Counter-mapping as Display:
Unfolding, Revealing, and Concealing Intermediary Spaces

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Maps are never neutral, yet their presumed anonymity often leads us to confuse the map for the territory. Considering map-making as a critical form of display, the following text focuses on strategies of counter-mapping in order to challenge traditional spatio-temporal perimeters of power and control. Counter-mapping, first coined to describe the reclamation of territories by indigenous populations in Indonesia, employs various meanings within disparate cultural, geographic, and media-based contexts and refers to, “the production of maps by a community that seeks to challenge (those) produced and used by a state, administrative body, or commercial company.” Counter-maps reveal the ways in which official maps often omit important information in order to justify particular political actions.

Through a variety of non-traditional forms of vehicular presentation, counter-mapping marks the creation of new spaces that deconstruct hegemonic knowledge systems. Counter-mapping acknowledges subaltern voices, while addressing forms of historical and contemporary expansionism, unequal development, and emerging realities.

This article will examine how counter-mapping serves as a form of research and creative artistic practice for contemporary artists, Gala Porras-Kim (b. 1984), Adler Guerrier (b. 1975), and Miao Ying (b. 1984). Within each individual artistic practice, these three artists incorporate alternative forms and media as a means of plotting regional and insular constellations that create both connections and elements of fracture. Their works present a new understanding in terms of how counter-mapping may be employed to activate maps not simply as archival documents, but rather as dynamic and evolving forms of generative knowledge. By exploring the legacy of coloniality, the politics of space, and the amalgamation of virtual and physical realities, these creative examples of artistic counter-mapping reveal threshold spaces that exist between both visible and invisible social conditions.

Maps, by nature, are customarily viewed as visual tools used to create boundaries and delineate social, political, and cultural spaces within non-linear spatial geographies. These physiographic instruments extend both direction and means for navigation between virtual socio-political territories and physical spaces of existence. Maps provide power to their creators and users, privileging a singular or multi-faceted knowledge system of one entity over another. In Maps: Finding Our Place in the World, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name (organized by the Field Museum, Chicago) Robert W. Karrow, Jr. argues that, “the power of maps rather subtly commands respect, deference, and subordination,” while at the same time, maps “charm, intimidate, beguile, and browbeat — by their authority, their signs, what they show and how they show it, even by their scale.” Forming networked archipelagos, linking together bodies in space, maps apply socio-cultural conditions in their creation of socialized spaces, projecting assertions about the world as observed through the eyes of their makers. According to James Akerman, imperial powers have historically employed maps “to conquer and manage their colonies and to promote and affirm their imperial identities.” Sumathi Ramaswamy adds that the cartographic line reveals far more than physical representations of space,
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rather, borrowing the words of J. Brian Harley, these linear indicators function as “new ‘dictators’ of representation,” while also underscoring “the history of modern imperialism and the nation-state.” These ephemerally delineated spaces lead to ownership and create physical manifestations of power, simultaneously affirming or denying the existence of entities, ideologies, and even people. Maps create virtual spatial relationships that reflect the real.

In his seminal text, The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre writes that societies are the producers of space. Rather than functioning as a neutral backdrop, “(social) space is a (social) product.” Furthermore, cultural production is a spatial practice. Humans do not simply record geographies, they create them. The map is not an artifact, but rather something that continues to expand and unfold. Counter-mapping strategies often target absences and omissions within the hegemonic knowledge systems of historically created maps. Simultaneously, they allow for the creation of intersections between material and cultural extraction. Counter-mapping processes make it clear to viewers that physical maps function as representations of virtual and temporal spaces whose structural and bordered compositions do not actually exist. Maps document spaces of memory and cultural delineation as created by humans, whose borders are only articulated through intermediary space and objects.

Denis Wood argues that borders perform a “world-configuring function,” serving as a spatial agreement among cultures. They trace boundaries and generate reciprocal recognition among nation-states. According to Sandro Mezzadra, borders, “represent shifting and unpredictable patterns of mobility and overlapping. (They) possess the ability to appear and disappear as well as solidify in the form of walls, breaking up and re-ordering political spaces once formally unified.” Working across multiple borders, I argue that Gala Porras-Kim, Adler Guerrier, and Miao Ying all explore themes positioned at the intersection between making and unmaking, visible and invisible, engaged in new border formation, which involves the inevitable process of historical and spatial amnesia.

Colombian born, Los Angeles-based Gala Porras-Kim notes in her artist statement that her work, “question(s) how knowledge is acquired, tests the potential of the art object to function as an epistemological tool outside of its tradition, art historical context, and challenges the possibilities and limits of learning about the cultures that surround us.” Her project Whistling and Language Transfiguration (2012), is an interdisciplinary research-based initiative that involves the translation and documentation of the minority Zapotec language, spoken within regions of Oaxaca, Mexico. Zapotec, is a tonal language, meaning “the content of the words is partly contained within the intonation of speech.” Porras-Kim observes that Oaxaca is one of the most linguistically diverse terrains in the world and Zapotec is only one of seventeen languages spoken within this region. She explains that Zapotec was passed down orally from generation to generation over the past one thousand years and contains over fifty variances.

After the colonization of Mexico, indigenous peoples utilized the tonal qualities of the Zapotec language as a form of dissent. Through whistling sounds, these groups communicated with one another in secret. Today, Zapotec is an endangered language in the socio-political stratum of indigenous people in Mexico. Porras-Kim adds:
There is a socio-political struggle that is manifested by the deterioration of these languages. This is where a linguistic colonization is happening, and where strategies of dissent could actually be implemented… the world’s knowledge is contained within its languages. Where else do we find what the word is for the second clipping of an agave plant after it has been harvested? I didn't even know there was any difference between the two. But there is a specific regional knowledge that is contained within the words of each village that needs to be available.  

The artist's project incorporates modes of research and display, organizing, and archiving as a method for remembering and documenting an oral tradition that is slowly being forgotten. *Mapping Tones* (2012) (Figure 1) was created as a part of this larger project and presents memory and language as a virtual construct. It engages with the Zapotec language, a form of verbal communication, which pervades within an ephemeral, abstract, and temporal space. The project attempts to provide visual signifiers for a verbal (or virtual) signified language. It concretizes oral histories, remembered events, and individual reflections within everyday circumstances. and individual reflections within everyday circumstances.

Figure 1: Gala Porras-Kim, *Mapping Tones (all documented Zapotec dialects in Oaxaca)*, 2012, Graphite, ink, tape, pens, post-it paper, wood, 30 x 40 x 4 in., Image by Heather Rasmussen. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council.
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*Mapping Tones* plots the existence of tonal variations located throughout the Oaxacan state (Figure 2). The work undermines majoritive forms of language and perhaps even official census data through careful and rigorous documentation of tones used by small populations of indigenous peoples throughout the region. This work promotes an alternative form of cognitive mapping, generating a new-found visibility for a marginalized culture within Oaxaca.\(^{17}\) Porras-Kim writes that this project represents, “an effort to maintain the viability of the Zapotec language by pointing out its unique qualities, and contribute to the preservation of a language that was and is the cultural heritage of the Zapotec people.”\(^{18}\) The artist views objects as a code, informing how people understand and perceive their daily experiences.\(^{19}\) She views her own creative process as filling in the gaps and “missing parts” that exist in the intermediary space between the known and the unknown.\(^{20}\)

![Figure 2: Gala Porras-Kim, Mapping Tones (all documented Zapotec dialects in Oaxaca), detail, 2012, Graphite, ink, tape, pens, post-it paper, wood, 30 x 40 x 4 inches, Image by Heather Rasmussen. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council.](image)

Lefebvre contends that space is a tool for thought and action; he writes, “Space operates as a means of control, domination, and power.”\(^{21}\) By extension, maps behave as tools for the acquisition and maintenance of such power. Those who possess the ability and resources to map a region or territory are subsequently able to assert some measure of control over its geographic forms and inhabitants. In this way, maps possess an intrinsic display function as arbiters of visual knowledge. They inform what we know, shaping our subjective created realities. In addition, those who distribute maps control not only who ascertains such modes of visual knowledge and power, but also directly and indirectly privilege how maps are both seen and unseen.
Recognizing the history of reinscribing space to challenge hegemonic control, Porras-Kim directly interrogates these issues as a part of her collaboration with small business owners located in the Soledad Corridor neighborhood, translating signage into Zapotec. This action was an attempt to make the invisible visible, documenting and recording an ephemeral virtual form of communication in the context of everyday lived experiences. The display of these signs in small markets, convenience stores, and street vending stands maps out the intermediary space between symbolic language and physical existence, creating tangible objects to represent language that exists primarily in oral form. Transcribing oral language into written language transmits a concept from virtual (auditory) space into a real, physical space where it is transcribed into a written form.

Porras-Kim recognizes she is not the first person to transcribe Zapotec using the Roman alphabet, acknowledging sixteenth century transcriptions by religious friars. At the same time, her own creative counter-mapping strategies correspond to the historical evolution of the Zapotec language as “a strategy of resistance against Spanish colonizers.”22 Noting that Zapotec can be emulated via whistling, the artist adds that “by communicating through whistling, the indigenous population disguised their conversations as musical diversions.”23 In this way, the artist not only engages in transcription and translation, but also offers new agency to indigenous peoples in this region, in addition to bringing greater visibility to centuries of colonial resistance.

Porras-Kim’s adoption of translation as a form of public display shares an intimate relationship to mapping. Both translation and mapping operate at the intersection between what is seen and unseen. They allow certain groups and individuals to obtain spatial knowledge through visual cues, often at the expense of others. The artist seeks to undermine this process through the incorporation of translation and visual mapping as a form of innovative display, which provides greater agency to the Zapotec people, allowing them to both see and be seen.

In a 2012 interview, Porras-Kim stated, “I am interested in translation, sounds, and the meanings that are produced not just as a result of the inherent transaction, but I also consider this shifting process as the work itself.”24 If we consider the liminal additive framework of translation in which original forms are re-formed into a destination language, the artist’s project engages in the mapping of spaces in between what is seen and unseen. She identifies ephemeral language exchanged through virtual means of verbal communication channels and documents this information into an actual visible written form, then presents this information directly into physical space. Mapping Tones, along with her translations of commercial signs into Zapotec, are both forms of counter-mapping. They provide increased legibility and visibility among a Zapotec speaking audience and other audiences alike. Furthermore, they challenge hegemonic anatomies of linguistic exchange within the Oaxacan region, identifying and subsequently making visible marginalized and historically dissenting modes of knowledge and communication.

Far removed from the buzzing streets of Oaxaca, Haitian-born, Miami-based artist Adler Guerrier’s artistic practice is derived from his engagement in what he describes as “mindful walking” around familiar Miami neighborhoods.25 Through both photo documentation and physical movement, the
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artist records objects and features within urban South Florida. This process makes tangible a deeper sense of emotional place, functioning as a deliberate acknowledgment of multiplicitous and complex layers of time, presence, and absence, both visible and invisible to bodies, which move through these natural and constructed spaces. The artist makes work about place. His walks inform his understandings of what the urban landscape looks like and how it takes shape through emotional affect, language, value, and memory. Similar to Porras-Kim, Guerrier’s artistic practice negotiates issues of visibility and invisibility, as well as legibility and concealment. He reflects upon private narratives in relationship to a public common in which a, “larger (collective) narrative is deployed.”

Guerrier’s walking practice directly informs his *Folds* series, officially titled, *Untitled (marked time, traced effect found to be held within the fold)* (2019) (Figure 3). Each work, measuring 48 x 72 inches, presents an abstracted black-and-white image of tangled, lush foliage casting a series of high-contrast shadows over an urban concrete background. A swift and lyrical constellation of lines cross over the image, connecting small pastel geometric shapes scattered throughout the planar surface. Finally, several carefully arranged colored rectangles are superimposed over the photograph. The artist explains

Figure 3: Adler Guerrier, *Untitled (place marked with an impulse, found to be held within the fold)* iv, 2019, Ink, graphite, enamel paint and xerography on paper, 71 x 48 in. Image courtesy of the artist.
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that the lines correspond to another body of work, which incorporates similar linear forms, thus creating additional spatio-temporal levels of connection. Cutting through the work, these decorative lines add depth, while also forging a “random” path that guides the viewer’s eye through the composition. This cartographic gesture also suggests the act of making one’s way through a physical landscape or virtual space evoked by a handheld map. The geometric forms placed throughout the composition suggest activated points and locations, which hold physical and emotional value within urban space. The artist likens the viewer’s optical scan over this dynamic line formation as analogous to a flaneur, whose movement reflects, “randomness through psycho-geographic push and pull.”

As suggested by the artist, the Fold series shares a conceptual framework similar to the ideas and activities of the Situationalist International (SI), organized by self-appointed leader, Guy Debord. Debord once described, “the great industrially transformed cities” as, “those centers of possibilities and meanings.” Rather than approaching mapmaking from an aerial surveyor’s macro gaze, similar to Guerrier, SI favored forms of micro immersion into the urban streets. Engaged in the practice of walking, Debord developed, “psycho-geographical pivotal points,” in which he cut up a street map, joining districts otherwise miles apart. Debord also incorporated a collage of arrows representing atmospheric currents and flows, offering a new dynamic strategy in both the creation and reading of maps, which undermines the authority of any one map. Expanding on this theme, Guerrier’s collage-like works on paper represent visual journals, documenting both the artist’s personal cartography and his understandings of place. He includes photographs of his own lived surroundings with elements of visual amalgamations of built and natural environments. These features evoke the writings of Lefebvre who articulated imagined space as socially co-created alongside physical constructions, co-opted by populations who inhabit these environments. These spaces do not simply exist. Rather, they are activated as “political products” and rendered into polyvalent social spaces.

Guerrier’s walking practice is also analogous to a series of works by artist, Francis Alÿs that generate space through walking. In 2003, Alÿs created a performance-based work in which he marked the temporary move of the Musee d’Art Moderne de la Villa de Paris to a former convent in Paris’ Latin Quarter by walking from the museum’s original space to its new temporary space. As he walked, he carried a can of blue paint with a small hole pierced in the bottom, allowing dripping paint to leave a semi-permanent mark on the concrete below. Alÿs titled his performance, The Leak: Version Colonial Blue (2003).

While both Alÿs and Guerrier intend to reveal otherwise invisible spaces as locations of personal experience, as well as strategic political networks, Guerrier’s works transform physical geographies into ephemeral emotional geographies that exist in between the visible physical and the invisible virtual, rather than semi-permanently altering physical space. Instead of focusing on recognizable landscapes or urban locations, the artist captures, “tighter views of place.” His photographs present the viewer with visual abstraction and embedded layers of spatial cognizance and memory that exists within the landscape. For Guerrier, the process of recording his urban surroundings through photography does not aim to capture any singular foliage or flower; rather, he seeks to record their place within an ongoing wave of development and decline.
Guerrier is interested in how neighborhoods within Miami both flourish and decay through physical and temporal layering. The color palette of overlaying rectangles are sourced from the artist’s own “pseudo-scientific survey” of Miami’s vibrant pastel urban landscape, in which a warm palette of various hues of coral pink, yellow, cerulean, and gray are used to paint single-family homes. In the artist’s mind, this collection of colors possesses a linguistic function, revealing certain personal values, which inform a home-owner’s decision to, “color their house in a particular shade of sea foam blue.” Color conjures simultaneous notions of legibility and concealment in which private affect (reasons why someone might choose a particular color) contends with visual narratives that exist within the “public commons.” Color reveals important emotive qualities that characterize the urban landscape. The artist’s incorporation of solid rectangles of pastel colors reflect upon a potential layer of time, affect, and visual narrative, which engages in acts of both revealing and concealing in simultaneously public and private spaces.

In an additional layering of color and visual information, Guerrier applies folds to the paper, allowing the work to adopt physical characteristics analogous to traditional maps. However, the artist’s incorporation of physical and geometric forms, layering, mark-making, and images of his own urban environment offer, what the artist refers to as, “complex abstraction of object, situation, and landscape, (similar to what) cartographic works tend to map.” Like most maps, the work offers clarity at the expense of objects, which are rendered illegible through masking and concealing. The artist’s aesthetic presentation of mark-making works in concert with legibility and illegibility, presence and absence. According to the artist, the Fold series invokes, “slight discomfort in terms of how it is generated, (along with) levels of randomness.” But at the same time, the series also offers a sense of ease.

Guerrier’s concording arrangement of objects within this planar space recalls Michel de Certeau’s articulation of space as, “composed of intersections of mobile elements.” In this work, an ensemble of formal elements is actuated by a visual grouping deployed onto the paper’s surface. Guerrier acts as a cultural cartographer, whose images are anchored within real, physical, and visible spaces around Miami. At the same time, they occupy and document virtual and invisible locations of personal memory and place. These works strike a balance between the internal conditions shaped by emotional relational spaces captured by the artist and external conditions informed by the physicality of Miami’s urban landscape.

As an effective mode of display, the work uses mapping to represent the space between a physical urban reality and an ephemeral emotional memory. Through walking, the artist produces new spatial relationships between emotional and physical spaces. He documents gaps between people, rendering the paths and boundaries of both emotional and physical space visible. Like traditional mapping projects, Adler Guerrier’s works attempt to document and even claim physical space. Yet what marks a point of departure from other projects is the artist’s sensitivity towards the recording of memory and personal connection associated with transitional and changing urban spaces. In the Fold series, Guerrier produces objects with connections to real physical places and spatial geographies. At the same time, they should not be read as static cartographic instruments. Like the research maps and translation projects of Gala Porras-Kim, Guerrier’s two-dimensional works are moving and affective dynamic snapshots of generative knowledge concerning a changing three-dimensional urban landscape.
While these artists both demonstrate counter-mapping efforts that engage with the changing politics of physical space, the Chinese born, self-proclaimed Internet-based artist Miao Ying concerns herself with the fluidity of digital ecologies. Miao’s gif animation *Hundred degrees cannot search your thirty degree smile, part of her LAN Love Poem.gif series (2014-2015) (Figure 4)* features a single line of Chinese text elegantly waving across a computer screen, accompanied by an intentionally clumsy English translation below. Set in a typeface seemingly generated by Windows 95-era WordArt for Microsoft Word, a beloved typographic tool imbued with millennial nostalgia, this animated gif employs double entendre, a common literary device within the Chinese language. “Hundred degrees” is the direct English translation of the Chinese search engine, Baidu, a rhizomatic map of sorts. The virtual scope of Baidu reflects the geography that its networked platform inhabits, home to over 904 million people who use the Internet every day. Located somewhere within this virtual ecosystem, elegantly flowing text is placed in front of a browsing screen with the familiar message for anyone who has come in contact with China’s Great Firewall: “This webpage is not available.” The artist imagines this pixelated poem as penned by a heartbroken young lover attempting to search for his ex-girlfriend on Instagram. Tragically, even her innocent smile is unattainable as Instagram is blocked in Mainland China. Thus, following an unfruitful query on Baidu (aka “hundred degrees”), he ascertains nothing but a fading memory of his former love. In this way, the seemingly limitless virtuality of the so-called “Chinese”
Internet is in fact a networked cartographic accessory of the nation-state. Limitless virtuality of the so-called “Chinese” Internet is in fact a networked cartographic accessory of the nation-state.

Miao Ying transfers the real into the virtual, recording intermediary spaces and marginalized modes of visual knowledge through a unique Internet-based display practice. Her time-based work, *Chinternet Plus* (2016) is what she describes as an official unveiling of, “a counterfeit ideology.” The project offers an online presentation of current conditions that characterize the socio-political geography of the Chinese Internet, or Chinternet. The work’s title makes a sardonic reference to the notion of Internet Plus, an official strategy proposed by China’s Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang in 2015. The goal of Internet Plus is to apply “cloud computing and big data to traditional industries” as a means of remodeling them to fit the changing needs of consumers in the age of the Internet. Miao Ying’s web-based project underscores the Chinternet as a so-called “counterfeit ideology”. *Chinternet Plus* humorously attempts to visually articulate and map out the scope of the Chinese Internet, whose virtual borders are shaped through official political ideology and systems of censorship and control.

Through virtual display, Miao Ying’s online platform functions as a counter-mapping effort. Her project challenges virtual spatio-temporal perimeters of authority and control enacted by ruling officials in the digital realm. The project functions as an online exhibition, introducing the spatial scope of the Chinese Internet through her own creative case study. Within this virtual space, the artist drafts how to brand what she calls an insubstantial idea, suggesting that, in terms of Internet political branding, pervasive within the Chinese Internet, media can easily stand in for the message. She adds, “dramatic advertising is never too much to sell a counterfeit ideology. Be heavy on the image; the lighting, cool effects, and background environments are just as important as the product itself. It enhances the product greatly. The viewer’s eye must not be allowed to rest. Pack as much content as you can into the aesthetic.” After all, the artist reminds us, more is most certainly more.

Miao Ying’s work attempts to map uncharted territory. While many in the US view the Chinese Internet as a barren wasteland due to the absence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google, WhatsApp, etc., *Chinternet Plus* presents it as a vital and vibrant living space, a virtual rhizome, evolving and expanding at unprecedented rates. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari’s evocations of the rhizome, *Chinternet Plus* is a dynamic and horizontal network, which explores space as a method of unfolding itself. Elizabeth Povinelli’s discussion of the rhizome offers a compelling descriptive comparison to the spatial configuration of the Chinese Internet. She writes that, “like a hunk of ginger, the root of the rhizome can be broken and data routes scattered… but each will start again, reconstituting and expanding itself.” Within this context, the Chinternet should be understood as a pliable form able to participate in the construction, reconstruction, and continued spatial unfolding of a virtual environment, inhabited by millions. Max Hantel considers the rhizome as a “holey space.” He writes that we may understand a rhizomic landscape as one that, “follows the movement of matter-flow to create concrete assemblages suffused with incorporeal affects… and grows unpredictably in the ‘non-place’ between content and expression, suggesting a mode of subjectivization and agency.” The Chinternet exists within this intermediate “non-place,” mitigating virtual language and forms of display, which bridge between official rhetoric calling for a “harmonious society” and underground forms of social dissent.
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As an example, the virtual landscape of the Chinese Internet is composed of gifs, memes, and danmu (literally meaning "bullet curtain"), a distinct commenting platform that allows netizens to post comments directly over streaming content. These distinct elements of the Chinese Internet are generated nearly every day and are often influenced by current political events and popular culture. One of the key features of this "Internet with Chinese characteristics" is an innovative form of sharing content through careful channels of self-imposed censorship. During the Obama administration, Chinese netizens commented on Sino-American relations by sharing images of Winnie the Pooh and Tigger, whose physical physiognomies and demeanor roughly corresponded to current Chinese President Xi Jinping and former President Barack Obama respectively. Soon after, representations and phrases related to "Winnie the Pooh" were swiftly censored by Chinese authorities. Yet netizens continue to press the virtual spatial boundaries of the Chinese Internet through the use of creative homophones, inventing new words and phrases, and incorporating historical and cultural allusions. Miao Ying also employs satirical gifs and memes in an effort to shape Chinternet Plus’s digital ecology.

Miao Ying divides her project into five pillars of the Chinternet Plus counterfeit philosophy: Our Story, Our Mystery, Our Goal, Our Vision, and Our Experience. While the first four pillars detail information in terms of the Chinese Internet’s “counterfeit” display function, Our Experience offers a glimpse into this digital space as an emerging virtual reality. In this section, the artist adds, “the most creative aspect of Chinternet Plus is that it makes the original a counterfeit. In this reality, commentary does not just replace the content, here reality serves comments and gets tips.” This refers to a changing cultural landscape in which people use live-streaming applications, such as Douyu, Xiao Hongshu, and Douyin to connect with others. Many of these “wang hong,” or Internet celebrities, display content to attract followers who “like” their content by making comments and sending virtual sums of money. This practice establishes alternative virtual economies that are not otherwise a part of physical Chinese culture. These virtual social and economic spaces are inhabited by millions of Chinese, who live their lives on the threshold between the physical and the virtual.

Chinternet Plus incorporates elements of this emerging virtual socio-political space into her online project, mapping ways in which people move through this dynamically unfolding virtual landscape, as well as new forms of social negotiations between groups and individuals. The work demonstrates an evolving series of social conditions in which meaning is not generated through the creation of new content but rather through the amalgamation and artifice of existing visual forms. To borrow critic Pi Li’s terms, Miao Ying engages in a form of “visual archeology,” in her excavation of familiar visual symbols, pulling them out of their original context, and endowing them with new meaning in a personalized pictorial composition. Akin to Miao Ying, both Gala Porras-Kim and Adler Guerrier engage in a similar practice of “visual archaeology” with their referential treatment of spaces drawn from multiple temporal and geographic reference points. In a 2020 interview with Diana Flatto, Porras-Kim goes as far to explain her recent investment in the indexical treatment of archeological objects as an, “effort to maintain the memory of objects,” as changing, fluid, and malleable, rather than as simply belonging to the past.
Spatially ductile herself, Miao Ying has written that her studio is located within the Internet, the “Chinternet”, and her smart phone, rather than fixing herself within a real geographic location. I do not see Miao Ying as confined to what Gao Minglu identifies as the “urban spectacle”, a reference to modern visual culture in light of radical urban expansion and investment. Rather, I argue that she, along with many other artists of her generation find themselves responding to a growing Internet spectacle, shaped by their literal inhabitance of virtual space. This online exhibition project places her directly within these varying spatio-geographic locations while also providing an opportunity to document how individuals move through, within, and between these visible spaces of the physical environment and the invisible spaces of a virtual one.

While seemingly different in approach, media, and creative strategy, collectively, Gala Porras-Kim, Adler Guerrier, and Miao Ying are all actively engaged in mapping the ways people both participate and construct physical and virtual geographies. Each artist employs a form of counter-mapping, actively identifying and investigating the spaces between physical and psychological layers of existence. Each incorporates strategies that alter both physical and virtual geographies into emotional ones, underscoring deeper awareness of spaces in which we collectively inhabit. The works transform the affective and social realities of those who occupy these disparate spaces into physical documentation, employing mapping and counter-mapping strategies to both draw and erase boundaries of existence. Functioning as independent yet intersecting units, each artist’s counter-mapping project forms a rhizomic model of display, whose de-centered form explores space as a method of unfolding, revealing, and concealing. Collectively, they create connections between time, memory, and history, producing unconventional liminal archives that actively remember what would otherwise be forgotten.

The works of all three artists reside at the intersection between creation and intervention. Each artist records her or his particular social conditions, whether pertaining to endangered or marginal forms of communication, altered or appropriated physical temporal spaces, or emerging virtual spaces through broadly defined counter-mapping projects. The greatest point of connection lies in their disparate creations of intermediary “non-places,” all of which mitigate between content and expression. These three artists present pictorial mapping interventions as a means to reveal the thresholds that exist between both visible and invisible social conditions, contemplating the legacy of coloniality, the politics of space, and most importantly, producing new maps and new territories through amalgamated virtual and physical realities.
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NOTES

1 See Nancy Lee Peluso’s “Whose Woods are these? Counter-mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia,” *Antipode*, 27 (1995): 383. Peluso interrogates the politics of land and forest rights in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo). She writes, “forest mapping by government forestry planners allocates rights of resource use and land access according to forest types and economic objectives, only rarely recognizing indigenous occupancy rights or forest territories customarily claimed or managed by local people. As maps and official plans based on them ignore, and in some cases criminalize, traditional rights to forest, forest products, and forest land for temporary conversion to swidden agriculture, indigenous activists are using sketch maps to re-claim territories - a process that requires re-defining many traditional forest rights. The paper considers the political implications of mapping and the implications of a focus on land use rather than forest use.”


3 Peluso, 383.


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.


16 Ibid.
17 See: Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 54. Jameson writes, “aesthetic of cognitive mapping, a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.”
20 Ibid.
21 Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 26.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
25 Adler Guerrier in discussion with the author, April 24, 2018.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Christoph Lindner, Urban space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture, (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 78–79.
34 Adler Guerrier in discussion with the author, April 24, 2018.
35 Adler Guerrier in discussion with the author, April 24, 2018.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
40 Following Google’s exit from China in 2010, over the last decade, China has accounted for more than one-fifth of the four billion internet users worldwide.
41 China’s “Great Firewall” refers to the regulation of China’s domestic internet, managed by the Ministry of Public Security division of the Chinese government.
42 See Miao Ying’s website: https://www.chinternetplus.com/.
43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
In 2006, then Chinese President Hu Jintao called for the nascency of China as a “harmonious society.” This official rhetoric encouraged all-out economic growth while also addressing increasingly problematic social conditions such as growing gaps between wealthy and poor, inadequate social security system, increased crime, and staggering divorce rates.

More recently, Chinese netizens responded to President Xi’s amendment to the PRC constitution. This policy act removed a clause limiting the President’s tenure to two terms in office. Many flocked to Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo, sharing images of Yuan Shikai, former Republic of China President who attempted to reinstate imperial rule after proclaiming himself Emperor of the China in 1915. Soon after, the terms “Yuan Shikai” seen in many social media posts were deleted by official censors.

See Miao Ying’s website: https://www.chinternetplus.com/.


A connection may be drawn between a newly emerging Internet Spectacle and Debord’s 1967 book La Société du Spectacle, in which the author describes “the increasingly total nature of alienation in capitalist and bureaucratic societies, and the emergence of a 'society of the spectacle' which (leaves) people as passive spectators of social life.” Chinese netizens are passive participants within an increasingly virtually demanding society, where virtually all communication, financial and social transactions, and information exchange are conducted within virtual space. See D. Pinder, “Subverting Cartography: the situationists and maps of the city,” 414.