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Pre-print version

*Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, by Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 213 pp. \$75 (cloth), \$25 (paperback).

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If you thought Royston, a small town about 40 miles north of London, was a world away from the economic development of New York City, then *Mobile Urbanism* is sure to be an eye-opener. In a chapter of that book, Kevin Ward describes how Royston, like a long list of other cities and towns in the United Kingdom, has looked beyond its national and municipal borders in the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) in an effort to turn around its economic fortunes. We learn that this has involved a back-and-forth movement of reports, stories, data, and of people, keen to see for themselves how New York's BIDs operate "on the ground." "Grounding" is also fundamental to the Royston experience, as place-based features of the New York context are imperfectly dis-placed, packaged up, and re-placed, to be let loose elsewhere.

This tale, Kevin Ward suggests, reminds us that "if it were ever enough to account for change in the nature of urban development on the basis of analysis generated solely from within cities and the countries of which they are part, then that time has surely passed" (p. 73). *Mobile Urbanism* shows why this statement should be heeded. Focusing on cities, their politics and their policy making as both territorially and relationally defined, the edited collection makes a significant contribution to ongoing debates around spatial theorizing and policy mobilities.

As suggested in Allan Cochrane's foreword, the book comes at a moment of reformulation in urban politics research, which has traditionally sought to carve out "the urban" or "the city" from broader fields, often predetermining "its" (the city's) relationship to other fields, and to processes such as globalization and neoliberalization. In contrast to such a strongly territorialized approach, others view spatiality through the lenses of flow and connectivity, offering valuable insights, but risking a conception of cities as products of frictionless relationality. *Mobile Urbanism* cogently demonstrates how research needs to appreciate both the territorial *and* the relational, and the tensions that inhere.

The editors begin the book by outlining how cities can be thought of through the rubric of an "assemblage": a dynamic collection of elements (e.g., infrastructures, people, identities, objects, and laws) that are relationally constituted and that produce territories. Assemblage is said to capture the way city territory is emergently co-constituted through engagements with places and scales "elsewhere," continually reworking its geographies and requiring maintenance to hold together. This orientation to city space is advanced through a focus on urban policy making in a global context: how urban policy knowledge is inserted into, and mobilized through, global circuits and how the innately territorializing properties of urban politics and its place-based legacies interact to produce contingent urban policy assemblages.

Although not divided into sections, the first three chapters could be read as containing some of the intellectual roots of this endeavor, including Doreen Massey (global sense of place), Jennifer Robinson (ordinary cities/global cities), and Jamie Peck (fast policy). Looking at the London–Caracas trade agreement and the globalized practice of city strategy making, respectively, Massey (ch. 1) and Robinson (ch. 2) trace the political and knowledge circuits that inflect and reflect urban politics in a number of wealthier and poorer countries. They provide carefully optimistic views toward the potentialities of interurban connection, emphasizing the unpredictability and the "room to move" made available through the production of urban policy assemblages. Peck (ch. 3) takes a long view of cultural-economic policy, historicizing the more

recent and pervasive “creative city” model with a previous set of “cultural industries” initiatives by the Greater London Council in the 1980s. For Peck, this contrast speaks to the distinctive “policy ecologies” of the two periods, with the contemporary period marked by neoliberalized imperatives for fast policy fixes. Kevin Ward’s (ch. 4) and Eugene McCann’s (ch. 5) chapters use the territorial-relational framework to chart a trans-urban genealogy at different moments of policy change. Ward’s chapter tracks the internationalization of the BID, tracing how British policy actors drew on a selection of New York City BIDs and their “experts” in what became the formation of a distinctive style of UK BID. McCann’s chapter explores the role of international referents and their long-term reverberations in relation to the politics of urban drug policy in Vancouver, Canada. In different ways, both chapters are demonstrative of Massey’s concept of a “politics of place beyond place” (ch. 1), detailing how territorial urban politics is co-constituted with relational engagements elsewhere.

Rounding out the collection, Roger Keil and S. Harris Ali (ch. 6) and Donald McNeill (ch. 7) are concerned not so much with interurban policymaking as with the territorial-relational tensions of urban forms as policy objects. Empirically, the chapters focus on global health responses in the wake of the 2002 SARS outbreak, and airport territoriality and governance, respectively. While somewhat distinct from the preceding chapters, each offers an insightful account of how intensified interconnection is persistently tied into territorialized social systems and relations that constitute the shifting terrain of urban politics.

The editors conclude *Mobile Urbanism* with a call for heterogeneity—theoretically, empirically, and methodologically—in research that seeks to “provide a fuller account of the processes and potentialities of interurban connection” (p. 180). Indeed, the book collectively follows through with that sentiment, providing a depth and diversity of empirical cases and theoretical reference points. Graduate students and researchers will appreciate the edited collection’s detailed insights into some of the underrepresented spaces of urban politics and policy making through a transurban, transnational lens, as well as the range of accounts brought

together around the conception of the city as a territorial-relational assemblage. Back in Royston, it is apparent that while aligned with New York City for a time, the two remain very different.

*Mobile Urbanism* pushes us to understand how and why this is the case.