



Gerardus Mercator called his great work of 1595—from which our contemporary use of “atlas” to describe a collection of maps is derived—*Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes de fabrica mundi et fabricati figura*, which might be translated as *Atlas, or Cosmographic Meditations on the Fabric of the World and the Figure of the Fabric’d*. Maps were only a part of what Mercator had intended as a cosmographical meditation of encyclopedic proportions: the creation of the universe, ancient and modern geographies, the histories of states, a universal chronology. In Mercator’s vision, “Atlas” encompassed . . . *everything*.

But William Blake had a different vision:

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

So did Henry David Thoreau:

The world is never the less beautiful though  
viewed through a chink or knot-hole.

Happy thought: have it both ways, a meditation on the cosmos—and in map form—but the cosmos as seen through the knot-hole of a neighborhood! Something on that scale might even be doable. And

why not? Why not an atlas of a neighborhood that you could read as if it were, say, a novel by Balzac (*Illusions perdues* perhaps or *Cousin Bette*), an atlas rooted in a profound sense of place, larded with moral ambiguity, stuffed with richly human characters, rife with incident, and . . . ah, well, maybe not all that!

### The Atlas and the Narrative

And yet . . . *why not?* Every map has its own tale to tell. Linking maps into a narrative atlas should transmute the maps into something like *The Canterbury Tales*, like the entire cycle of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*. Well, no need to go overboard. But it has been precisely a failure of ambition that for years—for centuries!—has stunted the atlas, kept it from achieving the signifying comprehensiveness of which Mercator dreamt. It's not that atlases don't have an inherent narrative thread. If you run maps in a sequence, people are bound to make meaning of the order. It's harder than one might imagine to sequence things without making meaning. So it's less an absence than a self-conscious *denial* of narrativity that's gagged the atlas's narrative voice. It's been claimed—again, for centuries!—that atlases are works of reference, where you go to find facts, facts you *need*. Consult an atlas, find your fact (fast), reshelve the atlas. Do not read it, certainly do not read it cover to cover like a novel. What an amusing idea, *reading* an atlas, with its forbidding style of clipped sentences devoid of anecdotes, elaborations, and by-the-ways.

“Just the facts, ma'am.”

“Please answer the question, yes or no.”

As though anything were ever so simple.

Yet this is one way maps maintain the illusion of their objectivity, their adherence to the factual. Admitting that atlases were

narrative—that they were *texts*—would force the admission that the individual maps were texts too, that maps constituted a semiological system indistinguishable from other semiological systems, like those of paintings or novels or poems.

The map as poem: this is something maps have labored to deny from the beginning.

Critical to this denial was the evolution of a literal panoply of technical map signage. The north arrows, scale bars, and other specialized symbols served to isolate the map from graphics such as prints, which were likely to emanate from the same workshop. Mapmakers were unquestionably responsible for this development, but also complicit were the commercial interests involved in map production and distribution, the legal and bureaucratic apparatuses that depended on maps, the academic disciplines invested in maps as a form of knowledge—a very special form of knowledge—and the governments that, from the sixteenth century on, have exploited the power of maps for ever-widening administrative purposes; that is, all those with a vested interest in the belief that maps are “Just the facts, ma'am.”

A lot rides on the facticity of the map.

To deny any continuity with painting and printmaking, stress “scientific” measurement, stress ever greater “accuracy;” when gathering maps into atlases, stress systematic order—the alphabetical, the gridded—to deny any continuity with narrative. This renders the atlas nothing more than a way of keeping the maps piled on the table from slipping to the floor.

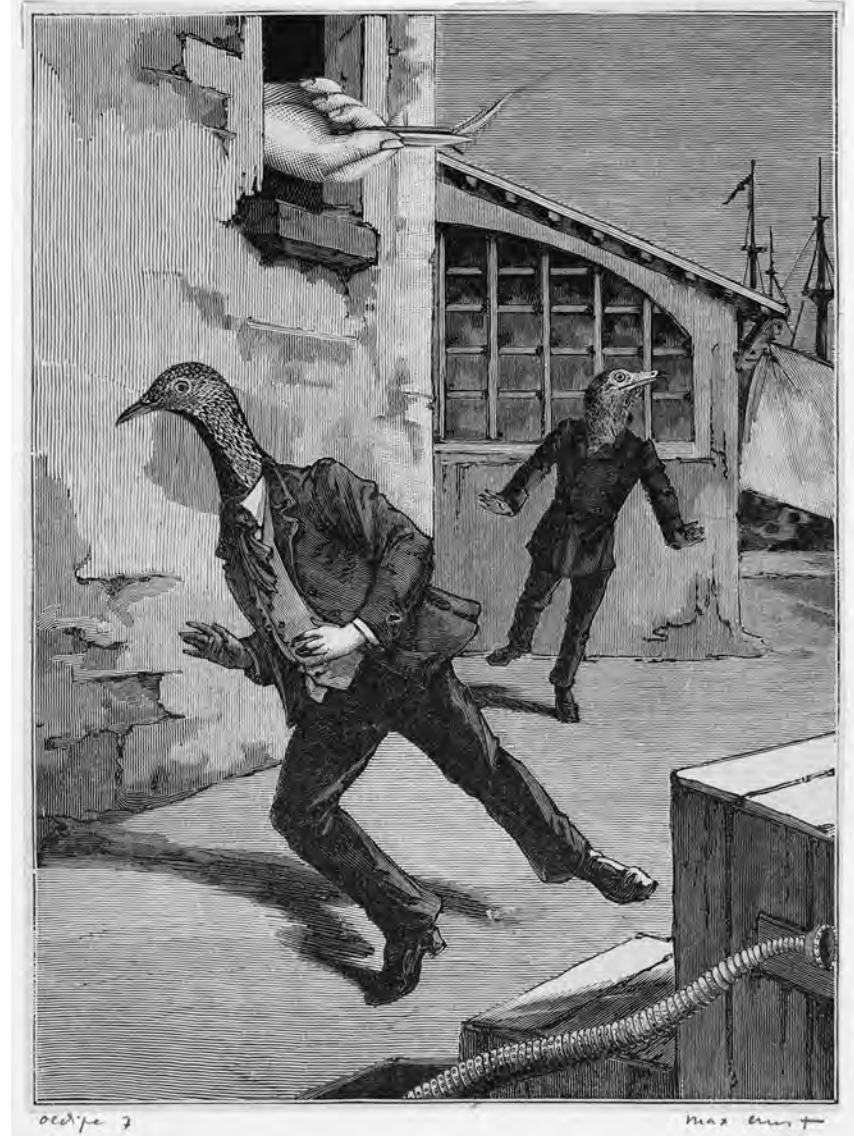
The problem is none of this works. What comes first is always primal, typically causal. Roland Barthes said, “Everything suggests, indeed, that the mainspring of narrative is precisely the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what *is caused by*,” and in atlases this is generally the case. Does anybody doubt an essay is being written through the sequence of world maps

that opens a typical student atlas: political, physical, climate, natural vegetation, soils, agriculture, population density, gross national product, literacy, protein consumption, and life expectancy? If not a cosmographical meditation on the creation of the universe, certainly an environmental-determinist disquisition on the origins of poverty! Can this be doubted?

Of course, this threatens our ability to accept the independence of the maps. We begin to see that they are servants of *this* way of thinking as opposed to *that*, they're involved in story-telling, they're not compendia of facts. This is why any intentionality in the ordering is so ferociously denied: the map essay on the causes of poverty that pretends not to be an essay at all is a uniquely powerful way to naturalize poverty. It suggests that poverty arises naturally from the earth itself, that there is nothing we can do about it. This is the power of what Barthes called myth.

So the ever-returning question: "What order would you have put them in?" Without doubting for a second that most atlases have always been ordered to promote one reading at the expense of another, I don't think it matters. *Any* order will give rise to a narrative reading which will—it's the nature of reading—be imputed to the subject. (Whence the power of writing arises, the power of all claims-making.) Resisting this was a major concern for 20th century artists: Marcel Duchamp letting his threads fall as they would ("If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting *as it pleases* [it] creates a new image of the unit of length"), Max Ernst unraveling existing narratives in his collages, Óscar Domínguez and Remedios Varo rubbing wet paint surfaces together (Domínguez called it "decalcomania with no preconceived object"), John Cage consulting the *I Ching*.

As with atlases, every sequence *insists* on some kind of meaning, imposes some kind of signifying experience. Cage is a wonderful



from *Une semaine de bonté* (quatrième cahier: mercredi) by Max Ernst, Editions Jean Bucher, Paris, 1934.  
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example. He worked so hard to build chance into his work in an endless effort to free the work from himself, from his own taste, from his personal preferences (his preferred principles of order). There was his prepared piano with its nuts and bolts, the *I Ching* with its tossed coins, the pitches from star charts, the mesostics on Thoreau and Joyce (the fabulous *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*). Yet no matter what he tried, in the end melody reasserted itself. Cage was fond of quoting Christian Brown: “No matter what we do it ends by being melodic.” I’m not sure I find this quite the cause for regret that Cage and Brown did. I too like noises—I love them!—but I also like melody. And while I agree with Cage that “humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together, that nothing was lost when everything was given away,” to me this also means that melody is here too, a perfectly organic melody which, with regard to atlases, is to say: narrative.

Denied by science, resisted by modern art, the narrative reading is inescapable. *Make the most of it!* After all, objectivity does not consist in suppressing an unavoidable subjectivity. It is achieved by acknowledging its intrusion so that the reader is relieved of the necessity of ferreting it out. Besides, nothing obligates a reader to start at the beginning and plow through the complicating actions to the resolution. A reader can always enter an atlas anywhere, via the index or the table of contents or, like Tommy Stubbins, with his eyes shut, letting the atlas fall open where it will, stabbing it with a pencil to fix the destination of Dr. Doolittle’s next voyage.

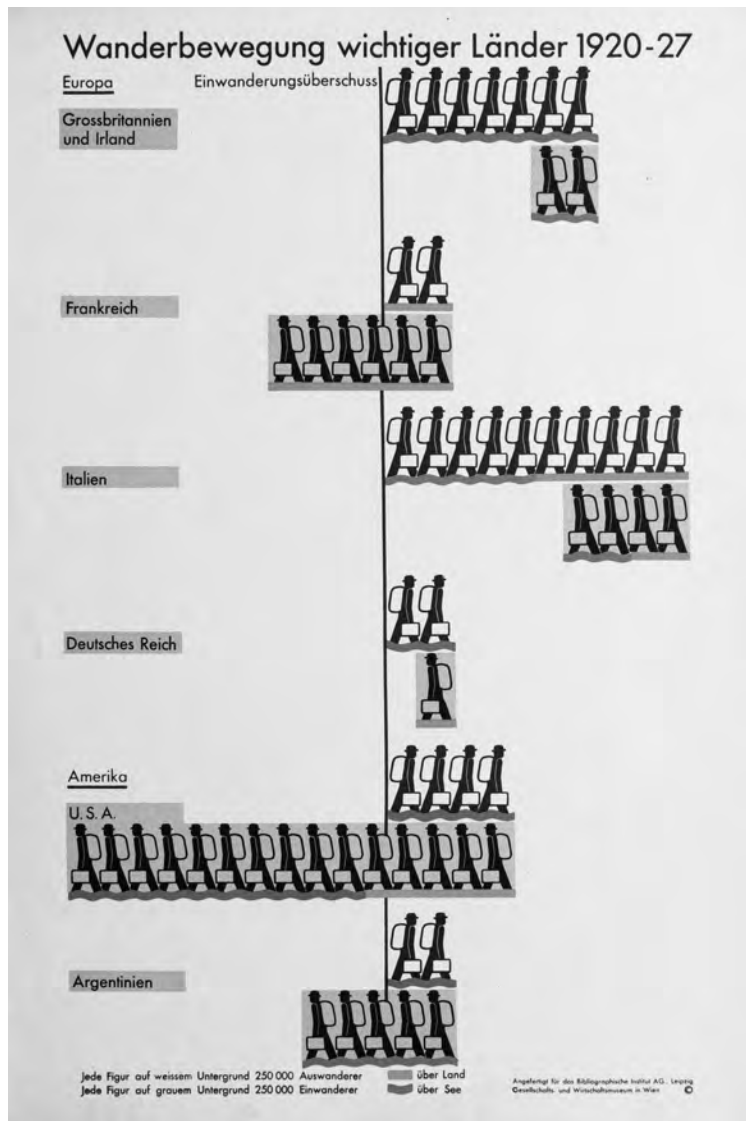
### The Map and the Poem

Imagine an atlas with a structure ordered to tell a story greater than those told by each individual map, an atlas with something more clearly on its mind than keeping the maps off the floor. There are terrific examples of narrative atlases, *self-consciously* narrative in precisely the

way I’m advocating. The series inaugurated by Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal—*The State of the World Atlas*, *The New State of the World Atlas*, and so on—is especially exemplary. Below the title of each of their maps is a pithy, almost aphoristic, verbal summary of its point. This effectively and immediately removes the maps from the class of reference works (a reference map may have a subject, it cannot have a point) and encourages reading the maps as links in a chain of argument. The sharply pointed quality of the captions makes it clear to even the most obtuse reader that this atlas is not a hodgepodge of “neutral” maps but a lively polemic about a self-perpetuating system of sovereign states so preoccupied with aggrandizement and conflict as to lead to world cataclysm. The sharpness of tone promotes close attention to the maps (if only in search of alternate readings). The concision propels readers to the explanatory notes (which explicitly discuss the quality of the data). It soon becomes apparent that the plates build on each other, that the divisions of the atlas have a rhetorical—not arbitrary—basis, that the notes are vital to any deep understanding of the maps. It is clear that the atlas is declaring itself an essay on the destructive potential of the nation-state. Nothing but an atlas could have accomplished this with equal force. Bill Bunge’s *The Nuclear War Atlas* and the series of historical atlases Colin McEvedy made for Penguin are other examples (McEvedy opened his *Penguin Atlas of African History* with, “What it is not intended to be is a reference atlas”).

These atlases further distinguish themselves with maps that are essentially modern, and I do mean “Modern.” Given the ubiquity of Modernism, it is astonishing that it laid so light a glove on mapmaking. Yet as Modernism was noisily turning its back on the failed rationalities, empty harmonies, and make-believe coherences of both Enlightenment and Victorian thinking, cartography was clutching them ever more tightly to its breast. Painters may have been deconstructing pictorial space, composers shredding inherited tonalities,





(above) from *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, illustration by Otto Neurath, Bibliographisches Institut AG, Leipzig, 1930. Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection, University of Reading

(right) from "Buffet" by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in *Litterature* No. 19, 1921. International Dada Archive, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries

architects stripping walls of pilasters, cornices, and dentil moldings, poets following Pound's cry to "Make it new," and novelists indulging a self-consciousness that was all but the hallmark of the age, but cartographers were content to hone, polish, and extend inherited forms. Cartography exalted its unreflective empiricism as its *raison d'être* and cherished the graphic conventions it had laid down in the 19th century. Even today few maps acknowledge the 19th century's gone.

Exceptions, such as Otto Neurath's Isotype maps, came from outside the profession. Neurath was a Vienna Circle polymath—a philosopher, originally a political economist—who, as director of the Social and Economic Museum of Vienna, developed a way to describe social, technological, biological, and historical phenomena in a "world language without words," a kind of pictographics he called Isotype (International System of TYPographic Picture Education). I know you've seen these: phalanxes of identical little men or cars or cows, all in poster colors, arranged to form graphs. Reductive minimalism. Stripped down. Almost aggressively modern. Sans serif typefaces (Akzidenz-Grotesk). There were Isotype maps too, and through Neurath's visits, Soviet mapmaking acquired a modern accent missing in other traditions. Harry Beck's map of the London Underground is a better known example.

But Beck and Neurath are exceptions that prove the rule. Look at Herbert Bayer and his *World Geo-Graphic Atlas*. Bayer was an archetypic Bauhaus designer—he both studied and taught there—with a distinguished U.S. career as an iconic modernist. His atlas, commissioned by the Container Corporation of America as a corporate giveaway, may very well be the "benchmark for information graphics that has yet to be equaled" that it is so often claimed to be. Its self-consciously narrative orchestration of double-page spreads of information-rich graphics opposite maps has proved lastingly influential. Yet the maps themselves were literally off-the-shelf, commercial products of the most pedestrian variety (the maps of the U.S. came from Rand-McNally). There

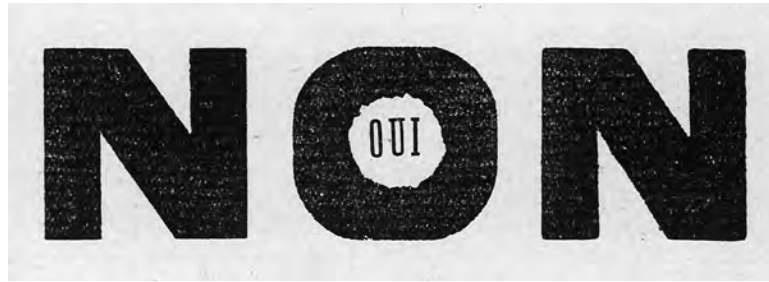
was nothing remotely modern about them. They were, in fact, relics of 19th century design. It was as though the map were protected by an impenetrable carapace of reference work authority, an aura that kept the designer's hands off: he could work around it, he could not touch.

Well, of course, he couldn't! He wasn't a cartographer, not a professional cartographer! *Only* a cartographer can make a map! Or so the cartographers would like you to believe. But then Neurath wasn't a cartographer either, and Beck was an engineering draftsman. For that matter, Mike Kidron was a Marxist economist; Ronald Segal an anti-apartheid activist, writer and editor; and Colin McEvedy a psychiatrist. Why were all these non-professional mapmakers making maps? Because cartographers couldn't or wouldn't make the maps they needed, because cartography refused to make the leap into the 20th century.

As a graduate student in geography studying cartography, this all made me very queasy. It was the 1960s. I was listening to Stravinsky and Cage and Smokey Robinson and the Beatles. I was looking at de Kooning and Jim Dine and David Hockney. I was protesting the war and resisting the draft. Geography as an academic discipline was determinedly ignoring Vietnam, civil rights, and feminism. It knew little of Marx, nothing of Foucault, and it seemed content to pump out papers like "Vacation Homes in the Northeastern United States: Seasonality in Population Distribution" and "The Changing Status of New Zealand Seaports, 1853-1960." Cartography was even worse, taught as a craft with vellum, bow compasses, quill pens, and Leroy lettering templates. What the fuck *was* all this antique shit!? I quickly tired of dot distribution maps of Kansas hogs—a map so often seen it was turned into a joke

tee-shirt—but I was also exhausted by the recruitment of university-trained mapmakers into what was then the U.S. Army Map Service to make maps of targets for U.S. bombers.

The line between the hog mapping and the target mapping was short and direct, a kind of repulsive instrumentalism to which Modernism, as I understood it, was irrevocably opposed (Dada, Surrealism, Gerrit Rietveld, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, Situationism, concrete poetry, New Wave film, you name it). Modernism came with a predisposition for resistance and smashing traditional forms, for going someplace stripped down, essential, real, for asking, *Why not?* Already in graduate school I was feeling around for a new map that wasn't of the same old subjects, that didn't have the same old forms, that looked and felt *modern*. Schoenberg wanted to emancipate the dissonance.



Arp wanted to destroy existing modes of art production to counteract "the trumpets, the flags and money, through which repeatedly killings of millions were organized on the field of honor." And I wanted to destroy existing modes of mapmaking through which millions were repeatedly killed. I wanted to emancipate dream and desire as subjects of the map.

What a delirium!

Looking for a job in geography was disheartening. There was zero interest in hiring someone like me (my dissertation was entitled *I Don't Want To, But I Will*), substantially less than zero when it came to cartography. All they wanted was a technician, someone to keep the cartography lab running smoothly while completing enough research to satisfy the provost when it came to promotion

(“Group and Individual Variations in Judgment and Their Relevance to the Scaling of Graduated Circles”). Mapmaking was understood as a trade or as a fee-for-service profession: the neutral, unbiased, value-free provision of maps for employers or clients who wanted to bomb the land, mine it, drill it for oil, run roads across it, plant suburban subdivisions on it, promote it as a tourist destination, or buy and sell it. Love it? Don’t talk to the cartographers, talk to the poets. What if map-making were an expressive art, a way of coming to terms with place, with the experience of place, with the love of place?

When I talked about these things at the obligatory faculty-student colloquia, I was met with blank stares (*What is this madman talking about?!*) and no job offers: “It will not come as a surprise to you to learn that we are not offering you a position on our faculty. Indeed, it did not seem to us that you wanted one.”

Indeed, I didn’t.

In 1974 I ended up at North Carolina State University in Raleigh teaching environmental perception to landscape architecture students. I used mapping as a way of selectively focusing their attention on those aspects of the landscape that, in the instrumentality of *their* training as future professionals (at least they were open about it), they were apt to overlook: the way the land smelled, the way it felt in their legs when they walked it, the sound of the wind in the oaks after all the other leaves had fallen, the way twilight made all the difference. At least this was all *useless* knowledge—nothing a developer or a bank could monetize—and the maps were fun to make. And because landscape architecture students are design students, there was both an attention to polish and an imaginative drive to find the less “mappable” things that, from the beginning, set their work apart from that of cartography students who were more concerned with “getting it right.”

Even so, I couldn’t get them to leave the streets off their maps.

As they mapped the nearby neighborhoods—Cameron Village, Cameron Park, Deveraux, Brooklyn Heights, and Boylan Heights—the streets seemed to be the irreducible subject, the what-it-was that made neighborhoods neighborhoods. If you’re laying out subdivisions, as many of these students would end up doing professionally, streets really are all you have to play with, which is exactly why I was all the more eager to get rid of them. The streets seemed to inhibit the other qualities to which I was trying to draw their attention. The streets always emerged in the foreground no matter how far into the background you intended them to recede.

Then in 1982 we were working on Boylan Heights, on a whole *atlas* of Boylan Heights, specifically a map of street lights, and we began paring away the inessential, the map crap (the neat line, the scale, the north arrow), the neighborhood boundaries, the topography, finally the streets: first the scaled streets, then a schematic grid of the streets, and finally, even a hint of a grid of the streets. Daylight went too—that default daylight that most maps take for granted—so that we were fooling around with circles of white on a black background. It became clear that the map wasn’t about the lamp *posts*, but about the lamp *light*, and light was something we weren’t sure how to deal with. Certainly, the uniform white circles we’d been drawing caught nothing of the way the light was fringed at the edges, and one night, armed with a camera, we scaled a fence and climbed a radio tower on the edge of Boylan Heights hoping to catch the night lights on film. What a disappointment! The view from above was *nothing* like walking in and out of the pools of dappled light on the streets below. But I had a pochoir brush at home, and when Carter Crawford—who’d put himself in charge of atlas graphics—used it to draw the circles, it was magical.

*That* was the way it felt to be walking the streets at night!

Nothing but blotches of white. The usual “efficient” map would have located everything on the street onto a single sheet—that is, different marks for lamp posts, fire hydrants, street signs, trees. Our *inefficient* map concentrated on a single subject, and, rather than lamp posts, it brought the pools of light into view. No legend, no north arrow, no neat line, none of the usual apparatus. At last, a modernist feel! Maybe even a sense of poetry, something imagistic, a little like Pound’s “The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough;” or Williams’s red wheelbarrow, but as it might manifest in a map, a map attentive to the experience of place.

That’s when I knew we could write poems in maps, and I began thinking seriously about a poetics of cartography.

### The Atlas and the Neighborhood

I don’t know exactly what I mean by a poetics of cartography, but the phrase wants to capture something about the way a certain poetic specificity manages to resonate. I’d never known Kenneth Patchen’s orange bears—my bears were brown—but I still cried the first time I heard him read the poem:

The orange bears with soft friendly eyes  
Who played with me when I was ten,  
Christ, before I left home they’d had  
Their paws smashed in the rolls, their backs  
Seared by hot slag, their soft trusting  
Bellies kicked in, their tongues ripped  
Out, and I went down through the woods  
To the smelly crick with Whitman  
In the Haldeman-Julius edition,  
And I just sat there worrying my thumbnail

Into the cover — What did he know about  
Orange bears with their coats all stunk up with  
soft coal

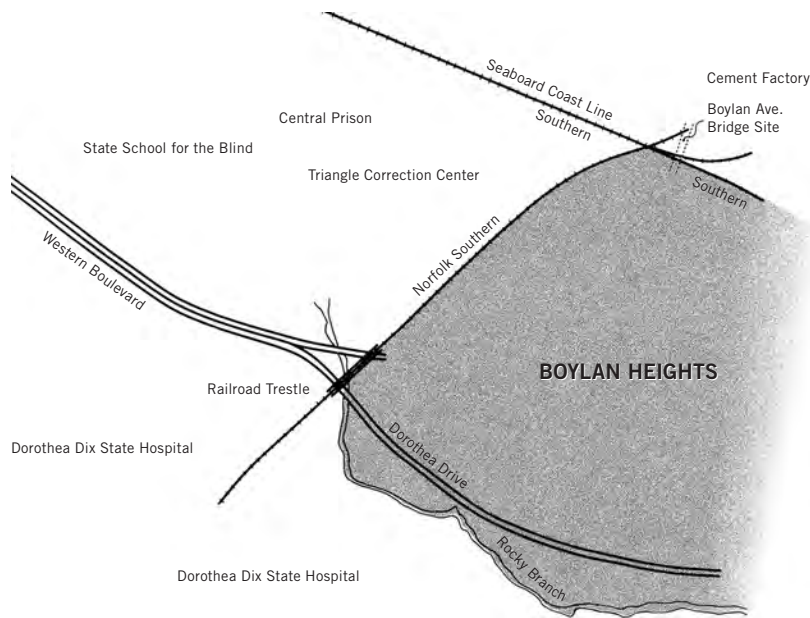
What resonates is *those* bears, *their* coats, *that* edition. I imagined that if maps could achieve anything like that, if maps were to resonate like a poem, then you’d have to give up mapping pumpkins and map *that* pumpkin, stop mapping lamp posts and map *those* pools of light. Maybe that’s not how it works, but I refuse to believe maps can’t achieve a resonance—okay, maybe not Patchen’s resonance, but some resonance—and can’t the resonances of a bunch of maps make, I don’t know, a heavenly chord?

Which in the end was what Mercator was after. Or something like it. Only he thought you had to cram everything in to make it work. I’m wagering Blake and Thoreau had the right of it (and Patchen and Williams and even lunatic Pound). You can make it work with anything real.

And Boylan Heights was *definitely* real.

The question was, what was it? This might seem to have been straightforward, but in coming to grips with place, delineation is often the thing you’re grappling with first and last. With Boylan Heights it wasn’t so difficult. In those days there were two good-sized, decorative signs at the neighborhood’s most obvious entrances. In the south there was one where Western Boulevard—squeezed between Central Prison and the mental hospital—became Dorothea Drive as it swooped around the neighborhood, and there was one in the north where Boylan Avenue expanded after the constriction of the old Warren truss that used to carry the avenue across the railroad tracks. These were all unmistakable landmarks. Central Prison was North Carolina’s maximum security prison for men. A classic 19th century prison—castellated, giant ashlar (construction dating to 1870)—Central was already





**Where is Boylan Heights?**

expanding beyond its old walls (it's still expanding today), housing the state's death row and better than a thousand inmates. In 1975 there was still a minimum security satellite, Triangle Correction Center, jammed in between Central and the neighborhood. West of the prison was the state's School for the Blind, founded in 1845. Even without the Norfolk & Southern railroad spur that cut between the neighborhood and the prison, the western edge of Boylan Heights was sharply drawn.

It was the same to the south. There Dorothea Dix, the state's central psychiatric hospital, spread its 2,300 acres up, across, and down the backside of Dix Hill. If you headed south out of Boylan Heights and crossed Dorothea Drive and Rocky Branch, you could walk for miles on state land, first on the hospital grounds, then on the experimental farms of the university. In the north there were railroad tracks, the ones

Boylan Avenue crossed on the Warren truss. The Southern line and what was then the Seaboard Coastline's (now CSX's) main New York-Miami line joined right below the bridge where they intersected with the Norfolk & Southern tracks (that ran south to Wilmington). In a switch house beside the bridge, an actual human being manually threw the switches, pulling beautifully-tooled wooden handles as Amtrak's Silver Star and a dozen freights a day hurtled past.

Only in the east was the question of the boundary open, and probably only since Gas House Creek had been culverted along most of its length. On older maps it's almost as hard an edge as Rocky Branch. Even in 1975, the houses on the east side of the creek still came from one world and those on the west from another.

This is one way of thinking about Boylan Heights, as a place in Raleigh, North Carolina, bounded by a prison and an insane asylum and some railroad tracks and a little creek. But there were other ways of thinking about it too. You could think about it as a neighborhood, that is, as some sort of community, or as a marriage of community and place, or as *those* people in *that* place, *their* relationships, and *their* ways in the world; and thus, less a place than a process, a life process, a metabolic one. That would take an atlas to unravel: what a neighborhood is, what a neighborhood does, how a neighborhood works.

Then there was Boylan Heights itself, a particular, unique instantiation of a neighborhood with its own unfolding, its own historical circumstances. No doubt the history of Boylan Heights could be embedded in a general history of neighborhoods, but it was also embedded in the history of Raleigh, of North Carolina, of the South, of the United States, and so it was unlikely to be the same thing. That particular history, too, could take an atlas to unfold.

In doing so it would have to catch up the histories of the individuals out of whose life stories it was woven, my own, for instance, for on taking up my position at North Carolina State, Boylan Heights

was where Ingrid, then my wife, and I had landed. Talking to my dad a couple of days later, I discovered that, quite serendipitously, Ingrid and I had moved into a neighborhood where my father and his family had lived back in the 1920s which meant—*mirabile dictu!*—that our sons would be the fourth generation of their family to live in Boylan Heights. I doubted anyone else could claim that. For a mapmaker like me who'd mapped everywhere he'd lived—Cleveland Heights, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Barranquitas, Worcester—this too was an irresistible subject for an atlas. I envisioned a sequence of maps paralleling the movements of the Iroquoian-speaking Tuscaroras, first into the eastern Piedmont and then in the early 18th century north to New York; the movements of my ancestors out of the Lower Palatinate and Anglo-Celtic highlands to Philadelphia and so down the Shenandoah and Blue Ridge front into North Carolina; and the movements of the Africans shipped in shackles from the Maison des Esclaves on the Île de Gorée in Sénégal to the West Indies, thence north to Wilmington, and so up the river into the Piedmont. Boylan Heights: Tuscaroran, Anglo-German, African.

Let me hasten to say that, by no means, has all of this made it into the book you're holding in your hands. It hasn't made it into any book. The project's not done. It may never be finished. What you're holding is a piece of a dream—maps *for* a narrative atlas, not the narrative atlas itself—but it is this dream that has driven the mapmaking and that infuses the maps with whatever quality they may possess. These three threads—of neighborhood, Boylan Heights, and the Wood family—began to twist themselves into an atlas that I, at least, keep thinking about as an epic poem whose structure would shoulder the burden of its argument. *This* has made it into the book you're holding in your hands: a collection of maps as a poem, or perhaps fragments of a much longer poem out of which a passable semblance of the whole has been reconstructed.



## The Neighborhood and the Transformer

The idea is this: the neighborhood is a process, a process-place or a process-thing, that transforms anywhere into *here*, and here into everywhere, the city into the space of our lives, the citizen into the individual, and *vice versa*. Correspondingly, the atlas is organized in three phases which insensibly lead from one to the other. The first embodies the neighborhood's everywhere and anywhere quality, its *continuity* with the rest of the city; the second its character as a *transformer*, literally turning city stuff into neighborhood stuff (and vice versa); the third its irreducible uniqueness, its *discreteness* in the city. The first and third phases reflect each other through the transformer acting on them, so that if in the first phase the hill the neighborhood tumbles down is presented as a fact of geology (Boylan's Hill), in the third it shows up as the slopes the kids sled down in the snow (but we're missing the sledding map fragment); or if in the first phase the neighborhood trees are just a part of the downtown Raleigh forest (Broken Canopy), in the third they acquire individuality, such as the superlative water oak at 901 South Street (The Magic Tree Map Transformer Machine).

The maps and the text are at once very personal and yet essentially abstract. While the atlas is very much about Boylan Heights, it's also about any neighborhood anywhere. They are *maps* with all of the science and technology that this implies, yet they have fingerprints all over them. I don't know where it comes from, but they have heart.

But then neighborhoods have heart, and it's that heart the maps in sequence sing about. When you look really hard at a neighborhood, it's impossible to miss how uncertain its edges are. This is because neighborhoods aren't about being distinctive, or rather, they're not *especially* about being distinctive. The most important thing about neighborhoods is how similar to the rest of the city they are, how undifferentiated, how ordinary (Numbers). Neighborhoods are part of the

city. They're most of it. What neighborhoods do is make the city real. They transform the common, ordinary stuff of the city—water and sewer (Intrusions under Hill), electricity (Squirrel Highways), streets (Streets)—into the real stuff of our lives. This is the part the neighborhood plays in the life of the city, the part of a Proteus capable of turning a perfectly ordinary lamp post (Pools of Light) or crab apple tree (Flowering Trees) or stretch of sidewalk (Sidewalk Graffiti) into *that* power pole whose cables hum and sing at night as you fall asleep, *that* crab apple beneath which you played as a child, *that* stretch of sidewalk in which your kids wrote their names while the concrete was still wet. It transforms the stars that shine on everyone alike into the stars that *you* wish on (The Night Sky).

If this weren't such an ordinary, everyday thing, you'd think it was magic, but it's just the transformation of the impossible, inaccessible space of the city into the possible, accessible space in which you live; the transformation of the city as a whole—the abstracted “too many miles, too many people”—into you, into me, into us. (From the other side, of course, *we* are the “too many people.”)

An electrical transformer makes a perfect metaphor. A transformer, like those gray cylindrical things you see on power poles, transforms electrical energy from a lower to a higher voltage, or vice versa. Inside the transformer are two coils. A current in the incoming “primary winding” induces a current in the outgoing “secondary winding.” By varying the number of turns in the coils, the incoming voltage can be stepped up—as it is before being sent out to the grid—or stepped down—as it is before entering your house.

Neighborhoods do exactly the same thing. They transform people and things coming in from the outside (sunlight, electricity, gas, food) into neighbors and neighborhood things (“Good morning!”, a shared cup of coffee, a muffin to go with it). In the same way, what's *of* the neighborhood is transformed into outside stuff, city stuff, state stuff,

nation stuff: the kid in the house next door is turned into a student at a certain school, into a citizen, a voter (Nesting). This is what I mean by “*process-thing*.” Sure, a neighborhood’s a *thing* (or it’s a collection of things) but it’s also a process, an ongoing commingling of regular routines (Bus Ballet) that slowly shift over time, accumulating history.

A neighborhood also has rhythms. Our maps are aware of the seasons (Autumn Leaves), but they’re also aware of the weather (Rhythm of the Sun). They’re aware of day (most of the maps) and night (The Night Sky, Pools of Light, The Light at Night on Cutler Street, Jack-O’-Lanterns), but they’re also aware of the mailman on his daily rounds (Mailman) and the paperboy on his (Lester’s Paper Route in Space & Time). They’re aware of a single copy of the *Raleigh Times*, as they map its route into the neighborhood in the back of the route manager’s truck (Two Routes); as it passes through the neighborhood in Lester’s bag as he rides his bicycle; as it lands in the Poole family yard, is picked up, read, and then discarded in the trash; and, finally, as it leaves the neighborhood in the garbage truck that trundles it off to the county landfill (The Paper’s Route). The neighborhood transforms the paper from a copy of the *Raleigh Times* into trash. En route, it generates conversation.

Rhythms like this beat at the *heart* of the neighborhood transformer where the power of the metaphor is particularly strong. The incoming paper snaking through the neighborhood can be likened to the primary winding, the paper lumbering off in the garbage truck to the secondary. The milkman, the vegetable man, the mailman, the delivery trucks, the school and city buses (Bus Ballet), all are involved in bringing in stuff that, sooner or later, invariably transformed, has to leave (though here the map fragments of these other routes are missing). But gas lines do this too (Intrusions under Hill). They bring gas all the way from Texas to stoves, to water heaters, to furnaces in the neighborhood. The secondary coil here is harder to see as the waste heat is vented or lost through the roof, billowing up from the neighborhood

in convection clouds of warm air (we’re missing the map of the heat rising from the neighborhood). In the gap between these coils? A cup of tea or a hot bath. The neighborhood inhales and exhales. It breathes.

As in a body, all these rhythms are nested. Those in the electrical transformers scattered around the neighborhood (Squirrel Highways) take place at the speed of light (you can hear them humming). The migration of kids to school takes place daily, though it also has a weekly beat and an even wider seasonal one (but these maps are missing). The pumpkins are put out on porches (Jack-O’-Lanterns), the Christmas lights put up, the flags hung out at an annual rate.

The maps toward the front of the atlas are about the neighborhood in its continuity with the city, with the Piedmont, with the stars: what is unchanging or changing at a glacial pace. The maps toward the back of the book are about the neighborhood in its discreteness in the city, its here and now-ness: this year’s jack-o’-lanterns, the afternoon’s sounds (Sound Walk, Barking Dogs), the colors of this fall’s leaves (Autumn Leaves). The maps woven through the middle try to capture the broad givens of the front giving birth to the literal facts of the back, and vice versa: the churning and grinding that transforms the city into the neighborhood and the neighborhood into the city . . . on the fly.

The historical maps would go here too, for the historical transformations—from Tuscaroran fields through slave plantation to residential subdivision—catch the transformer at what we might have thought about as a geologic pace if geology itself hadn’t already written its history here (Boylan Hill, Intrusions Under Hill. Six hundred million years ago what is now Boylan Heights lay at the bottom of the Iapetus Ocean.

### **The History of the Neighborhood Leaves Traces the Maps Catch**

The rhythms we find today—or those that could be felt in the 1970s and 1980s—taken together make up the history of Boylan Heights in



a very *familiar* sense. My son Randall—he'd inherited Lester's route—delivered the last *Raleigh Times* ever to be delivered to houses in Boylan Heights on November 30, 1989. This was at a time when afternoon papers all over the country were going out of business. The *Times* had started publication in 1901, gone bankrupt in 1910, and restarted in 1912. Boylan Heights had been carved out of the old Boylan cotton plantation in 1907, though by 1912 it may not yet have had enough residents to justify a route. But for the next seventy-seven years, delivery of the *Times* was a beat in the rhythm of the neighborhood, a daily beat and, since it didn't publish a Sunday edition, a weekly one too.

It was in 1907 then that the old Boylan plantation began its transformation into Boylan Heights the neighborhood. Purchased by the Greater Raleigh Land Company (it was real estate speculation—nothing's changed) and laid out by Kelsey and Guild (a Boston-area landscape architecture practice known for its City Beautiful proclivities), the neighborhood was designed with a "sensitivity" to the shape of the land, with curved streets (Streets), a central park, buried water and sewer (Intrusions under Hill), and sidewalks. It wasn't a big subdivision, only some 300 lots. The neighborhood stretches less than a half mile in each direction.

Because the ideal, white, middle-class suburb envisioned by Kelsey and Guild was not a homogenous gated community (some things have changed) but a heterogeneous simulacrum of the city at large (at least the white city at large), restrictive covenants were incorporated into the deeds of sale that placed minimum values on construction (Shotgun, Bungalow, Mansion). The most expensive homes, to cost at least \$2,500, were built on Boylan Avenue near Montfort Hall. Houses on secondary streets like Kinsey and Cutler cost as little as \$2,000. Still less expensive homes were built on the streets that wrapped around the bottom of the hill (Rooflines, Stories). Need I say black ownership was forbidden? It was stipulated in the language of a

typical covenant, "That the premises shall not be occupied by negroes or persons of mixed or negro blood, [but] that this shall not be construed to prevent the living upon the premises of any negro servant, who is employed for domestic purposes." Whereas the other covenants expired at the beginning of 1920, this one never did. And so: the richest whites at the top of the hill, the less wealthy arrayed around them, the poorest at the bottom toward the creek and the branch (Assessed Value), with blacks scattered among them as domestic servants, otherwise banished.

As all involved labored to bring Kelsey and Guild's vision to life, Boylan Heights grew rapidly. In 1921 my grandfather Lehman took a job with Carolina Power and Light and moved his family, including my father Jasper, from Wilmington to a little house on Florence Street, then later to a larger house a couple of blocks west on South, and finally to a third house just down the alley from where Ingrid and I would later live. On a visit in 1979 my aunt Marie Krawcheck drew a map of the Boylan Heights she remembered from the 1920s (Aunt Marie's Map, at right). Her concluding note says, "I'd walk to school down West South thru 'colored town' to Centennial School where they tell me the auditorium is now." This new auditorium was built in 1932, and my aunt walked through "colored town" because when she lived in Boylan Heights, it couldn't yet justify its own school. By 1927 though, the year General Electric moved my grandfather and his family out of Raleigh, enough young families had moved into the neighborhood to justify the construction of a school in what had been Boylan Springs Park.

The dreams of Kelsey and Guild and the Greater Raleigh Land Company had come to fruition. These were the years to be living in Boylan Heights.

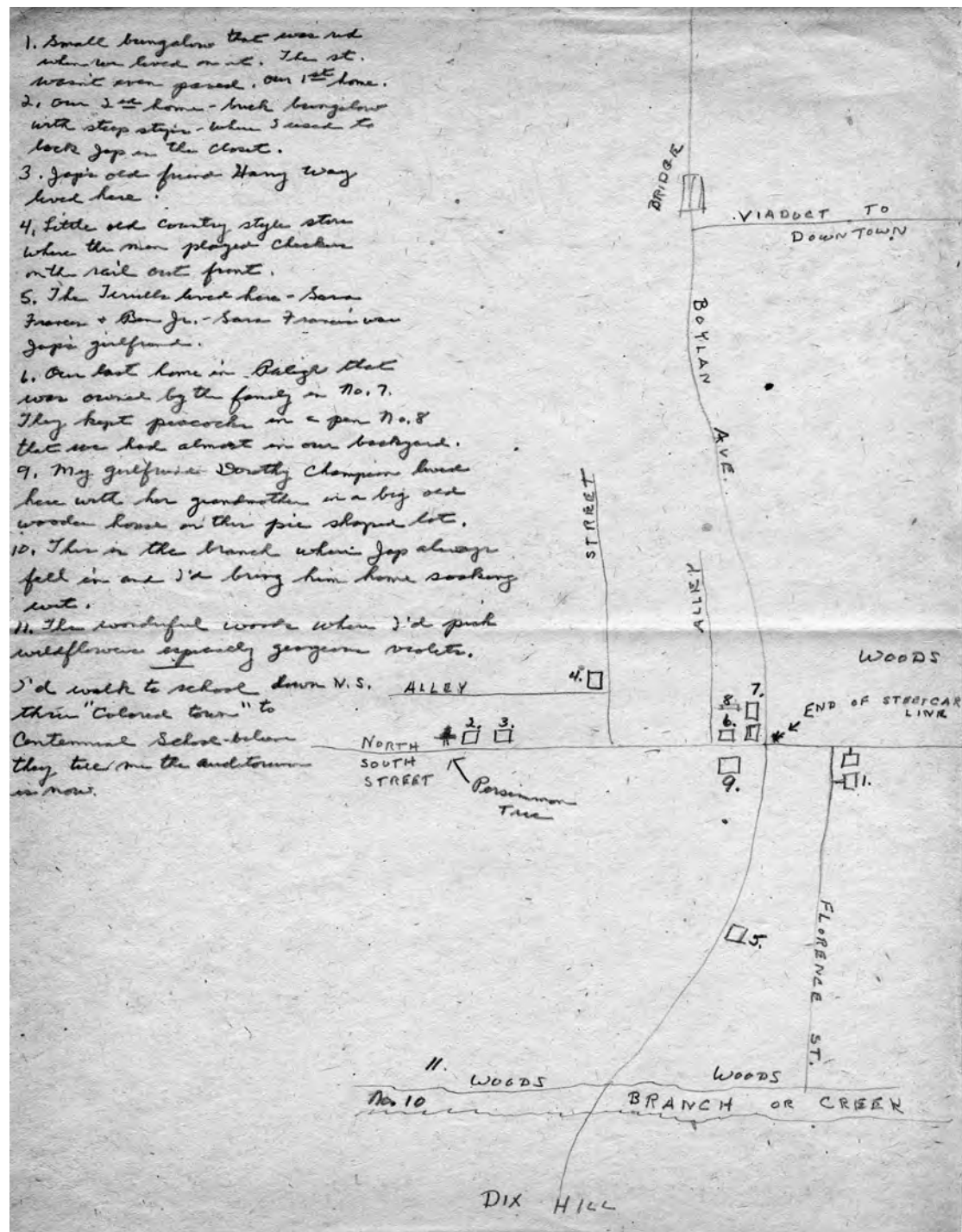
They didn't last. When a new high school opened north of the neighborhood in 1929, and the school board opted to keep the Boylan Heights kids east of downtown at Hugh Morson High, it was the end



## Aunt Marie's Map

1. Small bungalow that was red when we lived in it. The street wasn't even paved. Our first house.
2. Our second home—brick bungalow with steep steps—where I used to lock Jap in the closet.
3. Jap's old friend Harry Way lived here.
4. Little old country-style store where the men played checkers on the rail out front.
5. The Terrell's lived here—Sara Frances and Ben, Jr. Sara Frances was Jap's girlfriend.
6. Our last home in Raleigh that was owned by the family in No. 7. They kept peacocks in a pen at No. 8 that we had almost in our backyard.
7. My girlfriend Dorothy Champion lived here with her grandmother in a big old wooden house on this pie shaped lot.
8. This is the branch where Jap always fell in and I'd bring him home soaking wet.
9. The wonderful woods where I'd pick wildflowers, especially gorgeous violets.

I'd walk to school down W.S. [West South] thru "colored town" to Centennial School where they tell me the auditorium is now.



of any *éclat* the neighborhood might have been able to claim. The growing white city spread past it north, then west toward what was then State College. Increasingly, the south and east were stigmatized as “colored” parts of town. Then the Depression hit and World War II and, by the time that was over, Boylan Heights was altogether the wrong place to be. The folks who came to Raleigh when IBM moved to Research Triangle Park settled in new suburbs far to the north. The state built the Beltline to speed them to work, North Hills and Crabtree Valley Malls opened, and pretty soon there was no reason for people to come downtown at all.

By 1974 when Ingrid and I moved into the neighborhood—we didn’t own a car and it was within easy walking distance of both downtown and State, and we liked the old houses and the funky mix of people—the nicest thing most people could say about Boylan Heights was that it was struggling. One of the things it was struggling with were blacks. Under Jim Crow the closest blacks had been able to get to Boylan Heights was the east side of Gas House Creek. As I said, Gas House Creek ran along the bottom of the hill behind the houses on the east side of Florence. Its name came from the coal gasification plant just east and down the hill from the neighborhood and, in fact, in 1974 the old gasometer was still standing. With Jim Crow winding down, there was no longer anything to stop blacks from moving up the hill. With the division of the grand old houses into rentals—and landlords who increasingly lived outside the neighborhood (Absentee Landlords, Local Rents, Families)—there was also plenty of opportunity. The longtime white residents—racists like my grandparents—were very unhappy about this, and the Boylan Heights Garden Club, which had been founded in 1957, became a forum for discussions that, in 1974, led to the founding of the Boylan Heights Restoration and Preservation Association (Newsletter Prominence). Spearheaded by a couple of early gentrifiers, it successfully campaigned for changes in the



neighborhood’s zoning that made it more difficult to convert single-family houses to rentals. Hip, young lawyers with their offices downtown found the location, and the prices, congenial. The next thing you knew—in the 1980s when we were mapping it—the place was “up-and-coming.”

Since then Boylan Heights has morphed into one of the city’s most desirable locations. Downtowns are back again—Raleigh’s certainly is—and there was a recent moment when the mayor of Raleigh, the chairlady of the county school board, and a state assembly lady all lived within a block of each other on Boylan Avenue and McCullough Street. Once again it’s substantially single-family houses and property values are way up. Ingrid and I couldn’t possibly have afforded to move into the neighborhood now—a veterinarian lives in our old house these days—but it’s doubtful we would have wanted to.

You know, times change.



### The Transformer Stops for No One

And because they do, maps become historical documents the second they're made. This is almost preposterously true of these maps of Boylan Heights which reflect the neighborhood not only in the first flush of gentrification but also after two bridges at the north end of the neighborhood had just been knocked down, the old Warren truss on Boylan Avenue and the Martin Street Viaduct. The viaduct had never carried a lot of traffic, but the bridge had been the neighborhood's link to the north, to its schools, for example (by then Hugh Morson High had also been knocked down), and cars had flowed over it in a steady stream. With its demolition, traffic pretty much disappeared from the north end of the neighborhood (Signs for Strangers). This seeps into the maps in a variety of ways. It's there in *The Night Sky* in the fact that a couple of us were able to lay on our backs in the middle of Boylan Avenue at 10:00 p.m. in the early part of July and sketch the horizon and the stars.

You'd be run over if you tried that today since, compared to that of 1982, the traffic pattern has effectively rotated 90°. Today traffic flows across a new bridge—the viaduct has never been replaced—through the neighborhood north-south, while the east-west traffic that used to gush through it has been rerouted around it to the south. These days you can't drive west out of Boylan Heights at all. These changes would be reflected in corresponding changes to *Signs for Strangers* (and its attached map of traffic flow), *Police Calls*, *A Sound Walk*, and even to *Assessed Value* because property values rise when an inner city neighborhood of neat, old houses gets turned into the equivalent of a suburban cul-de-sac. All these changes have gone hand in hand with, driven and been driven by, the ongoing gentrification. They're further examples of neighborhood as process, as transformer.

The recent loss of a third bridge speaks to the limits of gentrification. This is the old Munford Avenue Bridge that used to carry traffic to Central Prison when its entrance faced north. Then you either bumped across the railroad tracks—unless there was a train—or reached it through the neighborhood: down Mountford Avenue, over the Munford Avenue Bridge (the spelling's never been consistent), and so down to the prisons (plural, because before you reached Central, you passed Triangle Correction Center). As I said, this was a minimum security prison—now long gone—with an exercise yard (weights, basketball court) right below the bridge. Families and friends of inmates used to hang out on the bridge, watching them and waving and hollering at them. When the Department of Corrections closed Triangle, the neighborhood had high hopes, maybe for a little park, maybe even (fingers crossed) the closing of Central itself. Instead Central launched a \$160 million expansion on the old Triangle site. In the process they truncated Mountford Avenue at the bridge head.

As I said, times change.

And *none* of this has made it into the atlas: the transformation



Boylan Heights Restoration and Preservation Association

\*\*\*\*\* NEWSLETTER \*\*\*\*\*

For Residents of Boylan Heights First Issue August, 1974

The monthly neighborhood meeting of the Boylan Heights Restoration and Preservation Association will be held at Boylan Heights Baptist Church on Thursday, August 22, at 7:30 P.M. All property owners and residents of our community are urged to attend. Mr. Beal Bartholomew will speak on zoning and show slides of houses in our neighborhood that have been restored. There will be a suggestion box provided at the meeting for ideas, suggestions, or criticisms, signed or unsigned.

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A community picnic has been scheduled at 4:00 P.M. on the Boylan Heights Church grounds on Labor Day. Further details will be announced.

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We welcome all newcomers to our neighborhood. The most recent ones reported are:

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Wright, of 413 Kinsey St., who have installed a new picket fence.

Mr. and Mrs. "Chuck" Harper of 407 S. Boylan Ave.

Miss Marty Phelps, Mrs. Ellen Prevette, and Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Wood, of 402 S. Boylan Ave., the home that Mr. Ben Floyd renovated. It really gave a boost to the appearance of this street.

Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Fulghum have done extensive remodeling to their home at 1009 W. South St. His brother Bill and his wife, newcomers, are remodeling at 1005 W. South St.

Mr. and Mrs. Stoney Eastman have recently moved to 509 Cutler St. The David Ophill family, whose home was burned at 309 Kinsey St., have begun rebuilding.

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Congratulations to Mr. Stanley Medlin and his mother, 917 W. South St., who won the garden club plaque for this month. It is given for the most noticed improvement in the yard.

Congratulations to Stephanie Wells, daughter of Mrs. Helen Wells, of 411 Kinsey St., for winning a hula hoop contest sponsored by the Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department. She also won in Charlotte. If the City had had sufficient funds, she would have competed in Atlanta, Georgia.

Our best wishes to Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Bobbitt who were married on Saturday, August 3! Mrs. Bobbitt is the former Mrs. D.R. (Dorothy) Ferrell of 730 S. Boylan Ave.

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Mrs. Ernest Goolsby of 1018 Dorothea Dr. is still on the sick list but is able to be at her daughter's home in Garner.

Mrs. Pauline E. Fish of 406 Kinsey St. is in Wake Memorial Hospital. We hope she is soon able to be out.

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of Boylan Heights Elementary School into Project Enlightenment, the collapse of the *Raleigh Times*, the final demise of the old guard (their Garden Club's finally gone too), the demolition of Triangle Correction Center, the inauguration of the annual Art Walk, the opening of the Boylan Bridge Brewpub (which, as I write this, is celebrating its first year with a "new high gravity and super tasty Boylan Bridge Anniversary Ale"). But then none of the earlier stuff made it into the atlas either: the Indians and the slave plantation, the establishment of Raleigh (in 1792!), the laying of the rail lines, the construction of Montford Hall, the Union soldiers camping on the hill. There are *so many* maps left to make! Just to finish!

The data are endless. We went door to door in 1975 asking intrusive questions about length of residence, occupation, magazine subscriptions, radio habits (Radio Waves), and pets (Dogs), among other things. In 1982 we recorded information for each dwelling about the number of stories (Stories) and porches (Rooflines), height from ground, porch railings, step railings, mail boxes, wind chimes (Wind Chimes), hanging plants, planters, porch swings, awnings, screens, porch lighting, porch furniture, porch grills, wood storage, other features ("incredible Corinthian columns," "concrete swans"), house foundation colors, house colors, yard grills, garages, garbage can holders, can condition, clothes lines, retaining walls, auto repair, evidence of kids, and "miscellaneous yard/porch funk" ("shed, cathouse, many irises, pie pans in trees"). I have draft maps of most of this.

The historic data exploded with the neighborhood's registration as a National Historic District. You can get the date of construction along with a description ("One-story Bungalow; gable faces street. Attached porch gable faces street off-center; wood shingles and siding") for every building in Boylan Heights . . . online! You can get very high resolution aerial imagery of the neighborhood . . . online! Using

Google's Streetview, you can look at every house . . . online! But it's all disaggregated, inchoate. Something's missing, maybe the poetry.

There is another map I want to make of the underground. You'd look up at the neighborhood from below, from underneath the trees' deepest roots, up through that latticework—that mesh!—to the mains (as in *Intrusions under Hill*), but then you'd look through the mains to the house connections snaking up *into* the houses and forking there into the toilets and sinks and tubs and showers like capillaries, and then out again, down the drains and through the waste pipes to the laterals and so down to the sewer lines, the house itself suspended in this web of flows, crystallizing out of them. *Can you see it?* You wouldn't see the house itself, just the water lines reaching up—as if to the sun, like branches—*almost* touching the drains. In the gap between? You, standing in the shower, the water shooting up from the underground, fountaining from the showerhead around you, cascading to the floor, pooling to the drain, and so down, down, down, you suspended in that gap, in that space, in that fountain.

Lawrence Durrell says:

You tell yourself that it is a woman you hold in your arms, but watching the sleeper you see all her growth in time, the unerring unfolding of cells which group and dispose themselves into the beloved face which remains always and for ever mysterious . . . . And if, as biology tells us, every single cell in our body is replaced every seven years by another? At the most I hold in my arms something like a fountain of flesh, continuously playing, and in my mind a rainbow of dust.

Which is all the neighborhood is: a fountain of flesh and shingles and concrete and two-by-fours and trees and asphalt and iron pipes and starlight and the leaflight cast on the sidewalks on a summer's night.

Neighborhoods are experienced as a collection of patterns of light and sound and smells and taste and communication with others, and here, in this atlas, I've tried to catch those patterns in black and white and arrange them so that the larger pattern, the pattern of the neighborhood itself, can emerge by flipping through the pages.

Maps for a narrative atlas . . .

There is a temptation to update the atlas, to change the traffic map to chart today's pattern, the assessed value map to display the new affluence, the jack-o'-lantern map to include all the gentrifiers carving pumpkins these days in the parts of the neighborhood where in the early 1980s nobody bothered. If the atlas were a reference volume and people relied on it to choose their route to a movie theater, there might be some reason to consider this. But it's not a reference atlas and never was and there's as little reason to update its maps as there is to update Balzac's Paris to include the Grande Arche or the demolition of Les Halles whose loudly lamented buildings were, in any case, constructed after Balzac's death. The transformer stops transforming for no one, every glimpse is fleeting.

Only cartography's general reference map pretends otherwise, has the hubris to present the world, you know . . . *as it really is*, as if to say Europe, not the topography of Europe at the end of the last ice age or the population of Europe during the High Middle Ages or the state system of Europe today, but Europe, the real deal, *now and forever*.

I say to you there is no real deal. There is only this starlight falling tonight on these asphalt streets still warm with the sun's heat, these slopes down which the streets slip, these mains beneath them with the runoff from this afternoon's rain, and—listen!—if you bend over



the manhole cover, you can hear the sound of the rushing water. There are only these wires scarring this sky, these trees with their heavy shade, this streetlight casting those shadows of branch and leaf on the sidewalk, those passing cars and that sound of a wind chime. But none of it is Boylan Heights *tout court* and none of our maps pretends to catch more than a note or two of a world in which everything's singing.