

**THE MAP IS NOT
THE TERRITORY**

Esbjerg Kunstmuseum 2008



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Foreword: Art and Knowledge in Everyday Life

Esbjerg Art Museum has invited Claus Carstensen, artist and former professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, and Per Aage Brandt, professor of Cognitive Science and Modern Languages and Head of Center for Cognition and Culture at Cleveland Case Western Reserve University, USA, to curate an exhibition on art, language and thought. Through their long professional careers, this duo of curators represents an outstanding insight into these areas and their importance for human existence.

The two curators have chosen to focus on the phenomenon of 'mapping' – an area where conceptual art and cognitive semiotics meet through their shared interest in the mapping of the human mind. Though we may not consider such matters while going about our daily business, we are all deeply dependent on our mapping of our physical surroundings and psychological inner landscapes. When we plan a holiday trip, we imagine the destination and look at brochures and maps in order to plan our activities. As a matter of fact we are in possession of a remarkable ability to map our lives, and we make use of this ability not only in order to e.g. plan our holiday travels, but we also, consciously or subconsciously, use it to understand and decode emotional, political, or religious matters.

Through the exhibition, Per Aage Brandt and Claus Carstensen have chosen to concentrate on three areas that refer to politics, utopia, and the self, respectively. In accordance with its theme, the exhibition has become much more than simply a traditional display of art. The present publication is an integrated part of the project. In this anthology, a number of the world's

leading artists, cognitivists and semiologists elucidate some of the most fascinating connections between art and mapping. In order to evoke the capacity of the exhibition and its theme as an ongoing project, we set up, during the exhibition period, three video conferences between American and Danish researchers who through these cross-Atlantic discussions will contribute to our understanding of the relations between mapping and art. Thus the present project emphasizes that an exhibition, like a work of art, is not an utterance that is finished and closed; rather it is subject to negotiation and change.

The Map is not the Territory is the second exhibition in Esbjerg Art Museum's research and exhibition series *Art in Context*, covering the period 2007 – 2010. Through four exhibitions pictorial art is juxtaposed with areas of everyday life and science that art was originally linked with or perhaps even rooted in. Through time both art and the various branches of science have become isolated and institutionalized to such a degree that the connections between them are no longer visible. Each individual exhibition will therefore focus on a specific area of everyday life and present works of pictorial art in accordance with principles that tie the works of art to the scientific branch in question. While art exhibitions traditionally present pictorial art as seen from the perspective of art history, in this project we attempt to develop new exhibition principles that contribute to the traditional perspectives based on art history, while at the same time we wish to establish connections between pictorial art and the everyday lives of the audience. That is why the project uses as its point of

departure those branches of science which, contrary to art history, focus on areas with which the audience has experiences on an everyday basis.

The exhibition series comprises religion, language and thought, the elements of nature, and the fundamental conditions for our existence – all of them issues that we are already familiar with. It is thus the overarching aim of the project to make us turn to those basic questions that create our existence; questions about phenomena of nature, the values of life, how we coexist with others and how we communicate and create meaning. Questions that have always been topicalized by art. Each of the four exhibitions is organized through the conjunctive efforts of a pictorial artist and a scientific researcher. This particular constellation provides the project with competences that by far exceed that expertise in art history which is at the disposal of most art museums.

Therefore our thanks first and foremost go to the two curators of the exhibition, pictorial artist Claus Carstensen and pro-

fessor of cognitive semiotics Per Aage Brandt, for their exceptional commitment to the project as well as their extraordinary effort. On behalf of the entire group behind the exhibition *The Map is not the Territory* we would also like to thank Center for Cognition and Culture at Case Western Reserve University for a fruitful and very inspiring cooperation. Furthermore, we thank the many researchers and artists for their contributions to this anthology. And likewise we would like to thank the partaking artists and their galleries as well as everyone else who has contributed to the exhibition, The Danish Arts Council Committee for Visual Arts and The Danish Arts Council Committee for International Visual Art for their substantial financial support for the project, and the following companies for their benevolent assistance: Calamus, Rosendahls Bogtrykkeri and Korsager Grafisk Design. Thank you also to: The Danish Ministry of Culture, Ribe Amt, The Lida and Oskar Nielsen Foundation, The Claus Sørensen Foundation, The Esbjerg Foundation, and The Novo Nordisk Foundation.

*Research psychologist, Dr. Phil. Bjarne Sode Funch and
Director of Esbjerg Art Museum, Inge Merete Kjeidgaard*

The Map is not the Territory. An Introduction

Per Aage Brandt and Claus Carstensen

WE ARE (NOT) HERE

This anthology, and the exhibition at the Esbjerg Art Museum that it is intended to accompany, is about mental mapping: we feel, think, operate in spaces, and we always need a map in the proximal space we are in, if we want to attend to the *territory*, the distal space we may also be in – so we *map* mentally from the graphic surface of the object we call a ‘map’ to the space it represents. The proof is that we can say, “I am here”, while pointing to a spot on the map, where of course we are not.

Art can be understood as an exploration of the spaces of human experience, that is, as a semiotic expedition exploring the possible or impossible networks of maps of maps of maps ..., and the human mind’s ways with spaces, pathways from one to another, often far from the here-and-now, and sometimes still so close to the present that we experience a sudden return from afar, to the present from the absent. Humans are absent-minded, therefore we have art. In order to get lost, to get lost precisely where we are, and thereby to ‘mind’.

The semiotic project on the domain of art has been present for some time in the Danish interdisciplinary debate.¹ The leading principle has been and is the interaction between living art and living reflection; so this anthology, presenting an array of essays by artists, cognitive scientists, and semioticians, and this exhibi-

tion, including video-conferences and film projections, are to be considered as aspects of one consistent interactive project.

WHERE WE ARE

While the individual pictorial works chosen for the exhibition exploit techniques such as maps, diagrams, photography, printing, drawing, video, architectural modelling, and indeed – in a few cases – painting, we preferentially expose small formats, because this scale minimizes closure and self-reference. We wish to explore spaces; the semiotic navigation between them; their physical, social, and mental charting; and last but not least, the semio-cognitive relations between mapping and political power. The structuring concept of the exhibition and the printed documentation is a display, more specifically of three inter-space types, distributed over three halls in the museum.

The first type, shown in the first hall, is extrovert and explores socio-political and geopolitical landscapes, territorialisations, their formation, development, and possible transformations into destructive scenarios. Some works show the split between illusion and disillusion in space or in time – as in the photos from Danish welfare optimism before Yom Kippur, the first oil crisis, terrorism, etc. Such time pockets are of course spaces in our sense.

The second hall focuses on psycho-geography and utopian maps – projections into imaginary futures that – for different reasons – are bound to never becoming present. Neverlands.

The third type, hence the last hall, is introvert and dedicated to self-observation, body and body images, thinking, and the *blending* of inner spaces. Or, correspondingly, to the processes of de-

¹ The co-curators of this project have often had the opportunity to contribute to the semiotic, psychosemiotic, aesthetico-semiotic discourse, cf. Carstensen 1995, 2000, and Brandt 1980 ff.

formation, dissolution, destabilization, deterritorialisation. Memory, mental maps, body schemas, sometimes disfigured and damaged, sliding slowly into the spaces of psychosis.

SIGNS AND SPACES

Signs – iconic and symbolic representations, including pictures, maps, diagrams, but also statues, signals, digitals, gestures, songs: graphics and ‘phonics’ of all sorts – first allow us to *create meaning by signifying*, that is, to set up potential spaces in our (private or shared) minds, fill them with signified content (so-called ‘meaning’), and then mentally ‘go there’ and see what happens. Secondly, they allow us to further project the created meaning from these signified spaces to even more distant signifiable spaces, where *we* can less easily go, but where our new imaginary avatars may thrive. Then we can eventually see our present here-and-now space from one of these space stations, in the light of this ‘alienation’ and in an avatar’s perspective. We call these ‘alienating’ mechanisms of back-and-forth-projection, as a whole, *mapping*.² It has many forms, and we are far from knowing all of them. But it is becoming clear that *mapping* is an essential meaning-grounding operation in the human mind and therefore in the human world.

² A road map is already a sign that opens an imaginary space of roads that are not on the piece of paper and not within the reader’s eyesight. This user of the map has to project back from the imaginary space of roads to the physical space where the reader needs to navigate, in order to use the map.

HOMO SPATIALIS

The primordial and principal thing that minds do in general may in fact be to connect spaces by signs. Reason and madness are then matters of stable or unstable spatial structures, of inter-space navigation. However, human passions, whether mad, reasonable, or just deep or flat, are always related to art in some form, probably because art is a basic mental technique of organizing and disorganizing meaning. We are a ‘spatializing species’, we are the species *homo spatialis*. Art is a basic human way of exploring realities, whereby signs of all sorts become our probes sent into the thinkable, unthinkable, but still signifiable: spaces of possible, impossible, enigmatic or trivial things, offered for our ‘realizing’ in both senses of the word ‘realize’: make real and know. And both for knowing the unknown and for unknowing the known.

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Dear Guest,

Pukulpa Pitjama Ananguku Narakutu!
Welcome to Aboriginal Land

We want to talk to you about alcohol, and I will tell you our
ideas about it. We don't like it. It's bad. When you visit our
country, we want you to buy grog. We want healthy and strong
people, and we want you to buy our grog. We want healthy and strong.

Some of our people have died and their
lives and the lives of their children have been
affected by it. Now some people are
about their children and their children
their children and their children are
dying.

use ourselves again.
this resort
a hotel. We have
the... have entered...
and along the Lasseter... they won't sell
grog to your people. We are supporting the
development of substance abuse programs to help our relatives
who are addicted to grog.

school could destroy our culture and way of life, and so we
are asking for your help too. Don't buy grog for Aboriginal
people, please. Don't think that... is a racist thing that
we are asking. It is the way that we have chosen to deal with
the problems that we have for us.

Thanks for your support. I hope you enjoy your visit to our
land.

Nelly Patterson

B N

Malya Teamay

Tommy Teamay Nelly Patterson Barbara Tjikatu Malya Teamay

Claus Carstensen, S.P.P. No. 11, 1993