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The ordinary city trap snaps back

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Alongside Amin and Thrift (2002) my research on poststructuralist cities initiated a ‘post-topographical turn’ in urban studies (Smith, 2003a; 2003b). Drawing on Deleuze (poststructuralism), DeLanda (assemblage theory), Latour (actor-network theory), Serres (topology), Badiou (event), and others, an intransitive/immanent poststructuralist approach has been invented that not only recasts the conceptual apparatus—boundaries, centrality, network, place, power, scale, space, territory, time (eg, Smith, 2006; 2007)—and empirical approach of urban studies (Smith, 2010), but also—in contrast to the failure of the ordinary cities critique—effectively critiques/overtures the neo-Marxist world city, global city, and interlocking world city network concepts (Smith, 2013a; Smith and Doel, 2011) to understand cities not only as connected, but as always striving to prohibit and disguise their unbinding and destabilization as networked assemblages [for a recent discussion of my work on poststructuralist cities see Jacobs (2012)]. Thus, the ordinary city trap (Smith, 2013b) is *not* a critique of Amin and Graham’s (1997) inchoate ‘multiplex’ proto-poststructuralist urbanism, but rather explains how, in failing to notice Amin and Graham’s (1997) seemingly innocuous error of interpreting global cities, not as “leading examples” (Sassen, 1991, page 4), but as “paradigmatic examples” (Amin and Graham, 1997, page 416), ordinary cities advocates have not only often repeated Amin and Graham’s error, but have also used that mistake as a fulcrum to launch a raft of similarly flawed critiques against the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts in order to incorrectly suppose that an ordinary cities approach has a legitimate and novel basis *in counterposition to extant urban theory*.

It is important to highlight the *fundamental error* that underpins Jayne’s (2013) response in toto: “it is disappointing that Smith has made no sustained critique of the complexity of the research agenda put forward by Amin and Graham” (page 2306). Jayne’s reply is not only replete with errors and misrepresentations, but is *extraneous* because—analogous to the ordinary cities critique of the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts—it is concerned with what Jayne *imagines* my paper to be about, rather than with what it is *actually* about. Offering no defence of the invalid critiques ordinary cities advocates have launched against the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts through counterevidence,⁽¹⁾ Jayne’s response is instead made up of several red herrings⁽²⁾ which, rather than drawing attention away from

⁽¹⁾For example, I clearly state (Smith, 2013b) that, whilst the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts *are* economicistic, the problem is that ordinary cities advocates have misrepresented *why* they are economicistic, and consequently have failed to launch an effective critique (cf Smith, 2013a). Thus, even if Jayne’s claim that the neo-Marxist concepts are only understood as economicistic by ordinary cities advocates in relation/contrast to a range of other writings was correct, it would only strengthen my critique of the ordinary cities critique.

⁽²⁾Most of Jayne’s reply is dedicated to claiming that the ordinary cities idea is ‘associated’ with other urban literatures. Now, it is worth briefly noting that Jayne’s associative claims are, not only a red herring (relevant only if my paper was a critique of Amin and Graham’s multiplex poststructuralism), but also mistaken. Consider, for example, the edited book Jayne cites—a product of the 2007 Berlin

the devastating consequences of my paper's apodictic exposure of the false basis on which the ordinary cities supposition is founded/legitimated, only serve to highlight Jayne's egregious mistake of imagining my paper to be a critique of Amin and Graham's ordinary city concept.

Jayne hopes that nobody is falling into the ordinary city trap. First, Jayne asserts that "even a cursory look" (page 2309) at the citation data for Amin and Graham (1997) and Robinson (2002) shows it to be incomparable to work on world cities. However, the Web of Science (accessed on 13 June 2013) records 136 citations for Amin and Graham (1997) and 175 citations for Robinson (2002). Citation scores comparable even to those few papers that have set the agenda for world cities research for more than a decade [eg, Beaverstock et al (2000) 141 citations; Beaverstock et al (1999) 243 citations]. Second, Jayne imagines that the influence of the ordinary cities notion has been limited to urban geography. But, the journal papers the Web of Science reports as having cited Robinson's (2002) article are published across urban studies—eg, in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Urban Studies*, *City and Community*, *Regional Studies*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, etc—and numerous other disciplines. Third, alongside Jayne, Maringanti (2013) denies, somewhat oxymoronically, that the ordinary cities supposition is founded on a sustained critique of the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts: "[the ordinary cities critique is] a loose coming together of a variety of ... assumptions about the world of cities that seek to pursue new pathways without bothering to produce a coherent methodological and epistemological criticism of global and world city research" (page 2316, my emphasis).⁽³⁾

⁽²⁾ continued

workshop at which I was the invited keynote speaker (Smith and Doel, 2011)—on *Urban Assemblages* (Farías and Bender, 2010). Jayne claims that the ordinary cities literature has affected/shaped this edited book. However, there is no citation of any ordinary cities literature in the book. Jayne puts the cart before the horse because it is the case, factually speaking, that some ordinary cities literature has belatedly come to be affected by extant work on urban assemblages. Interestingly, the one citation of Amin and Graham (1997) in Farías and Bender (2010) concerns the problem of synecdoche and difference. Farías (2010, page 11) reasons how "[T]he city ... can be one or simply not be", an argument that echoes my keynote address (Smith and Doel, 2011).

⁽³⁾ Maringanti's research on scrap dealer communities—supposedly a part of a wider concern for researching what he somewhat pejoratively labels a "supplicant world of cities" (page 2315)—is a red herring, it does nothing to undo how Bunnell and Maringanti (2010) have explicitly 'bothered' at length to draw on erroneous ordinary cities critiques—by Robinson, McCann, Roy, etc—of the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts. Now, the fact is that there are at least five errors on just one page of their paper (page 417). First, it is incorrectly supposed that global and world cities research was 'paradigmatic' before my research (Beaverstock et al, 1999) solved the problem. Second, they simplistically suppose my research on the world city network to be an extension of Sassen's work when, whilst it appears similar in concerning advanced producer services, it in fact fundamentally contradicts—theoretically, methodologically, and empirically—Sassen's post-Weberian concept. Third, they repeat Robinson's and Roy's erroneous (con)fusion of neo-Marxism and neoliberalism by forgetting to highlight the critical purpose motivating neo-Marxist accounts of the world as tiered/hierarchical. Fourth, they make the mistake of caricaturing the world cities literature as though it is only concerned with financial-enclave spaces in a few urban potentates, when research on globalizing cities has concerned itself with how, to varying degrees and in varying ways, many of the aspects—architectural, cultural, demographic, economic, environmental, infrastructural, political, social, technological, etc—of the world's cities both shape, and are shaped by, globalization processes. Fifth, they assert that "researchers are reluctant to venture beyond their comfort zones in English-speaking urban worlds", but that does not apply to world cities research precisely because it is conducted by an 'invisible college' of researchers from across the world. In short, the falling of Bunnell and Maringanti (2010) into the ordinary city trap matters not simply because it invalidates their critique of urban studies as 'metrocentric', but because it undermines their subsequent solutions to '(re)orientate' urban studies. Furthermore, Bunnell and Maringanti's (2010, page 416) assertion that a satellite image of Europe's cities at night in Beaverstock et al (2000) means that the world and global city literatures are not based on 'grounded experience', is not only improbable, but also belies the fact that urban satellite imagery is profoundly affecting the lives of many, and often the poorest, urban populations across the world (see Smith, forthcoming a).

But, a close examination of the texts that have founded the ordinary cities paradigm—eg, “Urban geography: world cities, or a world of cities” (Robinson, 2005); “Global and world cities: a view from off the map” (Robinson, 2002); “World cities, or a world of ordinary cities?” (Robinson, 2006); “Urban political economy beyond the ‘global city’” (McCann, 2004), etc—unquestionably refutes both Jayne’s and Maringanti’s denials.

Lacking the space for a full-blooded response to Jayne and Maringanti, the invitation to write this reply does nevertheless afford me the opportunity to move *beyond* my ‘critique of a critique’ through three observations: on *ethnocentrism, legacy, and critique*.

Firstly, Jayne’s decision to predominantly discuss writings that are not cited in my paper, and are not a part of the neo-Marxist world or global city literatures, only evidences how Jayne’s comments are red herrings. Citing Amin and Thrift (2002), for example, is ignoratio elenchi because Jayne fails to evidence ethnocentrism in the neo-Marxist world or global city literatures. Nevertheless, it is instructive to briefly examine Jayne’s critique of Amin and Thrift (2002) because it exposes the confusion that underpins the ordinary cities notion as a critique of ethnocentrism as a whole. Jayne quotes Amin and Thrift (2002, page 5), “it is the cities of the North which we have had in mind while writing the book”, not to praise Amin and Thrift (2002) for explicitly stating the locational basis of their perspective (eschewing the ‘God trick’), but instead as evidence that “ethnocentrism is at the heart of European and North American dominated academic knowledge production and consumption” (page 2307). But, notice how Jayne interprets ‘the North’, not as the more economically accomplished ‘Global North’ (countries mostly located in the northern hemisphere), but as Europe and North America. ‘North’ is provincialized by Jayne despite the fact that Amin and Thrift (2002) write about many cities not located in either Europe or North America. However, it is worth noting that it is not Jayne who is the first to use this quote against Amin and Thrift (2002) to accuse them of prejudice. Robinson (2004) used the same quote from Amin and Thrift (2002), confusing ‘North’ for ‘western’ she asserts that Amin and Thrift only draw on the experiences of cities located in or toward the west [or, if there is a typographical error in Robinson (2004), from those cities found in the noncommunist countries of Europe and America]: “[Amin and Thrift’s] theoretical insights are developed on the basis of the experiences of … western cities” (page 571). In short, in repeating Robinson, Jayne’s reply is useful because it reminds us how the ordinary cities notion is founded on *fanciful* readings of extant urban theory, neo-Marxist or otherwise.

Secondly, Edensor and Jayne’s (2012) edited book was cited in my paper, not ‘clumsily’, but alongside other texts *precisely* because it evidences the ordinary city trap. Edensor and Jayne’s faith in the ordinary cities notion leads them to make counterfactual claims about extant urban theory as the explicit rationale for their collection: “Until very recently urban theorists have sidestepped any progressive engagement with labels such as ‘West’ and ‘non-West’ in contrast to disciplines across the social sciences which have challenged dualisms and typologies which fix particular spaces, such as ‘first, second and third worlds’, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, ‘North’ and ‘South’, ‘majority’ and ‘minority’” (2012, pages 1–2, my emphasis). Now, Edensor and Jayne assert a tabula rasa for “Urban theory beyond the West”, but Sassen, for example, describes a new geography of centrality and marginality in the global economy: “new geographies of centrality (that *cut across* the old divide of poor/rich countries) and of marginality … have become increasingly evident in the less developed world *and* in highly developed countries as well” (1994, page 4, my emphasis). Indeed, this core argument is mobilized by Sassen to challenge the neoliberal global city throughout her oeuvre/activism: “[N]ew geographies of centrality cut across many older divides—north–south, east–west, democracies versus dictator regimes. So top-level corporate and professional sectors of São Paulo begin to have more in common with peers in Paris, Hong Kong et cetera than with the rest of their own societies” (Sassen, in Kuper, 2013, page 5). Now, Sassen’s work is merely

illustrative: both the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts are concerned, not with discrete fixed spaces, but with envisioning global capitalism as a structural totality, with exposing and challenging the irregular geographies that span/cut-across the world's capitalist cities, whatever their size⁽⁴⁾ and specialization, precisely because all cities are directly and/or indirectly tied together to form *one* asymmetrical interconnected global system. *In nuce*, Edensor and Jayne's introduction (2012, pages 1–27) to their edited book is merely symptomatic: founded on the ordinary cities critique it is illustrative of how the flawed critiques launched by ordinary cities advocates against extant urban theory are *tainting* a sizeable volume of scholarship across urban studies.

Finally, both Jayne's and Maringanti's responses are illustrative of the failure of ordinary cities advocates to acknowledge that the neo-Marxist world and global city concepts are *critiques* of neoliberal attempts to build 'world' or 'global' cities for the few (they are not a neoliberal policy recommendation!) Consider this assertion from Jayne: "the overwhelming focus of the outputs relating to world/global cities ... thinking have been focused on 'mapping' command and control rather than, as Smith argues to 'counter' neoliberal urban development" (page 2311). But, for example, Sassen's longstanding critique of the neoliberal global city is her oeuvre; it is its *raison d'être*. Jayne's assertion is akin to criticizing Marx for overwhelmingly focusing on capitalism! Take Sassen's (2003) "More than Citibank" as illustrative: "[T]he distorted representation we have today of the advanced urban economy does not help political efforts to make those cities more manageable, more liveable, less hopeless That is why un-covering and making visible the crucial role of economic sectors, firms and workers that may appear as marginal and 'imported,' as backward and not belonging, is one step in the direction of rebuilding" cities where difference is "rooted in the very constitution of urban space" (page 117). Now, in contrast, Jayne asserts that ordinary urbanism seeks "to expose and contest asymmetrical power and relations within and between cities" (page 2311). However, Roy (2011, page 321), for example, turns a blind eye to the use of bonded migrant labour to fulfil the 'postcolonial development' of Dubai, chastizing the emirate's critics as guilty of presenting Dubai as a "monstrous caricature" in order to situate its development trajectory "as beyond the bounds of reason". Roy (2011, page 321) provides a phantasmic screen for the Sheikdom's mercenary labour practices: "Will the labouring bodies that produce these global commodities be recognized as Person of the Year, making a contribution to economic recovery, as is the 'Chinese Worker?' Or is the Dubai Worker tainted by the hysterical modes of worlding through which Dubai is understood?" Roy's nostrums might impress Jayne and please Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, but one thing Roy is not doing is challenging asymmetrical power relations within Dubai (see Smith, forthcoming b). In short, the ordinary cities supposition can be criticised as only *posturing* as 'progressive', campaigning to deny/negate the critical capacity of extant urban theory for little more than foregrounding a concern for defending so-called 'postcolonial' urban development trajectories even when they are based on indefensible cruelties.

⁽⁴⁾ Recent critiques of the global city literature as 'sizeist', as biased against 'small cities', are not only, factually speaking, easily refuted (a city's functions/economic specialization and connectivity are what concern the neo-Marxist concepts, not 'size' per se), but also consequentialist because they fail to explain that it is the *problem* of how a few cities capture hugely disproportionate amounts of the excitement and wealth produced by the global capitalist system that is the neo-Marxist concern. Thus, no city is off the neo-Marxist map as such, precisely because urban dominance is understood as affecting all the world's cities precisely because it produces worldwide urban geographies of centrality and marginality (see Sassen quoted in Kuper, 2013).

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