

## Ricardo Basbaum

### A map without geography

I'D LIKE to develop my SITAC VII presentation by accepting Cuauhtémoc Medina's invitation to look at the diagram designed especially for this event. As you all know, Cuauhtémoc sought me out and generously invited me, to undertake simultaneous, though not necessarily convergent paths: on the one hand, so I could develop an image that would serve as a "brand" or "logo" for SITAC VII; and on the other hand, so I could design a diagram that would help us to think about the event. There were two tasks: to mark or brand, and to think, not necessarily in that order. This is, of course, a design—a map or diagram—that should serve as a tool for the production of thought, since a desire to think in other ways—with sensitivity, using the senses, or even so as not to articulate the unthought yet—has been posited. Additionally, if design in general seeks to have an impact or to make a perceptible mark, then this design is above all a *gesture*, an action that intervenes and leaves a record or trace. Therefore, the invitation becomes a reality based on a design—a diagram + a logo—that understands the act of thinking as a gesture that leaves a trace, or signs of its existence, behind. Every act of thinking is political in its public aspect of producing such traces; it represents a situation's re-ordering, in public; it is a design proposal that posits mapping out the traces. It is the construction of a neither abstract nor alien artificial memory, that would invade the body, similar to the way the design's ambitions for participation and impregnation are diagrammed, in their way, using the figure of the black broken heart.

In my work, I develop diagrams as tools. That is, diagrams respond to a demand to open and occupy a sort of intermediate space between discourse and artwork. There is a construction process involved in acquiring that space, in bringing words together and fashioning a dynamic space, with lines and diverse visual elements. Above all, there is a search to establish a design that consists of rhythm and pulsation signs: without a proper rhythmic pattern, the diagram will not work. Indeed, pulse, resonance generation, rhythmical vibration all guarantee the diagram moves and produces the necessary registers, without which it would be nothing more than abstraction—not intervention—and would neither move spaces nor occupy regions.

Cuahtémoc Medina was moved by the provocative idea that the SITAC VII diagram could work in a similar fashion to Joaquín Torres-García's *Mapa invertido* (*Inverted Map*) of 1943. It would be interesting to show the two designs side by side, in reciprocal provocation; they are two maps with different origins and different proposals. Right away I think it advisable to reject any comparisons, since in this case we're talking about entirely different historical movements. It's clear that Torres-García was moving in a modern historical/utopian context, and hoped to insert Uruguay—and Latin America—as centers for the generation of cultural potential. In its two versions—one more geographic and the other more symbolic—Torres García never ceases pointing out Uruguay's coordinates on the map, which he keeps in place when the map is inverted; nevertheless, what we have here is the south placed above the north; the south spreads up from the Equator, placing it in the "superior" position. The identification of the South American landmass is immediate and the gesture, of course, is subversive: cartographic convention is dismantled and literally turned upside down. The goal is to have a place on the map, centralize, and delineate possibilities for action and intervention.

On the *Sur, South, Sul* map, designed for SITAC VII, there is a deliberate dislocation: we aren't in any easily identifiable cartographic region; you don't clearly know what is land and what is sea, or even if the featured region is situated on an identifiable planet. You imagine you're on Earth...but what is this place? It's a location that wants to demarcate—that wants to intervene. It could be an island or it could be a continent. Cartographic elements are supplanted by words and a handful of graphic signs—words that largely indicate places on the map, and cease being strictly cartographic in order to become, above all, dynamic indicators of

certain conditions or desired interventions. The shift favors a particular problematic, indicated by the large letter  $x$  on the map, where various unknowns are also placed: the  $x$ 's of math problems and other questions. Thought processes are not constructed based on certainties but rather based on an understanding of vulnerability, identifications with regard to adventure, focus on the landscapes and contexts that are created. While Torres-García could work, simply and genially, with a clearly ordered image, and modify its *gravitas* while liberating it from being at the center of things—as well as with the void that resulted from a militant inversion on the part of someone disposed to confront the struggles of his times by latching onto avant-garde political battles—the map's inversion or diagram is presented in an impregnable, ruptured, truncated form and is conceived in terms of rhythmic patterns. Care with the proportions of this and other diagrams I've produced is important. As a tool for intervention, this is the modality for the attempted intervention. To perceive existent dynamics is to want to be in the middle of them, as in a cyclone, though not in a cacophonous way, or in the manner of meaningless encounters or random collisions; rather, one hopes they operate in a polyrhythmic fashion.

Wherever the ambition to leave behind traces exists, there is a rhythmic pattern, pulsation, resonance; where there is rhythm, something becomes public: there is a politics; *a politics of drums*. It means constructing other landscapes, and other imaginary scenes, not just to discover places but above all, to find oneself with water as a point of departure. How might the earth-water inversion relate to the north-south inversion? One thing is for sure, and it interests me constructively: the breaks and ruptures that have been made since the incorporation of the discovery and production of organic lines as proposed by Lygia Clark (1954). They are productive forums for ending things and an encounter between different surfaces and they are articulated in the diagram as a pulsation. Reproduction, repetition, marks on bodies, memory: organic line + a politics of drums.

There are a number of questions to be extracted from the art produced by a particular circuit of Brazilians, confronted by this diagram/map, and above all based on the South's problems and the way in which they are contextualized in particular circles. Like other cultures of the so-called post-colonial world, Brazilian art has also had to construct itself based on a condition of modernity in order to align itself with European

matrices—territory that was most often conquered through the elaboration of a variety of maneuvers, in a blending of nuances that dissipates extremes and combines differences. Both possibilities are opened up here, explored at important moments and still being exposed, pulsating today as emotional tools for intervention. But using the expression “*arte brasileira*” has a way of hiding discomfort: unless you wish to give offense, there’s no way to openly authorize a formula that perennially perpetuates exclusions, squelches difference, hides the existence of oppositional groups or those that dispute power and hegemony. As long as the expression “*arte brasileira*” is perpetuated, it would seem that rich local contexts are reduced to a private, limited and narcissistic collection; in spite of the profits it may offer Brazil. They are also reduced to convincing others that this in fact is very little—almost nothing—in comparison to what art can produce in conceptual and affective systems, etc. On the other hand, maybe it would be better to just leave this emblematic expression (*arte brasileira*) alone, as if it were something with which it would be better not to be related. There are other, more interesting and important problems, like those proposed here, that are articulated on the map: the repetition “sur, sur, sur sur...”, the pretext for constructing another context, beyond political borders, where, in the territory that is being configured, the proposal is not to include everything and everyone. It’s not about exclusion, but rather the construction of an inclusion in something bigger and more interesting. What is in play when one looks at the development of the expression “conceptualisms of the South”—in addition being more precise—is the search for and mastery of tools for the construction of this other, partial and local, belonging, constituted by numerous different nations and groups, as well as for the construction of location, forms of action and gestures of intervention. What is present are inscriptions in a field and—why not?—the simultaneous construction of context and the possibility of inscription. We imagine the map of this landscape and empower it in order to move it, transform it, deform it or even, like Torres-García, invert it when the time comes.

Perhaps one of the dynamics with the least potential within the north/south relationship as currently configured, is the difficulty of transmitting voices along hegemonic networks. The difficulty of participating in conversations, being heard, or taking part in large-scale demonstrations. But ultimately it’s not about wanting simply to be in far-reaching institutional spaces. It’s not enough just to *want* to be there or earn the

right to act in a hegemonic center. The task is constructing other paths that may or may not make themselves known. This would necessarily be the result of collective actions that go beyond political boundaries. Redrawing maps would also mean recording voices in another geography, emphasizing the importance of the media we produce, renovating contamination strategies, and constructing a certain autonomy for displacement. The upper left portion of the diagram is a verbal-visual sign that operates like an extra-artistic virus.<sup>1</sup> A device for action, given expression through direct contact. We must establish action networks that go beyond local borders, contaminate others and allow ourselves to be contaminated by still others.

A world divided by geographical convictions can only be understood based on the symbolic aspects of those divisions. A slight shift in point of view suffices to deconstruct this entire geography and determine viewpoints from other places. The conventional division does not grapple with the world's diversity and complexity. When something seeks to be communicated, an affective network of affinities is sought. You have a center there (regardless of whether it may be transitory, voluble or volatile). Tracing such lines, marking them on the map is in itself an intervention of notable effectiveness, since it goes against the conventional grain, and brings other possible paths and territories to the surface. That is what the diagram/map/brand *Sur, South, Sul* seeks to point out: everything from subjective politics to territorial battles, so that fissures are always opening, in individual bodies and in the collective body. What you have here are contacts, relationships, conflicts and battles. This is a map without geography. An anti-map in that it is a circuit, an organic conglomerate added to an organism and a place of collective movement, the transiting space for a great number of people. Here there is no previously scheduled stop. The design might circulate in our bodies (as a particle, the mark of experience) and configure paths for encounters here and now, among many others (as transiting spaces for you and me, or between us and them), as well as encounters both so small, and so large, they cannot be accessed in a single glance.

If we look at a summary of this event's proposal, the conceptualism of the south as a "cultural counteroffensive" — a "history of militancy and the margins" based on "local specialization with ambitions to global meaning" — it's because we believe this can reside simultaneously within and without our bodies.