

## LEGEND

Esther Hovers	<i>The travelling salesman</i>	Ds, Mf, Ck, Dns, Acs, Ccs
Elias Catheyer	<i>Europe is not one big zoological garden</i>	Cs
Esther Hovers	<i>On walking</i>	Dk
Ingal Vekla	<i>There are no lines disappearing with no traces</i>	Cs
Elena Kurthova	<i>Auto</i>	Bs, Ds
Maria Ise Bourlanges	<i>Days and nights</i>	Cs
Enak Hermans	<i>From here</i>	Ds
Maria Ise Bourlanges & Elena Kurthova	<i>The sky is not down</i>	Bk, Ccs
Elena Kurthova	<i>Endless</i>	Bs
Elena Kurthova	<i>Endless</i>	Bs
Anna Maria Luczak	<i>Probably (Hills, Roads, Walls)</i>	Cs

## THIS ISSUE

This issue functions as an unconventional map that can guide you – or help you lose your way – through seven artistic practices, all of which relate in some way to the idea of alternative geographies. This very broad subject can be accessed through multiple paths, as demonstrated by the selected contributions, dealing with themes as broad as psychogeography, symbolic geography, (un)mapping, and ornamatism. The practice of mapping is a double-edged sword: it is a certain epistemology that helps one navigate and understand the world, but at the same time it represents the dominant knowledge system and has historically been used in the service of nationalists, colonialist, and imperial agendas. Since the construction of maps and identities alike occurs through distinguishing and distancing oneself from the other, whatever is unifying is also dividing. The pursuit of alternative geographies, alternative ways of people relating to each other and their environments, can therefore become a liberating practice.

In her hypnotic videos, **Anna Maria Luczak** often deals with contemporary consumer culture and its implications for our self-image and identity. We are excited to feature her recent series of works, *Probably*, which deals with the phenomenon of imported products sold in Polish stores in Rotterdam. These stores are not a uniquely Polish phenomenon but an example of a broader trend of country-specific grocery stores. Each store is a decontextualised enclave, a microcosm where you can find all sorts of commonplace products, such as milk, water, and flour, which are nonetheless assigned a unique emotional and symbolic value.

**Maria Ise Bourlanges & Elena Kurthova** are an artist duo who since 2014 have been researching the archive of Jacques Bourlanges, the author of an intriguing theory correlating star constellations with French geography. Maria Ise and Elena have engaged with this exceptional archive through a series of artistic interventions, resulting in an extensive project *The Sky is on the Earth*. In this issue, the artists decided to present not only their joint project, but also their individual works, related to the archival research.

**Elias Catheyer's** work often deals with infrastructure and the ways in which people organise the space around them. For his work *Europe is in fact one big zoological garden*, he used characteristic Michelin maps – which used to be indispensable during any car travel – as a canvas, on which he traced seemingly random routes.

The animalistic shapes that emerged in this process bear a striking resemblance to prehistoric cave painting. The work itself travelled quite a lot this year – from Elias' solo show at Marion De Cannière, Antwerp, to Art Brussels, to now and here.

Over the recent months, **Enak Hermans** has been developing a series of works taking a form of imaginary or haphazard maps. These works posit coincidence as a part of the cartographic process and deal with the chasm between reality and the reality of the map, or between the signified and the signifier. His new work *From here* has its premiere in *The Map is not the Territory*, while the rest of the series will soon be presented in a group exhibition under the same title (opening on the 7th of November at B02, Maastricht).

In her practice, spanning over photographs, drawings, text and film play, **Esther Hovers** investigates how power, politics, and control are exercised through urban planning and the use of public space. We are happy to present selected elements from her extensive project *The travelling Salesman*, inspired by the figure of this contemporary flâneur. The work is accompanied by a text by **Katherine Adams**, a freelance writer and emerging curator based in New York.

In **Elina Kerttari's** practice as both artist and curator, on-site research plays an important role. This time, she presents a project initiated during her stay in Rome, where she explored the importance of soil as a type of cultural heritage that is often overlooked. The soil borings she encountered there became a starting point for the project *Underneath*, developed together with architect Gips Pyckelvel and a team of geologists. Elina's essay featured in this issue provides more details about this project as well as situates it within a broader debate on art and ecology.

**Ingal Vekla** is a filmmaker, photographer and curator, who recently co-curated the film programme within the scope of Tallinn Photomonth. In the conversation with **Aleja Medzacka**, Ingal talks about the construction of the self-image of 'Eastern Europe' in film, the perils of romanticisation, and the ethics of working with inherited memory. The title of the interview, *There are no things disappearing without traces*, was borrowed from the film by Estonian experimental filmmaker Arvo Kooli (1968), which opened the 2nd part of the programme *East from West*.







Elias Cafmeyer  
*Europe is in fact one big zoological garden*  
Acrylics on road map  
115 x 97 cm, 2019, edition of 25

## the traveling salesman

This project takes its title from the "Traveling Salesman Problem", a mathematical problem that is notoriously difficult to solve. The question the problem poses is: given a series of locations, what is the shortest route via which each place is visited exactly once? It so happens that this problem has so far proven mathematically intractable—which is to say, there is no general solution; this "traveling salesman" scenario is insoluble by any general algorithm. Esther Hovers' work is unique in that it is partly inspired by problems of a mathematical or algorithmic nature, yet these problems do not serve merely as a kind of cipher for her works. It would be easy simply to appropriate a problem at its point of breakdown and proceed to map the consequences of the chaos induced by the resulting failure—such a process supplies a sort of algorithm for generating something "critical".

By contrast, what Hovers captures goes "beyond the map"—but also beyond the *failed* map. Hovers probes past the point at which the order promised by technological calculation simply fails to capture a real experience. She moves beyond this point of mere in calculability to present us with scenarios that show a true human experience of technology and its pressures—ones where, in spite of our intellectual capacity to eschew the promises of perfect comprehension, we nevertheless navigate the world with a kind of wish for algorithmic orientation of our experience. We see this sustained tension sustained throughout her works in this series, which has been inspired not only by the Traveling Salesman Problem but by the figure of the modern flaneur, a figure who in the nineteenth-century became a symbol for the modern, leisured observer wandering urban streets. The goal of the flaneur was formally similar to that of the mathematician's "salesman"—he wanted to take in as many sensations and to experience as many "sites" as possible.

Hovers's series tracks the path of a man who in gesture and mien seems determined, as though he were indeed following a map that had been provided for him. Yet the source of this map's authority is unclear. Hovers captures the affect—for the main protagonist, at once numb and yearning—that stems from the continuing trust in something that might (but actually, can't) solve a compelling question of efficiency. There is a quiet dislocation that we as viewers experience in mapping for ourselves, as we look at Hovers's work, the terrain that emerges from the photographic traces of the journey of the man who is the main character of this series. What imaginary map might this path correspond to, which sees him pass through not only crucial hubs of transit such as Grand Central but also through backstreets, and causes him to take awkward paths that reject the straightforward parallels of New York streets?

Hovers shows how our continuing belief in, or desire for, the figurative algorithmic solution is sustained partly through the soft but omnipresent power latent in certain kinds of public, urban space. We see the contemporary "salesman", a kind of flaneur, both at moments of apparent clarity—at perfect profile on an escalator; from an aerial view as he crosses the street with an unhalting stride—and at moments where

he is totally dwarfed by a visual clarity generated by sharp angles that highlight urban passages yet blur his own face. Passing under the shadows of a broad street, whose name is visible for our cartographic reference, he seems eerily unaware that he is being totally eclipsed.

In placing a flaneur at the center of the scenario opened up by the Traveling Salesman Problem, Hovers explores the psychogeography of the contemporary city. Hovers illuminates not only the city's implicit traps and pressures, but also causes us to question how we reproduce and experience this power on an individual level. The contemporary flaneur Hovers captures is caught between the desire to see and visit everything—to, in effect, capture the city through traveling, movement, and image—and the desire for the optimal cartographic heuristic at which to take in all one's surroundings—the desire for an efficiency that will meet the demands of his modern life. A heuristic is something that enables us to solve practical problems quickly and efficiently. Two concomitant movements or processes are captured by this idea—on the one hand, an abstract process, which pursues the possibilities of understanding something more globally; on the other hand, an empirical response to knowledge gained through one's experience of a local environment. Insofar as it promises a shorthand for navigation, the Traveling Salesman Problem is by extension a problem of heuristics. The salesman-flaneur's predicament has to do as much with his physical movement as with the figurative calculation that one can imagine charts his path. Hovers's rendering of this scenario explores how the way we think consider problem that would seem abstract—the map and the city-provide models (heuristics of a sort) for how we as individuals navigate more local "territories" of space and image.

Hovers captures the uncertainty in a traveler whose very movement should, in "theory"—in the fantastic tale of the heuristic—he is certain as the direction of a vector on a graph. She captures the moment of disorientation at the core of a restless efficiency that cannot, contrary to the promise of the algorithm, find footing in a resolvable calculation. To this photographic capture of the flaneur's halting progress Hovers supplements the poetic demonstrations of what we can imagine as imaginary cartographies for the salesman and his flaneur fail. In these searching iterations we receive something like an informational climate or visual score to the rest of the piece. From an experiment devised to reveal complete efficiency and certainty, Hovers extracts playfulness. The artist's camera takes perspectives that both expose and evade, expressing a poetry that emerges around the figures in her works, even when they themselves seem at odds with it. Her visual techniques present an ideal of poetic clarity that ends up displacing algorithmic clarity. For the illusory clarity offered by the algorithm Hovers substitutes the true clarity of a poetic excavation of information, and a revelation of the infinite uncertainties lurking beneath what seems easily located in a territory.

— Katherine Adams



Esther Hovers - *Traveling Salesman* 2018-2019



Esther Hovers - *On Walking (The Grid)*, 2019  
62 x 89 cm / 24 x 35 in. Inkjet and laser prints, image transfer, gouache and graphite on MDF Panel.



‘Traveling Salesman’,

Katherine Adams for Nowhere Collective (NL), 2018

In the idea of a heuristic there are two concomitant movements that take place—on the one hand, an abstraction, which holds the possibilities of understanding something more globally and of penetrating the depths of an idea; on the other hand, the heuristic holds the possibility of expedience, of an economical movement of thought or, potentially, of the body. It is a tool of higher reasoning, of an aerial, distant vantage point on a problem that grants the power to draw out a pattern inherent in chaos. It thus holds are thus simultaneous possibilities of both refinement and simplification.

In her new body of photographic work Esther Hovers has been inspired by what seems to be a straightforward problem of heuristics, potentially solvable by an algorithm, but to which so far no calculable solution has been found. This is the ‘Travelling Salesman’ Problem. It asks how a traveler progressing through a series of cities exactly once can be assured to find the shortest path. The problem becomes increasingly resistant to any mathematical solution the more data—that is, the more locations—are involved. As it stands, there is no solution to the general form of this apparently simple problem. Because of this lacuna, in practice the Traveling Salesman problem the act of clarification itself yields to the play of uncertainty, because a solution is foreclosed in advance.

Esther’s main human subject is a disaffected flaneur, caught between the desire to completely capture a phenomenon through a concept and the desire for the optimal speed at which to take in all one’s surroundings. One gets the sense that she is captured in a haste not of his or her movements but of the cartographic calculation that takes place in the background. Lifted out of its historical origins in the arcades of Paris, the flaneur

Esther captures the uncertainty in a traveler whose very movement should, in ‘theory’—in the fantastic tale of the heuristic—be as certain and even instinctual as the direction of a vector on a graph. She captures the moment of disorientation at the core of a restless efficiency that cannot, contrary to the promise of the algorithm, find footing in a resolvable calculation.

To this photographic capture of the flaneur’s halted progress Esther supplements the poetic demonstrations of what we can imagine as attempts at mapping out the salesperson’s cartography. In these searching iterations we experience something like an informational climate or visual score to the rest of the piece. From an experiment devised to reveal complete efficiency and certainty she extracts playfulness, but moreover her visual techniques present an ideal of poetic clarity that can end up displacing or outperforming the algorithmic clarity

For the illusory clarity offered by the algorithm Esther substitutes the true clarity of a poetic excavation of information, and a revelation of the infinite uncertainties lurking beneath what seems easily located in a territory.