

Guido Martinotti

Comment on Sharon Zukin/3. There Is, There Is!

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Comment on Sharon Zukin/3

There Is, There Is!

by Guido Martinotti

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1. Some Intriguing Coincidences

Reading Sharon Zukin's "Is There An Urban Sociology," I was particularly struck by the similarities of experiences in the beginning of our respective careers, despite the vast differences in time and space. I do not want to annoy the reader with a pedantic comparison of my personal beginnings in the field of Urban Sociology, and what Sharon Zukin says of hers, particularly because I share practically all what she writes in her excellent paper, but some points are relevant. We seem to share what was once called a "non prescriptive" career, meaning that we entered this business by a series of haphazardous circumstances. Actually I think that if you look carefully, a lot of things in life turn out to be ruled by pure chance, but we also know many persons who knew pretty soon in their education what they wanted to study.

As it happened with Sharon Zukin, I entered the field by circumstances, mainly by the fact that I was offered research and teaching jobs which were not in the mainstream of my training and (what I thought were at the time) my intellectual interests. When I graduated at the Facoltà di Giurisprudenza, Università degli studi di Milano, in 1960, Sociology was not even a subject in the Law curriculum (nor in other ones). I was not very much interested in the Law family business, and was attracted vaguely by Sociology, which luckily for me was taught (in one of what they were then called "Complementary" courses) by Renato Treves who directed my dissertation on "The

Sociological Interpretations of Fascism.”¹ I had a brief brush with the Law profession because my father died while I was finishing the University and I had to close down his Law business, but at the same time started doing research. I consulted in a newly created think-tank called Ilse, Istituto Lombardo per gli Studi Economici e Sociali, instituted as a planning support by the Center-left new government of the city. It was a brief but interesting experience under the direction of Alessandro Pizzorno, and his then assistant, Laura Balbo. We studied the booming development of Milano in the “Italian Miracle” and we studied immigration – in pure Chicago School style I went around in boarding rooms – mainly from Southern Italy, grass root political participation and the incipient metropolitan development. The latter particularly was my first job [Martinotti 1963; 1993; 1999].

In 1962-64 I got a Harkness Fellowship and studied Sociology in the USA, at Columbia and UCB (1962-1964). At the time ecological analysis was utterly defeated, from the academic point of view. It was just object of scorn, such as Shils’ second-hand *boutade* that, “social ecology was about spending 300.000 dollars to find the location of a brothel.” Everyone was a functionalist, not only in the sense of belonging to the functionalist school proper, but simply because urban sociology is different from all other sociological specializations in that it includes in its analysis a variable (space) which carries with it historicity. Functional analysis can be abstract, space oriented analysis needs some form of “here and now.” Herbert Gans was doing his path-breaking research, but he was in Teacher’s College, and I met him only by chance through a friend. After I came back in 1966 I was offered a job in the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, at the time the only official course of Sociology in Milano. The situation in Architecture, where the 1968 movement had already started at full steam, was quite interesting from my point of view. The students, and large part of the Faculty were utterly dissatisfied with the traditional teaching of Architecture and Planning then in the same Faculty. It was quite clear that the traditional ways of handling the city, despite the great Italian tradition in the field and the fact that most of the best teachers were there, did not stand the largest wave of urbanization in Italian history, in the 1960s. But the new ways came in a hodgepodge of professional, intellectual, and political vocal claims, in a general climate of lots of books read, few understood. Sociology staid in a fuzzy cloud of expectations as the General Problem Solver: it was some kind of dreamlike situation, easily slipping into a nightmare. But again, the professional Columbia style Sociology I was imbued, did not fit these ideological expectations. I was running wild from seminar to sit-in trying

¹ See the re-edition of Renato Treves [2009; 1st ed.1954], and my essay there “Gli italiani sono fascisti ma (forse) non lo sanno.”

to correct the ideological mood and to reinterpret it in more systematic ways, but with little success. To support my course, and my claims, I patched up a reader of the classics in urban social studies [Martinotti 1967].² In the end the entire Faculty came to a standstill as students (and faculties) occupied the premises for months at the time. In any case, albeit in a sort of emergency situation, teaching in a Faculty of Architecture gave me the lucky chance to meet and befriend most of the top architects and planners, with some of whom like Giancarlo De Carlo, and especially Vittorio Gregotti, I continued to work in planning. The coincidences go (and stop) to the point that in the final essay of one of my first books [Martinotti 1966], “Sociologia e Pianificazione urbana,” the second paragraph was titled “La crisi della sociologia urbana,” no need to translate it, I gather. This was before Manuel Castells, and reflected mostly American literature, which was very critical of the field in a pre-Castellsian way. I will not continue a step by step attempt at “parallel lives,” in commenting Zukin’s paper, but I will go my own way and, in the end, we will arrive, I believe, very close. In short, maybe we can provisionally state that Urban sociology, or better urban studies, are a field that attracts a disproportional share of people with a high degree of curiosity, or simply naïve enough to like a field where systematic analysis seems hopelessly out of reach in the highly imbricated worlds of urban realities. At the time my conclusion was optimistic: the field of Urban Sociology was a mess, but the issues to be dealt with by a “possible” Sociology of Cities were relevant. But theory was missing. To quote Don Martindale: “In books dealing with cities one can find almost everything, except the principle on which the city is created. One has the impression of looking Pirandello’s piece “*Sei personaggi in cerca di autore*,” where you can find everything except the unifying criterion. All said and seen, we come back to the initial problem: “what is the city?”³

2. The Question Stands

So the question stands: is there such a thing as Urban Sociology? I do not think it is possible to give one simple answer. If I said “no” I could easily be countered

² In preparing the book, *Città e analisi sociologica* [Martinotti 1967], I relied heavily on the long introduction by Don Martindale to the American translation of Weber’s chapter of *Economy and Society, The city*, translated and edited by Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth [1958]. I do not have the original handy. It was a fast and dirty job, with lots of holes, and I resisted putting Marx into it, in part for simple pigheadedness against the *Zeitgeist*, in part because at the time I thought Marx was an economic writer. But also with some niceties: the great Arnaldo Momigliano, praised my re-take of Fustel de Coulanges. At any rate the book was quite successful in years. *Habent sua sidera* even books.

³ This is a reverse translation, from the quotation in Italian I have in my essay.

with the question: “Is there a Sociology tout court?” And the answer would be embarrassing, starting from the very word itself. We know the name of this discipline was an happenstance, because its most famous inventor⁴ wanted to call it “*la physique social*,” but the logo was under copyright by Alphonse Quetelet, a sort of unusual guy, himself an Astronomer, but in fact a sort of media savvy public intellectual in Social philosophy, demographics, statistics, and psychology in addition to being an important mathematician and astronomer, founder of the Observatory I Brussels. The contraposition between astronomy, the simplest of the sciences, and sociology the most complex, later made⁵ by Comte might not be extraneous to the pique he nurtured toward Quetelet. By the way, in reconstructing the birth of this discipline, the only way to make some sense of their defining process, it is noticeable that Quetelet’s vast popularity among literate upper class, had an important operational effects. One of Quetelet’s aristocratic fans was no less than the Great Dame Florence Nightingale who exploited her high society connections to be sent to the theater of operation in the Dardanelli during the Turkish war. To what delight of the Military Field Command everybody can imagine. But Florence Nightingale was a statistics addict, as a follower of Quetelet, which she produced in beautiful Victorian calligraphies called “coxcombs.” She started washing daily the dirty linen of the troop and with her coxcombs was able to proof to the military the dramatic reduction in mortality by simply fostering minimal hygiene. It is well known that in Nineteenth century wars, as in the Civil War more died of dysentery, cholera and other ailments than from the deadly Enfield carbines. Thus the practical importance of Sociology (of any denomination) was immediately established. The other part of the business, albeit the theoretical aspect, is much more difficult. Saying that Sociology is the Science of Society, is tantamount to repeat in plain words a much contested neologism. Logos means simply the equivalent of Science in a period in which most of the European progressive intellectuality was convinced that all aspects of nature including ourselves could be successfully explored with the same methods that was making “natural” science so fantastically successful. But this left as many answers unanswered as there would be without whatsoever definition: society remains the most intimate and arcane entity we have to deal with, and urban society is nothing less so because it is concretely closer to each of us. Yet there are, I believe, many good reasons why the city (in its manifold facets) is a legitimate object of scientific inquiry from the social point of view.

⁴ Actually apparently the first to coin this term was Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès but this only reinforces my idea that the concept was in the air.

⁵ *Leçons sur la sociologie. Cours de philosophie positive* [1999; 1st ed. 1851], mathematics itself not being a science but some kind of structural or transcendental (in the Kantian sense) tool.

3. Ten Good Reasons

First. The city is there: it is, I would say, unabashedly there. Any of the inhabitants of the planet in reasoning age will recognize the skyline of Manhattan and say, as the hellespontinan peasant of lore used to say “*Isten polis*,” (Istanbul) “there is the City.” But this immediate identifiability hides several layers of complexity that have to be analyzed one by one.

Second. The city is expanding. In the course of the Twentieth century the planet’s population has doubled twice: once from roughly 1,6G to 3.0G in the first 70 years, and then to roughly the double in the following half-period. Thanks to the dynamics predicted by Verhulst-Volterra models of differential equations, the subsequent growth has tapered off to a curve better known under the name of “logistic (or “S”) curve” [Cipolla 1962, 110-111], rather than exploding *a la* Erlich. Still, the distribution of the new population is not equipotential on the Earth surface and a largely disproportional share has gone into urban areas, particularly urban areas of the LDRs.

Third. In the physical world, when you pour a fluid from a container to another one, the only thing that changes is the level of the fluid in the two solids. In the social realm, on the contrary, everything changes, the nature of the two containers, as well as the nature of the flow. As he inurbates into the city, a peasant ceases to be a peasant *ipso facto*. And what we insist in calling countryside is vastly different now from what is the popular mind.

Fourth. The changes are very visible to our eyes, but much less to our conceptual apparatus, which is usually lazy and conservative, and continues to use obsolete labels for new stuff. Fortunately a quite interesting independent benchmark has been offered to help us to gauge the radicalism of these changes. In 1938 one of the smartest urbanologists ever, Louis Wirth, wrote a famous essay [1938, 1-24] proposing to capture the essence of the urban with three simple variables: *size*, *density*, and *heterogeneity*. For about fifty years no one has been able to challenge this elegant definition, nor to find a better one. Today, however, if we look around we have to ponder. *Size*: yes, cities are still big, but what precisely is big? Take Milano, a city I know well: in 1941, had the census been taken, the population of the Comune di Milano, whose boundaries have remained the same all along, would have been more or less the same size as today’s, 1.3M. A little bit more than in 1936 and a little bit less than in 1951 census years. But is it still the same reality? Of course not; in 1941, Milano was a traditional industrial city with a very articulated population, and a sparse hinterland of small communes. Today Milano, the Comune, is just the center of a vast and undefined metropolitan region, and its social structure, predominantly of

old and of rich people (not always the same individuals, though) would be unsustainable without the huge surrounding hinterland where much of the young and active population reside. The same can be said of most cities.

I am taking this table from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_city, but I could pick any at random: this shift in unit of observation makes city rankings very close to an exercise in futility.

Cities ranked by category

Rank	Population of city proper	Population of metropolitan area
1	Shanghai	Tokyo
2	Karachi	Seoul
3	Mumbai	Mexico City
4	Beijing	New York City
5	Moscow	Mumbai
6	Istanbul	Jakarta
7	São Paulo	São Paulo
8	Tianjin	Delhi
9	Guangzhou	Osaka
10	Shenzhen	Shanghai

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_city

Density. Always a fairly elusive sociological trait, density has become almost impossible to calculate, if you do not have a certain population to be divided by a certain surface. It is nonetheless clear that things have changed since Wirth's time. The overall metropolitan density in the USA (I calculated in 1993) is just below the total density of Italy, which has a large portion of uninhabited land. One thing is clear, modern city is not like Manhattan, as the lore of the film commissions would like us to believe, but more like a vast sprawl of low density. Deyian Sudjic has a very good image comparing the CBD of American Metropolitan areas as an eruption in a huge land of low rise.

Heterogeneity. Well, yes; to a point. The modern city is as ever a hodgepodge of different populations. Arriving at the airport of Dubai at any hour of the night you see multicolored mobs, of the most varied dresses and features, flowing along the halls and the elevated passageways as if in a Futurist's dream, but this mixity does not project on the general ground of the real settlement: there are different communities on land but increasingly segregated and sometimes gated. The elbow-to-elbow friction Wirth had in mind is not the same you find in metropolitan areas where 40% of the land is privatized by voluntary associations of sort, as if the Modern State had

not yet arrived. Nor in the highly secured high rises with individual pools sprouting at voice distance from the favelas in some L.A. city. If you take Sunset Bld. Eastward (for a change) and go up from Galdstone4fish toward the canyons, you will pass several communities, the Italian Castellamare, the Jewish Palisades, Brentwood, until you hop over the San Diego freeway (405) and bump into Westwood and UCLA campus, Bel Air and Beverly Hills. It is easy to notice that the density of settlement diminishes with the rising of income until you arrive at the vast estates of the stars on the East Sunset Bld. This is pure Los Angeles, but unless you are jogging in appropriate gear it is not a strolling area for *flâneurs* as Wirth imagined the city. The famous Italianist scholar Dante della Terza, became even more famous in academic circles when during his first stay at UCLA was arrested for loitering and jaywalking by simply having an evening promenade off campus.

Fifth. Today everybody can go to town, the contemporary city is truly “a city for all,” but not all live in the city in the same way. Today the traditional segregation patterns have received and added degree of complexity because in addition to the inhabitants we have other “populations” spread, layer after layer, on the city. I am talking of NRPs, Non Resident Populations of commuters, city users, and metropolitan business persons to which recently Giampaolo Nuvolati successfully added the *flâneurs*. So in addition to some sort of horizontal segregation we have a vertical one, so to say.

Sixth. The serious mistake of the scions of the Chicago School was not so much the rigid repetitiveness of the studies, and the weak methodology (always under the Damocles’ sword of the ecological fallacy, despite the numerical prowess of the ecologists) it was in the theoretical naiveté of trying to find generalizations, which would not withstand the complexity of historicity(i.e. space and time: here and now) and would not give convincing explanations. In response to this weakness the level of abstraction was brought to a point in which concepts like, centrality, competition, succession, segregation and the like became so shallow to be useless. While on the other hand the enormously rich descriptive material provided a huge patrimony of data on cities around the world.

Seventh. The relation between the richness of systematic (more or less) and cartographic – one is tempted to say, calligraphic – data on cities and the theoretical poverty, despite some good hunches, is in my mind the crux of the crisis of Urban Sociology that has elicited so many expressions. The point is that the city is not only a complex (very complex) system but an ambiguous one because it is an artifact (*feitico*, *fetish*, *faitish*) in Latour’s sense [Latour 2009], actually the largest, and today the most widespread product of the human species. Being a product it contains both a factual reality (*fait-ish*) which is damn hard and heavy, in the sense that it is both

quite expensive (requiring a lot of investments, which not all social forms are able to muster) and weight of the built area on the natural environment.⁶ In addition to this complexity to which we'll come back later, there is another inherent ambiguity in the city.

Eighth. Being an artifact, the city is eminently *observable*: the physical city can be seized, gauged, measured, counted and weighted. Its observable features are there in space and time in a very detailed way to the point that a drone can be instructed to fly over and into it to photograph or hit very accurately even the most minute detail. Increasingly we share at a mass level this accuracy by clicking on Google or simply touching the screen of our iPhone or GPS on the car. GSI software is one of the most explosively developing nowadays. Yet this observable reality only tells us part of the story, because it is produced by (made, constructed, *fait-ished*, so to say) by another entity which in short we can call "Urban Society," to signal that not all societies produce cities. This entity is *not* observable by drones, it can only be deduced with intellectual lenses, by observing signs, including verbal statements by individuals. At the same time, however this product, this observable entity is highly symbolic, in addition to producing physical constraints. Thus it is also a strong *fé-tish*⁷ affecting in turn behavior, and possibly social psychological traits of the social entity it harbors. Ratzel, Simmel and the entire Chicago School to begin with, have been working intellectually on this aspect. We are thus in a typical situation described by Giddens as "Structuration." Any urbanite, since being born or having arrived in a city whatsoever, is contrived by the context, but participates in the social dynamics that in the end will change the context in an endless dynamic and dialectic process. The city we see with visible wavelength, or gauge through any type of physical wavelength, is in a sort of "structuration sandwich," to use a very mundane metaphor; it is embedded between a layer producing it and another layer being produced by it. This is why I think it can be safely stated that, although the city is a legitimate object of study by many competing points of view, it cannot be understood without Urban sociology. The social layer (realm, factor, coloration, whatever you like) is inherent in the very concept of city.

Ninth. There is nonetheless a rather profound asymmetry in the accumulation of knowledge in the two directions of this triple-decker. Deducing the traits of a society from even the faintest traces of the observable city, in different eras, it is far from simple or straightforward. Yet, thanks to the painstaking and clever work of

⁶ Ample literature on this point, although I suggest reading some intelligent counter-criticism David Owen 2009.

⁷ Although not exactly in the same sense see the classic Alexander Mitscherlich [1968].

scholars in Archaeology [Liverani 2006]; classicists such as Mogens Herman Hansen [2000], or Art historians such as Hauser [1964] or Gombrich to quote just a few from a very very long list, has produced a huge accumulation of knowledge and fairly consistent translation protocols from prehistory and protohistory to more recent times. The same cannot be said of the obverse relation. Despite the fact that we have experimental ground at our disposal at arms' length knowledge in this areas is scant and mostly riddled with spurious *topoi* that are in general assumed in a rather mechanical way, such as the relation between density and socialization or even density and aggressiveness. I do not have the time to dwell on this point that remains to me rather inexplicable, but certainly it has to with the large amount of symbolic content (*fée-tish*) of this artifact.

Tenth. The city is thus not only a complex and ambiguous system. It has a peculiar positioning, as society in general of course, in the family of living systems. In nature there are two types of systems. One is made of complex evolving physical systems like hurricanes, that can be entirely explained, and to a degree predicted, by the interplay of physical laws. The other family is made of animal or vegetarian organisms, which are also explainable by physical laws [Laroussiere 2011, 4-5], as they are equally made of stuff, but they have an added trait. They carry an internal project in the form of DNA, which predicts their evolution down to the most minute specific detail, such as the color of leaves, hairs and eyes or disastrous malformations or malfunctioning, if even a tiny bit of the i^{th} bit is missing or misprinted. Nothing of this kind can be found for a hurricane, even if in retrospect, at least theoretically, one could reconstruct the beat of the butterfly wing that originated it. As societies, cities are something in between: they are a living system (not an organism though) and they have some kind of a project. There are intentions, often diverse competing projects, often aborted projects such as some of the "ideal" cities at the end of the Renaissance, like Sabbioneta in Lombardy or the abandoned cities in China like Ordo or others [<http://www.businessinsider.com/chinese-ghost-cities-2011-5>]. But mostly the human moss is very apt at walking over the stone of planned cities to erode, cover and modify it. The double nature of *fait-ish* and *fée-tish* implicit in the city has often time stimulated "culturally oriented" explanations, such as those sternly criticized by Manuel Castells in *La Question Urbaine* [1972]. Today we witness a new wave of symbolic explanations particularly because of the influx of large number of humanists and literati in the field.⁸ While it would be silly to deny the importance of culture

⁸ See my criticisms of the over-litterarization of urban studies in my paper "Lantello danle metro. Le disavventure del bardo urbano" at the Conference "*La città e l'esperienza del Moderno*," 16 Giugno 2010, UNIMIB, Milano, in publication.

in originating and maintaining cities, as technology itself incorporates symbols and cultural predispositions, it seems at times that the city can be explained in lightweight words and bits. Cities are made of stone, and stone means work, and work means capital, market or state capital indifferently. I am always rather taken aback when I hear classicists declare with the utter nonchalance that ancient cities were technologically poor. What about walls, pyramids, aqueducts, roads? Obviously it was a different kind of technology, but cities cannot be written by poetry and the first writing was invented for stuff, not for ideas. By the way our bits are written on the same stuff by which walls are made: Si Silicium or silica #45 on the Mendeleev Table.

4. Current Issues and Trends

In the end Urban sociology can be in crisis, but if you decide to talk about cities you cannot avoid having some kind of specific sociological explanation at hand. During the last decades of the Twentieth century while the mainstream ideologies interpreted the statistical data showing a numerical decline of almost all large cities, the popular lore and even the mainstream of social sciences, including such top guns of Economic Geography like Brian Berry, interpreted these data as counterurbanisation, return to the countryside and even one of the recurrent Deaths of the City. Connecting it, as in Alvin Toffler, in the coeval diffusion of the PC (1983: IBM AT on the cover of *Time*). It took sociologists of the caliber of Manuel Castells, and Saskia Sassen, among others, to make clear that the city was transmogrifying, not dying. Social transformations continuously add new layers of complexity, but also an increased need for sociological tools. One added layer is the spreading of NRPs, *Non Resident Populations*, namely populations that impact on cities but do not inhabit there, they go to city to work or for mere consumption purposes like commuters and “city users” [Martinotti 2003, 449-473; Martinotti 2004, 52-54; Martinotti and Pozzi 2004, 37-61; Nuvolati 2002]. Accrued mobility and a globality context transformed the economy of cities to the point in which the income generated by NRP-connected activities have become crucial for urban development, as testified by the furious aggressiveness with which cities the world over fight to be assigned, Olympics, Expos and other similar events. Thus in addition to the horizontal withering away of city borders in the limitless sprawl (“*terre sconfinata*,” literally) [Sernini 1996; Burdett, Sudjic 2011] there is also a vertical extension and multiplication of urban populations (not classes) as the major sociological consequence of the transition into a service economy. The digital technology counted indeed: yes, and quite a deal, but nothing like what was anticipated at the time: we are talking of a span

of time roughly a quarter of a century, the sliver of a nail powder on the pointing finger of the Giant of Time standing on the Everest. The speed of digital communication and its enormous data processing power have changed our relation with time (and hence with space, but they are not the same as sometimes we hear). Time and space are two different variables, they can be functionally related (thru speed) and exactly for this they are not the same, but two different points of view, so to say. What has happened in the last twenty years or so is that the cost of each unit of physical mobility has remained stable or gone up, as the cost of each unit of digital communication has decreased dramatically according to Moore's law, so far. Today it is even difficult to think of the world without The Net and the madly prolific world of new Apps. But to give an idea, not so long ago, the American desk at the *Economist* was allowed one hour long distance calls with the US, and the entire editorial board met in the room to listen religiously, while the managers complained for the cost. Those of us lucky academicians who started early to play around with Unix command to exchange files with Kermit used the mail mostly to send "Hullo" cards around the world while sipping the first cup of coffee. Soon, however, the mail intruded in our life: "I can't read fiction anymore, I just don't have the time to read it. I don't do any writing. I don't have time for it. The entire time is spent e-mailing" [Clarke 2000]. Nowadays if you find yourself in a blind location you start immediately getting nervous. We all know this and the anecdotes could fill a book (they do in fact, not rarely) but we have not yet come to grips with the changes the World Wide Net has provoked on our home nets. The "now but not here," for instance has not eliminated the city as a "central place" despite the vast decentralization it has induced. Contrary to what Toffler was expecting, the city has not withered away in a cloud of electronic cottages dispersed in the redwoods. Electronic cottages yes, and individually each of us is becoming a sort of Christmas tree where the Jobs of the world are hanging ever more shining *feiticos* with milliamperic devices, but dirty cars are still clogging the city transportation systems of the world. The digital frenzy that stimulated a sort of mediatic EP by anticipating the fireworks of the New Millennium in the wrong year, was followed by the crash of the New Economy, and the dire consequences of the 9/11. We used to say that a terrorist is a man with a bomb but not a plane: well they got a few. Still the "new economy," and the "information society are here, but they do not look all that nice, they are like our cities at night: shining but deadly poisoning like some tropical fish. Something in our analysis is amiss, and this is going to be eminently sociological.

My vision is that Urban sociology will be able to make an important breakthrough in understanding the type of urban context we live in, if it (we, in fact) will

be able to break free from obsolete models that have nowadays become highly ideological. The basic *topos* is still the *Gemeinschaft* *Gesellschaft* “Great Dichotomy” by which Toennies tried to axiomatize the industrialization and urbanization processes in the sixteenth century. As Sorokin points out⁹ Toennies’ vastly successful classification was nothing original, but it intercepted a general post-romantic widespread feeling that looked at contemporary society as destroying a sort of golden age when the dentists did not yet use anesthesia, and things were good and simple. The contraposition embedded in the dichotomy, is the opposition between *Wesenswille* and *Kürwille* which we can find in many similar Great Dichotomies¹⁰. The “organic” or “essential” will of the group and the “free” or rational will of the lone individual. The basis for *Wesenswille* is of course a biotic (as Park would say) type of relation with others, favored by the high density of small and stable *vis-à-vis* communities. While the *Gesellschaft* is a society largely contractual, with still a residue of biotic relations, as in Simmel’s theorizing of the effects of density on the “blasé attitude” of the metropolitan dweller. Schematizing with an axe we can say that *Community* was some 80% biotic and the rest cultural, while *Society* (*Gesellschaft*) is the reverse. Few persons have actually challenged this narrative of the effects of space on human relations, among the few I think it is worthwhile to remind Wellman who has made deliberate effort to correctly reinterpret the term *Community* by separating networks from space and of course Manuel Castells who criticized the use of *Community* in the first place. The great novelty today is that, thanks to the Web, sociologists have at their disposal an experimental setting that a few years back nobody could have dreamt of. In fact they have a third type of society: a completely bio-stripped society, ran by simple interaction. A “pure sociology” type of society 100% contractual in which the actors are oftentimes not known one another, and it is not even certain that either of them is human. Machines can interact too and, on the whole, online it is possible to see (and experience) a full-fledged society with actors at different levels, power relations, conflicts and positive affections (a lot) norms and deviance. To recant the *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft* series we could dub this society *Vernetzungsgesellschaft*,¹¹ the society of nets, and the interesting thing is that if one bothers to look into Toennies’ subcategories he will be amazed to see how neatly the equivalent cell in the third type can be deduced as a development from the previous ones. I believe that the main challenge for sociologists looking at the city will be to develop new conceptual tools

⁹ In the *Introduction* to the first American translation of *Community and Society* [Sorokin 1957].

¹⁰ I am indebted to Alessandro Pizzorno for this term.

¹¹ Needless to say that this is not a real German word but only a jocular term. I thank Helga Nowotny and Renate Ramge Eco who helped me concocting this term out.

to cope with this entirely new situation. The city is made of stone, the new city is written on stone, but we sociologists deal with the makers and the writers.

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There Is, There Is!

Abstract: This essay takes up the challenge posed by Manuel Castells in the essay “Is There an Urban Sociology?” (1968) by giving reasons for the persistent lack of a consensus within urban sociology on the theoretical status of space and time and speculating about the loss of esteem within North American sociology for the study of urban life. Despite the rapid increase in urbanization around the world, urban sociology in the U.S. suffers from a specific American dislike of cities and greater growth in suburban and exurban peripheries of metropolitan cores. Moreover, recalling the origins of urban sociology in the U.S. in the study of “problem” populations, urban sociologists find it difficult to distance themselves from grants and careers supported by the state while they often confront abuses of states and markets in their everyday empirical practices. Analyzing the interaction of social, economic, and cultural forces in bounded urban spaces is made more complicated, finally, by the recognition of difference among cities in different regions of the world and the importance of mobility, technology, and struggles for dignity in modern life.

Keywords: Urban sociology, urbanization, metropolitan areas, social theory.

Guido Martinotti is Emeritus Professor of Urban Sociology at the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane, SUM in Florence. Harkness Fellow in Sociology (Columbia University and UCB, 1962-1964), he has been teaching and researching in Urban sociology since 1961, in several Italian universities, of late at UNIMIB, and abroad, notably at UCSB, NYU and EPHESS in Paris. His major contribution in the field is the study of the changing social morphology of contemporary metropolises with the introduction of the concept of “city users” and other NRPs, Non Resident Populations, in addition to class related analyses of the inhabitants of cities. He has worked extensively also on mobility and ICT’s and Society. Contributions also in the study and reform of HE systems.