Chapter 2
A Polymath in City Studies

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2.1 On Being a Polymath

I am using the word polymath to describe the remarkable range of Peter Hall's scholarship as a means of avoiding popular terminology that promotes disciplinary thinking through its inter- or multi- or cross-variations. The concept of polymath long precedes the disciplining of knowledges, which makes it so appropriate as a descriptor of Peter's oeuvre. An obvious reason for this failure in intellectually disciplining Hall is his background in Geography wherein strict disciplinary thinking does not make sense. But I suggest a more important influence: Peter's fascination with cities that has always been at the heart of his work, largely explicitly, otherwise implicitly. Researching cities straddles social science disciplines, fits into none but requires all.

In terms of disciplinary thinking Peter is generally associated with three, Planning and History being added to Geography (Phelps et al. 2014). Such 'tri-disciplinarity' is rare but still it hardly does justice to Peter's studies. Being interested in cities meant that economic processes have to have an important role in Peter's research and sure enough agglomeration mechanisms and corporate structures feature prominently in his work. So we might add Economics and Business Studies to the Hall intellectual mix. We can make exactly the same argument for Sociology—cities are profoundly 'social/cultural'. Furthermore the subjects Peter tackled had weighty political implications which he always tackled head on: add Political Science. On a personal note, I encountered the latter side of Peter's thinking when I was editing *Political Geography Quarterly*. On launch, we invited contributions on the nature of Political Geography as a means of charting new directions. Amongst many responses from well-known political geographers there

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was an offering from Peter (Hall 1982a). It was a surprise to me that he would appear in the first issue of the journal since I had thought of him at that time as a 'planner-geographer', Peter suggested a new political economy frame for our studies. This discussion has already reached seven disciplines without any mention of Transport Studies, possibly the subject he cherished most.

The point I am making is that Peter was not a sort of brilliant 'octo-disciplinarian' simply because he did not take disciplines seriously in his work. His was a very practical slant on the way he contributed to our knowledge of cities, most obviously in Planning. Taking the latter out of the argument for the moment, not for him the conventional nod to long-dead 'founding fathers' providing guidance for defining current research, rather he used ideas and concepts from cognate disciplines for the specific purposes of his own understandings. From a disciplinary point of view these past academic heroes provide intellectual anchors in socializing (i.e. disciplining) new entrants to a discipline. This is where the benefit of Peter's academic origins being in Geography is so relevant since its founding fathers are largely of 'academic' interest in the derogatory sense (i.e. how not to do Geography). Interestingly Peter did edit a translation of a seminal book by an Economics founding father, von Thünen, but for a Geography audience (Hall 1966a)! But of course, in a curious twist, Peter contributed to turning Planning from a practice into a discipline by giving this activity the requisite founding fathers to take it beyond professionalization—'architecture writ large'—and making it a respectable social science (Hall 1974),on which more below. In this case the practical side of Peter's thinking coincided with a need to discipline, which is what he provided using critical historical narrative. It is this part of Hall's legacy that is particularly celebrated in the volume *The Planning Imagination* produced to mark his eightieth birthday (Tewdwr-Jones et al. 2014). Ron Johnston also assesses Peter as being foremost a planner, more than all the disciplines mentioned above (Taylor 2014: 226). But I will treat him as a polymath of city studies.

There is an obvious danger that Peter's eclectic mix of scholarship results in superficial thinking, after all it is the purpose of disciplines to insist on 'depth' of understanding. This suspicion might be enhanced by Peter's journalism, a plethora of short opinion pieces penned throughout his career. As a young lecturer I read Peter every week in *New Society*. In this work Peter expressed his practical side (and more) in a very up-to-date (and entertaining) manner proving the worth of such interventions. If you had to pick one word to encompass Hall's writings, curiosity and passions I think the term 'Tomorrow' is especially suited. It undergirds both his journalism and his supposedly more scholarly contributions. The former is about the present but looking forward and it is commonplace to argue that History is as much about the future as the past (which I would extend to all social science research) and this is clearly seen in Peter's research. 'Tomorrow' can be treated as the hinge at the intersection of his journalism and his research and I will deploy this intersection imagery further to show Peter as polymath was not merely a well-read collector of a vast array of ideas but that he deployed them interactively to better understand cities in undisciplined depth.

2.2 Five Intersections

Choosing scholarly intersections from an oeuvre built over half a century inevitably must be selective and reflect personal bias: there is no way a comprehensive record of the innate effervescence in Peter's work can be provided here. I have selected five intersections that I think reflect prescience and also enduring relevance. Readers are invited to elaborate on my short vignettes and think of further intersections. I have ordered my intersections from general issues to more specific pairings.

2.2.1 Geography and Planning

When I was an undergraduate in the mid-1960s the relationship between Geography and Planning was seen as being quite straightforward: the latter was a recognized applied version of the former.[1] It was a local government profession dealing with land use that was a natural career choice for many geography graduates (including me). It was attractive because it was about making better (local) worlds, but it was also notorious for being rather mechanistic and therefore unexciting. Peter did not take this career route; he did a Ph.D. in historical geography but not following the latter's traditional predilection for the rural (Bassin/Berdoulay 2004: 65–72), his focus was industrial London.

Geography was in flux in Hall's early career with changes emanating from the USA but with their synthesis produced in the UK by Haggett (1965). Hall was on the fringes of this transformation; he made what may have been an unintentional contribution through making von Thünen's land use model available in English as mentioned previously. The theoretical basis of the Geography transition consisted of borrowing a trio of location models from Economics with von Thünen (via Hall) contributing the primary sector space, Weber the secondary sector space and Christaller/Lösch the tertiary sector space. Interestingly it was the von Thünen land use model that proved to be more relevant for Planning through urban land use modeling. However in Geography it was the Christaller model that was by far the most influential—for Bunge (1966) it qualified Geography as a science, no less. But these abstract takes on 'new' Geography by Haggett and especially Bunge were not to Hall's empirical and practical taste. This was not a suitable 'pure' science that was supposedly twinned with Planning as the applied science.

Instead Hall embarked on making Planning an exciting intellectual pursuit by providing it with a stimulating biography. Despite, or perhaps because of, Hall's Geography background, he provided a lineage of eminent thinkers and practitioners

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[1]Hall (1974, 1988) represent the ideas discussed in this intersection. Their lasting relevance is indicated by the fact that both books are still in press through multiple editions, five for the former, and four in the latter case.

as Planning's own founding fathers from a wide range of backgrounds. These were people who engaged with city problems and city opportunities; traditional geographers were conspicuous by their absence due to their relative neglect of the urban (Wrigley 1965; Hall 2003; Taylor 2003). In this way Hall provided Planning with an intellectual grounding in social science. In the process his 'disciplinary history' provided an alternative view of the profession, shifting focus from boring bureaucratic mechanism to meaningful policy interventions. Who wouldn't want to be a planner?

This story places Peter in a key role even when the intersection of Geography and Planning was one of divergence. With Geography's neglect of cities overcome as urban geography came to dominate the human side of discipline from the 1970s, the intersection became more intimate with Hall right at the centre of the intellectual interactions. These are described in the remaining intersections.

2.2.2 Cities and State

Peter's practical approach to understanding cities and the state was firmly set in the reformist tradition of centre-left politics.[2] This had triumphed in creating the welfare state after 1945 of which physical planning was an integral part. In this way of thinking, society's problem could be and should be solved by state actions. In effect this nationalized a wide range of non-state radical traditions not least in Planning: this is made clear in Hall's planning history where, for instance, private-sponsored garden cities at the beginning of the twentieth century become transformed into a state programme of new towns at mid-century (Hall 1974). Such treatment of past radicalisms feeds into the suspicion that state actions on society are not the only solutions and are not inevitably benevolent.

Peter turned such suspicion into a critical assessment of state actions in three main contributions. First, he led a large-scale investigation into the effects of city containment policies instituted after 1945 to prevent 'urban sprawl'. Although the intention had been to support viable separate communities in terms of work/home balances, the results were very different. Cities were indeed contained but at the expense of increased social segregation, longer distance commuting, and rising costs of property and land. Thus for most people, there was a net material loss, while a few benefitted immensely. Second, Peter identified a set of large-scale projects instigated and implemented by the state that were seen as necessary but unobtainable through private sector funding. These large projects, such as London's third airport, were subject to planning procedures in a context where they cannot be disentangled from myriad outside effects and consequences. Dubbing them 'great planning disasters', with their inevitable cost overruns due to inherent, unpredictable uncertainties, Hall was discovering a societal complexity centred on the demands of dynamic cities.

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[2]Hall et al. (1973) and Hall (1980, 1982b) are the main works underpinning this intersection.

Hall shared this reaction to the post-1945 state overreaching its capability with other 1970s critics (e.g. Adams 1970; Brooks 1974) and the issue of state profligacy remains relevant down to the present (e.g. Flyvbjerg et al. 2003; Shepard 2015). Third, Hall's appreciation that planning purposes and planning outcomes could significantly diverge culminated in his controversial promotion of 'non-plan'. This was an attack on top-down bureaucratic obstacles to local economic development. Noticing that it was Pacific Asian cities without national development plans that were experiencing dynamic growth rather than so-called Third World 'developing states' with their surfeit of such plans, Peter suggested that the persistence of urban poverty in British cities might be better tackled through local withdrawal from planning restrictions rather than inventing more area-based anti-poverty policy 'solutions'. Coming from a leading authority on planning this was seen by many as astonishing, even more so when taken up by a right-wing government as 'enterprise zones' and thereafter seen as an integral part of the political movement to neo-liberalism. But you do not have to be a neo-liberal to understand that state intervention is not the automatic answer to all social ills.

This intersection between complex cities and state policies—Scott (1998) has subsequently shown how states inherently simplify complex reality—derives from Peter's practical and empirical imperative: what works? It places him in a long radical tradition that is not state-centric.

2.2.3   Times and Spaces

Peter's initial Ph.D. research in historical geography and his subsequent focus on planning studies are both fundamentally about relations between time/period and space/place.[3] Over a wide range of publications, these dimensional framings, treated as social constructs, are deployed by Hall in a variety of resourceful ways.

I have already suggested 'Tomorrow' as Hall's single word descriptor and it is noteworthy that this signal to the future is used in the title of one of his historical books. Although I began with History as one of his three most obvious disciplines, Peter's temporal studies are as much about the future as about the past. Contemporary concepts of how cities work are applied to cities both across historical periods and through scenarios for the future. But the imaginative treatment of temporal structures comes with his contributions to the work on long waves/cycles that became popular in social science from the 1980s. Often used as changing contexts in broad overviews, Peter's emphasized their specificities as 'carrier waves' of innovations. This directly links to spatial agglomerations in cities as the loci of innovations. These are special places of economic and cultural change with distinctive characteristics—latterly identified as technopoles for viewing or

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[3]This intersection covers a prolific amount of Peter's work represented by Hall (1988, 1998), Hall/Preston (1988), Castells/Hall (1994).

making the future. But this is not simply a case of exceptional spaces of places; these are entwined in ever changing spaces of flows. Here the intersection is with Peter's lifelong interest in transport, such as modal travel models in cities, and later with aspects of the communications revolution restructuring cities and their inter-relations. The time-space frames of innovation and technology both enabling as expected, and shifting in unpredictable ways, were plainly one of Peter's intellectual passions.

Clearly Hall's later collaborations with Manuel Castells are important in this intersection but there is a practical and powerful methodology that is very much Peter's. This is the thought pattern that takes a general process within which specific mechanisms are revealed: each carrier wave is a unique period within a general temporal repetition; each agglomeration is a unique place within a general spatial repetition.

2.2.4 Town/Country and City/Region

What is the spatial setting for human organization?[4] Should this setting provide the areal basis for planning activities? Answers to these questions in post-1945 Britain were answered in the reverse order. This produced a political-administrative framing for land use planning as required by the state: local governments became 'planning authorities' in law. In Peter's work this is where concern for practice and theory come together.[5]

The idea for the containment of British cities referred to earlier derives from late Victorian social reform movements that treated industrial cities as severely problematic places in need of solution. Rural/urban contrasts were embedded in local government organization and this was transferred over to statutory planning as 'Town and Country Planning'. The imagery implicit in this terminology is not one of large industrial cities but rather of small self-contained communities like garden cities.[6] But modern society is not organized through myriad small separate communities; the latter are functionally integrated into much larger city-based units. This was understood in the USA where 'City Planning' was recognized and Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas were defined in the 1960 census by combining counties using commuting data. This idea of functional urban regions has subsequently been copied across the world including Britain. Thus Hall's terminology for his planning was functional and not divisive: 'Urban and Regional Planning'. Although regional planning in Britain was originally conceived in terms

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[4]Peter's work in this intersection is specifically represented by Hall/Pain (2006).

[5]Peter was a central figure in both the Town and Country Planning Association and the Regional Studies Association through his career.

[6]The Garden City Association was formed in 1899, became the Garden City and Town Planning Association and then the Town and Country Planning Association; the statutory basis of UK planning was set out in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.

of large 'standard regions', with Peter active for the South East England region, only the latter had a city-region identity as London's region. But ultimately such regional planning fell by the wayside due to lack of political will, formal politics and government remained primarily organized at national and local levels. However with the rise of economic globalization articulated through world cities, city regions have made a return as global city regions (Scott 2001). With London as a classic case, Peter has been at the forefront of this movement with his POLYNET project describing and analyzing seven such regions in North West Europe. This work is notable for recognition of the innate spatial complexity of these emerging spatial structures as multi-nodal mega-city regions.

Still, despite their globality, they are defined within states so that they remain in-between national and local policy; theory with limited practice. But they are central to a different intersection in Hall's oeuvre.

2.2.5   London and Globalization

One city, London, is woven into Hall's research through all the decades of his studies.[7] In these works Peter illustrates how what goes on in London has resonance far beyond the city. In this way he shows an appreciation of scalar relations; Peter wrote about world cities long before the massive literature on globalization had even begun.

Although borrowing the term 'world city' from one of his Planning founding fathers, the prescient timing of his elaboration of the idea in the mid-1960s is quite remarkable. Seven world cities were originally identified and included New York and Tokyo along with London, which were to form the 'global trio' central to the seminal works of Friedmann (1986) and Sassen (2001) two decades later. But two other quite different 'world cities' were also identified: Randstad Holland and Rhine-Ruhr, multi-nodal regions that reappear in Hall's own POLYNET research three decades later. Peter is able to locate these different spatial structures under a single umbrella term because of his functional definition. His world cities were foremost great economic centres accounting for a relative large amount of the world's business. But they were at the same time more than this in two ways. First, they encompassed a broad range of vital 'metropolitan' functions that made them stand out politically and culturally in myriad ways. This comprehensive treatment of world cities has hardly ever been matched in later voluminous studies of such cities. Second, there is an important relational aspect to his world cities (i.e. why they are 'world'). These cities are key transport centres (great ports, road and rail nodes, and with international airports) and communication centres (publishing, media, universities) all currently researched as inter-city relations. This approach

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[7]This intersection covers a large proportion of Peter's work, here represented by Hall (1966b, 2001), and Hall/Pain (2006).

continues in POLYNET but with more emphasis on intra-regional transport and communication. In this way his ideas are revised so that even the most primate of regions are found to be multi-nodal in contemporary globalization; for instance, London's region includes Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Reading and Southampton.

Both the initial world cities study and POLYNET combine a geographical analysis of place followed by a discussion of the planning issues, thus illustrating my first intersection Geography/Planning. But the key point in this intersection is the continuity in this research thrust combined with a critical revision of theoretical concept derived from empirical evidence and practical needs.

2.3   An Optimistic Legacy

From these five intersections we find a scholar who has maintained a resonance and relevance for over half a century. In a previous discussion of Hall's work, I have likened his immense contribution to those of Jane Jacobs and Jean Gottmann (Taylor 2014). Like Peter they had a focus on cities with cognizance of political context, using a strong empirical approach casting into the past and with an eye on the future. In the 1960s each produced a seminal book on cities upon which a current literature is still building: alongside Peter's *The World Cities* (1966b) and contemporary global cities literature (Sassen 2001; Brenner/Keil 2006), there is Gottmann's (1961) *Megalopolis* and contemporary megaregions literature (Florida et al. 2008; Harrison/Hoyler 2015), and Jacobs' (1969) *Economy of Cities* and contemporary literature on agglomeration and network externalities (Glaeser 2011; Taylor 2013).

One common characteristic of these three polymaths in urban studies was their optimism for cities in a decade when cities were beginning to be seen as ominous portends for a worrying future. Not for them 'cities as problem' but rather cities were to be seen as places where society can find solutions to its ills. This optimistic attitude meant that all three recognized and promoted the practical implications of their works. However neither Gottmann nor Jacobs engaged with the policy side of urban studies with the intensity and passion that marks Hall's work, and which continued throughout his career. The decades of Hall's writings were times of immense societal change and these have been grist to his empirical and practical approach. By concentrating on his contributions to understanding the past and the future, his role—both journalistic and academic—as an inquisitive chronicler of an ever-shifting present for over half a century can easily be undervalued. When a biography of Peter appears, as surely it must, I think it is the latter that will be the added ingredient derived from assessment of his life in comparison to specialist academic assessments of his research.

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