

Explore Everything: Place-Hacking the City, Bradley L. Garrett, 2013, Verso, 288 pages, Price £12.99 (paperback), ISBN: 9-781781-681299.

Explore Everything is a “travel/adventure” title from Verso, in which Bradley Garrett recounts the various activities undertaken as part of his ethnographic research amongst a “crew” of urban explorers between 2008 and 2012. Garrett presents the story of a PhD project which produced “uncontrollable media spectacles” (p.xiv), arrests, tales of political activities in urban space, and an array of images taken in “unseen” or “hidden” parts of the city, through the practice of urban exploration (variously termed “place-hacking”, infiltration, or trespass).

Explore Everything follows in the tradition of *Invisible Frontier* (Deyo and Leibowitz 2003), and *Access All Areas* (Ninjalicious 2005). In *Explore Everything*, Garrett brings the kind of content common to these somewhat lesser-known texts into a new realm, making it accessible to both academic and mainstream audiences. The style of recounting, presenting images, cover art, and even titling situates Garrett’s work as a direct descendent of these two seminal urban-exploration publications. The influence of the more recent *Hidden Cities* (Gates 2013) is also directly evident in the recounting of explorations involving Gates and Garrett.

The book is divided into seven chapters, as well as a prologue and epilogue. The prologue recounts Garrett’s arrest for breaking into London’s transport infrastructure, which (along with a disclaimer notifying the reader that “due to the sensitive nature of this research” some details have been changed or semi-fictionalised), sets the tone for a series of accounts in abandoned, restricted, or otherwise inaccessible urban spaces.

Chapter 1 sketches both the research project aims, and the history of urban exploration, introducing Garrett’s crew (via recounted explorations), as well concepts of place hacking, ethnographic research, and security architecture.

Chapters 2 and 3 encompass themes around history, transition, and transience – some of the most common ideas associated with urban and modern ruins – by problematising the curation of historical spaces, and proposing ruins as possible sites for “other” histories or alternative forms of experience and recollection. This section also raises questions about a post-capitalist future, and seeks to revalue the ruin (and it’s discarded objects) as a site for critical inquiry, using the work of Benjamin, Nietzsche, and Garrett’s own previous publications.

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce the practice of infiltration in secure urban spaces (particularly skyscrapers), followed by “underground” explorations in sewers, stations, catacombs, and

the like. This section occupies the largest proportion of the book, and also contains some of the most detailed personal accounts of the experience of entering and photographing “secured” spaces. Chapter 5 also contains an extended history of underground urban spaces, and makes an argument for “spaces on the margins” (tunnels, train stations, urban infrastructure) as “potential zones of infection”, points of entry to the bloodstream of the city itself (p.115).

Chapter 6 recounts the crew’s travels to the “new world”, including the cities of Detroit, Chicago and Las Vegas, the Mojave Desert, and elsewhere, as well as historical details, and some brief critical discussion on the use of images.

The shortest section, Chapter 7, defends Garrett’s media presence against academic and online (urban explorer driven) criticisms, charting the unexpected explosion in media coverage following the infiltration of the Shard. The epilogue makes a final case for place hacking and infiltration as political work which “has the capacity to go beyond simple representation to create new assemblages” (p.242) and inspire modes of resistance against capitalism, securitisation, authoritarianism, and even the very media that currently seek to “buy out” explorers by purchasing and printing their work.

Explore Everything is promoted by Verso as an “action/adventure” title, and it certainly engages readers well in this regard. However, as this is an academic review, it must be noted that although Garrett has previously contributed to journals such as *Antipode*, *Transactions*, *Environment and Planning D*, *Geography Compass* or *Progress in Human Geography*, those expecting such academic discussion may be disappointed, and experienced researchers new to the field could benefit instead from the extended bibliography presented in *Reckoning with Ruins* (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012). Despite many moments of critical reflection, and a diverse selection of endnotes, more frequent are those moments where Garrett retells the victories or failures of his crew, with comparatively few attempts to turn a critical eye to either his position, or the practice itself. Entrhralling accounts are presented through images and action narratives, rather than as a means to dissect power-relations in urban space - a consciously auto-ethnographic approach may have afforded more critical potential than the ethnographic approach that is frequently cited, and the interrogation of Garrett’s own practice is mostly limited to reflections on legal and physical risks to researchers in the field, rather than a discussion of race, class, gender, or other (urban) politics. For example, a conversation between Garrett and a fellow explorer, states that: “Abdul Greaze, a London explorer, once told me, only half joking, that he was ‘the wrong colour to be an explorer’”(p.20). Garrett follows this up with an assertion that, despite this comment, “urban exploration is, in my experience, not exclusionary”, rather than considering how his own arrest – a pivotal encounter in the book – may have played out differently for someone like Abdul.

Given recent debates in the field (in particular, the conversation between Mott and Roberts, and Garrett and Hawkins in the journal *Antipode* (2013)), it should also be noted

that a critical reading of the role of women in *Explore Everything* does not allay concerns about the overly masculinized nature of urban exploration - even when presented as a political practice. Of the half dozen mentions of female explorers in *Explore Everything*, only one account – from the explorer herself – presents female explorers as anything other than companions in need of rescue; liabilities; or helpful informants or assistants. A brief reference to women’s edgework appears as an adage to an endnote, and other references to the debate are minimal. Given that there is no doubt that Garrett is aware of such criticisms of both the practice and his work (it is briefly noted that “approximately 10 to 15 percent of London explorers are female”, on p.21), this could be cited as a major oversight in this book.

As a researcher familiar with the field (working on urban ruins and experience since 2007, and currently researching urban ruin imaginaries), this title does not offer the critical academic perspective that is currently all-but-absent in longer form publications about urban decay, ruins, and urban exploration practices. Overall, however, this work engages many ideas and leaves the reader curious to know more about urban exploration, city space, modern ruins, and related concepts, and is not necessarily intended to engage with key intellectual debates.

What *Explore Everything* offers is a talking point – the kind of work which generates discussion and further research, or bridges gaps between academia and cultural practitioners - a title that combines coffee-table-book images with casual conceptual and critical references. Had the latter been teased out further, this work could appeal more to an academic audience – or even become a critical text within a fast-growing field, to which Garrett has contributed significantly already.

That said, despite academic references and ethnographic methods, Garrett does not claim that this work is intended to be a highly academic text, and thus it can be said that – as an overview of an increasingly popular practice – *Explore Everything* successfully engages, introduces, and explores place hacking, urban exploration, and resistant tactics in city space, and presents these themes to an audience who may otherwise remain unaware of the potentialities of space-based politics in the everyday city.

Emma Fraser

University of Manchester

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