

Editorial: Curating 'dialogue' and evidencing topological reach

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Here we are, only three issues in, and I am already circling back to our starting point – revisiting *dialogue* – what it means and how it happens, and more specifically what my role as an editor is in facilitating and inevitably, curating it. Taking stock of the dialogues enabled thus far through the first few issues of the new journal, still finding its footings within the publication cycle, and gaining recognition amongst a core readership, I am immensely proud of what has been delivered and what we have in the pipeline. An impressive collection of thought-provoking forum pieces has taken shape with a growing repository of incisive commentaries – directing the discussions and debates beyond the specialised academic clusters of the 'usual suspects' from urban geography. We have thus far been able, with relative ease, even in the era of a ['broken peer review system'](#), to attract commentaries from a diverse range of scholarship in sociology, geography, urban studies, English, planning, public policy and technology studies; and we are hearing from early and mid-career academics and seminal 'stalwarts' of the sub-disciplinary fields of social science concerned with 'cities', 'urbanism' and the intellectual praxis of 'urban research' and pedagogy. So far, so good.

I have however been reflecting back on Mark Davidson's inaugural editorial for the journal's launch issue wherein he charts "what the 'dialogue' in Dialogues in Urban Research means today" (2023, 5), emphasising how internationalisation, digitization of information and knowledge production and dissemination, and de-universalizing tendencies in urban research has diversified and de-centred academic communities and multiplied the need and value of comparative study that contends with divergence and convergence in intellectual praxis and epistemological projects. The challenge of communicating within, between and across disciplinary lines and specialised academic communities is promoted against a backdrop of inevitable specialization in the philosophical, methodological and pedagogic foundations of urban research. This was, and is, the entry point for the journal. To provide a platform for 'engaged' dialogue via open peer-to-peer conversations, bringing together previously less-conversant perspectives from different academic (and potentially non-academic) communities and specializations, with the aim of breaking through silos or at least interrupting epistemic bubbles.

But herein also lies the challenge for an interdisciplinary journal focused on encouraging dialogue. It seems difficult enough *within* a discipline to 'engage in critical 'closed' dialogues within our specialized communities', let alone meaningfully engage in 'more 'open' dialogues with those working beyond our context' (Davidson 2023: 8). Similar reflections from other journals' editors with cognate remits lends support to my own ruminations. For example, the issue of *Dialogues in Human Geography* Vol 8 No 2, wherein Rose-Redwood et al. (2018) set out their position on 'The possibilities and limits to dialogue' comes immediately to mind. I returned to this issue when I was working with some of the papers and commentaries included in the current issue of Dialogues in Urban Research, finding the contributions particularly useful in confronting how power asymmetries in scholarly dialogue can be redressed. This triggered my own reflections on how successful our efforts to elicit engaged 'dialogues' can be. More directly I questioned how do we know 'dialogue' is happening beyond the pages of the journal, and can and should we gauge the topological reach of our curated dialogues?

Take, for example, this issue's excellent forum paper on aversive racism in gentrification studies (Bloch and Meyer 2023). The paper was positively received by peer reviewers and the commentaries collated herein are deeply engaged with the provocations of the forum, each bringing into the discussion empirically grounded or experiential observations and theoretical elucidations of the appropriateness and potential (in)congruencies of the aversive racism lens for studying displacement beyond dislocation. But, as an editor, it was challenging to secure five commentaries for this forum – with one noteworthy reason for not contributing expressed by several of those invited to participate; a position that I will cautiously refer to as a form of *conscientious disengagement*. My use of this term needs qualifying, for I am not speaking here of the 'dialogical disengagement' in the same sense as detailed by Rose-Redwood et al (2018) and Mott and Cockayne (2018) – as a stance warranted when the conditions of dialogue are untenable, even threatening, such as when dealing with extremist polemics or direct harassment. The type of disengagement I refer to here is a much subtler, benevolent form of voluntary un-involvement, arguably stemming from a genuine ethic of care. This is not a decision based on whether to challenge a contentious theory or viewpoint, but more akin to a quiet affirmation or unspoken consensus for and with the original point of view.

I am gesturing here to the observed practice of conscientiously 'stepping aside' from directly engaging with a debate in order to enable essential critical space for those perceived to be researching *within* a specialised academic community. The forum piece by Bloch and Meyer rightly privileges the value of auto-ethnographic urban research, particularly from a Black geographies methodology, optimising the validation of affective experiential geographies of displacement studies. The agenda for auto-ethnographic voices inherently constrains the appropriateness of the members of the 'old guard' of gentrification studies responding to the forum, but their absence is not without implications. Direct acknowledgment of the interventions (theoretical and methodological) of knowledge produced through agentic and auto-ethnographic urban research must penetrate the intellectual field of projects and research frameworks in order to 'show' rather than 'tell' emergent scholars that the mainstream is *listening*.

Conscientiously declining to engage in a textually mediated dialogue with emergent and under-represented approaches needs to be compensated then by other visible expressions of dialogical engagement. This engagement, in turn, should be measured by more than the quantification of how many, and how *different*, the voices are of those doing the 'speaking'. It is also constituted through actively seeking out, accessing, interpreting, and applying the knowledge and theory generated from the margins. Here is where 'citation matters' (Mott & Cockayne, 2017). Oswin (2020: 13) reminds us of the extent to which citation practices are 'selective and skewed towards established authors, universities, topics and canons.' Citing work emanating from specialised academic communities, particularly those marginalised in mainstream theory needs to appear more often and not only in token nods via lists of indicative references, with little or no elaboration and meaningful application. See Hawthorne and Heintz (2018) for a deeper unpacking the ubiquity of 'superficial or provisional inclusion' (p. 150), that conditions which voices, and intellectual traditions are promoted as 'scholarly and canonical' (ibid). A position echoed in Guma's (2023, this issue) commentary, extolling the

legitimacy of urban theorisation from the Global South, beyond sites of empirical urban research destined to 'travel' north for theoretical validation.

Beyond the textual interchanges in the pages of this journal and others like it, dialogue needs to be taking place in the interstitial spaces of academic exchange – blogs, podcasts, conferences, workshops, meetings, supervisions, dinner parties, etc. Yet activating dialogue, especially evidencing genuine *listening* within, across and between the wider scholarly terrains of interdisciplinary urban research is far more challenging than simply providing the performative platforms that play 'host' to it.

References

Bloch, Stefano and Meyer, Dugan (2023) 'Displacement beyond dislocation: Aversive racism in gentrification studies' *Dialogues in Urban Research*, this issue.

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