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## The Future of Urban Sociology

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### Continuities and Change in Urban Sociology

- **Tim May and Beth Perry**

Over the course of the 20th century, sociologists have made rich and diverse contributions to urban studies, from the Chicago School with their focus on urban ecology, to the ‘radicalism’ of New Urban Sociology emphasizing neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist approaches (Bulmer, 1984; Faberman, 1979; Saunders, 1986). In both phases, sociologists positioned themselves as prominent critics and reformists of urban society, intimately connected with the identification and resolution of endemic problems and social issues. The aim of this symposium is to explore whether recent years have seen a crisis in urban sociology and to build an understanding of future potential in the context of historical trajectory and current challenges. Such issues have been the subjects of much debate. For this reason, joint sessions of the British and American Sociological Associations in March and July 2001 were dedicated to the discussion of the role and future of urban sociology, from which this symposium draws its inspiration (Perry and Harding, 2002).

The notion of crisis in urban sociology is partly rooted in the evolving nature of urban issues over the course of the 20th century and the resultant rise in interdisciplinary studies of the city. The study of urban phenomena is no longer the province of any one discipline in a complex socio-economic climate marked by reshifting notions of scale between the global and the local, increasing emphasis on interconnectivity, networks, infrastructures and flows and concern with interdependence and sustainability. Little wonder, then, that the past 20 years have seen sociologists lose a central position in urban studies, as other social science disciplines, from political science to geography, planning to economics, have contributed their own insights (see for example, Amin and Thrift, 2002; Drennan, 2002; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Hall, 1996; Judge

et al., 1995; Madsen and Plunz, 2001; Soja, 2000). The urban, as with all social phenomena, is simply not amenable to study through those disciplinary lenses that refuse to see the limits, as well as the strengths, of their modes of analysis.

At the same time, the trajectory of urban sociology demonstrates both a willingness to adapt to the challenges of interdisciplinarity in line with changing urban problems, and a continued focus on traditional questions distinct to the sociological imagination. The urban sociologists of the 1960s and 1970s stressed interdisciplinarity and comparison, accompanied by debate and discussion about the appropriate objects of analysis and core methodological and theoretical issues (Milicevic, 2001). They mixed political activism with studies of the city and an emphasis on social conflict, power, access to and control of resources and the systems of production, consumption, exchange and distribution. In so doing, they remained faithful to what have been identified as core sociological issues (Park, 1972). If geographers and historians had 'space' and 'time', the sociologists had 'structure' and 'culture' in the unfolding history of urban studies.

Urban sociologists have continued to make valuable contributions to the increasingly interdisciplinary study of complex urban issues. At the same time, they have maintained a concern with social dislocation and fragmentation, conflict and tension, cultural diversity, the 'symbolic' economy and competitiveness and cohesion – issues which have long characterized social studies of the urban and have traditionally been less well articulated in other disciplines (Buck et al., 2002; Sennett, 1991; Zukin, 1995). Studies of globalization and concomitant implications for cities have provided examples in which urban sociologists have combined a range of disciplinary perspectives to provide unique insights into issues of territory, scale and space (Brenner, 2000; Sassen, 2000; Savage and Warde, 1993). This has been achieved via an emphasis upon the continued importance of processes that constitute interdependence in the context of intensified global economic interactions (Le Galès, 2002; Storper and Walker, 1989; Taylor, 1996). In this sense, interdisciplinarity has led to a widening of horizons within urban sociology, rather than the encroachment of other disciplines on what is seen to be traditional terrain. Interdisciplinarity per se does not constitute a crisis for urban sociology, which continues to pose pertinent questions within the expanding field of urban studies, even more so as cities assume increasing importance in economic development processes.

Perhaps any concern with crisis can be better explained from within as a result of the fragmentation of urban sociology, an inward collapse and retreat into a series of separate studies that draw on sociology but frequently without explicit credit to the discipline itself: for example, in the areas of housing, education, policy and cultural studies, gender and sexuality, crime and ethnicity. This may be due, in large part, to how particular concepts are mediated between the global and action in context, as well as the organization of the university and particular claims to expertise. Social theory has also entered the stage and attention has turned to debates about global cities without connections being made to elements of urban life (Marcuse and Van Kempen, 2000).

What occurs here in the unfolding of urban sociology is a movement away from the difficult but also productive relations between theory and data. The danger is that social theory becomes so far removed from localities that it does not appear to have implications for informing context-sensitive research that connects everyday experiences to public and social issues. Two parallel yet paradoxical developments in the recent history of urban sociology can therefore be seen. First, the expansion into interdisciplinarity, often accompanied by grand theoretical frames, and second, a withdrawal into narrower studies of the more mundane elements of urban life, with little connection being made between them.

Seeking an explanation for such tendencies leads to consideration of the rapidly evolving relationship between science and society. Recent literatures have placed an increased emphasis upon interdisciplinarity within a 'Mode 2' of knowledge production which is said to characterize the 'new' knowledge economy (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny et al., 2001). In Mode 2, justification in the context of application requires 'borrowing' from whatever disciplines might provide appropriate insights or tools for analysis, as well as requiring skills on the part of the researcher that are not normally seen to be part of the mode of social scientific knowledge production. The Mode 2 thesis also draws attention to an increased emphasis upon the 'relevance' of academic knowledge and its application both to socio-economic problems and the needs of a variety of 'user' communities. These sets of forces are shaping what is expected of research, in any discipline. Yet incentives remain unbalanced. While interdisciplinarity is emphasized in principle, reward and organizational structures in universities still reflect traditional disciplinary boundaries. While the expected benefits of problem-solving and applied research are stressed, national research funding tends to be primarily linked to more traditional notions of scientific excellence, stressing theoretical and methodological innovation, leaving others to fund the more empirical or policy-related elements of urban and regional research. How this affects practice depends on how individual researchers are positioned within organizations and, when it comes to universities, most academics do not adequately reflect upon such relationships in terms of the production of social scientific knowledge.

In the field of urban sociology, the implications of such tensions relate directly to matters of funding and status. Diverse funding sources perpetuate the interdisciplinary/disciplinary and theory/practice divides and embody contradictory expectations of social scientific knowledge. While the re-articulation of the need for socially robust knowledge should pose no challenge to the social sciences, whose intimate connection with their subject matter constitutes their very relevance, it is the 'big' sciences that dominate the new knowledge economy. The relevance of bioscience, genetics, nanotechnology and ICTs is seemingly self-evident, as urban areas negotiate their global position as science cities, knowledge capitals or silicon fens and glens. This frequently leaves the social sciences competing for a space of limited attention. The challenge here is to better represent both the inherent values and the relevance of social sciences

more generally – including the position of sociology within urban studies – and to be clearer about the relationships between the global and the local, basic and applied research. More modest aspirations do not imply less effective engagements. On the contrary, they provide for the dynamism and relevance of insights as key contributions to practical rationality, as our understandings of space and its implications for human interaction change over time (Thrift, 1996).

How well equipped are sociologists to address such challenges? In the past, we saw processes of institutional absorption and disillusionment, accompanied by a retreat into established ways of seeing. The ‘new urban sociologists’ were inherently political, united by a common sense of social responsibility and a belief that change was both possible and imminent (Milicevic, 2001: 763). Yet the mixture of such zeal with the intransigence of the system they sought to change led to disappointment. Consequently, after the 1970s, leading urban sociologists aimed only to critique society from a distance, rather than effect change themselves: ‘they gave up political engagements, reconceptualized their own identities and continued with “normal” science, developing already raised questions’ (Milicevic, 2001: 773). As has been noted elsewhere, the writings of those who seek change through studies about the social world and engagement with it can easily become writings about these endeavours as acts of futility (May, 1998). For the urban sociologists, the lure of theoretical purity was perhaps more enticing. At the same time, generating the enthusiasm and momentum that is needed to try and influence urban reform cannot be the province of a relatively small group of scholars as the personal costs are too high, whilst institutional absorption is often the outcome of what appears, at first, to be radical in intent.

To guard against such tendencies, it is important that social scientists should continue to speak of the world not the word, in order that the proper object of reflexivity is the work of representation (Latour, 1988; May, 1999). Reflexivity is then opened up to a world beyond the self-referential. Without this in the forefront, the balance of considerations that are necessary to remain vibrant and relevant to understanding the urban can easily tip. The overall result is that deconstruction takes precedent over reconstruction. Alvin Gouldner (1975: 27) was clearly aware of this tendency when he wrote: ‘sociology begins by disenchanting the world, and it proceeds by disenchanting itself.’

At the other end of the spectrum, we see a wholesale embrace of the supposed realities of the new age with a resultant loss of criticality. If universities are at the heart of the knowledge economy (Castells and Hall, 1994; May and Perry, 2003) and the knowledge economy is urban, then urban sociologists are increasingly implicated as political actors in, rather than critics of, territorial projects. The ability to critique what are often loosely articulated and inadequately theorized new urban visions in the knowledge society is then limited, not only by the potential benefits of silence, but by a complicity in the project of creation and the complex sets of relationships between those that practice and those that fund research. The danger is that this may result in an approach



to urban sociology that is prescriptive, rather than analytical, tending to 'one-size fits all' solutions. Paradoxically, through greater engagement with urban society, urban sociologists may feel that they lose their critical voice. Academics then ask how the social sciences position their knowledge and hence themselves as embodying that knowledge. Oscillations occur between engagements by 'public intellectuals' who seek to shape debate and the pursuits of the 'detached intellectual', protected, for the time being at least, by their institutional position.

If there is a question over the future of urban sociology, this is not due to the loss of distinctiveness of sociology to comment in a meaningful way upon urban processes, nor to the challenges of interdisciplinarity or relevance to societal issues per se. Its history shows that it is a sub-field characterized by change and adaptation both in terms of the tensions and continuities in urban problems and in the approaches deployed. There is much to study, a great deal to contribute and many ways of doing it. Yet one thing is sure: the conditions in which knowledge is produced are changing and, with that, the implications for these debates and the future role of the social sciences in society. Rather than explore these implications, there tends to be a retreat into established ways of seeing or advocacy of the need for wholesale changes. Neither position is tenable in terms of understanding the role of sciences in society, how they contribute to and shape our understandings of urban phenomena and inform debates and actions concerning urban issues and policies.

## Interesting Times for Urban Sociology

### ■ Patrick Le Galès

There is a widespread agreement that urban sociology has lost its once leading role in urban studies. Therefore, it is important to raise questions about the future of urban sociology. Most agree that the dynamic field of urban research is now more interdisciplinary than ever. Nevertheless, it is one thing to note the decreasing role of urban sociology in the dynamic field of urban studies and another for that to lead to the conclusion that there is a crisis, or decline, in urban sociology.

The question of the future of urban sociology evokes the passionate debates at the turn of the 20th century when the German sociologists, Weber, Sombart and Simmel, discussed the relationship between cities, culture, arts, technological developments and control and domination. They raised issues about the influence of a particular set of social, economic, political and cultural conditions that constituted capitalism, as well as those relating to the state, individual and collective behaviour, modes of thinking, ways of life and cultural creation and imagination. They witnessed the rise of the metropolis that became classically differentiated from the self-contained medieval European city. Similar debates are now taking place within a new surge of capitalism,

environmental crisis, the erosion of the nation state, increased individualism and the effects of contradictory trends within the process of globalization.

In interrogating responses to these trends, let me start with the social theory/production of knowledge gap raised by Tim May and Beth Perry. I do not find arguments concerning the increasing gap between social theory and empirical work within localities convincing. There was, and there always is, a tension between grand theoretical work and micro-empirical studies. The tension may be more marked at present, but it seems more a nuance than a radical shift. As the urban field widens and becomes more international, some form of division of labour takes place, leading to widening gaps between sociological theory and empirical studies. On the other hand, it seems to me that most researchers are keen to adhere to the development of hypotheses and to test them empirically, or deploy inductive methods that lead to subsequent generalizations. The current effort that is going into comparative work, whatever its level of scale, is further evidence of this trend.

The argument concerning Mode 2 knowledge production is very sharp and stimulating. Again, however, I would not wish to overemphasize its implications at this stage and would stress the diversity of intellectual and institutional contexts within which these combinations of modes of knowledge production and their evaluation takes place. A division between 'ivory tower' academics on the one hand, and those who speak to the world of policy and practice on the other, is not that clear cut. The question of funding and status is still very much influenced by national institutions, or in the European case, by the EU. After all, there are many ways to speak about and reflect upon the urban world and it would be problematic not to be engaged in public and policy debates in one way or another.

When it comes to the intellectual content of urban sociology, it has continued to be dominated by Western academics, either from the USA or from Western Europe (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000). Gradually, more work is emerging not only from South America or Eastern Europe, but also a great deal from China, Asia, including India and Africa (Beauregard and Body-Gendrot, 1999; Eade and Mele, 2002; Gugler, 2004; Logan, 2002; Srinivas, 2001). The slow trend towards different, hybrid or contradictory forms of globalization has a major impact on the production of knowledge in urban sociology (Marcuse and Van Kempen, 2000). The notion of a 'crisis' in urban sociology was probably more severe in France and Britain with the decline of the neo-Marxist current of urban sociology, the crisis of sociology itself and the tough times encountered by industrial cities. That picture was not so bleak in different environments. A wider view of the field suggests that the future of urban sociology lies in the development of research in different corners of the world, the hybridization of intellectual traditions and the development of comparative work.

The new urban sociology revolution of the 1970s reached different parts of the world – from Japan to Brazil. The still active RC 21 (urban and regional sociology) from the International Sociological Association (ISA) bears witness

to the continuous dynamic of international networks in urban sociology. Research on gated communities, the rise of fantasy cities, transnational migrations, poverty, global cities and the governance of local economies, are being debated and researched in every continent. In other words, the production of knowledge is also progressively modified by input from different parts of the world where urban sociologists alter, change, discuss and deploy different paradigms in a way that actively contributes to the remaking of urban sociology. There is only a limited amount of urban sociology research done on major cities such as Manila, Djakarta, Tehran, Nairobi or Seoul. In that perspective, both classical questions about inequalities, segregation, social mobility, food riots, the making of social and political order and new questions about transnational migrations or the 'global local problematic' are central to the development of urban sociology (Perry and Harding, 2002). Urban sociologists are at the forefront of this trend because they easily think beyond national frontiers and beyond the nation state.

Urban sociologists have a long history in using analytic models that stress the convergence of cities, either based on models of urban ecology inspired by writers from the University of Chicago, or in the context of the Marxist and neo-Marxist tradition that privileges the decisive influence of newly globalized capitalism on social structures, modes of government, and urban policies. Those traditions are still influential and constitute an important body on research about global cities and metropolis and flows. However, convergence is not the only game in play. In theoretical terms, if the urban is growing everywhere, then it either reflects a universal pattern of an urbanized society, or there are different types of urban models of cities, which may differentiate, being different mixes of social, political, cultural and economic structures. That does not suggest that all those models follow the same path whether concerned with colonial cities, Western European cities or Asian city-states, but it reinforces the complexity and diversity of urban worlds. In that sense, urban sociology is also shaped by the literature on cosmopolitanism and globalization coming from different disciplines, as well as within the diversity of its own practices.

Urban sociology benefits from the intense dialogue with urban studies. Beyond sociologists, this research field has become very innovative and dynamic thanks to, for example, the contributions of anthropology, geography, cultural studies, development, planning, regional and urban economics, environment studies, political science and social history. Indeed, from the early days of urbanization, several conceptions of cities/metropolis were entangled and sometimes opposed:

- the material city of walls, squares, houses, roads, light, utilities, buildings, waste, and physical infrastructure;
- the cultural city in terms of imaginations, differences, representations, ideas, symbols, arts, texts, senses, religion, aesthetics;
- the politics and policies of the city in terms of domination, power, government, mobilization, public policies, welfare, education;



- the social city of riots, ethnic, economic or gender inequalities, segregation, everyday life and social movements;
- the economy of the city, in terms of division of labour, scale, production, consumption and trade.

Those classic categories of social sciences are, for the most part, derived from the division of labour between concepts and disciplines put forward at the end of the 19th century, for example, by Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Simmel and Weber. In many ways, the division of labour between various disciplines is also an issue in the production of knowledge. Of course, imperialistically minded sociologists could see that as a triumph of urban sociology incorporating or closely associated to entire sectors of other disciplines (social geography being one example). In the BSA debate mentioned at the start of this symposium, it was emphasized that a rising eclecticism in urban studies is an opportunity for various urban sub-disciplines to contribute to important sociological questions (Perry and Harding, 2002). Anglo-Saxon social geographers, in particular, have been remarkably innovative in bringing to the urban field issues concerning risk, vulnerability, crime, the social dimension of nature and energy or the role of food in cities. In the fields of cultural studies and sociology, we have seen the post-modern challenge and with it many dimensions concerning the interplay between society and space. Following the sociology of science, the relationship between technologies and the cities from a sociological perspective is key, from the invisible but structuring role of technological *dispositifs* to questions of public space, participation and usages of the city.

In many areas of social life, sociological studies are increasingly taken as a constitutive dimension of the social. In Italy and in the USA, as well as in Brazil and to some extent in China, there are also good examples of the strong influence of urban sociology on mainstream sociology from Molotch (2003), Massey (1984, 1994), Logan and Molotch (1987), Logan (2002) or Duneier (2000) to Bagnasco and Mingione (1996) in the Italian case, or of the urban dimension from more mainstream sociologists, such as Wacquant (1997), Waldinger (2001), Waldinger and Lichter, (2003), Portes et al. (1997), Portes and Rumbaut (2001), Wilson (1995, 1997) and Burawoy (2000). In the sociology of religion, for instance, mobility and the reinvention of the particular place of faith and pilgrimage give cities a particular role. Sociologists intrinsically elaborated their categories within the nation state. The erosion of the nation state and the contradictory trends of globalization and territorialization give all sorts of urban spaces a potentially interesting role where actors develop new cleavages and conflict-solving capacities. The dimension of incomplete integration and of the relative social order constructed in the city raises – in updated terms – one of the central issues of social sciences. Many avenues are followed by urban sociology from the most micro-interactions within the built environment to the most macro in relation to globalization. Promising developments focus on urban dynamics at different scales not on the urban as an immobile

and stable category, but on the mix of different groups, different users and citizens (Hoffman et al., 2003).

Among the many directions that urban sociology might take, let me emphasize one that is related to issues of agency and the making of incomplete society. As a sociologist, the question 'how individuals and groups are part of and make society' remains a fundamental question in terms both of segregation and inequalities, and of insertion or integration. It makes sense to ask it at the urban level. Indeed, many sociologists have stressed the effects of 'detraditionalization' and 'denationalization' on societies – hence the making of increasingly differentiated transnational collective actors, using partial exit strategies to negotiate their levels of participation in, and contribution to, national social order. The city, as a unit of analysis, is also always caught between a view which emphasizes the following: diversity; fragmentation; strangeness; mosaics; contingent interactions; moving borders; events and happenings; fluid situations; processes of identity formation; and the volume of interactions and complexity. Whilst anthropologists highlight multiple identities, the urban mosaic and the diversity of experiences, there are also perspectives that focus upon integration, domination, assimilation, social order, control, inequalities, unity, patterns of capitalist development and structures and systems (Bassand et al., 2001; Caldeira, 2000; Halle, 2003). Those issues remain key to understanding different urban contexts.

The founding fathers of sociology asked questions about the effects of social disorganization in the cities of modern industrial society – first European and, later, American society – on concentrations of working-class people and then on the diversity of immigrant populations. From Weber to the Chicago School and the Marxists, mechanisms for integrating socially and culturally different populations have been at the heart of urban sociological research. Open borders, immigration and mobility are helping to transform urban societies. Integration and social cohesion discourses have become increasingly widespread, yet the (incredibly vague) issue of cohesion has appeared just as mechanisms for integration through the labour market, the family, institutions and nation-state-level public policies have seemed, at best, to be stalling, or, at worst, impotent (Harloe, 1996). Those operate at different scales within overlapping polities and in a context of (relative) increasing mobility. The concept of society, however relative it might be, is at stake. We now find many competing views and strategies to structure societies and develop agencies, including within different urban spaces. Urban sociology has a contribution to make to the erosion and remaking of societies within and beyond the cities, whatever their size.

If a large body of urban research rightly stresses fragmentation, virtuality and ad hoc interactions, another way to think about cities is to bring back issues of social order, integration and politics. Indeed, cities, metropolis and the urban world do not develop solely according to interactions and contingencies: groups, actors and organizations oppose one another, enter into conflict, co-ordinate, produce representations in order to institutionalize collective forms of

action, implement policies, structure inequalities and defend their interests. Consequently they can, in part, be studied as incomplete local societies which are the result of interactions between multiple actors working and operating at different levels, some of whose actions are guided by urban societies which take on a particular pattern over time. They are stabilized by a set of organizations, linked to the state in varying degrees: for example, hospitals, schools, universities, ports and social and cultural centres. Social movements and associations, sometimes even families, are deployed in different organizations and help to shape – always partially and with only occasional stability – a degree of coherence and a certain local social and political order.

In the tradition of Weber, the city as incomplete local society can be analysed in terms of aggregation, integration and representation of groups and interests. Cities constitute only one of the levels at which social actors interact, represent themselves and are mutually interdependent. For instance, cities or metropolis may be more or less structured in their economic and cultural exchanges and the different actors may be related to each other in the same local context with long-term strategies, investing their resources in a co-ordinated way and adding to the social capital riches. In this case, the society appears as well structured and visible and one can detect forms of (relative) integration. If not, the city reveals itself as less structured and as such no longer a significant subject for study. Instead, it appears as a place where decisions are made externally by separate actors.

Our societies are frequently characterized as societies of actors or societies of organizations. That may be one way among many for urban sociology. Yet urban sociology also has to contribute to the definition of the common good, or 'the *intérêt général*' in the city with its critical tradition.

## Cities as Strategic Sites

### ■ Saskia Sassen

In relation to the issues raised by Tim May and Beth Perry, I want to address one particular aspect: the extent to which major trends under way today instantiate in cities and thereby make cities a lens for producing critical knowledge not only about the urban condition but also about major social, economic and cultural refigurings in our societies. The city has long been a site for the exploration of major subjects confronting society and sociology. But it has not consistently served as a site for the production of critical knowledge in sociology generally and in urban sociology specifically. Behind the sustained work in urban sociology over this past century lie marked shifts in the role played by cities in both enabling the production of critical sociological knowledge and in sociology generally. In the first half of this century, the study of cities was at the heart of sociology. Since then urban sociology has gradually lost this privileged role as a lens for the discipline and as producer of key analytic categories for

critical knowledge. Today, I argue, the city is once again emerging as a strategic site for understanding some of the major new trends reconfiguring the social order, and hence potentially for producing critical knowledge not just about cities but about the larger social condition. Since the scholarship is vast, and the specificity of cities and countries is high, I confine the discussion somewhat to the USA.

Much of sociology finds its origins in the emergence of the city of industrial capitalism. Some of the foundational questions for sociology as a discipline come out of this engagement by classic sociologists – whether Durkheim, Simmel or Weber – with the dislocations produced by industrial capitalism, conditions that became operative and legible in cities. Park and Burgess and Wirth (Park and Burgess, 1925; Wirth, 1938), deeply influenced by ‘the Germans’, went with gusto to the task of analytically taming the wild animal that was Chicago in the early 1900s. Chicago was not only their laboratory, but also a heuristic space through which to understand larger dynamics in industrial capitalist societies. Unlike the work of these pioneers, much of the scholarship that followed them was much narrower, and confined to the effort of mapping the urban condition. The city ceased being a heuristic space, a window onto the larger society, and, in that sense, a site for the production of (at least potentially) critical knowledge, certainly in US sociology. Elsewhere I have argued that this had partly to do with the actual urban condition: the city of the mid-1900s is no longer the entity that captures the foundational dislocations of an epoch as it had been at the turn of the century and into the early 1900s. The massive effort to regulate the urban social and spatial order had succeeded to a certain extent. Further, and in my view crucial, the strategic dynamics shaping society found their critical loci in the government (the Fordist contract, the Keynesian state project) and in mass manufacturing, including the mass production of suburbs.

Today, large complex cities have once again become a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations – political, economic, cultural, and subjective – both urban and non-urban. They are also in part the spaces for post-colonial history-in-the-making, and contain conditions for the formation of a post-colonial discourse. One question, then, is whether studying cities can today, as in past periods, help us produce critical knowledge and analytic tools for understanding the broader social transformation under way. The old categories, however, are not enough. Some of the major conditions in cities today challenge many, though not all, of the well-established forms of theorization and empirical analysis.

One set of challenges for urban sociology arises out of the intersection of major macro social trends and their particular spatial patterns. The city and the metropolitan region emerge as one of the key sites where these macro social trends instantiate and hence can be constituted as objects of study. Among these trends are globalization and the rise of the new information technologies, the intensifying of transnational and trans-local dynamics, foundational changes in the employment relation, the strengthening presence and voice of specific types

of socio-cultural diversity, and the particular forms of subjectivity associated with these transformations. In the 1990s a variety of scholars began to conceptualize some of these trends through the lens of the city, region or place (see for example, Ascher, 1995; Massey, 1994; Scott, 2001). Each one of these trends has its own specific conditionalities, contents and consequences for cities, as well as for theory and research. Further, cities are sites where each of these trends interacts with the others in distinct, often complex manners, in a way they do not in just about any other setting. These trends are at a cutting edge of actual changes that urban sociology could factor in to a far greater extent than it has.

In this regard then, the complex city or city-region becomes a heuristic zone: it actually can produce knowledge about, and make legible, some of the major transformations and dynamics shaping society. The city as an object of study has long been considered a debatable construct, both by earlier scholars (Castells, 1972; Harvey, 1973) or by more recent ones working from a broad range of perspectives (e.g. Amin and Thrift, 2002; Ascher, 1995; Brenner, 1998; Lloyd, 2003; Sandercock, 2003). Today's partial unbundling of urban space and of the traditional hierarchies of scale as a result of particular macro social trends and technical capabilities further problematizes the matter. Major cities can be thought of as nodes where a variety of processes intersect in particularly pronounced concentrations. In the context of globalization, many of these processes are operating at a global scale: cities can then be conceived of as one territorial or scalar moment in a vast world of trans-urban dynamics (e.g. Hamel et al., 2000; Rutherford, 2004).

This is the city not as a bounded unit, but as a complex structure that can articulate a variety of cross-boundary processes and reconstitute them as a partly urbanized condition (Sassen, 2001). Further, this type of conceptualization does not locate the city simply in a nested scalar hierarchy of institutional and/or geographic size running from the local, regional, national, to the global. Rather, at least, some cities emerge as one of the spaces of the global, articulated directly with various cross-border dynamics and institutional arrangements that often by-pass the national level. Some cities have had this capacity long before the current era (King, 1990; see several chapters in Gugler, 2004) but today these conditions have been multiplied and amplified to the point that they can be read as contributing to a qualitatively different phase for complex cities. This type of conceptualization of the city can enable forms of theorization and types of research practice that cut across the embedded statism that dominates social science research (Beck, 2000; Taylor, 1995; see generally Abu-Lughod and Lippman, 2000).

Besides the challenge of overcoming embedded statism, there is the challenge of recovering place in the context of globalization, telecommunications, and the intensifying of transnational and trans-local dynamics – all dynamics typically represented as flows. Here the problematic is one of conceptualizing place as something not necessarily marked by closure and, second, of conceptualizing the local as something not necessarily marked by physical proximity.

In my own work I have addressed the issue of boundary or closure by privileging centers of gravity for various critical dynamics – from capital flows to immigration flows – rather than specifying the perimeter. Further, I locate what we might describe as the ‘boundary function’ inside the city insofar as a city is traversed by a variety of global or trans-urban circuits that produce new types of fragmentations alongside the old ones. A variety of components of a city can be shown to be located on specific trans-urban circuits (see, for example, various chapters in Sassen, 2002). In such an analysis the space of the city is reconstituted as a partly disaggregated space, and the critical boundary functions are at the heart of the city not at its perimeter or administrative boundary. This is a space that is both place-centered in that it is embedded in particular locations; and it is trans-territorial because it connects sites that are not geographically proximate yet are intensely connected to each other through various networks (see, for example, various papers from the Globalization and World Cities [GaWC, 2004] Study Group at Loughborough University on the global geography of affiliates of firms in a variety of specialized service industries [Cordero-Guzman et al., 2001]).

I would argue that detailed fieldwork is a necessary step in capturing many of the new aspects in the urban condition, including the urbanized moment of major trans-urban dynamics. Recovering place can only partly be met through the research techniques of the old Chicago School of Urban Sociology (e.g. Dear, 2001). I do think we need to go back to some of the depth of engagement with urban areas that the School represented and to the effort towards detailed mappings. The type of ethnographies done by Duneier (2000) or some of the scholars in Burawoy (2000), or the type of critical social field analysis we find in Wacquant’s work on the ghetto and the prison (1997), are all excellent and very different types of examples of innovative critical urban sociology, using many of the old techniques yet working within a different set of framing assumptions. However, different territorial organizations of the urban condition, of which one important version is the so-called Los Angeles School (e.g. Dear, 2001; Soja, 2000), produce different notions of place and what it means socially and politically (see, for example, Sassen, 2001: Preface), and, in that sense, produce diverse types of critical knowledge. At the same time, we may find that the underlying dynamics may be similar even as their spatial outcomes diverge sharply.<sup>2</sup> Finally, multiple spatialities may inhabit a given terrain, but only some of these may be evident or lend themselves to be captured in standardized interpretations (Sassen, 2001: 122–6).

The centrality of place in a context of global processes makes possible a transnational economic and political opening for studying cities. There are a variety of processes that are both trans-urban and urban. Critical scholarship here includes, again, a variety of angles, such as Smith and Guarnizo’s (1998) work on transnationalism from below, Samers’ (2002) work on immigration in the global city, Bridge and Watson (1999) on spaces of culture; and Valle and Rodolfo on Latino Los Angeles (2000). It also opens up towards new ways of understanding politics, including what I would refer to as informal politics, and



the formation of new claims, notably rights to place. The emphasis on the transnational and hypermobile character of capital has contributed to a sense of powerlessness among local actors, a sense of the futility of resistance. But an analysis that emphasizes place suggests that the new global grid of strategic sites is a terrain for politics and engagement (for a brilliant, highly original interpretation of cities and politics today see Drainville, 2004). There are a variety of approaches to these issues, ranging from research on global care chains connecting cities in the south with global cities in the North (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003) to questions of cities and citizenship (Holston, 1999; Isin, 2000).

I want to conclude by focusing on questions of political subjectivity, which I see as one of the critical terrains for practice and theorization in today's complex cities. Going back to Weber's (1958) *The City*, we see his effort to specify a kind of city which combined conditions and dynamics that forced its residents and leaders into creative and innovative responses/adaptations. These changes produced in the context of the city signalled transformations that went beyond the city and could institute often fundamental transformations. In that regard the city offered the possibility of understanding potentially far-reaching changes.

There are two aspects of Weber's *The City* that are of particular importance here. Weber helps us understand under what conditions cities can be positive and creative influences on peoples' lives. For Weber, cities are a set of social structures that encourage individuality and innovation and hence are an instrument of historical change. There is, in this intellectual project, a deep sense of the historicity of these conditions. For Weber, the modern city of his times did not correspond to this positive and creative power; he saw modern cities as dominated by large factories and office bureaucracies. My own reading of the Fordist city corresponds in many ways to Weber's in the sense that the strategic scale under Fordism is the national scale and cities lose significance. It is the large Fordist factory and the mines that emerge as key sites for the political work of the disadvantaged and those without or with only limited power.

Struggles around political, economic, legal or cultural issues centered in the realities of cities can become the catalysts for new trans-urban developments in all these institutional domains – markets, participatory governance, rights for members of the urban community regardless of lineage, judicial recourse, cultures of engagement and deliberation. I think we need to recover in urban sociology the historicity of those conditions that make cities strategic sites for the enactment of important transformations in multiple institutional domains. Today is, in my reading, one of those periods.

What is being engendered today in terms of political practices, at least in the types of cities I am most familiar with (global cities), is quite different from what it might have been in the medieval city of Weber. In the medieval city we see a set of practices that allowed the burghers to set up systems for owning and protecting property and to implement various immunities against despots of

all sorts. The political project of the burghers was the right to protect their property. Today's political practices, I would argue, have to do with the production of 'presence' by those without power and with a politics that claims rights to the city rather than protection of property.<sup>3</sup> I also see global corporate actors emerging as political actors in, and making claims on, these cities. What the two situations share is the notion that through these practices new forms of political subjectivity, i.e. citizenship and concepts of belonging/possessing, are being constituted and that the city is a key site for this type of political work. The city is, in turn, partly constituted through these dynamics. After the long historical phase that saw the ascendance of the national state and the scaling of key economic dynamics at the national level, the city is once again today a scale for strategic economic and political dynamics.

In brief, both as a site that allows us to capture some of the major transformations afoot, and as a site for new types of political practices, the city is today a lens onto a wider world of change and a bridge to a critical sociology, including urban sociology. But there is still much work to be done ... on both fronts.

## Urban Sociology in the Third Generation

### ■ Mike Savage

There is a crisis in urban sociology, though this is neither unusual nor unproductive. However, I suggest in my brief paper that there are specific aspects to the current crisis that are distinctive. We are now arriving at a distinct turning point in urban studies, which involves a significant reconfiguration of its core concerns and agenda and, in particular, its relationship with urban sociology, as one of its disciplinary components. This argument can most succinctly be developed by a schematic historical sketch of the first and second generations of urban research before I consider the prospects for a distinct third generation.

I think it is useful to delineate two earlier generations of research in urban studies, though the first generation was brief indeed, being a framework which was no sooner elaborated than it was superseded. The first generation believed in the urban as fixed, place-bound community, defined in Le Play's famous words as the interplay between 'place, work and folk' (see generally Savage et al., 2003: 18–19). This emphasis on the urban as a territorially fixed and bounded system certainly influenced the conduct of early community studies which conducted research on cities as if they were largely self-contained. The most striking examples of this were the studies carried out by Britain's Sociological Society in the inter-war years, but the Lynds' studies of Middletown (1929, 1937), the earlier British poverty studies of Charles Booth (1891) and Seebohm Rowntree (1902), as well as other community 'classic' studies containing elements of this approach. This having been said, this first perspective was soon challenged by a second generation which emphasized the

urban as a form of achieved social order; a means of securing social stability amidst an inherently fractured and unstable environment.

The origins of this second generation can be traced theoretically to Toennies' famous distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Savage et al., 2003), though Simmel's 'metropolis and mental life' (1908) was probably its most influential early statement. For Simmel, the experience of the city was one which was inherently unsettling, but was one that people could come to terms with through adapting their perception and orientation. This conception directly fed into the Chicago School's emphasis on the dynamic nature of the urban evolutionary order (see Savage et al., 2003: Chapter 2). For the Chicago School, the central issue was how secondary order associations – of peer groups, sub-cultures, voluntary associations and the like – replace the primary associations of family and locale which had been ruptured by the chaos and instability of modern urban life. Urban society is dead – long live the achieved urban order! The Chicago School dominated urban sociology for 50 years and more, yet this broader theme persisted even longer than this, with its problematic continuing to inform urban studies into the 1990s and beyond. Marshall Berman's (1983) famous *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* can be seen largely as restating this problematic in neo-Marxist terms, with reference to literary texts. The more recent popularity of Walter Benjamin's urban thought (e.g. Caygill, 1998; Gilloch, 1998; Savage et al., 2003) offers a further way of seeing how urban fragmentation might – with difficulty – be redeemed.

This second generation placed a particular interdisciplinary configuration at the heart of urban studies, which bound urban sociology tightly with planning and social policy, leaving urban geography, anthropology and politics somewhat on the margins. The emphasis on the potential of an achieved urban order explains the reformist politics which was central both to the Chicago School and to British traditions of urban studies. Yet it was the ecological framework provided by the urban sociologists which cast its shadow over this whole tradition, whilst other academic disciplines had significantly less marked theoretical inputs into this second generation.

The Chicago School may now seem very dated. However, we can see numerous ways in which the assumptions of the second generation persisted into relatively recent currents in urban studies. There is the familiar insistence that amidst the chaos of urban life, communal relations could be re-established. In the work of Young and Willmott (1957) and Gans (1962), as well as more recent discussions of ethnic enclaves, migrants were seen as able to assimilate themselves to urban space, finding ways of reconstructing communal attachments and solidarities that had been previously dissipated. The same sets of assumptions continue to run through much communitarian thought within sociology, for instance in Bellah (1985), and even the social capital arguments of Robert Putnam (2000). Community is dead, but not irrevocably so. It can be built again, on the same kind of framework that earlier communities were built on, with fixed attachments to place remade.

Second, sociologists appropriated social network approaches to this concern with achieved community. Network approaches were actually developed from the 1940s by anthropologists such as John Barnes (1954), Elizabeth Bott (1957) and Clyde Mitchell (1969) as a means of mapping the contingent nature of social ties. However, from the 1970s, anthropologists largely abandoned their interests in social networks and it was sociologists such as Wellman and Leighton (1979) and Claude Fischer (1982) who used network methods to talk about the reconstruction of urban community. For these writers, urban dwellers (unlike rural dwellers) were able to make their own communities through nurturing specific kinds of ties to other like-minded people in dense metropolitan spaces. New network methods could thus be used to elaborate the familiar concern with the reconstruction of community.

Third, and particularly strong in British research (though evident elsewhere), was the idea that although people were increasingly mobile, it was the old residents who had historic ties and thereby played a central role in defining urban space. Thus, a fundamental division between 'locals' on the one hand and 'cosmopolitans', or 'spiralists', on the other was identified (see generally Crow and Allan, 1993; Elias and Scotson, 1965; Frankenberg, 1966; Pahl, 1965), with the locals retaining moral power over place. This approach was important in insisting that mobility need not fundamentally erode the power of communal attachments because the mobile were a distinct group who had less importance in affecting the tone of place.

Looking back from the vantage point of the early 21st century it is important to recognize the subtle awareness of both rupture and stability in the various currents of this second generation research. Many of the best studies were highly attentive to the dialectic of association and fragmentation. Nonetheless, the challenge today seems to be rather different. Rather than try to resurrect urban community on any kind of a territorial basis, increasing numbers of writers insist on the fundamentally dislocated nature of affect, identities and belonging, whether this be through diasporic forms of identity, global flows and movements, or new modes of communication (variously Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996; Urry, 2000; Wellman, 2001). Rather than seeing belonging as involving the reconstruction of relationships rather like the spatially proximate face-to-face community, it is now believed that they require an understanding of how people might feel they belong through the mediated interplay of spatially distant devices. Community can no longer be put back into its territorial Pandora's Box, even in a subtle form, but requires a fundamentally new mode of analysis.

It is important to recognize that this new way of thinking was predominantly developed outside urban sociology, and it has involved the 'de-throning' of urban sociology from its previous core role in urban studies. There are numerous ways in which a different interdisciplinary configuration to contemporary urban studies can be identified. Political economy approaches, championed from the 1970s, were developed mainly within geography and political science, through the work of David Harvey (1983) and Doreen Massey (e.g.

1984). Through the work of anthropologists such as Frederic Barth (1969), Anthony Cohen (1983, 1985), and Marilyn Strathern (1981), an awareness of the fluidity of cultural boundaries was established and a recognition of the subtlety of the insider–outsider distinction. In Cohen’s (1985) celebrated phrase, this led to the recognition of the ‘symbolic construction of community’. Anthropologists have also proved especially adept at examining the global connections which define contemporary senses of place (Appadurai, 1996). In addition, it was the geographer David Harvey (1983, 1985) who brought the Marxist insights of Henry Lefebvre (1990) to bear on the constructed nature of urban space and the power of capital to delineate urban experience. Political scientists have developed influential accounts of urban regimes and place boosterism (e.g. Mollenkopf, 1983).

This body of work now looks much more productive and interesting than the rather sterile debates which preoccupied urban sociologists during the 1970s and early 1980s. Fired up by Louis Althusser’s concern with the need to scientifically define one’s theoretical object, they worried incessantly about what precisely the ‘urban’ actually was (see variously Mellor, 1977; Saunders, 1981; Smith, 1980). Through the work of Castells (1977) this did have the unintended consequence of leading to the elaboration of a whole new dynamic area of academic study – that of consumption – but it failed signally in its attempt to provide a clear singular definition of the urban. All this now seems a rather pointless exercise – what other area of inquiry can give a precise definition of its subject matter? It did, however, mark the end of the leading role of urban sociology within the broader field of urban studies. It is not incidental that the most influential form of sociology within urban studies in recent years has not been urban sociology, but has come from the sociology of science, through the significance of actor-network theory (see, for instance, Amin and Thrift, 2002), as well as through Foucauldian inspired approaches, such as Rose’s governmentality theory.

A further problem for urban sociology’s previously hegemonic role has been the difficulty of reformist political projects, due to the increased hegemony of neo-liberal politics in America, Asia, Australasia and Africa (though not so conclusively in Europe, where the urban sociology tradition appears stronger, see e.g. Le Galès, 2002). The eradication of planning as a serious political project concerned with limiting the role of the market in allocating the use of urban space has entailed weakening the strong link between urban policy and urban sociology which was evident in the best work of the second generation. It is possible to detect an increasing gap between planning-related research, which eschews urban theory and is strongly pragmatic in orientation, and the field of urban studies, which is interested in urban experience and culture but with relatively little explicit policy significance.

Having made these points, there is no doubt that many sociologists have sought to catch up with developments outside sociology and have popularized intellectual currents developed from other disciplines. Manuel Castells’ (1996/97) remarkable trilogy on *The Network Society* can be seen as an

exemplary indication of this. It is rightly hailed as the single most impressive synthetic account of globalization and social change, drawing on a remarkable understanding of the fortunes of different continents in the globe, and showing great theoretical verve. He has an uncanny ability to direct attention to under-researched and emerging processes, such as criminal networks, and a host of provocative ideas regarding the course of change not just at the global level, but in particular parts of the world. And yet, this book also reveals the weaknesses of contemporary urban sociology. The fact that there is scarcely any reference to Castells' earlier urban sociology indicates how the Althusserian dead-end held urban sociology back for some years. More tellingly still, Castells can be criticized for appearing to rely on a simplistic form of technological determinism, for introducing an over sharp division between the global and the local, for failing to develop a clear critical vision of urban studies, and for relying nearly entirely on secondary sources, so failing to provide a clear exemplar of how to conduct contemporary urban research.

So, where do these reflections leave urban sociology? We should not worry too much that it has lost its supremacy within the field of urban studies, but should only celebrate the value of those ideas which have been developed in other disciplines, and which now sustain the much more open interdisciplinary field that constitutes urban studies. The more pressing concern, echoing the remarks of May and Perry, is how we constitute urban studies itself as a critical field of study, methodologically rigorous, attentive to empirical specificity, and relevant to policy issues. The third generation is still in its early development and, in order to develop its agenda, it will be necessary to stage a more complete dialogue between the second and third generations than exists currently (see Savage et al., 2004). In such a dialogue, urban sociologists will have much to contribute, though their role is better conceived as that of 'interpreters' rather than 'legislators' (Bauman, 1997).

## Urban Sociology: Into the Future

### ■ Tim May and Beth Perry

The responses from each of the contributors to our initial article add up to a dynamic and challenging future for urban sociology. Whilst we can detect oscillations between continuity and discontinuity in the unfolding history of urban sociology and a reduction in its place at the centre stage of understanding, it remains a field of activity that has been continuously enriched from within, as well as through the insights gleaned from other disciplinary perspectives. This volume and noise of academic traffic runs the risk of fostering selective hearing on the part of those who hold onto particular ways of seeing, whilst the structure of universities and professional cultures does little to assist in the cross-fertilization of ideas. However, as all three authors have suggested, the dynamism and change that is happening within the city helps expose the unique



contributions of different ways of seeing. In other words, we might say that the loss of centrality of sociology in understanding the urban is not in itself a problem, but one shared by all disciplines as a result of the inherent limitations of established viewpoints and perspectives.

Accepting diversity in the tools that should be deployed in understanding the urban is not to deny the continued importance of sociology. Max Weber's work provides, for Saskia Sassen, a starting point for discussing the role of political subjectivity within the changing nature of scale. Cities, city-regions, regions and the interactions between the rural and the urban enable us to examine the relations between place, space and levels of activity. New formations and constellations of forces constitute the city as a lens through which to gaze upon the effects of larger social forces and consequences for society as a whole. From Patrick Le Galès and Mike Savage, we see how new political and social movements are being formed and operate in different ways according to their context, values and types of action which relate to their overall purpose.

Related to these micro-politics is the changing nature of cities in terms of shifting scales of governance. In recent years, urban studies has been a major intellectual arena in which alternatives to the idea of nation-state control have been articulated through debates on globalization and world city formation, where cities are seen as localized nodes within a global hierarchy of inter-urban relations, as Saskia Sassen notes, rather than being neatly enclosed within national space. The city, therefore, is a field of encounters and exchanges among individuals and groups who accord, and are accorded, different levels of significance to spaces and places within it. At the same time, the nature and boundaries of the city are continually being re-configured as key economic terrains in their own right. This attracts those who seek to place 'their cities' on the 'world map'. However, if all cities aspiring to be 'world-class' did achieve such a status, criteria would nonetheless continue to change in order to attain a new hierarchy of relations. Such aspirations also support the notion of 'flows' and 'connections' in which a disembodied globalism is assumed not to discriminate on the grounds of place. Instead, it works in a positive fashion to bolster the ideology that markets do not discriminate and political governance has no effect in the face of such forces.

At the same time, all the authors point to the need to attend to the relations between macro trends and micro-level manifestations. On the one hand, new forms of governance, as well as emerging forms, may shift the balance between national and sub-state political formations, as well as the issues that are debated, discussed and acted upon. In turn, this has the potential to lead to a convergence with work on urban experience, planning and policy, as emerging identities at different levels of scale become more pre-occupied with the feel and culture of a place and as industrialization gives way to an interest in cultural industries. On the other hand, as Patrick Le Galès notes, we have much to learn from comparative work. Issues of divergence and convergence, as well as inequalities, segregation and mobility, produce a complexity but nevertheless, one with real consequences for those in the majority of the world, as he notes

with respect to food shortages. Here, too, we should examine relations between the material, including the built environment, and the cultural. This is important as developers, managers, utility infrastructure companies and agencies, social movements, national and local government and processes of capitalist accumulation make the city a site of opportunity, contestation and disaster. The materiality of the built environment, biology and social and cultural processes mix with the economy and systems of governance to configure possibilities and are often drawn upon to structure the determination of outcomes that are, upon examination, the product of contingency and so open to revision. Hence, the critical knowledge of which all three authors speak becomes of considerable practical importance now and into the future.

If the turbulence of past times influenced urban sociologists via the hope for human betterment through new ways of organizing social relations, how should we characterize the current era? If doubts are raised about the analytic armoury of sociology, this should be tempered by the existence of little doubt among those whose gaze is not constrained by its agendas. As terrorism, for example, is held to be the enemy of the West, then the military have to think of cities in different ways in response to the emergence of non-state organized violence. Cities then move from being targets that can be simply eradicated, to being places where tactics are deployed whose complexity requires new military technologies and different forms of intelligence gathering (SURE, 2002). Violence is still all too evident, but the US military is investing huge sums of money in new forms of heightened surveillance which find particular expression in the spaces and places of cities, with their densely populated areas, mixtures of anonymity and community and differences among and between populations.

In his essay 'Reflections on Communication and Culture', Robert Park speaks of Rome, London and Paris as cities in which 'the historical process is quickened, and acculturation, the mutual interpenetration of minds and cultures, goes forward at a rapid pace'. He was only too aware that whilst we should inhabit places and spaces of our own creation, those also re-fashion us in their image leading to a situation in which people of different cultures live together in the same local economy in 'physical contiguity, but in more or less complete moral isolation' (Park, 1972: 112). As processes of liberalization march forward leaving many in their wake, Park noted how the traits of material culture are taken on board more rapidly than those which are non-material. In contemporary times, the ability to extend the use-value of goods into cultural arenas that are non-market dependent has made the city a rich site of analysis for the study of identity beyond that envisaged by Park.

Because of the density and dynamism of the city, it represents different hopes for those groups who inhabit its space. We are now witnessing intensifications in diversity. As Benjamin (1999) noted, commodities are about dreams and this leaves the city as a site of conflict and tension, as well as vibrancy and novelty in what is a global and unequal age. Therefore: 'How the great public spaces of modernity absorb and reflect the tensions, and create a more inclusive vision of separate identities, is part of the visible struggle to enter the 21st

century' (Zukin, 1995: 260–1). There are contested visions within cities and changes in the modes through which they are understood as a result: for example, between the Chicago and LA Schools (see Dear, 2002). Yet those are also expressions of particular material environments leading to an understanding not just of differences, but also of common urban languages (Parker, 2004). Sociology, in combination with other disciplines, seems well placed to contribute to an understanding of these processes and their manifestations by, for example, focusing upon urban struggles for recognition and redistribution (see Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

Urban scholars contribute to understandings of globalization as a multi-layered space of networked interdependencies and inter-scale articulations in which processes not only of de-territorialization but also of re-territorialization occur. New spatial relations in terms of changing formations of sub-state urban and regional governance are now evident and we can see how politics and human geography add significantly to a sociological understanding. As government agencies tend to see cities as static sites of intervention and turn the domain of politics into the technicalities of administration, there is a need to expose this tendency as one of contingency rather than necessity. This opens up possibilities for other ways of seeing and organizing our lives together: "City air makes one free", it used to be said. The air is a bit polluted now. But it can always be cleaned up' (Harvey, 2004: 239).

In order to learn from past understandings, it is important to learn to discriminate between those questions that are inescapable and part of the human condition and those issues whose resolutions are attainable at given moments in time and have the potential to contribute to human betterment. With this dynamic in mind and as each of the contributors has indicated, sociologists need to remain engaged and attentive to understanding the constellation of social, economic, cultural, technological, political and military forces in and around the urban. This is not simply about sociology being a relevant public discipline and appropriating the popular, yet often limited and constraining, discourse that surrounds the idea of 'relevance'. Rather, sociology needs to renew its place in providing different lenses upon the urban environment. This involves, as is clear in this symposium, continuing to analyse contemporary urban manifestations and recognizing both the strengths and limitations of the resulting insights. Overall, we will continue to see a changing landscape in which the richness of its urban sociology will and should remain.

## Notes

- 1 SURF is a multi-disciplinary research centre at the University of Salford with its own offices in Central Manchester. It is largely self-financing and works on issues associated with urban and regional policy, regeneration, housing and territorial knowledge, science and technology. Its funders include research councils, development agencies, the EU, central and local government, universities,

health and private sector organizations. Tim May is Lead Director and Beth Perry is a Research Fellow. For more information please see [www.surf.salford.ac.uk](http://www.surf.salford.ac.uk)

- 2 One analytic issue here is the path-dependence involved in the preceding two formulations. Once a distinct spatial form is produced, even though conceivably stemming from a similar underlying dynamic, it will have its own effects on outcomes. This is perhaps best exemplified by the different logics for real-estate profitability evident in the development of Chicago and Los Angeles.
- 3 I use the term presence to name a particular condition within the overall condition of powerlessness, one I see as complex, produced (and hence changeable), and highly variable. Powerlessness can accommodate politics, but it does not always do so. A powerless political actor is to be differentiated from a powerless victim, though the same person may contain both subjectivities. In the context of a strategic space such as the global city, the types of disadvantaged people described here are not simply marginal, they acquire presence in a broader political process that escapes the boundaries of the formal polity. This presence signals the possibility of a politics. What this politics will be will depend on the specific projects and practices of various communities. Insofar as the sense of membership of these communities is not subsumed under the national, it may well signal the possibility of a transnational politics centered in concrete localities (Sassen, 2004).

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