# 3 Mapping the Labyrinth

## Twentieth-Century Cartography and the City

The postindustrial city may initially seem to be an incongruous space for nomadic subjectivity; however, in this chapter I wish to reveal the ways in which the figure of the "urban nomad" has been linked with a subjective project of "cognitive mapping," and the ways in which these conjoined figures permeate both critical and fictive urban writing of the later twentieth century. The figure of the "urban nomad" has a long tradition in modern writing and is seen striding through the works of Blake, Balzac, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Joyce, to name but a few. Indeed, the rise of the nomadic pedestrian in Modernist thought and writing is implicitly linked with the development of the modern city, for, as Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*, the "perception of the new qualities of the modern city [have] been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets."[1]

Gerard L. Bruns argues that this "metaphorics of the city which stresses wandering, vagrancy, anonymity, randomness, the underground, the outlaw, the fugitive, the slave, the alien, the streetwalker, the beggar, the trader, and the exile" displaces the conventional opposition between "the city and the country" with that of the opposition between "the polis and the labyrinth."[2] Indeed, the prevailing metaphor of the city of modernity is that of the labyrinth, and the urban wanderer who is cast adrift in the maze of its streets experiences its Dionysian qualities of chaos and disorientation. As Monroe K. Spears writes in his study of Modernist poetry, *Dionysus and the City*, the premodern city aspired to the status of a *Civitas Dei*, or "Heavenly City," while the modern city was presented as "fallen [. . .] and therefore moving in the other direction, toward the Infernal City—hence bathed in an infernal light, or revealing beneath its mundane outlines those of the City of Dis."[3] The chaotic nature of the modern city, Spears continues:

> …both constitute[d] and symbolize[d] the modern predicament: the mass man, anonymous and rootless, cut off from his past and from the nexus of human relations in which he formerly existed, anxious and insecure, enslaved by the mass media but left by the disappearance of God with a dreadful freedom of spiritual choice, is the typical citizen



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> of Megalopolis, where he enjoys lethal and paralyzing traffic, physical decay and political corruption, racial and economic tension, crime, rioting, and police brutality.[4]

Such representations of the modern subject's relationship with its disordered and dislocated urban environment stands testament to Fredric Jameson's 1984[5] argument that the overarching themes of the modern age—the "age of anxiety"—are those of "alienation, anomie, solitude and social fragmentation and isolation" (Jameson, 11). In the postmodern era or age of "late capitalism," Jameson continues, the anxious and alienated (though still relatively whole) subject of modernity has been fragmented, leaving a euphoric and schizophrenic subject in its place (Jameson, 74). Jameson's distinction between the modern and postmodern subject is clearly overstated, for the postindustrial city has continued to engender anxiety and feelings of isolation in a great many of its subjects (and I will deal with Jameson's own personal postmodern anxiety later in this chapter). However, in certain respects, a less adversarial relationship between urban dweller and urban environment is evident in the metaphors that attend late-twentieth-century discussions of urban experience. The city is still figured as a labyrinth, but the disorientation it brings about is regularly conceived as liberatory rather than restrictive. Consider, for instance, Iain Chambers who writes in *Border Dialogues* (1994) that the globalized city of late capitalism is "the place in which we can lose ourselves, experience an absence of direction and belonging. An experience that recalls not only the labyrinthine qualities of city life but also the contemporary experience of art in which the 'beautiful' is not the conciliatory or cathartic property of an object but a contingent experience caught, and then lost, in time and place."[6] This shift in attitude towards the labyrinthine structure of the city is also evident in urban fiction of the later twentieth century, for, as Wendy B. Faris writes, "unlike earlier uses of the labyrinth pattern, recent texts [. . .] do not represent escapes from but rather affirmations of entrapment in the city and its languages."[7]

Jonathan Raban, in his 1974 study of urban space, *Soft City*, argues that although the city's landscape appears "hard-edged, like the smooth walls of a labyrinth," it becomes through the power of subjective experience and imagination paradoxically "soft."[8] The "plastic" city allows, indeed incites, its inhabitants to construct it and, reciprocally, their own individual identity:

> For better or worse, [the city] invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form round you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a position on a map fixed by triangulation. [. . .] The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard

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> city one can locate on maps, in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.[9]

The city is no longer defined solely by its objective reality. Instead, it becomes multiple; each person's city becomes the "sum of all the routes [taken] through it, a spoor as unique as a fingerprint."[10] Moreover, the city becomes an array of "signs," a "code" to be read by the pedestrian and used to "decipher" the world.[11] This shift—evident in urban planning and architecture, as well as sociology—towards metaphorizing the city as a "text" and a "collage"[12] casts the urban subject as an urban actor or reader: the city dweller is no longer passively overwhelmed by the spectacle of the urban environment, but is able to read (or misread) it, thereby constructing it as a bricoleur. According to Chambers in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, the twentieth-century "linguistic turn" with its attendant textual metaphors does not so much foreground the agency of the subject as it does "the individuation (I, you, we, they) established by language."[13] Language, he argues, is not a commodity that may be purchased, consumed or owned by the subject. Instead, language is like a city that we "inherit" and "dwell" within, and it is the performative "movement of metaphor" that exposes the subject to "the poetics of a place."[14] For Chambers, as for many contemporary critical theorists, the practice of language is indissociable from practices of the body, of the self, and of place. Thus the "postmodern" subject becomes a nomad who, on a micro-level, weaves meaning out of his or her fragmentary urban experience: "In the extensive and multiple worlds of the modern city we, too, become nomads, migrating across a system that is too vast to be our own, but in which we are fully involved—translating and transforming what we find and absorb into local instances of sense."[15]

However, Chambers appears concerned about the mappability of the "migrant landscapes" of the global city,[16] and in *Border Dialogues* he states that "we can no longer hope to map the [post]modern metropolis, for that implies that we know its extremes, its borders, confines, limits."[17] Indeed, he continues, the "actual" city no longer exists, having been overtaken by an "image" of itself.[18] Although *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, published four years after *Border Dialogues*, ascribes somewhat more agency to the nomadic city dweller in his or her encounter with the "society of the spectacle" it still contains a chapter entitled "Cities Without Maps," and in it Chambers writes that the subject's experience of the "labyrinthine and contaminated" postmodern urban environment:

> …not only leads to new cultural connections, it also undermines the presumed purity of thought. [. . .] To travel in this zone, without maps and charts, is to experience the dis-location of the intellectual subject and his—the gender is deliberate—mastery of the word/world. The illusions of identity organised around the privileged voice and stable subjectivity of the "external" observer are swept up and broken down

> in a movement that no longer permits the obvious institution of self-identity between thought and reality. In this disjunctive moment, the object of the intellectual gaze—the cultures and habits of the "natives" of local, national and global "territories"—can no longer be confined to an obvious chart or map, and there freeze-dried as a fixed or essential component of "knowledge."[19]

Chambers's reference to mapping is undoubtedly an invocation of the objectivist, positivist cartographic tradition that underwrote the colonialist impulse, rather than the subjective nomadic mapping espoused by Deleuze and Guattari, and a similar attitude towards urban cartography is evident in de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life*.

For de Certeau, the city exists in a perpetual struggle between urban dwellers' desire to see the city laid out beneath them and their experience of it at street level. The former "lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more," de Certeau argues, is bound up with the "fiction of knowledge," and its realization lifts the body "out of the city's grasp," allowing the viewer/voyeur "the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive" (*PEL*, 92). This "immense texturology" made available by a panoramic view of the city is, however, only a "fiction," a "representation," an "analogue of the facsimile produced, through a projection that is a way of keeping aloof, by the space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer" (*PEL*, 92–93). The scopic drive serves to reaffirm the illusion that the city is stable, monumental, and unchanging; it "continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text" (*PEL*, 92). Meanwhile, "down below," beneath even the omniscient gaze of the voyeur, are the "ordinary *practitioners* of the city" (*PEL*, 93; emphasis added). The bodies of these "blind" walkers "follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (*PEL*, 93). By "mak[ing] use of spaces that cannot be seen," the urban walker disrupts the total gaze of the voyeur and "escap[es] the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye" (*PEL*, 93).

This disruption de Certeau likens to a "pedestrian speech act" in which city walking becomes "a space of enunciation" (*PEL*, 98). In this de Certeau also displays the "linguistic turn," for just as pedestrian practices become a form of "walking rhetoric" (*PEL*, 100), the figure of the walker takes on the garb of a metaphor, a rhetorical figure, one who displays the "drifting of 'figurative' language" (*PEL*, 100). These figures, at once physical and rhetorical, "are the acts of this stylistic metamorphosis of space" (*PEL*, 102). However, although de Certeau states that a map of the movements of these figures might uncover the "modalities of pedestrian enunciation," he maintains that the "(voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility [. . .] causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten" (*PEL*, 99, 97). The "map" and the "itinerary" are for de Certeau "two poles of experience," the former correspond-

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ing to Enlightenment cartography and "scientific discourse," the latter to medieval mapping and "'ordinary' culture" (*PEL*, 119–21). Whereas the medieval itinerary, he writes, described a tour and was a "memorandum prescribing actions" (*PEL*, 120), the scientific Enlightenment map:

> …collates on the same plane heterogeneous places, some *received* from a tradition and others *produced* by observation. But the important thing here is the erasure of the itineraries which, presupposing the first category of places and conditioning the second, makes it possible to move from one to the other. The map, a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a "state" of geographical knowledge, pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition. It remains alone on the stage. The tour describers have disappeared. (*PEL*, 121)

De Certeau's opposition between the map and the itinerary is not so much a disavowal of cartography as it is a dialogue between two different forms of mapping practice, the one subjective, the other objective. A strictly scientific cartography of the city brings about only striated, objectivist maps of the city—maps that rationalize the labyrinth, that reduce the complexity of the city to a singular and passive space that is the same for all. A reinscription of the medieval itinerary—a mapping practice that foregrounds both the subjective physical and mental negotiation of the environment—turns the city into a practised space and the pedestrian's tour into "a sort of dance through the city" (*PEL*, 120).

Thus we see in both Chambers's and de Certeau's works the desire for an urban mapping practice that undermines the positivist and colonialist cartographic tradition and draws together and foregrounds the city, subjectivity, the body, and language. The following section of this chapter will deal with the rise of what has come to be known as cognitive mapping: from Walter Benjamin's study of the flâneur in nineteenth-century Paris to Jameson's investigation of the "postmodern" subject in Los Angeles's Bonaventure Hotel, by way of the Situationist project of "psychogeography" and Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City*.[20]

## COGNITIVE MAPPING AND THE CITY

### Walter Benjamin and the Flâneur: 1920–1940

The solitary walker in the city finds its most recognizable form in Walter Benjamin's delineation of the figure of the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur. Benjamin's wanderings through the arcades of Paris have their own precursor in the surrealist strolls of André Breton and Louis Aragon. Peter

Collier writes that Breton's 1928 novel *Nadja* constructs a map of Paris reminiscent "of a medieval map of the world—it is a small, flat and patchy place, surrounded by nothingness [. . .] in defiance of the map of Paris that a rational atlas would offer."[21] Aragon's 1926 *Paris Peasant* was perhaps even more influential for Benjamin, for it mapped viscerally the Passage de l'Opéra, which was in imminent threat of being devoured by the "giant rodent" of the Boulevard Haussmann. At the same time as he imagines the Haussmannic *percements* "redrawing the map of our capital in straight lines," Aragon calls for a "geography of pleasure," a "charting [of] the territory of ecstacy."[22]

Also intensely critical of Baron Haussmann's boulevards, Benjamin reasserts the labyrinthine nature of the city, and indeed argues that the city is the "realization" of the labyrinth.[23] The flâneur is Benjamin's privileged metaphor for the type of urban dweller who is best able to negotiate the labyrinth of the city. This inherently bourgeois figure is differentiated from the amorphous and anonymous city "crowd" that forms his milieu, for even though "all traces of the individual" have been "effaced" from the crowd,[24] the flâneur nonetheless remains an "enlightened" individual within it. The flâneur's role is to be an "explorer" and spectator of the masses, who provide both "refuge" and "drug" for the flâneur, paradoxically veiling him from the scrutiny to which he subjects them. The masses are described by Benjamin as a "new and inscrutable labyrinth" for the flâneur to study.[25] They are a people who overturn received notions of inside and outside, revealing to the flâneur that the street and the arcade are "the furnished and familiar interior of the masses."[26] Yet Benjamin's attitude towards the crowd is ambivalent, for while the masses are the flâneur's *raison d'être*, providing him with compelling viewing-matter, they are also the nameless and undifferentiated *mass* against which his redeeming individuality is defined.

Mike Savage has noted the redemptive qualities of Benjamin's flâneur, arguing that Benjamin was less interested in "delineating [the flâneur] as an actual social type" than in proposing a theoretical redeemer and subverter of the "impersonal" masses.[27] Similarly, he argues that the concept of the "urban" functions for Benjamin not as "the prime site of modern experience" but as "the site in which the possibilities for redemption could best be explored."[28] Although Benjamin's conceptualization of the flâneur displays contempt for the crowd, it does nonetheless foreground the labyrinthine nature of the city and the idea of the everyday, and critique orthodox notions of temporality. According to Savage, Benjamin's interest in the urban is related both to the metaphor of the city-as-labyrinth and to his "critique of narrativity."[29] By employing the figure of the labyrinth Benjamin depicts the city as a complex space, full of twists and turns, in which the flâneur might become lost. Becoming lost, however, is not conceived by Benjamin as passive or accidental; it in fact requires great skill. Whereas being unable to "find one's way" in the city is "uninteresting and

banal" and requires only "ignorance," becoming truly lost in the city "calls for quite a different schooling."[30] Within this labyrinth, Savage adds, the "urban explorer," encountering the detritus of former times, "rupture[s] any naïve evolutionary belief that the present mark[s] a state of progress over the past."[31] Thus he concludes:

> Benjamin's strategy was therefore to displace, by questioning the boundaries between past and present, the notion of linear historical time which was sustained by narrative form. In his urban writing Benjamin could use a common spatial reference to bring things together in time. Thus the city could be used to disrupt ideas of new and old.[32]

Benjamin's urban narrative not only foregrounds the complexity of the city and a spatialized and nonlinear temporality through the metaphor of the labyrinth, but it also instantiates the city-as-text metaphor that de Certeau draws upon in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. According to Deborah L. Parsons in *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, the metaphor of the flâneur who "walks idly through the city, listening to its narrative" reveals "the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten, and reread."[33] Moreover, just as the flâneur recreates the city, the urban writer becomes, for Benjamin, not simply "a figure within a city," but,

> ...also the producer of a city, one that is related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone, one that results from the interconnection of body, mind, and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity. The writer adds other maps to the city atlas; those of social interaction but also of myth, memory, fantasy, and desire.[34]

The city becomes a text, and the text becomes a city to be explored and mapped by the urban writer or flâneur, in whose narrative the city "opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room."[35] Yet although the concept of the flâneur reawakened interest in the everyday, embodied experience of the city, in his assumption of a scopic mastery over the crowd and the city, the flâneur, even at street level, reasserts the modernist totalizing gaze. The flâneur is, like Descartes, more a spectator of than an actor in the world, for, as Parsons suggests:

> In this detached form of observation, the distinctive element of *flânerie—movement*—is lost, and the observer becomes an immobile figure. The act of walking, as a body *within* the city, seems incompatible with the need to be a totalizing, panoramic, and authoritative viewpoint, of being an eye *observing* it. Moreover, the privileged positions of the past cannot be returned to, and mimicry of them only places the urban observer away from the types of scopic authority that relate to the new modern wasteland. Detachment, self-assertion, and bourgeois

> control are now made prominent, in comparison to the wandering, subversive, and marginal ambiguity of the Baudelairian [*sic*] *flâneur*.[36]

Removed from his Baudelairean beginnings, Benjamin's flâneur becomes an omniscient cartographer, he alone holding the key to the labyrinth of the city.

## RADICAL CARTOGRAPHY—THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATIONISTS: 1957–1972

It was this perceived passivity and privilege of the bourgeois flâneur that partly prompted Guy Debord in 1955, 15 years after Benjamin's death, to call for a "renovation" of urban cartography in the form of a practice of "psychogeography."[37] The radical group headed by Debord, the Situationist International, was born in 1956 when three groups—the Lettrist International (LI), the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB) and the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA)—amalgamated as their nascent and collective fascination with urban geography began to outstrip their former interests. While the psychogeographical project of the Situationists was undoubtedly inspired by Benjaminian flânerie and the Surrealist strolls of the early 1920s, they viewed the Surrealists' automatism and escapism with skepticism.[38]

Moreover, the Situationists saw in the twentieth-century, postindustrial city the need for a new kind of urban geography: a cartographic practice unable to be carried out by the nineteenth-century flâneur. In 1956, Debord described the "great industrially transformed cities" as "centers of possibilities and meanings"[39] and, according to Christel Hollevoet, the Situationists in general recognized the twentieth-century city to be a "a privileged space where socioeconomic powers exert their most obvious control and influence; where dominant ideologies are everywhere reinforced and resisted."[40] For the Situationists, the city is no longer the stage for the "phantasmagoric" society of Benjamin, but has become, as the title of Debord's major work suggests, the "society of the spectacle."[41] David Pinder writes that Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* "documented and criticised what [Debord] saw as the increasingly total nature of alienation in capitalist and bureaucratic societies, and the emergence of a 'society of the spectacle' which left people as passive spectators of social life."[42] Similarly, Alastair Bonnett explains that, for the Situationists, the spectacular society of modernity was "oppressed" and "alienated" by the reproduction of its own images, and that they considered that the adoption of a directly oppositional stance towards these images would itself simply "become part of the spectacle." Instead, he continues, the Situationists advocated "nonpassivity towards the spectacle" and "argued that spontaneous and creative revolt could liberate people from constraining values and roles."[43] In this

respect, the Situationists' invocation of psychogeography calls for a Foucauldian micropolitics of resistance and subversion rather than a Benjaminian program of mastery and redemption.

Psychogeography is defined by the Situationists as the "study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals,"[44] and is performed through the technique of the *dérive* (literally drifting), a method Debord describes as "primarily urban,"[45] "a passional journey,"[46] and entailing "playful-constructive behavior"[47]:

> In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the dérive point of view cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.[48]

It is thus the peculiarly ordered randomness of the *dérive* that, for Debord, sets it apart from the journey or the stroll. Moreover, as Thomas McDonough argues, the city dweller on the *dérive* is also discernibly different from the Baudelairean flâneur, for where the "ambiguous class position" of the flâneur indicates "a kind of aristocratic holdover (a position that is ultimately recuperated by the bourgeoisie), the person on the *dérive* consciously attempts to suspend class allegiances for some time."[49] It is, however, the *dérive*'s "critical attitude toward the hegemonic scopic regime of modernity" that for the Situationists constituted its most salient critique of flânerie.[50] Unlike the flâneur, the psychogeographer on the *dérive* was distinguished by his or her *inability* to see and perceive, and indeed, as McDonough argues, in its "refusal of the controlling gaze" of modernity, the *dérive* re-constructs the modern city:

> The city and its quarters are no longer conceived of as "spontaneously visible objects" but are posited as social constructions through which the *dérive* negotiates while simultaneously fragmenting and disrupting them. [. . .] The blindness of the people on the *dérive* was a tactical practice, dependent upon neither spectacular consumption of the city nor upon factors of chance. This blindness, characteristic of the everyday user of the city who confronts the environment as opaque, was consciously adopted in order to subvert the rational city of pure visuality.[51]

In this sense, psychogeography implied a form of cognitive urban mapping whose subversive power came from overturning notions of objective-scientific rigor in favor of a creative and subjective mental cartography. Creativity, Raoul Vaneigem argues in his 1967 Situationist manifesto *The*

*Revolution of Everyday Life*, has always been marginalised or "suburbanised."[52] The urban experience, he continues, has historically been centered upon an object—upon, for example, a church or a factory—rather than upon the subject's experience of it. However, he concludes, modern cities:

> …simply have no centre at all. It is increasingly obvious that the reference point they propose is *always somewhere else*. These are labyrinths in which you are allowed only to lose yourself. No games. No meetings. No living. A desert of plate-glass. A grid of roads. High-rise flats.[53]

For Vaneigem, the single positive effect of this oppressive *a*centrality of cities that isolates and alienates their inhabitants is that it draws attention to the need for a "radical subjectivity." That is, the state of isolation in which city dwellers exist forces them to recognize "that first and foremost it is they themselves that they have to save, they themselves that they have to choose as the centre, their own subjectivity out of which they have to build a world in which people can feel at home anywhere."[54] Radical subjectivity in its turn brings about a creative, subversive, tactical, game-oriented, and participatory "reversal of perspective" that "turns knowledge into praxis, hope into freedom, and mediation into a passion for immediacy."[55]

The radically subjective praxis of psychogeography therefore takes the form of a game that undermines Cartesian perspectivalism, and allowed the Situationists to examine the interrelationship of mental and social space.[56] Yet psychogeography was not considered by the Situationists to be merely a mental or conceptual practice, and the two most famous psychogeographical maps—the *Guide Psychogéographique de Paris* and *The Naked City*, published by Debord in 1956 and 1957 respectively—provide concrete form for the playfully ironic, subversive intent of psychogeography.

Along with the *dérive*, these two maps display the Situationist technique of *détournement*, a bricolage-like methodology that seeks to integrate "present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu."[57] Each map "*détournes*" or "diverts" a preexisting utilitarian Parisian map such as one might find in an A-Z guide. The earlier of Debord's maps, the *Guide Psychogéographique*, is made up of fragments of the 1956 *Blondel la Rougery Plan de Paris à vol d'oiseau*. Dissected and rearranged, the original map's bird's eye view is distorted: the Seine is removed, and while some *quartiers* appear mutilated and rotated out of their usual alignment many others have simply been excised, replaced with arrows linking the remaining fragments. In this respect, Debord's *détournement* of the *Blondel la Rougery* map can be viewed as a deconstructive endeavor that, according to Pinder, "shatters the ordered and functional representations of Paris created by such maps, and subverts their illusion of reality."[58] In so doing, Debord's map becomes explicitly self-reflexive, for as McDonough argues, it "foregrounds its contingency by structuring itself as a narrative open to numerous readings," and "openly acknowledges itself as the trace of prac-

tices of inhabiting rather than as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions."[59] Moreover, the playful nature of the *dérive* was complemented by *détournement*, for, as Chris Jenks suggests, the latter provided Situationist psychogeography with "the perceptual tools for spatial irony."[60]

Debord's second and more renowned map is drawn from the 1951 *Guide Taride de Paris*, and even though at first glance it appears to differ only slightly from its precursor, the *Naked City* marks a development in psychogeographical thinking. Not only do the arrows that traverse the surface of the *Naked City* describe far more fluid and expansive trajectories than those of the *Guide Psychogéographique*—Guilana Bruno speaks of the way in which it "remakes an urban topography into a social and affective landscape"[61]—but also the map also refers to itself as an illustration of the hypothesis of psychogeographic *plaques tournantes*. As Simon Sadler writes in *Situationist City*, the phrase *plaque tournante* cannot be directly translated for it plays upon such a rich variety of concepts: "A *plaque tournante* can be the center of something; it can be a railway turntable; or it can be a place of exchange (in the same way that Marseilles is sometimes described as a *plaque tournante* for trafficking, or that Paris as a whole has been celebrated as a *plaque tournante* of culture)."[62]

As well as deconstructing conventional representations of urban space, Debord's maps may also be seen to argue that the psychogeographic application of the techniques of the *dérive* and *détournement*—of drifting and subversion—can recreate those subjective centers of meaning (*plaques tournantes*) that the Situationists argued were lacking in the modern city and its representations. Yet, as Pinder explains, although the maps' arrows provide a sense of experiential unity, the fragmentary nature of Debord's psychogeographic maps "seem to replicate something of the 'dual nature' of capitalist abstract space which the [S]ituationists and a number of other theorists have characterized as being simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented, whole and broken, continuous and cracked."[63] As a result, Pinder concludes, "far from being commanding visions of the city, [Debord's maps] therefore appear as more provisional and partial statements which oscillate between different conceptions of the urban scene: a patchwork city, known through actions and footsteps; an abstract space, carved out by capital and planners, but to some degree reappropriated by those on the dérive; and a potential social space, based on psychogeographical possibilities."[64]

The Situationist attempt to "renovate" cartography as a ludic, subjective, and active means of social critique and self-determination certainly did not succeed as fully as many of the group's idealistic members might have wished. As Bonnett argues, the social philosophy that sustained the Situationist movement was "both too romantic and too rational [. . .] to be politically plausible,"[65] and the collective did not survive long into the 1970s, faltering under its "growing burden of empty self-importance."[66] Psychogeography, on the other hand, was not destined to be consigned to the same ideological wasteland as that of the movement that brought it to

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prominence. Indeed, the 1990s witnessed a flourishing of renewed interest in psychogeography, with the reformation of the London Psychogeographical Association, the emergence of the high-profile Luther Blissett Project, and the constitution of various psychogeographical bodies across the northern hemisphere. While the British associations, such as the LPA and the Manchester Area Psychogeographic (MAP), seemed to leave Situationism behind and embraced new ageism, ley lines, John Dee, and the occult, their albeit brief return to prominence nonetheless attests to Sadler's comment that Situationist psychogeography:

> …produced a social geography of the city, especially important at a time when social geography was still struggling to emerge from the shadow of academic geography. Against academic geography's "scientific" taxonomy of the physical factors that supposedly determine the character of a space, social geography theorized space as the product of society.[67]

Moreover, the Situationist program of psychogeography can be situated as a precursor to the rise of cognitive mapping that began in 1960 with the publication of Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* and gained ascendance in Jameson's 1984 essay *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.*

## COGNITIVE MAPPING—KEVIN LYNCH AND FREDRIC JAMESON

The term "cognitive mapping" is generally thought to have been coined by psychologist Edward Chace Tolman in his foundational 1948 essay "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men." Tolman's paper argued that the behavior of a rat when placed in a maze implied that the rat, over time, constructed a cognitive map of the maze in its brain. These cognitive maps are, according to Tolman, "broad and comprehensive," unlike narrow "strip" maps, and imply a cognitive ability beyond mere stimulus-response,[68] for they provoke an active response in the rat, which "does not merely passively receive and react to all the stimuli which are physically present."[69] When applied to humans, Tolman's findings indicate that the ability, particularly of children, to create "comprehensive" cognitive maps has been held back by "overstressful experiences," frustration, and "overmotivation,"[70] and his conclusion is a kind of *cri du coeur*; an appeal to "child trainers" and "world planners" not to:

> …let ourselves or others become so overemotional, so hungry, so ill-clad, so overmotivated that only narrow strip maps will be developed. All of us in Europe as well as in America, in the Orient as well as in the Occident, must be made calm enough and well-fed enough to be able

> to develop truly comprehensive maps, or, as Freud would have put it, to be able to learn to live according to the Reality Principle rather than according to the too narrow and too immediate Pleasure Principle. We must, in short, subject our children and ourselves (as the kindly experimenter would his rats) to the optimal conditions of moderate motivation and of an absence of unnecessary frustrations, whenever we put them and ourselves before that great God-given maze which is our human world.[71]

Like the Situationists, Tolman stresses the active nature of cognitive mapping and its promise for autonomous human self-determination. However, the importance he attaches to the development of "truly comprehensive maps"—to rationalizing and objectifying the abstract space of the external environment, which is once more metaphorized as a maze or labyrinth—registers the double bind that has plagued many empirically based discussions of cognitive mapping. That is, although Tolman's assertion of the value of cognitive mapping for humans is predicated upon the exceedingly complex capacity of humans to mentally negotiate a given landscape, his desire for large-scale, universally applicable, and objectively verifiable cognitive maps means that the relativity of subjective human experience must be filtered out in order that life may be made less confusing.

The positive benefits of mental maps for human spatial orientation had been a subject of psychological research as early as 1913, when Charles Trowbridge asserted that those people who retain in their minds "imaginary" maps of urban spaces were less likely to experience disorientation and were more at home in their familiar urban environment.[72] However, it should be noted that Trowbridge ultimately displays intense skepticism towards these "imaginary" maps, which, when applied to "very distant places of the earth," are revealed as "entirely imaginary, and erroneous."[73] Based as they are upon the subjective viewpoint of the individual, these mental maps sheer away from the objective cardinal points, and thus Trowbridge's use of the term "imaginary" does not have the same meaning as Tolman's use of "cognitive," but instead simply becomes shorthand for "incorrect." Trowbridge does, however, argue that these "imaginary" maps, which are generally acquired in childhood, can be corrected by proper training:

> If it is desirable to correct this very common defect in orientation training, it would appear necessary that children should be seated at school in a special manner when studying geography, with the cardinal points of the compass marked in the room, and the maps in the books properly orientated [*sic*], and the imaginary maps systematically corrected in childhood.[74]

Despite these early forays into mental maps, it was not until Lynch conducted his 1950s case study into the spatial awareness of citizens of Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles—culminating in the 1960 publication of *The Image of the City*—that the social-scientific community was provided with a large-scale, phenomenological, and data-rich investigation into urban cognitive mapping. Although Lynch himself never employs the phrase "cognitive mapping" to describe how his samples negotiate the urban jungle, he does argue that the decisive factor in urban orientation is the mental "image of the city" that each person stores in his or her mind. The degree to which citizens can construct a clear and functional mental map of their urban environment, Lynch maintains, must depend upon the "legibility" of that environment. Not only must the citizen rewrite the city in order to grasp its meaning, but the city itself must be legible to its reader, and, as such, *The Image of the City* is a call to urban planners to create "readable" cities:

> We have the opportunity of forming our new city world into an imageable landscape: visible, coherent, and clear. It will require a new attitude on the part of the city dweller, and a physical reshaping of his domain into forms which entrance the eye, which organize themselves from level to level in time and space, which can stand as symbols for urban life.[75]

For Lynch, urban illegibility creates disorientation, resulting in "anxiety and even terror" for the human subject. Indeed, he points out, the word "lost," in the English language, "means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster."[76] In this respect, Lynch's divergence from the Situationist project is clear.[77] While disorientation is viewed by the Situationists as being instrumental in the subversive reclamation of subjectivity and the urban experience from the rationalist forces of capital, Lynch regards it as having an adverse effect upon the citizen's sense of "balance and well-being."[78] Moreover, psychogeography is relatively unconcerned with the degree of legibility that can be attributed to the physical aspects of urban design, being more interested in the affective relationship that develops between the subject and urban space. To be fair, Lynch does not deny the importance of contingency in urban experience when he states that "there is some value in mystification, labyrinth, or surprise," though it does seem a grudging acknowledgement that "must be granted."[79] A modicum of chaos may enter the ideal order of cities, Lynch continues, but:

> …only under two conditions. First, there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out. The surprise must occur in an over-all framework; the confusions must be small regions in a visible whole. Furthermore, the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have

> some form that can be explored and in time be apprehended. Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.[80]

At this point—perhaps wishing to avoid being seen to endorse the kind of rationalism propounded by the le Corbusier school of urban design in the early twentieth century—Lynch expresses concern that an ultra-legible urban environment might well "inhibit new patterns of activity," and proposes that "what we seek is not a final but an open-ended order, capable of continuous further development."[81]

Lynch also does not completely ignore the value of individual subjective experience of the city. His *Image of the City* experiment required subjects to draw physical maps as they navigated their urban environment, and when he revisits these maps in his later research, he states that in them "connections were made that did not appear on official maps; elements became prominent that designers thought beneath their notice; things were suffused with strong feeling."[82] Nonetheless, while Lynch recognizes that subjective experience of urban space is "partial" and "fragmentary,"[83] his argument is predicated upon his belief that the city does exist as a knowable totality, and the image of that city may be grasped fully by citizens through the training of their cognitive abilities and through more legible urban planning.

The same desire for a total cognitive map, yet on a global scale, pervades Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*. Although Jameson credits Lynch with "spawn[ing] the whole low-level subdiscipline that today takes the phrase 'cognitive mapping' as its own designation," he argues that *The Image of the City* lacked "any conception of political agency or historical process" (Jameson, 415). As a result, Jameson reads Lynch through the lens of Althusserian ideology, arguing, like the Situationists, that the human subject in the age of late capitalism is alienated from his or her environment for reasons not simply related to poor urban planning. This "synthesis" of Althusser and Lynch, Robert Tally writes, allows Jameson "to expand Lynch's city-model to a more global terrain, while grounding Althusser's abstract thesis in the practical 'art' (the 'aesthetic') of cognitive mapping."[84] Jameson, moreover, shifts his focus away from the alienation engendered by "traditional" cities dealt with by Lynch (Jameson, 51), and instead turns his attention to the disorienting, postmodern spaces of late capital. He argues that the human subject, confronted with such a postmodern space as John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, is no longer able to "organize its past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson, 25). Furthermore, Jameson maintains, the "cultural productions" of the alienated subject of postmodernity could only "result in [. . .] 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory" (Jameson, 25). The Bonaventure "aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city" (Jameson, 40) that disorients and decenters the subject and desires to replace the "real" city

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itself. The hotel becomes for Jameson the archetypal "postmodern hyper-space," which "transcend[s] the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (Jameson, 44). This schism between the body and its environment is, for Jameson, "the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Jameson, 44).

Like Lynch, and even Tolman and Trowbridge before him, Jameson argues that it is only the pedagogical application of an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" that may "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson, 54). By representing the "world space of multinational capital," he argues, a global practice of cognitive mapping will allow humanity to once more "begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (Jameson, 54). It can be seen, therefore, that Jameson's proposal of an aesthetic of cognitive mapping falls into the same dilemma as his predecessors—he invokes subjective, localized experience only in order to reassert an objective, global totality.

I would argue that such North American practices of cognitive mapping must be viewed as separate from Continental psychogeography, and must also be seen in the light of Comtean positivism. This school of thought was itself established in France in the mid-nineteenth century in order to address the social instability engendered by the French Revolution. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) established norms for human behavior and hierarchized the sciences, placing the human science of sociology at its apex. For Comte, sociology would provide, through close observation of subjects, ideal maps of human behavior. Jenks writes that the truth-value of positivism shared with empiricism a foundation upon a principle of "pure perception."[85] However, this presumption of absolute clarity of sight is itself paralogical, for, as Jenks argues, the "positivist instructions for 'good seeing' are essentially directives for a 'partial sight,' which would never recognise itself as being the 'impaired vision' that it really is."[86] Moreover, this "plain view" is also founded upon and perpetuates a "consensus 'world view'" that effectively erases "alternative 'visions' or 'perspectives'" under the rubric of "deviance or, rather, 'distortion'."[87] Moreover, as Lefebvre argues, the criterion of urban legibility demanded by this positivist approach to cognitive mapping can be seen to obscure its own labyrinthine processes of power operating behind its thin veneer of readability and verticality:

> …the impression of intelligibility conceals far more than it reveals. It conceals, precisely, what the visible/readable "is," and what traps it

> holds; it conceals what the vertical "is"—namely arrogance, the will to power, a display of military and police-like machismo, a reference to the phallus and a spatial analogue of masculine brutality.[88]

Thus we are left with one theory of cognitive mapping that celebrates the potential infinity of subjective urban mappings, and another that asserts a single, objective cognitive map for all. Nonetheless, as David Harvey writes, the growing corpus of literature on the subject of cognitive mapping, or "cartographic consciousness," suggests the emergence of a critical (and contested) interdisciplinary field that "links thematics in geography with much of cultural and literary theory (as well as with anthropology and psychology)."[89]

## THE CITY AND THE MAP IN LATER-TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

### De Certeau and Spatial Stories

Although these social-scientific investigations into cognitive mapping all display a kind of ambivalence towards subjectivity—one that bears a remarkable similarity to the paralogism at the center of the Cartesian philosophy of the subject—later-twentieth-century metafictional explorations of urban space and cognitive mapping tend instead to undercut any proposition of total knowledge or a totally knowable urban space. Moreover, they foreground the tension that de Certeau notes between urban dwellers' competing desires to see the city laid out beneath them and their experience of it at street level. Indeed it is the "story" that de Certeau identifies as cutting across the total map. Narrative diegesis "establishes an itinerary (it 'guides') and it passes through (it 'transgresses')" (*PEL*, 129). While the story, like empirical cartography, "tirelessly marks out frontiers" (*PEL*, 126) the borders it inscribes are multiple and fluctuating. These boundaries, being "transportable," are "*metaphorai*" (*PEL*, 129). Narrative and its metaphorical borders therefore function as a continual oscillation between territorialization and deterritorialization, between "progressive appropriations" and "successive displacements," thereby creating "an increasingly complex network of differentiations, a combinative system of spaces" (*PEL*, 126).

It is not surprising, therefore, that twentieth-century urban metafiction is so often described as "labyrinthine." The labyrinths represented in and enacted by these fictions rarely, however, have an identifiable creator, a center, a minotaur, a guiding thread, or a solution. Although, as Faris writes, these "labyrinthine" urban fictions are "verbal equivalents" of "cognitive maps and models:"

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> …they achieve their empathetic connection between mind and thought by not always yielding their own secrets or those of their places. In foregrounding the problematic nature of writing and reading, and in linking them symbolically and iconically to the designs of cities, they function as multivalent signs of the unity of city, text, and thought.[90]

Alessandro Baricco's note to readers of his 1999 novel *City* underscores this convergence of city, text, and thought. The choice of such a general title for his novel, Baricco states, related directly to the image held within his mind of "a city. No particular city. An impression of a city, rather." The novel itself, he adds, resulted from his desire "to write a book that moved like someone who gets lost in a city," whose stories become "neighbourhoods," and whose characters are "streets."[91] It is this very sensibility that, I will argue, permeates the three urban fictions in particular. The first, Michel Butor's *Passing Time* (1956),[92] makes manifest, both in its structure and narrative, the tension between the classical and "postmodern" labyrinth, between the ideal of the *polis* and the disorder of the city, between reason and desire, and between the sedentary and nomadic. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972),[93] tells, paradoxically, the stories of an infinity of invisible and fabulous cities, yet at the same time the story of a single existing city. Finally, Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987)[94] both provides an alternative mapping of Toronto and its history, while exploring the metaphoric and metamorphic power of the city.

## Michel Butor's *Passing Time*

Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*, or *Passing Time*, is the account by a young Frenchman, Jacques Revel, of his 12-month stay in the city of Bleston, a "transformation of the city of Manchester" where Butor himself worked for two years as a teacher of French.[95] The novel's first entry is dated May 1, though it deals retrospectively with Revel's arrival in Bleston by train late at night on October 1 of the previous year. Revel becomes disoriented in his new surrounds: losing his way in his fruitless search for accommodation, and revolted by the acrid-tasting air of the industrial city, he returns to what he believes to be the train station he began from only to discover that he had "gone astray" and arrived at "another station, Bleston New Station, just as empty as the first" (*PT*, 10). After spending the night in the station's waiting room, Revel leaves the building, finding himself in Alexandra Place—a square ringed by the city's three train stations. For Revel, the entrances to the five streets leading from Alexandra Place, capped by bridges, appear like "arches [. . .] like so many gates in an enclosure," so that he imagines the square itself to be the "heart" of the labyrinth of Bleston (*PT*, 14). The only thread Revel has to lead him out of the center of the labyrinth is the address of Matthews & Sons, the importing-exporting company for whom he is to work for a year. Yet even this means of escape

proves fraught as he has great difficulty communicating with the taxi driver he enlists to guide him through Bleston's maze of streets.

Reliant upon buses and walking for transport, Revel spends his first 10 days attempting to find his way about the city, and in the process forms "a vague and quite erroneous picture of the town, [. . .] having never, as yet, seen any map of the town and being still unable to estimate its real dimensions" (*PT*, 22). Even Bleston's omnipresent mist reduces to a mere glimpse any comprehensive, overhead view of the city Revel may have received from the New Cathedral bell tower (*PT*, 53). It is not until October 11 that Revel buys a map of the city from Ann Bailey with whom he will fall in love and whom he will forsake for her sister, Rose. In the days leading up to his purchase of the map, Revel encounters and befriends another alien to the city and wanderer in Bleston's labyrinth, the "negro" Horace Buck, whose hatred for Bleston is matched only by Revel's own. The city is, for Revel, a "disease," a "cancerous growth," a "possessing demon," and a "hydra," a "sorceress," an "octopus with spreading tentacles," and a "squid disgorging black ink" (*PT*, 34, 42, 250, 237). Disordered and illegible, it appears to Revel as an autonomous force that thwarts his every endeavor to construct a comprehensive cognitive map, and he writes that:

> From the very first I had felt this town to be unfriendly, unpleasant, a treacherous quicksand; but it was during these weeks of routine, as I gradually felt its lymph seeping into my blood, its grip tightening, my present existence growing rudderless, amnesia creeping over me, that I began to harbour that passionate hatred towards it which, I am convinced, was in part a sign of my contamination by it, a kind of personal animosity, since although I am well aware that Bleston is not unique of its kind, that Manchester or Leeds, Newcastle or Sheffield, or Liverpool, which also, I am told, possesses a modern cathedral that is not uninteresting) or else, no doubt, some modern American town such as Pittsburgh or Detroit, would have had a similar effect on me, it seems to me that Bleston exaggerates certain characteristics of such urban centres, that no other is as cunning or as powerful in its witchcraft. (*PT*, 36)

Paradoxically, Bleston also resists classification as an urban center, for as Revel discovers when he attempts to leave the city for a day in the countryside he assumes must surround it, "Bleston is not a city bounded by walls or avenues, standing out clearly against a background of fields, but like a lamp in the mist it forms the centre of a halo whose hazy fringes intermingle with those of other towns" (*PT*, 34). Bleston has no discernible inside or outside and, moreover, its center proves impossible to locate, for Revel soon discovers that Alexandra Place—that square whose appearance seemed to Revel so like the center of Daedalus's labyrinth—in fact inhabits the periphery of the city. Confusing the opposition between center

and periphery, Alexandra Place is more like the entrance to the labyrinth in that it is the point from which Bleston's inhabitants enter and leave the city. In his search for Bleston's center, Revel then turns his sights to locating the city's cathedral, yet once again the city refuses to be deciphered and mapped in such a simple manner. Revel discovers that the city has not one, but two cathedrals—the Old Cathedral, a Catholic, gothic structure built upon the ruins of a Roman temple, and the New Cathedral, a nineteenth-century neo-Gothic, Anglican one. Moreover, neither cathedral acts as a unifying force in the city; instead, for Revel, they "appear as the two poles of an immense magnet which disturbs the trajectory of all human atoms in its neighbourhood, according to the stuff they are made of and the energy with which they are charged" (*PT*, 175). If there is any one municipal building that suggests itself as Bleston's center it is the paradoxically marginal institution of the prison, which seems to Revel like "a sort of hole within the living tissue" of the city. It is a space in which are gathered the "bodies" that Bleston has been unable to "assimilate" or "cast out" for the simple reason that the city's limits are so poorly defined, lying like a "threat," a "reproach" and a "safeguard" in the "very heart" of the city (*PT*, 254).

Revel's visit to the Bleston Museum on November 3, the day before he first enters the Old Cathedral, both reinforces and problematizes his and the reader's association of Bleston with Daedalus's labyrinth. Without a guide,[96] Revel does not initially realize that the 18 "Harvey Tapestries" he encounters in the Museum portray the legend of Theseus, though he does immediately recognize the tale told by the eleventh panel, which depicts:

> …a man with a bull's head being slain by a prince in armour, in a sort of cavern surrounded by complicated walls, to the left of which, up above, on the threshold of a door opening on to the seashore, a girl in a blue dress embroidered with silver, tall, stately and watchful, is pulling with her right hand a thread that unwinds from a spindle held between the thumb and middle finger of her left, a thread that meanders through the mazy passage of the fortress, a thread as thick as an artery engorged with blood, fastened to the dagger which the prince is thrusting into the monster, between its bull neck and its human breast; the same girl appears again on the right, in the distance, at the prow of a vessel speeding with its black sail bellying in the wind, together with the same prince and another girl very like herself but smaller, clad in purple draperies. (*PT*, 68–69)

Thus the Classical associations begin to build up, and both Revel and the reader begin to identify Bleston as the Cretan labyrinth, Revel as Theseus, Ann, from whom Revel purchases his map of the city, as Ariadne, and her sister Rose as Phaedra. These associations, however, are complicated by Revel's visit to the Old Cathedral the following day where he views its

only remaining stained-glass window, the famous "Murderer's Window" that portrays the murder of Abel by Cain. Revel immediately notes how strangely similar and yet dissimilar are Bleston's representations of Theseus and Cain, and it is this friction between the two figures and their associated urban philosophies that form the foundation of *Passing Time*.

Upon committing fratricide, Cain, the firstborn son of Adam, is condemned by God to give up his agrarian life and become "a fugitive and a vagabond" in the land of Nod—the land of nomads, wanderers, and exiles.[97] Cain's desert nomadism does not last long, however, for he soon builds the first city, which he names after his son Enoch.[98] In the "Murderer's Window," Cain's city takes the form of Bleston in whose foreground are figured Cain's descendants, those icons of Bleston's art and industry: Yabal, father of nomads and weavers; Yubal, father of musicians; and Tubalcain, father of metalworkers (*PT*, 73). Set against Cain's city of contingency built by nomads is the *polis*, built upon reason and order, and exemplified by Theseus's Athens. Upon his return from Crete, Theseus legendarily fused the disparate territories of Attica into the single city-state of Athens. Theseus's act of unification provides the most famous instance of *synoecismus*: a "single act, performed by a single person" and "the most important means by which a tribal State could turn into a *polis*."[99] In terms of urban design, the single most important feature of a *polis* was its construction around a central axis; a significant site, typically a square, a temple or a monument. Indeed, Revel's later description of the second last panel of the Harvey tapestries depicts Theseus's crowning in "the great public square in Athens amidst the temples and palaces and monuments" (*PT*, 155).

It becomes clear that Revel's search for Bleston's center is ultimately futile, based as it is upon his desire to see Bleston as Theseus's centralized and sedentary *polis* rather than as Cain's entropic, rhizomatic and nomadic city, a fact he concedes by August when he imagines the voice of Bleston speaking to him:

> I am Bleston, Jacques Revel; I endure, I am tenacious; and if some of my houses fall down, don't let that persuade you that I myself am crumbling into ruins, that I'm ready to make way for that other city of your feeble dreams, those dreams that through my power have grown so thin, so obscure, so formless and impotent—maybe you fancied last April that the framework hidden within these walls foreshadowed that dream-city? But my cells reproduce themselves, my wounds heal; I do not change, I do not die, I endure, my permanence swallows up all attempted innovation; this new face of mine is not really new, you can see that, it is not the first sign of my contamination by that imaginary city which my enemies contrast with me, although they can never describe it; no, no, this is the present face of an old, though not an ancient, city, a city that some call doomed [. . .]. (*PT*, 225)

Even the name of Bleston registers the tension between the cities of Cain and Theseus, between chaos and order, for, as the Old Cathedral's priest informs Revel, contrary to the belief that prevailed for centuries, the town was not named after the city's famous bells. Archaeological excavations of the Roman temple beneath the Old Cathedral confirmed Bleston was not "Bells Town," symbolic of religious order and harmony, but a mutation of "Bellista," itself derived from the Latin "'Belli Civitas'—city of war" (*PT*, 79). The city's name also registers the slippage of language and of translation, the tension between Revel's native French and the English language he struggles with. "Bleston" conjures up paradoxical images of the city: as "blessed" in English,[100] and as *blessé*, or wounded, in French. Indeed, Bleston appears to Revel as a savage and war-like city, and even to one of its sons, James Jenkins, Revel's only friend at Matthews & Sons, the city's "deserted streets," though "clearly mapped out in [his] mind," are a space in which the pedestrian can lose more than just his or her way (*PT*, 89–90). They appear to Jenkins as the backdrop for a murder: "everything is ready; the victim is behind one of the doors, grasping its handle, he's about to go out and turn the corner where his enemy lies in wait with his finger on the trigger; only everything is held in suspense" (*PT*, 90).

Bleston, as it presents itself to Revel and Jenkins, is the city of entropy, a city falling inevitably towards utter chaos and disintegration. Entropy, as a scientific concept, was born in 1865 when the German scientist Rudolf Clausius coined the term to describe the operation of the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the contents (*en-*) of a given system will inevitably transform (*-tropē*) over time. The science of thermodynamics in turn originated from Nicolas Carnot's early nineteenth-century studies of steam engines. These studies painted a very different picture to Newton's conception of physical systems as closed, symmetrical, predictable, and reversible, for with the advent of steam power the outcome of a system could no longer be predicted accurately from its initial conditions. Moreover, as the second law of thermodynamics states, the energy within that system is distributed chaotically, and is subject to degradation in a stochastic process that is temporally irreversible. The human body, along with every biological system is thus subject to the degenerative properties of time's arrow.[101] But while this arrow might be irreversible it is certainly not undeviating, for a comparison of two halves of a given system exhibit an asymmetric temporality. Unsurprisingly, the chaotic foreboding of entropy appealed to *fin-de-siècle* Victorian doomsayers for whom entropy spelled the "heat-death of the universe," the unstoppable descent into the inferno and the infernal city.[102]

Butor's *Passing Time* also throws into relief Gerard L. Bruns's statement, mentioned earlier in this chapter, that the modern city foregrounds the opposition between the labyrinth and *polis*, which, Bruns adds:

> …suggests in turn that we should put aside Plato or Plutarch and study instead the Cain and Abel story, which is an allegory of desire against reason that figures the city explicitly in terms of nomads, transgressors, and the need to be nameless and invisible. [. . .] In the bowels of the city over which Theseus (and his Law) is thought to preside there is a figure of the wanderer. Imagine a city constructed not just by reason but by skepticism as well. Beneath the polis there is the labyrinth where reason turns into cunning.[103]

One might well also make the distinction between the classical labyrinth of Theseus and the labyrinth in which Revel discovers himself. Daedalus's Cretan labyrinth was constructed, like the *polis*, around a center, though what was located at that point differed greatly. In contrast to the architectural symbol of order that stood at the core of the *polis* was the abomination of nature that lay in waiting at the heart of the labyrinth. Butor's *avant-la-lettre* postmodern labyrinth of Bleston, however, has no center and no identifiable minotaur. Try as he might, Revel cannot reconcile the images of the Cretan labyrinth he sees woven in the Museum's tapestries and later, in June, displayed upon the screen at Bleston's News Theatre, with his experience of Bleston. The Cretan labyrinth Revel visits through the documentary entitled "A Tour in Crete" seems so unlike the one in which he feels trapped. The "almost subterranean existence" to which Revel feels condemned in the "murky darkness" of polluted Bleston and the "airless and hazy" atmosphere of the cinema are in stark contrast to the images of "dazzling white-washed villages between the shoulders of great rocks streaked with rows of olive trees, and beaches perpetually glistening under the salt kiss of the blue water" that are projected upon the screen (*PT*, 98–99). "Day must be bright there," Revel repeats again and again, the Greek isle fundamentally unlike Bleston whose days are dull and foggy and whose nights are lit by the glow of the arson-lit fires that continually burn throughout his stay.

Without a center to locate and a minotaur to slay, Revel cannot "solve" the labyrinth, and is instead condemned like Cain to endless wandering. Even the map Revel purchases from his Ariadne in October cannot extricate him from Bleston's labyrinth. Revel describes the scopic control he feels upon first viewing the map of Bleston: "Then I saw the town; I who had stumbled mole-like through its muddy passages, I surveyed its whole extent at a glance, like some hovering bird about to pounce" (*PT*, 41). While he acknowledges that the map cannot capture the physical experience of the industrial city with its "roof-slates," "smoking chimneys," and sluggish black river, Revel feels that at that moment he "had learnt more about the structure of Bleston than an airman by flying over it, if only because of that dotted line denoting its administrative boundary, [. . .] that egg-shaped outline with its pointed end towards the north" (*PT*, 42). However,

the translation of his new-found knowledge of the city into practice proves difficult, for, setting out to find new lodgings, Revel immediately becomes lost, "in spite of the map [he] had bought, which was hard to read because of the particularly inadequate lighting in that part of the town and because of the rain, which was falling heavily that night" (*PT*, 44). Revel's authoritative physical map of Bleston seems to be no less fragmented than his early unsanctioned "erroneous" mental map, and over time he becomes increasingly frustrated with the chasm that exists between his experience of the city and its representation in the map, which he begins to view as Bleston's "ironic response to [his] efforts to see it whole and to take its census" (*PT*, 103). Rather than providing an authoritative image of the city, Revel becomes aware that his physical map has superimposed upon it "other lines [. . .] other points of interest, other references, other networks, other systems of distribution—in short, other maps which, though vague and fragmentary at first, are growing fuller and more precise," such as the nomadic trajectory described by the "miniature mobile town" of the traveling fair (*PT*, 103). At the end of April, having once more become lost, Revel's frustration becomes too great and he burns his map only to replace it by an exact copy the day after. Yet this new map, which he hoped "would be indistinguishable from the other," becomes instead the guilt-laden symbol of Revel's "profoundly irrational act" (*PT*, 196).

Unable to rely upon a physical map to lead him out of Bleston's labyrinth Revel decides to write his way out. Two days after purchasing the replacement map, Revel buys a ream of paper from Ann Bailey and on the following day, May 1, begins to write his account of the time he has passed in Bleston:

> The rope of words that uncoils down through the sheaf of papers and connects me directly with that moment on the first of May when I began to plait it, that rope of words is like Ariadne's thread, because I am in a labyrinth, because I am writing in order to find my way about in it, all these lines being the marks with which I blaze the trail: the labyrinth of my days in Bleston, incomparably more bewildering than that of the Cretan palace, since it grows and alters even while I explore it. (*PT*, 182–83)

While Revel diligently attempts to map out his fragmentary and disordered experiences of the city, a second text begins to overshadow his diary. Jenkins's statement that Bleston appears to him as the scene of an imminent murder is given ironic force, for murder is indeed at the very heart of *Passing Time*, not only in Cain's act of fratricide and Theseus's unwitting patricide,[104] but also in the detective novel entitled *The Bleston Murder* that Revel discovers in a bookshop on October 27, nearly a month after his arrival in Bleston. This novel, authored by a pseudonymous J. C. Hamilton and narrated by the detective Barnaby Morton, tells the story of

the murder of Johnny Winn by his brother Bernard in the transept of the New Cathedral, where the shadows cast by the rood screens form the sign of a cross, and Morton's subsequent murder of the murderer in the Old Cathedral, beneath Cain's window. Revel, however, soon begins to doubt the validity of the novel's claim to fictionality, for, when he lends the novel to the Bailey girls, they tell him of the similarity it bears to the situation of an acquaintance of theirs—Richard Tenn, a man whose brother died in a car accident a few years before. Revel discovers in May that George Burton, a man he has befriended in the Chinese restaurant they both frequent, is actually the mysterious author of *The Bleston Murder*, a secret Revel soon confesses to both the Bailey girls and James Jenkins. When, in July, Burton is left injured by a hit-and-run "accident," Revel begins to fear that his indiscretion has led to retaliation by either Richard Tenn or his friend Jenkins (whose beloved New Cathedral was treated with contempt by Burton in his novel).

Thus Revel's interlinked attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding *The Bleston Murder* and to escape the labyrinth of the city's streets cast him as a cartographer-detective who, by weaving his story from the strands of his experience, strives to discover the center, the minotaur, "whodunit." However, while Burton's detective discovers and slays the monster at the center of the labyrinth, Butor's ironically named narrator Revel[105] fails to reveal anything. The two detective narratives are structurally similar, for Burton describes to Revel the way in which his novel "superimposes two temporal sequences, the days of the enquiry which start at the crime and the days of the drama which lead up to it, and that this is quite natural since in real life one's mental analysis of past events takes place while other events are accumulating" (*PT*, 167). Similarly, Revel's narrative displays a complex double time, caused by the seven-month gap between his arrival in Bleston on October 1 and his first journal entry on May 1. On another occasion, Burton states that his detective's narrative "is not merely the projection on a flat surface of a series of events, it rebuilds these as it were spatially, since they appear differently according to the position occupied by the detective or by the narrator" (*PT*, 158). In this respect, *The Bleston Murder*, a novel within a novel, acts both as a textual *mise en abyme* and a metafictive signpost as to how to read Revel's narrative, which becomes temporally and spatially more complex and labyrinthine as it continues.

Conversely, the closed system of *The Bleston Murder* is also held up as a contrast to *Passing Time*, for Butor's novel is a "postmodern anti-detective story" in which "the action of detecting continues, but the possibility of final solution is gone."[106] Burton's novel, like the tapestries depicting Theseus, and Revel's physical map of Bleston, symbolizes reason and order, while Revel's narrative, itself metaphorized as a map and a tapestry, resists spatial, temporal, and textual determination. Towards the end of his stay, Revel begins to realize that he cannot hope to fill in all the remaining gaps in his narrative, to tie up all the loose ends, before his departure at the

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end of September exactly a year after his arrival. In August he writes that while he "had hoped to reduce the seven months' gap," he had in effect "barely been able to prevent [it] from widening" (*PT*, 212). He begins to feel caught in the tapestry-labyrinth he has woven, he feels "all around [him] the threads of the warp flooding into the weft" and fears that he will become "imprisoned within the loom, unable to find the lever to move in order to change the pattern" (*PT*, 212). Indeed, as Butor writes of the narrator of his own novel, Revel begins to experience,

> …difficulty in finding his way not only among his memories, not only in the complicated city in which he is searching, but also in the text that he has written and which is a part of the reality that surrounds him. He has difficulty remembering not only what he did seven months earlier, or a few days earlier, or at a distance growing larger and larger between the two, but also what he has written. He is thus led to reread his text. [. . .] He then annotates and corrects a certain number of things.[107]

By September, Revel has resigned himself to trying to finish what he now regards not as a thread that will, by way of logic and order, lead him out of Bleston's labyrinth, but as an "exploratory description, the basis for a future interpretation" and one which he "like some son of Cain's [*sic*]" composes, forges, and weaves (*PT*, 256). Revel must resign himself to incompleteness, to disarray, and to textual openness. The labyrinths he and the reader have entered have been four-fold and interconnected: spatial, temporal, psychological, and textual. Not one of them has a center, and not one of the maps Revel uses or creates can provide the key or solution to them. Revel leaves Bleston on September 30 without having solved the mystery of Bleston or having discovered the culprit responsible for the possible attack on Burton. Moreover, Revel even fails to "get the girl," for the attention he pays to his writing after May 1 results in his loss of both Bailey girls to rival suitors, with Rose becoming engaged to Revel's fellow Frenchman Lucien Blaise and Ann to James Jenkins. Butor's narrator is a failure; he is a failure as a romantic hero and as an omniscient cartographer-detective.

However, as Laura Kubinyi argues, Revel does discover a form of truth at the end of his narrative, though this truth "is not a 'thing found' but a 'way of exploring' [. . .] an act, a function or process that is, not a center or an origin."[108] This is achieved, she maintains, through the "dialogue between a traditional narrative form and a non-centered postmodern form"—a dialogue in which the latter form is always "given validity as a method of researching reality."[109] Revel's failure is necessary and it is positive, for it foregrounds the irreducible *petits récits* of localized complexity and disorientation over the metanarratives of order and reason. The map Revel constructs from his narrative is a fragmentary, postmodern one of experience conducted at ground level. While he enters and leaves Bleston as a

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migrant,[110] Revel's primary experience of the city has been as a nomad. The city he experiences, constructs, and maps through his narrative is haptic and rhizomatic, constantly transforming, being destroyed by fires and reconstructed in the new buildings that arise seemingly of their own volition.

The necessary incompleteness of the map Revel constructs, and the narrative possibilities that those very lacunae engender, is emphasized in the novel's final paragraph. Sitting on the train as it pulls out of Bleston Hamilton station, Revel remembers a day he had forgotten, a day that occurs only once every four years: "I haven't even time to set down something that happened on the evening of February 29th, something that seemed very important and that I shall forget as I move farther away from you, Bleston" (*PT*, 288). What grows increasingly more mysterious and seemingly central to the reader who desires to discover the key to Revel's maze, grows increasingly less important to him as his train takes him further from Bleston. Revel appears to have accepted that while he has failed to impose order upon a chaotic world, and that he has only managed to supplant one decentered labyrinth or map with another, he has, through his narrative, "like a caterpillar [spun] a cocoon for his metamorphosis."[111]

## Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*

Where Butor's novel delineates and explores the tension between two visions of the city—entropic and ordered—Italo Calvino's 1972 novel *Invisible Cities* can be seen to carve out a space for the urban between those polarities. Calvino's novel opens in the court of Kublai Khan, with the great emperor expressing skepticism about the veracity of the tales told to him by Marco Polo.[112] Yet, the Khan is fascinated by the Venetian traveler, for, faced with the inevitable destruction of his empire—the inevitability of entropy—the emperor can make out in Polo's accounts the faintest hint of order, is able "to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termites' gnawing" (*IC*, 5–6). Polo tells the emperor of 55 cities, each of which falls into one of 11 categories: cities and memory, cities and desire, cities and signs, thin cities, trading cities, cities and eyes, cities and names, cities and the dead, cities and the sky, continuous cities, and hidden cities.

Polo tells the Khan of the city of Zaira, a city that consists not of its architecture, "but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past" (*IC*, 10). Zaira's description must contain the city's entire past, a past which, in turn, is not told but is inscribed in its architecture. The city is a massive unfolding text, its history "written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls" (*IC*, 11). Tamara is another textualized city whose streets are like "written pages" to be scanned. Its apparent legibility, however, is only superficial for:

> ...while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts. However the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it. (*IC*, 14)

Despina is an urban space that elides the traditional distinction between the desert and the city. In terms reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari, Polo informs the Khan that "each city receives its form from the desert it opposes; and so the camel driver and the sailor see Despina, a border city between two deserts" (*IC*, 18). Esmeralda, on the other hand, belies the Euclidean primacy of the straight line, for in this city "the shortest distance between two points [. . .] is not a straight line but a zigzag that ramifies in tortuous optional routes" (*IC*, 88). Travelers in Esmeralda are presented not with the choice of two paths, but with a multiplicity of paths that exist in three-dimensional space, for the city is constructed on many levels both on and above ground. The city thus presents its citizens with the daily "pleasure of a new itinerary to reach the same places" (*IC*, 88). Esmeralda's inhabitants exist perpetually on the *dérive*, playing a combinatorial game that results in the abolition of repetitive journeying. Thus, Polo concludes, Esmeralda's map "should include, marked in different colored inks, all these routes, solid and liquid, evident and hidden" (*IC*, 89).

For the Khan, Polo's descriptions are labyrinthine cognitive maps: "you could wander through them in thought, become lost, stop and enjoy the cool air, or run off" (*IC*, 38). However, he soon begins to realize that Polo's cities are not remarkable for their interior uniqueness, but for their relationships to one other. Just like Esmeralda's inhabitants who create new journeys by "combining segments of the various routes" open to them (*IC*, 88), Kublai Khan begins to notice "that Marco Polo's cities resembled one another, as if the passage from one to another involved not a journey but a change of elements" (*IC*, 43). The emperor realizes also that in speaking of so many cities, the Venetian has neglected to mention the one city most familiar to him. When he questions the traveler about his silence over Venice, Polo replies:

> What else do you believe I have been talking to you about? [. . .] Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice. [. . .] To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice. (*IC*, 86)

While Polo's Venice is an archetypal city that embodies only "exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions" (*IC*, 69), the Khan sets out to create a typology or semiology of urban elements that would form a model city—the "unique and final city" (*IC*, 60) that would contain "everything corresponding to the norm" (*IC*, 69). In the *Travels* Marco Polo describes

the Khan's imperial city of Taidu as laid out as a perfectly rectilinear grid (see fig. 3.1). It is a city, he adds, that is "arranged in squares just like a chess-board, and disposed in a manner so perfect and masterly that it is impossible to give a description that should do it justice."[113] Just as the Khan finds his antithesis in Polo, Taidu finds its formal other in Venice, a city that for Baudrillard "is built like a trap, a maze, a labyrinth that inevitably, however fortuitously, brings people back to the same points, over the same bridges, onto the same plazas, along the same quays."[114]

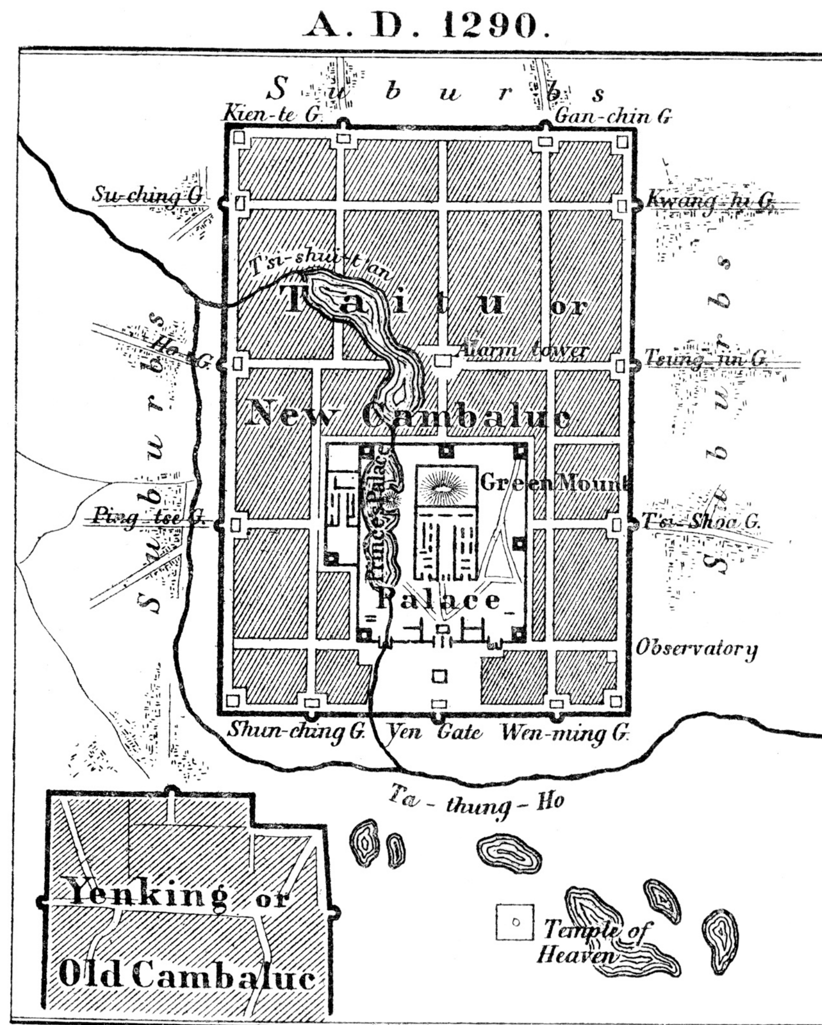


*Figure 3.1* Map of Taidu in 1290 AD from Henry Yule, ed., *The Book of Ser Marco Polo The Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1929), 376. All attempts have been made to locate the copyright holder of this image.

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Polo's comparison of the Khan's city to a chess-board is taken up by Calvino in *Invisible Cities*, for he describes the ruler as "a keen chess player." Moreover, the emperor sees in the grid of black and white squares the key to solving the problem of the ideal city, for he imagines: "If each city is like a game of chess, the day when I have learned the rules, I shall finally possess my empire, even if I shall never succeed in knowing all the cities it contains" (*IC*, 121). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe chess as an intrinsically imperial game, a "game of State, or of the court" (*ATP*, 352). It constitutes a "semiology" within which the "coded" chess pieces become "subject[s] of the statement," whose combined "relative powers" create a "subject of enunciation, that is, the chess player or the game's form of interiority" (*ATP*, 352). In its desire to occupy the greatest territory with the fewest pieces, chess moreover presumes a closed system that "codes and decodes space" (*ATP*, 353). Kublai Khan's attempt to identify the ideal and invisible order underlying the city by reducing it to a game of chess is, therefore, presented as an imperial act that nullifies difference and alternative mappings. And yet, the Khan's rational method nonetheless fails, for while "at times he thought he was on the verge of discovering a coherent, harmonious system underlying the infinite deformities and discords," he discovers that in fact "no model could stand up to the comparison with the game of chess" (*IC*, 122).

Along with his chess-board, the Khan is renowned for his great atlas "whose drawings depict the terrestrial globe all at once and continent by continent, the borders of the most distant realms, the ships' routes, the coastlines, the maps of the most illustrious metropolises and of the most opulent ports" (*IC*, 136). Yet along with these tangible places and visible cities, the atlas depicts as-yet-invisible cities, or potential cities, such as Cuzco, Mexico, Novgorod, and Lhassa. The existence and location of these cities cannot be verified either by Polo or the imperial geographers, but nevertheless "they cannot be missing among the forms of possible cities" (*IC*, 137). The atlas contains maps of all cities: past, present, and future; forgotten, lived in, and unimagined; utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia. The final leaves of the atlas are dedicated to "reveal[ing] the form of cities that do not yet have a form or a name" (*IC*, 138), the respectively semi-circular, walled, and gridded cities of Amsterdam, York, and New York. But the Khan's atlas must, of necessity, be an open-ended system, for:

> The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins. In the last pages of the atlas there is an outpouring of networks without beginning or end, cities in the shape of Los Angeles, in the shape of Kyōto-Ōsaka, without shape. (*IC*, 139)

As Polo informs the Khan, unlike the closed and coded system of the chessboard, the atlas "preserves the [cities'] differences intact" (*IC*, 137), and only an attention to, and a mapping out of, these differences can allow for a proper understanding of the order within the urban. Polo offers to piece together a model, indeed a "perfect," city for the Khan. Yet, unlike the utopian-rational city that the emperor dreams of, Polo's city is "made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them"; it is a city "discontinuous in space and time" (*IC*, 164). Perhaps, Polo informs the Khan, that perfect city is at that very moment "rising, scattered, within the confines of [his] empire," but warns him that its fragments may never be completely unified, and the search for it can never cease (*IC*, 164). Faced with the failure of order, the Khan scans those maps in his atlas that ominously depict the fallen cities of Enoch, Babylon, Yahooland, Butua, and Brave New World, resolving that his search for the ideal city is "useless, if the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us" (*IC*, 164–65).

Once again, the fear of the inevitable entropy of cities and social order strikes at the heart of the rationalist view of space—if perfect order is unachievable, all that remains is perfect chaos. This dialectic, however, is subverted by Polo who advocates a "risky" approach to the inferno: "seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space" (*IC*, 165). Polo makes space for a faint order amid the chaos, the turbulent "pockets" of negative entropy that Serres discerns within what would otherwise be an entropic absolute.[115] Thus Calvino's novel departs from the unequivocal entropy of the earlier twentieth century, as foregrounded in Butor's *Passing Time*, and enters the realm of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers's chaos theory. As the title of their influential work *Order out of Chaos* implies, for Prigogine and Stengers there is no "pure" state either of order or disorder. Entropy is inescapable, but while its "turbulent motion appears as irregular or chaotic on the macroscopic scale, it is, on the contrary, highly organized on the microscopic scale."[116] Understood as such, the shift from the "laminar flow" of Newtonian physics to the "turbulence" of non-equilibrium thermodynamics is a "process of self-organization" and marks a shift from "being to becoming."[117]

The catalyst for this shift is given by Serres, Prigogine, and Stengers as the "clinamen," a term derived from the Epicurean theory of the creation of matter. Epicurus's (341–270 BC) conception of the clinamen is given by the first-century BC poet Lucretius in his *De Rerum Natura* as the point at which atoms, falling through the void in an otherwise regular laminar flow, swerve (*declinare*; *clinamen*), collide, and thereby create matter.[118] Moreover, for the Epicurean philosophers, the swerve of the clinamen came to denote freedom of choice, for Epicurus could not understand how free will,

let alone matter, could have eventuated from the undeviating determinism of Democritus's earlier theory of the consistent and ordered flow of atoms. Prigogine and Stengers argue that while the "spontaneous, unpredictable deviation" of the clinamen suffered an enormous amount of criticism in the history of physics, in the context of chaos theory, it has once more achieved currency; today, they enthuse, "we are not so far from the clinamen of Lucretius!"[119]

Likewise, for Deleuze the clinamen "has always been present," and constitutes nothing other than "a differential of matter and, by the same token, a differential of thought."[120] Neither contingent nor deterministic, the clinamen moreover displays only the "irreducible plurality of causes or of causal series, and the impossibility of bringing causes together into a whole."[121] While it cannot weave its fragments into a totality, the clinamen can, nonetheless, bring about a form of "reunification" through the combinatorial conjunction of its elements,[122] in much the same way that Marco Polo connects and re-connects fragments of his invisible cities. While, as Serres argues, entropy may claim the *polis* of Athens, thereby erasing it from history, the clinamen brings about a new turbulence, a new form of city, "flickering somewhere in the infinite void," that is "formed in the blink of an eye, or solidly welded."[123] In the turbulence of the clinamen are joined "movement and rest [. . .] constancy and variation, life and death," and it is this conjunction of opposites that, for Serres, defines a "living thing": a "thing in equilibrium and in disequilibrium, a flow, a vortex, heat."[124] The clinamen is, ultimately, "transport in general," the "deviation" that forms the "primary space in which every metaphor finds its place and time."[125] Thus the metaphoric writing produced by the clinamen exists "outside of the redundancy of repetition," and marks "a deviation from equilibrium, a deviation from the universal."[126]

The clinamen was certainly also not a foreign concept to Calvino who, as an Oulipian, considered it to be a fundamental tool in his writing. In 1960 Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais formed the experimental writing group OuLiPo (an acronym of *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, or Workshop of Potential Literature). Oulipian literature is the literature of mathematical constraints placed upon narrative and plot, and, as I have elsewhere stated, Oulipians such as Calvino and Georges Perec (whose novel *Life A User's Manual*[127] demonstrates the most extensive Oulipian application of the clinamen) "placed great importance upon the clinamen, for it allowed a swerve or a bending in the structural, often mathematical, constraints placed upon the work."[128] For Oulipians, "the only rule that governed the use of the clinamen [. . .] was that it could be used only if it wasn't required—in other words, the rules could be bent only if the constraints could actually be fulfilled. Thus the clinamen becomes [. . .] analogous with the creativity that emerges from the bending of constraints."[129] Calvino goes even further in an essay first published in the 1981 Oulipian

anthology *Atlas de littérature potentielle* to say that the clinamen is the only device that "can make of the text a true work of art."[130]

In his extended analysis of Calvino's interest in, and application of, the clinamen, Paul Harris argues that within *Invisible Cities* the clinamen registers the points at which the aleatorics of desire enters the rationality of the underlying code, the points at which the dialogues between Polo and the Khan interrupt the novel's coded series of chapters. Harris, furthermore, posits that the clinamen "may serve as a trope" for the "generative" tension between the antitheses of code and desire, thus mapping a curve upon a curve, and becoming a second-order deviation. The tropic clinamen thus brings to the "textual domain [. . .] a quality of potentiality, a flexible multipli-city where the work is both more and less than its ostensible object of representation."[131]

Polo's description of the city of Eudoxia and its map perhaps best reflects the instability of representative scale in *Invisible Cities*. Polo informs the Khan that the inhabitants of the labyrinthine city of Eudoxia regularly become disoriented or lost among its "winding alleys, steps, dead ends, [and] hovels" (*IC*, 96). Within Eudoxia, however, is preserved a carpet within which can be seen "the city's true form." Yet at first glance the carpet-map seems nothing at all like the city, for, unlike the chaotic and entropic streets below, its design is "laid out in symmetrical motives whose patterns are repeated along straight and circular lines, interwoven with brilliantly colored spires, in a repetition that can be followed throughout the whole woof" (*IC*, 96). A closer examination, however, results in the viewer's conviction that the carpet does indeed provide a map of Eudoxia, and portrays the underlying order of the city, which at ground level "escapes [the] eye distracted by the bustle, the throngs, the shoving." The carpet provides the point from which the city's "true proportions" can be judged, a distance that is lacking in the "incomplete perspective" generated by the physical experience of the city (*IC*, 96). Polo informs the Khan that when the city's inhabitants questioned an oracle about the strange relationship between the paradoxically similar yet dissimilar carpet-map and city, they were informed that "one of the two objects [. . .] has the form the gods gave the starry sky and the orbits in which the worlds revolve; the other is an approximate reflection, like every human creation" (*IC*, 97). The accepted interpretation of the oracle's response was that the carpet was a perfect form of divine origin, the city merely its tarnished reflection. However, Polo adds, "you could, similarly, come to the opposite conclusion: that the true map of the universe is the city of Eudoxia, just as it is, a stain that spreads out shapelessly, with crooked streets, houses that crumble one upon the other amid clouds of dust, fires, screams in the darkness" (*IC*, 97). It is in this generative interplay between map and territory, chaos and order, real and imaginary, being and becoming that Calvino's novel becomes, like the cities it portrays, a dynamic and creative system within whose crumbling labyrinth can be discerned once more that faint and subtle "tracery of a pattern" (*IC*, 6).

## Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

Like *The English Patient*, Ondaatje's earlier novel *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) is preoccupied with nomadism, mapping, historiography, and metafictionality. Yet the two novels share more than these thematic correspondences; indeed they seem to exist in a constant dialogue—the urban space of Toronto communicating with the Libyan desert. This is nowhere more evident than the interweaving of characters between the two novels, for the protagonist of *In the Skin of a Lion* is Patrick Lewis, adopted father of the English patient's nomadic nurse, Hana, and close friend of the thief-turned-spy Caravaggio. The events that unfold in the novel take the reader back to Hana's childhood and earlier—to the rapidly transforming Toronto of the 1920s and 30s. During these decades, Patrick's wanderings through the city map out an alternative, migrant history of Toronto that does not appear on the familiar map of Canada, and that still exists just beyond the horizon of its accepted history.

From the novel's outset, Patrick is identified with cartography. One of the novel's earliest images is of Patrick as a boy, living with his father on a farm in the countryside of Ontario. The young Patrick yearns for the summer nights when, having waited until his father is asleep and the house is dark save one light, he can become absorbed in his school atlas. Like Conrad's Marlow, the young Patrick has an intense fascination for maps, and on these summer nights of "inquiry" he pores over "the white sweep of currents, testing the names to himself, mouthing out the exotic. *Caspian. Nepal. Durango.*" The atlas, moreover, has its own seductive topography that Patrick explores as he runs his hands over its "pebbled cover," feeling its texture and the "coloured dyes which create a map of Canada" (*ISL*, 9). For Patrick, his atlas possesses talismanic qualities, and yet, perhaps because he inhabits one of the blank spaces upon his country's map, his imaginative geography is ultimately unlike Marlow's colonialist one. Despite the fact his family had lived and labored there for two decades, Patrick's birthplace "did not appear on a map until 1910," and upon the Canadian map of his atlas, it remains "pale green and nameless." Due to the logging industry, the region will eventually make its way onto the map as "Depot Creek," but, despite its apparent literality, the name speaks less of the territory than of the contingencies of mapping and naming. Though the land had been settled for less than 100 years, within that time the "Deep Eau" of the upper Napanee River had already undergone a transliteration reflective of its industrial progress (*ISL*, 10–11). On the banks of this river the dynamiter Hazen Lewis passes on to his son his knowledge of explosives, and shows him the danger of its "little seeds" that embed themselves and remain hidden in his clothing.

While Patrick learns the ways of dynamite and the latent power of its tiny grains, 200 kilometers away on the Don river a bridge "goes up in a dream," a bridge that will link Toronto's center with its east end (*ISL*,

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26). The Bloor St Viaduct is itself the dream of Rowland Caldwell Harris, Toronto's Commissioner of Public Works from 1912 to 1945. Harris has a mighty plan for the city, but it is one that appears to take the form of an imaginative geography rather than a pragmatic surveyor's map or architectural floorplan. For Harris the "real city" has to be imagined before it can be seen, in the same way that "rumours and tall tales were a kind of charting" (*ISL*, 29). If Patrick's cognitive maps are akin to those of Calvino's Marco Polo, Harris's are like the Khan's, for, as Susan Spearey argues, the Commissioner's imaginative geography of the city is an attempt to circumscribe and control space. It is founded upon, and "takes for granted an exploitable labour market, and various apparatuses for recording its history, stabilizing its structures and ensuring its continuity." Moreover, this continuity or progress is itself predicated upon the "*a priori* reality" of Harris's "mental map of the existing city."[132]

As Harris stands immobile upon the unfinished bridge, beneath him the "daredevil" laborer Nicholas Temelcoff swings in his tethered harness through open space, weaving the viaduct into existence. Temelcoff is a "spinner" who "links everyone," just as he has "charted" the space below the bridge, always aware of "his position in the air as if he is mercury slipping across a map" (*ISL*, 34–35). A Macedonian immigrant, he practises his English while suspended from the bridge, and while he loves the "terrible barriers" of this new language, he finds its acquisition "much more difficult than what he does in space" (*ISL*, 43). His early obsessive study of the language led to his having "translation dreams" in which "trees changed not just their names but their looks and character. Men started answering in falsettos. Dogs spoke out fast to him as they passed him on the street" (*ISL*, 46–47).

For Temelcoff the question of literality does not yet enter into this new language—its strangeness is pure metamorphosis. Yet metamorphosis is not simply the stuff of dreams and language for, while working on the bridge, Temelcoff witnesses yet another, this time corporeal, transformation. Amid a strong April wind in 1917 a young nun is blown from the bridge and falls silently into the void. To Harris and the workers above she is lost, but to Temelcoff beneath the arches of the bridge she is a reflex action, and one that would dislocate his arm (*ISL*, 31). Once more on solid ground the nun makes a sling of her veil, and Temelcoff leads her to a Macedonian restaurant. By morning, the nun's transformation is complete and, with a new identity and her habit altered into a skirt, she steps into Toronto's west end. The anonymous nun has become Alice Gull, soon-to-be political activist, actress, and lover of Patrick. For Michael Greenstein, Alice's metamorphosis occurs through an "exchange of skins"—her exchange with Temelcoff of hand for veil—and in this reciprocal transformation, he adds, "man and woman have been caught and liberated by the bridge joining east to west, outsider to insider, premodern to postmodern."[133] Temelcoff, on the other hand, will in the years ahead become a baker, a man who understands

"the metamorphosis of food." He will become a successful citizen, "never look[ing] back," and when driving his family across the viaduct will "only casually mention his work there" (*ISL*, 149).

Some six years after Alice's descent, 21-year-old Patrick arrives in Toronto an "immigrant to the city" (*ISL*, 53), and soon becomes a "searcher" in the hunt for the missing millionaire Ambrose Small. In his search, Patrick meets and embarks upon an affair with Small's mistress, the radio actress Clara Dickens, who in turn introduces him to Alice. Patrick inevitably discovers Small in the one place he never thought to look, for he had been "the searcher who had gazed across maps and seen every name except the one which was so well-known it had remained, like his childhood, invisible to him" (*ISL*, 91). Yet at Depot Creek Patrick cannot—or does not—claim Small, whose desire to remain undiscovered, a blank space on the map, is so great that he attempts to kill the one searcher who has located him. Patrick, wounded and alone once more, returns to Toronto without his reward and without Clara.

By 1930, Patrick has moved to the immigrant quarter of the city, a zone peopled by Macedonians and Bulgarians, and one where he is drawn into the migrant experience. Toronto at this time is a city ever more in flux. "Like the blossoming of a tree," the "excavations and construction" of the R. C. Harris Water Filtration Plant were being "orchestrated" by its namesake Commissioner Harris, a man who, recalling Baudelaire, would "remind his critics" that "the form of a city changes faster than the heart of a mortal" (*ISL*, 108–09). This transforming and transformative city is reflected in Patrick's own particular proficiency with dynamite, a skill that is put to use in the construction of Harris's Waterworks. Yet Patrick's task of dynamiting the water intake tunnel beneath Lake Ontario presents the great edifice as a construction that masks a prior destruction. The demarcation between these categories becomes even more blurred for Patrick when he becomes involved in the subversive political activism of his dissident migrant co-workers. While Harris, in his "bed on Neville Park Boulevard," dreams once more of his "Palace of Purification" with its "marble walls," and "copper-banded roofs," below its imposing face lies an "unfinished world" in which "men work in the equivalent of the fallout of a candle" (*ISL*, 111). The workers, all too aware of this disparity, stage clandestine after-hours performances in the unfinished Waterworks. It is at one of these theatrical protests that Patrick is reacquainted with Alice, having witnessed her transformative performance.

As Patrick becomes more deeply involved with Alice, her nine-year-old daughter Hana, and the radical union movement, the little seeds of his youth begin to germinate and reveal their deadly force. When Alice unwittingly picks up a bag containing one of the dissidents' bombs, the explosion sets off a catenating chain of events that sends Patrick's life off in an unforeseen direction. He assumes the migrants' "high level of justice" (*ISL*, 122), and, in what is seemingly an act of retribution for Alice's death, he

plants a suitcase bomb in the Muskoka Hotel to the north of Toronto. For this crime Patrick will serve five years, during which time he will meet the similarly incarcerated thief Caravaggio, a man who teaches Patrick the significance of demarcation and how to subvert it. While painting the roof of Kingston Penitentiary blue, Patrick and Caravaggio "would scratch their noses and realize they became partly invisible":

> *Demarcation*, said the prisoner named Caravaggio. *That is all we need to remember.* And that was how he escaped—a long double belt strapped under his shoulders attaching him to the cupola so he could hang with his arms free, splayed out, while Buck and Patrick painted him, covering his hands and boots and hair with blue. They daubed his clothes and then, laying a strip of handkerchief over his eyes, painted his face blue, so he was gone—to the guards who looked up and saw nothing there. (*ISL*, 179–80)

When Patrick is released he seeks out the man who metamorphosed into a piece of sky, and he and Caravaggio make an abortive attempt to blow up the almost completed Waterworks—a building that has, in these darkest years of the Great Depression, become for the dissidents the manifest expression of the State's hegemony over the workers. Patrick enters the Waterworks by swimming through the very tunnel he dynamited, but, coming face to face with his nemesis Commissioner Harris he realizes they are more similar than he could have imagined. Order and chaos are not discrete processes, but are implicated, folded one on the other. Patrick does not detonate his bomb and Harris does not turn him in. The experience allows Patrick to work through his grief and remorse over Alice's death, throwing up memories of the woman whose life, more than any other, seemed to be an ongoing process of metamorphosis.

Indeed, for Patrick, Alice is metamorphosis personified as she whispers to him her favorite line from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*: "Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects" (*ISL*, 135, 163). When they become lovers, Patrick "watches her face waiting for her to be translated into this war bride or that queen or shopgirl, half expecting metamorphosis as they kiss" (*ISL*, 153). She describes to him a play in which the lead role was shared by a number of actresses, each of whom would "break through her chrysalis into language" when she donned a coat made from animal pelts. Alice's tale of the women who take "responsibility for the story" once they have "assumed the skins of wild animals" (*ISL*, 157) reinforces the reader's identification of Patrick with Gilgamesh, the hero of ancient Mesopotamian myth who, in his grief at the death of his untamed companion Enkidu, "wander[s] through the wilderness in the skin of a lion."[134] For this reason, Alice's story can also be seen to prefigure Patrick's reaction to her death. However, the moment when Alice reaches Patrick most fully is in her subversive performance in the

Waterworks under cover of night. Patrick is amazed by her performance, which seemed to him not "theatrical" but "locked within metamorphosis" (*ISL*, 120). Yet for Alice it is something else, a metaphor. "You reach people through metaphor," she tells Patrick, "It's what I reached you with earlier tonight in the performance" (*ISL*, 123).

Maps, metaphor, and metamorphosis are, both thematically and formally, at the core of Ondaatje's novel. Just as a nomadic cartography of Toronto's invisible or obscured history requires a dramatic shift in scale from the State to the street, and from society to the community and the individual, its textual expression demands a shift in linguistic scale away from the literal and towards the transformative or metamorphic power of metaphor. As Robert Harbison suggests, in his appropriately titled *Eccentric Spaces*, "like maps metaphors often seem propelled by a change of scale," and this scalar shift, in turn, can be regarded as a cognitive act, in that it "perform[s] a transformation in which everything is altered but remains the same."[135] The spatial stories told by Patrick's mapping of Toronto are thus akin to de Certeau's metaphorical pedestrian speech acts—enunciations that disrupt, by reinstating difference within, the ideal order of Commissioner Harris's dream of a rational-historical city.

Yet Patrick's urban cartography, like that of Marco Polo in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, does not simply supplant order with chaos, but instead intimates the existence of an entirely different order, one that is "very faint, very human" (*ISL*, 146). Once again, the city reveals the smooth and striated in mixture: chaos in order, and order in chaos. When Alice speaks the words of Lucretius, she teaches Patrick of the fluidity of subjectivity and landscape, and yet Patrick remains aware that his charting of the city must also reinscribe boundaries upon it. Soon after Patrick arrives in the city his life begins to appear to him as a multi-faceted work of art: "no longer a single story but part of a mural, [. . .] a wondrous night web—all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day" (*ISL*, 145). Patrick plays the role of artist even in Hana's memory of him, for, as she recalls in *The English Patient*, he was a man who invented the city he loved by "paint[ing]" its "walls and borders" (*EP*, 91). When Ondaatje cites Judith Mara Gutman's definition of the "best art" as that which "can order the chaotic tumble of events" and "realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become,"[136] it becomes clear that Patrick's movement through the city and its history similarly becomes a work of art that, through the modesty of its *petits récits* and its mediation between the smooth and striated, achieves a certain greatness.

So too does the novel as a whole, for Ondaatje's own narratological nomadics mimic the wanderings and cartographies of his characters. As Spearey points out, Ondaatje's use of "spatialized images which demand intricate mapping and continual realignment rather than definitive linear plotting [. . .] provides a model for a more open reading of texts and of

history."[137] The textual openness of Ondaatje's novel also makes manifest its second epigraph—John Berger's postmodern proclamation that "never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one."[138] Once again, Ondaatje insists that multiplicity and unpredictability do not lead to pure and utter chaos, for to Berger's comment he adds his own desideratum that every novel should have as its opening sentence: "Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human" (*ISL*, 146). Ondaatje, in typical fashion, ironically subverts the claim to priority inherent in this statement, for it enters *In the Skin of a Lion* at the novel's very midpoint, followed by yet another qualifying maxim: "Meander if you want to get to town" (*ISL*, 146). According to legend, the twists and turns of the Maeander (now the Menderes) river on the west coast of Turkey gave Daedalus the inspiration for his Cretan labyrinth.[139] Indeed, Daedalus's labyrinth was based upon what is known as the meander pattern or key, a device that appears traditionally in mazes and labyrinths. Without obliterating the ordered and striated space of the point—the goal of the "get[ting] to town"—Ondaatje's invocation assumes not only a labyrinthine urban, textual, or historical space, but also foregrounds the necessity of an oblique or curvilinear movement (physical, textual, or mental) through which that space may be negotiated and transformed.

For Ondaatje it is the meander, for Calvino and Serres the clinamen, for Debord the *dérive*, and for Derrida the detour,[140] but despite the divergent terminology, each of these metaphors invokes the curvilinearity of narrative, history, space, movement, and language. The *dériv*ation or *declin*ation of language, as Nietzsche would have us understand, is not the literal but the metaphorical, whose errancy translates into a metamorphic power. While Ondaatje, like Nietzsche, effectively assimilates metaphor and metamorphosis, many recent critical theorists have been less inclined to afford metaphor this privileged position, and the following chapter will chart the twentieth-century debate surrounding the relationships among mapping, metaphor, and metamorphosis.