

# Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places

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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.

What lies along the highway, just out of sight? How about behind that building? Or under the street? Most of us muse idly about such things as we take our walks or drive our cars, but only a few go further and explore the secret histories of the places where we live. Landscape historian John R. Stilgoe is one of these intrepid explorers; for years he has taught Harvard students to open their senses to the created environment we share, to gently dissect our neighborhoods and public spaces for the knowledge hidden in plain sight. In Outside Lies Magic, he lets us all in on these wonderful secrets.

Guiding us on tracks laid by utility and railroad companies, showing us the hidden territory of postal systems, Stilgoe reminds us that important frontiers lie invisible in our backyards and side streets, waiting for our attention. Though more interested in showing us how to see than telling us what there is to see, his descriptions of power-line right-of-ways, alley-side entrances, and hobo jungles provide compelling incentive for the reader to take his advice to heart and start looking around and asking questions of the community. If you think it's important to "think locally," Outside Lies Magic is an outstanding training manual. -- Rob Lightner

John R. Stilgoe is Orchard Professor of Landscape History at Harvard University. He is the author of *Alongshore: Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*; *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb*; and *Common Landscape of America, 1540 to 1845*. He lives in Norwell, Massachusetts.

#### Other Books

The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies. Written by an international team of experts, the Handbook makes accessible a full range of theoretical and applied approaches to the study of material culture, and the place of materiality in social theory.

presenting current thinking about material culture from the fields of archaeology, anthropology, geography, and science and technology studies.

🔍 🔍 🔍 🔍 🔍 . Steven Levy's Hackers : heroes of the computer revolution (2001) first appeared in 1984, the same year that the science-fiction writer William Gibson coined the word 'cyberspace' and provided hackers with their first fictional hero in ..."