

THERE ARE NO MAPS OF THE WORLD

Timothy Morton



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(Fig. 48)

Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space-Map Projections: The Egg, 1976 Lithograph on paper 37 × 29" The JPMorgan Chase Art Collection

A map is a tool. For example, if you want to voyage round the Cape of Good Hope, because you've heard that there are these fabulous islands just east of Eden, the Spice Islandsyou've heard of this medieval poem by these Benedictine monks called "The Land of Cockaigne," in which on the Spice Islands, ready-made roast geese fly directly into your mouth; you invent point perspective and certain mapping techniques in order to see around the corner of the southern tip of Africa, so you can more easily get there. Once you get there, you find that the islands are just normal old islands, with people on them. So you colonize them and force the occupants to grow the fabulous spices you heard about in that song, which was a song about what monks think about how rich lazy people enjoy themselves.

Capitalism literally began as a fantasy, and that fantasy was pure unabashed consumerism. Everything makes sense as a way to justify and enact it: the invention of loans and venture capital and the birth of stock exchanges around Europe; the wars between England and the Netherlands; and the attempts to go in the other direction and this time, once more with feeling, really actually discover those spice islands (it's called America). The narrative of these physical places is like one-armed bandits in permanent jackpot potlatch mode. Inside every Puritan-work-ethic-driven human is a La-Z-Boy lounger glued to the television, like that prone fat white man, staring up at the sky, satiatedintoxicated out of his tiny mind in the Pieter Brueghel the Elder painting The Land of Cockaigne (1567). And so, about 800 years later, here we are, under the gigantic fat thumb of the monstrous hyperbolic Eden to the west, and its planet-destroying upgrade of "The Land of Cockaigne"-it's called McDonald's-incarnated (quite literally, as we are talking about meat

here) in the fantasies realized (white working-class European fantasies this time, not those of medieval monks) on Main Street. Walking up Main Street, USA, is walking through the fantasy space of a starving 19thcentury immigrant, escaping the potato famine in the 19th century. Just press this button, just swipe right, and all the spiced candies in the world will pour into your mouth. All the white bread and red meat that posh people eat will be available in this hyperbolic Eden.

In this sense, America, with its biggest shoe in the world by the highway, America itself is the biggest pile of Europe ever. "Great again." as in the catchphrase of the current white-supremacist president of the USA, doesn't just mean military or ideological might. "Great" also just means "a reliably huge pile of Europe" in just this way, a giant, gilded bowl of meat. Take another Vicodin and relax, anxious Land-of-Cockaigner. Normal ready-cooked-goose-flying will resume shortly. Relax in the La-Z-Boy. It's gonna be great.

To a hammer - a tool, for example a sardonic, compensatory fantasy in some medieval monk's headeverything looks like a nail. Be careful what you dream of. Be careful which maps you use. A map is a tool.

Map tools often project space as flat, because as we are not planetsize beings, the curvature of spacetime doesn't matter very much. Until it does. The fantasy of being able to transport oneself everywhere-the Spice Islands were like medieval asteroids, they were floating and the original idea was to attach chains to them and pull them toward Europe by ship-resulted in mobile phones and the internet, which necessitated Global Positioning Systems. Time aboard GPS satellites is moving faster than time on Earth's surface, so their clocks run a little faster than the ones in our phones to compensate for the curvature of the gravitational field. So it looks like even human maps need

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to be curvy now, sometimes. But nice neat linear grids will do if you want to capture an asteroid or voyage around the Cape of Good Hope or discover a convenient Land of Cockaigne called the islands of the Caribbean, where you can make commodities called enslaved Africans fly toward plantations. A thing may be a tool for another

thing. This is the best, least ideologically cloudy definition of technology. To an ant, a leaf is part of a house. To a leaf, sunlight is food. To an ant and a leaf, Earth's magnetic field is a shield against solar rays. To a merchant adventurer, a captain of primitive accumulation, a map is a way to see around corners, project power into the future, gain time, minimize danger. To Agnes Denes, a map is a way to make art. For us, Denes's maps are ways to break up the conceptual monopoly on maps-who gets to make them, and why. The whole world looks like a nail. Then someone makes all kinds of hammers that don't bash in nails. Some of them are made of slime. Some of them are made of breakfast cereal. She hands these hammers on the wall of an art ment to thinking in four dimensions gallery. People see them. They realize that the world doesn't just look like a nail. There are more things to do with the world than hammer away at it.

A thing is never an "object," a static inert solid blob (what an amazing fantasy that is). Object-oriented ontology (OOO) should really have a different name. We OOO philosophers should really have called it de-objectification-oriented ontology. But we ran out of ink. OOO brings out a primordial fantasy in the white Western imaginary about what an "object" is, a.k.a. something that has been hammered to death, that has experienced the worst possible thing that could happen to a subject. That's pretty telling. To an ideology about what white Western people are, everything else looks like that kind of object-to a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Just keep bashing

the Easter egg will pour out into your mouth. When such people hear the word object they see as in a mirror the worst thing that could happen to them. Better perhaps to think that to be is to become. This is how what seems subversive can often join up with what is most oppressive. Exxon, Facebook, and Google are the ultimate realization of the ideology that things are processes, a meme that Denes asserts in a David Bohm-like manifesto statement: Bohm, writer of beautiful books about relativity and quantum theory, Krishnamurti disciple, suicidally depressed Manhattan Project scientist. Let no one stand in the way of the digging machinery of deterritorialization! We are but salt spray effervescing in the ocean of capitalism, where everything solid melts into air.

The fact that such assertions are made in art space, however, disarms them by displacing them, with or without the deliberate intent of a human author. And as Denes's diagrams and David Bohm's commitsilently indicate, a process becomes a static object when you view it from a high-enough dimension.

Do we really need to dissolve things in some kind of conceptual or economic acid in order to tolerate their thingness? Let's try another way. For a start, a hammer is never really (just) a hammer. A hammer is also a landing strip for a fly. A hammer is a piece of spider tech in an abandoned garden shed. A hammer is a shapely lump of bacterial poop from several billion years ago-most of the iron in Earth's crust just is that. A hammer is an example of object withdrawal in an essay about Agnes Denes. If I bash a nail with a hammer, I get a hammer bash. If I lick the hammer (I am a curious feline), I get a hammer lick. If I think about the hammer, I get a hammer thought. If the hammer was some kind of special

lt's a map. But it's not just a map. It's a piece of art. It's a gymnasium for a spider. It's an electrostatic surface for dust to be attracted to. It's an example of the genius of an artist in an essay by an object-oriented philosopher, It's a way to show how white Western violence carves up the world in the name of stupid fantasies about how other people enjoy themselves. But it's also a way to show how that world is never, ever fully encapsulated or shaped or appropriated by such a vision. Such a vision merely tries to shut down the futurality of the future, the possibility that things can be different. Ideology tries to automate what we do and think about maps. But it can't win, not really, not even if it's armed with night vision goggles and ballistic guidance systems. It can't win, because in order to be a thing at all, a thing withdraws from all its appropriations. If it was just an idea in someone's head, or a construct in a discursive archive, or just a pile of atoms that nanotechnology could rearrange into a ready-cooked goose flying straight into a monk's mouth, then sure, ideology wins. Objects are nothing. They are just manipulable lumps for achieving a certain end. There are no people. There are just manipulable objectified blobs: blobs of atoms of blobs of discourse.

But then you'd never be able to take the idea of maps and the technology of map projection and reappropriate them for artistic use. So (sigh of relief) that can't be true. So we can be grateful to Denes for proving that to us

Map of the world: what does it even mean? A world is not something

missions, is on the one hand a utoyou are extensionally "in." If humans ever decide to colonize Mars. because Earth is uninhabitable, thev will still be "on Earth" in the better sense of world. World is everything that you're into, not something that you are in. The world of football is everything that football players and fans and media (and so on) are into. It's not a point on a map. So, fascinatingly, a map of the world is never just a set of extensional points. (As we have just seen, a set of extensional points are themselves never just a set of extensional points. They are for something and for someone.) A map of the world is precisely a

map designed for the development of a certain world, a certain set of projects that someone or some group is into. The ideological ruse of a map is that it's "just" a set of points, but I am sure the reader is familiar with how the standard Mercator (the clue is in the name) projection favors Europe and North America and, during the Cold War, made the Soviet Union look scarily huge. Africa is much smaller on this map, like a torso belonging to the head that is Europe. The Peters projection makes Africa look as vast as it should be, and cuts Europe and North America down to size. There are no maps of the world. Maps are for worlds.

Turning a global map into a doughnut, as Denes has done, is a very significant project. But imagine the reverse: one would have to squeeze a doughnut by hand to crush it into a sphere. In other words, to transform the globe of the Earth into a doughnut is a work of extreme force. What imaginary alien strength requires Earth to be a doughnut or a nautilus, and what kinds of immense violence would it entail? Such projections require that we reverse engineer the world it would support, and it's a world that would destroy the hopes and dreams of even the most powerful terrestrial humans. The view that sees Earth from space, as in the earthrise images from the Apollo

pian hippie gaze from out of the first issue of the Whole Earth Catalog. On the other hand, the flip side of this distant gaze is evil incarnate. "He's got the whole world in his hands" (as the earthrise hymn puts it) implies that "he" is capable of crushing it like an unwanted Christmas ornament Denes's work may appear mathematical and composed, but maybe that's the whole point. The power of art is to suspend the violence of social processes, literally (on the walls of art museums) and metaphorically, Better to suspend it there than to act it out, with logistics and mutually assured destruction The logical neatness, the

scintillatingly perfect diagrams, the hymns to dialectical progress, are all suspended in the necessary finitude of things, because as someone who plants wheat in Manhattan knows only too well, true progress would mean getting over the very idea of progress, before it succeeds at the game of Planet Death for which it was unconsciously programmed. As Denes, channeling Kurt Gödel (the guiding spirit of OOO) puts it in The Human Argument (1969 - 70; p. 59), one must be able to speak nonsense in order to be true.

ISOMETRIC SYSTEMS

ISOMETRIC SYSTEMS IN ISOTROPIC SPACE-MAP PROJECTIONS From Study of Distortions

Map Projections, like most of my work, maps human perimeters within the changing aspects of reality and involves distortions and perspective, probability and space relations, transformations and interactions of phenomena. In essence, mathematical forms are projected over fluid space to create distortions of our globe into the pyramid, the cube, and the dodecahedron (three polyhedral); the doughnut (tangent torus); the egg (sinusoidal ovoid); the snail (helical toroid); and the lemon (prolate ovoid). Additional forms are the hot dog and the geoid.

Entropy (amorphous continents) envisions and maps unique phenomena in the creation or final entropy of global systems and universal coordinates in space/time.

Fragmentation (an integral part of my work for the past ten years, closely aligned with Study of Distortions) is here applied to the floating continents.

Map Projections creates sculptural form in celestial space and presents analytical propositions in visual form. It is a tantalizing game if one learns to read between coordinates and doesn't mind making sport of the human predicament. It takes place in hypersphere using all of our space-our entire orbiting home in the universe. Map Projections is sculptured reality, based on the conflicting and interdependent elements of art and existence, illusion and reality, imagination and fact, chaos and order, irrationality and reason. It projects a dynamic world of rapidly changing concepts and measures, where the appearances of things, facts, and events are assumed manifestations of reality and distortions are the norm. In this new relativistic existence, objects become processes and forms are patterns in motion. Matter is a form of energy and our own human substance is but spinning velocity. There is no solid matter and no empty space; time becomes an earthbound reality but remains an enigma in the fourth dimension. Even the laws of nature may undergo evolutionary changes and one becomes aware of the relativity of reality. Knowledge must be reassessed to cope with the new concepts of probability and catastrophe theories, curved space, black holes, the uncertainty principle, and possible other universes. We must create a new language, consider a transitory state of new illusions and layers of validity, and accept the possibility that there may be no language to describe ultimate reality, beyond the language of visions.

Map Projections enters art in the form of process, involving the pleasures of doingshaping, transforming, splitting, erasing, and the excitement of the search, the hunt, the analysis, the discovery.

Point of departure: rejection of existing information, zero dimension. Followed by the amassing of new data, assessment, and choice. The anatomy of form is studied. vectors are built, earth measurements and scale factors rearranged, grid systems created, and dimensions added. And when the perfect form slowly emerges, it is carefully obliterated, dissected, and pulled apart, not only to find further beauty but to gain other perspectives. The live skin of the globe is peeled, the dynamic mantle stripped bare to expose the membrane of grids and coordinates down to the core of gravitational mass, the nucleus. At this point elusive processes and invisible structures begin to emerge. Longitude and latitude lines are unraveled to form networks of consciousness on new levels of awareness. The remaining points of intersections are cut, and the continents allowed to drift. Gravity has been tampered with, earth mass altered, polar tension released. The north pole is forced to meet the south or they are pulled apart.

The consequences are then observed, weighed, and reassessed. There is change in orbital rotation, chemical structure, physical operations, gravitational pull, time dilatations, itidal waves, compression and expansion of matter, and of course. whatever the necessary effects are on us, inhabitants. The remaining degrees float in space to map the moment, eventually to realign themselves around new forces and form new loyalties. The boundaries have been transgressed, the orbital soin arrested, and momentum held still in conceptual form.

But the hard-won knowledge is once again relinquished, and new forms and possibilities are sought. And there you have it. Substance and matter, structure and system blend with first causes, final causes, and the *ex nihilo*. Polar implosion, velocity, momentum, inertia, the quest, the hunt. Searching for the logic of matter, a glimpse at the formation of form, knowledge gained and abandoned, the game won or lost. And the game is all there is.

Agnes Denes, 1976



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—The Pyramid, 1976 [cat. no. 87]



Map Projections: The Pyramid, 1976 [cat. no. 88]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Egg, 1974–76 [cat. no. 89]

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From the series STUDY OF DISTORTIONS - ISOMETRIC SYSTEMS IN ISOTROPIC SPACE, 1973 - 1974. May projection - deal with defined undefined

boundaries and space relations

Six basic shapes were created in various mathematical projections. The cube, the pyramid, the dodecahedron (12 fareted polyhedron), a suail (helical toroid), a doughment (tengent torus) and the egg. There were 18 images printed in an edition of 25, while

then were hand selected into 50 unique suite of 9. Each suite is designated with a roman memoral I through L. no two suites are alike. Taking into consideration this method of relection, there are 48,620 possible combinations before a repetition should occur, according to the theory of protability of chance occurrence.

In addition to the roman memoral designating a unique suite, each print is individually membered on 1/25, and is signed by the artist.

all impressions are on arches paper, 13 4/ * 19/4 with form and deckle edges, printed at nove scotta College of and + Design Lithe Work shop by John Hutcheron between Des 2 + De 19, 1974, and publiched by Editions 99 in new York.

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Study of Distortions—Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space: Map Projections, 1973–74 [cat. no. 91]





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A DECEMBER OF





Study of Distortions; Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Cube, 1978 [cat. no. 93]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space — Map Projections: The Lemon (prolate ovoid), 1974 [cat. no. 94]







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Untitled From Fragmentation, 1998 [cat. no. 95]



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27/15 Aque, 9/200, 9/20







Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Doughnut, 1976 [cat. no. 97]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space -- Map Projections: The Snail, 1974 [cat. no. 98]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Hot Dog, 1976 [cat. no. 99]

MARCH POLICE





Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space — Map Projections: The Pyramid (The World From Below), 1978 [cat. no. 101]





Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space — Map Projections: The Snail, 1978 [cat. no. 103]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space -- Map Projections: The Doughnut (tangent torus), 1980 [cat. no. 104]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Pyramid; 1380 [cat. no. 105]



AGNES DENES:

PROMETHEA OF PARADOX

Lucy R. Lippard