

**CARTOGRAPHIES**

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**Navigating**

**the Urban**

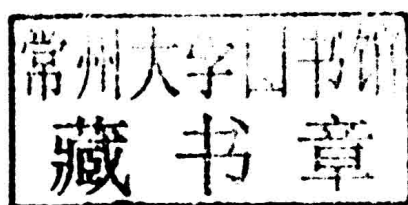
Edited by Michael Darroch and Janine Marchessault

# Cartographies of Place

## Navigating the Urban

EDITED BY

Michael Darroch and Janine Marchessault



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## CARTOGRAPHIES OF PLACE

## THE CULTURE OF CITIES

SERIES EDITORS: KIERAN BONNER AND WILL STRAW

Cities have long been a key focus of innovative work in the humanities and social sciences. In recent years, the city has assumed new importance for scholars working on cultural issues across a wide range of disciplines. Sociologists, anthropologists, media specialists, and scholars of literature, art, and cinema have come to emphasize the distinctly urban character of many of their objects of study. Those who study processes of globalization are drawn to analyzing cities as the places in which these processes are most deeply felt or where they are most strongly resisted.

The Culture of Cities series has its roots in an international research project of the same name, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada during the period 2000–05. The series includes books based in the work of that project as well as other volumes that reflect the project's spirit of interdisciplinary inquiry. Case studies, comparative analyses, and theoretical accounts of city life offer tools and insights for understanding urban cultures as they confront the forces acting upon them in the contemporary world.

The Culture of Cities series is aimed at scholars and interested readers from a wide variety of backgrounds.

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*Alan Blum*

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Montreal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities

*Edited by Johanne Sloan*

Circulation and the City

Essays on Urban Culture

*Edited by Alexandra Boutros and Will Straw*

Cartographies of Place

Navigating the Urban

*Edited by Michael Darroch and Janine Marchessault*

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CARTOGRAPHIES OF PLACE

# Introduction: Urban Cartographies

MICHAEL DARROCH AND JANINE MARCHESSAULT

Media are connected to our physical environments more dramatically than ever before – literally opening up new spaces of interactivity and connection that transform the experience of being in the city, its forms of public gathering and movement, the democratic ideals of *civitas* of which we think the city capable. Urban screens, mobile media, new digital mappings, ambient and pervasive media of all kinds create ecologies in which entire communities dwell or in which singular entities take refuge. How do we analyze these new spaces?

Recognition of the mutual histories and research programs of urban and media studies is only just beginning. *Cartographies of Place: Navigating the Urban* seeks to develop new vocabularies and methodologies for engaging with the distinctive situations and experiences created by media technologies that are reshaping, augmenting, and expanding urban spaces. The book builds upon the rich traditions and insights of a postwar generation of humanist scholars, media theorists, and urban planners. Authors situate different historical and contemporary currents in urban studies that share a common concern for media forms, either as research tool or as the means for discerning the expressive nature of city spaces around the world. All of the media considered in this book are not simply “free floating,” but are embedded in the geopolitical, economic, and material contexts in which they are used.

Cities are not images but living entities deeply connected to and fabricated through collective memories, social relations, and built structures expressed in material culture. But even though cities are not images, they are images before they are cities – they are imagined, dreamed, and planned. While such imaginings can be understood

through and clarified by the aesthetic systems/experiments of art making, they exceed art. They belong to a network of discourses and epistemologies, hierarchies and power relations that are both structured and unpredictable. Photographic and digital images, for example, are not simply representations of imagined spaces; nor are they empirical records of moments past. Rather, they are integrally tied to the very enactment of urban space, to the creative intersubjective performance of urbanity.

The authors we have brought together in this volume seek to understand the urban in and through its complex mediations, its cultural cartographies that “activate” the layers of reality in each environment. We have called our collection *Cartographies of Place: Navigating the Urban* to express the notion that media both anchor and complicate what it means to be located in the world today. With the exception of two chapters by two of the leading researchers in the field of urban cultural studies (Highmore and Shields), the essays in this book are the result of many years of collaboration amongst the authors on various urban research projects. In addition to collaborations (Coté, Darroch, Horgan, Liinamaa, Marchessault, and Straw) initiated during the *Culture of Cities Project 2000–2005*,<sup>1</sup> the majority of the contributors to *Cartographies of Place* participated in two symposia coordinated by the editors: the Urban Research Methodologies Symposium held at the Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art in Toronto in April 2007; and the Urban Mediations Symposium held at ArtCite in Windsor, Ontario in May 2009. Initial versions of their chapters were presented at these two symposia, and we believe that this gives the collection a strong cohesion and shared purpose.

The impetus behind these meetings was the potential implications we saw for developing innovative methodologies in urban research – whether it be new forms of citizenship tied to social media, new cultural formations in urban contexts, or “artistic research” that redefines the very parameters and meanings of existing knowledge. Participants focused on cultural spaces, visual fabric, and the mediated character of cities. In particular, we were concerned with research methods that cross the humanities and fine arts such as innovative forms of ethnographic inquiry, object-oriented ontologies, comparative archeologies, artistic projects, and interventions in urban space.

These origins, and the concerns to develop innovative interdisciplinary methodologies that bring together urban and media studies, are reflected in this book’s intellectual breadth. Our contributors strive to

bridge modernist and contemporary perspectives of the cartographic, proposing a central understanding of “navigation” as a changing phenomenon within a digital urban environment. Navigation encapsulates the tension between maps as representations of territory, and maps as interfaces with routes and routines of city life. The way in which the cartographic has moved beyond two-dimensional representations is theorized by different authors in this volume who analyze how these technologies have influenced our experience of place, transformed everyday activities or enabled political actions. The collection thus positions “navigation” as a central form of mediation between the spaces, tempos, and experiences of the city. Drawing upon modernist paradigms for thinking through contemporary imaginaries, the authors engage with phenomena in contemporary cities around the world. *Cartographies of Place* offers original methodologies that are vital for understanding the ecological, social, and cultural spheres that define twenty-first-century urban spaces – both designed and unplanned. Across the book’s three-part structure, the contributions evolve from broadly stated metaphors and theories (“Legibility”), to studies that examine how specific spaces and times of the city are activated and negotiated (“Navigation”), to case studies of places and acts of place making (“Locale”). Before getting into more detail about the contributions, we would like to turn to some of the early considerations of media and environment that underpin how this book has evolved.

#### MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENT

We do not see experience and mediation in terms of a philosophical divide, an either/or situation, since experience of/in the modern city is one of mediation. This insight comes to us from many places, but we may point to the French Symbolists in the nineteenth century (Mallarmé, Baudelaire) who began to incorporate media forms into their art works as they produced documentation (paintings, poems) of their everyday perceptions in the city. This is an insight that has been adopted by many modern philosophers and artists, from the Bauhaus artists, to Giedion, to Innis and McLuhan, and to more contemporary philosophers such as Deleuze and Agamben, all of whom are represented in our book. Indeed, their approaches are both phenomenological *and* articulated through differentiated forms of mediation.

Kevin Lynch and György Kepes helped to open this relationship as an area of study using insights from art history, anthropology, and psychology in the early 1950s. In their project on the “look of cities,” they sought to develop a new approach for analyzing and renovating the visual design of cities. Concerned with understanding the total urban environment, Lynch was focused on place making in terms of the environment’s capacity to communicate. The city is not a “thing in itself” but a product of “being perceived by its inhabitants” (Lynch 1960, 3). It was while collaborating with Kepes in 1954 that Lynch broadened his interest beyond the ways in which city dwellers merely orient themselves in a metropolitan region, to undertake studies of our perceptions of daily experience in terms of “*imageability*: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer” (Lynch 1960, 9). As he wrote in the “Visual Shape of the Shapeless Metropolis,” the perceptual form of the city needs to be “an imageable region, composed of vivid differentiated elements, legibly organized” (Lynch 1990, 67).<sup>2</sup> The structured image of the city ought to be extensible, legible at general and detailed levels, and yet it should be an image that could unfold in various ways according to the observer’s desires and knowledge.

In keeping with a modernist postwar universalism, Kepes was deeply committed to crossing interdisciplinary boundaries. In *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (1956), the concerns that animated his collaboration with Lynch emerge as a plea to rethink urban space according to human sensibilities and the technical achievements of the day: “Architects design buildings in which exterior and interior space flow together, opening up the prison cells to which we have condemned ourselves. Painters and sculptors have absorbed new values: the speed and precision of machines, the energy of a dynamic society, the new range of space opened by science and technique” (Kepes 1956, 70). To restore balance between scientific knowledge and our emotional and psychological state, Kepes argued, we need new symbols for creating order – a sentiment similarly reflected in the writings of his mentor, László Moholy-Nagy, and their collaborator, the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion. The search for a dynamic equilibrium was to be accomplished by identifying a “new poetry of images, latent in the new landscape” (Kepes 1956, 74).

The notion of a “new landscape” was a strong inspiration for the interdisciplinary Explorations Group (1953–59) at the University of Toronto, led by Marshall McLuhan and the radical anthropologist

Edmund Carpenter, alongside psychologist D.C. Williams, political economist Tom Easterbrook, and the modernist town planner Jacqueline Tyrwhitt. Tyrwhitt, originally a horticulturalist and long-time associate of Giedion, had arrived with affiliations with the Bauhaus and the MARS Group, the UK wing of the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM, the International Congresses of Modern Architecture). She brought a keen understanding of studies of the environment and urban ecologies across time.<sup>3</sup> Just prior to her arrival in Toronto, in 1951, Tyrwhitt had initiated a vision of the city as an interconnected combination of media and architecture through the concept of "live architecture" in a Bauhaus-inspired exhibition on town planning that she helped to coordinate at the Festival of Britain. The same year, she also helped to organize CIAM 8 as its acting secretary. CIAM 8 took as its theme "The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanization of Urban Life." According to Eric Mumford, CIAM 8 "can be seen as a reference point for the new forms of public space, including shopping malls, renewed downtowns, and theme parks, that came to characterize urbanism in the rapidly decentralizing cities of the 1950s and later" (2002, 215). In the published proceedings of CIAM 8, Giedion summarized the new problematic central to postwar urban planning in terms of the need to create a new kind of spectator citizen: "The thing that is needed today to turn people back from passive spectators to active participants is an emotional experience which can reawaken their apparently lost powers of spontaneity" (Giedion 1952, 161).

At the Festival of Britain, the South Bank exhibition represented architecture in practice, while a *Live Architecture* exhibition in the Lansbury neighbourhood of the Poplar-Stepney district in London's East End would "demonstrate the possibilities inherent in good town planning, architecture and building by putting on show part of a re-planned, living community in the process of going about its daily life" (Guide to Architecture 1951, 7). The exhibition consisted of a cross-section of a residential neighbourhood containing houses, flats, shops, primary, secondary, and nursery schools, street furniture and open spaces, light industry, a church, and several pubs, alongside a Building Science Pavilion and a Town Planning Pavilion. It aimed to illustrate the visual and practical advantages of postwar town planning, to make intelligible the latest advances in building techniques with some of the structures left in various stages of completion with sections exposed to illustrate structural techniques. After the festival, these structures were completed and the entire neighbourhood was

handed over to the city. It was the relationship of individuals to the community that predominated as the core concerns of the Town Planning exhibition: "The many and sometimes conflicting needs of people of different callings have to be provided for .... The lives of a baby, a schoolchild, a teen-ager, a single worker, a married woman with a job, a mother and an elderly person are very different, but all have to live together as one community" (Guide to Architecture 1951, 38). For Tyrwhitt, these spectator ideal types reflected CIAM 8's focus on the heart of the city, where once again the "spectator citizen" was invited to imagine the city of the future: "Representative buildings of entertainment, evening education and civil administration should be visible. A major stream of traffic should also be seen, skirting the area. Trees and sculptures should be in evidence – possibly also water and perhaps grass. Visitors should receive an impression of freedom of movement; ease of choice of activity; of places where informal crowds can gather, places where one can 'promenade' and places where one can rest."<sup>4</sup>

Tyrwhitt was later concerned that Lynch's renowned *The Image of the City* – in many ways the fruits of his collaboration with Kepes – still presented the notion of image as a static and atemporal conception of urban life and space. Such a static image failed to consider architecture's ability to delight. In a review of Lynch, she admitted that placing too much emphasis on delight may be a "slippery slope," but argued that it should nevertheless be addressed as essential to urban experience: "A clear and comprehensive image of the entire metropolitan region is a fundamental requirement for the future," states Kevin Lynch (1960, 110). But is this so? A graphic and pleasurable image of one's immediate environment (one's habitat); a clear knowledge of one's regular areas to which one is going; these are certainly acceptable desiderata. But what can be the advantage of carrying around a mental map of the entire metropolitan region?"<sup>5</sup>

As we have traced in previous research (Darroch and Marchessault 2009), Tyrwhitt adopted Giedion's approach to time and histories of material culture, suggesting that Henri Bergson's notion of duration be conceived as an alternative to Lynch's legible city maps:

It is just possible that an alternative, and conceivably more valid hypothesis for organising an image of the city might be Henri Bergson's original notion of "duration," or some of its later derivatives. This notion made a distinction between time and duration



– which might, also perhaps be interpreted as impact. Thus, the mental impact entering into an urban space arousing an emotional response could seem to occupy a fuller amount of time – duration – than the time occupied in driving along several non-descript streets. Such a hypothesis could make allowances for the necessary psychological process of periods of rest – pauses – between moments of great visual awareness. It is only the complete stranger or mentally insane who make any attempt to give equal attention to everything they pass by.<sup>6</sup>

Tyrwhitt's interpretation of Giedion's studies of space-time (in *Space, Time, and Architecture*, 1941) permitted her to treat the city as a continually mediated sphere of cultural life. In Tyrwhitt's hands, cities must be studied in terms of a phenomenology: urban space is active, constantly shifting and changing. She proposed studying the experience of living in cities and not simply "the city" as means to develop new forms of urban design that were devoid of bodies and subjectivities. As a major inspiration for McLuhan's many reflections on the mediated environments of cities as classrooms, Tyrwhitt was constantly attentive to the effects cities and their environments have on the human sensorium: what are our emotional responses to specific locations and events? The 1951 *Live Architecture* exhibition is exemplary of this focus. In a later collaboration with psychologist D.C. Williams, she carried out a study for *Explorations* that developed her own theories of the relationship between urban space and memory (a project with which Lynch would later compare his own "Walk around the Block" [1956] studies of perception in Boston in correspondence with her). The Explorations Group conducted surveys with students of Toronto's then Ryerson Institute, probing into their capacities to remember their urban environment (focusing on elements such as architecture, advertising, street furniture, and physical layout). Published as "The City Unseen" in *Explorations* 5 (June 1955) and elsewhere, Tyrwhitt's analysis promoted an understanding of the interrelationship between imagination and memory in the process of perception and recollection as an essential component of town planning research. Whereas the Explorations researchers set out to diagnose the effects of the media on language and human behaviour, Tyrwhitt arrived in Toronto with an interest in diagnosing the effects of the city on the human senses. Aiming always to design better cities on a human scale, Tyrwhitt's vision of the city included an understanding that all urban media existed in a