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Review of Cities by Design, by Fran Tonkiss

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up, to perform in public, and to experience solidarity in the face of racism. Because those who attend such churches often come to them through family rather than neighborhood ties, the artistic talents on display can come to the attention of better-connected audiences than are found in the neighborhood. “These inconspicuous small storefront churches contribute to life on the Avenue by providing a social and psychological safety net for those who find themselves without one” (p. 158). In that way bonding social capital augments the welfare of the city.

Although there are no longer any Catholic churches directly on the avenue, chapter 6 highlights two congregations that embrace a sense of responsibility for the neighborhood similar to the Catholic “parish” concept. Both are Muslim mosques, one predominantly African-American and the other predominantly Palestinian, each of which recycled formerly commercial properties (a furniture store and a furniture warehouse). The rehabilitation of these derelict buildings and the business brought to the street by the mosques’ activities were factors in the decline of crime in both neighborhoods.

As rich as Day’s quantitative and qualitative data are, no book of this size could offer a definitive answer to the question she addresses: What do religious institutions contribute? Nonetheless, her framing of the answer establishes new terms for debate and discussion.

Cities by Design: The Social Life of Urban Form. By Fran Tonkiss. Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2014. Pp. vi+204. \$24.95.

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For those who study urban planning and design from a sociological perspective and dialogue between the two fields in their work, the limited cross-pollination of ideas, terminologies, and foundational theories between disciplines is a routine source of bemusement and frustration. In *Cities by Design: The Social Life of Urban Form*, Fran Tonkiss takes a step in the right direction with a robust review of the state of contemporary global urbanism. She brings to the fore a wealth of research from design, planning, and development studies and offers for her own part a compelling view of urban form and place making that complicates common assumptions—in sociology and planning alike—about the nature of cities in the 21st century.

Taking the influential 20th-century planner Kevin Lynch as a sort of Virgil in her tour of urban planning’s goods and evils, Tonkiss proceeds through chapters on themes of morphology, inequality, informality, environment, and infrastructure. In each, she provides a review of literature

that many social scientists would do well to be more familiar with (though her language is not necessarily any less specialized). That said, there are no new empirical findings here; Tonkiss is largely restating ideas that are known to urban studies, at least in pieces. In other words, while theoretically generative, the book's contribution is essentially its comprehensive and thoughtful assemblage of the existing corpus of urban research. Yet the real achievement here is the *sociologizing* of it: Tonkiss shows us how every aspect of urban form and life being studied is made by individuals and their everyday actions, and she makes the connection to sociology explicit where she can.

She begins the tour, for instance, with Louis Wirth, taking up his project of *Urbanism as a Way of Life* by focusing on size, density, and heterogeneity as (still) the fundamental elements of understanding urban morphology. In doing so, Tonkiss offers a persuasive—if not overly rousing—defense of the continuing value of human ecology in urban studies. Wirth notwithstanding, it is chapter 3 that may be of greatest immediate interest to the “average American sociologist,” with a substantial focus on inequality in U.S. cities (as well as some valuable global perspective for comparison). A noteworthy aspect of Tonkiss's framing is her emphasis on how much urban inequality and segregation are consequences of the increase and concentration of wealth in cities and, by extension, subject to the shifting tastes of elites.

The strongest and most important contributions of the book, however—and, one gathers, where Tonkiss's passions lie—are its sections on informality (beginning in chap. 4) and its implications for ecology, mobility, and infrastructure. The review of research on informal urbanism globally is valuable simply in summarizing this incohesive literature (much of it from planning theory and development studies). But Tonkiss also assembles her review to make an important argument about the very centrality of informality to the urban condition. Informality (of economies, labor, settlement, and design) is not only a subsistence tactic of the marginalized, but “a core means of ordering urban processes at quite different scales of income and urban power” (p. 111), including frequently by elites. “Planning and design for informality,” she rightly declares, “is one of the critical challenges for contemporary urbanism” (p. 112).

The remaining chapters build from this assertion, engaging better-known contemporary discourses on urban environmental concerns, mobility, and infrastructure. In chapter 5, Tonkiss argues crucially that, even more than the feats of planning and engineering that will be required, the hardest part of addressing the challenges of the urban environment may be the intangible complexities of human behavior. Combining observations of Lewis Mumford with contemporary analysis, Tonkiss paints a disconcerting picture of the almost-inevitable tragedy of “technology, design, and behavior”

producing devastating environmental conditions (p. 129). Her claim here may be a little heavy-handed—behavior is an essential element, yes, but is by her own description still influenced and constrained by options technology and policy make available. Nonetheless, the hope that things like mass transit usage can be malleable cultural factors is worthy of much more research beyond what the literature she reviews currently has to offer.

The chapter on infrastructure itself initially feels disjointed, with pages of stand-alone literature review and definition work on a famously dry topic. Yet if this impression leads the disinterested to flip past these pages, it would be too bad for the author and her readers. For Tonkiss ultimately uses the discussion of infrastructure as a test case for demonstrating how the various propositions of earlier chapters play out in very real ways. Among other things, infrastructure is a fundamental concern of informality, a frustration of market-based development, and a persistent cry for the continuing importance of the state. She illustrates the centrality of informality in particular in describing the “human infrastructure” composed of myriad informal actors: garbage scavengers who help “sort, remove, and recycle waste,” Mumbai’s *dabbawalas* who distribute “up to 200,000 lunch boxes across the city six days per week,” and the informal transportation networks ubiquitous in the global North and South alike (p. 154). (It’s too bad that Silicon Valley’s “tech buses” only began causing controversy in San Francisco as the book went to press—they provide a complicating case.) And then, in recognizing how important state leadership can and must be in environmental resilience and infrastructure provision, Tonkiss narrowly avoids celebrating the informal a little too much at the expense of the (also “ordinary” and “everyday”) triumphs of the good old democratic planning process.

In the end, it is hard to say whether *Cities by Design* is (or wants to be) a work of urbanism theory itself. At its heart the book is simply a sweeping and insightfully assembled literature review, not unlike an especially sophisticated and eloquent textbook. Yet important, even fundamental, questions for sociology are raised by the revelations and connections that Tonkiss makes. In this way, clichéd as it is to say, her book is perhaps best understood as a call to action, or at least a call to additional thought and research. If Tonkiss has an agenda beyond emphasizing that urban design is a populist project, it is that we need not only to plan for informality but fight for it as well. At scale, the fact that everyone is at work making the city would seem to bode well for democracy. But there is little in that vision to guarantee access or mediate between the interests of the powerful and the interests of those without. “If one is to defend a notion of meaningful, substantive citizenship,” Tonkiss concludes, “then one must also secure and defend the spaces in which it becomes possible” (p. 175).