

THINKING BEYOND THE HYBRID: 'ACTUALLY-EXISTING' CITIES 'AFTER NEOLIBERALISM' IN BOYLE *ET AL.* A RESPONSE TO LAW AND MOONEY

by

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We would like to begin by thanking Alex Law and Gerry Mooney for their generally supportive while constructively critical commentary on our paper tracking actually existing neoliberalism as it has become manifest in Glasgow since 1977. Their commentary extends in valuable ways the range of ideas through which neoliberalism's assault on institutions of governance in the city might be better clarified, decoded and critiqued. As outlined in our initial paper we believe that Glasgow is an especially important and insightful city to study given that it has served as something of a pioneer and test bed for neoliberal reforms. The wider significance of Glasgow as a theoretical laboratory however has been somewhat obfuscated by the piling up of individual thematic and neighbourhood based studies and we felt it important to assemble the strands and offer the beginnings of an overarching reading. Law and Mooney's contribution helpfully adds to this wider project.

Law and Mooney (2009) make two interesting points about our reading that we wish to comment upon. First, they focus upon our tendency to foreground prior institutions and policy practices as key mediators of the grounding of 'doctrinal' and theoretical neoliberalism of von Hayek and Friedman vintage, in Glasgow. They question the value of ever speaking in terms of pure and hybrid neoliberal forms. They point out that hybridity 'is too evasive and finished a term to capture the contentious mediation of the neoliberal *Weltanschauung* in Glasgow and elsewhere' (Law and Mooney 2009, p. 289). But they do then draw attention to capitalism's own hybridities, the class relations which mediate neoliberalism's local forms, and the wider extra local processes which are at play (see Brenner and Theodore

2002). As such, while Law and Mooney talk about the need to think *beyond* the hybrid, we read their concerns to imply the need to think in better ways *about* neoliberalism's local hybridities.

It is clear that the term neoliberalism is suffering an identity crises (Gibson-Graham 1996) and that many, such as Law and Mooney, are now questioning where, when, why, how, and by whom, the label can still be usefully applied. To restate, our thinking around hybridity has been informed by Peck (2004) and by Larner's (2003, p. 509) assertion about the need to 'pay attention to the *different variants* of neoliberalism, to the *hybrid nature* of contemporary policies and programmes...[and] to the *multiple and contradictory aspects* of neoliberal spaces, techniques and subjects' (emphasis in original). We concur with Castree's (2006, p. 2) assertion that 'neoliberalism only ever exists in articulation with actors, institutions, and agendas that immediately call into question whether a thing called "neoliberalism" – however carefully specified – can be held responsible for anything'. The purpose of our original article was to acknowledge the considerable disquiet which exists about both the language and practices of neoliberalism while retaining that which is powerful about the idea. We do not wish to treat the idea either schematically and superficially or to ditch it as irrelevant and paralytically chaotic. This in fact is a decisively critical position to take up and one which we feel Law and Mooney would agree with.

Our treatment of Glasgow's path dependencies draws upon wider trends within British capitalism, shifts within Scottish planning and housing policy, and the changing structure of social relations within Glasgow concomitant with deindustrialization and the staggering of the city towards a poorly specified post-industrial future. We made it clear in our conclusion that we regard the mutant forms of neoliberalism in Glasgow to reflect a new phase of what Harvey (2005) calls 'accumulation by dispos-

session'. In thinking about the uneven, complex, and contradictory neoliberalization of the institutions of urban governance in Glasgow then we do not feel that we significantly underplayed the points raised by Law and Mooney in our original article. We do not reify institutions and present a de-contextualized assessment of neoliberalism's reworking of local institutions. But to the extent that Law and Mooney force ever wider sets of contexts and processes to be incorporated into our analyses, we welcome their paper as an enrichment rather than a reframing of our narrative.

Second, we welcome Mooney and Law's point about the need to place greater emphasis on resistance and opposition in mediating the shape and trajectories of neoliberalism. We accept that our account did not discuss opposition in any great detail and there is scope to write conflict more centrally into the story. But our assessment in Glasgow's case is that all too often resistance and opposition fails to stop the neoliberal juggernaut. We too would like to think that local opposition, class based or otherwise, might have dented, moulded, constrained, or tempered neoliberal reforms. But there is precious little evidence that this has been the case. There is a danger that any account which prioritizes opposition may well create a false impression of what has been achieved, what is possible, and what now needs to be done. This is not to deny the importance and value of local victories which have been won. But it is to insist once more that the grander historical vista be preferred over potentially comforting but ultimately misleading local case studies.

While there has been opposition and resistance, there is also growing evidence of increasing public apathy and social alienation as an 'urban crisis' has emerged within the most disadvantaged parts (or 'problem areas') of Glasgow (Keating 1988). While recent national and local state policies have sought to include marginal and disenfranchised groups in attempts to create social cohesion and 'manage' problems within these areas this has largely been unsuccessful and has generated further social conflict, regulatory crisis and governance failure at a variety of levels of the state. For all the policy talk of future visions and mission statements designed to improve local neighbourhoods local people have not bought into such an agenda; indeed, they are more likely to be turned-off than tuned-in (McWilliams 2004). In Glasgow (as elsewhere) public disengagement is still crucially underestimated.

A recent example from Glasgow is Paddy's Market (a local market for the city's poor) which stopped

trading in May 2009. Glasgow City Council minutes, local media sources and online discussion forums suggested that 'Paddy's' was a contested space for a number of years before its closing. Despite local support to save the market and the staging of a mock funeral over its death, Paddy's has become the latest casualty in the City Council's drive to sanitize the built environment (Nicoll 2008). This policy decision has deepened the divisions between alternative consumption spaces and the extension of a more profitable urban retail frontier. Law and Mooney seem to suggest that public contention in and of itself is of significance for assessing the multifarious spatial outcomes of neoliberal urbanism. If the closure of Paddy's is anything to go by then public contention per se may be a mere delay for more sadistic neoliberal outcomes. Now that the City Council have taken over the lease of the historic site their plan for a mini Camden market in the centre of Glasgow seems to be one stop closer to this realization.

Of course capitalism's latest crises will become a vital new context within which old and new neoliberal projects in the city will be working for the foreseeable future. It is too early to consider what the collapse of the banking system, the further demise of the economy, and the rise of unemployment, will mean for urban institutions and policies. But it is clear that the account offered in our initial research paper is already dating and that neoliberal ideology and practice is entering a new historical phase. The story of neoliberal mutants and mutations in Glasgow has yet to fully run its course.

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