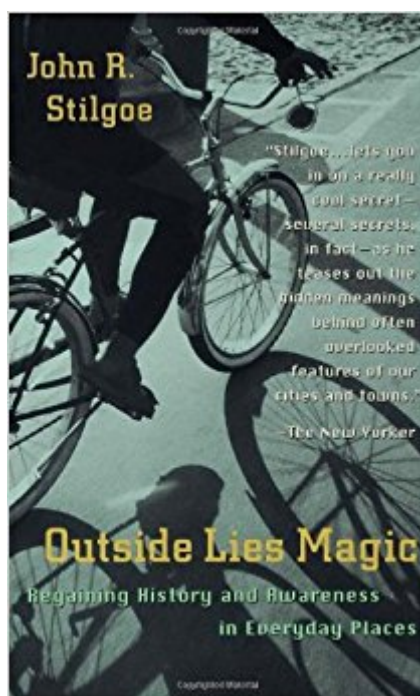


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# Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History And Awareness In Everyday Places



## 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

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Walker Books (April 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802775632

ISBN-13: 978-0802775634

Product Dimensions: 4.4 x 13.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 38 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #142,613 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #82 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Social Theory](#) #549 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > General](#) #2040 in [Books > Science & Math > Behavioral Sciences](#)

## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845*, Stilgoe brilliantly traced the history and the meaning of man's imprint on the American environment. His new book, as informal and chatty as *Common Landscape* was scholarly, looks at the physical state of America today and encourages his readers to become "Explorers": unhurried, clear-eyed observers of the world they rush through. The book is wildly uneven. The section on motels, for instance, does little more than belabor the obvious. And the repeated refrain to *Open Your Eyes and Look Around* becomes hectoring, but when Stilgoe lets his imagination run free, the results can become breathtaking. The chapter on interstate highways touches on such things as what's written on the backs of signs, the dirt tracks that parallel expressways, roadkill and what happens to it and what seemingly random patches of wild flowers may really signify. Perhaps the best chapter deals with fences and other ways people draw lines across the landscape to mark boundaries or create the illusion of privacy. Stilgoe calls this a "straightforward guidebook to exploring" whose purpose borders on the evangelical, but it's the sort of book that makes the reader want to buttonhole anyone handy and say, "Listen to this." Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of the most insightful books I have read on the topic of cultural landscapes. Stilgoe's expertise is on early American landscapes but he demonstrates clearly that he is as effective in assessing the modern landscape; writing is poetic but not euphemistic. He reveals the smallest details which tell volumes about our concepts of space and environment and the ways American landscapes have evolved over time, and why. I read this first as an assignment for a college course on American landscapes, and have reread it many times--I ordered a second copy as my first was heavily

annotated, and am now reading it aloud to my seven-year-old son, who loves the descriptions and the fact that he can see so many of the examples on our own walks together. As a graduate student of archaeology, I have found many occasions to recommend this book to professional colleagues, but have also given it to family and friends because it is simply a pleasure to read. If you wish to develop a habit of close observation and a deeper understanding of both the natural and built environment, this book is an easy--and excellent--choice.

I'm just reading it now and enjoying the premise of the book, allowing ourselves to really look and explore our daily walks and surroundings. It points out a different way of seeing it and ways of seeing the history and evolution of such common things as telephone poles and wires. Everything has a history and even romance that we can see if we know how to observe.

One of the those inspiring books that will get you outside and pay close attention. Then, see what you learn. Cool.

The author appeared on 60 Minutes and it was at that point that I knew I had to read his book. Years later, I have finally gotten around to it and it really helps you to understand the background of many everyday things around you. Read this book and you will no longer be bored on a walk around your neighborhood or even a drive around your city.

you should get outdoors more often! Professor Stilgoe fascinates the reader with bringing to life, everyday cityscapes, and towns! Become an urban explorer with this great book!

Out of print, so glad to get it here. Thanks!

This book includes fascinating historical anecdotes as well as suggestions for readers to use observational techniques to learn more about the world they live in. Recommended for people who want to explore new ways of looking at the world.

What an interesting book about "under the rug" America, the parts of our country... and of each of our communities... that is at the fringe where nobody pays attention, but that has so much to tell us. I especially liked the section about power and what happens when it is improperly grounded... a little scary! The style is a little funky, but if you like this topic, this guy is the best.

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