

X-Ray of Soy Agribusiness in the Pampa and Mega-Mining in the Andes¹

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iconoclastas.net



We are a duo formed in 2006. We combine graphic art, creative workshops and collective research to produce activist resources that can be circulated, used and appropriated freely. Through designing and carrying out workshops, we seek to strengthen the communication between activists, to set up networks of solidarity and affinity, and to promote collaborative practices of resistance and transformation. Through this dynamic web of affinity and solidarity, built by sharing and promoting open projects and collective workshops in Argentina, Latin America and Europe, our practice keeps on spreading.

We share our resources and practical experience on our website in order to not only set them free from barriers of private property but also from economic, physical and geographic restrictions. The website works as a multimedia support in order to spread and share the material we produce and to foster its appropriation through creative commons licenses. Resources uploaded to the web for reappropriation, reproduction and redefinition turn this virtual means into a collective tool through which hierarchies are dismantled and exchange is stimulated. In consequence, users become producers recurring to liberated production.

Creating resources for their free circulation as well as their particular drifts and reappropriations has transformed and broadened our practice. Constant exchange with and relations to other collectives, organizations and social movements has promoted a reciprocal influence encouraging us to incorporate new approaches, resources and topics. These have led us to rethink the way in which materials circulate, how strategies spread and how we engage in collective constructions. This political, affective and creative network gave way to itinerant exhibitions, collaborative creation workshops, new ludic resources and the participation in meetings with cultural organizations and social movements.

About the Maps

Between 2008 and 2010 we travelled across Argentina, setting up workshops in various cities of different provinces by contacting university students as well as cultural and communicational groups. In these spaces topics for collective reflection emerged. They were thoroughly analyzed and expanded when we participated in the 10th and 11th session of the Citizen Assemblies Union (UAC) in Jujuy and Córdoba, as well as in four meetings organized by the popular education collective Pañuelos en Rebeldía in Bariloche, Tucumán, El Dorado (Misiones) and in Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). During these sessions and meetings a heterogeneous group of social movements, social and environmental assemblies, organizations of peasants and native peoples, neighbors and citizens for the defense of common goods participated in creating accounts, marking situations and rendering visible the various types of organization and resistance of communities. During the first two days of the sessions in Jujuy we assembled a booth displaying maps and cards so that participants could approach the desk to share their knowledge about conflicts and resistances taking place within the different regions in Argentina. During the third and last day a map was presented. This map was systematized and depicted the following question: Keeping in mind that we were designing a map to be circulated in public, should we also depict the resistances and achievements of organizations? This dilemma was

positively resolved in a second session in Córdoba when dozens of representatives of assemblies and communities, after having corrected and verified data, voted on the importance of rendering visible resistances in the maps of the public domain by a show of hands. After the systematization of these meetings two major issues were identified:

The Model of Agribusiness and the Consequences to Transgenic Monoculture

A complex issue, which emerged in the workshops organized in the city of Córdoba, Rosario (Santa Fe) and the districts of Morón, La Plata, San Andrés de Giles, Olavarría, Tandil and Bahía Blanca, among others. These mappings revealed a type of agricultural production concentrated within a few hands and produced with a technological package consisting of machines, transgenic seeds, herbicides and highly toxic and polluting pesticides (see map on opposite page).

Open Pit Mega-Mining

This topic in particular emerged during the workshops organized in districts close to the Andes. In this case mappings evidenced the business of multinational corporations (primarily Chinese and Canadian companies) and the ways in which they penetrate districts, are poorly regulated by the State and are tolerated by the political branch. The mappings furthermore revealed the types of exploitation in mountain areas and the separation of minerals through a toxic process using big amounts of water, polluting air and water, damaging landscapes and ecosystems and harming the rights and the health of inhabitants and communities (see map at the end of the article).

"The Map Is Not the Territory"²

When we talk about local territories, we don't just mean the physical space in which we find ourselves, but also the social body and rebel subjectivities. Mapmaking is one of the principal tools employed by the dominant powers to appropriate territories for utilitarian purposes. This happens not just as a form of spatial planning but also to set borders that define new occupations and plan strategies of invasion, plunder and appropriation of communal property. As such, the maps commonly circulating in our societies are based on a vision that is imposed onto territories by the dominant powers in order to create hegemonic representations of space. These are functional to the development of the capitalist model, rationally decoding the land, classifying natural resources, demographic characteristics and the type of production that can most effectively transform labor power and resources into capital.

But the map is not the territory. A connection with a particular territory is established through processes of interpretation, feelings and personal experiences. Maps are not the territory because they are unable to account for the subjectivity of the territorial processes, symbolic representations and imaginations inherent to them and the constant mutability and changes they are subject to.



In that Case, Why Work with Maps?

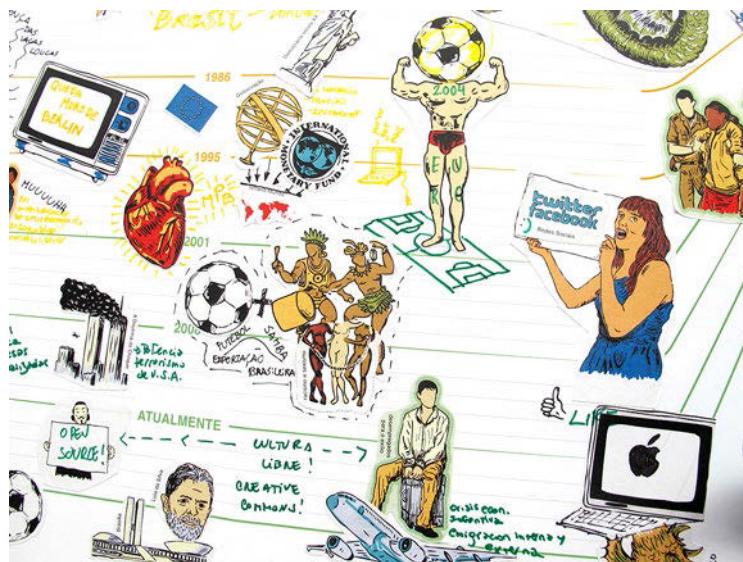
To harness a tool that enables us to collectively create critical narratives and in order to share inputs for the creation of emancipatory practices. In the workshops we use tools that allow us to collectively create complex scenarios, deepen critical approaches and encourage alert and active subjectivities. These are essential if we are to protect common property, fight against processes of colonization and privatization of the public sphere, and establish new worlds.

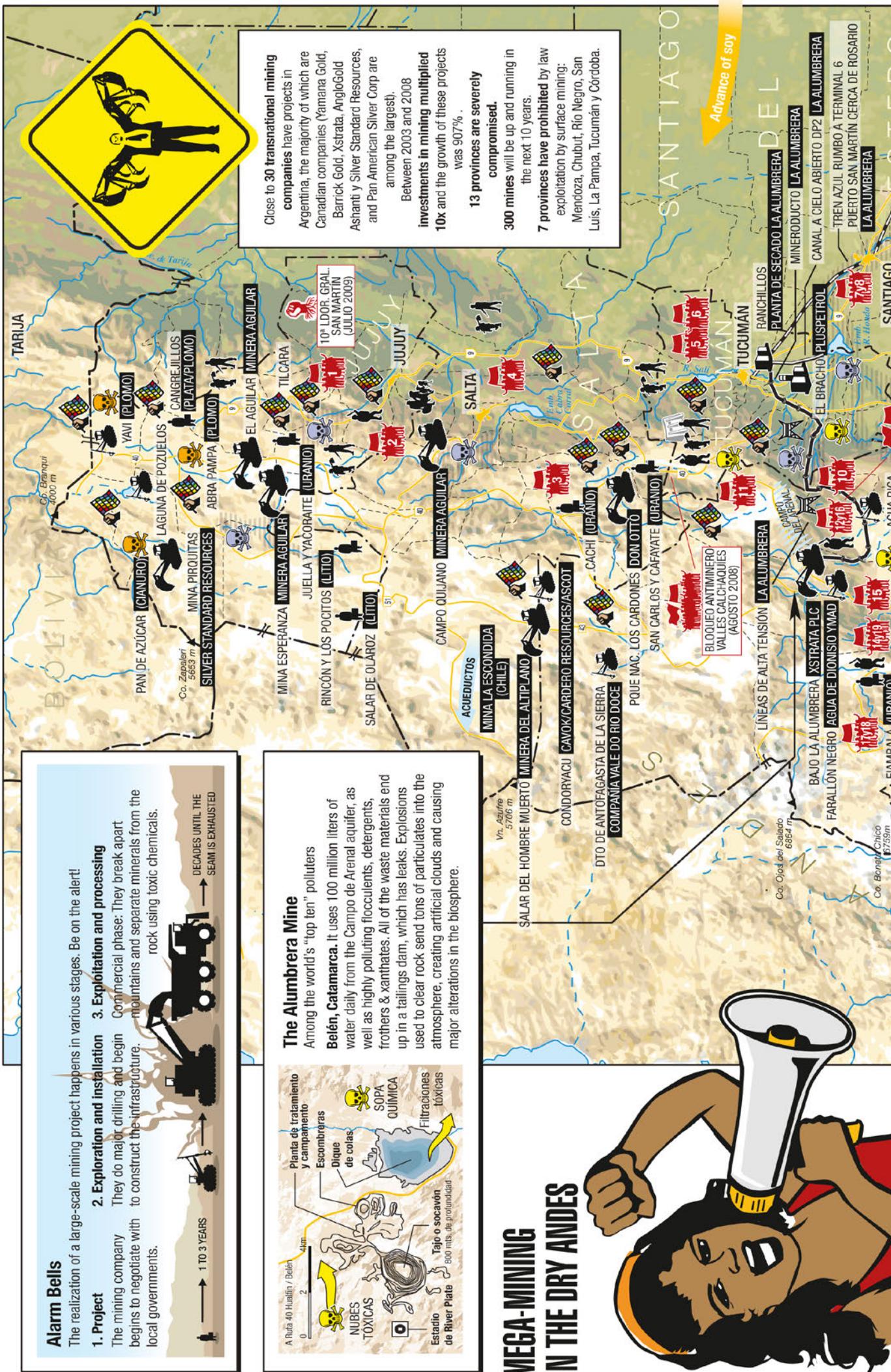
Maps as Part of an Ever-Moving Collective Process

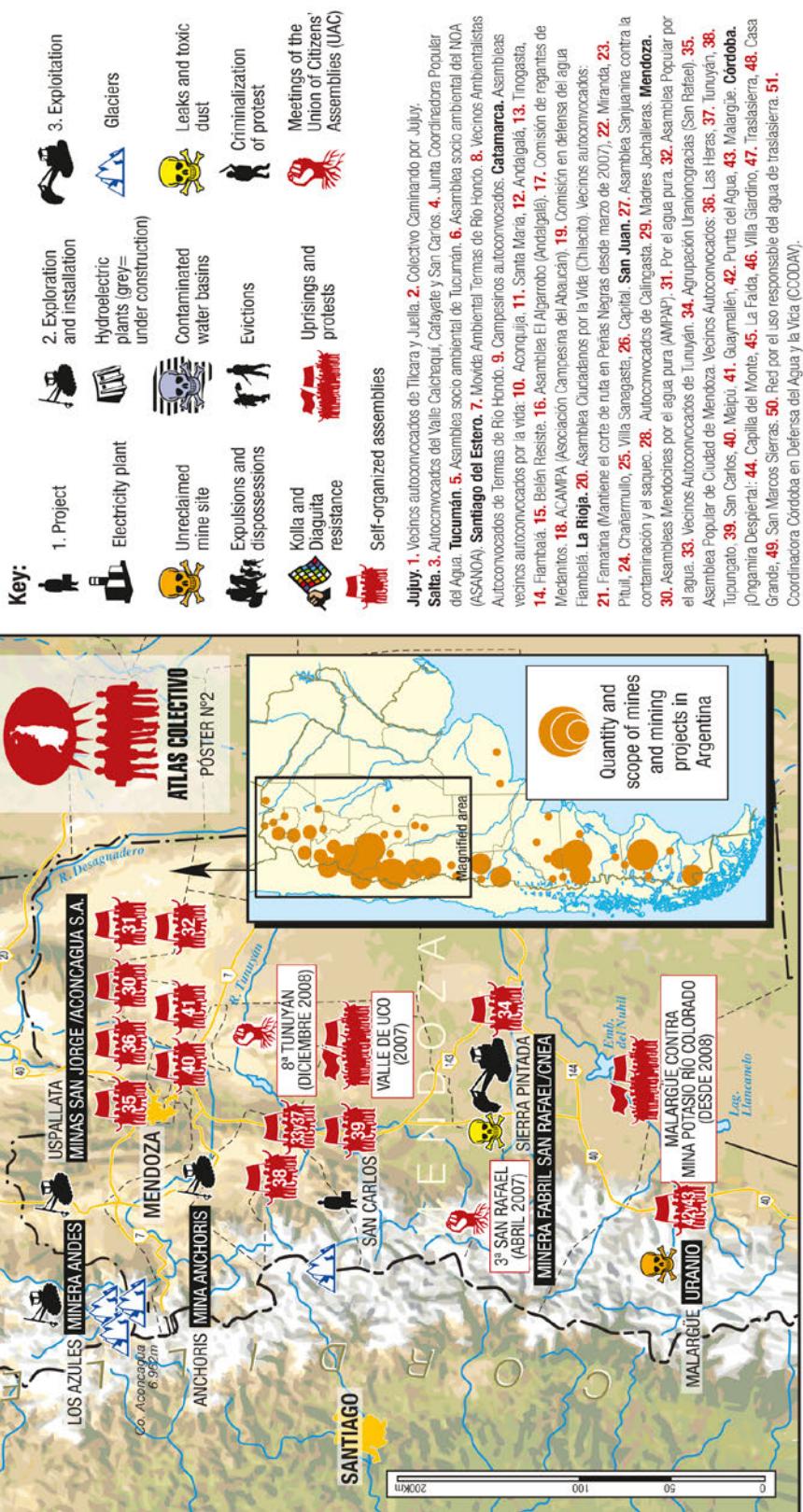
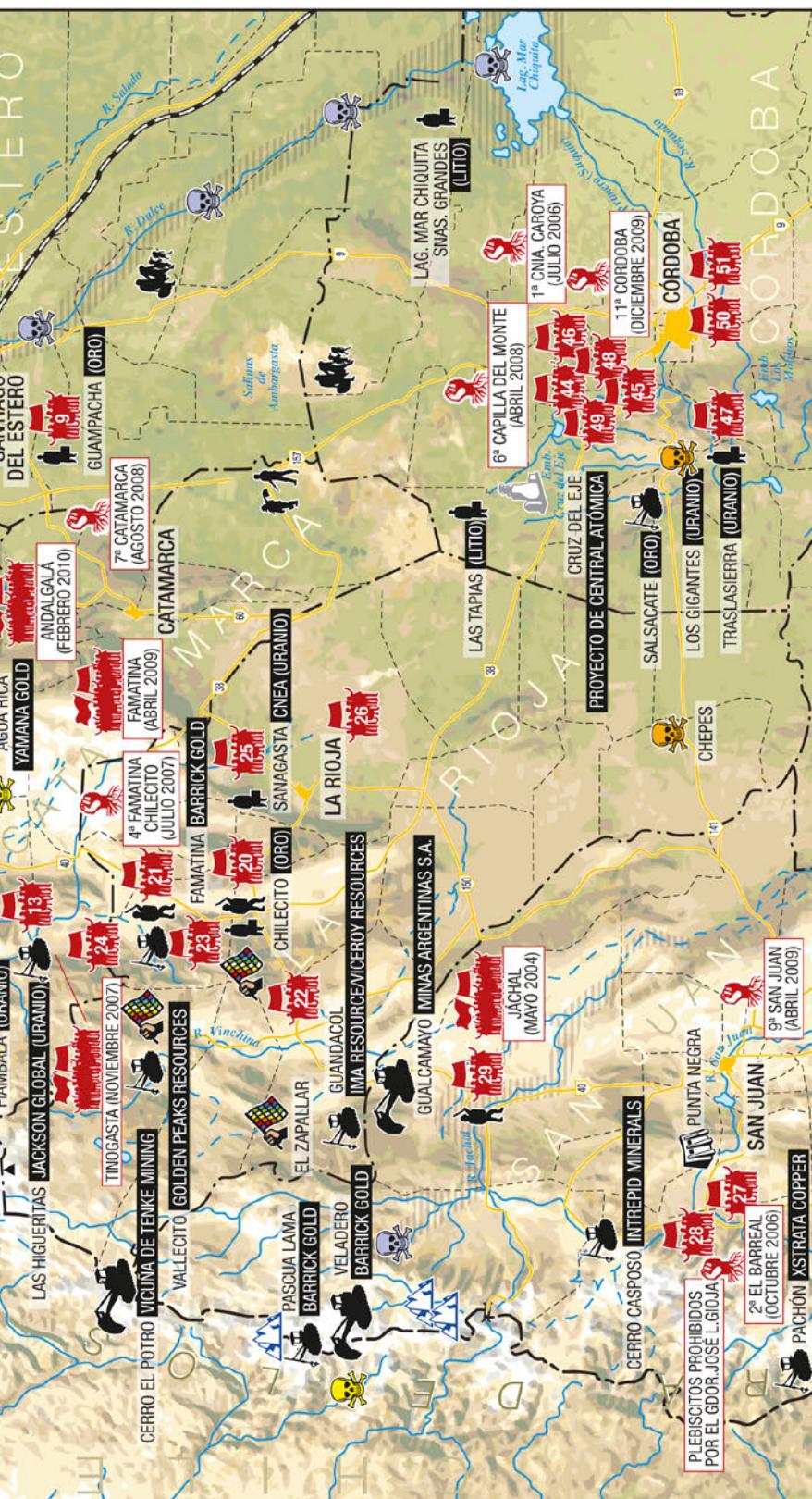
We shouldn't forget that maps are tools that capture a snapshot of a particular moment, but they cannot completely describe the complex, problematic territorial reality that they are based on. Rather, a map transmits a particular collective idea of a dynamic and ever-changing territory in which the real and symbolic borders are constantly affected by the perceptions and actions of bodies and subjectivities. Maps have to be part of a bigger process, one of many strategies, a means to foster thinking, to socialize knowledge and practices, to boost collective participation, to work with strangers, to swap experiences, to challenge hegemonic spaces, to promote creation and imagination, to probe specific issues, to visualize resistances and to point out power relationships...

Endnotes

1. Parts of this text appeared as "Iconoclastas. Critical mapping, collaborative practices and open source graphic resources" online (de.scribd.com/document/202343141/iconoclastas-Critical-mapping-collaborative-practices-and-open-source-graphic-resources)
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2. This phrase is attributed to Alfred Korzybski (a Polish aristocrat and founder of general semantics), who apparently coined it after his experience as an officer in World War I, when he led a disastrous attack in which his soldiers ended up falling into a pit that was not marked on the map. Gregory Bateson (a North American anthropologist and linguist) completed the phrase by adding "and the name is not the thing named." What they both sought to express was the impossibility of objectivizing the significant, emotional dimensions of spaces and linguistic representations.







NOT FOR ALL THE GOLD IN THE WORLD!

Surface mining uses excessive amounts of water and energy, destroys territories, and directly affects the health and ways of life of their inhabitants.

Transnational mining companies have enjoyed government subsidies and legal stability for over 30 years; state and local fiscal incentives mean these companies pay minimal withholdings to move valuable metals out of the country, doing so with only a simple vow and without state oversight. They are also allowed to leave 100% of their profits from these transactions outside Argentina. The implementation of this model of looting -- extraction and export -- has been resisted by residents, campesino communities, social organizations, indigenous Kolla and Diaguita peoples, and concerned neighbors organized in social-environmental assemblies for the defense of life and land. These groups use various strategies of struggle and denunciation when faced with the damages wrought by these mega-mining projects.

Local governments argue that mining will bring "development and work" when the facts demonstrate that they only generate sickness, destruction and death. These governments assist the onslaught of transnational mining companies with repressive politics that criminalize and penalize protest and by supporting the action of quasi-official "special groups" charged with intervening violently against anti-mining marches or blockades with the aim of silencing resistance.