



Compte rendu de lecture

par [Denise Pumain](#)
Professeur, Université Paris 1

DODGE M., KITCHIN R., 2001, *Mapping Cyberspace*,
London, Routledge, 260 p.

Geography explores virtual spaces without forgetting its Greek origins and its origins in travel, because, according to the authors, Cyberspace is *navigation space*, an etymological translation of the term coined by the novelist William Gibson in 1984. Geographers navigating the net had surely already encountered various different representations of the Web on the Website 'An Atlas of Cyberspace' prepared by one of the authors. The work has three main virtues: it gathers together and organizes a considerable quantity of information and cartographic documents related to the new technologies of information and communication; it analyses this information and offers a synthesis of the lines of research proposed in this decidedly 'new' geography.

The first chapter clarifies the basic concepts related to questions of space, the network and virtual reality; the second situates the new technologies among the group of questions they pose for society, between globalisation and exclusion, freedom and the restructuring or destructuring of territories...The third chapter queries the spatiality of communication space as it is practised and perceived by individuals in their use of the Internet, but also its lack of geometry, its 'liquid architecture', which is however not incompatible with the emergence of certain forms. Chapter Four is a reminder of the difficulty of the exercise that consists in mapping the virtual networks, and highlights the development from the time the first maps were put online to the most recent types of documents, either virtual, carrying hypotexts, or animated...Chapter Five presents fascinating maps of digital communication networks based on the localisation of infrastructures (cables, connected hosts, addresses and domains) or according to traffic (use) (including the variations in the hours of use). Not surprisingly, investments and the use of the new technologies correspond, on a global scale, to the centre-periphery distribution, with, however, some slight differences. More difficult is the representation of connections and flows covered in the following chapter, with a demonstration of an impressive variety of improvisations on this theme, from the Arpanet topology drawn on the corner of a table in 1969 to the forms of the most sophisticated three-dimensional networks, passing along the way through some conceptual maps that even recall ancient Japanese maps, or a literary 'map of love'...More embryonic is the knowledge of the forms of sociability stirred up by the new media, whose possible expressions are discussed in Chapter Seven, from inter-individual messaging to more or less specialised discussion groups. In Chapter Eight the reader will find attempts at cartography, with the synchronic media, the untranslatable 'cat', the interactive 'scenes', the virtual words that

construct an imaginary city...Spatial representations of navigable space constructed by individuals are compared in Chapter Nine to cognitive maps, from which they however differ, even if spatial metaphors are used to assist, for example in the understanding of hypertext structures. The last two chapters are given over to imaginary and future cartographies of cyberspace. Here there no more images, but references to science fiction, and useful questionnaires to search the hearts and minds of Internet explorers.

The reader will I hope forgive me for the linearity of this account, an approach that I believe will allow everyone to navigate freely in this book, which is strongly recommended, even if it is important to remember that it is a pioneering work, and therefore opens more fields of discussion and questions than it can resolve.

