

Chapter 8

From the City of Bits to E-Topia: Space, Citizenship and Community as Global Strategy in the Governance of the Digitally-Inclusive Regeneration Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Mitchell's book on the City of Bits, sets out a vision of urban life literally done to bits, left fragmented and in danger of coming unstuck. His next book e-topia, provides the counter-point to this vision of urban life as ungovernable and scenario where the city is no longer left in bits and pieces, but a place where it 'all comes together'. As Mitchell states in Me++: the Cyborg Self and the Networked City, all this 'coming together' is now possible because the trial separation of bits and atoms is over and the dissolution of the boundaries between virtual and physical space makes citizenship worth playing for. The landscape which this chapter uncovers is different for the reason it reveals the middle ground between the 'high-level' issues surrounding e-topia and those lying at the 'grass roots' level of me ++ the cyborg-self. For it is here with the likes of Graham and Marvin, Laclau and Mouffe and Zizek, that questions about the (radical) liberal democracy underlying the 'city of bits' and supporting the global strategy of 'e-topia' as the 'me++ of the cyborg self', get 'bottomed out' as the citizenship, community and governance of the digitally-inclusive regeneration thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the growing significance of Mitchell's (1995, 1999, 2001, 2003) work on the transformative capacities of information technology (IT), this chapter shall reflect on the transition from the *City of Bits* to *e-topia* and concerns Graham and Marvin's (2001) *Splintering Urbanism* reveals about the status of this thesis. Reflecting on these concerns, it shall uncover what the critiques of Graham and Marvin (2001), Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and Zizek (1997, 2006a, 2006b) reveals about e-topia and go on to expose what this chapter's reworking of the thesis tells us about space, citizenship and community.

The critical nature of these insights is then used to take this investigation further. This is done by offering an outline of urban life as those spaces we shall come to know it by. That is as places where the embedded intelligence: semantics, syntax, vocabulary and notion of citizenship, not only have a sense of community, but global strategy for governing the digitally-inclusive regeneration which everything is subject to.

The focus of the paper is theoretical. This is not to suggest the thesis has no practical relevance as this would not be true. For major software developers like Microsoft, Cisco, Hewlett Packard and Siemens, are all currently in the process of developing a global strategy for the governance of their digitally-inclusive regeneration plans.^{1 2 3 4} However, as the object of this chapter is to put theory before practice, what follows shall take the opportunity this examination of the thesis offers to uncover the critical role space, citizenship and community play in the global strategy multi-national organisations are currently developing to govern their digitally-inclusive regeneration programmes.

FROM THE CITY OF BITS TO E-TOPIA

Mitchell's (1995) book on the *City of Bits*, sets out a vision of urban life that is literally coming unstuck, broken up into a series of fragmented experiences and 'done to bits'. Mitchell's (1999) next book *e-topia*, provides the counter-point to this vision of urban life and scenario whereby the city is no longer left in bits and pieces, but a place where it 'all comes together'. For Mitchell (1999) *e-topia* offers the prospect of just such a future: urban life in a city no longer 'done to bits' and in danger of coming unstuck, but a place where it 'all comes together'. In particular, as a place which makes it possible for cities to be creative in 'piecing together' spaces that allow for a notion of citizenship and sense of community.

It is for this reason *e-topia* culminates in an examination of: 'where it all comes together'. Where the notion of citizenship and sense of community comes together as a global strategy strong (lean, mean and green) enough and sufficiently resilient for the governance of any 'digitally-inclusive regeneration' to keep everything stuck together.

As Mitchell (2003) goes on to state in his more recent book: *Me++: the Cyborg-self and the Networked City*, all this 'coming together' is now possible because:

"The trial separation of bits and atoms is now over. In the early day of the digital revolution it seemed useful to pry these elementary units of materiality and information apart. The virtual and physical were imagined as separate realms – cyberspace and meatspace, as William Gibson's insouciantly in-your-face formulation put it. They seemed a welcome release from the stubborn constraints of tangibility – until the dot-com bubble burst, at least. Now, thought, the boundary between them is dissolving" (2003, p. 3).

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