



The Urban Spectator: American Concept-Cities from Kodak to Google (Interfaces: Studies in Visual Culture)

Eric Gordon

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The Urban Spectator is a lively and utterly fascinating exploration of the ways in which technologies have influenced our collective conception of the American city, as well as our relationship with urban space and architecture. Eric Gordon argues that the city, developing late and in conjunction with a range of modern media, produced a particular way of seeing—what he labels “possessive spectatorship.”

Lacking the historical rootedness of European cities, the American city was open to individual interpretation, definition, and ownership. Beginning with the White City of the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 and the efforts to commodify the concept city through photography, Gordon shows how the American city has always been a product of the collision between the dominant conceptualization, shaped by contemporary media, and the spectator. From the viewfinder of the Kodak camera, to the public display of early cinema, to the speculative desire of network radio, all the way to machine-age utopianism, nostalgia, and America’s “rerun” culture, the city is an amalgam of practice and concept. All of this comes to a head in the “database city” where urban spectatorship takes on the characteristics of a Google search. In new urban developments, the spectator searches, retrieves, and combines urban references to construct each experience of the city.

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