

The cartographic impulse: post-representational cartography practices in contemporary visual art¹

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ABSTRACT

Post-representational cartography is being approached from broad interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies and geographical humanities. Since poststructuralism and postmodern theory, political and cultural readings have emerged which consider dynamic, performative, and postcolonial realities in cartographic practices. Taking the hypothesis that contemporary visual arts have played a fundamental role in this paradigm shift, this article presents a part of the research developed within the R&D project on critical cartography in the framework of the *Art Globalization Interculturality* laboratory at the University of Barcelona. With the aim of understanding the relationship between post-representational cartography and contemporary visual arts, a brief state of the art of the most significant contributions is presented, as well as a set of categories as interpretative conceptual tools for the case studies: contingent cartographies, sedimented cartographies, embodied cartographies and cosmographies. In the same way, these results are analysed by problematizing the challenges and contradictions found when confronting cartographic practices in contemporary visual arts from a post-representational perspective.

Keywords

post-representational cartography, postcoloniality, contingent cartographies, sedimented cartographies, embodied cartographies, cosmographies

Introduction

The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters.

Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

The title of this article takes as reference the "mapping impulse" concept of John Brian Harley, as well as two key contributions of art theory, being the articles "The Allegorical Impulse" by Craig Owens and "An Archival Impulse" by Hal Foster, both published in the journal *October* around the turn of the twenty-first century.² While Craig Owens sought to draw up a new theory of art by contrasting allegory with the symbolic meaning of modern art (Owens 1980, 67-86), Hal Foster approached contemporary art as an alternative enunciation strategy that avoided the assumptions of modern representation (Foster 2004, 3-22). Some years earlier, Hal Foster had published his well-known essay "The Artist as Ethnographer?," where

he confirmed the interest of contemporary art in the methodologies of the social sciences and their irruption “into the expanded field of culture” (Foster 1995, 306). He argued that post-colonial discourses, the cultural other, and subculturality occupy the theoretical concerns of cultural studies, displacing the previous place of proletarian subalternity in the humanities (Foster 1995, 302-309). In addition, art has also experienced a shift from its traditional ‘aesthetic’ domain to a social, geographical or ethnographic sphere, and this is the reason why “mapping of a given institution or a related community is a primary form that site-specific art now assumes” (Foster 1995, 306).

Indeed, in the face of the models of representation of space derived from Euclidean logic and systematized during colonial modernity, since the second half of the 20th century artistic practices involved in the reinterpretation of cartography and mapping processes have proliferated. These practices have coincided with the effervescence of certain theories that, in opposition to the objective knowledge of modern thought, have formulated a critique of language, science and totalizing knowledge systems. This paradigm shift would imply, in cartographic terms, the discrediting of the modern colonial map centred on political logic and the opening to a new form of cartography that, from a post-representational logic, is capable of taking in dynamic, postcolonial and performative realities. In this respect, our hypothesis was that artistic practices responsive to the critique of representation in cultural studies have played a fundamental role in this paradigm shift. Therefore, the contribution of our research resides in approaching the post-representational cartography debate from the analysis of contemporary visual art, as well as in categorizing a set of stages of case studies as a conceptual tool that could be used in understanding the relations between art and cartography. But before unfolding such case studies, the state of the question of the most significant contributions in post-representational cartography and its relationship with the visual arts will be briefly recapitulated.

State of the question

The use of spatial metaphors in the analyses of Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault definitively contributed to ‘spatializing’ the humanities and social sciences through a critical narrative that combined the analysis of space with its social, political and cultural dimensions (Bachelard 1957; Lefebvre 1974; Foucault 1975). This interdisciplinary turn brought together geography, political theory, economics, urban studies, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, literature, philosophy, cognitive and technological analysis, architecture and the visual arts. Starting in the 1980s – coinciding with the global diffusion of the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault – with the consolidation of the school of cultural studies, the interdisciplinary debate of the spatial turn was opened up, promoting policies of recognition or “criticism of representation” (Foster 1995, 302-209). In these analyses, the concept of ‘ideology’ – which had been central in critical theory – was

replaced by that of ‘representation’, prioritizing cultural criticism when addressing space and cartography. The configuration of this new framework was central in several works published in the 1990s, such as *The Location of Culture*, by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994), or the commitment of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) to link the discourse of cultural studies to the emergence of a new postcolonial and globalized spatial imagination. To some extent, this goal was also shared by urban theorist Edward Soja in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996).

As a consequence of all this, critical geography has been established as a topic of research from which to be able to map multiculturalism and a diversity of global identities, in contrast to radical geography focused on Marxism and class conflict (Gregory et al. 2009, 123).³ For this purpose, new perspectives such as global studies, gender studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, ecology, antispeciesism and the Anthropocene theory have been added to the geographical humanities. All these perspectives have participated in discrediting modern cartography as a representation of the Eurocentric, white, patriarchal and anthropocentric model of modernity, appealing to a new form of cartography and polyphonic geographical imagination. Some of these fronts underlie the volume *Rethinking Maps: New Frontiers in Cartographic Theory*, edited by Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin and Chris Perkins in 2009, where the poststructuralist ideas of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway were introduced with the aim of defining a new type of post-representational cartography, linked to the multiplicity of identities, spaces of experience and performative logic: ‘mapping’ (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins 2009).

Likewise, discrediting modern cartography and analysing how Europe was consolidated as the driving force in the production of global space and the centre of the world during modernity, has also been the goal of critics of the Latin American decolonial sphere such as Aníbal Quijano in *Modernidad, identidad y utopía en América Latina* (1988), and Walter D Mignolo in *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000), as well as from what have been called “epistemologies of the south,” systematized by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in *Epistemologías do sul* (2009). These studies, which also take as their reference cultural studies, French poststructuralism, and very particularly Jacques Derrida’s idea of deconstruction, have had a special impact on fields of research in the Spanish language and have encouraged a growing interest in artistic practices related to mapping or critical cartography in these contexts.

All of the above has had a significant impact on both art theory and art practice, which has led to the launch of numerous artistic projects as well as the publication of several analyses in regard to critical and post-representational cartography; some of these contributions are enumerated below. It is no coincidence that we began this text by referring to the journal *October*, considering its fundamental role since the end of the 1970s in translating the ideas

of poststructuralism and cultural studies for the contemporary artistic sphere. In the article “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Rosalind Krauss described certain artistic practices already interested in a new type of landscape, the construction of sites and axiomatic structures, as well as other forms of “signaling” the territory (Krauss 1979, 30-44). It was precisely around the work of both post-minimalist land-art artists, and what has been termed the “new genre of public art,” where critics and art historians have located the first cases of these kinds of practices. The volume *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy in 1995 as a result of a symposium organized a year earlier, should be understood as an attempt to reflect on a new kind of procedural artistic practices, many of which were taking over public space using cartographic methodologies as a cultural and social tool.⁴ Within this volume, in her article “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be” (the germ of a book that she published two years later with the title *The Lure of the Local: The Sense of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 1997), art theorist Lucy Lippard recognized that

[f]irst, the postmodernist impulse [...] has spawned a plethora of exhibitions, articles, and books called re-viewing, re-visioning, re-mapping, re-thinking, re-photographing. Second, the titles of exhibitions about land and nature are becoming melancholic and even apocalyptic: for instance, *Against Nature*, *The Demoralized Landscape*, *The Unmaking of Nature*, *Lost Illusions*, and *Utopia, Post-Utopia*. Third, the terms “territory,” “land,” “earth,” “terrain,” and “mapping” are also ubiquitous in both theory and practice. The map as a micro/macro visual concept has long been of interest to artists, and particularly to “conceptual” and “earth” artists from 1965 to 1975. On one hand, mapping the turf can be seen as abetting surveys, fences, boundaries, zoning, and other instruments of possession. On the other hand, maps tell us where we are and show us where we’re going. (Lippard 1995, 114-130)

In a way more focused on post-representational cartography, and in the same year as the symposium organized by Suzanne Lacy, the exhibition *Mapping*, curated by Robert Storr, took place at MoMA, New York. This exhibition, which sought to inscribe the fascination and interest of art in the history of cartography, following the model of exhibitions such as *Cartes et figures de la terre*, organized in 1980 at the Centre Pompidou, would be the trigger for a debate that would hold sway for many years (Storr et al. 1994). As part of this debate, the following year the artist Peter Fend organized an exhibition at American Fine Arts in New York with the title *Mapping: A Response to MoMA*, which refocused the topic of cartography of contemporary artists not so much towards their fascination with the history of cartography, but as a critical position and in terms of their goal to use cartography as a transforming tool of the social environment and the role of maps. In the catalogue that was published in this regard, the artist’s text appealed to definitively replace the concept of ‘map’ with that of ‘mapping’, underlining the procedural, counter-representative and performative connotations of the latter (Fend 1995).⁵ In the same way, as a result of their performative possibilities, many of these artistic mapping practices have been directly connected to the “direct action” of social and environmental movements, especially since the First International Earth Sum-

mit, organized in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The actions – carried out by both Greenpeace and activist artists during the Earth Summit to criticize the interests of economic dominance that were concealed amidst the event – produced a wave of replicas by artists, critics and theorists who, from the activist and postcolonial discourse, demanded to transform the world-image.⁶ Among these, the statements of the artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña were especially significant for his defence of a map without political borders. His words were:

Artist and writers throughout the continent are currently involved in a redefinition of our continental topography. We imagine either a map of the Americas without borders, a map turned upside down, or one in which borders are organically drawn by geography, culture, and immigrations, no by the capricious fingers of economic domination. (Lacy 1995, 19)

In recent years, contributions – both from theory and art practices – have continued to be made in regard to the possibilities of rethinking the idea of cartography in the shift towards a critical and post-representational cartography.⁷ Among other existing research programs, the findings presented in this article are part of the R&D project *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Era: New Methodologies, Concepts and Analytical Approaches*.⁸ Such research is the result of the phenomenon that I have briefly described and confirms its consolidation as an object of study in contemporary visual arts. Specifically, this research began in 2012 with the consideration that, despite the large amount of evidence emerged in recent years regarding mapping practices in the visual arts, there has not been a methodological will or historiographic labour to analyse the phenomenon as a whole from the field of art theory, which has caused a certain dispersion or fragmentation of the contributions we have elucidated. In the same way, despite being a topic of discussion that has brought together a great variety of disciplinary fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the expanded field of cultural studies or the geographical humanities, there have continued to be isolated analyses along disciplinary lines. Taking into account the necessary interdisciplinarity when facing this new paradigm, our research emerged in its beginnings with the aim of overcoming these disciplinary limits, as well as inscribing within a common mission in the humanities the aim to rethink, in both ontological and epistemological terms, modern cartography and the study of new mapping practices.

In order to analyse this in detail and place such kind of artistic production in an interdisciplinary framework, a large assemblage of mapping practices developed by art over the last 60 years was carried out, with up to a total of 100 case studies. The way to approach this large number of case studies has been to elaborate five categories of analysis that might allow us to interpret each of the artistic works according to the possibilities they offer when challenging the logic of modern cartography: the visualization of complex, often cross-border relationships and dynamics which are invisible on political maps (Contingent Cartographies); the surpassing of the false dichotomy *chronos-topos* that has excluded the temporal

dimension from maps (Sedimented Cartographies); the recognition of the body as a geographical, biopolitical and performative space (Embodied Cartographies); the possibility of redeeming a negative and self-critical narrative in modern cartography (Negative Cartographies); and the appeal to a definitive escape route, through which it might be possible to imagine other kinds of territorial orderings (Cosmographies).⁹ As a summary of this research project, just a brief overview of four of such categories are presented in the second part of this article in order to focus on some critical, post-representational and postcolonial cartographies, as well as to present these categories as a conceptual interpretative tool.

Contingent cartographies

The Situationists proposed a new aesthetic based on chance, mutability and the playful sense of the city. An aesthetic “as a sum of possibilities” that materialized in the practice of *detournement*, with press clippings, photography, film and music, as well as with maps (Debord 1955, 11-15; Debord and Wolman 1956, 2-9). By creatively distorting the sense of cartography and introducing motion-related arrows and vectors, they were able to achieve their goal of “renewed cartography” (Debord 1955, 11-15). Even though they were using their artistic techniques in a larger attempt to overturn capitalism, the numerous subsequent analyses and practices are related to the complex and dynamic relationships of territories and the need to search for other post-representational cartographic models. This would be the case of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*, where they introduced a new cartographic possibility that was open, connectable in all its dimensions, removable, alterable, capable of receiving constant modifications, which they called a “rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). In addition, postcolonial theorists such as Arjun Appadurai or Homi Bhabha have argued for the analysis of the territory from a complex approach that would take into account ‘in-between spaces’ (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994). Along with them, numerous artists have tried to challenge the statism of maps and propose another class of cartographic devices that are able to visualize this complexity and account for cross-border realities.

The Mexican artist collective Torolab works on artistic processes that include extensive research on territories. These investigations are the starting point of projects that can materialize later in very diverse devices, such as new technology, clothing, maps, self-construction systems, experimental laboratories and even food stalls. Through collaborative work, they have been able to draw a complex cartography of Tijuana and of “cross-border” life. In *La región de los pantalones transfronterizos* (2004-2005), Torolab did a mapping of the movement on the border between Mexico and the United States (Tijuana / San Diego) through GPS devices placed on the clothes of five people who were constantly in transit between both countries. The locators traced transnational routes based on the economic, family and work movements of the participants. Within the daily life of these five inhabitants,

the finished cartography made it possible to approach the territory in a different way than the divisions of the established geopolitical borders.

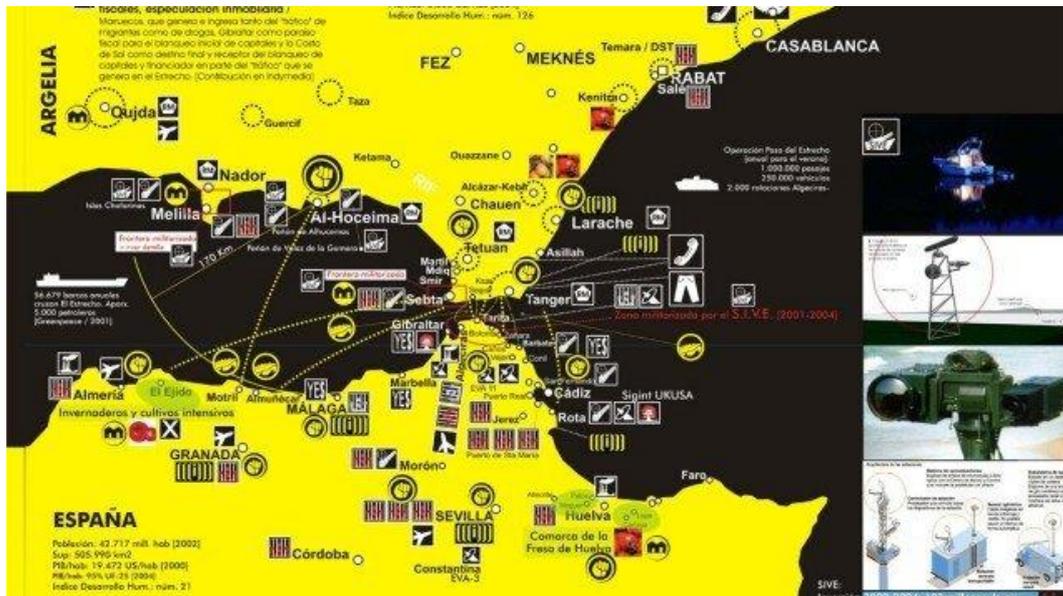


Fig 1. Hackitectura and Indymedia Estrecho, *Cartografía Crítica del Estrecho* (A-side), 2004. Courtesy of José Pérez de Lama, Pablo de Soto, and José Lauhé.

There have also been many cartographic works developed by the group of Spanish architects “hackitectura” from the logic of the appropriation of digital networks and public space. These projects have been articulated with associations, local institutions, and architects. The *Cartografía Crítica del Estrecho de Gibraltar* (2004, fig. 1) addresses then-current power relations over the Strait area and their consequences on migration and the movement of populations. Whether due to the actions of military groups, or through the political and social reality between North Africa, the Canary Islands and Andalusia, the cartography of these areas shows a constant movement of people. The project was presented in two cartographies: on the one hand, the Cartography of the Strait, which shows the flow of capital, migrants and information focusing on control strategies, the economy, borders and the militarization of the area between Madrid, Mauritania and the Canary Islands; and, on the other, the Fadaiat Action Map, which includes the ‘mig-pre-cog’ social networks and the trajectory as an ‘Indymedia’ project.

Sedimented cartographies

The postmodern critique of representation also challenged the supremacy of space over time, considering that this supremacy was an achievement of Western civilization (Soja 2000, 35-39). The political map of nation states erases any trace of the memory of the conquered or subjugated peoples, while at the same time denying the changing of territorial limits. On the contrary, a cartography with a post-representational will would tend to overcome the false dichotomy *chronos-topos* by visualizing histories and incorporating the

palimpsestic memory of territories. In addition to this, many communities in colonized territories conceive space inseparably from the histories of their ancestors and their places are intimately linked to time. As Bruce Chatwin deftly showed us, this would be the case of Australian aboriginal communities (Chatwin 1987). This gaze towards the temporal sediments of the territory is shared by several visual artists and, in some cases, has also been linked to the ‘artistic practices of time’, such as sound art, music, cinema or video art.

Present Tense (1996) is an installation composed of 2,200 square Nablus soap prisms, which Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum pierced with small red dots. These points reproduce the outline of the Middle East, outlining the map drawn up in the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement by the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to demarcate the land that was to be returned to Palestine. This soap is in fact a traditional Palestinian product whose industry has been developed in the city of Nablus from the 10th century to the present. Mona Hatoum’s cartography highlights the ephemeral state of recent territorial mapping and, at the same time, reflects the persistent and enduring history of the Palestinian people. The work’s title reinforces both the sense of constantly changing territories and the tensions that arise from the different political agendas in the region, referring precisely to this condition of temporality that in turn has to do with territorial tension and the construction of histories.



Fig. 2. Alÿs, Francis, *The Green Line*, 2004. In collaboration with Philippe Bellaïche, Julien Devaux and Rachel Leah Jones. Courtesy of the artist.

For its part, *The Green Line* (2004, fig. 2), by Belgian-Mexican artist Francis Alÿs, is a continuation of an action carried out by the artist in the summer of 1995 in the city of São Paulo, marking a line in his path with a pot of paint. In June 2004, that same action was repeated following a line parallel to what had been the Green Line that crossed Jerusalem, with 58 litres of green paint used to walk the 24 km. This line had been drawn in pencil on a map by Moshe Dayan at the end of the war between Israel and Jordan in 1948, and it remained the boundary until the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel occupied the territories inhabited by Palestinians east of the line. The filmed documentation of the walk was shot involving various spontaneous observers who joined the action. The artist thus proposed a reflection on what the role of poetic acts could be in violent political situations, and on how the production of space also has historical implications.

Embodied cartographies

Following the poststructuralist perspective of Michel Foucault in his works on biopolitical spaces, the recognition of the body as a geographical, biopolitical and performative space would emerge from a critical analysis of the tradition of Western cartographies linked to anatomy, psychology, immorality, disease and healing (Foucault 1976). Examples such as Leonhard Ludwig Finke's atlas of diseases, Dr. John Snow's map of cholera, Charles Booth's map of poverty and maps of the human brain from the phrenology experiments of Dr. Franz Joseph Gall and the Fowler brothers, up to the map of the Human Connectome Project or the latest cognitive neuro-cartographies, would be part of this tradition. These cartographic works were especially linked to statistical or morphological cartography developed since the 19th century and, although their main goal was controlling the bodies for scientific achievements, some cases served as an argument to elaborate criminal profiles, defend racial purity, diagnose non-normative behaviours or justify colonial settlements. Numerous post-representational cartographic practices carried out by contemporary artists or researchers assume the geographical condition of our bodies and the challenge to liberate this first essential geography from the biopolitical control of traditional cartography and the infinite space of the geometrician. In this way, several artistic projects have focused on the act of "walking as an aesthetic practice" (Careri 2017), but also have visualized the wound that colonial violence leaves on bodies (Vergès 2003, 10-15).

The work of Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão examines issues such as anthropology and miscegenation in contemporary Brazilian society. Her works include painting, sculpture, works on paper, installation and photography. She is interested in modern forms of colonization in contemporary Brazilian society. The *Contingente* work (1998-2000) is an installation which shows the signs of colonization on the body. The line of the equator, barely indicated by a minimal legend, is marked as a stigma or wound on the palm of a hand, in the same way that colonization remained as a scar through cultural tradition or language.

Through this symbolic gesture, the artist delves into the tragedy of that chapter in colonial history, which was also a chapter in the history of the domination of bodies.

Mapa-corpo (Decolonizing the Body, 2002-2005, fig. 3), was a series of interactive poetic rituals by the Mexican artist collective La Pocha Nostra, which explored neo-colonization/decolonization through acupuncture and the enactment of post-9/11 ‘*corpolitica*.’



Fig. 3. La Pocha Nostra, *Mapa-corpo (Decolonizing the Body)*, 2005. Courtesy of the artists.

La Pocha Nostra (Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes and Nola Mariano) denounces global culture, xenophobia, organized crime violence, the economy in free fall, and how these factors impact the human body as well as our notions of identity and nationality. Guillermo Gómez-Peña invited the public to participate in the images created by La Pocha Nostra to embody “the border experiences” (Britto et al. 2012, 35). La Pocha Nostra is a transdisciplinary artistic organization that involves a support network for artists from diverse fields, generations and ethnic origin, with the aim of erasing the boundaries between art and politics, artistic practice and theory and artist and spectator.

Cosmographies

Finally, cosmographies would appeal to a definitive escape route through which we might be able to imagine another kind of territorial planning, even opening up to non-Western geographical imagination. Unlike political modern cartography, cosmographies tend to imagine an integral conception of the world, where a separation or rupture between the outer and inner world cannot be conceived. These behaviours could be considered a subjective planning of the whole, a primal will to know and make sense of the universe through mystical

diagrams or other cartographical devices. These other worldviews were a milestone of the editorial plan of John Brian Harley and David Woodward for the *History of Cartography* project carried for the University of Chicago (Harley and Woodward 1987). They were also described by Michel Foucault as *des espaces autres*, and post-/decolonial theorists have encouraged consideration of these non-Western geographical imaginations (Foucault 1967, 12-19; Vergès 2003, 10-15). Michel Foucault took account of traditional Persian carpets, but this would be also the case of the Mandala, the Candomblé or the Aztec diagrams, such as the map of Tenochtitlan in the Mendoza Codex. Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the potential of these cosmographies lay in the ability to break free from the matter of expression and the machinery of production of hegemonic subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari 1980).

The *Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* (1978) is a video piece by British artist and filmmaker Peter Greenaway that examines over 92 mixed media images, most of them paintings by the artist himself. The film is related to the migration of a soul following the migratory paths of birds, and the subjective movement of the camera focuses on each of these itineraries. Such travel is described in detail using the paintings as if they were maps or some type of cartography. This mapping work is not intended for the territorial planning of a physical location, but as a means of reflecting on life itself. This work by Greenaway demonstrates the cartographic possibilities of the video medium, but at the same time opens the door to reconsider the *oeuvres* of art, either abstractly or figuratively, as cartographies in themselves, able to be traversed and walked as if on a geographical surface.

In the late 1970s, German artist Lothar Baumgarten lived with indigenous communities for 18 months in the forests of Venezuela and Brazil. During that time, he made more than 500 drawings, as well as photographs and films with the Yanomami. In this way he experimented with notions of territoriality linked to the question of rituality, repetition, oral culture and sound. Additionally, the artist absorbed nouns and place names that followed another kind of geographical imagination and linguistic parameters, different from those of the West. These place names had been phonetically composed through a tradition of melodies that acted as mapping mechanisms of the territories associated with the Guyana topographic basin, as well as other areas in Venezuela and Brazil. These melodies had already disappeared from the group's memory, but their names remained on the indigenous maps. Lothar Baumgarten collected these place names to test various forms of cartography, installations and objects, following a cosmological logic, as "*Venezuela*" *Map of Indigenous Societies* (1985, fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Lothar Baumgarten, “Venezuela’ Map of Indigenous Societies,” 1985. Photographer: Bill Jacobson. Published in *Lothar Baumgarten. Autofocus Retina* by Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Marí et al. 2008, 51).

Conclusions

Postmodern criticism focused on exposing how science, especially Newtonian mechanics and Euclidean space and language, exercised its domination by presenting itself as “a unique, indisputable, authentic, true and absolute system, quintessence of white, patriarchal discourse, and symbol of the colonialist power of the West” (Bishop 1990, 51-65). Faced with modern science, other possible systems influenced by what is termed the critique of representation were proposed. As part of this challenge, absolute classification systems and watertight categories, as well as genealogical and arborescent systems were suspect. Precisely, Michel Foucault and especially his contemporary Jacques Derrida, placed the question of classification systems and taxonomy at the centre of poststructuralist reflection (Derrida 1995). This leads us to confirm that the crisis of certain forms of language classification coincides with the crisis of knowledge systems and modern cartography. In fact, this had already been noticed by John Brian Harley when he transferred the post-structuralist debate to the discipline of geography (Harley 1989, 1-20).

As a consequence of all this, since the postcolonial debate it has been proposed to intervene or distort modern maps to adjust them to this new reality. This would be the case of the well-known Arno Peters proposal which, taking James Gall’s cylindrical projection,

corrected the shape of the countries against what he considered to be the representation of eurocentrism and colonial exploitation visible in the Gerardus Mercator projections (Monmonier 2004). In the same way, discourses that defend a southern orientation on maps have proliferated, starting from the idea that the northern orientation presupposes a centre in this hemisphere. Taking as its reference the famous poster *La escuela del sur* (1943), by the artist Joaquín Torres García, decolonial theory and the ‘epistemologies of the south’ have called for turning the map (de Sousa Santos 2009). However, we have concluded that these campaigns do not propose an effective solution for different reasons: on the one hand, because they do not start from a post-representational and performative will that allows for profound challenges to the logic of the map; and on the other hand, because they do not take into consideration that the centrality of the world has been supplanted by a complex polycentric network of powers, which makes any attempt to standardize one type of orientation unfeasible.

Likewise, the decolonial analysis of how Europe was consolidated as the engine of the modern production of global space and the centre of the world, has made it possible to understand modernity not only as an economic and political project, but above all as an epistemic project. From these analyses, Walter D. Mignolo has understood that modernity would be constitutive of a colonial world system of domination, fundamentally through the production of a “historical-cultural dependence” (Mignolo 2010), while Aníbal Quijano has approached the colonial project of European modernity as a colonization of knowledge (Quijano 2010, 22-32). Like Bruno Latour’s concept of the “immutable mobile,” these contributions confirm that only through an epistemological critique of the material and social conditions of the production of knowledge is it possible to deeply challenge the logic of cartography (Latour 1987).

Lastly, the challenge to the modern centre as a system of colonial domination has opened up the possibility of unfolding other ‘diffuse’, ‘displaced’ or ‘demultiplied’ identities through a new topology that has assimilated the theory of complex systems, disseminated thanks to the studies in cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson and its application in the field of economics by Friedrich Hayek (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Weizman 2007, 185-218). This new topology would correspond to the “micrological fabric of identities, individualisms or intensities” of complex latitudes of the Internet and Big Data (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 224). Beyond the fact that we consider it necessary to carry out studies that analyse this phenomenon from the point of view of a post-representational cartography, the role currently exercised by financial and market powers on new forms of geographical imagination invites us to also reconsider the possibility of a cognitive cartography as Fredric Jameson suggested in regard to Kevin Lynch (Jameson 1991). In turn, this cognitive cartography would be able to ascertain a clear sense of where we are in relation to broader ideological structures and determining the place of post-representational cartography in them.

In conclusion, contemporary visual arts have not only tackled early and prolifically the debate on critical, post-representational and postcolonial cartography but have also played a crucial role in establishing this paradigm shift. The ability of art to transform the logic of modern cartography has to do, precisely, with its potential when it comes to putting a knowledge system in crisis, and its ability to create other models responsive to other thought systems. Whether incorporating complex, temporal, corporal or cosmological dimensions, the cartographic practices of the visual arts that we have elucidated account for the multiplicity of proposals and the impossibility of thinking about cartography from a single and absolute system, rather inviting us to think about the problem from the expanded field that is art itself. At the same time, as Foster recalled in regard to Walter Benjamin's text "The Author as Producer" (1995, 302-309), they would be able to side with the other, to intervene in the problem, to change the techniques of traditional cartography, to transform the apparatus of dominant culture. But a correct tendency is not enough, that is, to assume an ideological place, an impossible place: an impossible cartography.¹⁰

Notes

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² We are particularly interested in the idea of 'mapping' beyond physical artifacts: "There has probably always been a mapping impulse in human consciousness, and the mapping experience – involving the cognitive mapping of space – undoubtedly existing long before the physical artifacts we now call maps" (Harley 1987, 1).

³ "Critical human geography emerged from a long tradition of dissent. Although its predecessors include the anarchist geography of scholars such as Reclus and Kropotkin, Anglo-American critical geography's roots are to be found in the radical geography that emerged in the 1970s. A self-identified field of critical geography began to emerge in the late 1980s. Important departures included a rejection of some of the structural excesses of Marxism (in line with a general postmodern turn), and a sharpening interest in questions of culture and representation, as opposed to the economic focus of radical geography. Radical and critical geography, while closely related, are not interchangeable" (Gregory et al. 2009, 123).

⁴ See also Smithson 1969 and Smith 1981.

⁵ See also McDonough 2002, Holmes 2009, and Thompson 2009.

⁶ Among other actions, a world map flag was presented, in which the global allocation of states was being reconsidered.

⁷ For some more contributions on critical cartography in contemporary visual arts see Bourriaud 2000, Rogoff 2000, Barriados 2007, de Diego 2008, O'Rourke 2010, Risler and Ares 2013, Careri 2017.

⁸ R&D project *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Era: New Methodologies, Concepts and Analytical Approaches* (MICINN: HAR2010-17403 / MINECO: HAR2013-43122P / MINECO: HAR 2016-75100-P, Art Globalization Interculturality laboratory of the University of Barcelona) was funded from 2010 to 2019 by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, together with other state and regional organizations, with 25 researchers from various international universities participating with the aim of analysing the relationships of contemporary artistic practices with the ideas of cartography, interculturality, multiculturalism, 'glocality', border crossings, diaspora, postcolonial discourse and geo-aesthetics.

⁹ The first results of this research have been partially presented both in the artistic field through exhibitions, round tables and workshops, and in academic research conferences, lectures, scientific articles and as a PhD project, *El Impulso Cartográfico: Comportamientos cartográficos del arte contemporáneo en la era del capitalismo deslocalizado, 1957-2017*. See Padrón-Alonso 2018 and 2020.

¹⁰ "My title is meant to evoke 'The Author as Producer', the text which Walter Benjamin first presented

at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris in April 1934. There, under the influence of Bertold Brecht and Russian revolutionary culture, Benjamin (1978) called on the artist on the left ‘to side with the proletariat’. In vanguard Paris in April 1934 this call was not radical; the approach, however, was. For Benjamin urged the ‘advanced’ artist to intervene, like the revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production – to change the ‘techniques’ of traditional media, to transform the ‘apparatus’ of bourgeois culture. A correct ‘tendency’ was not enough; that was to assume a place ‘beside the proletariat’. And ‘what kind of place is that?’ Benjamin asked, in lines that still scathe. ‘That of a benefactor, of an ideological patron, an impossible place’” (Foster 1995, 302).

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