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Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers by Karen O'Rourke (review)

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Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers by Karen O'Rourke (review)

Abstract

In *Walking and Mapping*, both senses of the term "mapping" are caught up in a detailed hagiography of artists who, in one way or another, engage with movement through space, mainly as walkers. Records of the experience, by both the participants and the creators of the artworks, are mapped across both contemporary and historical time spectrums.

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Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers by Karen O'Rourke (review)

Mike Leggett

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is that worldwide gallery and museum attendance is increasing for exhibitions that display contemporary portraiture, the old masters (from all periods) and so-called traditional art. It is my contention that all forms of art are valid and beneficial to society. Of course, styles, subject matter and materials go in and out of fashion, but this does not mean that art that may not be the flavor of the month is no longer valid. Some new media advocates are writing an unnecessary apologetics for this latest fashion.

Reading this book, bearing this criticism in mind, will be a wonderful, rewarding experience and a fascinating glimpse into that which is beyond the normal reach of our senses. I was delighted to come across many of my favorite artists featured in *Molecular Aesthetics*, some of whom I have worked with, such as John McCormack, Julian Voss-Andreae and Blair Bradshaw, to name a few. Thierry Delatour's essay on molecular songs was simply brilliant; his concept opens up a completely new genre of molecular music.

WALKING AND MAPPING: ARTISTS AS CARTOGRAPHERS

by Karen O'Rourke. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2013. 360 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN 978-0-262-01850-0.

Reviewed by Mike Leggett, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia. Email: <legart@ozemail.com.au>.

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In *Walking and Mapping*, both senses of the term "mapping" are caught up in a detailed hagiography of artists who, in one way or another, engage with movement through space, mainly as walkers. Records of the experience, by both the participants and the creators of the artworks, are mapped across both contemporary and historical time spectrums.

The walking aspects are various in approach—symbolic, referential, structural, relational, minimal or simply willful. The lists are expanded to encompass the psycho-geographical, the perceptual, datascares of hybridity, networks with and without maps, and labyrinths. Modes of interaction across the spaces might be didactic, diaristic or conceptual, involve role play or engage the ludic. The making of a map as such is mercurial.

As an act of curation the author confesses she focuses "mainly on walkings and mappings I was able to experience firsthand." The territory is, therefore, predictably Europe and North America

(she is based in Paris), clearly delineating this volume as a partial listing, more of a journal of encounters with mapping projects or narratives about them. It lacks the authority of other listings in the Leonardo Book Series, such as Stephen Wilson's encyclopaedic *Information Arts*. As she reads, the reader enters into a whirl of encounters, almost collisions, with the many exponents described, rushing past on their way to a destination, happily of their choosing. The movement through space/time is well documented, the ramifications of each project remaining in often transitory or ephemeral states. The sense of an ever-changing inventory is palpable, as is an awareness that these accounts may be the only record of many of the works described.

As the author observes, "The field has burgeoned over the past decade." This is fully evident. More recent projects have been related "to landmark [sic] works from the past half-century." Precursors to this recent past are, nonetheless, also inside the circle—Baudelaire, the French surrealists and situationist followers are present, the latter encouraging an approach termed psycho-geography, intended to eventually "reveal the city's underlying structure." In this regard, a "landmark" figure in Britain, Steve Willetts, goes unlisted, and reference to writers influential on this field of art practice, such as W.G. Sebald, are not part of the mix.

Curious references are made with claims, for instance, that boredom in the 1960s became an aesthetic, with films like *Wavelength* used as an example (p. 32). By comparison, too much of what is described as mapping makes the film for this reviewer an edge-of-the-seat thriller. There is, in fact, no clash of aesthetics here, as the art in common is centred on the existential

and reflexive experience of space and time and the reflections that flow from them—*Wavelength* certainly encourages such engagement, though not through physical perambulation. Many will find the wealth of detail in this source book valuable—the research effort is impressive and the findings are clearly if not pleasurably expressed. The bibliography in this well presented and illustrated volume is extensive.

Tom Conley wrote recently of the impact mapmakers had on the social development of early-modern France through the shifts in understanding caused by the ideological re-definitions of byways, and concepts of country and property (reviewed in Leonardo Reviews, April 2012). Conley arrives at a sentence that carefully locates the reader, the text, and its writer: "One can move into space by surveying and arrogating it, and one can make it virtual, seemingly self-made, when a cartographic process is adjusted to the imagination of one's origins, growth, works, memory, and living itineraries." This perfectly expresses the Australian indigenous contribution to knowledge (glibly referred to as "songlines" and "bush erudition" by so many) being a complete expression of place, identity and community as part of an ancient lineage.

The contemporary shifts in describing space and its dominions explored in this volume have impacts far removed from such a culture. Conley describes cartography and its impact on the confines of 16th-century culture and politics. The performances described here possess significance in a provisional context—it being too risky, it seems, to assess the role ubiquitous and ready-to-hand technologies have in lubricating changes in social and political relations.

THE ART OF FAILURE: AN ESSAY ON THE PAIN OF PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

by Jesper Juul. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2012. 168 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 9780262019057.

Reviewed by Jan Baetens. Email: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>.

doi:10.1162/LEON_r_00879

In this short, thought-provoking essay, Jesper Juul departs from the personal but widely shared observation that video games have as much to do with pain as with pleasure: We feel pain when we don't manage to end the

