Introduction

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medium [me-di-um] ~ an intervening substance through which a force acts or an effect is produced

This section of the book focuses on the idea that the city functions as a medium through which politics are enacted. As such it identifies the ways in which actors and groups of actors utilize the city as a mean to achieve certain ends. Our bracketing of 'urban politics' here is therefore less geographical than the previous section. This is not to say that we are not interested in the geography of the city. But rather we first look at the actors who utilize the city as a particular environment. In the section you will read about the ways in which mayors, political institutions and legal systems use the city as a means to achieve their ends.

There are many strands of the urban politics literature that look at how various actors are empowered and mobilized through their intervention in the urban process. Perhaps the most pronounced strand of thought in this genre is urban regime theory. This theory of urban politics focuses on explaining how and why certain actors come to dominate the shape and form of city government. This understanding of urban politics is often credited to Clarence Stone's 1989 study of Atlanta, Georgia. Stone sees urban regime theory as based within political economy perspectives in that it is concerned with the economic forces that make and implement distinct policy initiatives. The theory can therefore be said to have two elements: a concern with the

external economic factors (i.e. market competition, competitive bidding for national government resources) and internal political dynamics (i.e. coalition building between parties). Urban regime theory is therefore concerned with those occurrences where various actors come together within institution settings to achieve a particular goal. This goal might be the construction of a particular retail space, the building of a new road or the blocking of certain environmental regulations. In each case, we need to be cognisant of the ways in which certain actors come together to shape these urban political dynamics.

The urban scholarship that has taken up and developed urban regime analysis has focused upon actors operating within and upon urban government. Often times this is concerned with the connections between political and economic actors with particular cities, whereby those with vested interests in economic development seek to shape and direct the actions of democratically elected government (e.g. Logan and Molotch, 1987; Hackworth, 2002; Jonas and McCarthy, 2009). But there is another strand of urban scholarship that looks at the ways in which certain individuals and/or groups use the fabric of the city to achieve certain goals. These would include those who have examined how the processes of building and regulating urban environments are bound up with processes of social regulation and control.

This section of the book contains three different examples of the city being used as a medium for certain political actors. In Chapter 5, Kurt Iveson takes up the notion that the city is a policed space. For those familiar with the past two decades of urban scholarship, this idea of the city as a policed space will bring to mind the theoretical influence of French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the work of Foucault greatly influenced the social sciences.

Foucault's studies of the birth of modern society revealed the numerous ways in which social order and regulation was constructed and re-created. For example, his work on mental illness and prisons illuminated the mechanisms of social ordering and regulation that were generated alongside the birth of the industrial city. From this body of work, Foucault's deconstruction of Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century prison design, the panoptican, has proven particularly influential:

> For Foucault the Panopticon represented a key spatial figure in the modern project and also a key *dispositive* in the creation of modern subjectivity, in other words in the remaking of people (and society) in the image of modernity. Panopticism, the social trajectory represented by the figure of the Panopticon, the drive to self-monitoring through the belief that one is under constant scrutiny, thus becomes both a driving force and a key symbol of the modernist project. (Wood, 2003: 235)

The use of this prison model as a spatial metaphor for the ways in which urban space has been constructed in order to generate certain behaviours and social norms provides an important entry point for thinking about the politics of urban space.

Insert Box S2 – about here

These politics are developed in Iveson's chapter through a discussion of graffiti and related attempts to regulate the activity. Iveson bases his discussion of graffiti within Jacques Rancière's theory of politics. We've already seen Rancière employed by Hankins and Martin to discuss the politics of strategic neighbouring. But here Iveson focuses on what Rancière calls the opposite of politics: policing. Rancière's usage of the term police/policing has much in common with Foucault's work on social regulation in modern society. For Rancière the police are all those things which go into maintaining a particular social order: rules, laws, social norms, acceptable

behaviours, roles, identities, and so on. And Foucault was interested in the ways in which things such as medical knowledge, prisons and sexual identities all went into shaping a certain social regime. In Iveson's discussion of graffiti he explains how various mechanisms go into regulating graffiti, from explicit acts of policing to moral codes within graffiti communities. The point to be identified here, then, is that in policing the city many elements come together to maintain a social regime. It is not purely the state or institutional actors that create society and space, but also the actors themselves. If we are to engage with questions of struggle and political change, what Iveson's illustrative example demonstrates is the multitude of elements that must be considered. Or, to put it in Rancière's terms, for politics to occur the police order itself must be transcended and another, more just, one installed.

In Donald McNeill's chapter, our tack changes slightly. McNeill's chapter focuses on the mayor as an important political agent. The chapter argues that the mayor is an often under-appreciated figure in urban politics. Whereas approaches such as urban regime theory focus on coalitions of interests, McNeill argues that it can, in many cases, be the actions of one person that end up directing urban political change. A particularly enigmatic, wealthy and/or well-connected mayor can exert power within cities that far outweigh their institutional role. The argument here is not that mayors are the only figure of political power in some cities. Indeed, McNeill stresses that those everyday disciplining processes that the likes of Foucault have illustrated are usually central to understanding political power. Rather the chapter's central contribution is in demonstrating that, on occasion, the city can become a medium through which a particular individual exerts an influence that changes the city beyond that which can be explained by structural conditions. In this sense the city becomes a medium for that powerful individual to impose a vision of the city.

The final chapter of the section focuses squarely on how institutions of social regulation are enacted through the city. John Carr takes us to Seattle, Washington; to the scene of public planning battles over the provisioning of skate parks. From his insider's perspective, Carr argues that what might be considered a struggle over collective provision actually turns out to be a lesson over how social control operates in and through legal structures and procedures. The chapter's emphasis on the role of law in the (non-)creation of urban politics is part of a broader move across urban studies and geography to understand the role of law in the urban process (e.g. Blomley, 2004; Martin et al., 2010). Within this literature legal systems are understood as normative agents that actively reproduce a certain type of society and city. In Carr's chapter, this is a society and city that do not respond to democratic decision making. Rather, the legal system is used by certain actors to maintain a status quo and protect privileged interests. As Carr urges us to recognize, we cannot see community consultation practices as neutral devices that serve democratic ends. Rather, they function to pacify citizens and stymie political change.

The chapters in this section therefore take us beyond the collection of actors we most commonly associate with urban politics. Urban politics do not serve simply as a medium through which the interests of place-based capital are collectively mobilized. Rather, the chapters show illustrative examples of the ways in which the city is used by various actors in various ways to produce certain outcomes, or in some cases to ensure certain outcomes are not produced. The chapters all do this in different ways. For McNeill, it is the individual persona of the mayor who must be recognized as a potentially powerful political agent. For Carr, it is the legal regime in Seattle that serves particular interest over others. And for Iveson, his drawing on Jacques Rancière's theory of politics and policing directs him to see societal-wide modes of

social regulation imposing themselves through a set of different actors. We therefore have different types and scales of political action engaged in using the city as a medium of social power and control. We might then think of the following questions:

- If the city is used by multiple actors to achieve certain ends, who are the most powerful actors and what are their goals?

- Do the institutions of urban politics, mayors and councils, have influence over all political processes in the city?

- Is everything political in the city? Or are things rarely political in the city?

- If mayors have significant personal power and/or democratic processes of citizen engagement do not work, how can we assess the justness of our political institutions?

- How compatible are the political theories of people like Jacques Rancière with established theories of urban politics, such as urban regime theory?

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