

ANNA BELLA GEIGER

“And I think to myself what a Wonderful World” written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss

Maps to liberate the world.

[On the “cartographic” imagery of Anna Bella Geiger].

Fernando Castro Flórez

It is crucial to *situate* ourselves, and, for such a purpose, we certainly must pick up upon Torres García’s 1943 “inverted map,” which posits a radical hemispheric reconfiguration. This map is an icon of Latin-American art¹ which can be found, among many other instances, on the cover of the catalog of the important exhibition *Beyond the Fantastic*, edited in 1996 by Gerardo Mosquera. In our tentative approaches to the work of Anna Bella Geiger, it is worth keeping an eye to the cartographic traces without adopting a scientific methodology, but on the contrary, fully assuming that her work sets in motion all “territorializations”. “Memory,” writes Estrella de Diego about Anna Bella Geiger, “is a doubtful, inauthentic territory, and, moreover, in a country like Brazil, the us and the them, the personal and the other, are concepts of uncertain demarcation. Everything is mixed there, everything is anthropophagus —as Oswald de Andrade proclaimed at the end of the 1920s— and the nativa hopelessly blends with the alien, the foreign, what lacks name that the tongue could pronounce, that which a language dares not say, but maybe reveal its lineaments in another.”²

Anna Bella Geiger received an extra-academic education, absorbing, from the end of the 1940s, the lessons of her master, the artist Fayga Ostrower, studying Cubism and the approach of the Bauhaus, but without the imperative of following an “orthodox” style. In 1953 she participated in the first Exposição de Arte Abstrata at the Hotel Quitandinha in the city of Petropolis.³ In the 1960s, the most

¹ “Joaquín Torres-García’s 1936 drawing showing an inverted American continent—the logo of his “Escuela del Sur,” whose intention it was to remind the artist of the region of where “our North” stood—soon became a symbol of Latin-American art at large” (Terry Smith: “Crear peligrosamente, entonces y ahora” in *Lo desacogedor. Escenas fantasma en la sociedad global*, 2ª Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, 2006, p. 124). [There is an English-language version: “Creating Dangerously, Then and Now” in *The Unhomely. Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, 2ª Bienal Internacional de Arte de Sevilla, 2006.]

² Estrella de Diego: “Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana” en *Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 31.

³ “In early 1953, Décio [Vieria] organized an exhibition in the hotel Quitandinha [in Petropolis]. [...] This was the first exhibition of Brazilian abstract art. Lygia Clark, Lygia Papel, myself and some other twenty artists took part in it. We were abstract painters ‘against the rest of the world...’” (Anna Bella Geiger: interviewed in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 289).

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prescient critic Mario Pedrosa observed that Anna Bella Geiger had described “the superior reality of the body,” which had led her to move from abstraction to the guts, traveling from a certain Tachisme to an exploration of the depths about organic reality.⁴ In fact, the main realm of artistic development through which Anna Bella Geiger advanced was printmaking,⁵ from her earliest solo exhibition at the Eglinton Gallery of Toronto (1954) where she presented a number of drawings, gouaches, and prints.⁶

Geiger was one of the first Brazilian artists to use video, her first super-8 films dating from 1969. In the 1970s, she was invited by Walter Zanini to present a video in a great exhibition of video art at the Institute of Contemporary Art of Philadelphia, alongside such important artists as Nam June Paik, Bill Viola or Vito Acconci. In 1972, she presented her exhibition *Circumambulatio* at the Museu de Arte Moderno de Rio de Janeiro, which included an audiovisual (blending sound and slides), and super-8 film. “Around that time,” remarks Anna Bella Geiger, “video did not seem a good option because it forced me to return to low-resolution black and white images. Mobility was, moreover, greatly impaired; a Sony Portapak camera weighed almost 40kg. The only advantage was the possibility to record both sound and image live and direct. Though these possibilities were rather minor, they made me think about problems of a different conceptual nature. This is why there’s a prevalence of ideas over the final result. There was also the option of *looping* —endlessly repeating a segment of video— which was at that time an unheard-of device.”⁷ In this work there is a spiral symbol that resembles the *contemporaneous* work by Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1970), and has a certain *trace of the body* which brings to mind Ana Mendieta’s interventions,⁸

⁴ Cf. Mário Pedrosa: text written for the catalog of Anna Bella Geiger’s exhibition in the Relevo Gallery in Rio de Janeiro in 1967, reproduced in Anna Bella Geiger. *Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 155.

⁵ “Anna Bella Geiger’s field of operation is graphic. It is fascinating to what extent she lives and breathes in that particular point. Even when her works seem to drape themselves with the trappings of sculpture, they are still graphic objects: “Para Anna Bella Geiger. Diciembre 2004” in Anna Bella Geiger. *Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 208).

⁶ Anna Bella Geiger has received countless awards and distinctions for her engravings; let us remember here that in 1961 she won the first award Engraving Award at the XVIII Salão de Arte Moderna de Bahia or that in 1962 she was presented with the Casa de las Américas Award at the 1st Engraving Latin-American competition in Havana.

⁷ Anna Bella Geiger in conversation with Diana B. Wechsler: “En primera persona...” en Anna Bella Geiger: *Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 134.

⁸ Anna Bella Geiger herself has spoken about the “resemblance” between her work and these artists, in a conversation about her work from the 70s and a number of workshops she ran at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro: “The results could be compared to much later works by Ana Mendieta, for instance. [...] At the Venice Biennale in 1980, which I took part in, I was surprised to confirm that various artists were presenting works

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though, more important than these “analogies” with other artists, it is the archetypal process of seeking the center, and the mitho-poetical insights, which recall most strongly Mircea Eliade’s thought.⁹

Fernando Cocchiarale warns that Anna Bella Geiger’s work embodies a showcase of different artistic expressions, techniques, and materials, which go from design to printmaking, from painting to video and super-8, without necessarily landing on her own individual style, but seeking a *deliberate fragmentation*. Her fertile creative process allows her to drift pictorially from Mondrian or Vermeer,¹⁰ using videos to produce “drafts,” without stumbling on a “technological fetishism,” understanding that it is the adequate medium to sediment discourse.¹¹ “Geiger is an artist of strategies, a maneuver concealed behind the extreme fragility of her productions and the impression of a fixed, ordered world —each thing in its place, nothing dissonant or discordant. It is a game of simulacra, a mask where the impact, hidden, is discovered after a second, more attentive look over the refined and extremely beautiful pieces of Geiger.”¹²

involving the soil and the earth in their diverse explorations and encounters with the symbolic. Richard Long, for instance, with his stones and circular fences, his explorations of archeological constructions... and Smithsons immense photographs, based on the symbol of the spiral with which I had worked in the past” (Anna Bella Geiger: interviewed in Anna Bella Geiger. *Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 291).

⁹ In *Circumambulation*, Anna Bella Geiger expresses her interest both in Mircea Eliade and Jung. “From 1972 [...] till today, the theme of the center of man, locations in space, and cosmic things in general, invaded me, though they were already sketched out in the abstractions and even more so in my guts. This is what I feel, that we are things. It is the relationships that I go on making which change” (Anna Bella Geiger in Francisco Bittencourt: “Anna Bella Geiger” in *Jornal do Brasil*, 1972, quoted in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 324). In 1975 Anna Bella Geiger participated in the round table *Jung e a Comunicação* within a conference organized by Dr. Nise da Silveira and the Society of Friends of the Museu de Imagem do Inconsciente, at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁰ “From 1987 till today Geiger has lived with the memory of paintings housed in her imagination. Those memories vary from the image of Vermeer with a woman reading a letter to Mondrian’s exceptionally beautiful series grouped under the title *Pier and Ocean. En route*, Geiger acknowledged the depth of Philip Guston’s later work and seems to have reflected a fair amount about the work of older Russian painters, specifically, I would venture, about the women in Malevich cycle, Liubov Popova, for example, who experimented with the elliptical canvas format which he find in a set of paintings by Geiger from 1987, called *Macios*” (Dore Ashton: “Anna Bella Geiger,” published in *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, n° 48, 1994, reproduced in Anna Bella Geiger. *Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 316).

¹¹ “I am interesting in working with video as a draft; sometimes as image that lends itself to redundancies; sometimes, as a source of discussion or conversation; sometimes, as space; and, other times, I am not interested in working in video” (Anna Bella Geiger: text in *Mostra de Arte Experimental de Filmes Super-8, Audio-Visual e Video-Tape, Maison de France*, Rio de Janeiro, 1975).

¹² Estrella de Diego: “Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 24.

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From the 1970s, Anna Bella Geiger displays a *cartographic imagery*;¹³ maps that she began to draw in small notebooks became, as she has noted herself, true testimonies of an obsession.¹⁴ Describing space, mapping out the territory, these drives have to do with the desire to control the world. “Or perhaps that’s not the case. Perhaps the opposite is true. One maps things out to get lost, to disturb a place and narrate it once again from the beginning; from an unforeseen beginning which craves for another beginning, where one need not renounce just for the mere fact of being a woman.”¹⁵ This artist has ample knowledge of the value of geography, the limits it imposes, but she is keen to develop a form of mapping that looks toward the possibility of subverting or breaking through the established frontiers,¹⁶ as when she formulated “The Ten Commandments” through multiple connections with Brazilian history: “An example is the application of the Fourth Commandment, “Thou shall not kill,” in the exhortation: “You shall not stray from the effort of remembering the Tordesilla line.” The text from the Treaty of Tordesilla, which fixed the boundaries between the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, excludes the surface of Brazil as an empty form.”¹⁷

With a fine *postcolonial irony*, Anna Bella composed the work *Amuleto. A mulata. A muleta. Am. Latina* (1977). The words, literally, *mesh themselves* into the maps, generating an unforeseen geography which endeavors both to (politically)

¹³ “Desde a década de 1970, é recorrente a representação cartográfica em minha obra, através de conceitos como local, território, centro, periferia, fronteiroço, global. Entendo que a partir das condições mutantes da história e da geografia, posso falar de situações análogas em outras instâncias da vida, através da minha condição como artista, produzindo idéias, objetos dentro dessa época” (Anna Bella Geiger: “Circa” in *Circa MMXI. Anna Bella Geiger*, Centro Cultural Correios, São Paulo, 2014).

¹⁴ “The map began to emerge in my work, in small notebooks, as an attempt to establish the idea of a new Atlas, devoted to the Brazilian artist. I began to interest myself in the profile of the forms of the maps of Brazil and Latin-America. This, in that particularly moment that we were experiencing—as Brazilians, as artists—, became an obsession for me and I found that my abstract work no longer consisted in forms in themselves, but that these forms were a problem that remained between the stains and the map. [...] While producing the engravings a title suddenly came to my mind for these pieces, and I called them *Location of Action*” (Anna Bella Geiger: “Recontro com a Amazônia” en *O Liberal*, Belém, 3 de septiembre de 1995, quoted in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 326).

¹⁵ Estrella de Diego: “Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 23.

¹⁶ “It is worth underscoring how the notion of geography both as form and formation entered the imagery of this artist. Its amplitude, envisioned by the geographer Pedro Geiger [Anna Bella Geiger’s husband], is a valuable reference: ‘form defines the limit of each object or individual allowing us to distinguish them, and the limit turns form into an element that brings a certain tension to matter’ (Pedro Geiger: *As formas do espaço brasileiro*, Ed. Jorge Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 2003, p. 7)” (Adolfo Montejo Navas: “Anna Bella Geiger una poética en archipiélago (aproximaciones)” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 270).

¹⁷ Karin Stempel: “Anna Bella Geiger” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 283.

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subvert as much as it tries to (subjectively) suture. In 1978, this artist *swallowed up the map* of the Southern Cone in one of her most radical works: *O pão nosso de cada dia* [*Our Daily Bread*]. Fully conscious that the map is a manifestation of ideology, Geiger questions the *eurocentric* perspective with astounding brilliance.¹⁸ With the overcoming of abstraction, and the unleashing of her cartographic drive, she sets the world "upside down," and situates herself in an *interstitial space*.¹⁹ The aesthetic of Anna Bella Geiger can be defined as a *dynamic cartography* where the maps, as Gilles Deleuze noted, should not be understood in their extension, but also as vectors of intensity, of density that ultimately refer to that which makes the journey possible.²⁰

Anna Bella Geiger has used, in some of her pictoric works, a form of camouflage to highlight the tensions between her body and her surroundings, in the friction of nature and culture, positing (dis)adjustments between background and surface.²¹ It is a game of aesthetic ambiguity, a plastic sedimentation redolent of irony.²² It is not merely a camouflage, but also a way of addressing the process of unmasking. Camouflage or, in terms of Caillois, "legendary psychasthenia"²³ was

¹⁸ "It is actually this series, *Local da ação* and *Fronteiriços*, which operate as corrective works to those Eurocentric outlooks (a recurring topic for this artist) which Okwui Enwezor called 'westerncentric.' The sociocultural fractures of the new "globalized" postmodern world are to be found here too, in these dialogic works which blend intersubjective and collective experiences, and which are nothing if not virtual and imaginary cartographies. They are constructions that belong to the "expanded field" of sculpture, and are beyond the ideological (another central theme of this artist's work), because at heart they are 'a dissertation upon the landscape and a great abstraction,' in Anna Bella Geiger's own words" (Adolfo Montejo Navas: "Anna Bella Geiger una poética en archipiélago (aproximaciones)" in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 268).

¹⁹ "In 1965, Anna Bella Geiger abandoned an aesthetic she had come to master: abstraction. While abstract space was losing its credibility, she begins to transit toward an image which stands 'between,' that is, toward an image that is not representation nor abstraction; an image of illusions, which reveals itself repeatedly through the deployment of certain cartographic methods" (Márcio Doctors: "La emergencia de la imagen" in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 322).

²⁰ "And, in the same way, the map of movements and journeys was no longer a derivation or extension of the father-mother, the map of forces or intensities is neither a derivation of the body, an extension of a previous image, or of a *posteriori* (Gilles Deleuze: "Lo que dicen los niños" in *Crítica y clínica*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1996, p. 93) [There is an English-language version: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1997].

²¹ Adolfo Montejo Navas: "Fotografia além da fotografia (notas de montagem)" in *Anna Bella Geiger. Fotografia além da fotografia*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 9.

²² "Even when we relish in the jocose ambiguity of Anna Bella's graphic imagination, the 'mutation,' as Fernando Cocchiarella said, 'of a reference inside another,' and the artist's equal predilection for camouflage, an abstraction which enables the concealment of a entity, signal or utterance within another, we also perceive that this is carried out in a manner that allows the reference to point to an omnipresent graphic kingdom, a realm outside of art: that of information and control which pollutes and orders our lives" (Guy Brett: "Para Anna Bella Geiger. Diciembre 2004" in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 280).

²³ Cf. Roger Caillois: "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire" in *Minotaure*, n° 7, Paris, junio de 1935. [There is an English-language version: "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in *October*, Vol. 31, (Winter, 1984), pp. 16-32.]

related, according to Lacan, to the *mirror stage*. Against the upholding of difference and self-possession, mimetism represents a loss of autonomy, of differentiation, of boundaries—blending with surroundings, the “inscription in space,” brings the subject closer to dispossession, as if giving in to the temptation (or impulse of fusion) exerted by the vast exteriority of space itself.²⁴ Geiger uses camouflage not so much as a way of “disappearing”²⁵ but of activating a certain *masquerade* in the meaning established by Joan Riviere.²⁶

Anna Bella Geiger subverts the widespread commandment to *not stand out*,²⁷ a geographic-cum-cartographic vision that unearthed the clichés of anthropology. Thus, in her foundation work *Native Brasil/Alien Brazil* of 1976-1977, Geiger contrasts some postcards which represent the truisms of Brazil, the “stereotype” of what’s supposed to be “Brazilian,” to some photographs where her daughters, her friends, and herself (adopting thus the position of *strangers*, subjectivities which, to a certain extent, exoticize the *other*) ape the same poses. This *mise-en-abyme* (a mimicry with an evident parodic tonality) of the ethnic cliché²⁸ has to do both with her particular reinterpretation of *anthropophagy*²⁹ with the question formulated by this artist about whether we are all aliens.

No matter how much we try to affirm ourselves in the realm of marginality or “strangeness,” ultimately, we are trapped by a bureaucracy as shown by these

²⁴ Cf. Jacques Lacan: “El estadio del espejo como formador de la función del yo tal y como se nos revela en la experiencia psicoanalítica” in *Escritos 1*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1971, p. 89 and Denis Hollier: “Mimesis and Castration” in *October*, 31 (Winter 1984), pp. 3-16.

²⁵ “One of the fundamental strategies of camouflage is that of *disappearing*, becoming invisible or imperceptible” (Paolo Fabbri entrevistado por Tiziana Migliore: “Estrategias del camuflaje” in *Revista de Occidente*, n° 330, November 2009, p. 98).

²⁶ Cfr. Estrella de Diego: “Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 32.

²⁷ “Camouflage is also a form of referring, in a general manner, to the nature of the uniform and the disguise, which impacts everybody’s life nowadays” (Maite Méndez Baiges: *Camuflaje*, Ed. Siruela, Madrid, 2007, p. 94).

²⁸ “From the mid-1970s, Rio newsstands began to sell colorful postcards showing natives of the Center-West and the Amazonas. They were women, men and children, from the tribes of the Borors, Uaikás and other natives, photographed in a variety of poses inside their natural environment. This took place around the time when the military regime began to act past the line of demarcation of indigenous land, but the natives were being murdered by henchmen hired by the local landowners” (Guy Brett: “Para Anna Bella Geiger. Diciembre 2004” en *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Sasa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 281).

²⁹ “In an anthropophagic practice, Anna Bella Geiger takes the aura of the ‘tupi,’ transforming into totem the fetishistic cliché of the postcard, and digests it into the dialectic game of the postcards (‘tupy or not tupy’) in the battering/combating against a manichean cultural posture: native or alien?” (Maria Cecília Flosi: “Com o meu despreparo como homem primitivo...” in *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo, June 25th 1978, quoted in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 325). In 1998, Anna Bella was invited to participate in the collective exhibition *Antropofagia?*, curated by Paulo Sérgio Duarte in the Museo da República in Rio de Janeiro.

women that Anna Bella commands to unhurriedly repeat that word which is already laden with Kafkian reverberations. We must bear in mind that, if this artist has resorted to seriality and has made use of, for instance, file cabinets in some of her works, her aesthetic does not (fortunately) stray toward an archival rhetoric. IN her artistic processes, as Adolfo López Montejo notes, what we find is the potential of a *cosmogonic recreation*.³⁰ But there is also the latent throb of a determined political activism. “I believe,” notes Anna Bella Geiger, “that in my work from the 1960s and the 1970s there are a number of imbricated questions, such as the need for political action, which in my aesthetics are combined with a constant exploration of the meaning, nature, and function of the object itself, that is, of art. Moreover, I was preoccupied about my function as an artist in such a moment.”³¹ Crucially, her work never steps into the field of campaign literature, but rather its language, in terms of Paulo Herkenhoff, reveals a “refined politicization.”

This artist, who has drawn from the age of two, has found in drawing a vital channel for the sedimentation of her thoughts;³² she doesn’t dwell on decorative details, but on the contrary, as is manifest in the work *Arte e Decoração* (1975), she posits the problems and subjective displacement embedded in the historicist dimension of ornamentation. All throughout her career, Anna Bella Geiger has tried to establish a *line of flight* from subjectivism, a transgression of the “possessive individualism” which could perhaps come about from the prism of *artistic practice*. Her encounter with Joseph Beuys in 1975 in New York, at the René Block Gallery, was of the utmost importance.³³ “In your opinion,” asked Anna Bella Geiger to the German shaman, who had lived with the coyote within the abnormal premises of the gallery space, “should the artist always go to the extreme, like the edge of a cliff or the blade of a knife?” to which Beuys answered: “Yeah, that’s it. However, in order to do that, one must have a different vision of the world, one which will lead us into a new reality. Without forgetting that everything that was done in the past works as our frame of reference and base. It is necessary to fragment. Placing

³⁰ Cfr. Adolfo Montejo Navas: “Anna Bella Geiger una poética en archipiélago” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa de Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 272.

³¹ Anna Bella has declared that drawing has a certain character of permanent aperture, renovation and revelation: “it is a ‘direct way’ to my thoughts, a radiography of my work” (Anna Bella Geiger in conversation with Diana B. Wechsler: “In first person...” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografia física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 135).

³² Anna Bella Geiger quoted included in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografia física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 130 [a sentence she wrote for the catalog of the exhibition *Re-Aligning Vision: Alternative Currents in South American in Drawing*, 1997].

³³ “By the mid-1970s, meeting Joseph Beuys allowed me to converse with him about certain subjects and confide my intuitions about my work at the time” (Anna Bella Geiger: interview in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 290).

everything in one single thing, and from there extending the reduced knowledge of the different sciences.”³⁴ From her hommages to Duchamp, produced that very same year when she spoke with Beuys, this Brazilian artists adopted the role of “girlfriend” and of Rrose Sélavy,³⁵ positing a ceaseless *re-territorialization* which implies a “embodying of stereotypes,” rendering into metaphor (with its shifts and movements) her “identity,” creating games of *parodic dualities* such as *Blonde Brunette Indian* (2017).

We have to listen or, rather, “tend our ears” to Anna Bella Geiger’s *physical geography* (something literal in the work *Obren Athenea II. À escuta da paisagem*, 2003), being aware that the map, as J.H. Andrews explains, is a “space that is used to represent another space.” The question marks heap upon the map,³⁶ endeavoring to subvert the *colonizing power* of the cartographic disciplines. “The fact of cartographing,” write Smith and Katz, “starts with the assumption of a particular space as something given; the function of the cartographed is to produce a scaled-down representation of that space, a one-to-one correspondence between representation and represented, so that the resulting mode—the representation—comes to be regarded as ‘adequate’ to its specific purpose.”³⁷ In this respect, Anna Bella Geiger’s artistic meditation adopts the political condition of mapping out which has to do not only with an “external territory” but particularly bears upon the world to which we are *subjected*.³⁸ An artist like Geiger, who pays attention to the paradoxes of existence, has managed to transform her

³⁴ Joseph Beuys in conversation with Anna Bella Geiger, quoted in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagenes, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 311.

³⁵ I mean the work *The Bride met Duchamp before the Bachelors* (1975) which she is presenting at the exhibition in the Aural Gallery of Madrid (2022) and *Rrose Sélavy mesmo* (1997-2002). Juan Vicente Aliaga has written a brilliant text titled “Testigo del mundo. Anna Bella Geiger” about her “Duchampian” works.

³⁶ “To use the map as the only possibility, but at the same time to be able to say—what thing through the map? There is already a prior sense of representation, therefore, am I bound to ideology? To dealing with polarities such as center and periphery? To refer to the Third World?” (Anna Bella Geiger: interviewed in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagenes, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 293).

³⁷ Neil Smith and Cindi Katz: “Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialised Politics” in Michael Keith y Steve Pall: *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Ed. Routledge, London, 1993, quoted in Estrella de Diego: “Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana” in *Anna Bella Geiger: Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, p. 29-30.

³⁸ “Judith Butler reminds us that even if states are, in effect, *loci* of power, they are not exhausted in said administrative categorization, for there are non-national states, and security states. A state, adds Butler, is the condition in which we find ourselves, and it is defined as the set of institutional and legal structures which bound a given territory (though many of said structures do not belong to the framework of the state). That is to say, the state is the entity which maps out the obligations and prerogatives of the citizen” (Gabriela Rangel: “El “estado” en los mapas de Anna Bella Geiger” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Geografía física y humana*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2017, pp. 55-56).

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cartography so that it does not become a way of controlling the space but, on the contrary, of *opening it up*,³⁹ activating her *hybrid maps* into forms of *de-subjection*.

Her exhibition at Madrid’s Aural Gallery (2022) gives us a glimpse of the *terra incognita*, giving fresh testimonies to the fractures within globalist discourses.⁴⁰ In her work, art is always embedded in the social space (something highlighted in a print from 1977 where the oceans of the world map are covered by a text of critical theory), a method towards a *different reading of reality*, as it is manifest in the outstanding series *Rolos* (Rolls), those book-objects which could be related to the Torah, though what we need at the moment is not a kabbalistic deciphering but an artistic and social commitment that may point toward an escape from the current catastrophe we are trapped in. This great Brazilian artist understands at as an “object of discussion,” bearing always in mind both its material conditioning and its historical and social dimension,⁴¹ ceaselessly reflecting about the subjectivity that is, to use terms dear to Eugenio Trías, located in a *bordering condition*, rooted in the field of symbols.⁴²

Anna Bella Geiger produces an *Orbis descriptivo* which is, in fact, a *dismantling of the world*, a critique of hegemonies which legitimizes the “maps.” When she says that “There is no place like home” (2014) she is not lapsing back into *interiority*, there is no nationalistic undertone, on the contrary, she seems to be *weaving* a different form of existence, at a time when *quadrillages* seem paranoid forms of containing the heterogeneous. The maps of Anna Bella Geiger are *undisciplined* processes, critical activations that overcome the “bunkerization” of life, invitations to trace a different path across the world, using a compass which, as Wagner Barja

³⁹ “[...] um espaço aberto- um mundo aberto/ a coluna vertebral/ a passagem de um modo de ser a outro/ um modo de ser paradoxal” (Anna Bella Geiger, 1973, citado em Adolfo Montejo Navas: “Fotografia além da fotografia (notas de montagem)” in *Anna Bella Geiger: Fotografia além da fotografia*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 3).

⁴⁰ Cfr. Edward Said: “Travelling Theory” in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

⁴¹ Anna Bella Geiger writes in *About Art* (1976) a series of manuscripted questions and a series of contradictions which define her concept of the artistic: “object of contemplation / object of discussion, ideal object / material object, natural object / historico-social object, eternal object / ephemeral object.”

⁴² “It is precisely this ‘symbolic supplement’ which remits to those specific aspects of the human condition which the work of Anna Bella Geiger is constantly targeting, as the Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías has remarked recently: ‘the necessity to integrate a radically reconstructed concept of symbol in the aesthetic reflection.’ Aware that ‘[...] it is not man who constructs the symbolic, but the symbolic which constructs man. When man enters the world, he enters into the symbolic which was already there. And he can’t be a man if he does not enter the symbolic’” (Adolfo Montejo Navas: “Anna Bella Geiger una poética en archipiélago” en *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa de Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 272).

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“And I think to myself what a Wonderful World” written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss

noted, points toward the “territory of the subjective.”⁴³ In a text written by Anna Bella Geiger in 1974, on the occasion of an exhibition at the Bonino Gallery of Rio de Janeiro, she declared that the imagination helps her expose her feelings, “to feel being-alone, the dimensions of the angst of human condition, the feeling of mystery of the universe, of time, the quest for centers, resemblances more than differences, passages more than contrasts, ultimately perceiving everything that dwells in my moment.”⁴⁴ This temporalization is also a critical location, the task of an artist who has learnt how to find support in *extremes* while questioning what is “one’s own,” searching (with an utopian hope) the commons, drawing maps where we might finally achieve a lasting and dignified existence.

⁴³ “With her hybrid maps, both visionary and critical, brimful of an anticolonial furor, Anna Bella Geiger endorses the widely-known remark of the Uruguayan artist Torres García, who, in his vision of an upside-down map of Latin-America, proclaimed that the South is the North. This preoccupation of the artist, and the connections she establishes between cultural identity and experienced space, is so evident and coherent within our current political map, that her whole work is reflected in this project of giving live to a geopolitics of decolonization. Her compass points toward a timeless navigation, with the cursor aimed in the direction of the field of subjectivity” (Wagner Barja: “Los entre-mundos de Anna Bella” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 287).

⁴⁴ Anna Bella Geiger: “Grabados en color” in *Anna Bella Geiger. Territórios, Passagens, Situações*, Ed. Casa da Palavra, Rio de Janeiro, 2007, p. 307.