Policy and place: general practice in the UK
by Graham Moon and Nancy North


The National Health Service in Britain, and the role of general practitioners within it, is an inexhaustible source of debate, and never more so than at present. This book provides a valuable contribution to the discussion. A stated aim of the book is to provide a sympathetic but critical analysis of general practice and its role in the NHS. The authors examine how it has come to the position it now holds in the health service, how waves of reform in the NHS, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, have influenced its development, and the challenges faced by general practice today. The book includes chapters relating to the historical development of general practice in Britain, and to some specific policy changes that have affected general practice in this country over the last 20 years. The authors explore a number of policy developments in detail, including: efforts by government to monitor and manage activity in general practice; the growing emphasis on consumerism and patient participation; experiments with new models of organization of general practice, such as fund holding, primary medical service pilot schemes; and recent moves toward primary care development through Primary Care Groups and Primary Care Trusts.

This book appears to be targeted at a broad audience interested in primary health care policy and does not seem specifically targeted at geographers. Nevertheless, the discussion often takes a strongly geographical perspective and much of the content of this book is of special interest from a geographical point of view, reflecting the concerns of health geography. Geographers working in this field have traditionally focused on issues of access to care and territorial justice. This has resulted in a stream of research on the impact of spatial accessibility upon use of primary care in rural areas, as well as studies of other, social and organizational dimensions of accessibility that are important in some urban areas. The problems of ensuring territorial equality and equity of provision across the country, and the potential and limitations of various geographical indicators to guide resource allocation, are also discussed. The book also reflects more recent preoccupation in health geography with the effects of context, and place, on need for healthcare and its delivery. The variable contexts for general practice within Britain are considered, including the particular issues that arise in urban and rural areas. Attention is given to the relevance of localities to primary care provision and the local impact of geographically targeted policy initiatives.

The book is largely focused on the situation in Britain and the changing national context for primary care in this country. However, it will probably be of interest to readers from other countries, since the rather distinctive model of general practice in Britain is often discussed and used abroad as a point of comparison. This book provides an up to date account of British trends for those interested in comparative health systems. The authors’ account also provides a sense of the impact of ideas from other countries on the development of general practice in Britain, and this is explicitly addressed in the final chapter of the book, which compares the British system with that of New Zealand, the Netherlands and the USA.

The book asks some fundamental questions about the model of primary care, as currently provided by general practitioners in the NHS. Readers may see a connection (which is not, however, very strongly developed by the authors) with research in geography on the theoretical foundations of social justice (e.g. Smith 1994), which relates to some of the fundamental principles of the NHS. The challenges faced by general practice in Britain today can also be seen as associated with broader social, economic and political changes in society that make it even more difficult than in the past to provide a comprehensive primary care service to the whole population.
equitably and effectively. The book illustrates the tensions arising, for example, from global, national and local fiscal pressures to contain and manage public spending, the growing socio-economic, cultural and ethnic diversity in Britain, the increasing impact of commodification and consumerism, and the potential conflicts between personal and professional freedoms and public accountability.

Reference
Smith D 1994 Geography and social justice Blackwell, Oxford

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Concrete and clay: reworking nature in New York City
by Matthew Gandy


Matthew Gandy’s book is the product of his attempt to understand the ‘modern metropolis’ (p. ix) by way of ‘exploring a series of relationships between nature, cities, and social power’ (p. ix). The product of those relationships he calls ‘metropolitan nature’ (p. 2); something that is neither purely cultural or social, nor purely natural. Instead Gandy proposes a hybrid or cyborg concept of urbanization that bridges the ontological divides between nature/culture, nature/society and nature/capital. He narrates five stories of nature being ‘reworked’ in the creation of New York City, here considered the exemplar of the modern metropolis, which span 200 years and which represent the wide range of possible intersections and intertwinings of nature and society.

The first story told is that of the development of a water system that, since the 1840s, has linked New York to a vast region upstate. Hundreds of kilometres of pipe and aqueduct connect hinterland and city so that ‘the rain dripping down through the leaves of hemlock trees (in distant forests) will eventually find its way into the pipes of millions of homes’ (p. 23). Gandy’s fundamental point is that in the city that is the clearest proof to many of the unnaturalness of all cities, nature in a basic and elemental form – water – is everywhere. Indeed, New York could never have grown to its present size, nor now continue to survive, without it. In this regard Gandy would, no doubt, concur with David Harvey’s often quoted assertion that there is nothing unnatural about New York City (Harvey 1993).

The creation of Central Park is Gandy’s second tale of reworked nature. In it he debunks the generally accepted view that the Park’s fundamental purpose was to provide the citizens of New York with the uplifting experience of sublime nature in the middle of the city. Rather he argues that the insertion of a simulacrum of first nature into the city represented ‘a kind of elaborate spatial fix to the economic downturn of the 1850s’ (p. 109). He also counters the oft-touted idea that the creation of Central Park should be read as an expression of a kind of idealized American democracy. Building it, he points out, required the removal of some of the city’s most marginalized residents (many of them African Americans) who were living on the site as squatters.

The third case study of reworked nature is that of the urban parkways created in the 1920s and 1930s, which Gandy believed ‘represented a new spatial configuration of society, technology, and nature’ (p. 122). His critique of Robert Moses, the public figure most associated with building the parkways, is particularly interesting as it departs from earlier histories (Caro 1974) that have described Moses as omnipotent. Gandy ties Moses’ ultimate demise to the demise of technological modernism in the face of mounting political opposition to its projects.

In a chapter on the 1960s work of the Puerto Rican Young Lords in New York’s barrio, Gandy explores ‘the conception of “nature” as a material and symbolic dimension that extends from the health of the human body to the social production of urban space’ (p. 155). The Young Lords were attempting to create a counter-hegemonic metropolitan nature by way of ‘a series of far-reaching social transformations, in contrast to the fragmentary aesthetic interventions associated with urban beautification and the Olmstedian traditions of landscape design’ (p. 183).

The final case study is an exploration of ‘Rustbelt Ecology’ (p. 188), the brownfield legacy of Fordism. Gandy notes the current tendency in many rustbelt
cities to eliminate all evidence of processes deemed to be unpleasant or unsightly – power generation, manufacturing, waste disposal. This results in a kind of ‘invisible urbanism’ (p. 207) – a way of everyday urban life that is not confronted with the material realities of the processes that constitute it and sustain it.

Gandy’s book can be situated in several scholarly conversations about the relationships between nature and society. The first of these conversations is an attempt to redefine the terrain of ‘urban ecology’. This redefinition rejects both the Chicago School tradition of human ecology and its naturalization of the social relations of capitalism, and the more recent ecological tradition that focuses on the restoration of non-human nature in cities. A different, and still evolving, concept of urban ecology considers it to be the sum of societal relations with nature (Biro and Keil 2000). Within this concept, social relations are de-naturalized at the same time that nature is understood to be social. While Gandy is dismissive of anti-modern, anti-urban ‘ecology’, I believe his book can be read as a contribution to urban ecology’s current redefinition. He also enters the lively debate on the production of nature (Smith 1984; Castree 2000) and the related concept of cyborg or hybrid urbanization in which urban space is considered the co-product of society and nature; of the human and the non-human (Latour 1993; Swyngedouw 1996, 1999).

It is difficult not to think of Concrete and clay as part of an unintended trilogy with Cronon’s Nature’s metropolis (1991) and Davis’ Ecology of fear (1998), books that narrate the urban ecologies of two other American cities – Chicago and Los Angeles. Gandy has provided us with a masterly exploration of the production of urban space at the intersection of nature, society and modernity. Concrete and clay is both eminently scholarly and accessible; an absolute pleasure to read.

References

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Making sense of men’s magazines
by Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks


There may be something categorically wrong with me as a male, in that I had never read the magazines reviewed in this stimulating new volume. So I bought as many as I could find in my grocery store, or at least as many as I thought I could safely bring home on the pretext of writing this review. Then, of course, my wife promptly seized them and began the review process for me.

The authors of Making sense look at magazines like Loaded, Maxim, FHM (For Him Magazine), Stuff for Men, Attitude and GQ Body and Soul. After framing their subject in various theories in communications, cultural and gender studies, Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks examine questions of consumption and marketing, editorial prerogative, audience reception, and the psychology of body politics and fantasies, whether they be explicitly sexual or not. Based on interviews with editors of these magazines and focus groups they composed, and their own reading of the contents of the magazines, Making sense asks what the recent commercial success of these men’s magazines (in the UK, at least) might tell us ‘about the changing nature of contemporary masculinities’, in
particular ‘the arrival and increasing popularity of laddish forms of masculinity’ (p. 1).

Making a distinction between discourses and dispositions, the authors are at pains to contrast the background (some might say ideological) concepts informing people who read these magazines about what it means to be a man, with attempts by these same readers to create new approaches to men and masculinities, including in opposition to such pre-existing identity frameworks. In particular, the authors are critical of the broader media’s summary judgement about the success of these new men’s magazines, that is, that they uniformly reflect the inexorable rise of a ‘laddish masculinity’. They find that the range of masculinities articulated by the readers of these magazines is indicative of far more tension and flexibility, as well as challenge, to earlier male models of thinking and comportment.

Through examining ‘the commodification of contemporary gender anxieties’ and exploring ‘internally contradictory popular culture’, the authors of this study intend to find a middle ground between arrogant condemnation of men’s magazines as uniformly sexist and cavalier amusement by their supposedly frivolous purpose. Grounded in a particularly British experience of magazine production, circulation and readership, the analysis in this study of recent challenges to men and masculinities may be usefully compared with those in the United States and other English-speaking countries.

The bottom line, it seems, is that the magazines reviewed in this book can be anything you want them to be: forces for good or evil, and above all not inherently sexist or non-sexist, such that their impact on society as a whole is determined by the readers far more than the editorial staffs, reporters, advertisers or sales people. Even if laddism itself is not held to be in the eye of the beholder, the effective promotion of misogyny versus ironic manly mischievousness are ultimately matters that are resolved outside the playing fields of commercial publications.

I was never clear why certain magazines were included in Making sense and others were not. Why, for example, was there no Playboy review? What about sports magazines, whose readership, I believe, is overwhelmingly male? What about magazines aimed primarily at men who have sex with other men? This may pertain to differences in English-speaking readers in the United States, Britain and Australia, but I think it also may stem more from a somewhat arbitrary definition of ‘men’s magazines’ in the first place. Such a comment is not intended to diminish the significance of the findings of the study by Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks. Rather some of the implications of the book are necessarily more limited because of the somewhat narrow focus on certain magazines to the exclusion of others.

My wife’s comments on the magazines I brought home from the grocer’s led to her to quickly develop a ranking system regarding the degree of come-hither photos in different magazines, a point at odds with a comment from the editor of Loaded’s website, quoted by the authors of this volume: ‘Loaded’s not a sexist magazine, like Loaded’s strictly into sex, it’s sexual, like into sex, but there’s a difference between being sexual and being sexist…’ (p. 69).

Perhaps, but if, as the authors contend, ‘The magazines are not trivial, as some critics of popular culture might claim, but a key ideological marker in respect of the reformulation of gendered relations’ (p. 148), then we need to be clear whether such magazines are simply reflections of broader contradictions and confusion regarding gender relations, or whether they play an instrumental role in shaping male identities and practices, even if the editorial personnel may be less than fully aware of the impact their decisions may have. The study of popular culture and, more specifically, changing gender relations, is admittedly not a simple affair. None the less, as the mere existence of this serious study of these magazines makes patently obvious, they make a difference, in complex ways, in how their male readers look at themselves and at women.

These men’s magazines are thus, to paraphrase a not-so-ancient saying, either part of the problem or part of the solution to unequal gender relations. Perhaps with Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks, we should alter the saying: ‘we need to appreciate that these magazines are simultaneously part of the problem and part of the solution’. I am not convinced, but I enjoyed reading many of the reasoned arguments in this creative and informative study.