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"Genesis, Retold: In Search of an Atlas of the Anthropocene"

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While, within the last decades, the atlas has lost its dominance as a medium of spatial representation to digital media, it has recently attracted a significant aesthetic interest. Artists and writers have created books that are explicitly or implicitly linked to the atlas, delving into its history, its epistemological preconditions, and its representational capacity. In this essay, I suggest a connection between this attraction to a supposedly outdated medium and the representational challenges raised by the model of the Anthropocene. A first example offers Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* (2013), a monumental collection of photographs that promises a journey "to the beginnings of our planet," confronting the viewer with the dimension of geological time into which human agency has expanded. Due to the indexicality of photography, the *Genesis*-project has to approach deep time by movements within space, and thus it is not coincidental that the book that is credited as one of the most powerful representations of the Anthropocene resembles an atlas. In this resemblance, however, it also reproduces the abstract and generalized space of cartography. The atlas allows, as I try to demonstrate by a short view into its history, the representation of large dimensions through a negotiation of relations between part and whole, but in order to do so, it increases the distance between the observer and the observed. As an alternative model, I discuss Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands* (2009, Engl. 2010). More aware of the problematic effects of media and modes of representation on the represented world, Schalansky's atlas deconstructs the observer who looks at the territory from outside and above, and reinserts him or her into a landscape of multiple movements and connections. Exploring a multiplicity of cultural techniques and actors, human as well as non-human, involved in the production of the image of the globe, this atlas becomes a medium of "being in the world" rather than one of "looking at" it. Being in the world is also the attempt of another photographic atlas of deep time, Ernst Haas' *The Creation* (1972), a thorough negotiation between part and whole, that offers an epilogue to my argument, although it is historically, more than four decades before Salgado's *Genesis*, a prologue to the recent return of the atlas. (Text from author's abstract)

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