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## Reviews

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**Splintering urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition** by S Graham, S Marvin; Routledge, London, 2001, 479 pages, £70.00 cloth, £21.99 paper (US \$110.00, \$36.95) ISBN 0 415 18964 0, 0 415 18965 9

In some ways it is difficult to review a book when it has already been so favourably endorsed by a number of high-profile names. Manuel Castells, Saskia Sassen, William Mitchell, Steven Pinch, James Wheeler, and Barney Warf are among those who glowingly praise the book, either on its back cover or in its first pages: “It is required reading”, “cutting edge”, “enormously important book”, “a crucial text”, “truly path-breaking”, “Inspiring!” And moreover, they are right. Building on their oft-cited 1996 text, *Telecommunications and the City*, *Splintering Urbanism* seems destined to be a landmark book for urban theorists and city planners.

*Splintering Urbanism* lives up to Graham and Marvin’s intention of (1) providing an interdisciplinary and global analysis of the urban condition at the start of the new millennium and (2) developing new ways to understand cities. In essence, what Graham and Marvin do is focus on networked infrastructure—transport, communication, energy, water, streets—as a means to deconstruct the complex ways in which cities are dynamically constructed and used, and to reveal the sociotechnical processes that shape modern cities. In doing so, they call for a revisioning of urban theory to focus on *infrastructure* and *flow* across *scales* from the local to global; detailing infrastructural networks and sociotechnical processes; charting the power geometries, (geo)politics, and regulation of such networks; and how these together structure and delineate business, industry, and the experiences of urban cultures (pages 10–12). This represents a significant shift from traditional urban geography, because it (1) recognises that sociotechnical processes are “directly supporting the emergence of an internationally integrated and increasingly urbanised, and yet highly fragmented, *network society* that straddles the planet” (page 15, emphasis in original) and (2) seeks to take infrastructure, flow, and scale seriously to create what they call a “critical urbanism of the networked city” (page 420). In doing so, to borrow Kaika and Swyngedouw’s (2000, page 122) phrase, they “script the city as a process of flows”.

Importantly, the approach they develop—drawing from theories of large technical systems, actor-network theory, political economy, and ‘relational’ theories of contemporary cities—is interdisciplinary and not technologically deterministic or ethnocentric. As such, it recognises the hybridity of sociotechnical networks—the interlinking of complexes of infrastructure across scale—and how these networks are embedded in and help (re)produce (in complex and sometimes contradictory ways) economic, political, and social relations. Consequently, drawing from a rich variety of sources, they chart sociotechnical networks in relation to: capitalism and flexible accumulation dynamics, modes of production, patterns of consumption, the development of global and local economies, the political landscapes of neoliberalism, political regulation, governance, and planning, the social landscapes of late-modern capitalism and the attendant sociospatial divisions of access and wealth. This provides a robust framework that allows them to develop a critical urbanism that transcends divisions between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ cities and ‘global’ and ‘local’ scales.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, divided into four chapters, outlines a historical and theoretical analysis of urban infrastructure and processes of splintering urbanism from the late 19th century to the present, and details their own hybrid theoretical approach. The second part uses their framework to explore the ‘splintering metropolis’. The first chapter in this section examines the changing sociospatial landscapes of the city, focusing on public space, real estate, consumerism, car use, cyberspace divides, streetscapes, surveillance, theme parks, shopping malls, domestic spaces, gated communities, ghettos, and so on. The second chapter explores changing urban economies, including ‘global’ infrastructure, financial enclaves, technopoles, new media, air travel, foreign direct investment,

logistics, manufacturing, e-commerce, back-officing, differential development, and so on. Both chapters are well illustrated with case studies from around the globe (Manila, Johannesburg, Singapore, New York, Tokyo, Istanbul, São Paulo, Mumbai, Melbourne, Shanghai, Atlanta, London, and so on). Indeed, Graham and Marvin have to be congratulated for drawing together and synthesising such a vast array of literatures and examples. The third part draws the book to a close, assessing the limits and prospects for a critical urbanism centred on examining 'splintering urbanism'.

Ironically, if I have one criticism it is that the book itself lacks flow and is (perhaps deliberately?) fragmented into lots of short sections that break up the narration. That said, the book is bursting with ideas and examples and is richly illustrated (over 100 plates and boxes), more than making up for the fractured style.

Overall, *Splintering Urbanism* is a timely and significant addition to the field of urban studies. If the book's endorsers are to be believed, and I strongly suspect they should be, it is set to change urban theory radically, ushering in a new paradigm: a critical urbanism centred on examining infrastructure and flow. As such, *Splintering Urbanism* should be required reading for scholars and students of globalisation, urban processes, and city life.

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## References

- Graham S, Marvin S, 1996 *Telecommunications and the City: Electronic Spaces, Urban Places* (Routledge, London)
- Kaika M, Swyngedouw E, 2000, "Fetishing the modern city: the phantasmagoria of urban technological networks" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **24** 122–148

**Rural homelessness: issues, experiences and policy responses** by P Cloke, P Milbourne, R Widdowfield; The Policy Press, Bristol, 2002, 245 pages, £45.00 cloth, £17.99 paper (US \$81.00, \$32.50) ISBN 186134 284 5, 186134 346 9

There is an old saying among researchers into homelessness that the academic study of the rural homeless is the equivalent of nailing Jell-O to a wall. The phenomenon is so elusive that a credible analysis involves an immense amount of skill using a variety of research techniques and then presenting findings in a manner that both informs and calls the reader to action. These authors do this and do it well. They are to be commended for offering a nicely developed analysis of this elusive phenomenon with a focus on rural England. One of the major assets of this book is that the findings, generalizations, and conclusions are as applicable to the rural parts of the United States as they are to their actual research location, the English counties of Gloucestershire and Somerset.

This highly informative presentation by these three scholar-activists offers the reader a richness by blending theory with selectively drawn quantitative research supported and supplemented through well-chosen examples of ethnographic interviews conducted in the field. The book offers a blending of academic and applied research presented in a way that interests and informs the scholar and lay person alike. This book needs to be an addition to the library of any scholar of rural poverty.

Perhaps one reason this book offers so much is the overall lack of existing literature in the scholarly field of rural homelessness. After completing the book one is drawn to the realization that nothing new emerges from the 200-plus pages. We already knew that rural homelessness is illusive, hidden. We certainly realized that the lack of housing, adequate income, and services make things especially difficult. These and other issues are merely supported by research contained in the book. Attention is drawn to the reality that there is a lack of consistent public policy despite an expanding awareness of the problem along with a desire by most to 'do something about' the problem. Yet, since there is such a lack of scholarly publication and synthesis about rural homelessness, this work is a major asset to our collective understanding of the issue.

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The primary weakness of the work is its redundancy. One reads over and over, again and again, that rural homelessness is hidden and elusive. Statement after statement, followed by example after example become tiresome. The book could have been cut in half without the loss of any significant ideas, generalizations, or content. However, had that happened no publisher could have given us this valuable work. Despite the heavy repetition of the same ideas and examples we should be glad that this valuable work has been published and hence stands as one of the few academic critiques of rural homelessness in England.

Overriding any criticism and commentary is the fact that through all of the issues addressed by the authors it is important to note a major asset is that the authors 'give voice' to the rural homeless and those who advocate for them. Yet, this advocacy comes to the reader in a manner that both enlightens and informs. Additionally, specific credit must be offered the authors as they illustrate what is perhaps an inevitable clash between ideology and public policy, one based on an advocacy of understanding or rural homelessness while the other focuses on practical economic and political issues. A marriage of these two viewpoints seems out of the question but serves as an underlying conflict that may prevent public sector ever addressing rural homelessness with a workable solution.

The authors review the literature on both urban and rural homelessness, noting how similar the two are becoming as the homogenization of culture impinges on what has traditionally been two distinct cultures—rural and urban. What comes from the discussion is the realization that the spread of a common media into the smallest and largest communities, regardless of their location, has been the prime force in leveling differences in all parts (social/structural—cultural—social/psychological) of rural and urban life. With this leveling, differences between rural and urban homelessness have also subsided. Alas, the reality of modern international culture. These three authors weave these and other dilemmas of modern society into their informative book. As a field of study we are richer because of its publication.

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