



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Social Sciences - Papers

Faculty of Social Sciences

2012

Geographies of urban politics: pathways, intersections, interventions

Pauline M. McGuirk

University of Wollongong, pmcguirk@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

McGuirk, P. (2012). Geographies of urban politics: pathways, intersections, interventions. *Geographical Research*, 50 (3), 256-268.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Geographies of urban politics: pathways, intersections, interventions

Abstract

This paper deals with urban political geographies and, most particularly, with political economy perspectives on urban politics. It offers an account that narrates what I see as influential pathways and intersections, theoretical debates, and methodological developments that have shaped contemporary urban political geographies in this vein since the 1970s, including: the 'new urban politics', intersections with postmodernism, and postcolonialism; urban neoliberalism and the contingency of urban politics; and, most recently, poststructural political economy and the notion of assemblage. This leads me to trace the implications of the shift in understanding from urban political geography to geographies of urban politics, and the growing emphasis on practice, contingency, relationality, and assemblage that accompany this shift. I conclude with reflections on new directions, new productive questions and tensions, and on the knowledge politics of how we do and might do contemporary urban political geographies.

Keywords

pathways, intersections, geographies, interventions, urban, politics

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

McGuirk, P. (2012). Geographies of urban politics: pathways, intersections, interventions. *Geographical Research*, 50 (3), 256-268.

Title: Geographies of Urban Politics: Pathways, Intersections

Pauline McGuirk

Published in Geographical Research

Introduction

This paper deals with urban political geographies and, most particularly, with political economy perspectives on urban politics. Shaped by the formative influence of neo-marxian critique, urban political economy emerged as a somewhat distinctive domain in urban geography focused on “the transforming landscapes of urban economic development, the shifting institutional infrastructures of urban politics, and the changing directions of urban policy” (McLeod and Jones 2011, 2445). From this perspective then, urban politics has largely come to stand for governance and policy. And, like many other areas of Anglophone geography, the western city has been at the core of its investigations and the source of its theorisations. My paper offers an account that narrates what I see as influential pathways and intersections, theoretical debates and methodological developments that have shaped contemporary urban political geographies in this vein since the 1970s including: the ‘new urban politics’ (NUP), intersections with postmodernism and postcolonialism; urban neoliberalism and the contingency of urban politics; and, most recently, poststructural political economy, the notion of assemblage and the geographies of urban politics. I conclude with reflections on new directions, new productive questions and tensions, and on the knowledge politics of how we do and might do contemporary urban political geographies as we move forward. Of course, other accounts offering a different narrative are possible.

Political economy perspectives on urban political geographies

For most of its relatively short history, the political has been explicitly at the heart of the sub-discipline of urban geography. The sub-discipline emerged as a systematized field in Anglophone geography only in the 1950s. The field developed initially within the quantitative spatial science paradigm of the time, framed by modernist aspirations to develop knowledge via rational theories, models and techniques

aimed to produce an improved urban reality (Barnes 2003). But the explosion of Marxist-inspired radical urban geography in the 1970s, signalled by Harvey's (1973) *Social Justice and the City*, redirected urban geographical analysis onto a resolutely critical path. Radical urban geography—mirroring broader shifts across critical social science—critiqued urban spatial science for its empiricist focus on outcomes over process and its positivist emphasis on the nomothetic over the normative. In particular, scholars drawing on Marxian political economy perspectives repositioned the city and urban processes as objects of analysis, locating them as products and drivers of capitalist uneven development. The 1970s and 1980s, then, witnessed the emergence of an explicitly politicized urban geography that eschewed empiricism in favour of empirically-informed abstraction. Critical urban analyses explored the city as a socio-spatial formation underlain by generalized capitalist relations, structures, and processes. They rejected rationalist, pluralist interpretations of urban politics and power relations in favour of more radical interpretations, conceiving of urban politics as framed by capitalist imperatives, viewing the political and economic realms as co-dependent rather than autonomous, and understanding urban politics as the expression of inevitable class conflict of the tensions between fixed and mobile forms of capital (Dear and Scott 1981, Harvey 1985).

Towards the new urban politics

From the late 1980s the political-economic shifts associated with globalisation—fashioned as epochal transformations from national fordism to globalised postfordism—became insistent motifs in critical urban analyses that traced links between global economic restructuring, the transforming production and social relations and spatial form of the 'postfordist city', and the particular effects and local political contestations these induced in specific cities (see Amin 1994). Alongside this work, a series of influential accounts theorised another imputed epochal transformation: from modern to postmodern urbanism (e.g. Harvey 1989a; Soja 1996; Dear 2000). Reflecting their embeddedness in the broad tenets of neo-marxian critique (Peet 1998), these accounts drew paradigmatic conclusions about western cities' increasingly fractured socio-cultural and socio-economic alignments, and the

segmented spatialities and increasingly carceral landscapes characteristic of postmodern urban capitalism.

Contemporary analyses of urban politics in this vein became preoccupied with how transformations in cities' socio-spatial forms were paralleled by shifts in their management and governance. Reflecting the tenets of regulation theoryⁱ, these analyses drew attention to seemingly systematic reworkings across western cities in the institutional configuration and policy thrusts of urban government as cities responded to deregulated global capitalism as 'hostile brothers' competing for globally mobile investment flows (Peck and Tickell 1994). David Harvey's (1989b) characterization of this reworking as a transition 'from managerialism to entrepreneurialism' captured the transition in urban government priorities from social policy and service provision to boosterist, competition-oriented policies to nurture economic development, prioritise business elite interests and attract mobile investment. The move from 'government to governance' emerged as a dominant theme as scholars traced the seemingly ubiquitous enactment of entrepreneurialism as a new mode of urban politics across struggling and prosperous cities alike, via the creation of collaborative public-private governing institutions which adopted the culture, calculative practices and policy priorities of the private sector (e.g. M^cGuirk 1994, Jewson and MacGregor 1997).

The 'new urban politics' (or NUP) of the entrepreneurial city has since shaped a generation of critical urban research (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; MacLeod and Jones 2011) addressing wide-ranging themes including: the shaping of 'urban regimes' and governance agenda around elite business interests (Ward 1996); representational strategies for place-marketing and city reimagining (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Dunn et al 1995); state-sponsored mega-projects to rejuvenate cities in line with global capital's investment priorities (Searle and Bounds 1999; Moulaert et al 2003); realignments of state-market-civil society relationships through competitive city governance (Kipfer and Keil 2002); transformations of public space and publicness associated with entrepreneurial urban politics (Mitchell 2003), the adoption of market-led gentrification as public policy over alternative social welfare measures (Lees, 2008); and the viral adoption of 'creative city' strategies (Peck 2005).

New intersections: poststructuralism, postcolonialism

As work broadly under the banner of the NUP developed through the 1990s and 2000s, a parallel group of scholars influenced by the growing strengths of cultural studies, postcolonial and poststructural theorising, sought to open up understandings of the drivers, sites and stakes of urban politics beyond the central concerns of political economy, and in ways that have posed productive challenges to founding tenets of the NUP. This work embraced the postmodern critique of metanarratives and rejected the economism and reductionism that inflected some neo-marxian interpretations. It drew on theories of difference that recognized multiple axes of social difference—foregrounding the intersection of class with gender, sexuality and ethnicity as lineaments of identity (Dowling 2009)—and explored how difference is produced through socio-spatial processes of (fluid) identity formation and structured and negotiated in ‘the contingent circumstances of specific people in specific settings’ (Fincher and Jacobs 1998, 2). These multiply constituted and locationally contingent notions of difference brought forward ‘the politics of difference’ and ‘the politics of identity’ as challenging new themes for urban political geography (see Keith and Pile 1993). The structuring of difference and associated relations of power were also central themes in postcolonial studies of contemporary urbanism which also proliferated in the 1990s. These studies explored how, in ostensibly postcolonial cities, the material and discursive legacies of colonialism continued to shape everyday urban politics in struggles over the development and redevelopment of urban spaces, representation, identities and power relations (Jacobs 1996; Yeoh 2000).

Urban geography’s engagements with theories of difference and postcolonialism conceptually unsettled understandings of urban processes, ‘the city’, the nature of power relations and the sources of authority. Tellingly, this suggested that urban politics needed to be reconceived with greater sensitivity to the multiple processes of identity formation and reproduction, to anti-essentialist understandings of (multiple) class positionings, and to the cultural as well as the economic (Gibson, 1998, Dowling 2009). And it suggested that crucial sites of politics and sources of

political alignment lay *outside* the formal realms of government and economy and presumed class alliances, pointing instead to diverse political formations (irreducible to singular class alignments), practices and actors as part of the field of urban politics. These reconceptualisations raised new complexities to be negotiated by neo-marxian urban political analysis, its methodologies and its normative dimensions. Methodologically, these reconceptualisations demanded a new emphasis on recognizing and deconstructing textual, representational, discursive and performative processes in urban politics. And the emphasis on context, locatedness, anti-essentialism and contingency engrained in the politics of difference approach, challenged any tendency to read off the lineaments of local urban political contestations or the axes of power from wider processes of political-economic or cultural transformations.

An equally profound challenge lay in the poststructural/postcolonial insistence on non-essentialist understandings of social categories, relations and identities, whereby understanding in given, fixed, universal or singular terms is replaced (and destabilised) by understanding in contingent, fluid, relative, multiple and performative terms. These conceptual shifts all problematised the normative underpinnings that characterised neo-Marxian political-economy-focused analyses of urban politics and its (redistributive) prescriptions for urban justice. The challenge, one not always readily accepted (Harvey 1992), was to embrace the diverse textures and spaces of postmodern urban politics and power relations, to embrace broader and shifting understandings of class, justice and their material and discursive underpinnings, and to accept the uncertainty of outcomes—indeed the radical contingency—associated with urban political action (Watson and Gibson 1995). As the following discussion elaborates, these are challenges that political-economy informed work on urban political geographies has continually engaged with over the last decade. Though, in truth, this engagement runs deeper in some strands than in others.

The politics of the city in neoliberalism/the neoliberal city

Since the early 2000s, neoliberalism has become a dominant frame for political

economy interpretations of urban politicsⁱⁱ, with a particular focus on the imbrications of global neoliberalisation, urban governance and policy (Larner 2011). This framing interprets the intensive neoliberalisation of urban governance and political processes as part of a rescaling of state spatialities and regulation in line with the political objectives of neoliberalism. Through re-scaling the geographies of governance, the urban itself is taken to have become an increasingly important strategic scale through which neoliberal accumulation and a complementary array of regulatory strategies can be institutionalised and advanced (Brenner 2004; Peck et al 2009a). And this has seen the development of multi-scalar perspectives which position transformations of urban politics as both reflecting and constituting broader systems of political-economic regulation, and as implicated in the territorial/scalar restructuring of the neoliberal state (M^cGuirk 2003; Keil and Mahon 2009).

The theoretical trope of neoliberal urbanism has also shaped a broader research focus on the implications for urban power relations of the widening privatization of urban landscapes reflected, in turn, in the emergence of novel, more fully privatized governance forms: from city centre Business Improvement Districts (Ward 2011) to the profusion of micro-governance schemes associated with private neighbourhood developments (Atkinson and Blandy 2006). With this, researchers are recognising more diverse sites of urban politics beyond the state (Dear and Dahmann 2008) and considering the interconnections between the 'splintering' of urban material and governance landscapes (Graham and Marvin 2001). Many have sought to tease out the implications of these interconnections for democratic political representation and the public realm, the extension of privatism beyond formal governance agencies into politics of everyday urban life, the intensification of social control and surveillance in governing public spaces, and the resulting politics of the 'right to the city' (Low and Smith 2006; Purcell 2008; Staheli and Mitchell 2008; Walks 2008). For some, the triumph of urban neoliberalism has been so complete, and the mechanisms and policy priorities of privatism and entrepreneurial urban governance so entrenched as the commonsense of 'good governance', that the city has become 'postpolitical', allowing neoliberal tenets to be re-established despite the recent perturbations of the global financial crisis (Keil 2009; Swyngedouw 2009).

'Actually-existing' urban neoliberalisms and beyond

The mutual constitution of urban and global neoliberalism, then, has been an insistent theme in recent political economy accounts of urban politics. But this has not precluded these accounts from engaging seriously with poststructural critiques and alternative conceptions of urban politics. Poststructuralism's emphasis on context, contingency and multiplicity suggests it is impossible to understand urban economic and political restructuring processes in terms of local responses to abstract global imperatives, as disembodied or undifferentiated, or as taking place on 'some placeless stage' (Fincher and Jacobs, 1998: 13, Larner and LeHeron, 2002). In a series of moves sympathetic with this stance, urban political economy scholars in recent years have engaged directly with the contingent, multiple and context-specific ways in which urban politics are reshaped.

NUP accounts have tended to focus on documenting change and emphasising the presence and coherence of key macro-features and aspirations of neoliberalisation, with lesser emphasis on continuities with other governance traditions or, indeed, on the processes inciting observed change. And prioritising the observation of neoliberal trends or techniques at work has led to the suggestion that urban politics and power relations—at least in western cities from which these theorisations have predominantly been drawn—have been *essentially* neoliberalised such that the NUP could be represented a distinctive epoch of entrepreneurial urban governance with predictable realignments in political processes and power relations (see M^cGuirk and Dowling, 2009a; Larner, 2011, forthcoming). As such, NUP accounts have risked reifying neoliberal hegemony and universalising the narrative of a neoliberal trajectory (Gibson-Graham, 2008), with insufficient attention to the inevitable contingencies of urban politics. The need to theorise these contingencies led many to turn to more grounded accounts of 'actually existing' urban neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

These analyses commence from the standpoint that neoliberalism has no unitary logic nor realisable state of completion, but is a set of evolving processes with all the

historical and geographical specificity and contingency this implies. Urban politics, then, are taken to be shaped by the ways in which neoliberal policies and techniques intersect and articulate with *other* forms and styles of governance in specific urban (and national) contexts. These moves have led to careful biographies of particular cities' encounters with neoliberal reforms such as: M^cGuirk's (2005) exploration of how these reforms have articulated with existing urban institutional and policy frameworks and local institutional practices around metropolitan planning in Sydney: Leitner et al's (2007) analysis of how neoliberal reforms themselves are engendered and reshaped by place-based contestations: and Boyle et al's (2008) analysis of the contingent and hybrid effects on Glasgow's governance formations, political practices and policies.

A key effect of this analytical move to contingency, context and hybridity has been to migrate one of the central research questions driving political economy analyses from the 'big why' of urban politics to the 'hows' of urban politics (paraphrasing Jacobs, J. 2008). This move has drawn much more careful attention to the agency of urban actors and the consequential role of key players and personalities, for example McNeill's treatment of the role of urban mayors (2002); the operation of multiple motivations, negotiations and legitimisations within governing authorities, for example Jones et al's (2004) analysis of state and urban authorities as 'peopled'; local political cultures and the uptake or rejection of urban neoliberal urban policy reforms by local leaders and populations, for example Paul (2005) on Minneapolis-St Paul's rejection of such reforms; and the intermeshing of globally-oriented politics of accumulation with the local spatial politics arising from negotiating everyday urban life and social reproduction, such as M^cGuirk (2007) on how the local spatial politics of reproduction have played into shaping the Sydney's policy frameworks. This of itself addressed, in part, poststructural critiques of structuralist and essentialist tendencies in some neo-Marxist interpretations. But so too has the incorporation of poststructural methodologies in the attempt to look more seriously at *how* transformations in urban politics are materially and discursively constituted.

Earlier studies of place-marketing and re-imaging associated with the emergence of 'the entrepreneurial city' had certainly dealt with the politics of representation and engaged in discursive analyses. But the growing attention to 'how' questions, context and contingency in recent engagements reflects the recognition that transformations in urban governance and politics, like wider-scaled political economic transformations, have to be practically accomplished and politically constructed. Recognition that this is inherently, if not exclusively, discursive has led to much closer attention to discursive matters and methodologies, posing questions about how urban political communities of interest and alliances are articulated (M^cGuirk 2004), how particular modes of calculation informing urban policy emerge and are institutionalized (Greene et al 2007), how particular imaginaries, especially of economy, globalization and governance itself, are stabilized and made hegemonic (e.g. McCann 2006). And a distinctive strand of Foucault-inspired discursive analyses has focused on neoliberal governmentalities and how they have been mobilised to reshape urban politics. These analyses have traced, for example, how expectations around urban collective consumption have been excised from urban policy and replaced by a discourse of mutual obligation and the normalisation of individualized, private provisioning, for example Raco (2009) on urban welfare; how urban political subjectivity has been reconvened around the notion of the consumer-citizen participating in contractually-mediated markets rather than the public-citizen engaging in democratic politics, for example M^cGuirk and Dowling (2011) on the contractual governance of private residential estates; and how the politics of urban communities' social regulation has been governmentalised around expectations of self-regulation according to neoliberal behavioural norms, for example Keith Jacobs, (2008) on tenant management techniques in public housing estates.

The challenges posed by poststructuralism, then, have opened up political economy analyses of urban politics in productive directions. In recent years these analyses have been critically exploring how urban politics, policy and governance are, on the one hand, driven by material and institutional contexts that are powerfully conditioned by neoliberal ideologies enacted at multiple scales. Yet, on the other, they are constituted discursively, contextually and contingently.

New directions and new challenges: assembling poststructural political economy

While a plethora of process-oriented accounts of historically and geographically specific cases now point to diverse, contingent and hybrid forms of ‘actually existing’ neoliberal urban politics (see Wilson 2004; M^cGuirk 2005; Boyle et al 2008), neoliberalism has remained centred in these accounts as the dominant interpretive grid. At issue here, and echoing earlier poststructural challenges to political economy (Jacobs 1998), is the fact that making neoliberal influences visible and focusing on neoliberal similarities in multiple contexts risks what Gibson-Graham (2008) have labelled ‘reading for dominance, not for difference’: that is, over-projecting the neoliberalisation of urban politics, downplaying contingent enactment and, most problematically, occluding the multiple other political projects and possibilities that might coexist alongside neoliberal tendenciesⁱⁱⁱ.

Responding to the analytical constraints and effects of ‘reading for dominance’—often times packaged with neo-marxian political economy analyses—has led some analysts to turn to poststructural political economy, drawing on Foucauldian theories of governmentality and Deleuzian ideas of assemblage to rethink and retheorise contemporary urbanism, urban politics and policy. Still working within a critical political economy framework, they have resisted taking the categories and processes shaping urban politics as pre-given but instead sought to examine how these are codified and framed, mobilized and drawn together to shape subjects and to problematize and politicise issues in situated contexts, and with what effect (see Wetzstein and Le Heron 2010); M^cGuirk and Dowling 2009b; McCann 2011, MacFarlane 2011a). Part of the theoretical agenda of making framing explicit is to make visible the diverse projects and subjects, drivers and practices circulating through urban political processes within putatively neoliberalised space, that might otherwise be framed out of analysis and marginalized from political agenda and governance aspirations. In this drawing together of political economy and poststructural perspectives, the multifaceted notion of assemblage is proving productive (McFarlane 2011a), as well as posing challenging new questions about the conceptualization and spatialisations of urban politics.

The urban politics of assemblage

Building on process-oriented accounts and drawing from theories of governmentality, an assemblage approach explores how heterogeneous arrays of elements and actors, objectives and techniques are assembled together—often across diverse spatialities—to compose the city, its governance and politics (see Li 2007; Collier and Ong 2005). Taking an assemblage approach to cities and their politics demands that familiar conceptual categories of urban analyses—public/private, state/market, structure/agency, government/governance, powerful/powerless, citizen/consumer—need to be understood from the perspective of situated practice to examine how they are named and framed, constituted and drawn into relation through social and material practices to be configured into, policy objects, governable subjects and governmental forms (Larner 2011). Likewise, urban processes and forms that have tended to be theorised as structurally given (e.g. neoliberalism’s impacts on urban governance priorities, the operation of economically-rational market logics, the outcomes of privatisation) are reframed as constituted through situated practice. Understood through assemblage-thinking, the city and city politics are relational compositions, always emergent and indeterminate, always laboured at and in process rather than being a resultant formation of urbanisation processes or the working out of any necessary set of relations (Cochrane 2011, McFarlane 2011b).

Assemblage-thinking, then, is bringing specificity, contingency, process and relationality to the fore in understanding urban politics. Its entry point—the situated socio-material processes and practices through which urban politics are re/constituted—means that there can be no *a priori* presumption that urban politics are *inherently* neoliberalised. Instead, neoliberalisation (or otherwise) becomes an empirical question, requiring investigation of how neoliberal governance aspirations articulate with diverse other approaches and forms of politics. And this investigation requires attention to the micro-politics of how discursive and material practices connect elements of local and extra-local institutional contexts to produce urban

politics in given places and times and around particular governance and policy questions.

The implications for political economic interpretations of urban politics are challenging, not least not least because assemblage-thinking opens up assumptions about the sites and forms of power and authority in urban governance, and the nature of how they take effect. As McFarlane (2011b, 5) puts it, ‘urban actors, forms, or processes are defined less by a pre-given definition and more by the assemblage they enter and reconstitute’. Power and authority are inseparable from the social relations and assemblage of political actors that comprise and contest them, so they cannot be fixed but are continually negotiated through the practices of the different actors involved and the sociomaterial forces, resources and techniques they draw together (McFarlane 2009; Allen and Cochrane 2010). This view departs significantly from the hegemonic understandings that have characterized political economy interpretations, whereby powerful institutions and sites of political-economic power install a hegemony of ideas that, in a broad sense, stabilize the city’s political relations and its powerful actors. Instead it focuses on heterogeneous, productive and unexpected aspects of power, as power relations are performed and implemented by the diverse actors involved in urban politics. Urban political formations and power relations, then, are understood not as the structural effect of broader forces but as fluid and performative arrangements and achievements. From this perspective, generalizing the systematics of urban politics requires careful handling. Certainly, actors viewed traditionally as powerful in urban politics—property capital, elected politicians, the local bureaucratic and business elite, well-resourced neighbourhood and community organisations—will feature as key nodes, well-positioned to reproduce their power through their capacity to capture and command resources and knowledge. But the playing out of the power relations in which they are embedded is not pre-ordained. They must be enacted and their outcomes achieved in contextual assemblages that are continually being constituted.

Despite their seeming stability, the ordering of the power relations of urban politics can only ever be provisional, being actively arranged and rearranged as the practices

of the different actors involved can reassemble political spaces, draw in different actors and rework outcomes (see Collier and Ong 2005). If urban governance and politics are seen as 'unstable power formations in the making' (Allen and Cochrane 2010) then analysis becomes less a predictive task of establishing 'who has power' and more a topological task of tracing the situated engagements through which power formations take shape and whereby the lines of authority through which they exercise power are assembled, hierarchised and stabilised. And this takes analysis outside the conventional focus of urban political analyses on the spaces of formal politics and state institutions and engages with a wider understanding of the sites of urban politics, the array of urban political actors, the way these actors' agency is realised, and the configurations of urban governance aspirations.

My own work with Robyn Dowling offers some illustration of how this approach shapes urban political analysis. We engage assemblage-thinking in our analysis of the political effects of the proliferation of privately-governed residential estates^{iv} in Australian cities (McGuirk and Dowling 2009a 2009b, 2011). We situate our analysis in the contemporary political-economic context of Australian residential development and investigate how these estates emerge through heterogeneous assemblages of actors: developers, financiers, state projects, local and state policy frameworks, governance and management practices, the materiality of the city, design ideals, and overlapping social, economic and even environmental projects. We trace how these assemblages result in a recomposition of the public and private domains, contingently reworking how these domains practically intersect to give rise to particular governance arrangements, to shape neighbourhood politics and the political identities enacted by estate residents. But, by starting with practices, processes and assemblage rather than with pre-given categories and structures—such as markets/states, public/private, economic/social—we do not assume that these estates are dominated by privatized urban politics and neoliberal governance logics and subjectivities. Rather, we explore the processes and practices involved in these estates' production and governance. As an empirical question, we ask what particular practices and rationalities around privatization *do* in the Australian urban context as they intermesh with other co-existing governance logics, aspirations and

practices. And we find multiple governance agenda, for example around privatization, citizen responsabilisation, sustainability and community cohesion, and diverse negotiations around the politics of everyday life, for example around managing work-life balance, reproducing middle-class identities, managing the responsibilities of privately governed estates. These *are* distinctively reshaping urban governance, but they strain against a singular neoliberal inscription of the primacy of the 'private' interest in these new urban spaces of governance and politics.

The poststructural emphasis on process together with an assemblage approach suggest a more open interpretation of urban politics than has characterised neo-marxian political economy: one which emphasises diverse and contingent enactments of urban politics in situated political economic contexts, unexpected alliances and articulations, multiple governance objectives and the possibility that diverse urban political actors can reassemble urban political spaces, urban power relations and their outcomes. From this perspective, coherent stories of epochal transformations to urban politics to are certainly harder to construct.

From urban political geography to the geographies urban politics? Policy assemblages

Assemblage-thinking has also been central to driving new research questions around the spatialities of urban politics. Traditionally, the urban has been understood as a local political and policy arena and analysed within the territorial bounds of the (single) city, while acknowledging its wider political economic context (Cochrane 2011)^v. But the realities of globalization (and neoliberalisation processes) have made this analytical habit and bounded urban imaginary increasingly problematic and led to an explosion of new interest in the ways urban politics are produced through engagements with 'parts of elsewhere' (McCann 2011) in ways that single-city focus cannot hope to capture^{vi}. The burgeoning literature on transnational urban policy mobilities reflects the most obvious new research direction on the geographies of urban politics. Researchers are tracing the material geographies of how urban policies and politics are assembled relationally as actors, policy knowledge and ideas, resources and techniques, and governance practices situated 'elsewhere' are

gathered into the assemblage that makes up 'local' urban politics (McCann and Ward 2011a).

This is bringing a new texture to habitual concerns in urban political analysis in at least three ways. First, it requires attention to the transnational selectivity involved in assembling policy. In a field of 'incessant mobility and incipient translocality' (McFarlane 2011b, 3), some policy knowledges are made mobile while others are not. The strategic social and material practices involved (including mundane practices like using benchmarks and urban 'performance' indicators) constitute a particular, selective spatial politics of emulation which certain policy styles and localities—creative city policies, workfare labour policies, and business improvement district (BID) policies included—are mobilised, translated and adopted over others (Peck and Theodore 2010, Prince 2010, Ward 2011). Second, it requires attention to consequent reconfigurations of cities' power-relations and, beyond this, of their socio-spatial forms. The translocal assemblage of policy involves political actors drawing together distant phenomena "to reinforce their position, to develop political initiatives, to resolve or generate political controversy, and to build political power and authority" (Cochrane 2011, xi). Particular policy assemblages, purposefully drawn together to advance specific agenda and programs, will empower some interests over others at certain times and, conversely, locate some policy options beyond the conditions of possibility. While the elements and effects of these assemblages may not be pre-given and are always open to being remade, they are power-laden nonetheless. Third, it demands attention to how the assemblage of urban policy involves (uneven) global circuits of policy knowledge yet must happen *somewhere*, as a territorialized political process enrolled in local spatial politics and worked through local political legacies (McCann and Ward 2011a, McNeill 2008). Urban policy and its related urban politics need to be conceptualized as global-relational assemblages that are constituted and (temporarily) fixed through processes of territorialisation and that take effect through their performance in place.

McCann's (2008) work on the assemblage of Vancouver's drug policies illustrates

these aspects of urban-politics-as-assemblage put to work analytically^{vii}. He traces how, in face of a 1990s health crisis associated with illicit drug use, a coalition of local policy-makers, health and social service workers and community activists actively engaged with global drug policy networks as they sought policy alternatives as 'exemplars from elsewhere' to counter the dominant criminalization approach thought to be contributing to the crisis. They quickly focused on harm-reduction policies institutionalised in Switzerland and Germany where comparable political structures might ease policy transfer to Vancouver. McCann's analysis highlights the purposive labour involved in translocally gathering people, expertise and knowledge, models and technologies, and in mobilizing and translating policy to achieve the desired urban policy shift in face of significant political opposition from local practitioners in Vancouver. It also draws out the consequences of this harm-reduction drug policy assemblage on the city's drug-using population, the neighbourhoods they frequent and on policy opponents. By the mid 2000s, harm-reduction had become so established as the drug policy paradigm that opponents critiqued the policy assemblage for having excluded alternative policy forms. In their turn, these opponents sought to assemble alternatives, drawing for legitimation on alternative policy points of reference, from alternative 'elsewheres'. Illustrating urban politics as both territorial and relational, McCann concludes that in acknowledging urban politics and policy-making is 'always about more than the city', we need to look closely how differently spatialised forces and processes are assembled 'at certain moments, by and for certain interests' (McCann 2011b, 115) in the constitution of urban politics.

Productive tensions, generative questions

Along with other poststructural conceptions, assemblage-thinking is opening up generative new questions for urban politics, perhaps especially new questions about the multiple geographies of urban politics and conceptions of power at work simultaneously in constituting the city's politics; the importance of relationality and territoriality in understanding political organization in any city; and the challenges of identifying the relevant institutions and actors and the effective socio-material practices. These questions suggest that the range of processes and interests involved

may not be as internally coherent and unassailable as recent neoliberal narrations of urban political transformations have suggested (see McCann 2011a). Certainly, they suggest that urban politics are indeterminate, always emergent, and less amenable to epochal narratives than once assumed.

As contemporary analyses of urban politics draw together the different knowledge systems associated with political economy and poststructural perspectives, ontological and methodological tensions have certainly emerged. These are suggested for instance in the different ways and purposes for which concepts are used. Assemblage for example has been used, in diverse applications, descriptively, methodologically and ontologically, to different analytical effect (Brenner et al 2011). Within the policy mobilities literature, some analysts have used the notion of assemblage methodologically to explore the global diffusion of neoliberal policy forms—BIDs (Ward 2011) or workfare policies (Peck and Theodore 2010) for instance—as institutions, agents and discourses are connected across numerous sites, and shape macro ‘rules of engagement’ that limit urban policy-making and shape political decision-making. By comparison others, such as Robinson (2011a) and Massey (2011), draw on assemblage ontologically and in ways that decentre neoliberalism by emphasizing, first, the indeterminacy of policy circulation outcomes as policies remain open to renegotiation through their local enactment and, second, how policy circuits can identify and mobilise alternative, progressive policy possibilities.

Poststructural perspectives and concepts—such as assemblage—can sit awkwardly with the critical realist foundations traditionally associated with neo-marxian political economy accounts. Poststructural perspectives highlight the specificity, contingency and potential incoherency of urban politics, rather than seeking empirical regularities or shared features understood to structure urban political processes in a general sense. If, as a poststructural stance would have it, structures are enacted through situated socio-material assemblages, then indeterminacy, over-determination and unpredictable outcomes must characterise urban political geographies. And this can strain against accounts that might appeal to recurrent

causal relations or structural explanations, or that presuppose the outcomes of urban political processes. Methodologically too, the critical realist focus on 'why' questions and on identifying causality through abstraction (Jones 2008) can jar against poststructural methodologies that, in asking 'how' questions, stay 'close to the ground' (Collier and Ong 2005, 4) and focus empirically and ethnographically on detailing the processes, social practices and labour involved in constituting assemblages (McFarlane 2009).

But the tensions that emerge in bringing these approaches together in the study of urban politics are generative too in that, together, they work at the challenge of finding ways to connect situated practices in contingent cases, with processes that may not be evident at the scale of the cases themselves (see McCann and Ward 2011a xvi). They bring together the analytical tasks of understanding the always-contingent socio-material practices that produce agency in urban politics, with understanding observable, seemingly widespread urban political tendencies and their connection to processes of institution-building and regulation that are capable of producing systematic inequalities in relations of power and resources. Both frameworks work on the proposition that cities and their politics can be 'captured, structured and storied more effectively and with greater influence by particular actors or processes than by others' (McFarlane 2011a, 208). They can be brought together effectively in the analytical task of understanding how varying capacities to shape the city and its politics are produced, made recurrent and, crucially, opened to being remade.

Conclusion

This paper has offered an account tracking the theoretical and methodological currents that have circulated around and influenced studies of urban politics from a political economy perspective, concluding with an exploration of the growing influence and epistemological implications of poststructural political economy. Poststructuralism's emphases on framing, discourse, practice, contingency, multiplicity, relationality and assemblage has brought both analytical tensions and generative questions to political economy analyses of urban politics. It also

foregrounds the question of knowledge politics and I want to close with a brief reflection on the implications of the knowledge politics of poststructural political economy for future geographies of urban politics.

Poststructuralism demands attention to the ways in which thinking practices—the theories and concepts we see through and the accounts we produce when we ‘write the world’ of urban politics—have performative effect. Our accounts circulate, they frame, they bring certain social and spatial relations to the fore and, crucially, they become part of the assemblage through which urban politics are enacted.

Consciousness of the performativity of knowledge has challenged political economy analyses of urban politics to consider the effect of its ‘writing of the world’. To be sure, this consciousness was part of the move away from totalizing accounts of the neoliberalisation of urban politics towards more contingent accounts. Yet poststructural political economy pushes further than this and suggests a different knowledge politics beyond that of critique, which has traditionally motivated political economy urban analyses (Blomley 2008). Poststructuralism’s emphasis on practices, contingency, multiplicity, relationality and the continual re/making of assemblages aligns with the knowledge politics suggested by Ferguson’s (2009, 167) provocative question: “what if politics is really not about expressing indignation or denouncing the powerful? What if it is, instead, about getting what you want?”. Poststructural political economy, then, not only points to analysis of how urban politics and power relations are (provisionally) made but, crucially, to how they might be re-made. This suggests a knowledge politics that, while it maintains a critical view on trends in urban politics, policy and governance, is also explicitly attuned to the multiplicities inherent in urban processes and to the ever-present possibilities for reassembly to enact different, more productive outcomes.

Poststructuralism’s insistence on understanding the geographies of urban politics in terms of relationality and multiplicity, rather than terms bound to the formal political spaces and territory of the (single) city, also opens up the possibility of widening our field of vision and thought beyond the western cities that have been the primary sources of urban political theorisations. The post-colonial critique of

urban studies (Robinson 2006) has inspired a recent burgeoning of interest in explicitly extending the reference points from which theorisations of urban politics are generated so as, as Roy (2009, 820) puts it “to blast open the geographies to produce a new set of concepts in the crucible of a new repertoire of cities”. Extending beyond the concerns of tracing the global pathways of urban policy transfer, this ‘blasting open’ aims, first, to globalize urban theory, loosening its dependence on western experience and frames of reference and building theories of urban politics from the experiences of the ‘urban shadows’: that is, the majority urban world of the south (McFarlane 2008)^{viii}. Second, it aims to situate and thus provincialise the claims of theorizations of urban politics, governance and policy derived from the west (McFarlane 2010).

Quite where this will take urban political geographies cannot be predicted. But this overdue poststructural/post-colonial move will undoubtedly further open the epistemologies and methodologies through which we approach urban politics (Robinson 2011b, Roy 2011). The prompting of attention to a wider array of the practices, actors and connections that constitute urban politics and a broader array of alternative framings, relations and practices that might be cultivated to remake urban political processes is likely to bring fresh conceptualizations and interpretations and open up alternative, potentially more progressive possibilities^{ix} (see Boyle 2011, Robinson 2011b, Bunnell and Maringanti 2010). When combined with the new currents of assemblage-thinking, one widely accepted outcome is that theoretical claims around urban politics are likely to be less certain, more modest.

Undoubtedly, there remains much theoretical and methodological work to be done in exploring the potential possibilities and limits of poststructural political economy, and indeed of the simultaneous globalizing and situating of urban political analysis. Nonetheless new analytical directions for scholarship on the political geographies of the urban suggest the field has much yet to yield empirically and in terms of vibrant, generative and possibly transformative accounts.

Acknowledgement

The development of some of the ideas in this paper has benefited enormously from my collaborative work with Robyn Dowling on ARCDP0772518, held with Rowland Atkinson.

References

- Allen, J., and Cochrane, A., 2010: Assemblages of state power: topological shifts in the organization of government and politics, *Antipode*, 42, 1070-89.
- Amin, A., (ed) 1994: *Postfordism: A Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Amin, A. and Thrift, N., 2002: *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Atkinson, R., and Blandy, S., 2006: *Gated Communities*, Routledge, London.
- Barnes, T., 2003: The 90s show: culture leaves the farm and hits the streets. *Urban Geography*, 24, 479-92.
- Blomley, N., 2008: The spaces of critical geography, *Progress in Human Geography*, 32, 285–293.
- Boyle, M., 2011: Commentary: the new urban politics thesis: ruminations on MacLeod and Jones' six analytical pathways, *Urban Studies*, 48, 2673-985.
- Bunnell, T., and Maringanti, A., 2010, Practicising urban and regional research beyond metrocentricity, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34, 415-20.
- Boyle, M., McWilliams, C., and Rice, G., 2008: The spatialities of actually existing neoliberalism in Glasgow, 1977 to the present, *Geografiska Annaler B*, 70, 313-325.
- Brenner, N., 2004: *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Brenner, N., & Theodore, N., 2002: Preface: from the "new localism" to the spaces of neoliberalism, *Antipode*, 34, 341–347.
- Brenner, N., Madden, D., and Wachsmuth, D., 2011: Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban theory, *City*, 15, 225-240.
- Bulkeley, H., 2005: Reconfiguring environmental governance: towards a politics of scales and networks, *Political Geography*, 24, 875-902.
- Cochrane, A., 2011: Foreword. In E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, ix-xi.
- Collier, S.J. and Ong, A., 2005, Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems. In S.J. Collier and A. Ong (eds) *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, Blackwell, Malden, MA.

- Dear, M., 2000: *The Postmodern Urban Condition*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Dear, M., and Dahmann, N., 2008: Urban politics and the Los Angeles school of urbanism, *Urban Affairs Review*, 44, 2566-79.
- Dear, M., and Scott, A.J., 1981: *Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society*, Methuen, London.
- Dowling, R., 2009: Geographies of identity: landscapes of class, *Progress in Human Geography*, 33, 833-839.
- Dunn K.M., McGuirk, P.M. and Winchester, H.P, 1995, Placemaking: The social construction of Newcastle, *Australian Geographical Studies*, 33, 149-66.
- Ferguson, J., 2009: The uses of neoliberalism, *Antipode*, 41, 166–184.
- Fincher, R., and Jacobs, J., (eds) 1998: *Cities of Difference*. Guilford Press, London.
- Graham, S., and Marvin, G., 2001: *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, Routledge, London.
- Gibson, K., 1998: Social polarization and the politics of difference: discourses in collision or collusion. In R. Fincher and J. Jacobs (eds) *Cities of Difference*, Guilford Press, London, pp. 301-316.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2008: Diverse economies: performative practices for 'other worlds', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32, 613-32
- Greene, F., Tracey, P., Cowling, M., 2007: Recasting the city into city-regions: Place promotion, competitiveness and the quest for urban supremacy, *Growth and Change*, 38, 1-22.
- Hackworth, J., 2007: *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*, Cornell University Press, New York.
- Hall, T., and Hubbard, P., 1998: *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation*, Wiley, Chichester.
- Harvey, D., 1973: *Social Justice and the City*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Harvey, D., 1985: *The Urbanization of Capital*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
- Harvey, D., 1989a: *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Harvey, D., 1989b: From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism, *Geografiska Annaler*, 71B, 3-17.

- Harvey, D., 1992: Social justice, postmodernism and the city, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16, 588-601.
- Jacobs, J.M., 1996: *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, Routledge, London.
- Jacobs, J.M., 1998: Staging difference; aestheticization and the politics of difference in contemporary cities. In R. Fincher and J.M. Jacobs (eds) *Cities of Difference*. Guilford Press, London, 252-278.
- Jacobs, J.M., 2008: Epilogue: requalifying the city, *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 9, 241-249.
- Jacobs, K., 2008: Contractual welfare ideology and housing management practice: the deployment of 'tenant incentive schemes' in Australia, *Urban Policy and Research*, 26, 467-79.
- Jewson, N., and MacGregor, S., (eds), 1997: *Transforming Cities: Contested Governance and New Spatial Divisions*, Routledge, London.
- Jones, M., 2008: Recovering a sense of political economy, *Political Geography*, 27, 377-399
- Jones, R., Goodwin, M., Jones, M., Simpson, G., 2004, Devolution, state personnel, and the production of new territories of governance in the United Kingdom, *Environment and Planning A*, 36, 89 – 109.
- Kearns, G., and Philo, C., (eds) 1993: *Selling Places. The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, Pergamon Press, Oxford.
- Keil, R., 2009: The urban politics of roll-with-it neoliberalization, *City*, 13, 231-245.
- Kipfer, S. and Keil, R., 2002: Toronto Inc? Planning the competitive city in the new Toronto, *Antipode*, 34, 227-64.
- Keil, R., and Mahon, R., (eds) 2009: *Leviathan Undone? Towards a Political Economy of Scale*, UBC Press, Vancouver.
- Keith, M., and Pile, S., (eds) 1993: *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London.
- Larner, W., 2011: C-change? Geographies of crisis, *Dialogues in Human Geography*, in press.
- Larner, W., and LeHeron, R., 2002: The spaces and subjects of a globalizing economy: as situated exploration of method, *Environment and Planning D*, 20, 753-74.

- Lees, L., 2008: Gentrification and social mixing: towards an inclusive urban renaissance?, *Urban Studies*, 45, 2449-2470.
- Leitner, H., Sheppard, E., Sziarto, K. and Maringanti, A., 2007: Contesting urban futures: decentering neoliberalism. In H. Leitner, J. Peck and E. Sheppard (eds), *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers*, New York: Guilford Press, 1-26.
- Li, T., 2007: Practices of assemblage and community forest management, *Economy and Society*, 36, 263-93.
- Low, S., and Smith, N., 2006: *The Politics of Public Space*, Taylor and Francis, New York.
- MacLeod, G., and Jones, M., 2011: Renewing urban politics, *Urban Studies*, 48, 2443-272
- Massey, D., 2005: *For Space*, Sage, London.
- Massey, D., 2011: A counterhegemonic relationality of place, in E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policy-making in the Global Age*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1-14.
- McCann, E.J., 2006: Urban political economy beyond the 'global' city. In Y.S. Lee and B. Yeoh (eds) *Globalization and the Politics of Forgetting*, Routledge, New York, 21-39.
- McCann, E., 2011: Veritable inventions: cities, policies and assemblage, *Area*, 43, 143-47
- McCann, E. 2008: Expertise, truth, and urban policy mobilities: global circuits of knowledge in the development of Vancouver, Canada's 'four pillar' drug strategy, *Environment and Planning A*, 40, 885-904.
- McCann, E., and Ward, K., 2011a: Urban assemblages: territories, relations, practices, power. In E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, xiii-xxxv.
- McCann E., and Ward, K., 2011b, Cities assembled: Space, neoliberalization, (re)territorialisation, and comparison. In E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 167-85.

- McFarlane, C., 2008: Urban shadows: materiality, the 'southern city' and urban theory, *Geography Compass*, 2, 340-358.
- McFarlane, C., 2009; Translocal assemblages: space, power and social movements, *Geoforum*, 40, 561-67
- McFarlane, C., 2010: The comparative city: knowledge, learning, urbanism, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34, 725-742.
- McFarlane, C., 2011a: Assemblage and critical urbanism, *City*, 15, 204-24.
- McFarlane, C., 2011b; The city as assemblage: dwelling and urban space, *Environment and Planning D*, advance online publication
- McGuirk, P.M., 1994: Economic restructuring and the realignment of the urban planning system: the case of Dublin, *Urban Studies*, 31, 289-307.
- McGuirk, P.M., 2003; Producing the capacity to govern in global Sydney: a multiscaled account, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 25, 210-33.
- McGuirk, P.M., 2004: State, strategy and scale in the competitive city: a neo-Gramscian analysis of the governance of 'global Sydney', *Environment and Planning A*, 36, 1019-1043.
- McGuirk, P.M., 2005 Neoliberalist planning? Re-thinking and re-casting Sydney's metropolitan planning, *Geographical Research*, 43, 59-71.
- McGuirk, P.M., 2007: The political construction of the city-region: notes from Sydney, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31, 179-87
- McGuirk, P.M., and Dowling, R., 2009a: Masterplanned residential developments: beyond iconic spaces of neoliberalism? *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 50, 120-34.
- McGuirk, P.M., and Dowling, R., 2009b: Neoliberal privatisation? Remapping the public and the private in Sydney's masterplanned residential estates, *Political Geography*, 28, 170-85.
- McGuirk, P.M., and Dowling, R., 2011: Rethinking urban politics: new directions in governing social reproduction and everyday life in the city, *Urban Studies*, (in press, accepted December 2011)
- McNeill, D., 2003: Rome, global city? Church, state and the Jubilee 2000, *Political Geography*, 22, 535-556.
- McNeill, D., 2008, Politics and Policy. In T. Hall, P. Hubbard and J.R. Short (eds) *The Sage Companion to the City*, Sage, London, 285-300.

- Mitchell D., 2003: *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*, Guilford, New York.
- Moulaert, F., Rodriguez, A., and Swyngedouw, E., (eds) 2003: *The Globalized City: Economic Restructuring and Social Polarization in European Cities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Paul D, 2005, The local politics of 'going global': Making and unmaking Minneapolis-St Paul as a world city, *Urban Studies*, 42, 2103-2122.
- Peck, J., 2005: Struggling with the creative class, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29, 740-70.
- Peck, J., and Tickell, A., 1994: Jungle law breaks out neoliberalism and global-local disorder, *Area*, 26, 317-26.
- Peck, J., Theodore, N., and Brenner N., 2009a: Postneoliberalism and its malcontents, *Antipode*, 41, 94-106.
- Peck, J., Theodore, N., and Brenner N., 2009b: Neoliberal urbanism: models, moments, mutations, *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 29, 49-66.
- Peck, J., and Theodore, N., 2010: Mobilizing policy: models, methods, and mutations, *Geoforum*, 41, 169-174.
- Peet, R., 1998: *Modern Geographical Thought*, Wiley-Blackwell, London.
- Prince, R., 2010: Policy transfer as policy assemblage: making policy for the creative industries, *Environment and Planning A*, 42, 169-86.
- Purcell, M., 2008: *Recapturing Democracy: Neoliberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures*, Routledge, New York.
- Raco, M., 2009: From expectations to aspirations: state modernisation, urban policy, and the existential politics of welfare in the UK, *Political Geography*, 28, 36-44.
- Robinson, J., 2006: *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Routledge, Oxon.
- Robinson, J., 2011a: The spaces of circulating knowledge: city strategies and global urban governmentality, in E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policy-making in the Global Age*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 15-41.
- Robinson, J., 2011b: Cities in a world of cities: the comparative gesture, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 1-12.

- Roy, A., 2009: The 21st –century metropolis: new geographies of theory, *Regional Studies*, 43, 819-830.
- Roy, A., 2011: Slumdog cities: rethinking subaltern urbanism, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 223-238.
- Searle, G., and Bounds, M., 1999; State powers, state land and competition for global entertainment: the case of Sydney, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23,165-172.
- Soja, E., 1996: *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Spaces*, Blackwell, Cambridge.
- Staeheli, L., and Mitchell, D., 2008: *The People's Property? Power, Politics and the Public*, Taylor and Francis, New York.
- Swyngedouw, E., 2009: The antinomies of the postpolitical city: in search of a democratic politics of environmental production, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33, 601-20.
- Walks, A., 2008: Urban form, everyday life, and ideology: support for privatization in three Toronto neighbourhoods, *Environment and Planning A*, 40, 258-282.
- Ward, K., 1996: Rereading urban regime theory: a sympathetic critique, *Geoforum*, 27, 427-38.
- Ward, K., 2010: Towards a relational comparative approach to the study of cities, *Progress in Human Geography*, 24, 471-487.
- Ward, K., 2011: Policies in motion and in place: the case of Business Improvement Districts, in E. McCann and K. Ward (eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policy-making in the Global Age*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 71-96.
- Wetzstein, S., and Le Heron, R., 2010: Regional economic policy 'in-the-making': imaginaries, political projects and institutions for Auckland's economic transformation, *Environment and Planning A*, 42, 1902 – 1924
- Wilson, D., 2004: Toward a contingent urban neoliberalism, *Urban Geography*, 25, 771-783.
- Watson, S., and Gibson, K., 1995: Postmodern politics and planning: a postscript. In S. Watson and K. Gibson (eds) *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 254-64.
- Yeoh, B., 2000: Postcolonial cities, *Progress in Human Geography*, 25, 456-468.

i Regulation theory situated the transformations in urban governance, policy and politics in terms of their contribution to a broader project of achieving the wider social regulation required to secure the reproduction of globalised capitalist accumulation.

ii Peck et al, 2009b have noted that of the 2500 articles in social science using the term neoliberalism, 86% were published after 1998. To be sure, prior accounts of the politics of the entrepreneurial city involved implicit emphasis on the transformative effects of privatization, commodification and marketisation—the mechanisms of neoliberalisation. But since the 2000s, analysis has tended to be more explicitly framed in terms of the politics of ‘the neoliberal city’ (e.g. Hackworth, 2007).

iii For example, in considering the role of cities and the governance of climate change, Bulkeley (2005) queries whether political economy interpretations can be straightforwardly extended, and suggests that a more careful reconceptualisation of the actors, roles, relationships and power relations is needed in this rapidly emerging domain of urban politics.

iv Integrated estates with privately-provided communal facilities and services paid for by resident levies, and managed through private micro-governance mechanisms.

v Which, of course, is not to say that all urban political analysis have adhered to this imaginary. As McCann and Ward (2011b, 168) point out, Harvey’s analyses of urban politics were clear that ‘to discover the “where” of urban politics and policymaking, we must leave not just the confines of city hall but also the city itself’

vi This sits within a longer standing interest in human geography more generally in the ways cities are constituted by their relations to other places and in relation to processes operating across wider geographical fields (see Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005).

vii McCann consciously focuses on urban social rather than economic development policy and on non-elite urban actors as a corrective to the tendency in neo-marxian political economy analyses to interpret urban politics through these prisms.

viii Situating the claims of western urban theory has thus far been advanced through a ‘comparative turn’ (Ward 2010) whereby comparative work is used, amongst other things, as a means of both expanding the gaze of theorisation and learning about its limits.

ix Roy (2009, 826) offers one resonant example when she points out that “(u)rban theory has long been concerned with the ways in which the poor and marginalized act in the face of power. However, it has been better able to explain acts of power than acts of resistance, as in concepts of growth machines, political regimes of redevelopment, modes of regulation, and urban entrepreneurialism. The ‘Third World’ literature on informality is a treasure-trove of conceptual work on the ‘grassroots’ of the city, and is thus able to expand considerably the analysis of ‘urban politics’ (Roy 2009, 826).