Exerpt from **You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination**
by Katharine Harmon (Princeton Architectural Press, 2004)

Two Maps of Boylan Heights

DENIS WOOD

THE IDEA WAS TO SEE what we could learn about neighborhoods by mapping them.

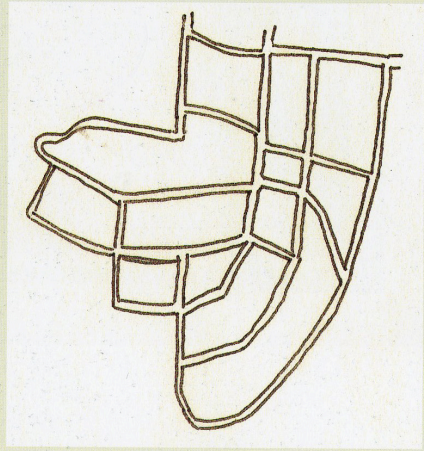
Because we didn't know much about neighborhoods, we didn't know what to look for, so we mapped everything in Boylan Heights, a neighborhood in Raleigh, North Carolina. We mapped the streets and what was under the streets—the sewers, water mains, and gas lines. We wanted to map the tree roots, mirroring underground the branches spread out overhead. We did map the trees.

We mapped the power lines and the telephone lines and the cables for televisions. We mapped the street lights. Later we mapped the light cast by the street lights and all the other lights, prowling the neighborhood after dark with a light meter. Up above the lights we saw the stars, and we mapped the stars you could see from the neighborhood.

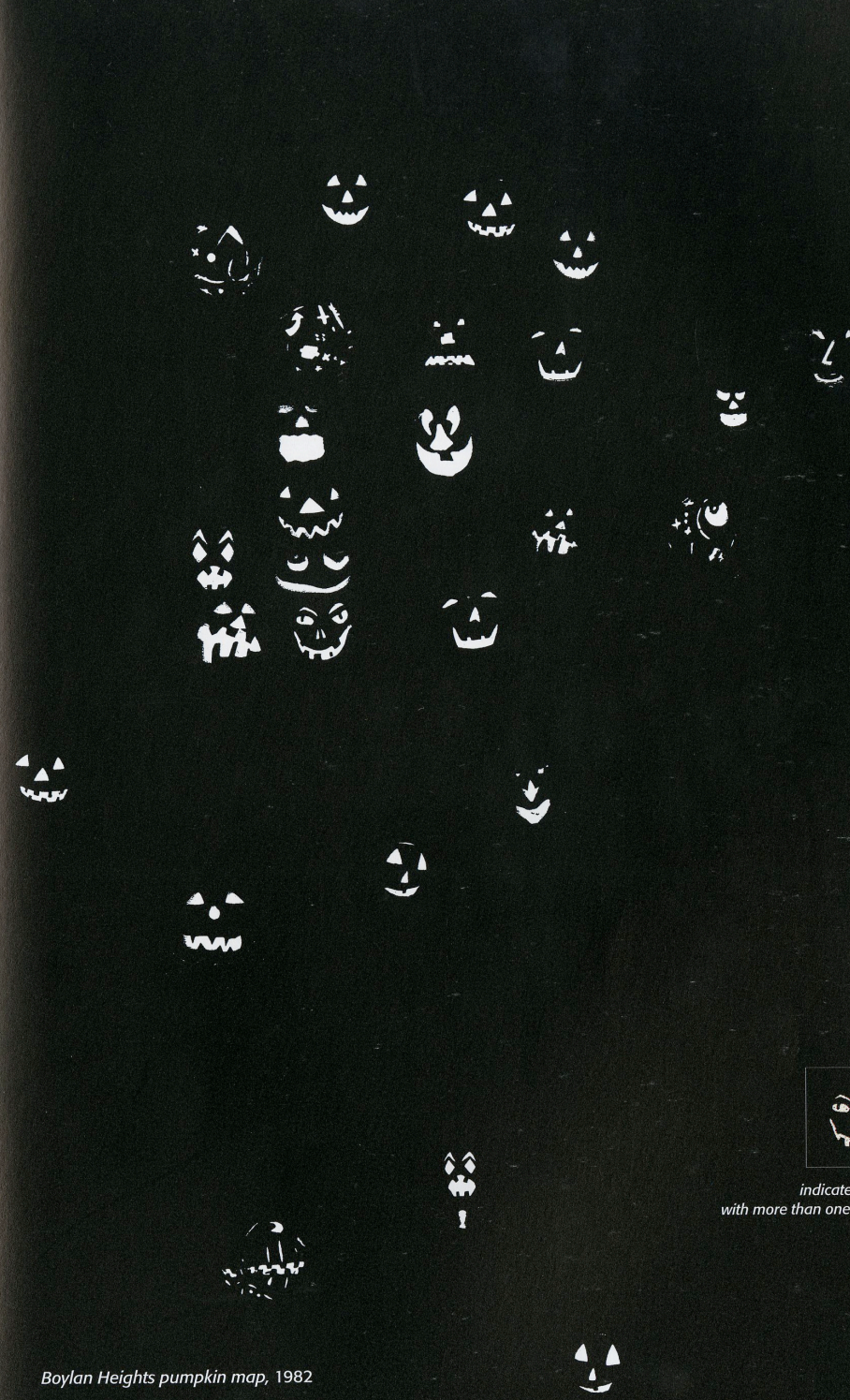
We mapped the traffic and the colors of the leaves in the fall and the fences. We mapped the graffiti made in wet cement and the street signs and the dollar value of the real estate, the colors of the houses and the number of stories and the number of steps from the sidewalk to the front porches, and where the wind chimes were and the clotheslines. We mapped everything we could figure out how to map.

One Halloween—it was 1982—we mapped the pumpkins. While everyone else was trick-or-treating, I walked through the neighborhood with a camera and took pictures of all the jack-o'-lanterns. We made high-contrast contact prints of the photographs and pasted them on a street map, so there's a jack-o'-lantern at every address where there was a pumpkin on a porch. In most cases the photograph is of the jack-o'-lantern that was at the address, but in some cases my photographs didn't turn out (in these cases we duplicated an image from another porch), and in other cases there was more than one pumpkin (in these cases one does duty for the rest). Then we blacked out everything but the faces of the jack-o'-lanterns: Halloween in Boylan Heights! The pattern will not be clear without the streets to imply the extent of the neighborhood, but the readers of the neighborhood atlas in which this map was intended as a plate would, by the time they looked at it, be so familiar with the layout of the neighborhood as to pick up the pattern immediately: most of the pumpkins are on the porches of the big houses at the top of the hill.

It made us think of another map we had made. By that Halloween the Boylan Heights neighborhood association had been publishing its monthly newsletter for eight years. We had recorded on a map the addresses of every one of the 923 mentions in those ninety-six newsletters. The addresses most frequently referenced were those of the big houses at the top of the hill.



Boylan Heights baseline map



Boylan Heights pumpkin map, 1982

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with more than one

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Boylan Heights newsletter map, 1982

The size of the circle indicates the number of times a household was mentioned in the community newsletter, with the biggest circle indicating sixty or more mentions, and the smallest fewer than four. The shading differentiates between family business and neighborhood business. The darkest circles indicate fewer than twenty percent of references were personal in nature; the lighter the circle, the more likely the newsletter references had to do with a householder's return from a visit to a sick relative, or with friends or relatives coming to visit. (An example of personal news: "Mrs. Harry Caldwell of 1030 W. South St., has a Sister, Mrs. Ruby Tunnell, who has been quite ill in Wilson Memorial Hospital." An example of community news: "Our special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Edwards, who invited us to their beautiful backyard at 417 South Boylan Avenue for the June meeting [of the neighborhood association.]") The distinction shows not only that most of the addresses that appeared in the newsletter are at the top of the hill, but that those located elsewhere are likely to be of the "sick relative" character.

What was interesting was that the people who lived at these addresses changed. The people could come and go, but the addresses kept on being referred to. What this suggested was that people who were going to be movers and shakers in the neighborhood were attracted to certain kinds of houses, bigger ones, toward the top of the hill; and those who weren't going to be movers and shakers were attracted to others, smaller ones, down toward the streams and the railroad tracks that surrounded the neighborhood.

People living in the big houses at the top of the hill were mentioned all the time. The address referenced most frequently is currently occupied by Raleigh's mayor, Charles Meeker. But it was referenced at the same rate when it was occupied by Ben Floyd, who lived there in 1974, the year the newsletter was founded. That year Ben was president of the neighborhood association. The family that moved in when Ben moved out played a lesser but similar role in the newsletter. After that, Charles moved in. He played a strong leadership role in the neighborhood and, before becoming mayor, was a city councilman.

During the eight years these different people lived there, their address was referenced sixty-six times; the house across the street to its side was referenced forty-seven times; the one directly across the street from it was referenced thirty times; and the one five doors down from that house was referenced thirty times. Those four houses account for a fifth of all the references made to any address during the newsletter's first eight years. Only two other addresses in the neighborhood are referenced at least thirty times—and a full third of the addresses were never referenced at all. As far as the newsletter was concerned, these people didn't exist. Their addresses could be anywhere, but they predominated among the small houses lower down the hill.

People who get mentioned in the newsletter carve jack-o'-lanterns and put them on their porches on Halloween. Both of these are measures of class. They are also measures of a certain respect for tradition, especially the traditions of a certain kind of neighborhood, which Boylan Heights has always imagined itself to be. All this would have warmed the cockles of the hearts of Kelsey and Guild, the Boston landscape architects who laid out the neighborhood in 1907. Because they meant for upper-class folk to live at the top of the hill, they laid these lots out large. Down slope they were smaller. At the bottom of the hill the lots were tiny, long, and narrow. Their plan worked.

Nowadays the whole neighborhood has been substantially gentrified, and while the 1982 patterns we found persist, there are more jack-o'-lanterns everywhere. After the kids have trick-or-treated, folks carry their pumpkins to the Boylan Avenue Bridge, where they line them up for a group portrait taken by Michael Zirkle, one of the neighborhood's professional photographers. These portraits hang in many homes.

Want to bet on where the homes are?

Denis Wood initiated the mapping of Boylan Heights, North Carolina, in 1974 as an assignment for students at the School of Design at North Carolina State University. It grew into a long-term project, documented in the as-yet unpublished book, Dancing and Singing: A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights. *Wood writes frequently about mapping for a variety of publications and is the author of* The Power of Maps.