If maps make meaning by locating us as agents in the world, the dynamic cartographies by the Ethiopian-American painter Julie Mehretu suggest the extent to which the modern project has given way to fragmented social identities and thus to new kinds of spatial awareness. Such eccentric space is shot through with other spaces functioning in relation to and interaction with other spaces. In addition, these new spaces both produce and are produced by our active and continuous interchanges with sophisticated technologies in real time and virtual time, which themselves constitute spaces that are unbounded, heterogeneous and fluid, making spatial orientation indeterminate and jagged, ruled by chance and contingency. How can such territories be mapped? What do these cartographies of the future tell us about our present technosocial world? What relationship between the map and its territory do they suggest? That is what this contribution discusses by examining Mehretu’s high-velocity urban charts which not only embody these indeterminate, jagged and indeed chaotic facets of spatial orientation and situatedness. Despite their bleakness and the uncertain future emerging from these hybrid fragmented maps, the stor(ies) they tell suggest poetic ways for agents to create new sensibilities and sensualities that do not rely on consumerism or consumption but evoke the potential for collective action and social change.

Keywords: cartographic art, cognition, psychogeography, diagrams, hybridity, fragmentation, technosocial spaces, multidimensionality

INTRODUCTION
The complexly composed cartographies by the Ethiopian-American painter Juliet Mehretu involve diagrams, marks, lines and geometrical coloured forms. Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction and between past and present, her dynamic explorations of her family genealogies, history of art and architecture as well as popular culture and urgent contemporary concerns are defined by cultural dislocation, migration and war. Her atlases suggest the emergence of a new kind of spatial awareness which has developed partly because the modern project has given way to more fragmented social identities, and partly because the new technosocial spaces generated by novel and sophisticated technologies are fluid and instantaneous. Creating hybrid landscapes that are dynamic, multiperspectival and pluridimensional, these spaces do not only confront the past and the present, but they also project what a future emerging from such confrontations might look like only.

What relationship between the map and its territory do these spaces suggest? What do these cartographies of the future tell us about our present technosocial world and how can we locate ourselves in it? An examination of Mehretu’s high-velocity urban charts implies that new systems of orientation are required to investigate these spaces which have been scientifically but not yet philosophically investigated.

WHAT IS A MAP?
In contemporary cartography, maps are defined as ‘graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world’ (Woodward and Harley, 1987, p. xvi). They could therefore be considered spatial embodiments of knowledge, since they are not restricted to the mathematical domains but are also prevalent in political, social, moral or psychological fields and apparently limitless as to their creative scope, which makes them ideal stimuli for further cognitive engagements. Alone the origin of the word ‘map’, from the Latin mappamundi (L. mappa for the cloth on which the map was drawn, and mundi, ‘of the world’) suggests the extent to which meaning is and always has been mapped into and out of maps: these medieval maps provide a rich representation of the world views of both their
makers and their readers as they integrate the spiritual and cultural concepts of their time. And just like the mappa mundi, which demanded of its viewers to engage with its abundant iconography, so maps generally stimulate us to interact by figuring, conceptualizing or recording the world again. This is what accounts for the performative function of maps, which is inherent in the map’s semiotic system: maps generate new ‘realities’ as they continuously create new narrative spaces. As processes of mapping rather than finite objects, they become ‘protocols of cognition’ informing us about their own processes of creating meaning – and their attempts to shape the meaning of others – as well as demonstrate the extent to which all maps are cognitive.

These ‘protocols of cognition’ are complex constructs that are highly communicative. Writers included maps in their texts as soon as they realized the map’s potential as a metaphor for their readers to orient themselves in literary space (cf. Ljungberg, 2003; Ljungberg, 2004; Ljungberg, 2005; Piatti, 2008). A very early but nevertheless sophisticated example are the 1516 and 1518 maps that serve as frontispieces of Sir Thomas More’s Utopia, on which the charts of More’s ideal island not only mirror the book’s narrative structure but also portray Utopia as an imaginary and unrealisable construct. A different but equally intriguing example is the 1654 narrative map of Carte du Tendre which accompanied Mlle de Scudéry’s novel Clélie and which set off a veritable mapping craze across Europe, making mapping emotions into a widely enjoyed salon game. Even today, a cursory look around any bookstore will reveal an astonishing amount of maps in contemporary literature in which maps appear in literary texts as strategic visual devices that not only supply readers with a referential guide to the text, assisting their movement within its fictional space, but also draw attention to the representational problem posed by both geographical and fictional spaces.

It is, however, above all in contemporary art and, in particular, in the map art of the last two decades that we find the most notable increase. This could be explained, on the one hand, by the ubiquity of maps in contemporary life (cf. Cosgrove, 1999; Ljungberg, 2004; Wood, 2006) and, on the other hand, because painting and mapmaking are both graphic artefacts for spatial communication and have always been closely connected. Since the beginning of mapmaking, artists have been involved not only in map drawing but also in decorating borders as well as ‘empty’ map space with exotic animals and peculiar objects. Even such a remarkably ‘realistic’ map as the Carta Marina, Olaus Magnus’s 1539 map of Scandinavia, is filled with imaginary figures and outlandish beings of all kinds. This mixture of different cultural codes goes back to the medieval mappa mundi with their multiple codedness, which makes such maps intriguing documents to decipher. This was something that medieval readers were familiar with from the tradition of biblical exegesis, since even objects of the physical world were read from the perspectives of several simultaneously valid codes (Nölting, in press), which would seem to be the most marked difference to our contemporary maps. The latter are the products of the shift towards a new concept of empiricism which was introduced by the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century and which resulted in new modes of representation that disregarded the map as a cultural object. Cartographers have considered the move towards visualisation and the visual representation of data as the cause for what J. B. Harley calls ‘The Myth of the Great Divide’ (1989) in a paper in which he challenges the dichotomy so often posed between science and art, or between science and the humanities. The comparatively simple visual graphs and diagrams such as maps that were generated to represent complex sets of data thus seemed more ‘scientific’ than more ‘artistic’ maps, while disregarding the deeper and more numerous affinities existing between art and science as various ways of describing and representing reality.

As hybrid representations of our life-world, of imaginary or of projected worlds, maps are different from other representations. In mapmaking, there is a variety of projections, each with its unique set of distortions, for the mapmaker to choose from. Despite the creation of more and more ‘scientific’ maps, certain inherent distortions will always remain, because any projection will necessarily distort the relationships between five geographical features, namely, area, angle, gross shape, distance and direction. That explains why, as David Woodward points out, for a map to function, there must exist ‘a structural analogical relationship of the scaled topographic map to reality’. That relationship constitutes what C. S. Peirce calls the diagrammatic relation between the map and its territory, which enables the recognition of similarities and patterns, and which determines the complex relation between a sign and its object(s), which accounts for the map’s effectiveness as a sign. In Peircean semiotics, a map has at least two objects, one dynamic and one immediate object. The dynamical object is the reality of the geographical facts (in the case of a map), whereas the immediate object is what could be called the mode of imaging intrinsic to the map itself (Peirce, 1998, p. 498), which will influence the ways in which the map will reflect our cultural and personal knowledge. A map could therefore be said to function as a ‘protocol of cognition’, both in the way it is made and in the way it is interpreted. As icons, maps are primarily regarded as diagrams, the second subcategory within Peirce’s three types of icons, images, diagrams and metaphors. Diagrams can only represent relations, structures or abstract patterns and, as we saw above, for a map to function as a means of orientation, it requires the recognition that the relations between its different parts are analogous to those between the parts of the geographical areas it represents. In addition, diagrams enable experimentation: by constructing a diagram and observing it, we can test our hypotheses. Peirce’s highly sophisticated work with diagrams resulted in his quincuncial projection (which is conformal everywhere except at the corners of the inner hemisphere). With this projection, as Gustavino and Havenel have pointed out in an unpublished manuscript, Peirce demonstrated that cartography is an experimental science that can be used both in philosophy and mathematics. It could therefore bridge the cleft between the ‘two cultures’, which Woodward and Harley (1987) set out to do with their History of Cartography project and which they both (cf. Woodward, 2001; Harley, 1988), have repeatedly called...
for: not only to acknowledge the map as a cultural practice but also to recognize its fundamental functionality as an instrument for experimenting and projecting theories and hypotheses in art, philosophy and science.

MAP ART

Such critical and creative prospective, not least coupled with the desire to unmask hidden agendas, together with the insight into the inherent potential that maps have for communicating complex data visually and formally coherently, is probably what lies behind the contemporary splurge in map art. With the so-called crisis of representation, both scholars and artists have scrutinized seemingly objective representations exposing them as ideological constructs and cultural practices (Nöth and Ljungberg, 2004). In Denis Wood’s (2006) view, the number of artists who have taken up the map as an expressive medium is steadily growing because

[...the irresistible tug maps exert on artists arises from the map’s mask of neutral objectivity, from its masks of unauthored dispersion. Artists either strip this mask off the map, or fail to put one on. In so doing map artists are erasing the line cartographers have tried to draw between their form of graphic communication (maps) and others (drawings, paintings, and so on). (Wood, 2006, p. 5)

Are map artists reclaiming the map as a general terrain of expression and communication or do they have more specific political agendas? It seems as if they want to denounce earlier uses of the map as a privileged form of communication and its involvement in shaping political decisions and geographical territories, which Edward Said has called ‘the battle of geography’ (1994)\(^9\). By concretely fashioning maps that point to other worlds, whether real, fictive or imagined, artists create new realms beyond the reach of so-called normative mapping. Often starting by revising and redrawing existing maps or digitally altering them, they paint over and even distort conventional map symbols such as those used to mark cities, roads and boundaries, only to have seldom used topographical patterns and objects come into focus in order to create their own personal atlases or use particular projections. Mona Hatoum’s art works ‘Present Tense’ and others (drawings, paintings, and so on). (Wood, 2006, p. 5)

Debord’s call for a ‘renovated cartography’ (Wood, 2006, p. 10) as a strategy to challenge the city planners responsible for the drastic urbanistic development in Paris during the 1950s is palpably present in Mehretu’s work. His psychogeographic maps, Debord claimed, represented cultural and social aspects of the city just as ‘truthfully’ as did the planners’ maps. Although he was not able to stop the development at the time, contemporary artists have repeatedly taken up his ideas. Debord’s description of the Situationist architect Constant’s futuristic ‘New Babylon’ influenced Mehretu’s painting as she confronts it with the past of old Babylon. And with Brasilia, Oscar Niemeyer’s visionary city architecture, which, as Mehretu points out, as a rationalist and modernist city, was ‘designed from above’ and therefore, ‘an important marker of a particular social and political thinking at a particular time’ (Pérez Rubio, 2007, p. 32).

Mehretu’s work suggests different ways of looking at the history of modernism as it directs our attention to the role of maps in modernism and imperialism (Chua, 2007, p. 12). By remapping what has been mapped in various ways but consistently to the disadvantage of individuals outside Western centres of power, her concern is not with the future but with the conflict of geography, the tension of the present, which her efforts aim at reconfiguring and reinscribing. In these centres of power, the modern subject, partly defined by the relationship of the self to space, once developed strategies to deal with the Cartesian space that Western maps embody, making him or her an omniscient spectator of the projected space that maps represented. That is what makes modern maps the offspring of modernity as their use implies an orthogonal, static point of view, which turns the map into an object seeing the world as a tableau or plan (Certeau, 1984, p. 92). As Certeau argues, ‘[t]he totalizing eye imagined by the painters of earlier times lives on in our achievements. The same scopic drive haunts users of architectural productions by materializing today the utopia that yesterday was only painted’. The representations of spatial relationships in dominant maps are, when understood critically, more or less accurate representations of the political relationship in a particular place at a given time. This also goes for architecture, since reconfiguring the map is part of reconfiguring the terrain. To Mehretu,

[architecture is] a metaphor for systems, for rational efforts to construct the world that we exist within, even...
though so many things happen in a very organic or irrational way. Always, whether it’s in psychoanalysis or in astrophysics, we are trying to come up with some understanding. Mathematics may not always be rational, but I think art isn’t either and the world doesn’t operate that way. (Mehretu interview in Pérez Rubio, 2007, p. 31)

Mehretu’s project therefore seems to be striving for a way to reconfigure the world. Her multilayered diagrammatic assemblages of lines, shapes, grids and marks blur and erase the structures, plans and projects of the architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth century modernity. These modern projects were created to shift the daily practices of their users, as Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 46) has pointed out: space is agent and effect, a social product as well as constitutive of social relations. Space shapes the daily experiences of the people who use it; it is also in turn shaped by these experiences. This is what Mehretu’s traces from architectural drawings, plans and details across time remind us. At the same time, the way her quotations move within her map space opens up a host of different perspectives on the history of modernity and its various art forms, in particular its privileging of space over time, which calls attention to our inherited forms of understanding. As Vincent Colapietro points out, ‘privileging space entails equating knowledge with a form of space, which makes for an uneasy relationship between temporality and spatiality’ (Colapietro, 2009).

Space can no longer be thought apart from time; it can also no longer be separated from movement.

This is what comes to the fore in the city grids and maps that Mehretu deconstructs and then reorganizes into multi-dimensional, semi-abstract diagrammatic compositions of both fictional and ‘factual’ elements, blurring any clear-cut distinction between them. Or does she suggest that there is a domain of discourse in which such distinctions have yet to be drawn? Might not her layerings and juxtapositions of time and space, avoiding any fixity of limits or frames of experience, suggest a new sense of space or kind of representation in which there is a simultaneity of events and actors and locations? The sense of varied dynamics in her paintings seems to fit what Nigel Thrift (2004, p.140) designates as ‘movement-space’, space in constant interaction with its environment. ‘Movement-space’ incorporates ‘many kinds of spaces, many kinds of dynamics, many kinds of existences, many kinds of imagination, holding each of these spaces in tension and never trying to resolve them: collisions, concordances, cataclysms, they are all here’ (Thrift, 2004, p. 141). This tension of the present is what Mehretu is working in to achieve what she says she is aiming for: ‘speed, dynamism, struggle and potential’ (Fogle and Ilesamni, 2004, cited in Thrift, 2004).

MOVEMENT MAPS

Mehretu’s Black City is such a multidimensional ‘movement-space’ image. In it, layered drawings of structures suggesting city walls and fortresses ranging from early Japan and Mesopotamia to Hitler’s Atlantic bunkers along the French coast form hazy shapes of ruins at the paintings centre. These are in turn overrun by blueprint-like diagrams of military flight patterns and architectural drawings evoking both surveillance and erasure, blurring the distinction between fact and fiction and between past and present. One immediate sensation is that of looking down through these layers as through sheets of time in motion: various spaces fold into one another, shot through by lines in different forms of movement and overwritten by yet other lines. This produces an effect of moving palimpsestic space within which one force field is superimposed on top of the other, populated by scattered marks grouped together in various places.

What do these lines and marks spreading over the diagrammatically layered structures mean? In an interview, Mehretu has confirmed that, to her, the ‘fortress mentality’ is crucial for understanding urban history but adds that this particular work also concerns the contemporary political ‘fortresses’ emerging as the result of the current reactionary fears of terrorism and immigrant labour circulating in the Western world after 9/11. This also accounts for the title of her painting, Black City, on which she comments on her interest in ‘looking backwards in time’ in order to position the global presence of the USA and the development of the European Union as ‘a fortress in a context and history of behaviour’ (Sheets, 2007). However, as she progressed with her work, she also noticed how her making her characteristic marks on the painting broke down the ‘fortress effect’ by making the boundaries porous and permeable, functioning to both erupt as well as integrate the various spaces into the dynamics of her painting. She recalls,

In a notebook I tried to make a context for each mark that had a meaning. That’s how I started thinking of them as little characters behaving. They don’t have a meaning, not like a word or a symbol. They are little agents and that’s why they are smaller. (Mehretu interview in Pérez Rubio, 2007, p. 30)

The sometimes score-like distribution of these marks has Pérez Rubio assume that the ‘shapes resulting from the strong and fateful actions represented, individually and collectively, by these marks or notes strive to configure their own cosmology that appears in each painting as a special choral form and evokes the forms, colors, glazes and camouflage in instrumental compositions’ (Pérez Rubio, 2007, pp. 36–37). That is what makes them in some works reminiscent of the musical paintings of Kandinsky and Klee. But in Mehretu’s maps, these marks could, I would suggest,
also stand for our own location in the present anthropotechnical space in which we live and in which we are all interconnected: what happens in one part of the world will affect the rest of the world almost immediately (e.g. the political practices in the wake of 9/11, or the recent financial crisis). This space is increasingly IT-dominated and is, therefore, fluid, instantaneous and consistently interacting. The immediate positioning relationships that these new technologies produce are based on an Umwelt of information, which releases humans into a coordinate system of (re-)active real time. These new strategies and grammars of orientation that such coordinate systems demand have already been analysed from the perspectives of the natural and technological sciences. The humanities have, however, not yet taken full account of what this development implies, in particular that it has created a need to redefine anthropological conditions and practices. New grammars of orientation demand new forms of mapping. What is characteristic for the ongoing technological revolution, however, are the informatisation of space and a direct embedding of the representation in the spatial structure and in the spatializing technologies themselves.

The diagrammatic displacements of space and time in Mehretu’s whirling landscape could therefore also be seen to reflect the extent to which the technologies surrounding us generate new dynamic spaces in constant motion. In so doing, they produce interactive force fields in which the Cartesian subject–object framework seems severely limited. Instead, what becomes more relevant is the concept of implicated agent and expansive field in which the agency of any identifiable presence is intertwined with that of other agencies. This incessant interplay produces ‘agential spaces’—spaces in which agents are at once caught up transcending their immediate control and being concerned with the effective exercise of their somatic, social agency. In other words, these agents or presences are such situated and embodied forces that the exercise of agency is best understood in terms of introducing disturbances into this field, or tracing these intersecting force patterns.

These could be the agents at work in Mehretu’s moving space, in which they are forced to apply improvisational and variable perspectives as they position themselves, interpreting and recontextualizing, constantly leaving traces, memories and messages behind. Past and present form moments of articulate erasure, both on the level of the marks and of the underlying architecture, evoking both despair and potential. There is despair in the sense that these traces, memories or messages will never amount to any kind of authenticity or identity achieved, nor does the notion of centred space as a location where everything comes together fit the scenario in which these agents seem to gather and move through walls, foundations and boundaries. But there is also the potential for reconstruction in ways that have not yet been realized and for refiguring maps that have not yet been drawn.

NEW MAPS FOR NEW SPACES

The present technological development could, I suggest, be an explanation for the current profusion of maps in the humanities and in the arts. We are entering a sea change in the way we exist in different spaces as we can increasingly live with distant others as if they were near by. Although this may only be true for the technologically advanced part of the world, it has enabled us to develop and maintain relationships across the globe. These new dynamic groupings of societies and spaces necessarily call for new maps and mapping strategies, since such telematic vicinity has both its advantages and disadvantages – not least because we are also affected by the lives and actions of others who are very far away. What conflicts come from inhabiting a global village? Who is included, and who is left out? What impact can an individual have on the epic scale of history? These seem to be the implicit questions raised by Mehretu’s world map with the ironic title, Looking Back to a Bright New Future (2003), which shows the world reconfigured in dynamically diverging directions.

With its ‘geographical’ forms and shapes, the painting’s pastel cartographic colour coding directly refers to traditional world maps. The various geographical objects are, however, organized diagrammatically in the form of an amphitheatre with a white trapezoid, strangely hovering over the map’s centre. What does this white shape mark in a work that otherwise rejects the notion of centre and in which the moving forces seem to collide and contradict one another? The white form weighs heavily as a contrast to the pastel colours and to the intensely coloured bands and banners traditionally used for political demonstrations and propaganda designs, marking figurations and structures that are reminiscent of historically public places such as stadia, plazas, colonnades and arenas. Rhetorically, the banners, which forcefully erupt from the centre of the map, echo gestures of appropriation and control over the masses as we know them from political history. Although power and information appear to be circulating spontaneously, they are governed by other forces – unseen but contained in the white, ‘unwritten’ space.

According to Cay Sophie Rabinowitz (2007, p. 22), Mehretu started to reconsider what (political) independence in all its aspects, forms and consequences actually
implies during the time before the war in Iraq and subsequently reworked a work made earlier in the same year, Transcending: The New International (2003). Instead of a Mercator grid, the map-like wire diagrams underlying the work refer to blueprints of the modernist African city design which arose during the African Independence Movement of the 1950s, and which have since become ‘decrepit and dysfunctional’. The pastel map shades stand for the various power groups, which have configured themselves into the shape of amphitheatre, one of the historically oldest democratic structures, and from which the red banner lines emanate. The questions these configurations seem to articulate are: what does democracy entail? And what does a ‘war for democracy’ actually mean?

So what ‘protocols of cognition’ can we discern in Julie Mehretu’s cartographies of the future? Her preoccupation with this new dynamic ‘movement-space’ has been called ‘a perfect metaphor for the twenty-first century’ as well as ‘a fascinating redux of modern geometric abstraction, in the style of Lissitzky and Mondrian, completely turning that tradition on its head by reintroducing narrative and figuration’ (Sirmann, 2001). Despite its very personal iconography, the forceful patterns her diagrammatic figurations of narrative elements evoke challenge spectators to interpret them cartographically. In her opinion, however, maps can only be the first step in trying to reach a deeper understanding of any matter:

*The reason for using the language of mapmaking, or any language of Rationalism, is that in our modern civilization we try to understand everything in the world, whether it’s geography, whether it’s something intimate or a galactic phenomenon, whatever it is through the modes of science in terms of a rational approach. Even in politics, we say democracy works because most people benefit. We do that with everything.*

It’s an absurd play in the work, because art is in many ways the opposite of that, but my effort in trying to do a drawing and trying to understand myself is an intuitive process that very much mimics this other phenomenon. The way I play with a painting from the beginning, even with the marks, is to try to gain a rational understanding, even though you could never do that. That’s why the charts are unreadable. I try to structure them and make sense out of them from a very Cartesian, rational approach. (Mehretu interview in Pérez Rubio, 2007, p. 31)

As Mehretu seems to suggest, we cannot get away from Cartesian space since the mathematical calculations underlying it also provide the perspectives and projections of the responsive fields in which they operate. That does not mean that we are able to make sense of them: her participating agents are nevertheless at once caught up in fields transcending their immediate control and implicated in the effective exercise of their social agency. However, Cartesian space emerges out of these formalisations and symbolisations, rather than the other way round, that agential placements and positions emerge out of abstract Cartesian space. Instead, her maps suggest that the new spaces these agents inhibit are eccentric and shot through with other spaces functioning in relation to and constantly interacting with them. Exploding the dualist concepts connected with absolute space – past/future, fiction/reality and subjective/objective – she introduces space in her maps as something relative and open-ended, fluid and inherently dynamic but which operates beyond such dualisms, including that of hope and despair.

The move beyond hope and despair is strongly reminiscent of Walter Bejamin’s (1968, p. 249) appropriation of Paul Klee’s painting ‘Angelus Novus’, the angel of history, who looks at the world: ‘fixedly contemplating’, ‘his eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread’. What he is contemplating is the catastrophe of history:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurling it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 249)

Does not Benjamin’s compelling image inhabit Mehretu’s whirlwind movement maps with their palimpsestic wreckage of demolition and debris? Does not the ‘storm blowing from Paradise’ seem to pervade these archaeologies of the past, present and of an uncertain future, forcefully articulating ‘speed, dynamism, struggle and potential’ (as the artist herself designated her intent)?

Her hybrid high-velocity urban charts not only break with the past: seemingly abandoning a more hopeful stance toward the future, they embody the indeterminate, jagged and indeed chaotic facets of spatial orientation and positioning inherent in such dynamic, uncontrollable motion. They also probe the limits of graphic signification
by first eroding the fixedness of semantic structures and taxonomies of meaning, and then reassembling them into a vibrant equilibrium, generated by the irreducible multiplicity of ordering perspectives. As she has pointed out,

[The visionary cosmology in my work] stems from a desire to put things in context. I want that to be the way people look at the painting. I’m not necessarily making them to be epic, but the scales are big and there are many things going on. You can go from one point to the other and each point has a stage of importance. It mimics the way we operate in the bigger organism of our families, our villages, our cities, our time, our history, it’s about putting everything in context. (Mehretu interview in Pérez Rubio, 2007, p. 37)

Despite their bleakness, the stor(ies) told by her hybrid fragmented maps project what a potential future emerging from the confrontation, suppression and coercion of the past and the present would look like. The radical quality of Mehretu’s work is that the diagrammatic experimentation within her eccentric and unbounded cartographies of an uncertain future suggests poetic ways for agents to alter a chaotic present by creating new sensibilities and sensualities that do not rely on consumerism or capitalism but are built on collective actions and desire for social change.

BIORAPHLICAL NOTES

Christina Ljungberg, PhD, is Adjunct Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Her research focuses on visuals and narrativity, intermediality (in particular, the interaction between cartography and other media) and iconicity. Besides numerous articles in these fields, her publications include To Fit, to Join, and to Make, The Crisis of Representation: Semiotic Foundations and Manifestations in Culture and the Media (with W. Nöth) and Insistent Images (with E. Tabakowska and O. Fischer). She has just completed Redefining Literary Semiotics (with J. D. Johansen and H. Veivo, and Signergy (with J. Conradie and O. Fischer), and is currently working on her book Creative Dynamics: Diagrammatic Strategies in Narrative.

NOTES

1 Thanks to Vincent Colapietro for coining this apt expression.

2 As Nöth (in press) points out, the complex dual codenedness of medieval maps results from their codes of topography and choreography on the one hand, and historiography and mythography on the other hand.

3 As David Woodward argues, taking issue with Alan Turnbull’s (1989, pp. 19–20) claim that modern projective maps are highly symbolic constructs (‘non-indexical’) requiring training in order to be deciphered, and then goes on to qualify his claim by saying that all maps are ‘in some measure indexical’ (Woodward, 2001, p. 56).

4 However, at the same time, maps are also strongly indexical since they are both causally related to the territory they depict and orient their users either in their immediate geographical environment or in their mental imaginary space. They also display symbolic properties in their specific map symbols, toponyms and map shape (cf. Nöth, 2000, p. 490).

5 Peirce even used the metaphor of an optimum map that is so exact that it becomes a sign of itself to explore the philosophical question of self-consciousness (cf. Nöth, 1998; Gustavino and Havenel, in press).

6 A pertinent example of this is Mona Hatoum, whose political maps captured Said’s interest (Flagstaff and Said, 2000, p. 39).

7 Such ‘socio-political’ boundaries and ‘natural’ boundaries are what the philosopher Barry Smith calls ‘flat’ and ‘bona fide’ boundaries. As he points out, also ‘natural’ boundaries are not so natural as they may seem (Smith, 1995).

8 ‘Who draws the maps?’ asks Said in Culture and Imperialism, and continues: ‘The exile’s new world, logically enough, it unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction .... Much of the exile’s life is taken up by compensating for the disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule’ (1994, p. 100).

9 There were, however, exceptions: as Svetlana Alpers (1983, p.156) has shown, Dutch seventeenth century map makers, in particular Vermeer, expertly employed a variety of pictorial strategies to ‘make the world visually immediate’.

10 Many thanks to Vincent Colapietro for suggesting this in an email exchange in June 2009.

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