

**URBAN POLITICS AND THE SOCIAL PRACTICES OF CRITIQUE AND JUSTIFICATION:  
CONCEPTUAL INSIGHTS FROM FRENCH PRAGMATISM**

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## ABSTRACT

Recent times have witnessed a growing belief in urban spaces as ‘assemblages’ produced through interwoven and spatially differentiated forces that converge in particular places. There is also continuing interest in the nature of neoliberal tendencies and the rise of post-politics and democracy in urban governance. Nonetheless, these accounts typically lack attention towards the comprehensive conceptualisation of the heterogeneous logics and mechanics of relations and negotiations between actors. This paper seeks to advance these perspectives by exploring the potential contribution of French pragmatism thinking on how social life is produced through practical dialogue between actors through critique, argumentation and justification.

Urban      Politics      Assemblages      French Pragmatism      Neoliberalism      Post-  
democracy/politics

## INTRODUCTION

There has been a broad trend within the social sciences towards an understanding of the 'social' as materially and discursively heterogeneous, and subject to constant construction, reconstruction and reconfiguration (Reckwitz, 2002). Within geographical studies this is related more broadly to a view of space as relational, unbounded and socially produced, with place conceptualised in terms of a 'relational politics of place' (Massey, 1991; Amin, 2004). What has grown from these conceptions is a belief in the examination of socio-spatial relations and configured intersections between, within and producing space, place and territory (Amin, 2004). Integral to such considerations is the growing range of actors, discourses, objects and performances evident within urban governance sites, operating through a 'variety of socio-spatial lines of engagement and networks of association', both within and beyond the 'urban' (MacLeod and Jones, 2011: 2446). Peck (2003), for instance, argues for a conceptualisation of policies 'in motion' in which there is less concern with what takes place within regimes, to a concern with 'transnational' and 'translocal' relations and networks. For Cochrane (2011), the 'throwntogetherness of place' (Massey, 2005) demonstrates the need to take account of the urban as 'the space within which sets of relationships overlap, settle and come together', and which are 'sites where a range of different political outcomes may be explored and struggled over' (863).

Such conceptual beliefs are tied into broader understandings of the changing nature of the 'urban' (MacLeod and Jones, 2011). For Keil (2009) the financial crisis and retrenchment of the state is fostering the transition from urban and regional regulatory territoriality towards

more topologically-orientated relationships. This is characterised by the boundaries between spatial areas and their scalar jurisdictions being increasingly blurred (Graham and Marvin, 2001). There has also been the continuing evolution of many state and non-state bodies involved in urban governance, which is related to the ever increasing importance of relations and negotiations around everyday politics, democracy and citizenships in such landscapes (MacLeod, 2011). Ultimately, these processes constitute the call for a 'more fully relational urban political theory' (Young and Keil, 2009: 94), including greater appreciation of the role of multiple extra-local relations, mobilities and transactions that come to influence and constitute urban areas (Ward, 2010). It is through such heterogeneous mobilities, relational spaces of engagement, and resulting processes of socio-political struggle that the 'urban' and 'urban politics' are (re)constructed and (re)configured (MacLeod and Jones, 2011). A broadly defined 'assemblages' perspective has recently developed, building upon a variety of theoretical approaches, but with a focus on the creation of temporary governing arenas involving differential, socially constructed spatial relations. Whilst lacking a theoretical core, McFarlane and Anderson (2011) argue that the approach is important in critically examining the process and formation of geographies, and exploration of alternate possibilities within the construction and composition of various processes and structures. However, there remains scope for conceptual exploration and clarification on the rationale, content and operation of negotiations between diverse entities (Allen, 2011). Working on the understanding that the 'urban' is constructed through socio-spatial interaction, there is a need to more fully understand processes of negotiation and how social co-ordination is temporarily created.

Neoliberal tendencies and the rise of post- democracy and politics are also significant trends in regard to the urban. Studies of neoliberal tendencies remain embedded within political economy and governmentality perspectives. While both approaches present considerable insights they lack attention to processes of negotiation between actors within and beyond neoliberal tendencies. Furthermore, Swyngedouw (2009) argues that post- democracy and politics are increasingly evident within urban governance, but his account lacks sensitivity to the construction of justifications that are deployed by actors when seeking to create and contest post- democracy and politics conditions.

One way to address these conceptual issues is to utilise elements of pragmatist thinking that emphasise the role of practical dialogue between actors within social situations, and which constitute the construction of governance arrangements and power relations. It is with such issues in mind that this paper examines the contribution that French Pragmatism can make to an understanding of the construction and functioning of socio-spatial relations, neoliberal tendencies and post- democracy and politics conditions.

## **ASSEMBLAGE, NEOLIBERALISM AND POST-DEMOCRACY/POLITICS**

### **Assemblages of governance**

The concept of 'assemblage' has acquired increasing prominence in studies of socio-spatial relations in recent years, which McFarlane (2009) terms 'assemblage geographies'. Such thinking has come about as a means in which to examine and understand the various elements constituting the creation of bounded notions, such as territory, as well as the

production of particular spaces, such as the 'urban'. It has also been deployed more recently as a means in which to examine the growing disjuncture between the spatial jurisdictions of politico-collectivist institutions, and the rise of heterogeneous urban processes and landscapes (MacLeod, 2011). Of particular importance is the understanding, stemming from Deleuze and Guattari (1988), that assemblages are constituted by both materialities and various enunciations such as language, strategic documents and laws. Assemblages are understood as seeking to create stability, but where their boundaries are ambiguous and the possibilities for de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation are always evident (Legg, 2011). As McFarlane (2009) argues, they are sites of 'doing, performance and events' rather than simply formations and are thus subject to material, performativity and discursive change through relational processes and properties, such as new actors infringing on existing formations (562). For Ong and Collier (2005) assemblages encompass discursive, collective and material relationships, objects and actors, operating through multiple spatial and temporal dimensions, which are not 'reducible to a single logic' (12) (see also Marcus and Saka, 2006). Relations, actors and objects are treated in terms of a range of spatial associations, from proximate to distant, all of which are traversing in the sense of working through multiple relations, spaces and temporal dimensions both within and beyond any one assemblage (Bennett, 2005). They are therefore not strictly codified formations such as in Foucauldian apparatus or neo-Gramscian state spatial strategy, but are constantly created (McFarlane, 2009).

Through such an approach there is a realisation of the dynamism of formations in that they are subject to a range of relational effects, including power relations and conflict, which produce stability and change, and where there is a great deal of heterogeneity in their form

and content (Legg, 2009). The production of governance landscapes is therefore a consequence of 'relatedness' rather than the topographical location of and distance between actors, relations and practices, or the consequence of overt institutional design enacted by distant hierarchical bodies such as the nation state (Allen and Cochrane, 2007). In this sense they are emergent and constantly produced formations, with both dynamic form and content, or 'multiple determinations', and are often reassembled in heterogeneous ways (Ong and Collier, 2005). This leads to many accounts that are process-based in the sense of examining the (re)assembling objects that are disparate and distributed both near and afar with the purpose of producing congruence, but where such objects remain dispersed within multiple social contexts and relations (MacFarlane, 2009). This is not to suggest that all assemblage-inspired accounts believe in such heterogeneity. Legg (2009; 2010) situates assemblage firmly within Foucauldian analysis by discussing a dialect between Foucauldian 'apparatus', as formally configured mechanisms of governance, and Deleuzian assemblage that represent greater sensitivity towards disorder and agency, particularly through processes of everyday lived experience, autonomy and resistance. For Legg (2009), apparatus are the re-territorialising of causal and governmentalizing elements within assemblages. This builds upon Deleuze's (1992) understanding that Foucault recognised the uneven multiplicity of elements constituting apparatus, which have to be constantly produced, and thus the possibility of resistance and circumvention. In this manner Legg (2009) equates the sedimentation of order within assemblages, through processes of de- and re- territorialisation, with emergent yet relatively stable 'apparatus' where stability is defined in terms of congruence between tactics and strategies, and actual governmental action.

There is broadranging consensus around the importance of agency. For Ong and Collier (2005) there is a need to examine the ability of agency to decontextualise, recontextualise and transfer across different social arenas. Of importance in these processes is the capacity of actors through assemblages to code and classify objects as a means in which to control, but also define them within the context of particular governmental apparatus, and thus there are important value judgements. Actors utilise particular logics, including certain discourses, practices, objects and spatial imaginaries when constructing assemblages, with the purpose of aligning actors and objects towards particular courses of action and spatial imaginaries (Featherstone, 2011). This includes the deployment of spatial imaginaries by actors when seeking to construct assemblages, such as scalar narratives (McFarlane, 2009).

With regard to the understanding of 'the urban' and urban politics, studies generally recognise that 'the urban and urban politics are assembled and put together in place, yet are shaped by the nature of their connections to elsewhere rather than being limited by the territorial boundaries of particular urban spaces' (Allan and Cochrane (2007; Cochrane, 2011: 863). Allan and Cochrane (2010) for instance argue that the power of the state stems from the ability to reach and act across space through 'mediated and real-time connections [as assemblages], some direct, others more distanced', when influencing, guiding and directing temporally and spatially disparate actors (Allan and Cochrane, 2010: 1073). This is not to suggest the relegation of territory, or socio-politically constructed scalar arrangements, but rather the understanding that territory, socio-spatial relationality and 'overlapping administrative hierarchies of government and state' are interwoven (Cochrane, 2011: 863). The discussion of such issues has been particularly prominent in research on urban policy mobilities. Various accounts have sought to highlight the important way in



which forms of knowledge, expertise, discourses and actual material practices from a distance are incorporated, reworked and territorialised by actors (McCann, 2008). Such processes are highly politicised and endowed with power relations, since there are processes of dialogue between actors around the incorporation of external elements within an assemblage. Through such thinking McCann and Ward (2010) conclude that urban governance is constituted by elements of both proximity and distance, with urban areas consequently forming 'translocal' assemblages, but where there is tension between translocal elements and the need for such assemblage parts to be territorialised.

In this sense, and building upon Allan and Cochrane (2007), assemblages form part of the production of territory and as such the latter are not fixed entities, but are produced relationally in a constant manner through dialogue, negotiation and conflict between actors. McCann and Ward (2010) have subsequently argued for a territorial-relational analysis. This would focus on the 'situated practices' and imaginings of actors, but where they interact with more 'global flows', and in which they have a level of causality in terms of interacting with such processes, such as in being able to manage, promote and resist such activity. McCann (2008) argues further that there is a need to examine which 'practices and discourses frame the actions of urban actors as they seek to learn about the policies from elsewhere', and 'how policy mobilities are 'mediated and facilitated by organisations and institutions operating at various scales?' (4). This suggests that before analysing mobilities there is a need examine value judgements that make them mobile, how consensus is produced, or alternative opinions are subordinated, in regard to their importance and legitimacy in becoming mobile, transferred and embedded within place.



### ***Critiques of the assemblages approach***

While assemblage perspectives offer a framework in which to examine the heterogeneous nature of governance across space, within place and in time specific periods, Allen (2011) suggests a danger of weak conceptualisation and descriptive analysis. This follows MacFarlane and Anderson's (2011) recognition that assemblages are often used as a descriptor, rather than as a basis in which to theoretically examine and explain (see also Wachsmuth, et al, 2011). For Allen (2011) there is a need to conceptualise the diverse logics, modes of relational operation and the 'content of the relationships that hold assemblages in place' (156). There are further questions regarding how consensus is produced and alternative opinions are subordinated through processes of justification and legitimisation. This suggests the need for greater theorisation of the actual processes of interaction between agency, including the nature of power relations which have tended to be downplayed more generally in networked-inspired accounts. Secondly, he argues for the investigation of the nature of relations in reference to their 'messy actualities', such as tensions, displacements and conflict. For Featherstone (2011), certain studies adopting an assemblage approach utilise an expansive definition, leading to 'ill-defined usage that closes down its ability to explanatory work and makes it hard to differentiate between different kinds of relations' (141).

As recognised by McFarlane (2009) there are issues within the assemblage approach arising from the focus on differentiated agency, emergence and process, including an understanding of agency as a 'distributed socially, spatially and materially' (566). This presents the danger of failing to identify the causal role of agency (see also Tonkiss, 2011).

This inevitably leads to questions surrounding the need for greater conceptualisation of the genesis of assemblages and the basis of actors' social practices in producing argumentative stances and assembling objects in support of such activities, including endowing value judgements on the purpose and content of an assemble. This is particular important in accounts such as Allan and Cochrane (2010) who argue that the nation state's highly differentiated governing arrangements are subject to reconfiguration by way of 'renegotiation and displacement' through dialogue between state and non-state actors. Focusing on the causality of agency as a mechanism of assemblage construction requires a concern with why they seek to assemble and how they go about such aims through negotiations, including how they construct their arguments. Such issues are of considerable importance given that assemblages are unstable formations requiring constant production through dialogue and negotiation.

### **Urban neoliberalism and post-politics/democracy**

While the assemblage approach recognises the importance of examining the changing configuration of socio-spatial relations there are two further important trends that significantly impact on socio-spatial relations and urban governance. Firstly, there is little doubt that the rise of heterogeneous urban spaces of politics and governance are related to a highly contentious set of broadly defined neoliberal tendencies (Leitner et al, 2007). Political economy accounts view neoliberalism as more of a 'syndrome than a singular entity, essence or totality' (Brenner et al, 2010: 330). While neoliberal tendencies are argued to be unevenly produced through variegated regulatory restructuring, this broad approach believes that its various manifestations derive from a 'basic operational logic', characterised by quasi-generic processes of regulatory experimentation, inter-jurisdictional policy transfer

and transnational rule regimes (Brenner et al, 2010). Innovation and change within particular places subsequently constitute neoliberal divergence. These contingency-laden tendencies depend on interaction with existing alternative place-specific institutional and political forms, producing particular hybrids which vary across space (Fuller and Geddes, 2008). Brenner and Theodore (2002) consequently recognise that it is the material and discursive manifestations of neoliberal tendencies that are of importance, termed 'actually existing neoliberalism'. Any appreciation of 'actually existing neoliberalism' and innovation therefore requires greater conceptualisation of the antecedents, genesis and enactment of neoliberal tendencies, particularly in regard to their mechanics as they interact with alternative actors, institutions and practices.

Of course the importance of discourses, subjectivities, techniques, everyday practices and performativity are of particular concern to governmentality accounts. Within such a perspective neoliberalism is viewed as being produced by and interacting with philosophies, strategies, institutions, discourses and subjectivities that lay both beyond and within divergent neoliberal tendencies, producing locally contingent arrangements characterised by contradiction and contestation (Larner, 2003; Leitner et al, 2007). While there is recognition of the highly uneven, contested and contingent institutional and political landscape, there remains a dearth of studies geared towards recognising and examining the 'messy actualities' of state programmes in the sense of their internal and external contradictions and tensions, and the 'counter-conduct' tendencies of subjects as they negotiate, contest and circumvent nation state efforts (McKee, 2009; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011). For Allen (2004), governmentality reduces the spatio-temporal 'institutional detail' and dimensions associated with government arrangements, instead relying upon a landscape 'where the

production of new subjectivities is assumed to take its shape from the simple act of living' (24). Ignoring the complexities and power relations embedded within programme delivery and broader governance arrangements results in an inability to explain why the 'governable subject, constituted through discourse, fails to turn up in practice' (Clarke, 2005; McKee, 2009: 474). If as Foucauldians suggest, the state can only enact power through broader social relations, centres of excellence and subjectivities then there is likely to be the creation of highly heterogeneous governance systems with actors lacking any complete uniformity to individual state programmes and technologies. It is within such spaces that we are likely to see the constant negotiation, argumentation, justification and legitimisation of governing practices, and this requires far greater sensitivity to such inter-agency practices.

Secondly, there is growing recognition of changing democratic and political arenas and processes (MacLeod and Jones, 2011). This has been extensively discussed by Swyngedouw (2009) in terms of a post-democratic and post-political urban condition in which politics and democracy have been redefined in terms of the need for managerial and rationalist inter-stakeholder co-ordination. There is a breadth of stakeholders providing sectoral democratic representativeness but with 'economic' and capitalist interests judged to be 'worthy' and at the forefront of city concerns. Political debate is being reduced to the discussion of modes and mechanisms of governance, with the focus on producing a 'post-political consensus' considered conducive to the aims of the state, rather than difference and political conflict deriving from Laclauian understandings of the 'particularities' of social groups.

While there is considerable depth to the Laclauian-inspired understanding of the subordination of the 'particular' through totalising mechanisms that seek hegemony by way

of attempting to fill the discursive void, there is scope for far greater exploration of the mechanics and dynamics of consensus building and compromise that seeks to produce a 'common sense' favouring urban elites and legitimising post-politics, including the subordination of actors and agendas that deviate from a socially constructed norm (see also Paddison (2009)). Swyngedouw (2009) does recognise the important role played by a 'common predicament' in which responses require collective involvement, co-operation and solutions. The importance of this and the other conditions lie in social coordination and order through the construction of a morally-configured 'common good', and the justification of particular forms of action, which correspondingly stems from various socially constructed value systems and argumentative logics. This leads to questions such as how justifications for particular courses of action, working through particular values, are able to bring about social co-ordination through temporary hegemonic status.

Similarly, given that the particular, or 'political', is never able to realise itself and represent the universal, one has to also consider the mechanics characterising the social conflict between different social forces, since the universal and 'politics' in the sense of the institutional-legal apparatus of the state (see Rancière, 2001), can never truly create hegemonic status. In this sense, and recognised by Swyngedouw (2009), there is always social conflict, although at differing degrees, within post-political governance arrangements. This leads us firmly to the need to examine the processes and mechanics of deliberation, argumentation and justification between actors in such contradictions, tensions and conflicts. Indeed, as argued by Fuller and Geddes (2008), many sites of urban governance experience inherent politicised conflicts relating to the internal contradictions of neoliberal tendencies and their interaction with inherited institutional landscapes. At the forefront of

such accounts is an understanding that urban governance is conflict-laden, subject to constant processes of negotiation as actors mediate conflicting policy agendas, state apparatus and divergent aims of actors (Fuller, 2010; Ward, 2010). In this manner there is a need to appreciate how conflict is produced and attempts are made to arbitrate such issues, including the subordination or circumvention of resistance and divergent viewpoints and value systems. This includes an understanding of how actors define and agree the relevant policy issues, what is a relevant post-political managerial arrangement, and who should be included and excluded. It is within such realms that dissident actors and viewpoints are excluded and temporary consensus is constructed by technocrats, managers, experts and particular politicians.

To summarise, the assemblage approach and perspectives on contemporary neoliberal tendencies and post-democratic/political conditions present important frameworks in which to examine contemporary urban governing practices. However, they lack a comprehensive conceptualisation of interaction between actors within such landscapes. One approach that addresses such issues is pragmatism with its consideration of social truth, meaning and power relations being produced through practical engagement and dialogue between actors, but where they are implicated, co-constituted and mediated by broader social human/non-human relations (Allen, 2008; Bridge, 2008).

## **INSIGHTS FROM FRENCH PRAGMATISM**



Within the social sciences a turn to 'practice'-based studies since the 1980s has sought to move beyond macro-social structures and individual agency to examine practices between actors (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). A particular concern has been with everyday lived experiences that are heterogeneous but constitutive of broader social structures. Of importance for De Certeau (1984) is the 'murmurings of the everyday' by which he means how actors navigate, negotiate, undermine and circumvent the constraints placed upon them through tactics (70). So that while actors are embedded within and shaped by broader social relations and structures, their ability to be reflexive in what are relatively plural social systems facilitates everyday practices that move beyond simple reproduction of pre-existing social orders (Giddens, 1991). This strand of thinking is particularly pertinent to pragmatism where there is a concern with the interdependent, co-producing and mediating relations between structure and agency by way of communicative transactions within situations (Bridge, 2008).

Deriving partly from Michael Walzer's (1983) 'spheres of justice' theory with its focus on plurality in social relations and the importance of context in social redistribution, the recent French Pragmatism approach of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) examines the interactive processes underlying the creation of social co-ordination and order, and how actors challenge perceived injustices by drawing on different conceptions of 'worth'. Their approach arises in response to the belief that many practice-based studies, and particularly that of Bourdieu (1984), tend to be theoretically geared towards actors being disposed to act according to habitus through routinized behaviour, and are thus not subject to change over time and between different social situations (Wagner, 1999). Bourdieu (1984) also tends to view struggle in terms of the collectivist opposition of social groups, thereby downplaying

the role of the critical competencies, values and the individual choice of actors within particular situations.

Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) argue that society is indeterminately structured by a plurality of conceptions and embodiments of a common good and 'worth', co-existing within social situations rather than one single social order (Thévenot, 2006; Wagner, 2012). Within such landscapes there are endemic and on-going processes of deliberation and disagreement characterising social order, co-ordination and co-operation by active actors. The concern for Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) is how social order is maintained and co-ordination is produced when there are such social differences, including how such universal actions are created when there is the requirement for legitimacy. Building upon pragmatist thinking, Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) argue that such processes occur within the inherent indeterminacy of situations, rather than being inscribed within and occurring through homogenous, collective habitus. For Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) societies comprise a range of symbiotic, morality-configured 'orders of worth', functioning within the same social fields, and with actors drawing upon these particular orders during social interactions. They are deployed in processes of argumentation through critique and justification as a way in which to produce social co-ordination and order within plural societies encompassing a range of values, collective groups and lifeworlds (Denis et al, 2007a).

At the core of the Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) approach is a belief that social order and coordination is characterised by common processes of argumentation, critique and justification. Within individual situations of crisis or conflict ('moments critiques') actors produce argumentative critiques through the assembling of disparate actors, objects, and

narratives in relation to their critiques and justifications, and which is compatible with the individual situation (Wagner (1999). Actors have to move towards common definitions of relevant objects, the transparent identification of their commonalities, including how they are linked together in a congruent way with similar previous social situations, to form a legitimate basis for justifications based on a common definition (West and Davies, 2011). More specifically, for Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) disputes and argumentation in social life are a consequence of conflict over differing conceptions of the 'worth' of actors, objects, values, discourses, and practices within individual social situations. The designation of worth is in terms of contributing to a particular understanding of a legitimate universal moral common good, encompassing a common definition that is connected to similar contemporary and historically constituted situations, and with actors justifying their critiques and actions in reference to these conceptions (Boltanski, 2011; Eulriet, 2008).

Through such processes they endow worth and common good to relevant actors, social processes and objects (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). This comprises the ordering of objects by their level of importance to a justification, and thus their related 'worth' which is recognised by all actors since it relates to a 'common good'. Each level of worth therefore adheres to a particular degree of satisfaction for actors that they are able to achieve. As actors can utilise different critiques and justification as they move between disparate individual situations, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) develop a common model that encompasses the ability of actors to undertake such movements. They argue that actors utilise formulations of worth embedded within historically constituted socio-cultural constructions of justification that form the basis for social order and coordination. Conceptions of worth are structured into assemblages - termed 'orders of worth' - of

ordered values and principles in relation to conceptions of worth and common good, which actors draw upon during social interaction (West and Davis, 2011). They are intrinsic to processes 'of calculation, of rationality, of values' (Stark, 2009: 22), since they are 'the way in which one expresses, embodies, understands, or represents other people' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 132). Orders are configurations of historically created grammars, argumentative logics and non-human devices (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). They are constituted by the shared understanding of an acceptable social order geared towards particular values and conceptions of a 'common good', which includes the designation of worth to actors and legitimised distribution of resources amongst individuals (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000). Orders are based on a 'model of the city' framework that postulates that where actors are pursuing particular conceptions of common good through differing practices and discourses, they need to develop a compromise between potentially conflicting justifications for the city to co-ordinate mutual co-occurrence (Callinicos, 2006). The basis of this being that the creation of legitimacy required for these worlds, and co-existence between actors, depends on firstly the acknowledgement and safeguarding of a common humanity for all participants. Secondly, it relies upon a societal discursive test of an order, which produces a legitimate variable distribution of resources and the co-ordination of participant actors that leads to the compromise around a common good, and thereby sustains the compatibility of actors and practices within a city (Callinicos, 2006).

Orders of worth comprise a range of elements. Firstly, they embody what needs to be valued within a given situation, termed a 'principle of equivalence'. This provides the framework in which all relevant actions, objects and actors can be defined and evaluated. This takes place through a convention for formulating equivalence among objects and

establishing stable forms of association, and which enables 'apparently distant conditions to be brought together' (Boltanski, 1999: 67; Giauque 2004). It is through such processes that there is the designation of associative congruence between values, actors and objects, based on their link to particular conceptions of common good (Eulriet, 2008). Such principles do not therefore relate to particular social groups or structures, but are rather embedded within situations. Secondly, actors are required to embody and display requisite characteristics confirming to these superior principles (a 'state of greatness'). Thirdly, the kind of effort and investment that actors must expend and sacrifice to acquire respect and 'greatness' is important, such as the entrepreneur seeking market opportunities through risk-taking and sacrificing a private life. Finally, a test ('épreuve') of the legitimacy of actions and objects within a given world is evident, such as a public talk on particular moral or civic causes. Orders are constantly subject to such tests of coherence over time, with worlds representing the 'sum of collective justifications known to date' (West and Davis, 2011: 237).

There has been criticism of the failure of the approach to fully elucidate the role of politics (Ricoeur, 1994). For Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) the plurality of democratic society produces politics since there is a need for processes of justification in underpinning social order and coordination. Ricoeur (1994) and O'Mahony (2009) argue that this ignores the constitution of commonality and their broader influence and institutionalisation into polity. For Blokker and Brighenti (2011) this fails to recognise the pragmatist view that democratic regimes comprise and are related to different justificatory regimes, with some more dominant than others through public toleration. In ways similar to Lefort's (1988) understanding of the democratic project as lacking completeness and being conflict-ridden, as well as Arendt's understanding of the plurality of social relations and values, Boltanski

(2011) takes the view there are a range of understandings of common good and thus the democratic project never manages completeness. Conceptions of common good are really mechanisms of domination where they restrict critique of their understanding of reality and where 'a majority of those involved – the strong as well as the weak – rely on these schemes in order to represent to themselves the operation, benefits and constraints of the order in which they find themselves immersed' (Blokker and Brighenti, 2011: 292).

From extensive empirical analysis during the 1980s and 1990s, accompanied by a reading of major philosophical works, Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) identified a range of 'worlds of justification' that represent major legitimate frameworks within society (see Table 1). They therefore embody the material manifestation of orders of worth (Nachi, 2006). Actors do not make reference to major works of political philosophy when referring to particular notions of worth, rather they 'implicitly refer to philosophical vocabularies of justification that appeal to a common good' (Vandenberghe, 2006: 73). Firstly, there is the 'inspirational' world, encompassing a superior principle that is geared towards inspiration and originality, and with individual qualities such as creativity. Secondly, there is the 'domestic' world that is based on principles of tradition and loyalty, with individual qualities such as benevolence and loyalty, and with a test based on family. Relevant objects relate to their role in creating hierarchical relations among people. The world of 'opinion' includes principles of judging others and actor qualities such as prestige, tested through establishing public arenas of dialogue. Objects are said to correspond to the identities actors seek to project, particularly in relation to material consumer goods as a representation of social status and respect. The 'civic' world comprises collective good principles, and individual attributes such as representativeness and officialdom, with a test demonstrating commitment to moral causes.

The 'merchant' world is based on principles such as free market competition and actor characteristics such as self-interest, their investments in sacrifice for personal opportunities, and a test based on the completion of a transaction. The importance of objects will depend on the extent to which they satisfy individual need. Finally, there is the 'industrial world' in which effectiveness, efficiency and performance are key principles, with individual qualities such as commitment to work. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have highlighted the rise of projects and networks as integral elements of the spirit of capitalism, which has subsequently been institutional as a moral-legal framework, termed the 'projective' world. The 'projective' is based on principles geared towards short term projects and flexible networking, in ways that are very similar to that of the growth of governance under neoliberal tendencies. Individual characteristics relate to adaptability, flexibility and genuineness in face-to-face interaction, with sacrifice relating to the long term aims of the company to the detriment of a private life, and with a test relating to the ability to move from project to project.

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TABLE 1  
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These are not hegemonic sets of values and principles determining the actions of agency within all social situations, or with actors being embedded within only one world (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999). Particular situations are characterised by a range of orders of worth, with actors drawing upon differing worlds within individual situations to justify their arguments or resolve conflicts (Stark, 2009). As these worlds comprise historically produced and configured legitimate representations they are constantly produced and subject to change through social relations. Similarly, new worlds arise through societal interactions, in response to changing (economic, social, cultural, political and environmental) processes.

It is within such a framework that pragmatic sociology provides a conceptual framework in which to examine the motives and causal efforts of actors in assembling urban governance, as well as underpinning other socio-spatial relations, and the 'messy actualities' of relations. By focusing on the argumentative logics deployed by actors and the influence of broader societal values and principles, the 'circular approach to context and causality' of many assemblage accounts is circumvented (Tonkiss, 2011: 587). Central to such thinking is an understanding that relations between actors can be conceptualised in terms of heterogeneous, contextualised societal values and principles underpinning processes of negotiation, argumentation, justification and legitimisation of governing practices. An emphasis is placed on actors as they utilise particular justificatory regimes in the social practices of interaction and negotiation with others, and through such an approach it is possible to conceptualise their motives. For instance, the motives of private economic actors in urban collaborative mechanisms will be typically through values based on merchant orders of individual responsibility, risk-taking and entrepreneurship that work through broader market (socio-spatial) relations and which are justified by way of their historical legitimacy in underpinning successful city regeneration. These market values are embedded within mobile objects such as city competitiveness league tables stemming from broader socio-spatial relations which are subsequently used in the assembling of governance. The consequence of such dynamics is that market actors will potentially favour greater market provision of services, pro-growth strategies and streamlined governing practices (see Purcell, 2008). This can be substantially different to urban state actors within socially-orientated public services that are more concerned with reducing social polarisation and would thus relate to civic justificatory regimes which, for instance, could be based on historically



produced values around a 'national' welfare state system. In each case private and state actors will seek to act and influence governing arrangements by way of critiquing alternatives and justifying their aims in regard to broader normative values and principles.

In relation to discussions on policy mobilities McCann and Ward (2010) have recently argued for greater consideration of why and how such mobilities arise. Policy creation is politicised in the sense of problems, issues and solutions being socio-politically constructed by actors through discursive processes. McCann (2008), for example, explores how a drug policy was constructed in Vancouver through the utilisation of experts and policies from alternative urban spaces. Importantly, he identifies the processes of truth and expertise construction by stakeholders as they sought to delegitimise existing policy arrangement and legitimise new policy solutions by way of engaging various experts and stakeholders from other cities. This process of creating truth and designating expertise to particular actors involves the designation of worth in regard to the ability to achieve the intended aims and benefits, which correspondingly relates to the discursive policy framing of a broader common good. The legitimacy of actors, discourses and objects are central to any accounts of mobility since this requires actors that proactively seek and receive such policy mobilities to have trust and belief in their efficacy, and thus to co-produce their mobility. It is therefore possible to argue that there is judgement on their worth (in regarding to achieving their objectives) that makes it amendable to actors across space, as well as actors having to justify their worth to local populations and partner, all of which involves 'very specific and situated interactions, practices, performances and negotiations' (McCann and Ward, 2010: 177). Policies are both relationally mobile and subsequently territorially fixed by way of processes of deliberation and the discursive construction of truth in which they are justified by way of their worth.

The above arguments do not seek to suggest that urban actors are solely situated within certain worlds, but that in particular situations they are likely to resort to the values and conceptions of worth that have a strong guiding principle in their everyday experiences. For example, service reduction measures enacted by senior state managers can be justified in regard to industrial values based on levels of performance (e.g. efficiency), but in other situations they may well critique and justify in reference to civic values in supporting continuing state interventions. Such conceptions move us beyond a more restrictive understanding of 'actually existing neoliberalism' based on its hegemonic ability to dominate alternatives, to realise that it exists in relation to alternatives through individual situations where there are endemic processes of negotiation. Furthermore, such a deliberative focus assists in moving away from an overt concern with urban entrepreneurialism and privatisation, typically centred on city centres, to examining and being able to conceptualise collective service provision and institutions, their broader socio-spatial manifestations across urban areas, and interactions with neoliberal tendencies (see MacLeod, 2011). Through such an approach there is far greater sensitivity to the 'intricacies' and 'practices' of neoliberalism, which can complement other approaches (Larner, 2003). McGuirk and Dowling (2011), for example, analyse the intersections of everyday practices and neoliberal tendencies in social reproduction by examining the creation of resident subjectivities of asset management and consumer-citizen identities through economic logics of consumerism. Particular elements of this include resident management committees characterised by 'economic language and business-orientated rhetoric', but where there is considerable fracturing of consumer-citizen subjectivities and thus 'ungovernable subjects' (McGuirk and Dowling, 2011: 2619). What is critical in such accounts is how residents adopt and contest such subjectivities through

everyday social interactions within the estates' contractual governance arrangements. However, while they provide an excellent description of the messy actualities of subjectivities, such accounts necessitate greater conceptual sensitivity to examining 'how' contestation and conformity arises through argumentation, critique and justification in everyday actions and relations.

Through processes of argumentation actors seek to critique, or 'denature', the validity of the values and principles deriving from particular worlds with the purpose of ensuring their own aims are dominant (Callinicos, 2006). Actors ('critics') can critique and contest the legitimacy of social practices that are set within particular worlds if they, firstly, feel that they do not adhere to the overarching principles of a world, such as in challenging civic benefits of an urban regeneration strategy which is built on an argumentative logic of promoting the collective good for the community (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Secondly, they can critique a world from argumentative logics based on alternative worlds. Processes of critique occur via the validation and justification of relevant evidence in regards to particular tests stemming from individual worlds. As worlds have different processes of verification conflict is likely, which is compounded by there being no boundary spanning independent instruments between different worlds that can designate legitimacy and worth, and thus resolve conflict. Such critiques are evident in the UK Coalition Government justifying the abolition of regional development agencies by critiquing their embeddedness in civic and industrial values, which are argued to have been overly bureaucratic bodies that hinder private economic actors and which are distant from localities since they operate at the regional scale (BIS, 2010). Replaced by Local Enterprise Partnerships, these bodies are discursively constructed in terms of market-based solutions to contemporary economic

challenges which move beyond the 'big government' approach of New Labour, and where new spatial imaginaries and scalar jurisdictions are created through these conceptions of worth at sub-regional scales. This is justified by Government in terms of the over reliance on state spending to produce economic growth, with a resulting need for private sector growth as this is justified as the driver of employment growth, and where the Government can only 'create the conditions' for growth (BIS, 2010: 5). Only the devolution of power to '*local* businesses and communities' can produce tailored approaches to '*local* opportunities' (BIS, 2010: 5). This is evident in the revitalization and legitimisation of market friendly, highly localised 'Enterprise Zones' which are likely to circumvent the influence of local government within LEPs, and justified by way of their 'market' success in high growth economies (Sissons and Brown, 2011).

Critiques and justifications are therefore organising forces, power relations and mechanisms that define and produce a range of socio-spatial relations, including assemblages and territorialised spatial imaginaries. They seek to define the purpose of such configurations and the role of objects and social practices in reference to these broader justificatory regimes. It is through such a conceptualisation that it is possible to analyse how certain actors acquire hegemonic status and the mechanics of consensus building, subordination and compromise that constitutes post- politics and democracy, including the role played by particular values and principles in producing the socio-spatial relations of governing arrangements. For instance, the **Author** (forthcoming) has explored the important role played by market values and principles in allowing urban state organisations to justify state-led gentrification in an urban regeneration project. Ultimately, this is a case of the community well-being of a deprived area (in the sense of levels and quality of new social

housing) being determined through urban state justifications based on market values of competition and atomised consumer culture that stem from much broader socio-spatial relations, but which come to define territorialised spaces of intervention and the resulting production of place through housing provision. State actors constructed arguments that legitimised the role of the market by linking market values to community benefits for existing residents who would be subject to gentrification. This included justifications based on the greater ability of the market in providing private and social housing at a much larger scale than the state, thereby efficiently satisfying the desires of atomised consumers. Further justifications were based on private developers being able to undertake substantive capital investments in new community facilities and services in ways that the nation state is unable to deliver. These justifications were therefore based on 'principles of equivalence' in which market competition and thus the consumer culture produce a common good, with all elements of the programme and dialogue with stakeholders judged in regard to these values.

Objects utilised in such justifications included market data on the economy, future housing price projections and resource/labour costs, all of which are embodied within a 'financial model' document which became the object dictating the programme, including levels of social housing provision. Justifications incorporate a testing of the legitimacy of the market orders based on previous experiences, in this case the successful completion of projects, with urban state actors referring to previous programmes such as Hope VI in the USA and the documented evidence of the UK government. Actors also seek to embody and represent 'individual qualities' encompassing particular orders. Individual private developers were judged and justified in terms of their sacrifice and ability to produce a successful housing

development within a competitive marketplace. Similarly, urban state actors sought to epitomise principles of market self-interest and competition by permitting lower levels of social housing in responses to broader market trends and the requisite profit margins of developers, with the purpose of ensuring favourable judgement by relevant stakeholders such as the developers, and where such actions were integral to producing territorialised spaces of gentrification.

In terms of how disparate actors, social practices and objects are assembled into relative temporal unity there is a need to understand how short-term consensus is produced, and alternative opinions are subordinated through processes of justification and legitimisation in relation to broader societal values and principles. Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) identify a range of agreement forms that can be utilised in the examination of assemblages. These include domination of one world by another, local arrangements based on a temporary and localised agreement concerning a single issue, and finally a 'compromise' encompassing a more resilient, long term agreement between different worlds. Of considerable importance in long lasting covenants is the resolution of conflict through objectified 'conventions' between actors and the worlds through which they base their justifications (Thévenot, 2001). These are objects that bring together differing orders of worth in a congruent manner by way of a compromise that appeals to differing values, but emphasis a linkage, or co-existence, with other values (Mesny and Mailhot, 2007). They are a set of ideals and objectives that include elements from each world but not in a comprehensive manner since they emphasise the congruence, and potential interdependence, between conceptualisation of worth from different worlds. Compromises encompass conventions that make it possible

for different actors and worlds to co-exist and co-ordinate through negotiation and dialogue within the same social space (Denis et al, 2007b).

Integral to such a function is the understanding that compromises and conventions have their own identity independent of relevant worlds, with Cloutier (2009) arguing that they arise where bridging practices are evident. One such example of a compromise could be an urban partnership strategy document during the contemporary recession. This object could well incorporate the need for state cost-cutting ('industrial'), greater role of non-state actors through contracting ('market'), utilisation of partnerships to fill the gap left by service reductions ('projective'), and 'civic' values of devolved responsibility to communities. These all encompass actors, discourses, objects and performances working through a range of socio-spatial relations, such nation state service marketization discourses and place-specific historical contingencies of partnership working. Conceptions of worth are different for each of these but through the creation of a compromise actors seek to situate differences within the background, while at the forefront is a concern with immediate issues (e.g. rising poverty) and the need to have a functioning partnership arena during a period of organisational upheaval, within a defined scale and space of intervention and through the creation of particular relations. Immediate priorities within particular spatial sites of intervention therefore act as bridging practices since they are at the forefront of partners' concerns and are recognised as being interrelated. Nonetheless, compromises are not static configurations but should be recognised as subject to continual critique, negotiation and change (Callinicos, 2006).





## CONCLUSION

Urban studies have increasingly been concerned with the production of space and governance landscapes through heterogeneous socio-spatial relations (Cochrane and Ward, 2012). This stems from an understanding of a range of urban processes, such as the rise of informal governing spaces, which are having a considerable impact on urban geographies and their relationship with administrative territorialised scales of states. Such accounts have not sought to dispel territory, scale or place, but recognise that these are constituted by networks of actors and objects working through disparate socio-spatial relations, which happen to converge at particular points (Massey, 2005). It is within such a context that an emergent assemblage perspective has developed. While lacking a theoretical core, proponents argue that it has the potential to analyse the processes underpinning the production of governing geographies constituted by convoluted socio-spatial relations and objects (McFarlane, 2011). Nonetheless, the approach has attracted constructive critique, most notably in terms of the incomplete conceptualisation of the heterogeneous logics and mechanics of relations and negotiations between actors (Allen, 2011).

Further important trends within urban politics relate to the continuing role of neoliberal tendencies and the rise of post-democratic and political conditions. Within both sets of literature there are comprehensive accounts of the transition of urban governance, but they lack attention towards the interactive and deliberative processes underlying such processes, including the role of individual agency and resistance (MacLeod, 2011). Seeking to fill the void of the universal through discursive representation of the universal requires the

discursive construction of reality, one element of which involves the configuration of justifications for such discourses. Correspondingly, as particular social forces can never fully represent reality there are always political tensions and conflict, which suggests greater attention to agency and resistance through deliberative struggle and argumentation. While considerable theoretical differences lie between pragmatism and Lacanian inspired post-Marxism, the former does provide a framework in which to explore processes of argumentation and justification within hegemonic conflicts. In particular, Pragmatist Sociology provides strong conceptual insights into the processes of inter-agency interaction, co-ordination and control.

For Martin (2011), urban politics is concerned with the creation and reworking of socio-spatial relations and the production of places which are both embedded locally, but also relate to broader global conditions and processes. The utilisation of Pragmatist Sociology permits an examination of the connection between the production of particular urban sites through relational processes, territorialised boundaries and a 'sense of place' within the everyday lived experiences, and global in the sense of being embedded within broader constitutive value systems and social practices. It does so through the recognition that such socio-spatial relations and constructs are produced by and in reference to historically-produced conceptions of worth and common good that work through deliberative processes of argumentation and justification. Examples include the construction of spatial imageries, assembling of actors and mobile objects within place, and the designation of expertise that underpin state interventions which seek to define spaces of policy implementation such as market-biased city centre redevelopment. So that the conceptions of worth embedded within argumentative logics and processes of justification links relevant values and principles

with particular courses of action and socio-spatial relations. One such example is that of Gonzales' (2009) discussion of Milan, in which managerialism underpins the production of territorialised governance arrangements geared towards market-based entrepreneurialism. This political strategy and the resulting subordination of alternative governing arrangements is highly value-laden in that actors refer to the benefits of working to managerial values, such as being able to achieve tasks without excessive deliberation, as a mechanism in which to acquire temporary hegemony. A further example is that of urban state actors that relate the 'regeneration' of cities to market values such as risk taking and entrepreneurship that are considered integral to the governing bodies of 'successful' cities, which subsequently become globally mobile and work through particular socio-spatial relations by way of the construction of truth and designation of worth (McCann and Ward, 2010).

An important element of this approach is the appreciation of a range of broader constitutive value systems and social practices, such as civic collectivism, which assist in moving beyond the market-focus of political economy accounts of neoliberalism and New Urban Politics to appreciate alternative values, strategies and actions. In essence Pragmatist Sociology can examine the processes underpinning the causal logics and actions of actors, how disparate actors and objects temporarily coalesce, and the 'messy actualities' of relations, such as in the interactions between neoliberal and alternative tendencies. It achieves this through an understanding that actors undertake processes of critique and justification when seeking to bring about social co-ordination and control, but that such actions take place within individual social situations rather than being a consequence of a broader habitus or macro-structures. Indeed, through a belief in social co-ordination and subordination arising from individual social situations, and heterogeneous actors and deliberations, it is sensitive to the

intrinsically 'polymorphic' nature of socio-spatial relations, which encompass 'mutually constitutive' territories, places, scales and networks (see Jessop et al, 2008). This is not to argue for the abandonment of existing approaches but to suggest that pragmatist thinking provides a theoretical framework in which to understand the processes of argumentation, critique and justification which constitute broader socio-spatial tendencies.

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**Table 1: Worlds of justification**

	<i>Inspirational</i>	<i>Domestic</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Civic</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Industrial</i>
<b>Superior principle</b>	Inspiration, originality	Tradition, loyalty	Judgement of others	Collective good	Competition	Effectiveness, performance
<b>Individual qualities</b>	Creative, imaginative, Passionate	Dedicated, wise, benevolent	Prestige, public recognition	Representative official	Defence of self-interest	Dedication to work
<b>Specific investments</b>	Risk	Sense of duty	Pursuit of publicity	Renunciation of personal interests, dedication to solidarity	Search for personal opportunities	Investments in progress
<b>Test</b>	Introspection, solitude	Family, ceremonies	Setting up public	Demonstration in favour of moral causes	Concluding a contract for transaction	Rational tests

Source: Denis et al (2007b)