

Edited by

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URBAN POLITICS

Critical Approaches

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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AS A PLACE FOR (URBAN) POLITICS¹

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Introduction

Urban politics often implies a local politics, or neighbourhood politics. In this chapter, we examine the notion of politics as local or neighbourhood oriented. We explore common conceptualizations of ‘neighbourhood’ and argue, ultimately, that neighbourhoods should be considered as every day, momentary and instantiated bundles of place identities and relationalities (Pierce et al., 2011) which requires us to question whether neighbourhood politics are necessarily local. We think through neighbourhood as a *relational place* that has the inherent potential to invoke politics. We then problematize this potential by examining the meaning of politics, drawing from the conceptualizations of ‘the police’ and ‘politics’ as expressed by Jacques Rancière. Drawing on our case study of ‘strategic neighbours’, in which people of faith settle in low-income communities as a way to serve them, we conclude with a call to destabilize neighbourhood in favour of place politics that seek dissensus, or a voice for those who are not heard.

Neighbourhood as place

Scholars in geography and urban studies more generally have long struggled with defining the concept of *neighbourhood* (Park et al., 1967[1925]; Hunter, 1979; Olson, 1982; Galster, 1986, 2001; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Clark 2009). Far from having given up on this vague concept, a special issue of *Urban Studies* (2001) demonstrates continuing interest among scholars in defining, applying, and

investigating the significance of 'neighbourhood' for individual behaviour, health, and life chances (Buck, 2001; Ellaway et al., 2001; Galster, 2001); in fostering social allegiances, identities, and capital (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Purdue 2001); as an indicator of urban growth and change (Butler and Robson, 2001; Galster, 2001); and, importantly for our discussion, in shaping political decisions and structures (Allen and Cars, 2001; Docherty et al., 2001). Neighbourhoods also have an increasingly political meaning and function in the neo-liberal era, in which governments seek solutions to social and economic problems by devolving responsibility – without resources – to more local areas (Raco, 2000; McCann, 2001; Meegan and Mitchell, 2001; Elwood and Leitner, 2003; Newman and Ashton, 2004; Purcell 2008).

Martin (2003a) draws upon an extensive literature review to argue that we do not know neighbourhoods when we see them; we construct them, for purposes of our research or social lives, based on common ideals of what we expect an urban neighbourhood to be. The neighbourhoods that we define through research or social exchange are always subject to redefinition and contention; they are not self-evident. A neighbourhood is a type of place, and, as such, should be studied as a contingent, flexible space that nonetheless has material, experiential salience for people's lives. Neighbourhoods may be like any other type of territorially based social ideal, in that they are socially as well as spatially constituted, and are, as Anderson (1991) suggested in reference to nations, 'imagined' by those who share them (e.g. Cope, 2008).

Given definitions of neighbourhoods as sites of daily life and social interaction (e.g. Hunter, 1979; Galster 1986, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001), we suggest that neighbourhoods are a particular type of place: locations where human activity is centred upon social reproduction (see Castells, 1977, 1983); or daily household activities, social interaction, and engagement with political and economic structures. Neighbourhoods derive their meaning or salience from individual and group values and attachments, which develop through daily life habits and interactions. Neighbourhoods, like places, are 'where everyday life is situated' (Merrifield 1993a: 522; *emphasis in original*). Furthermore, as Schmidt (2008) suggests, neighbourhoods can gain their meaning through sustained practices that produce them in particular ways over time.

If neighbourhoods are places, we can examine them as a particular form of that geographic concept. Agnew's (1987, 1989) definition of place as locale (site of daily life), location (a site with connections and relations to broader social, political, and economic processes at varying scales), and sense of place (affective feelings) captures the many facets of neighbourhood that other scholars have identified (Park et al., 1967; Hunter, 1979; Galster, 1986, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Escobar (2001), writing about place, argued that places are constituted through two processes: political economy and humanistic

sense of place. Political economy shapes places through local and global economic processes of capital investment, while sense of place reflects the sentiments people feel about a place, derived from individual experiences, attachments, and social connections. These two processes roughly parallel Agnew's location and sense of place categories, but only implicitly includes locale, as the meeting-point of location and sense of place. Nonetheless, both views capture the combination of economic processes and individual, cognitive attachments in shaping place. These are fundamental elements of places, but need to also be considered as always flexible and simultaneously multi-scalar, rather than necessarily local (Pierce et al., 2011).

Hunter (1979) characterized neighbourhood as 'a uniquely linked unit of social/spatial organization between the forces and institutions of the larger society and the localized routines of individuals in their everyday lives'. For Hunter, the context of the neighbourhood – its linkages with other places, or within places – ought to be part of any analysis of neighbourhood. This recognition of the embeddedness, and, therefore, of the multiscalar nature of neighbourhoods within a larger set of routines and social, political, and economic forces, is one that echoes the approach of Suttles (1972). He argued that neighbourhood can mean the immediate home area, the locality of a few blocks, and/or the entire urban region (Suttles, 1972, cited in Kearns and Parkinson, 2001). Conceptually, we draw from Pierce et al. (2011) to suggest that neighbourhoods are *relational* places. Rather than conceiving places or specifically neighbourhoods as location, locale, and sense of place, relational place embeds social and political-economic relations with affective and environmental features as 'bundles' (drawing on Massey, 2005). These bundles (places) develop simultaneously agentially and structurally, as they are both individually experienced and socially expressed and lived (Pierce et al., 2011). Thinking about neighbourhoods as relational places requires serious consideration of the ways in which they are embedded in and connect to urban politics.

Neighbourhood and Politics

The utility of the concept of 'neighbourhood' for much contemporary urban political geography derives from its construction through political strategy and contestation. The ideal of neighbourhood asserts a role for the 'local' in a world increasingly characterized by extra-local interactions and exchanges. The locally based activism that can occur in neighbourhoods, regardless of the particular motivation or cause, demonstrates the important role of local areas in situating the grievances that form a basis for activism (McCarthy and Zald, 1973, 1977; Traugott, 1978; Escobar 2001). For example, community organizations in Chicago use

geographic information system (GIS) analyses and mapping in order to position their neighbourhoods as sites of resources and need in local municipal policy discussions (Elwood, 2006). In Los Angeles, residents of the San Fernando Valley worked to preserve a neighbourhood landscape of single family homes through political activism aimed at secession from the broader city, prioritizing a 'local' suburban identity against the broader city (Purcell, 2008).

Political agendas and concerns can coalesce in the particular spatial locations of the actors involved in conflicts. Thus, neighbourhoods are often formed and constituted through activism, sometimes in response to imposed boundaries or efforts to delineate new boundaries. Robinson (2001) investigated the reaction of residents to a proposed road in Glasgow that would have severed the connection of one residential district to a local park, further spatially constraining an already economically disadvantaged community. Residents of the area expressed 'fears of exclusion and segregation' about the proposed land-use change (Robinson, 2001: 101). In that case, a land-use change resulted in a new, more rigid boundary for a neighbourhood. Likewise, activism around the construction (or demolition) of institutions such as schools, parks, or public housing further develop neighbourhood boundaries. For example, parents in a gentrifying area of Atlanta, Georgia, created a charter school, which required contending with neighbourhood identities to draw attendance zone boundaries, and in the process solidified the territorial extent of the neighbourhood (Hankins, 2007). Neighbourhood change, such as gentrification processes or selective redevelopment in poor neighbourhoods, can foster the emergence of class-based forms of neighbourhood politics, creating intra-neighbourhood tensions (Newman and Ashton, 2004; Hankins, 2007; Martin, 2007).

The scale at which neighbourhoods are defined can also be the basis of dispute, however, where residents of an area may define their spatial community at a different scale than the perspective of local public officials. McCann (2003) shows how city-wide concerns over sprawl and growth in Austin, Texas, were translated into new neighbourhood-based planning and zoning programmes. The city sought to increase demand for and densities of housing in the urban core by fostering more intensive land uses and revitalizing the landscape. Some residents of the affected neighbourhoods resisted the small-area, neighbourhood-based focus of planning efforts in favour of larger, regional coalitions of poor and mostly Latino neighbourhoods in order to fight what they perceived as White gentrification into their neighbourhoods. These residents defined their communities in terms of economic, ethnic, and locational criteria, and their definition of 'neighbourhood' was at a broader scale than that of the city planners.

A relational approach to neighbourhood and urban politics anticipates the flexibility of identities and territorial affiliations that McCann's case highlights: people affiliate and recognize themselves as members of communities that are

linked to particular, material, and tangible locations but which are also simultaneously connected spatially, socially, politically, and/or economically. As such, we suggest that neighbourhood-based politics can be more constructively thought of as *place* politics.

Geographers have spent part of the past few decades refining our understanding the relationship between politics and place, and more specifically the political possibilities of conceptualizing sociospatial dimensions of place (Martin, 2003a; 2003b; Massey, 2004, 2005; Jessop et al., 2008; Leitner et al., 2008; Pierce et al., 2011). The various contours of place have been examined, turned over, left for dead in some cases (alongside ‘militant particularisms’ (Harvey, 1996)), and resurrected (Massey, 1991, 1994, 2005). Massey (2005: 119) suggests place is ‘the collection of interwoven stories’, and ‘a bundle of trajectories’, which represent the stories and experiences of people who interact in and with particular space-times. Furthermore, McCann and Ward (2011) suggest that places are ‘assemblages of elsewhere’ which create and mobilize urbanisms through global policy transfers. They focus on the territorializations of urban policy in particular places through global exchanges, situating urban politics itself as a global, though locally instantiated, phenomenon.

The place/politics juncture has often been empirically focused on the moment of negotiation and/or contestation over places or place identity. According to Pierce et al. (2011), politics are the processes of negotiation over the terms that govern the use of space and place, which may include contestation over discursive place representations, scalar conceptualization or the terms of participation in space/place (e.g. Martin et al., 2003; Purcell 2008). Place/politics, then, poses the conjuncture not simply of open conflict over space or land or people, but over being in situ: ‘Places pose in particular form the question of our living together. And this question [...] is the central question of the political’ (Massey, 2005: 151). Politics makes bare ‘the moment of antagonism where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible’ (Laclau, 1990: 35, cited in Massey, 2005: 151). This definition highlights the openness of possibilities of place/politics, and points to dilemmas between ordering places to resolve antagonisms, and making those antagonisms fully visible, a conflict confronted in political philosopher Jacques Rancière’s understanding of politics.

One of Rancière’s central concerns has been the interrogation and rethinking of democracy. This is not democracy in terms of liberal (capitalist) democracy, but rather democracy as a social order founded on a notion of egalitarianism. For Rancière (true) democracies are societies that are continually reworked by the recognition of inequalities and consequent granting of equalities that transform the said society. Rancière’s (2001) conceptualization of the political within his understanding of democracy hinges on a distinction he makes between ‘the

police' and 'politics'. For Rancière, the police is 'an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise' (1999: 29). For Rancière, policing partitions the social into knowable parts with attendant places. Most conceptualizations of politics or government are, for Rancière, more concerned with questions of the 'police' and its ordering of social bodies. By contrast, 'politics' is the 'intervention upon the visible and the sayable' (Rancière, 2001: paragraph 21). The essence of politics is 'to disturb this [police] arrangement by supplementing it with a part of the no-part identified with the community as a whole' (Rancière, 2001: 21). The function of politics within a democratic society is 'the configuration of its proper space. It is to disclose the world of its subjects and its operations. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one' (2001: thesis 8). The two worlds are the ordered, sensible, named and the world marginalized by the naming and ordering.

Politics therefore become concerned with what, within the existing police order, is unknowable (unsayable, invisible) becoming known and sensible. When an unequal group – what Rancière calls 'the part with no part' – declares itself unequal within a system of declared equality, it therefore constitutes a radical disagreement that challenges currently assigned roles. Politics thus challenges all that is ordered in the world of the police. Politics is, therefore, wrenching, confronting, and challenging in ways that must disrupt and undermine presumed orders.

Rancière's 'police' includes, for urban politics, the ordering and naming of territories such as neighbourhoods as specific, bounded, often very local sites of participation in urban governance. Neighbourhoods define and create manageable, fixed spaces or territories for urban politics to take place. Many cities have codified the importance of neighbourhoods through formal planning processes, creating territorially designated planning units in which the 'local' scale becomes reified, as the logical scope for planning or policy solutions. Through processes designated to include residential spaces and populations in policy input, the neighbourhood becomes one of the appropriate structures/scales/spaces through which (urban) society is governed. Neighbourhood, then, becomes a site of ordering, stabilizing and partitioning the sensible. Whilst not inherently problematic given the fact that every society requires some ordering of roles, this designation of neighbourhood politics can certainly generate an inability to speak to important social issues. To put it in Rancière's terms, the ordering of neighbourhood politics might well serve as a mechanism to avoid the political; to depoliticize. If indeed this ordering does depoliticize, we would therefore need to see neighbourhood in a way that enables a politics that can

potentially destabilize and transcend those orders/names that limit the neighbourhood becoming an effective locale for social change.

For Rancière place is not merely political because of the ‘question of our living together’ (Massey, 2005), but as Mustafa Dikeç (2005: 172) suggests, place becomes political in that it becomes the ‘site where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated. It becomes an integral element of the interruption of the natural (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order’. Places can become political when the noises of discontent within them become political voices that construct dissensus. This conceptualization opens up the relationship between place and Rancièreian politics. Yet this relationship is not guaranteed; place must *enable* dissensus, an articulation of a wrong. To do that, it must enable the interruption of the ordering. In what follows, we ask whether neighbourhood-based politics can be Rancièreian politics, through destabilization of the categories (of territory and residents) that neighbourhoods produce.

We draw from survey data and interviews with ‘strategic neighbours’ in US cities to explore the complexity of neighbouring as practice and neighbourhood as a setting for police and, potentially, Rancièreian politics. We examine the place-making and political encounters of strategic neighbours, who are middle-class people of faith relocating into some of the country’s poorest urban areas. The case of strategic neighbouring highlights the conflicts between neighbourhood as a site for politics and for police, in Rancière’s terms, while illustrating the relationality of the place-making that produces and is produced through urban politics.

Strategic neighbouring

‘Strategic neighbouring’ is a term developed by Robert Lupton (1997), one of the founders of the Christian Community Development Association (see ccda.org) that represents a broader (social) movement of faith-motivated people who serve the poor by living among them.² Strategic neighbours are people who move into what they term under-resourced areas, be they inner-city neighbourhoods, suburban apartment complexes, or trailer parks, to offer their social connections, emotional support, political organizing, money, and faith. This movement grew out of what John Perkins (1995), a civil rights activist, refers to as the three Rs: relocation, redistribution, and reconciliation. Relocation involves the physical move into poor areas; redistribution suggests the reallocation of resources as part of this process; and reconciliation refers to addressing racial barriers and racism. In essence, part of their mission is to confront the injustices of poverty and racism by living among and developing relationships with their neighbours.

BOX 2.1 STRATEGIC NEIGHBOUR CRISSY BROOKS DESCRIBES GOALS

Crissy Brooks, from Costa Mesa, California, is a 35-year-old White woman who has lived for seven years in a neighbourhood that is 98 per cent Latino. She reflects on her goals as a strategic neighbour:

I want my neighbors to be able to afford their own place to live. I want the police to treat our teens with dignity. I want my neighbors to be able to work legally. I want landlords to fix structural problems. I want people outside my neighbourhood to know my neighbors.

For Crissy, her issues involve immigration, which reflects the different kinds of issues across different place contexts. She also explicitly seeks to resignify the meaning of her neighbourhood to those beyond its borders.

BOX 2.2 STRATEGIC NEIGHBOUR SCOTT DEWEY DESCRIBES DIALOGUE AS A GOAL OF STRATEGIC NEIGHBOURING

Scott Dewey, a 48-year-old White man who lives in the Whittier neighbourhood of Denver, Colorado, which is 30 per cent African American, 40 per cent Latino, 30 per cent White, suggests that his goals are 'Understanding and dialogue between new gentry (usually White), new immigrants (usually Latino), and long-time residents (usually African American)'. Scott has lived in five different neighbourhoods over the past 25 years – and his location in Whittier seeks to mitigate the deleterious effects of gentrification.

BOX 2.3 STRATEGIC NEIGHBOUR ASHLEE STARR DESCRIBES HER ATLANTA NEIGHBOURHOOD

Ashlee Starr, a 27-year-old, White, married mother of two children has lived for five years as a strategic neighbour, and most recently for the past year in the

neighbourhood of Pittsburgh, Atlanta, which is 98 per cent African American, where over 50 per cent of homes are vacant. She expresses her understanding of the conditions of her neighbourhood space and what she, as a strategic neighbour, has sought to do about it:

The physical conditions are awful because no one is being held accountable to deal with the mess (banks, investors, etc.). We only have one park in the neighborhood, so kids are left to play in the street which effects [*sic*] their environmental conditions. We have a large number of homeless men and women living in the neighborhood who need social service help. Prostitution is a MAJOR problem throughout the entire neighbourhood as well.

We are here to be a safe place and to love those around us. We want to be a part of this neighbourhood. The same struggles that our neighbors are facing, we are also facing. We aren't involved on the macro level but the micro level.

We allow the homeless to be comfortable in our home, we let kids do homework on a shared computer in our dining room, our swing set is open to all. We don't have a lot of answers and we pray daily for others to want to move in to our very abandoned neighbourhood and feel the same call we do. We want to be here and be present. We are still working on what that looks like.

Ashlee reflects on the struggles of strategic neighbouring as developing relationships with those who are marginalized or left behind in her largely abandoned neighbourhood. She, like other strategic neighbours, embody place and place-making and in the process, their subjectivities are constructed by the negotiation between 'police' and politics.

We want to suggest that, in fact, these strategic neighbours intentionally reconfigure the bundles of the neighbourhoods in which they live, connecting their networks to the networks of incumbent neighbours (see Hankins and Walter, 2012). In the process, many strategic neighbours have grappled with their own social positioning and have engaged in various channels of the police, formal neighbourhood associations or city hall, for example, and, based on our interviews, have suggested a deep puzzlement at the ineffectiveness of these formal channels of politics – what we interpret as a recognition of the ways in which these structures of policing do not address the needs of the poor and socially marginalized. The ineffectiveness that strategic neighbours encounter is, to put it again in Rancière's terms, the experience of the partitioning of the sensible that leaves a part of no part. For strategic neighbours, the result of such a

confrontation is that they see themselves as caught between the officially sanctioned political process of the neighbourhood, such as neighbourhood organizations or city hall, and the realities of deep poverty and marginalization that keep many of the poorest and disenfranchised neighbours from participating in these channels. In Rancièrian terms the act of relocation creates fissures in what is sensible for strategic neighbours; they see the gaps and inconsistencies, the inequalities of the current police order.

Our case study draws on an 18-month study of both urban ministries and strategic neighbours in North America, and specifically in the Atlanta, Georgia, area.³ We conducted an online survey with approximately 70 strategic neighbours from across the United States from 18 states and from Canada: 36 women and 34 men; 23 per cent were single with a median age of 29.5 and a mean age of 35; 84 per cent self-identified as White, 7 per cent as non-White. Furthermore, we conducted three focus groups in Chicago, Illinois, and in Atlanta, Georgia, and carried out interviews with 37 strategic neighbours who live in some of Atlanta's poorest neighbourhoods.

Strategic neighbours seek to redirect the place trajectories (Massey, 2005) of the neighbourhoods in which they live by connecting their (multi-scaled) resources to their neighbours, in the form of friendship, social support, financial contributions, and engagement with formal governance structures. Barbara Fiske, a 40-year-old Latino stay-at-home mother, who has been a strategic neighbour for 20 years in Fresno, California, reflects on how the neighbourhood's needs should be met:

Ah. With loving neighbors. More strategic relationships. Relationships are what is going to cause change. Not so much programs or events. Our family's personal vision is to be available when 'life' happens. We build friendships and trust. Currently, when we engage with neighbors who are going through serious, intense drama/crisis in their lives we have such a network of support and resources.

She continued, commenting on the different connections she has across various 'scales' of the city:

With neighbors, working on our front lawn gardening. Being introduced by other neighbors. At events such as block parties, school fairs, etc. [We work] with government agencies – because of the amount [*sic*] of strategic neighbours here and their longevity we have partnered with City Hall to bring many improvements and maintained weekly meetings to address current issues. [We work] with churches and faith-based organizations – there is quite the networkings and meshing of resources to address the needs in the neighbourhood.

Barbara reveals an emphasis on connecting neighbours within the neighbourhood and providing connections to city services and to broader networks of faith-based organizations and churches. She embodies an extensive network, connecting her neighbourhood to resources such as the institutions of her faith and of government, well beyond its borders. Although these institutions seek to transform the circumstances of the poor neighbourhoods that they serve, they nonetheless are part of a Rancièrian police, an ordering that, while allowing poverty to be visible, does not necessarily interrupt and contest that ordering.



Figure 2.1 Thanksgiving Day on Cheryl's front porch, Booker T. Washington neighbourhood, 11 November 2010. Cheryl has been a strategic neighbour for four years in Atlanta (source: Cheryl Case)

Many of the strategic neighbours we interviewed sought to reconfigure the bundles of their place-networks by changing the material spaces of the neighbourhood and fostering relationships among neighbours. For example, Michael Wong, a 26-year-old Asian man, who has lived for three years as a strategic neighbour in a New Orleans neighbourhood that is 98 per cent African American, is in the process of developing a house for interns in addition to creating a 'tutoring/safe space for [recreation] and work'. He is also developing 'a community garden to increase neighbour connectivity' and reflects that he and his wife 'intentionally spend time walking around outside getting to know our neighbours'.

These efforts to get to know people, really connect with them, illustrates the malleability of the neighbourhood as a site that is not solely local, but that nonetheless provides common ground, literally, for people to meet and interact. In relational terms, the neighbourhood is a site where multi-scalar processes, from sidewalk hellos to city hall and global economic relations, converge and are expressed. At the same time, they are sites of politics – both the Rancièrian police partitioning, as well as a nascent politics of disruption, of open incongruity between the sensible and the invisible.

Barbara and other strategic neighbours revealed frustrations with the power relations embedded in their social positioning and also with the ineffectiveness of many of their (middle-class) political channels to effect change (see Case, 2011). When asked directly about the degree to which strategic neighbours see their work as political (which we did not define), the answers were quite mixed. From our survey, 30 per cent of respondents identify their work as political; 70 per cent suggest it is not. When asked to explain their position, strategic neighbours offered a variety of answers. Michael Wong (from New Orleans) stated ‘I don’t have a political agenda, but I know that politics do have a lot to do with the needs of the neighbourhood, and that you have to be somewhat involved in politics to get things done.’ For Michael, it is formal state channels, such as neighbourhood associations, city hall, or being involved in political campaigns, that he defines as politics. For Rancière, of course, these are classically the police that partition the sensible. The neighbouring that Wong does is not, for him, political, even though through his actions (of creating an intern centre, or building social connections) he seeks to change the material and social dynamics of the community. Indeed, he seeks to foreground the part that has no part, and in doing so, he pushes forwards (but does not necessarily create) dissensus, a making visible of that (who) which previously was not.

Some of our survey and interview participants initially eagerly embraced the neighbourhood association – the formal structure of police – as a vehicle for change for the neighbourhood. But then, after months and generally within the first year, they became frustrated with the class structures embedded in the neighbourhood associations. For example, Samantha Greg, White mother of two who was a strategic neighbour for two years in the Vine City neighbourhood of Atlanta, elaborated on the complexity of being involved in ‘politics’ (police):

We used to go to Civic Meetings but don’t anymore. I think we helped for 6 months or more. We weren’t super involved, helped with some studies and things but we just waned out ...

That is not to say the civic association is bad, but it was frustrating. The people we had grown to love were not respected ... It was like if you rented and didn’t own then you weren’t a part of the community. And 85% of the community at the time were renters ...



Figure 2.2 Community garden in English Avenue, west Atlanta, 11 October 2009.
This community garden was developed by residents and strategic neighbours

The frustrations of strategic neighbours with the formal politics of neighbourhood associations and interactions with city government illustrates the embodied conflict of the police (or the ordering of state channels) and politics – or the arena where the voice of the marginalized can be heard. For neighbours like Samantha Greg, politics were not really possible through the neighbourhood association, which clearly did not offer a voice to those who were marginalized in the poverty of Vine City.

Other strategic neighbours underscored the absence of marginalized inner-city residents from formal governance structures. For example, Bart Campolo, a 47-year-old, White, married father of two, in the Walnut Hills neighbourhood of Cincinnati, Ohio, plainly stated that his involvement in ‘politics’ is critical, as ‘The folks we’re with here have no money, and therefore no political voice’. His observation echoes the marginalization of the impoverished as lacking an ability to participate in what Rancière would term ‘the police’. Anna Terry, 31, a White, single woman in the Binghampton neighbourhood of Memphis, Tennessee, echoed a similar sentiment but with the opposite framing: ‘I’m not worried about politics. I am worried about the lives around me, sometimes that involves politics, but very rarely can politicians help me or the folks around me.’ The idea that politicians cannot really help highlights Rancière’s assertion that they are part of a police order that

does not want to allow for politics (i.e. post-democratic); a partitioning that does not enable the powerless to have a voice or to participate in a supposed democracy.



Figure 2.3 Historic home in South Atlanta, two doors down from a strategic neighbour's residence. South Atlanta, a neighbourhood of approximately 550 homes, has over two dozen strategic neighbours (source: Katherine Hankins)

Strategic neighbours recognize how the structures of the police fail to help them in their goals of connecting with and transforming their own lives and those around them. Instead of achieving such transformation, however, frustration with the disconnection between the police and dissensus politics both constructs the complex sociospatial positionality of strategic neighbours and it also contributes to what many of them term 'burnout' (see Case, 2011). For example, Richard Humphrey, a White 30-year-old father of two, in the West End, Atlanta neighbourhood for the past eight years, contemplates his frustration:

I saw so much change ...working in an upper middle class, white youth group setting ... But what you see here is so little change in people's lives, and what dominates most of all is seeing brokenness, seeing dysfunction, seeing kid after kid drop out of high school, seeing relationships as dysfunctional, not good for kids ... I have seen it with the kids on my basketball team. Where I have seen kids go from being a 9th grader to like a, you know, to becoming a grown man and watching 7 out of 10 of them drop out of high school, involved in some sort of crime, and then in and out of prison. And it is just kind of depressing to see that over and over again.

Almost half of the survey respondents identified 'burnout' as a serious challenge to strategic neighbouring – evaluating it 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the most significant challenge. This burnout around the sociospatial subjectivity of the strategic neighbour is, we suggest, constituted by the constant confrontation with police and politics – and the unsatisfactory options of how to deal with the kinds of everyday living conditions that strategic neighbours see their neighbours experience.

Conclusions

Through their insertion into inner-city life, strategic neighbours reconfigure the place bundles in the neighbourhood setting, which results in a complex sociospatial positionality (for them and the neighbours with whom they interact). As part of and through their rebundling, strategic neighbours seek to give voice to the voiceless, which in Rancièrian terms could help to produce politics. Yet they encounter the ineffectiveness of the formal governance structures situated in and through the neighbourhood. That is, strategic neighbours wrestle with contemporary forms of policing, the categorization of the parts of society into particular spaces, rather than engaging and enabling dissensus (i.e. politics). Strategic neighbours situate themselves at the juncture between police and politics: challenging and reworking police categorizations is central to their purpose, but at the same time, they recognize that the institutions seemingly designed to give voice to marginalized neighbours effectively keep the unknowable and the unsayable unknown, as suggested by Rancière (1999) in his critique of contemporary democratic societies. While everyday police partitioning recognizes the presence of poor, marginal neighbourhoods and residents, they remain to a large degree without voice (i.e. they are unequal). The limitations encountered by strategic neighbours suggest that neighbourhood itself, as an imagined political unit and meaningful territory for social change, is a limited concept for opening up politics to and for the unknown.

Neighbourhood in urban politics in this case, then, sits as part of the current post-democratic police. A relational place-making perspective on neighbourhood insists on a partitioning which is flexible and unordered; open to rebundlings which may foster a politics of dissensus, because it resists the bounding of neighbourhoods as 'local'. Strategic neighbouring – through its frustrations and confrontations with the ordering of urban politics-as-police – highlights the necessity of conceptualizing neighbourhoods as relational places, constantly in process, as a means to challenge the ordering of an urban politics definition of neighbourhood. It is through actions like the rebundling that strategic neighbours do that conscious place-making and politics may occur. Real

neighbourhood politics – a politics of dissensus – require challenging fixed, bounded notions of neighbourhood and reworking them as flexible, contingent dynamic places of/for an urban politics of the as-yet-unknown.

Notes

- 1 Portions of this chapter appear in D. Martin (2003) 'Enacting neighborhood', *Urban Geography*, Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 361–385. Reprinted with permission from © Taylor and Francis Group, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, UK, OX14 4RN. All rights reserved. The authors gratefully acknowledge this permission from Taylor and Francis Group (www.tandfonline.com).
- 2 There is no official 'count' of strategic neighbours across the United States, but preliminary research suggests they are in most major cities and develop through networks such as the Christian Community Development Association, which has over 3,000 individual members.
- 3 This research was conducted by co-author Katherine Hankins along with Andy Walter, University of West Georgia, and Cheryl Case, Georgia State University.

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