MAPPING OTHERWISE: IMAGINING OTHER POSSIBILITIES AND OTHER FUTURES

Nishat Awan

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My interest in mapping started with an interest in migration and diasporas. I wanted to represent the way space is experienced by those whose lives span different cultures, spaces and times, as well as the spatial experiences of those who are situated at the margins. Maps of course have a long history of narrating power and they have been instrumental tools in the claiming of territory. Yet, as many contemporary mapping practices have shown, maps can also be used in opposition to dominant narratives. Perhaps a key feature of all maps is their ability to visually depict different realities by distilling and privileging some information over others. In this sense, maps are always political and should be read as such. They are also always partial and perspectival, regardless of their claims to authority.

The relation of maps to representation is therefore fundamental; they frame, codify and distil. That this quality of maps is often hidden or left unacknowledged might be one important issue for a feminist mapping practice. How to draw a situated map that is still readable and useable, but does not resort to the bird's eye view of conventional maps? Or does the point of view matter, as long as the content is oppositional? In the collection *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*,[1] the editors state that in choosing the maps to include in the book, they realised that for them it was the content that held a radical potential, and not necessarily the way that they were drawn. It is true that the topographic conventions of Western mapmaking, including the adoption of longitude and latitude, are fundamental to what we now consider to be a map and without such conventions perhaps we lose a sense of what a map is, and what it is for. Yet, the dominant tropes of such mapmaking leave out much: scale, colour-coding, longitude, and latitude do not account for temporality, touch, memory, relations, stories and narratives—in fact, it is experience that is altogether removed.

Maps and agency

James Corner describes the "agency of mapping" as a tool for design in which the focus is on mapping as an activity rather than the map as artefact.[2] In this sense, mapping is considered propositional and could be a way of imagining different futures. As Corner writes, "mappings do not *represent geographies* or ideas; rather they *effect* their actualisation."[3] Corner is here writing on how mapping can be used within the disciplines of planning and architecture, of its role in design as an act that works with projections of the future. Citing David Harvey, he writes about "a utopia of process rather than form,"[4] that mapping as

[1] *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*, ed by Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat (Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2008).
[2] James Corner, 'The Agency of Mapping', in *Mappings*, ed by Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 214–253.
[3] Corner, pp. 214–253 (p. 225).
[4] Corner, pp. 214–253 (p. 228).

practice can contribute towards. Corner's account of mapping's agency is illustrated through maps that are grappling with ways of showing time and space in its dynamism through practices of drifting, layering and through the use of game boards on which to map out potential futures as scenarios. Yet, what is always missing in these accounts of mapping is the body. Perhaps this has something to do with Corner's original definition of mapping as abstraction, which, according to him, is the fundamental quality of all maps.

Whilst it is true that one way in which mapping operates is through abstraction, in a feminist mode of imagining the future, it would be an abstraction that is always returning to the real – it is a movement back and forth. The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz describes the real as: "The uncontained, the outside of matter, of things, of that which is not pragmatically available for use, is the object of different actions than that of intelligence and the technological."[5] The real therefore is the world before we apprehend it, it is outside representation. What Grosz refers to as "the thing" is the necessary process of making sense of this multiplicity, it is "the real we both find and make."[6] If maps are both abstractions that strive towards the real and things that point to a spatial and temporal specificity of the real, then they should also operate in ways that are able to access both these registers. On the one hand, maps should deal with a knowledge that is related to representations, measurements and symbols, and this is something that maps are very good at. But, on the other, they should also deal with a knowledge that is more intuitive and is accessed through bodily gestures and postures. In describing mapping as a practice that performs this movement back and forth, another conception of the time also emerges, one that is related to matter – both matter in the sense of the map itself as object but also matter in relation to the bodies of those involved in the process of mapping. As Karen Barad states, "one of matter's most intimate doings" is "its materialising of time. Matter doesn't move in time, matter doesn't evolve in time. Matter materialises and enfolds different temporalities."[7] This enfolding of different temporalities and spatialities could be one way of describing the practice of mapping otherwise and its relation to imagining other futures.

If maps are a way of working across the real, it is also useful to think what place such a practice of mapping could hold within a wider process. In the book *Spatial Agency,*[8] we were concerned with an underlying idea that the potential of agency, that is the power and freedom to act for oneself, was somehow inherently spatial – it had a spatial dimension. We were interested in exploring how agency might emerge through spatial practices, and it is interesting to note that many of those featured in the publication were using forms of mapping as part of their work. Our conception of agency was based on the classical duality, the ability to act independently, on the one hand and the constraints of social structures on the other. We followed Anthony Giddens' thinking that agency emerged through the interplay

[5] Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 179.
[6] Grosz, p. 168.
[7] Karen Barad, 'Re-membering the Future, Re(con)figuring the Past: Temporality, Materiality, and Justice-to-Come', Feminist Theory Workshop Keynote, Duke University, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7szDFwXyg&feature=youtube_gdata_player> [accessed 17 March 2015].
[8] Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

of these two poles, what he described as “the capability of acting otherwise.”[9] He writes of the reciprocal relationship between human agency and social structure and we followed this human-centred approach to think of agency as always residing in the architect or the user. We wrote of acting on behalf of others or acting with others. Corner’s undefined notion of the agency of maps is aligned to this definition, where the agency of maps is embedded in their use by architects, planners, the users of spaces etc. But perhaps a different definition of agency would lead to a different notion of the use of maps in imagining possible futures.

What is missing from the above account and also from Corner’s account is the question of materiality, the body, and of imagining agency as not only the privilege of humans, or at the very least not *only* emanating from human social structures and their relation to individuals. A different version of agency linked to the discussion of the real above is developed by Grosz, who describes another genealogy of thinking freedom and its relation to subjectivity. She starts from the writings of Henri Bergson, who did not rely on the Western philosophical tradition of setting up binary distinctions. For Bergson, the freedom to act was neither confined to the subjectivity of individuals nor to the structural conditions of society, instead, he posited that acts themselves are free. Free acts are conceived as those that take part in the becoming of the subject, that is, they express the subject in transformation. In couching free acts as such, Bergson’s concept of agency is affirmative, it is embedded within actions, in their possibility and in their performance. As Grosz makes clear in her appraisal of Bergson, neither the determinist position of structural conditions that will only allow one choice to be made, nor the libertarian position that allows a choice of a number of outcomes that are equally possible and remain available to the free will of the individual, acknowledge that the different outcomes were never equal in the first place. In this, Grosz is critiquing a notion of agency that relies solely on oppositional modes and is advocating a form of agency that arises through the creative potential held within life and matter.

In claiming such a notion of agency embedded within free acts, a feminist practice of mapping could be imagined that facilitates a move from abstracted possibilities caught within the oppositional logic of struggles towards the production of materially real potentialities that are more open and creative. For Grosz, this is more a capacity of the body than that of the mind, “linked to the body's capacity for movement, and thus its multiple possibilities of action.”[10] This reinforces, again, the crucial movement back and forth that mapping has to make between an abstracted realm that necessarily deals with representations, and a knowing *through* the body.

Mapping otherwise

Maps and mapmaking could hold a privileged position here in the unexpected ways in which they are able to bring together disparate knowledges and claims, juxtaposing ways of seeing the world. But this is a practice of mapping that is far removed from the abstracted nature of standard cartographic modes, and also from the ubiquity of contemporary mapping tools such as Google maps. In the type of mapping practice I am advocating, the abstractions of maps would be used in such a way as to mediate between the realm of representation and

[9] Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 216.
[10] Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom’, in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed by Diana Cole and Samantha Frost (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 139–157 (p. 152).

lived realities. This could mean, for example, moving away from a dominant mode of mapping where experience is elided through a mode of representation that privileges precision over the messy reality of life. Maps could instead describe social relations or connections that transcend spatial proximity. At the same time, maps can be used to mediate between different types of knowledge and constructions of space, from the professionalised world of architects or cartographers to more accessible forms of representation.

A different approach to mapping that does not rely on standard cartographic conventions will also imply a different understanding of space and time. Rather than the Euclidean concept of space as territory with fixed and stable spatial geometries, a topological understanding of space requires a relational approach that privileges continuity through change. Dynamic associations are made not due to spatial proximity but because of common properties. In cultural understandings of topological spaces, it is not only a question of the connections that are made but also of their quality, their temporal dimensions, historical reach, etc.[11] Time is no longer thought of as an accumulation or sequential movement, as the steady progress of one homogenous flow of time. It is instead thought of as duration. Time would be multiple, allowing for multiple future possibilities. This also has consequences for the ways in which the future is constructed. Mapping could be a mode that allows us to speak of the future not as pure projection, or as something that is in thrall to the past, but as a future that resides in and shares our present.

The term “mapping otherwise” tries to capture some of these aspects of thinking space and time, as well as the notion of agency described above as an assemblage of acts, objects and relations. Choosing to use “mapping” over “cartography” is important in making a break from the professionalised world of cartographers and to valorise instead the amateur knowledge of the non-professional specialist. This reveals a different ethics of mapping, one that neither takes the position of the powerful and the elite nor an explicitly oppositional stance, preferring instead a mode where the politics of representation allows others to be included in the mapping process, as well as acknowledging the mapmakers’ own positioning.

In the remaining section, I use a series of maps I have made to relate how mapping can be used to represent a lived knowledge of space, particularly in the case of diasporic subjects.[12] In diasporic lives, notions of space and time are most obviously topological since migration displaces subjects, producing specific modes of inhabitation through dislocated gestures and practices borrowed and adapted from other spaces and times. The ways in which notions of belonging and inclusion are constructed within diasporic lives is also topological, the differential inclusions of host societies, what Alain Badiou has called an excess of inclusion over belonging,[13] all point to ways in which diasporic lives construct space, time and belonging in ways that are different from those who remain in their place of origin.

These diasporic maps were all made along a single stretch of street in the London Borough of Hackney, which is situated in the northeast of inner London. The southern tip of the

[11] Rob Shields, ‘Cultural Topology: The Seven Bridges of Königsburg, 1736’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29 (2012), 43–57 <doi:10.1177/0263276412451161>.

[12] This research was carried out as part of my doctoral thesis at Sheffield School of Architecture and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

[13] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, New Ed (Continuum, 2011).

borough sits adjacent to the City with private development encroaching northwards. The site of the project, Stoke Newington High Street/Kingsland Road, runs north-south and extends from Stoke Newington to Dalston. The area has a large Turkish and Kurdish population and, being situated close to the site of the London Olympics of 2012, was undergoing significant transformation at the time the maps were made between the summer of 2007 to the end of 2008. This included the demolition of prominent existing buildings, the construction of new residential towers, as well as new transport infrastructure. Such private/public regeneration is often accompanied by the production of many maps—development plans indicating opportunities, constraints, zones, and phases. These mappings typically represent a bureaucratic exercise intended to create a formal record of a developmental process rather than encouraging a situation in which dialogue and participation is possible. They are also highly selective in what they choose to represent, they are neither a faithful description of an urban condition at a particular moment nor are they a representation of an idealised situation in the future that could be realised; instead, they are merely a predetermined stage in the process of urban development. These maps are linked to the requirement for participation and user consultation in the planning process. Although opinions are sought and questions asked, in the end, the limited nature of the choices and what is highlighted and enframed in these consultations leaves no room for any real discussion or conflict—the outcome is predetermined and the maps record a process in order to meet the obligation to consult residents. It is within this context that I carried out the mappings described below, which aimed to reveal the types of spaces that would be displaced through the development process, spaces that were marginal to the dominant use and understanding of the street. These mappings were concerned with revealing the different inhabitations of the street by its diasporic users, including the narratives of other places, and stories of how people came to be there.

Drawing Kurdistan in London

Starting with the premise that diasporic subjects reterritorialise space and often internalise the geographies of other places, I conducted a series of interviews with Kurds and Turks from very different political and social backgrounds. I wanted to understand how Kurdistan as an "imagined home" was constructed by the Kurdish people strewn across national borders, and also how it was constructed for those who are opposing the desire for an independent Kurdish state. At the same time, I was interested in how to map such border struggles without resorting to the dominant narratives of those in power. In a context where contested borders were not even allowed the ambiguity of dotted lines on official pieces of paper, how might these borders and territories be drawn through the experiences of those whose lives are affected by these contested spaces?

During the interviews, I asked people to draw a map of "Kurdistan" as they saw it in their mind. The conversations we had together whilst they were drawing the maps revealed how their experience of urban space in London was also inflected through the way in which they conceptualised Kurdistan. For some, Kurdistan was a geographic location, for others, a concept or a hope, and, for others still, it was embodied through a person, Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). Drawing or mapping thus became a tactic for speaking about these contested borders and situations, which were inscribed onto the

subjectivity of those I interviewed. The maps produced during these sessions vary enormously, both in what they choose to represent and in the way they were drawn. A wider question that these maps pose is whether where you are and who you are affects what you draw. In this case, it certainly did, producing mental constructions of what always fails to be represented in the hegemonic accounts of those in power. For the Kurds, until recently it was the refusal of the Turkish state to recognise their separate ethnicity, being referred to as “mountain Turks” instead. Mapping therefore functioned as a mediatory practice, a ruse for speaking about difficult journeys and personal stories. The gesture of hand-to-paper, which began as a self-conscious, deliberate stroke, slowly became a non-articulated movement, sometimes almost an auto-drawing, tracing maps made of gestures.

For some, the drawings were a description of home, for others, a journey or a narrative, as the act of drawing provoked stories that augmented the maps. For some, the map was drawn following their own journey, with the compass directions switched in order to follow their path. Where someone chose to start the map was also important. Diana, an Iranian Kurd who worked for a women’s rights organisation, was the only person to start her map in an area that could geographically be designated as a future Kurdistan. She had lived in the Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq and Turkey and said that she felt at home in them all. For her, the continuity of this space was a reality and her map reflected this attitude, the national borders of the surrounding states being just sketched out in the barest of lines, as a quick gesture. Another map tells the story of the invasion of Iraq as seen from the eyes of Derin, a young Turkish waiter who worked in a local café. Here, the map is a narrative of politics and promises. For him, drawing Kurdistan was almost impossible. The story of the US invasion of Iraq, and what he saw as their complicity in establishing a “Kurdish state”, was the main topic of concern. [Fig 1. Diana’s map] [Fig 2. Waiter’s map]

In each of these maps, the words are just as important as the drawings. It is the process of mapping rather than the final product that is important; the movement of hands and the words spoken. If I had permission, these sessions were recorded on film and some of the mappings include stills from these videos. Whilst the drawings produced could be described as “mental mapping” they are also a “material mapping”. The places where we spoke, the “props” that were used, such as a map of the area brought over by one of the interviewees, are all part of the mapping.

An allegorical map of Turkey

Summer 2007

Walking along Stoke Newington High Street you could almost miss the signs, open doors leading down into basements, shop fronts that could be empty but are not. Chairs sitting in a patch of sunlight on the Victorian pavement. There is another world here that I don't see, but which may also not see me.

Spring 2014

> *The basements seem to have disappeared. There are cafés here but they are different. They have confidence, a way of appropriating the pavement with many chairs and many tables. Things are a little different now.*

> *When I first started exploring the high street, I was told that if you were to map all the* kahve *on this one street, you would get a perfect map of Turkey, down to the last village. This little anecdote caught my imagination. Is there another map of this familiar street that others use to navigate by? A map that is not included in the London A-Z or on my phone?*

The *kahve* are Turkish and Kurdish social clubs or small cafés that operate as members only spaces where usually men gather to drink tea, play cards and chat. They are said to mimic the geography of Turkey, each place being affiliated to a certain area or a regional football team. The names of the *kahve* give an indication to their loyalties (Besiktas, Adana, Gurun…), which are usually those of the owner. In the space of the street there is an overlapping of the physical location of the *kahve* with their toponymic distribution that alludes to regional affinities elsewhere. This other geography overlaid on to the physical space of the street forms an allegorical map of Turkey that is performed daily in the everyday comings and goings of the *kahve's* diasporic users. I wanted to map this hidden layer that remains unseen for those users of the street who will never visit a *kahve*. In order to do this, I took a plan of the street and overlaid it with two maps of Turkey that were distorted according to the regional affiliations of the *kahve* on the street. On one of the maps, the country is elongated with Cyprus moving up to the middle, whilst the other map remains much closer to the original. Since the practice of naming reterritorialises space and produces borders related to the regional and political conflicts, solidarities and nostalgias of another place, it makes me wonder if this is a coincidence. Or did the owners actively seek to set up their *kahve* in proximity to others from their region? The geography that the map describes is gone now, displaced by another wave of territorialisation; this time it is the consumer culture of hip young Londoners.

Mapping possible futures

The maps described here operate in different ways; they depict marginal uses of space or tell stories that allow an understanding of how space is inflected through political subjectivities. Neither of the maps described above are propositional in the sense that designers and architects might think, but in their attempt to map space through other perspectives, they are thought of as propositional devices that open up future possibilities. What might the developments in that area of London have looked like if they had to address these uses of space and the politics embedded within them? Through mapping the invisible geographies that only reveal themselves through spending time there, both maps attempt to describe a space that is not merely physical. In the case of the *kahve* map, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find all the locations without being there and talking to those who visit the *kahve*. In the mapping of Kurdistan, the map itself acted as a mediator, it prompted the conversation and was a way of broaching difficult subjects. These mappings and observations were part of an attempt to explore the production of diasporic space

through processes of reterritorialisation and displacement. Through making these maps, sometimes on my own, sometimes with others and sometimes *by* others, a practice of "mapping otherwise" emerges, where experience is re-introduced. They are ways of exploring different possibilities or futures by giving voice to other narratives and uses of space. In thinking about maps not just as drawings or objects, but as ways of producing and disseminating knowledge about the world, the maps themselves take on a certain agency.

My concern in this chapter has been to explore what a feminist practice of mapping could be and how it might contribute towards imagining feminist futures. In much of the mainstream literature on mapping, a fundamental quality of maps is described as their ability to abstract, but in a feminist mode, this abstraction has to work in a back and forth movement with a different logic, one based in the bodily understanding of space. Bodies (and matter more generally) allow us access to the real and a glimpse into the multiplicity of space and time, its "co-constitutive dis-continuities," as Barad describes it.[14] We can then imagine a different notion of the future, one where the creative potential of life, its singular ability to differentiate, means that there is never just one future but many possible futures.

[14] Barad, 'Re-membering the Future'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7szDFwXyg&feature=youtube_gdata_player> [accessed 17 March 2015].