

History and Theory Studies, Second Year

What is Architecture? How to Architecture?

3 – 2 – 3 : Dancing with the Map

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3 – 2 – 3 : Dancing with the Map

Introduction

The rules of the game are the following: “it is essential that you drop your relations, your common habits and your everyday life roles, though, without taking on other roles. The aim is to let yourself be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters you come across”. A Friday grey sky, downpour, the sound of trotinettes’ wheel carving the puddles... Walking in a nonchalant manner, thinking about the cold weather, perhaps thinking only about the nose, the freezing nose. The nose, the only uncovered part by the many clothing. An extensive street appears. Little shops are evenly distributed on both sides of the street. Passing through them with curiosity affiliated with hurried footsteps. Suddenly, the inscription on the chamfered corner of a building declares “Librairie Lamartine”. While entering the building an agitation engulfs and once inside, a heat wave supinates first the nose. Calm and shiny atmosphere that makes us forget about the outside, the cold and all the little shops. Taking off the clothes one by one until having the arms full and not being able to scroll any book. 1pm! Chaos begins. Students run towards the library and the silence gives place to infinite whispers. The book dropping thud coalesces with the hubbub. Exiting the library, we already notice the extensive street is more crowded. Leading toward the

Parc de la Muette, we encounter many dog owners with their Petits Lévrier Italiens and Australian Shepherds. Strolling in the park and sitting on a bench. Contemplating the Statue of Lafontaine, feeling that the day is slowly over and already thinking about the next day. Hurry in serenity: such would be the contemporary Psychogeographical¹ description of the 16th arrondissement in Paris.

We often stroll from one place to the other, lost in our thoughts, without noticing our three-dimensional architectural environment in which we evolve. In 1957, the Situationists² created maps following feelings attached to places. In other words, the three dimensional architectural environment was the starting point of the creation of Psychogeographic maps, since the Situationists followed feelings procured by the different places to create the maps. The awareness of the three-dimensional world was primordial in the creation of two-dimensional maps. This is a very unusual process since maps are not meant to represent the imperceptible. The common understanding of maps is that they are the representation of the three-dimensional world with scientific coding systems. In that sense, the mapping process can seem a straightforward application faithful to reality that produces a two-dimensional summary of a place or an information. We use the map as a tool to see what is beyond our sight, we take its information as granted and we plan our activity accordingly. That is why it is very important that we understand what a map really is. And this essay attempts to demonstrate how maps mould our perception of the world and govern our decision making process.

By looking closely at a specific Prehistoric map, this essay will try to show how map making has been the first step in the change of perception of the map maker. Then, the essay will reveal the hidden power of maps that is guiding the map reader's perception of the world. It will draw parallels between Prehistory and contemporary times. The act of mapping is meant to be a rational action. It is the science of

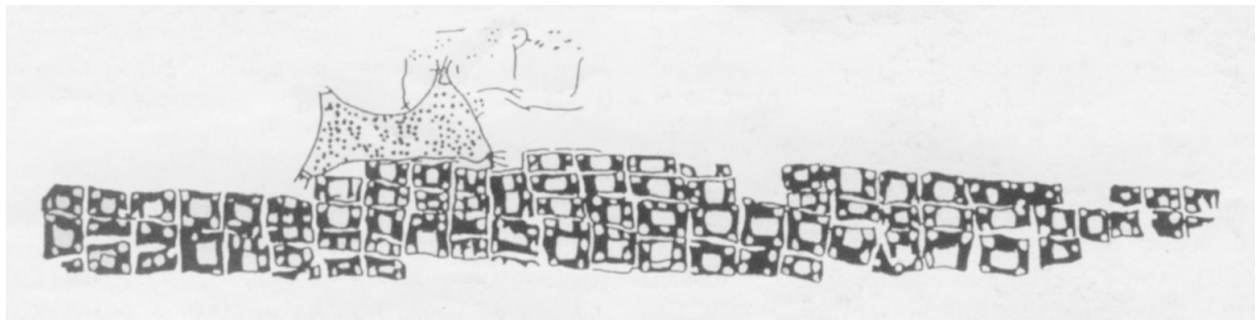
¹ Psychogeographical maps were first introduced by Guy Debord with his theory of the *Dérive*. Psychogeography describes the effect of a geographical location on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The Naked city is an example of a Psychogeographical map.

² The Situationist International was an organization made up of avant-garde artistes and political theorists.

representing information according to set criteria. A map results from a necessity, the necessity of registering what exists, the necessity of establishing a transferable information, from generation to generation, acting as a universal memory.

To Live “In” or “On” the World

The Çatalhöyük Map



A reconstruction of the wall painting (Ülkecul 1999: 49, after drawing by Grace Huxtable)

Early in History, men felt the urge of reporting what they saw in their environment. We can find maps back to prehistoric times. The maps are proof of our spatial awareness. As stated by the British archaeologist Mellaart, the extraordinary wall painting uncovered in the excavations at Çatalhöyük is the world's first map. Which would date the map to the Neolithic period in Anatolia, 9000 BP. According to Mellaart, the drawing is a bird's eye view of the packed buildings in the settlement of Çatalhöyük over which emerges the two peaked Hasan Dağ volcano. The rectangular patterns seem to represent units with central voids at the corners which is similar to Çatalhöyük houses' layout. Even though the settlement would never have looked the same way as architectural plans to people living in the Neolithic times,

incredibly enough they managed not only to imagine the site from above but also to represent it on a two dimensional surface. In fact, the inhabitants would have seen the settlement in a perspectival way as shown in Grace Huxtable reconstruction of the site.



Site reconstruction (by Josh Pollard, Science Museum of Minnesota)

The development of map making has direct implications on cognitive ability to transfer spatial consciousness to a two dimensional surface. This means that Neolithic people were capable of exercising abstract thinking. The process of making a map which includes reducing the space, creating analogies between two dimensional and three dimensional space and representing distant elements is a great development of abstract thinking and symbolic representation³. Thus I would argue that mapping was the first element that changed the Neolithic people's perception of the world they were living in.

³ In his essay "What is the World's oldest map ?", Keith C. Clarke affirms that maps predated writing by at least 10.000 years, they may also have co-evolved with humanity itself. The process of making a map, including reducing a space, constructing analogies between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space, and representing distant features is a significant development of abstract thinking and symbolic representation.

Consequently, mapping also changes the way humans situate themselves in the natural and cultural world⁴. As people move through a landscape; they are in the world and not on it. However with map making and abstract thinking, people began to live on the world. This dislocation of human perception from living *within the world* to *living above* and perhaps beyond it⁵ means that the human viewpoint moved to an entirely imaginary location from where it was possible to speculate and map something hypothetically.

Besides being a sign of a brain capable of abstract thinking, maps show also that the humans have entered a phase of distancing from nature and of questioning his place. We understand that societies which made maps were developed enough to question their place in Nature, in the Universe. Even though they were in the world, an integral part of Nature, these prehistoric populations have somehow taken some distance from their environment, they have achieved the process of looking at their world as an exterior eye. Maps are the tools where they transferred their discoveries. After the observation and mapping process, people started to appropriate spaces. A map is a formal way of appropriation and domination and for a long time was used as a property deed.

Map as a line that separates the known and the unknown

People use maps for spaces that do not fit in their field of vision. By the simple fact of being represented on a map, the indefinite amount of space becomes measurable thus described. Hence, Kant asserts that the

⁴ Harley Woodward states in his 1987 essay that “Maps condition humans’ ideas of their relation-ships to the world around them, and in many societies they express more than the tangible landscape; they express spiritual, mythical space, cosmological space, as encoded in the landscapes of the tangible world”.

⁵ Denis Wood affirms that the dislocation of human perception from being “within the World” to being above and beyond it, develops in a specific social circumstance, arising within specific social structures.

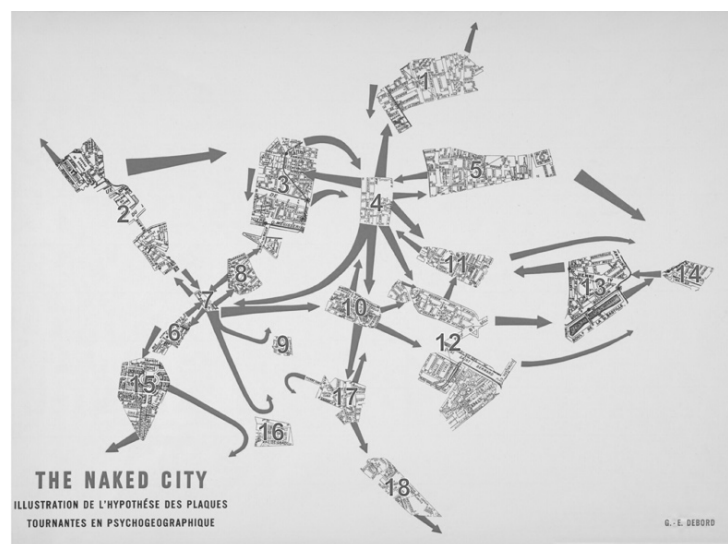
measurement of a space is at the same time a description of it. Once a space is determined with position and measurements, it becomes a particular space with its own characteristics. This very space that did exist in nature amidst its neighbouring spaces, once drawn on a map, finds a kind of official existence and becomes a separate lot of land that can be appropriated and surveyed. Therefore, we can presume that it is the act of mapping that formalized the property concept. A territory that could be described precisely could be owned because it would not be confused with another one. When humans start to understand a space they tend to appropriate it in the second phase. When two groups of people have the awareness of the same place, then the fight for the same territory begins. The map is the first tool of appropriation, consequently of division. The space outside the map symbolizes the unknown. We can say that a map is the line that pushes the limits of the unknown.

The very early prehistoric maps were representations of newly discovered territories, matters in the discovered territories, and existing dangers. Thus we can assume that mapping was a means of representing what was known. Hence, the territories not represented on maps can be seen as the unknown. The unknown is the perceived absence of information at any level of consciousness. This absence of information is the biggest trigger of fear. Perhaps many ancestral fears such as the fear of darkness or the fear of forests are descending from the fact that the dark spaces or the forest were not mapped because information about these spaces were not provided. *Lovecraft suggests “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”.*

The Word of Maps

The maps as storytelling

Mapping is a means of conveying information. But it could also be used to reveal abstract notions. One particular mapping experience worth studying is the *Dérive Theory* of Guy Debord. It aims to catch the emotions of the environment instead of the information. It comes from the reflection of the Situationist International movement on the notion of city and starts from the observation that the city built according to the functional urbanism principles is a city of exclusion, of solitude, where emotions and desire have no place. They propose to refund the city, thus creating new ambiances allowing special and ephemeral moments of life by using the psychogeography apparatus, which can be defined as the study of the laws and the effects of the geographical environment acting directly on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The *dérive* is the main tool for understanding the Psychogeographical characteristics, that is to say the change of atmosphere within the city, its neighbourhoods and its streets. These urban spaces that the Situationist International calls "atmospheric units" are places whose characteristics are homogeneous.



The Naked City Map by Guy Debord

The people attempting a *dérive* experience are walking through the streets of Paris, without any preconceived idea or expectation. From this déambatoire arises a map : the Naked City. It is a Psychogeographical map of Paris which translates the emotions and state of mind of the walkers called “derivers” in contact with the diverse urban tissues. A different experience is Jake Barton's City of Memory map which is a dynamic story map of New York. The participants walk through New York and pin post their own stories when walking through the street the story took place. It diametrically differs from the Naked City which is a live experience map. In the City of Memory map people relate their past personal experiences. It is about the idea of defining the space as a living memory. These two map making experiences reveal an essential point about maps. A specific space contains a multitude of realities, as much as people who have the awareness of the space. This assessment raises a major question : Is the information presented on official maps are the reliable and unique one?

Jake Barton states that “The *City of Memory* makes the idea that there are a million stories in the naked city”. A map is considered as a reliable document issued from an official institution like the City, the Ministry of Economy, the Office of Tourism and so on. They are so powerful tools that they form an unquestioned authority on people. We assume that they relate reality and that the given information is reliable. But is this always the case and could maps be tools that orientate our vision of the world and control our decision making ? Experiences like the Naked City or the City of Memory amongst others have brought the idea of thinking over the real nature of maps. In 1929, Surrealist artists such as André Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon and Paul Nougé have created the “Surrealist map of the World”, a sarcastic map showing the world through their interpretation, implementing the idea that a map is first of all a political tool for ideological creations.



The Surrealist interpretation of the World's map

A critical thinking over maps reveals that maps do not represent reality as there is an infinite reality but instead they are a powerful means of convincing people about the social order that States want the world to be perceived. Maps are arguments that condition our perception of the world. Political powers use the authority of maps to assert their interests and their ideology. A recent example illustrates how misleading maps can be. During his impeachment trial, Donald Trump tweeted a map showing the results of the 2016 elections that he had won. The US map was presented with an overwhelming majority of red with the inscription “Try to impeach this”, a misleading message. In fact, the rural counties supporters of Trump represent a lot of large land. However, these lands don’t have nearly as many people as the urban ones that voted for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Denis Wood, defender of the counter mapping (mapping against the state) is one of those who claim that maps are not simply representations of the world, but arguments with the power to misrepresent it. In fact, he argues that maps serve interest; they are partisan and contain knowledge used for the advantage of some and the detriment of others. For a long time, land was source of wealth and underpinned political and social power, a predicted power, promoted as much through the medium of the map as through the written or spoken words.

Architecture as means of sincerity

However, one domain where mapping can claim some sincerity is architecture. Or could it be that architecture deciphers the imperfections/vices of maps and takes advantage of them ? Maps tell stories, multiple stories about the same place. Each story contains a part of reality. Architectural design uses the information provided by maps to fully understand the space. In the course of the design process, the architect gathers the multiple maps, puts them into relation, defines their intersection points, looks how their juxtapositions work, thinks over the meaning of each one, and tries to understand the space. The heterogeneity of the maps is valuable. It is by projecting the different maps on the same image that one can pretend to see the whole. A good perception of a space can be made by converging as many maps as possible, including maps containing social tissue and psychogeographic information. As cartographer Dennis Wood points out, mapping is creating and imagining space. Therefore, it is a powerful tool used for the production of space. For Wood, the accumulation of multi-layered stories about a neighbourhood (its social class, culture, and rituals) is what defines a map. He claims, “They tell stories on how we understand, perceive, and define the places we call home”.

Conclusion

Mapping is a language that translates the three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional representation, be this representation accurate or altered to serve interests. Maps are paradoxical and ambivalent instruments. Map making is everything but a linear process; starting from the three dimensional environment, we create maps, and we use the maps we have created to construct new architectural spaces. The opposite is also relevant, from the making of a two dimensional map, humans began to appropriate spaces, thus dominating it and constructing it. Thus, we come to the statement that we do a constant back and forth between three dimensional realities and two dimensional representations.

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