

FRANZ ACKERMANN

Parkett 68 – 2003

ACKERMANN HALLUCINATING MAPS

JOSHUA DECTER

...A memory wanders, becomes dispersed, then partially reassembled: conceivably, we first met at the home of...

...It would seem that I initially encountered Franz Ackermann somewhere in...

...or near my friend's house, proximate to...

...Yes, it was somewhere within the environs of Los Angeles...

...Is this an imaginary memory... or the recovering of an imagined event?...

...It was around 1994 or 1995, on one of my occasional trips to the West Coast...

...Ackermann had been moving about, inhabiting different places... re-locating himself... iterating these re-locations through drawings...

...If I can recall accurately, memory often being a slippery substance, on at least one evening, Ackermann and I shared a taxicab to navigate through var-

ious neighborhoods scattered across LA's de-centered territories...

...traversing the multi-centered city space in a vehicle, navigating by an endless interconnectivity of imagination and objective topographical scanning...

...networked, interlaced, urban, and post-urban nodes...

...taking advantage of mobility, really there was no other choice, to negotiate relatively unknown social spaces...

...through territories that seemed mobile themselves, interpenetrating conduits of activity and inertia...

...echoing in his phantasmagoric drawings...

...Now I recall that Ackermann had used LA's public transportation system, the buses, to move through the city's arteries...

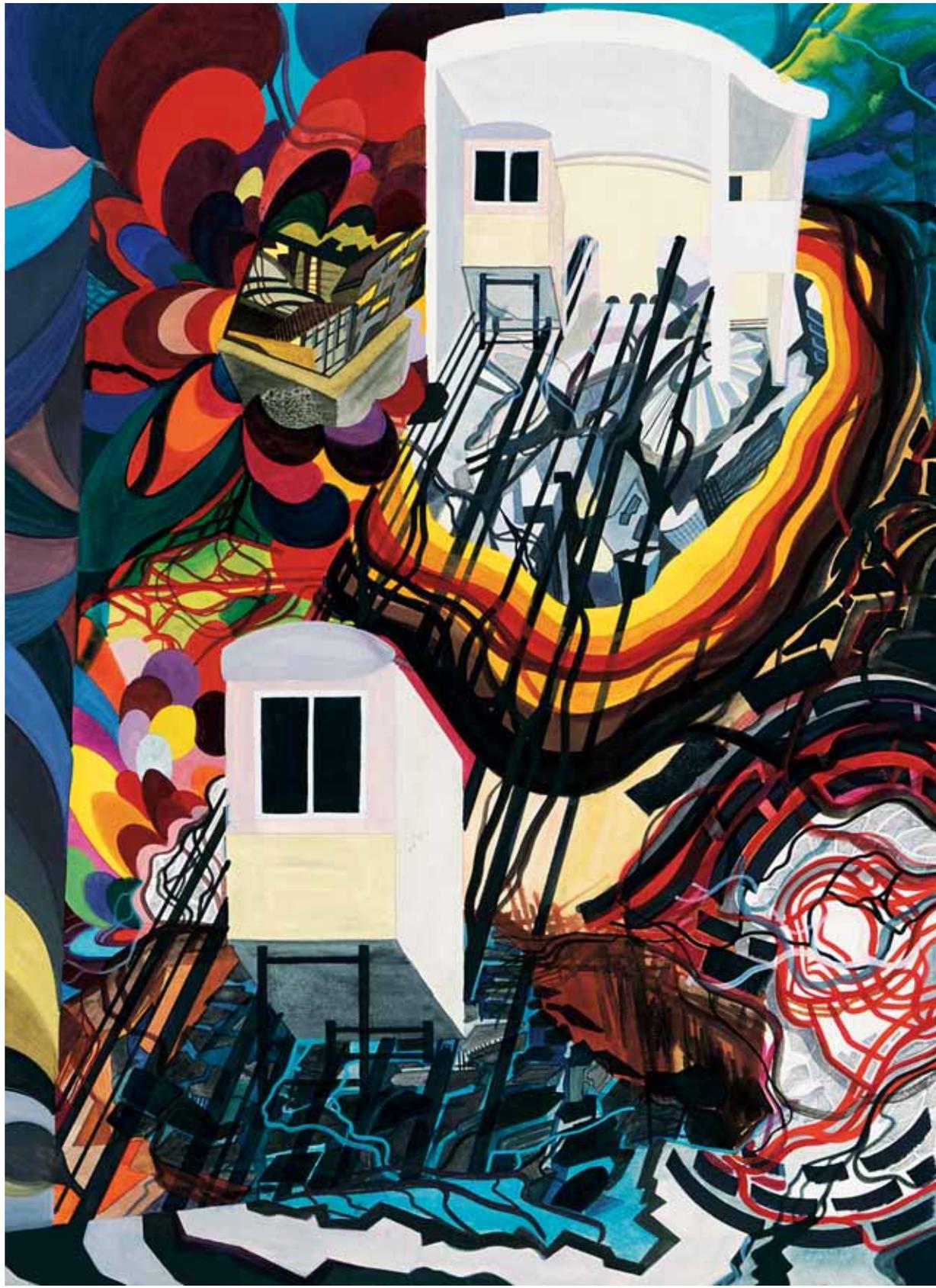
...It became evident that there was a certain synergy between his method of working and Los Angeles...

...In Ackermann's works, it was possible to discern his way of navigating through places known and unknown, consuming the unfamiliar into a language of ...

...a continuous re-generation of cartographic lo-

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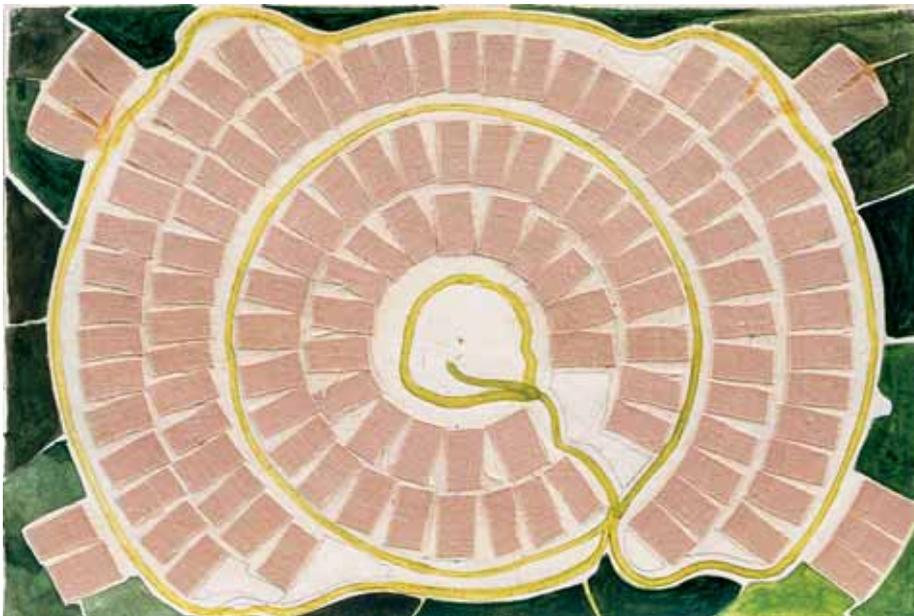
FRANZ ACKERMANN, OHNE TITEL (MENTAL MAP: CROSSING CITIES), 1999, Mischtechnik auf Papier, 70 x 50 cm /
mixed media on paper, 27¹/₁₆ x 19¹/₁₆".



Franz Ackermann



FRANZ ACKERMANN, OHNE TITEL
(MENTAL MAP: SEAT 52A), 1998,
Mischtechnik auf Papier, 13 x 19 cm /
mixed media on paper, 5¹/₈ x 7¹/₂".



FRANZ ACKERMANN, OHNE TITEL
(MENTAL MAP), 1992–1994,
Mischtechnik auf Papier, 13 x 19 cm /
mixed media on paper, 5¹/₈ x 7¹/₂".

cation and un-location... an intoxication brought on by immersion into the flux of a place....

...and how to render the interpenetration of location, time, space, and subjectivity into image...

...a palimpsest... a topography of simultaneously erupting, and then systematized, places and non-places...

...if memory is more than a re-imagining, or re-imagining, of some events that unfolded at a different time and location, a place that can only be revisited through conjecture.

Recently, just some days ago, I scanned through Paul Virilio's small book, *A Landscape of Events*, and was struck by a number of observations that seem quite illuminating in relation to my current thinking on Franz's work. In the foreword to the book, the architect Bernard Tschumi offers a condensation of Virilio's ideas: "Indeed, rarely has a contemporary writer so engaged in an exacerbated analysis of the acceleration of time, to the point where space itself becomes engulfed in time. Space becomes temporal."¹⁾

For Tschumi, Virilio is engaged with the notion that "...duration is really a conjunction of simultaneities"; and "...in Virilio's global temporal space, landscapes become a random network of pure trajectories whose occasional collisions suggest a possible topography..."²⁾

In evoking Virilio (initially via Tschumi), I would like to propose a relationship, albeit oblique, between Ackermann's approach to art making and elements of Situationist thinking. Virilio, in the first chapter of his book, refers to Debord: "... the Situationist Guy Debord was to remark, 'We didn't try to find the formula for overthrowing the world in books but by roaming around.'"³⁾

In relation to contemporary society, and the notion of traversing—or wandering—through space conceived of as a temporal condition, Virilio posits: "...specialists in time differences, revolutionary jet-setters amidst a general roaming in which the dislocation of the real world derives spontaneously from the delocalization and accelerated displacement of bodies (dislocate is from the Latin, *dislocare*: to move about, displace)." ⁴⁾

I can recall thinking of Ackermann's mental map drawings as both visionary and modest, meticulous and provisional, a kind of spontaneously (post-utopian?) impulse to offer reflection upon the notion of the artist as the inhabitant of an intangible space in which local experience and global self-awareness become sensuously interpenetrated.

"At this point, cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality."⁵⁾

Ackermann articulates a language, at once cartographic and anti-cartographic, that moves far beyond the parochial distinctions between (pictorial) representation and (organic-cultural) abstraction. One spatial condition displaces and then reinvents the other, continuously, rhythmically.

If only it were possible to generate this text, my text, so that it would function as an analogue to one of Ackermann's works, as a way of mapping an aesthetic language. An implausible notion, to be sure, but there is an occasional desire in the writer to produce textual counterparts to what is observed in the body of artworks, to recreate, by alternative means, the phenomenal reality, or irreality, of the artwork.

To attempt such a thing would take the writer, and needless to say the reader, along multiple meandering, even colliding pathways of logic and illogic, sense and nonsense, stable and unstable meanings. A kind of drive through intertextual architectures and spaces, to find a way back in Ackermann's world through a network of textual fragments, strands of ideas... perhaps this is already unfolding here...

Ackermann's quirky, subtly hallucinatory works might reveal how a mobility of existence can engender a fecund elasticity of imagination, wherein empirical observation of place undergoes poetic erosion as a result of the vagaries of subjective experience.

Mental mapping, as literal method and figurative relationship to the objective world, is the creation of a territory that may have its basis in the real. Here, things inevitably break down into multiple tendrils of imagined geography, and a thousand streams of possible bearings... and are then reorganized... and

then begin to fall apart, all of which again leads me to Debord and Situationist thinking:

“The production of psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete insubordination to habitual influences (influences generally categorized as tourism, that popular drug as repugnant as sports or buying on credit). A friend recently told me that he had just wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London.”⁶⁾

Ackermann’s works suggest a hybridity of source materials and references: souvenirs of the memory’s engagement with place. I would imagine that Ackermann considers himself something of a wanderer who collects sensations in unfamiliar social and cultural territories, sensations that mutate through his act of recollection and re-/de-construction. Cities, non-cities, the spaces (in) between urban zones, and other interstitial spaces are reprocessed as events akin to psychic hallucinations.

Philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s early theoretical writings on “everyday life” influenced the Situationists, as he considered the city to be an arena for the encounter between differences, a space which both produces social relations and is produced by social relations. Lefebvre suggests that we tend to think about the contemporary urban environment in contradictory terms: as both an abstract space modeled upon hierarchical orderings (e.g. center, periphery) that may reinforce dominant economic relations, and as a space of ruptures, disjunctions, flux, and pulverizations.

How to trace the contours of the meeting ground between imagination and place? What is a map if not a demarcation of the self in relation to a location, or a network of locations? Mapping is a procedure at once instinctual and rational, intellectual and intuitive. In order to inhabit the known, we map it. In order to inhabit a world yet to be known, we invent new maps, which may indeed be post-rational, beyond empirical notions of “order,” indeed, mischievously psychological geographies.

If Ackermann does practice an eccentric kind of cultural geography, he also manifests a desire for an aggressive decomposition of the territorial order usually associated with structured social spaces. Ackermann is able to access the character of an architectural location by accentuating the subjective interplay between the perception of place, and the place itself, creating a lyrical reconfiguration of that which we recognize as tangent to our lived social spaces, and that which exceeds the real.

We often reflect upon the status of certain artists as migratory or nomadic creatures, continuously shifting from one context to the other, moving across boundaries, slipping in and out of identifiable political and cultural affiliations, reinventing identity positions within an increasingly liquid field of trans-global relations.

Ackermann has moved through various places, known and unknown, throughout the world, perhaps even suggesting a kind of late modern version of *vagabondage*, a notion that Walter Benjamin introduces in his *Arcades Project*, in relation to the notion of the flaneur’s phantasmagoric engagement with place and space.

For Ackermann, it seems there is a continuous intercourse of movement, a dance or interplay, between literal location/place and imagination, and the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between these ways of inhabiting the world.

“The figure of the flaneur. He resembles the hash eater, takes space up into himself like the latter. In hashish intoxication, the space starts winking at us: ‘What do you think may have gone on here?’ And with the very same question, space accosts the flaneur.”⁷⁾

Collapsing together inscrutability and legibility, Ackermann unravels reference and denotation, triggering a continuous oscillation between inscription and erasure, memory and invention. His lyrical meta-travelogues explode linear narrative, delivering us into the controlled rapture of an artist’s intercourse with the unknown...

...mental mapping, the marking of a territory that may have its basis in the real, yet inevitably breaks down into multiple tendrils of imagined geography, and a thousand streams of possible bearings...



FRANZ ACKERMANN, OHNE TITEL (MENTAL MAP: JUST ANOTHER PLACE FOR RIOTS III), 1995,
Mischtechnik auf Papier, 13 x 19 cm / mixed media on paper, 5 1/8 x 7 1/2".

...If Ackermann practices a quirky kind of cultural geography in his works, we might say that his rationalist tendencies are filtered through the unpredictable mess of intuition and imagination, and vice versa...

...His subjective anti-maps decompose the territorial order usually associated with various kinds of urban and suburban spaces, willfully corroding the representational protocol of topographical systems, while suggesting that there is always an interconnection between organization and chaos...

...Each of Ackermann's works might be understood as an event of reconstructed and deconstructed memory, the synthesizing of memory-fragments, at once indexical and solipsistic...

...the need to throw away maps, or to hallucinate new cartographic representations and counter-representations...

...A map is its own territory, a territory inside of a representation of a place, becoming a meta-world...

...a beautiful jumble of impossibly linked geographies... a geography of imagined geographies... the apparition of the known interfaces with the phantasmagoria of the unknown...

...Now, where did I initially meet Franz Ackermann... perhaps, nowhere?

1) Bernard Tschumi, forward to Paul Virilio, *A Landscape of Events*, transl. by Julie Rose (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), p. viii.

2) *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4) *Ibid.*

5) Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146, July/August 1984, p. 90.

6) Guy-Ernest Debord, "Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine," *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 6, 1955, p. 14. (English translation in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981).

7) Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, transl. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 841.

Frans Alkermant





Franz Ackermann

FRANZ ACKERMANN, GSP (GREATER SÃO PAULO), 2001, Mischtechnik auf Papier, 70 x 100 cm / mixed media on paper, 27⁷/₁₆ x 39³/₈”.