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REDEFINING GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES: MAPS AS COMMUNICATION DESIGN TOOLS FOR PURSUING SOCIOPOLITICAL GOALS.

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ABSTRACT | The paper focuses on the crucial role played by visual design artifacts in reconfiguring the relationship between the so-called first and third worlds, between centers and peripheral or semi-peripheral cultures and territories, overtaking the societal structures perpetuating a cycle of subjugation and dependency that still affects several regions in the contemporary geography of the world. The aim is to contribute within the international debate about maps as cultural artifacts through a comparative exploration of two artistic experiences coming from different regions of the world. The case studies examined are the work of the South African draftsman Titus Matiyane and the one of the American maps and books artist Doug Beube, whose cartographic representations will be investigated as visual communication artifacts to overcome the “borders” of the map. Aspects under analysis, therefore, will be the ways in which they employ visual elements, symbolic motifs, cartographic conventions and narrative structures for suggesting the construction of an imaginary transnational identity.

The experimental approaches described denounce sociopolitical phenomena that seem viscerally imbued with the history of civilizations and nations by redesigning visually and implicitly metaphorically the cartographic representation of the world. Imaginary, alternative and utopistic forms of maps destroying, and then rewriting and redesigning the boundaries between territories are the object of analysis, addressed as media for creating new perspectives for a more equal geographic shape of the world in which otherness and multiculturalism are values to be preserved.



1. Introduction

Maps are powerful instruments of knowledge. Since the dawn of civilization, territories have been mapped to allow to cross them without getting lost, providing a graphic abstraction and therefore experimenting translating approaches necessary to synthesize a large amount of information in a single image. These graphic visualizations reflect the perception and the knowledge of the world in different historical periods and reveal aesthetic trends and technical abilities of mapmakers and their evolutions through time (Thrower, 2008). According to Norman Thrower, indeed, maps are “excellent indicator of culture and civilization” (Ibid., p.1) and as such they have been performing several functions over time, going beyond the necessary knowledge of the spatial characteristics of a territory.

Over the last decades the act of mapping has evolved and has taken on different purposes, ‘alternative’ forms and a multidimensional and thematic connotation, overcoming any desire to schematize the world, in favor of a subjective representation of the same (Jacob 1992). The science of cartography [1] has been replaced by a hermeneutics of cartography (Quaggiotto 2016), and mapping has become the prerogative not only of geographers, cartographers, paleoclimatologists, seismologists, but also of chemists, biologists, astronomers involved in mapping the human genome, the universe, the cells, and then philosophers, sociologists, theologians, anthropologists, who began to build “atlases” that describe cultures, migrations, rituals, journeys into interior worlds, spiritual phenomena and topographies of existence. Added to these are the information maps, which have the arduous task of acquiring, decoding and returning complex data, knowledge, processes, physical phenomena and thoughts [2]. The paper explores particular design experiences in which maps are used for rediscovering the territory through an imaginary rewriting of the same, and through the creation of ‘other’ spaces compared to the measurable ones: spaces of encounters, of transit and emotional crossing, spaces imagined by the sensitivity of the individual.

By observing the transition from the geographic scientific maps to imaginary maps as cultural artefacts, this paper aims at investigating the ability of a map to reinterpret physical spaces, deconstructing and reconstructing them, thus to become a tool for rewriting the territory with cultural and sociopolitical objectives. In this perspective maps can become showcases on imaginary scenarios that demolish boundaries and shorten distances – thus differences – between faraway places, between topographic ontologies seemingly unattainable, between centers and peripheries, and – in a sociopolitical perspective – between the so-called Third and First Worlds. Maps therefore can strategically deconstruct and interpret the world, or a portion of it, conveying choices of a political, social and economic nature.

After outlining critical analyses, and primary sources collected for establishing a comprehensive understanding of the concept of maps as spatial agents for rewriting and remodeling territories and boundaries, the paper will undertake a comparative examination of the work of two artists: Titus Matiyane and Doug Beube. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which the artists employ visual elements, symbolic motifs, cartographic conventions and narrative structures for suggesting the construction of an utopistic transnational identity.

2. Maps as Relational Sociopolitical Artifacts

“Those who drew the maps controlled the destiny of nations through the very power of delineating space. The graphic impact of maps of exploration, invasion, and rebellion is more memorable and vivid than the long explanatory texts accompanying them.” (Envisioning Maps, 2008)

With this sentence the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum Curator, Laura Kruger, on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Envisioning Maps* exhibition (2008) highlighted the power of maps to reflect “the state of cultural activity, as well as the perception of the world, in different periods” (Thrower, 2008, p.1). ‘Primitive’ civilizations’ early maps were attempts to visually represent earth distributions in order to improve its visualization and knowledge. When examined across time these maps

not just demonstrate their power to fulfilled certain purposes, but they illustrate how human cognition has evolved. As previously stated, a map serves many important purposes in the modern world: It is an essential tool for understanding spatial phenomena, an effective way to store data, and a research tool that helps uncover distributions and relationships that would not otherwise be known. In this multifaced scenario maps have been a compelling theme for contemporary designers and artists throughout the twentieth century as these visual artefacts represent any kind of relationships, and not necessarily spatial ones, occurring at or near the surface of the Earth: social, political, cultural, historical and help humans to read and understand them according to the context of investigation. That is why today we are able to give a historical-political justification to compositional aspects of cartographic artefacts of colonial travelers such as Thomas Baines (1820–1875) and Thomas Bowler (1812–1869), whose restitutions of the South African territory mainly concerned the geography of the country and people were excluded or they were represented proportionally on a smaller scale compared to the overwhelming scale of the landscape, like those in David Livingstone's travelogues (Huigen, 2009, p. 209). These representations focused on panoramas of desolate landscapes, as if in preparation for colonial expansion and capitalist exploitation, deliberately excluding indigenous populations considered an obstacle to expansion (Pratt, 2008, p. 51).

This finding corroborates the arguments discussed by Nicholas Gliserman in the article *Unpacking the Meaning of Maps, Power, and Boundaries* (2021) in which the author claims that we must ask ourselves not what a map *is* but what a map *does* to arrive at an all-encompassing definition, and – in perspective – what a map *can do* in the future: by “navigating an environment or visually representing information [...] the map can help reconstruct mental and physical [...] processes” (Griserman, 2021, p.2) but they can also utopistically and optimistically act as agents that influence the relationship between territories and cultures, thus changing the geography of the world in a reciprocal relationship in which “maps shape a world that in turn shapes its maps” (Matthew 2005, 12). The agency of map as recursive and relational tool can affect and influence different cultural aspects and mapping becomes occasion for territorial rewriting. These performing visual texts break down boundaries and suggest a utopian, imaginary and subjective reconfiguration of the world without inequality, thus becoming a vehicle of social denunciation.

Several non-mapmakers have approached this form of expression for narrating stories asking the viewer to navigate into imaginary spaces that – by altering the representational conventions and the geography of a territory – demonstrate that mapping is a continuous process that relate different aspects of society and reshape identities, relationship, and the idea of the world itself (Kitchin and Dodge 2007).

Map-artists such as Saul Steinberg, Stephen Wiltshire, Dannielle Tegeder, Wopo Holup, Titus Matiyane and Doug Beube are generally considered outsiders that do not follow a precise style and do not have conventional artistic training, but operate within and for the society starting from a personal vision and technique. The works of these artists have relational sociopolitical purposes, as their maps, in any shape they have been designed, flat or tridimensional, with altered scales or faithful to the real proportional relationships between the territories represented, drawn or obtained by assembling elements, tell stories aimed at defining, reconstructing, administering polities and territories, and so at developing national identities and “establishing places in the Community of nations” (Akerman, 2017, p. 2).

3. New Views of the World in Titus Matiyane and Doug Beube's Maps

The work of two map artists will be following examined: the imaginary territorial representations of the South African draftsman Titus Matiyane and the collages and altered atlas of the American artist Doug Beube. Since the late 90's Matiyane has designed imaginary geo-mappings by deconstructing and reconstructing transnational spaces that connect numerous cities of the Western world and South Africa - not by chance an environment with a postcolonial history harassed by the contrast between centers of power and peripheries (Dreyer, 2017, p. 126). Doug Beube between 2003 and 2015 created physical artefacts in which he manipulated the structure of geographical atlases, dissecting them and altering the organization and relationship between the territories represented on the existing maps (Masuga, 2016).

The two artists have been selected - among those previously mentioned - because in both of them the idea of rewriting national borders and transforming the geographic configurations of places which still today shows the consequences of processes of colonization and decolonization strongly emerges. Both in Matiyane's drawings and in Beube's collages and recomposed atlases the imaginary juxtapositions between political geographies and anthropic landscapes seem to produce territories and – as suggested by Kitchin and Martin Dodge (2007, p. 21) – create constructive and not merely descriptive maps. In their works, the choice to show a city or a specific place is not random but strategic and demonstrates a precise desire to translate into graphic visualizations the criticism towards the destruction of the history of entire cities, ethnic groups or nations, also conducted through cartographic representations. An example is the history of road mapping in *apartheid* and *post-apartheid* South Africa described by Thomas Bassett as a clear case of racialized organization of space, and so persistence of racial prejudices (Bassett, 2017, p. 373). Matiyane and Beube denounce – by de-structuring it – classical cartography as it is recognized as a powerful tool of racial discrimination and colonial politics, probably among the most dangerous, “because the eye and mind of the map user are likely to be quite unaware of them” (Akerman, 2017, p. 7). By redesigning borders, distances and hierarchical relationships between cities and nations, therefore, the cartographic act of Matiyane and Beube is strongly politicized, and the following analysis will try to identify the visual codes and the graphic choices adopted to achieve this objective, and then it will compare the emerging overarching trends, and implications.

3.1 The Imaginary and Transnational Maps of Titus Matiyane

The maps of the South African cartographer Titus Matiyane ask the viewer to broaden their physical and ideological horizons towards an imaginary and transnational geographical space that enhances the identities of African territories and cultures (Ekpo, 1995; Adichie, 2020). Matiyane deconstructs the Afrocentric idea of a solitary Africa and a shared system of values and stories (Sidogi, 2018, p. 129), placing in his imaginary views urban contexts that belong to different continents, but which seem to dialogue as they are integrated into scenarios in which individuality and difference coexist as values.

Titus Matiyane began his work as a cartographer in the 1990s, in a decade that saw South Africa recovering from a historical moment of “cruel dehumanization” (Kruger, 2022, p. 199), drawing his monumental panoramas on a small coffee table of 40 x 60 cm outside a house of approximately 25 square meters in which he still lives today with his family (Figure 1). His first panoramic drawings depicted local cities, metropolitan districts and provinces, including Durban, Pretoria and Pietersburg, before moving on, at the end of the decade, to drawing telescopic scenery of foreign cities such as New York, London, Amsterdam and Hong Kong. Matiyane Maps are long strips of paper whose size varies from 6 (as in *Panorama of Hong Kong*) to 46 meters wide (this is the case of *Panorama Pietersburg-Sasolburg*) for approximately 1.5 meters in height (Figure 2). Here the artist reconstructs scenarios created with colored pencils and markers and characterized by strange proportions based on intuition and an admirable attention to detail. Matiyane, in fact, graphically transposes what he pictures in his head, and the visual references of his work are the commercial maps donated by sponsors or purchased from local stationery shops and Google Maps. These images are often his only source of knowledge of the cities of which he then proposes monumental panoramic representations based on his vision of places that, in most cases, he has never visited. Through his imagination, writes Elfriede Dreyer (2017, p. 128), Matiyane “becomes a transnational traveler who produces representations of the geo-history of the most famous cities in the world”. Matiyane works as a sort of archivist and produces documents that tell a local history that can't be captured by photography because it is not contingent, but extended over time, in a dimension of intrinsic dynamism and continuous evolution. Matiyane's concern for functioning from the city justifies the cartographer's singular process: he draws what he knows, not what he sees, and this makes his panoramas more like maps than impressionist views (Silverman, 2007, p. 23).

In this new vision of the world, it is possible, indeed prescriptive, that large cities such as New York and London relate to peripheral places such as Soweto and Atteridgeville in a utopian and imaginary geographical restitution. As Dreyer writes:

“By including less important South African cities and towns in his canon of famous cities, the artist suggests an intervention strategy that deconstructs the paradigmatic perception of the world that associates African cities like Pretoria and Johannesburg with a Marginalized Third World.” (Dreyer, 2017, p. 135)

The South African cities designed by Matiyane overcome the social and cultural confinement that emerged with the advent of post-apartheid political regimes and establish a fair dialogue with the territories, architecture and urban planning of that First World seen from the eyes of an African, and therefore perhaps more authentic (de Kler, 2007, p. 17). By operating this hybridization between panoramas belonging to apparently irreconcilable social, cultural and geographical contexts, Matiyane makes graphic choices that convey a very specific sociopolitical communication project. Most of his panoramas include powerful and fast vehicles, planes, trains and boats that can easily cover long distances. The lines and connecting paths are marked - to the detriment of proportion - as to form a global and transnational network. The representation of the buildings becomes homologous, attenuating the aesthetic differences between the so-called Third and First Worlds to the point of almost disappearing. The border lines between towns and cities are invisible and the distinction between territories relies on topography and toponymy: large green areas, endless blue horizons and warm colors to make the anthropic areas recognizable. These panoramas are actually glimpses of a broader reality, of a world without hierarchies, differences or contrasts between those who have and those who have not, therefore between poverty and prosperity, and, above all, of a world free of racial discrimination. To confirm this prospective, Matiyane's cartographic representations lack – As Melinda Silverman writes (2007, pp. 32-33) – specific elements of a decadentism typical of the postmodern condition of third world countries: the settlements of shacks, the dense system of ropes from which linen dangles to “decorate” the skyscrapers of the 1960s, the numerous street vendors who gather on the freeway ramps to sell their products. Of particular importance in the cartographer's drawings is, then, the almost total absence of human figures, except for the symbolic use of the faces of some well-known personalities which strengthen the identity of the places portrayed, for example Princess Diana in *Panorama of London* (1998), Nelson Mandela in *Panorama Pietersburg-Sasolburg* (2004) and Queen Beatrix in *Panorama of the Netherlands* (2000). This aspect, together with the simplified style, the use of color and the inclusion of considerable toponymy, reinforces the ideological, imaginary and transcendent nature of his work.

Another relevant graphic character of Matiyane's cartographies is the erasure of borders. This choice can be interpreted as a further action of deconstruction of the political barriers of South Africa and the world, which is, in fact, transcribed and reconfigured in such a way as to communicate a utopia of depoliticization. The graphic space imagined by Matiyane in his panoramas terminates oppositions and deconstructs the traces of colonialism, apartheid, the hierarchies of national states and the great differences between the First and Third Worlds (Kruger, 2022, pp. 199-200). The cancellation of borders in favor of a geographical, economic and cultural re-mapping does not mean the absence of references to the history and specific characteristics of the territories that are protagonists of the panoramas. The cartographer, in fact, portrays a precise historical moment in his panoramas, a specific event that inextricably and unequivocally characterizes a city or a state, as if his map crystallized on paper a moment of local importance and global resonance. And so, for example, in the 46-meter-wide *Pietersburg-Sasolbourg Panorama*, the cartographer refers several times to the 2010 World Cup; in the 2019 *Panorama of Italy*, the portrait of Pope Francis overlooks the city of Rome; and again, in *Panorama of New York* (1999) the Twin Towers are on fire (Figure 3) (See Hobbs, 2007, p.39).

Matiyane's work is therefore part of a phenomenon that has seen contemporary African artists generally considered outsiders - including the sculptors Helen Martins and Jackson Hlungwani - becoming spokespersons for an authentic, honest and free testimony of decolonial processes.



Figure 1. Titus Matiyane at work on *Panorama of Cape Town* (2005). Mixed media on paper, 7m Photo: ©Titus Matiyane.



Figure 2. Titus Matiyane (Atteridgeville, 1964). *Panorama Pietersburg-Sasolburg*, 2004. Mixed media on paper, 46m. Photograph taken on the occasion of the exhibition *Cities of the World* (2008). Photo: © Titus Matiyane.



Figure 3. Titus Matiyane (Atteridgeville, 1964). *Panorama of New York* (detail, 1999) [drawing modified after 09/11/2001]. Mixed media on paper, 12m. Photo: © Titus Matiyane.

3.2 The Altered Atlases of Doug Beube

With a very different approach than Matiyane, the American mix-media artist Doug Beube undertakes the deconstruction of maps not through a graphic rewriting, but by physically dissecting and reassembling maps' paper material, thereby engendering the creation of unique territories characterized by altered borders and amalgamating political and geographic identities (cfr. Hoeltzel and Villalonga, 2013)). In the last three decades Doug Beube has produced bookwork, collages, installations, and sculptures and has forged a new source for cultural and artistic understanding of the world trying to rewrite social conventions in a creative way (Masuga, 2016, p. 181).

Since the beginning of his artistic experiments Beube has demonstrated a particular attention to books and, in many artworks, he manipulates, destroys and transforms these objects into cultural artifacts of different nature that provide a new image of the world and asks the viewer to experience "the dichotomy of the physical object and its conceptual status" (Ibid., p. 194), and yet of course to explore the new significances carried on with this process of retransformation. Many of the books altered by Beube are, not randomly, geographical atlases, which he reorganizes and transforms into new bodies with and of new images. Beube's mapworks' premises, indeed, stand from the assumption that "maps are not to be understood or trusted as firm markers of meaning. Rather, Beube's works illuminate that maps are often markers of the meaning we seek in them" (Mullin, 2011, p. 55). Diane Mullin in the article *Illuminated maps: the World unzipped but not uncut* argued that Doug Beube's collages question our beliefs about the world in which we live and can be considered:

"Explorations into nameless territories of our consciousness where the rationalistic and nationalistic zeal that underlies the western enlightenment has become, in and of itself, an almost blind faith in our worldview, no matter how unbearable it is for the planet at large." (Ibid.)

Mullin focused especially on the "Erosions Series" (2004) in which Beube sanded the pages of atlases so that the familiar images of territories disappear and new images of mountain ranges emerging from the center of oceans are created and so he built new elements on the maps such as islands and rain forests

appearing like oases in the middle of deserts. If the images or objects (atlases and books) are artefacts with a big cultural meaning, in a certain way – according to Thomas Mitchell and Katy Masuga – by destroying and restructuring them automatically their transformation questions and suggests the need of a similar rewriting for the cultural aspects that these objects are representations of. In other words, these alterations redesign the boundaries – thus the relationships – between spaces and places that bring with them a stratified tradition of social and cultural conventions (Mitchell, 1996; Masuga, 2016).

Beube concentrated on mapworks and bookworks especially in the first decades of the new century, when he creates a jumbled and practically unintelligible world's geography by dissecting and layering actual vintage maps, insinuating the emergence of a global community that blurs social and political frontiers (cfr. Mallonee, 2013). As revealed by the artists in an interview release in 2018 on the occasion of the exhibition *Books Undone: the art of altered books* (2018), in these pieces, he physically manipulates the obsolete cartographic configuration by cutting, crushing, sketching, drilling, gouging, and sewing maps, pushing their physical ontology until they nearly collapse. By converting a map from its original purpose, Beube suggests reading it non-linearly and transferring decades of devotion for a pervasive object into a challenging shape with new levels of meaning (Beube, 2018, p.6).

This approach is clear especially in five artworks produced between 2003 and 2015: *Fault lines* (2003), the *Erosion Series* (2004), *Border Crossing* (2006), *Fallen Borders* (2014), and *Shifting Borders* (2015) [3].

The first experiments involving atlases and printed maps date back to the artwork *Fault Lines* of 2003 (Figure 4). In this work Beube cut all pages of the atlas into one-inch strips which however remain sewn to the spine of the volume. The book's start and finish are interwoven with the chopped rows “in an arbitrary geopolitical braiding” (Bright, 2011, p. 17) that enables the spectator to examine various topographical perspectives and, in turn, reinterpret the globe. This artwork inaugurated a path of conceptual experimentation that has focused on maps – and in particular borders – as flexible entities that can be deconstructed and reconstructed, thus allowing to re-read the relationship between territorial, geographical, historical, political and cultural identities.

In the *Erosion Series* of 2004 (Figure 5) Beube kept questioning the fluidity of international relations by manipulating pages extracted from world atlases. Moved by the notion of geopolitical adaptability, Beube's process involved a meticulous exploration of color-field relationships and compositional elements within a bunch of chosen maps. With a belt sander on the verso of the pages, he deliberately carved out irregular forms, akin to the erosive actions of insects, thereby redefining the geographical shapes of numerous nations.

When overlapped to underlying pages these irregularly perforated maps lead to unexpected juxtapositions, expanse seas and oceans, and intersect terrestrial masses. This intervention interrogates cartographic conventions, thereby challenging socially-embedded assumptions regarding the representation of physical and cultural boundaries, and so global alliances and political sovereignty.

The resultant artifacts disrupt the reader's accustomed navigation through territorial boundaries, prompting a reconsideration of the inherent complexities underlying border delineations.

By halving atlases pages and affixing separator zippers along the incised edges, in *Border Crossing* (2006) (Figure 6) Beube focused again and reimagined new, dynamic and malleable boundaries as segments of disparate maps can be seamlessly joined, mimicking an analogue version of “cutting” and “pasting”. These resultant sheets offer a kaleidoscope of possibilities as they allow to be interchanged and recombined, defying conventional perceptions of geographical demarcations. Whether laid out flat or fashioned into multidimensional shapes such as prisms, these compositions imbue the spatial plane with an illusion of depth, thereby subverting conventional understandings of geographic representation. The integration of a zipper-based system confers a newfound openness, facilitating the addition, removal, or interchangeability of pages at the user's discretion, thus redefining the boundaries between places, people and cultures.

In the bookwork *Fallen Borders* of 2014 the focus of reshaping boundaries gains more and more importance as each page undergoes a transformative process, involving techniques such as cutting, drilling, or sanding, which serve to disrupt and reshape the traditional boundaries of national, geographical, and cultural

identity. The project is conceptualized as a metaphorical battleground, wherein the physical alteration of the book's pages symbolizes the clash and fluidity inherent in the construction and dissolution of borders between nations. Notably, no external elements are introduced to the book; rather, the manipulation of existing materials accentuates the organic evolution of boundaries. The exposed layers of the book's covers, revealing the juxtaposition of green leather and yellow foam cushioning, evoke imagery reminiscent of spilled spaghetti squash, metaphorically suggesting the porous and malleable nature of territorial demarcations. A similar piece to *Fallen Borders* is *Shifting Borders* (2015) (Figure 7), but here every page is altered only by meticulously cutting elements from the overlapping maps of the atlas, thus leaving elements that strengthen the concepts of connection and confusion. Both the works *Fallen Borders* and *Shifting Borders* metaphorically reference the tumultuous process of restructuring national, geographical, and cultural delineations driven by political regimes and authoritarian leadership. They delve into the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding the establishment and recognition of territorial boundaries, wherein the exercise of power by political entities often results in arbitrary rearrangements of land and property ownership. Consequently, the reliability and clarity of delineating where boundaries precisely commence and cease become subjects of doubt and skepticism. Maps, rather than serving as definitive representations, are portrayed as imperfect approximations, further emphasizing the fluid and contested nature of boundary delineation in the geopolitical landscape.



Figure 4. Doug Beube (Hamilton). *Fault Lines* (2003). Altered Atlas. Photo: © Doug Beube.



Figure 5. Doug Beube (Hamilton). *Erosion* (2004). Collage. Photo: © Doug Beube.



Figure 6. Doug Beube (Hamilton). *Border Crossing* (2006). Altered atlas, collage, thread, zipper. Photo: © Doug Beube.



Figure 7. Doug Beube (Hamilton). *Shifting Borders* (2015). Altered atlas, collage, gouache. Photo: © Doug Beube.

4. Conclusions: Maps as Sociopolitical Visual Communication Projects

Matiyane's territorial representations and Beube's physical cartographic compositions provide imaginary but conceptually possible geographical configurations. Their visual action provokes new 'deterritorializing' desires as it premediates an a-territorial or a-bordered world (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). However, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argued in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), 'deterritorialization' is just a preparatory phase that anticipates the transformative and creative moment of making new connections, reconfigurations and assemblages; and they named this moment 'reterritorialization'. The simultaneously destructive and constructive action of deterritorialization and reterritorialization theorized by the Philosopher and the Psychiatrist is not spatial rather social and cultural in a constant changing scenario. By transcending geographical, material and cultural boundaries the work of the two artists analyzed in this paper follows the same idea of spatial estrangement formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, and intersects spatial and sociopolitical discourse, engaging with issues of power, identity, and representation. Their borderless imaginary worlds, indeed, cause a profound upheaval and reconciliation between the spatial/representational and the social/communicative dimensions of cartography. Matiyane's imaginary maps and Beube's altered atlases can be considered, therefore, powerful visual communication projects, unique utopian panoramas that invite the viewer to experience new places in which spatial relationships are altered, destroyed and then reconstructed, and thus convey sociopolitical messages that underlie the fragility of strategies of transnational abuse and the search for social and economic equality. The described artefacts are indeed messages that "invite us to see and think about what is neither seen nor thought when observing real spaces" (Jacob, 1992, p. 50), but with a different approach, which – to simplify – we could define optimistic, utopian and naive in the case of Matiyane's imaginary maps, more critical, hermetic, apparently destructive in the case of Beube's altered atlases. The articulated structure of graphic elements and compositional criteria described, paraphrasing the words of Maria Linda Falcidieno, makes the manipulation of the representations of the territory conducted by the two designers a privileged form of expression that mediates between objectivity and subjectivity and which, taking advantage of the rich tradition of historical cartography, offers graphic-linguistic and physical-experiential solutions intermediate between a symbolic and iconic representation (Falcidieno, 2009, pp. 115-121). The reading and design of the territory – and above all its rereading and redesign –, therefore, open up to the development of a specific visual language in which the design components dialogue in an unusual but recurring and recognizable way. These works become a manifesto of a new form of pseudoscientific communication of the world, a multicultural simulacrum with a strong sociopolitical meaning. Their maps create new connections and paths, they are visions of a transactional identity ideologically close to a global dimension, they are projects of graphic-visual representation in which otherness and multiculturalism are values to be preserved, they are forms of visual communication of the territory which give "access to otherwise unattainable cultural and human spaces" (Quaggiotto, 2016, p. 228).

The analysis undertaken underscores an additional aspect intricately interwoven with the use of Matiyane's cartographic transformations and Beube's multi-dimensional collages: namely, the maps crafted by these two artists can be interpreted as expressions of a transnational identity within contemporary culture, rooted in the consumption of technology, each emphasizing distinct components. Matiyane's portrayal of cities invites users to traverse and enjoy the magnificence of panoramic vistas, thus navigating "virtual" spatial realms. This immersive experience disregards conventional metrics of dimension, proportion, and distance, fostering subjective and individualized exploration. Implicitly, Matiyane advocates for participatory engagement, facilitating an authentic analogical encounter marked by deliberate attention to localized identity details. Beube's altered maps and atlases, on the other hand, demand active involvement and interaction from viewers, enabling them to manipulate and overlay depictions of diverse terrains and landforms, stitching them together or substituting paper strips to create new configurations. Users are thus prompted to engage directly with the installation, assuming the role of virtual nomads navigating an idealized and imaginary landscape.

Notes

[1] Cartography is a science whose object is the graphic restitution of physical space on flat supports (geographical maps) through the symbolic representation of geographical, statistical, demographic, economic, political and cultural information (Tracanni Encyclopedia, 2010).

[2] The definition of mapping here provided and the listed different uses and graphic configurations that affect the production of maps today, come from the re-elaboration of the reflections conducted by Jerry Brotton (*Le Grandi Mappe* 2015, p.7), Lorenza Pignatti (*Mind the Map* 2011, pp.5-7; *Cartografie Radicali* 2023, pp.7-12), Katharine Harmon (*YOU ARE HERE. Personal Geographies* 2004, pp.15-19).

[3] Beube's bookworks descriptions written in this paper paraphrase and expand the explanations provided by the artists on his personal website: <https://dougbeube.com/home.html>.

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