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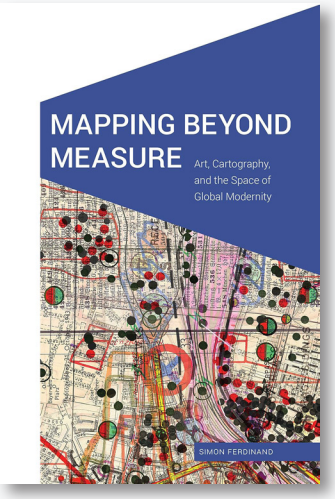

MAPPING BEYOND MEASURE: ART, CARTOGRAPHY, AND THE SPACE OF GLOBAL MODERNITY

By Simon Ferdinand

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Review by: Zach Thorpe, University of California, Berkeley

Simon Ferdinand, in *Mapping Beyond Measure*: *Art, Cartography and the Space of Global Modernity* (hereafter referred to as *Mapping*), argues that maps, geographies, and other expressions of spatial phenomena can challenge and excite our own understanding of space and place. He maintains that when we analyze the nature of this proposition we discover that maps are simply visual expressions of ideas, whose format is subject to the same critical analysis that is so often applied to visual art. The concept of a "map" itself can even be seen as subject matter that artists can include within their own work, helping to better communicate their messages to their audiences. Ferdinand further argues in favor of an innovative narrative of "map art" by placing this narrative within the context of how artworks can use cartography to examine, challenge, and disrupt the concept of "global modernity." This term, originally coined by Arif Dirlik (2007), stresses "important transformations in global relations" that posits the modern state of the world as "one and unequal" (8). Namely, that "capitalism's expansive tendency toward ever greater accumulation and the global articulation of markets" makes our world an integrated whole, while simultaneously being unequal, in that it is "riven with disjuncture, unevenness and diversions . . . [that] actively produces inequality and difference" (8).

Primarily theoretical in nature, *Mapping* examines a variety of artworks, maps, and other figures that reference an even broader range of artists, writers, and spatial theorists. The author's primary argument is "that map art is especially well placed to explore themes of global modernity because mapmaking itself has been inextricably bound up with the articulation of modern nation states, colonialism, and capitalism" (14). He divides his analysis of this assertion into six distinct parts, and devotes a single section of the book to uncovering the depths of each.

Previously, there have been other explorations into the intersection of visual art and cartography.[1] For example, books like Harriet Hawkins's *For Creative Geographies* (2014) provided an exploration into the relationship between geography and visual art, and laid out a broad argument about art's role in forming geographical knowledge in general. Similarly, Karen O'Rourke's work *Walking and Mapping*: *Artists as Cartographers* (2016) delved deeper into the ways some artists are harnessing technological advancements in GIS to aesthetically render the concept of "wandering." No one else, however, has taken on the task of investigating map art as it particularly applies to the theme of global modernity. Simon Ferdinand has devoted six years—both alone and in collaboration with colleagues—to putting this book together. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam, has lectured about art history and criticism, and has explored the relationships between art and geography through various articles and reviews since 2012—so he comes to the undertaking with some respectable credentials.

1. Editor's note: this includes **a special issue** (#53, 2006) of *Cartographic Perspectives* devoted to the subject.

The book's "Introduction"—subtitled "I Map Therefore I Am Modern"—outlines the content and premises of his arguments, along with some pertinent self-criticisms. Ferdinand's primary argument is that "map art" (explained as "the remarkably large and various field of artistic production concerned with mapping" [5–6]) is well situated to remark on global modernity because maps have, historically, been "the makers and markers of modernity" (7). He introduces some compelling original concepts that support this claim throughout the book, such as how cartography's "ontology of calculability" (17) reproduces our perception of the world as measurable, representable, and calculable. To Ferdinand, this inherently places cartography within a political view, a view that seeks to maintain global modernity's hegemonic control. The ability to create artistic mappings by using cartographic layers from temporally varying political perspectives over time is another of Ferdinand's original concepts, one he terms "polychronous cartography." These concepts are referenced many times by Ferdinand as he lays out the base arguments that are expanded in the first four chapters. In these chapters, the selected map artworks focus on themes that undermine cartography's façade of objectivity by reimagining and revealing perspectives of uneven spatial and temporal development in an increasingly globalized world.

Chapter 1 spotlights a painting entitled *The Old and the New. A Group Portrait* (1935) by Ukrainian artist Solomon Borisovich Nikritin. The subjects and composition of this work are analyzed to explore what Ferdinand calls the "phenomenologies of global mapping" (39)—another of his original concepts. A fitting work to begin the content of this book, Ferdinand explains how the four figures of the artwork represent global mapping's evolution from "Hellenistic cosmological predestination" to its current place of "calculative malleability." Ferdinand draws upon the form, emotions, genders, and gazes of the figures to argue that this work "focuses [on] a perpetual, constitutively modern impulse to map meaning and order onto a fortuitous world" (59). Referencing details like preparatory studies and other artworks by Nikritin, as well as the historical context of this artwork's creation in the shadow of the Soviet Union, Ferdinand melds art and geographic theory to lay out this initial argument of how projecting our own meanings onto the earth in the name of progress can consequently alienate us from it. He references consequences like "banal globalism," which creates "cosmopolitan consumer-citizens [that] are constructed through daily exposure to media motifs of global belonging" (59). This

Solomon Borisovich Nikritin. *The Old and the New. A Group Portrait.* 1935. Oil on canvas. State Museum of Arts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan.

asserts global modernity's calculability that yields "meaningless facticity across which global rhetorics play out" (65).

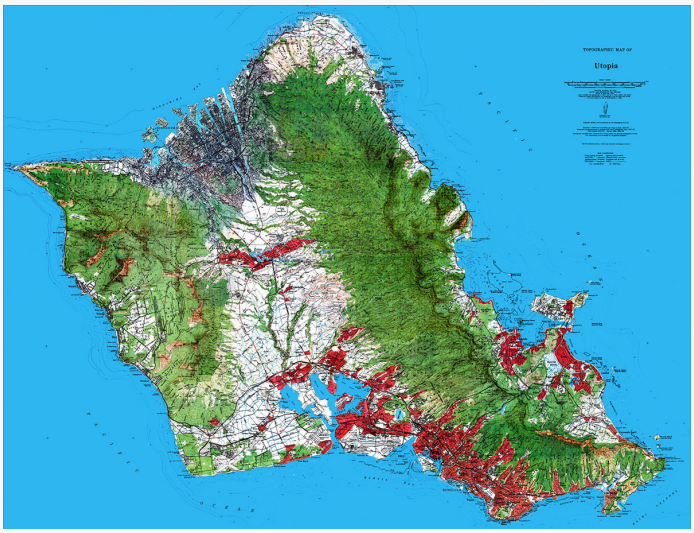
In Chapter 2, Ferdinand contrasts what he sees as modernity's urge for "monochronus mapping"—a mapping that temporally freezes space perception in the name of capitalist market globalization, state organization, and colonialism—with the idea of a "polychronous mapping" that critically reimagines the global temporalities that modern mapping constructs. He uses Alison Hildreth's piece *World Fort* (2007) to show how a visual combination of spatial temporalities can reveal historical and political tensions so often disguised by modernity's monochronus mapping tendencies. His analysis of the subject matter—war machines, insects, surveillance, and violence—associated with Hildreth's geographies-under-threat leads Ferdinand to conclude that the spatial-temporal frictions associated with Hildreth's work resolve to "modernity's ecological ruin following the triumphant resurgence of an avenging natural order" (93). The author links the themes of climate change and ecological crisis to the stark, gritty, melancholic aesthetics of the artist's temporal layers by noting that even ecological ruin will likely play out through a "combined and uneven apocalypse" (102), echoing global modernity's one and unequal evolution.

In Chapter 3, Ferdinand combines these two concepts and relates the amalgam to cartography's historical yet unfortunate connection to political and military conquest. Gert

Jan Kocken's work *Depictions of Munich* (1933–1945)—an incredibly detailed and dense work featuring various layers of state-planning maps, annotations, and datasets—speaks to the idea of how maps act as plans and, inversely, how plans of conflicting ideas of political utopias can turn into maps that depict "fascist, communist, and liberal-capitalist visions of modernity vying for hegemony" (119). Kocken purposefully chooses map layers that have political and temporal tensions to highlight these contrasts which speak to cartography's power to create different realities of state ordering. Using themes of warfare to highlight the differences of these visions, Kocken highlights both realized and failed cartographic plans in his work. These "aperspectival views" speak further of militarism's ability to violently shape our space perceptions and lived-realities through "epistemologies that purport to be immutable, contextless, and disinterested" (134), save for the purposes of state domination and control. In another stark take on our modern condition, Ferdinand's analysis of Kocken's work reveals a critique of the way modernity produces itself through "state gardening," a concept of continuous re-fabrication (and subsequent spatial ordering) to befit the winning ideology of the time, and urges us to remember that this is a process we continue to undergo.

While the first three chapters focus on works that outwardly challenge and criticize the effects of global modernity, Chapter 4's analysis of the Japanese artist Satomi Matoba's work is more complex and nuanced. Matoba's works digitally collage maps of different places into one fantastical region, under the guise of traditional cartographic representation standards. In the featured work, *Utopia* (1998), an island resembling the shape of Oahu contains Hiroshima in the north and Pearl Harbor in the south. This poignant symbolic connection opens a floodgate of observations upon which Ferdinand builds his arguments, saying that Matoba's technique of experimentally combining geographies both "naïvely [wishes] away the complexities of global modernity" and accentuates "the repressed transcultural hybridity that persists, unacknowledged, athwart national borders and inside national 'geobodies'" (144–145). Despite Matoba's express intention to imagine a possibility of unity within times of globalization, Ferdinand's uses these aspects to support his belief that Matoba's work perpetuates the theme of ontological calculability. He references the choice of an island as utopia as an "archetype of the emergent territorial nation-state" (151), an insular region that will eventually cause an "othering" of outsiders not within the region's clearly-defined borders. On the one hand, Ferdinand acknowledges that the values of intercultural cosmopolitanism and global flow suggested by Matoba's work challenges this insularity, but, nonetheless, he ultimately defines her work as one that inadvertently idealizes globalization through her aesthetically normative mapmaking choices.

The fifth chapter takes a look at contemporary mapping practices employing GIS and GPS, and how, by "undisciplining cartography" (34) and performing "art *as* mapping" (177), they challenge the modernist ontology of calculability. By taking mapping back from institutional control, Ferdinand argues, these cartographic practices come closer to properly challenging established ontological traditions in ways that many of the artworks discussed in this book struggle to fully achieve. Jeremy Wood's *My Ghost* (2009) is a mapping performance where Wood employs GPS to use himself as a "geodetic pencil" that, through traveling through London, accumulates records of his daily mobility. To Ferdinand, this concept of mapping on the street directly challenges the scientifically "elevated," aperspectival mapping that has dominated the cartographic control of urban space and infrastructure. Although Wood's personal cartographies empower pedestrianism and de-institutionalization by challenging the hierarchy of elevated street maps versus subordinate street-level mapping, Ferdinand recognizes that the hegemony of entrenched hierarchies is, at best, difficult to escape. As much as he respects the attempt, he cannot help but admit that Wood's work both directly challenges *and* inadvertently reinforces the ontology of calculability. Ferdinand explains that, in

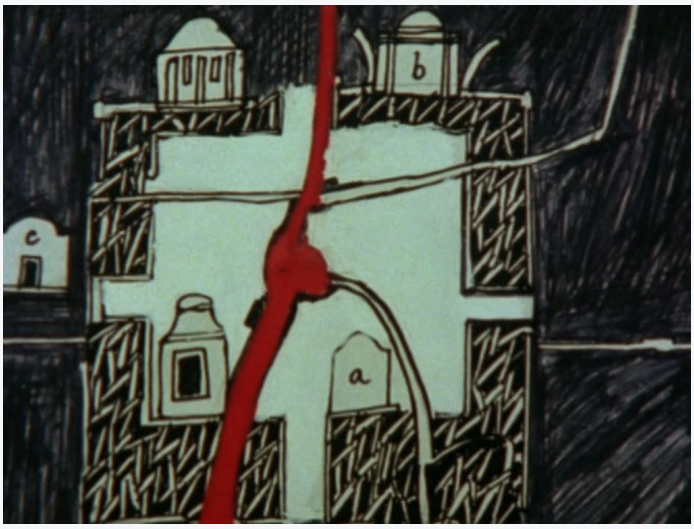


Satomi Matoba. *Utopia*. 1998. Digital collage.

harnessing GPS and GIS technology to create his work, the artist also adopts the values implicit in, and *controlled* by, the tech itself. This problematic ontology will always be perpetuated through the use of the tools that support it—unless artists can "counter this ontology with qualitatively different, experimental, and original visions of mapped space" (193). Ferdinand warns that, in the age of Google Maps and Apple Maps, the growing power of the socio-spatial field of "distributed digital mapping culture" (204) may further strengthen the very ontologies Wood's art-as-mappings projects seek to undo, due to unavoidable reinforcements given to calculated space.

In the final chapter, Ferdinand explores how map art can transcend cartography's historically persistent ontology of calculability through an examination of the 1978 film, ***A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist*** by Peter Greenaway. In it, an ornithologist retrospectively looks over his life and navigates a journey into the afterlife by voicing over a showcase of ninety-two maps that Greenaway produced himself, all widely varying in media, perspective, and chronology. The innovative way in which these imagined geographies are presented directly challenges the ontology of calculability through what Ferdinand offers as an imaginative ontology of *performativity*—saying that "the displacement of representational correspondence as cartography's essential function annuls the ontological basis upon which institutional cartography has claimed special authority in mapping" (210). Ferdinand further supports this markedly postmodernist take on a seemingly inescapable calculability in cartography by invoking the philosophical idea of *chorein*, defined as "an act of setting up space, which precedes place and grounds the capability-to-be-in-place" (221). This way of ontologically analyzing Greenaway's work is crucial for Ferdinand's argument because it supports the way Greenaway's work reconceptualizes ideas of space and place entirely, relinquishing any intentions of calculability. In fact, Ferdinand comes to the conclusion that Greenaway's works are entirely incalculable due to their increasingly irregular and bizarre abstractions of place. This development into a phenomenologically performative mapping divests from modernity because it reimagines the world not as something to be calculated and controlled, but to represent individual, lived experiences of spatial understanding.

Overall, *Mapping* is a fascinating exploration into the intersection of art, cartography, and philosophy. Ferdinand's core proposition is that the vast majority of map art



Peter Greenaway. *Antilipe*. Detail of *A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist*. 1978.

perpetuates calculative global modernity, despite each artist's individual attempt to comment on or directly challenge it, and each facet of this overarching argument is supported by his detailed analysis of works by a diverse array of artists from various backgrounds and time periods.

However, although the ideas and analyses presented in *Mapping* are compelling, Ferdinand offers few moments of respite from his take on map art's ability to successfully counteract, reimagine, and operate independently from, global modernity. Even his analysis of *A Walk Through H*, which provides a general resolution for his ominous argument of hopeless inescapability from modernity's grip, is left on a note of skepticism, saying that Greenaway's "impulse to found the world anew through mapping does not negate, but rather distills and radicalizes modernity" (241). Still, Ferdinand's arguments are worth consideration and provide a benchmark for future theorists and map artists to imagine cartographies that are inherently anti-modernity. Ferdinand admits in the introduction that his arguments are not "humanist," in that he is purposefully *not* seeing these map artworks as a universalizing "artistic expression and celebration of a shared human mapping impulse" (7). Quite to the contrary; his critical interpretation of map art, maps within art, and "art as mapping" sacrifices artistic intention to find fallibility under the crushing weight of modernity's influence. This represents a weakness in Ferdinand's thesis, as can be seen particularly in regard to his conclusions about Matoba's *Utopia* in Chapter 4, where he criticizes the artist's ultimate faltering turn to calculable perpetuation by the use of traditionally aesthetic

mapping practices. The book's non-humanist critique could use a breath of fresh, humanist air; for example, it could be argued that Matoba is purposefully leveraging traditionalist means to create non-traditionalist, imagined spaces rife with humanist tension that undermines, rather than reinforces, modernity's coldness.

Despite these few overlooked and/or potentially overworked points, Ferdinand's *Mapping* is a recommendable read to anyone with interests in cartography, visual art analysis, critiques on globalization and the modern condition, or broader spatial theory in general. The language Ferdinand uses suits *Mapping* to a more academic audience, creating passages and arguments that use thick (maybe even borderline pretentious) vocabulary. The firm stance taken in *Mapping Beyond Measure*: *Art, Cartography, and the Space of Global Modernity* can be credited to the sheer amount of effort Simon Ferdinand clearly put into this book's creation, and its forthright presentation will lend itself well to this book's becoming an important work that will support the burgeoning field of critical cartography and of map art in general.

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