

PDPal

some words by Denis Wood

Yesterday I took my bicycle for a spin in the country. Probably it was too hot and probably I went too far and coming back the traffic got crazy, but I remember making the turn off Western Boulevard and gliding into an empty stretch of Carolina Avenue thinking how relieved I was to be home.

The thing is, I still had a couple of miles to go.

Part of me was a little surprised to find this edge so far away from the house, but another part of me took it as confirmation of something that had been happening in response to a new route I'd been cycling for a few months now. As a result of this new route, *my* Raleigh was changing.

My Raleigh.

My City, Your City

My Raleigh is the Raleigh I live in, the Raleigh where I feel comfortable, the Raleigh where I feel ... *at home*. My Raleigh is that part of the capital of North Carolina – which is everybody's Raleigh – where I've invested the most energy, where I've spent the most emotion, where I've deposited the most memory traces. It's true that I've involved myself a lot in my city, but when I speak of investing, spending, and depositing mostly what I'm talking about is the kind of awareness that comes as a jolt. I'm walking somewhere and I glance up and the late Sunday sun on the fading red of that warehouse wall against the blue of the sky with that thunderhead in the background whams me in the solar plexus. I have to stop and take it – drink it – in. It's not always a jolt of pleasure. It can be one of anger or confusion, melancholy or desire, but it's mostly these kinds of jolts I'm thinking about when I speak of investing, spending, depositing.

Though at the same time I'm also thinking about where I go in the city (I don't go everywhere in it). I'm thinking about where I go *most of the time*, about my routines, my circuits, the people I regularly see, the people with whom I regularly interact, the things I do, my turf, my ... habitus.

It follows that *my* Raleigh isn't the Raleigh you're going to find on the maps you can buy at a gas station. It isn't the Raleigh you're going to find on web sites like Map Quest. It's not a Raleigh you're going to find on any map period. *But wouldn't it be cool if it were?* Wouldn't it be cool if there were a place I could go to map my Raleigh and find maps of other people's Raleighs?

Wouldn't that be something?

PDPal

PDPal is not that place, but that place is exactly the place PDPal *wants to be*. PDPal wants to be a site where you can deposit traces of your city and share your city with others by making maps of it.

Or annotating maps of it. At the moment the way it works is the PDPal site offers you a map – currently one of the garden at the Walker Art Center and another of Minneapolis-St. Paul – and dialogue boxes and pull-down menus. These let you *identify* a locale with a rubberstamp you choose from a palette, and then let you *describe* the locale by assigning it a name, giving it rating and an attribute (both chosen from pull-down menus), and annotating it. You can do much the same for routes you can trace with your mouse. Guiding you through the process is a cool but excitable Urban Park Ranger.

If you have a Palm™ PDA you can install PDPal on it and use it to map locales while you're actually at them. Later you can download these annotations to the maps you've made on the web. There's no limit to what you can record on your map as you transform it dynamically into a "city you write."

Your city.

At the web site you can access the maps that others have made and they can check out your map. This way we can share our cities. *It is with this possibility that PDPal takes a step into the future, extending and immeasurably enriching a tradition that is over forty years old.*

The Citizen Sketch Mapping Tradition

The idea that we each construct our own dynamic city is an old one, but collecting maps sketched by individuals in order to communicate, study, and exploit our personal cities is an idea that was popularized by the city planner Kevin Lynch. In the late fifties, Lynch and Gyorgy Kepes, both then at MIT, investigated the Bostons, Jersey Cities, and L.A.s floating around in the heads of inhabitants they got to draw maps and answer questions. Lynch thought about these cities in people's heads as "images," and he called the influential book he wrote about them *The Image of the City*.

Lynch's work spurred hundreds of others to collect people's images of the cities they lived in and although what most of these researchers did was ask people to sketch maps, Lynch had asked the people *he* interviewed to do a lot of other things. "Every citizen," Lynch wrote, "has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings." Lynch also understood that the city is dynamic and that both these considerations meant that more than map-sketching would be required to get at its image:

Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with other participants. Most often our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns, nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all.

To get at this rich repository – the idea of “depositing memory traces” comes from *The Image of the City* – Lynch did collect sketch maps, but he also asked for directions to specified places and descriptions of those trips. He had people identify the images in stacks of photos, had them say how they recognized the subjects of the photos, and then had them arrange the photos as if on a map. He took some of these people into the streets to take one of the trips for which they’d given directions. While they were doing this, Lynch asked them to talk about what they were experiencing and recorded what they said on tape. Such rich sources gave Lynch a real grasp of the personal cities his subjects lived in, on the way they connected the parts of those cities, and on the emotions the cities aroused in them. It became clear that the strong emotions people had about the cities they lived in colored the way they conceived even the physical layout.

Lynch was interested in using the images he collected in city planning, and he and his colleagues applied different forms of the approach to many cities, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Cleveland, Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles, and others. In the early sixties the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard (which in 1960 had published *The Image of the City*) became planning consultants for the new city of Ciudad Guayana then rising on the banks of the Orinoco River in Venezuela. Donald Appleyard, who with Lloyd Rodwin is most associated with the project, used the map-sketching and other imaging techniques he had worked on with Lynch to demonstrate that the inevitable conflicts between planners and people were not just due to clashes in values and intentions, but resulted as much or more from differences in perception:

The planner sees his model of the projected city as a totality, from above; the inhabitant sees the present reality, from street level. The planner’s map is a multicolored physical reality; the inhabitant constructs and constantly revises his mental map as experience interacts with memory.

The section headings in Appleyard’s book – *Planning a Pluralistic City: Conflicting Realities in Ciudad Guayana* (MIT Press, 1976) – lay it all out: “The Planner’s City,” “The Inhabitants’ City,” “Local versus City Identity,” “Insiders and Outsiders,” “Many Cities in One,” “The Personal City,” and “Different Personal Cities” among others of a similar flavor.

The idea that local inhabitants need to stir into the planning process the images they have of places – their *personal* images – has become standard practice in city planning. A well-known example involved Randy Hester and the town of Manteo, North Carolina. In 1980 Manteo hired Hester, a landscape architect who had gone to graduate

school at Harvard, to come up with a plan for redeveloping its downtown. After working on the project for some time it occurred to Hester that townspeople might be underestimating their emotional ties to the *plainer* features of the town. Using a variety of imaging techniques, Hester uncovered a “sacred structure” of the residents’ downtown and made a map of it as a guide for development. Recently Hester has used the same approach to design a park for Los Angeles, but his *Community Design Primer* (Ridge Times Press, 1990) is filled with examples.

Not everyone who collected images from people was a planner or designer. David Stea is a psychologist interested in cognitive maps, that is, in the way people mentally represent large environments. He’s interested in the problems of location, orientation, and movement in cities. In the mid-sixties Stea took a joint position in the psychology and geography departments at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and psychogeography was born. In those early days, sketch maps offered the best window into people’s “mental maps.” In 1971 Stea and I – a geographer – published *A Cognitive Atlas: Explorations into the Psychological Geography of Four Mexican Cities* (Environmental Research Group). The questions we asked and the way we collected the sketch maps was modeled on Appleyard’s work in Ciudad Guayana, but our work was more oriented toward *understanding* how the residents of Mexico City, Puebla, Guanajuato, and San Cristobal mentally represented their cities than it was for their future development. At the same time another psychologist, Robert J. Beck, and I taught a “mapping language” to a bus load of American teenage tourists traveling through Europe for the first time to investigate how mental maps of London, Paris, and Rome might *evolve* with experience. During the same period, Thomas Saarinen, a geographer at the University of Chicago, was collecting sketch maps to study environmental perception; Reginald Golledge, a geographer, was using similar techniques to study human spatial behavior in Columbus, Ohio; and Roger Downs, another geographer at Penn State, was extending related ideas into education. As these researchers refined their methods and their questions, the collection of sketch maps became less and less common, but active research goes on in all these areas. For a sample, check out *Wayfinding Behavior: Cognitive Mapping and Other Spatial Processes* which Golledge, now at the University of California-Santa Barbara, published in 1999 (Johns Hopkins).

The Democratization of Sketch Mapping

What happened to all the maps people made? After the researchers had squeezed what they could from them, the maps were pretty much forgotten, shoved into boxes, left to mold. Lynch, for one, didn’t publish a single one of the maps he collected for *The Image of the City*, preferring to “summarize” them in maps of his own devising. The maps Lynch made became famous, and continue to be widely reproduced; but the sketch maps his own were constructed from have never been seen, and those who drew them

remain nameless. This set the standard. Of the thousands and thousands of sketch maps collected during the sixties and seventies few were ever shared with anyone. Appleyard published a baker's dozen or so, and Saarinen a handful. I published dozens, but until the nineties only in obscure places. Not the residents of Manteo but Hester (or his students) made the much reproduced map with the hearts for sacred places. People could fill out the questionnaires, and sketch the maps, but somehow the things they made were never really theirs.

Jeremy Anderson, a geographer at Eastern Washington State University in Cheney, took a different approach. Anderson asked students – from elementary school through graduate seminars – to draw what he called “turf maps,” maps as much about self-knowledge as anything else. By “turf” Anderson meant:

... those areas in which you or your friends usually play, travel, hang out, etc. You may wish to show places of special importance, barriers, dangerous or disliked areas, etc. Your map doesn't need to be precise in terms of scale, direction, or size and shape of objects, but should be done as neatly as time allows. If you use some special symbols, you might include a legend or key. As you are doing it, you might imagine that you are drawing the map to show a faraway pen pal what your area is like and what it means to you.

Older students were often asked to make a map of the turf they had when they were six to nine years old – what Anderson called their “primary turf” – and Anderson observed how making these maps of remembered places could unleash floods of memories. Students got a whole period to make their maps – or even overnight (it wasn't a test) – and they could use whatever drawing tools they needed to make it (because the maps weren't going to be “used” by an expert, standardization wasn't an issue). The students shared their maps with each other – Anderson had many ways of going about this – and in this way the maps became touchstones for personal and interpersonal learning. It goes without saying that the mapmakers kept their maps.

“Consulting the experts that reside within each of us via the medium of turf and other kinds of sketch maps may truly open up new worlds to students and teachers alike,” Anderson argued, and it is certainly his perspective's emphasis on “the experts that reside within each of us” that has fertilized the growth in citizen mapping of the past couple of decades. This growth has many roots, but one of them is undoubtedly the ever-increasing participation of citizens in the planning process at so many levels, including their sketching of maps. Occasionally these are still solicited in the manner pioneered by Lynch and Appleyard, but more often, as Hester and other designers have found more productive, the maps are made by citizens collaborating around large sheets of drawing paper, or from suggestions lobbed at one of their number who has been designated to do the drawing. A full generation of citizen activists has now matured that *expects* to express itself in this fashion.

Another root draws sustenance from the bioregional or ecoregional movement established in the early seventies whose maps were given great publicity by *CoEvolution Quarterly Magazine*. In the eighties this commitment was given a kind of institutional form in the mapping workshops of the North American Bioregional Congresses, and in 1993 a manual in the form of Doug Aberley's *Boundaries of Home: Mapping for Local Empowerment* (New Society Publishers). Because government mapping reflects political boundaries which ignore the natural boundaries of areas such as watersheds, citizens concerned with areas such as watersheds were forced to map these themselves. A classic example are the maps the Mattole Restoration Council – Northern Californian residents in the Mattole River area – made in order to understand and publicize the relationship between salmon, water, and trees. The on-going mapping programs of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science constitute another example (www.communitymap.org).

Related but different is the Parish Maps Project launched by Common Ground – in England – in 1985. Their guiding principle, “making every local person an expert,” has resulted in the production of literally thousands of maps by parish councils, schools, social groups, and individuals. Angela King says:

The stipulation that the maps can be made by anyone and in whatever form has been an important reason for the tremendous response. The mappers haven't felt constrained by traditional mapping techniques or by the impersonal formality of the Ordnance Survey (which makes the U.K. topographic maps). Idiosyncrasy and variety have been encouraged. Common Ground sees the process of map-making as the start of a greater involvement with ones place.

As with Anderson's turf maps, Common Ground's parish maps are expected to be publicly displayed and to stimulate discussion and indeed further action, including the compilation of other kinds of records, the formation of action groups, the transformation of land status, and other preservation and conservation efforts.

No less important – perhaps even more inspirational – have been the examples of aboriginal peoples who have learned that *it's map or be mapped*. In the mid-seventies studies of Inuit land-use and occupancy in Canada's Northwest Territories developed a combination of oral histories, the early accounts of white explorers, archeological excavations, and most importantly *individual map biographies* to graphically describe the intensity and extent of Inuit land use. Hunters, trappers, fishermen, berry pickers and others – men and women – exhaustively mapped everywhere they had ever camped, berried, fished, trapped, or hunted – all the land they had ever used. Later projects were carried out among the Inuit, Settlers, and Naskapi-Montagnais Indians of Labrador; the Dene of the Mackenzie River basin; two Ojibway groups in northwest Ontario; and many others. Most of these resulted in land claim challenges against central governments, as have similar mapping projects elsewhere. The *Nunavut Atlas*, published by the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut in the early-nineties, played a central role in the creation of Nunavut, Canada's newest territory.

The *Maya Atlas* (published by North Atlantic Books in 1997) was produced by the Toledo Maya Cultural Council and the Toledo Alcaldes Association, and carries the subtitle, *The Struggle to Preserve Maya Land in Southern Belize*. Its maps were compiled by the forty-two Ke'kchi and Mopan Maya communities of southern Belize:

The Maya know geography because that knowledge has sustained them for centuries. The Atlas maps, writing, and illustrations were done by people who live in thatch-roof, wooden houses they made themselves and who eat food they grew themselves. They got up early in the dark morning hours to make wood fires to cook tortillas and warm coffee before walking to their *milpas* to cultivate corn and beans, and then mapped their fields, rain-forest hunting grounds, traditional medicine places, and ancient ruins.

Page after page of the atlas displays the colorful, detailed maps these Maya made of the places they call home. Taken together they add up to a portrait of land use hard to gainsay, and therefore hard to bulldoze.

Merely getting together to create atlases like this and that of Nunavut has a powerful effect. Suddenly resources are pooled, and what had seemed individual community problems are revealed as regional ones. More valuable, though, is the insight the mapping gives into the actual human construction and occupancy of *place*, and the moral authority such occupancy gives to claims of tenure. Bernard Nietschmann argues that “More indigenous territory has been claimed by maps than by guns and more indigenous territory can be reclaimed and defended by maps than by guns.” The results attributable to the Nunavut and Maya atlases and other on-going indigenous mapping projects would seem to bear him out.

Proactive city and regional planning, grass-roots bioregionalism, parish and other place-based mapping projects, and mapping by First American and other indigenous peoples are only four of the roots of a flourishing citizen or “counter-mapping” movement that also draws on feminist practices, green mapping programs, peace, labor and transportation activism, and other forms of resistance that benefit from mapping. Unaware of the momentum this movement had already gained, in 1992 in my book *The Power of Maps* (Guilford) I called for just such a revolution in mapmaking. The advent and rapid growth of computer mapping has only increased the momentum.

But PDPal Is Somewhere Else

It will be obvious that PDPal touches many of these mapping projects in important ways, but from even the slight sketch of the PDPal site I gave earlier it must also be obvious that PDPal departs from them in ways that are ... *no less important*.

For example, in its concern with personal cities, with the meanings we ascribe to places, and with the vividness of these meanings and personal histories, PDPal aligns itself with Lynch's project. PDPal's reference to “the lively nature of urban cultural

environments” echoes, knowingly or not, Lynch’s references to the city as dynamic; and in its interest in ratings, attributes, and annotations PDPal recalls Lynch’s conviction that there was more to the image – more to the map – than the *where*. In its commitment to “your own city,” that is, to the city “composed of the places *you* live, work, and remember,” and in its distancing of itself from “the way technologies that locate and orient are often static,” PDPal touches Appleyard’s distinction between the planner’s – the official’s – and the inhabitants’ cities. And evidently the project is informed, directly or otherwise, by the methods and discoveries of the mental map movement of Stea, Wood, Beck, Saarinen, Golledge, Downs and so many others. As with Anderson’s turf maps, the maps made at PDPal are not only archived, but shared, where their abundant potential for personal and interpersonal learning is apparent. *No one can be as expert as we are about the cities we live!* This also makes patent the parallels with the Parish Maps Project. If PDPal doesn’t seem to directly connect with the bioregional and aboriginal mapping projects, it certainly resonates with their general “counter-mapping” vibe. Clearly PDPal is very much a participant in this citizen-sketch-counter mapping movement.

Yet its differences are no less marked. Whatever Lynch’s interest in our *individual* cities, it was manifested in practice by a relentless *collectivism*. Individual images were rarely discussed, never displayed. All were Cuisinarted into a planner’s purée, as is indeed the case for all the planners and designers who may want to *query* our individual cities, but only know how to *build* the normative, collective one. With their commitment to discovering universal laws of behavior, the psychologists were – *are* – no more interested in individuals than the planners. And collective action is the very foundation of the bioregional, parish, and aboriginal mapping projects.

The various projects are further characterized, *above all else*, by their earnestness, by their deep sincerity and good will, by their importance, indeed, by their self-importance. Their motivation is one of improvement, of self-improvement, and as laudatory as most of these efforts are it is sometimes hard not to feel stifled, suffocated, by the aura of amelioration, by the high-minded, high-modern tone of ... progress, of moving forward, of advancing, of enhancing, of enriching, by ... *the sense of purpose*.

None of them has a sense of humor.

PDPal in contrast is all about the individual. It’s *my* city it wants to let me write. It’s *my* city it wants to archive. It’s *my* city it wants to exhibit. It’s *your* city it wants to let me look at. With no more these ... intimations ... of the exhibitionistic, of the voyeuristic, PDPal also lets us know we’re not in Kansas anymore.

Or in the twentieth century.

The Urban Park Ranger assists us to this understanding. What it is with this winsome crossing-guard Smokey with his eyes where his tits should be and his mouth in his navel? What it is with that *hat*? The sense of parody is undermined by his (precisely)

earnest helpfulness, but his directions are unavoidably tinged with the parodistic. This is *not* a data-gathering exercise designed to advance some institutional goal, it's, it's ...

What is it?

The palette of rubberstamps (*rubberstamps!*) and the menus of ratings and attributes further roil the waters. A rubberstamp of a jet takes off next to one of a crib, a Taj Mahal and a triumphal arch rub shoulders with tents and a teepee; unisex couples mix it up with the birds and the bees; martinis, stoplights, baseballs, and test tubes; guns, dice, candles, and clouds. It's like a pictographic definition of heterogeneity yet it's presented in a numbered and lettered grid: the automatic rifle's at F-10, the scooter's at R-2. Again, you *can* paste these onto your map, but ...

You can *imagine* the ratings you're allowed: *prudishly, tamely, lustily; faintly, visibly, boldly* ... Again, they *are* ratings, but they're not those of the telephone pollster. (They're not those of planners, or architects, or psychologists either.)

The attributes include *bright, dark, crowded, and comfortable*, but *lawless, delicious, soggy, and haywire* too. It's *sort of* like a survey, but a survey administered in a dream.

Prompts ask: *What is closer, past or future? Map the place you miss, the places you imagine. What is noisier, Godzilla or a garbage truck? Map the beasts that roam your landscape. What is bigger, your cubicle or your cranium? Map your taste for consumption.*

There is poetry here, and madness; there is humor here, and a kind of seriousness that earnest people never get.

It's pointless, the whole thing, and its freedom from the crushing burden of purposefulness produces a kind of ecstasy. And because of this PDPal is hard. The Urban Park Ranger seems to be leading you somewhere but it's only to the edge of a precipice: either you confront a city *you* have to write, or you might as well leave the site. The Urban Park Ranger gives you no *easy* alternative. (It's why the ratings aren't on a scale of one to seven, why the attributes aren't their verbal equivalent.)

Because the creators of the site – Scott Peterson, Marina Zurkow, and Julian Blecker – are charting new territory, they don't know where they're going. And so the site is changing, evolving. That's the nature of exploration. Perhaps down the road the site'll have a Raleigh I can trace my bike route on, and a way of marking boundaries. Perhaps there'll be a way we can add our own rubberstamps, ratings, and attributes. (Why should they need to be tested by the community?) And it would be cool if there were a way to build my city *up* instead of eking it out of a standard map. *A little* earnestness wouldn't hurt either (if relentless purposefulness is crushing, unending purposelessness can be numbing), but, hey! maybe that's another site.

For the time being, *this* is PDPal, the only *postmodern, humanistic* map site out there.