

Mapping Regina (and Saskatchewan and the people)

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Representations of a spherical world on a flat surface pose significant challenges to the cartographer. So, too, does representing cultural activity and awareness: some aspects and activities are inevitably privileged. The activities described in this paper embrace participatory mapping projects that involve a variety of materials and settings in “Canada’s Greatest City,” Regina.

Three years ago I moved from Vancouver to Regina; from a dynamic international city with a mild climate to a frigid and windswept prairie outpost with terrible public transit, no recycling and slim possibilities for weekend brunch. This is not a move many would make, or even understand - but I was driven by the dual purpose of an overwhelming desire for prairie landscapes and a passion to pursue graduate work at the University of Regina.



*ALL of the people who live in Regina - especially the artists – ‘heart’ this sign.
And it’s a good thing we love it because it is everywhere.
(photo: Barbara Meneley)*

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There are a lot of differences between Vancouver and Regina and I was very naturally drawn to exploring the nature of my new city through my work. I am a visual artist with a background as a cartographer as well as in the study of cultural theory. This presentation illustrates some of the ways I've been working with mapping and with visual representations of place in Regina, and some of the contemporary art that has influenced me in this work.

The American contemporary visual artist Lize Mogel uses the term associative geography in the context of her work with conceptual mapping. In work that mobilizes and repositions traditional cartographic relationships, Mogel reminds us that all cartography is subjective. This awareness is heightened in the context of accessible interactive technologies which facilitate global positioning and geolocation. This accessibility engages contemporary artists on many levels and offers a range of possibilities for subjective representations of geography and experiences of it. Mogel (2008) states that "The translation of the spherical world onto the flat plane of a map is a mathematical problem; the translation of the political world into a map is an ideological problem. How does one represent the world in a way that does not show dominance? Something or someone is always on the top or at the center." There are obvious connections between Mogel's work and colonial spatial conceptions. Regina is very definitely a colonial city, its location determined by the railway in relation to the township and range grid which in turn is based on global meridians. Before the railway people did not live where Regina is today, preferring the more poetic contours and water courses of the Qu'Appelle Valley. Regina is a place that looked good on paper – and coincidentally the land also belonged to Edgar Dewdney, lieutenant governor of the Northwest Territories. That is why the city was established on that site in 1882.

Given this perceived embedded agenda of traditional cartographic representation, it is intriguing to look to practices that engage with a wider approach to spatial representation. An artist collaborative based in Canada and the UK, Hamilton, Southern & St Amand (2008) "have a social and tactile approach to technology and work with audiences to explore location and sense of place." In artworks such as *Landlines* (2006) or *Running Stitch* (2008), the collective employs locative devices such as mobile phones and GPS's in working with participants to visually represent their experience of moving through space. Framing mapping as a citizen audience and collaboratively generate representation, their work engages the unseen but felt influences and elements of the built environment. This situates spatial representation as palimpsest, which in this context is defined as the complex layering and overwriting of histories, experience and influences that make up the shape of the city or the landscape.



City Blocks: Barbara Meneley & Jennifer Delos Reyes, 2008 (photo: Barbara Meneley)

I find participatory mapping concepts very engaging. This is subjective mapping at its best - a new texture each time it's made, opening possibilities for dynamic representations which express layered conceptions of site and space. 'City Blocks' (2008) which I made in Regina in collaboration with Portland-based artist Jennifer De los Reyes, explores these possibilities. 'City Blocks' calls on Regina residents to engage with one another and explore their visions of what their city could become. A large table made of snow and ice bears a simplified map of Regina. Various city buildings and infrastructure are represented in moveable ice blocks, which participants are invited to place on the map, thus creating their ideal vision of the city. The ephemeral qualities of snow and ice speak to the ebb and flow of human presence as it layers and overwrites the urban landscape.



City Blocks: Barbara Meneley & Jennifer Delos Reyes, 2008

(photo: Barbara Meneley)

I make connections between associative mapping and theories of site specificity in contemporary art. In this, I draw from the contemporary art theorist Miwon Kwon (2004), who frames site specificity “as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes that organize urban life and urban space.” Participatory mapping, subjective and associative, draws from these wider influences in the creation of site specific artwork. My focus is on investigating and expressing concurrent layers of site specificity to engage the inherent integration and fundamental indivisibility of various process and influences in life and urban space.



In This City, we walked and talked about the weather: Barbara Meneley, 2007
(photo: Barbara Meneley)

‘In This City’ contends with how human interactions animate the urban landscape. As we move through our daily lives, countless intimate and personal interactions take place between strangers. A driver stops to let a pedestrian pass, strangers chat about the weather, or two people exchange smiles as they walk past one another in a park. ‘In This City’ marks some of these interactions with sand stenciled arrows and printed messages describing these moments. Here arrows, symbols typically used for cartographic representation, are placed on the landscape. These ephemeral markings are only slightly more permanent than the interactions themselves.



*In This City, we looked at each other and said 'hi': Barbara Meneley, 2007
(photo: Barbara Meneley)*



Motion Mapping: Barbara Meneley, 2007 (photo: Barbara Meneley)

'Motion Mapping' expresses subjective mapping with an intimate focus. With this work, I visually map my own physical and physiological experience of movement. This is a project I've been developing over several years as a passenger on planes, trains and buses using a variety of drawing materials and techniques to visually express the motion of my body. This mapping expresses my intimate and personal experiences of landscape, my own subjective cartography.

Saskatchewan is a province defined by motion. To some it's the 'gap', a featureless monotonous someplace which exists only to be passed through. For those of us who live here and perhaps revel in this expanse, the space exists as something we consume. We move around and

travel great distances, out and back again. We long for these dynamic kinetic perspectives which stretch our eyes. The roots of this twist up from agrarian relationships with these unimaginably vast tracts of land and before that the constant rhythmic flow of nomadic civilization. As long as there have been people here they have been in motion through this place. What are the visual forms of this motion? What are the shapes, the traces, the maps of moving down the highway in a prairie snowstorm, flying through the night vivid with stars, or bumping through the city on a bus made windowless by grime? Perhaps after all the infinite prairie landscape remains just that; open and endless, with infinite possibilities of exploration and investigation, like a straight prairie road, focusing deep into perspective but never really coming to an end.



(photo: Barbara Meneley)

Works Cited

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About the Author

Barbara Meneley is an intermedia artist currently based in Regina, Saskatchewan. Barbara has a BA in Communications and a minor in Dance from Simon Fraser University and an MFA in Visual Arts Intermedia from University of Regina.