



**Belfast
Derry**
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Zelimir Koscevic

***“Cartographers - Where is Rhodos, and
Where to Jump”***

10:50 hrs, Saturday 20th September

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AICA - Croatia

A lecture for Belfast

On June 8 1997 a ten year school-boy who with others attended the cartographic workshop organized in conjunction with the exhibition "Cartographers" in Zagreb said to me: "This is the most beautiful day in my life". I have never received such a sincere and heartbreaking compliment. But 138 works by 68 artists which I presented at this show, nine serious essays written by our distinguished colleagues, published in the catalogue and - I must say - more than sixty missing artists whose work I was not able for many, mostly profane, reasons to present at this show only begin to illustrate the full extent of this obviously overlooked artistic phenomenon of the 20th century. The fact that Zagreb exhibition was NOT the first one of these topic (let me remind you on "Mapping" in MOMA New York in 1994, and "Mapping - a response to MOMA" organized by Peter Fend in New York in Jan.-Feb. 1995, "Art on the Map", Chicago Cultural Center, 1994, "Map Room", Belgrade 1995., "The World Over" in Wellington and Amsterdam, "Language, Mapping and Power" Orchard gallery, Derry, 1996, "MAP" Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 1996, "Atlas" in Linz 1997, "Geographiques ..." organized by FRAC Corsica 1997, and in some extent "Inklusion/Exklusion" in Graz 1996. We also should not forget Dossier "Histoires de géographie" in ArtPress of May 1992.), clearly demonstrate that cartography is not only an attractive visual pattern, but also a way of creative reflection of the world we live in and therefore in the focus of many critics, curators and intellectuals..

Shortly, through the entire century, from the cartographic interventions in the cycle *Parole in Libertà* by F. T. Marinetti in 1914, to the amusing renaming of the well-known European toponyms on the map *Your Rope* by Guttorm Nordo and Robert Ohrt in 1993, artists demonstrated an apparent and divergent interest in cartography.

Although created on the basis of exact science and through the utilization of precise techniques in geodetic measurements, geographic maps stimulate unusual mental activities. These challenging graphic models of abstract streaks and signs that we learned to read in primary school usefully bring home space and faraway foreign and unknown places on a reasonable scale. The maps, however, with their distinct thematic application and definition represent rather explosive material. These political, historical and geopolitical geographic maps are the true detonators of conflicts of all kinds.

My fascination with cartography did not provoke just politicians and ideologists who preached national liberation from various forms of "foreign" economic, political, ideological, religious, ethnic, and racial domination or influence. Expertise in geopolitics as a science and demagogy has become sought-after and profitable, multicolored magic markers are the tools preferred over the most sophisticated computer for marking geopolitical distinctions. Media coverage of an event would be unthinkable without cartography. It can illustrate the location of a fallen aircraft, the Golan Heights, a disastrous shipwreck, Bhopal, Czechenia, Sarajevo, the 38th line or the 42nd parallel, the route taken by armed forces, the destinations of displaced people. The asterisks, thick, thin and dashed lines, etc., signal the dynamics of events at locations shown. Nonetheless, we should not overlook the amusing side of media cartography: the dramatization of a weather report and its obligatory cartographic stage design.

political, historical and geopolitical maps, geological and geophysical maps, maps of race, culture, religion and nationalities and tourist maps. Moreover, in the time when the cyberspace conquer more and more our idea of the world, the alternative offered by the artists seems to me more curative than it appears.

August 1997

Shortly, through the entire century, from the cartographic interventions in the cycle of the 19th century, to the amazing renaissance of the well-known European topography on the map, from the 19th century to the 20th century, in 1997, we demonstrated an apparent and divergent interest in cartography.

Although created on the basis of exact science and through the utilization of precise techniques in geodesic measurements, geographic maps stimulate unusual mental activities. These challenging graphic models of abstract streaks and signs that we learned to read in primary school usually bring home space and faraway foreign and unknown places on a reasonable scale. The maps, however, with their distinct thematic application and definition represent rather explosive material. These political, historical and geopolitical geographic maps are the true detonators of conflicts of all kinds.

My fascination with cartography did not provoke just politicians and ideologists who preached national liberation from various forms of "foreign" economic, political, ideological, religious, ethnic, and racial domination or influence. Experiences in geopolitics as a science and demography has become sought-after and profitable, multicolored magic markers are the tools preferred over the most sophisticated computer for marking geopolitical dimensions. Media coverage of an event would be unthinkable without cartography. It can illustrate the location of a fallen sector, the Golden Heights, a disastrous shipwreck, Bhagal, Cossens, Sargol, the 13th line or the 42nd parallel, the route taken by armed forces, the destinations of displaced people. The artists, think, thin and dashed lines, etc. When the dynamics of events at locations shown. Nonetheless, we should not overlook the amusing side of media cartography: the dramatization of a weather report and its obligatory cartographic stage design.

For this reason I have assigned a special place to the surrealist Map of the World published by the renowned Belgian review "Variétés" in 1929. On this map the world is spaced - a surrealist witticism of a kind - according to the zones of its spiritual potential. This conceptually predictable cartography freely and completely changes the commonly accepted outlines of the world and molds them as befits the Surrealist movement. Alaska, Labrador and the Easter Islands got continental proportions; France, Paris excepted, and England with London have vanished from the map. The contour of the European continent is left without the Balkans or the Iberian Peninsula. This cartography will later appear once again in Beuys's concept of the Euro-Asian diagonal, and also - though it will not be as radical or "picturesque" in the cartographic ideas of Conceptualists, Fluxus, and in various cartographic depiction of postmodern multiculturalism. So much for the 20th century. The attention that Vermeer paid to geographers evidenced by his signature on the map integrated into his painting *Painting Skills*, 1665-1667, conveys a message from bygone times concerning not only the inner challenges of a geographical map, but as well the miracles that it hides.

It has not been easy to make a concept of the exhibition "Cartographers". In final version the exhibition represents a panorama of imaginary topographic and cartographic ideas and suggestions. The framework of these ideas and suggestions respects standard cartography. However, the fact that this scientific discipline oversees methods of map-making and the projection of a round body onto a level surface in this case was nonessential. Information about these topics is readily available in encyclopedia, what for fictitious cartography we cannot say. Scientific cartography deals with what is known; unusual beings and the topography of bizarre landscapes appear only at the edge of scientific cartography. Fictitious cartography begins where scientific cartography ends, it begins with anticipation - for instance, the South continent or Atlantis. With fictitious cartography it is not strange to - just as Alice did through the mirror - reach new lands, islands and continents and establish cartographic outlines of parallel, even invisible worlds. Described once as a "distant mirror", geography and cartography is a way of seeing the world from a distance, or - much better - from the another side, which seems to me extremely revealing.

Still, I tried to create a show that would give as much insight as possible into creative cartography and its imaginative, intellectual and aesthetic challenges. The 68 artists participating in this exhibition represented with 138 works suggest a variety of projects which penetrate almost all segments of contemporary reality and spirituality. Some are almost amusing and relaxed while others are serious and warning. This does not mean that the first are lacking earnestness and the latter charm. What links them all together is the need to redefine spiritual and physical territory, which can indeed be accepted, but no one can dispute the right of an artist to see facts unconventionally, in another light, and at a specific angle.

Natural, artificial, cultural, social, ethnic, political, economic, transportable and ecological, geophysical configurations of the Earth offer unbelievable challenges to the mind and to the creative spirit. Long ago these were "white dots," that are today gone. Still, the miracle of our existence on this round planet, the third from the Sun, that we neatly researched, measured, described and cartographed, remains. The cartography, however, is not only topographic, astronomic or triangular factography, but a mental vision of the world, although not identical to the level projections of the globe that we learned to read. Staged and inscribed on a map, such a mental picture of the world contains signs and coded messages that help us see and understand the world differently; different from the pictures offered by traditional atlases, road maps, special military maps,

Contrary to existing global geographic information, in reality the strategies of post-modern particularization have frightful and forbidding perspectives. Ecumenical and ecological messages are lost in conflicts among people, or between people and nature. Yet, it would be farfetched and uncalled for to impute to just one tangible condition called "the post-modern" by Lyotard all the troubles at the end of the century and the millennium. Moreover, we should be thankful to him and to other interpreters of the post-modern condition for an identification and a precise description of the characteristics of the modern era in which conservative, traditional and local ideologies prevailed. Eclectic historicism in architecture and painting from memory are in fact harmless aesthetic phenomena when compared to ethnic conflicts and their resultant slaughtering. The redesign of the map of Europe by the Russian nationalist Zirinovski and global mapping through Geographical Information System (GIS) makes us shiver. However innocently it may appear on paper, cartography is a dangerous venture in people's hands. The so-called geopolitics through which national socialism permitted its politics of expansion to the East should be tossed onto this millennium's dump site where many a blunder of "enlightened" humankind already rot.

The lineage of my interest in cartography is romantic in nature. Mixed memories of pirates' maps from *Treasure Island*, *The Little Prince*, *Alice*, or Tolkien's *Middle-earth* are the layers from which this interest came. These repressed and foggy memories are ingeniously connected to romantic experiences described and cartographically outlined by adventurers and explorers. A shadow, however, is cast over the imperial, expansionist propinquities of the adventurers and explorers. It is, therefore, recommended that a clear line be drawn between Sven Hedin's travel stories and political chronicles. In time, through a mixture of romantic nostalgia, travel fever and post-modern nomadism, Joseph Conrad, Borges and science fiction spiced this interest in cartography. Through this, cartography definitely left the general category of cartography - a scientific discipline of map-making for various means.

Eratosthenes's map of the world, made between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, was an ingenious speculation that opened doors to the unknown. Cartographic presentation of geographic and topographic facts gathered by sailors, wanderers, explorers and adventurers has a long and brilliant history. Whatever reached us represents collectors' items and has enormous museum value. In this brilliant history, however, one thing catches the eye: the maps, with the help of triangulation, astronomical measurement of geographical length and width and accurate dimensions, become more precise and their miraculous beauty gradually fades. It was necessary to go as far as the Moon to rediscover the wondrous planet Earth. Its reality is not just its geographical configuration, current geo-political division, territorial seas, alliances and unions. Astronauts, scientists such as James Lovelock, Tibetan monks and Peter Sloterdijk are in full agreement. Whether Sloterdijk talks of "Copernicus aesthetics" or Lovelock of Gaea as a being, artistic intuition sensed and the works exhibited distinctly show that the planet Earth with all its known attributes offers challenges that in our Cartesian euphoria we never before imagined. The geognostic achievements of Eskimos, Aborigines, Micronesian sailors and European Surrealists speak in favor of this, shall we call it, theleological background of cartography. Cultural anthropology offers numerous examples. Understanding that geography can also be constituted differently - for example, that it can be coded by totemic classification, local meteorological conditions, the direction of sea currents or schools of fish, or be based on a poetic myth - makes a cartographic topic much more intriguing than presented at first sight.