The politics of value in urban development: Valuing conflict in agonistic pluralism

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Abstract

In this article, we consider the role of value pluralism in theorising urban development and the politics of participatory planning. Rather than situating analyses of urban development in a monist or universalist ethics, where values are reducible to a single universal (e.g. human rights), or a normative pluralism based on the tension between different bearers of political value (e.g. liberty and equality), we argue for a plural ethics to make sense of the complex empirical reality of our cities. Post-consensus theories of planning treat the presence of conflict as an enduring reality in urban development, with Chantal Mouffe providing one way of conceptualising a productive politics of conflict. We extend Mouffe's plural politics through an appeal to value pluralism in the form of anthropological theories of value. A better understanding of the plural and incommensurable nature of values not only contributes to our understanding of the operation of agonistic pluralism, it also provides a more robust theoretical account of how different urban actors in the city transition from antagonism to agonism, which Mouffe suggests is necessary for a more inclusive urban politics. The politics of value resides in the struggle for legitimacy of particular regimes of value; not just to determine economic value, but to define what value is, and how different values dominate, encompass or otherwise relate to one another. This moral politics approach, via value theory, provides one way of tracing an ethical urbanism that exists between conflict and consensus. It allows us to reframe the central challenge of agonistic pluralism as the transition from antagonistic positions, marked by moral intransigence and immutability, towards more flexible value positions that allow 'adversaries' to enter into a viable agonistic politics.

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Introduction

Urban planning, and urban development more broadly, is an arena of persistent and often intense contestation as different parties pursue various visions of appropriate development. In an attempt to mitigate against a narrow focus on economic growth, urban planning has embraced processes of community engagement and participatory planning. Over the last two decades, the urban planning profession in Australia, as in other countries, has been building 'consensus-seeking' models of community engagement into their urban planning practices. There is an established and wide-ranging critique of this approach, which we will not repeat in full here (see Forester, 1989, 1993; Healey, 1992; McAuliffe and Rogers, 2018; Rogers et al., 2017; Sager, 1994). But, by way of summary, consensus-seeking modalities of community engagement are often implicitly, and at times explicitly, drawn from Habermas (1984, 1987), assuming that a very diverse group of social actors can come together and agree on certain short- and/or long-term planning development visions for the future city. While Habermas' intention was to provide an empirically valid philosophical account of social action, one that brings together philosophy and the applied focus of the social sciences, there is growing recognition that ideals of consensus built on truthful communication, which are at the core of new models of participatory planning, are inadequate (see Fainstein, 2010; Healey, 2003; Hillier, 2003; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; Legacy et al., 2014; MacCallum, 2008; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). As Mark Purcell (2009) asserts,

> What the neoliberal project requires are decision-making practices that are widely accepted as 'democratic', but that do not (or cannot) fundamentally challenge the existing relations of power. Communicative planning, insofar as it is rooted in communicative action, is just such a decision-making practice. (p. 141)

Where these participatory planning processes are utilised, they are often based on a limited reading of Habermas' communicative theory whereby we might eliminate conflict in planning and urban development through rational argumentation leading to consensus. Through processes of consensus-seeking, what makes a particular case of urban development 'appropriate' is the agreement of the different parties involved in a shared process of decision making. Consensus became, for a time, the 'holy grail' of participatory planning with visions of 'the good city' to be realised through rational negotiation; 'the good city' thus conceived becomes a product of practical reason.

In contrast to consensus-seeking approaches that seek to remove conflict from planning and urban development, we support the case for moving beyond consensus politics by engaging in a more agonistic approach to negotiations over urban development. Like others (e.g. Bond, 2011; Yamamoto, 2017), we recognise the persistence of conflict and agree that consensus-seeking politics, in its efforts to remove conflict from planning, has

contributed to a post-political spatial governance where conflict is more carefully choreographed to suit the neoliberalising conditions of contemporary urban governance (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012: 89; see also Fainstein, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2011). The processes themselves become post-political as they feign genuine inclusionary politics whist yielding to power structures that work against such politics (McGuirk, 2001). Conflict remains present but its effects are nullified by democratic processes as powerful actors 'get their way', which helps explain the increasing disillusionment with consensus-seeking approaches.

Our position is that conflict is persistent because what is morally right cannot be reduced to a universal notion of morality. That is, there is no single universal morality to which all moral positions can be distilled.[1] Following this, there is no one good city, but rather a plurality of good cities, each of which could be considered morally right; and it is the unequal distribution of power that tends to determine which vision of the city prevails. Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism presents a forceful critique of consensus politics through consideration of the persistence of conflict. Her pluralist politics, drawn from Gramsci's neo-Marxist interpretation of hegemony, brings to the fore the persistent role of power that is somewhat sidelined in consensus politics. However, this productive analytical frame provides less insight into the motivations that inform plural subject positions in the working through of power. That is, for the purposes of the discussion of contestations over urban development, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism focuses more on the contested politics than the ethical underpinnings of different actors that inform their conceptions of the good city. But Mouffe's plural politics might engage more forcefully, we suggest, with the plural values that underpin the different subject positions that are in conflict, to better clarify the potential of agonistic pluralism in planning and urban development. More specifically, we argue for value pluralism (Berlin, 2002; Kekes, 1993) as a way to better understand the nature of persistent antagonism, and the transition from antagonism to agonism in the agonistic politics of Mouffe. Better understanding the function of agonistic pluralism *in praxis* will contribute to our understanding of an ethical urbanism that is tied to the sometimes-competing visions of the good (Amin, 2006; Friedmann, 2000) or just city (Fainstein, 2010).

In line with the theme of this special issue, below we first summarise the argument for a post-consensus focus on conflict in the form of agonistic pluralism before detailing how a more efficacious engagement with value (and values) provides a way of better understanding how the negotiation of conflicts over urban development occurs. We deploy theories of value, and value pluralism in particular, in order to provide insight into the limits of contemporary planning politics in Sydney, Australia, and present one possible pathway to a broader ontological framing of a pluralist democratic politics. This engagement with theories of value not only informs a more applied approach to Mouffe's agonistic politics, it contributes more broadly to theoretical understandings of the politics of value in urban development.

Moving beyond consensus: pursuing political pluralism

Responding to the 'consensus-seeking' moment in participatory planning, recent scholarship has drawn on Mouffe's (1993, 2005) concept of agonistic pluralism to challenge, from

a number of angles, the consensus-seeking epistemology of communicative rationality within participatory planning (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; McClymont 2011, 2014; Pløger, 2004; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). Mouffe (Castles, 1998) presents agonistic pluralism as, 'a new way to think about democracy which is different from its traditional liberal conception of democracy as a negotiation among interests' (p. 1). In contrast to consensus, which can only be achieved once people put aside their particular interests and think as rational beings, Mouffe states that we must always allow for the possibility that conflict may appear and 'provide an arena where differences can be confronted. The democratic process should supply that arena' (Mouffe, in Castles, 1998: 1).

Agonistic pluralism provides a useful way of thinking through the limitations of contemporary consensus politics in community engagement and participation in urban development. Where consensus politics is ultimately concerned with eliminating conflict in the form of antagonisms between different actors, through rational argumentation, to reach the best possible agreement between parties, Mouffe counters that antagonism cannot be eliminated from social relations. These antagonisms are fundamental and persistent and form the basis of 'proper political questions' that always[2] involve decision making between conflicting alternatives. A key goal of this pluralist politics is to transform antagonistic positions, which Mouffe presents as an unproductive contestation 'between enemies', into more productive agonistic positions 'between adversaries'. That is, in order to achieve more meaningful democratic engagement within the context of persistent disagreement, it is necessary to transform antagonisms into agonisms.

The sense in which agonism is productive is tied to Mouffe's differentiation between 'the political' and 'politics'.[3] The political is the antagonistic dimension which is 'inherent to all human societies' (Mouffe, 2013: 2) and is the site of unproductive contestations marked by an absence of respect for the divergent positions of others (cf. Bond, 2011 and Hillier, 2003). It is the site of unproductive contestations 'between enemies'. In contrast, agonism represents the dimension of politics, which is 'the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organise human coexistence' (Mouffe, 2013: 2–3). Agonism is thus a manifestation of mutual respect across difference (Bond, 2011: 170; Hillier, 2003; also Sennett, 2003).[4] It is the dimension of contestation between 'adversaries' or 'friendly enemies', where plural positionality is bent towards a negotiated social outcome. It is the commitment to determine (a new) social order from divergent positions that nevertheless recognises the persistence of plurality. Thus, for Mouffe, the dimension of politics represents an advance on the conditions of the political, where difference does not disable the commitment to work through and produce social outcomes. Those who remain in the antagonistic dimension remain outside of 'politics' and therefore unable to effect productive change.

A central tenet of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is the contingent nature of the negotiated outcomes of democratic processes. For Mouffe, any social order is the product of the arrangement of power relations between antagonistic parties and, as such, is a temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Drawing on a Gramscian notion of hegemony (see also Laclau and Mouffe, 1986), any negotiated social outcome remains susceptible to challenge from counter-hegemonic discourses and practices, which attempt to disarticulate it in an effort to install another form of hegemony (i.e. a new set of dominant power relations). The contingent nature of hegemony underpins the need for

parties to remain 'in politics' even if they disagree with the current social and/or political outcome. By committing to ongoing agonistic engagement, a stakeholder may be able to play a more substantive role in the articulation of any subsequent rearrangement of relations of power which leads to a new hegemonic outcome (e.g. a different urban development outcome).

Mouffe points to the transition from antagonism to agonism as a way of achieving a more effective democratic politics. In the context of urban planning, moving from antagonism to agonism is a way of productively entering urban development politics and being involved in the articulation of relations of power that surround the development. While Mouffe calls on us to move beyond a consensus politics, by theorising a move from an antagonistic to an agonistic politics, her conceptual work provides little instruction as to how we might actually enact such a transition *in praxis*. Mouffe was more concerned with the 'multiple moments of decision within a context of incessant contestation' (Bond, 2011: 172), than with our concern here, which is about theorising the move from antagonism to agonism *in praxis*. While there is an emerging body of literature on the potential of agonistic pluralism for planning (e.g. McClymont, 2014; Mouat et al., 2013), there is little empirical knowledge about the conditions that might precipitate a transition from antagonism to agonism in the urban development political sphere on-the-ground in cities (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; cf. Bond, 2011). Providing the theoretical resources to undertake this empirical project is a key task in this article.

Ethical pluralism: towards a politics of value

The political pluralism of Mouffe's model of agonism accounts for the presence of different and often divergent voices in the politics of urban development. It acknowledges the perpetual presence of conflict and the limitations of consensus-seeking politics as a model of liberal rationality. However, the theoretical framing of agonistic pluralism is less useful in identifying the nature of the conflict between different social actors and thus the conditions under which the transition from antagonism to agonism, necessary for a more democratic politics, might occur in practice.

Understanding the values that underpin political positions helps unveil the nature of plural politics by exposing, first, the basis for understanding the ethico-political positions of different political actors, and second, the conditions under which we might see a transition from antagonism to agonism. Before we interrogate these two arguments in support of an analytical frame based on value theory, we note that Mouffe (2013: 8) makes a distinction between moral and political values. This position conforms to the wider problematisation of values as beyond reason and a threat to objective rationality in decision making (Fainstein, 2010; Sayer, 2011). In the absence of adequate democratic institutions, she warns that 'non-negotiable moral values' become the basis of unresolvable antagonistic tension. For Mouffe, this path leads to relativism, whereby moral claims are beyond negotiation and hence may not form the basis of a productive agonism. In contrast, the basis of Mouffe's (2013) pluralism derives from ethico-political values. Ethico-political values or principles, as she also calls them, demand a consensus 'that should inform political association' (p. 8). Political pluralism thus derives from the fact that there will always be different interpretations of these values. Mouffe points to the central

values of liberty and equality that underpin democratic subjectivities. Her model of ago-nism is based in a plural politics, where it is the tension between different conceptions of liberty and equality that produces different and competing political positions. Under the conditions of agonistic engagement, adversaries are opponents with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality for all', while disagreeing over the interpretations of these principles. As she notes,

> Adversaries fight each other because they want their interpretation of the principles to become hegemonic, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position. (Mouffe, 2013: 7)

If agonism represents the shared commitment between parties to a social outcome in spite of their fundamental antipathies, then one way of apprehending the presence of agonism is through understanding the nature of this shared commitment. Mouffe (2013: 15–18) presents these shared principles that form the basis of mutuality (Bond, 2011) on which agonistic engagement depends as both ethical and political, but at the same time decries the incursion of ethics into politics. Mouffe privileges a political interpretation, in that democratic institutions built on liberty and equality provide the possibility for a range of interpretations of these universal ethico-political values that inform political association. At the same time, she warns that in the absence of clearly differentiated democratic political positions through which different ideas can be contested, demo-cratic confrontations 'will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identification' (Mouffe, 2013: 7). She points to the rigid morality of religion where values are seemingly immovable, as informing an unproduc-tive relativism that precludes the possibility of productive agonistic engagement, instead fostering persistent unproductive antagonism. For Mouffe, ethics in the absence of poli-tics produces relativism, which precludes mutuality and guarantees antagonism between enemies who are unable to 'sublimate' to a state of agonism (Mouffe, 2013: 7–9).

While we are sensitive to this critique – of a reliance on ethics in the absence of poli-tics producing the conditions of relativism – our position differs somewhat to Mouffe's. We feel there is more to be learnt from the values that underpin decision making. Mouffe is perhaps here too quick to dismiss the full range of values that undergird political engagement on the grounds that certain values are merely subjective and thus 'beyond reason' (see Sayer, 2011). Rather than starting from the position that moral values are beyond reason and necessarily relativistic, in line with the separation of facts and values that animates modernity (see Olsen and Sayer, 2009), we follow Andrew Sayer (2011) in noting that not only do values 'matter' when thinking about the drivers of political con-testation, but that our values are often the product of reasoning; they are derived from a reasonable consideration of the working of our social and material worlds. Looking at the values that form the basis of decisions goes beyond noting that we are riven by fun-damental antagonisms, to attempt to account for *why* people choose to argue and fight for their political positions. As Sayer (2011) notes, paying more attention to values is not merely a subjective folly, but helps to uncover the reasons people commit to a particular position, and through this help us to better understand why these contestations matter to people. Unfortunately, the tendency to see values as subjective and beyond reason means

that the values that drive individuals, groups and institutions are often sidelined in our efforts to understand contestation and politics.

In order to better understand the contested politics that swirl around our changing cities, we posit the presence of complex and multiple values driving engagement (or disengagement) with the formal politics of urban development, where ethics based on practical reason informs action in a range of ways. That is, ethics in the form of values is not merely rigid and immovable, forming the basis of antagonism. Rather than situating our analysis in a monist or universalist ethics, where values are reducible to a single universal, or a normative pluralism based on the tension between different bearers of political value (liberty and equality, in Mouffe's case), we pursue a more plural and relational notion of ethics. We advance our conceptual argument here through an appeal to a more radical ethical pluralism, and particularly the value pluralism of Isaiah Berlin (2002; see also Kekes, 1993; Stocker, 1990) and the relational ethics of care derived from the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (1984; see also Held, 2006). Where Mouffe dismisses ethical or value-based approaches, we feel that value pluralism need not necessarily lead to a relativist dead-end, but can support a more comprehensive pluralist ontology that can help us better conceptualise and, ultimately, analyse processes of community participation in urban development. Plural and relational approaches to ethics offer new ways of thinking through and engaging with the plural values that underpin and influence the negotiation of plural politics. Value pluralism, as framed by Berlin (2002), determines that there is a plurality of radically distinct or incommensurable values. For Berlin (2002), plural values that are not easily reconciled exist simultaneously *within and between* individuals. This stands in contrast to universalist, or monist, value systems that profess to form the basis of all other values (e.g. justice within Habermas' rational consensus; see also Fainstein, 2010).

Where Mouffe sees the source of conflict in political pluralism as a product of the different interpretations of ethico-political principles, Berlin's value pluralism positions the source of pluralism in the fundamental differences of values between individuals.[5] The presence of plural values within the individual provides the potential for textuality, discontinuity and difference in the narratives of value applied in different contexts (from Spivak, in Eiss and Pedersen, 2002: 285). Such a reading of value theory through value pluralism resists the reductive imperative often attributed to Karl Marx and his interpreters (e.g. see Junankar, 1982), allowing for a more open and ambivalent set of relations of value both within and between individuals. Importantly, taking a value pluralism approach provides the seeds of a politics of value founded in the tensions between the different conceptualisations of value held within and between different actors. Just as the political, for Mouffe, is the realm of persistent antagonism, the contestations implicit in a pluralist framing of value provides an ethical approach suffused with political intention that avoids the worst of Mouffe's fears. Rather than leading us into a relativistic bind, as we shall see below, value pluralism provides the possibility for negotiation over values, providing the basis for a politics of value. Through better understanding the way we negotiate our plural values we can discern the way individuals, groups and institutions negotiate the moral territory that marks their difference, and how they draw connections across difference in order to work together to achieve social outcomes. Thus, we suggest that deploying value pluralism to inform a politics of value helps us to better understand transitions from antagonism to

agonism and therefore provides the basis for the development of more applied approaches to democratic engagement through agonistic pluralism.

In the next section, we flesh out this argument, drawing first on anthropologists' work on the politics of value (and values). We then briefly consider the way the ethics of care – as a relational value theory – can be mobilised in order to think through the different ways stakeholders approach the ethics of participation and the way their values influence the negotiation of the politics of community participation and engagement in urban development.

Theorising an urban politics of value

Theories of value remain surprisingly under-explored in the social sciences (Eiss and Pedersen, 2002; Graeber, 2001 2013; Sayer, 2011), with discussion often limited to classical and neoclassical debates about the fundamental worth of something that can be universalised in markets of exchange. Much of the work interpreting Marx has been consumed with the 'transformation problem', attempting to better understand how the labour theory of value might derive the prices of commodities from the value of labour.[6] Here, the discussion of value is not about accounting for or deducing the absolute value of urban phenomena. This has long been a project of classical and then neoclassical theories of value, where the aim has been, ultimately, to find universal and comparative frameworks through which value could be understood, and through this render with clarity the processes of use and exchange that mark fundamental economic relations. Ours is not an economic argument about value, although economic considerations are not absent and provide momentum to our argument. Rather, drawing on value pluralism, ours is an argument about the plural and incommensurable nature of value as it is deployed and realised, and how we might utilise interpretations of value (and values) to produce a better understanding of the arrangements of power at work in urban development contexts.

In his call for a more central role for value theory, anthropologist David Graeber (2013) notes, 'in a very real sense, anthropology could be said to have emerged around questions of value, and such questions have remained just below the surface of just about every important theoretical debate'(pp. 219–220). Despite this, he concedes that questions of value have made little impact in anthropology and the social sciences more generally. Drawing on the work of Turner, Graeber's attempt to produce an anthropological value theory widens the purview from a Marxist focus on the labour theory of value to consider those 'values' that resist commoditization. Value is for Graeber a social relation, in that it can only be known in relation to the way it is seen by another person. Typically, we tend to use the term 'value' when something is able to be commoditized in a way that replaces its social or labour value with a market value. In contrast, we use 'values' when we are talking about something that cannot be commodified in markets of exchange (i.e. it cannot be reduced to some equivalence, say its economic value, that allows it to be readily compared and exchanged). Rather than ignoring those values that resist being brought to market, Graeber (2013) notes that the 'value of "values" … lies precisely in their lack of equivalence; they are seen as unique, crystallized forms. They cannot or should not be converted into money. Nor can they be precisely compared to one another' (p. 224). At the same time, we do make

comparisons and decisions based on the relative value of values. In spite of the difficulty of comparing values, in our everyday lives we constantly make decisions on the basis of values that privilege one choice over another. Just as Appadurai (1986) points to the ambivalence that surrounds the social valuations of ritual items, which informs ties of reciprocity in gift exchange, Graeber notes that the different social interpretations of values (such as truth, justice and beauty) form the basis of choices, decisions and, ultimately, political contestations.

To account for the presence of incommensurable values, Appadurai (1986) develops the analytical frame of *regimes of value*, which resist the reductive imperative of classical and neoclassical value theories in order to provide a theoretical container for different and incommensurable valuations. A particular regime of value forms the context within which some valuation can be understood. As applied to material goods, regimes of value allow for differences in cultural understanding of the value of a given commodity, where culture is understood as a bounded and localised system of meanings (Appadurai, 1986: 15). When a commodity transcends cultural boundaries, there is the opportunity for misalignment of value. In these cases, the social value attributed to the commodity shifts between regimes of value. For Appadurai, value is realised as a commodity shifts from one regime of value to another. For example, drawing on the Kula Ring in classical anthropology, where ritual gift exchange between the islands of Melanesia produces ties of mutuality based on indebtedness and obligation, when a ritual item, such as a shell necklace, moves from one island to another, the understanding of the value shifts with its cultural context. It moves from one regime of value to another, and through this value is realised, which becomes the basis of mutual relations and reciprocity. The realisation of value in the social life of commodities associated with the movement across cultural contexts presents, for Appadurai, (1986: 56–57), the opportunity for a range of political contestations. Graeber develops this relationship between value and politics further, extending his anthropological theory of value beyond the commodity (Graeber, 2001, 2005, 2013). He expresses this through his inclusion of value and values in his theory of value. Like Appadurai, he refers to value spheres as theoretical 'universes' from within which different and incommensurable values are understood. As value is social for Graeber (2013), 'it is always a comparison; value can only be realised in other people's eyes' (p. 226). As such, value must always have an audience. In this way, spheres of value are only understood through their relationship to audiences. The inability to easily reconcile value across spheres of value ensures that, 'the ultimate stakes of political life tend to lie precisely in negotiating how these values and arenas will ultimately relate to one another' (Graeber, 2013: 226). Thus, the politics of value resides in the struggle for legitimacy of particular regimes or spheres of value. It is always ultimately about the attempt to privilege a particular value sphere as the hegemonic mode of valuation; not just a process to accumulate value, but to define what value is, and how different values dominate, encompass or otherwise relate to one another (Graeber, 2013: 228).

Rather than deriving the basis of antagonisms in the different interpretations of fundamental political concepts like equality and liberty, value pluralism derives its pluralism from the meaning ascribed to different regimes of value. Value pluralism is thus tied to those things 'that matter to people' (Sayer, 2011). Rather than being tied to universal

abstractions, values conceived in such a way are more intimate, avoiding where possible abstraction from the objects of concern to people. These values animate a plural ethics of care that is messy, locally felt and incommensurable across the regimes of value that are of importance to us; that help us understand our moral worlds and political actions. Such an accounting of ethical pluralism helps us to better appreciate the difficulties we face in negotiating the ethics of everyday life. Value pluralism provides the possibility of dynamic interpretations of moral problems, allowing us to develop the justifications and rationales for the values we hold, and where these are inconsistent, to change the way we orient ourselves to regimes of value. Furthermore, understanding that there are plural and incommensurable values present *within* the individual allows us to account for the tendency of people to shift the emphasis of their morality to fit the conditions they face in the complex everyday. In line with a feminist ethics of care approach, rather than having a totalising vision of the way our values translate into actions, we fit our values to actions in a more relational way.

Importantly, the presence of plural and incommensurable regimes of value does not guarantee that an individual, group or social organisation recognises the complexity of a plural morality. Where a regime of value solidifies for a particular audience as the fundamental ethical framing of their moral world, irrespective of the presence of other internally consistent regimes of value, relativism may occur. It is not that other regimes of value are not present, but for those where particular values become the source of a relativistic view of the world, these alternate moral frames are rendered subordinate to the primary regimes of value, or in the worst case, not recognised as ethically legitimate at all.

Mouffe is concerned that ethical pluralism necessarily leads us to unproductive relativism, where non-negotiable morals form the basis of irreconcilable subjective claims that limit the possibility of agonistic politics. Berlin, in his objectivist value pluralism, provides an account of the nature of value, but provides less detail about what we do when faced with incommensurable values. He is concerned more with demonstrating that we should not follow a single overarching criterion when making judgements. Valid decisions about good outcomes from the conflict of incommensurable values can be made, according to Berlin, through the application of practical reason, grounded in a full appreciation of the context of the decision. In this way, he avoids claims of relativism when choosing between 'ultimate values'.[7]

Susan Fainstein's (2010) consideration of a more ethical approach to the politics of urban development, in her book, *The Just City*, also provides a response to the critique of relativism. She appeals initially to value pluralism in the form of the ethics of care as the way to progress towards a more just city. However, Fainstein appeals to an ethics of care that has as its guiding framework an undergirding universal value system of social justice. While a relational ethics of care provides a means by which we can conceptualise a plural and dynamic ethics, the position we take forward here conforms more closely to Berlin's foundational pluralism. The ethics of care approach of Fainstein is compelling, particularly given we are interested in the working through of plural values *in praxis*; that is, in the politics of plural values. However, we do not feel that Fainstein's monist appeal to social justice is workable *in praxis*. In short, the contestation over different visions of the good city need not spiral around a foundational vision of the just city.

Towards a new politics of the city: the politics of value

As stated above, it is our contention that through consideration of the plural values that underpin contestations we can better understand the conditions that might facilitate a productive agonistic politics. To do this we need to recognise first that values are not merely subjective interests, but *may* have a basis in reason; second, that such reasoning about values does not necessarily lead to a reductive universal value, but instead involves a more partial and contingent process of evaluating practical reason that produces plural values within and between individuals, groups and institutions; and that such plural values may cohere as regimes or spheres of value that have internal consistency for particular audiences, but that may remain incommensurable with other regimes of value. Bringing this conceptualisation of value pluralism into engagement with the political pluralism of Mouffe provides the potential for better understanding and analysis of the conditions under which antagonism takes place and, more importantly, the conditions that lead from an unproductive antagonism to a productive agonistic pluralism.

By unsettling the fact-value dualism we are not making the claim that all values are factual or 'reasonable' (Sayer, 2011: 63–65), but rather making the less ambitious claim that not all values are beyond reason. Certain values are open to claims of being unreasonable, based on mere subjective interest and ultimately the potential source of relativism. Where plural values tend towards a reductive relativism in the understanding of an individual, group or organisation, this may inform a persistent antagonism that resists transformation into a productive agonism. This *rigid antagonism* reflects a position typically underpinned by moral intransigence, where antagonism denies plurality and privileges a political position based on non-negotiable moral values. It tends towards a reductive moral framing of social interactions and outcomes. Where there is a failure to recognise the ontological status of value pluralism, there exist the conditions for a lack of respect across difference. A lack of respect for other regimes of value ensures an individual, group or organisation is unable to build the ties of mutuality across difference that are a necessary condition of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism.

Conversely, where individuals, groups or institutions recognise the legitimacy of plural regimes of value, we may find the conditions for dynamic engagement across difference. When different actors develop ties of mutuality where both parties respect the values of the other, this leaves room for agonistic negotiation of shared commitment to social outcomes despite the differing complex of values that define both parties. In its ideal form this leads to a productive agonistic pluralism. Unlike the case for Habermas' theoretical moment of consensus, which is built on the appearance of an ideal speech moment where powerful forces are momentarily neutralised and rationality reigns supreme, at the core of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is the recognition that uneven power relations remain, but that a commitment to mutual respect can operate to secure particular social outcomes in spite of difference.

Beyond these two more ideal forms of antagonism and agonistic pluralism, there are two further modalities of antagonism that represent partial commitments to a productive agonistic politics. These more partial modalities represent the degrees of transition from antagonism to agonism. In both cases, these partial transitions from antagonism to agonism relate to the power of one of the parties to a negotiation being able to exert agency

in the expression of their desires within the negotiation. That is, whether they are able to deploy both discursive and material power to get their way, to achieve a 'best fit' of the social outcome to their values.

In the case of these partial transitions from antagonism to agonism, different parties are seeking to achieve an outcome that best fits their values and are willing to negotiate their position. What differentiates the parties is their underlying values and their ability to prosecute their case within the bounds of a political engagement. This ability relates to the discursive and material power that a party is able to wield within the nascent structures of political engagement. Those who lack the power to adequately prosecute their case but remain committed to the process of negotiating a social outcome enter a mode of *soft antagonism*, where they are less able to have their values considered in the negotiated social outcome. Alternatively, those who lack power in a negotiation across values may seek to deploy alternate forms of power outside the bounds of a political engagement in their attempts to see their values adequately internalised in the social outcome. Here, a less powerful party inhabits a mode of *strategic antagonism*.

In order to illustrate how this theoretical framing might inform an urban politics of value in praxis, we turn to a case study of resident action groups (RAGs) involved in the contestations over urban development in Sydney.[8] Participants took part in focus groups[9] discussing the motivations for their political projects (why these projects mattered to them), and the range of ways they sought to influence the politics of urban development. These RAG members routinely identified the values underpinning their political positions, as well as the regimes of value that motivated the thoughts and actions of individual members. These regimes of value were also deployed to frame the moral positions of the groups that the individuals sought to represent. Through an analysis of the plurality of values within and between individuals and groups, we were able to identify how incommensurable differences in values formed the basis of irretrievable contestation or led to more agonistic negotiation. The value statements of individuals helped to align the plural values at work in these contestations over urban developments in Sydney with different modalities of antagonism in our theoretical model.

For example, the rigid antagonisms identified in our focus groups, particularly in the smaller and more recently formed single-issue RAGs, were typified by a reductive moral intransigence that framed urban development as an encroachment on the normative landscapes of the local community. In our research, the moral resistance to urban development demonstrated by such actors was evidenced by references to these new developments as being 'bad' or 'wrong'. There were several instances across the focus groups where newer single-issue groups, typically involving one or two primary residents who were directly impacted by the proposed development, framed the contestation as a zero-sum 'fight' or 'battle'. For these RAGs, giving any ground in the battle against the imposition of change in the form of new urban development would unsettle the normative construction of the local community. It would be an affront that ran counter to their understanding of the moral geographies of the local community. As such, their rigid antagonism reflected their inability or unwillingness to enter into a discussion about the plural moral positions of the various actors. This observation confirmed Mouffe's warnings of the dangers of moral relativism, whereby these single-issue groups had entered a relativist

dead-end, a position that invariably led to their tacit exclusion from the politics of the urban development affecting them.

The rigid antagonism of these single-issue groups privileged a singular moral framing of the local community and denied the legitimacy of alternate values and valuations that might be held by other stakeholders. The result observed in the focus groups was an inflexible denial of the plurality of voices, and an insistence that their position was the 'right' position and, furthermore, that the impending urban development was 'wrong' – whether that meant morally 'wrong' for the local area, or simply an inappropriate model of urban development per se. In line with Mouffe's conceptualisation of antagonistic politics, these actors tended to frame the politics of urban development as an incursion of 'enemies'. Their rigidly antagonistic position placed them outside of the politics of urban development and saw them collapsed into a stereotypical NIMBY subjectivity.

In contrast, other RAGs demonstrated mutual respect for other parties right to hold different values; a form of meta-respect across difference.[10] The recognition of rights to hold plural values, both within and between individuals and groups, allows groups to negotiate social outcomes that are the product of plural values. For example, a rigidly antagonistic stance may not persist if a group shifts from narrowly defined values towards an acceptance of plural values. One inner suburban RAG developed a plural political stance over time that fostered a plurality of voices and values. They saw themselves as a disseminator of information with the primary aim of pushing for greater government transparency, and they developed a broad remit that would account for, as they describe it, a 'diverse range of voices'. In another case, a well-established group from western Sydney demonstrated a progressive shift from a narrowly defined set of values towards a broader engagement with urban development issues. In this case, the group was originally tied to an 'environmental' regime of value (e.g. the environmental movement), but had developed more recently into a group more concerned with urban development, more generally framed. Within this shift reside a politics of value; this group's transition towards a more plural set of values led to a split within the group's membership, with some remaining tied to the original value framing of environmentalism and splitting off to form a new group, while the core of self-described 'experienced members' widened the purview of the groups' concerns to better suit the new urban development context.

Some rigidly antagonistic groups were drawn into alliances with larger groups, where their singular perspective and voice was drawn into a plural coalition operating within the broader politics of urban development. In these cases, we observed a nested set of antagonisms, where a political action (e.g. a media intervention, or a protest) might have different meaning or 'value' for different members of the larger coalition – with some seeing it as a performance of rigid antagonism, while others ascribing a more agonistic reading to the event. In these cases, the more recently formed single-issue groups, who were otherwise defined by their rigid moral framing, obtained a wider perspective via their exposure to different groups. Some members even gained an appreciation of other perspectives and urban development values in the process. The transition in this case was from a more universal framing of ethics bound to a sense of moral affront, which was a response to the potential development, towards the recognition (and in some cases acceptance) of a plural set of values that were at work in the operation of urban development politics. Thus, bringing these single-issue RAGs into engagement with larger

groups with a more nuanced appreciation of the complexity of urban development, in some cases, led to a shift in the understanding of the competing values at work in urban development for the rigid antagonists.

This, in our view, is an essential move in the transition from rigid antagonism towards a more agonistic position. Other single-issue groups in our research failed to recognise the legitimacy of other value positions in the politics of particular urban developments. For these typically smaller and more newly formed groups, a sense of moral outrage continued to fuel their rigid antagonism. However, maintaining a rigidly antagonistic stance typically led to these actors feeling frustrated with the politics of their urban development because they were unable to effect change. Maintaining a rigid antagonistic stance influenced access to Mouffe's 'politics', with these individuals and groups failing to pursue the possibility of mutuality with those with the power to effect change (government officials at different levels; politicians; developers, etc.). In other words, they remained outside of Mouffe's 'politics'.

Furthermore, not all the individuals and groups that expressed a desire to be involved in a more democratic process of engagement, and appeared to understand the politics of completing values, gained entry into the 'politics' of the urban development. Some RAGs used statements that suggested they understood the implications of being open to a negotiation across different values and that this would mean negotiating outcomes among plural actors. Yet these actors felt they were outside the politics and unable to effect change in the current political power structure guiding urban development. These actors inhabited Mouffe's conception of the political but remained outside the politics of urban development. As such, they inhabited the partial modality of soft antagonism, being commitment to an outcome that is the negotiated outcome of plural values, but unable, despite their desire, to impact the politics of urban development through agonistic discourse and practice. Some recognised the reason they remained unable to impact the politics of urban development despite a desire to commit to work with local and state government actors to produce a negotiated urban outcome was due to persistent antagonism of powerful actors in the development process. Therefore, despite their desire to enter into a mutually respectful engagement with other parties, and to push forward a collaborative democratic urban agenda, they appeared to be sidelined by more powerful institutions and actors who were not willing to accord them the same respect in return.

Other individuals and RAGs, when faced with unequal relations of power within the bounds of the formal politics of community engagement and participation, strategically moved between the inside and outside of these formal processes, in their attempts to exert influence. This strategic antagonism manifested in a number of ways (see McAuliffe and Rogers, 2018; Rogers et al., 2017). Some groups directly lobbied Local or State government politicians, or drew on existing social capital with powerful actors outside of the officially sanctioned processes of community engagement to mobilise a political campaign. Others published commentaries or gained exposure in local or metropolitan media in an attempt to strategically influence urban developments. Others sought more direct influence through election to local government, or mobilised direct action in the form of protests. Whatever approach these RAGs took in their attempts to influence the politics of urban development, those who demonstrated a more strategic form of antagonism (which is really a form of agonism) were wary not to overstep in such a way that

they would alienate themselves from what they perceived to be the politics of urban development. These groups recognised the importance of maintaining civil and professional relationships with key planning bureaucrats at local government level, even as they sought to directly influence the politics through lobbying the local council's political arm. This was one way they respected the different values of competing stakeholders in order to maintain the mutuality required for an agonistic commitment to a shared social outcome.[11]

In this way, some groups expressed a degree of agency in the face of inequalities of power and access in their decision to operate antagonistically in order to further their political agenda. This choice to revert back to antagonism, as a political strategy, would be viewed as a regression under a strictly Mouffarian conception of urban politics, and it is only by interrogating the different regimes of value that underwrite this politics that a better appreciation of the actions of the RAGs is garnered.

Conclusion

In this article, we considered the role of value pluralism in thinking about urban development, and more particularly, in thinking through the politics of participatory planning. We argue that rather than situating analyses of urban development in a monist or universalist ethics, where values are reducible to a single universal (e.g. human rights), or a normative pluralism based on the tension between different bearers of political value (e.g. liberty and equality), we argue that a plural, regimes of value, approach to understanding the inherent conflict in urban development will help us make better sense of the complex empirical realities in our cities.

We provide here the building blocks for a politics of value, through which we might better understand urban decision making, without feeling the need to reduce the value of urban phenomena to some universal currency. The presence of plural values within and between individuals, groups and institutions provides the basis for antagonistic subject positions. At the same time, it is the respect for plurality that provides the grounds for mutual respect across difference that is necessary for agonistic pluralism. The identification of the different regimes of value in operation, for example, as environmentalism, human rights or a zero-sum localism in our Sydney case study of community participation in urban development processes, and the different audiences who variously subscribe to these regimes of value, provide insights into rigid, soft and strategic antagonisms, which serve to illustrate the entrenched antagonisms and successful agonistic engagements in the politics of urban development. Importantly, this approach provides new ways of understanding the moments of transition from one to the other through analysis of the values that underpin contestations and the moments of mutuality that may arise from the recognition of value pluralism in the self and others.

We provide initial insights into a 'value pluralism as method' approach to the seemingly intractable political contestation that formulate around urban development. We are therefore using Mouffe as a critique of urban planning and development practice, rather than as a guide that might be used to inform future urban planning and development models. This is a critique of the way the 'potential of conflict' has been theorised, and a call to theorise political contestation not only through Mouffe's political pluralism

but also through theories of value pluralism. While Mouffe dismisses ethical or value-based approaches, our research shows that value pluralism need not necessarily lead to a relativist dead-end. Indeed, theories of value can inform a more comprehensive pluralist ontology to better conceptualise and analyse processes of community participation in urban development.

In order to better understand what might precipitate the shift from antagonism to agonism in the politics of urban development *in praxis*, it is helpful to discuss what we mean when we talk about 'value' and 'values'. Anthropological theories of value take us beyond economic theories of labour value, use and exchange, to consider the broader social and cultural context within which value and values are derived. Both Graeber and Appadurai commit to a value pluralism that contrasts universalist or monist approaches to value. They do this not to disable comparability, but to enable new ways of thinking about the way we value phenomena that are not reducible purely to their 'worth' in a system of market exchange. This provides us with ways to analyse and respond to multiple, diverse and incommensurable valuations of urban phenomena. Through investigation of different regimes or spheres of value, and the nature of the 'universes' within which these values and valuations makes sense, their analysis helps us understand the nature of antagonism in processes of community engagement and participation in planning and urban development. By identifying the plural values that drive community mobilisation and the politics of community engagement, we can observe and map how a politics of values is tied to the transition from antagonism to agonism.

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Notes

1. This philosophical position relates to the post-foundational philosophy of Isaiah Berlin and others, which will be discussed in the latter half of the article.
2. Yamamoto (2017) recently challenged the ontological status of Mouffe's antagonism. We will not deal directly with that argument here, but note that Mouffe does not hold that all relations of difference are antagonistic. Rather, she suggests that all identities are relational (the product of a relationship to the constitutive outside) and thus have the potential to produce antagonistic us/them relations in the form of friend/enemy (see also Bond, 2011: 167–168).
3. On post-foundationalism and the discussion of 'the political', see section 'Introduction' in Marchart (2009).
4. Mutual respect across difference differs from Habermas' (1987) mutual understanding borne of communicative action, which impels us towards the erasure of difference and the realisation of social consensus.
5. Mouffe's rejection of liberal individualism as the source of pluralism aligns with her general critique of liberalism. She sees liberal individualism as an inadequate source of group or

communal identities within political deliberations. Berlin's (2002) value pluralism allows for multiple values both within *and between* individuals, which provides the basis for both individual and group identification.

6. A purpose for which Marx never intended his labour theory of value to be used (Eiss and Pedersen, 2002: 284). See also Graeber (2013: 222–224).

7. In Berlin's *objective value pluralism*, ultimate values are those plural values that have a universal relevance to human beings, foremost of which for him was the value of liberty. See also Crowder (2015) and Nussbaum (2000)'s central human capabilities.

8. For a more detailed consideration of the empirical case study and the development of the modalities of antagonism discussed in this section, see McAuliffe and Rogers (2018) and Rogers et al. (2017).

9. This research involved four focus groups: two with participants from eastern Sydney and two with participants from western Sydney. The participants in the focus groups represented more than 30 resident action groups, non-government organisations and other less formal community collectives operating across metropolitan Sydney (see Rogers et al., 2017).

10. Crowder's (2014) 'conceptual' value pluralism provides that all values are intrinsically good in some way, making a claim on us to respect them. This does not preclude choosing between values, as 'one can respect a value even when one chooses against it' (p. 132). As in the choices made between capabilities in Nussbaum's (1990) work, choice between different values should be done 'with regret rather than indifference or recklessness' (pp. 63–66), in Crowder, 2014: 133). This effort to respect across incommensurable values forms what Crowder calls the *respect for plurality*, which we are here noting behaves like a form of meta-respect.

11. It is worth noting that strategic antagonism tends to configure resistance as negotiation, reproducing the normative stance that negotiation is more 'productive' than resistance. Resistance is thus limited to its value in furthering negotiation within the formal politics of urban development, rather than its ability to inform a new hegemony. This is enough when dealing with actors who lack the power to enforce change. However, more powerful actors, such as large developers, may be able to productively use resistance to destabilise the current hegemony.

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