Part I Imagining Cities

Chapter 1

City Imaginaries

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Cities are not simply material or lived spaces – they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation. How cities are envisioned has effects. Urban designers and planners have ideas about how cities should look, function, and be lived, and these are translated into plans and built environments. Cities are represented in literary, art, and film texts, and these too have their effects. The public imaginary about cities is itself in part constituted by media representations as much as by lived practices. Ideas about cities are not simply formed at a conscious level; they are also a product of unconscious desires and imaginaries. This Companion starts with these city imaginaries to illustrate the power of ideas, the imagination, representations, and visions in influencing the way cities are formed and lived.

Here we pursue two themes which organize thinking on the relationship between the city and the imagination: *how the city affects the imagination* and *how the city is imagined*. Although there are obvious links between these two they are a useful way to think about imagining cities.

The effect of the city on the imagination contains a tension between the conditions of the city *stimulating* or *constraining* the imagination. On the one hand cities are creative, places that encourage the imagination, sites of stimulation. People with different ideas come together in cities and their webs of interconnection and sharing of knowledge and ideas are productive creatively. These ideas have material effects – in the form of economic innovation (for example in manufacturing) and profits from selling ideas in the innovation and informational economy (see, for example, in this volume Amin, chapter 11, Catterall, chapter 17). The idea of the city as a crucible for ideas and innovation has a long history – back to the very origins of urbanism in fact. Soja (chapter 3) argues that the stimulating effects of urban agglomeration (what he calls synekism) resulted in innovations in cultivation that produced the agrarian revolution. Here the interactive conditions of the city encourage bright ideas to overcome settled ways of thinking.

Settled ways of thinking can be powerful acts of the imagination in themselves. Cities might act to constrain the imagination or to consolidate it in collective imagination as tradition and authority. Cities, like nations, can be the locus for

imagined communities. This collective imagination might be held in place through the exercise of discipline and authority. One of Short's three urban discourses (chapter 2) looks at the city as a source of authority, repression, and compunction. These influences act as chains on the imagination. On the other hand such an authoritarian city can be a source of identity and security. The tensions between authority and identity are evident in Patrick Guinness's account (chapter 9) in which the figure of the sultan acts as a powerful locus for the imagination on the "subjects" of Yogyakarta. In many non-Western cities (and increasingly in many Western ones) the religious or spiritual imagination is a key locus of identity and impacts on the built form of the city. This cosmic city (as Short puts it) can come into conflict with the dominant urban imaginary in the West which is that of capital accumulation. This also challenges conventional Western views of modernity and the city (via Weber 1966; Simmel 1995, and others) on the secularization of society and forms of individual alienation or anomie. If Western urbanism was facilitated by the individualism that came with a disenchantment with the world, the interaction of capitalism with other collective imaginations and representations (such as those based on religious faith) give a more unpredictable mix of confrontation or cooptation of capital and culture, and vice versa.

It is clear that forms of collective imagination can be both positive and negative (Boyer 1994). Prejudiced imaginaries of "the other" are a source of racism, and the untrammeled domination of certain collective imaginaries work to exclude others – as the burgeoning literature on postcoloniality points out (see Akbur, chapter 7; King, chapter 22). Similarly notions of community assume a homogeneity of population and can entail an idea of purification where those designated as outside become the site of prejudice and segregation. Postcolonial and feminist writing reveal the degree to which Western imaginaries of the city and the other were overwhelmingly *visual* in nature (the colonial gaze, the watching *flâneur*). Anthony Vidler (chapter 4) shows the extent to which this was true for the conceived space of the city in Western architecture and planning: Le Corbusier's imagination was fed by airplane flights above Paris.

The speed of growth and the kaleidoscope of capital and culture in non-Western cities challenges the visual imaginary through the synesthesia of the city and the importance of other senses. What makes cities extraordinary is that they contain sites where the senses are bombarded and these can be read as a source of pleasure: the Spice Market in Istanbul, or the street markets of Hanoi; or displeasure, as in the rush-hour spaces of underground stations.

The city in its complexity and abundance of sensory data can also be seen as a space which contributes to our sense of fragmented subjectivity or overload. In Simmel's exploration of the relation between the subject's inner life and the city he suggests that in the modern metropolis the individual becomes saturated with stimuli: "There is no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé attitude" ([1903] 1995: 329). Yet with the influence of postmodernist thought the notion of fractured selves, lives, and complexity has shifted from being constituted as a negative trope to a more positive one. Thus Simmel's notion of the city as a site of overstimulation and excess of feeling has been substituted by an imagination of the city as vibrant and exciting and a space where the play of the senses and bodily pleasures can be celebrated and explored.

Contemporary discourses of the city as constituting sites of pleasure are perhaps one of the many reasons that Benjamin's writings have received so much recent attention by urbanists. For him the city and its crowds are intoxicating, fascinating, productive, and creative, while the commodity culture of the nineteenth century is conceived as a dreamworld. The modern metropolis for Benjamin was the principal site of the phantasmagoria of modernity and the new manifestation of myth, which is illustrated particularly in his writings on the covered shopping arcades of Paris which were constructed from glass and intricate ironwork which shone and sparkled. The dreamworld and unconscious of the bourgeoisie, with its dreams of progress, abundance, desire for pleasure and consumption are materialized in the architecture, commodities, and fashion of the city. But the city for Benjamin is also an ambiguous place – at once alluring and threatening (Buck-Morss 1995: 66):

> As a social formation, Paris is a counter image to that which Vesuvius is as a geographic one: A threatening, dangerous mass, an ever-active June of the Revolution. But just as the slopes of Vesuvius, thanks to the layers of lava covering them, have become a paradisiacal orchard, so here, out of the lava of the Revolution, there bloom art, fashion and festive existence as nowhere else.

His writings are not explorations of memory as such and the metropolis is not simply a space remembered by Benjamin; rather memory is intricately interwoven with particular sites (Gilloch 1997: 11, 66). Memory shapes the city at the same time as being shaped by it.

City and the Realization of Self

So far we have considered the city's effect on the collective imagination. But urban imagination can also be read in terms of *realization* or *nonrealization* of the individual – *the self*. It was in the ordinary spaces of the city that James Joyce's characters achieved self-realization – those epiphanies or moments of insight and revelation, so extraordinary, came in the everyday spaces of the city. Equally those urban writers and scholars of the cosmopolitan school look to the encounter with others as a form of psychic development and enlightenment (Sennett 1970; Young 1990; Jacobs 1962). On the other hand the city and urban experience may also act to separate the self from imagination and creativity. Alienation is estrangement. For Marx this was a material process, an outcome of the social relations of production in capitalism. In this sense much experience for many urban dwellers in western and non-Western cities is a distance from the imagination and a denial of imagination. Yet even in the spaces of alienation, shackled to the production line, acts of the imagination like daydreams form sites of resistance (see Figure 1.1).

This distance from the imagination was enforced through bricks and mortar for Engels (Engels 1971). In his study of Manchester of 1844 the separation of workers in different quality housing and separate districts led to the separation of their imaginations and suppressed the possibility of them coming together to form a revolutionary consciousness. These city trenches (to borrow Katznelson's 1981 term) are trenches in the imagination. In contemporary cities such trenches take

new forms in the fortress architecture of the gated communities, or exclusionary suburbs, all of which act to block imaginative identifications with the other.

Alienation is one modernist trope; other imaginative influences on understanding the city look to the fragmentation of self and suggest that there is no real self to be estranged from. We could also argue that the notion of the self is a Western problem, or at least a Western conceit when set against life on the Bombay pavements or in the squatter settlements of Manila. Nevertheless, the distance of self from deeper impulses, desires, and fears continues to be a theme in understanding the urban condition. Here we encounter the relation of the imagination to the subconscious. Deep desires and fears can emerge in the city – hence its representation as a crucible of civilization, as promethean, but also as the site of sin (as in Sodom and Gomorrah), or as unruly spaces that have to be managed. The fabric of the city might provide glimpses of deeper psychic drives but it might also operate to keep them in check. The city might be the dreamwork that keeps those urges at a distance (see Pile, chapter 8), or it might help reinforce our distance from the unconscious. The city is a dream, a trance full of ghosts and traces and possibilities that never (literally) materialize.

We can also think of the city as a space of anxiety and fear, or drawing, as Vidler (1992) does, on Freud, as the site of the uncanny. Richard Sennett sees the modern city as reflecting the divide between subjective experience and worldly experience, or between the self and the city. Thus cities reflect a great fear of exposure, and are constructed instead to protect our inner (even spiritual) selves from the threat of social contact and from differences. There is some resonance here with the idea of the fortress city (Davis 1992) of more recent construction which plays on fear of "the other" and of violence to entice people into private gated communities. Suburbs are imbued with a similar imagery counterposed to the dangerous, congested, and criminal inner city as imagined spaces of community, safety and family.

Early feminist writers looked to the city as a source of self-realization away from the constraints of the gendered space of the home and patriarchal relationships. Rather than following conventional views of the city as spaces of immorality, threat, and danger for women, feminists have also articulated the city as a space of freedom and possibility away from the shackle of domestic life, constraint and suffocation (Wilson 1991). Thus in the Australian context Barbara Brooks (1989: 33–5) writes:

> Coming from the country to the city was an escape into a freer more varied and tolerant way of life . . . the private and the public landscape interact, release each other. Moving to a different place gives you the chance to shift habits and routines, move into a different persona. An urban or semi-urban environment gives more variety, more chance to move around between different groups and get lost in between.

Other feminist writers and idealists have imagined new urban designs and city forms as a potentially liberating force whereby women can be freed from domestic drudgery (Hayden 1981). The fantasy here is that more collective built forms will enable and even determine a more collective and shared way of life. Many utopian novels written by women embody similar ideas.

Figure 1.1 Aboriginal inscription, Sydney (© Steve Pile)

Clearly for people living outside of conventional norms, such as gays or single women, or for those seeking to break the bonds of earlier ties, the city can represent a space of liberation. A different fantasy comes into play for many intercountry migrants or rural–urban migrants leaving an impoverished rural life where agricultural opportunities have been stripped away, who may see the city as a potential source of livelihood and a better life. The fact that many such migrants end up living in the poor areas of the American, British, or European city or ramshackle dwellings on the sidewalks of Johannesburg, does not dilute the force of the imagined advantages of the city to those who follow.

Cities, then, operate as sites of fantasy. So also subjectivities are constructed in the spaces (both formal and interstitial, imagined and real) of the city and certain kinds of feelings or a sense of self are made possible, and we remember these as emerging in a particular site. In Woolf's (1938: 119) *The Years* Rose is standing by the Thames:

> As she stood there, looking down at the water, some buried feeling began to arrange the stream into a pattern. The pattern was painful. She remembered how she had stood there on that night of a certain engagement, crying. . . . Then she had turned . . . and she had seen the churches, the masts and roofs of the city. There's *that*, she had said to herself. Indeed it was a

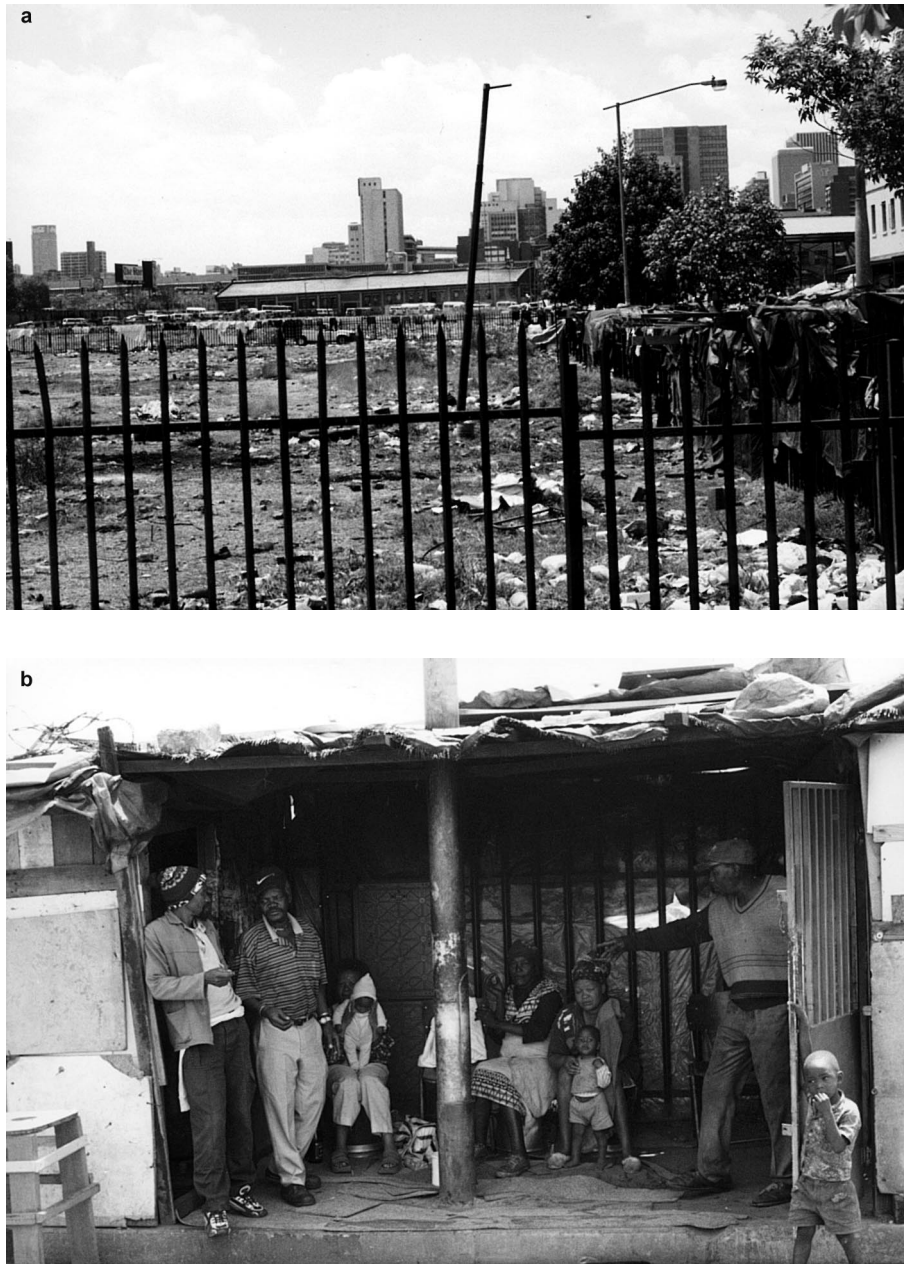

Figure 1.2a,b Sidewalk dwellers, Johannesburg (© Sophie Watson)

splendid view . . . she looked, and then again she turned. There were the Houses of Parliament. A queer expression, half frown, half smile, formed on her face and she threw herself slightly backwards, as if she were leading an army.

The buildings and spaces of the city are formed in, and themselves form, memory, while memory becomes spatialized.

Drawing on memory, learning from the past in one's relationship with the city is part of this self-development and self-actualization. Memory plays a part in the way that cities are imagined. At the level of the everyday a smell in the street or the sound of a piano from a room we are passing can evoke another place and time. The complex textures of the city are a rich source of memory for urban dwellers which may represent an absence for new migrants disembedding them, at least initially, from a sense of place and belonging. Antony Vidler (1992: 176) suggests that urban memory in the traditional city was easy to define as the image of the city which made it possible for the individual citizen to identify with its past and present as a cultural, social, and political entity: "it was neither the 'reality' of the city nor a purely 'imaginary' utopia but rather the complex mental map or significance by which the city might be recognised as 'home,' as something not foreign, and as constituting a (more or less) moral and protected environment for actual daily life." In this scenario monuments come to act as crucial signifiers constructing particular meanings – whether it is the triumphal arch or the splendor of government buildings. Once again this aspect of cities is captured by Viriginia Woolf (1938: 165):

The omnibuses swirled and circled in a perpetual current round the steps of St Paul's. The statue of Queen Anne seemed to preside over the chaos and to supply it with a centre, like the hub of a wheel. It seemed as if the white lady ruled the traffic with her sceptre, directed the activities of the little men in bowler hats and round coats; of the women carrying attache cases; of the vans, the lorries and the motor omnibuses.

This view of the significance of monuments giving cultural location is questioned by Thrift (chapter 34) when he argues for the inconspicuousness of monuments and encourages us to look to other everyday spaces in the city to find the extraordinary.

As cities have become more complex, more global, and more diasporic it is harder to construct cultural markers which make for a simple image of the city with which to identify. At whose imagination, we may ask, is the statue, the poster, the building facade, or the pavement mosaic directed, and for what purpose? And what and whose past are we drawing on in the construction of city monuments? As Vidler points out (1992: 179), for modernists it was as much a story about erasing the past, forgetting the old city and what it stood for, its chaos and corruption, as it was a story about referencing earlier urban forms. Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, for example, maintained the body as the central organizing principle and central reference point echoing the classical tradition. In a similar way current urban regeneration initiatives are also drawing on cultural imaginaries of earlier times, be it invoking earlier traditions of local employment and industries – as is classically seen in the reconstruction of dockland areas – or cultural life.

Representing Cities

All these tensions – between imaginative innovation or constraint, between actualization or remoteness, between the individual or the collective imagination – emerge not just in the effects of the city on imagination but in the way that the city is imagined, the way it is *represented* in film and literature, in urban scholarship, and in urban planning and politics. City narratives can come in many forms. Cities take their shape through representation and the discursive practices which construct them, and the boundary between real and imagined cities is difficult to draw. Jonathan Raban (1974: 10) puts it thus:

> Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try and impose a personal form on them. . . . The city as we might imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.

Different theoretical approaches tell different stories which purport to some kind of truth about cities but which are themselves only one way of understanding the complexities that constitute a city. There is no one narrative of a city, but many narratives construct cities in different ways highlighting some aspects and not others.

There has been a long tradition of the urban sociological imagination with writers as diverse as Simmel ([1903] 1995), Benjamin (1985), Wirth (1938), and Lefebvre (1991) representing the city in a diversity of ways. In the early days of urban analysis the dominant imagining of cities was the Chicago School and the ecological approach. In this formulation, Burgess (1925), Park (1925), and others conceived the city as a plantlike organism which was ordered according to certain principles which divided the land into specific populations and uses thus achieving some form of balanced growth. In this model the analogy was of the city as a living organism operating according to given laws. Contained within this approach was an evolutionary model of economic growth and change where Chicago was taken as the epitome of the modern industrial city which was the culmination of a long evolutionary process dating back to much earlier historical periods. The new spatial divisions in cities were imagined as the product of the complex divisions of labor in modern industrial society.

The Chicago narrative was superseded by two dominant theoretical imaginaries to understanding cities; one of these derived from Weber's work, the other from Marx. Ray Pahl (1975), among others, drawing on Weber, emphasized the importance of institutions and the decisions of urban managers in determining the shape and distribution of resources and services in the city. This was a relatively benign imaginary, wherein resided the possibility for change and reform. David Harvey (1973) and Manuel Castells (1977) are two of the Marxist urban analysts who have played a significant role in developing a political economy approach to the city. In his work Harvey developed Marx's theory of capital accumulation to draw out the implications for urban structures. In the early texts he set out to explore the importance of land in three circuits of capital: the primary circuit of production of commodities, the secondary circuit where capital is fixed in the built environment,

and the tertiary circuit of scientific knowledge and expenditures related to the reproduction of labor power. Other Marxist writers developed different but related approaches to understanding the city, but within each the prevailing imaginary was of a city that worked in the interests of capital accumulation and exploitation. In this period, from the early 1970s to mid-1980s many writers sought to construct true representations of the city, rather than recognizing that any representation of the city could only ever be partial.

More recently the cultural turn has meant the emergence of new city stories and imaginaries which foreground cities as spaces of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, as well as spaces of the psyche, memory and the imaginary. Much of this writing has turned back to the earlier analysts of the city in modernity to develop new paradigms and new insights. Other texts draw on postmodern writers such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard to shift the focus from the material and economic spheres to the imaginary, the cultural, and the hyper-real. These paradigms self-consciously disrupt the boundaries between real and imagined cities and discursive and non-discursive terrains. Notions of difference, fragmentation, complexity, virtuality, hyper-reality, simulacra, and cyberspace surveillance are thus now embedded in these contemporary stories. Cities have always been the repository of all sorts of myths and fantasies, some of which tend to the utopian-cities as sites of desire, others to the dystopian–cities as sites of fear. Pro- and anti-urban representations and mythologies have been as much a feature of literary and film texts as they have a been a feature of the texts of social reformers, philanthropists, and politicians. For pro-urbanists and city lovers, cities are imagined as spaces of opportunity, of the co-mingling of strangers, as spaces of excitement, difference, cosmopolitanism, and interconnection; and as spaces of culture, engagement, enchantment, fluidity, and vibrancy. These pro-urban imaginaries themselves have translated into policies to encourage and enhance city living (see chapter 42 in this volume).

Another positive representation is the city as polis. A political imaginary of the city dates from the early days of cities from the Mayan and Aztec cities of Central and South America to the cities of the Greek and Roman empires. The archetypal city of Athens stood, and continues to stand, for notions of democracy, civic culture, human fulfillment, and urbanity. For Marx the city represented a potential space of freedom for the masses away from the conservatism and idiocy of rural life. Taking seriously the politics of difference in the contemporary city Iris Marion Young (1990), among many other political theorists (Sennett 1990), proposes a political imaginary of the city as a space of "the being together of strangers." Different political imaginations find their way into urban design and form. Harlow new town, for example, was built after the Second World War near London with a socialist vision of democracy and inclusion and with innovative ideas as to how the city could enable a more egalitarian way of life. Similarly Brasilia was conceived as a symbol of modernity, where squatting was to be abolished, and order was paramount (Hall 1988: 219).

Anti-urban imaginaries have been forcefully in play in literary, art, and political texts for as long as there have been cities. Here the associations are with the city as a site of anomie, alienation, corruption, ill health, immorality, chaos, pollution, congestion, and a threat to social order. In these imaginaries, the urban masses need to be contained and controlled, for if they are left to their own devices the city will become a site of crime and potential revolution. Fear and anxiety lie close to the

surface of these representations, whether it be fear of cities as spaces of disease or as spaces of disorder. The role of the social reformer or politician in this scenario is to impose order in the midst of chaos, harmony in the face of disharmony, and cleanliness out of squalor. This attitude is characterized in the reforming zeal of the mid- to late nineteenth century of philanthropists in the mould of William Booth and Octavia Hill in England.

Urban designs and city plans (such as those of Le Corbusier, Lloyd Wright, and Ebenezer Howard) have often embodied, implicitly or explicitly, some version of anti-urbanism which evokes the city as a place to be tamed and ordered and made predictable. It is interesting to question what is at stake in the different discourses and interpretations of the city and whose interests they serve. Or to put this another way, what power/knowledge relations are in play in these representations? Plans and designs are never neutral tools of spatial ordering. We can illustrate this point by considering the strategy deployed by the Republican Mayor of New York in the 1990s, Rudolf Giuliani, to clean up the city. Dominant representations of the city as dangerous, dirty, and derelict legitimated fairly draconian measures to clear the streets of unwanted people. Rather than tackle the problem of the homeless through housing policy, homeless people were simply forced off the streets of Manhattan – to other parts of the city – so that Manhattan residents could walk the streets without encountering beggars. In this case this representation acted in the interests of businesses and established residents of the city both financially – in the case of businesses or property owners – and in terms of quality of life. As a result homeless people were further marginalized. A dominant imaginary of Black people as threatening and violent similarly legitimated an apartheid system in South Africa where Black people were cast to marginal settlements on the edge or outside of the city. If we take seriously the power of the imagination, then questions also need to be asked regarding in which sites and institutions different imaginings are produced and with what effects.

Representations of the city have tended to be dominated by the Western imaginary – Peter Hall's mammoth text on cities (1998) is a case in point, where the only non-European or non-American city to warrant a chapter is Tokyo. Western rationalist planning imaginaries have also failed to cope with the conditions and particularities of many non-Western cities. This Companion has deliberately set out to include explorations and discussion of different kinds of cities not in an attempt to be comprehensive or even comparative, but in order both to shift the dominance of western cities in contemporary urban collections and also to illustrate the diversity and specificity of cities across the globe. This is all the more necessary as processes of globalization have disrupted cities as imagined homogenous spaces. So too new racial imaginaries have begun to destabilize predominantly White representations of city life and experience.

In conclusion, imaginings of cities are powerful and have their effects. In some instances they may represent an attempt to overcome our sense of alienation from the city; in others they are an outcome of that, and no doubt these responses exist in some kind of tension. So too our imagination can be either an escape from the problems of cities, or an act of resistance, or both. Any representations and imaginaries are bound to be in a state of flux and will also be subject to contestation by those who feel excluded or on the margins of the dominant imaginary. Increasingly cultural geographies of locality are revealing the multiple stories of how space is lived and

imagined by different sections of the population from youth to small migrant communities, by women, and by gays. There are many cities and many stories to be told.

Not only are cities constituted in imagination and different forms of representation, they are also themselves sites of imagination and creativity. The very maelstrom of the city to which Benjamin and others have drawn attention can itself be a creative influence, while in other circumstances it may be constraining. Imagination and the city are mutually constitutive and interwoven in countless ways and, as we have seen, the membrane between specific sites of the city and memory and the imaginary is a porous one. We see in Part 5 how imagination is translated into policy and how through the mechanisms of governance it has its effects.

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