

Thinking About (and with) Maps: A Reflection on Artistic-Activist Interventions in Contemporary Metropolises

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Abstract

Hegemonic maps that are guided by political, cultural, and economic interests, name and create visibility schemes that establish representations of goods and natural resources while simultaneously fixing and making invisible the social and spatial dynamics that characterize mapped regions and populations as unique. Many associations and artistic-activist collectives are concerned about this situation and its effects and have started to use *open source software* in order to make visible a set of political issues that are hidden by “official” maps, geared towards control. With regard to this symbolic confrontation, the present article’s main objective is to systematically reflect upon political and associative arrangements related to the contemporary dissemination of technological resources aimed at cartographic practices.

Key words: mapping techniques; artistic activism; visibility; territory; urban space.

Pensando sobre (e com) mapas: uma reflexão sobre intervenções artístico- ativistas nas metrópoles contemporâneas

Resumo

Orientados por interesses políticos, culturais e econômicos específicos, os mapas hegemônicos nomeiam e, com isso, produzem regimes de visibilidade que fixam representações sobre bens e recursos da terra, ao mesmo tempo em que congelam e invisibilizam as dinâmicas sociais e espaciais que caracterizam as regiões e populações cartografadas. Atentas a essa realidade e aos seus efeitos de poder, distintas associações e coletivos artístico-ativistas têm feito uso de tecnologias digitais e certificados de direitos intelectuais de código aberto com a finalidade de atribuírem visibilidade a uma série de processos políticos, os quais tendem a ser ocultados pelos mapeamentos “oficiais” e de controle. Tendo como referência esses enfrentamentos simbólicos, a proposta deste artigo será refletir, de forma detida e sistemática, a respeito dos desdobramentos políticos e associativos relacionados à disseminação contemporânea do acesso a uma diversidade de recursos técnicos voltados à prática do mapeamento.

Palavras Chave: técnicas de mapeamento; ativismo artístico; visualidade; território; espaço urbano.

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Introduction

That which a map demarcates, an account crosses (Certeau, 1994 [1980]: 215).

Maps are slices of the world that are based on particular perspectives and specific interests (political, cultural, military, economic) related to the territories they portray. In a strategically oriented fashion, hegemonic cartographies name and produce regimes of visibility that fix representations of the Earth's goods and resources in place, while freezing and making invisible the dynamics that characterize the mapped regions in their daily relations. They disregard popular forms and unorthodox socio-spatial representations².

Artistic-activist groups around the world are aware of this reality and its effects in terms of power on associations, collectives, and traditional communities. In response, these artist-activists have taken advantage of digital technologies, employing free software and open source intellectual property (such as the *Creative Commons*³) in order to produce and to circulate critical insights that are capable of exerting counterhegemonic effects by making certain processes visible. These processes are often political and not necessarily geographical and, when they become visible, systems of control and domination that are often obscured by official maps become perceptible. These new cartographers and the cartographies they produce are aware of the fact that all forms of knowledge that deal with space do not only “portray” but “construct” their object⁴.

¹ I want to thank, first of all, the evaluators for their opinions about this article, especially their rigorous and attentive analysis, which has allowed me to improve it in many fundamental respects. I would also like to thank to FAPESP for my postdoctoral fellowship in Brazil (Processo No. 14 / 04243-8), as well as for funding my research internship abroad (Processo No. 17 / 04416-8), which was essential for writing this text. Finally, I'd like to thank CAPES, for my current post-doctoral scholarship (Processo Nº 88887.372324/2019-00). I also remind readers that the opinions, hypotheses, and conclusions or recommendations presented here are solely my responsibility and do not necessarily reflect the views of FAPESP or CAPES.

² What I designate here as “hegemonic” or “official” cartographies are, in short, mappings based on territorial and identity classifications produced by state-linked institutions or private corporations through censuses and registrations, among other things, with a view towards standardizing identities and defining spatial boundaries under the logic of primordialist criteria, supported by notions that disregard the self-definitions of mapped populations and which then become indicators for policies.

³ For more details see: <https://www.creativecommons.org> (Accessed 13/06/2018).

⁴ New elements have been brought into the public and academic debates, with regards to this criticism of the boundaries of traditional “geographical” cartography. These include successful “ethnomapping” experiments. One of these experiences worth noting is the “New Social Cartography of the Amazon”, created by a diverse group of researchers linked to different university institutions and local populations, who have been working together to confront the positivist and arbitrary logic that underpins the way hegemonic powers produce cartographic data about the region and the populations within it. For more information, see Almeida (2013).

For these new⁵ cartographers, the cartographic technique ceases to be understood simply as the application of neutral and scientific knowledge to the reality of a given location. Instead, mapping is understood as a set of practices and interactions that cannot be reduced to the materiality of the objects it produces. Understood from this point of view, the map becomes much more than a mere artifact, resulting from the application of an abstract scientific rationality: instead, it is configured as one piece (among others) of a “socio-technical system” (Akrich 1989; 2014 [2010]) whose evidence disappears to the degree that we conceive of it as the embodiment of an irrefutable objective reality.

The purpose of the present article is to think of maps as “technical objects” (Akrich 2014 [2010]), enmeshed in a set of symbolic and political confrontations linked to different (and competing) ways of conceiving contemporary relationship between visibility, power, and tactics of territorial representation and occupation. In this endeavor, we foreground the fact that:

Through their configurations, technical objects define a certain partition of the physical and social world; assign roles to certain types of actors -- human and non-human -- while excluding others; authorize certain modes of relationships between these different actors (...) such that they can fully participate in building a culture in the anthropological sense of the term. At the same time, [these objects] become mandatory mediators of all relationships that we maintain with the “real” (Akrich 2014 [2010]:161).

In view of the above, I will seek to highlight the set of relationships made by the confection of different sorts of maps and, to this end, the article below will be divided into four parts.

Initially I engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue with different bibliographic sources in order to problematize understandings of territory that are either too abstract or too rigid, drawing attention to the importance of a relational perspective of current spatial-temporal dynamics. Analyzing some case studies involving the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, I then present examples that illustrate how the hegemonic cartographic imagination is not a faithful portrait of reality, but always a translation of partial perspectives that are related to disputes regarding the legitimate interpretation of mapped territories and the populations that occupy (or should occupy) them. In the article’s third section, I relate the experiences of a pair of Argentine communicators, educators, and social activists called the *Iconoclastas*, in order to show the ways in which they have developed a set of collaborative mapping techniques, which they have disseminated through transnational activist, artistic, and academic circuits. In the final section of the article, I will use my experiences as a member of a workshop aimed at teaching collective mapping techniques (a workshop organized by the pair discussed above) in order to think in more detail about the pedagogical and critical roles that this type of practice plays. I will then conclude the article with some final considerations.

Places, spaces and mobilities: Towards a relational perspective of territories

In the first volume of his classic work, *The Invention of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau differentiates “place” from what he defines as “space”. According to de Certeau, “place” is an “order in which elements are distributed according to relationships of coexistence” (Certeau 1994 [1980]: 201). A “place” is thus the result of a normative perception of the territory, guided by the “one’s own laws”: i.e. by a coherence that presupposes a stable structure with fixed boundaries and which, by necessity, excludes the possibility that two things might

5 In this case, the expression “new” seeks to draw attention to the difference between the type of mapping that the subjects I researched produce in relation to that produced by official cartographies. My subjects are not committed to a closed system of methods based on censuses, measurements, and etc. Instead, they draw upon a diverse set of experimental methods and sources based, above all, on in-depth knowledge of localized realities. They thus seek (as Almeida remarks (2013:155), to cause “(...) a rupture with the monopoly of identity and territorial classifications historically produced by colonial society(...)”, as they record an increasingly noticeable tension between groups’ self-consciousness, expressed by collective actions and self-definitions, and census categories of identity supported by primordialist criteria.

simultaneously occupy said place. “Space”, on the other hand, is the result of itinerant practices that can symbolically appropriate places, breaking down the rigidities that maintain fantasies of unity and cohesion. In the author’s own words, “(...) Space is place as practiced. In this way, a street geometrically defined by urbanism, is transformed into space by pedestrians” (Certeau 1994 [1980]: 202).

When understood in these relational terms, “space” refers to the effect generated by the encounters of the diverse and conflicting mobilities that are present within territories. In light of this view of things, “space” is the stage upon which “places” are conceived of and enacted by different human groups via rules, hierarchies, codes and private boundaries. These co-exist and/or enter into conflict with a greater or lesser degrees of confrontation, as authors such as Gilberto Velho (1999) and Antônio Arantes (2000) have demonstrated through metaphors such as “the worlds of Copacabana” and “the war of places”⁶.

Similar to Certeau (1994 [1980]), but without his concern of employing a strict differentiation between “space” and “place”, is the work of French archaeologist and anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan (2002 [1965]) and his use of the notions of “traveling space” and “radiating space”. According to this author:

Perception of the surrounding world takes place in two ways: one dynamic, consisting of traveling through space and thus becoming aware of it; the other static, its stillness allowing us to reconstruct around us successive circles, which become progressively more vague until they reach the limits of the unknown. One way gives us the image of the world based on an itinerary, while the other integrates the same image on two opposite surfaces -- heaven and earth -- which come together on the horizon. These two modes of perception and understanding exist, together or separately, in all animals, the itinerant mode being especially characteristic of terrestrial animals, while the radiant mode is above all the bird’s point of view (...). In the case of man, the two modes coexist and are primarily related to vision, having originated a double representation of the world, in simultaneous modalities that, according to all indications, are inversely proportionally represented before and after sedentarization (Leroi-Gourhan 2002 [1965]: 134-135).

Leroi-Gourhan (2002 [1965]: 136) thus believes that forms of spatial representation produced by the nomadic hunter-gatherers during the period prior to sedentary agriculture were images that referred to “traveling space”. For Leroi-Gourhan, there was nothing “in cave art” that demonstrated the radiant perspective that later came to dominate human experience -- particularly through processes of urbanization, when a whole system of geometric references in the world imposed itself upon our ways spatial and temporal thinking.

The underlying idea that interests me here, however, is that the act of walking about (traveling) is to the radiant representation of territory (the “map”, for example) what speech is for language. In other words, the act of walking about the world is capable of producing unexpected effects, as it does not necessarily fit the scheme proposed by those who create the idealizations of places.

6 Both authors analyze places, having as their principal references the symbolic dimensions of these places. Their studies show how the same environment can be meaningful in very different ways, depending on the actors or social nuclei with interact with it (and with mappers). They thus create an approach that enables understanding of the way space tends to be constructed differently by different subjects, with the researcher concentrating on not reproducing airtight descriptions that, as they lose sight of this dynamic, tend to naturalize normative interpretations. For more details, see Arantes (2000) and Velho (1999).

By moving oneself, by letting oneself be taken over by the experience of the rough and noisy metropolis, the city dweller is encouraged to create links between apparently discontinuous environments which are connected through the layout of the city's routes. Thus, where one sees borders on a map, the act of travelling constructs "bridges". Likewise, where cartography indicates a continuity, one might actually encounter a physical or symbolic barrier in one's travels⁷.

Put another way, there are individual experiences that form around these routes, created by the steps pedestrians take and which are imperceptible in traditional mappings. As Tim Cresswell, notes, "a line on a map linking A and B may be experienced completely differently by a man and a woman, or a businessman and a maid, or a tourist and a refugee" (Cresswell 2009: 26). Roaming about thus becomes an act that can produce and reveal other mappings: it challenges the topographical logic that gives meaning to traditional maps.

Indeed, authors like Certeau (1994 [1980]) and Cresswell (2006; 2009) understand as counterproductive, readings that reduce the spatial dimensions organizing practices in a town to rigid geographical lines. They believe that spaces only can be effectively understood in their complexity when we account for the mobility of the agents that circulate through them.

Another important contribution that conceives of space from a relational and mobile perspective can be found in the work of British feminist geographer Doreen Massey (2012 [1991]). In one of her best known articles, Massey seeks to counter certain "conceptual exaggerations" that arose at the end of the twentieth century, when the remarkable transformations in the field of geopolitics, economics, communications, and transport led to the creation of a problematic duality in the public debates of the period. This duality was characterized by opposition between those who linked urban fragmentation and "disorder" to the supposed loss of "places" inhabited by cohesive and homogeneous communities, and those who, in reaction to this conservative reading, began to understand the concept of "place" as linked to a certain negative and reactionary logic of romantic operation that eschewed the functionality of the real world.

For Massey, the problem with these two positions is that they both insist on neglecting the opportunity to think of places as based on social relationships and bonds that extend across space and time. In this sense, she proposes an alternative interpretation of place, saying that:

(...) what gives a place its specificity is not a long internalized history but a history that has been constructed based upon a given constellation of social relations, encountering and intertwining in a particular space (...). So instead of thinking of places as areas contained within certain limits, we can imagine them as articulated moments in networks of social relations and interpretations, in which a large proportion of these relationships, experiences, and interpretations are constructed on a much larger scale than that which defines that space in that particular moment - whether this space be a street, a region, or even a continent. This, in turn, allows for a sense of extroverted place, which includes an awareness of a given place's links with the world and which integrates the global and the local in a positive way (Massey 2012 [1991]: 126).

To illustrate her more comprehensive and porous understanding of "place" with a concrete situation, Massey employs the case of Kilburn High Road, the region where she lived in northwestern London, which she also considered to be her favorite commercial area.

⁷ This kind of reflection is what makes some authors, such as Ingold (2015 [2011]: 215-229), position themselves against the very idea of "space", given that the category imposes a flat, fixed, and two-dimensional concept of the world in terms of stable representations. These authors disagree with other theorists like Doreen Massey (whom we will discuss below 2008 [2005]), preferring to assume that space is a great void, even as they agree with many of the English author's ideas. Ingold prefers to call the "world of life" that which Massey calls "space-time", for example. However, it is worth pointing out that I, like Massey - and unlike Ingold - believe in the importance of maintaining "space" as a category, especially when we talk about societies marked by peripheral and subordinate experiences. For these societies, space acquires a fundamental character in the conflicting relationship established with the state or with other hegemonic forms of knowledge.

As a narrative strategy, Massey describes the sensations resulting from her experience of crossing the streets of the neighborhood while attentively and analytically looking at the relationships established there. She highlights, for example, a newsstand that sells periodicals from counties identified by some of her neighbors as belonging to the “Irish Free State”, as well as in which one can make out the letters “IRA”⁸. She also makes note of the life-sized mannequins of Hindu women, dressed with several layers of clothing. She pays attention to ads for a show in the the famous Wembley Stadium, as well as a random chat she has with a Muslim laborer, who is depressed about the consequences of the Gulf War and who is “silently annoyed” by feeling obligated to sell the British newspaper *The Sun*. These and other cases serve to illustrate the fact that:

On the one hand, communities can exist without being in the same place: they can be founded on networks of friends with common interests or upon religious, ethnic, or political communities. On the other hand, cases of places inhabited by unique “communities”, in the sense of coherent social groups, are probably very rare (and I would say that this has been the case for quite some time now). Moreover, even when they exist, they do not imply in any way a single sense of place. People always occupy different positions within the community (...). It is (it should be) impossible to even think of Kilburn High Road without thinking about half of the world and a considerable part of British imperialist history (and, of course, this is also true of the miners). Imagining things in this way provokes (at least in me) a global sense of place (Massey 2012 [1991]: 124-125).

Although there is no exact correspondence between what Massey (2012 [1991]) and Certeau (1994 [1980]) conceptualize as “place” and “space”⁹, there thus appears to be a relative proximity in terms of how both interpret the spatial extent of mobile, global socio-cultural phenomena. Both authors consider “space” and “place” to be much more dispersed and complex than is commonly thought of in geography and both authors therefore eschew reduce them, either with traditional and static boundaries, or as abstract environments that exist without concrete territorial bases.

Following the same example, more contemporary authors from multiple disciplinary fields (Aderaldo 2017a; 2017b; 2019; Agier 1999; 2011 [2009]; 2013; Butler 2017 [2015]; Carmo 2009; Cresswell 2006; 2009; Sheller and Urry 2006; Haesbaert 2010; 2014; Reguillo 2017 a; 2017 b; Simões 2009) have also encountered the challenge of “rehabilitating the importance of places in theories of globalization” (Simões 2009: 73) by questioning the ethnocentric imperatives that underly current imaginations of space and place and which supports the idea is that current flows make space a minor consideration that is, in some cases, even dispensable. In the words of Simões:

Although the intensification of globalization, the mediated experiences that it triggers and -- above all -- the effective possibility of geographical mobility have made our relationships with various territorial (and identity) referents distinct from those experienced centuries or even decades ago, territories continue to maintain prominence for us at different scales. From the country in which we were born to the neighborhood in which we live, territorial referents have not completely dissolved. They continue to shape our experience of mobility, as well as our imagination (...). If we can say that flows are tangible, it is because they are effectively somewhere. They do not remain in endless traffic, oblivious to what is happening in places and space. They are in some fashion anchored in territories from which they emanate and to which they move (Simões 2009: 74).

8 This is a reference to the Irish Republican Army Catholic separatist group (IRA), whose terrorist methods provoked much public fear until 2005, when its members decided to announce the end of their “armed struggle.”

9 Such a discussion is beyond the scope of the present article. To learn more about Massey’s (2008 [2005]) critical reading of Certeau’s concept of “space”, see in particular the third part of her book, cited here.

Simões' thoughts can be complemented by those of Judith Butler (2017 [2015]: 97), when she criticizes current concepts that assume that social networks and other media forms promote a “disembodiment of the public sphere”. Butler argues that for an “event” to occur, the media (streams) need bodies, gathered in the streets, which are subject to very specific risks. These bodies also need the means to convert their local practices into global phenomena. Butler claims that this conjunction between the street and the media constitutes a very contemporary version of that phenomenon that we traditionally understand as “public space”, in which (through broad and simultaneous circulation of images and messages through social networks and *hashtags*) space-time links gain the ability to produce wider relationships. According to the Mexican anthropologist Rossana Reguillo (2017 a, 2017 b), these relationships are then capable of generating new communities of interaction and interpretation, arising in previously unexpected alliances.

Further evidence that the flows are always anchored in the territories (as Massey (2012 [1991]: 119) and Simões (2009: 74) purport) can be seen in the fact that mobility exerted by dominant social sectors dominant ends up interfering, one way or another, in the possibilities of other, more politically fragile, sectors to move or stay put. According to Massey, the ability of capital to move around the world is further enhanced by the relative immobility of working populations¹⁰. Likewise, in order for residents of exclusive neighborhoods to fully enjoy their “freedom” to move about the city, it is often necessary that the mobility of poorer populations be restricted and kept under control by the police or military. In the same way:

(...) each time someone uses a car and therefore increases their personal mobility, the social justification and the financial viability of the public transport system is reduced and, therefore, the mobility of those who depend upon the system is also potentially reduced (Massey 2012: 119).

As Campos (2011), Butler (2017 [2015]), Graham (2016 [2011]), and Reguillo (2017 a; 2017 b) point out, the fact that these inequalities in possibilities of use and representation are naturalized is also often converted into a symbolic economy of visibility¹¹, which Stephen Graham (2016 [2011]) claims is responsible for legitimizing and reproducing Manichean imagery that demonizes cities as essentially threatening environments and transforms difference into the mark of an “Other” who is the constant target of suspicion and violence. This, in turn, feeds dreams of permanent and omnipresent frontiers.

It is this condition that makes visibility fundamentally important for subaltern groups. After all, as Butler (2017 [2015]) points out, the viability of the lives of subjects linked to these groups depends on the legitimation of their presence in public spaces. In other words, access to spheres where one can appear is what makes recognizable claims concerning one's right to be and one's ability to lead a life that can be lived.

For these reasons, the cartographic representations produced by institutions, media outlets, and other organizations controlled by socially dominant groups tend to emphasize these sectors' “necropolitics” (Mbembe 2018 [2003]). They hide the workings of power and convey the idea that the data contained in these interpretations coincides with a faithful reading of reality itself. This is something that does not occur without resistance, however, as I will try to show in the next topic, which deals with cases involving disputes over the ways of reading and representing aspects of the urban geography of Brazil's two largest metropolises, the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

¹⁰ Regarding this, see also Sheller and Urry (2006) and Cresswell (2006).

¹¹ By “visuality”, I mean a broad and complex process which, as Marques and Campos (2017: 6) point out, involves not only the visual perception of the world, but also the “creative competencies” through which reality itself becomes the subject of disputes between social groups separated by recognizably asymmetrical positions.

Map wars: Some cases from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo

According to recent literature (Haesbaert 2014; Tommasi and Velazco 2011; Vainer 2011), the city of Rio de Janeiro has recently been used as a true “laboratory” for the implementation of all kinds of experiments involving urban policies, military actions, and the development of systems of control and monitoring. The greater part of the investments in these fields has been aimed at the systematic containment of population flows that are characterized, in official discourse (and popular perception) as “at risk” and “risky” (Rocha 2015). These factors were significantly empowered by two global mega-events (the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics) that adopted Rio as their main venues¹².

In this sense, the landscape of Rio has been marked by the presence of a series of containment mechanisms that take more or less visible forms. One can think of the walls hiding or surrounding entire slums, for example¹³, but there is also the interruption of certain bus lines that connect outlying areas of the city to its richest regions¹⁴, and the electronic systems of surveillance and monitoring, which can now be seen everywhere in town¹⁵.

As geographer Rogério Haesbaert (2014: 262) points out, however, such forms of geographical containment do not have maximum “effectiveness” without being complemented by what the author calls “symbolic containment” -- that is, territorial representations defined by hegemonic media vehicles.

In his study of the dynamics responsible for the configuration and legitimation of the “biopolitical” form (Foucault 2010 [1997]) of the current landscape of the city of Rio de Janeiro, the Haesbaert performs an interesting diagnosis of the role played by media elaborations of this metropolis and its populations. Haesbaert evaluated a year’s worth of reports involving favelas in the two of Rio’s main daily newspapers. One of these, *O Globo*, is considered to be the most important paper among the city’s elite and ruling sectors while the other, *O Dia*, is most popular among less influential groups¹⁶.

Haesbaert’s investigation found that the “geographic coverage” varied considerably in both newspapers, representing the public and interests of each paper. While *O Globo* prioritized the news and conflicts that occurred in the slums of the city’s south zone and center (Rio’s most privileged areas), home to most of its public, *O Dia* had a more comprehensive coverage of the actions that took place in Rio’s favelas.

The papers thus tended to focus on different regions of the metropolis according to the interests of their different reading publics, while also creating different cartographic representations of urban space¹⁷. Haesbaert concludes that:

(...) by hiding a significant part of metropolitan life, the hegemonic media ends up stimulating a segmented view of the city, privileging certain spaces and neglecting others, as if promoting a containment that symbolically invisibilizes and contributes to the depreciation of the city’s poorest areas (...). By making invisible or minimizing occurrences in much of Rio’s urban space, *O Globo* can also have serious impacts on the direction of public policies. Given that it is the leading newspaper in Rio de Janeiro -- especially well regarded by the most favored and influential classes -- *O Globo* ends up directing the State’s to what is produced and published as information and thus to [what will be considered as] the most relevant problems and/or spaces of the city. If the representation of basic issues appears linked to only a few areas, it is “natural” that these will be given priority for State action (Haesbaert 2014: 265).

12 In addition to being chosen to host the 2016 Olympics, Rio de Janeiro was also the city of choice for the grand finale of the 2014 Football World Cup.

13 Further details on these cases can be found in Haesbaert, 2014.

14 See, for example, this UOL portal article on the subject: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-estado/2015/09/18/corte-on-bus-lines-and-criticized-by-river-suburbs.htm> (Accessed 6/13/2018).

15 For a comprehensive reflection on these systems, see Haesbaert (2014).

16 As the researcher demonstrates, this difference is even manifest in the price of the diaries, with (at the present moment) the first costing twice as much as the second.

17 In the paper, Haesbaert even produces two maps where this issue is made even more evident. For more details, see Haesbaert (2014: 263).

The act of neglecting and making Rio's vulnerable spaces and populations invisible also gains other problematic developments, such as the recent case involving the printing and distribution of tourist pamphlets by the Rio de Janeiro-based company Riotur, in which the city's favelas were simply erased from its geography¹⁸. This meant that about 1.4 million residents of Rio had their presence literally wiped from the maps made by the company, although Riotur's magazine also highlighted the favelas as places to be visited by so-called "special tours"¹⁹.

Such cases are significant in revealing how our everyday perceptions are often defined by cartographic representations associated with the interests of certain social sectors, without us even realizing that this is taking place. Similarly, they demonstrate how maps are far from being faithful records of the territories they seek to represent.

In recent years, however, artist-activist collectives, popular movements, and a series of agents organized via networks have been using different technical, visual, political, and epistemological mechanisms in order to resist the perverse effects generated by mainstream representations of territories and the subsequent security policies they reinforce. In this endeavor, counterhegemonic cartographies have found a place to thrive.

As Graham states (2016 [2011]), "countermappings" are a reverse appropriation of cartographic production techniques, using a series of graphical and georeferencing tools, which seek to disrupt the logic of what the author calls "military urbanism". This is a way of thinking that colonizes urban spaces and places by imposing securitization and market fundamentalist paradigms, projecting a vision of life as a constant war of "us" versus "them", and legitimizing mechanisms of exclusion and exception as a common forms of everyday urban political management.

In 2016, for example, a collective action called "The Exclusion Games", supported by the studies and discussions carried out by the "Rio de Janeiro World Cup and Olympics People's Committee"²⁰, produced a map entitled "The Rio de Janeiro of the Exclusion Games". On this map, the high political, economic, urban, and social costs involved in the creation of the "Olympic city" project were transformed into structures that could be cartographically visualized.

On the map²¹ one can see, for example, all the removals that were responsible for the the displacement of about 77,000 people beginning in 2009, when the city was elected to host the 2016 Olympics. One can also visualize the various labor law violations that had been denounced and proven: labor conditions analogous to slavery, for example, in some of the construction projects linked to the games, or the resurgence of State persecution of small street traders. In addition, an attentive look at the map allows one to identify environmental impacts and the perverse effects of extensive military occupation, responsible for the creation of a "belt" that was characterized by the repression of Rio's less privileged areas and the "protection" of its highly valued tourist districts.; The map clearly shows that the militarization which took over the city in the name of preparing for and hosting the games never focused on the safety of Rio's inhabitants, as had been announced in official speeches by the city's and the games' political representatives.

18 With regards to this, see: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/folheto-da-riotur-distribuido-turistas-tira-favelas-da-geography-of-city-21806418> (Accessed 7/11 / 2018).

19 I refer more specifically to a mode of favela-oriented tourism whose undeniable complexity is carefully examined in the work of Freire-Medeiros (2007), as well as in Freire Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2016).

20 For more information about the committee, see its official website at: <https://comitepopulario.wordpress.com/apresentacao/> (Accessed 14/06/2018).

21 An interactive and detailed version of this map can be found at: https://issuu.com/justicaglobal/docs/mapa-gogos-da-exclusa__o (Accessed 14/06/2018).

Figure 2 - Mundo Brasil, Brasil Mundo map, February 3rd Front



The February 3rd Front aimed at revealing the interests behind this urban and “securocratic” project within the context of an entire history of interventions in the field of race relations in Rio de Janeiro. They showed, for example, the militarization of Rio as part of a broader process that involved the conservation of racist and classist imaginaries. They also illustrated other actions, developed not only in Brazil but around the world, which followed a logic defined by the members of the collective. as “colonialist”. These included the operations carried out by the Brazilian army in its so-called “peace mission” in Haiti, where several experiments tested in this small Caribbean nation were later carried out in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas.

The map created by the collective also allows one to perceive other intersections, linking the characteristic exclusionary effects of city architecture to certain hegemonic representations in the Brazilian media and cultural industry²⁴.

24 A detailed overview of this cartography can be found at: https://issuu.com/invisiveisproducoes/docs/mundo_brasil_brasil_mundo (Accessed 14/06/2018).

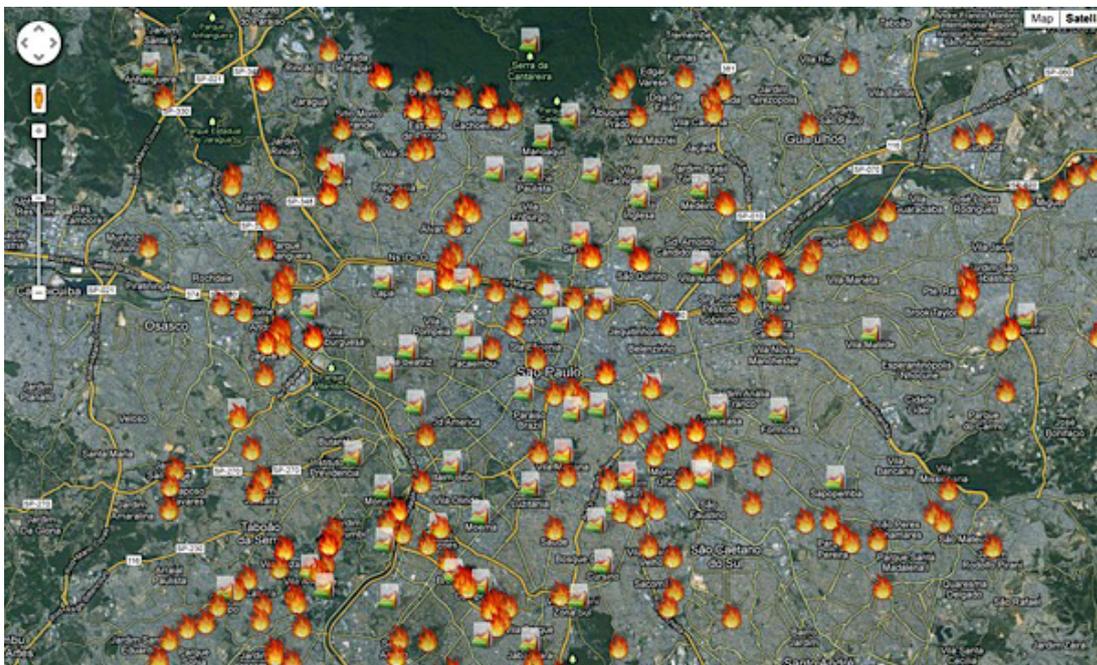
As André Mesquita (2011: 125) points out, by comparing the “empty spots” in media discourse or in “official” maps and communiqués with alternative cartographies such as those described above, one can move beyond the extensive set of really existing actions mapped out around certain problems and begin to question “the motives of those who conceal certain types of information”.

In São Paulo, for example, also in the context preceding the 2014 World Cup (and at a time when many changes in the urban structure of the metropolis were being made with the support of public agents clearly involved with economic and real estate interests), a series of favela fires caught the attention of journalist and activist Patricia Cornils, who wondered about possible relationships between these events and real estate speculation in the city²⁵.

After conducting an initial survey and proving that there was substance to her question, Cornils created a spreadsheet containing data related to changes in land prices in those regions where there had been fires. She launched an open platform on the internet inviting people to collaborate in transforming the data from her private investigations into something more comprehensive and systematic that could be easily consulted and understood by the general population. Several people began working with Cornils’ project, including programmer Pedro Moraes, who helped the journalist develop a map and a mobile application entitled “Fire in the Shanty”, which people could use to contribute and information that, once checked for veracity, would be incorporated into the collective cartography project.

The resulting map, fed in real time by community volunteers, showed all the fires in the city’s slums since 2005. By clicking on the icons referring to the fires, one could bring up informational screen balloons containing data related to the real estate valuation of the region corresponding to the selected event. This enabled interested citizens to access an entire web of dark relations that linked apparently discontinuous cases understood in official reports as mere “environmental accidents” or “fatalities”.

Figure 3 - Fire in the Shanty map



²⁵ These cases drew the attention of many activists, reporters and human rights groups and inspired the documentary “Clean with Fire” (“Limpam com Fogo”), which tells the story of the political processes involved in these fires. The documentary’s trailer can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8RfUPPXl5M> (Accessed 14/06/2018).

Collaborative cartographic experiments such as these are not exactly a novelty in the field of contemporary political activism, as Mesquita has demonstrated (2011; 2013). They are gaining space today, however, given significant technological improvements and simplified access open source mapping software and services, available on virtual online platforms such as Qgis²⁶, *OpenStreetMap*²⁷ and *Mapas Coletivos*²⁸. The improvement of flexible legal licensing has also aided this process, allowing individuals and groups to produce and distribute maps, iconography, booklets, and manuals containing production methods and techniques and advice regarding the use of free content for consultation and sharing by wider audiences, without authors losing the right to be recognized for their work.

The emergence of these laws and technologies are also responsible for stimulating the emergence of many mapper communities throughout the world, a good part of which are tied to movements, activists, and popular struggles in rural and urban environments. As we have seen above, these are generally people and groups who are interested attacking the hegemonic cartographic imagination, expanding counterhegemonic cartographies their niches in academic, political, institutional, or artistic spheres. It is this aspect that has drawn the attention of Heitor Frúgoli Jr. (2018) in a recent article, where this author mentions the challenge of paying special attention,

(...) to the way the activists themselves (...) theorize about their practices, whose lexicons (although apparently close to those of researchers) reveal potential differences which must be demonstrated and analyzed (Frúgoli Jr. 2018: 76).

Aware of this need, from here on in I will focus my analysis on the performance of the duo of popular Argentine activists, communicators and Iconoclastas²⁹ who have become widely known in Brazil and in several other countries precisely because of the theoretical and educational model they have developed. This is based on teaching the techniques of collective map production to different populations and institutions (student groups, neighborhood associations, social movements, NGOs, autonomous collectives, museums, schools and etc.).

Through a brief description focused on the performance of these interlocutors as I witnessed it during an internship research experience abroad³⁰, I will demonstrate how the exercises developed by the duo are able to provide ways of thinking about maps not as simple graphics artifacts imbued with accurate and objective information about the world, but as collaborative technical objects produced by situated knowledges, which also produce interpretations, forms of subjectivation, and relationships that can profoundly affect the daily lives of mapped populations, who are often unaware of the cartographic activity which seeks to in/exclude them.

Maps are thus far more than political and/or artistic instruments representing given geographical scenarios. In this interpretation, they must be considered as cognitive support tools, responsible for specific ways of understanding the world and the alterities that characterize it.

26 More details at: <https://qgis.org/en/site/> (Accessed 11/06/2018).

27 More details at: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/about> (Accessed 11/06/2018).

28 Further details at: <http://www.mapascoletivos.com.br/> (Accessed 11/06/2018).

29 Detailed information on the duo's performance in different collaborative processes can be found at: <http://www.iconoclastas.net> (Accessed 12/06/2018).

30 I refer here to my research internship in the city of Buenos Aires, which was funded by FAPESP (Case No. 17 / 04416-8).

Iconoclastas: (Carto)graphic communication as a pedagogical resource for political empowerment

The duo referred to above is composed of social communicator and university lecturer Julia Risler and her companion, activist and graphic designer Pablo Aires. Their project was formally established in 2006, shortly after Pablo left the Callejero Art Group (GAC), in which he served for over ten years and where he played a key role in various public actions, becoming widely known in the contemporary artistic activism scene³¹.

From the moment the couple began to create their first joint actions, they began to self-identify (albeit informally) with the nickname “*Iconoclastas*”. The beginning of their joint activities coincided with a period in which Argentina began to recover from the economic, political, and social chaos that overtook the country in 2001³². The election of President Néstor Kirchner in 2003 seemed to create ideal conditions for a historic rapprochement between impoverished middle-class sectors and less privileged social groups.

The duo believed that traditional movement in Argentina employed a language that did not communicate with the everyday realities of ordinary people who did not frequent movement circles militants. As their first challenge, they therefore decided to employ their knowledge in the field of communications in order to broaden the reach of the messages being created by grassroots social organizations. According to Julia Risler:

I am a communications specialist. Pablo understood communications and graphic arts. What we saw in the social movements was a certain bankruptcy in terms of their graphic, visual, and pedagogical communication styles, an inheritance of much older anarchist leftist groups. This was great, but it didn't communicate beyond the incestuous circle of leftist militancy. Because of the poverty of the type of images these groups were using, the resources they employed, there was always this thing of “we are always speaking to ourselves, to those who are already convinced and who know what is going on” and they could never get out of that circle. And in reality, it was a moment in which a certain empathy between the middle classes, the impoverished and precarious middle classes, and the rest of the country because we were going through a huge economic crisis. So we thought, well, let's think about this: how do we generate a language that can break out of the endogamy of politics, of the social movements, of the collective. So we offered up a pedagogical tool that could be appropriated by the movements, which they could use in daily life (Julia Risler, interview with author).

This was thus the initial context that pushed the duo towards a series of militant intellectual experiments and practices focused on the development of a communicative language, for by social movements, that sounded more attractive and contemporary. They also developed innovative pedagogic methods that could stimulate the sharing of lived experiences and theoretical reflections related to the ways in which the different populations equally affected by the crisis thought about and represented their collective territories, identities, and actions.

The first reference work, released in 2006, was the *Anuario Volante (Flying Yearbook)* series³³. This was a set of small flyers bound together in a booklet, which were distributed at protests and events organized by different activists collectives. The *Iconoclastas* sought to create a kind of reverse appropriation of statistical language. They availed themselves of the same sort of mathematical logic normally employed by technocrats tied to the corporate world and official government agencies to communicate controversial political decisions. The *Iconoclastas* however, sought to throw light on the interests and effects that are often silenced by the adoption of this sort of rationalist language.

31 Regarding the Callejero Art Group Collective, see Carras (2009).

32 2001 is regarded as a true landmark in the history of Argentine political activism. After the very serious economic and political crisis experienced by the country and the terrible consequences of successive waves of police repressions, which left a huge number of people dead and injured, various initiatives and associations created and developed aesthetic and political actions. For more details on the political and economic processes responsible for the generation of this crisis, see: <http://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2014/01/entenda-crise-economica-e-politica-na-argentina.html> (Accessed 6/22/2018).

33 This document may be consulted freely at: https://issuu.com/iconoclastas/docs/anuario_volanteissuu (Accessed 01/07/2018).

It was only in 2008, however, after doing some exercises involving maps with different communities with which they interacted, that the *Iconoclastas* started to adopt the collective production of critical cartographies criticism as their main form of intervention. In 2013, they systematized a set of mapping methods and techniques³⁴ to be employed in pedagogical activities by publishing a manual under a *Creative Commons* license in Spanish and English. This was then freely distributed as a PDF that could be downloaded on the duo's website³⁵.

Figure 4 - Spanish and English versions of the Manual de Mapeo, produced by the Iconoclastas



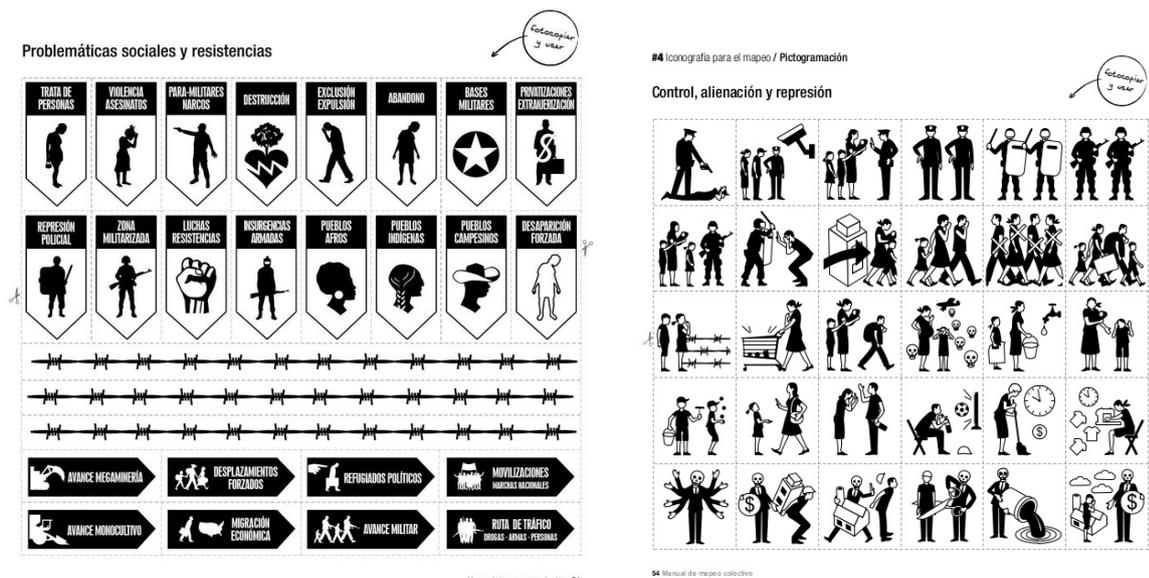
The *Iconoclastas* developed series of pictograms and graphical tools geared towards the critical illustration of various topics ranging from real estate speculation in metropolitan areas, gender violence, the militarization of urban space, and the pollution and poisoning of nature reserves by mega-corporations, among many other issues characteristic of the daily confrontations experienced by diverse populations marked by political, economic, and identity subordination .

These resources were also made available for download on the internet and this enabled them to be used by other communities of mappers who were interested in acquiring tools able to amplify the political reach of the causes different activist nuclei around the world.

³⁴ I will address these techniques and their ways of mediating social relations below.

³⁵ More information about the Manual, as well as the two versions' files (in Spanish and English) can be found on the duo's page at: <http://www.iconoclastas.net/map-collective/> (Accessed 21/06/2018).

Figure 5 :- Series of pictograms developed by the Iconoclasts for use by different causes



Gradually, these graphical tools, the pedagogical methods outlined in the manual, and the many maps resulting from the practices developed by the *Iconoclastas* among different communities, came to be widely viewed, published, and shared. This, in turn, made the duo’s work in creating collective, critical cartographies more and more recognized throughout the world. The very process of mapping the “exclusion games” in Rio, discussed in the previous section, took advantage of some of the iconographic resources created and distributed by the Argentinean duo and their network of partners.

As the *Iconoclastas*, Julia and Pablo were also invited by different institutions and associations (political, student, artistic, and neighborhood, groups etc.), to give lectures and map production workshops. This allowed them to participate in several important events and exhibitions related to the theme of political art in countries such as the United States, Spain, Portugal, France, Poland, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay, among others. Recently, some of duo’s maps have been put on display at the famous French museum the *Pompidou Centre*³⁶.

The growing recognition of the *Iconoclastas*, along with the remarkable influence exerted by the teaching model the duo developed in different cartographic experiments experiences that I had been following in Brazil, led me to observe their work, both inside and outside of Argentina. This process intensified in 2017, when - as I have said above - I had the opportunity to spend a year in Buenos Aires participating in various activities either organized by the duo or in which they participated.

Some questions I sought to answer with my research were the following:

1. What exactly are the maps produced in the pedagogical exercises coordinated by the *Iconoclastas*?
2. What is the profile of people who participate in these activities, and of the communities who request that the *Iconoclastas* come to their spaces?
3. What kind of information and exchanges are these techniques are able to generate?
4. How do the exchanges and reflections related to collective mapping actually occur in practice?

³⁶ The full list, containing all the duo’s participations in shows and exhibitions around the world, can be found at: <http://www.iconoclastas.net/exposiciones/> (Accessed 11/06/2018).

5. How does the production of these maps allow us to read issues related to territories marked by disputes over forms and meanings?
6. What pedagogical techniques are these, exactly, and what specific characteristics do they have in terms of developing new models of interpretation and expression of knowledge regarding politically and economically subordinated populations and territorialities?

Within the limits of the present article, it is impossible for me to present dense and detailed a description of all the activities that I followed alongside the *Iconoclastas* in the Argentine capital. I would like, however, to briefly reflect upon aspects of the pedagogical techniques the duo has prepared and practices, based on participant observation research I conducted during a workshop offered by the duo at the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center in Buenos Aires.

Collective mapping as a pedagogical proposal

The workshop was entitled “Collective Mapping: Resources-Investigation for Territories”. Its main purpose was to present to a wider public part of the collective mapping techniques developed by the *Iconoclastas*, showing off the techniques’ potential as tools for activist research that could increase public understanding of and the conditions of dialogue and intervention regarding various issues (political, social, economic, subjective, and cultural) .

The first meeting began with a very brief explanation of the work done by Pablo and Julia and also of the workshop’s general objectives. As occurred in other occasions I witnessed, these objectives were described as seeking to demystify the idea of the “map” by pointing out that such representations are interpretations of the world based on specific interests that are often hidden, created by those who generally monopolize cartographic knowledge.

The *Iconoclastas* explained to the approximately 20 people present at the workshop that they believed that a “map” is any graphic presentation seeks to create diagrams that are capable of aiding the visualization and understanding of the forces acting on a particular spatiality or problematic.

In general terms, the presentation served to emphasize the idea that we could work with various conceptions of a “map”, both throughout the course and in our daily activities, using, for example, drawings or records of itineraries of the mobile experiences of the usage of space, instead place of traditional geographic models, with their homogenous structures and fixed boundaries.

Following this introduction, we engaged in a group dynamic that consisted of using a sheet of paper divided into three parts to draw a timeline in which we were to chronicle our individual trajectories. This would allow us to display the paths that had us directed to the mapping workshop we were attending. On the back of the sheet, we were to write down our personal data (name, email address, social networks, etc.) and also the main issues that we would like to reflect on during the workshop. Finally, we used an inflatable globe that we would toss at random people in the group to introduce ourselves to each other, based on the timelines we had built. This went on until the last person had introduced themselves.

The following week, we found that the information we had provided at the previous meeting through our timelines and as our individual presentations had served to enable the *Iconoclastas* to group us into four different sections of mappers, organized around open and general themes. These groups were then made into teams that would define different issues that we’d map during the course of the rest of the workshop. The workshop coordinators also used the information to build a restricted-access page on Facebook, which served as a kind of virtual base where the teams could exchange information and talk about their impressions regarding the activities that would be developed over the next two months of the workshop.

My group's theme was "Culture and Identity". In addition to myself, the included a Costa Rican graphic designer and urban planner, a U.S. American geography student who, like me, was spending an academic year in Buenos Aires, two Argentine secondary school teachers and an art student, also from Argentina.

None of us knew each other, nor did we know each others' interests or life trajectories. Moreover, the fact that a significant part of the group was made up of people from different countries, with varied life trajectories and levels of education, made our first a challenge. We needed to find common interests and build a collective language through which we could understand ourselves as an interpretive community.

Gradually, as the meetings were passed, we were presented with a series of graphical tools via educational practices that were made up of both classroom exercises and information provided by the groups on Facebook. In this way, we began develop categories of analysis as well as to create icons related to those categories. We were also introduced to virtual mapping platforms such as the aforementioned *OpenStreetMap*, among other resources. As we were taught to use more complicated resources, our understanding of the problem we sought to map also matured (I will discuss this in greater detail below).

In order to create the maps, each team began with the same graphic structure, provided by the *Iconoclastas*. This contained a central space, where we would fill in the map's territory, and edges containing several fields that were to be filled with information such as :1) a title; 2) a timeline, where we could describe the historical processes related to the theme being mapped; 3) a frame of reference, where we could insert icons related to the subject, along with descriptions of the meaning of each; 4) a space reserved for the "landscape", where we could paste images of the visual composition of the scenery linked to the chosen theme; and 5) a "body", which we could use as we wished in order to develop a character that could symbolize the main conflicts and issues the map collective was working on.

Figure 6 - Graphic structure for the elaboration of collective cartographies



Based on internal discussions that took place during the meetings, each of the four groups of mappers elected a different problem and territory -- as well as certain resources presented during the course of the workshop – which they would map together .

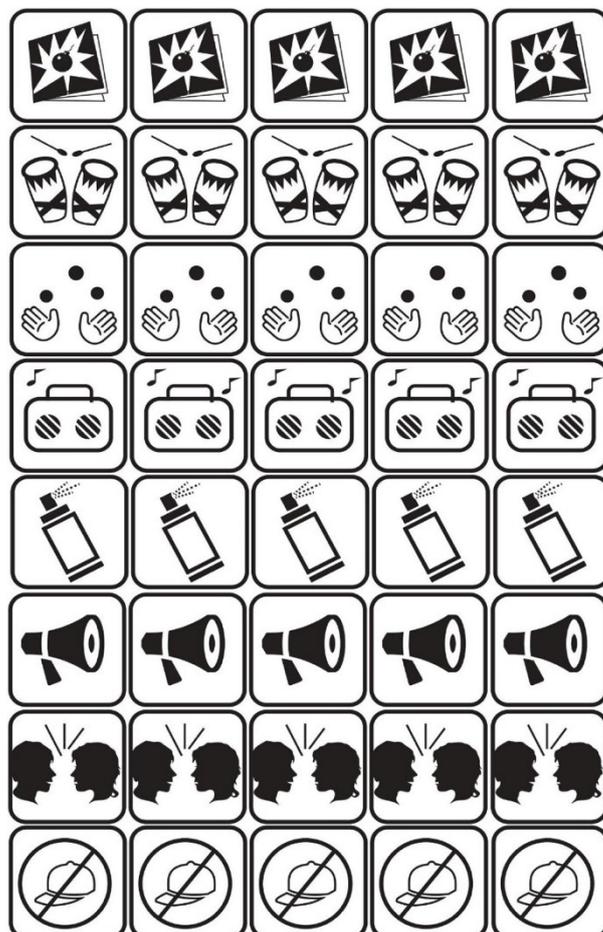
After many conversations and exercises, my group decided to take advantage of the fact that we had members from all over the Americas (North, Central and South) in order to develop a reflection related to a problem that touched on all of our personal trajectories: the relationship between youth and social insurgencies.

We thus wanted to use the mapping techniques in a collaborative and dialogical way to reflect about the changes in the meaning of the notion of “youth” over different historical periods, as well as the challenges that mark youth experience in today’s context.

We agreed upon what set of categories and icons we would collectively create and decided that we would each individually map out a territory characterized by youth occupations in our cities. We would then overlay these maps, looking to highlight certain patterns that, in turn, would allow us to talk about and understand some of the cross-cutting issues that could be used to form a common narrative. We called the theme “Dissident youth territorialities in the Americas.”

As we worked and talked, we discovered a need to develop icons that could symbolize the issues we wanted to address. We thus created an entire iconography to mark such themes as areas of dissident political demonstrations, public areas of youth repression, places for youth cultural encounters and discussions, street art areas, environments where alternative publications could be exchanged, and etc., as can be seen in the template below:

Figure 7 - Collectively developed icons for use in mapping



For this first stage of the process, I chose to map the region of Praça Roosevelt in São Paulo, since it is an area that has historically served as a privileged reference point, occupied by many different groups of young people (skaters, rappers, university students, etc.). This also makes it a zone for countless conflicts and acts of political resistance³⁷. My colleagues in the group mapped regions with similar characteristics in San Jose, Costa Rica; Houston, Texas; and Buenos Aires, Argentina. In the end, the overlapping of the questions raised by our individual maps allowed us to see common landscapes, which served as elements of continuity that we could use to collectively build a single map. This map then highlighted pointed a number of issues related to the theme of dissident youth mobilizations.

In other words, we used the structure that had been provided by *Iconoclastas*, not exactly to map a territory with an eye to scientific precision, but rather to construct a cartographic reference that would allow us to visualize the very movements upon which we were jointly reflecting. We thus created a timeline in which we marked the problematic characteristics of distinct generations of young people. This began with the “rebel” decades of the 1960s and 1970s, with their defiance of customs and their struggles against the military, military dictatorships, and “imperialist” wars. We also noted the period of the late 1970s, when youth consolidated itself as a value for cultural markets. We then passed through the generation hit by the great advance of neoliberal policies in the 1990s and arrived at the most recent period, in which a generation of hyper-connected young people exist in an environment marked by a deep crisis in democratic paradigms and the development of different experiences of active citizenship.

We also built small mosaics with photographs taken from the territories we had individually mapped. These were then combined in the “landscape” field, grouped according to the following subjects: 1) territorial occupations and expressive forms of dissidence, 2) repression and resistance, 3) forms of street culture and entertainment, and 4) symbols of identity affirmation and struggle. Finally, in order to create the “body” on our map, we drew on a conversation we had, where we had talked about a text produced by Catalan sociologist and youth expert, Carles Feixa³⁸. In this article, Feixa discusses the transformtaion of youth over time, making use of metaphors inspired by characters like Tarzan, Peter Pan and those of the film *Blade Runner*.

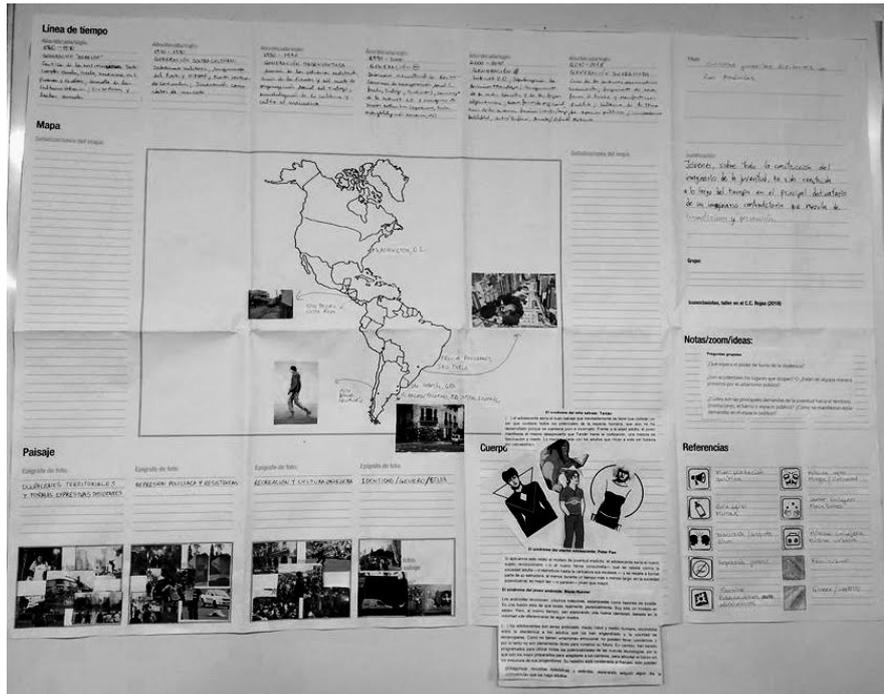
According to Feixa (2014), Tarzan symbolizes youth marked by an adult perspective, where it is seen simply a stage of life. Here, young people -- unable to be fully understood in their own terms -- were interpreted as “good savages”, occupying an inferior position within a linear evolutionary scale. The character of Peter Pan, however, corresponds to a period in which youth was becoming something that had market value. Peter – and his opponents -- wanted to consume youth, remaining forever “young”. Finally, *Blade Runner* is related to the current moment when young people – like the replicants created by Ridley Scott, inspired by Philip K. Dick’s book³⁹ -- are characterized as being endowed with many more skills than those of prior generations, but nevertheless find it enormously difficult to enjoy and cherish these abilities in a full and satisfactory way, as they are not lucky enough to live in a social environment marked by stability with regards to a series of rights.

37 Due to space constraints, I chose not to describe the individual mapping work in detail. It should be noted, however, that each of my group’s members used different techniques to produce their maps during this first stage of the work. In my case, I used 5 A4 sheets, with a layout of Roosevelt Square in the center. I marked each sheet as corresponding to a different decade and, through them, I sought to tell the story of the square and the different forms of youth occupation of it during these different periods.

38 I refer here to the book *De la generación @ a la generación #: la juventud en la era digital*, Barcelona, NED Ediciones, 2014.

39 I refer here to the book by writer Philip K. Dick, originally published in 1968, entitled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, which was translated in the Brazilian version as *Andróides sonham com ovelhas elétricas?* The book was the basis for the film adaptation produced in 1982 by director Ridley Scott and entitled *Blade Runner*.

Figure 8 - Map of “Dissident Youth Territorialities in the Americas” (Credit: Guilherme Aderaldo)



We were thus able to construct our map in a playful and collective way through the use of various different graphic resources. Our final product was a common account that emphasized the fact that “youth” was not a simple age category, but a symbol that could make social change legible. Youth, we discovered, was a condition which causes young people to commonly be seen as borderline subjects. It is precisely because they occupy this imagined space, which is in a process of constant re-elaboration, that they are capable of stimulating fantasies that both romanticize and condemns them.

During the course we also exchanged information and impressions with the other groups of mappers. At each session, we all shared the advances we had made as well as the dilemmas we encountered, creating fruitful exchanges and a fertile learning environment.

In addition to our map on “dissident youth territorialities in the Americas,” the course’s groups created maps on 1) real estate speculation in the upper class Palermo region of Buenos Aires, 2) the practices of repression and conflict in the Retiro area, where Buenos Aires largest train and subway stations are located, along with the bus terminal and a pedestrian-oriented commercial are, and 3) the “educational struggles” that took place between 2015 and 2018. The team responsible for this last mapping project sought to illustrate the processes related to the destruction of Argentine public education, as well as the forms of popular resistance that emerged to confront this problem.

In short, at the end of the two month course, we all learned to think “about” and especially “with” maps, understanding them as artifacts that went well beyond the condition mere illustrations of objective realities. By the course’s end, we had discovered that maps can (and should) be understood as powerful pedagogical and cognitive tools .

The collaborative construction of cartographies allowed us, in this sense, to see our own role as members of a broader interpretive political community, thus enabling us to understand the fact that while, on the one hand, we produce maps, on the other, maps also play a role in producing ourselves, given that they mediate the relationships we establish with the world by giving its diversity a common narrative and materiality.

Figure 09 - Mapping Workshop / Iconoclasts (Credit: Guilherme Aderaldo)



Figure 10 - Mapping Workshop / Iconoclasts (Credit: Guilherme Aderaldo)



Towards some conclusions

I hope that the set of examples I have described throughout this article regarding the collective production of critical, analytical maps, has succeeded in highlighting the following things:

1. How a series of subjects linked to assorted heterogeneous social nuclei have come to employ the cartographic imagination as a cognitive resource that can illustrate the ways in which regimes of (in) visibility and (im)mobility are produced and naturalized through dominant political and cultural logics;
2. The need to perceive maps not as neutral artifacts, passively subject to human action, but – as Akrich puts it (2014 [2010]) – as “technical objects” that operate as vital supports for human agency, responsible for mediating our relationship with the world and the alterities that compose it.

Maps must therefore not be taken as things that are valid in and of themselves, the simple result of a subject's work with a graphic platform. In fact, they are elements of mediation. This leads us, as Sautchuk remarks (2017: 16), to a discussion of the anthropological approach to mapping techniques, towards “some central issues and dilemmas in the contemporary scenario, such as the distinction between nature and culture (...)”.

As Doreen Massey (2008 [2005]) emphasizes, the ways in which we usually imagine space produce political, cultural, economic, and subjective effects. When we consider “space”, for example, to be only “the earth extending around us” (Massey 2008 [2005]: 23), imagining it as a simple continuous surface which is taken as given, we tend (even if we are unaware of this fact) to reproduce political silences. After all, “(...) this way of conceiving of space can (...) easily lead us to conceive of other places, peoples, cultures, as simply phenomena ‘on’ this surface” (Massey 2008 [2005]: 23).

In this sense, the denaturalization of dominant geographic representations through the collective elaboration of critical cartographies can be understood as an attempt to make readable other ways of conceiving of and occupying territories readable, paving the way for new coordinate and reference systems to be inserted into this process.

For example, during one of the conversations we had during the workshop offered by the *Iconoclastas*, one of my co-students commented on a stretch of the region they were mapping out, mentioning the fact that women avoided moving about in a particular area after dark because its users were predominantly male and the women felt at risk. This colleague was thus encouraged to include this point in their cartography, creating an icon that indicated the problem and placing it on their map. In this way, their experience and knowledge about the characteristics of a certain kind of territory became legitimate references in building collective understanding about that region.

Situations like this usually provoke something very similar to the effect labeled “interruption” by Mexican anthropologist Rossana Reguillo (2017 b), as they consist of a type of action responsible for altering the “meaning anchors” of the world, providing “the distancing from what is assumed normal or unalterable” (Reguillo 2017 b: 111). Interruptions would thus have the role of inviting us to “think and feel beyond what is taken for granted, natural” (Reguillo 2017b: 111), opening the way for other possibilities of interpretation, through the construction of collective reports, our own experiences within a world where many worlds coexist.

Submitted: August 14, 2018

Approved: September 18, 2019

Translated by: Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette

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