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AN ATLAS OF RADICAL CARTOGRAPHY

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Any unmapped space might as well not exist; so runs one prevalent attitude. This is as true for the uncharted ocean floor as for the shantytowns rising daily on the outskirts of Beijing and Rio de Janeiro—both exist in the liminal zone between the known and the imagined.

An Atlas of Radical Cartography aims to dispel that attitude, along with the related notion that what is mapped exists as official cartographers have represented it. The book, which consists of ten essays and corresponding maps, takes its cue from the upturned Mercator projection in which South displaces North, turning the colonialist model of cartography on its head.

Jai Sen maps squatter settlements in Calcutta that government maps have labeled “vacant land,” laying the foundation for residents to demand their basic rights. The Institute for Applied Autonomy tracks the spread of surveillance cameras in Manhattan, providing residents with an online map of “routes of least surveillance.” Elsewhere, water use is quantified, the New York garbage-collection mafia is exposed, and the frantic movements of would-be North African immigrants are detailed. The world is not flat, the radical cartographers insist, and the myriad processes concealed by maps of that world charge to the foreground.