

## BEYOND THE MAP

by Alastair Bonnett; Aurum Press; £16.99 (hardback)

Bonnett's previous book, *Off the Map*, was a thoroughly readable study of unmapped areas: uninhabited cities, liminal spaces. Similarly, the current volume 'responds to a new spirit of geographical giddiness', in which surprises abound: none bigger than the discovery, in 2016, of an extra 534 islands in the Philippines' archipelago - unless it was Estonia's recent realisation that it had 834 islands more than previously reckoned.

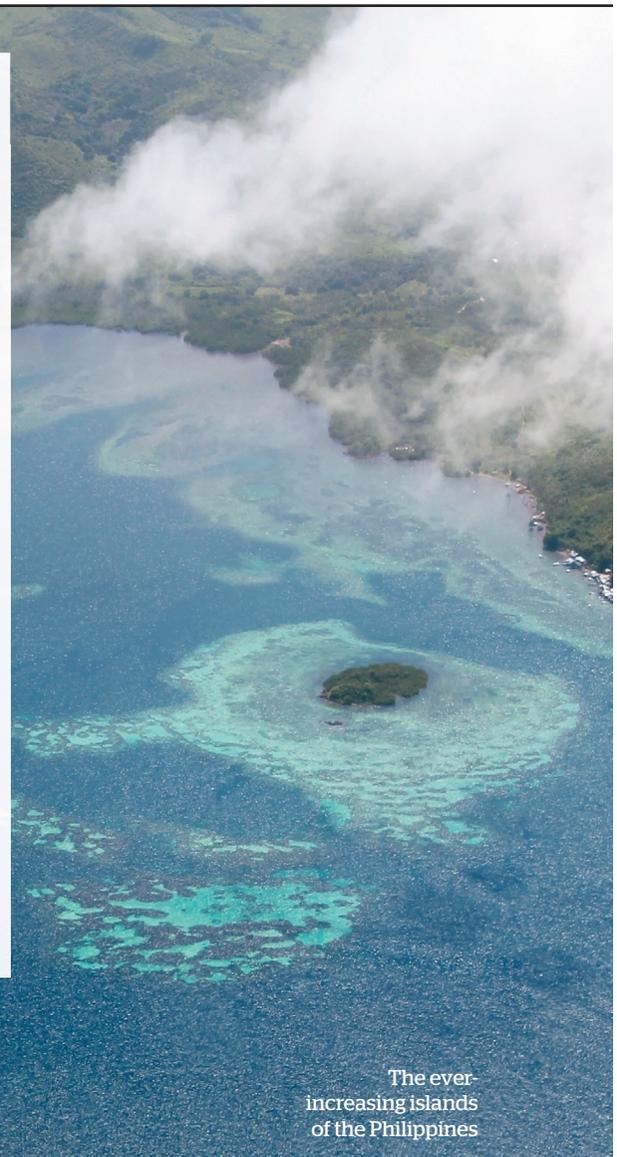
Island-counting is evidently trickier than one might suppose.

Even on greater land masses, the borders between what's there and what's not can blur. It's well known that mapmakers invent 'trap streets' to protect their copyright, but Bonnett finds a whole trap town, Algae, which came into existence following its appearance on a map; and ponders, too, a Russian movie set recreating 1950s Moscow, where the cast and crew lived for years under controlled, Soviet-era conditions, the line between representation and reality torn to shreds.

Other discoveries are less tangible: an *eruv* is a religious enclave, in theory bounded by walls - but a wall can contain any number of windows and doors, and hence does not have to be solid. This lends an appropriately angels-on-pinheads feel to the business of defining an *eruv's* borders.

Whether exploring modern legends that suggest that commuters go missing in Tokyo's enormous Shinjuku train station, or chronicling humanity's search for utopias in cyberspace and perpetual mobility, Bonnett has an eye for the fascinating corners of his subject, not all of which are remote and inaccessible. The liveliest spots in which to find language enclaves, it turns out, are big cities: immigrant tongues that have died out in their homelands still find purchase in New York, for example.

There's much to enjoy here; and a useful warning, too - if one is needed - as to the inadvisability of combining red wine with late-night online shopping. **MICK HERRON**



The ever-increasing islands of the Philippines



## THE RED ATLAS: How the Soviet Union Secretly Mapped the World

by John Davies and  
Alexander J Kent;  
The University of Chicago  
Press; £26.50 (softback)

An inveterate armchair traveller ever since my Soviet childhood, I have always loved maps, which used to provide me with an imaginary window to the outside world - the only one available in the USSR. Much later, when already living in the West, I found out that all maps in the Soviet Union carried deliberate errors, purposeful paranoia-driven deviations to mislead Western spies. Maps, apart from giving joy to both real-life and vicarious travellers, could also be powerful weapons. To quote

the authors of *The Red Atlas*, 'Maps are instruments of power'.

There were few (if any) mistakes - deliberate or other - in the Soviet cartographers' military maps of the West, as proved convincingly by the 350-plus extracts reproduced here. To me, they brought back memories of the lessons in *Military Tactics* at my 1970s Soviet university at which we - for some obscure reason - used the extremely well-produced maps of the area of West Germany around the town of Fünfhausen.

Indeed, Soviet Cold War maps of the West - products of the 40-year global topographic mapping programme initiated by Stalin (from 1950 to 1990) - were truly spectacular, both technologically and artistically. At the recent *Maps of the 20th Century* exhibition in the British Library, it gave me creeps to look at the large 1980s map of Brighton as a possible nuclear strike target, showing and describing in its

super-detailed legend, every single dwelling, warehouse and workshop in that unsuspecting British city. Same with the maps reproduced here: it feels sinister to see the familiar British, American, French or German toponyms, rendered in Russian, as if the places in question have been already occupied by the Soviet Army.

Despite the unmistakably military purposes behind those maps, their sheer quality was such that they continued to be of use even after the collapse of communism. According to *The Red Atlas*, some post-communist states of Europe derived symbology for their new maps from the established Soviet specifications.

For anyone interested in maps, this book is a sheer delight. It also carries huge educational and historical value by introducing the inner workings of the Soviet military topography - a little-known and rather fascinating side of the Cold War in its own right. **VITALI VITALIEV**