



Archis 2



9 Research

P I N G

Lost & Found

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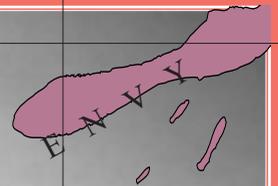
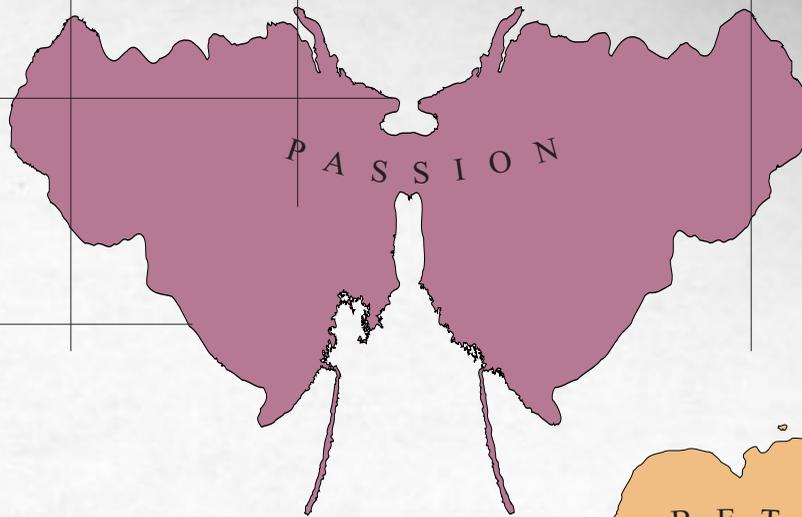
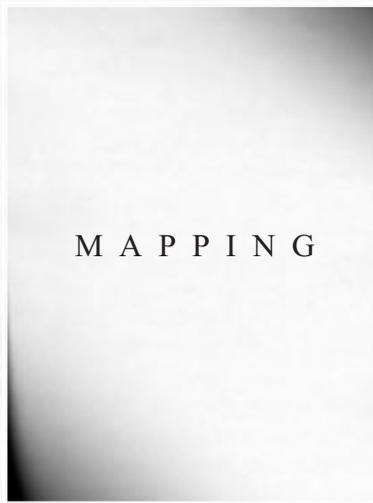
Once upon a time you were expected to know your place in the divine order. Or in the secular order. Factors like predestination, occupation, class, race, social milieu and intelligence determined your precise place in the scheme of things. You also had a fixed abode. In such a rigidly ordered world, maps were scarcely necessary. It is only when you want to break out of such an order, to escape from the inexorable consequences of your origins and your social status, that you need a map. First as an aid to fantasizing about far-off, unfamiliar places, then as a guide on your journey there. The map is a travel guide.

There are, of course, many kinds of travel

guides. Some are content merely to help you find your destination. Others take an active part in defining that destination. The same is true of maps. What at first glance appears to offer a frame of reference to prevent one from getting lost – information about the right direction, the best route and the best means of transport – may prove to be a new kind of rhetoric, as when a seemingly neutral description turns out to be the representation of a mode of thought, an imposed mental orientation. Such a map is an enforced frame of reference that not only helps you find your way but also imposes a certain way of thinking.

Topographical maps are very handy for

visualizing the relationships between regions, people, goods, everything in short that depends on spatial coordinates. But they are virtually useless for visualizing a whole host of other kinds of relationship that have started to dominate our world: the interaction between knowledge, capital, intelligence, technology and the like. In a society where the cultural core is made up of things that are constantly on the move, where motion has itself become the core, where mutations of certain processes are the rule rather than the exception, and more especially where all that movement has a virtual component unencumbered by matter and the slowness of things, maps that impose



a spatial order on the world are becoming less and less relevant. The new reality calls for maps of a completely different calibre: three-dimensional maps, diagrams, search machines, animations. They still help you to find your way, but in addition they help you to understand the world a little better.

Another important aspect of the new reality is the inescapable tendency to make things compatible. Which is to say, interchangeable. People, goods, ideas, finances are eagerly subsumed in a global matrix where they communicate with one another at lightning speed, in several dimensions and according to standard protocols. Maps, once intended to represent the mutual specificity of things as a collection of points a and b between which people could travel, must now, if they are to illuminate the journey, consist of moving configurations of only a's or only b's. If all things are in motion and in search of the areas of overlap, maps too must be all movement and overlap.

Maps that depict movement and overlap could also be termed animations. These new maps 'animate' reality. The data furnished by geographical information systems, by search machines, by visualization software serve not so much to place things in relation to one another as to reveal their mutual force field. Through the introduction of much more data and many more parameters which, instead of being converted into maps by cartographers, are constantly recalculated and visualized by computers, a dynamic reality becomes visible. It is that dynamism that causes people to lose their way and so fuels the demand for new maps. The latter may not help us to find our way, but they do help us to retain our hold on the thin thread of understanding that still ties us to the complex reality of our world.

Thus, cartography continues to do two things at once. On the one hand, it helps people to understand their world and in so doing helps to separate main issues from a multitude of side issues. In other words, it contributes to an understanding of what really matters in this world. On the other hand, the opportunities for manipulation are inexhaustible. Instead of merely suggesting an order, modern maps also present processes, in all their inexorability. With today's dynamic maps you can end up thinking that you understand everything without being able to change anything. With today's animations you can stand above reality and simultaneously be totally overwhelmed by it.

Ordinary citizens can afford to shrug off this paradox. They do their best to understand what is going on in the world and then try to use this understanding as a basis for

democratic opinion or even a rational vote during some election or other. Designers do not get off so lightly, however, for their work is not about casting a vote but realizing an intervention. Designers who aspire to make a contribution to the spatial battle simply cannot ignore the new representations of reality. They need maps in order to understand what the big issues and dilemmas are. Only then will their designs go beyond the mere solution of practical problems and acquire cultural relevance. That said, there is a growing gap between the fantastic studies in which deeply hidden forces are revealed and interconnected, and the designs, masterplans and scenarios that are supposed to change the appearance of those maps. What historicism once did, namely declare the course of history inevitable, is now only too frequently being done by dynamic maps, animations and diagrams of datascares and other conceptual matrices. Sadly, cartography has not yet produced any figures to compare with philosophy's Karl Popper and Jean-François Lyotard, who judged great ambitions by their potential for damage.

If we want to know where and in what respect the design is capable of transcending the inevitabilities of the map, we arrive at a number of essential notions. Anyone intending to approach the intervention by way of description, statistics, visualization and animation needs to be aware of:

- The level of administrative support for the intervention. A design may be ever so intelligent, but without political-administrative underpinning, it will get nowhere. Designs that ignore this aspect and neglect to include an administrative 'caveat' usually end up, after doing the rounds of the lecture circuit, being filed away in the 'interesting ideas' drawer of one or another bureaucrat.

- The need to move between various levels of scale. There is a growing gap between very concrete and realizable proposals at the level of the plot, and totally unrealizable visions at the national and international level which for all the charm of their rhetoric no longer have a clear address. The intermediate level, the region, where an integrated approach is occasionally possible, is also the most under-examined level.

- The definition of the design grows with the definition of the task. Architects are not infrequently required to deliver visionary ideas, the execution of which is never placed in their hands because that is not considered the work of architects. For their part, designers must be prepared to act as developer, process organizer or lobbyist.

There is a sense in which every design, whether it be called a masterplan, a blueprint

or a floor plan, is a map. It orders man and matter. Now that the ordering of man and matter has become part of the movement patterns of information, knowledge and capital, it is logical that architects should change their maps to conform to the level of the new reality. Until now, they have done so very cautiously, and it is quite something for a progressive insight to be arrived at in the research and conceptual phase of the design. This at least makes for improved orientation. But it does not help one to find the way. That is only possible when making a map is the same as making a road. In a society of flows, the need is above all for road maps, and these are not discovered but created.

At this moment a buggy is riding around on the surface of Mars, carefully mapping out some new territory. There are no buggies riding around the terra incognita of global patterns of movement, however. Though they are perhaps being rendered more understandable, there is little ambition to change those patterns. There is no shortage of maps nowadays; instead of maps of the oceans, we have oceans of maps. But where, oh where are the explorers? ●