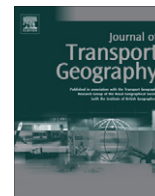


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Book review

Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life, R. Kitchin, M. Dodge. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA (2011). \$35.00/£24.95, ISBN-10: 0-262-04248-7, ISBN-13: 978-0-262-04248-2

1. Introduction

Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge's *Code/Space* is a pretty remarkable piece of scholarship. It works in a number of important ways to collate and develop the authors' research on software, the internet and communications over the last 15 years or so. The book appears intended for an audience far beyond Geography and sub-disciplinary concerns. It is also very nicely produced by MIT with a variety of illustrations. This is not to say, however, that the book does not have important implications for specific audiences such as readers of the *Journal of Transport Geography*, and that is where I'll focus my comments.

The book brings together a central thesis around code/space, that is, the manifold ways that software code – from the simplest algorithm to the most complex software made up of millions of lines of code – is dyadically related to space. Space and code produce one another and they work through one another. The book obviously builds on a range of existing publications on this topic, but it is here brought together and made especially accessible, which is actually one of the most impressive moves that the book offers in opening up these ideas to a wide and interdisciplinary audience. Rarely does the book get bogged down in the heavy theoretical arguments and foundations that underpin it. Indeed, when it does touch down into ontogenetic notions of space and becoming or Foucauldian governmentality, it does so lightly and with real clarity in the explanations and descriptions. In-fact both of these notions run fairly strongly through the book's main thesis, for first, in order to understand the co-production of space and software we must look to ontologies more accustomed to becoming as opposed to stasis. And secondly, in all manner of ways, software is often involved in regulating activities, behaviours and spaces. Sometimes this appears as disciplinary closure, and sometimes in manners that more subtly abstract and tinker with populations from a distance. This is all achieved with some ease and it is gratifying to see these sorts of arguments helping to assert geography's contribution to broader audiences.

All this will interest scholars of Transport Geography, most especially through the implication that – and very often – the object which software manages, administers and regulates are mobilities and transportation. Furthermore, they show how this may operate according to volumes of information shuttling to and fro between locations, or indeed, the ways in which specific mobile objects are now managed and controlled because of how they have become location aware e.g. with RFID technology. Thus from logistics systems, procurement to smart roads and airline and airport security, the book drops into specific locations and empirical materials which show how our everyday lives and

transport systems depend upon the mutual imbrication of code and space. This garners particularly important insights for the importance of location in how software allocates geographical values to people, objects and things which are increasingly becoming machine readable, from baggage to bodies to automobiles. Or, for instance, how more and more spaces and places simply could not perform their complex functions without code. Neither are these processes particularly socially neutral, as the authors illustrate the ability for code/spaces to deny, debilitate and discriminate. What we learn as scholars interested in transport and mobility is that the spaces and flows which constitute mobile societies have been rearticulated through code at all manner of scales, so that complexity and coordination can be managed and information can be brought to our fingertips.

A book cannot do everything, and perhaps where its weakness lies is in the empirical specificity which sort of gets lost as the text tells bigger and far more sweeping stories about coded society. Readers might wait for deeper illustrations of points. Whilst the authors occasionally use anonymous examples, substantive case-studies might have been more effective and more liberally used. Second, there is a certain penchant for developing new terms and words for the processes and relations described in the book. To an extent this works if the book is to function like a manual for making sense of our coded world, but it is not always going to be so ready to hand, and the proliferation of terms and functions can easily become forgettable, although the typologies developed here do have analytical purchase. And third, I think what's less clear is just how uneven this all is. Although we certainly get a sense of some of the geographical differentiation of code/space, and how code/space socially and spatially differentiates and discriminates and 'splinters' (Graham and Marvin, 2001) through their mutual production, the book is predominantly but not always an analysis of code/space in western society. It would have been interesting to see more examples of code/spaces emerging elsewhere, and rather than repeating development narratives (although this doesn't necessarily happen here) it would have been interesting to see how code/spaces are emerging differently and with different social configurations to how they emerged in the Global North.

In all, I think if you're familiar with the authors' arguments from papers and other publications, there might not be much that jumps out as new, for instance the systems of air-travel, although the material has certainly been updated. Rather, what is likely to be of far more value is the wider scale and expanse the book offers in providing a much broader analysis of software and space, a passionate argument for their combined study, and the analytical tools to do this.

Reference

- Graham, S., Marvin, S., 2001. *Splintering Urbanism: Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. Routledge, London, New York.

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