The ‘Urban Maps: Instruments of Narrative and Interpretation in the City’ is co-authored by Richard Brook and Nick Dunn. This book is a continuation of a long growth of research and the deep efforts into the field of understanding the urban environment. The authors have extensive works and contribution in this field, both have previously edited a book in 2009 ‘Isolative Urbanism: an ecology of control,’ which focused on the relationship between the urban conditions and the ownership of space, public and private, how the space is demarcated, and what are the roles of governance and security upon civic, urban and personal space. They added another input with a co-authored chapter within the 2009 edited publication ‘The Control of Space: mediating fear in the urban condition,’ as a product of the research-by-design/design-by-research unit at the University of Manchester. Both are well engaged with the academic and professional work at local and international levels through collaborative architectural think-tanks and the research unit which is concerned with the mapping and representation of urban networks, policies, planning and regulation and the impact that this has on the urban form, evolution of space and their materiality.
In focus, publications that usually interconnect two or more disciplines to produce a new interpretation or understanding of the urban elucidation, take the challenge of fulfilling the macro and micro levels. However, Brook and Dunn’s utilized Urban Maps with a merge of diverse media and art practices to provide a wider framework of urban theory and new revelations. This is a unique book; the authors have stretched their thoughts to flee out of the conventional box of understanding the urban environment to include various instruments of the surrounding media, and to see the city from a different perspective and alternative modes of analysis. This publication is divided into 7 chapters including the introduction and conclusion chapters. In addition, it is readily friendly book with sufficient use of case studies to enhance the clarity and simplicity.

Through the introduction, Brook and Dunn’s have significantly demonstrated the urban evolution of cities and the application of media sources to give new dimensions and criteria that may shape them in the future. They have explored the different forces and conditions of urbanism and being intrinsic to the super-modern conurbation. As well, they have explored the sense of place by defining the change, which occurs to the space via two trends, the ‘erosion of space’ and ‘confusion of space’. This part also drew the attention of the reader to the evolution of the cities’ urban landscape with the essential need of the ‘Map’. The authors presented the way in which maps can be used in reading and interpreting the city form and the history of urban remodeling. They expressed the different thoughts and models of urban theorist since the beginning of the 20th century, going through the work of Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs, and Reyner Banham. Notably, the authors tied this historical evolution with the media produced at that time expressing the different arts and sciences and the ideas informed whilst not consistently overt in the texts of the theoretical and urban critics. By this methodology the book gives the reader a glance across the city from a different scope.

The following main chapters are quite independent; focus on several tools and instruments of how to interpret the new aspect of ‘urban’ rather than the ‘city.’ This discussion complements the concept of the gradual scale shifting to reduce the understanding of urban scale, which evolved from the beginning of the 21st century through both theoretical and practical perspectives. Chapter 2 discusses the role of ‘brand’ making and increase of the society consumption along with their effect of the spatial orders of the contemporary city. First, the chapter defines the essential values offered by imaging and signage and subsequently the focus on visualization. The authors explicitly use several international examples to show the concept of branding within the urban realm and the way in which a visual message is conveyed. Later, the chapter described how the walls of the city have been developed by capitalism governance and digital advertisement tools that, in essence, act as brand and imaging tool itself. The authors also offer a discourse that pertain to the ‘sign’ and its influential role in invading the entire urban environment and presiding over major architectural productions.

Chapter 3 discusses the emerging scope of understanding networking within the city through the new boom of telecommunications and its ability for seeing the exponential expansion. According to the authors, new digital devices...
interpret the urban setting with an abstract form plus abandoning the social dimension. However, some digital handheld tools have overcome this dilemma through simplified titling rather than expressing the real experience. The crux of this argument is how the networking can be described on digital maps and tools putting the urban navigation and the individual situation at the same time. In chapter 4, the authors took a further step and focused on the use of films in understanding the urban realm by their articulation of the temporal dimension. They argued that the knowledge of the urban landscape can be expanded through incorporating the physical setting with the experience(s) being held and this can only be gathered from films to add another layer on urban mapping.

In chapter 5, in reference to the phenomenon of the city fragmentation into smaller urban spaces, districts have emerged not just to create the center of the city but to form its own identity as well. The chapter discusses the work of local artists to mark and distinguish each district through graffiti and art work. The authors expressed the notion of graffiti through history and the acts of territorialization, which has an impact on the city mapping. On the other hand, these acts of graffiti have produced another layer of mapping, through understanding the spaces of action and their aspects of control, safety and surveillance. Notwithstanding, the concept of using the city as large drawing board, these marking tools also had their impact on the understanding of the social strata of different urban districts. In essence, they give urban mapping another distributional social dimension.

In chapter 6, the authors focused on the production of physical art and its association with architecture. This chapter explores the effect and meaning surpassed by artistic objects and the various physical and cultural relationship conceived in a certain urban setting. It was essential within this book that the authors focus on the ‘object’ within the urban realm due to its effect on perceiving space and other various meanings. Into a further scope, the chapter discussed the ‘object’ as an element embedded within architecture or within the urban setting.

By and large, the book provides several techniques of using ‘maps’ and explores the soft and unseen information that can be gathered to explain many dimensions that go beyond the physical dimension. The authors have emphasized the relationship between the acts of visualization and mapping techniques that produce significant opportunities of understanding networking and acknowledging the urban evolution and various social and artistic trends in contemporary urban settings. This is an important contribution to the architectural and urban library, which advances the discussion on analyzing the urban condition in contemporary cities. The book will be of interest to a wide spectrum of reader types, from artists to urban planners and from architects to graphic designers.

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