



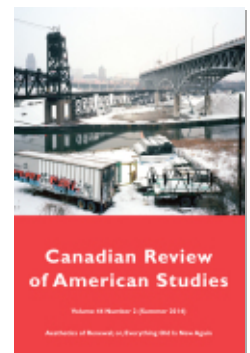
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: *A San Francisco Atlas*

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Cartography and Renewal in Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*

Monica Manolescu

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which contemporary American writer Rebecca Solnit renews traditional approaches to map making by emphasizing both the imaginative and the communal in cartography, through a combination of maps and storytelling. Presented like a traditional atlas and featuring twenty-two historical or subjective maps of the city, accompanied by essays, *Infinite City* illustrates not only the huge interest in maps and mapping manifest in American art since the 1960s but also the emergence of an alternative, community-based type of cartography. Inspired by literary models (Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*) and critical cartography, *Infinite City* opens up the field of mapping to both interdisciplinary dialogue and subjective narrative. This article looks at how *Infinite City* navigates between the individual and communal relevance of mapping, while also examining its attempts to "un-discipline" cartography and place it within a larger community of disciplines and fields (literature, critical theory, visual arts).

Keywords: mapping, critical theory, critical cartography, literature and mapping

Résumé : Le présent article explore les façons adoptées par l'écrivaine contemporaine Rebecca Solnit pour renouveler les approches traditionnelles à la cartographie et met l'accent à la fois sur l'imaginatif et le communal dans la cartographie, en combinant cartes et narration. Présenté comme un atlas traditionnel et offrant vingt-deux cartes historiques ou subjectives de la ville accompagnées d'essais, *Infinite City* illustre non seulement l'énorme intérêt pour les cartes et la cartographie dans l'art américain depuis les années 1960, mais aussi l'émergence d'un type communautaire alternatif de cartographie. Inspiré de modèles littéraires (*Les Villes invisibles* d'Italo Calvino) et de la cartographie critique, *Infinite City* ouvre le domaine de la cartographie tant au dialogue interdisciplinaire qu'à la narration subjective. Cet article évalue la façon dont *Infinite City* se situe entre la pertinence individuelle et communale de la cartographie, tout en examinant ses

tentatives de faire déborder la cartographie de ses frontières disciplinaires et de la situer dans une vaste communauté de disciplines et de domaines (littérature, théorie critique, arts visuels).

Mots clés : cartographie, théorie critique, cartographie critique, littérature et cartographie

The Death and Renewal of Maps

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, originally published in French in 1980, Michel de Certeau starts from the experience of viewing New York from the top of the World Trade Center to formulate a critique of panoptic vision and urban legibility, which are denounced as a myth. The empowering view from above transforms the city into an orderly, readable artefact, devoid of life and soul. The god-like perspective only embraces “cadavers,” a lifeless cityscape whose “ordinary practitioners” are “below the threshold at which visibility begins” (de Certeau 93). This kind of vision is paradoxically a form of blindness. “Lifted out from the city’s grasp” (92), the panoramic viewer no longer participates in the pulsating and chaotic texture of differentiated experiences. De Certeau’s meditation on the detached altitude of the “scopic drive” (92) points to the shortcomings of a constellation of related concepts, fields, and approaches to urban space: rational urban planning, cartographic point of view, and sociology and anthropology as disciplines showing little interest in the specificity of everyday life in urban contexts.¹ The lifelessness of maps as creations of disembodied and detached knowledge also looms large in geographer Brian Harley’s lament for the human anonymity encoded in maps in his ground-breaking article “Deconstructing the Map,” published in 1989, several years after *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

Consider, for example, the fact that the ordinary road atlas is among the best selling paperback books in the United States and then try to gauge how this may have affected ordinary Americans’ perception of their country. What sort of an image of America do these atlases promote? On the one hand, there is a patina of gross simplicity. Once off the interstate highways the landscape dissolves into a generic world of bare essentials that invite no exploration. Context is stripped away and place is no longer important. On the other hand, the maps reveal the ambivalence of all stereotypes. Their silences are also inscribed on the page: where, on the page, is the variety of nature, where is the history of the landscape, and where is the space-time of human experience in such anonymized maps? (Harley 14)

This passage is emblematic of the impasse cartography as a discipline has reached as it questions its own foundations and objectives. The “deconstructed” map is revealed to be a powerful rhetorical instrument, an intrinsically manipulative form of representation embedded in frameworks of authority. Taking this disenchantment with the lifelessness of cartographic objects as a starting point, the present article examines an approach to renewing map-making practices that stands at the crossroads of cartography, art, literature, and historical/social investigation. Rebecca Solnit’s *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* (2010)—a hybrid work, inviting literary, visual, and geographic explorations—gives an original answer to the question of how to breathe life into a map. Subverting normative map-making ways is certainly not a new enterprise. Artists were playing with maps and mapping as early as 1929, the date of the surrealist “Map of the World,” which redraws national boundaries and disregards conventional proportions by blotting out the United States and by giving a gigantic Soviet Union pride of place (“*Le monde*”). A more radical subversion of cartography was imagined by Guy Debord in the 1950s, through his celebration of the aimless (and oppositional) “*dérive*” through urban space in the context of situationism. Debord privileged disorientation and the abandonment of any map (mental or material) of a city that was to be experienced as a *terra incognita* (see Sadler; McDonough). These are two prominent examples of mapping at the intersection of cartography, ideology, art, and play, but a number of contemporary artists have also interrogated the limits and tenets of cartography in the past decades.² *Infinite City* is a case not of subversion but rather of an aesthetic and political appropriation of mapping that attempts to offer a new understanding of how mapping could function, creatively and constructively (although this constructive stance necessarily builds on the earlier “deconstruction” phase), in close relationship to individual and communal experience.

Directed by Solnit, *Infinite City* is the result of the collaborative efforts of thirty writers, artists, cartographers, and sociologists, all of whom are San Francisco or Bay Area residents. This highly inventive atlas is made up of twenty-two colour maps of San Francisco or the Bay Area, nineteen of which are accompanied by an essay and occasional photographs. Solnit was the main inspiration behind the book and is the author of nine of its essays. *Infinite City* benefited from the institutional support of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where some of the twenty-two maps were launched in 2010 (see “SFMOMA’s”). Before *Infinite City*, Solnit had published about

fifteen books, in which she combines the work of the cultural historian and art critic with autobiography and highly personal observation to produce works that discuss landscape in its evolution and representation, also addressing the personal experience of place and migration as well as the role of communities in facing disaster and renewal.³ Her writing is often, but not always, driven by activism, political protest, and environmental concerns, and is strongly anchored in San Francisco and California. The ideological framework of *Infinite City* is no exception, but the book goes beyond activism to deal with the “texture of place,” a concept in humanist geography first explored by Yi-Fu Tuan, who considers place as a nexus of human relations and symbolic representations, as a weaving together of social interactions and hierarchies, but also as a texture of words, images, affects, and tactile experience (Adams, Hoelscher, and Till). *Infinite City* translates the texture of place into cartographic discourse, providing a meditation on and a performance of original ways of creatively mapping place (more specifically home) and its relationship to the self. *Infinite City* activates the concept of renewal in a variety of ways, notably through an understanding of renewal, both in the sense of bringing under the scrutiny of the present something belonging to the past and in the sense of making something new again by transforming it.

This San Francisco atlas starts from two truisms: (1) cities are inexhaustible and (2) maps are selective. Despite their apparent banality, these statements provide unexpected angles for exploring the city. Solnit’s introduction expresses what could be called the despair of mimesis, the awareness that no given space can be entirely or accurately represented in all its details. Solnit confronts us with the vision of a storm of cartographic leaves falling off imaginary trees, leaves both vegetal and textual that map the changes occurring in the same landscape across the millennia.⁴ The maps/leaves fall on the ground in thick layers, accumulating in strata as recorded versions of a given place:

Imagine the age when the Sierra Nevada had a seacoast and Salinia was out there in the sea, and think of the myriad maps required to describe the geological shifts between that topography and ours, and then project forward a little into the era of ocean rise and a lot into the deep time of tectonic shift, and you see more maps floating, falling drifting, an autumn storm of maps like leaves, off the trees of memory and history, a drift of maps, an escarpment of versions. (4)

Although the storm, the trees, and the falling leaves are elements of a natural metaphor, they also suggest an archaeological layering of leaves as artefacts. Geographical representations are, thus, translated into historical representations of lost civilizations, and mapping becomes analogous to archaeology. The vision implies that ancient landscapes of which no written trace or living memory exists become alive again (as objects of study, contemplation, and remembrance) through cartographic representation, not only in their momentary configuration, but also in their evolution across time. The mutability of the world transforms mapping into a constant necessity that verges on utopia: “infinite” places require infinite mapping.

This awareness of the inexhaustibility of urban space gives way to a compromise that seems both sensible and playful: the choice, by individual authors, of one or two dimensions of the city that they consider meaningful from a personal or collective point of view, themes they explore in a given map and in an essay attached to it. Traditional atlases have always relied on the representation of conventional cartographic themes such as demographics or transportation, but some of the topics chosen here (and especially certain correlations of topics) are quite idiosyncratic, reflecting the variety of interests and experiences of individual authors, from the seriously historical to the humorously playful. A conventional topographical map of San Francisco or the Bay Area is the underlying basis upon which are projected, in divergent visual styles, from the minimalist to the baroque, the topics that the various maps open up to exploration. “Monarchs and Queens” shows, on the same map, butterfly habitats and queer public spaces, the underlying assumption being that they both unfold gradually and undergo metamorphosis. “Poison/Palate” highlights gourmet San Francisco (a trope of tourist discourse), but also the sites of toxic production (chemical factories, laboratories, gold mining). “Phrenological San Francisco” humorously associates feelings and attitudes to various parts of a head-shaped city, revisiting Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Carte de Tendre*. “Treasure Map: The Forty-nine Jewels of San Francisco” is Solnit’s rewriting of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* map, showing forty-nine sites she considers worth visiting. “Fillmore: Promenade through the Boulevard of Gone” is the map of a single street, mirrored in a Rorschach blot—“an enigma that can be read many ways” (68)—while the text documents its metamorphosis through history; “Dharma Wheels and Fish Ladders: Salmon Migrations, Soto Zen Arrivals” shows on the same map salmon migrations

(dwindling) and the sites of Zen Buddhism (growing), two phenomena that have no manifest connection at first glance.

History looms large at the heart of this mapping project: starting from the assumption that “the familiar vanishes” (6) in an evolving city, Solnit brings to life cityscapes that no longer exist and whose disappearance is due to brutal acts of destruction in the face of community protest (see, for instance, the map entitled “The Lost World: South of the Market, 1960, before Redevelopment”). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau is concerned with the “knowledge (about places) that remains silent,” what he calls “inward-turning histories” or “stories held in reserve” (108). Solnit excavates these buried stories, placing fragments of memory on the map. The result is an attempt at localizing memory through acts of remembrance that combine cartographic and narrative forms, showing the life and history of the city deemed inseparable from the lives of ordinary people, those practitioners of space who are invisible from de Certeau’s panoramic view of New York from the top of the World Trade Center. One of the maps in *Infinite City* traces four lives “that have unfolded largely within the confines of the seven-mile-square city over the past century” (115), lives that are “historically dense, geographically static” (119).

The book revisits the mythologies associated with San Francisco (Muybridge, Hitchcock, homosexuality, culinary excellence), and certain maps come close to the discourse of tourism and tour books. To the extent to which tourism is an activity aiming at locating and experiencing local authenticity (according to [Jonathan Culler](#)), *Infinite City* might seem to provide useful insight into authenticity from the perspective of the locals—except that the concept of usefulness is problematic: if the “Treasure Map” showing the “forty-nine jewels” of San Francisco could very well orient a tourist in the city, the map of salmon migrations and Soto Zen arrivals is certainly out of place in a tourist’s quest. Similarly, the map entitled “Death and Beauty: All of 2008’s Ninety-Nine Murders, Some of 2009’s Monterey Cypressess” does not partake of a tourist logic at all. Rather, such a map is futile and metaphorical, not only because it shows a disconcerting coupling of contraries, but also because it is not destined to invite quests on the actual terrain. It is, rather, a mythological or imagined city that is explored here: one that lives in the imagination of the map-maker, who originates this yoking of opposites in order to best express his or her perspective on the city. The gourmet-toxic map entitled “Poison/Palate” ironically plays with the restaurant

map in tour guides by grafting pollution onto food and by pointing out that any form of consumption inevitably produces waste. This is not to say that *Infinite City* totally resists tourist appropriation—it parodies or questions some of its stereotypes—but, for the most part, it defines a different kind of urban exploration, mental or real, of the unexpected, the extinct, the metaphorical dimensions of the city.

The various maps and texts navigate between individual and collective meaning: some of the authors choose to include autobiographical passages in their texts, but there is always the sense that they belong to a larger community and that the city itself binds that community together. Although the various texts accompanying the cartographic material are diverse and of uneven quality, the book as a whole is an original example of how renewal can be not only materialized in a given work but also generated further, offered up as a series of infinite possibilities. The main feature of this potentially infinite atlas is its generative force, which opens it up to new additions, new maps, new narratives—individual narratives of collective significance. In the introduction, Solnit talks about the “living maps” (3) that all the inhabitants of a given place carry within themselves. Cartography becomes grounded, above all, in “relevant,” individual meaning: “We select, and a map is a selection of relevant data that arises from relevant desires and questions” (9). The maps we are looking at are embodiments of some of these living maps—maps alive with stories and routes. Such an approach to mapping tries to make sense of the self in place, to give it both orientation and meaning, a visual and semantic trajectory.

Infinite City relies on an original blending of disciplines, literary perspectives, and cartographic styles that provides a renewed context for the debate about the meaning and role of cartography, its death and possible resurrection. Renewal comes from outside the map—from literature, sociology, and art. Some of the sources of inspiration for the book, both explicit and implicit, are Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* (1972), Jorge Luis Borges’s *Labyrinths* (1962),⁵ Henry David Thoreau’s meditations on walking, Walter Benjamin’s autobiographical writings about his childhood in Berlin (*Berlin Chronicle* and *One-Way Street*, written in the 1930s), de Certeau’s *Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), with its emphasis on the everyday experience of space, and situationist practices of drifting through the city. Solnit’s “Introduction” opens with a quote from *Invisible Cities* (on the questions, rather than the answers, that a city formulates for its dwellers) and another from *Walden* (“I have travelled a good deal in Concord”).

Invisible Cities, one of the most influential texts on the urban imaginary, is a series of urban portraits of fifty-five cities, with feminine names, that Calvino's Marco Polo purports to have visited on his trips across Kublai Khan's empire.⁶ These invisible cities do not exist, and Marco admits he has never *actually* visited them, but he claims that each of them contains an "implicit" city, Venice itself: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice" (Calvino 86). Marco's invisible cities are possibilities, utopian or dystopian projects that illustrate a philosophical question about the relationship between illusion and reality, past and present, desire and memory. They can be read as a collection of versions of a given city – as a personal catalogue of fluctuating configurations of home. *Infinite City* takes Calvino's *Invisible Cities* as a model of representation, as an intertextual guide for the ways in which recording or recollecting a city is creating it. It is not only imaginary cities that exist in the realm of possibility; any existing city does. Cities are inseparable from the images they have nurtured and inspired because, as Giuliana Bruno puts it, "cities practically live in images" (38).⁷ Rather than present the wonders of China, as the historical Marco Polo does in *The Description of the World*, Calvino's version of Marco Polo focuses only on Venice, multiplied and transformed into a constellation of improbable cities encountered on Marco's "journey through memory" (98).

Calvino's text offers a double perspective and has a double centre of gravity: on the one hand, a fabulous dissemination of imaginary cities, and on the other, their unique implicit source and urban matrix (they are all avatars of Venice). Marco Polo attempts to reach the perfect city, "discontinuous in space and time" (164), which is none other than Venice, the ultimate narrative and emotional destination, the lost origin. Solnit has never lost San Francisco in the literal sense, but the city's many layers of meaning and ephemeral configurations through history entitle her to explore its various forms of invisibility and infinity. We thus move from Calvino's Venice as a city of nostalgic recollection and remoteness to Solnit's San Francisco as a city of presence and closeness, still ungraspable because it is endless. The dialogic framework of *Invisible Cities* is implicitly preserved – all the essays and maps in Solnit's atlas are addressed to a larger community of individuals: "While my story is mine, my map of San Francisco is also potentially yours" (8). However, this atlas is not necessarily restricted to the community of San Francisco inhabitants. The interest of *Infinite City* transcends its purely regional character since it creates constructs representing

the emplacement of the self through a combination of mapping, explanatory historical and geographical discourse, and personal narrative.⁸

Point of View and Renewal

One of the most interesting maps in *Infinite City* reconsiders point of view and the relationship between the different modes and contents of representation. Entitled "Cinema City," it documents three related historical and thematic dimensions: (1) the places in San Francisco associated with Eadweard Muybridge,⁹ who lived there intermittently between 1855 and 1881 and took panoramic photographs conceptually related to his interest in the techniques of photographing motion that made possible the birth of cinema; (2) Alfred Hitchcock's making of *Vertigo* (1957) in San Francisco; and finally (3) the apotheosis and decline of movie theatres in the city between 1958, when *Vertigo* was released, and 2010. The essay accompanying the map, written by Solnit and entitled "The Eyes of the Gods," is concerned with the ghosts of the past that continue to haunt the present and envisions cities as spectral sites, in which the past shines through the present. One of the founding assumptions of *Infinite City* is that cities always signify beyond themselves and exist only in a correlative state. The map and the essay about "Cinema City" discuss the cinema as a paradoxical medium, which animates characters and brings them to life, but also as a spectral medium, which projects the past into the present. Solnit quotes Thomas Edison's prophetic pronouncement about the imminent emergence of a new medium, capable of blurring the boundaries between past and present: "[G]rand opera can be given at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York . . . with artists and musicians long since dead" (26). The map and the essay deal with images of the city and with image making in the city, focusing both on what is represented and how it is represented. This intertwined historical exploration of content- and form-production examines the passage from fixed to moving images and the emergence of visual fluidity as a modern way of representation.

The map, though static, urges the viewer to move from one topic to another horizontally on the topography of San Francisco. Christian Jacob talks about the cinematographic movement induced by atlases that invite us to link cartographic sequences in a coherent spatial narrative (106–9). Here, this dynamism animates a single map, which constructs a narrative of growth, a partial *Bildungsroman* of

cinema. The map invites horizontal movement but is the product of vertical movement as well, through the strata of history, from the nineteenth century until today. This archaeological mapping digs through the various layers of the city's memory and puts them in dialogue with each other.

"Cinema City" is a map about ways of seeing and different types of gaze. According to Bruno, "in portraying the city as a panoramic subject of observation, panoramic photography contributed to establishing modernity's particular way of seeing" (39).¹⁰ Modernity's panoramic way of seeing implies the extension of the field of vision and relies on the increasingly mobile gaze of the camera capturing the scene.¹¹ Panoramic photography and the cinema experiment with gazes that are more fluid and mobile, gazes that see what the human eye cannot see. E. H. Gombrich offers a lengthy discussion of the complicated relationship between the limitations of human vision and the rendering of a moving or static motif. In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock uses the "dolly zoom," also known as the "*Vertigo* effect," which gives an unsettling impression of perspective distortion, since the background appears to change size relative to the object in focus. The dolly zoom exploits a subjective manipulation of perception to suggest a loss of inner balance and disorientation. Maps, also, are the result of a certain kind of gaze, the cartographic gaze, holistic or panoptic—the gaze of Icarus flying above the earth (see Buci-Glucksmann) or the divine gaze encompassing the universe. "Cinema City" is, then, an artefact of embedded and stratified media (photography, cinema, and mapping), just as it is a slice of stratified time. This map can be read as a meta-device, as a reflexive representation inviting us to meditate on the act of mapping and its ability to collect and recollect previous modes of representation. With a structure that embeds film, within photography, within narrative, within cartographic points of view, "Cinema City" is also replete with *mise-en-abyme* effects: it is a map of San Francisco, indicating the sites where Muybridge photographed the city, the sites where Hitchcock filmed it in a medium made possible by Muybridge's techniques, and the sites where theatre halls once stood.

The essay accompanying "Cinema City" provides the narrative impulse necessary to set the map in motion, while also mapping, in words, the writer's interest in Muybridge and Hitchcock and her experience as a moviegoer in San Francisco. The essay adds biographical depth to our understanding of the two image makers and autobiographical depth to our view of Solnit herself, as she

remembers the cinema halls of San Francisco and the intensely sensory dimension of the ritual of movie going (the “aroma of the popcorn,” the worn carpets, the crumpled ticket later found in her pocket [29]). If the map tries to document the relationship between vision and representation in three different media (photography, cinema, maps), with special emphasis on the emergence of ever more encompassing and mobile images, the essay shifts from the wholeness of artistic vision to the deeply personal point of view of the narrator. There is a perceptible tension between the temptation of holistic vision, exemplified by the photographer’s camera, and a phenomenological filtering of experience, through first-person narrative and through Hitchcock’s dolly zoom. Solnit, looking at Charles Bronson’s eyes on the screen, declares herself humbled by the magnitude of this awe-inspiring image that is likened to a totemic figure. The eyes on the screen induce a state of worship in the viewer, who experiences something akin to Rudolph Otto’s description of the sacred, “*mysterium tremens et fascinans*.” Seated in the darkness of the cinema hall and staring in wonder at this new idol, Solnit compares herself to Saint Foy as she is depicted on the western façade of the abbey in Conques, “a tiny figure bent in prayer” by the huge hand of God (30).

More subtly, the map and the essay comment indirectly on the articulation of totality and fragmentariness that lies at the heart of *Infinite City*. This atlas of San Francisco only offers versions of the city and does not aspire to the wholeness that often underlies nostalgia—transcendent, certainly awe-inspiring, but inaccessible and inappropriate. Alternative points of view replace totalizing vision. An open-ended sum of first person pronouns is substituted for the all-seeing eye. “Cinema City” reflects on the blending of physical perception and subjectivity, on the possibility of reconciling global and local perspectives, and on the necessary passage from purportedly objective omniscience to subjective, partial vision. A major claim made by cartography as a discipline, for centuries, concerns the supposedly inherent transparency of maps as faithful recorders or objective representations of the earth. What *Infinite City* does is to make the point of view of the map, on the map, manifest by surrounding the map with autobiographical material and by making clear that the choice of themes presented on the map has its origin in specific individuals with specific life stories. The literary notion of point of view modifies and enriches the cartographic notion of point of view.

Identity and Performative Cartography

If “Cinema City” reflects on embedded points of view and on the primacy of the perceiving self through a more conventional combination of text and cartography, the map entitled “Who Am I Where? / ¿Quién soy dónde?” focuses on the related issue of how identity is articulated in connection to place through an original fusion of map and text. The map is framed by a bi-focal and bi-vocal poetic creation about “contingent identities and circumstantial memories” (102), as is spelled out in the title. Two poems, authored by Solnit and by Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, respectively, record a vast spectrum of possible identities associated by each of the authors with specific urban scenes. The map is minimalist in its selection of San Francisco sites: forty-four major landmarks are shown, from the Golden Gate Bridge to Hunters Point. Although the two poems seem to be autonomous monologues, they are, in fact, articulated along dialogic lines. Two vocal identities respond to each other across a cartographic bridge, offering complementary views. Solnit constructs a narrative of identity as experienced by the speaking “I”:

In Golden Gate Park, I am an arcadian populist among Tai Chi practitioners, hippie drummers, Sunday jitterbuggers, gardeners, indigent campers, rare botanical specimens, runners, and raptors

In the Japanese Tea Garden I am always six years old

In the Richmond District, I am wrapped up in dim sum steam, fog, and the fatigue of the grid. (102)

Gómez-Peña weaves together the ways in which he is seen, classified, even monumentalized or fossilized by others:

In Chinatown, I am mistaken for a tourist from Spain or Argentina

On downtown Market Street, I am just part of the local fauna

In the Financial District I am nobody

In SFMOMA, I am “a scary local myth”

... In the Kaiser Medical Center at Divisadero, I am a regular asthma patient whose tattoos perplex the doctors and the nurses. (103)

In many respects, “Who Am I Where? / ¿Quién soy dónde?” revisits the prose and favourite themes of Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*.

Individual heterogeneity, as a site of conflicting versions of the self gathered in a “knit of identity” (Whitman 190), is precisely one of them: “I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)” (246). The interaction between the poems and the map is shaped distinctly by specific factors. Gender, language, and ethnicity are crucial categories for the definition of the self and its relationship to place. Linguistic, sexual, and ethnic diversity are part and parcel of the human and cultural urban fabric of San Francisco. The rational structuring of the world fades into a landscape of swarming heterogeneities.

The effect of the text’s framing the map is that of an artistic synergy, a cartographic poem, or a performative, declamatory map. Together, they form a text and context continuum. Without the text, the map is devoid of semantic density, while the text is disembodied without the map. The map anchors the speaking self in place, delimiting the perimeter of its various movements and metamorphoses. Inseparable creators of significance, the poems and the map respond to each other and signify, through a dynamic movement back and forth, reminiscent of hypertext. The map and the poem function as a shifting semiotic unit of signifier (map) and signified (poems), the latter being dependent on the speaking voice. The map seems immobile, in contrast to the ever-changing identities that hover above it. Its immobility is heightened by the fact that it is easily recognizable as a rigidly codified form of spatial representation. In contrast to this massive representational anchorage, the flowing quality of the poems is even more striking. The fluidity of the poems is not only thematic but also formal because, beyond the printed page, they could go on forever: they are, in a sense, “infinite poems,” whose open-endedness matches that of the atlas itself. Just as the self drifts across the city, the map itself seems to drift from one person to another, as it is impersonated in each and every speaker. (The fixity of the map is, of course, illusory, since the urban image is only reflected in the changing self.)

This vocal map of identity also raises the philosophical problem of what defines and determines the self. For *Émile Benveniste*, the locus of subjectivity in language is the first person pronoun: “I” is the person saying “I” (255). Here, the definition of subjectivity takes into account the context: “I” is the person saying “I am here in time and space” and placing himself/herself on the map. Linguistically, this constitutes a pragmatic understanding of the speaking “I” in specific circumstances. Together with a reference to place, “I” is the

anaphoric nucleus of both poems. The interrogatives of “Who Am I Where? / Quién soy dónde?” are a deictic map whose changeable meaning relies on contextual information. The poems are actually verbal maps of the self as much as they are verbal maps of the city. Solnit’s poem suggests an empathetic identification with the various San Francisco sites: identity is born out of identification, but is certainly not limited to the sum of its contextual instances. The self resonates and is synchronized with the places it passes through.

The poems are the result of a choice of format shared by the two authors from the outset, which can be deemed artificial. Yet the constraint of associating specific sites with “contingent identities and circumstantial memories” mimics the constraints of the map itself; namely, the cartographic grid, what Solnit calls “the fatigue of the grid” (102). Identity, just like space, is subjected to the grid of a joint poetic and geographical exercise. The boundaries of home, as an inherently familiar sphere, are stretched to include the unfamiliar – not in the sense of the strangely familiar “*unheimlich*,” but rather in the sense of the *terra incognita* blank. Solnit declares that she is “home in the known and unknown” (102), projecting a personal map of the city not unlike the medieval maps that show a world whose margins harbour the mythical *terrae incognitae*. Urban space, as it emerges from the various personal experiences mapped in *Infinite City*, is not orderly or legible (as Kevin Lynch would have it in his classical urban study *The Image of the City*, for instance), but is, rather, a place of confusion, disorientation, and constant negotiation.

Conclusion

Infinite City revives the map as a type of representation that thinkers like de Certeau and Harley, who speak of the deathly or disembodied quality of maps, considered to have exhausted itself. In an even more profound way, *Infinite City* renews map making as a form of knowledge (self-knowledge as well) and understands it as an instance of Jean-Marc Besse’s restorative epistemology, a dialectical counter-mapping that confers visibility on subaltern values and discourses that have never been included in canonical maps (22). The writing of history has done much to take into consideration alternative points of view, but there have also been changes in the understanding of geography and cartography as ways of producing knowledge, through practices of counter-mapping. Two such examples of restorative epistemology from *Infinite City* are “Green Women: Open Spaces and Their Champions” (on the women

environmentalists of the Bay Area) and the map of “The Names before the Names,” which is the result of research into the complex history of the names of the Native American communities that were spread all over the Bay Area in 1769, at the moment of contact with the Spaniards. Such examples of restorative mapping (the latter, in particular) rely on the conventions of traditional cartography in order to subvert or supplement dominant epistemic paradigms. In doing so, the map of “The Names before the Names” raises a certain number of problems because of the illusion of historical accuracy and representational fixity that it gives. The essay dispels that illusion of fixity and accuracy, since it mentions the scarcity of evidence, the necessary recourse to deduction and speculation, the haziness of some of the areas on the map, and the chain of translation and transcription of some of these names (12-7). It undermines the map (voluntarily or involuntarily), suggesting that it is a nostalgic construct, based on a fantasy of origins. “The Names before the Names” relies on appropriating a conventional western form that does not take into consideration mapping representations in the Native American tradition: pictographs or ephemeral maps, for instance (Lewis 51-182). Visually, *Infinite City* is a far cry from the uniformity of digital imagery, since it relies on a return to older styles of maps, which bespeak nostalgia for the map as an artistic object, without escaping the representational confines of the western mapping tradition.

Another source of aesthetic and ideological renewal stems from the ways in which the relationship between geography and narrative is reinterpreted in *Infinite City* by going beyond the limits of the codified atlas genre. Historically, atlases sum up knowledge in a monumental way, functioning as geographical archives of a given context and offering “a symbolic mastery of space” (Jacob 97-8). Monuments of possession and authority, atlases are omniscient and, since knowledge cannot be dissociated from power, omnipotent. *Infinite City* operates a series of shifts in mode and perspective from the monumental to the fluid, from omniscience to individual points of view, and from knowledge to the intimate experience of the texture of place. It plays with the codes of the atlas and regenerates it by using literary filters and by placing storytelling, subjectivity, together with a combined individual and communal relevance at the centre of a new understanding of map making. This is one of many recent examples of cartography undisciplined or unbound, appropriated by individuals or groups outside the field of cartography itself.¹²

Infinite City seems to be a perfect case study for Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, but upon closer inspection, the neat dismantling of the "grand narratives" of totalizing meaning it undertakes is not as thorough or as radical as it may appear. It does renounce official versions of wholeness, but not without formulating a nostalgia for an alternative wholeness, which passes through a communal production of meaning. The utopian strain of this project resides in its emphasis on participatory, community-based sharing of maps and stories. *Infinite City* suggests that cartography is most human when it charts not the faraway but the nearby with the same sense of wonder—mapping home as a microcosm in order to produce personal and communal versions of home. In this sense, *Infinite City* is close to the practice of "reinhabiting home" through mapping, pursued by the so-called "reinhabitants"—domestic explorers charting their homelands.¹³ *Infinite City* breathes life into the form of the atlas, and each of its maps breathes life into the imaginary and subjective life of a city that is both intensely familiar and unfamiliar. Through repetition and variation, *Infinite City* echoes Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by producing twenty-two often unexpected, oblique, and unsettling ways of looking at a potentially infinite San Francisco and beyond.

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Notes

- 1 An insightful discussion of de Certeau's passages about the view from the World Trade Center can be found in Pinder's "Subverting Cartography: the Situationists and Maps of the City" (1996).
- 2 See, e.g., Harmon's beautifully illustrated catalogue, *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* (2010).
- 3 See, e.g., Solnit, *Wanderlust; Yosemite in Time; California Bestiary; Paradise Built in Hell*.
- 4 The storm of leaves and the accumulating maps are reminiscent of the Borgesian trope of the infinite library in "The Book of Sand" and "The Library of Babel."
- 5 The English-language collection entitled *Labyrinths* includes some of Borges's most famous short stories, among them "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "The Garden of Forking Paths," "The Library of Babel and Pierre Menard," and "Author of the Quixote."

- 6 Some book projects and urban projects inspired by Calvino include Malutzki and Ketelhodt, *The Second Encyclopaedia of Tlön* (1997–2006): Volume 6, “Città,” is based on Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. Another work in which Calvino is prominent is *Pile and Thrift, City A-Z*. A project directly inspired by *Invisible Cities* is Van Vankelburgh’s “Eudoxia.” Finally, *Invisible Cities* provides a model of rethinking a city; see, e.g., Reichert and Aubert. I would like to thank David Pinder and Jessica Sewell for having suggested some of these references.
- 7 But Marco Polo reminds the Khan that “the city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between one and the other there is a connection” (Calvino 61).
- 8 In 2011, Solnit also conducted a community mapping project, with students from the creative writing program at the University of Wyoming, to produce a similar atlas of Laramie: see Gilman. Solnit published an atlas of New Orleans in 2013, entitled *Unfathomable City*, identical in spirit to *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*.
- 9 Solnit has written a book on Muybridge entitled *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*.
- 10 On painted panoramas, see Oettermann; on Muybridge’s panoramas, see Harris and Sandweiss.
- 11 On the close relationship between cities and the emergence of the cinema see Bruno.
- 12 Crampton and Krygier use the term “cartography undisciplined” (12). Pinder uses the phrase “cartographies unbound” (453), in his review essay of the same title. Interesting experiments in artists’ appropriating mapping have taken place in Germany: see Möntmann; Möntmann and Dziejwior.
- 13 The concept of reinhabiting home refers to mapping home as a form of empowerment. Three notable examples come from Canada; see Aberley; Harrington; Harrington and Stevenson. Another example of participatory mapping based on local knowledge is discussed in Williamson and Connolly.

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