

Making Cartographies of Ourselves¹

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"Social ecology will have to work towards rebuilding human relations at every level of the socius."

Félix Guattari, The Three Ecologies

In April 2014 one of the last great urban-rural fires took place in the city of Valparaíso, Chile. This fire consumed neighborhoods in which more than 3,000 people lived. A few days after the fire we organized, in collaboration with Iconoclasistas, a "Collective Mapping Workshop", which focused on a critical reflection of the ways to present the city from the standpoint of its representatives and subjectivities. It also looked at possible ways to collectively build an integral and binding awareness of the city's most relevant problems.

The mapping workshop originated from an invitation that we extended to the Argentinian duet Iconoclasistas. We organized the workshop in the Cultural Space of Santa Ana, a popular, self-organized community space located in the Cordillera Hill, one of the 44 hills in the city. This self-organized place is situated next to the first building designed as workers' housing in Chile in 1870 – the Workers Population La Unión, which was restored by its inhabitants in early 2000. Attendance to the mapping workshop was wide and heterogeneous. Participants came from several social, political and cultural areas; students were also represented. For three days we worked on four maps of Valparaíso, using diverse graphic supplies. During this time the main problems of the area slowly became visible; they were associated with the processes of gentrification and privatization of the city versus the counter-culture and self-management organizations.

The debate at the workshop centered around alternative concepts of today's city – conceiving places where the city is becoming inclusive and democratic in regards to its public and common spaces. The participants conceptualized the "fictions" that the government elaborates at the discursive level in order to sell ideas such as "development" and "innovation" to the citizens. These processes were contextualized in the face of the advancement of a neoliberal city that expands without including them and that, by doing so, creates precarious conditions. We also addressed the progressive weakening – almost the complete loss – of the ties of the Valparaíso citizens with the ocean due to the diverse projects of commoditization and privatization of access. Due to the fire, the workshop also provided a place of encounter in a moment of crisis for many; it was a moment of vulnerability in which people were able to generate action and participation to revitalize links, to make sense of a series of activities that were taking place throughout the city and to support those who were affected by the fire.

One of the results of the mapping workshop and its meetings was a poster titled "Did I invite you to live here?", referring to the cynic response of the Valparaíso major to a claim from one of the victims of the fire. The phrase also reflects forty years of public housing policy in Chile. One of the critical reflections developed was that the current city is the result of policies implemented to support private, financing and speculative sectors, the result of land property and the implementation of subsidies administered by the Chilean state. These subsidies ultimately serve real estate compa-

nies that make a business out of social housing projects. The poster also highlights a series of other problems: The current port is almost completely privatized (86%); the life of traditional popular neighborhoods has suffered from gentrification resulting from real estate speculation; the eviction of neighbors and the privatization of public spaces, giving primacy to the profile of a city built for the eventual visitor. In contrast to this outlook, we identified the presence of cultural, social and communal spaces, the presence of students and teachers, workers and militants, who, along with an alerted, solidary community, meet to think about and activate transformative practices through community self-organization and networks.

After the workshop, a group in Valparaíso worked on systemizing the information of the four maps. We shared this information and talked about ways to formulate vital questions in the collective mapping process. Finally, Iconoclasistas worked along with CRAC in designing the map-poster. The poster was printed in Valparaíso and distributed formally and informally throughout the city; it was also plastered on the walls of community and social centers, public offices and faculty offices. CRAC has been invited to present the mapping process at different universities and community spaces. A large version of the poster (more than two meters long) was exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Art (Santiago de Chile) in the exhibit on art and activism, "The Workers of the Moon", curated by Loreto Garín and Federico Zukerfeld between November 2014 and January 2015. At that exhibit, we also included a display of slogans from the content of the poster and printed other graphic designs in serigraphy to share it with the participants during the opening event.

Future Maps or Maps for the Future

The workshop has made us aware of the need to create maps which enable us to localize problems and visualize some specific points of reflection on our living conditions in the city. For this reason we have started a new cartography process. This process focuses on developing a cartography of water in its environmental, cultural and social dimension. In Valparaíso the water is running out; shrinking water reserves will create problems in a few years. In the light of this we want to ask, "What kind of life do we want to sustain?" We have already organized a discussion session with a geographer and several interested persons. The next step will be a mapping workshop, using the tools we acquired and the methods we learned in our first experience in order to design a poster that collects the information we want to spread throughout the community. The map will cover the topic of care for life and the alternative ways in which we can design this life in Valparaíso.

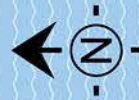
Translation by Carla Guerrón-Montero

Endnotes

1. This text has been written on the basis of a systematic account developed by Iconoclasistas. It can be found on the following page: iconoclasistas.net/valparaiso-chile

“DID I INVITE YOU TO LIVE HERE?”

The major of Valparaíso responded with this phrase to the claims of one of the persons affected by the fire in April, which took away housing from thousands of people living in the hills. This cynical response summarizes the attitude of successive governments, which have transformed the city to the tune of private, financial and speculative benefits, tied in particular with the interest of port holdings and the tourism business. This “Valparaíso for others” is evidenced in the imposition of lifestyles based on consumption with high purchasing power for some, and the precarization of work for the majority. Life in former popular neighborhoods has been affected by processes of gentrification resulting from real estate speculation, the expulsion of neighbors and the privatization of spaces for public use, privileging the profile of a city built for the eventual visitor.



1 Behind closed doors

88% of the port sector is privatized since Pinochet's dictatorship. This implies that, from the immense flux of commodities and capital that circulates through it, the city only receives minimal benefits. Artisanal fishery was replaced by precarious and poorly remunerated work. The spaces of popular use were either closed or restricted and were oriented to touristic consumption.



3 The mall of many

The Barón pier and its surroundings are threatened by a real estate speculative project with high social and environmental impacts. This includes the construction of a mall in the coastline, in a zone at risk of flooding. Its construction will foment the destruction of common heritage, the deterioration of the landscape and the expulsion of informal businesses, which provide basic subsistence to thousand of families.



5 A history that repeats itself

The magnitude of the fire that took place last April 12, which caused the tragic death of 15 persons and the loss of more than 12,000 homes could have been avoided. This situation evidenced the discrimination with which the government treats certain sectors, as well as its inobedience because—knowing the risk of potential fires—did not adopt preventive measures such as installing fire tanks or cleaning garbage dumps.



2 Valpo Hill

The main touristic cultural zone of the city is located at the foot of the Concepción and Alegre Hills. This zone developed as a result of a speculative process that used communal land for private purposes.



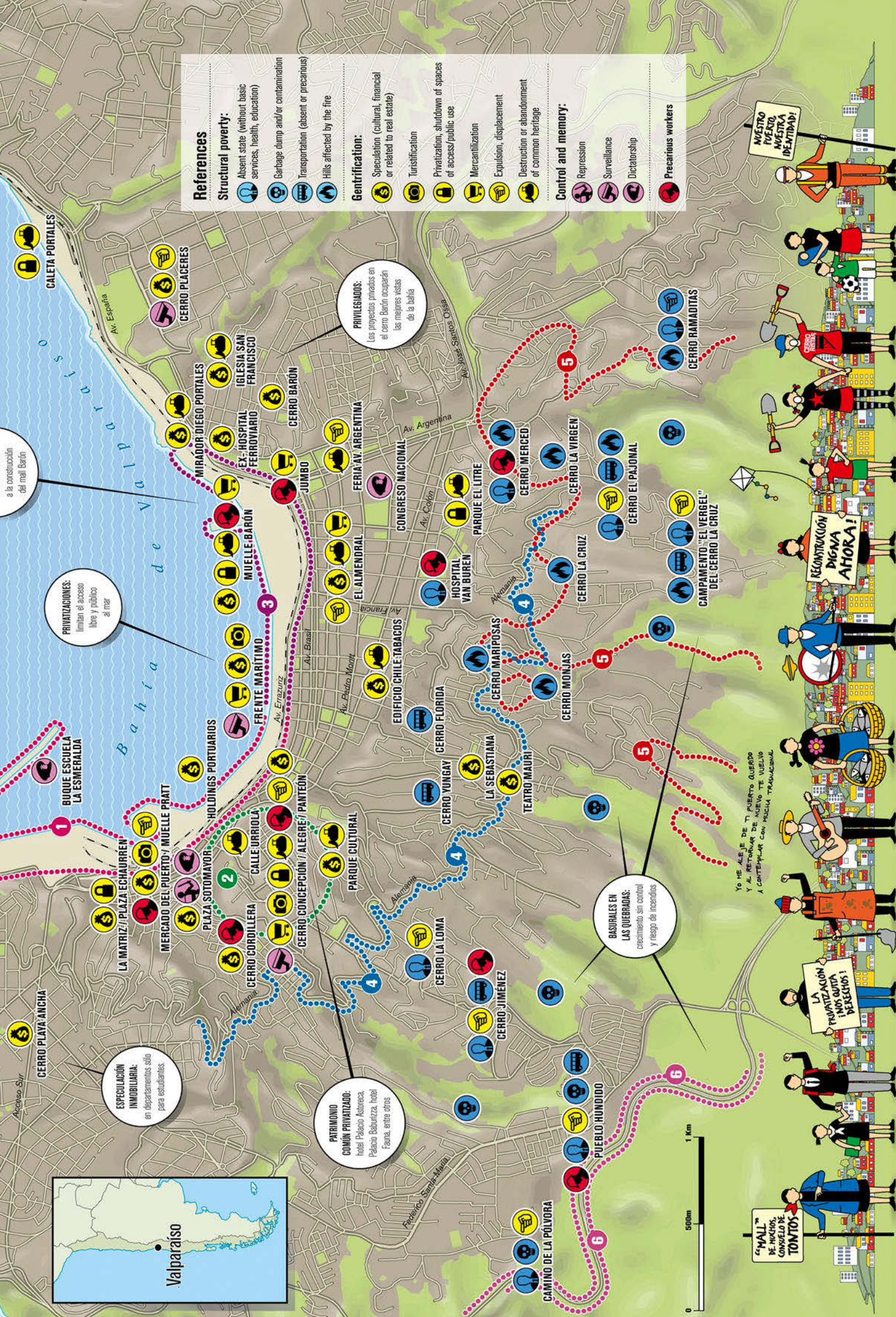
4 Level of invisibilization

The road Cintura and Alemania Avenue divide the city in two opposing realities. Beyond this limit, and as the level increases over one hundred meters, the landscape that dominates is one composed of garbage and lack of infrastructure and basic services such as a sewage system, potable water, electricity, and gas. The lack of interest of the government to improve the quality of life of its inhabitants is notable.



6 The gun powder of the Changos

This is one of the oldest roads and it is characterized by expulsion and neglect by the state towards its inhabitants. Precarious homes are built over land surrounded by garbage. Families survive on informal work; the lack of public transportation limits or hampers their movement due to work or health reasons.



In spite of, and because of the dark outlook described above, it is notable the presence of cultural social and communitarian spaces, of students and teachers, of workers and militants, who—along with a watchful community in solidarity—meet to think and activate practices transformed through communal self-management and network.

This includes the organization of mobilizations and informational activities, the design of workshops and open meetings, as well as public interventions oriented to spread the word about the impacts that these processes are producing. In spite of their promises of 'modernization' and 'development', they are only producing more inequalities.