those known as the *burakumin*, it seemed slightly to go against the initial aims of the book to rehearse them all again in quite so much detail. The

second part of the book is headed 'whose history, whose tradition?' and it also offers a good insight into the way in which the people with whom Cangia worked see themselves, and seek to portray their own traditions, eventually picking from some of the abundant historical accounts those that allow people to present their own lives and their importance for Japanese society generally. Here is where the real value of this section lies.

The third aspect of the book which must, I suppose, be mentioned, is that there is little related theory that has been left out. Quite a lot of this comes in the first section which is headed 'setting off into the field' and again, I found it distracted from what I personally wanted to read. For a thesis, this awareness of theory is a must, of course, and had it only been a demonstration of awareness, it could still have been carried forward, but I felt that the book could have happily cut down on the degree of reiteration of each of the theories recounted. Again, this could be seen as a strength, and again, it could perhaps be a teaching tool, for the theory is not, as far as I can tell, misrepresented, but it is tiresome for a reader coming at it for the umpteenth time.

This book has much to recommend it, then, and I enjoyed some parts of it immensely. Indeed, I hope that the writer will eventually build up the confidence to present her own work in the same appealing way that her closest informants are performing and presenting to the world at large the enormous importance of what they do

for the Japanese society of which they form a part.

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Brigit Obrist, Veit Arit and Elísio Macamo (eds) (2013). *Living The City In Africa. Processes of Invention and Intervention*. Zürich: Lit Verlag

This book is based on papers presented at a conference of the Europe African Group of Interdisciplinary Studies AEGIS held in October 2010 with an emphasis on the "...creative tension at the interface of processes of intervention and invention in the rapidly growing African cities." (p.6). The book consists of an Introduction, fourteen different chapters (covering a variety of topics pertaining to cities in southern, East and West Africa) and a Conclusion. There are twenty-nine contributors representing different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives addressing the characteristics of living the city in contemporary Africa and how to explain them.

The chapters are arranged around four major themes namely, urban politics, transnational urbanism, urban moves and urban creativity.

Urban politics:- Jo Beall examines urbanisation trends in Africa, the drivers and nature of African cities, the challenges to urban governance due to these dynamics and how to accommodate the existence, competition and collusion of multiple institutions in African cities so as to

determine the conditions giving rise to the institutional arrangements that can be aligned with the inventiveness of Africa's urbanites. Through individual agency and collective organisation, inclusive and effective institutions can be formalised as has happened in Durban (South Africa). Tom Goodfellow analyses the way of and motivation for government intervention in urban planning in two fairly similar East African countries (Rwanda and Uganda) and how the underlying political dynamics (political actors, incentives) and not the technical or formal governance arrangements, lead to the implementation or undermining of formal urban plans. Rasheed Olaniyi explores how the colonial segregation policy contributed to over-urbanisation characterised by overcrowding, poor sanitation, spreading of infectious diseases, unemployment, an overstressed social infrastructure and a very high crime rate in Sabongari (part of Kano) and how community leaders, accomplished merchants and residents, in pursuing their own vested interests in the city, thwarted the efforts of the colonial government to create the "healthy city". In contrast, African urban dwellers had their imagined ideal of an "African city" and by creating new social spaces based on rural/traditional and urban characteristics invented their own "city" in Sabongari. Joschka Philipps looks at how youth gangs in the axis (a strip of neighbourhoods in Conakry) actively responded to that specific urban context. Their political actions are strongly influenced by contextual factors

depending on the extent to which gangs actively relate to them. Thus, urban contexts provide certain resources and conditions which actors may employ, oppose and creatively reinterpret and do not cause or determine action mechanically. The urban youth gangs shape the meaning of their context while, at the same time, the context is influencing them.

Translocal urbanism:- Ola Söderström *et al.* look at the role of decentralised co-operation in recent strategies of the municipal administration in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and how translocal urbanism reshaped the city. Ercüment Çelik addresses how urban life in an African city is affected by strategic urban projects linked to a "mega-event" (FIFA 2010 World Cup) in Durban (South Africa). The modernist vision of the ideal post-industrialised city has led to an exclusionary approach towards the informal sector economic activities with a negative effect on the livelihoods of the urban poor. The reaction from local street traders was "reclaiming livelihoods" in a vision of "World Class Cities" indicating the importance of inclusive urban planning. Ulf Vierke and Nadine Siegert, looking at the representation of the city, analyse art as cultural practice in the urban life of Nairobi and Luanda where urban space and its imagination form a constitutive part of the local art worlds going beyond the art production itself. Political ideologies are engraved in the cultural memory of both countries and art is regarded as an essential part in a

process of '*re-membling*', linking the past, present and an unknown future.

Urban moves:- Jan Gerold gives prominence to the mobility patterns of first generation elderly people living the city in Dar es Salaam. 'Being on the move' involves physical mobility (actual travel), mediated mobility (virtual connectivity) and immaterial mobility (imagination) and all three are inter-linked and also extend to outside the city boundaries (even trans-nationally) whereby unanticipated possibilities can be taken advantage of and perceived vulnerability be counteracted. Ambivalence in their experience exists in that the village (real or imagined) is the place of belonging and not the rapidly changing city. Silje Erøy Sollien *et al.* analyse 'home space' (act of and physical space of dwelling) in Maputo to indicate how the concept of home is affected by and affects the physical environment in which people are dwelling. To understand home space means understanding the physical, social, economic, cultural and temporal sides of urban change in view of the new forms of urbanism that are emerging. Material aspects of home are results of social and cultural processes that are acting upon the site and architects require flexible interventions that involve the life worlds in places to be able to make relevant and sustainable interventions. Sandra Manuel focuses on middle-class and cosmopolitan young adults in Maputo to describe and explore the fluidness of gender identities and non-normative heterosexuality influenced by post-colonial notions of personhood.

Individual identities are constantly reshaped, however, masculine and feminine still remain strong principles that inform people's view of themselves as gendered. Valérie Liebs *et al.* describe how the work of herbalists is formed by Kinshasa and its urban context. The chances and constraints that they have to face as well as the strategies used by some in that context, leading to some herbalists dissociating their work from "traditional" herbalists (leaning towards biomedicine) whereas others associate their knowledge with "tradition" for the legitimisation of their skills and status enhancement of their work. Practices, spaces and objects from different contexts are borrowed to signify competence.

Urban creativity:- For Till Förster urbanity can take many forms and the visions that people may have about cities in Africa are therefore as manifold as urban life itself - inhabitants are influenced in ambiguous ways. In what way then do cities in Africa shape the inhabitants or the inhabitants shape the cities? Urban practices are regarded as to be still emerging while creativity does not necessarily blossom everywhere and in all cities in Africa, because creativity does not result from the heterogeneity of the urban but on the ability of the actors (agency and social practice). Fiona Siegenthaler focuses on artists who, through their own bodies and capacities of interaction, engage with the city of Johannesburg (South Africa). There is an interplay of the visible and invisible of social imaging and performance interventions play a specific role in the

analysis of, reflection on and influence on urban imaginaries. Joseph Hellweg and Sory Koutouma look at African urbanity by reading N'ko (an alphabet to write a mother tongue and a social formation) as an urban creativity that created 'social and cultural spaces that did not exist before'. N'ko being a means of discursive production that was meant to assist Africans in regulating the dynamics of encounter and distancing prevalent in African cities in the colonial and post-colonial contexts. N'ko practice gave rise to schools, bookstores and pharmacies with an alternative system of healing.

The book provides an interesting description of how people make sense of and adapt to the ambiguous urban environments that they find themselves in - often with much ingenuity and bearing in mind that the urban environments in Africa are quite variable. What is interesting is that in the process of adaptation there is often a fall-back to the "traditional" or known worlds for ideas and means and the way in which this knowledge is adapted to the new environment. As some of the contributors rightfully recommend this fusion of ideas and experiences should be used in planning or the reworking of urban spaces. It makes a highly readable contribution to the knowledge of urbanisation, urbanism and urbanity.

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Kokot, Waltraud (ed.) (2012) *Living and Working in Sofia: Ethnographies of Agency, Social Relations and Livelihood Strategies in the Capital of Bulgaria*. Münster: Lit.

Living and working in Sofia is the outcome of a University of Hamburg project led by Waltraud Kokot. Based on short-term fieldwork in the Bulgarian capital, these papers aim to contribute to the relatively neglected topic of urban anthropology in Bulgaria in order 'to add further aspects to the overall picture of Sofia's urban culture(s)' (p. 18) with an emphasis on 'diaspora and migration, post-socialist transformation, urban social networks and everyday economic strategies' (pp. 18-19). Indeed, this volume is one of the very few recent publications on Bulgaria which treat the urban space analytically (see Zlatkova 2012, Duizings 2013).

Kokot's Introduction to the volume provides a brief historical sketch of Sofia as an urban centre since Roman times and the Ottoman period, covering especially the 20th century's industrialisation and population rise through migration from the country's rural areas, the architectural development of residential districts during socialist times and the privatisation of formerly public space during the postsocialist period. Kokot also provides an interesting discussion of the methodology of this project, its educational character and its limitations. One has to take into account that the volume is the work of undergraduate students involved in a project intended to introduce them to fieldwork methods

in anthropology. After a preparatory academic year in Hamburg, where students studied urban anthropology, Bulgarian literature and basic Bulgarian language skills, they conducted six weeks of fieldwork in Sofia. Along with qualitative research for each individual project, the authors gathered information on urban social networks and demography. The papers in the volume focus on social networks related to a profession (Kern, Harms, Wewer) or to specific workplaces (Kunze, Kleinknecht) and activities (Höpfner, Raduychev). The chapters focus mainly on practices related to Sofia's young generation; especially professionals and artists who had attended university. While Sofia's working class and older generations are less discussed in the volume, the economic insecurities and survival strategies of the young educated generation of the Bulgarian capital are portrayed in most of the ethnographies (Kern, Kleinknecht, Harms, Wewer).

Three papers address different communities of artists. Kern describes Russian-speaking dancers and explores their relationships with the Russian diaspora in Sofia and with a broader community of dancers in the city and their economic strategies in the face of economic insecurity and unemployment, and suggests that inter-ethnic relationships with colleagues are more important than those with fellow Russians. Harm's vivid ethnography explores the art scene in the city by following the spatial paths that artists take, such as the areas where they have their studios and the cafes that they

patronise. She further focuses on the artists' livelihood strategies and draws connections between their economic precariousness and the difficulties of contemporary art production. Wewer's paper describes artists of a different sort, street musicians, who often are Roma and whose activities have been controlled by the state since socialist times. Wewer explores the ways in which musicians relate to public space and to their audiences, as well as their relationships with the state and the fact that they often are stigmatised.

The experience of work is the focus of Kleinknecht's comparative research in two cafes, approached as places of work and socialising. One is a small, neighbourhood cafe run by a family at the outskirts of Sofia, the other is a larger one in the city centre. Kleinknecht explores differences between these different businesses and their daily rhythms and work routines, focusing on the division of labour, the relationships and hierarchies among workers, the ways in which workers spend their daily time and organise their schedule and their relationships with clients and regulars.

New forms of political participation are discussed in the papers on a women's NGO (Kunze) and on environmental activists belonging to various organisations (Höpfner). Kunze's interesting ethnography explores the resources that support the operation of the NGO and describes the history of the organisation, the participants' role and the role of friendship and relationships among the employees. Höpfner's presents an

overview of environmental activism in Bulgaria exploring the notion of trust and the role of social networks in the development of these organisations.

Raduychiev's paper on a yoga group analyses people's participation in the activity and their relationships as they become core group members, less regular members and sporadic members. Raduychiev describes how those who move closer to the core group establish relationships with other members, with whom they share spiritual experiences and lifestyles, while often their relationships with those outside the group get weaker.

All the chapters focus on the ways people with a common activity or group membership relate to each other and on how urban networks are developed and maintained. It would have been helpful for the reader to have more information about the methodology used to study those networks. Moreover, while most papers present a variety of interesting qualitative data, there is also a tendency to go beyond what the data will support, and indulge in unwarranted generalisation and quantification. Finally, although each paper discusses the methods used, it would have been interesting to know more on the experience of doing fieldwork, which would help other young researchers who are preparing their projects.

What one misses in this collection on urban life in Sofia is a discussion of the permeability of the boundary between urban and rural life in Bulgaria and the different economic strategies that are common and interconnected in each realm (Creed 1998, Dichev 2005,

Kaneff 2002). People's links with the countryside did not disappear during socialist times, and often they became stronger after the 1990s. Although Kokot discusses rural migration to the city, such links are not pursued in this collection even though they are commonly important for understanding urban life.

Living and working in Sofia is a collection of ethnographies about changing social networks and peoples' daily strategies in relation to employment, art, activism and leisure in an urban context. The volume is the result of a students' team project with common themes, methods and approaches that speak to each other. The project has been a success, for, as Kokot mentions, many of the authors are going back for more fieldwork in Bulgaria.

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Astrid Wonneberger (ed.). 2011. *Cultural Contrasts in Dublin: A Montage of Ethnographic Studies.* Germany: Lit Verlag

A rich anthropology of the island of Ireland exists. However, much of this earlier anthropological work was produced in the context of a rural, sometimes 'exoticised' Ireland. *Cultural Contrasts in Dublin: A Montage of Ethnographic Studies* edited by Astrid Wonneberger is a delightful collection of essays which challenges a number of the extant tropes in erstwhile ethnographies of Ireland. What makes this book all the more interesting is its origination in a Masters level fieldwork assignment, where students make an annual trip to conduct anthropological fieldwork on the island of Ireland. Striking about this study is the careful methodological apparatus deployed alongside such beautiful crafting of the student's ethnographic encounters. This collection is firmly embedded in an urban anthropology, one which seeks to evince the depth of the anthropological encounter in contexts as varied as the

Polish Catholic Church, the Hindu community, the Homeless community, and Irish pagans. Most of the research is set in Dublin in 2006, where the Celtic Tiger wrought great change. It is a book that sets about making a contribution to a new anthropology of Ireland, one which follows Curtin, Donnan, and Wilson's (1993) call for a critical engagement with urban culture on the island of Ireland.

Since the global economic recession in 2008, change and loss has figured large in the Irish imaginary. With widespread unemployment, emigration, an increase in crime and a decline in mental health statistics, Ireland as a country in crisis has become deeply anchored in discourses of loss, failure and indeed, nostalgia. Published in 2011, just after the economic recession had set in, this book shines a lens on how urban culture in Ireland has been so subject to the vagaries of economic change. While a general sense of disenchantment and malaise is also part of the current zeitgeist, anchored in a broader crisis of faith, identity, and community, this book shows how during the period of the Celtic Tiger inward migration and new religious dynamics played an important part in the shaping of Irish society. This project ultimately focuses on the potentialities of acknowledging urban socio-cultural shifts as a productive force in society more broadly.

The introduction to the text sets out both the history of Dublin, the Celtic Tiger as well as the story of how an anthropology of urban Ireland has

started to gain momentum. The book flags many interesting studies on urban Ireland in order to mark out this important terrain. While all of the studies merit mention, the book, however, does not connect to the reach body of anthropological work which has emerged on urban spaces from anthropology departments like Queens University Belfast and NUI Maynooth. Given the focus on both migration and homelessness in a Dublin context, mention of studies by Mark Maguire on migration in Dublin and Jamie Saris on urban poverty and drug addiction in Dublin are noticeably absent. What the book cannot capture since it was published in 2011, are the advancements in the use of anthropology in industry contexts in Ireland. Currently, we are seeing much wider acknowledgement of the use of anthropology within business and user design contexts, yet another shift for an anthropology of Ireland. Nonetheless, the collection provides an important snapshot of a very interesting moment in both Irish history and more broadly, the anthropology of Ireland.

Divided into an introductory section and four chapters, this short book offers an interesting level of diversity for the reader. The first chapter by Angela Pohlmann entitled ‘Polish Spaces in Polish Irish Places: The Polish Dominican Community in Dublin,’ documents the rise of Polish of migration in Ireland and the issue of transnationalism through the lens of the Polish Catholic church in Dublin. Well written and researched, it is an important examination of Polish social

spaces in Irish society. While much has been written about the Polish diaspora in Ireland, this essay is driven by a nuanced reading of how transnational practices are in fact situationally shaped. Anna Eisenberg brings us from Polish migrants to the Hindu religious community in Dublin in a chapter entitled, ‘Diaspora and Religion: Hindus in Dublin City.’ This innovative and evocative piece draws our attention to the history and development of the Hindu community in Dublin (of which there is a dearth of scholarly work), alongside an attempt to theorise whether Hindus in Dublin can truly be considered a diasporic community. Eisenberg achieves both of her objectives in an impressive unpacking of how the Hindu community is constituted. From the Hindu community, we move to a subtle and poignant piece on homelessness in Dublin during Celtic Tiger Ireland by Katja Wilkeneit. Entitled, ‘Breaking the Day up: Homeless Peoples Strategies to Adopt Urban Public Space,’ Wilkeneit engages with the notion of cultural knowledge in the lives of Dublin’s homeless population. This is a much welcome study in an age where great disparity emerged in Irish society. With the focus on a fast-moving economy, Ireland’s most vulnerable citizens were often ignored; this piece convinces us of the need to do more, particularly in the context of the economic crash. The final essay by Kerstin Kuster entitled, ‘“Walking between Worlds: Irish Paganism in Dublin”’ brings fresh analysis to bear on the religious dynamics of Irish society. It is an

interesting, ethnographically engaged piece, which offers real insight into the world of Irish paganism in a post-Catholic context. Together, through an ethnographic engagement with the lived experience of urban change during the Celtic Tiger, the essays impress upon us how the intersections of migration, religious dynamism, and economic disparity created a new Ireland.

This collection of essays came about after what are comparably short stints of fieldwork. What is most welcome then about these essays is the ethnographic depth and intellectual insights they offer up. *Cultural Contrasts in Dublin* is not alone a lovely read, but is, undoubtedly, a book which makes an important contribution to a now radically different anthropology of Ireland.

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Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Sharon Zukin is a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her latest book, *Naked City*, is the result of a series of works devoted to the culture of cities (Zukin 1982 [1989], 1991, 1995 and 2004). In *Naked City*, she develops a conversation with Jane Jacobs' (1916-2006) seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). This book was highly critical of urban policies of wholesale

slum clearance and highway development. Jacobs sought to preserve the simple qualities of diverse local urban life, especially for pedestrians. Zukin agrees with Jacobs' intellectual and environmental sensibilities and suggests that the city has 'lost its soul'. In the present day, reinvestment in cities is taking place, suburbanites are returning to spaces they had abandoned, and industrial buildings are being retrofitted for residential uses. These economic dynamics also have a powerful cultural dimension.

Zukin links this urban transformation to the emergence of middle-class gentrifiers who seek authenticity by sinking their roots into particular, culturally rich, neighborhoods. She explored this broad issue by focusing on the concept of authenticity, which raises some questions: Is the idea of authenticity only a tool preserving a city's elite cultures? Can it be used to ensure everyone has right to stay in the place where they live and work? What do educated urbanities see as 'authentic' in urban life? — aging buildings, art galleries, small boutiques, upscale food markets, neighbourhood old-timers, funky ethnic restaurants, old family owned shops? The sense of a place's authenticity is contrasted to the bland standardization of the suburbs and exurbs. But this demand for space also led to a rise in real estate prices and, consequently, the eviction of the social groups that made the 'authentic' atmosphere of the neighbourhood: immigrants, working-class residents, and artists. Like Jacobs, Zukin looks at

what gives neighbourhoods a sense of place, but argues that over time, neighbourhood distinctiveness has become a tool used by economic elites to drive up real estate values. The result is that the neighbourhood 'characters' that Jacobs so evocatively idealized are pushed out. She also examines the role of local government in providing security for the authentic city. From the privatization of public spaces (such as Union Square Park and the new Harlem renaissance) these operations attract the white middle-classes into onetime ghettos, thereby redefining many once marginal New York City neighbourhoods.

Zukin examined authenticity in New York City in six chapters, six stories: Williamsburg (Brooklyn), Harlem, the East Village, Union Square, Red Hook (Brooklyn), and a community garden in East New York. In each chapter Zukin describes the feeling of the neighbourhood, gives historical context to the place, and then portrays the place as real, not abstract, with a history, and as active and changing places of interest. Zukin portrays a sociological tour of New York; a story of gentrification through the collective memory of the city. Thus, she raises the question of the history of the transformation of cities as reported by residents, businesses and governments. These snapshots of the city touch on the ways various neighbourhoods change: such as the role of artists and media in defining areas as 'cool'. She underlines the impact of digital media, food, and shopping. Zukin notes that many bloggers reside in Brooklyn

neighbourhoods that have experienced the most transformations in recent years. She underlines the role of food culture (healthy and tasty). She describes restaurants and stores which people prefer to patronize. According to Zukin, 'Authenticity' is the main thread running through all her observations in the city. Consumption is also elevated over everything else in terms of how we interact with the city. But authenticity may not be the solution to urban transformations that privilege some groups over others.

For a Parisian sociologist, the narrative that Sharon Zukin offers presents interesting similarities with New York. Indeed, as noted by Simmel (1900), an urbanite is par excellence foreign, rootless and without strong attachments. As shown thirty years later by the Chicago School of sociology and anthropology, no urban district is exempt from the phenomena of invasion or succession of people who change local society. Paris is no exception to this rule and we have neighbourhoods that have become 'gritty' with restaurants serving 'nouvelle cuisine', old rehabilitated buildings, terraces and pedestrian streets, and increasingly higher real estate prices. However, we cannot uncritically translate American urban analyses to the French situation. For example, in the Goutte d'Or Parisian popular neighbourhood I studied, gentrification has not evolved on a landlocked urban desert: there are jobs, businesses and governments that have not been erased from the common scene. A large part of the local population belongs to the working class,

and it still has a large number of foreign nationals. One reason for this resistance to gentrification is the social housing built by the city of Paris. The other major reason is that even when residential gentrification takes place, there is strong resistance to commercial gentrification because the non-gentrifiers who live in the neighbourhood continue to frequent the local shops. Thus, on the one hand in gentrifying neighbourhoods we see the influx of wide variety of middle class residents experiencing the flexibility of employment, teachers, artists, as well as heirs of wealthy families. On the other hand, we observe how the poorest resist, and try to stay in the core of the city. What Zukin shows as to gentrification in New York City has much in common with the Parisian scene. Thanks to her insightful work, it is possible to make a comparative study of gentrification, and consolidate the scholarship on how cities are being transformed in XXI century. For this enterprise Sharon Zukin's *Naked City* is fundamental.

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