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Rappresentazioni urbane Urban Representations

a cura di ETICity

- Simone Tulumello & Giacomo Ferro |
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- Maria Michou |
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Mapping as Performance: An Alternative to Authoritative Representations of Istanbul

Mapping |
Performance |
Place |

The article claims mapping as a performative practice, which provides an alternative to authoritative representations of Istanbul; those depict the city as a singular fixed entity. Performativeness, as defined and used by feminist and poststructuralist theories, suggests approaching place as a notion which is open, dynamic, and multiple. Here, I will give examples of performative mapping, which were carried on with students in the last year and a half at my elective course named Topographical Practices. I will argue that three different exercises that were carried on in the course perform place and provide alternative multiple knowledges of Istanbul by different methods, such as critical embodiment, appropriation, and “participatoriness”.

Mapping as Performance: An Alternative to Authoritative Representations of Istanbul

Mapping as performance may be an alternative to top-down urban representations, and it suggests means to understand, criticize, and re-imagine complex cultural, social, and physical relationships in the built environment. Traditionally, maps have been regarded as objective sources of territorial knowledge, and as such they acquired an authoritative power in defining and controlling land and people (Cosgrove 1985, p. 45-62). Since the mid-1980s, post-colonial and post-structuralist research revealed the ways in



which maps produced and furthermore concealed territorial power relations (Wood 1992, Harley 1988, Harley 1992). In contemporary urban discourse, the practice of mapping rather than map-making emerges as an alternative way of thinking about place. This is because mapping refers less to a representation than a performance, in which the maker, the place and the product redefine, reposition and reproduce each other in the process of making. Following the notion of performativity of Judith Butler (1999), I argue that mapping practices are defined by social norms and historical context in representing place, yet mapping may also diverge from norms and create new places according to individual practice. Mapping allows developing an embodied and multiple understanding of place, which is continuously produced through practices of people. This is especially meaningful at a time when the metropolitan cities are rapidly changing, however static and authoritative urban representations lack the ability to respond to the contemporary situation, in which we live.

Mapping for Critical Embodiment

Istanbul, like many other metropolitan cities of the world, is today in a vast transformation with large scale demolitions and constructions. Since the beginning of 2000s, new suburban settlements have been proliferating and traditional urban environments have been changing through renovation projects and large-scale infrastructure such as the underground transportation. Together with the changing physical urban structure, the citizens are relocated between the centre and peripheries. The long-deteriorated historical centre of the city, which has been inhabited by the underprivileged populations, is now being reconstructed to appeal to the upper class (fig. 1), while the former inhabitants are under pressure for moving to the peripheries



which have less or no social and cultural infrastructure. As witnessed in certain relocations, for example the traditional Romani settlement named Sulukule, the underprivileged struggle to settle in new places face economical problems, and in the end return to the centre for jobs and social connections to find themselves further dislocated (Çiftçiöğlü 2009).

On the peripheries of Istanbul, both the government and the private developers have been building an increasing number of large-scale housing complexes for the middle and high-income population. A new style of living is promoted through these housing, which is complete with recreational and trading facilities present in the complex. In addition, constant mobility of inhabitants is foreseen in the advertisements of the new housing by announcing certain potential destinations, such as the airport and business centre, accessible in minutes by car (fig. 2). As the urban fabric and, consequently, life in Istanbul is now constantly changing, we need new ways of understanding and acting critically within this situation. For this, mapping, rather than static representations, may provide means to dynamically form relationships between changing knowledges of a place.

Mapping suggests ways to recognize multiple and alternative knowledges of a place and challenges the authoritative single knowledge. This is especially significant now more than ever, as increasing numbers of people are made mobile and detached from their place of inhabitation in contemporary Istanbul. Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti points to the capitalist world economy's dependency on mobility of people, which result in "social instability, transitory citizens, and impermanent settlements" (Braidotti 2011 [1994], p. 5). Mobility of people is celebrated by the postmodern discourse as providing

Fig.1 The posters on the construction walls of Tarlabasi, which is one of the traditional neighborhoods under reconstruction, show images of this place as conceived. The images, which were partially burnt down as a protest, show new inhabitants rather than the contemporary low-income families who reside in the area.



Fig.2 Examples of maps accompanying the housing advertisements published in popular newspapers. The new housing projects are represented for mobile prospective owners to show their proximity to heliports and airports.

a freedom to move and see the world from different perspectives, even from others' viewpoints. However, feminist theorists warn us of the impossibility of experiencing a limitless circulation, and stress that one's knowledge is limited by her/his point of view and identity (see, for example, Bordo 1990) Among these theorists, Bell Hooks (1992, p.343) points out that the notion of travel as freedom may hardly refer to all relocations, such as deportations, homelessness, immigration, and enforced migration. Hooks (1992, p. 344), referring to her accounts of travel as a black woman, states that each unique experience of changing place creates its own limits of knowing, those need to be acknowledged when writing and talking about a place.

Mapping suggests a potentially rich understanding of place, which is continuously in re-creation through the practices of describing and representing. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of production of space (1991), maps can be both dominant and resistant in form. Traditional map making practices, developed in parallel to empirical sciences, are often used to produce and re-produce the dominant knowledge of a place in a society at a certain time in history. On the contrary, there may also be resistant or critical mapping practices, which produce other knowledges of place. Traditional map making practices often fix place through representing place as objective, single and closed, whereas critical mapping refers to practices that regard place as multiple, subjective and open. Traditional maps seek to define place as a determinable and quantitatively fixed whole, which indicates a closed system and certain set of elements located within this. Furthermore, this definition sets out rules of engagement, which position the surveyor and the viewer outside the place, looking at it from a fixed and often dominating point of view. Critical mapping practices, on the other hand, offer

an “experimentation”, rather than an “imitation” of a place that performs a place rather than reproduces it. Critical mapping question then traditional practices for objectifying methods, and suggest instead self-reflexive methods. In doing so, critical mapping practices tend to unfix dominant knowledges of place and provide grounds for the production of other multiple, subjective, resistant, and critical knowledges.

Criticizing the claims of being able to view from everywhere as a disguise for totalizing ideologies, Donna Haraway (1991) suggests situating knowledge. Haraway (1991, p. 193) points out that knowledge is partial, embodied, and situated, so multiple subjectivities and accordingly multiple knowledges of place is produced simultaneously. In the same line of thought, Braidotti (2011 [1994], p. 25) calls for a nomadic subject, who produces different knowledges as s/he recreates her/his identity according to her/his changing location, with intersecting and interacting notions at a place, such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age. As Braidotti (2011 [1994], p. 46) points out, multiple situated subjectivities and knowledges of place may be acknowledged through mapping. For feminist theorists, mapping is a metaphor for writing in a situated way, but for this text, mapping refers to a spatial performance of documenting and presenting embodied knowledges at a place.

Mapping Taksim Square exercise explored such embodied knowledges. Each student mapped a certain issue at one of the most controversial public spaces in Istanbul. The square has been represented in traditional maps as, for example, the crossroads of transportation and touristic attraction. But neither of these are able to reveal the everyday spatial practices and accordingly the variety of meanings attached to this place by different users at different times. The exercise aimed for observing and documenting the everyday uses of the square. Each mapping challenged both the observer’s position and the fixed knowledges of this place. For example, *Mapping the Superimposed Views* questioned both our sense of vision in observing the square and the cliché representations of the square, such as the frontal view of the Ataturk Culture Centre (figure 3). A viewing device was produced in order to superimpose the view of the left eye and the view of the right eye. In this way, for example, a part of the facade of the Ataturk Culture Centre and the trees of the Gezi Park were merged to create a new space.

The *Mapping of People Waiting in Taksim* revealed the relationships of different spatial organizations and the use of the square (fig. 4). The timing of this exercise was critical as the arguably pedestrianization project, which recently started in the square was changing the spatial organizations. The *Mapping of Motion and Working Activities* at different times in the square created different spatialities, for example, the unregistered trading facilities flourished next to construction walls at the blind-spots of the surveillance cameras (fig. 5). The *Mapping of Borders of Taksim Square* shows the unseen borders between public and private space, those are different for people from various social statuses (fig. 6). For example, for a homeless the interior of a bank’s ATM hall is public at night, but for a student this space is not

accessible due to feelings of insecurity. In another case, the front of luxury hotels is not publicly available for the homeless, however for students and tourists, they remain public as long as the private security allows.

These examples show that a performative mapping may allow one to have a sharpened sense of how and what one knows at a certain place. As such, performative mapping produces site- and time-specific multiple knowledges. In this way, one becomes aware of knowledges produced due to different points of view, and develops a critical view towards authoritative and singular representation of a place.

Mapping as Appropriation of Place

Following Michel de Certeau (1984, p.97), I argue that during the process of making and using maps new and alternative spatial organizations are produced. De Certeau points out pedestrians, as the users of urban space, appropriate and transform a place during their everyday activities, just like speakers, as the users of language, appropriate a language. Similarly map making and using practices offer rehearsal of spatial behavior before visiting a place, provide means to locate and relate ourselves on site, and trigger memories. Map making and using suggests diversion from the proposed fixed routes of maps, by relating different places, things, and memories to a place.

During Fall 2012, we used map making as a way to form a unique and intimate relationship to a place in order to appropriate it, to claim it a place of its users rather than planners and authorities. *Mapping of the Trees in Gezi Park* included carefully marking the places of the trees and creating an identity card for each tree. The mapping of Gezi Park allowed us to engage in this site personally, and produced an unprecedentedly close-up knowledge on one of the most contested places in Istanbul, a place represented by the authorities as simply a “park” with “some trees”. The mapping of the trees of Gezi Park made the place a unique park with specific trees for us the map makers.

Gezi Park is by now a globally renowned site of resistance against capitalist policies, which put large-scale urban developments before citizen’s right to the city. The park was occupied for 15 days against its demolition in June 2013. Gezi Park is located in Taksim, the business and entertainment centre of Istanbul. To its south, is the Taksim Square, which has been a political arena for public demonstrations and celebrations. In the last decade, Istanbulites experienced an increasing government control over this urban space, for example, Workers’ Day celebrations were banned in 2003 and the Police Day celebrations were organized the same year. More surveillance cameras, undercover police, police control points and barriers were installed in the last years. However, Taksim Square and the adjacent Istiklal Street continues to be the centre for culture and entertainment until recently with its diverse theatres, cinemas, bookshops, cafés, restaurants, and music halls. Today last few remaining cultural facilities and local shops are struggling to

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Fig.3_ Mapping the Super-imposed Views at the Taksim Square, merges partial unrelated views in order to question the cliché representations of the Square and our vision structured by those clichés.

Fig.4_ The Mapping of People Waiting in Taksim shows that different spatial organizations affect the duration of waiting at certain spots in the square.

Fig.5_ The Mapping of Motion and Working Activities reveals the relationships between spatial control and use. Mobile trading appears next to construction walls and at the blind spots of the surveillance cameras.

Fig.6_ The Mapping of Borders of Taksim Square shows the unseen borders between public and private space.

Fig.7_ During the Mapping of the Trees in Gezi Park, an ID card was prepared for each tree at the park.

survive against the shops of international brands, shopping malls and hotels. The surrounding area, which had been inhabited by mostly a middle-income non-Muslim population until 1950s, has been settled by low-income immigrants from eastern Anatolia and Africa for recent decades.

The local population, which is the frequent users of the Gezi Park, is under an emerging pressure to leave this central position in the city due to a large-scale demolition and construction activity at the southeastern edge of Taksim Square. Known as Tarlabasi Renewal Project, the development includes building of luxury housing, international hotels, and offices by demolishing the whole urban islands consisting of Grade II houses and forcing the eviction of their low-income inhabitants. Connected with the above mentioned transformations in the Taksim area, Gezi Park is under threat of demolition in order to build a shopping mall, luxury residents, and a hotel imitating the form of a former barrack building at the site. Built by the government in 1940 in place of military barracks, Gezi Park is a historical turning point which demonstrates the desire to support and flourish a public life in Istanbul. Still continuing to be freely accessible, in contrast with the proliferating private properties in the area, the park is an important support for public life, with the adjacent Ataturk Culture Centre for Opera and Ballet, Istiklal Street, and Taksim Square.

The reconstruction of the Taksim Square resulted in building tunnels under the square for roads and public transport, rearranging the pedestrian access to square, and demolishing the grown up trees around the square, despite wide opposition from professional associations and public, for its non-transparent construction process. The *Mapping of the Trees in Gezi Park* was a response to this non-transparent process. It aimed to acknowledge the trees as commons, create an image of the trees with their unique characteristics, such as their individual shadows, the space created below their branches and among their trunks, and their different colors (fig. 7). Each student had to individually engage with the trees, document the spatial characteristics with their bodies as the scale of measure, take a photo with each tree and collect the fallen leaves in order to make a memory at the place. As a result, an ID card was created for each tree. The students developed a personal relationship with the place, attended the ongoing meetings against the demolitions, copied the ID cards and distributed these during the occupation of the park.

Participatory Mapping

Braidotti (2011 [1994], p. 6) warns us of the proliferation of uncritical sameness, same identities and same spatialities, in sake of consumerism. For example, in the aforementioned so-called renovation projects in Istanbul, Sulukule, Fener-Balat-Ayvansaray, Tarlabasi to name a few, large traditional neighbourhoods are demolished and whole new districts are built from scratch. The claims of these projects are about protecting the traditional architectural and urban characteristics and conserving the sociocultural diversity of previous inhabitants. However, the actualized projects create a newly

made-up neo-Ottoman architectural style, which eclectically gathers architectural features like bay windows, window frames, and deep eaves from Ottoman residential architecture. The same kind of architecture is applied in many new projects despite of the location. This production of sameness is also present in the foreseen users of these areas. The new projects aim for middle- and high-income inhabitants of similar socio-cultural classes. These places are transformed through an ideal representation. However, participatory mapping suggests questioning of the ideal representations and instead creates diverse knowledges of this place.

Like other empirical sciences which depend on observation, in traditional map-making, the observer is separate from what is observed, the observed place is under a controlled view from above and afar (Cosgrove 1985, p. 48). The birds-eye-view and plan view of the maps have been developed in order to achieve such a distant and god-like view, under which everything is visible. Mapping, on the contrary, is a process, in which the maker reveals her/his view and acknowledges other possible views. Mapping produces new knowledges by forming new relationships at a place, rather than withdrawing any intrinsic knowledge at a place. As one forms new relationships, these relationships also redefine one's own territories of knowledge and becoming. Participatory mapping further complicates the relationship of one to her/his environment, as the observer reveals and shares her/his methods of documentation. The hierarchies dissolve between the person who maps and the people who are mapped in order to produce the knowledge of a place in collaboration.

Participatory Mapping in Fener and Balat included documenting this place through different tactics of participation. For example, two groups of students asked way to certain places and tried to draw maps with the direction of people, and others wanted the locals to take the camera and shot a short video which showed the front of their houses and shops while speaking about this place. At times, the tactics evolved with the responses of the locals. A group shared their pens with the locals to draw the neighborhood, but ended up collecting their hand writing and mapping the hopes and desires of people about the place instead. These participatory methods of mapping reveal nevertheless the observer's (outsider's) point of view on the site and simultaneously acknowledge other possible views. We produce new knowledges by forming new relationships at a place and with people, rather than claiming to withdraw any intrinsic existing knowledge. As we form new relationships, these relationships also redefine our own territories of knowledge. The process of documentation creates new bonds between people and place, visitors (us) and locals.

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