

The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life. Edited by Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2008. 472 pp. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780691133430.

There is something of the agora about this collection. A dozen well-informed citizen-scholars gather to discuss the topic of urban space, in a reasonably unbuttoned atmosphere. (The book grew out of a series of fellowships, seminars and colloquia, led by Gyan Prakash during his tenure as Director of the Shelby Cullom Center for Historical Studies at Princeton.) The contributors think about city space in different ways, but they are all equally passionate about telling their story. As a result, they sometimes, to some degree, appear to be talking past each other. But their travellers' tales are so engaging, well-informed and imaginative that the element of randomness turns out to be an advantage. 'The city' hovers just beyond definition, and slightly out of focus, in the penumbra of different perspectives and mutual incomprehension, just as it should. In this way, the volume renders, in its diversity and form, the heteroglossia and argumentativeness of the lived city.

Gyan Prakash kicks the book off with brisk panache, surveying the current lie of the land with authority and insight, but also announcing the polemic of *The Spaces of the Modern City*. He emphasizes three informing principles. First, the new urban scholarship is global in reach and cosmopolitan in attitude: Algiers, Baghdad, Johannesburg, Dakar and 'Bombay cinema' appear alongside Berlin, London, Los Angeles and Vienna. Second, claims Prakash, the contributors all 'focus on the city as a spatial form of social life and power relations, not just a site of society and politics' (p. 2). Although that was no doubt the brief, not all the contributors stick to it; but their digressions and divergences are part of the pleasure. The third defining feature of the collection is its interdisciplinarity. Implicit in Prakash's Shelby Cullom project, I infer, was a desire to get historians to take the question of *space* seriously, not least by bringing historians together with scholars from a variety of other disciplines. If that is right, then, in its own terms, this book succeeds. Setting urban case studies in their historical moment makes them all the more compelling.

But *The Spaces of the Modern City* has a larger ambition. That, states Prakash, is to 'rethink the history of urban modernity and urban change'. Judged against that benchmark, the book does not articulate a new paradigm. But it does represent the current state of the art in rich and engaging detail.

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The Natures of Maps: Cartographic Constructions of the Natural World.

By Denis Wood and John Fels. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2008. xviii + 231 pp. \$49.00 hardback. ISBN: 0226906043.

Almost two decades after the publication of their controversial book *The Power of Maps* (1992), Denis Wood and John Fels are literally 'back on the map' to present refreshing perspectives on mapmaking and cartography. In *The Nature of Maps*, they postulate that maps are not innocent representations or pictures, but arguments and 'propositions to which varying degrees of assent have been granted' (p. 26). Their main aim is to find out where the power of maps comes from and why many maps got 'away with it' (p. xv). For this mission, Wood and Fels have selected a host of maps – many of them produced by the National Geographic Society and the U.S. Geological Survey – that represent, relate and transmit ideas and 'facts' about the natural world such as hurricane tracking charts or colourful picture maps about bird migrations or the unique fauna of Australia. In the eight thematic chapters of the book, these maps are assessed from different angles,

ranging from the belief in a threatened and threatening nature to nature's perception as a park, system, mystery, magnificent landscape or cornucopian scenery.

In order to read between the lines of the maps, the authors borrow ideas from the field of cognitive linguistics. They claim that both language and graphics open mental spaces that 'propagate' when discourse and map reading unfold (p. xiii). Wood and Fels ponder on how maps facilitate thinking, acting and communicating and label their approach as 'cognitive cartographics'. Diagrams of 'cartographic sign planes' with 'postings' throughout the book prove that the authors do not 'plow old ground' (p. xv), but follow the non-representational trend in cultural geography (p. 14).

Wood and Fels demonstrate their map enthusiasm on every page but, at times, the exhaustive, sometimes painstakingly hair-splitting interpretations of the map texts and contexts unfold as lengthy monologues that lack a deeper engagement and a dialogue with the book reader. Map viewers (excluding the authors) remain strangely absent from the reading process. Wood and Fels are able to unmask the power and the discourse of maps, but the 'guilty' mapmakers (especially those from the *National Geographic Magazine*) are stigmatized and remain without face, voice or defence. Maybe this will be the central issue for their next book. Regardless of these minor limitations, *The Natures of Maps* is a truly thought-provoking contribution to help us rethink maps and their relations to society.

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Monkey Puzzle Man: Archibald Menzies, Plant Hunter. By James McCarthy. Caithness: Whittles Publishing/Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. 2008. xiv + 224 pp. £25.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781904445616.

Archibald Menzies trained in medicine and horticulture in Edinburgh in the late 18th century, and his significance to botany is due principally to the plants he collected and recorded during three long voyages. Menzies introduced species to Britain which 'dramatically altered the landscape of the British uplands' (p. 1), a fact little appreciated before this biography. His omission from the plant hunters' hall of fame is partly due to lack of social status, and partly his own doing – Menzies was under pressure to publish, but he never did. Hence the forensic nature of McCarthy's work, fitting the 18th century jigsaw together: a monkey puzzle indeed.

On his voyages Menzies experienced or witnessed 'exotic' places, their plants and inhabitants (especially the women, with whom Menzies had very civil relations due to his facility with language), sickness, routine brutality, near starvation, and exuberant hospitality from the Spanish in Chile and California and the Russians in the north. Details of such adventures and privations are supported by the Appendices, which provide timelines, Banks' instructions to Menzies, and lists of plants collected and their origins. More detailed maps would have been welcome, however. So few maps even in an avowedly historical biography is startling because like lists of plants, people and objects found and traded, maps were an output of the imperial project.

Appointed by Sir Joseph Banks as naturalist to the Discovery, which circumnavigated the globe 1791–95, Menzies was appointed subsequently also as ship's surgeon by the captain, George Vancouver. Menzies' patron relied on his hobby of botanizing and his talent for close observation. Menzies' captain was lucky that his surgeon's interests extended from plants to people. Menzies learned the languages of the indigenous peoples he encountered, acquiring a depth of knowledge and custom that made him both an invaluable resource to his colleagues and a trusted figure to

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