

Caren Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths: Wartime From Above* (Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies), Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. 2018. Pp. xiv, 298. Paper \$27.95, e-book \$27.95.

Bringing together mapping, photography, war, and the interrogation of the aerial view, this engaged study underscores the significance of that view to contemporary visual culture. Moreover, Kaplan, Professor of American Studies at the University of California, Davis, links this account to an established critique of cartography as a form of power and more particularly an engagement with Western control over non-Western landscapes and peoples. The reading of the latter is critical. For example, there is much discussion of the First Gulf War of 1991. Kaplan points out that, although estimates of Iraqi dead in that war number in the hundreds of thousands, in the West, at least, there were very few close-up views, but, instead, mostly aerial images of remote, arid landscapes. This is a pertinent observation and a reasonable critique. What is less so is the claim that the war “both intensified and destabilised this Western tendency to create fantastic deserts in order to control the terrain” (p. 190). No evidence from policymaking circles is offered, but, instead, an essentially theoretical literature relating to a small sample of photographs.

Where the material is more grounded, the study is more helpful. Thus, considering the West Bank, Kaplan draws on the aerial imagery used by Fazal Sheikh and Eyal Weizman in order to delve into the complexity of landscape in a contested space. The focus is on the recovery of the Bedouin part of the northern Negev, and notably the village of al-'Araqib where the al-'Uqbi tribe have tried to maintain their presence. As Kaplan notes, this is a difficult issue of analysis, not least due to the history and meaning of such terms as Bedouin, cultivation, desert and dwelling.

Kaplan is correct to note that maps and photographs are scarcely value-free. That, however, is not the same as readily reading them automatically as forms of control. That leap underrates the practical problems of mapmaking and photographic analysis. These are aspects of the problematic nature of any system of presentation and perception, and ensure that far more than control is at stake. Kaplan's book ranges widely, including the mapping of Scotland in the eighteenth century and aerial photography of the Twin Towers on 9/11.

I was particularly struck by the discussion of the panoramas, which Kaplan skilfully relates to the fashion for ballooning. She argues that the “moment in the mobile experience of flight, frozen in time and yet so sensorily and spatially expansive, was craved by many of the visitors to early panoramic installations.” (p. 107). The use of a low oblique angle is seen as reminiscent of the ascent or descent of a balloon. At this point of the book, wartime is far distant and the subsequent attempt to argue a link is unconvincing: “Given that Barker had relocated from Ireland to Scotland in 1786 to teach ‘perspective drawing,’ it is possible that he responded personally to the undercurrent of resistance to Hanoverian English rule that ran throughout the Gaelic-speaking regions” (p. 115). Well

not really then, and certainly not in Edinburgh. Moving on to London, imperial vantage points are seen in the panoramas. Unfortunately, there is no discussion of James Wyld's later "Great Globe," exhibited in Leicester Square in 1851-62, which was both a paean to empire and seen as having appeal for its military details, by land and sea.

The links drawn by Kaplan are sometimes problematic as well as interesting. For example, after a consideration of the aerial mapping of Iraq in the First World War and then more briefly of the Western Front, where "cubist country" was detected, Kaplan asks "Did RAF personnel in the GHQ read F.T. Marinetti's 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature' where he writes of the perspective he gained from flying in an airplane?" (p. 171). In practice, the range, speed and manoeuvrability of aircraft gave them a great advantage over balloons, and they were far less vulnerable to defensive fire or to attack by other aircraft. The invention of cameras able to take photographs with constant overlap, proved a technique that was very important for aerial reconnaissance, notably with the development of three-dimensional photographic interpretation. Maps worked to record positions, as well as to permit the dissemination of the information. After that we move to postwar air control, ie aerial retribution, in Iraq: The use of aerial photography is presented as contributing greatly to "the geographical legibility of the modern nation-state." (p. 179). The National Photographic Interpretation Center was created by the American in 1961 in order to perform photographic analysis as part of the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology. Photo-reconnaissance was also crucial to the American Army Map Service, which, as a result, delivered large numbers of maps to American forces in the Vietnam War. The Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird, able to fly at Mach 3 and to provide reconnaissance information on 100,000 square miles in an hour, enhanced capability as did drones. And so on. During the First Gulf War, the Defense Mapping Agency produced over 110 million maps for its forces. And so on. The book is a contribution to the discussion, but bolder in its conclusions than the material usually merits.

(854 words)

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