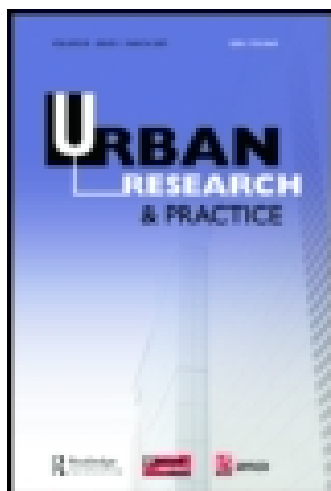


This article was downloaded by: [University College London]

On: 17 February 2015, At: 03:43

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Urban Research & Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rurp20>

Urban interstices: the aesthetics and the politics of the in-between, edited by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Farnham, Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, 230 pp., £60.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781472410016xx

Ella Harris^a

^a Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London
Published online: 13 Feb 2015.



[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Ella Harris (2015): Urban interstices: the aesthetics and the politics of the in-between, edited by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Farnham, Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, 230 pp., £60.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781472410016xx, Urban Research & Practice, DOI: [10.1080/17535069.2015.1011432](https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011432)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011432>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

BOOK REVIEW

Urban interstices: the aesthetics and the politics of the in-between, edited by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Farnham, Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, 230 pp., £60.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781472410016xx

Traversing diverse situations, from Alpine suburbs and derelict piers to Lawscapes and Megacity air spaces, this edited collection locates and advances the theorization of ‘the interstice’ as a particular form of urban spatiality. It argues that a nuanced conception of urban interstices can be used to test and problematize classical models of urban growth and governance, questioning, for example, centre/periphery distinctions. Equally, the collection demonstrates interstices as a valuable entry point into understanding the territorializations of the city and urbanizations of territory which, it suggests, are foundational to an emerging ‘new urbanity’ (xvi). Edited by Social and Spatial theorist Andrea Mubi Brighenti, the volume presents an interdisciplinary collection of 10 chapters from international authors spanning Geography, Urban Studies, Architecture and Law.

In its approach to the interstice itself, the collection’s stated intention is to shift theories of the interstice away from traditional, static notions of interstices as leftover, decaying or forgotten spaces – created as by-products of urban planning – and to move towards an ‘eventual’ understanding of interstices. Interstices are addressed as becoming spaces, as movements, happenings and encounters which, although ‘small’ in terms of their ‘*minoritarian*’ (xvi) status, are by no means ineffectual within or distinct from the broader city. Certainly, the collection’s 10 diverse essays approach and advance the interstice in this way: while many are concerned with spaces that could be characterized traditionally, spaces such as tent cities or residual sites, these spaces are explored as part of the dynamic constitution of broader urban processes and imaginaries rather than as gaps within the urban fabric (xvi). Other essays explore less traditional forms of interstitial space, discussing, for example, legal spaces, spatial justice, the politics of air, and the contradictory experiences of automobile driving. In these essays, the interstice emerges as a territorial imagination, a movement of de-territorialization, an affective otherness and, most prominently, an intersection, encounter or negotiation between orders and visual regimes.

Collectively, these eventual perspectives on urban interstices persuasively demonstrate that the interstice is, much more than a topographic space, a dynamic part of the territorial city and its politics of visibility (xx). However, the collection also shows that, rather than just contest visual orders (xix), interstices can emerge from and perpetuate dominant, neoliberal regimes. Many chapters warn against romanticizing the interstice and situate it within, rather than against, planned and institutionalized spatialities.

From the first chapter, this collection’s novel approach to the interstice is clear. For Nicholas Blomley, the interstice is not a territorial formation and his case study, of a panhandler in Vancouver, takes up the interstice as a point between constructed legal orders and scalar organizations of jurisdiction, where law is ‘both a product and instrument’ of ‘scalar logic’ (7). Likewise, in Chapter two, Luc Lévesque argues that, when understood aside from fixed territorial forms, the interstice emerges as a kind of

landscapeness, a ‘territorial imagination’ (50) that ‘directs attention on certain aspects of the environment’ (23).

In Chapter three, Don Mitchell discusses a more traditional form of interstitial space in his analysis of tent cities. Mitchell considers how tent cities in the USA are both evidence of ‘contemporary capitalism in full flower’ (74) and sites in which homeless people create interstitial spaces that can potentially demonstrate ‘non-commodified and cooperative’ forms of ‘property and social relations’ (82). The politics of visibility is especially prominent here, and Mitchell illuminates how visibility must be managed by tent city residents who negotiate between an exposure which, as a contestation of the neoliberal visual regime, could lead to demolition and the ‘episodic’ (67) visibility necessary for survival. In Chapter four, Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos develops a convincing theoretical stance. Discussing the emergence of spatial justice within the lawscape, he argues that the interstice must be disassociated from the idea of ‘the in-between’, which merely reaffirms dualist positions, and be understood as a form of emergence from ‘the middle’ as a space of encounters.

In Chapter five, Peter Adey’s piece on air in megacities complicates both the location of the interstice and the meaning of *visibility* as mobilized within this edition. Adey investigates how olfactory circulations of odorous ‘otherness’ through the air spaces of Delhi and Mumbai, and the attempts of those ‘others’ to survive near ‘exhausts, underground warm pipes’ or ‘road-sides’, reveal an affective ‘politics of comfort’ (104). In Chapter six, Ian Borden also problematizes the politics of visibility through his discussion of how automobile spaces in film expose tensions between seeing and being seen and between escape and quotidian reality. Mattias Kärholm’s Chapter (seven) on transformations of retail building types illuminates how interstices can carve out new spaces but also add rules and classifications to existing orders. Kärholm’s contribution insightfully reveals a politics of visibility which is about additivity as much as contestation.

Chapter eight returns to territorially defined interstices as Stéphane Tonnelat investigates power struggles over Pier 84 in New York. Approaching the pier as an interstitial space, Tonnelat describes the battles between community groups and developers over its imagined future. In Chapter nine, Andrea Mubi Brighenti reconsiders Alpine suburbs as in-betweens rather than peripheries, exploring how in these ‘blurred borderland[s]’ the interstitial manifests not as a difference between the urban and the ‘non-urban’ but between urban imaginaries in a place where ‘different territorial components and modalities of making the urban intermingle’ (179). Finally, in Chapter ten, Ross King and Kim Dovey explore how in Bangkok interstices arise between different ‘urban morphologies and modes of production’ (200) as well as between differing imaginings of the city had by tourists, media commentators, elites and officials.

As a whole, this collection provides a novel theorization of urban interstices by grounding and developing an imagination of the interstice as more than territorial. Across the 10 chapters, a nuanced approach to the politics of interstices emerges, although the role of aesthetics is perhaps less well theorized. In the Introduction, Brighenti explains that aesthetics is taken up to address the phenomenological, the perceptual, the embodied and the lived and while this is evident, the collection falls short in situating its take on aesthetics against other political theorizations of the aesthetic, for example, Rancière’s politics of aesthetics (Rancière 2004), which Geographers and Architectural Theorists have recently used to theorize interim or temporary (and arguably interstitial) spaces (Iveson 2013; Tardiveau and Mallo 2014).

Urban Interstices is a valuable resource for those working to re-theorize ‘traditional’ urban interstices, such as leftover and unplanned spaces, as dynamic parts of the city. But

the book also extends the utility of the interstitial as a concept. Put into proximity with ideas of governance, territory and atmosphere, the interstice illuminates the importance of encounters, in-betweens and middles within a broad array of urban spatial formations and conceptual orderings. The interstice is successfully revealed to be an invaluable analytical tool with which to approach 'new urbanity' (xvi).

References

- Iveson, K. 2013. "Cities within the City: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (3): 941–956. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12053.
- Rancière, J. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Edited by S. Žižek. London: Continuum.
- Tardiveau, A., and D. Mallo. 2014. "Unpacking and Challenging Habitus: An Approach to Temporary Urbanism as a Socially Engaged Practice." *Journal of Urban Design* 19 (4): 456–472. doi:10.1080/13574809.2014.923743.

Ella Harris

Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London
Ella.harris.2011@live.rhul.ac.uk

© 2015, Ella Harris

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011432>