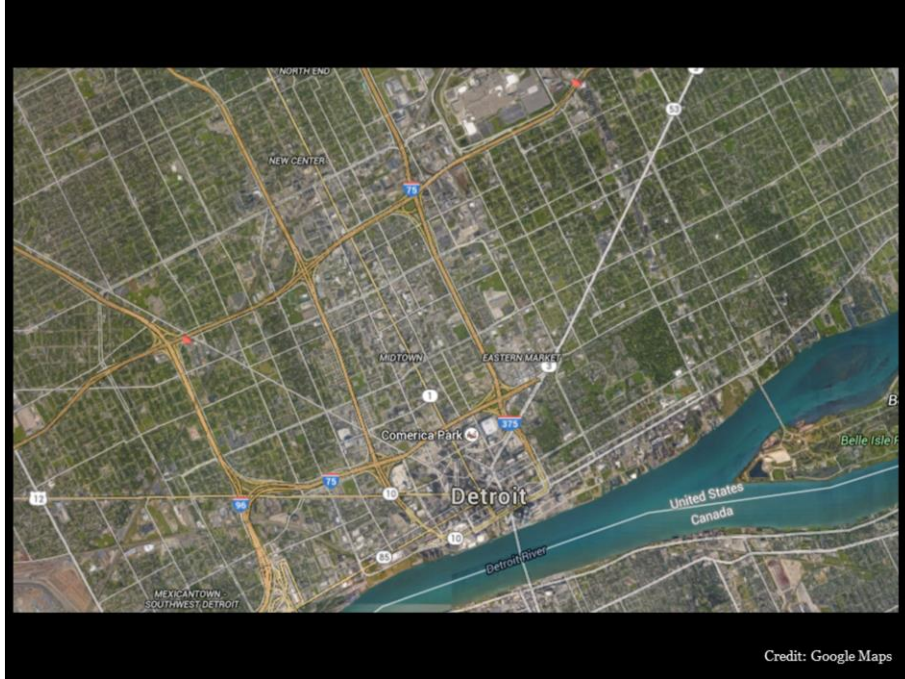




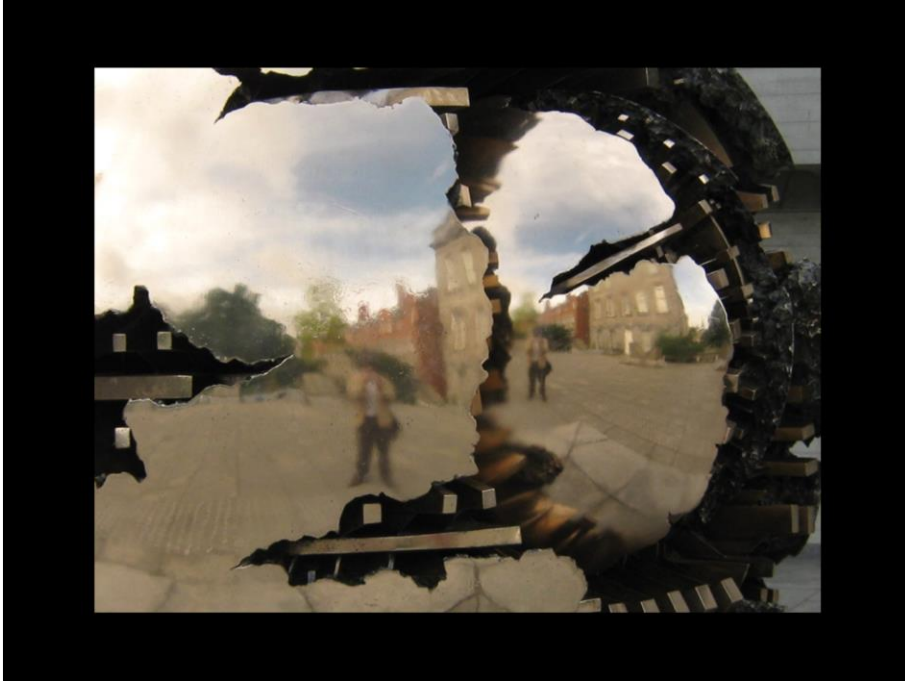
Is this Detroit? _____ This here is a perspective we have used for centuries—distanced, from an angle, from above. Henry Ford, Pistons and Tigers, Devil’s Night and riots. Far too often, our geographical imagination of a place is formed by these symbolic representations alone.



Is this Detroit? Yes and no. This is a Google Map satellite image of the city we find ourselves in. It is an abstraction, a generalization of what lies below. It privileges the grid, the built, the designed. But is the map the territory? Is a picture of the thing, the thing? Is a city a thing?



Our imagination of the world is shaped by our perceptions and by HOW we access it, by HOW we know what we know about the globe, the continent, the country, the bio-region, the province, the watershed, the city, the town, the village, neighborhood, block and building.



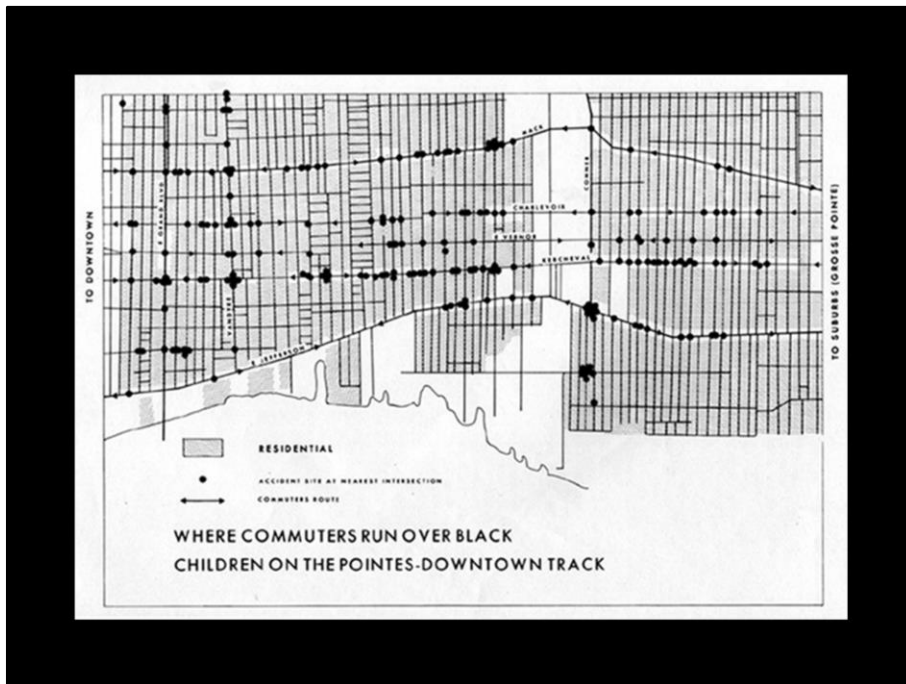
Where do we locate ourselves in the world? How do we form our geographical imaginations? From what angle? Are we co-makers, forming part of place transformation? From the inside or from above? What happens when we really zoom in? Can we see faces and hear the many voices?



In the late 1960s academic geographer William Bunge and community activist Gwendolyn Warren teamed up and organized the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute—a mix of free university urban geography classes and community or public cartography initiatives that looked from the INSIDE—precisely to fill in the voids of the grid with faces and voices.



This participatory “expedition” methodology challenged our ideas of exploration as “out there” and instead subverted this way of knowing to look deeper “in here.” They took the pulse of Fitzgerald, a neighborhood of Detroit, and produced collective mappings that highlighted injustices— for example, comparing pounds of glass on a white playground (1 pound) with a black playground (364 pounds);



Collecting data on rat bites across the city; proposing—pre-GIS—over 7000 alternative school districting solutions that fell within federal and state law while remedying the gerrymandering taking place; and HERE pointing out how dangerous it was for black children living on or near the major automobile thoroughfares.

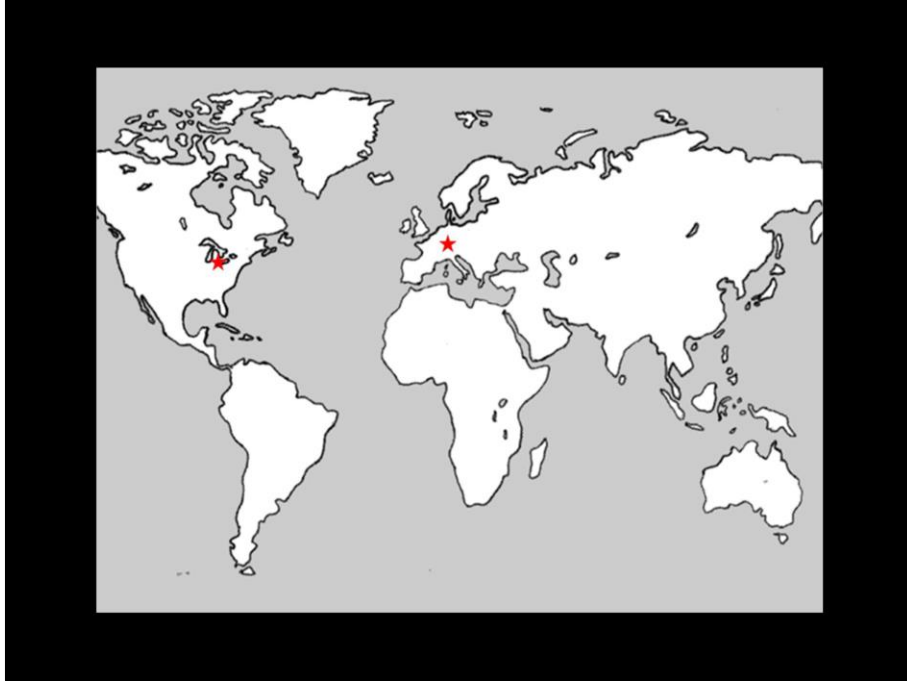


The legacy of these expeditions runs deep. Academic geographers cite the Detroit Geographic Expedition and Institute as a key moment in the ever evolving practice of community counter mapping. Recently, Uniting Detroiters used this methodology for their People's Atlas project. The question here is not only WHO is producing knowledge about the City but HOW they imagine it.



Public Geographies Public Geographers

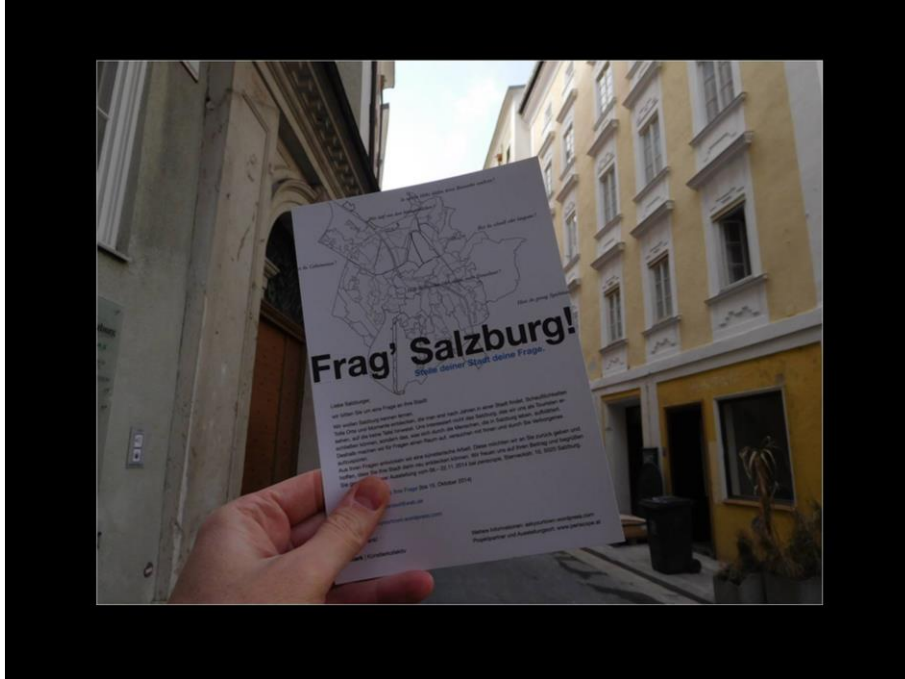
Bringing together diverse publics—and not just race, class, gender—but diversity of spatial thinking, of perspective. Part of doing public geography is to equip citizens with tools to be able to communicate and share their perspectives of the City in some common language. The map becomes the lingua franca.



Geography is often misunderstood—at worse, as the memorization of place names (here, Detroit and Salzburg, Austria) or, at best as something specially trained academics or professionals do behind some curtain. But we all have spatial cognition, we all imagine the world, we all can draw a map, in whatever form.



From Salzburg I make a radio essay program aptly called *Geographical Imaginations: Expeditions into the Geographies of Everything and Nothing*. The idea is to explore both the tangible and intangible geographies that frame and structure the how we know places we live in and their relationship to the rest of the world.



The show often highlights work that groups are already doing in the community. Here an artist collective called “mark” challenges Salzburger to ask their city a question and submit it via postcard—presupposing that the city is alive and inviting us to get inside and dialogue with it. What would you ask Detroit? Or your city?



Another group, Fraulein Flora's Favorite Hangouts, looks closer at the city's spatial stories to help expand the geographical thinking of locals and tourists alike, taking back a sense of place far too adapted for the tourist gaze in this city with over 2 million visitors each year. Are our maps for the consumer or for the citizen? For a sense of belonging? Belonging to what narrative?



At Geographical Imaginations we are also engaging the public through the Salzburg Rhythmanalysis Project—asking public geographers to share their “windows” into the rhythms and vibes of the City. After all, doesn’t each city have its own rhythm? How do we know that? Where does the City show us?



Artist and philosopher Joseph Beuys is often quoted as saying that EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST. While we are not all Picasso we can, however, see the world through a more poetic lens. Understanding our existence through the framings of space and place is accessible to all of us. We are all geographers and we all have our own maps.



Credit: www.detroitography.com

I don't know the lived spaces of Detroit. I look from above, from the outside. But there are plenty of groups here—mappers and community radio, for example—working on how to better understand the complexities of the City, how to better envision its transformation, mapping out the stories and narratives of people and collectivities, those faces and voices situated within the grid.



We come back to this question: From where do we imagine the City? The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination defines imagination as the ability to form images and ideas not yet experienced or seen. They call it a “useful tool of survival—especially when liberated or shared.” Where do our images come from? From outside or inside? Are we making our own?



How do we liberate, or cultivate, or expand this geographical imagination? We can certainly map out our lived spaces. We can build a common lexicon with our neighbors, with the planners, the government. We can Walk the City—but walking as an expedition, as a methodology. I propose the following.....



Draw a line that crosses the city map. Walk the line. Walk all the way across the Motor City into the suburbs. Document your observations, your findings, your own expedition. Do it again. Take pictures. Pair each picture with 50 words. Reflect. Walk. Reflect. Map. Walking as mapping as writing as proposing as imagining. Walking.



Ask the city questions. Walk another transect. Take someone with you. Explore those questions with them. Explore new images of the city. Make new hybrid images. Break the psychogeographical boundaries—the “I can’t go there” because if you can’t go there then you can’t see the City or those faces or hear those voices.