

Urban Maps: Instruments of Narrative and Interpretation in the City, Richard Brook and Nick Dunn, 2011, Ashgate, 266 pages, ISBN: 978-1-4094-6188-3, £24.30 (Paperback)

If you are looking for a book on maps, *Urban Maps: Instruments of Narrative and Interpretation in the City* may not be for you. *Urban Maps* is predominantly about our changing relationship with the accelerating city, and uses artistic representations to examine human interaction with the urban realm. The book attempts to articulate and situate new methods of urban visual practice as a form of sensing or describing the city including assembled data from the city for mapping. *Urban Maps* is decidedly for an educated audience, as the authors use strategic and plentiful literature to examine art, film, networks and architecture. These built and ephemeral artworks are presented as representative and inherent to the processes of contemporary urban life. The authors provide an intense review of literature and an enormous list of projects that range from buildings to digital representations of activities. The book is an effort to reveal the nature of our interactions with an ever-accelerating and transforming urbanism by looking at the devices of urban practice such as graffiti, architecture, film and public art. *Urban Maps* is a preliminary step in analysing what new modes of mapping says about our cities and ourselves.

The introduction presents a mediated landscape of networks, nodes and fluctuating systems of density as inherent in urban conditions capitalizing on traditional architecture literature such as Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960). The authors make the distinction between the geographically larger urban or urbanized area, and the city. In the following chapters, the book delves into the relationship between a programme, or the use of space, and the physical or built space. Of particular importance to the premise of the book is to look at cities or urban space as a super organism instead of a determined and finite machine. In *Urban Maps*, the city is explored as a far reaching and complex system comparable to a biological and mutable organism. Explored in the book is this idea of a process-driven, or non-designed, city and the diffusion of the architect's will as current social, legislative and economic processes diffuse the power of the top-down architect or planner. Market trends and a survey of architecture history are called upon to explain the detachment of people from social institutions and the public's changing interaction with urbanism. Naturally, this discussion of literature inspires questions from the opposite vantage point, such as how this dispersal or market forces have changed or may cause participation in public space. The remainder of the book attempts to address this new relationship of the public with urban space through the analytic lenses of the chapters "Brand, Image and Identity", followed by "Networks", "Films", "Marks" and lastly "Object". From the outset and throughout the book, the "map" that is discussed is not the comprehensive description of reality that satellites are so

adept at creating now; rather the map is the discussion, interaction and expression of social processes in and with architecture and urban space.

In Chapter 2, “Brand”, Image and Identity, the authors take a look at the expanding imagery of advertisements produced to inspire desire instead of satisfying needs. Chapter three is focused on the unseen elements of the city, the somewhat invisible networks of the streets and the subterranean, described through the work of artists. Films as a media are assessed for their ability to depict social processes and provide insights into the public realm in chapter four. Art works are again used in Chapter five, “Marks”, to reveal a visual discussion on urban topics. The final chapter, “Object” presents physical interventions operating within cities. The Networked Object, a subsection, provides a helpful link between the previous media discussed with projects that highlight use or activity phenomena and their implementation across space.

Urban Maps begins to confuse because it is largely not about maps but more about the changing practices of participation with public space as seen through different films, architecture and art works. The authors view these media as new kinds of maps or mapping processes. Furthermore, chapters do not seem to have a strategic relationship to each other, or to build upon each other. Preliminary chapters read like a survey of history while the later chapters are lists of projects with philosophy interspersed. The book could also benefit from some dedicated terminology besides maps and some more literature from the disciplines of art, especially on appropriation in art practice. A more thorough analysis of the artists or practitioners of these projects, their backgrounds and motivations, might be the next step when digging deeper into the work that is an expression of their relationship with the city. For example, why are these graffiti artists compelled to change the city? *Beautiful Losers* by Aaron Rose (2004) describes the street art movement of New York City at a pivotal time from the perspective of the art makers and is the type of work that might be advantageous to include in a future expansion of *Urban Maps*. However, the ephemera of the city and the shifting sands of our relationship with it are vague and difficult topics of discussion. The ever-increasing speed and privatization of the city has often been discussed, but insufficient analysis exists on the internal processes and *Urban Maps* represents a valuable step forward in unpacking this new malleable and potentially out-of-control urban organism that is the city.

The book excels when it moves beyond description and repetition of previous discourse and discusses what these art pieces might say about us, our culture and our relationship to the changing city. *Urban Maps* reveals the archaeology of the latent conditions of the city and contains an immense catalogue of literature, art works and architecture while leaving the reader with a lot to think about when navigating the city, how our perception may change the city and how the city may change us.

References

Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press.

Rose, A. (2004). *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*. New York, D.A.P.

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