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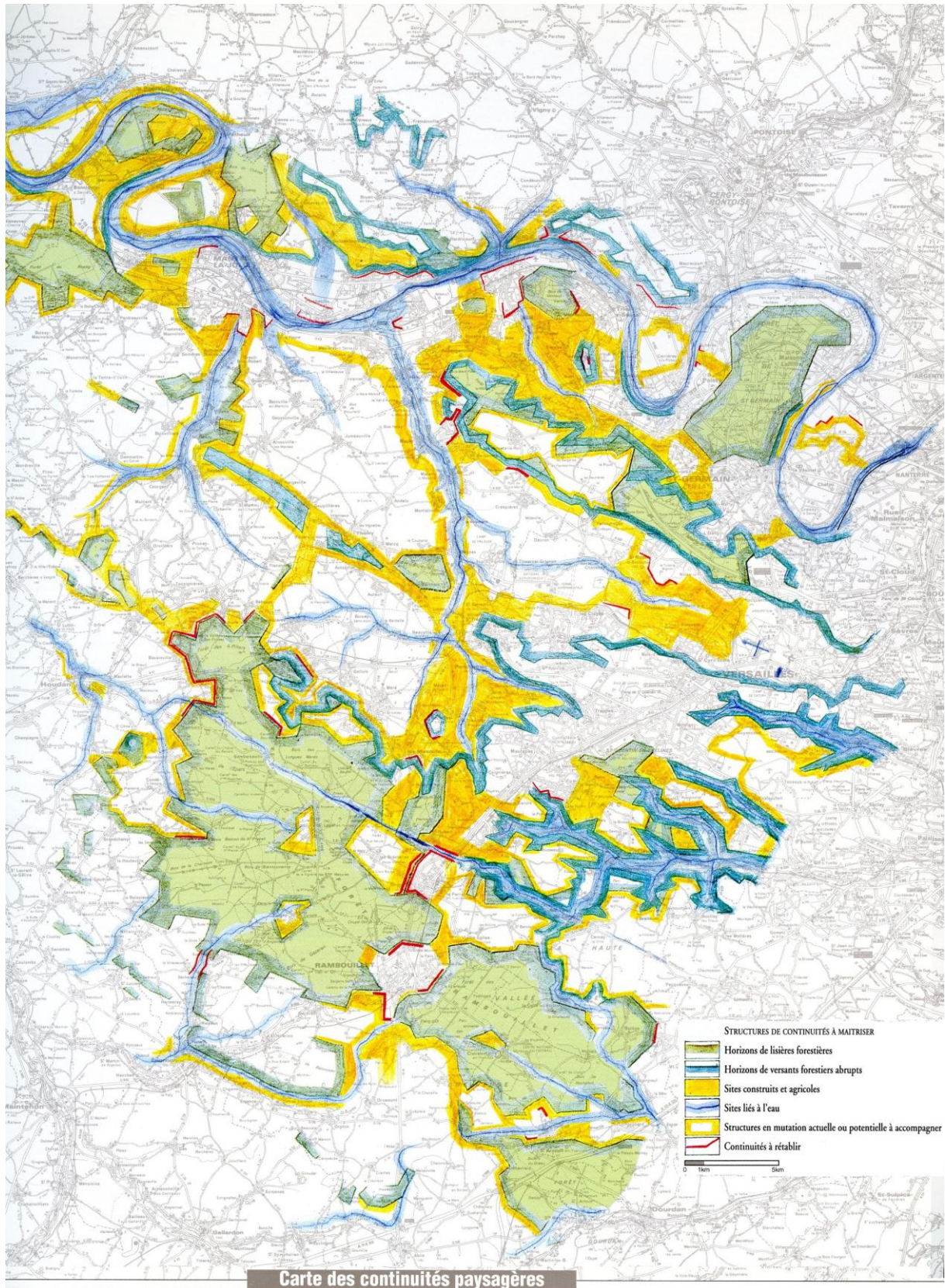
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Navigating Between Survey and Project.

Alain Freytet and Alain Mazas's *Landscape Atlas of Yvelines*

Twenty-five years ago, the Swiss urban historian André Corboz examined description as a means of deconstructing the boundary between survey and project.¹ Dismantling the positivist boundary separating the objective territorial representation of geographers from the subjective interventions of architects and engineers, Corboz argued that all description is “active”: one can’t describe a territory without reimagining it, and therefore all survey, be it of a geological substratum or social land use has an intrinsic project budding inside of it.

“The Map of Landscape Continuities” appeared in a series of nine maps, which introduced the *Landscape Atlas of the Yvelines* – a French department just outside Paris, still structured in part by the network of royal hunting grounds, notoriously including the forests of Rambouillet, St-Germain-en-Laye, and Versailles gardens.² Published in 1992 by two landscape architects, Alain Freytet and Alain Mazas, the atlas was the first attempt to map landscapes. A year later, the French Ministry of Ecology requested all departments to produce, according to a centralized method (Luginbühl, 1994), a landscape atlas every ten years.³ Beyond highlighting the biological corridors related to the water system (blue), the continuous horizon of forest edges (green), and adjacent agricultural fields (yellow), Freytet and Mazas’s map drew attention to the areas most exposed to real estate pressures and large-scale transformation (red). At first glance, it thus appears to protect certain areas and be preservationist in its aim. However, the caption for red lines reads “continuities to be restored”. The authors are advocating physical interventions: the first obstructions signalled by the red dashes should disappear, in order to restore the solid skyline of fields and forest edges. If this proposal only discreetly appears in the caption, Freytet admits in an interview that writing is the best way to surreptitiously introduce a framework for projects to come.⁴ Anticipating Corboz's work, the map represents at once what is already there *and* what future projects should be.



Alain Freytet and Alain Mazas, 'Cartes des continuités paysagères', Atlas des Pays et Paysages des Yvelines (Maps of Landscape Continuities, Atlas of Land and Landscape of Yvelines)

This map is paradigmatic of the tension subsequent landscape atlases negotiate between their logic of production by landscape architects, and the logic of their commissioning and reception by the French administration: on the one hand, most landscape architects disapprove of the static knowledge of geography atlases,⁵ and are stimulated by playing on the ambivalent dimension of mapping; on the other, the administrative choice to contract them to produce atlases they insist be *a tool of knowledge*, and not of practice. To avoid enabling monopolies, the administration needs to separate the designers who produce territorial information from those who use it in order to make changes to the territory. By doing so, they reinforce the positivist distinction between knowledge tools (landscape atlases) and project tools (landscape charters, landscape plans).

Landscape atlases embody in effect the encounter of two epistemological approaches: landscape architects acquire knowledge from the process of reimagining the territory by representing it, while administrators seek it in a territorial fact reduced on paper. In a few cases, administrators and landscape architects alike have been able to recognize the agency of representation, but the study of these fortuitous instances still remains to be conducted.

Sandra Parvu, Veyrin, May 28, 2020

Notes

1 André Corboz, 'La descrizione tra lettura e scrittura', 2e Convegno internazionale di urbanistica 'La descrizione', Prato, 30 March to 1 April 1995. Published as: André Corboz, 'La description: entre lecture et écriture', *Faces* 48 (2000), 52-54. Republished in: André Croboz, *Le territoire comme palimpseste et autres essais* (Besançon: Les éditions de l'imprimeur, 2001).

2 Alain Freytet en Alain Mazas, *Atlas des pays et paysages des Yvelines* (Versailles: CAUE 78/Grenoble: Courcoux, 1992).

3 Yves Luginbühl, *Méthode pour des atlas de paysage: Identification et qualification* (Paris: Direction de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanisme, 1994).

4 Interview with Alain Freytet at his office in Maisonnisses, 30 September 2019. Alain Mazas was interviewed at the Laboratoire Architecture Anthropologie in Paris, 5 April 2012.

5 Interview with Jacques Sgard at his office in Marly-le-Roi, 24 June 2011.

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Interviews

Freytet, Alain. *Interview in his home office*, Maisonnisses, September 30, 2019.

Mazas, Alain. *Interview at the Laboratoire Architecture Anthropologie*, Paris, April 5, 2012.

Sgard, Jacques. *Interview in his office*, Marly-le-Roi, June 24, 2011.