Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Harvey, Penny and Hannah Knox, *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015, 264 pgs.

Reviewer: Sara Komarnisky
University of Alberta

Anthropologists are increasingly turning to the study of infrastructures as material forms that enable the circulation of goods, people, and ideas, reorient spatial and social relationships, and provide insight into the workings of power and politics across multiple scales. In this book, Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox draw on over a decade of research on roads and road construction in rural Peru to investigate how roads, approached as "infrastructural technologies," can provide new perspectives on the politics of contemporary social relations (4). Their work adds to the growing literature on infrastructure by focusing squarely on the form of the political: the political purchase of infrastructural forms; the material politics through which infrastructures are brought into being, sustained, or undermined; and the ways in which infrastructures are constitutive of political power (5). Roads promise social transformation, and they rearrange the spaces of everyday life. They create spaces for institutional forms of governance exercised by state representatives and experts such as engineers. They reflect the gap between the intended effects of infrastructural practice and the way those intentions play out in actual practices. They work as scaling devices, so that state power is present in the lab and in measurements, and global capital is there in confrontations over ownership of land (14). In other words, roads manifest the political (7).

To explore the politics of roads and road building in Peru, Harvey and Knox focus their analysis on two specific roads. The first is Route 26, 700 kilometres of the Interoceanic Highway, which runs from the highland town of Urcos to the Brazilian border at Iñapari. The construction of the highway was a multi-million dollar initiative that was the subject of considerable political debate before road construction began in 2006 (23). The second road was no less controversial: a one-hundred-kilometre stretch of highway between Iquitos and Nauta in the northern Peruvian Amazon, which had a 70-year history of construction at the time of the publication of the book in 2015. Harvey and Knox write that this road is "the most expensive road on the planet" (24), based on per-kilometre construction costs. These two roads provide a focus for the ethnography and bring together a diverse cast of characters: national, regional, and local officials, local residents, pressure groups, "stakeholders," military and police, skilled and unskilled labourers, and a diverse group of experts and professionals working within private organisations, non-governmental organisations, and state institutions.

Harvey and Knox tell a story of road construction and politics in Peru in three parts: the intricacies of engineering practice; engineering, safety, and financial regulatory regimes; and the social space of the road construction site. The text is complex and yet highly readable, complemented by photographs taken along the way. Part 1, "Roads as State Space," describes the entanglements of past desires and future imaginaries related to state formation that emerge in the process of road construction (15). This includes tracing the history of modern road-building initiatives to explore how roads have participated in the emergence of the globally interconnected territorial state. The promise of economic and political connectivity through road construction projects is linked to the exercise of state power: roads both territorially unite the nation and promise a global reach (Chapter 1). However, the integrative ambition of a new road must always contend with prior geographies and previous histories of connectivity. Local narratives from regions where new roads were being built show that the "frontier," past and present, entails the production of complex geographies of connection and disconnection. Out of this connective capacity, as "network infrastructures" that bring people and things into relation with each other, roads produce an ongoing politics of differentiation: between Andean regions, between permanent residents and outsiders, and between extractors of wealth and the custodians of the land (Chapter 2).

Engineering and construction also involve a politics of differentiation. Part 2, "Construction Practices, Regulatory Devices," takes up the day-to-day practices by which political effects become manifest in road construction processes. In this section, the authors theorise the role of expertise in road building, focusing on the procedures, norms, and regulations that guide infrastructural projects like roads. To do this, they focus on the quantification of materials in construction laboratories (Chapter 3) and health and safety regulations on the construction site (Chapter 4). Road construction engineering and health and safety both work to stabilise and make legible inherently unstable and uncertain material worlds. Harvey and Knox also interrogate the siting and the shaping of the political. Contingent and constraining practices by engineers and health and safety professionals bridge the gap between formal regulatory

codes and the actual material and social conditions on site. Engineering and safety are therefore more than technical, they are also political. Chapter 5, "Corruption and Public Works," continues this focus to explain why road construction projects are often wrapped up in accusations of corruption. Like health and safety regulations and engineering standards, the formal regulatory systems that attempt to ensure transparency and accountability of road-building projects also generate deep uncertainties, manifest in the conviction that public works are always steeped in corruption.

In Part 3, "The Modern State," the authors consider the political impacts of social transformation via infrastructural engineering by identifying two areas of attention for anthropological analysis: the "impossible public" and the "engineer bricoleur." As Harvey and Knox have illustrated throughout the book, road construction projects are deeply imbued with ambitions for social transformation in the name of the public good (168). However, infrastructures also fix things in place. Even though roads are established as projects of social transformation, they are also manifestations of social, legal, and technical methods that work to fix relations and hold them in place over time (181). This fixity has powerful effects for generating the conditions of possibility for political action (181). However, impossible publics take a position of refusal – not acquiescing to the project nor engaging in explicit acts of opposition or resistance to it.

For example, the authors relate the story of Aurelio who refused to sign paperwork to transfer ownership of land because (in his words) "*es que no me da la gana*" (I am not moved to) (175). This refusal is not definitive; he never says that he will not nor that he will; he simply prefers not to sign (177). This action frustrated the lawyer for the Ministry of Transport and Communications, who worked to ensure that people who were required to sell their land for the road project were appropriately represented, informed of their rights, and adequately compensated. If Aurelio gave a reason for his refusal, they could compromise or perhaps give him more money. As the authors put it, "if Aurelio's statement was a wilful claim, he would easily be able to be incorporated into the ethical schema by which his opposition to the road was understandable as a statement of opposition. The next step would be to rationally discuss appropriate levels of compensation, or articulate the grounds for rerouting the road, or both" (178). But if he gave no reason at all, what could they do? For Harvey and Knox, such acts are less easily contained than more explicit forms of public protest. These impossible publics thus represent other possibilities for political action that derive not from a culturally different mode of explanation or analysis but, rather, from the very contradictions that the process of infrastructural transformation puts into play (185). In Chapter 7, which is also the conclusion of the book, Harvey and Knox return to the figure of the "engineer bricoleur." Such a figure draws attention to the fact that what engineers actually do is inherently pragmatic and flexible. While standardising metrics and the universals of mathematics are central to engineering practice, the measurements these techniques allow are never assumed to be stable (196). The professional expertise of engineers allows them to produce resilient structures out of the dynamic relational properties of the material and social worlds in which they work (197). The material transformation they enact is produced out of a world of tensions, negotiations, and contestations – or, in other words, politics.

Harvey and Knox write that they began their study of Peruvian roads as a means to work ethnographically on the state. However, their attention to the material politics of road construction on two highways allowed them to rethink the political from the grounded, experiential, and immediate space of infrastructural formations. Roads brought social forms into being by way of their planning and construction: territories and displacements, diverse forms of expertise and analytical attention, movements and blockages, forms of social difference and transgressions. Roads matter to people, and, in this book, Harvey and Knox demonstrate why roads should also matter to those of us who are interested in thinking about the political.

Heiman, Rachel, *Driving After Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb,* Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015, 288 pages.

Reviewer: Joshua Friesen
McGill University

Driving After Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb is the product of Rachel Heiman's fieldwork in a suburban town centre in New Jersey, United States, pseudonymously referred to as "Danboro." Clearly written and argued, this ethnography explores what it was like to be a middle-class American in the 1990s. It is a time that, according to Heiman, is important to study to better understand how the post-war American dream came to an end as well as to "think deeply about how to create a new American dream that will be more sustainable and equitable than the last" (xii).

One of the contextualising arguments for *Driving After Class* is that neoliberal government policies in the United States created new opportunities for the expansion of middle-class and upper-middle-class wealth and, at the same time, undercut the institutional basis for a secure middle-class existence. More specifically, Heiman argues that neoliberal political and economic conditions created a dominant "common sense" or habitus in places like Danboro. It was this neoliberal habitus that drove the people Heiman worked and lived among to make decisions, investments, and consumer purchases that both asserted their class position within America and jeopardised their personal resources. As Heiman herself puts it, "the central argument of the book is that rugged entitlement – a product of neoliberalism and its limited commitment to the public good – participated in furthering conditions that intensified middle-class anxieties in the first place" (4). In other words, the ruggedly self-serving entitlement that residents of Danboro felt about their own luxuries and their own status privileges walked in lockstep with the degradation of the public sphere that made it harder for Danboro's residents to hold on to their privileged way of life.

Driving After Class is broken into seven chapters: the introduction frames the arguments and historical context of the book; Chapter 2 explores the exodus from Brooklyn that many Danboro residents made along with the "post-Brooklyn"