



An Atlas of Radical Cartography

Edited by Alexis Bhagat and Lize Mogel

The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2007

Perhaps one of Buckminster Fuller's greatest gifts to humankind was the notion that we should understand maps not as documents that reveal how the world is partitioned but how it is far more connected than we seem to imagine it. Sadly, world politics, in conjunction with the detritus of late capitalism, overshadow this kind of thinking, leaving virtually no room for innovative concepts regarding the ways territory, history and identity can be interrupted or redefined. *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* is an amendment to this kind of calcified thinking, with a deeply activist bent. Comprised of ten essays from a variety of artists/activists/collectives, it also includes ten handsomely produced maps illustrating each essay—varied strategies by which the shape of geography and politics can be remodeled to empower autonomy through acts of cleverly discrete sedition, humor and the poetics of subjectivity.

The Institute of Applied Autonomy's term "tactical cartography," which defines "spatial representations that confront power, promote social justice and are intended to have operational value," neatly frames their *iSee Project*, an activity that documented the unsettling glut of surveillance cameras installed throughout Manhattan after 9/11. Labeled "Routes of Least Surveillance," this map offers the dizzyingly labyrinthine directions necessary to avoid the creepy purview of federal- and state-sanctioned eyes, annotated with tongue-in-cheek commentary from those "likely to arouse suspicion" (i.e., practically anyone).

Pedro Lasch's brilliant project *Latino/a América Selections* involved the distribution of two maps to a group of twenty individuals he knew were going to be traveling from Mexico to the United States during a certain period of time. Each map was illustrated with silhouettes of North and

South America, the word LATINO/A emblazoned across the northern continent and AMERICA written on the southern. Travelers were instructed to keep one copy of the map; the other was to be mailed back to the artist once he or she reached New York, everyone's final destination. Maps received by Lasch expose the residue and wear of assorted journeys, functioning as psychic records that indicate liminal—rather than concrete and linear—aspects of border, body and temporality.

Trevor Paglen and John Emerson's sickening record of CIA "rendition" flights (the illegal kidnapping and transporting of individuals believed to be terrorists to secret prisons), a nearly illegible morass of pathways that run throughout the world from Baltimore, Maryland, to Shannon, Ireland, to Rabat, Morocco, and straight to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is as illuminating as it is heartrendingly confusing. Though the artists give us a sense of where these planes are going, we still have no idea who they are carrying, how long these people will be detained or what may happen to them. These scrupulously gathered coordinates become just as anonymous as the omitted bodies and identities.

An Atlas of Radical Cartography is an optimistic slap in the face to those who consistently bleat "We can't," a sentiment that only adds to the futility of dreadful current events. But failing—falling down—after all, is only an effect of gravity; standing up, however, defies gravity and therefore represents plenty of hard work. The contributors to this publication make a certain mode of defiance a regular facet in their lives, as well as provide an enormously rich model that we urgently need to build upon.

Alex Jovanovich is an artist based in Chicago.