

## World Cities and Second Cities: Imagining Growth and Hybridity in Modern Literature

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### ON THE CONCEPT OF “SECOND CITY”

#### *World Cities and Other Cities*

In an essay dating from 1999, Paul Nizon, a famous Swiss writer of autobiographical fiction who has lived for decades in Paris, described what made the city different from places that were not as big or great, such as regional metropolises, provincial cities, and small towns. In order to make his point, Nizon employed three criteria. Though he seems to classify them, somewhat fussily, as belonging respectively to the material, the social and the cultural spheres, I will label the criteria differently as size, aura and influence.

In Nizon’s view, a city must possess magnitude and immensity to deserve the name of world city. It must be a megalopolis, composed of an immense ocean of houses, factories and shops and able to astonish on a regular basis whatever observer with its swarms of innumerable permanent

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and occasional city-dwellers. This physical magnitude, Nizon adds, goes hand in hand with a series of economic and cultural factors. The excessiveness manifests itself in both an endless offer of labour and market activities, and a series of extravagances in the sphere of fashion and cultural habits. A world city must be able, at all times, to guarantee a magnificent display of pomp and circumstance, and should always exude prosperity.

Of equal importance as this visible, “denotative” magnitude, is its “connotative” aspect, its aura. A world city must invariably conjure up the idea that it is *Weltbedeutend*, of world importance. It displays exceptional human achievements and its talented sons and daughters must be representative of what the modern world has to offer. Similarly, its architecture must be unique. Thanks to such associative action, Paris, over the course of many centuries, has become world history set in urban concrete. The aura of Paris as capital of the nineteenth century was bound up with its reputation as city of democratic revolutions, and of consumption patterns and cultural habits. It was also a city where all European cultures and all possible religions came together and worked as a collective in giving shape to the idea of the “world citizen.”

Because of this denotative and connotative, visible and invisible magnitude, a world city also has a great reach. Between 1800 and 2000, Paris, London and New York were the kitchens of ideas, the laboratories of the future, and the locomotives of progress. They worked as magnets on entrepreneurial and creative minds, carrying a piece of Paris in their heart when they returned to their home city. Everything that was new in the nineteenth century seemed to be found first in Paris, and only then could it be found elsewhere in Europe. This is why Walter Benjamin could justifiably call Paris the capital of the century—just as London had been the capital of the eighteenth century, and just as New York would become the capital of the twentieth century.

In view of this rich definition of a “world city,” it seems easy to define a second city—at least, at first glance. Because it only partially meets the rigid criteria laid out above, a second city is not a world city in the manner of Paris. Granted, Berlin, Chicago, Vienna, Milan and Manchester possess a considerable amount of magnitude. They certainly satisfy the criterion of size. Their aura, however, is not self-evident because it is only visible in limited parts of the world. Their influence is also limited: on specific points, they left their stamp on the world, but their place in overviews of cultural history never went beyond these specific features. In the hierarchical pyramid of Western cities, other types of “second cities”

range under such metropolises. If Berlin is *Weltbedeutend* in Germany and Central Europe, then Munich and Hamburg are merely satellites orbiting the German capital city. Obviously, when inhabitants are promoting their city, they will claim that, on further consideration, their city can equally and rightly claim the title of world city. The history of world expositions splendidly illustrates how the self-promotion of second cities works. The Belgian cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Liège, for example, went to considerable lengths to prove that they came conspicuously close to the magnitude of Paris. They simulated the feeling of world city with such panache that it seemed they personally believed the yarn of hyperbolic words and images that they spun around their city. In spite of heroic attempts to pimp the urban radiance—by highlighting a world harbour, a world position in the area of textiles and steel, and a political importance—many a second city remained nothing more than a “metro-pole manqué” when observed from the perspective of Paris.

### *The Growth of Cities*

I discuss Nizon’s argument at length because I identify a number of parallels with the way in which urban sociology and urban history handle the concept of “magnitude.” It seems to me that the classical works in urban studies (by authors such as Simmel, Wirth, Mumford and Benevolo) are driven by the desire to find some sort of objective foundation for this impression of magnitude. By drawing parallels with the hermeneutics of the world city proposed by Nizon, it becomes clear that the classical urban studies implicitly tend toward a hierarchical judgment about urbanity. In addition, it is also apparent that this happens from the same fixation on “magnitude” that characterizes Nizon’s view. Central to the classical view of urbanity is the idea that a modern city is a metropolis and that its magnitude arises because of the realization of powerful modernization processes. Classical urban theory accepts economic strength and social diversity as self-evident presuppositions. Equally self-understood is the resulting assumption that a hierarchy arises between big cities, and that this hierarchy is bound up with the magnitude of the effects produced by the modernization processes. By classifying cities based on the degree in which modernity has taken hold of them, a distinction between progressive cities and cities that are lagging behind is automatically introduced. The slowly developing cities should be pictured as settlements that hover between urbanity and a pre-industrial lifestyle.

The presuppositions of classical urban theory were first revealed in the critiques raised against the Chicago School by Ulf Hannerz (*Exploring the City*) and Manuel Castells (*The Urban Question*). They showed to what extent these pioneers created an ideal image of modern urbanity and subsequently pushed it forward as an implicit benchmark for all urban phenomena. The hard core of this theory shines especially bright in the work of Louis Wirth, the theorist who gave an empirical foundation to Georg Simmel's urban theory in the 1930s. In Wirth's view, the sociological condition he calls urbanism can be explained by way of three criteria: size, density and heterogeneity. One notices immediately how these criteria enter in a play with the element "magnitude." To Wirth, a city is a permanent settlement with a sizeable and heterogeneous population that puts a dense infrastructure and a dense spatial environment at the disposal of this population. Size, density and heterogeneity, Wirth believes, are inextricably connected with modernization processes; his studies often emphasize the importance of the economic and technological dynamics of modern cities. It is precisely this dynamic that is responsible for the size, the density and the social heterogeneity, and growth factor that allows cities to drift away from the feudal and rural lifestyle. After all, the degree of size, density and heterogeneity increases as the economy is cranked up—the model that is also employed in such well-known simulation games as SimCity and returns in the cinematic genre of the city symphony. In the documentary film *The City that Never Rests* (1928), the Hungarian Andor von Bary highlights the theme of the vicissitudes of the seaport of Rotterdam by representing the growth dynamics in an academic manner.

Apparently, the genre of the city symphony assumes the same basic view of urbanity as the pioneers of urban sociology. In other words, one can presume the existence of a consensus about the relationship between "big" and "economic success" during the interwar period, and that most likely this growth model has become the nucleus of all thought about cities. Unsurprisingly, in studies of urban history, the size of the economic dynamics is directly linked to a hierarchically ordered pyramid of cities. Patrick Geddes's *Cities in Evolution* and Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* can count as the pioneers of the growth model within urban history. They adopt a narrative of evolutionary teleology with stages that bear names such as eopolis (communalities, rural communities), polis (small-town communities founded on family and legitimized by religion), metropolis (big-city communities that are individualized

and shaped by the Industrial Revolution) and megalopolis (imperialist capitalism's version of the metropolis) (Mumford 285–292). The fact of the matter is that the hierarchical pyramid of metropolises, small towns and villages is based on one single criterion: the determination of the growth potential of a settlement.

The growth model propagated by the Chicago School and the urban historians is not simply a theoretical matter. The list of studies in literary theory that discuss urban stories has grown long and shows that a large number of works of art are infused with the urban image described by the theorists. It is no coincidence that such studies frequently invoke the views of Simmel, Wirth and Mumford as an argument from authority in the interpretation of novels and visual arts. A second symptom of the importance of the classical urban discourse is found in the political world. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, authorities pursued urban policies that adopt the same premises. Contemporary urban theorists such as Neil Brenner and Peter Clark observe that nation states have spent decades pursuing a selective spatial policy, in which the principal aim was the growth of the main metropolises. In this political constellation, the capital cities ran off with the larger part of the investment capital and the second cities received impulses by supporting specialized economic activities: Antwerp and Hamburg became port cities, Ostend and Brighton national seaside resorts. The evolution of second cities turns out to be inextricably bound up with this selective spatial policy and with the growth model that it is based on (Clark 252). Of course, there is nothing wrong per se with studying or promoting growth, but from a more general culture theoretical point of view the growth model can be accused of reductionism. Peter Marcuse rightly summarizes the problem concerning this model as follows: “Specific groups within a city promote policies . . . ; not everyone in a city but specific growth coalitions seek growth; a city does not compete for the Olympics, a city’s governmental leaders do, with the support of certain groups within it” (Marcuse 248).

### *Late Modern Urbanity and Its “States of Matter”*

In recent years, urban theorists arrived at the conclusion that the growth model could not explain all of today’s urban phenomena. More specifically, Henri Lefebvre’s insights that space should be viewed as a socially produced space and that cities were in fact bundles of urban processes,

gradually brought the growth model under review again. Any thinking in urbanism that carries out such a spatial turn in a consistent way possesses more explanatory power to map out urbanity's diversity. In the interdisciplinary work carried out at the Ghent Urban Studies Team since 2012, three elements proved relevant for abandoning the growth paradigm.

1. First, the contributions made at a conference in 2012 on medium-sized cities organized by GUST (see also Notteboom et al.) made clear that peripheral cities such as Ljubljana, Skopje, Tallinn or Helsinki may be called metropolitan centres in their region, but that at the same time these cities hold on to their pre-industrial physiognomy; to some extent, they have remained commercial cities of trade.
2. Secondly, newer phenomena in urban development also necessitate an analysis in terms of heterogeneous social processes. The first two books published by GUST (*The Urban Condition* and *Post Ex Sub Dis*) describe an evolution that does not entirely fit in with the picture of classical urban history or the schema that rigidly distinguishes metropolitan communities from rural communities (read: "modernity" from "tradition"). Following the rhythm of an increasingly complex economic and technological reality, the urban space became particularly heterogeneous in the late modern era (that is, the post-Second World War era). Neologisms such as posturban space, postsuburbia, exurbia, exopolis, suburban downtown, disurbia and *città autostradale* arose to describe the urban settlements that are characterized by different gradations of urban density and that can all be connected with (at least some of the properties of) the urban lifestyle of olden days. This new reality incited theorists in urbanism such as Ed Soja (*Thirdspace*) to add important footnotes to the growth paradigm.<sup>1</sup> In the post-industrial and neoliberal world of the global village, growth did not only mean a growth dynamics that was concentrated in a dense space, but also a growth that was spread (over larger territories). Other recent studies by urban theorists such as Neil Brenner showed that nation states did not only pursue a selective spatial policy. They simultaneously executed a spatial policy that was non-selective. From the 1960s on, they administered economic injections to non-urbanized regions. This policy had the effect that even the smallest place in Western Europe could develop into a modern settlement if it so wished.

3. A third factor that necessitates a new conceptualization is that virtual urban life in the cultural sphere (television and internet) has made sure that the metropolitan space does no longer possess the exclusive right to what Louis Wirth called “urbanism as a way of life.” In today’s urban condition, the urban experience becomes more frequently detached from the factors of size, density and heterogeneity. The concept of urbanized space has ceased to coincide with the metropolis and with the (concentric) growth of a dense space. It even transcends the thinned-out urban life in the exopolis; television and internet, financial and transport networks can make sure that even the least obvious space plays a part in the urbanized global town of today.

Within the Ghent Urban Studies Team, these evolutions lead to a new project: a revision of theory in urbanism that could instigate an alternative representation of urbanity and could do away with the classical discussions about urban magnitude. In the first two volumes published by the research team, we assumed, rather naively, that the concept of the exopolis essentially related to the final stage of a teleological development. Now, however, we are seeking a different assessment of the late modern urban problem. Our main question is the following: is urbanity within a relational network of different urban types not something other than the (small, mid-sized or large) instantiation of the metropolis? Above all: is economic growth still the dynamo of the urban feeling of life?

I would like to replace the growth metaphor by a more abstract image, whereby urbanity is viewed as a social praxis that materializes in different “states of matter.” In physics, “state of matter” refers to the condition in which the molecules of matter are found given specific energetic circumstances. This condition varies on the rhythm of the enthalpy and may take on four distinct forms, hence states or phases in which matter exists: solid, liquid (attained after melting), gas (after evaporating) and plasma (after ionization). I see four great advantages in adopting this alternative imagination of the urban:

First, it becomes possible to counter the ideological nature of classical urban history and sociology. The growth model inevitably leads to quantitative comparisons, and hence to sterile—and in a sense puerile—conclusions that all revolve around the motto “size matters.” The concept of “state of matter,” by contrast, puts the qualitative differences in the forefront. Urbanity is assessed in terms of the precise nature of the

heterogeneous nature of human settlements in a specific place, which allows for the distinction of different layers of urbanity. The image of layers allows for a more flexible descriptive model because, as so often in matters of human culture, old forms may coexist with newer forms; they are elements in a world regulated by what Ernst Bloch called “the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous” (“die Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen”). In a first draft of this descriptive model I propose to work with the following four layers of urbanity:

- A. The solid state of the old commercial city from the pre-industrial era (although a distinction could still be made between capitalist and feudal forms of the pre-industrial city). This concerns a city such as seventeenth-century Paris, as well as the city described by Max Weber in “The Nature of the City”: a fairly static social space with hierarchical social relations and ritualized economic activities, often combined with a public sphere regulated by rather rigid moral and religious norms. This state of urbanity implies an urban rhythm that could be dubbed as “solid.”
- B. A second, and qualitatively different form, is the liquid state of the modern industrial metropolis. This is the condition of urbanity that is driven by economic and technological growth, in accordance with the thesis of Wirth and Simmel. A telling example would be nineteenth-century Paris, freed from its walls. As an oil stain, it is taking possession of the surrounding villages and is giving a new dimension to the concept of urbanity in the form of industrial terrains, workers’ suburbs and residential neighbourhoods. Clearly visible are the hubs that incarnate the dynamics: the great train stations on the border of the new agglomerations that made Paris burst at its seams. Life in the industrial metropolis moreover, is characterized by rapid changes and by a pace that is much more “fluid” than in early modern forms of urban life.
- C. A third state of matter is the gas-like state in which we find late-modern “post-industrial” urbanity. As a result of increased (auto) mobility post-war Europe experienced a mushrooming of sleep cities, suburban agglomerations and business districts. In Dutch, a poetic neologism was coined that adequately refers to this state of matter: the nebulous city—or, as the dictionary says, “an urban area in which the division between city and countryside is not clearly visible.” In Italian, it is called *la città diffusa* or *città*



*autostradale*—concepts that explains accurately the pervasive role of mobility in this kind of urban life, and hence the “gas-like” rhythm which permeates the area of the urbanized exopolis.

- D. Finally, there is a fourth qualitative form of urbanity of very recent date. This virtualization of urban life, which we owe to (television and computer) screens and to (information and transport) networks can be seen as a sort of ionization of the urban settlements; the outcome of this could be compared to a state of plasma. Plasma screens can be seen as the locus of newer forms of urban life, as the medium of an “immaterial city” that emerged in the latest phase of modernity.

A second advantage of this metaphorical cluster concerns the sociological status of a city. “States of matter” are (at least in German and in Dutch) also called “states of aggregation.” The etymology of aggregation fits in closely with the essence of urbanity, that is, the fact that it concerns human settlements, the assembling and gathering of individuals—a meaning comprised in the root of the word “grex,” herd or flock. The aggregation form of the classical metropolis, for example, is dominated by a liquid state of aggregation—a condition that involves multitudes and masses: large quantities of people and goods that flow into and through the urban space. In the aggregation condition of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commercial city, the mass has but a marginal part to play. Except on market days and during carnival, the social space is organized in a solid manner according to segregation lines of sex and class. In such a state of aggregation, which came into being in medieval times, the Marxist idea of “all that is solid melts into air” (Berman) does not apply yet. Nevertheless these early modern forms of social life persist in later periods. The pace of the industrial city is at specific times and places slowed down and is doubled by traditional forms of social interaction. Everyday urban life is characterized by heterogeneous forms of aggregation and descriptive studies of urban life should take this heterogeneity into account.

The third advantage of the heuristic metaphor and the descriptive model here proposed would seem to be the most important one. When urbanity is viewed as a series of aggregation processes, the possibility arises to attribute a hybrid status to a specific urban space. In this way, a city can be connected with coexisting “states of matter,” irrespective of the different eras and the different cultural constellations to which

they historically belong. A city should be associated not so much with a specific stage of modernity, as with a particular kind of hybridity. In the urban movie by von Barsy, for example, one can see that Rotterdam, apart from being a growing seaport of cutting-edge technology, is also a settlement that still bears the marks of the Dutch Golden Age. Rotterdam is a trading city that emanates the pomp and circumstance of the citizen (the big storehouses, the stately mansions, the idyllic canals that join together both types of building), yet has also become a metropolis where masses of goods and workers give shape to the idea of dynamics and growth. In the universe of artistic representations of the city such hybrid constructions are relatively frequent. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this is that closer analysis reveals that urban spaces are a palimpsest, spaces that take shape layer after layer and therefore can harbor different types of settlements. Hybrid urbanity could be described with poetic images such as “melting ice”: both solid and liquid. Or such as “morning dew”: gasiform and still liquid. In other words, the descriptive model I would like to propose respects the multiple rhythms that coexist on the surface of a specific city.

A fourth advantage of the aggregation metaphor is that it allows the explanation of new or “forgotten” developments in urban culture. The question this model allows to ask is whether the principal European type of city does not fundamentally differ from the metropolis, whether cities as Fribourg, Utrecht, Ghent, Orléans, Verona and Brighton do not deserve another label than that of “failed world city”? More than likely, and for quite a long period, urban networks in densely populated areas have had a very different function than the world cities that play the leading part in the global story of growth. For a few years now, a revival of older urban settlements can be observed in the Low Countries and in other urbanized regions of Western Europe. Year after year, these settlements have hardly experienced any growth. Today they can be promoted as utopian places in which different positive aspects of urban life coexist in harmony. Such an urbanized place, at the intersection of exopolis, global city and metropolis, could be termed a mediopolis. This is a city in which the urban condition makes itself felt and in which the inhabitants are immersed in all the virtues and vices of modernity. At the same time, however, it is also a city in which the urbanites mentally and sometimes also physically disassociate themselves from the metropolis and from modernity.

## THE REPRESENTATION OF SECOND CITIES

### *Second Cities as Sites of Growth and Modernization*

For the analysis of the first type of representation of second cities, I would like to re-examine the classic stories of the metropolis. It is striking that the majority of these stories form illustrations of the growth model. The novels by Döblin, Dos Passos, Zola, Joyce and Dreiser are situated in a setting and a social environment that are infused by modernity, as well as by symbols of the various modernization processes. The same goes for some classics in the history of cinema. To illustrate this, I will present an inventory of the recurring elements from Frans Masereel's urban iconography. In *The City (La Ville)*, a series of 100 plates from the early 1920s, the same elements can be found as in classic big-city narratives. One can group the urban elements in this graphic novel *avant-la-lettre* in clusters that correspond with size, density and heterogeneity—the three criteria of Louis Wirth's analytical model.

A first remarkable element can be found in the metaphors and metonyms that refer to size. Initially, the references concern population size. It seems as if the multitude of people and the dynamical street life serves as a *pars pro toto* for the urban; after all, masses evoke associations with the economic dynamics. To this cluster also belong the emblems of mass communication: the depiction and representation of papers and commercials.

In line with this, one can group the images that indicate density: asphalt and concrete suggest that the masses find themselves in dense surroundings: their movements need to be channelled by way of a cutting-edge technological infrastructure, because the size of the city cannot be efficiently managed without transport facilities. Hence the prominent presence of train and tram tracks, as well as motorways. In addition, density manifests itself in the lattice motif of the high-rise, which is placed along the rigorous lines of the boulevards. High-rise and tenement buildings create the image of a dense settlement that adequately anticipates the population growth.

Finally, there are the images that point to heterogeneity: economic contrasts, social contrasts and psychological contrasts.

More than likely, the city depicted by Masereel in his work is Paris. It is the city with which he was unfaithful to his hometown Ghent, and where from his studio in Montmartre he designed lithographs.

In an interview, he stated that the work was aimed at “the synthesis, the summary of different big cities in the world. In any case, I have converged in this work everything that happens in the city in one day, from early in the morning until late in the evening” (see Florquin 227). Masereel also states in the same interview that his city plates also capture the essence of other cities he knew so well (Geneva, Brussels, Hamburg and Antwerp). By that, he implicitly indicates that second cities are not that different from world cities—a statement that is confirmed when one examines the lithographs he made of Antwerp and Hamburg. The same elements dominate the street image; with the goal of more effectively emphasizing the essence of these cities, he selects situations that lend themselves most adequately to the evocation of size and density: port activities, for example, or motorways and an occasional skyscraper.

In short, Masereel seems inclined to upgrade the second city to a metropolitan status. The rationale behind this is clear: capital cities *and* second cities are the incarnation of the modern world’s essence; they are emblems of the economic and technological growth dynamics that govern the lives of modern people. It could be said that a large majority among the urban poets share this concern with Masereel. This is already so in the early nineteenth century. In *Le Père Goriot* (*Father Goriot*, 1835), Balzac’s Saumur is a predominantly mercantile trading city with avid pensioners. The Burgundy La-Ville-en-Fayes that he evokes in *Les Paysans* (*The Peasants*, 1855), however, is the prime example of fledgling capitalism. With its bankers, entrepreneurs and speculators it takes hold of Les Aigues, a nearby agricultural enclave that lives in harmony. Later nineteenth-century authors had no trouble in further developing this theme by making use of the industrial setting of the new second cities. In *The Jungle* Upton Sinclair paints the alienating existence of the workers in Chicago’s meat industry. Emanuel De Bom does the same with Antwerp by choosing dockworkers as his protagonists. Raymond Williams is right to claim that the tradition of the Industrial Novel, with its staging of Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow, can be seen in its totality as an explicit examination of urban growth. In this, it does not matter whether the second city belongs to one of the leading industrial nations. Lieven Ameel’s monograph about Helsinki stories shows that in some novels this peripheral city (observed from a European perspective) is depicted as a world of economic growth or of social conflicts. Ameel notices how in other novels Finnish authors go to great lengths to ascribe to Helsinki a blooming culture of flâneurs and the

concomitant association of prosperity and liberty. A similar study exists about the representation of the second city in the Dutch-speaking novel, namely Mary Kemperink's book about the fin-de-siècle in The Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup> The tendency to zoom in on partial aspects of the modernization process and to represent them as a *pars pro toto* for the growth dynamics of modernity continues into the twentieth century: Bernard Clavel paints urban life in Lyon by focusing attention on the life of the textile workers, and the great Flemish modernist Louis Paul Boon manages to distill the essence of the modernization processes from the almost unsightly small town Alost.

The cited examples mainly originate from the economic sphere and are illustrations of the impact of the Industrial Revolution. Yet modernity can be represented in many different ways. The anomic aspects of urban life and its depressing psychological aspects can also be invoked with the setting or backdrop of a second city. In *Desert* (*Désert*, 1980), Le Clézio uses the seaport Marseille as a basis for an account of cultural displacement. In *Pigeons on the Grass* (*Tauben im Gras*, 1951<sup>3</sup>), Wolfgang Koeppen turns his sights on middle-class psychology in post-war Munich, and a novel for young adults by Melvin Burgess is set in the squatter and junkie scene of Bristol (*Junk*, 1996). Finally, yet importantly, further evidence for my hypothesis can be found in the twentieth-century tradition of hardboiled crime fiction, especially detective stories. Many of these novels show that economic and social problems, as well as socio-psychological and emotional effects, are brought up prominently both in New York or Paris *and* in Denver or Nancy.

All my examples give evidence of the same general trend, namely the existence of an ideological frame of reference. Following Manuel Castells, this could be labelled "culturalism." Castells uses the concept in *The Urban Question* to characterize argumentations such as those of Simmel and Wirth. In the density, size and heterogeneity of the metropolis, the pioneers of urban studies detected the power of an "objective culture" that had become autonomous. This objective urban culture makes sure that pressure is put on the subjective culture—the mental equilibrium, the harmonious intersubjective ways of interaction and the aesthetic sense. The same opposition between objective culture (the city and the modernization processes) and subjective culture (the moral and psychological condition) that marked the culturalism of Simmel and Wirth is put in practice in the modern authors' urban stories. Similarly to theoretical culturalism, the individual is represented as the tragic victim

of that objective culture. On this point, texts about secondary cities are no different from those about world cities. Even if it turns out that the density, size and heterogeneity is consciously depicted in a more moderate manner, the essential nature of these cities is preserved: an anonymous, technologically and rationally ordered environment that hinders personal development, and in some cases calls into being pathological excesses (cynicism, indifference). In classical urban stories, the booming city and its inherent forces are unleashed upon the novel's characters to illustrate the exceptional cultural condition of modernity. In this operation, the distinction between big, mid-sized and small cities seemingly becomes blurred. It appears the only element of importance in culturalism is that the urban space exerts an influence on the individual.

### *Hybrid Urbanity in Second Cities*

In order to gain an idea of urban hybridity in late modern settlements, and to gain more insight into my alternative view of urban stories, it can be inspiring to cast a glance at cultural phenomena outside of literature. In the 1960s, French sociologist and anthropologist Edgar Morin carried out an extensive study that made him the pioneer in urban legends research. In *La Rumeur d'Orléans* ("Rumor in Orléans," 1969) Morin called the urban legends he retraced "modern myths." Precisely such everyday urban stories give perfect evidence of the fact that social spaces are permeated by heterogeneous practices and by a paradoxical mix of urbanization processes. In the eyes of Morin, urban legends are "the subterranean layers of our modernity" (Morin 10). Especially in areas of transition, as Morin suggests, this underground of modernity is a fixed geological condition. A particular kind of modern myth is found in areas where urban and pre-industrial culture merge into one another, where the layers of history regularly rub against each other, and where there is a relation of tension between the attachment to traditions and quasi-religious fears and two typically modern tendencies: de-traditionalization and individualization.

Both cities of Orléans and Amiens, in May 1969 and in 1970 respectively, witnessed the fanatical spread of a "rumour" about white female sex slaves. Rumour had it that Jewish merchants—in particular, the Magasin Dorphé, run by a young couple—regularly kidnapped young girls. This allegedly occurred when the girls would wind up in the fashion store's fitting rooms to try on some of the clothes. They were

subsequently drugged by injection, were locked up in the cellars of the department store and eventually sold as white female slaves in the Middle East. Morin emphasizes that metropolitan urbanity, by means of what I have called its “fluidity,” gives cause to fear: he argues that young people in Orléans are clearly fascinated by the erotic, by sexual violence. Their desire is to look alluring and sexy by wearing fashionable outfits and all sorts of fashion accessories. At the same time, a certain repressed fear of “the modern” is playing tricks on them.

Morin rightly argues that metropolitan urbanity, by means of what I have called its “fluidity,” gives cause to fear: Orléans, at the time of the rumours, coincided not with the solid early modern city any more, but became much more fluid. Its inhabitants tended to see their environment as a secularized, consumption-oriented urban agglomeration without either head or heart. Now this vision imposed by the myth corresponds—in a manner at once schematic, exaggerated and fantastic—to that real-life evolutionary process which transforms provincial cities into mere modern agglomerations. Fear of modernity is converted in fear of a Jewish intruder, subsequently takes possession of reality and is fictionalized in a tale of terror about violated virginity and alarming displacement. Morin attributes this to the fact that these are “mid-sized cities,” cities with specific socio-geographical transitional traits: “too close to Paris to remain provincial capitals, and too far to become suburb of the great metropolis, these are, to an ever diminishing degree, cities (polis) and to an ever increasing degree conurbations” (8). For a rumour to come into being, the sort of friction is required that can be found in Orléans and Amiens, and may also be present in the urbanized inland of many other European second cities of the second half of the twentieth century. It is a friction that originates from “the coincidence of provincality and modernity” (63).

Morin was one of the first to put forward an urban mentality that plays an important part today and to which urban studies has devoted too little attention: certain second cities are more inclined to stick to the traditions of “solid” urban life and to some degree also cultivate this image. A second city feels it has a calling to profile itself both as a hyper-modern and as a traditional commercial city. The dialectical opposition does not lead to a synthesis, but rather to a heterogeneous juxtaposition, to a point in case of diversity and heterogeneity. The concept of “sense of place,” which was introduced by Edward Relph in 1976, undoubtedly plays a leading part in detecting such heterogeneity. One could say

that the images and representations incited by the hybrid metropolis are based on the desire for a subaltern urban rhythm. The rhythm of the solid city puts the *genius loci* and the sense of place in the forefront and coexists with the fear and the fascination that is aroused by the rhythm of the metropolitan growth dynamics, by the daily fast routines in the industrial “liquid” city, and by the incessant destruction of social and cultural traditions.

Many of the novels previously discussed could be re-read from Morin’s conceptual framework and from my perspective on the hybrid nature of urban settlements. The novels of the *fin-de-siècle*, especially the late naturalistic novels in “peripheral” literary fields (e.g., the Low Countries and Germany), combine these two thematic strains: the desire for modern life (influenced by the life style in world cities as Paris and London) and the fear of being uprooted (the feeling of identity loss) are the dominant emotions hiding behind the urban representations. Examined within the conceptual apparatus of the growth model, these novels are primarily concerned with evoking modernity, with a mix of liberation and alienation. Nonetheless, a more nuanced reading is possible. Would it not be more appropriate to observe in this a relation of tension between the effects of liquid urbanity and that of an older variant, the solid urbanity of the pre-industrial commercial city? In a number of literary texts, I see great potential when it comes to testing my hypothesis about urban hybridity.

The Symbolists were the most radical in their scepticism about the growth model. Artists such as Stephan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Maurice Maeterlinck and Georges Rodenbach preferred cities of culture such as Bruges, Venice and Florence above the economically more successful world cities. In most cases, these are second cities that exuded economic power in days long gone, and failed to keep up with the growth impulses of the Industrial Revolution. One of the Symbolist masterpieces dating from the *fin-de-siècle* is extremely interesting because this novel confronts two urban rhythms with each other. Georges Rodenbach’s *The Bells of Bruges* (*Le Carillonneur*, 1897) places two conditions of aggregation opposite each other: on the one hand, there is the Bruges we know from *Bruges La Morte* (1892), the medieval city that has come to a standstill, and, on the other hand, the Bruges of the capitalist entrepreneurs who want to build a seaport between the city and the sea. Although it certainly was not Rodenbach’s intention to create a hybrid city, unwittingly he presents us with a coherent cross-section of



the city with which it would be possible to also describe the Bruges of today. It is a city with a certain historical identity and a successful mercantile population. It is also a liquid city without identity, which works as a dynamo in realizing economic growth in the entire region.

My reading of Rodenbach's novel can serve as a model for other forms of re-reading of works of art. There are innumerable literary and cinematic works in which different layers of urbanity become visible by means of representations of second cities. The novels I will briefly mention in the following form a body of works in which expressions of urban hybridity can be found and which testify to the coexistence of heterogeneous urban conditions. Regional crime fiction, which enjoys tremendous popularity today, is also a particularly rich source. I am thinking of the work of Krajewski in Poland, of Daeninckx and Izzo in France, of television heroes such as Morse and Frost in England or the Flemish Pieter Aspe in Bruges. On the face of it, the examples involve a series of stories that continue the metropolitan hardboiled tradition. On second thoughts, however, they respond to and take advantage of the relationship of tension between traditional forms of urbanity and the anomic existential conditions of the metropolis.

The same amount of potential for the study of hybridity is found in the novels that were dedicated in the course of the twentieth century to the feeling of solidarity among workers in the industrial cities. In this so-called *littérature prolétarienne* ("proletarian literature"), and in the cinematic city symphonies that originated in the fold of the European workers' movement, a striking attention is paid to the heterogeneity in the urban experience. Everything indicates that this genre consciously plays with the idea that the slower social life in popular neighbourhoods can form a counterweight against the economic and technological growth idea.

Texts and films in which "urban villagers" play the leading part provide an even clearer proof of urban hybridity. They are especially interesting because they offer a model to analyse the narratives that are set in world cities and therefore prove that the descriptive tool I propose is not limited to second cities at all. A case in point are novels set in industrial suburbs. An important body of urban stories, reaching from the urban migrant novels about Paris, London and New York (Emile Zola, Arthur Morrison, Henry Roth) to recent *banlieu*-novels (e.g., Faïza Guène's *Kiffe Kiffe demain* (*Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, 2004)), are dealing with the friction between the capitalist growth economy, on the one hand, and

the mercantile, religious or social traditions that refer to the “solid” urban condition, on the other hand.

Following sociologist Herbert Gans, urban villagers can be defined as urbanites that preserve rural habits and therefore deviate from the blasé personalities from the work of Simmel and Wirth. Observed from the perspective I have outlined, the urban villager is probably more than this: it is a type of urbanite that can embody both a rural and a pre-industrial urban lifestyle. One thing is sure: the urban villager can serve as symbol of the fundamental hybridity in Western cities, of the way in which the liquid urbanity can go together with the solid urbanity. A good example is the “minor city symphony” *A Bronx Morning* (1931) by Jay Leyda. This film offers direct support for my claim that urban stories are in need of more nuanced interpretation. In addition, my view of this film can be applied to an important body of urban stories, the urban migrant novels in which the friction between the capitalist growth economy, on the one hand, and the mercantile, religious or social traditions, on the other hand, often appears as object of conflict.

The film opens with a sequence of rapidly moving shots taken from a train on an elevated track. From abstract blurred motion, the image turns into concrete glances of urban life. The opening evokes the technology-driven dynamics of the modern capitalist city. Through the train window, we see the symbols of growth: tall housing blocks, long straight streets populated by workers on their way to work, the train’s technological infrastructure, the traffic junctions that intersect the Bronx or link it up to the world city of New York, and various signs of metropolitan economic prosperity. After the intro (taking up one-third of the film), other ingredients of urbanity come in the forefront: small retail activities that remind of the market event in the pre-industrial city, children on their way to school, and, most notably, a flourishing street life. There are only three intertitles, but they neatly capture the essence of the images: “The Bronx does business . . . and the Bronx lives . . . on the street.” The street is symbol of a multicultural urban life of which the family is the cornerstone: mothers with prams, grandmothers on the pavement, and above all, a multitude of children—playing, fighting, and horsing around. They have the leading part. The reason for this is not that this is a neighbourhood where Italian migrant kids such as those from the families Scorsese, Coppola, Pacino and De Niro grew up. It is primarily because in the eyes of Leyda this secondary city on the outskirts of the world city of New York is governed by its own rhythm, by its own form of urban life.

Through the combination of the images from the train and the profusion of small-scale urban activities, Leyda shows that the Bronx functions in the concrete social practice as a hybrid of two states of aggregation: the solid and the liquid state.

The representation of hybridity in world cities, however, is not limited to novels on urban villagers. Novels such as *Le Paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant*, 1926) by Aragon demonstrate that the commercial passages of Paris, with their small businesses and their orderly, surveyable social network actually do possess an alternative rhythm. Aragon, for that matter, never omits a chance to confront the “passage of the opera”—his utopian niche—with the dynamic and powerful forces that impose their Haussmannian will from the outside. In this sense, *Le Paysan de Paris* is the perfect illustration of the idea of the city as palimpsest, the idea that in concrete social spaces layers from different historical eras interact with each other. Furthermore, Aragon is at the start of a long tradition; later examples of a hybrid Paris can be found in the work of Georges Perec, for example.

#### CLOSING OBSERVATIONS: SECOND CITIES IN A NETWORK SOCIETY AND THEIR POTENTIAL AS MEDIOPOLITAN UTOPIAS

By way of conclusion, I would like to go back to Morin and bring his analysis up to date. In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells describes a phenomenon that convinced me of the legitimacy of Morin’s view on urban hybridity. In contrast with the situation in the 1960s, the hybridity Castells addresses is of a different kind. He deals with a hybridity consisting of plasmatic forms of urbanity he calls the “space of flows” on the one hand, and the more solid urbanity he associates with the neighbourhood he lived in, the suburb of Belleville. By means of this contrast, he argues that we have entered an era in which urbanites undergo a sort of “structural schizophrenia,” a condition that is caused by the relation of tension

between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society. The dominant tendency is toward a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aiming at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural codes. Unless cultural, political, and physical bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading toward life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into different dimensions of a social hyperspace. (Castells, *Network Society* 459)

Castells connects this conclusion with an interesting case. In the 1980s, the urban authorities in Tokyo simultaneously pursued the policy of development in the direction of a “global city” and “an image-making policy of singing the virtues of old Edo, pre-Meiji Tokyo.” An extraordinary event showed to what extent the latter proved to be rooted in a very strong and actually utopian desire for more “solid” forms of urbanity.

A project symbolized this logic: the celebration of a World City Fair in 1997, a good occasion to build another, major business complex on reclaimed land in Tokyo Harbor. Large construction companies happily obliged, and work was well underway in 1995. Suddenly, in the 1995 municipal election, an independent candidate, Aoshima, a television comedian without backing from political parties or financial circles, campaigned on a one-issue program: to cancel the World City Fair. He won the election by a large margin, and became governor of Tokyo. A few weeks later, he kept his campaign promise and canceled the World City Fair to the dis-belief of the corporate elite. The local logic of civil society was catch-ing up with, and contradicting, the global logic of international business. (Castells, *Network Society* 458)

As this strange event shows, in the “global village” of today, urbanites keep looking for the “genius loci” of their biotope. The quest goes beyond paying lip service to the city marketing teams. Linking traditional urban ways of interaction to a firm share of metropolitan prosperity and freedom or to the virtues of the global networks, is revealed as a basic pattern in the daily life of today’s urbanite. This does not only apply to Tokyo. Glasgow, Barcelona, and even Antwerp (cf. Eeckhout), also long for a utopian hybridity that I would like to call “the mediopolis.” I believe that in many of today’s second cities the utopia of the mediopolis is constantly invented to build bridges between different forms of space and that we are not heading toward life in parallel universes. I believe urbanites are always negotiating between different forms.

## NOTES

1. “Some have called these amorphous implosions of archaic suburbia ‘Outer Cities’ or ‘Edge Cities’; others dub them ‘Technopoles,’ ‘Technoburbs,’ ‘Silicon Landscapes,’ ‘Postsuburbia,’ ‘Metroplex.’ I will name them, collectively, *Exopolis*, the city without, to stress their oxymoronic ambiguity, their city-full non-cityness. These are not only exocities, orbiting outside, they are ex-cities as well, no longer what the city used to be.” (Soja 238–39)

2. In Mary Kamperink's study one can read between the lines that Amsterdam and The Hague are represented as mini world cities, in which objective and subjective culture are at odds. Louis Couperus perfectly sums up this type of judgments about the city when he shows that the inhabitant of The Hague leads a life "in the cellar of his house in the prison of the city" (47).
3. The Munich middle class of *Tauben im Gras* is composed of people who react against sociological turnovers in modern society. The characters are, with the words of Gertrude Stein, "Pigeons on the grass alas," an allusion to the random and senseless quality of human life.

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