

About maps and place-name with a cartographic attitude

By Lily Díaz-Kommonen

As a form of structuring behavior, map-making activity involves the management of uncertainty. Through maps we strive to create both factual representations of the territory “as it is”, as well as subjective instantiations of the imaginary. In their effectiveness and beauty our objects of cartographic activity combine the objectivity of reason with the originality of creation.

Here is a beautiful image of light pollution visible at night from Europe!

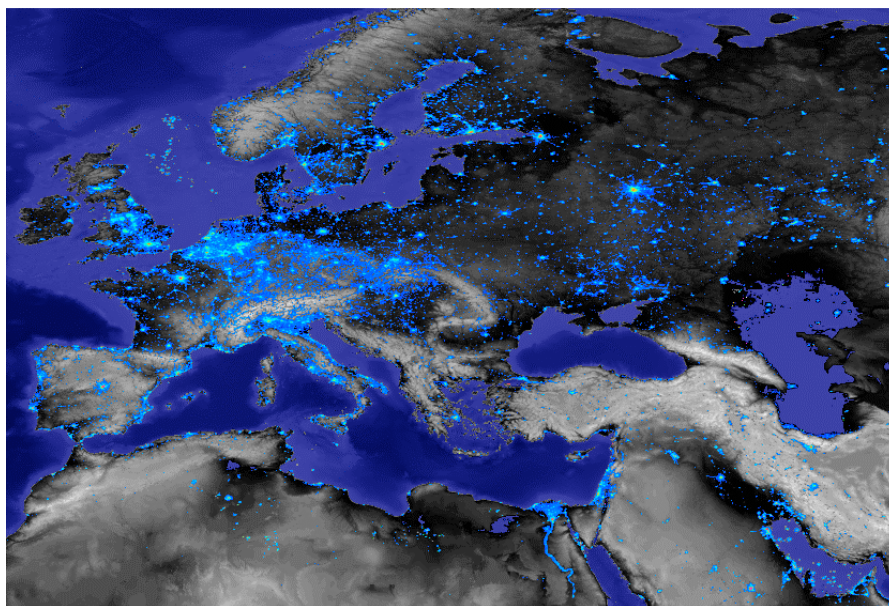


Fig. 1: Light pollution in Europe.

But this is not what I am going to talk to you about. Rather, I want to briefly take you down South and tell you about a place called **Petare**...

Trying to comprehend Petare, remotely

Some of the best and worst neighborhoods in Caracas are adjacent to each other so that as the poor have become more visible, the rich have become more invisible. It is possibly that this proximity of both the imagined and the real constitutes the first shock: To the tourist arriving in Caracas at night, the illumination of the Barrios of Caracas at night might look like the lights in a Nativity scene.

I would agree that there is a certain similarity, especially if you can imagine yourself telescoping (closing in) your sight well into one of these small cardboard constructions that fill the homes of families in Catholic countries during Christmas time.

When I decided to gather this story for you, I had to imagine showing you how such a metaphor might be conceived. It did not prove too difficult to illustrate this. All I had to do was to go to Flickr.



Figure 2: Ranchos of Caracas at night downloaded from Flickr

The earlier image contrasts with the view that reveals itself in the light of the day. For example, here is a picture that I took myself on my way to the airport a few weeks ago. Please note that even though they look similar, neither image is **Petare**.



Figure 3: On the way out to Maiquetía airport.

A city like Caracas--or any city for that matter--NOT ONLY exists in its physical form. We really get to know the city through language and language is possible the most reasonable vehicle in which the lives of the 5 million souls in the city can reveal themselves to itself us...

This is fortunate for me, using such an “unsmart”, text-based channel such as Web 1.0 to gather stories about the city and its everyday life.



Figure 4: Aerial photograph of Petare taken from a helicopter. An ocean of stories to be told?

Place-name, Petare

The concept of *place-name* allows us to create cartographic spaces in which narrative becomes the referential point. As a variable, *place-name* contains, anchors, and situates a narrative within its historical and social context. At the same time it pulls intangible elements of storytelling into a physical, embodied, frame of reference. It can be said that in *place-name*, space and body converge with time. In becoming *place-name*, the present and the conflate into living performance.

According to the Portuguese edition of the Wikipedia: “**Petare** é uma cidade venezuelana e capital do município de Sucre, estado de Miranda. Possui a maior Favela da América e do Ocidente, e está localizada na região metropolitana de Caracas.” (Petare is a Venezuelan city and the capital of the Sucre municipality in the State of Miranda. It possesses the biggest slum in

America and in the Western world. It is located in the metropolitan region of Caracas.)

According to the Portuguese Wikipedia, Petare is:
• 3 times bigger than the biggest favela/slum of Rio de Janeiro
• + 600,000 inhabitants
• 300 gangs (or 1 per 2000 inhabitants)

Figure 5: Some facts about Petare.

<http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petare> (Accessed on November 7, 2006)

Digital narrative in Petare, Venezuela

Azotes de Barrio en Petare, The Whiplash of the Neighborhood in Petare: “Available through your nearest street vendor, it is the first full scale Venezuelan film to achieve national distribution solely through the streets, and far, far, away from the large established film scene. The movie has elicited a polemic in Venezuela.” So claim the webpages of QDTP.

The screenshot shows the homepage of **eluniversal.com** on March 12, 2006. The page is in Spanish and features a navigation menu with options like 'Mapa del sitio', 'Daily News', 'todo el archivo', and 'Buscar'. The main content area is titled 'Caracas' and includes a sidebar with 'Blogs' and 'SECCIONES' (National and Political, Economy, International, Opinion, Sports, Caracas, etc.). The main article is titled 'Expediente AZOTES DE PETARE' and discusses a controversial video showing a young man being hit by a group of men. The article includes a photo of the scene and a caption: 'El equipo de jóvenes que actúa en el video hace una demostración de la forma como lo grabaron (Foto Fernando Sánchez)'. Below the article is a 'PUBLICIDAD' section and a list of 'ARTÍCULOS RELACIONADOS' (Related Articles).

Figure 6: El Universal, March 12, 2006.

In March of 2006 the Ministry of Public Affairs began an investigation into whether minors were used in the portrayal of criminal actions, and whether criminals themselves were involved in the filming. Nothing further from reality claims another weblog: “It is easy to notice the bad acting, the bad editing, and that the red liquid used in the violent gun scenes is in reality ketchup.” In a city where an average of 5 citizens are killed every weekend, reality becomes farce.

Question: How does this relate to drama? Where does comedy end and tragedy begin?

Urban Violence Feeds Independent Film Desires

“Peace, violence, reality and dream, a barber and a filmmaker co-exist in Jackson Gutiérrez’ barber shop in Petare.” 06,11,2006, El Universal, Caracas.



Figure 6: Jackson Gutierrez, is a 23-year old barber, resident of Petare, turned filmmaker, and featured in several interviews in the national media this past week:

(Gutiérrez) “I recorded and directed **Azotes de Barrio en Petare**. The same movie that is selling like hot bread in the black markets in Caracas and Venezuela and through which all of Latin America will find out how people live a capital like Caracas.”

“Every day I shave around 20 guys in La Veguita, a section of Petare where I live and I hear an average of five stories a day about violent incidents: that they killed so-and-so’s brother last night, what is his name...”

“A film began to take shape in my mind where these same people would talk openly, and say whatever they wanted in their own words and without a screen play, and without knowing anything about film-making”

Question: What does this tell us about genre?

(Gutiérrez) “After I finished, I made 30 copies and gave it to those who participated and to my relatives. Many of them work in the informal economy. I imagine that is how it was pirated so that now it is sold everywhere.

Question: In an informal economy, what sort of new distribution networks have become available through the use of technology?

Does he see as failure the fact that he has not received a penny from his movies?

(Gutiérrez) “Many people have bought the film, seen it and liked it. It would have been a failure if nobody had been interested.”

Question: Where and what is the value of exchange in digital economy?

Although he wants to continue doing movies, he is not interested in going to film school:

(Gutiérrez) “The reason for my success, and the reason why so many people want to work with me is because my work is original. If I start taking courses, I will lose myself.”

Question: Does this tell us anything new about the meta-discourses of art?

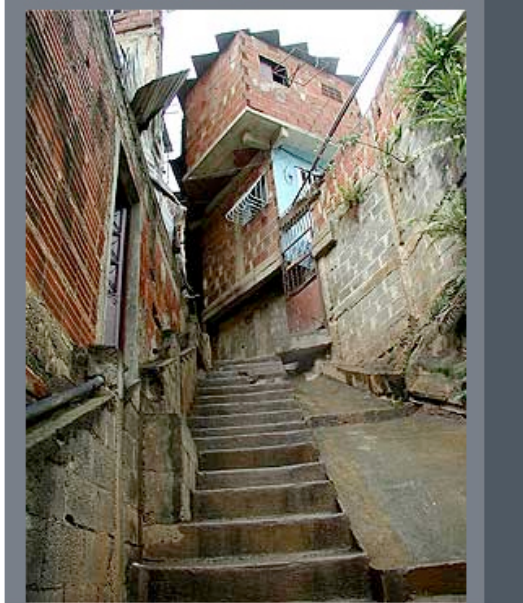
Can Petare and the barrios be sources of innovation?

The latest evolution in the production and distribution of media via digital digital networks is closely intertwined with the progress of science and technology. “It’s getting better all the time!” Really. But while the scope of apprehension and degree of accuracy of our tools continues to improve, the incommensurable, complex, center of our human experience remains a world outside the epistemological boundaries of hard scientific data.

A workshop of the Architectural League of New York held in 2002 offers a glimpse of hope.

of land in the barrios were realized, the barrios could become a great asset to the city.

We speculate that an incredible transformation will occur in the next decade that will turn many of the existing barrios into valuable real estate. This privatization would result in investments to develop the services and infrastructures in these areas. Creation of a schematic to guide this development is a necessary task for the near future. After many years of difficulty in the government housing sector, a research team from the Central University lead by Josefina Baldo and Federico Villanueva organized a plan to provide infrastructure to 4,600 hectares occupied by barrios. The plan encompasses a 15 year period with a total investment of \$2.45 billion, of which the World Bank has given \$50 million. The proposed area to be developed holds 40% of the total metropolitan population. One of Caracas' five municipalities--Libertador-- holds 65% of all the barrio population of the metropolitan area.



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“The barrios represent a single highly democratic building process that **promotes qualities** that are not found anywhere else in the city. The metabolism of the informal city is impressively positive. **Less trash is produced than in any other area of town.** The high-density low-rise buildings offer a **positive alternative to the high-rise developments** promoted by the formal construction industry. The selection and use of building materials is in direct response to climate, with **low environmental impact and equally low investment costs.** The barrio houses maintain a **microclimate that is far superior to structures of comparable density** in the formal city. Pedestrian access and its dependence on existing topographic elements are currently treated as negative characteristics but can be easily viewed as **creative responses to a difficult problem.**”

(<http://worldviewcities.org/caracas/barrios.html>)

* A **cartographic attitude** seeks to join cartographic activities with performance. All texts—except Portuguese—have been translated by the author.