

Graham S. 2016. *Vertical: the city from satellites to bunkers*. London: Verso.

Steve Graham's book *Vertical* begins with the contention that 'attention to the vertical structuring of cities and urban life remains patchy and limited' (p.6). Although true within the confines of the key urban geography texts he surveys in the introduction, it is testament to Graham's powers of collection and narration that the rest of this volume proves this first statement somewhat false. By assembling a wide range of secondary sources, including academic studies, journalism and blog posts, Graham is able to present a detailed overview of past and present vertical topographies and processes. The argument is brought to life through engaging writing and excellent use of figures.

The first part of the book is devoted to verticals 'above' ground. Some chapters discuss topics familiar from Graham's earlier work on military urbanism, such as drones and bombers. Others resonate closely with his thesis on splintering urbanisms, such as chapters covering helicopters and skywalk/skytrain/skydeck. In both cases, the discussions in *Vertical* usefully extend the ideas presented elsewhere, or alternatively provide a useful synthesis of this earlier work for those readers who are not familiar with it. However, perhaps the most interesting chapters are those that break new ground, such as the fascinating history of the elevator/lift in chapter 6 and the connections in chapter 10 between air, urban heat islands and climate change.

Part two of *Vertical* deals with below ground. Chapters in this section trace cities through the extraction of earth in chapter 11, the evolution of Basement/Cellars (chapter 12) and Sewers (chapter 13), and a fascinating examination of mining in the final chapter, which connects many of the previous foci (e.g. elevators, skyscrapers, earth extraction) together. The interconnection and imbrications of different verticals with each other is characteristic of the book as a whole.

A passionate denouncement of global capitalism, and the growing levels of inequality it produces, structures the text as a whole. This refrain ties together the various vertical topographies that are examined, by positing a common cause. However, whether this causal thesis is sufficient remains to be seen. The recent fire at Grenfell Tower in London was clearly a result of austerity politics, a cruel spectacle of the structural political economic violence constantly attacking the poor in the UK. And yet the populations who were disproportionately affected by this violence - black British (Adams 2017) and non-UK nationals (Dehghan 2017, Abbott 2017) - demands a more nuanced understanding, which puts capitalism in conversation with Britain's long colonial history and present racial and racist dynamics.

Vertical one-page afterword identifies the key criticism many readers will have of this text. As Graham notes, this book does not examine how people contest vertical axes of power. This lack of attention to forms of resistance or even practices of endurance means the book is infused with a slightly dystopian mood. However, the final *mea culpa* is perhaps more problematic because it creates the impression that studies of resistance can be simply bolted onto the four hundred pages of analysis that has gone before. What such an argument misses is the

ways in which everyday practices and geographies of vertical life co-constitute and reshape the geographies and power relations they are enmeshed within. They are neither additive nor derivative, but rather creative in their own right. This is why *de Certeau*, (first cited on page 209 in *Vertical*), moves so swiftly in *The Practice of Everyday Life* from the panoptic view from above to the inventiveness and 'the rumble of so many differences' (cited in Graham 2016: 211) of embodied urban subjects. A more recent study in the same vein, Simone's (2014) *Jakarta: Drawing the City Near*, demonstrates how topographies of urban life, no matter how fully three dimensional, struggle to comprehend much of what is actually happening in cities if they neglect the co-constitutive topological relations in which the majority of residents are also ensconced.

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References

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