The Atlas of Cyberspace. Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin. London, New York, Reading,

MA: Addison Wesley Press, 2001. xi and 268 pp., maps, diagrs., photos, and index.

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If nothing else, the *Atlas of Cyberspace* should be revered for offering the first

comprehensive collection of visualizations of the virtual world. The authors' ability to

illustrate the dynamic changes that mapping cyberspace has involved, and furthermore,

include such a vast variety of approaches to visualizing the virtual world, in one easy to

peruse hard copy is commendable. As noted in the acknowledgement section (xi), the

book took five years to research, including searching out and weeding through the

visualizations, finding the original creators of many of the maps, and conducting

interviews to get the history of particular virtual cartographies. Stemming from all their

years of research Dodge and Kitchin have produced a thorough, and often wandering,

tome to online cartographies.

The goal of the book is to review, through both image and text, the vast array of

visualizations and scales of mapping cyberspace. For the most part this review is done

benignly, containing no real critical analysis of the visualizations' potential faults. Each

series of maps is accompanied by explanatory dialogue that identifies the underlying

concepts behind the maps' creation and usefulness. Due to the non-territoriality of

cyberspace, the book divides the different online cartographies into four different realms,

each with their own chapter: mapping infrastructure and traffic; mapping the web; mapping conversation and community; and imagining cyberspace. This format works surprisingly well in allowing the reader an opportunity to analyze the various approaches to mapping the same types of nodal connections. However, the overall structure of the book is a bit awkward, leaning heavily on the first chapter's concise overview of cartography and principles of visualization and then delving into chapter after chapter of cartographic samples. Cartographic theory and analysis might have been interspersed more throughout the book, rather than exemplified in the first chapter and only occasionally alluded to at the start of each subsequent chapter.

In fact, though an easy and colorful read, the *Atlas of Cyberspace* seems to suffer from a lack of editing. By being more selective, the book could have been edited to half its current size without losing any of its message or thoroughness. As it stands, *Atlas* suffers from being too exhaustive, with numerous cartographic samples so indiscernible from others that the book's focus is easily lost in numerous places. This is particularly evident in the "Mapping the Web" chapter, where many of the cartographies illustrated are indecipherable without being able to interact with them anyway, and therefore become identical looking and monotonous. This occurs again to a lesser degree in the following chapter when the Atlas suddenly devotes 19 pages to imaginary virtual worlds, immediately followed by 12 pages spent on the cartographies of video game worlds. Though interesting, and perhaps an integral part of cyberspatial cartography, the plethora of images from videogames and overly detailed write-ups concerning the games from which the images come, bog down the relevance of the Atlas. More textual description of the various methods used to map out videogames and less, often pixelized, image filler

would help. In addition to cutting many of the images and space devoted to various

tangential cartographies of the virtual world, this book likely could have cut an entire

chapter – *Imagining Cyberspace*. Though a delightful chapter, and offering a topic that

might be built upon to produce a book in and of itself, *Imagining Cyberspace* feels as out

of place in this atlas as a Trekkie might at a geography convention. This chapter is

devoted to reviewing visualizations of cyberspace through cursory analysis of cyber-punk

literature (i.e., William Gibson and Neal Stephenson), plot overviews of movies dealing

with the virtual world (i.e., Tron and the Matrix), and pictures of how the Internet has

been used by modern artists. The primary problems with this chapter are that it skirts

detail, has no focus, and though on its own it was this reviewer's favorite chapter, its

relation to the rest of the book was strenuous at best, non-existent to me. This chapter's

inclusion probably stems from the authors' research interests in cyberspace (Kitchin &

Kneale, 2001), but the editors might have realized that this chapter was not necessary and

left the still shots from science fiction movies on the cutting room floor.

Partially due to its length and wavering focus, the term "atlas" in *Atlas of

Cyberspace* may end up being a bit of a misnomer. This book struggles to fit itself into

its own definition. This is likely due to the fact that it is more theoretical and text-based

than a standard atlas, nor does not purport to truly illustrate cyberspace in a similar

fashion to how most atlases do. That is, the *Atlas of Cyberspace* primarily consists of

visualization methods, or cases, rather than definitive maps. Though certainly not an

atlas in the traditional sense, the book also fails to fit the coffee table genre as well –

excluding perhaps those tables found in the households of information technicians and

cartographers. Though this book may be useful as a supplementary text in a dynamic or

virtual cartography class, it really offers little more than visual examples from which to take inspiration and understand how online cartography has evolved. Thus, the market for this atlas is likely going to be limited, and perhaps this is why it is already heavily discounted in several online bookstores.

Lest this review be deemed negative by the book's above mentioned shortcomings, it must be noted that this is an incredible atlas and a highly recommendable text. Though editing may have provided the atlas with more focus, the comprehensive sample collection of cyber-cartographies is staggering. The breadth of Dodge and Kitchin's archival research ends up unearthing and placing in the same volume hand-drawn sketches of ARPANET from 1969 and the Porsche site map of 2000. Furthermore, the book's use as a quick resource guide for those looking to find inspiration for cyber-cartography is indubitable. The book's outlay is well done, with a very clear and concise caption acting as a superb legend for each and every map represented in the book. A web address is provided with each illustration to help the reader find the original digital version illustrated on the page or to at least facilitate finding further information. In fact, the real fun with this atlas lies in going online and finding similar cartographic examples through the links provided in the book. In addition to the captions, at the end of the book there is a further reading list, which will help guide anyone interested in a particular facet of cartography in the right direction.

Producing the first of anything is always an arduous, unthankful task, destined to garner criticism from all angles of the scientific community. Taken in this context, what Dodge and Kitchin have done is quite phenomenal. They have pieced together, in static form, a thorough sampling of the various cartographic and visualization methods used to

attempt to map a virtual space. The *Atlas of Cyberspace* is a superb and enlightening

piece, and its brilliance is dampened solely by the authors' overzealous enthusiasm to

touch upon all facets of cartography in virtual space – a pardonable offense to be certain.

This book presents an extremely illustrative, informative, and inspiring piece of literature

on visualization, and is highly recommended for Internet enthusiasts and cartography

hobbyists of all persuasions.

Keywords: cyberspace, internet, cartography, visualization