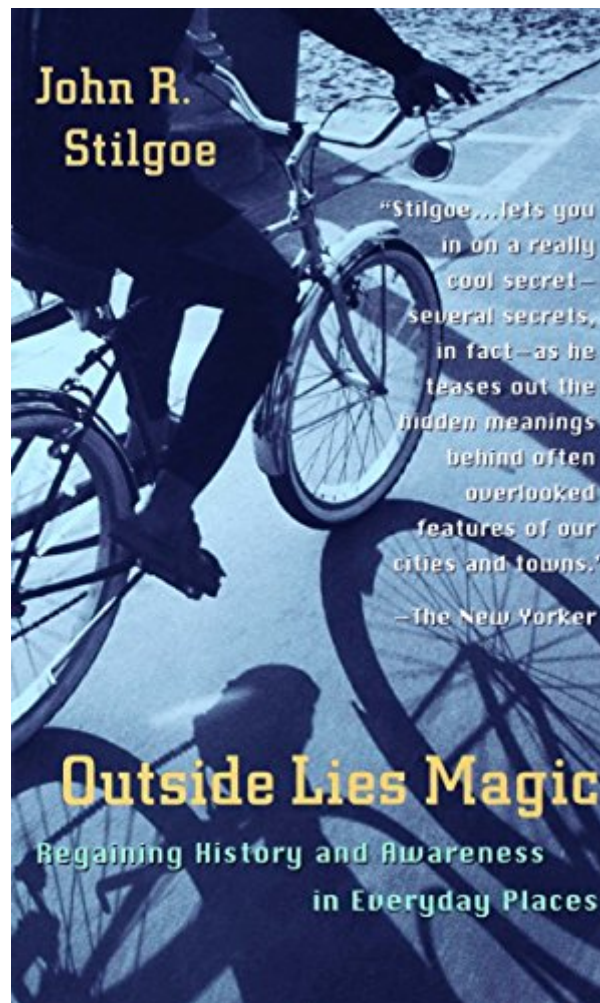




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Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History And Awareness In Everyday Places



Synopsis

Outside Lies Magic is a book about the acute observation of ordinary things, about becoming aware in everyday places, about seeing in utterly new ways, about enriching your life unexpectedly. For more than 20 years, John R. Stilgoe has developed and practiced the art of exploring the everyday world around us, where so much lies hidden just beneath the surface, offering uncommon knowledge if we but know what to look for. In this remarkable book, Stilgoe inspires us to become explorers on our own-on foot or on bicycle-and by so doing to reap the benefits of escaping, even temporarily, the traps of our programmed lives. "Exploration encourages creativity, serendipity, invention," he writes. And while sharing his insights on how to explore, Stilgoe provides a fascinating pocket history of the American landscape, as striking in its originality as it is revealing. Stilgoe dissects our visual surroundings; his observations will transform the way you see everything. Through his eyes, an abandoned railroad line is redolent of history and future promise; front lawns recall our agrarian past; vacant lots hold cathedrals of potential. From the electrical grid overhead to fences, malls, and main streets, Stilgoe offers a fresh understanding of the links and fractures in our society. After reading Outside Lies Magic, your world will never look the same again.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book should please anyone who enjoys spending time walking, in-line skating, or bicycling around the margins of the landscape that Americans have crafted (and often later abandoned or forgotten) during the last few centuries. Stilgoe seems to believe that such casual observation is a far rarer pastime than I suspect it is (and perhaps that it should be less a mere pastime than a virtuous calling). That doubtless accounts for the excess of zeal that I think has crept into his text. Stilgoe is unquestionably right, however, that further inquiry into the little puzzles encountered in these marginal landscapes will reward anyone with a mildly inquisitive bent. Stilgoe himself rewards the reader with insights into the interplay of diverse forces that can be read in the patina of an inhabited landscape (e.g., the less-than-obvious relationship between a townscape of tree-lined streets and an economic base sufficient to support municipal fire-suppression services). I doubt that Stilgoe was trying to prescribe a program of action to "rescue" or "restore" the landscape, or in fact to do anything but to "regain awareness," as the subtitle puts it. Should this book be the start for a reader interested in such things? The story that Stilgoe tells about the experience of close observation should make it an accessible beginning. But some readers might wish to begin with one of the other writers and scholars closely associated with observation of the American landscape, e.g.

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