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## Anthropology and the city: Standing on the shoulders of giants?

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# Anthropology and the city:

## Standing on the shoulders of giants?

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### Abstract

*It has become increasingly commonplace to note that the past decade has witnessed a proliferation of anthropological studies dealing holistically with the dynamics of cities and city-living, to the extent that the current moment is considered to represent something of an epistemological 'flourishing' within anthropology, particularly in relation to the benchmark of the discipline's historical urban mainstay, the neighbourhood ethnography. Studies explicitly offering a window onto the broader nature of urban contexts are not necessarily new, however, and indeed, were arguably the basis upon which urban anthropology originally emerged as an identifiable sub-discipline before subsequently taking a more particularistic turn. This article offers a re-appraisal of the origins and evolution of holistic urban anthropological approaches, explaining how, why, and in what context these coalesced during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as offering an explanation for the ensuing rise of more parochial approaches to city life. It does so based on an alternative intellectual history of the famous Chicago School of Sociology (CSS), in particular highlighting the epistemological debt contemporary anthropological studies implicitly owe to the CSS, as well as the enduring methodological lessons that the urban studies it inspired potentially continue to offer for anthropology.*

### 1 Introduction

Over the past decade there has been a flourishing of anthropological texts dealing with the city. Studies such as Sian Lazar's *El Alto, Rebel City* (2008), Didier Fassin's *Enforcing Order* (2013), Thomas Blom Hansen's *Melancholia of Freedom* (2012), Kristin Peterson's *Speculative Markets* (2014), or Austin Zeiderman's *Endangered City* (2016), for example, have all offered insightful depictions of the dynamics of urban life. A common element of these works is that they all explicitly explore the affective dimension of city-living from a holistic perspective, to the extent that it can be argued that taken together these works represent something of an urban anthropological regeneration, particularly in relation to traditional neighbourhood studies. At the same time, however, investigations offering a window onto the broader processes that constitute and give resonance to city life are by no means new. If we go back a further decade, we find another set of anthropological works that inherently provide a window onto urban life writ large, including for example Philippe Bourgois' *In Search of Respect* (1995), James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity* (1999), Farha Ghannam's *Remaking the Modern* (2002), or Daniel Goldstein's *The Spectacular City* (2004). Indeed, going back further still, studies such as Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside* (1969), Larissa Adler Lomnitz's *Networks and Marginality* (1977), Thomas Belmonte's *The Broken*

*Fountain* (1979), or Peter Lloyd's *The Young Towns of Lima* (1980) also display an analogous sensibility, to the extent that one might contend that the holism of the current urban anthropology 'moment' simply represents the continuation of a longer-standing trajectory.

As Ulf Hannerz (1980) has pointed out, the origins of this particular epistemological approach to the city actually lie in the work of the famous Chicago School of Sociology (CSS) rather than anthropology *per se*. To a certain extent, this reflects the fact that the boundaries between sociology and anthropology were much less clear-cut previously, something that is also evident in the way they share key foundational intellectual figures such as Immanuel Kant or Emile Durkheim, for example. At the same time, this particular genesis also implicitly highlights how urban anthropology arguably took something of a 'wrong turn' at some point, insofar as the mainstay of urban anthropology was for many years the neighbourhood study focusing on a specific area of a city, more often than not treated as a bounded entity. While often extremely insightful, these studies obviously tend to offer a limited insight into broader urban processes, and represent a very different tradition to the more holistic anthropological research that is (rightly) being celebrated today. This paper offers a re-appraisal of the intellectual foundations of the contemporary urban turn in anthropology, in particular highlighting the epistemological debt anthropological studies implicitly owe to the CSS, as well as the enduring methodological lessons that the urban studies it inspired potentially continue to offer for anthropology.

## **2 Urban anthropology and sociology: Common origins, divergent paths**

There is an extensive literature examining the institutional origins, philosophical basis, and intellectual contribution of the CSS (Casey 1975; Bulmer 1984; Smith 1988; Deegan 2007; Abbott 2009; C. Hart 2010).<sup>1</sup> These are of course inextricably intertwined with the broader genesis of sociology at the University of Chicago, which was first established as a department in 1892, and which the founding chair, Albion W. Small, deliberately set out to make a mark on the intellectual life of the university and indeed social sciences in the United States more generally. In 1896 he founded the *American Journal of Sociology*, which remains a leading journal in the discipline and which he edited for 30 years until his death in 1926, and co-founded the American Sociological Association. Small also set out to secure funding for major research programmes, not least from the Rockefeller Foundation, and recruited bright, innovative, researchers. Perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Having said this, the origins of this article lie partly in an ongoing joint research project re-examining the emergence of the CSS and its intellectual significance, particularly in relation to contemporary urban studies (see Jones and Rodgers 2015).

the most critical early hire was W. I. Thomas, who had studied at Chicago, and became an instructor in the new department in 1896. A gifted academic, Thomas, had been partly educated in Germany, at the university of Berlin, a background he shared with Small, who had been educated at universities of Leipzig and Berlin, and which exposed the department to ideas of, among others, Ferdinand Tönnies, George Simmel and Max Weber, who were also influential on later appointees including in particular the German-educated Robert E. Park and Louis Wirth.<sup>2</sup>

Although Small was a respected and published academic, it was Thomas who can most be credited with setting out the pluralistic ethos of the CSS (see Guth 2004). After a number of books, including *Sex and Society* (1907) which drew from psychology and evolutionary behavioural science, Thomas co-wrote with Florian Znaniecki his landmark five-volume *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an immigrant group* (1918-20). The collection set out an innovative methodology, conducting fieldwork in both the United States and Poland, used writings of migrants including letters and diaries, examined how the migratory process was represented in newspapers and developed life histories to establish views of participants. Working in Polish, which Thomas learned for the research, but also working with Znaniecki, the research developed ethnographic methodology and ‘worlded’ sociology from a discipline previously focussed on the small worlds of social life to the larger processes that, in today’s terminology, we might term transnational.<sup>3</sup> Thomas was not an urbanist but he established the interest in organisation (and disorganisation), social interaction (contact and assimilation), and meaning (attitude), as well as the overarching significance of location to social facts, and ultimately the critical importance of collecting primary data. His influence on the subsequent ‘big names’ who would position the CSS as the principal centre for the study of urbanism and the city in the social sciences is clear.

This is particularly the case of Park, whom Thomas in fact recruited to the Chicago department of sociology in 1914. As Paul Baker (1973) notes, Thomas and Park shared a maverick oppositional disposition to the limits and etiquettes of academic life. A former newspaper reporter and personal secretary to the African-American reformer Booker T. Washington, Park was not a conventionally ‘trained’ academic, as was well reflected in the fact that his lectures

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<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that a German language examination was an obligatory requirement of the Chicago sociology graduate programme during the 1920s, something that was highly consequential to the formation of CSS considering that Weber’s famous work *The City* was published in German in 1921 but not available in English until 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Znaniecki received a PhD from University of Cracow and was running a migrant association in Warsaw when he came into contact with Thomas, but had previously studied philosophy and sociology at the University of Geneva and at the Sorbonne in Paris, in addition to also serving in the French Foreign Legion (Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago [hereafter SCRC], Florian Znaniecki Papers, Box 1, Folder 1).

tended to be performative exercises which he usually conducted without notes and during which he “did not pontificate” but rather “puzzled out loud” (Smith 1988: 2). Like Thomas, he was also indefatigably curious, and constantly sought to inspire students to get out and study ‘life’. Where Park differed from Thomas, however, was in his sensibility to the ‘big picture’, including especially to issues of social interaction and conflict, which he combined with a pragmatic rather than a moralistic interest in social reform. This comes out perhaps most clearly in Park’s seminal article on “The City”, with its often overlooked but vital sub-title “Suggestions for the investigation of human behaviour in the city environment” (Park 1915). Importantly, what this provided was an intellectual and methodological route map to understanding the general nature of urban contexts that the ethnographic studies conducted by his masters and doctoral students – as well as those supervised by his colleague and intellectual partner in crime, Ernest Burgess – could then take with them in to the city. Between 1917 and 1940, around 40 of these studies were published as part of a Sociological Series by the University of Chicago Press, with Park, Burgess, and later Louis Wirth, providing either a preface or postscript, engaging the specificity of the texts for a more general audience.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Park’s preface to the first edition of Nels Anderson’s *The Hobo* (1923) explicitly suggests that the aim of urban sociology at Chicago was not so much to emphasise:

*[T]he particular and local as the generic and universal aspects of the city and its life, and so make these studies not merely a contribution to our information but to our permanent scientific knowledge of the city as a communal type (Park 1923: viii).*

It is little wonder that, as James F. Short, Jr. points out in his “Foreword” to Carey’s (1975: 1) study of the CSS, that even if faculty and members “did not think of themselves as [a School], ...they were acutely aware of and enthusiastic about their involvement in an enterprise of great importance”, which as Louis Wirth (1940: 749) highlighted, was “a model of research [in the] many countries touched by the magic wand of urbanization”.

A frequently overlooked fact about the Chicago Department of Sociology, however, is that until 1929 it was the Department of Anthropology AND Sociology.<sup>5</sup> To this extent, associating the

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<sup>4</sup> Although we do not have the space to explore the issue in any detail here, it is evident that some of the essays offered by Park and Burgess provide interpretations that are at odds with the empirical evidence, tone and terminology of the texts themselves. The consistency of findings relating to the conceptual themes of “social ecology”, “disorganisation”, “interactional fields” or “conflict” is often a great deal clearer to Park and Burgess than it seems to have been to the authors of the monographs.

<sup>5</sup> There nevertheless continued to be a joint chair of Anthropology and Sociology at the university after 1929, which was held between 1935 and 1959 by W. Lloyd Warner, author of the famous “Yankee City” studies, a major

origins of urban anthropology with the rise of the so-called CSS raises intriguing questions about disciplinary boundaries and trajectories, especially with regard to the city. Moreover, the emergence of the CSS as a particular collective intellectual endeavour in the mid-1920s arguably came at a moment when what subsequently coalesced as an independent anthropology had perhaps begun to run out of intellectual steam. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> had seen anthropology steadily innovate and move from being based on second-hand reports, classical studies of ancient Greece and Rome, and mythological accounts – with James Frazer’s famous *The Golden Bough* (1890) perhaps the most famous example of this approach – to a science of primary observation and recording of data, based on a range of new ideas about the nature of culture, society, and human agency associated with individuals such as Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, or Marcel Mauss, for example. These key figures went on to institutional positions at Columbia University, the London School of Economics and Political Science, or the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris and taught a distinguished roster of students including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Alfred Kroeber, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, and Claude Levi-Strauss, among others. Although these all produced works that are now considered part of the classical anthropological cannon, with the exception of Levi-Strauss, epistemologically they arguably did little more than reproduce the foundational works of their teachers, potentially signalling something of an intellectual impasse.

In Chicago, however, Boas, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown – whose structural functionalist anthropology clearly had deep synergies with the CSS’ approach (see Becker 1999) – as well as Mauss and Malinowski,<sup>6</sup> were hugely influential on Park (1952: 15), who claimed that:

*Anthropology, the science of man, has been mainly concerned up to the present with the study of primitive peoples. But civilized man is quite as interesting an object of investigation, and at the same time his life is more open to observation and study. Urban life and culture are both more varied, subtle and complicated... [and] the same patient methods of observation which anthropologists like Boas ...have expended on the study of the life and manners of the North American Indian might be even more fruitfully employed in the investigation of the customs, beliefs, and general conceptions of life prevalent in Little Italy on the lower North Side in*

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comparative study of urban America theoretically and methodologically inspired by Warner’s close collaboration with A.R. Radcliffe-Brown who taught at Chicago from 1931-37 (see Silverman 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Mauss and Malinowski’s influence is evidenced by their correspondence with Park (SCRC, Robert E. Park papers, Box 14, Folder 1). Interestingly, there also exists something of a feedback loop insofar as Robert Redfield, who was heavily influenced by Robert Park (who was also his father-in-law), seems to have influenced Malinowski in the conceptualisation of his final study of Mexican market systems in Oaxaca, Mexico (see Waterbury 2007).

*Chicago, or in recording the more sophisticated folkways of the inhabitants of Greenwich Village and neighbourhood of Washington Square, New York.*

The practical enactment of this belief led to the production of a series of famous ethnographic studies that in many ways constitute the bedrock of *both* urban sociology *and* urban anthropology (see Deegan 2007; Andersson 2013). These include Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923), Frederic Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927), Paul Cressey's *The Taxi Dance Hall* (1928), Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928), Harvey Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), Clifford Shaw's *The Jack-Roller* (1930), Pauline Young's *The Pilgrims of Russian-Town* (1932) and more. What however distinguished these from ethnographic studies produced at the time within the more conventional bounds of anthropology, such as Raymond Firth's *We the Tikopia: A Sociological Study of Kinship in Primitive Polynesia* (1936) and E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940), is the way that CSS scholars sought to develop embedded analyses, understandings of the city not as a bounded, static community, but in a holistic and relational manner. One of the great critiques of Evans-Pritchard's work is that he was able to write about the Nuer without engaging with colonial dynamics, despite the region effectively undergoing colonisation by the British at the time (Rosaldo 1986). This parochialism is unimaginable in CSS works which, while the focus is often the city of Chicago, are fundamentally outward-looking in scope. Pace Hannerz (1980), who sees this distinction as constituting the boundary between sociology and anthropology,<sup>7</sup> we believe that this particular CSS ethos in fact corresponds much more closely to a nuanced urban anthropological sensibility than that displayed by the neighbourhood studies that became the mainstay of the sub-discipline during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. While often extremely valuable in their own right, providing us with detailed slices of urban life, these ultimately represent an intellectual tradition that goes against the fundamental grain of anthropology as a holistic "science of man", aiming to understand how human beings think, act, live, and are acted upon in the wider world.

The question to ask from this perspective, is why and when did urban anthropology take a wrong turning, so to speak. Without wishing to lay blame at the door of one person, in this

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<sup>7</sup> This boundary was clearly highly theoretical, and many now considered "sociologists" thought of themselves as "anthropologists" – including for example W. I. Thomas – while figures now recognised as "anthropologists" such as Radcliffe-Brown were thought of as "sociologists" (including by Park), and academics who were formally neither, such as Milton Singer, were regarded as both (see Wilcox 2004: 143-145; Andersson 2013). Indeed, perhaps the most interesting counterpoint in this respect is William Foote Whyte, whose *Street Corner Society* (1943) is often considered to be paradigmatically part of the CSS's output but is actually antagonistically related to it – including especially to the ideas of 'social disorganisation' – as Whyte makes very clear in the methodological appendix of the fourth edition of the volume (Whyte 1993: 354-357). To a large extent, this opposition derived from the fact that he considered himself an anthropologist rather than a sociologist (Andersson 2013). Indeed, the methodological appendix of the fourth edition is widely considered to constitute one of the best discussion of urban ethnography ever written.



respect, the work of Robert Redfield is extremely illuminating. Redfield studied in the joint Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chicago and from 1934 to 1946 served as Dean of the Social Sciences, a position through which he supported both interdisciplinary research and the activities of the CSS specifically.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, his study of the Mexican village of *Tepoztlán* (1930) is cited by Andersson (2013: 92-3) as constituting, along with Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant* and Anderson's *The Hobo*, "the real origin" of the CSS tradition. As a number of biographical treatments have argued, for one of the leading anthropologists of his generation and president of the American Anthropological Association, Redfield was ambivalent, even distrustful, of disciplinary boundaries (Wilcox 2004; Wolf and Tarn 2004). It is instructive that Redfield's manifesto *Anthropology: Unity and Diversity* (1946) sets out to place anthropology with sociology, psychology and - more curiously, perhaps - economics on the same axis of Cultural/Scientific Behavioural Sciences (see Mandelbaum *et al.* 1963).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Wilcox (2004: 183) suggests that one of his most original contributions was to introduce a "conceptual vocabulary" and theory from Sociology to Anthropology. A collection of lectures brought together as *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (1953) draws from Boas, Kroeber, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, but also the work of Park. The latter's influence but also the sociological attention to comparative method, is also apparent in Redfield's only significant attention to the city, his seminal paper with Milton Singer on 'The Cultural Role of Cities' (Redfield and Singer 1954).

Yet, despite being in the ferment of thematic and methodological experiment of the CSS, and his own study of Mexicans in Chicago preceding his work in *Tepoztlán*, Redfield's principal contribution to urban anthropology paradoxically remains his work on 'folk society', developed from extended research in Mexico, initially in *Tepoztlán* and later Chan Kom in the Yucatan.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that it was Park who suggested and paid for his trip to Mexico,<sup>11</sup> and whereas the CSS placed "the understanding of the city into the center of social science research" in order to acquire "a perspective for the comprehension of the salient problems not only of urban civilization but of contemporary society as a whole" (Wirth 1940: 743), Redfield ended up

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<sup>8</sup> The papers of Redfield and Park held at the University of Chicago SCRC reveal a close and continuous conversation, aided by Redfield marrying Park's daughter Margaret, who accompanied him on fieldwork in Mexico various times for the whole of his professional life.

<sup>9</sup> To underscore our point in footnote 7, Redfield's first degree was in law, his first teaching job was in Sociology at the University of Colorado in 1925-26, and his second at Cornell in 1928, where he taught Sociology and Anthropology.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that even this classically anthropological concept was developed in conversation with CSS scholars, including in particular Robert Park, who was Redfield's PhD supervisor, and explicitly links Redfield's notion of "folk society" to his own notion of "marginal man" in the introduction to a monograph written by another of his students, Charles Johnson's *Shadow of the Plantation* (1934).

<sup>11</sup> See <https://lisapeattieblog.wordpress.com/2013/05/23/my-parents/> (consulted 13 April 2016).

focusing on folk society as the polar opposite of urban life.<sup>12</sup> Following Tönnies' notion of *'gemeinschaft'*, Redfield argued that folk societies were isolated, culturally homogenous and organised around intimate, kin-based and tested social networks. Adopting a Durkheimian notion of social solidarity, he famously suggested that in folk society people "are much alike" and indeed "what one man knows and believes is the same as what all men know and believe. Habits are the same as customs" (Redfield 1947: 297).<sup>13</sup> Although he pushed at the spatial envelope of the 'village studies' to encompass the region, his work rested on a premise that cities are by nature transformative of culture, marked out as a shift to modernity or "The Great Tradition", on the "little community", transforming primitive to peasant society (Redfield 1953, 1960; also Wolf and Tarn 2004). As Sackley (2012) notes, Redfield hoped that a cosmopolitan modernity would emerge in which tradition could inform a more intimate, humanist and less teleological shift to civilisation obliterating custom.

Redfield's work on the folk-urban continuum became the dominant lens through which anthropology, at least in the US and until the early 1970s, would understand cultural change within regions and in combination with acculturation theory the means to understand cultural contact more widely (Silverman 2011). At its core was a concern with malign impact of the city or, as he and Milton Singer (1954: 53) put it, the issue was "the part played by cities in the development, decline, or transformation of culture". This paper is a tour-de-force in terms of its geographical scope and provocative suggestion to build 'orthogenetic' rather than 'heterogenetic' cities at a time when modernism and post-colonial politics were inspiring debates about the future of cities. Yet, and tellingly, we can draw three important points from this comparative attention to cities. First, Redfield appears to have modified his view of a shift from folk, rural, to modern, urban civilisation, observing that city people were communal and that, therefore, peasants, communal by nature, could be considered to be part of civilisation (Sackley 2012). Sadly, aside from noting that cities were formed of "an assemblage of part-folk societies", Redfield (1953b: 225) seems to have turned this nuanced view back on to peasant society and not developed an anthropological theory of city life. Second, and an unintended consequence, Redfield provided credibility to research that sought to locate 'villages in the city' and which contributed to neighbourhood studies arguing that migrants were ill-adapted to the full

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<sup>12</sup> His classic paper on the topic was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* (Redfield 1947).

<sup>13</sup> This tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity, which Redfield also discusses in later work, in which "civilized communities are more heterogeneous" but people in folk society are "homogeneous in that they share the same tradition and have the same view of the good life" (1953a: 8, 13) could be classic CSS. But, whereas Wirth (1938), for example, derived this idea from Simmel, and developed it in to a range of implications for heterogeneity in urban life, Redfield does not, and indeed simply sees the comparison as stylised fact.

opportunities presented by urban life. While Redfield drew anthropology away from the single village study, the conceptual attention to folk-civilisation meant that he omitted how social interactions and cultural change are grounded in material circumstances, or more eloquently his analysis “leaps over” the middle ground of “society” (Wolf and Tarn 2004: 183). Instead, anthropologists wrestled with a marginality thesis that was in contrast to the more sharply nuanced studies conducted by sociologists such as Herbert Gans (1963) who related their ethnographic findings on neighbourhood life to the wider economics and politics of the city.<sup>14</sup> Third, and again a consequence, Redfield’s attention to the city with Singer seemed concerned with how modernisation and urbanisation would impact upon ‘civilisation’ and ‘moral order’ rather than people. Thus, it is intriguing that *The Primitive World and its Transformations* takes the archaeologist V. Gordon Childe’s (1950) famous notion of the “Urban Revolution” as its point of departure, thus providing Redfield with a long *durée* of what he preferred to call ‘transformation’ and saying almost nothing on how anthropology might attend to the study of cities. As such, he clearly missed an opportunity to have “one eye cocked to... traditional theory, while [keeping] the other busy observing the living city before [him]”, to lift a quote from Wirth (1940: 745).

### 3 Towards an anthropology ‘of the city’ rather than ‘in the city’

Despite Redfield’s transformative contribution to the discipline and his close involvement with the CSS, it is perhaps here that one can pinpoint urban anthropology’s wrong turn. Certainly, as Fox (1972: 222, 205) observed in a prescient but generally ignored article on “the present limited horizon of urban anthropology”, part of the problem was the fact that “little of the city as urban community and less of the interactional or ideological fit of the city to the larger society emerge from such studies”. Rather, for Fox (1972: 218, 206), anthropologists tended to “take the urban environment as a given, a mere location, a site selected for small-scale investigation of what are assumed to be (on the basis of their residence in the city) urbanized tribals or poverty-stricken industrials”, and he called for “a reorientation of urban anthropology’s purpose away from isolated ghetto studies or arbitrarily delimited urbanization networks and towards a holistic perspective on cities in their social and cultural settings”. Hannerz (1980: 3) echoed Fox, arguing that more often than not the city was being taken as “the locus rather than the focus”. This is

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<sup>14</sup> An exception in this regard was Janice Perlman’s (1979) famous study of “the myth of marginality”, which explicitly placed her investigations into living condition in a poor *favela* in Rio de Janeiro within a broader political economy of the city. Interestingly, Perlman explicitly built on the work of the CSS, including in particular Park and Wirth (see Perlman 1979: 7-8, 98-102)

particularly obvious in relation to the so-called “Copperbelt” studies – see e.g. Mitchell (1956) or Epstein (1958) – that in many ways went even further than neighbourhood studies insofar as they sought to study events in isolation, by developing what came to be known as “situational analysis”. Although this often focused on key urban processes such as migration, labour practices (the Copperbelt urban centres were mostly mining towns), or cultural upheaval (“detrribalisation”), as a whole they made almost no contribution to the study of urbanisation *per se* and paid little critical attention to wider structural issues such as colonialism, for example (Hannerz 1980: 119-162).<sup>15</sup>

Seen in this light, it can be argued that from the 1940s onwards, instead of developing a real urban sensibility, anthropology struggled to find a language and framework to interrogate the complexity and change of urban life, and especially the multiple forms of heterogeneity and entanglement that the citiness implied.<sup>16</sup> One reason for this is perhaps that whereas the CSS grounded its ideas in ‘older theories of social structure’ – principally Simmel, Sorokin, Mead and Weber — that attended to large-scale temporal processes and developed new categories of conceptual analysis, but relied on empirical evidence and followed, more or less, a ‘systematic framework’ set out by Park in his 1915 paper on “The City”, anthropology often appears lost both theoretically and empirically where cities were concerned. Certainly, Fox (1972: 222) even goes so far as to accuse anthropology of adopting a “cargo cult” view of urban theory-building, whereby “accumulating enough powerful facts inevitably brings the anthropologist to high-level abstraction”, and asks the basic question: “without an approach based on a conception of the city or cities, will the observer ever generate it from slum localities, impoverished families or formerly tribal peoples?”

At first glance, this disorientation might seem perplexing considering the nature of the CSS’ foundational studies, which often focussed on the tensions in urban social relations, the capacity for cities to provoke alienation, anomie, and the potential for people to live between the culture of the city and the countryside, to become what Park famously called ‘marginal man’ (Park 1928;

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<sup>15</sup> Hannerz (1980: 130) does however note that Max Gluckman’s attempt to set up a seven year research programme for the Copperbelt was “reminiscent in its range of Robert Park’s 1915 paper on the city”, and like Park he provided prefaces to some of the monographs produced by the group of researchers he brought together. The project however seemed more intent on relating small-scale situational ethnographies to comparative historical processes rather than how people related to citiness or what varieties of urbanism were the result. In this respect, the contrast with Ferguson’s (1999) *Expectations of modernity* is striking.

<sup>16</sup> The principal exceptions to this comment are the already mentioned Janice Perlman and perhaps most importantly Keith Hart (1973), who conducted ethnographic research in a single neighbourhood of Nima, Accra, but explicitly related the findings of a particular set of circumstances to the wider political economy of the city and indeed to broader development processes, contributing in particular the notion of the informal economy to the social science (see also Hart, 2006). Indeed, much of Hart’s work since, while not necessarily urban, has sought to develop a more “universal” form of anthropology (see K. Hart 2010).

also Cavan 1928; Stonequist 1937; Wirth 1938).<sup>17</sup> Although neither the moral disposition nor the normativity of the CSS's leading figures held cities or urbanism to be positive, they nonetheless embraced the "heterogeneity of the human materials in the city [as] at once a source of the ferment and stimulation, and of the frictions and conflicts that characterize modern society" (Wirth 1940: 750). The CSS studies focused on deviants, outcast groups or minorities not in order to seek out the exotic, but rather to focus on the cutting edge of urban life. They were, Park (1928) insisted, a fundamental part of the transition to an urban society that brought together people from varied backgrounds into confined spaces, but which also provided opportunities for creativity at the expense of the stultifying "cake of custom". As Gerald Suttles (1976: 1) pointed out, urban anthropology clearly forgot this basic reason for focusing on "the unusual, the exceptional, and the exotic", however, and indeed, began to justify it for precisely the opposite reason to the CSS, as was well summarised by Oscar Lewis (1965a: 497):

*The city is not the proper unit of comparison or discussion for the study of social life because... social life is not a mass phenomenon. It occurs for the most part in small groups, within the family, within households, within neighborhoods, within the church, formal and informal groups, and so on. Any generalizations about the nature of social life in the city must be based on careful studies of these smaller universes rather than on a priori statements about the city as a whole.*

It is interesting to note that Lewis was perhaps the anthropologist who most disrupted, in a very practical way, Benet's (1963: 212) observation that until the early 1960s, anthropologists were "a notoriously agoraphobic lot, anti-urban by definition".<sup>18</sup> Through a range of texts, Lewis offered sensitive and nuanced insights rich in detail on these "smaller universes", famously focussing of course on a single extended family, located in one neighbourhood of Mexico City (Lewis 1959, 1961, 1969), and comparatively between San Juan and New York (Lewis 1966a). Although much of his writing would be aggressively critiqued, *The Children of Sánchez* (1961) was also considered according to no less a figure than Eric Wolf (1962: 619) to be "burningly relevant to the world in which we live" and one of "only a few books by anthropologists that have so affected our public view of the world". Unlike most anthropologists of the period who essentially replicated

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<sup>17</sup> Here, Park is clearly indebted to Simmel, and to some extent Tönnies and Veblen, but also to the notion of "double consciousness" proposed by W. E. B. du Bois (1899), whom he in fact cites.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Lewis had something of an antagonistic relationship with Redfield, especially after his (in)famous restudy of Tepotzlán (see Lewis 1951). This was the village that Redfield had originally studied in the mid-1920s (see Redfield 1930), and Lewis purported to demonstrate that the rather static community depicted by Redfield was in fact rapidly changing (something that was hardly surprising given the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution). Redfield's papers in the SCRC show a calm annoyance at Lewis – see for example the reference letter Redfield wrote for Lewis on 26 April 1948, his letter to Lewis of 22 June 1948, or his undated four pages of criticism of Lewis' (1951) *Life in a Mexican Village* (box 20, folder 5) – which he eventually expressed in print (Redfield 1953: 155-156).

parochial neighbourhood studies, Lewis attempted to project anthropology as the leading social science to study the nature of urban life, writing in *Scientific American* and *Harper's Magazine* (Lewis 1965b, 1966b). The difficulty was that Lewis and anthropology were ill prepared to communicate the intimacy of ethnography to understand urban life and the city as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

Our claim is that 'urban' anthropology had become intellectually disengaged from its common origin with sociology. The philosophical base and methodological innovations that sociology and anthropology had shared in the early decades of the twentieth century had been undermined. This was not due to a lack of contact. Lewis' work was explicitly in conversation with that of CSS scholars such as Thomas, Park and Wirth, as well as Redfield, as is evident in his successful 1950 application for Rockefeller Foundation funding for a "Socio-psychological study of Mexican families of rural background in Mexico City", which subsequently provided the empirical basis of his *Five Families* study.<sup>20</sup> Even if generally critical - especially of Wirth - he engaged with them as his principal theoretical – and sometimes empirical – reference points, clearly to a large extent because of their general epistemology but also because of some of their specific theoretical propositions. Lewis' studies concentrated on individual psychology and on the nature of family life in urban conditions, and in this he clearly took his cue from CSS studies of so-called "urban personality types", which Park (1952: 24-25) described as corresponding to:

*The shopgirl, the policeman, the peddler, the cabman, the nightwatchman, the clairvoyant, the vaudeville performer, the quack doctor, the bartender, the ward boss, the strikebreaker, the labor agitator, the school teacher, the reporter, the stockbroker, the pawnbroker; all of these are characteristic products of the conditions of city life; each, with its special experience, insight, and point of view determines for each vocational group and for the city as a whole its individuality.*

The difference between Lewis and CSS scholars however lies in the fact that the former was interested in the above as they reflected more general forms of human sociability, while the latter sought to understand them in relation to their positioning within urban structure, thereby inherently connecting them to larger dynamics rather than considering them in situational isolation. Although the authors of the famous CSS monographs exploring different urban personality types – such as Anderson (1923) on the hobo, Donovan (1929) on the saleslady, Landesco (1932) on the gangster, or Shaw (1930) on the jack-roller, to name but a few – often made this connection more implicitly than explicitly, as Deegan (2007: 19) highlights, the prefaces, forewords, and introductions written to the CSS studies by Robert Park and Ernest

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<sup>19</sup> His principal attempt to think conceptually and comparatively was the "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1966b).

<sup>20</sup> SCRC, Robert Redfield papers, box 20, folder 5.

Burgess sought to do so explicitly, and constitute an essential element of the CSS “theoretical tapestry” aiming to conceptualise the nature of urban life in general rather than particularistic terms, in stark contrast to most urban anthropological work, at least until the present moment.

## 4 Conclusion

The past few years are widely perceived as having seen a flourishing of urban anthropology. Certainly, a cursory look at publisher lists seems to confirm an ‘urban turn’ in anthropology that it is hard to dismiss. Superficially, of course, the increased number of texts by anthropologists is hardly a surprise. In an ‘urban age’, most disciplines in the social sciences, not least sociology and geography, are affording more attention to urban studies. Moreover, the majority of urban growth for the past half century has been in the so-called ‘Global South’, with many of the putatively ‘remote’ areas that have been stereotypical stomping ground for anthropologists becoming increasingly urbanised, and we might therefore expect anthropologists to similarly become more thoroughly urbanised. Taken together, it might even seem as if the future of the discipline itself might depend on ‘urban anthropology’. Certainly, it could be argued that it is almost as if - to update Evans-Pritchard’s (1950: 123) famous warning that anthropology had to choose “between becoming history or [being] nothing” - the discipline today must choose between “becoming urban or nothing”. Yet one must remain cautious about whether the contemporary ‘urban turn’ marks such an abrupt break with the past. As we noted in our introduction, going back 10, 20 or 30 years, one can identify important texts in urban anthropology, texts which if they have had less influence on anthropology undoubtedly had important audiences beyond the disciplinary ‘wall’. Indeed, all of the key texts in ‘urban anthropology’ noted in the introduction can to a certain extent be qualified as interdisciplinary texts, and as a consequence arguably offer a much truer form of urban anthropology, that is to say an ‘anthropology of the city’ as opposed to an ‘anthropology in the city’.

It is the last point that has intrigued us most because a historiography of urban anthropology reveals origins that were precisely defined by a holistic approach to urban life and attempts to grapple with general urban dynamics, and we have sought to unpick the puzzle of why anthropology ‘turned away’ from the city. Examining the relationship of anthropology and sociology, and more specifically the common origin of the disciplines at the University of Chicago where until 1929 they formed a single department, as well as the cross-fertilization and exchange that occurred partly as a result reveals that while sociology at Chicago is often provided

the shorthand of the Chicago School of Sociology, and developed a distinct identity for research on the city, it owed much to anthropology, so much that Hannerz (1980) regards the disciplines as mutually constitutive at that time. The methodological innovations that produced nearly 40 book-length ethnographies from the early 1920s, combining oral history and participant observation, and an ethos of subject engagement, owed as much to the principles of Malinowski as to the positivism of Durkheim (C. Hart 2010). Yet, from a common origin, anthropology seemed to lose its way, or at least mostly avoid the city through the mid part of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> This was very much epitomised by the work of Redfield (1953a: 28, 27), who argued that anthropology should be “the chief agency to bring survivors [of Western civilization] to general notice” by asking the central question not of “How does civilization come about? But, What becomes of the folk society?”

Anthropologists who ignored this call were few. As a result, with the exception of Oscar Lewis, urban anthropologists contributed very little beyond understanding some specific issues in specific places and a particular moment. Without necessarily having these authors in mind, Anthony Leeds (1994: 233-234) summarised the ‘wrong turn’ in urban anthropology rather well when he claimed that they tended to deal

*with social phenomena which, like kinship, are not restricted to the city or even to urban society (including its country aspect). In such studies, the question asked has generally been, ‘How is kinship operating in this city?’, not, ‘What is the effect of cityness on the operation of kinship?’, that is, what systemic and characteristic aspects of kinship – if any – are elicited or forced into being in the city, and only in the city, as a function of specifiable features, or variables if you will, characteristic of the city. They have been studies of kinship in the city, not of the city in kinship.*

So what is new about the current ‘flourishing’ in urban anthropology? What arguably distinguishes many contributors to the current wave of anthropological studies of urban contexts from the neighbourhood studies or the anthropologies that - to repeat Hannerz - took the city as “the locus rather than the focus”, is the infusion of a conceptual richness and an excitement

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<sup>21</sup> The specific approach to studying the city promoted by the CSS was not without its detractors – not least in its supposed lack of attention to political economy, class and politics towards ‘race’ – and it also lost influence from the 1940s within sociology. Quantification gained fashion (and power) under Howard Odum, and William Ogburn, while Herbert Blumer promoted symbolic interactionism, and methodologically large-scale surveys. Nevertheless, figures such as Howard Becker, Herbert Gans, Erving Goffman, Jane Horowitz, Gerald Suttles and William Foote Whyte retained an attention to ethnography and have had a far more sustained influence on ideas about urbanism. Indeed, this particular tradition arguably directly led to the recent re-emergence of an increasingly dominant ethnographic tradition within urban sociology, which include the work of figures such as Javier Auyero (2001, 2015; and Swistun 2009), Teresa Gowan (2010), Jonathan Wynn (2011), Sudhir Venkatesh (2013), or Alice Goffman (2014), for example. It is especially interesting to note that not only do all of these offer holistic and contextualised approaches to varying facets of urban life, but several moreover make reference to and build on CSS work.



about the urban environment, and the possibilities and innovations that it generates. This, however, is highly reminiscent of the initial frontier research carried out by CSS scholars, and to this extent, it can be argued that contemporary ‘urban anthropology’ – even if the theoretical frames, terms and politics have (sometimes) changed – in fact represents, more than anything, a return to an urban ethnographic and theoretical sensibility originally developed by the CSS.

Unlike the CSS, however, anthropology has returned to the city rather haphazardly. It has no equivalent to Park’s “The City”, with its open-ended provocations, challenges to methodology and attention to experimentation. The intention of Park’s ‘manifesto’ was to draw attention to the study of the city as holistic exercise, and highlight how it might contribute to a better understanding of human beings writ large. Indeed, he explicitly eschewed the – now widespread – notion that it was to be a privileged ambit of sociology and rather saw the city as a key lens for all the social sciences. Seen from this perspective, the future of urban anthropology will not be helped by carving out a distinct subfield within the discipline – especially as we suspect that most of those who might be labelled ‘urban anthropologists’ today are probably more comfortable with labels such as ‘social’ or ‘political anthropologists’ – but rather through the demonstration that an ‘urban anthropological’ approach – that is to say, a disposition, a sensitivity – might offer something theoretical to anthropology more generally, as well as to the wider discussions concerning urbanism in the other social sciences. In this respect, the way forward is clearly not just developing ever more nuanced and holistic ethnographies of individual cities, but rather returning to something that was at the heart of the original anthropological project, namely comparison, and developing what other disciplines have described as “the comparative gesture” (Robinson 2006) in order to attain a better understanding of the underlying nature of what Wirth (1938) famously and elegantly described as “urbanism as a way of life”.

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