

I woke up and walked over to the local coffee shop for breakfast. As I came out of the apartment I walked west on Colima Street and I crossed these streets:



I ordered my coffee and sat down to drink it while looking at Pushkin Park and the people using it for their morning routines. Every street has a name. Every park has a name. This is how I find my way. This is how I know where I am, where I was and where I am going. Sometimes, in a rare moment of awareness, I notice that the names of the streets are the names of other places, or people, or dates – and even ideas. Liberty Plaza comes to mind. These names are never unique to the streets, in the same way that there are many people with my name, and none of us were the first person to be named Paul. This naming system seems to serve another purpose in addition to wayfinding. It also functions as a diffused mnemonic device reminding us of important nuggets of our culture and history. Sometimes the names act as ideological re-enforcers, they can also be somewhat pedagogical and as a whole they become a form of collective memory.

The first street I crossed, Córdoba, has a name that contains a complex and rich message. The most immediate connection is that there is a street in Mexico City called Córdoba. This name can be traced back to Spain – the country that colonized Mexico and where there is a city named Córdoba. Before that, the city was Roman and called Corduba, and even before it was Phoenician and called Qartuba after a Numidian king. This name is embedded in Latin American history and surfaces not only as a geographical name but at many levels, for instance my grandmother's last name was Córdoba. There are 78 places named Córdoba spread in 13 countries around the world. Without duplicates these namesakes are:

Mexico City,
April 4th, 2018.

By some counts, there are over 7,823,764 unique geographic names in the world. This includes the names of airports, arches, arroyos,

watercourses or channels, bars, basins, bays, beaches, bridges, canals, capes, caves, cemeteries, cliffs, craters, crossings, dams, falls, flats, forests, glaciers, harbors, islands, isthmuses, lakes, levees, mines, parks, plains, populated places, ranges, rapids, reserves, reservoirs, ridges, seas, springs, streams, summits, swamps, trails, tunnels, valleys, wells, and woods, among many others.

I suspect that the total number might vastly exceed this number. What happens if we go beyond collectively agreed names and also count the subjective names we give places: 'grandma's house,' 'the shed in the back,' 'under the mango tree,' 'where we first met,' 'around the corner,' or 'the neighbor's house.'

Place names did not come out of nowhere. I like to imagine that as we acquired language, we invented these names and we began to use them to name the landscape. As our languages and histories evolved, these names started to accumulate and create a linguistic sediment over the landscape. After a few millennia, any original order, system or cohesion has faded; and has been replaced by a rich, complex and chaotic texture of names that is hard to untangle.

Even the abstract space of the sky has been mapped and named. Last night I looked up at the constellation Sagittarius (my sign) – every single one of its visible stars has a proper name:

- AINALRAMI
- ALBALDAH
- ALNASH
- ARKAB POSTERIOR
- ARKAB PRIOR
- ASCELLA
- KAUS AUSTRALIS
- KAUS BOREALIS
- KAUS MEDIA
- NUNKI
- POLIS
- RUKBAT
- TEREBELLUM

A	AGUAJE DE CÓRDOBA
	ALTA CÓRDOBA
	ALTO CÓRDOBA
	AMPLIACIÓN LUIS
	CÓRDOBA REYES
	AQUILES CÓRDOBA
	ARROYO CÓRDOBA
	ARROYO CÓRDOBA
	GRANDE
B	BOCA CÓRDOBA
	BOCA DE CÓRDOBA
C	CALETA CÓRDOBA
	CANADA CÓRDOBA
	CANADA DE CÓRDOBA
	CAYO CÓRDOBA
	CENTRO DE SALUD
	PUERTO CÓRDOBA
	CERRO CÓRDOBA
	CIUDAD CÓRDOBA
	CÓRDOBA
	CÓRDOBA GURAY
	CÓRDOBA DOS MIL
	CORREGIMIENTO
	CÓRDOBA
D	DEPARTAMENTO
	DE CÓRDOBA
E	DISTRITO CÓRDOBA
	EL LLANO DE CÓRDOBA
	ESCUELA MILITAR
	DE CADETES
	JOSE MARIA CÓRDOBA
	ESCUELA RURAL MIXTA
	PUERTO CÓRDOBA
	ESTUARIO CÓRDOBA
H	HACIENDA CÓRDOBA
I	ISLA CÓRDOBA
	ISLA DE CÓRDOBA
	ISLA DE CÓRDOBA
	IRAMOS
	IXHUATLAN-CÓRDOBA
L	LA CÓRDOBA
	LAGUNA DE CÓRDOBA
	LOBATO AND
	CÓRDOBA DITCH
M	LOS CÓRDOBA
	LUIS CÓRDOBA REYES
	LUIS CÓRDOBA REYES
	TERCERA SECCIÓN
	MONTALBAN DE
	CÓRDOBA
N	NIUEVO CÓRDOBA
O	OJO DE AGUA DE
	CÓRDOBA
P	PASCUALA MUÑOZ
	DE CÓRDOBA
	PASO CÓRDOBA
	PASO DEL CÓRDOBA
	PATROCINIO CÓRDOBA
	PENINSULA CÓRDOBA
	PORTILLO DE CÓRDOBA
	PRIEGO DE CÓRDOBA
	PROVINCIA DE CÓRDOBA
	PUENTE CÓRDOBA
	PUERTO CÓRDOBA
	DE CÓRDOBA
	PUERTO CÓRDOBA
	PUNTA CÓRDOBA
Q	PUNTA DE CÓRDOBA
R	QUEBRADA CÓRDOBA
	RANCHO CÓRDOBA
	RAUDAL CÓRDOBA
	RIO CÓRDOBA
S	SENAL CÓRDOBA
	SERRANIA CÓRDOBA
	SIERRA DE CÓRDOBA
	SUBIDA DEL CÓRDOBA
V	VALLE DE CÓRDOBA
	VENTA DE CÓRDOBA
	VEREDA CÓRDOBA BAJO
	VEREDA PUERTO
	CÓRDOBA
	VILLA CÓRDOBA
	VILLAFRANCA DE
	CÓRDOBA
	VILLANUEVA DE CÓRDOBA
	VILLAVICIOSA DE
	CÓRDOBA

June 15th, 2018
Paul Ramirez Jonas
Naming Rights





Every single one of these names must have stories and namesakes behind them. It is as if our languages have spilled onto the landscape and spread over it, intermixing and becoming re-organized along something different than their original cultural and linguistic context. We can now use different grammars to read this rich text in different ways. These can be pragmatic and quotidian, like when we give someone directions. They can be speculative and contain meaning like when an astrologer reads our stars. Or the names can be organized to represent a journey.

Back in New York City I take the train to work. I get on the F line at 7th avenue. As the subway line crosses the city it acts like a grammar that organizes the names. First stop:

- 4 Avenue
- Smith and 9th St
- Carroll (why two r's and two l's?)
- Bergen (in Norway?)
- Jay Street-MetroTech (transfer to the A,C or R)
- York (like a city in England)
- East Broadway
- Delancey (always reminds me of the painter Delaunay)
- 2 Avenue (where Veselka's restaurant has been since 1954)
- Broadway-Lafayette (reminds me of the French general who came to the United States' aid during the war of independence)
- West 4th
- 14 Street (I space out reading the news)
- 23 Street (conjures nothing)
- Herald Square (a messenger, a memory of the Herald Tribune)
- Bryant Park (the gold standard)
- Rockefeller Center (a very rich family)
- 57th Street (a multiple of three)
- Lexington Av (my stop, and a famous battle of the revolutionary war)

I remember when the Jay Street/Metrotech stop was simply called Jay street/Borough Hall. Borough Hall is the the seat of our municipal, democratically elected government; and it has been replaced by the name MetroTech – the name of an urban public-private partnership development. Name changes are not unusual, nor is it that a place has several names. Near this subway stop, another station called Atlantic was recently changed to Barclay Center. The original name referred to something shared and vast, a commons, an ocean. The name came from late Middle English; and before that from Latin, and before that from the Greek Atlantikos. It was originally used to name the Atlas Mountains in North Africa. It was later used to name the sea near those mountains, and later the whole ocean which that sea belonged to. Now it has the name of a private bank that bought the naming rights over our public space. Most subway riders see letters that form the name Barclay, but they read Atlantic. Who has the right to

permanently name our commons and public spaces? Whose ideologies, values and histories are inscribed in our landscape? As citizens and individuals we seem to lack the right or agency to name; but we do have the freedom to read this text in any way we choose. We don't make these places ours by naming them but by reading them, performing them and by inhabiting them in our own way and for our own purposes.

For example, from September 17, 2011 to November 15, 2011 citizens occupied Zuccotti Park in downtown Manhattan, New York in protest against economic inequality worldwide. Zuccotti Park is a plaza that was named after the CEO of the corporation that now manages it. This public space reveals the devolution of many of our commons. United States Steel created the plaza in 1968 in exchange for the rights to build a taller-than-allowed office tower next to the site. At the time the plaza was named Liberty Square. While privately funded, it is held in public trust by the city – United States Steel did not own, regulate, manage or rename it. The square was rebuilt again as a result of damage incurred during the September 11 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. This was done with private corporate money; and it was renamed Zuccotti Park after John Zuccotti. Mr. Zuccotti had been a public servant, working as the City Planning Commission Chairman for the city. After retiring, he became CEO of a real estate development corporation – the very same corporation that provided the funds for the rebuilding of Liberty Square. From Liberty to Zuccotti, is this the future of our public spaces?

Zuccotti Park is a civic no-man's land, which is reflected in its old and new names. Regardless of its renaming it still remained a potential gathering place, where citizens ironically had fewer restrictions on their right of assembly than in a 'proper' park. New York City parks all have curfews. Meanwhile, as part of the transfer of Liberty Square to the corporation, the state demanded 24-hour public access to the Park. With this change the park became one of the rare public spaces in the city without a curfew. It is in this terrain vague that Occupy Wall Street landed in 2011 – the protesters settled in one of the few parcels of land where a continuous protest could take place without breaking the law. Had the protesters succeeded, could the plaza then have reverted to its original name? Or was the name altered by their performance of Liberty in Zuccotti Park?