Illustrating the City –Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag

How can illustration investigate, record and intervene in urban environments? Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag survey a wide array of creative strategies that reveal new insights.

Who studies the city? Generally it is urbanists, geographers, architects, planners and perhaps sociologists who are concerned with researching our rapidly growing urban environments. It is an almost overwhelmingly complex field of study – an endless array of methods and approaches are adopted in an attempt to gain insights to a subject that is itself in constant flux and movement. For this article we wanted to find out what contributions illustrators are making to these discussions.

We have scrutinised a broad range of different approaches, methods and locations, from Egyptian comics to doormat rubbings on a London council estate, gigantic murals in North America to representations of the miniscule spaces granted to Hong Kong's domestic workers. We have been delighted, fascinated and moved by the inventiveness of illustrators and the powerful ways in which their projects speak of the joys, conflicts and complexities of living in such densely populated environments.

In order to maintain some order in what was threatening to become an unmanageably rich array, we have loosely grouped our findings under section headings. During the process of writing, this system itself was in continual flux as we were incessantly adding new examples, reexamining their achievements and drawing new connections between different practitioners and projects. Inevitably this article leaves out much more than it can possibly contain. Like the city itself constantly threatens to overwhelm its observer with boundless levels of detail and complexity, so too we were at times bowled over by the sheer amount of interesting work we were discovering. We can only offer a heartfelt apology for all the impressive projects that we had to exclude. We hope that the richness of the work we do discuss below makes up for it.

Walking, drifting & floating through the City

How the illustrator relates to their object of study will determine how they investigate it. For those seeking empirical evidence by way of a direct encounter with the phenomenon of interest, being within the city is key. One method of embodied, urban investigation is the *dérive*, which involves

drifting through the city on foot[1] (see also Giada Maestra and Becky Moriarty's accounts of walking through the city in their article pp.25–35).

Artist and writer Laura Grace Ford utilises the drift to produce images that offer a socially-enmeshed ground-level perspective of London. Her book *Savage Messiah* (2019) draws together a substantial collection of zines produced from 2006-2009, comprising her montaged drawings, photographs, ephemera, and typewritten text. Her use of cheap materials and production processes, and accessible (at times vernacular) language for the drawing, photography and writing to capture the places and communities she is situated within results in an overall informal tone of voice – a deliberate contrast to the slick, corporate and professional visual communication often used to present a sanitised and aspirational

view of the city (see also consideration of this in our roundtable discussion p.58).

Despite some methodological overlaps with the practice of psychogeography, Ford has come to distance herself from this association: "I think a lot of what is called psychogeography now is just middle-class men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot" (Ford, 2019: xvii). Ford prefers the term 'sociogeography', which emphasises wider collective experiences over a more isolated, inward-looking position (Ford, 2017). She presents a view of London as someone within it, living and drifting against the dominant channels of movement and money as she traverses an increasingly gentrified space. In doing so, Ford seeks to document the changes she sees and feels "as the process of enclosure and privatisation continues apace" (Ford, 2019: ix). Urban studies scholar David Pinder highlights this aspect of Ford's practice and locates it within a broader range of urban drifting practices, which he groups according to four themes: undoing, disorientating, losing and constructing. Ford is an example of 'loss', expressed in her concern for transience and change within the urban environment (Pinder, 2018:15).

Pinder notes further connections between Ford's work and the concerns of artists associated with Situationist International (SI) in the 1950s and 60s, who were also keen urban drifters. The latter made an interesting proposal in relation to the point-of-view

[1] Reflecting on how the process has taken shape since the 1950s, urban studies scholar David Pinder (2018: 18) traces its origin to the practices and publications of both the Letterist International and subsequent Situationist International avant garde groups, and to Guy Debord's 1956 publication on the strategy. Debord used the derive to explore the relationship between location and emotion, which he called 'psychogeography'.

IMAGE Artist's impression of Laura Grace Ford's book *Savage Messiah* (2019)

presented within images of the city, and what that suggests about the intentions behind that view. Pinder states that at the time of publishing *Internationale situationniste*, the aerial photograph was "favoured by urban planners and sociologists for the study of social space", and that members of SI critiqued its role as complicit within the imposition of capitalist and state restrictions, for it represented "a disembodied administrative gaze that made the city 'legible' and enabled its 'colonisation'" (Pinder, 2018: 20). Ford's images very much refute this position, literally and ideologically (Ford, 2019: vix).

However Ford's practice is also distinct from the Situationists' approach. Her work operates as testimony in the form of material outcomes, whereas for her Situationist predecessors the dérive itself was primary (Pinder, 2018:24). Ford's *Savage Messiah* zines bear witness to a different, now vanished city, caught up in and temporarily resisting the encroachment of capital and the marginalisation of working class communities on London's streets. On another occasion (for a different project) her work was presented as an installation of a series of images in advertising poster sites within the city of Bristol (UK) in 2011. The accompanying maps that indicated the various poster sites offered the viewer the opportunity to experience their own unusual route through the city, allowing Ford's work to operate as 'disorientation' – another theme that Pinder associates with the *dérive*. As archaeologist James R. Dixon notes, the work encourages the casual bystander to consider the display site and its broader locale anew, by creating a discrepancy between the location and the urban decay pictured (Dixon, 2013: 568). Through doing so, Dixon suggests that Ford reveals the difference between the casual visit and her durational experience of a place: "We might suppose that [Laura Grace] Ford's work exposes what is hidden by the veneer of respectability, imposed perhaps by lack of depth of engagement on the part of most who encounter central Bristol" (Ibid: 569). Beyond nudging our perception of the specific site of the work, Ford brings the lost futures of social projects inscribed within brutalist architecture to our attention.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased interest in the processes of remote investigation, see for example the Remote Sensing symposia. At the first instalment of this series, illustrator Serena Katt presented a project that uses archival photographs and Google Street View to revisit her previously embodied experience of urban Kenya.[2] By setting herself and the viewer at a temporal and geographical distance the drawings offer a disembodied perspective of the city, in contrast to that presented by Ford. The point of view seems to be taken from at least one metre above the average human eye-level, and the figures have no discernible faces. Drawing from images produced by the car-mounted Google camera produces a sense of disconnection from the scene for the viewer: it becomes apparent that we are seeing technologically mediated imagery. Katt is

[2] For another illustrative practice using Google Street View, see Gareth Proskourine-Barnett's work, which explores Birmingham's virtual traces of brutalist architecture via this platform, a discussion of which can be found in Proskourine-Barnett (2016).

interested in highlighting the subjective presence of the illustrator ("I, in relation to a subject", Katt, 2021:49), at play in any work. In this case her own experience of creating the drawings was dominated by her memory of the place, but what does this do for the viewer who is not party to the process of reawakening these recollections? Do the multiple levels of mediation result in a sense of floating detachment?

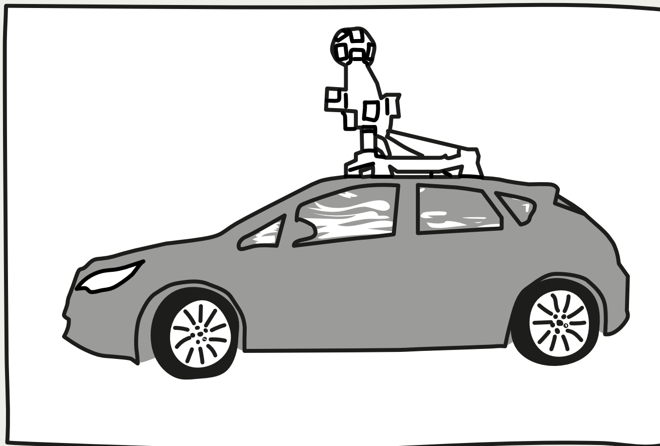


IMAGE Artist's impression of Google Street View car

Observation: Inside and outside perspectives

Serena Katt is right to raise questions regarding the positionality of the illustrator: An insider, someone who knows and understands the places and communities they are making work about can often produce more nuanced and insightful work. Ford, for example, says: "I have spent the last 20 years walking around London and living here in a precarious fashion, I've had about 50 addresses. I think my understanding and negotiation of the city is very different to [that of other psychogeographers]" (Ford, 2019: xvii). While Ford is not a designer, her concerns overlap with discussions in social design, regarding the relationship between designer, context and outcome. Designers and writers Cinnamon Janzer and Lauren Weinstein propose a 'Social Design Matrix' to help scrutinise projects and the associated research methods that characterise these relationships. They distinguish between the inside and outside perspectives that Ford hints at above: "Outside perspective projects are characterised by 'parachute' designs where solutions are proposed for, and even implemented within, communities from which the designer is heavily, or even completely, removed. Conversely, an inside perspective refers to a context in which designers have developed a strong sense of solidarity with the community being addressed. Inside perspectives demonstrate a high level of earned trust from the community" (Janzer and Weinstein, 2014: 333).

London based illustrator Olivia Twist prioritises the position of insider in relation to the communities she works with and represents in her work. She explains how her interest in participatory design and human-centred research methodologies takes shape within her practice as an illustrator: "I like to celebrate my local community in my work and draw everybody who's around me" (Duddy, 2021).

She observes from an embedded perspective to capture everyday and overlooked moments in order to produce outcomes that contribute to more nuanced representations of the city and its inhabitants. Twist explains that "...[g]rowing up, I saw representations of council housing that didn't feel fair or accurate. So through my work I try to show my experience, my truth, the people around me, and the mundane things I appreciate." The benefits of this lie in the rich intertextual references available to viewers and collaborators within her multi-layered communication. Twist explains: "You can put esoteric messages in your work – like the layout of a kitchen that is instantly recognisable to anyone who has lived in a council flat. You can communicate on a deeper level" (Ibid).

Twist's work is also visible within the city. Her residency at a London youth club resulted in murals within and outside the space; her work has also been shown on billboards in London, Bristol, Birmingham and Sheffield. Where the work is experienced is an important part of Twist's practice, who is always keen to start conversations through her work: "For me it has to be on the streets or in the places the people who have inspired me frequent. From my experience private views aren't really an intergenerational space" (Williams, 2021). In both Twist's and Ford's practice, their focus on the production of a carefully considered material output allows them to intervene in the city that inspired the work.

For illustrator-researcher Mitch Miller earning the trust of the communities he works with is crucial for the production of his large-scale 'dialectograms'. Miller describes dialectograms as: "[images that] sit somewhere between a map, an architectural plan, comic strip and diagram. Using techniques from these disciplines to contain and arrange information… focusing on places that are deprived and marginal areas, hidden from public view or in a state of transition" (2013: 25). Information is gathered through ethnographic methods (such as observation, fieldnotes, drawings and conversations) to "collate personal narratives, local knowledge, feelings and imaginings about place, to create a unique social and aesthetic document" (Ibid).

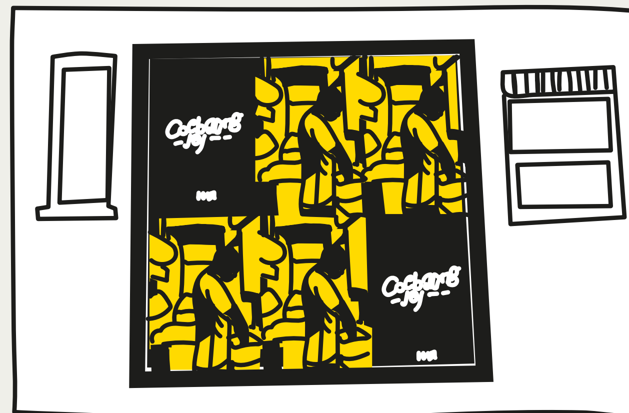


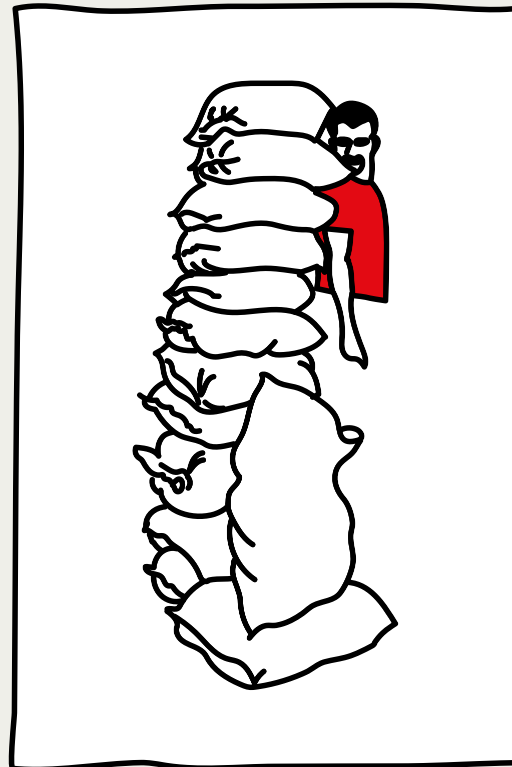
IMAGE Artist's impression of Olivia Twist's billboard in London

Miller has used these methods to produce 'dialectograms' of various locations and communities in Glasgow, some he was already very familiar with

and others where he spent time embedding himself through a long process: “I'll go into a place and work with the people for months and sometimes years, […] I'll get to know them, I'll talk to them, I'll sketch them and I'll try to involve them as much as possible. I'll chat to them about where they live and work and get to know why their place means so much to them. All the while I'll be creating a drawing of the place I'm in, and include their opinions and stories within that” (Selbie, 2019). The years Miller has spent as an embedded illustrator-researcher creating ‘dialectograms’ have enabled him to identify a recurring theme: participants consistently highlight the superficiality of many urban renewal projects promising ‘progress’, noting that entrenched problems often remain neglected (Ibid).

Visual artist Sameer Kulavoor’s practice[3] also focuses on observing city life, in this instance he examines Mumbai. His illustrations invite us to consider concepts such as alienation and aspiration in relation to how people use the city, and are used by it in turn. In his *This is not a still life* series, his detailed understanding of the habitual practices of Mumbai’s inhabitants allows him to make incisive judgments about what to include in his pared down images of roadside objects. The vertically piled up commodities in the paintings invoke urban skyward expansion via minimalist images of mundane everyday objects. Kulavoor’s sharp observation and insider knowledge allows him to cast the familiar road-side assemblages in a new light.

Illustrators Lucinda Rogers and Olivia Twist have both made observational drawings of the Ridley Road Market in London, with outcomes offering different languages for different audiences. Twist’s work takes the form of an oral history project presented as a zine, containing drawings, photos, direct quotes and close-up scans of materials. Rogers drew the market with great elegance, producing images for the more traditional gallery setting of the House of Illustration for her exhibition *On Gentrification* (2017).



[3] Thank you to Mrudula Kuvalekar, who drew our attention to his work.

IMAGE Artist’s impression of Sameer Kulavoor *This is not a Still Life* (2020)

Both Twist and Rogers include evidence of primary research in their outputs (they both spent time in the market), but Twist's work also captures evidence of her building relationships and becoming embedded within the place. Rogers' work is more ocular-centric by comparison, making it feel (rightly or wrongly) like a more distanced observation (while Twist's inclusion of close-up scans of fabrics and materials found in the market also evoke the sense of touch). But this is not a reason to dismiss Rogers' work, rather it allows us to consider the different affordances of an outside perspective. By exhibiting the work in a gallery, Rogers is able to address a different audience, namely one that frequents galleries and is more likely to have different privileges and clout in relation to the problems faced by places at risk of development.

Of course illustration can also be mobilised to less benign ends within processes of urban gentrification and change. In her piece for Varoom Magazine's "activism" issue illustration educator and writer Emily Jost warns about the process of 'artwashing', for example through commissioning illustrators who have little knowledge of the bigger context to produce artwork for hoardings surrounding building sites of dubious redevelopment projects (2018:61). Jost's article is accompanied by an image of Cat Sims' *Black Matter* comic, an unsettling piece of dystopian fiction that warns us of the impact such housing developments can have on the 99% of us who can't afford them.

Utilising conventions

Architectural drawing and cartography are representational conventions closely related to the city. An architect's visual vocabulary such as elevation, sections, or floor-plans represent standardised and efficient modes of spatial representation. Similarly, cartographic renderings of urban environments that focus on technical accuracy have high use-value (such as Google Maps) and are a practical way to navigate the city.

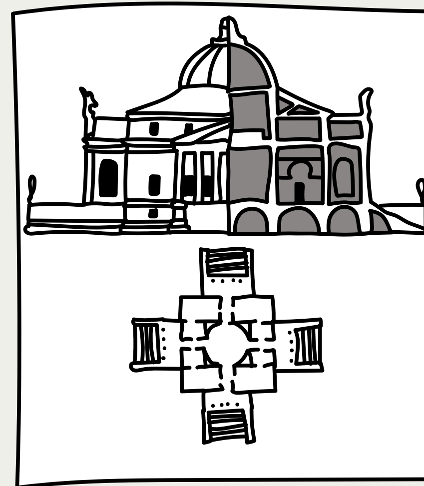


IMAGE Architectural drawing conventions: front elevation, section, floorplan. Artist's impression of Andrea Palladio's drawings for Villa Capra 'La Rotunda', published in *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (1570)

The high levels of readability and mathematical exactitude of these plans and maps might suggest neutrality and universalism, however various scholars have highlighted the fact that they are historically and culturally specific mental constructs, borne out

of specific agendas and ideas.[4] What affordances might these modes of representation offer? Architects, planners and illustrators who make use of these visual conventions must take heed of the mathematically quantifiable exactitude of this mode of representation – by harnessing, deconstructing, or undermining it. Whatever their project or approach, their work stands in relation to the calculable precision of this visual language.

Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi cracks open the confines of these spatial abstractions in his *Manhattan Transcripts* (1976-1981), a series of graphic experiments that push at the limits of architectural representation. Published as a book in 1982, these diagrams, drawings and photographs attempted to "transcribe things normally removed from architectural representation, namely the complex relationship between spaces and their use" (Tschumi 1982:7). Integrating space, event and movement they "transcribe" a series of fictional events playing out in Manhattan: a murder, a fall, a battle – represented through sequential arrangements and fracturing perspectives. This project is a good example of critical practice – i.e. practice that questions conventions by bringing them to the surface, showing up their limitations and suggesting alternatives.

Similarly, Mitch Miller's 'dialectograms' (also discussed above in "Observation") incorporate lived experience into the geometric framework of the architectural floor-plan. In contrast to Tschumi, whose interest in movement and action derives from an abstract, theoretical notion of the "event" (see Fontana-Giusti 2016: 272), Miller works with participants to transcribe their actual lived experiences. The architectural floor-plan is gradually populated with Miller's drawings of collectively and personally held views, stories and experiences relating to the location. What is included and how things are represented is repeatedly debated during meetings, where participants gather around the gradually emerging illustration. Here, the floor-plan becomes a stabilising frame to structure and hold the otherwise unmanageable heterogeneity of spatialised anecdotes, habits and biographies. The form is able to hold together divergent views, without resolving them into a simplistic or superficial consensus. This resonates with political theorist Chantal Mouffe's position: she argues for the importance of institutions that permit conflict, where opponents don't become enemies, but adversaries who can coexist in 'conflictual consensus' (2013).

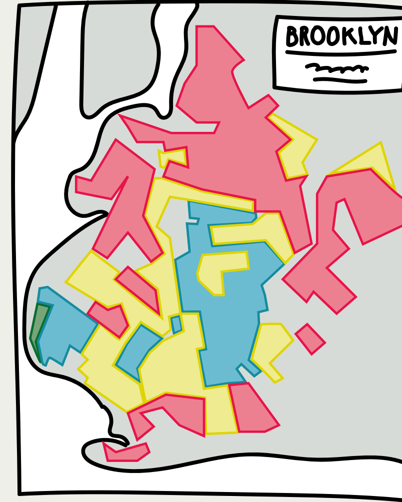
Rather than working to enliven the cold precision of architectural representation, illustrator and activist Tings Chak harnesses its factual accuracy to draw attention to spatial injustice. In her project *Suitable Accommodation* (2016) she mapped out the miniscule spaces that live-in domestic workers in Hong Kong are typically assigned by the families who hire them.[5] While employment contracts stipulate that "the Employer should provide the Helper suitable accommodation" (quoted on

[4] See for example sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* ([1974]1991), geographers and map historians such as Brian Harley and Denis Cosgrove (see retrospective collection of essays in Harley 2001 and Cosgrove 1999) and political scientist Benedict Anderson's chapter 'Census, Map, Museum' in *Imagined Communities* (1991).

[5] See also this report from the Hong Kong Justice Centre for a more general account of Domestic Migrant Workers' living and working conditions.

project webpage), in actual fact the interpretation of "suitable" is often stretched to (and beyond) its limit. Based on testimonies and interviews with domestic workers, Chak created floor-plans and interior elevations of the spaces that maids and other migrant domestic workers described. Chak marked up these architectural renderings at a scale of 1:1 onto the floor and walls of a gallery space, and invited viewers to experience the cramped conditions in relation to their own body. Chak's work harnesses the accuracy of the architectural renders as a corrective to the obfuscation allowed by written language. The precise representation of actual spaces stands in stark contrast to the blurry notion of "suitable accommodation".

Chak's work reveals spatial injustice with a few precisely drawn marks, but this unforgiving exactitude of lines drawn in mathematically conceived, abstract space can also have the reverse effect. 'Redlining', an insidiously discriminatory banking practice in the United States during the 1930s and -40s, exploited the visual precision of lines on maps to inflict decades of discrimination upon those who get caught up with these marks and boundaries.[6] The maps, produced by the Home Owners Loan Cooperation (HOLC), divided cities into colour-coded segments that were used as a basis to decide whether mortgages would be granted or withheld to applicants residing in these areas. Districts outlined in red were characterised as "hazardous" and the overwhelmingly Black and immigrant communities residing there were denied



access to finance. This was followed by yellow districts ("definitely declining"), blue ("still desirable"), and green areas ("best"), which were inhabited mainly by so-called "native-born white" families. Large swathes of the urban population were thus denied the possibility of home-ownership, arguably one of the most important inter-generational wealth creation mechanisms in the United States in the 20th century. Mapping Inequality has published a comprehensive and accessible website that showcases many of HOLC's discriminatory maps, alongside contextualising information.

The long-term devastating impact of withholding finance cannot be overstated. Author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates draws a direct connection between the racist banking practices of redlining, and today's alarming degree of incarceration in impoverished

[6] Other examples of environmental racism that are perpetrated by drawing lines on a map are documented by architect Adam Paul Susaneck on his independently run website Segregation by Design.

IMAGE 'Redlining': Artist's impression of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation's *Residential Security Map for Brooklyn (New York)* (1938)

black neighbourhoods (Coates 2014). The outrageous cost of maintaining this practice of the incarceration of populations from specific areas in US cities has been effectively visualised by academics and activists at the Justice Mapping Centre and the Centre for Spatial Research at Columbia University. They coined the term “Million Dollar Blocks” to describe specific housing blocks, where around one million dollars are spent annually to incarcerate people usually resident there. When examining maps pin-pointing the location of these Million Dollar Blocks, their position overlaps with depressing predictability with the areas that were redlined a few generations earlier.

The colour-coded city-maps produced by HOLC acted as a particularly destructive form of top-down design – a cruel application of a disembodied administrative gaze: drawing those lines condemned generations of mainly Black families to run up against the banking system’s structural racism. The graphic simplicity of these maps produced harrowing and complex effects on the ground. The maps functioned as a potent tool to inflict harm. They are reminiscent of design historian Gavin Grindon’s notion of ‘Cruel Designs’: “These objects compose and embody state and capitalist order, accompanying the formation of repressive laws and unjust social relations”, all the while passing as bureaucratic necessities of no one person’s particular responsibility (Grindon, 2015). In contrast, the visualisations coming out of the Centre for Spatial Research, such as the “Million Dollar Blocks” represent a masterful synthesis of complex data on the ground – a bottom-up approach. Rather than being a tool or precursor for discriminatory behaviour, they illustrate the complex ramifications and spatial injustices of these practices through their inspired act of visualising data that is otherwise presented in inaccessible tables and reports. They bring to mind W.E.B Du Bois’ ground-breaking infographics of the 1900s that chart black lives in the United States. These maps, similar to Du Bois’ hand drawn graphics, shed light on harm that has been wrought, and urge us to strive for greater social justice.

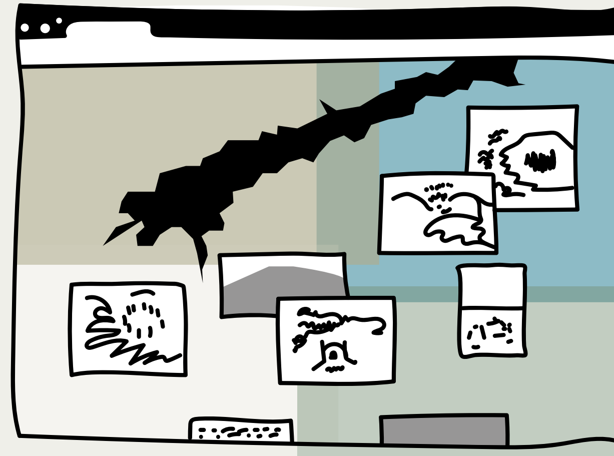
While the above discussion has shown how the precision of geographically accurate maps can be deployed with both devastating and revelatory effects, the concept of ‘mental maps’ stands in opposition to the mathematically exactitude of cartographic surveys. Urban planner Kevin Lynch notes in his book *The Image of the City* (1960) how individual and subjective perception of the urban environment is quite distinct from graphically drawn maps. “Most often our perception of the city is [...] rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all” (1960:2).

The fragmentary and sensorially mixed nature of this “image” presents a problem to anyone trying to capture a mental map in pictorial form. Geographer Franz Buhr, who uses mental maps

IMAGE Artist's impression of Imogen Humphris *Govan Deep Map* (2021)

as a research tool to study migrants' relationships to urban territories, is acutely aware of the multiple processes of translation and interpretation that are at work when someone is invited to draw a mental map of an urban area (Buhr 2021, see also his contribution to our roundtable discussion pp.58–63). He reminds us that drawing skills, the level of familiarity of cartographic codes, as well as the prompts and materials offered by the researcher all impact on the resulting drawing. Instead of treating the mental maps his research participants draw as a straightforward representation of their subjective perception of a city, he uses them as a prompt for further conversation that often takes a more interesting turn after the maps have been produced.

Buhr's research participants are not professional illustrators, and their drawings were made relatively quickly with simple materials. Illustrator and researcher Imogen Humphris' project *Govan Deep Map* (2021) is a more professionalised attempt at rendering a mental image of a place, in her case the Govan Graving Docks in Glasgow. Similar to Laura Grace Ford's 'sociogeography' discussed above, Humphris blends her own sensory impressions of the site with snippets of remembered conversations and other recollections that relate to the location. Clearly her mixed-media, collaged website is not a direct 1:1 representation of Humphris' interior mental representation of Govan Graving Docks – such a thing would be impossible. But in its oscillating, scattered yet interconnected form, it is a convincing translation of Lynch's "partial, fragmentary, [...] composite" mental image into a tangible picture (Ibid).

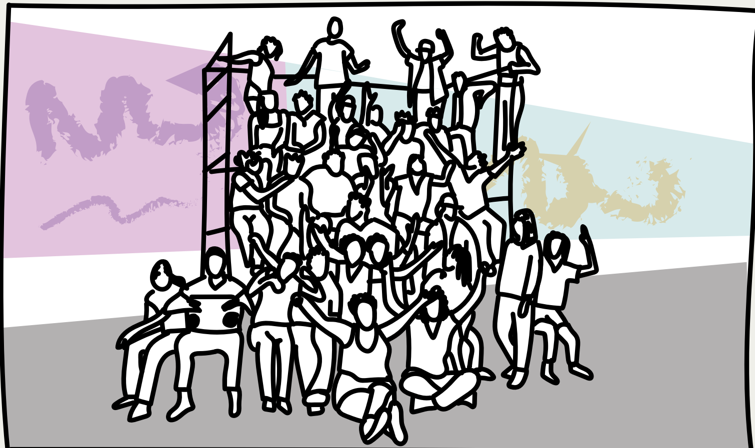


Intervening: Marking & inscribing the City

Illustration inserted directly into the texture of the city (through street art, wheat-pasting, murals or poster-sites) has the potential to change a city, and the relationships within it. (See Sergios Strigklogiannis' piece pp.36–41 for an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon in contemporary Athens.) In the confines of this article, we focus on work that uses a city's walls to lay claims for increased visibility, presence and respect within its contested scopic regimes. Who is seen? Who

is noticed? Who is recognised as a legitimate participant in the life of the city? Who is able to claim space for themselves and their communities?

Chicago's *Wall of Respect* (1967) is a powerful example of a community asserting their presence and making themselves visible.[7] It grew out of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960-70s, and was created through a collaborative process of shared creative labour and discussion. The presence of the wall immediately changed the nature of the site: it became a place for community and congregation – political gatherings, celebrations, and tourism, but also for violence and sabotage. As a self-assured celebration of Black experience it was tragically short-lived (it was destroyed in 1972), but it catalysed a larger community mural movement in Chicago and beyond.



Artist Judy Baca's *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1974 – ongoing!) operates on a different (monumental!) scale, but has similar aims and ambitions. The mural, one of the longest in the world, presents the history of California through the eyes of women, immigrant, and minority communities. It affirms the legitimacy of their continuous presence in California and acts as a counterpoint to traditional textbook accounts of history, which often privilege a white colonial perspective. Like the *Wall of Respect* in Chicago, this mural was also created with grassroots community involvement, but is embedded in greater levels of institutional support — with many youth groups, scholars, municipal bodies and funders contributing to its creation.

The practice of using illustration to affirm and celebrate otherwise marginalised communities' rightful presence in a site, is also evident in powerful contemporary examples of politicised wheat-paste activism. French street-artist JR's piece *Women are Heroes* (2008) in the Favela Morro da Providência, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, operates along these same principles. Impressively large visual representations of people who are typically undervalued in a particular urban environment, are produced in collaboration with the community it portrays, and inserted into the city's fabric. New York-based illustrator and activist Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's project *Stop Telling Women to Smile* (ongoing) strikes a more defiant tone in its vigorous rebuttal of gender-based street harassment.

[7] Additional information on the *Wall of Respect* can be found here: 'Legacies of the Wall of Respect' (audio recording of conference presentations, Block Museum of Art, 2017), article forming part of the 'Picturing Place' series in the Guardian (Campkin, Mogilevich & Ross 2014), summary of its history and a short video documenting activities marking its 50 years anniversary (Art & Design in Chicago 2017).

IMAGE Artist's impression of a group of young volunteers working on the 1950s section of Judy Baca's Great Wall of Los Angeles (1983)

Her pencil-drawn portraits of women talk back to their harassers, from the walls of those neighbourhoods where they experienced the unwanted attention. These women may have been seen, but not respected. These powerful posters demand the dignity they have been denied.

IMAGE Artist's impression of a poster in Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's project *Stop Telling Women to Smile* (ongoing)

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how illustrative practices can make an intervention in relationships of power in urban territories. It is also interesting to note how street art, murals and posters can change the nature of the walls they appear on: constructed as a material expression of a boundary, a separation, deterrent or impediment, they have the potential to become an opening towards new ideas, and a site of public discourse. Instead of hurrying along, people are now invited to pause, realign their bodies and lift their gaze: passers-by become attentive, as they are invited to reflect on visibility in the city.

Another factor that the projects introduced in this section have in common is their organic integration with the communities who inhabit the neighbourhoods where the visual intervention takes place (as discussed above in 'Observing as an Insider'). When this link is missing, a project can lose much of its force. Our review of the recent ambitious public-art project *Aeroarte* (2021) in Guayaquil, Ecuador, suggests that this vital community integration was largely absent in this case. It is of course hard to gauge the intricacies of an urban art project at considerable geographical distance, but a local newspaper informs us that there was no consultation process supporting the selection of the (mostly international) illustrators and artists who were commissioned to create images "celebrating the heroes of the Covid-19 pandemic". Perhaps that is why, as the same newspaper piece suggests, there is limited public support for this project. The 14 poster sites (so far 9 have been realised) are elevated above the city's roofs to make them visible to passengers on a newly constructed cable-car service, literally removing the artwork from the ground, and the grassroots involvement that is so vital in sustaining this type of work. Is this an example of top-down, 'parachute' design, where solutions are proposed and implemented by designers largely removed from the communities they are intended to serve?

City, time & polyvocality

Time is a theme and factor common to a lot of work concerned with the city, capturing the continuous growth and decay within its fluctuating form and fortunes. In Anne Howeson's evocative drawings of the Kings Cross area in London the passing of time is captured in multiple interpenetrating layers. She describes how she put engravings from the Museum of London's archive into conversation with her own drawings of contemporary views of the same area in composite landscapes to create her series entitled *Present In The Past*. Howeson's work draws our attention to the palimpsest of human experiences in one place through the appearance of figures from different eras traversing the same ground. There are overlaps with Richard McGuire's book *Here*, but Howeson's project demarcates time and location more loosely. Her focus on human experiences in these places and through time allows her to comment favourably on the changes she observed in the King's Cross development, seeing the potential in the new public spaces established and their enthusiastic use by younger generations, and reminding us that "change is inevitable" (Howeson, 2018:16).

This may be true, but the question of who is consulted on how this proceeds is a theme common to the following examples. Illustrator Jessie Brennan raises the question of agency in the face of urban change in her series of drawings *A Fall of Ordinariness and Light*. The four images show Robin Hood Gardens, a London estate (designed in the brutalist style in 1972 by Alison and Peter Smithson) in a process of collapse. The building in the drawing has since been demolished, with the estate's 252 flats removed in order to build over 1500 new homes with a reduction in proportion of social housing on the newly 'regenerated' site, undermining its capacity to provide decent, low-cost homes for low-income households, as Brennan (2015) observes. The artist describes the series as reflecting greater shifts in policy, planning and architecture, explaining that in her series of drawings: "the story is one of social failure – the fall of post-war aspirations of progress, the end of architecture for social good" (Ibid).

This is a theme echoed in Cat Sims' *Space* zine (2017), which foregrounds the progressive values of postwar council estates. Places such as the Alexandra & Ainsworth Estate and the Barbican Estate (both in London) are presented as desirable utopias, characteristic of a more equal society. Sims states that "this work is full of hope and celebration of architecture and public spaces that were, in their very essence, designed and built to make people feel good. All people. Not just the wealthy" (Oliver, 2018).

Brennan extends Sims' point with echoes of Mitch Miller's interest in amplifying under-represented voices from within the process of regeneration. In relation to the wider practice of demolishing brutalist

blocks she notes that “The buildings – and their apparent architectural successes and social failures – are debated and argued over, but the residents’ feelings are often either ignored or misrepresented” (Brennan, 2015). In her project *Regeneration!* Brennan seeks to capture a polyvocal view of the experience of living in Robin Hood Gardens, addressing this omission of residents’ views in many discussions of brutalist architecture. Her publication of this project contains different perspectives alongside her drawings, including former residents’ photographs and interviews, essays by architectural commentators, and archival materials. The heterogeneity of the material is reflective of the tussle over the representation of the place, and its contested value and existence. Incidentally, when Brennan first started work on this project she was an “outsider” and as such encountered some resistance from the residents of the block. Brennan recalls that “a radically different approach to engagement (socially, conceptually, critically, spatially) was required for the project, and it came in the form of conversations – developed out of the process of making doormat rubbings” (Ibid). Here drawing successfully created a bridge between an outsider-researcher and the communities she wanted to engage with.[8]

Geographer and illustrator Giada Peterle’s *Lines* (2020), a picture book based on research undertaken on public transport as public space, also includes the voices of those consulted during the research, allowing participants to be heard in their own words. The book focuses on the history of (the now-defunct) trams in Turku, Finland, and “uses comics as a research method for human geography” (Peterle 2021: 8). It presents the tram as part of the city’s cultural heritage, linking its lifespan with broader social shifts related to gender. Peterle’s methods range from archival research, her own experience of the contemporary bus system that replaced the trams, scheduled interviews, and informal conversations. The materials collected during two weeks of fieldwork are incorporated in the book. Participants’ testimony is differentiated from the author’s voice through the use of different typefaces; diagrammatic representations of the transport system are superimposed over representational drawings

[8] Author and musician Darren McGarvey suggests that more socially-engaged art projects would benefit from considering this gap between researcher and community and how it might be bridged. He criticises the social distance at which such projects often operate, comparing them to “an imperial power” and “predicated on the assumption that people in those communities don’t have any ideas of their own” (McGarvey, 2018:79). McGarvey offers the sobering thought that often it is the commissioning arts-organisations that benefit from such projects rather than the community it is ostensibly supporting. By not designing self-sufficiency into the project, organisations maintain their position of influence.

IMAGE Artist’s impression of Jessie Brennan’s doormat rubbing, part of *Regeneration!* (2015)

IMAGE Artist's impression of Nora Zeid *Cairo Illustrated: Stories from Heliopolis* (2021)

of archival and contemporary images. Geographer Juliet Fall praises Peterle's use of the comic format (with Peterle herself naming it a "geoGraphic novel") to communicate research, describing it as "a creative, clever, and subtle reflection of what can happen when scholars take risks and experiment [with] new ways of doing and communicating research" (Peterle, 2021: 5). In Turku, comics pasted onto the hoardings surrounding building work on a new tramway are part of the ongoing conversation surrounding the public transport system; contributing to conversations that are shaping the city to come.

Like Peterle, Egyptian illustrator Nora Zeid also uses the comic format to present a polyvocal argument for a city's future. In a large-format series of comics pages, Zeid questions the value attached to places simply because they're old, a blunt and arbitrary tool. She examines the cultural heritage of the neighbourhood of Heliopolis, a comparatively new area threatened by rapid development in Cairo. Through interviews with (mostly) women her work presents an argument for why Heliopolis should be protected for its social (as well as architectural) complexity. Her comics hold together many perspectives to make a sound case, in particular amplifying voices usually not heard within discussions on urbanism. It is, as designer and academic Hala Al-Ani states, "women claiming their rights to the streets of Cairo" (Khatt Chronicles, 2022).

Indigenous Indian artist Rajesh Vangad uses drawing to highlight the process of urbanisation threatening rural areas traditionally occupied by the Warli people of western India. The Warli speak an unwritten language (Varli) and their culture is recorded through oral history and drawings. Vangad's concern for the survival of his people, their culture and environment is evident in his collaborative work with photographer Gauri Gill, where he layers a detailed illustration of an encroaching modern city on top of a photograph of a rural landscape. In a recent short film for the BBC, Vangad can be seen using a Google Tilt Brush to tell the urgent story of the destruction of this community through urban development and environmental devastation. By extending his drawing practice into VR, Vangad uses the medium

IMAGE Artist's impression of Rajesh Wangad drawing with a Google Tilt Brush for his film with the BBC (2019)

to underline his assertion that his tribe has a right to be part of the conversation: "We are not against change, but let us choose what we want and what we don't" (BBC, 2019).

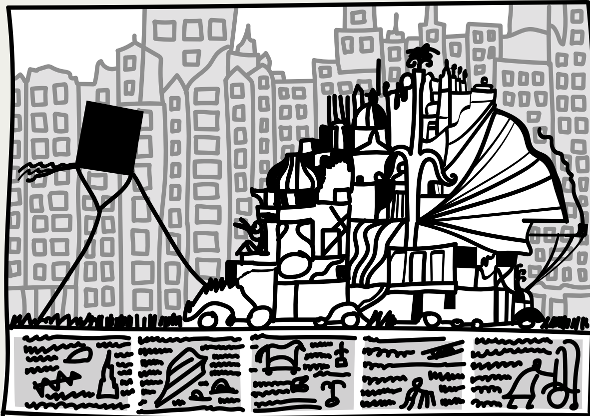
Hypothetical Cities

Hypothetical cities have a long literary history, as do their pictorial representations. In this context architectural images of buildings and cities were never intended to be realised through construction. Instead these projects use the motif of the city to present a hypothesis, thought experiment or argument. Admittedly, one of the best-known early examples of speculative world-building, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) with an illustrated frontispiece by Ambrosius Holbein, is more island than city. Holbein's image is a straightforward "editorial" illustration, visualising this historic exercise in detailed scenario building, but not adding much to it. Probably the more interesting point here is that More's intentions of creating this comprehensive account of a possible future society remain famously unclear. It is precisely this ambiguity regarding the author's position that reveals itself as a dominant feature of many of the hypothetical urban scenarios in this section.

The ambiguous intentions of More's writing are mirrored in the equally enigmatic ambitions for the creation of another well-known historical example of hypothetical structures: Giovanni Battista Piranesi's images of *Imaginary Prisons* (1750, 1761) reveal a series of nightmare-ish vaults and subterranean interiors, from which there seems to be no escape. The vast and looming staircases don't appear to lead anywhere. Ladders and arches don't deliver you to a new terrain, but confront you with only more walls, vaults and staircases. This architectural dystopia offers many interpretive possibilities, at least partly animated by the lack of certainty we have regarding Piranesi's motives for its creation.

Russian architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin produced a stunning portfolio of graphic etchings of architectural fantasies during the 1980s. They sidestepped corrupt architectural practices and restrictions by avoiding any actual construction in

favour of participating in design competitions in international magazines (Kurg 2019:688).

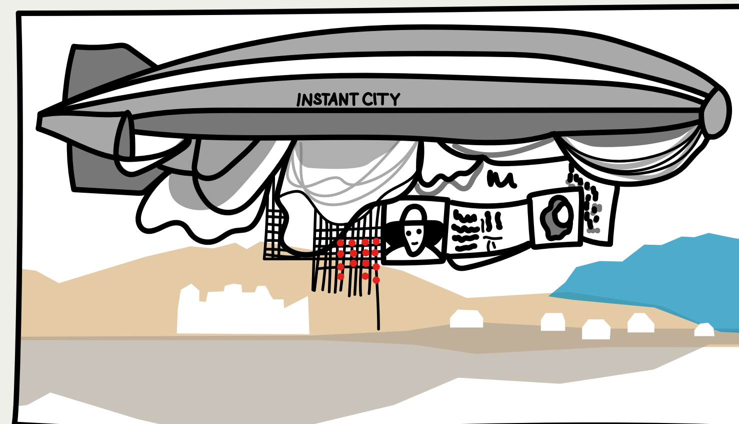


Their work is characterised by breathtaking levels of detail and complexity, many of their prints contain multiple panels, suggestive of wondrous narratives and spectacular urban hallucinations. Reminiscent of a gothic architectural fairytale, the exact details of each story are difficult to make out for us, although the overall sense is one of escapism (as a form of critique of the dreariness of state-controlled building work of the time?) and a concern for the preservation of architectural heritage. *Wandering Turtle* (1984) for example depicts a gigantic mound of historic, architectural matter on wheels, being pushed past seemingly endless facades of featureless buildings: this image appears to be a delightfully formulated argument for conservation in the face of destructive and ill-considered planning policies.[9]

In contrast to Brodsky and Utkin's weighty cultural heritage in *Wandering Turtle*, *Archigram*'s *Instant City* (1964) comes effortlessly suspended from an airship "like a giant circus" (Cook 2020). The British group were less concerned with architectural preservation; instead they focused on playful innovation.

Through illustrations and graphic presentations they introduced the idea of an urban wonderland of gadgets and machines descending on innocent rural environments, but do so without asking why the countryside might desire the buzz of a city and how anyone might be able to meaningfully interact with or benefit from it.

Seen from today's perspective, the image of a floating airship heaping unsolicited urban 'delights' on an unsuspecting community is an almost-too-perfect visual representation of 'parachute' design.



[9] See also *Galilee* (2007) for an account of Brodsky's ongoing concern for the preservation of architectural heritage.

IMAGE LEFT
Artist's impression of Brodsky & Utkin *Wandering Turtle* (1984)

IMAGE RIGHT
Artist's impression of Archigram *Instant City* (1964)

In its historical context, its value remains as an innovative example of architects creating illustrations as a form of irreverent, speculative thinking, rather than a more sober utilitarian step towards construction.

Frackpool (2014) is a more recent example of an architectural thought-experiment presented via a series of striking illustrations. Aspiring architect Jason Lamb's final project for his postgraduate degree is based on rigorous research and detailed scenario planning. He imagines an economically prosperous future for Blackpool enabled by Chinese investment and dominated by fracking (hence "Frackpool"). The extremely damaging environmental consequences of this process of fossil fuel extraction is widely documented, and the UK government withdrew its support for it in 2019. In *Frackpool*, Lamb expends considerable effort designing an urban infrastructure where fracking is practised in as wholesome a way as is possible; with job-creation and "sustainable" economic revival at the heart of his vision. It remains a distinctly jarring fantasy. The detailed images impress with their accomplished composition, sweeping vistas and technical specificities, and yet the bigger picture remains opaque: What kind of hypothesis are we looking at? Is this a cautionary, promotional, satirical or predictive scenario? Perhaps, just like in the case of More's Utopia, the enduring indeterminacy of these images is precisely what lends them their currency and allows us to evaluate potential futures.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, no straightforward claim is possible about the affordances that illustration brings to exploring, intervening in and representing the city – the sheer variety and incongruity of the illustrative work we have reflected on in this article, both in terms of method and outcome, escapes the grasp of a neat summary or conclusion. We did, however, discover a few emergent themes that arise at various junctions where common qualities of the urban (e.g. density, multiplicity, power struggles) intersect with common qualities of illustration (e.g. visibility, perspective, synthesis).

We noted practitioners using different methods to observe and record from different viewpoints within the city, bringing the position of the maker to the fore through their use of methods that relied upon being and, conversely, *not* being there. On occasion the work produced asked us as viewers to consider *our* position, in order to then in turn highlight the experiences of others. Reflecting a wider interest in positionality within the study of illustration, we also examined the respective merits of insider and outsider perspectives in relation to the urban communities documented, celebrated, and consulted by the various projects surveyed here. In these examples, the act of picture-making helped the illustrator move from an outside to an inside perspective, although we are keen to note that the outsider perspective comes with different allowances and it would be simplistic to

define either approach as right or wrong. We saw that in a crowded urban environment projects resulting from such community-based projects can give much needed space and visibility to those represented, and elevated their concerns.

Some practitioners harnessed the strength of the illustrated image as a complex and polyvocal form of communication, able to hold together different perspectives, times, voices, and forms of information. Others used the fabricated quality of illustration to hypothesise about entirely new realities (and whether we should set to work on changing course immediately in order to avoid – or realise – them). Beyond the breezy speculations of hypothetical scenarios, illustration and visual culture can also be harnessed for plainly vicious objectives – insidious forms of graphic cruelty that have the power to devastate the prospects of those who are unlucky enough to get caught up in them. Any discussion of positionality such as this is rooted in recognizing power relationships between the illustrator and their subject within its political and social context. In this respect the overarching tendency emerging from this survey of diverse practices is that illustration as both verb and noun is a valuable tool for enacting, revealing and contesting power.

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