

The Evergrowing Map A Fluid Account on Cartography

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Abstract Geography and cartography lay in the intersection between two knowledges, namely physics and geometry. In his book *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce*, Michel Serres shows how geometry – and the consequent static model of reality, on which cartography is traditionally based on – originated from the mechanics of fluid, as fluid was, in the atomistic philosophy, the process of agglomeration and dissolution of things made by atoms. In the last two decades, thinkers like Michel Serres, Tim Ingold, Luce Irigaray and others, have raised awareness on the possibility of conceiving reality on a fluidity based model, in order to better explain the complex, *moiré*, variety of our experience of the world. In front of the problems raised by the rapid changes happening in the physical and biological realm, the model of the world as a static plane on which object are situated and experienced is no longer sustainable, because it is unable to describe and orient human being between the emerging characters of life on earth. A new sensibility to acquire orientation in the multi-faced and multi-layered world goes hand in hand with the one of a new geographical and cartographical description of physical reality. Through the concept of *evergrowing map* this article aims to outline a cartographical strategy of orientation through a fluid conception of the world, based on multilayered representations of the territory rooted in multiple relations weaved by human inhabiting the world.

Keywords Cartography. Fluidity. Palimpsest. Michel Serres. Maps.





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Maps are a tool for orientation and description of reality. They serve to understand one's position and describe the territory one is traversing, so as to reach reliably¹ a destination or goal. However, the idea that orientation can be reduced to knowing one's position in space - the coordinates of one's 'point' on a plane - seems to have reached a turning point: even if the surface of the Earth has been discovered and mapped altogether, thanks also to satellite systems, the space in which human beings inhabit and move never ceases to hold surprises. Half a century ago a forest, an area neither urbanized nor exploited by humans in any way, could be represented as empty territory on a map, just as empty is, even today, the surface of the sea on Google Maps. Today, historical-environmental circumstances, from global warming to the problem of natural resources to the emergency over the staggering decline in biodiversity and the increase of migratory fluxes, call for new ways of representing the earth, new descriptions of reality that allow humans to orient themselves not only on the surface of the globe, but also in the multiplicity of its thicknesses, in the continuous flow of processes at work that compose the reality we experience.

The idea that the truth of space - the concept on which both cartography and geography are based - consists in its homogeneous stillness (Newton 2018, 70) and absence of form, demonstrated all of its destructive potential. Behind such a model, commonly referred to as 'absolute', lies a theoretical framework that goes back to the origins of the relationship between physics and geometry, and which, if we want to lay the theoretical foundations of a different mode of orientation, must be critically retraced. What is more, insofar as traditional cartography carries with it well-defined structures of domination and oppression, seeking new ways of describing and orienting space becomes an opportunity to rediscuss balances of power.²

If we exclude for a moment the artistic expertise needed to make any map, cartography can be said to stand at the intersection of two knowledges: physics and geometry, which correspond to the two instrumental needs we mentioned at the beginning, namely, description and orientation, respectively. Either of these poles, i.e., nature (I use this term to indicate the *physis* with which physics is concerned) and the geometric-mathematical system, appear to be absolutes; absolutes in the sense that they do not depend on any particular point of view, or rather on a point of view that suppresses itself as a historical particularity to make room for the stability of numbers and

1 As Heidegger notices (1984, 20), the nature of the means, to which tools can be ascribed, is in its reliability to accomplish a task.

2 To understand how power is produced and reproduced in and through space, a key text is Lefebvre 1999.

objects. But this same possibility of suppression is not true, from the account that Michel Serres offers in *The Five Senses*, following Leibniz. There's no way (except for God) for an eye to overtake the profile of the single thing and the "coordination with the surrounding visible" (Serres 2016, 46); geometral, in this sense, doesn't mean completely abstract neither objectual, as "the geometral subject, far from perceiving a geometral-object, sees space as the sum of places, while still seeing each thing according to its profile" (47).

Even after at least fifty years of criticism about the absolute paradigm, it seems that today the conception of space as an absolute reality that lies under a world made of objects is still rarely questioned outside academia. Today it's really common to travel in unknown places, for work or tourism, and orientation in those situations is almost-inevitably demanded to G.I. systems, such as the well known Google Maps, that lies precisely on an absolute and uniform plane. Even the possibility of a user-implementation of those maps doesn't move forward the same model: it consist of creating landmarks on the surface, adding information to the plane. But they're not related one another, they don't build a spatial experience but simply stay on the space. The point of view is external, an abstract subject.

This belief in the existence of a static and stable reality for the subject to orient on is the point Michel Serres focuses on, in particular, in his *The Birth of Physics*. In this text, Serres' aim is to understand the nature of that philosophical concept that has always made atomistic physics obscure and, apparently, absurd: the *clinamen*. It consists of the kind of 'wind' that, at a random place and time, creates a minimal deviation and initiates the movement of atoms committed along the original fall by virtue of their mass. According to the French philosopher, this strange phenomenon is far from unthinkable; indeed, far from being the black hole of the atomist system, it constitutes its most concrete instrument, the point of contact between the philosophical system and the world: "a flow always is or becomes turbulent. The *clinamen* is, first of all, the infinitesimal turbulence, but it is also the passage from theory to practice" (Serres 2018, 106). The mistake is to consider "the original fall of atoms in the global framework of a mechanics of solids" (23), that is, to think in the terms of static mechanics (which brings together most of modern mechanics) a concept that in the bosom of Greek physics was linked to fluid mechanics. If we think of the fall of atoms not as a set of falling solid 'balls' but as a real laminar flow of atoms composing a fluid, then it is easy to see that the most normal and inevitable thing is precisely the original mixing by which the fall is configured as a whirlwind and not as an ordered bundle. The evaluation and, subsequently, the elimination of the gap that occurs in every fall is the business of geometry. According to Serres, geometry stands in relation to physics as, first and foremost, a theory of evaluated gap

and its overcoming, that is, as a conscious reduction of the experience of the fluid whirlwind to a model, through the elaboration of a “statics of movement” (Serres 2018, 67) based on the idea of the minimum angle as a minimum deviation to get rid of. When discussing Archimedes, Serres’ goal is to show that the Greeks “produced rigorous formal systems and dissertations upon nature, like two separate linguistic families, or two disjunct wholes” (31): on the one hand, therefore, nature as the absence of a plane, or rather as a laminar plane that continually morphs into whirlwinds in search of the unstable equilibrium of a form; on the other hand, geometry that takes the form of “is a discourse on inequality, which cancels itself out as it grows. It evaluates the deviation, describes it, measures it and brings it back to zero” (39-40). We are faced with a paradoxical reversal of the order with which we habitually think of these two sciences. The geometric, pure, quality-free, metrically ordered plane is understood as an *a priori* of our experience of the world at least since Kant. Consequently it genealogically precedes the physical world of temporal and changing reality. The instrument comes before the substance on which it operates. Serres launches himself precisely against this genealogy in *Le Gaucher boiteux*, where he writes that:

Anaximander discovered or constructed the indefinite space in which Greek mathematicians, followed by Euclid and others, later and seamlessly, placed the objects of geometry, points, lines, planes, solids and vectors. Assume that such objects, whatever they may be, recede from each other indefinitely; will leave between them the ultimate desert abstraction proposed by the pre-Socratic, and without which nothing in mathematics could ever have been thought. However, a famous fragment of Simplicio declares that the indefinite emerged “at the moment its inventor understood that the elements, air, water, earth and fire, pay each other the penalty and expiation for their mutual injustice”.³ (Serres 2017, 158)

In conclusion, the “Northwest Passage” between physics and geometry, which makes the latter an abstraction aware of itself and of its own debt-fee to physical reality, consists in the permanence of the relationship between objects in space (159), which ontologically constitute the plane through its own presence or present-absence. The atomist void-plane then, even where it resembles the Cartesian, isotropic, proto-modern plane, shares with nature its dependent and relative character. Any space is permeated by a tension made by relations between things (man included) that can be excluded to give

3 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

rise to mathematical space, but which nevertheless reappears in contact with reality, asserting its concrete, empirical transcendentalism (Deleuze 1995). In nature there is no empty, isotropic plane devoid of “operation”, rather, the plane itself arises from the operations among the elements acting in what, only then, can become its interior (Jammer 1996, 86). Serres seems to suggest that the plane itself as a static structure has no connection with the plane of reality as a processual, fluid, changing and tumultuous creative process of entities and forms.

It now seems clear that maps, and more generally any system of representation of reality, are not simply pure lenses that return an intact reality, but rather devices capable of producing, reproducing or favouring certain orders of power. In cartographic representation, there is always an ontogenetic, as well as a descriptive, component. The notion of “cartographic anxiety” elaborated by Martin Saxon (2016a, 112) shows precisely the effects that the ability of maps to “create reality in the territory itself” (113) have on the inhabitants of the mapped areas. In other words, the choices made in representing the land affect and shape the land itself. For the same reason, cartography is far from a harmless science. Returning to our present, it is worth asking whether traditional cartography, carrying with it the belief that the world is in its essence a pure space, is an adequate tool for perceiving and guiding us in a world whose complexity is increasingly urgent to preserve.

Let’s take a closer look to three kinds of spaces, that for different reasons are now of outmost importance both for the description and orientation of contemporary world. This is not to say that these kinds are the only one to which this article’s argument is suitable, I’m only offering examples of situations that well fit this argument and, most importantly, inspired it. The first ones are margins of cities, especially western or western-like ones, that are difficult to grasp, from a geographical point of view, if we rely only exclusively on a traditional map. The division between the main municipality and the periphery ones, mirrors in the co-presence of multiple cultures and historically stratified cultural milieux. In these spaces, the only possible geographical reading is the one that stays in between the fluid encounters of multiple individuals and histories, that are involved in a non-stop process of mutation and adaptation, in which the intervention on space is one of the active forces. A second kind of space can be seen in rural areas, especially the ones that are not involved in massive agroindustrial processes, such as “Mountains in the Middle” (Varotto 2020). In these areas, there’s a relevant need of a geographic narrative that is able to highlight the historical backgrounds (and resources) as well as the present demographic processes. People living in those areas can mostly rely on resources and practices that are difficult to transmit and represent through a traditional map, such as pastures with

specific biodiversities (García-Dory et al. 2021), strong and localized artisanal traditions and foodscapes (Fontefrancesco et al. 2023) that are the result of many years of adaptation and dwelling of the space. A third kind of space that can be seen as a possible laboratory for alternative and even critical forms of cartography are the areas where strong migratory fluxes happens. Whether we are talking about seas, mountain passes or zones that precede a frontier. These places need to be comprehended way deeper than what traditional cartography can do. If we agree that the world is not made of static objects put on a surface, then those migratory fluxes and their trajectories are part of the space, and need to be included also as geographical data. As Forensic Architecture frequently demonstrates (such as in the work dedicated to *drift-backs* (Forensic Architecture 2024), boat maneuvers and trajectories operated in the Aegean Sea against people seeking rescue), geography need to broaden its perimeter in order to properly represent and orient a space of conflict, welcoming data analysis, video and textual narrations and innovative visual solutions. For now, we referred mostly to socially-battled spaces, but the same argument works for biologically-battled spaces, often related to climatic processes. Both humans and non-humans are part of the Harlequin costume of the earth's surface, that can no longer be reduced to "virginal coat" (Serres 2016, 237). New tools are needed to orient us in those unprecedented phenomena. This task has a peculiar aspect: we need to draw the map of territories at once very well-known and completely new. The tools used to make it known are no longer of any use because, relying on a static physical reality, they fail to account for the multiplicity of processes at work, which continually reshape the territory's physiognomy and experience.

At this point, the simplest but least usual solution is to return to pose ourselves in the original condition of all mappings and perceptions of space, that is, that of walkers, or, as we shall see later, navigators. With no points on the sheet to indicate the route in advance, "this way of dwelling and understanding the world is based on a 'traveller's path', the experience of land which arises by moving through it, that differs fundamentally from the notion of land as fixed bounded plots, typical of European based perceptions of the land surface" (Johnson 2010, 138). Without having a point to reach, we are forced to draw trajectories "on pen-toe" along the paper and, drop by drop of ink, to build a track (*pathway*)⁴ that connects in the same story human and space. This pathway is the starting point of the *evergrowing map* we will eventually arrive at.

Let us return again to Serres' text: we can conclude that, with

⁴ "Rather than a space, the notion of pathway describes a socio-spatial constellation that aggregates heterogenous elements" (Saxer 2016b).

respect to the fluid and manifold variety that originates the world, geometry unaware of its own debt of existence becomes responsible for an annihilation: it in fact offers a set of unambiguous coordinates to orient oneself, a yardstick for measuring the world, but this world and this orientation are inert, dead, they concern a static vision that exists only at the price of killing the space of our concrete experience. Carl Ritter, quoted by Franco Farinelli in the first pages of *Geography*, writes this clearly: “maps stand to the essence of the world as the anatomy of the corpse stands to the living substance of the heart” (Farinelli 2003, 21). It is a practical demonstration that geography, as Farinelli himself writes, tells not only *where* things are, but also *what* they are (37). When this second question is not asked, it is simply because this ‘something’ is reduced to nothing, to death.

On the geometric plane nothing moves. The world, seen through a traditional top-down map, could die and life could cease, without any change on the map. Entire aquifers, fields and portions of land could cease to produce edible food and water, and yet their cartographic representation would not change. Human beings today are immersed in exactly these kinds of changes and it is within them that they need to orient themselves.

It is not true that traditional maps are drawn from God’s point of view. The “extraterrestrial” point of view (Calvino 1984), has nothing of the divine one that Leibniz described as the totality of all profiles simultaneously. Perfect perpendicularity does not consist in the multiplication of viewpoints, understood as the sensitive and perceptual (not only visual) nodes from which knowledge of the world is articulated, but in the indistinct departure from the perceptual ecosystem and thus, literally, near-death.

How did it happen that the descriptive requirement of the physical nature on which the map insists was overridden by the geometric one, related to orientation? It is necessary to concentrate on the moment when the reversal in the genealogy identified by Michel Serres becomes taken for granted. This moment, if we were to identify it precisely, I believe may consist in the words with which Newton calls absolute space, that is, precisely that desert, empty and isotropic space, “true space” (Newton 2018), addressing the other as “relative space”. Many authors have identified the English physicist as the turning point that leads directly to the Kantian perspective, in which the plane of absolute space becomes the foundation of experience and no longer, as in the atomism with which Serres is concerned, the derivative by subtraction of an eternally moving function. It was this revolutionary step that opened the door to modern cartography as we know it. Here, too, description (absolute space as true space) and orientation (man as a point in neutral space, orienting himself thanks to a coordinate system outside the world) go hand in hand.



Figure 1 Luca Vitone, Carta atopica. 1988-92. Map, plexiglass, 68.5 × 99.5 cm.
Collezione AGI, Verona

The real problem we face today is that the plane on which we have for centuries undisturbedly placed objects, roads, our own bodies, has proven its agency. In other words, it has proven to be null and void (and dangerous) if the processes that shape it are not taken into account. This sort of muteness into which, suddenly, the main support of the cartographic tool has resolved itself is well demonstrated by a series of works by artist Luca Vitone entitled *Carte atopiche*, belonging to his very first production.

If we take away from maps their toponyms, that is, that element which in its complete conventionality robs maps of their objective character, all that remains is a dumb and useless sheet of paper. What remains is pure space, pure representation that achieves the opposite result from the desired one of describing and orienting reality.

The agency that space demonstrates when considered in conjunction with the processes that constitute it had already been highlighted, with regard to urban space, by Michel De Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Reacting to the failures of modernism and focusing on the concrete dynamics by which space is inhabited in

urban contexts, the French author had highlighted the fact that space is never neutral. On the contrary, every urban choice, every closure and every opening of the inhabitant's possibilities for action, affects the life and political existence of individuals and the community. As in De Certeau's text, today the surface that is highlighted by traditional cartographic representation matters less than any other aspect of our experience of the world: less than the richness or poverty of the soil, less than the healthiness of the aerial medium of the biosphere, less even than the sky and its role in the continuation of life.

Awareness of this irreducibility of the physical world to surface also means openness to a new human experience of space. Today there is a need to rethink the 'force' of space, which rebels against its simplifications, the processual thickness that is revealed in the nature of every surface; and cartography can help to represent this possible need.

Michel Serres has reflected extensively throughout his oeuvre on the notion of fluidity, understood as a true expression of the consistency of the world and experience, to such an extent that he has defined his own work as a "navigational map-a mobile and floating inventory" (Latour 1992, 105). But he is not the only one. The debate about the possibility of perceiving the world as a set of fluid flow processes that stochastically and momentarily shape what we call objects has involved several thinkers in the physical and human sciences. For example, Tim Ingold who, in much of his output, has reflected on how forms are generated from flows: "If there is regularity in the form of the artefact, it comes from the fluent rhythmicity of the movements that gave rise to it" (2013, 45). The very notion of line, fundamental to his thought, is nothing more than a tool for modelling such fluidity. The earth, the *geo-* of geography, is composed of folds, of forms in which flow is structured and deconstructed - not by objects placed on a surface. The mountain is not an object on the earth's surface, just as the path is not a line drawn on the earth, but both belong to the earth itself: the forms are the handwriting of the flow of the earth's material life. As Perullo writes, "the life of beings is a flux that is born, develops, and continually transforms itself among masses, spirals, tangles, and crossing/running lines not on the surface of the world but in it, in the sense that it is this incessant process that constitutes it" (2016, 404). Ingold himself spoke specifically about how solidity is to be understood as a particular state of fluidity, and not vice versa (Ingold, Simonetti 2022). Luce Irigaray showed how metaphysics, understood in heideggerian terms as the being of the entity in the age of technology and nihilism, is intimately linked to the solid earth and 'evaporates' in contact with an element as widespread and fundamental as unthinkable, air:

Metaphysics always supposes, in some manner, a solid crust from which to raise a construction. Thus, a physics that gives privilege to, or at least that would have constituted, the solid plane. Whether philosophers distance themselves from it or whether they modify it, the ground is always there. As long as Heidegger does not leave the “earth”, he does not leave metaphysics. The metaphysical is written neither on/in water, nor on/in air, nor on/in fire. Its *ek-sistence* is founded on the solid. And its abysses, whether from on high or on low, doubtless find their explanation in the forgetting of those elements that do not have that same density. (Irigaray 1999, 2)

Such perspectives hinging on the physical notion of fluidity have the great merit of trying to account, at least in theory, for the complex system of mixtures, contradictions, causes and effects of which we suddenly find ourselves too little aware actors. Climate issues for example are as much about air as they are about land, as solid as they are about air and liquid. We are being pushed in the direction of an unthinkable future, and the force that pushes has nothing of the static mechanics, but is enacted through a patchwork of elements that, at a distance, seem to us unreadable and incoherent, confused.

Part of this difficulty in consciously reacting to a fluid system of forces stems from “distantism” (Clark 2017), upon which our perception of reality and much of cartography are based. Space is essentially a seen space, that needs distance to be perceived; there is only little room for the other senses in cartography. By remaining at a distance, however, the relationships we can have with the world, which are mostly sensory, diminish dramatically (Serres 2016; Levin 1993).

At this point we need to ask whether and how it is possible to imagine cartography and geography of physical reality viewed from the standpoint of fluidity. The explorer Robert Shaw writes “after all, we do not desire to know a country in order to map it, but we map it in order to know it” (Shaw 1871, 18): cartography has always been used to control – a subject reducing a territory to an object of knowledge – but now, in the irreducible multiplicity of the world’s thickness, any purpose of control fails and any static grid becomes useless. Meanwhile, the ontogenetic power of cartography can be useful to rethink cartography in a political way. If we know that description, as well as orientation, is never pure and detached, then is possible to orient geographical enquiries toward descriptions and orientations that work as agents for the spaces they insist on. At the same time, geography can be used to create awareness and self-representation of communities that live in certain areas (of the kinds that we mentioned before), opening to co-projection of maps and spatial accounts.

It is necessary to ask how we orient ourselves in this fluidity. In this regard, there is one point on which all the thinkers we have cited,

from Ingold to Serres, via Heidegger, De Certeau and Irigaray, agree: the internal point of view, that means to put attention on the geographer, as well as the user, as a part of the description. It is summed up well by the geographer Eric Dardel, when he says that geography is based on the link between man and earth: “geographical science presupposes that the world is understood geographically, that man feels and knows himself to be linked to the earth as a being called to fulfil himself in his earthly condition” (1986, 38). This means never leaving the position of the walker, the explorer that with “attentive observation” (Erlwein, Gandy 2019) dwells an unknown land, or an unknown aspect of a land, with the aim of describing and orienting. Again, leaving the idea that there’s a static surface to rely on, distractedly. There follows a passage where it is well understood how the work of the geographer, of the Dardelian geographer, is inextricably linked with closeness to the land and its variety:

Everywhere geographic space is carved into matter and diluted in a mobile or invisible substance. The pure space of the geographer is not the abstract space of the mathematician: it is the blue of the sky, the frontier between the visible and the invisible; it is the emptiness of the desert, the space for death; it is the frozen space of the dock, the torrid space of Turkmenistan, the mournful space of the heath under the storm. (Dardel 1986, 16)

Without this connection, which takes the form of a feel-a-part of the earth and space one’s working on, there is no possibility of navigating at the heart of Harlequin’s costume. So first, internal point of view.

Second then, relationship. Relationship that can only arise from a sensitive, and not solely visual, involvement with the world. We can no longer consider ourselves inhabitants of an empty desert, of a surface in itself devoid of quality. Although the earth in the not-too-distant future might, according to many estimates, increasingly resemble a desert, this would not mean that a desert cartography would become more real. On the contrary, it would be up to us to realize how much richness and affordances there are of the desert, or we would not be able to survive. To orient ourselves in search of these resources we will certainly have to change the map. We have talked about the relational origin of geometry: relationships, seen simultaneously, produce a fabric. Not a fabric already made, however: we must not imagine, once again, a grid made and finished that overlaps the territory, but a fabric that is ceaselessly being produced, on which we always position ourselves on the end yet to be spun, at the limit. The same limit with which Aristotle identified place itself in his physics. Map and territory are no longer the central point: the very point of view from which these two elements can be separated is lost. Relationship means attention, it means alertness of the senses to have as much

data as possible, feel as close as possible to the earth. As we already pointed out regarding the work of Michel Serres, building a dense net of relations out of our sensible experience is the key element for experiences a spatial horizon that doesn't fall into abstraction. The possibility of orientation in a fluid world begins from the active perception of what is around, in order to insert the geographer (or the men existing geographically, in Dardel's words) inside, and not outside, the map. In this sense we can speak of an *evergrowing* map, because it perpetually needs intervention and active perception to work, and grows preserving a trace of its own past.

It's a continuous putting into play: returning walkers, or navigators. The navigator never goes straight, but responds through continual crookedness of the rudder to the angles that the fluidity of the sea presents to him, only then can he follow his own trajectory. Like him, the walker responds to the constant obstacles of the terrain, which require him to adjust his course, to change course, to recognize the tracks and resources the path offers. Both the navigator and the walker are always immersed in the environment they're traversing, ravenous of significant relations with the space that can show them the orientation for their next move. It is clear how this perspective is marked by a strong limitation: it never goes beyond the openness around us, but

to inhabit the earth does not mean to nestle in a place, but to inhabit a space that opens between a here and a there, it means to traverse this space in all senses. The spatiality of existence is movement, not rootedness. (Besse 2008, 116)

The evergrowing map is not something to be simply read, but more of something to participate and join.

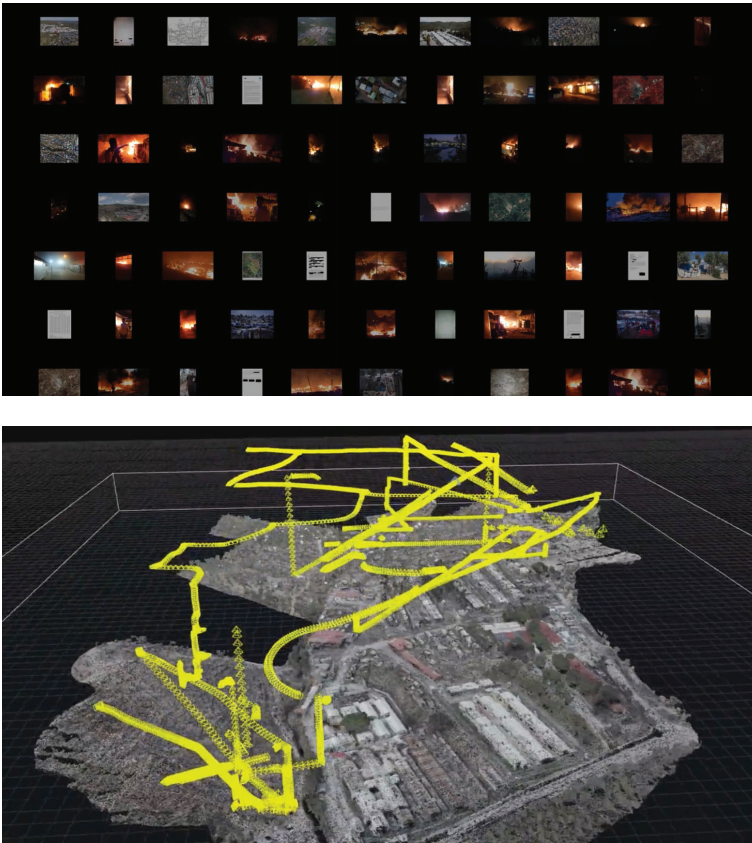
In this continuous movement, what stays on the map is, more than a plain, the vectors of which Serres speaks about in many occasions (2016; 2017; 2018). Vectors between what? Between names, icons, sensitive similarities that "take as a mayonnaise" (Besse 2008, 111) only in contact with the things we depend on for our relationships. A cartography independent of the human, understood in its sensible being-a-thing, is a cartography independent of the world, which is exactly what we are trying to distance ourselves from. Vectors instead of static realities, signs that connect places and things and that compose space. The sum of these vectors is a layering of lived experiences that linger in relationships. To orient oneself in a fluid reality requires multiple layers, and so the evergrowing map consists of multiple layers of the same area, that give thickness to space not only in a stratigraphic sense, but in a way that conjuncts social, biological and historical realms. Each layer corresponds to a point of view, a gaze in motion and in a perpetual state of dependence from the others. As

written by Simonetti: “Maps are always the result of a specific perspective of space since we are never able see the world from everywhere at once” (2018, 70). Clearly here endless possibilities open up for the artistic component inherent in cartography, for each palimpsest can be composed of sound, literary, graphic, olfactory and so on. Each, partial. Through vectors, time can appear in space, overcoming the paradigm outlined by Simonetti, in which space is a surface of simultaneity while time can be seen only in the vertical overlapping (76). Vectors can be signs of simple movement, or can take the form of narratives that creates “trails of story” (Johnson 2010).

To get a model of this conception, one need not go far: just look at how we experience our homeland, understood, in Tuan’s sense (2013, 149), as the inhabited space theatre of livelihood. Overlaid in it are tactile, auditory maps, tales of the past, memories, and plans for the future. No piece remains pure, detached. The synchysis (Bosca 2023) of all this is a kind of manifold narrative, capable of traversing space in all its fluid thickness, without falling in a simple stratigraphic model. It is an awareness reserved for inhabitants, for those who can have a stable as well as a deep relationship with a ground. But is it not then true that the need to know a territory without inhabiting it is at the heart of the colonial enterprise? Doesn’t it consist in reducing the active multiplicity of a place to a static plane on which to intervene?

There is no single work of art or research that represents the idea of evergrowing map, for two reasons. The first is that it is a concept that requires further research and attention, the theoretical basis for which has hopefully been laid in this article. Consequently, the hope is that the suggestions contained therein may generate not only more reflections about it, but also focused research in the context of contemporary art. The second reason, on the other hand, is more of a theoretical order and concerns the possibility that this evergrowing map is itself multiple, like a synchysis, a mixing and co-presence of multiple maps. An open concept or, to use a figure dear to Michel Serres, a *character*, that keeps moving and operating whenever it becomes part of an encounter with a reader or, in our case, a traveller. If this is true, if evergrowing map indicates a multiplicity of readings of space united by the tendencies outlined throughout the article, then there are some artistic elaborations that can give an idea of what we are talking about. Some examples were given at the beginning, I am thinking in particular of the research of Forensic Architecture, which through a process of graphic and arithmetic processing of data, offers interesting spatial perspectives referring to situations of geopolitical conflict and humanitarian emergency.

An entirely different work is that of the Inland collective, engaged for years in research on the theme of pastoralism and food production. Its centre is a village in northern Spain, whose location



Figures 2-3 Screenshot from Forensic Architecture, "Fire in Moria Refugee Camp", 03/2023

is unknown, but whose geography continues to be enriched through all the projects the collective puts forth, from those related to honey and bees to those related to cheese, such as the recent pavilion exhibited at documenta fifteen. While not revealing the location, Inland's works related to the village manage to give an orientation within the history of food production in that area, highlighting the geographical and biological characteristics of the space, aimed at raising awareness towards rural areas. A similar operation, but referring to a marginal urban space, has been carried out for years by the collective Stalker, Osservatorio Nomade, which organizes collective walks and crossings of those areas of the Italian capital that would otherwise be invisible or, at most, marked by a simple name on a map. By walking, together, and making themselves available for encounter, the paths designed by Stalker are able to orient and describe shadowy

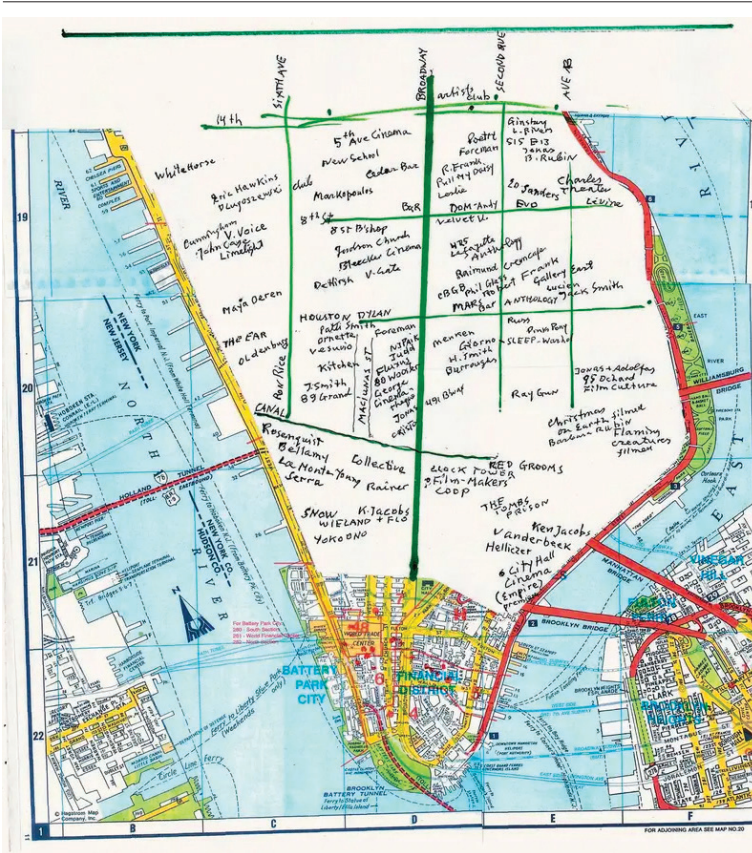


Figure 4 Jonas Mekas, *A Map of 1960s New York from Memory*. In Obrist 2014, 15

territories in a profound way. *Terra Forma* also offers a rich variety of visual elaborations of space, that try to bind together space and the processes that constitute it (Ait-Touati et al. 2022). There are also several artistic interventions that have maps at their core: for example Jonas Mekas overlaps the map of New York with the spatial locations developed by his memory in *A Map of 1960s New York from Memory*; or, on a totally different approach, Andrea Zanzotto, that gives life to a simply-drawn map of his *heimat* through words that proceed along specific trajectories in space.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that what comes closest to the idea of evergrowing map is not a single one of these maps, but rather their co-presence, their joint tension to multiply the possible readings of space. Map, in this sense, remains a verb rather than a noun, as a continuous attitude of mapping, reading and rereading,

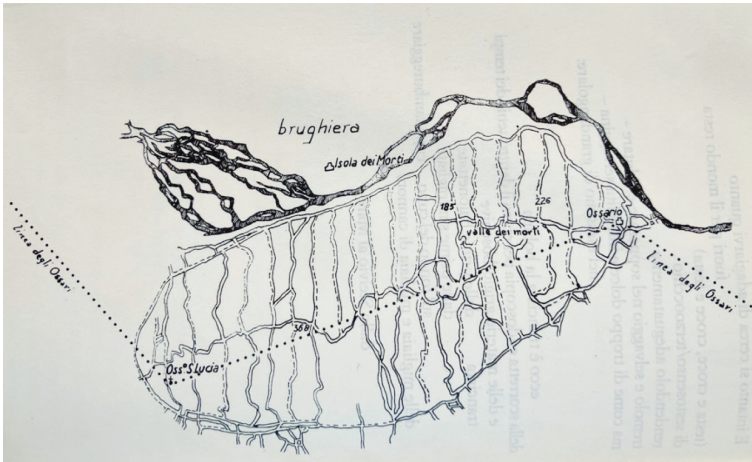


Figure 5 Andrea Zanzotto, *Le poesie e le prose scelte*. A cura di S. Dal Bianco e G.M. Villalta, Milano: I Meridiani Mondadori, 1999

rather than delimiting and establishing a single reading. This reading ties in with recent criticisms from Non-Representational Theory, summarized by Kitchin as “space can be seen as a verb, rather than a noun” (2009, 270). One of the actions of the verb is, probably, mapping the “dynamic simultaneous multiplicity” of space in present “spatial times” (Massey 2005, 177).

The *evergrowing map* is this continuous overlapping of layers of territorial knowledge, the continuous intersection of viewpoints situated along ever-changing trajectories. It is a map where no point is drawn before the pathway arrives to it. A map that is born like a tree, rather than a spider’s web, and that, like a tree, is capable of maintaining its structure and usefulness even in the aftermath of the severe shocks we will inevitably encounter in the future into which we are venturing. A map that gives an account of gestures and movements, more than of a supposedly stable reality. To read it is to participate it, both in the encounter with the past and in the necessity to continue the walk in the future. Time stays in the correspondence. As Giuseppe Penone writes:

Fossilizing the gestures that have developed in a space
brings humans closer to plants forced to live
eternally under the weight of the ‘gestures’ of their lived
experience.

Is not permitted to the tree to forget: it is its contortions,
its balance, the harmonious distribution of its masses,
its static perfection, the freshness of its shaping,

the purity of its structure combined with the compact character
of its bronze surface, making it a living sculpture.
Producing a column made of overlapping gestures
is like building a tree.
Forging and fixing the lines of force of the blow at a point,
taking into account the set of actual and probable breaths
that has place in this space, is to produce a sculpture.
By imparting a rotational motion to the chin that grasps and
holds,
and to the lip that licks and pours, you get a vase.
(Penone 2022, 113)

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