Map as zeitgeist

AB: This discussion about agency brings forth the question of human agents’ self-consciousness, the replacement of judgment with calculation, the faith that you can accomplish something within the world, and that people can make rational use of maps. I think this is a relatively recent development: the fantastic tradition is older in geography than in cartography. Pedro Laszlo’s Route Guides plays with that moment of cartography’s turning towards geometry in geography. In the 15th and 16th centuries, there were in fact a couple of fantastic reports of new worlds: if you could draw them, you could name them. The parenthesis of this discipline, which is the history of America.

NT: There’s not a lot of those. I think activists sometimes like that damn work ethic in it, they get that Weber thing going on, good pragmatism as their way of doing it. Fantastic mapping is utopian, even when it is not in a fantastic, utopian tone. Fantastic maps present problems for the activists who just want to get from A to B, but often a useful praxis for activists who want to subjectively picture what is going on here and now.

SS: What is the relevance for radical cartography?

NT: Well, we’re talking about the growth of mapping as a kind of zeitgeist, but one of the things that’s kind of terrifying about it is it is so utopian and fantastic. MapInfo Systems. A massive amount of people are making maps in the image of the Borges story where they draw the map that’s one to scale with the world. People going on vacation with drawing visualization data; we’ve got data, we’ve got maps, so raw data going to map everything under the sun. Personally, I don’t care. Where you are is not really important; much more is how you feel this stuff washing over you. There’s just more and more, at some point you will feel as if you have gone to one to scale, awash in the maps of all that is.

SS: You have to wonder what the point is?

NT: The Mark Lombardi maps are really not trying to tell you what to do. NT: No, they are beautifully neurotic and dramatic.

Activist maps

AB: Exactly! They portray the paranoia of knew shit was fucked up, you know? The Lombardi maps aren’t really trying to tell you what to do.

NT: What about property? Do architects forget that the few own most of the vast majority of the planet? It is built on a massive foundation that produces a surplus that runs to the few. Moreover, it treats people as if they are a kind of commodification of exploitation because it is the foundation of the discipline as it works so as to mean that property is protected. It is a kind of pseudo-corporal orientation or an architectural architectural practice like that did not assume the necessity of the property system? Shouldn’t architects be really constructing a practice thatundermines the property system, proposes alternatives, surrogates? It have we have a lot of very contemporary models to do. What kind of forms of property that for the most part have sunk into stereotypes and lack the force to exist on a large scale?

SS: What is the relevance for radical cartography?

AB: The only map in an atlas we have that addresses property is this map from the Unnayan, a map that potentially integrates a large number of people into a property system. You have this map of the property in the Banj, that’s the settlement of “un- touchable” people, and their settle- ments are already integrated. What the US was the Allotment Act in 1934, a map that put even informally organized native American nations into individual plots allotted to the few. Of course, there are many other maps.

SS: What about property, do architects think in work in other projects that seem of a use way to do their property?

NT: I’m very influenced by the Situationists. The powerful move they demonstrated was that a lot of people is that they made the connection between the production of space and the production of produc- tion, Simple things like copyright and landlordship you have to be there. It’s hard for people. It’s hard to exist. We have some maps which we mean to contribute to that can demonstrate this quite simply
A communist thought, but that's going left-anarchist thought, definitely not Libertarian thought, not just a common person could own property, in a long time there was this dream that all these Nobles, and created smaller in 1789, what did they do? They killed men in New York, but to me that's the argument of where I'm getting this from is so obvious, it's from science-fiction novels. What I'm really talking about is sci-fi novels. Maybe sci-fi novels are radical cartography. Lize would hate that, we are always at the same time clarifying the present. I hate to be so coy about this, but I do believe in this privilege of space inasmuch as we need to produce spaces where the imaginary of a world is possible. Don't put the cart before the horse right, we need to make a place where these visions can be made. But right now we're just running on autopilot, like… fuck.

AB: A dwelling right is about not the footprint of a building or a parcel of land? Property versus dwelling rights

NT: Yeah, property is like that trick, at that point it's a demarcation of space.

AB: It's more than a demarcation of space...

Coercion

NT: Alex Villar does this piece where he walks and tries to resist the function of the city. His walking pieces speak to the coercive nature of property, the way in which space is designed. It's funny when you break down what space is because it will make you claustrophobic.

AB: What do you mean?

NT: If you go on a sidewalk you're really not meant to litter, you're meant to keep moving, you can't really go anywhere because you don't own anything, so you really either have to shop, go to work or go home and rest. These are your options in public space. Wall, that is a function of property under capitalism. What is the world?

AB: It's a series of spaces, that are owned and controlled, and have functions that move you through basic ways of being in the world. So that's what his piece is demonstrating, what would it be to try to resist this machine called the city?

NT: But is the machine the city, or is it just a limited conception from Modernism? It wasn't too long ago that the city was precisely made to litter in. Then Le Corbusier came along with his four functions—play, rest, work, and circulation. Somewhere to stop is not really part of it. You stop at home in that schema.

SS: So how does the commons escape that? How does it escape the filthiness?

NT: And, is that the spatial corollary of the commons? The park?

AB: No, certainly not a park, because you can't use a park. I'd say a park is almost antithetical to the commons. It's just the image of the commons. You can only occupy it and leave. If you make physical use of it, say plant a lettuce start there and expect to come back in a couple weeks and get a bed of lettuce, you won't. A park is zero use: what can you do, you can play football, that's a use, which I don't think it is, it's a pastime...