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**New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies**

**Title**

Huyssen, Andreas. *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard UP, 2015.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/00x1s112>

**Journal**

New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies, 27(1)

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**Publication Date**

2016

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**Huyssen, Andreas. *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard UP, 2015.**

With his book *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*, Andreas Huyssen returns to the modernist cornerstone of Urban Humanities. As a hybrid discipline that combines architecture, urban planning, film, and literary studies, Urban Humanities creates a platform for interdisciplinary analysis. The foundation of this discipline is rooted in the concept of modernity that accompanied the rapid growth of cities in a period that Benjamin would call “Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936). In “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), Georg Simmel responded to the spectacle of the city by making the argument that the urban space led to a sensory overload for the modern individual. This resulted in a major shift of the human apparatus of perception. According to Huyssen, *the literary responses to the modern city, as a new type of psychological stimulus, resulted in the hitherto unrecognized genre of the metropolitan miniature*.

Huyssen dedicates his volume of 300 pages to defining and establishing this ‘new’ genre of the metropolitan miniature, which he considers to be a “mode of modernist writing” (9). Thereby, the scholar eloquently suggests that there is much more to explore within this substantial gap in the history of urban, media, and literary studies. Summa summarum, the genre of the metropolitan miniature can be described as a quantitatively short, quickly published text that emerges as a result of contact with modern urban space. Qualitatively, it distinguishes itself through its fragmentary and incoherent character. As Huyssen demonstrates, the concise literary genre of the miniature metropolis flooded the feuilletons of major newspapers and small magazines throughout the modernist period. It operated as a sensitive seismograph to contemporary challenges and changes in the fast-paced space of the city. In the urban environment, the genre’s ability to absorb and respond to ongoing developments immediately—without a lengthy writing and publishing process—reached its full potential.

With regard to the reception of modernity, Huyssen sees the genre’s grand achievement in its sensibility towards the contemporary profound upheaval in the literary world. Literature was both challenged and innovated by the rise of the new visual media of film and photography, which were taking over the city space in the form of billboards, cinemas, etc. Thus, the genre documented how visual media gained the ground that the literary world simultaneously lost, a phenomenon which sparked contradictory reactions by authors using the eponymous genre. All this has remained mainly unrecognized among existing historical and theoretical meditations about the modern period. In order to prove his argument, Huyssen introduces a range of examples of the ‘miniature metropolis’ written by prominent 20th-century contributors.

The textual corpus of *Miniature Metropolis* combines canonical and unknown works, and can be divided into: aesthetic theorists (Adorno, Baudelaire, Benjamin,

and Kracauer), literati and poets (Aragon, Benn, Jünger, Kafka, and Musil), as well as visual artists (Höch and Klein).

The overall strategy of the book is to provide comparative studies where they are missing, and to include minor writers in order to expand the literary canon. In its first chapter, the book provides a comparative analysis of Rilke and Baudelaire—both canonical for urban writing—through the lens of the newly discovered genre (Chapter 1: “Urban Spleen and the Terror of Paris in Baudelaire and Rilke”). The author emphasizes that, even if both authors are certainly well researched, comparative studies are missing. Huyssen is seeking to point out and fill these gaps—and thus leads the way for further research in that direction. Furthermore, the scholar focuses on lesser-known texts of well-known writers whom he aims to re-evaluate. Thus, he examines Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood*, rather than thoroughly excavated works such as the *Arcades Project*. On top of that, Huyssen tests the influence of the unknown writer Aragon, on Benjamin, a connection that has as well not been established thus far (Chapter 6: “Benjamin and Aragon: Le Paysan de Berlin”).

Huyssen engages in a discussion about texts that do not explicitly deal with the city, but are nevertheless highly saturated by the influence of urban growth on human perception. In doing so, Huyssen includes authors that “may be fairly obscure to American readers,” such as Gottfried Benn and Ernst Jünger (Noah Isenberg, Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts, New York). As Huyssen demonstrates, due to their aesthetic richness, the works of these writers turn out to be highly productive for the literary exploration the city space when analyzed as miniature metropolitan pieces. The chapter about Benn’s visual and hallucinatory writing style in particular opens up new perspectives on Benn’s texts that Huyssen re-evaluates as documentations of modern modes of perception (Chapter 4: “Benn in Occupied Brussels: The Rönne Novellas”). Thus, Huyssen brings a fresh direction into Benn research, which has recently focused on meticulously tracing the poet’s scientific quotes (e.g., Marcus Hahn’s studies).

Along with Benn and Jünger, Huyssen places Kafka on the map of the miniature metropolis (Chapter 2: “Kafka’s *Betrachtung* in the Force Field of Photography and Film”). Huyssen makes the powerful argument that Kafka’s visual and obscure writing style has to be measured as a subconscious reaction of the writer to the overwhelming new media, and is thus highly fertilized by the historical breeding ground of modernity, with its growing cities and visual culture. Huyssen even goes so far as to claim that without the spectacle of urbanization, Kafka’s distinct writing style would not have been possible—a bold statement in the academic world that still underestimates visual media as a venue of serious philosophical inquiries in favor of literature.

After examining canonic and non-canonic literati among urban writers, Huyssen’s third approach explores the miniature metropolis in the context of photographic innovation (Chapter 5: “Double Exposure Berlin: Photomontage and Narrative in Höch and Keun”). Huyssen demonstrates how the technique of

montage—which was invented in the field of photography as a means of retouching—not only grasped the fragmentary character of modernity, but also inspired writers such as Musil (Chapter 8: “Musil’s Posthumous Modernism”).

In his concluding chapter, “Coda. Diving into the Wreck. Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*,” Huyssen marks the end of the miniature metropolis as a productive writing style in the early 1950s. According to Huyssen, the genre became obsolete once the sensorium of human perception acclimatized to the spectacle of the metropolis and no longer perceived the city’s mechanical character as a *Moloch* (as did Young Fredersen in *Metropolis*). It is the urban model of Los Angeles, as mix of nature, skyscrapers, and suburban sprawl—which Adorno reflected on in his writings—with which Huyssen chooses to bring both the genre of the miniature metropolis and his book to an end.

Major players in the academic field recognize the innovative quality of the book. Anthony Kaes (University of California, Berkeley) predicted that the book “will serve as an invaluable guide to the wide variety of miniature writings that emerged in the modern age.” Anthony Vidler (The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at The Cooper Union) praises the new perspectives that Huyssen provides to the reader. Altogether, as Huyssen emphasizes, his work has to be seen as a first step towards defining and locating the genre of miniature metropolis writing, thereby opening up a new dimension of research. The latter is built upon the legacy of modernist writers, who—consciously and subconsciously—responded to the cities that were erected around their heads and thus created the visual writing mode of the miniature metropolis.

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