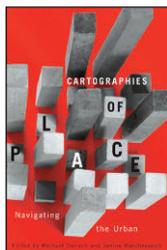


Reviews



Cartographies of Place: Navigating the Urban. Edited by Michael Darroch & Janine Marchessault. Montréal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. 320 pp. ISBN: 9780773543027.

This might be the most important, and most challenging book I have read this year, but it is not for the faint-hearted or those lacking imagination. Loosely speaking, it is about how “media” have changed the way in which we inter/act. Opening up new spaces of connection, media enhance and transform our experiences in the city. And to examine and explain this, the authors have collected a set of essays under the headings “legibility,” “navigation,” and “locale.” The first refers to theoretical premises, the second to how specific times and places are negotiated, and the last to case studies of place making. These essays were initiated during the Culture of Cities Project, 2000–2005, and developed in symposia in Windsor (2009) and Toronto (2007).

A way to begin thinking about the impact of media, and of the city as a living entity, is to see it as fabricated through collective memories, as imagined, as both impacting on and interacting with the subject through the experience of navigating place. For this we need an example, such as my favourite, the chapter “Remapping the space between: Sovereignty, globalization, and media representation in Rio de Janeiro.” The author, Justin Read, a professor of romance languages at the State University of New York (SUNY), takes up the case of two young boys who live in a favela, or squatters’ encampment in Rio de Janeiro. In this zone of exclusion, the powerless have been forgotten, and drug lords and gangs rule. Read’s focus is a television series about life in the favela, *Cidade dos Homens* (City of Men), and specifically the third episode called “Correiro” (The Mail). It opens with Acerola in his underwear taking a shower in the public fountain. Afterwards he goes with his grandmother to the local community centre where all the mail is delivered because the streets have no names and the houses have no numbers. An argument ensues between the faveleiros and the mailman that grows so loud it annoys the local drug lord. In his mediation of the dispute the drug lord appoints Acerola to deliver the mail and warns him what will happen if he does not do his job. Acerola and his friend Laranjinha are able to deliver all of the mail suc-

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cessfully except one letter, which is refused by its drunken recipient. They then have a dilemma because they have not fulfilled their job requirement. On the discursive level they do not know how the city operates and so do not know to mark “return to sender” on the envelope. And on the experiential level of the street, when they go to return the letter to its origin they do not know how to find the address. They get assistance from a clerk at a magazine stand who shows them how to find their location on a map. Coincidentally, they see that their home, the favela, is not on the map. It is presented as if it is green space or wilderness. In finding one locale, they have lost the other. Despite the map, the letter is undeliverable because it came from a different city, so they tear it up. Returning to the favela they are confronted by the drug lord’s lieutenants with the original recipient of the letter who is angry because it contained a job offer, and so they have to admit they lied. Facing harsh punishment, they offer to correct the underlying problem by creating a map of the favela and giving names to all the streets, starting with those of the lieutenants themselves.

While it is a simple plot, the fictionalized representations of *Cidade dos Homens* are theoretically rich because they are written by those who wish to represent the favela in a more sympathetic way than it would be in traditional, mainstream media. They wish to make it politically visible. So in this fictionalized episode, shot in cinematic realism, the plot then twists to include the buildup to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The police raid favelas, arresting drug lords and seizing weapons. The results are televised by TV Globo as representations of sovereignty, as necessary police actions. Yet, to the residents of the favela, they know a different experience of the police, their cruelty and violence. To them this is civil war. The raids are symbolic of state power, just as the absence of the favela on a map is evidence of its exclusion, its powerlessness. Just as writing letters was an instrument of colonial rule, the images of the city and its favelas are transmitted to the world as an export of colonial power. Ironically, the only news not linked to police, military, and state was produced by adolescents living in one of the favelas. Rene Silva started a community newspaper, *Voz da Comunidade*, which featured first-hand interviews with residents who could testify directly to police brutality, intimidation, and theft. His posts on Twitter start to scoop large media outlets like Globo. The liberatory aspect of this more subterranean media resists the mainstream media in re/imagining the relation between the city and the favela. In this most concrete way we see how journalism takes new form with the new media.

The book’s other chapters contain analyses of topics such as “art and the post-urban condition,” “mapping the spatial practices of protest,” “the artist as urban researcher,” and “aleatory urbanism and serendipity,” and are theoretically dense. They challenge the reader to re/think the ways we construct relations between re/presentations and (putative) reality, and I was continually reminded of Guy Debord where he says: “The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.”

Photographs from *Pokemon Go*, for example, are not mere representations of imagined spaces, but tied to the intersubjective performance of urbanity. In those photo-

graphs players find themselves negotiating the imagined city. In this way the city is both mediated and mediates through its cartographic representations. Take for example that augmented reality game in which surveillance can watch one wandering around with a virtual map trying to find game objects in the physical environment. Whereas in traditional cartography one carried a map on which the landscape was brought to the subject, one now carries a map that locates oneself within a gamed landscape. The layering of subject, object, and interpretations continuously looping on themselves reminds me of the video about Casey Neistat being ticketed for not riding in the bike lane in New York City. In the video, he shows what it is like to actually ride in the bike lane and have to negotiate around trash cans, delivery trucks, pedestrians, and other random objects by crashing into them. However, what he does in the video is create what (did not happen in the past as if it) happened in the present in order to create protest in the future (which was in reaction to the present of the video).

The cartographic has moved beyond two-dimensional representations, and it is the new media that are in part responsible because of their pervasiveness. This collection of essays initiates interdisciplinary conversations and new research methodologies at the juncture where the image is transforming the geography of cities. A new grammar is required to unravel these cartographies and come to terms with the “ephemerality and complexities of place.”

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