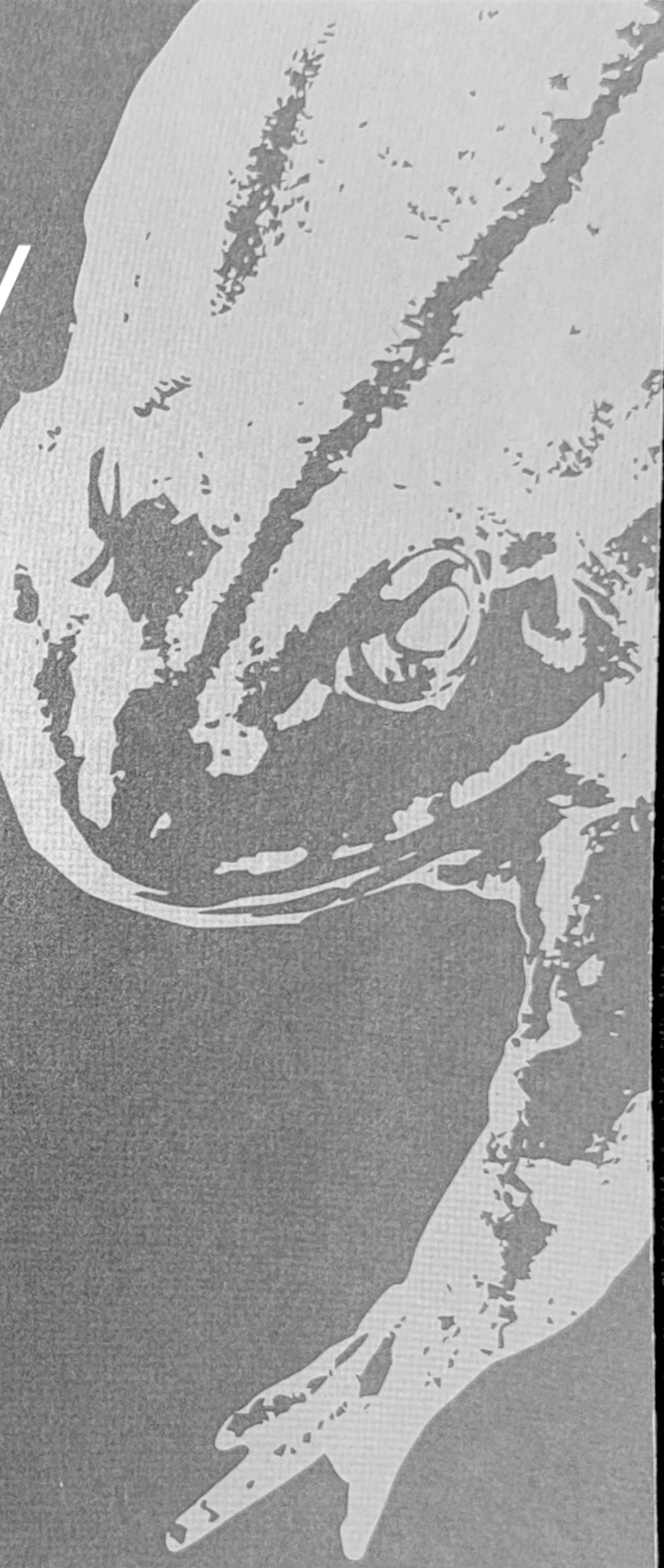
Script for a Synthetic Play



THE PUBLIC BUILDING

Edited by
Flora Reznik

SCRIPT FOR A SYNTHETIC PLAY

The public building

ONO
MATO
PEE

Script for a Synthetic Play



THE PUBLIC BUILDING

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X + Y − Z

DIMENSIONS OF THE MAP

EEF VELDKAMP

The map utilises the Y and X axes to create a virtual plane that models reality into recognisable, readable symbols in order to navigate through a landscape that unfolds itself before oneself as it is transversed. This creates a simulated elevation from one's situatedness, by negating the Z axis. It is an aphetic system for an emphatic surrounding, facilitating a sort of spatial dissociation from one's embeddedness, whilst being embedded.

Because the Z axis is left out of it, reading a map forces the beholder to see themselves not through the immersive first person experience as we are deemed to experience ourselves, but from the detached third person perspective, even though this is merely a cognitive reality; a shift of perspective, and *not* a spatial configuration. In other words, one is not truly ripped from the first person perspective, but one is enveloped in a model of reality as a third person perspective. This third person perspective enables us to scale up or down without the 'burden' of a horizon that moves with us with every step. The horizon that necessitates the unknown, is precisely what the map is to transgress. However, the horizon always goes beyond you, and implies that you should go further than where you are; drawn linearly to the locus point of no beyond. A map is discontented.

Enlarging the plane of the map is emphatically a mathematical equation— its topological ground is as abstract and endless as scrolling through an excel file. The ratio of the map determines its link to reality, and thereby hints *your* link to reality, existentialising you as 1:1.000. Reading a map is a mind game you play by toggling between looking at it and around yourself, and at it, and around yourself in a vile rhythm with no progressive insight aside from vertigo, just in order to calibrate one to the other and vice versa. Just in order to be where you are, and to be there indeed, that is, according to the map. It is a mind-boggling experience, as one has to imagine oneself 'over there' whilst necessarily always being 'here', which gives rise to the odd experience of being semi-suspended: you are here and there, and there and here.

Navigating isn't always convenient. Navigating using a map isn't always convenient either, except when one fully embodies its logic, and is thus integrated into it too. Above all, a map obliges its reader to think of themselves as integrated into a system of coordinates, locations, logistics between locations, encoded by cartographic symbols that speak only one language: signifying what's what, and nothing more than that. Abstracted from first to third person, a landmark is a landmark, a restaurant a restaurant. The map generalises our lifeworld into a symbolic order of symbols and signs, that always is necessitated by its utility to that lifeworld, but is simultaneously posing a hindrance to it.

For a map to be a useful tool for navigation, it needs to maintain, or at the least uphold, a position of epistemological superiority

over its reader so that when in doubt, or when its reader loses their way on the road, the road itself isn't lost. Ironically, this is primarily a cognitive reality, for the road surely is still there. Hence the interface of the map is a key apparatus in luring people into dependency on it: it needs to be easier and more accessible than to look up from the map and around oneself. The map that maintains its position of hegemony over its reader in navigating the world slits a layer of the earth like a razorblade, determining as a destination plan what is ought to be there and what is not. Which one is true or false, reality or the map? When something suddenly does not exist—either on the map or in reality—it feels like an unsolvable mystery which of the two is right or wrong. That reality can be wrong is the mysterious claim of the map, a power that "break[s] the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to define what is real."[1] The map above all is a derivative, though it transcends what it is derived from because it has a logic. Logic reigns in a model, and it is precisely that logic that is missing in what the model represents: a model can be held before our eyes and be seen as a whole, while reality cannot. Not being able to see the world as a whole makes it impossible to systematise it on the go, and therefore no logic is applicable to it: it is reality itself that the map mystifies. The map functions as a "reality effect"[2] which by symbolic *representation* establishes what is real and what is not; the map "becomes the very signifier of realism"[3]. The realness, in effect, is accredited to the map. As the map becomes informative of reality, and thus "when reality takes the form of information, the immediate *experience of presence* withers".[4] A map, opposite to reality, has clear limits, although it is infinitely scalable. The map offers a firm sense of control whereas the world we inhabit runs out of hand towards all directions the Z axis has to offer. The Z axis introduces uncertainty, it disorientsus, brings in the horizon, always out of reach. The map's epistemological claim is of such magnitude that it sometimes seems to have replaced the necessity of the Z axis that is an intrinsic part of life, fostering a dependency on the implied authority of the derivative that both forces the world into its dilution, and offers the world a mirky glance in its own self-image.

We confidently turn right when we are told so by a pleasant voice, as a well known meme of a car crashed into a bush cunningly illustrates with the text 'turn right here'. Looking up and down regresses into solely down, but at least there was no doubt! Eyes wide closed, ripped from the Z axis. Paper realities amongst which the map reign our self-assurance and mobility and accentuate like manuals what is ought to be done. Pragmatism turned moralism. In this relationship we have to ourselves through the map, we do not follow the map because we do not trust ourselves, but because we trust the map more. Even though some boomers might put to blame

1 Herbert Marcuse. *The Aesthetic Dimension: towards a critique of marxist aesthetics.* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd. 1979). 8-11; 13.

2 Roland Barthes. "The Reality Effect." In *The Rustle of Language.* Translated by Richard Howard. 141 48. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1989).

3 Ibid., 148.

4 Byung Chul Han. *The Crisis of Narration.* Translated by Daniel Steuer. (Cambridge: Polity Press. 2024). 7.

that "'we can't read maps anymore"', which they claim to be the reason we miss-navigate. But at the junctions of reality making derivatives, even the map-using-map-makers-making-maps-which-map-users-use make the same mistakes as all of us do.

Most maps, especially if used for navigation, imply a causal if not positivist relation to the land they are seen as derivatives of. Precision has always been the great ambition of maps. As David Woodward argues, the modern map implied a world "over which systematic dominance was possible, and provided a powerful framework for political expansion and control."[5] Power always needs a *what* and a *how*. In order to serve that power, maps ought to never get behind on the so-called 'facts' of the reality they map, consecutively the need for maps urged an even more ambitious intervention on the world they have mapped, so that the world would be up to date with the map. Bruno Latour notes that a difference must be made between what is as it is (facts), and "that to which we are fully habituated and which has been totally naturalised"[6], even though this difference is virtually impossible to distinguish.

Maps are not apolitical copies that neutrally model the world into something we can hold before our eyes: they offer a systemic mediation of a lifeworld and emphasise, through centration, accentuation and metrics certain locations and ratios over others. Derivative and original interchange and affirm each other as such through a hypnotising oscillation between up and down, and up and down. This oscillation doesn't just invite us to conclude what is truly real and what is derivative, but to think about what we want to be real. The map implies a utopia through the dissonance between up and down. Whoms utopia is a question of a different order.

EXPERT SYSTEMS

In oscillating between describing the world and prescribing the world, the map might gain hegemony over the world, enforcing itself as an expert.[7] The map coerces the given, colonising the lifeworld as Jürgen Habermas illustrates with his *Theory of Communicative Action (1981)*. He explains that through the motive of aiding the world, 'expert systems' like the map shape the world up until the level where nothing given can prevail without the mediation of a second nature system: the map as second nature attempts at replacing the given or inhibits access to it by imposing itself to it. And they do so with a bargain. Expert systems are designed to ease life: mobility, smooth communication, being able to plan. In that selfless aid expert systems tend to subject the lifeworld to their own logic without which that lifeworld is not ought to persist. It produces an experience that no mobility is possible without maps; no road can be ridden if it is not on the map. Expert systems are naturalised to such an extent, that no alternative seems possible. Just like it is

5 Ricardo Padrón, "Mapping Plus Ultra: Cartography, Space, and Hispanic Modernity" in *Representations*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Summer 2002).

6 Bruno Latour, Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, Copenhagen, 26 February 2014. Videnskabernes Selskab/Royal Danish Academy of Sciences. Lecture. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i-ZKf-Shovs

7 Mathijs van Boxsel terms the presumption of expertise 'deskundologie', primarily in his book: Cf. Mathijs van Boxel, *De Encyclopedie van de Domheid: Deskundologie*, (Amsterdam: Querido, 2006).

easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.[8] We cannot imagine navigating the world without the intermediary of the map. We cannot imagine ourselves even accessing the world without the map, as the map implies this distance to it: "*reality itself takes on the form of information and data*"[9]. In line with that experience Bruno Latour wonders, "what is there, in second nature, that generates such a lack of sensitivity to the worldly condition of our existence?"[10] The answer to this question might lie in the effect of the map: a sense of control. This control becomes especially desirable as we increasingly experience the world as contingency—as *unforeseen*—which is precisely what the map renders by negating the Z axis.

Maps are structures of naturalisations that aim to resemble a first nature, but they model it into a biassed derivative: the second nature, called in this way because of being derivative, *second* in relation to an original. Original here does not pertain to artifice, but to the unmediated, to the foreseen. When second nature gets naturalised and it experiences as a first nature, it effectively becomes first nature, degenerating the 'former' first nature. To illustrate that process, ironically, the lines that ripped the world into colonial bite-size pieces devoured by the capitalist West, have now become in some regards the identifiers of scarred nationalism of respective states. Naturalisation through second nature systems becomes a primal signifier in real life, it affects it to its core. The aphetic need of the British colonists for a container term for all the religions encountered in the South-Asian continent, now hosts the religion of Hinduism.[11] The case of Siam (now Thailand) illustrates this well too. The map conquered the countryside scattered with lords and chiefs and centralised it under the unifying label of the nation. Through doing so it generated the need for a claim of ownership and simultaneously rendered the legitimacy of such a claim. A claim that had not existed before. The feeling of 'Thainess' was something new that this claim made an appeal on,[12] and is now to be taken as substantive. A map can help in creating something new, to which reality has to relate once it is reified—making 'things' out of human relations—as such. Maps *make* the territories they map.

In a map a distance is created between the terrain it signifies and that terrain itself by negating the Z axis implying a *gap* between X&Y and Z that needs investigation. That the map makes what it describes, could potentially be turned upside down: can we use the map to prescribe to reality another reality? Above all, the gap created between X&Y and Z is an invitation for 'fillers': ideas, theories, speculations that transverse the cliffs on either side. But is there truly a gap? Or does the map generate a gap between reality and a model of it? Let's investigate some of those 'fillers'. One could argue that the gap is symptomatic of our relation to ourselves as feeling

8 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?*, (Zero Books, 2009), 2. In reference to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Zizek.

9 Han, The Crisis of Narration, 6.

10 Bruno Latour, Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, Copenhagen, 26 February 2014. Videnskabernes Selskab/Royal Danish Academy of Sciences. Lecture. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i-ZKf-Shovs

11 Many scholars argue that the concept of 'hinduism' as a single, unified religion was coined by British officials in the 17th and 18th century. Cf. David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41:4, 1999, 630. Cf. David N. Lorenzen, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Reli-*

embedded in reality or not, which hints to a constant alienation to our lived environment: a map is a tool that offers guidance, surety. However, it is true that a map creates a certain type of interaction with the world, looking up and down, verifying not so much the map but the world it describes. This type of interaction, as suggested earlier, is of transversion, of going through rather than being in. Maps affirm and substantiate that alienation; they make it 'real'. Looking up and down from the map to what's around us, and up and down again, confused, having the feeling that what we see in both directions are incommensurable realities. This process of up-and-down problematizes the relationship between the two, making reality the derivative and thereby the model that can be adapted to what the map—how we think of reality—prescribes. The map vividly asks something of reality: to cohere to it, and if it does not, it will misguide reality. The map is vicious. This repetitive verification through looking up and down, "does not let itself be persuaded of something by what is 'past', just in order that this [..] may recur." In other words, it anchors not what is repeated. Rather, Martin Heidegger continues "the repetition makes a reciprocative rejoinder to the possibility" of what has been repeated. But "such a rejoinder [...] is made in a moment of *vision;* and as such it is at the same time a disavowal of that which is in the 'today'".[13] Hence, repetition through looking up and down builds a vision upon what is present, through the sense of being alienated from it. And this process of vision occurs quite literally, through the repeated looking at it and then at the model of it, where at a certain point in time a thought about what ought to be there imposes itself: allowing for an indictment of the given, which thereby is not a given anymore. The map facilitates a *metabolic rift,* to use a Marxist concept, that lies at the foundation of bodily alienation from being embedded in the world. This results not so much in an estrangement of reality itself, thereby allowing an indictment of the given world, but a further disengagement from that world. Of the affirmative as well as the negating functions the map might be an apparatus; a political technology.

A model, any model, creates a distance from what is modelled by emphasising a gaplessness to what is modelled. The model such as the map creates a gap between itself and what is modelled, which allows it to investigate reality as if it is not a given, as unforeseen. The specific movement in which the reader of the map "is stretched along and stretches itself along" whereby a betweenness comes about for example between the map and reality. This is what Heidegger ironically terms "'historicising'".[14] It puts things into perspective; into third person. The map, above all (and quite literally), moves away from reality. The map makes reality 'present-at-hand', as opposed to 'ready-to-hand' to use a bit more of Heidegger's terminology. He argues that in some situations, things around us in

gion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The same is said of the Hindu caste system, that was allegedly imposed by a foreign invader about 3000 years ago, and ever since—whilst the evasion has been long forgotten—been appropriated as a fundamental Hindu premise up until today. Noah Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2011) 155-156.

12 Cf. Thongchai Winichakul, "Siam mapped: the making of Thai nationhood" in *Ecologist*. 26(5) Sept./Oct. 1996. 215-221.

13 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (New York: State Univeristy of New York Press, 2010 [1927]). 437-438. Emphasis added.

14 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (New York: State Univeristy of New York Press, 2010 [1927]). 375.

reality like a map, present themselves not as in plain use, not as obvious, but as broken. Just like the map sometimes makes it impossible to transverse reality rather than making it easier. This 'present-at-hand'-situation is ideal for investigative exploration, because it draws us aways from naive use, stretching us between reality and the model of it.[15] We become the bridge; the 'betweenness', over the gap between reality and its model. We have to argue for the correlation between the two, and act out what the map prescribes onto reality and in this act we have the power to change reality.

Opposite to Heidegger, Some theorisations argue that reality withdraws itself from us, whilst we anxiously hurdle towards it, looking for punctual models to keep it close and dear, mapping it out at each instant a grain of sand moves in de wind. This endeavour anxiously sweats 'out of sight out of mind'. Maps are placeholders for a fear of disappearance of the world, keeping it in mind whilst it is out of sight.

However, although reality does not run into our arms like a loved one, that does not imply it withdraws from us in shyness. Although reality is aphetic, we are not aphetic about it. As Graham Harman argues, reality is only accessible through "something I call a lure. Something is summoning you. Something is drawing you in."[16] You have to grab its hook; help it pull you in. Or, put slightly differently, as Maurice Merlau-Ponty argues with his concept of primordial openness, which means one cannot not perceive; it is in advance an active faculty to relate to the world that surrounds us. He notes that "visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it's *caught* in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But, because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself."[17] We are lured, caught into the web called reality that we have spun ourselves, that sticks to use wherever we move. The more we struggle against it, the more we get entangled in it. Like a zoetrope, spinning the world around us at rapid speeds, reality generates a centrifugal force that spins us out into the world rather than it pushes us inwards. The images of reality are at its peripheries, not at its core. The reality of reality is not its essence, an objective base that we have to work towards, but the models we make of it, to which we are forcefully pushed anyhow. Maps are models that spin us into reality, while feeding a feeling of moving away from it. This embodiedness Merlau-Ponty speaks of comes from the same line of reasoning why Markus Gabriel argues thinking to be the sixth sense, rather than a sort of sovereign bringing all other five senses together.[18]

Maps, because they engage with mobility, are about access and implied inhibition of access without the map. They generate a suspension of the Z axis that both supports a presumed alienation from reality, but they also facilitate a distance which is hard for us embodied beings to achieve. It helps to think of life in abstractum

15 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (New York: State Univeristy of New York Press, 2010 [1927]).

16 (v.a. 00:02:39) Graham Harman in conversation with Slavoj Zizek. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdGeJWJsxto

17 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. Carleton Dallery. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964. 3. Emphasis added.

18 Markus Gabriel, "Making sense of thinking" in *Radboud Reflects*. 07-09-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-09-05-making-sense-thinking-lecture-by/

whilst necessarily being immanent. In this regard, a map can be read backwards: how can we map what's important, influential and overly present in our direct environment? What politics are implied through what is mapped? Because the map offers a manner to negate the Z axis, and thereby simulates a third person perspective, the political lines of one's lifeworld can be drawn by a map.