

Introduction

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In this volume, we demonstrate the vitality of urban studies in a double sense: its fundamental importance for understanding contemporary societies and its qualities as a dynamic and innovative field of inquiry. However, urbanists have detractors, particularly scholars in mainstream U.S. political science. In 2007, Bryan D. Jones, a former urbanist, and two graduate students, Joshua Sapotichne, and Michelle Wolfe (Sapotichne, et al. 2007), launched a scathing attack on the urban politics subfield. They argued that it has become parochial and moribund, ignoring significant approaches in mainstream political science and failing to contribute anything to it. Other than urban regime theory, they claimed, it has contributed little of value for two decades or more. Led by Imbroscio, the attack was defended robustly in a debate, to which Davies and others contributed.¹ At the same time, Davies was organizing a series of workshops at Warwick University designed to develop “critical governance studies” by challenging orthodox theories, such as Rhodes’ “differentiated polity model” of governance by network (Rhodes 1997), that have dominated urban political inquiry for a quarter century.² The coincidence of these developments caused the current editors to organize a debate on *Critical Urban Studies: New Directions*, taking in the whole urban field. We did so partly to emphasize the falsity of Jones’ critique and partly to engage the field with the renewed spirit of social critique emerging since the late 1990s. We convened two panels at the 38th meeting of the Urban Affairs Association (UAA), held in Baltimore in April 2008, on the critical urban studies theme. Between them, the panels attracted some two hundred people and convinced us that critical urban studies is a matter of considerable interest and debate. The first panel looked at developments in critical urban theory, the second critical urban policy, and we have structured the volume accordingly.

The Warwick workshops provoked considerable debate about the nature of “orthodoxy” and “critique.” By orthodoxy, we mean that which is established, unquestioned doctrine. Orthodoxy refers to any theoretical or empirical assumption taken for granted in a significant field of inquiry. The orthodox may or may not be synonymous with the “mainstream” and the practice of critique can itself become orthodox. Critique is certainly an integral feature of the urban field. From its origins in the late 1960s to the present, the detection and eradication of social injustice has been its dominant theme, alongside its celebration of city life. This strand of critique—the pursuit of social justice—features more or less explicitly in all the contributions to this volume, as readers would expect. However, it also addresses a second strand characteristic of the practice of critique, that of self-examination and renewal. To remain relevant, any field of inquiry must move beyond its comfort zone, challenge its orthodoxies, critical or otherwise, and respond to new intellectual and empirical challenges.

To meet this challenge, we asked each of our contributors to identify an orthodox perspective in urban studies and subject it to critique, while mapping out a future research agenda for the renewal of critique. As the result of their considerable endeavors, the volume reflects the most recent developments in the practice of critique in the urban field, challenges prevalent orthodoxies, and identifies the key challenges posed for critical urban studies by contemporary city life. It thus reaffirms and renews the tradition of critique through which the international field of urban studies has made its name. We see this book very much as the beginning of a debate and if it provokes controversy and uncertainty, at a time of global crisis, it will have achieved its primary goal.

Elvin Wyly opens Part I: Critical Urban Theory with a qualified defense of positivism in urban enquiry. Urbanists have been particularly critical of positivism. However, Wyly argues that the urban discipline is wrong to reject it wholesale. Positivist research, characterized by rigorous observation and measurement, has an important role to play in radical urban inquiry. In Chapter 2, Mara Sidney accepts Wyly’s claim about the potential of positivist urban research to be critical, while also revealing the critical potential embodied in an epistemic rival to positivism: constructivist and interpretive analysis. She further demonstrates how a constructivist, interpretative approach could do much to revitalize the study of urban politics. Warren Magnusson’s contribution in Chapter 3 finds great value in critical urban studies’ ability to “see like a city”—envision the world as resulting from distinctively urban practices—as opposed to the conventional state-centric view of the world. “Seeing like a city” rather than “seeing like a state” presents a profound challenge to orthodox political science by detaching the discipline from its traditional state-oriented moorings. Doing so, Magnusson demonstrates,

transforms contemporary political science into an urban discipline, as urban political phenomena now marginal to the discipline instead become central to it.

In Chapter 4, Julie-Anne Boudreau also asks that we envision the world as constituted by distinctively urban practices and characteristics. If we do so, she argues, then it is plausible to conceive of a specifically urban standpoint from which to generate knowledge and do research. Such an urban epistemology possesses significant critical potential, while challenging the orthodox view that a researcher can produce knowledge in a disembodied way. In Chapter 5, Jonathan Davies renews his critical engagement with urban regime theory (2002), arguing against Clarence Stone (see, e.g., Stone, 1989) that urban politics needs Marxist theory. He contends that a Marxist conception of systemic power, centered on the evolving relationship among state, capital, and class is both stronger and more dynamic than Stone's and capable of explaining a variety of forms of urban governance, from informal urban regimes to British-style urban partnership bureaucracies. In a period of neoliberal crisis and ever-rising inequality, this Marxist conception recommends radically different forms of political action based on the potential for revitalized class struggles. Concluding Part I, David Imbroscio argues in Chapter 6 against the likes of Bryan Jones and his colleagues (Sapotichne et al. 2007), and instead suggests that urban politics must resist the allure of the mainstream and its methodological and normative orthodoxies including ontological individualism, pluralism, and (neo)liberal political economy. Urbanism needs to maintain a critical stance toward its own orthodoxies, but it must also continue to look outward by challenging the mainstream with, in his words, "sustained intellectual ferocity."

Part II, Critical Urban Policy, begins with chapters by Jeff Spinner-Halev (Chapter 7) and Yasminah Beebeejaun (Chapter 8) engaging the issue of diversity. Spinner-Halev questions the orthodox view in urban studies that blames the nefarious actions of the abstract entity of "the state" for racial and class segregation in the United States. Such a view, he argues, is much too simple a portrayal of the problem and neglects the role played by the actions and preferences of individual citizens. His analysis provides a sobering retort to those urban scholars who fail to come fully to terms with the complexities surrounding efforts to protect minority interests from majoritarian impulses in democratic politics. Yasminah Beebeejaun argues that multicultural theories and policies based on the goal of racial equality have come under attack in recent years and been replaced by a newly hegemonic policy narrative, "community cohesion." The idea of community cohesion deflects attention from racial inequality, placing the onus on black and minority ethnic communities to assimilate. Beebeejaun attacks this new orthodoxy, arguing that it reflects a "colonial attitude" toward black and minority ethnic groups, treating them

as immigrants not citizens. She mounts a robust case for multiculturalism, while maintaining that the defense of difference “is empty if not linked to debate about justice and equality.”

The next two chapters by James DeFilippis and Jim Fraser (Chapter 9) and Edward Goetz and Karen Chapple (Chapter 10) challenge orthodoxies concerning how best to confront spatially concentrated urban poverty. DeFilippis and Fraser critique the orthodox theoretical justification for creating mixed-income housing and neighborhoods offered by mainstream urban policy analysts. They see this theoretical justification as especially troubling as it spawns problematic and unjust public policies. In light of this critique, they offer their own theoretical justification for mixed-income housing and neighborhoods, a justification that suggests policies both normatively and programmatically superior. Goetz and Chapple question the related orthodoxy of what Imbroscio elsewhere (see 2008a, 2008b) identifies as the “dispersal consensus” in U.S. anti-poverty and low-income housing policy. Dispersalists believe improving the lives of the poor and the conditions in America’s inner cities requires relocating poor residents to more affluent areas within the metropolitan region. Goetz and Chapple’s analysis marshals considerable empirical evidence challenging the dispersalist position by demonstrating that such policies are often both ineffective and unjust.

Finally, in Chapter 11, Thad Williamson takes a critical view of the urban sprawl debate. What troubles Williamson is the overconfidence of much of the conventional critical urban scholarship on sprawl. Such scholarship views the notion that sprawl is a “bad thing” as a self-evident truth. This overconfidence, and the absence of scholarly rigor it engenders, has provided an opening for sprawl’s defenders to mount a seemingly compelling case for it. Williamson takes the defense of sprawl seriously but shows how such a defense ultimately founders on both empirical and normative grounds.

Taken together, the eleven essays in this collection considerably advance the enterprise of critical urban studies. They challenge a wide range of prevalent orthodoxies and illuminate several new directions on which subsequent critical scholarship and practice can build. On the theory side, contributions in this volume lay the foundation for reconceiving the conduct of empirical inquiry and knowledge production, revamping the nature of disciplinary work in the social sciences and revitalizing the field of urban studies itself with a renewed sense of confidence and intellectual vigor. On the policy side, the contributors provide thorough critiques of established urban policies that hinder social justice while offering progressive alternatives. More profoundly, they also press policy advocates committed to social justice to develop more rigorous and justifiable understandings of the immense challenges posed by contemporary city life. It is our hope that the essays collected in this volume

inspire future urban scholars and activists to further advance the theory and practice of critique in even deeper and more transformative directions.

Notes

1. See *Urban News: Newsletter of the Urban Politics Section (of the American Political Science Association)*. Spring, 2008. Vol. 22, No. 1. <http://www.apsanet.org/~urban/newsletters08-1.pdf>.
2. See <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/orthodoxies>.