



## Joshua Barker, New Editor of City and Society

*Society for Urban, National and Transnational Anthropology*

Andrew Newman

Joshua Barker

**Andrew Newman (AN): Do you think there is something distinctive about the way the urban is conceptualized in *City & Society* as opposed to other anthropology journals?**

**Joshua Barker (JB):** I think so. We very much see ourselves as coming out of a long tradition of urban anthropology, going back to the Chicago School, when urban sociology and urban anthropology weren't so distinct. But I think the boundaries between this tradition and other areas of anthropology have increasingly become more fluid and shifting, and we welcome that; the subtitle of the journal reflects that. At the same time, I do think it's important to allow people to think about the things they are discovering in their ethnography through the lens of urban transformation. For many anthropologists there is a distinction between doing anthropology "in the city" versus "of the city." The journal can be a means for those who do the former to come to see their work as part of the latter.

**AN: How does this impact the way you and your reviewers evaluate submissions?**

**JB:** We very much appreciate submissions that have some real original ethnography along the lines of our focus on contemporary urban issues, though we do publish historical pieces too. The main thing is that you have good ethnographic material and an analysis that really moves out from that material and speaks to some aspect of urban theory and urban anthropology. It's an old field with a lot parts to it, so there are lots of ways that people can plug into that. Our goal here—and I'm speaking for the whole editorial team, which also includes Sheri Gibbings and Derek Pardue—is to create a space of discourse where different people can plug-in. In order to do that you need some sort of shared ground. The shared ground that we've carved out for ourselves in the journal is speaking in some sense to theories of urban change in a way that highlights rich ethnographic material.

**AN: The very idea of the city is evocative of interdisciplinarity. What is the importance of such approaches for the journal?**

**JB:** There are lots of areas where the interface between disciplines can be really productive. Scholars from other disciplines like architecture and urban planning and so on have really thought carefully about space and place and the aesthetic dimension of cities. One of the special issues we are considering now focuses on public art. I think it helps to spark new ideas when we read across disciplinary boundaries based on a shared object of study. Personally I have found in my own teaching that some of the most interesting collaborations between different students can occur across those boundaries. In anthropology today we are seeing a return to a greater amount of collaborative work and I embrace that trend. I think interdisciplinary work, especially for students, but also for faculty researchers, can be a really helpful way of instigating collaborations where there is a lot of cross-pollination.

**AN: Can you give an example of how that might be related to teaching? Here I'm reminded of the [Anthropology of the City](#) initiative at Wayne State, in Detroit.**

**JB:** Yes. One of the things I've discovered through helping to create the [Ethnography Lab](#) at the University of Toronto is that students really benefit from research projects that involve deep community engagement. One of the things we've done is create a really interesting research project in a neighborhood called Kensington Market that's right by the downtown university campus. It is very convenient for field research, so they learn anthropology by doing anthropology. These kinds of projects are sprouting up again at a lot of different places. I've had a lot of interest from other universities who are creating something similar, and some who are already doing something similar and want to connect with us. So I think these kinds of projects are really of the moment. What I haven't yet seen many examples of is how that work is going to translate into more serious academic publication. It's one thing to do an edited volume that will mostly have a local readership, focusing on the city in which the work is being done, but I think it also interesting to think about that work conceptually in terms of what collaborative fieldwork means in the city. I would love to see the fruits of that kind of work appearing in *City & Society*. I can imagine *City & Society* being a venue for questions all around the practice of ethnography in urban settings where the boundaries between the field and the academy are really breaking down in interesting and productive ways.

**AN: Can you tell us about new features we'll see at the journal soon?**

**JB:** One of the things we are starting, which actually was developed during Suzanne Scheld's editorship, is an online book review section. It is now hosted on the SUNTA website, but it will probably be available in the online C&S version.

**AN: Where do you see the journal going in the future?**

**JB:** We are certainly looking at growing our digital profile. In terms of the themes, it is really going to track urban transformation. I will not be surprised if we end up focusing more on cities in the global south, which are growing very rapidly, and focusing on changing political economy. Broadly speaking, the role of China, and Chinese forms of urbanization, globally, is a really interesting area of work, which you can see in African cities, Indian cities, Southeast Asian cities. You can even see this in Latin American cities, and to some extent in North American cities. It will be interesting to track those kinds of developments over time.

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