

region's superhighways, he captures the sense of Toronto being a 'region in constant motion' (p. 117). The 'urban space of the region' (*ibid.*), he believes, cannot be understood completely without driving its expressways.

An important contribution of the book is that, in accepting things for what they are, it valorizes all parts of the region, including the suburbs that for decades have been de-valorized by downtowners. Relph makes the important observation that the suburbs might appear 'baffling' (p. 7) from a downtowner's perspective, but to the 5.5 million people who live in them 'there is nothing incoherent about the suburbs' (*ibid.*). Likewise, from a suburban perspective, Jane Jacobs' beloved downtown neighbourhoods (home to only about 650,000) are experienced as 'dirty, noisy, and congested' (*ibid.*) and not considered a desirable place to live. These modest statements represent, in fact, a radical departure from what have been orthodox understandings of everyday life in Toronto. In seeing the entire region Relph moves the concept of centre and periphery up a gear. The urban region 'is simultaneously centralized and decentralized, spread out and concentrated, networked and dispersed' (p. 122). There are, he notes (channelling McLuhan), many centres, many peripheries and many Torontos.

While the 'what' of the Toronto region's transformations is beautifully described, the 'why' of the transformations is told in a somewhat less satisfying manner. Several times Relph resorts to 'what seems to have happened' or 'what seems to be going on' as a way of explaining how the transformations came to pass. These are guesses, educated guesses from an urban scholar who is intimately familiar with the landscapes and urban patterns of the Toronto region, but guesses nonetheless. We are required to ask ourselves if we trust Relph's analysis of the city-building processes that shape and re-shape urban space. Does 'clear seeing' have the power to explain the processes whereby regional landscapes have been so thoroughly transformed? For this reviewer the answer is—not quite. Nevertheless, despite this reservation, *Toronto* is a stunning book and one that will be rewarding to Torontonians and outsiders alike. It makes a significant contribution to the literature about the Toronto urban region, as well as to our general understanding of twenty-first century urbanism.

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**Andrea Mubi Brighenti (ed.) 2013: *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-between*. Farnham: Ashgate**

The complexity of the title concept of *Urban Interstices* has allowed editor Andrea Brighenti to weave ten diverse chapters into a thought-provoking volume. As a noun and a place, the 'interstice' is defined by its informality and invisibility in the larger urban landscape. In the introduction, Brighenti explains that: 'Traditionally, interstices have been associated with wastelands and leftover spaces, generated as by-products of urban planning' (p. xvi). Such spaces can be found between more clearly defined institutionalized spaces saturated with power and social control. Yet this first definition of the interstice does not entirely capture it. As an adjective, 'interstitial' appears to describe the practices of people who use these kinds of spaces to create authentic lives. However, what seems most significant is that the 'interstice' is neither just a kind of urban territory nor a specific social practice but that it always refers to 'dynamics of power and resistance, of fluidity and boundedness, of mobilities and moorings, of smoothness and striatedness' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, interstitial dynamics are embedded in two global shifts in the urban landscape, portrayed by Brighenti as the 'urbanization of territory' (or a Foucauldian rise in the social control of human environments) and the 'territorialization of the city' (or a growing disappearance of public spaces and, with it, established forms of urban civility). The concept pair of the 'interstice' and its unnamed opposite (controlled institutionalized urban space) adds a clever new device

to the theoretical toolkit of urban sociologists and others. Here, it competes with more traditional classifications, such as urban/suburban/rural, neighborhood/city/region or public/private, some of which appear tired indeed.

The volume's multidisciplinary line-up of authors includes architectural and legal scholars, geographers, sociologists, urban planners, designers and artists working on three continents. Their chapters range widely in topic, length and style—including theoretical and historical essays, case studies and more traditional research articles. Moreover, the ten chapters' engagement with the key concept of the volume varies greatly, on a continuum from very serious treatment to none at all. While all chapters are interesting, I can only mention a selection in the following.

At one end is the essay by geographer Peter Aday on the neglected topic of urban air in which he makes no reference to interstices at all. However, it isn't difficult to see the interstitial potentials in his engaging description of the class and race battles over clean air fought in many cities around the globe. At the other end of the spectrum are the chapters by architectural scholars Matthias Kärrholm and Luc Lévesque who both offer extensive reflections and critiques, as well as convincing applications, of the key concept. Their chapters are, respectively, about the 'mallification' (i.e. displacement and colonization) of Western urban retail spaces and 'territorial imagination and action' explored through architectural history and urban art. Both authors manage to push the meaning of the interstice well beyond a certain kind of place. This is also accomplished in another, no less fascinating, chapter by their colleagues Ross King and Kim Dovey on the territorial power struggles between the state, the middle class and the urban poor in the city of Bangkok. Surprisingly, the authors argue that Western tourism and mass media attention have brought visibility and agency to Bangkok's urban poor and their marginalized ways of living, thereby managing to disrupt longstanding power structures and opening windows for resistance and innovation.

Three of the chapters stand on solid sociological ground. In one of the strongest contributions, the search for interstices led editor Brighenti to suburbanizing villages near urban centers in the Alpine region, specifically the hinterland of his hometown Trento (Italy). Brighenti skillfully shows that, far from being one-dimensional, these villages are complex places in which residents' conflicting understandings and uses of space are renegotiated on a daily basis. Another notable paper is Don Mitchell's 'historical geography' of homeless encampments in the US which culminates in detailed descriptions of several contemporary examples. Overall, the chapter reminds us that tent cities are not social problems but rather attempts (however imperfect) to solve the underlying wrongs of poverty and discrimination. Last but not least, there is Stéphane Tonnelat's chapter chronicling the 'institutional career' of Pier 84 in Manhattan which was transformed from a truly interstitial 'public' space in which diverse groups pursued a variety of uses to a consumable 'open' space managed by authorities—even though some interstitial niches were successfully preserved.

While the book is successful overall, a review would be incomplete without pointing out some weaknesses. One of them is the absence of a better roadmap for readers, another is the lack of overall organization. If there is a larger story these chapters are telling, or if they are somehow grouped by themes (as edited volumes typically are), it does not come through. Likewise, it remains unclear how this particular mix of authors was chosen and why, for instance, urban anthropologists or political scientists were not included. Further, the absence of female authors and the rare references to feminist perspectives are surprising given that the volume intends to disrupt hegemonic discourse and structures. And even though the subtitle promises to investigate the 'aesthetics' of interstices, analyses of interstitial 'politics' are much more strongly developed throughout. Nonetheless, in the charting of new territory, gaps are unavoidable and I don't mean to diminish a rich and stimulating collection for what it did not manage to cover.

Urban sociologists will get the most mileage out of those chapters (e.g. the ones by Lévesque, Mitchell and Brighenti) that link investigations of the interstice with issues and debates in our field, however virtually all chapters can be enjoyed by scholars with an interest in urban theory and space and place. While the book's high price will likely prevent it from becoming a classroom staple, many individual chapters are suitable for use in advanced urban courses and certain to energize discussions. In closing, *Urban Interstices* is a highly original collection that cuts a fresh path into the woods of urban theory and research, and we shall look forward to what Brighenti will be cooking up next.

**Margarethe Kusenbach**, University of South Florida

**Dexter Whitfield 2014: *Unmasking Austerity: Opposition and Alternatives in Europe and North America*. Nottingham: Spokesman Books**

For its proponents and critics alike, austerity has become the new buzzword to describe the neoliberal crisis management drafted and implemented (despite strong and widespread resistance) in the aftermath of the 2009 recession. Politicians and decision-makers from many countries in Europe and North America have deployed austerity measures to rapidly reduce public debt, which had increased enormously as a consequence of the global financial crisis and the ensuing huge state-funded banking rescue packages. As such, the vague and cynical promise of austerity comprises a combination of cutting public spending, reducing wages, privatizing public services and further dismantling the welfare state as a strategy to in turn allow the private sector to rekindle growth and thereby escape the economic recession. In response, critical scholars emphasize the negative consequences and economic failures of the recent turn towards extreme austerity measures, and analyse the social power relations sustaining it. By building on this literature and a broad range of other empirical (mostly statistical) data, Dexter Whitfield's short eBook gets to the heart of the latest developments; it gives a clear well-written condensed overview of both austerity policies and austerity protests in Europe and North America since 2008. The monograph is divided into four chapters which: (1) expose how austerity can drive economies further into recession; (2) identify key lessons from organizing and action against such policies; (3) formulate comprehensive alternative economic strategies informed by Keynesian thinking; and (4) look at the contradictions evident in neoliberal crisis management.

By examining austerity strategies, including their economic and social effects, Whitfield demonstrates in the first chapter how austerity policies and the neoliberal reconfiguring of the welfare state 'have fuelled the fire of recession in Europe and the US rather than stimulating growth' (p. 6). Despite its promises, austerity has failed as government debt has continued to increase and weak economic performance has prevailed in most countries, due to reduced effective demand created by significant reductions in public expenditure. This section concludes that the (flawed) theory of growth-friendly fiscal consolidation has been empirically discredited on a massive scale. Given this, the economic and social effects of austerity are catastrophic. By giving an impressive, but understandably incomplete, overview of the devastating social consequences of increasing unemployment, reduced wealth, widened social inequality and deep cuts to wages, benefits and pensions, the author convincingly demonstrates that austerity entails a 'gigantic wealth transfer from taxpayers to the corporate sector and wealthy individuals' (p. 7). Based on engagement with the multifaceted experiences of trade unions, civil society organizations and social movements, the second chapter identifies key lessons drawn from diverse actions and strategies that have been deployed against austerity policies in recent years. Whitfield's critique explains that most protests were directed only against government and *troika*-imposed public