

## Book Review

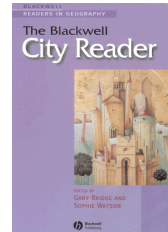
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### The Blackwell City Reader

*Bridge, G. & Watson, S. (Eds. 2002), Blackwell, Oxford, ISBN 0-631-22514-5*

An earlier, smaller and perhaps less ambitious collection of papers by Peter Ambrose acknowledges the students whose seminars informed his choice ‘in grateful recognition that the flow of wisdom has not been one way’, (Ambrose, 1969). Bridge and Watson’s work is at a different order of magnitude, and not so obviously linked to their teaching, but comparison may be worthwhile, if only to justify a longer than usual review. The City Reader is several books long when compared with Ambrose’s fourteen papers on Analytical Human Geography. These made heroes of Garrison, Carrothers, Gould and Morrill for students on a means-tested annual maintenance grant (in the UK) of about £222, when there were no fees for undergraduate students. Bridge and Watson write at a time of repayable undergraduate loans and £1100 means tested tuition fees in England, and follow a tradition of compendious Urban Studies texts. They mix established authors with a selection of novel material. Some, as in Ambrose’s book, obscure or possibly unvisited rather than new. I found inspiration in Mitchell, Cronon, Myung-Rae Cho, Sennett, Certeau and Viriluo, and much ‘by the yard’ elsewhere, but others will make a different assessment.



Collections of readings such as the 1978 Open University reader, Fundamentals of Human Geography, where John Blunden and others’ 44 authors lie between the analytical and the city collections, suggest a link with Giles Mohan’s *product cycles* approach to the disciplines such collections help expose or promote. The ebb and flow of rival perspectives, ‘a Gestalt-switch... suddenly seeing an old familiar picture in a radically new way...’, (Livingstone, 1992, pp 13 – 14), with career success and better essay marks for those that can place their expertise correctly. Or from a more cynical perspective, for those who can anticipate and conform to the latest orthodoxy, (Mohan, 1994, pp 387 – 390), The Blackwell City Reader may help this process by introducing a new generation of students to a stimulating mix of established and novel perspectives. By making it easier for lecturers to incorporate this material in their teaching. And perhaps by slowing the academic product cycle enough for more to appreciate this snap shot of salient text. It is already threatened by other World views, of which environmentalism and the sustainability agenda are perhaps the most obvious omissions. Insufficient attention to environmental justice, heritage / conservation and identity issues, lifestyle changes and emerging less spatially constrained ‘geographies’ are possible grounds for criticism of this reader’s content. But in each case this must be muted as these and other priorities and

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perspectives are represented, but easily missed or forgotten within nearly 600 pages of text.

Bridge and Watson tempt us with over 50 crucial writings on the City. Many are quite short, but this remains a daunting read. Cover notes' celebrate the '*sheer range of city voices*' (Nigel Thrift), though whether these are '*the most important commentaries on urban life*', so '*this book transcends the limits of academic endeavour and becomes a cultural intervention in its own right*' (Angela McRobbie), begs further discussion of choice of material and the use to which it is put. Questioning its selection risks unreasonable 'I wouldn't have started from here' criticism. But it is fair to place this work in a well-defined intellectual stockade, and perhaps to object to the assumptions required by this starting point.

This is a cultural, geographical and critical view of the City as a concept and of cities as places. It usefully introduces us to, or reminds us of, the 'City Imaginations' of Simmel, Le Corbusier, Lynch, Joyce, Woolf, Dickens, and Duras, and juxtaposes these with more recent or less widely read work. Christine Boyer reflects on the city of collective memory. Antony Vidler takes Simmel's 'fear of contact', *beruhungsangst*, Freud's interest in women's *agoraphobia*, and via other gendered perspectives, invites a more critical approach to bodies and to space: a theme that returns many times in the rest of the book. Mitchell's '*City of Bits*', introduces hyperspace, questions of enclosure and exclusion, and the parallels between real and electronic transactions and networks. The protocols that govern cities have escaped their material form, just as trading relationships and institutions grew out of the Chicago grain trade in the 1850s to create modern financial services that in turn led to dematerialised electronic trading, (Cronon, Ch. 19). For contrast Djuna Barnes describes a boat trip round Manhattan in 1917 and Hanan Al-Shaykh gives an, undated, recent account of Beirut.

The matter of dates is important. None of the collection's chapters are dated directly, though most can be identified through the list of acknowledgements and sources. At first I found this unsettling. Date of publication helps set expectations, which is perhaps why it is left out. The clues to date permeate each piece, but lack of prompts or context may make papers and chapters more interesting, and less readily categorised and discarded. The short extract from Le Corbusier, for instance, is as relevant to the case for garden cities, and for equitable access to reasonable living conditions, as it is to prescriptions for modern, high density ways of living. And these are to be made possible by a hierarchy of separate transport networks that anticipates Buchanan's 'Traffic in Towns' and the Dutch ABC integrated transportation / land use planning protocol. Overall a better case for compact cities than nostalgia or inertia, whatever its ideological context and despite difficulties in implementing Le Corbusier's dream.

Part two of the book has the title 'Reading Urban Economics', and incorporates the Marxist Revolution in Urban Studies, the Fordist and the Post-Fordist City, Globalisation, the Global City, Fantasy Economics, the Postmodern City and its Aesthetic Economy. David Harvey's Framework for Analysis, Allen J. Scott's *Metropolis*, Manuel Castell's on *the Information Age*, Edward W. Soja's *Six discourses on the Postmetropolis* and Saskia Sassen on *Globalisation* give a context which is brilliantly fleshed out by Myung-Rae Cho's account of Postfordist Seoul, William Cronon's grain sack based history of financial service development and a diversity of other, more mundane or unwelcoming, perspectives: Sharaon Zukin's discussion of *Liminal Space*, Lindsay Bremner on the

reinvention of Johannesburg's Inner City, Susan Buck-Morris on Arcades and World Expositions, a *Feminist Critique of Political Economy* by J.K. Gibson-Graham which deals with the spatiality of women's bodies and has some links with Vidler's earlier chapter, and Ali Mari Tripp on women's economic activity in Dar es Salaam.

Part three concerns 'Reading Division and Difference'. It starts with Ernest W. Burgess' classic work on the concentric growth and five subdivisions of the city, juxtaposed with Ira Katznelson's *City Trenches* account of trade union, party and governmental politics in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American cities and with William Julius Wilson's exploration of *underclass* in mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century America. In *City A/genders* Sophie Watson reviews the concepts of gendered cities and feminist urban theory. Elizabeth Grosz challenges traditional notions of the body, in particular *the constitutive and mutually defining relation between bodies and cities*, (Grosz, p298). More concrete matters are discussed in Brendan Gleeson's chapter on discrimination against people with physical disabilities, a *socio-spatial exclusion* with undesirable cumulative effects that reflects the values and power relations of the society which permits such injustice, warrants resistance and has implications for radical geography. Richard Sennett uses Shakespeare's writings on Venice to introduce this 'most international city of the Renaissance... a golden and luxuriant port' where resident foreigners such as the Jews, permanent immigrants barred from citizenship, relied on Laws of Contract for business, but were obliged to return to the Ghetto at dusk, (Sennett, p316). Segregation came from Venicians' fear of infection or seduction by physical mixing with *the Other*, similar to contemporary response to AIDS, leading to squalid over-concentration and much greater susceptibility to plague. The same spatial politics of fear are represented in Mike Davis' account of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*: fortress cities with fortified cells to protect better off residents from the criminalized poor. Public space is lost and *sadistic street environments* created as the city is *hardened* against the poor.

'Reading City Publics', the fourth part, deals with the appropriation of public space. Richard Sennett follows contradictions inherent in the International School of Architecture's approach to visibility and social exclusion to explore the linguistic roots of the words 'public', meaning common good (1470), and 'private', meaning privileged (1542). Jane Jacobs reflects on the fear of barbarism in many city streets. Setha M. Low provides a Costa Rican perspective on the social construction of public space: an anthropological approach to the study of urban space in terms of two *plazas*. Henri Lefebvre writes of *the right to the city* in the context of pseudo rights to nature and the countryside by, mainly urban, people whose actions destroy these places, and of the absolute need for 'a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*', which only the working class can deliver. Michel Foucault describes strict C17 quarantine rules for plague and compares these with the logic of Bentham's *Panopticon*, an all seeing but unseen authority, or rather a political technology detached from any specific use. The reader is left to make the link with today's CCTV monitored, Quality Assurance obsessed anxious fear of dangerous failure to conform.

Michel de Certeau reawakens contemporary fears by dwelling on New York's World Trade Centre (in a piece from 1984), though his argument is perhaps more important as a critique of what this book stands for. He doubts the city itself. Like all research or publication predicated on a specific subject, the City Reader is a poor home for arguments that question the functional, social, economic or cultural reality of the City. Intermeshed in de Certeau's assault on any uneducated readership, buried under expressions such as '

“tropes” catalogued by rhetoric furnish models and hypotheses for the analysis of ways of appropriating places’, and terms such as *Synecdoche* and *Asyndeton*, (de Certeau, p 389), the city ceases to have real meaning. ‘Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer.’ So, after 386 pages, we are told the plot. Cities are impressive visual and sentimental forms, but unworthy, unrewarding and irrelevant topics for study. That is, unless the purpose is to score points against other writers, to surf the latest exclusionary wave of the intellectual product cycle, and be rewarded as a notable thinker and teacher. But this may be too facile and cynical. Hardly fair comment on an influential, rather dated, beautiful piece of densely woven prose. Though it might justify an attack on the whole edifice of Urban Studies. What is the point of academic endeavour that perpetuates a myth?

An answer may be seen the remainder of the section. Walter Benjamin revisits the *Arcades project*, dwelling among other facets on the *ambiguity of place*. Roslyn Deutsche explores the politics of community, public space and art, ending with the question ‘was the city once more public than now’, more democratic? (Deutsche, p407). Judith Walkowitz examines Henry James’ urban spectatorship (as *flaneur*) in Victorian London, and describes how politicised ‘respectable women’, middle class moral reformers and radical workingmen together achieved the repeal of legislation to regulate prostitution in 1886. A sexual, erotic theme continues in Elizabeth Wilson’s discussion of Paris, Colette’s writing and feminism. While Iris Marion Young approaches community from an abstract, philosophical perspective, exploring notions of mediation and alienation: ‘Even for many of those who decry the alienation, massification, and bureaucratisation of capitalist patriarchal society, city life exerts a powerful attraction’. The *unoppressive city*, open to unassimilated otherness, appears to be a myth we willingly ascribe to, despite the flaws that afflict relationships between groups: ‘racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, suspicion and mockery’, (Young, p436 – 437). Finally Paul Virilio returns to the way fear, in this case of terrorist attack, has restructured cities and their use and has produced new geographies and forms of separation. ‘Deprived of objective boundaries the architectonic element begins to drift and float in an electronic ether, devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion... distinctions of *here* and *there* no longer mean anything.’ (Virilio, p 442). Instantaneous urbanity begs questions about where the city ends, about dealing with *accidental, heterogeneous space*, with *synthetic space-time*. ‘...today’s metropolis is a phantom landscape, the fossil of past societies whose technologies were intimately aligned with the visible transformation of matter, a project from which the sciences have increasingly turned away’. (Virilio, p448). So we must question its claim on our senses and our institutions.

The last part of this reader, Reading Urban Interventions, addresses globalisation and boosterism, the idealism of some urban planners, suburbanisation, the decline of modernism, influence of postmodernism, links with colonialism and, finally, self-empowerment as a way of resisting domination in megacities. David Harvey is critical of urban entrepreneurialism and public-private partnerships. John Logan and Harvey Molotch explore the trade offs associated with growth: is an opera house worth the pollution caused by having a sufficiently large population to support one? Peter Hall tells how the automobile city emerged in the USA, briefly contrasts this with a deurbanist vision from the USSR, and gives details of Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Broadacre City*, and of how suburbanisation accommodated 9 million Americans in the 1940s and 19 million in

the fifties, while the population of large cities started to shrink. But suburban flight to Levittowns and similar places was largely white, accentuating racial segregation. Planners had little effect on this process, and it has only recently come to be studied and even celebrated rather than dismissed as lacking form.

Patsey Healey sets the physical development of towns and cities in its economic and ideological context, from Marx to Thatcher, and shows how the obsession with urban form developed. Contrasting European and North American traditions have converged, but are challenged by neo-liberalism and face problems because argumentative, communicative or interpretive planning theory, and related locally focussed forms of governance, are not sufficiently well informed about urban and regional change. In other words, policy prescriptions and interventions are out of step with the world they seek to control. Robert Beauregard reiterates this point. Modernist planners cannot cope with the post modern. Critical social theory that integrates dialectic conceptions of space and time is generally absent from US planning. In its place are poorly informed local and community focussed interventions, a willingness to accept the 'end of ideology', and failure to make sense of the post-Fordist economy and the postmodern city. A more concrete application of modernism is provided by James Holston's anthropological critique of the desert city of Brasilia, which he presents as very similar to Le Corbusier's vision (chapter 2), but describes as monotonous and flawed as a place to live. Late in this collection Anthony King presents exhaustive lists of colonial planning, suggests a useful model and framework for attempting to understand this process, but limits discussion mainly to the undemocratic nature of such impositions, and so misses the opportunity to make more of the comparative dimension. Oren Yiftachel also looks at the imposition of planning, in this case to control an ethnic minority in *plural*, deeply divided, societies. While the processes described seem similar to Sennett's account of the Venetian Ghetto, Yiftachel's piece lacks examples. By contrast Jane Jacobs narrates how Aborigines became invisible, through exclusion or assimilation, as the grid of the colonial city (Perth) was superimposed on their land, and how their claims to a sacred urban site (the Old Swan Brewery) lost out to the *tourist gaze*, and the production of non-Aboriginal 'heritage'.

Finally Akhtar Badshah and Janice Perlman consider how the voluntary or non profit sector is helping counter the rapidly deteriorating urban environments faced by most citizens of mega cities, as reported by UNCHS 'Best Practices' and aided by intermediaries such as the New York based Mega-Cities Project, which supports transfer and adaptation of successful innovations, or *cross cultural learning*. The example of the Zabbaleen waste collection and recycling system in Cairo informing similar, traditional, practices in Manila and Bombay is useful, and is one of the few places in this collection where the language of sustainable development is used. However, it glosses over the political difficulties and limitations of self-help or voluntary sector solutions to chronic urban problems, and begs more comprehensive treatment of crucial issues such as large-scale domestic waste collection and treatment or disposal, and its links to other essential services. The spread of conventional, state led, municipal systems and the implications of privatisation are more important than this paper suggests, even if its message is sensible and worthwhile.

That the collection ends with important issues barely touched earlier in the book justifies an advertisement, on the last page, for *A Companion to the City, 2000*, by the same editors and now in paperback. These collections are worthwhile, but there is a need to go beyond assembling and contextualising salient texts. *The Geography, Governance and Future of*

the City must transcend the contradictions of differential spatial constraints: instantaneous, unrestricted Global commerce and media, increasingly unrestricted spatial movement of goods, tourists and expert labour. In contrast, market and authoritarian limits on lower status movement and residential choice, in part, due to racial and other prejudice (towards asylum seekers, economic migrants, those trapped in slums and refugee camps, or more generally through the limited purchasing power of ordinary people when the property market allocates social and environmental goods: schools, health care, amenity...). The City, and traditions of Urban Studies, give focus. But, as shown in various places in this book, are a metaphor, accident or lie if they are interpreted as having any more special meaning for society and economics. That we bunch together and concentrate transactions spatially or temporally is just part of a wider, Global process. While its description and analysis is useful, we should avoid replacing naïve ecological fallacies with more sophisticated, but equally flawed, obsessions with place and local narrative.

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