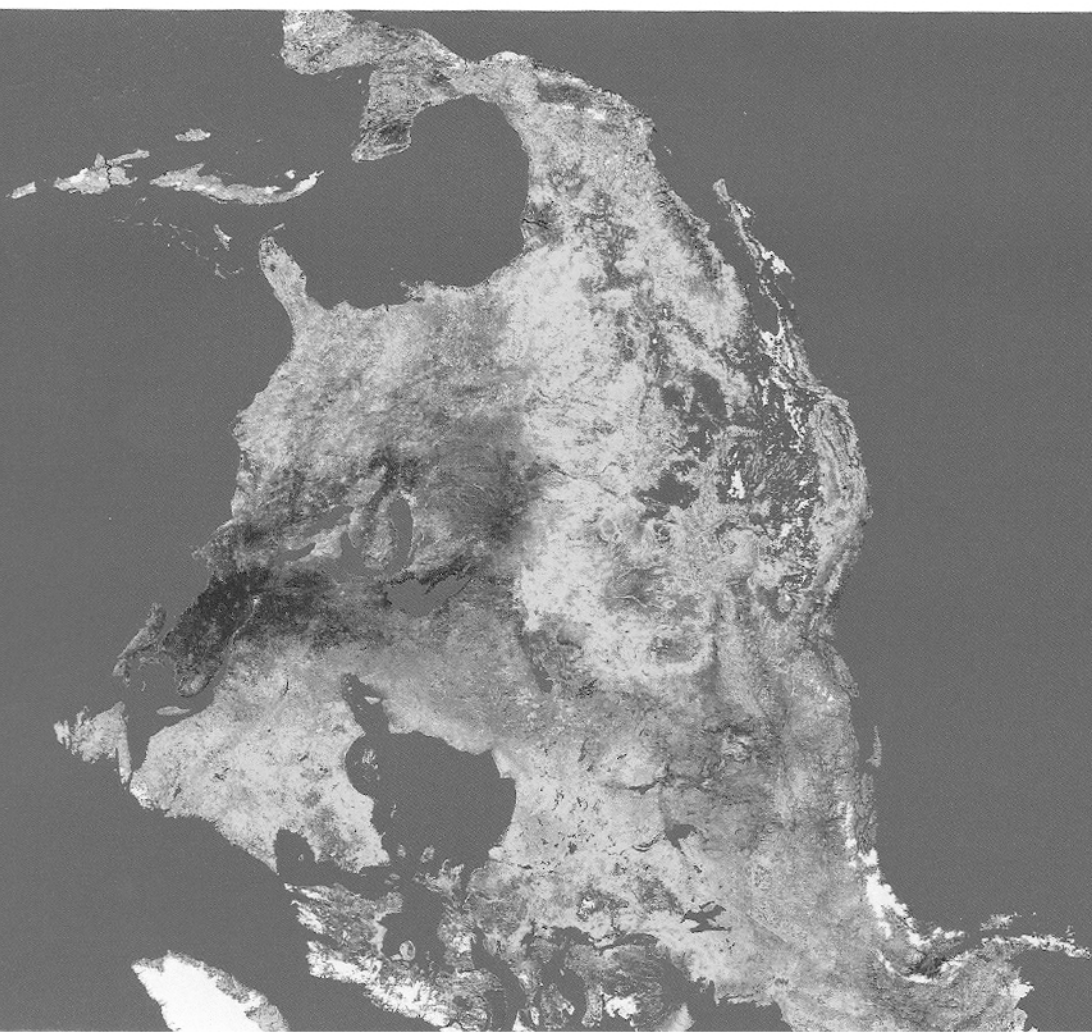


# RETHINKING THE POWER OF MAPS

*Denis Wood*



seizure by the mythologies of the artists. Every code will be exploited. Does a map of the world attempt to pass as definitive and certain? Then Mona Hatoum will construct her *Map* (1999) by strewing 3,300 pounds of clear glass marbles across the floor of a gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. From a distance the floor seems simply to shiver like the air above a radiator; up close the continents shape-shift with every change of light and threaten to send tumbling any who would dare put their weight on them. Hatoum has rendered the opaque transparent, the rigid unstable, and all that is solid threatens . . . to roll away, especially every pretense of institutional stability, the establishment of which is the essential goal of every national mapping agency.<sup>177</sup>

Surrealist, Pop artist, Fluxus member, Conceptual artist, Earth artist—it doesn't seem to matter. Each will take the map and destabilize it, highlight the myth in some way, attack its surety, its certainty, its utility, its reality, its relevance. Duchamp will pun a map of the United States with the head of George Washington; Oldenburg will stuff a map of Manhattan with kapok; Ono will draw an imaginary map . . . and walk it; Paik will build a map out of TV sets; Boetti will paint it with flags and embroider it; John Baldessari will visit the locations of the C, the A, the L, the I, the F, the O, the R, the N, the other I, and the other A that he finds on a map of California and photograph the letters in situ;<sup>178</sup> Smithson will cut the heart out of a map and display the edges; Hiller will ask people to sleep inside mushroom fairy rings and map their visits to fairy land; David Wojnarowicz will collage maps on a manequin of a young boy and set it on fire;<sup>179</sup> Nina Katchadourian will cut the land and water from a subway map of New York and photograph the jumbled skein in the palm of her hand.<sup>180</sup>

Here there is no interest whatsoever in maintaining any kind of footing in the world of maps. The map is being picked up and shaken to see what falls out, and though no piece of map art fails to do this, this is not to say that map artists don't do other things with maps. They do. Map artists are people, after all, who use subway maps to get around and atlases to understand the news and weather maps when making plans. They may even use maps in multiple ways in their art—Christo and Jeanne-Claude are a perfect example—but after being shaken and cut up and stuffed and punned and embroidered and set on fire, no map can ever again wield the authority it claims: its mask has been taken off and though the map may put it back on, we've all seen the face it's hiding.

Through the scrim of map art the complexion of other counter-maps comes to seem more complicated; their interest in staying in the world of maps less certain, more ambiguous; their critique of the map more akin to a mythology and less that of a supplement or replacement myth. This is especially true for those artists whose practice includes the making of other kinds of counter-maps as well.

### Lize Mogel

Lize Mogel is an artist who makes counter-maps; she's a counter-mapper who's an artist. Take her *Mappa Mundi* (2008), a map mash-up making connections, improbable on a globe, between the North Pole, the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair (The Panama-Pacific International Exposition), the Panama Canal, the Northwest Passage, the San Francisco mothball fleet, and ship breaking sites in Pakistan, India,

Bangladesh, and China (Figure 7.7). Playing with location, scale, figure-ground relationships, and color, Mogel's *Mappa Mundi* is part of her ongoing exploration of the relationship between world maps and World Fairs. This is also the subject of *From South to North* (2006), a mash-up that's in the *Atlas of Radical Cartography* Mogel edited with Alexis Bhagat. *Area of Detail* (2008), which Mogel did for the Overgaden Nations emblem, zooms in on the small blue region at the heart of the United Nations emblem, that is, on the Arctic Circle, site of looming territorial disputes and what's soon going to be . . . a Northwest Passage. Yet at the same time Mogel's *Public Green* (2001) was a bilingual poster-map of publicly accessible green space in Los Angeles that drew attention to how public green space was acquired, created, and maintained. The map—it's huge—hung in city buses and transit shelters throughout Los Angeles and spun off the 2002 SCI-Arc map art show that Mogel curated with Chris Kahle. Mogel's *Privatization of War* (2006) can be thought about as a counter-map too, though it's far less straightforward than *Public Green*. *Migration Routes of the Wood River Valley* (2007) really straddles the line between counter-map and map art, though it's as easy to imagine it occupying the space *between* them. This is the community mapping project I mentioned in



**FIGURE 7.7.** Lize Mogel's *Mappa Mundi* (2008). The large white shape, center right, is San Francisco, site of the 1915 Panama–Pacific International Exposition. The black shape below it is Panama. As it says on so many maps these days, scale varies in these views. (Source: Lize Mogel)

connection with the map art show at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts, in which Wood River Valley residents, workers, visitors, and others mapped the migration of Native Americans, mining and railroad industries, sheepherders, domestic workers, second-home owners, and wild animals. With its productive mix of curatorial and editorial activity, counter-mapping, and map art, Mogel's practice is one paradigm for an exciting future.

### kanarinka

kanarinka (Catherine d'Ignazio) is another artist pushing the boundaries of a whole range of established practices with the added attraction of a powerful performance dimension. Like Mogel, kanarinka is deeply committed to collective and collaborative action, especially within the framework of iKatun, an artist-run organization kanarinka directs with Savic Rasovic.<sup>181</sup> iKatun is engaged in a range of activities only some of which involve maps (e.g., it co-curated the 2006 psychogeography *Conflux* in Brooklyn). Among map art projects, iKatun has supported kanarinka's book *42 or 363 Definitions of Cartography* (2004), a book containing kanarinka's "Limits of Cartography" and J. H. Andrews's "Definitions of the Word 'Map,' 1649–1996." You can order the book online or download it for free (at *Lulu.com*).<sup>182</sup> iKatun also supports the Institute for Infinitely Small Things whose *The City Formerly Known as Cambridge* (2008) I discussed in Chapter 6 as an example of a genuine public participation geographic information system. A few pages ago I referred to kanarinka's *It Takes 154,000 Breaths to Evacuate Boston* (2007) as a map art piece, and while kanarinka did appropriate the *City of Boston Evacuation Routes* map, she also ran the entire system, capturing the sound of her breathing (which is also part of the piece) and so measuring the system's length in human breaths. Another map project was *12 Inches of Weather* (2007), a series of drawings in which kanarinka mapped the movement of perspiration across her body (Figure 7.8). kanarinka also writes about map art. Her "Map-recipes and Body-Ovens: Entries for a Psychogeographic Dictionary" appeared in *Cartographic Perspectives*. Her "Art & Cartography" is forthcoming in Elsevier's *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*.<sup>183</sup> This mix of critical writing, performance, map art, publishing, collaboration, counter-mapping, arts administration, and so on, is another model for practice.

### 3Cs

Both Mogel and kanarinka have participated in the activities of the 3Cs, the Counter-Cartographies Collective associated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The 3Cs is a social movement, mapping group, and research project carried out by John Pickles and some students from a number of disciplines. I had originally intended to write about the 3Cs in Chapter 5, after the Parish Maps Project, because the 3Cs are really committed to counter-mapping; but there's something so right about slotting them here among the map artists because their *disOrientation* (Figure 7.9) is really a great piece of map art.<sup>184</sup> Created by Tim Stallmann, Craig Dalton, Sebastian Cobbarubias, Maribel Casas-Cortes, Liz Mason-Deese, Lauren