



ENOT

by Lorenza Pignatti

In recent years, maps, atlases, and topographies have in their own right entered the contemporary world of the imagination. They are used not just by geographers, town planners, topographers, and architects, but also by artists, designers, non-governmental organisations, and journalists. In *The Node Knows*, J.J. King writes that in our contemporary society we find ourselves facing a sort of post-information cartography, in which there is a necessary updating of traditional geography. This leads to a different way of recording reality, the task of which is to represent the complex interaction that comes about between knowledge workers and the processes, bodies, and flows they administer.¹



The recording of 'contemporary life' thus ceases to be a device for measuring human activities within unequivocal coordinates and becomes a means for the self-definition of cultural identities, and for bringing cognitive processes once again into question. The representation of a system, such as that of art, establishes codes of interpretation that are capable of acting directly on the rules of cultural management. According to the *Atlas of Radical Cartography*, making maps actually means getting organised, establishing new connections, being able to transform the material and immaterial conditions we live in, and deconstructing reconstituted visions. The cartographies in *Time Zone* are devoted to some art scenes that are currently emerging, and what is at stake here is the position that these countries will adopt in the globalised system of contemporary art. Drawing a map also means reversing the balance of power, in which the role of the individual is defined by his or her function within the dynamics of the system. And this system constantly questions the level of efficiency in carrying out 'normalised' work functions: those of the curator, the artist, the critic, the journalist, and so on. This shift of attention from the passive accomplishment of intellectual work to a direct questioning of the rules and habits that govern the field of work makes it possible to reverse the balance of power, meaning that a 'system functionary' is able to become a 'function' of the transformation of the system itself. We might say that the author of the mapping process shifts from being an individual disciplined by the parameters of capital assessment, which

constantly measures the level of value within predefined work mechanisms, and becomes an active agent in questioning and transforming the rules of art management.

The coordinates for identifying an art scene thus constitute a visual memory that immediately acquires constitutive value. Drafting a map is thus a process of subjectivisation in which the personal sphere works on structuring the social dynamics being described.



Atlases, topographies, and geographical maps are narrative devices that make it possible to catalyse a whole range of interpretive strategies and to record their variations and changes. This creates interaction between diverse disciplines, in which geography, biography, and topography all make it possible to build up and develop a personal, portable atlas - a sort of bio-geographical diary, as W. Benjamin wrote in the notes in his *A Berlin Chronicle*: 'for a long time, indeed for years, I have played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life - bios - on a map.'² Benjamin had a feeling for the practices of process recording that were later implemented by a number of conceptual artists in the 1970s, and that have since been rediscovered and reinvented in the third millennium.



Also Giorgio Agamben reflects on the ways in which our existences are recorded, when he states that: 'the only interesting, or at least possible way of thinking about something as a biography, or a relationship with places, between life and places, is cartography. Biographies are normally linked to time, and yet time is too intimate, and it is also linked to memory... For a scatterbrain like me, places and spaces are way better: so it's better to project a life onto a great imaginary city.'³ In their 'presumptuous omnipotence,' maps do indeed presuppose a world of scatterbrains. This is why they are also interpreted as instruments of memory, both to counter oblivion, and to deconstruct the identity of places by means of discontinuous and heterogeneous points of view. This leads to a rift between history and memory, between image and event, and between various systems of meaning that constantly redefine their status.

(1) J.J. King, *The Node Knows*, in *Bse/where: Mapping, New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*, p. 45.

(2) Walter Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1970.

(3) Interview with Roberto Andreotti and Federico De Melis, in *Alias*, no. 19, Anno 3, Saturday 13 May 2000, pp. 2-5.

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