

Introduction

At the start of the new millennium cities are firmly back on the agenda. More people live in cities and more people are affected by urban processes than ever before. Cities are the sites of complex global/local interconnections producing a multiplicity of social, cultural, political, and economic spaces and forms. It is no longer possible, if it ever was, to look at the city from one perspective – be it cultural or economic. Instead cities need to be understood from a variety of perspectives in the recognition that the cultural/social constructs, and is constructed by, the political/economic and vice versa. It is only when we adopt such a complex and textured reading of cities that we will begin to be able to address the pressing social, economic, and environmental questions faced by cities across the world – be it the postindustrial city of North America or the rapidly growing megacity in China.

This Companion sets out precisely to think about cities in these more complex ways and to bring together scholars from a range of different fields to create a multidisciplinary approach to cities. No longer is the city the privileged terrain of urban studies or geographical analysis. Instead academics and thinkers from disciplines as diverse as film studies and economics or philosophy and geography have turned their attention to the city and generated exciting new ways of thinking. This Companion has deliberately included voices from this diverse terrain in order to promote a dialog that for many years of urban analysis was dormant. Poststructuralist and feminist writers thus rub shoulders with Marxists and neoclassical economists in order, hopefully, to provoke lively debate and new intellectual spaces.

The Companion does not aim to map the field historically or to provide a chronology of major writing on cities – there are other excellent readers that do precisely that (see Le Gates and Stout 1996; Short 1996). Neither does it aim to provide a geographical catalog of the conditions of contemporary cities, since that is done very well by Habitat and other regional collections. This Companion instead deals with contemporary analysis *of* cities as well as some of the key issues *in* cities. There has been a tendency within urban studies historically to develop an analysis and argument based on Western cities and Western assumptions of cultural, social, and economic life, with little attention paid to the profound differences of social,

cultural, and economic processes and the local specificity of cities across the world. This universalizing approach has come under growing criticism and scrutiny from postcolonial writers, feminists, poststructuralists and others who have pointed out how western, male, and white assumptions have produced a global homogenous discourse which has masked and ignored difference. It has also perpetuated dominant power/knowledge relations and written whole groups of people, cities, and countries out of the picture.

This Companion aims to redress this imbalance. It does not purport to be comprehensive in its coverage or analysis of cities across the globe. It does however aim to consider the key themes of the book in a variety of contexts, places, and spaces. Its aim therefore is to give a taste at least of the complexity and texture of cities, city spaces, and city interventions at the beginning of the millennium.

All the chapters in this Companion were commissioned by the editors and are thus original pieces of work. They range from discursive and reflective pieces to discussions of original empirical research. The Companion is organized around five themes which we consider to be a useful way of mapping the field: imagining cities, the economy and the city, division and difference, public cultures and everyday space, urban policy and interventions. Each of the sections is introduced by a think piece by the editors which is not intended as an introduction to the chapters in the section, but rather is an attempt to lay out the dimensions of discussion and suggest new ways of approaching the city. Each section includes chapters from non-western¹ cities in order to highlight the variety and diversity of cities and analyses of cities globally rather than to provide a comprehensive coverage of cities across the world.

Cities are feats of the imagination and they affect the ability to imagine. The first section, "Imagining Cities," looks at the different ways cities have been imagined in planning and design as well as media representations and the effects on the built form and the social, cultural, and esthetic realms. These are not just cognitive and creative but unconscious and uncanny. They are not just confined to planning and cultural discourse but influence ways of thinking the economic, identity, and difference, constructions of the public and the private, and the sphere of politics. Each section of the Companion is intended to cohere sufficiently to examine the main currents of discussion within each theme but also to provide openings, connections, and productive juxtapositions with the other sections of the book. So "The Economy and the City" is not just understood in terms of academic disputes about material processes (between neoclassical, Marxist, and post-Marxist analyses) but also as acts of the imagination and political will – as much the terrain of cultural studies as conventional political economy. "Cities of Division and Difference" explores the distinctions of age, class, gender, "race" and ethnicity, sex, citizenship in relation to urban space, and the disruptions of western and nonwestern understandings of productive recognition and prejudiced separation. The extent to which these interrelations result in a depleted public realm in cities is a concern that runs through the chapters in the section "Public Cultures and Everyday Space." Rumors of the death of public space might be a little exaggerated as the contributors seek the possibilities of a rejuvenated public realm in the mundane, the unnoticed, and the everyday practices of city life. These insights give us new ways of thinking about urban politics and the interrelations between formal, institutional policy-making, and informal political activity in the uncelebrated spaces of the city.

In all these arguments on the city and imagination, economy, division, the public, and politics we are seeking to unsettle assumptions and cross boundaries, not in the pursuit of endless displacement, but rather to identify new connections that lie at the confluence of the imagination as economy, globalization as cultural difference and as productive, and the political in acts that are normally ignored. These disruptions and juxtapositions are at the heart of the urban experience and offer a beginning for a reconstituted understanding of the city in the third millennium.

NOTE

1. There have been a number of ways of regionalizing discussion of cities such as the division between cities of the north and cities of the south. Here we choose western and non-western to connote not just geographical location but sets of intellectual histories and assumptions in traditional literatures on cities.

REFERENCES

- Le Gates, R. and Stout, F. (eds.) 1996: *The City Reader*. London: Routledge.
Short, J. 1996: *The Urban Order: An Introduction to Cities, Culture and Power*. Oxford: Blackwell.

