

# Discussing Counter-Cartographies

Before finally printing Not-an-Atlas, we invited critical cartographers engaged in activism, art and academia to reflect counter-cartographies in general and Not-an-Atlas in particular. We wanted to complete this publication by deepening our understanding of maps and atlases, as well as map-making and atlas-making. At the same time, we wanted to pose new questions and point towards future ways of developing a counter-cartographic culture. We do not claim integrity. Instead we want to close this book by leaving it open for more. This is not a conclusion because Not-an-Atlas does not end with this discussion. Moreover, it is part of a cartography in movement that started long before and might keep on moving for quite a bit.

The people behind Not-an-Atlas, like the editors of *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* (Mogel & Bhagat, 2007) do not believe that counter-cartographies stand or speak for themselves. We believe that maps can be a point of departure and even a practical tool that helps to analyze and support local and global change. But only if we differentiate between the map and the territory (see article page 86), maps can become part of a "fluid movement whose tactics range from art-making to direct action to policy-making. This slow, cumulative, and constant work across many scales of action is what creates social change" (Mogel & Bhagat, 2007: 12). So, in a nutshell, Not-an-Atlas wants to support emancipatory transformation on the ground by supporting counter-cartographies within and beyond these pages (see notanatlas.org).

To find an appropriate way of not-ending this publication, we asked critical cartographers to reflect on some questions, to ask their own questions, to tell us about their doubts, to act and to react. We wanted to initiate a reflective dialogue, and we are delighted to unite the following most proficient individuals and collectives for this experiment.

**kollektiv orangotango+:** Could you please introduce yourself?

**André Mesquita:** I am a historian and researcher, I write about art and political activism. In practice, I have used counter-cartographies in my work while sometimes conducting workshops with students, artists and social movements. I also make many diagrams to organize my work as a researcher and curator. Right now, I'm making a giant diagram for an exhibition I'm curating! (see article page 26)  
andremesquita.redezero.org

**Denis Wood:** I've thought, written and curated shows about maps for the last 50 years. I've published seven books about maps, some in several editions. I've also made a few maps. I still don't like them. (see articles pages 165 & 322)  
deniswood.net

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** I am an anthropologist at the National University of Colombia. For more than a decade I have participated in processes of education, communication and self-organization of indigenous communities in the Colombian Southwest. In order to criticize the neocolonial processes in South America, I studied the strategies of privatization of territories within the frame of imperialism. I collaborate in the planning and construction of the Self-Communication School of the Putumayo. I am a co-author of *Geopolítica del Despojo – Biopiratería, Genocidio y Militarización* (CEPA Editores, 2016).  
geopoliticadeldespojo.com

**Francis Harvey:** I have been curious for maps for most of my life, especially "unconventional" geographical representations. Now I work at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, Germany after teaching at universities in the US and Europe for a number of years. Most of my research does not directly follow this curiosity, but it informs it in various ways.  
ifl-leipzig.de/de/das-ifl/mitarbeiter/harvey-francis.html

**Iconoclasistas:** We are a duo formed by Pablo Ares and Julia Risler in 2006. In our projects we combine graphic art, creative workshops and collective research. All our productions are licensed under creative commons and are distributed via Iconoclasistas.net. In 2008, we started to experiment with different cartographic tools in spaces of collective work. This is how the collective mapping workshops and the processes of collaborative territorial research were born. In 2013, we published the *Manual of Collective Mapping – Critical Cartographic Resources for Territorial Processes of Collaborative Creation*. We are part of a dynamic network of affinity and solidarity spread all over the world, which allows us to adjust the elaboration of playful and pedagogic resources from a "tactical horizon". (see articles pages 86 & 183)  
iconoclasistas.net

**Lize Mogel:** I am an interdisciplinary artist and counter-cartographer, working between the fields of cultural production, popular education, public policy and mapping. I use maps to make the politics of place visible, including public green space in Los Angeles, future territorial disputes in the Arctic and water and wastewater infrastructure systems in New York City. I co-edited the book/map collection *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* (JOAAP, 2007) with Alexis Bhagat.  
publicgreen.com

**Liz Mason-Deese & Tim Stallmann from the Counter Cartographies Collective:** We are a collective that began in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 2005. We use mapping to intervene in spaces and flows of knowledge production, to destabilize centered and exclusionary representations of the social and the economic, and to construct new imaginaries of collective struggle and alternative worlds. Our major projects include disorientation guides, situated drift-interventions, and community cartography convergences. (see articles pages 26 & 212)  
countercartographies.org

**kollektiv orangotango+:** Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier once wrote that critical cartography is "a one-two punch of new mapping practices and theoretical critique" (2005). As critical geographers we wanted to focus Not-an-Atlas on counter-cartographies because we felt a lack of presence of counter-mapping practices compared with the theoretical critique of maps. This might be a quite limited view from a critical geography perspective. However, we wanted to show that working critically with maps can be more than deconstructing them and that critique can also lead to new and critical forms of map-making. So we invited some of the people with whom we hope to share the same critique of maps. But do we really? Let's keep it simple: What do you not like about maps?

**Denis Wood:** I hate the insistence of maps that they've got it right. They never do.

**Tim Stallmann:** I think that maybe the counter-cartographic question here is not so much "what do you not like about maps" as "what do you not like about how maps are being used".

**Liz Mason-Deese:** Well, I think maps are produced with certain uses in mind, and those shouldn't be ignored. Along that line, I think it's important to not forget that critique aspect of counter-mapping. So I think what I don't like about maps is that they try to present themselves as neutral, as somehow not always already political. And I think the critique of that gets lost in some activist or participatory mapping projects.

**Francis Harvey:** I don't like their reification and essentialist understanding for many people from all walks of life, even in the humanities, and the lack of critical distance to their selectivity and biases. It seems to me that too often maps are needed in a rush and people end up following the conventions they would usually criticize or strive to go beyond.

**André Mesquita:** I do not like the obsession with which the capitalist and neoliberal world approaches the use of maps. This means the manipulation of data and how those cartographies end up being used only as means of surveillance, imprisonment, annihilation and genocide of communities and populations.

**Lize Mogel:** Maps can obscure the data and stories behind them in search of a totalizing surface. Also, given the ubiquity of mapping in the digital age, there's an over-reliance on geography as the frame.

**Tim Stallmann:** There's plenty not to like, but one thing that comes to mind for me particularly is the way that single-variable choropleth maps (colored areas) have become a go-to solution for many non-profit and government agencies which are trying to "democratize" neighborhood-level data or make it more "accessible".<sup>1</sup> Choropleth maps are easy to make, and they adapt to nearly any quantitative indicator. So, increasingly they've become the first mode of representation for data portals or neighborhood atlases that are focused on spatial inequality – like the 500 Cities project, Healthy City, the USDA Food & Environment Atlas, etc.

These maps work well at showing overall spatial patterning in a particular indicator but end up conflating *place*-based differences with Cartesian geographic *space*. This can lead to the hiding of deep histories of exclusion, oppression and resistance, which have much more to do with particular racialized bodies and particular physical structures in place than they have to do with the latitude and longitude coordinates defining a given neighborhood or region.

**André Mesquita:** We also have to remain alert regarding our tendency of wanting to map absolutely everything that is around us, because maps are tools with ambivalent purposes.

They can serve the purpose of freeing, but they can also serve the purpose of controlling and destroying – "to make war", as Yves Lacoste (1976) said about geography. Personally, I prefer not to create mappings of social movements, because many times this kind of action can give too much visibility to collectives, spaces and actions that must remain invisible to the control apparatus and the capitalist/military radar. Perhaps we need to be more strategic than tactical about this kind of analysis, remaining aware of the actions and risks as well as the consequences of mapping. We should also realize that there are initiatives that deal with these questions very carefully and with a great degree of consciousness about the effects of producing maps about histories of resistance. This is, for example, the case with the collective mapping carried out by the Iconoclastas (see articles pages 86 & 183). During the collective workshops they organize with social and student movements, everything included within the map is discussed and agreed upon collectively. I believe these experiences of discussion and decision-making about the power of mapping are a fundamental pedagogical stage in the cartographic practice.

**Liz Mason-Deese:** André brings up an important point here. This is something we have had to deal with in the Counter Cartographies Collective when working with migrant communities. Many migrants do not want to be mapped for various obvious reasons, and in this case visibility could be very dangerous. Consequently, we chose to focus on mapping the regimes that attempt to police, control, or produce certain types of migrants. I think this tendency of wanting to "map everything", something that I see all the time with my students, is something that should always be questioned, and questioned collectively in relation to social movements.

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** I do not like the standardization and the discourse of objectivity, in addition to the impossibility of generating a dialogue beyond the work created, which produces a narrative and reactions or an analysis of it by the viewer. From a deconstructive perspective toward cartography and because the conceptions and creations of our worlds are valuable for the vindication of our positions toward reality, we cannot cede this role to "experts" who attempt to homogenize reality through a rational and Cartesian framework. It is necessary to break with this concept of the representor and represented.

**Iconoclastas:** I do not like it because maps are incomprehensible when they offer very little in terms of communication or because they are difficult to read – and when form becomes more import-

ant than content and the maps become aesthetic products while losing their political value. I also don't like it when a fashionable attempt to intervene through a geographical profile without any objective or tactical approach is called a "map".

**kollektiv orangotango+:** We agree. Knowing that all maps have an agenda, we feel that too many atlases lack clarity about this fact. Also there is a lack of reflexivity. That was one reason for choosing *This Is Not an Atlas* as the title of our collection. All of us counter-cartographers seem to have something in common. We criticize maps and at the same time we constantly read, use and make maps ourselves. We appreciate maps, so it seems we all share this contradictory love for them. So what is it that maps are good and better at?

**Iconoclastas:** Maps are good for prefiguring actions, recomposing outlooks, reflecting upon our strengths and recognizing our weaknesses and threats. Furthermore, maps potentiate the processes of territorial co-research. They facilitate reflection based on a common graphic medium. They turn the interventions into something playful, allowing to think from other perspectives: less rational, more sensitive, corporal, emotional and experimental. Maps rapidly summarize complex processes and allow sketching the guidelines of a territorial research project, which can be deepened over a long period. Maps help to compose spaces of collective work in which the participants' bodies play a key role and activate themselves through the articulation with the others.

**Francis Harvey:** Graphically communicating geographical connections and relationships. The abilities and possibilities for simple maps have increased in the last 30 years. And simple can mean conventional, but it doesn't have to. I am convinced that for many contemporary uses the map you use isn't your grandfather's or grandmother's map. Today a map is more of a graphic technology for reducing spatial ambiguity and/or providing geographical insights in the context of institutionalized geographies.

**Lize Mogel:** Maps help us *believe* that we can fully understand large, complex systems. Counter-maps can help us understand the politics of place.

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** To me, what makes maps interesting and full of possibilities is precisely the narrating capacity of cartographies and the possibilities of building diverse modes of thinking about the territories we inhabit. A few months ago, I was immersed in an exercise of mapping the collective history of indigenous communities in the municipality of Puerto Asís in Putumayo in the Amazonian region of Colombia. This mapping was done by taking the marks in their bodies, building a collective history about identity and understanding the human body as a map. I also participated in another project that focused on the creation of a cartography of analysis of the conflict surrounding the oil industry. This mapping was based on multimedia resources such as video, animation, interactive cartography, etc. These pieces of work make us think about maps as flexible tools in continuous construction. Currently, there is a resurgence of critical cartography, created because of the needs of people and groups to present diverse critical

analyses of the imposed reality. They are building new proposals of re-territorialization and empowering diverse groups, based on ethnicity or gender diversity, or the hybrid urban and/or rural "subcultures" and their philosophical and ideological diversities. They are thus generating new cognitive processes for a world in permanent crisis.

**André Mesquita:** I think good maps are those that produce good uses. Maps that, through their limits, information, and blank spots, allow me to make my own counter-cartographies about the world. I see these possibilities in many of the projects of cartographic artists. Many times, I do not just want to map a known territory but to invent other territories, imaginary worlds, dreams and new constellations. This kind of radical imagination made possible by cartography is something politically powerful.

**Liz Mason-Deese:** Maps are good at changing our relationships with the earth, with the territory, with one another. Of course that can be good or bad. I think maps are at their best when they are part of a collective process, when they bring people together in new encounters that can produce new ways of seeing and inhabiting the world.

**Denis Wood:** Maps are good at identifying who owns what, at telling people where they're supposed to be, at laying down the law. But as Proudhon said, property is theft; people ought to be where they want to be. And, as Proudhon also said, laws "are spider webs for the rich and mighty, steel chains for the poor and weak, fishing nets in the hands of government", which could also be a good definition of most maps. So maps are good at doing bad things!

**André Mesquita:** I also like to think of the many connections present in the maps as energy flows, like the great organograms produced by the Bureau d'Études (see article page 26). You can look at those flowcharts as if they were a visualization of a company's actors; however, the administrative aesthetics used by the Bureau d'Études for re-appropriating a standardized or even military model of visual organization is what can change a "bad" map into a very powerful and interesting image. I think that this is an example of how counter-cartographies produce new subjectivities and new desires for researching and discovering even more of those processes. At the same time strategic knowledges are created that feed the actions of many movements.

**Tim Stallmann:** This question – What are maps good and better at? – begs the bigger question of what is a map! In the broadest sense of the term – maps as visual (or auditory) constructions with some sort of linkage to space or place – I think maps are good at being non-linear. They're good at opening up questions and conversations. And they're good at suggesting new ideas and new linkages. I think they are also powerful in that they can incorporate elements of visual (or sound or movement) art, moving beyond the rational and drawing emotional and spiritual responses in much the same ways that poetic forms of writing open up new possibilities.

**kollektiv orangotango+:** Maps are powerful tools that can be used for different purposes. And counter-cartographers like you draw a picture of a world of possibilities and non-dominant realities. What kind of inspiration do you get from critical maps?

**Iconoclasistas:** All the available inspiration to continue thinking that it is possible to change the fixed state of things at the mental, material, social and political level, etc. The creation of critical maps potentiates the formation of complex panoramas of determined subjects and territories. Critical maps allow a memorable view from a bird's perspective as you travel in a reflective way over a determined space and time. During this flight, everything is possible: a simple distraction or a comment from another participant could initiate a memory or a surprising experience. A powerful picture can help to create similar perspectives. Also, the processes of dissent or temporary disagreement regarding perspectives on the territory create tensions and evolve when the playing field is defined by a "tactical horizon" of common goals.

**Denis Wood:** Critical maps give me the sense that it's not all over yet, that there's still reason to keep on breathing.

**Francis Harvey:** And that it is possible to be critical with and about maps in a proverbial sea of mediocrity. Cartographical clarity and power remain inspiring.

**Lize Mogel:** Critical maps tell very different stories and have different political effects than conventional and institutional maps do. Around the time that Alexis Bhagat and I started working on *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* in the mid-2000s, I was inspired by the maps of counter-cartographers like Bureau d'Études (see article page 26), Philippe Rekacewicz (see article page 244) and hackitectura. They were mapping global flows as well as creating more local counter-maps, such as the Spatial Information Design Lab's mapping of "million dollar blocks" and the Institute for Infinitely Small Things' "pay to play" mapping of Cambridge, MA. I am interested in the inherent and visible politics of these kinds of mappings, and how they serve spatial justice.

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** More than inspiration, it was kind of like diarrhea because the beginning of our work on cartography resulted from work we were doing in response to the militarization of the US military bases in Colombia. Thus the process developed along with several street art collectives and along with street interventions and transmissions. Out of this process, the need to shed light on what was happening at that moment arose. After compiling all the information, a friend suggested to create a map for sharing the wealth of information in a way that would be simpler to understand and also attractive from a design perspective.

**André Mesquita:** I consider myself a punk cartographer! I think the first critical maps I found in my life that inspired me were in some of the lyrics of punk bands, such as "Map Ref. 41°N 93°W"<sup>2</sup> by Wire or even "End on End"<sup>3</sup> – a song by Rites of Spring that does not directly engage with cartography, but I always imagined that the song could also be about someone in a room choosing data and information, making diagrams of secret powers over and

over again very intensely in order to understand the world's cycles – such as Mark Lombardi (see article page 26). Songs inspire me to think about maps all the time. For instance, the record *Yanqui U.X.O.* (2002) by Godspeed You! Black Emperor: On the back of the cover you find a diagram with the names of the most important record companies and world entertainment conglomerates, directly or indirectly connected corporations allied with the industrial-military complex. Even though the graphics were quite limited, that information blew my mind!

**kollektiv orangotango+:** But, apart from your personal connection between punk and cartography, is there another link between these seemingly distant cultures?

**André Mesquita:** One of the best qualities of critical maps is that they are tools in the best do-it-yourself spirit. I was very inspired by connecting with Chris Jones and the 56<sup>a</sup>, an info shop that has existed in the neighborhood of Elephant & Castle in London since 1991 (see 56a.org.uk). Chris has an archive of critical maps created by the 56<sup>a</sup>, and he organized a festival in 2005 called *You Are Here But Why?* The festival included an exhibition of alternative maps produced by collectives and during workshops. My contact with the 56<sup>a</sup> was important because I could see that Chris and his colleagues were producing maps that were not only related to the process of gentrification and real estate speculation of Elephant & Castle. They were also creating diagrams, timelines and diverse graphics about unusual occurrences that I also found quite interesting, such as punk rock and reggae events or the history of the workers' autonomy in Italy. There was not only one theme to be studied on these maps, and that made me realize that critical maps are inspirational because they open up to life – they are open to the organization of ideas, to the telling of stories and to suggesting alternative futures. What is inspiring about these maps – based on my interest in music and autonomous spaces – is that all of this goes against the establishment, and for me this is the spirit of what we do and the spirit of this anti-atlas.

**Tim Stallmann:** Critical maps, more than anything, give me the inspiration of knowing that other people in the world are out there doing this kind of work. To me, each map is a potential conversation: How did you come up with that design? How did you collect that data? What have the intended and not intended effects (and affects) been? And then, maybe, what should we build together next?

**kollektiv orangotango+:** We think these are exactly the issues that inspired us to publish *Not-an-Atlas*. So, with this in mind, we dove into the world of counter-mapping. We started to ask ourselves what it meant to (not) publish an atlas, and we reflected on existing counter-atlases. On our journey we shifted from *Critical Atlas* to *Anti-Atlas* to *An Atlas from Below* until we finally agreed on *This Is Not an Atlas*. So "atlas" was a central topic in our discussions during the editing process. Eventually we asked ourselves: If this is not an atlas, what *is* an atlas? Now we are curious to know from you: What do you think of when you hear the word "atlas"?

**Iconoclasistas:** I think about something enormous, worldwide and expanded, a general panoramic view of things, a complex pic-



ture about a particular theme, a gesture of arrogance necessary to create a story, and therefore something that causes fear but also curiosity. And it is also an expression that is hip, hackneyed and in many cases has become meaningless.

**Tim Stallmann:** I always get excited when I hear the word atlas. It makes me think that someone, or some group of people, has taken the time to create or curate a set of maps which explore a theme through a diverse range of dimensions – I expect to see a wide range of maps in an atlas. But I also expect some sort of narrative flow I can sink my teeth into and really curl up with.

**Denis Wood:** What comes to mind when I hear the word "atlas" is Atlas, the African king, renowned as an astrologer, whom Mercator put in the frontispiece to the collection of maps that he intended as ... but a *part* of a gigantic cosmogonic meditation that he was calling ... *Atlas*. This *Atlas* of Mercator's was never intended solely as a collection of maps. It just so happened that the maps were the only part he managed to publish in his lifetime. And even so, "atlas" became a term for far more than a collection of maps: It could be a collection of *anything* – blood vessels or fish, for example – arranged in some kind of systemic fashion. Or, like Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, a collection of photographs, newspaper cuttings and sketches barely arranged at all. That's what I think of ...

**Francis Harvey:** Here I want to point to Micheal Serre's atlas, a significant work by him, which takes up the cultural significance of the atlas in post-enlightenment science and society. Bruno Latour's discussion of globes in *Facing Gaia* seem to offer some important ideas in this direction. The globe seems to transcend our experiences but, like the atlas, it is never transcendent but just a model bound up in our material knowledge and experience. Its authority arises in its political capillary power based on the myth of atlas as interpreted by cartographers for hundreds of years. The potential of this power also comes from its relevance and function.

**Lize Mogel:** An atlas is a heavy tome, an authority, a reference, utility: it defines the territory, speaks the language of institutions, gathers dust. A counter-atlas is created from the political moment, it is made and remade, is rooted in the local, contains and transmits knowledges from the ground up.

**André Mesquita:** For me, an atlas is an open process that merges different ways of seeing, interpreting and intervening in the world. In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) reminds us that the ancient name of atlas is "theater", and that a map puts together in the same scheme "heterogeneous places, some received from a tradition and others produced by observation". I like to think that a "scene" that results from this theater is a map that questions a cartographic tradition as well as our positivist outlook on territories. And that it becomes a critical tool that helps us to know, remember, problematize and especially act within the world. Through the same interpretation, an atlas can be a "machine of thought and action", and it needs to be activated through its use.

**kollektiv orangotango+:** So then, what do you envisage by Not-an-Atlas? And how does it feel to be part of Not-an-Atlas?

**Denis Wood:** It feels great. I'm happy to be part of any effort to contest, query, throw into doubt or otherwise discombobulate the tired orthodoxies of mainstream mapmaking.

**Francis Harvey:** Very good. It's an important contemporary project and contribution in a number of fields. Hope there will be an exhibit.

**Tim Stallmann:** I'm excited but also curious to see the finished product – how will Not-an-Atlas be more than the sum of its parts?

**Iconoclastas:** It feels great to share spaces with other collectives, and we truly look forward to learning a great deal from the experiences of others. We believe that many coincidences are widespread all over the world, and this gives us a common territory we should debate collectively: Why are so many people making maps? What use do maps have? Why do we need to explain/approach our territories from a cartographic perspective? Is this in any way linked to a wider process of a general loss of meaning, certainty or comprehensibility?

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** To conceive of a world atlas as a collection of critical or anti-systemic cartographies is a supremely profound and interesting topic. Conducting analyses of issues from a counter-hegemonic perspective while debating the construction of critical cartographies produces a dialogue of thinking about territories, practices and thoughts and using the language of maps. This generates a central problem of how to exert a dialogue of using maps. How do we make sure all these projects and participating groups engage in a dialogue that enriches our work?

**kollektiv orangotango+:** That's exactly the point! So, going beyond your positive feelings: What are your expectations towards this Not-an-Atlas?

**André Mesquita:** I think that an anti/not-atlas does not simply negate or reject official maps. Instead it creates new conventions and definitions and especially produces counter-memories, counter-narratives and alternative social exercises of counter-cartography. Rejecting a traditional and normative view of the world through counter-cartographies must be accompanied by a political position aimed at transforming the territory in which we live, even if this change – as we know – is slow, difficult and can be uncertain at times. An anti-atlas must direct us to the autonomous movements of resistance and collective action; it must be open to affect and be affected by social struggles and by people who are in the streets, fighting against the violence and inequality of this capitalist/patriarchal/racist system. Producing an anti-atlas means creating dissent and ways to act along with these movements; it is a way to destabilize what is assumed to be "the only" and "official" truth about our history.

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** Beyond thinking about maps as alternative, counter-hegemonic or anti-capitalist narratives, we need to think about the processes underlying the creation of each of our own

works and the wealth that each of these conceptions, reflected in our cartographies, represents. We need to think about the artistic aspect of these maps while also understanding the critical and collective analysis of the art that maps entail.

**kollektiv orangotango+:** For us as editors and activists it would be the greatest reward to know that this collection of counter-cartographies leads to new maps and solidary cooperation. That it inspires emerging cartographers and supports grassroots movements struggling for a more free, egalitarian and ecological global society. It is a great pleasure to be in touch with over a hundred counter-cartographers, to know about all these different struggles around the world, to be reminded that all these people are fighting day by day to create another world. But after reviewing so many maps from different places, it somehow looks like a globalized panorama of mappings of globalized struggles. So we ask ourselves if there is still space for the prospering of a local mapping culture? What kind of local differences and specifics do you observe in counter-cartographies? Or is it already a homogenized global culture?

**Tim Stallmann:** My experience has been that counter-cartographies are still very much a "minor" knowledge, one that is passed on by word of mouth and through personal encounters rather than through a formalized canon. There seem to be many counter-cartographies, although it is hard to say that any of them are *not* globalized – but rather there are multiple globalized cultures of counter-cartography, each located in different places. From my own position in Durham, North Carolina, a network of counter-cartographies tied to critical digital humanities, oral history, and anti-gentrification/anti-displacement movements feels "closest"; but I can see many other formations out there – countermapping/counter-cartographies springing from indigenous movements in Mexico, Canada and the Western US, a South American formation anchored with Iconoclasistas, etc. The differences I've seen tend to spring from different problems and contexts; they are not necessarily a priori stylistic differences.

**Iconoclasistas:** Maps with graphic languages are very communicative and universally understood because "an image is worth more than a thousand words". We also need to remember that the West has a hegemonic power that renders invisible other ways of understanding spaces and territories that are part of ancestral cultures or native peoples around the world. The great challenge will be getting to know other forms of approaching and representing territorial space: Maps with imaginary scales, inexistent references or an iconography that tries to mark the "unmarkable". A map should allow us to go beyond the visible and help us to walk through the gates of perception.

**André Mesquita:** As I always say, counter-cartographies need to go beyond representations. It is a learning process that is alive, and I think that their existence is tied to experiences from movements from the South and decolonial practices. The experiences of the Zapatistas and the Chiapas-uprising during the decade of the 1990s radically transformed the configuration of the social, political and economic map of the world. Without a doubt, these

acts totally transformed our local and transnational views, and they also have a great impact that needs to be considered when we think about cartographies. "Asking we walk", as the Zapatistas say, is something that helps us to understand the idea of a map as an action.

**Lize Mogel:** In *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* (2007), Jai Sen writes about a late 1980s project in which the group Unnayan (a collective of radical planners and architects) mapped informal settlements at the margins of Kolkata and used these maps to convince planning officials to provide services to settlers. He writes: "After all is said and done, the maps that we at Unnayan prepared used the same vocabulary of mapping the world as those with power-over did. The techniques of representation we used were all drawn from our skills as professionals trained in the formal worlds of planning and architecture. We rarely discussed or developed the maps with those whose lives and struggles we were documenting. There is nothing wrong (and everything right) about using such skills for counter-purposes. The questions nevertheless arise: What would the maps have been like if we had developed them with the settlers themselves? Did the settlers have a vocabulary of their own for mapping the world around them, as many folk cultures do? And would such maps have lived on, including through memory and oral culture, in ways that our maps could not and did not?" In most of the counter-mapping projects I have seen (or created), the map's political agency hinges on its use of accepted mapping techniques to speak the language of power. Does the choice to use this language preclude other kinds of more local representation? Can other forms of local representation gain the same power as the map? Map and data literacy is important, but what do we lose by prioritizing the form of the map?

**kollektiv orangotango+:** ... and this brings us back to the discussion: in what ways Not-an-Atlas is or is not an atlas? We say it is not an atlas as it does not claim any integrity or completeness. Instead it is to be understood as a possible, preliminary encounter of mapping experiences. It is not a finished project but has to be continued. In this sense, the online version notanatlas.org will be dynamic, open for new maps, processes and representations. Not-an-Atlas should not be seen as the standard reference representing the state of the art of counter-cartography. It needs to be contested in its form and content. So we should ask ourselves: What do these supposed counter-cartographies need to truly overcome dominant representations, languages and aesthetics?

**Iconoclasistas:** It is something that we need to propose as a constant challenge, as a permanent question in each process that we develop! For example, how can we incorporate the maps of the communities that have no access to the internet? Or the maps which are only passed along by spoken language? Or those who represent their territories through dances, songs or food? It would be wonderful to think of maps as living organisms, because we know that by creating a map, we take a "picture of the moment", but at the same time the depicted territories are in steady change and transformation. So, how can we represent this open sense that maps should have? How can we visualize that they are in continuously constructed subjectively?

**Felipe Martín Novoa:** It would be good to rethink the construction of these new territorialities from a perspective of diversity of identities. Thereby the construction of and the return to invisibilized or forgotten struggles signify critical mapping beyond simply considering it as a tool. In doing so, the aim would be to transcend the space of maps as such, highlighting the transformative capacity of collectivities dialoguing from different spaces and visions: maps talking with maps. This is a perspective of how to understand our realities and proposals.

**Lize Mogel:** Counter-mapping can be a kind of "sousveillance". Even as mapping from below gives our communities the power of visibility, these representations and data sets are then also available to the interests of capital.

**Tim Stallmann:** I myself often fall into the trap of describing counter-cartography by using a temporal story about maps: Maps *once were* tools of the Empire and the state *then* critical cartographers developed new ways of reading maps; *now* counter-cartographers attempt to use those same tools in the service of justice movements. But the more I study history, the more I realize that critical and counter-movements have been a constant presence, one that state power is continually trying to erase. I think that counter-cartographies (including *This Is Not an Atlas*) have a blind spot concerning our historical predecessors, and I want to challenge myself and others, over the forthcoming decade, to continue unearthing and sharing examples of counter-cartographies of the past!

**Francis Harvey:** I see this question in relation to Magritte's famous painting, e.g. *La Trahison des Images* ("Ceci, n'est pas une pipe") and the paradox of reality in the ideology of implicit essentialism that lubricates capitalist discourse. Maybe the most overlooked blind spot is how distortions and biases from maps and atlases lurk in the shadows, but are really in plain sight. The sense of "let the atrocious images haunt us", as Susan Sontag put it, has become more and more present in societies I know. Too often, too easily and too blissfully we seem to slide over the erasures and complexities of maps and atlases.

**André Mesquita:** Will we be able to go beyond discussions about representations and power of maps from this atlas and transform our lives? We are talking about social change here! In Brazil, as well as in most regions of Latin America, we are living a terrible social and political moment. I hope that the maps and histories of this anti-atlas help us to bring light to the present struggles and to optimize them.

**kollektiv orangotango+:** In discussions and mappings with militants and radicals from Latin America and Southern Europe we very strongly feel an urge to create common narratives across differences. In fact, we deal with a lot of shared issues and we should start to address them as such, conceiving of ourselves as engaged in common struggles. We see many parallels between your work and ours, as well as between the different counter-cartographies gathered in *Not-An-Atlas*. So we are already somehow engaged in a common struggle. Just like André, we, too, hope that the dis-

cussion we are having here will reinforce present struggles and inspire new counter-cartographers maybe precisely by emphasizing the common grounds of this cartographic multitude. We thank all of you for participating in this discussion and hope to find ways to continue this dialogue.

*Severin Halder, Paul Schweizer, Boris Michel and Laurenz Virchow have been speaking for kollektiv orangotango+.*

*Translation support by Carla Guerrón-Montero & Nicole Jullian*

#### Endnotes

1. There's an active and interesting discourse by, for example, the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition or the Our Data Bodies project, about whether these sorts of "data portals" increase participation or actually increase surveillance of marginalized communities, but I'm not talking about that here.
2. "An unseen ruler defines with geometry; An unrulable expanse of geography; An aerial photographer over-exposed; To the cartologist's 2D images knows; The areas where the water flowed; So petrified, the landscape grows; Straining eyes try to understand; The works, incessantly in hand; The carving and the paring of the land; The quarter square, the graph divides; Beneath the rule, a country hides; Interrupting my train of thought; Lines of longitude and latitude; Define and refine my altitude [...]."
3. "I've had days of end on end, Where nothing changed 'cause nothing ever began, Restless movement in an empty room, Gathering shadows of a darkened blue; And oh, it feels so strange, Oh, it feels so strange when it comes again; Cycles of end on end, Edges begin to blend, Time following time, A pattern becomes defined [...]."

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