

# Mapping fieldtrips

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## MAPPING FIELDTRIPS

by Jacqueline Parish

The overall aims of the FIELDTRIPS within the MAS LA 07/08 were twofold: firstly to explore the relationship between the shaping of the environment and the culture of walking as an aesthetic practice, and secondly to abstract and represent the spatial experience with a 'sketched' map.

Authors such as Robert Smithson and Lucius Burckhardt have introduced the creative potential of the act of walking in perceiving site. For example, Robert Smithson published in 1967 *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* describing a tour in the suburbs of New Jersey and reading found situations, such as industrial pipes or highway construction sites, as new monuments of the suburbs. By strolling through his hometown of Passaic, he started to link individual sites or monuments to a continuous and new suburban experience. In the context of this exercise, to map is to take measure of the urban landscape and 'figure' this measure in such a way that it may be communicated between people, places or times.<sup>1</sup> The exercise focused on a fundamental basis of landscape architecture: the techniques and culture of graphical representation of the physical environment. Mappings are used to abstract the existing yet also to imagine or envision new landscapes. Denis Cosgrove refers to the inventive potentials of 'Cognitive mapping': this means much more today than was conceived by its 1960s investigators, who took for granted the existence of an objectively mappable and mapped space against which their 'mental maps' could be compared. "Not only is all mapping 'cognitive' in the broadest sense, inescapably bound within discursive frameworks that are historically and culturally specific, but all mapping involves sets of choices, omissions, uncertainties and intentions – authorship – at once critical to, yet obscured

within, its final product, the map itself."<sup>2</sup> In this sense students were asked to develop their own technique of mapping and representation of spatial experience of all six FIELDTRIPS.

The FIELDTRIP walks were led by six different guides, who each selected a specific theme, sequential experience and narrative of the physical space seen. The produced mappings illustrate a wide range of techniques and approaches. Examples were chosen that illustrate four reappearing issues and methods discovered and discussed during the course.

### Scale

Scale is fundamental in mapping. Choosing scale in mapping is a choice of a relative dimension, without difference in proportion of parts. Enlarging or reducing the space generated and occupied by different phenomena alters their form, their significance, their relations of meaning with other phenomena. Scale selection and manipulation is thus a powerfully imaginative and generative act, which at once records and illustrates meaning and association in an active process.

Martina Tomsic's mapping (No 2) illustrates the scale of the airport in comparison to the surrounding lakes.

### Selecting

The act of mapping implies a reduction in complexity through a clear, precise and conscious selection of topics. Conventionally a distinction is often made between geographical and topographic maps which represent areas in correspondence with their appearance to the eye, and thematic maps which highlight

the spatial features of a selected topic (i.e. climatic patterns, tourist attractions etc.)<sup>3</sup>. In fact all maps are thematic: selecting and highlighting specific phenomena and consciously removing others. The produced mappings show that the essence of the experience of the fieldtrip is translated with a thematic selection and its graphical abstraction. For example Chantal Wuhrmann's mappings (No 4) of the botanical garden visualize a perspective mapping and thematic selection of labelled plants of the gardens.

### Layering and Time

A relatively new development in the design of large-scale urban and landscape fabrics has been, according to James Corner, 'layering'<sup>4</sup>. This involves the superimposition of various independent layers one upon the other to produce a heterogeneous surface, with different stratas of information overlaid. In this context Gingga Metchanun's mapping (No 1) go beyond a mapped overlay of complexities and different stories on site, but rather figure a time line of the day's experience. Here a route walked in three hours in the old town of Zurich is intersected and overlapped with stone and geologic timescales perceived and communicated during the walk.

### Coded Stories

Strong elements in the legibility of mapping are 'codes' introduced as a standardised graphical representation for the diverse features requiring explanation. In this sense every student was challenged with finding a language to translate information in a graphical abstraction.

Tanya Sack's mapping (No 3) illustrates the coding of a discussion she had with Hardi, a resident living

along the newly designed and constructed Glattpark. The reason for contemporary revisioning and rethinking of maps and mapping are not difficult to detect. For a politically, economically, technically and culturally globalizing world in which visual images have an unprecedented communicative significance, much is at stake in matters of space and its formal and graphical representation.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, a valuable result of the exercise is a heightened awareness of the inventive character of the map for landscape architecture. In this sense it challenges a fundamental question in landscape architecture: the perception of landscape. As Christophe Girot states, it is not so easy to change our way of looking at the landscape, because we are accustomed to the comfort of a particular kind of understanding of nature replete with long established values and references. I therefore personally hope that the FIELDTRIP mappings helped the students to translate new ways of looking at landscape as opening explorations to a wide range of graphical techniques, themes and spatial experiences.

FIELDTRIP 1: Thresholds  
 Laurent Stalder, Assistant Professor Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich  
 Route 1: Airport of Zurich

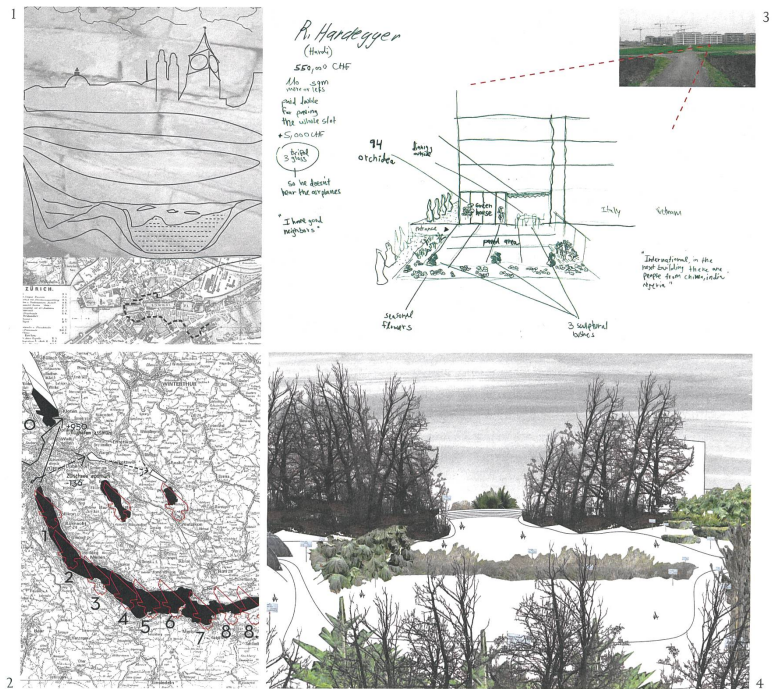
FIELDTRIP 2: Travelling Natures  
 Reto Nyffeler, Herbarium Curator, University of Zurich  
 Route 2: Botanical Garden of Zurich

FIELDTRIP 3: Landscape and Geology  
 Helmut Weissert, Professor of Geology, ETH Zurich  
 Route 3: Old Town of Zurich

FIELDTRIP 4: Contextual reevaluations of urbanist's landscape models  
 Angelus Eisinger, Professor of Urban Design and Spatial Development, University Hamburg  
 Route 4: Oerlikon-Schwamendingen, Zurich

FIELDTRIP 5: Space Appropriation  
 Klaus Overmeyer, Landscape Architect, Berlin  
 Route 5: Glattpark and a riverside walk along the Glatt

FIELDTRIP 6: Biotopes  
 Bettina Tschander, Biologist, City of Zurich  
 Elias Landolt, Emr. Professor of Biology, ETH Zurich  
 Route 6: Zurich-West and a riverside walk along the Limmat



- No 1 Ging Gal Metchanun
- No 2 Martina Tomsic
- No 3 Matanya Sack
- No 4 Chantal Wuhrmann

1 Cosgrove, Denis (1999), **Mappings**, London, Reaktion Books.  
 2 Cosgrove, Denis (1999), **Mappings**, London, Reaktion Books, p. 7.  
 3 Cosgrove, Denis (1999), **Mappings**, London, Reaktion Books.  
 4 Corner, James (1999), **The Agency of Mapping**, in: Cosgrove, Denis (1999), **Mappings**, London, Reaktion Books.  
 5 Cosgrove, Denis (1999), **Mappings**, London, Reaktion Books.