

the people she has met across 30 years of residence. The writing, therefore, is eccentric and particular (“I am constantly struck that no two people live in the same city ...”) and nicely done. We learn a lot about Solnit, and we read a lot about San Francisco from her perspective, her history, and the history she borrows from other residents: “One of the pleasures of this project has been the encounters with people who are incarnate histories of this locality” (p. 5 n. 1). And yet we find no map of Solnit’s city, of her residences and workplaces, of her friends. The impersonality of the maps does not match the personality of her prose, alas.

Were this simply one more urbane paean to the specifics of a place, the book would be admirable, even beautiful. It wouldn’t be an atlas, however, but a writer’s tale. Solnit wrote 12 of the 22 chapters; others authored the rest, presumably at her request, but there is little difference in style from chapter to chapter. Presumably Solnit or an editor went through the varying texts, standardizing the style in the same way that the work of individual map-makers was more or less standardized to a simple design template.

Each of the short, densely written chapters begins with a map and a headnote that attempts to anchor it in the stream of the text. According to the credits, four cartographers were employed to work with 12 different artists whose illustrations are incorporated into the maps and text. Most of the maps are done in light colours, easy to reproduce, with callout boxes and arrows that name specific places. Most are titled with sometimes ostentatious nineteenth-century boxes surrounding the plate name.

The relation of map to text seems, at best, incidental and, where obvious, either boringly mundane or, worse, cute. Consider, for example, the map most frequently reproduced in the pre-publication publicity: “Monarchs and Queens.” Artist Mona Caron’s winged version of a goateed transvestite Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, hands held high, is shown in a dress decorated with butterflies. Elsewhere, different species of butterfly fly individually across the map. The city is a dull grey on which are imposed, in orange, title boxes with the names of places important to the gay community and, in yellow, the habitats of different species of butterflies. The result reduces an arduous, complex, sometimes terrifying history of sexual repression and then liberation to, at best, a visual pun.

And that is the way with most of the maps. They name places but provide no sense of place, often confusing rather than clarifying the text. A “Treasure Map” of San Francisco “treasures” is littered with place names (yellow boxes on a bilious green city surface) whose rationale and thus purpose is unclear: What are these places, and why are they mapped at all? “Treasures of San Francisco” promotes the city’s diversity, but it looks like an illustration from a children’s book, with cut-out figures pasted helter-

skelter on the map. A Caucasian female worker with goggles and a drill sits on an area labelled “African Americans”; some type of Indian (faux Aztec?) stands over territory labelled “Chinese,” which also features a white man on a scooter. The map of the life courses of four San Franciscans (“400 years and 500 evictions”) is indecipherable.

It didn’t have to be like this. Denis Wood’s *Everything Sings* (2010, also reviewed in this issue) covers similar conceptual material better and less pretentiously. It, too, is text rich, but its maps and text work together; the maps are not simple placeholders but imaginative cartographic evocations of the phenomena described. Compare Wood’s space–time maps of a local newspaper-delivery route with Solnit’s map of local lives (p. 117–18) to see the difference.

Perhaps the best thing about *Infinite City* is its failure. It reminds us not only of the durability of the atlas as a form but of the real expertise required to craft maps that say something beyond a place name, that evoke complexity. Solnit is right: Every place deserves an atlas. San Francisco is still waiting for its own.

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EVERYTHING SINGS: MAPS FOR A NARRATIVE ATLAS / Denis Wood. Los Angeles: Siglio, 2010. 112 pp.: 85 b/w illus. (50+ maps); ISBN-13 978-0-9799562-4-9 (paper), US\$28.

How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question. What we are most likely confronted with here is a sort of instant infinity, a situation reminiscent of a Mondrian painting. (Lefebvre 1991, 85)

The project’s not done. It may never be finished. What you’re holding is a piece of a dream—maps for a narrative atlas, not the narrative atlas itself ... (Wood, *Everything Sings*, p. 17)

Denis Wood's *Everything Sings* can be read as an essay in both that word's senses—a short literary composition and an attempt with no guarantee of success—that seeks, if not to answer, then at least to work in the spirit of the rhetorical question posed by Henri Lefebvre in the passage quoted above. In the maps and supporting texts collected in this volume, one small neighbourhood—Wood's own, Boylan Heights, a century-old suburb of Raleigh, North Carolina—is turned over and scrutinized as if it were a gem, a facet at a time. But the gem metaphor falls some way short of doing Wood's project justice, suggesting as it does a discrete and stable object—a *thing*, hard and crystalline. As the title's Heraclitan overtones suggest, *Everything Sings* favours an ontology of becoming rather than being: place is always in process, and Boylan Heights is figured as a tangle of lives and flows of energy, water, waste, and information.

Wood is best known for his critical writing on the norms and myths of the discipline of cartography, and I should admit that while I appreciate the general tenor of Wood's critique and find his writing always engaging and accessible (particularly for an interdisciplinary poacher such as I am), I have also found Wood's structuralist analyses somewhat over-elaborate at times—see, for example, the proliferating categories of semiotic codes that he limns in his best-known work, *The Power of Maps* (Wood and Fels 1993). Apart from a broad-brush treatment in the accompanying essay, such theorizing is well in the background here, although these maps do undeniably constitute their own critique of cartography, in terms of both what can be mapped and how one should go about mapping it.

The maps were produced in the early 1980s by Wood and the groups of North Carolina State University landscape-architecture students who took his course on environmental perception (his co-producers get full credit). As Wood describes it, his intention was to focus these students on overlooked aspects of the landscape: the sensual, the fleeting, the everyday: “*useless knowledge*” (p. 14, original emphasis). The maps in *Everything Sings* are unrepentantly idiographic, joyously particular both in terms of place and with respect to the people whose practices create and shape it. They are also historically specific—as Wood puts it, “every glimpse is fleeting” (p. 25). This is the Boylan Heights, then, of a particular moment in the early 1980s, as it was poised between decline and gentrification; the Boylan Heights of an afternoon paper-boy's route (the newspaper itself soon to be consigned to history); the Boylan Heights of a vivid autumn day when Wood walked the neighbourhood tracking the colour variations he saw in the foliage; the Boylan Heights of one Halloween, when every porch that carried a jack-o-lantern was recorded by Wood as he rode by on his bicycle. These “useless” data, this radical specificity, are

what form the basis of Wood's “poetics of cartography” (p. 15). For me it seems to have some affinity with George Perec's (1997, 210) call for a way of questioning and describing the “infra-ordinary”: “how are we to speak of these ‘common things,’ how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are.”

The maps themselves are attractive propositions. The volume is all in monochrome, a fact that works in its favour design-wise and helps lend a coherence to the rich diversity of graphics. Some of the sparer diagrammatic or textual plates look more like conceptual art than cartography. Others have a lo-fi, grungy aesthetic: isopleths linking assessed property values are scratchy rubbings over glued-down strings; fuzzy white daubs from a pochoir brush on a black ground denote the pools of light cast by the neighbourhood's lampposts; the grins and leers of the jack-o-lanterns beam out from a similarly black and empty field (the use of black in this way itself constitutes a minor critique of cartography and “the default daylight that most maps take for granted” (p. 14). This monochrome minimalism extends to what Wood calls “the map crap”—grids, margins, scale, and north arrows are all noticeable by their absence.

Wood's “atlas” is far from exhaustive or encyclopaedic, and indeed it wears its partiality, particularity, and provisionality on its sleeve. But just as Mercator's prototype atlas was an attempt at a cosmographic meditation, so Wood hopes that these glimpses offer a view of “the cosmos as seen through the knot-hole of a neighbourhood.” Rather than a gem, then, this book and these maps might instead be a lens. I'm not sure whether it can achieve this grand vision, grounded as it is in a poetics of the particular, but it is an engrossing and evocative portrait of place and everyday life as much as it is an iconoclastic exercise in mapping.

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