

THE MAP AS MUSE

Exploring the World of Artists' Maps

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INTRODUCTION

It is not down in any map; true places never are.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851

Could you transform and upend all the roads of a map? Take away its layers, its symbols, and words, shift its scale, and wipe away all the blue of the water? Could you twist, distort, mold, and rip it apart, and turn it into something new, something beautiful, something *sublime*? What if you could do all this to a map, and still call what you have left of it, a map? Come one, come all! *This* is the world of artists' maps!

Never before has there been such an exciting time for artists and cartographers. Artists from every stripe, since about the 1960s, have taken up the map as their chosen medium of expression, in rising numbers and in varying ways. Their works hail from the influences of the surrealists, situationists, psychogeographers, fluxus artists, pop artists, Earth artists, conceptual artists, installation artists, and others, and their numbers have virtually *exploded* since the 1990s, especially with the rise of the internet and greater access to mobile mapmaking tools (Wood 2006b; kanarinka 2006; Harmon 2009). This body of work includes at least 24 cartographically-focused art exhibitions between 1977 and 2009 (Watson 2009), 350 map-related works by 160 artists catalogued in Katharine Harmon's delightfully illustrated *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* (Harmon 2009), and a working catalogue of 218 artists compiled by independent scholar and geographer Denis Wood (2006a). This interest in maps for artists is alive and well today, as I saw from my own visit to AIGA Philadelphia's *MAPnificent!* exhibit, curated by Yulia Tikhonova. The show, which ran from February 1st through March 31st of this

year, featured the works of seventeen artists and groups, ranging from Doug Beube's altered atlas sculptures to Joyce Kozloff's painted frescoes to Robert Walden's hand drawn "ontological maps." As Tikhonova begins her curator's statement of the exhibition:

"Maps are magic. Artists are magicians."

This is the world of artists' maps—magical visions hovering at the edge of art and cartography; beautiful and inspiring *beyond* gallery walls.

The Nature of Artists' Maps

"Map artists," as Denis Wood, author of the highly influential 1992 best-seller *The Power of Maps*, calls them (Wood 2006b), are using every imaginable material to create artistic visions of maps. From old atlases, road maps, and digital satellite imagery, to unconventional materials like animal tissue, hair, broken glass, neon lights, rust, spider webs, lichen, and even bacterial cultures grown in Petri dishes, map artists engage themselves with maps in ways most trained and academic cartographers, in their professional work, would not. As Harmon writes in her introduction to *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography*, "Geographers submit to a tacit agreement to obey certain mapping conventions, to speak in a malleable but standardized visual language. Artists are free to disobey these rules. They can mock preoccupation with ownership, spheres of influence, and conventional cultural orientations and beliefs" (Harmon 2009:10). These artists, free from any obligation to follow the established conventions of cartography, boldly draw, paint, tear, distort, carve, sand, mold, tattoo, burn, stitch and, in a growing number of cases, even 'walk' and 'perform' maps. To the disciplines of cartography and geography, "which tend to frame mapping as being about good aesthetics (map

design) and straight-forward representation” (Crampton 2009:841), these are rarely explored terrains.

Artists are embracing the map as their muse. They are creating exciting, provocative, and critical works that often fly in the face of conventional notions of what professional cartographers—“official mapmaking, the dominant map houses, and academic cartography”—may think ‘good’ maps should be (Wood and Krygier 2009:340). On what has been traditionally viewed as being a ‘good’ map, Brian Harley writes: “In our own Western culture, at least since the Enlightenment, cartography has been defined as a factual science. [...] A good map is an accurate map. Where a map fails to deal with reality adequately on a factual scale, it gets a black mark. [...] Inaccuracy, we are told, is a cartographic crime” (Harley 2001:35). In fact, Arthur H. Robinson, a key player in the establishment of post-war cartography on “a-political, empirical and scientific grounds, segregated from context” (Crampton and Krygier 2006:24), expresses his thoughts on the *detrimental* effects of the artistic side of cartography. In his 1969 edition of *The Elements of Cartography*, a classic text in academic cartography that has undergone six editions, he writes: “[The] primary purpose [of maps] is to convey information or to ‘get across’ a geographical concept or relationship; it is not to serve as an adornment for a wall. On the other hand, one of the cartographer’s concerns may be to keep from producing an ugly map; in this respect he is definitely an artist, albeit in a somewhat negative sense” (Robinson 1969:18). “Negative,” because Robinson preferred cartography to be more akin to graphic design—maps functioning as efficient “communicative objects,” with principles “derived through the analysis of scientific data” from psychological research (18–19). Within such a view of cartography, Robinson probably would have found artists’ maps abominable to the whole ‘science’ of cartography, or at best dismissed them as crude or poor attempts at mapping, not to be taken

seriously as ‘good’ maps. Map art simply has no place within this purely scientific concept of academic cartography.

But artists’ maps can and do nevertheless defy these rules. While there are many academic cartographers today who are indeed developing highly innovative and creative map designs that challenge cartographic conventions and norms—see, for example, some of Yale historian and cartographer Bill Rankin’s award-winning “radical” works on cartographic representation of social statistics (e.g. “Chicago Boundaries,” 2009)—even these are still tied to certain cartographic conventions, such as references to reliable sources, clarity of use and design, and references to scale, in order to maintain the quality and credibility of the map’s content. These restrictions in cartography can lead to what Wood means by traditional maps being “yoked to the social reproduction of the status quo” (Wood 2006b:11). Artists’ maps, in contrast, freely do away with these boundaries, and are “always pointing toward worlds other than those mapped by professional mapmakers” (Wood and Krygier 2009:344). One might call the world of artists’ maps, therefore, a sort of *terra incognita* to the practicing expert cartographer.

The Rise of Artists’ Maps

The reasons why these artists choose to use maps in their works vary as widely as their materials and practices of art- and mapmaking do. For some, maps serve as contemplative points of departure onto journeys of personal and emotional exploration, while others see them as ready vessels for critiquing, protesting, and subverting the “normative mapping program” (Wood 2006b:11). Still others are simply drawn to an aesthetic charm they see in “the line and shape of the map’s vocabulary” (Harmon 2009:10). Although these are all different approaches to maps, what is common to most map art is that they can express ways of mapping that are often beyond the reach of trained cartographers.

There are several ways to situate the rise of artists' maps, one of which is a historical look at the presence of maps in Western society. Denis Wood and Ruth Watson both attribute the rise in map art to the growing ubiquity of maps in our daily lives (Wood 2006b; Watson 2009). Wood often insists on this interesting statistic: "99.99% of all paper maps ever made have been made in the past hundred years, the preponderance of them in the past fifty" (Wood 2006b:7). Although he admits that there is no way to prove this, he asks us to consider the use of maps by today's media—the weather map in your local newspaper, for instance, printed tens of millions of times a week—and this is not to ignore television "which adores maps" or the web (7). Of Western artists in the 1960s and 1970s, Ruth Watson writes that they "were much more exposed to maps in popular culture than those working before them," especially with the rise in map use and production following the Second World War (Watson 2009:295). In the United States, efforts to satisfy the government's demand for the rapid production of accurate, up-to-date maps continued even after the war, "as the government vowed never to be caught short again" (Tyner 2010:13). In more recent years, this ubiquity of maps in our daily lives extends to the increase in access to mobile and web mapping technology, which has led to uses not only within the artistic community, but also by counter-mapping or counter-cartography initiatives (Wood 2006b:11). For contemporary artists, then, who often take inspiration from the world around them, maps are playing a larger part in artists' lives than ever before.

Ubiquity alone does not explain the rise in the use of maps in art, since the worlds of artists are immersed in many things that do not necessarily become their subject, just for being more present in their lives. Denis Wood explains that maps also possess several unique qualities that are especially attractive to artists, especially in postmodern times "with all truths suspect" (Harmon 2009:9). One reason he gives is the similarities maps share with the medium of

painting. Maps are, like paintings, graphic artifacts and communicative constructs—“That is, both maps and paintings are more or less permanent, more or less graphic artifacts intended to shape the behavior of others” (Wood 2006b:7). Maps also, in having the unique role of linking human behaviors “through the territorial plane,” wear what Wood calls “masks of impersonal authority” that fascinate artists (7–8). Through their various conventions, which are parts of the mask, maps often successfully pull off an appearance of being objective representations of reality, un-authored and impersonal. For artists, “This mask, for so long worn by painting, makes maps an irresistible target for contemporary artists who either take the map’s mask off, or refuse to put it on” (Wood 2006b:8).

One component of the map’s mask is the look of “uniformity” about maps, especially with the help of computerized mapping today, that disperses the ‘objectivity’ of the map “evenly across its surface to infect every mark” (Wood 2006b:8). Lines are made to be all of the same width; symbols all of the same size, shape, or color. Even before the digital revolution in cartography, professional cartographers used *tools* that allowed them to make uniform lines—“ruling pens, pantographs, imprinters, preprinted symbol sheets, splines, curves, and other devices for controlling the wayward hand” (8). Along with this uniformity, other components of the map’s mask include signs connoting the map’s objectivity or an air of detachment, including source statements, frames, scales, descriptions of projection methods, grid ticks, and inset maps—all of which work together to “mask the social construction of the map” (Wood 2006b: 9). This idea of maps being social constructions also connects to Brian Harley’s well-known writings on maps being *texts* and not *mirrors*. Rather than strict one-to-one correspondences to the empirical world, Harley argued that maps are multi-layered, socially constructed texts: “Maps are text in the same senses that other nonverbal sign systems—paintings, prints, theater,

films, television, music—are texts. [...] Maps are a graphic language to be decoded” (Harley 2001:36).

Both Harley and Wood’s analyses of maps can be situated within the larger context of “critical cartography,” which Jeremy W. Crampton and John Krygier describe as a “one-two punch of new mapping practices and theoretical critique” involving “a pervasive set of imaginative mapping practices and a critique highlighting the politics of mapping” (Crampton and Krygier 2006:11–12). Critical cartography emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a movement to both resist and challenge conventional practices of professional cartography as “a progressive and value-free transcription of the environment” (Wood and Krygier 2009: 340). As a “critique,” which Crampton and Krygier define as “a politics of knowledge,” critical cartography places artists’ maps within the context of political acts that explore “how maps are political and how mapping can be a political act” (Crampton and Krygier 2006:17).

Another way to understand the rise of artists’ maps, according to Dalia Varanka, is through the perspective and application of James M. Blaut’s theories on “natural mapping” or “universal human map-modeling behavior” (Varanka 2006). The ‘map-modeling’ behavior exhibited by young children asked to perform spatial tasks (e.g. way-finding and orientation) reveals, according to Blaut’s theory, an innate ability in humans to imagine map-like spatial representations, developed in order to serve “a universal need for humans to move through and function in the world, and to communicate with others about it by making visible, from a single vantage point, what is otherwise too large to see” (Varanka 2006:16). Cartographic maps and, as Varanka argues, artists’ maps both draw from “natural mappings” as their “ecological and probable evolutionary source” (16). Varanka defines “natural mapping” as “a form of imagination that creates personal images of places, movement, and landmarks that are highly

invested with meaning. It draws freely on the unconscious and memories, and is experimental in forms of depiction”—all of which are characteristics, Varanka argues, of map art (17).

The ubiquity of maps in society, the development of critical cartography, and the theory of natural mapping behavior provide some of the reasons for the rise of maps in art. A history and understanding of map art can therefore be situated in many ways. One should note that while academic cartography is being “ruthlessly” debated and deconstructed by critical cartographers, and while some artists’ maps do fall within this practice, not all map art is so critical in nature; as Denis Cosgrove writes, “in the creative worlds of the arts, maps and the processes of mapping have proved astonishingly fertile material for artistic expression and intervention” despite these debates (Cosgrove 2006:4). Artists’ maps, whether they are situated within political, critical, or historical analyses, will continue to make their presence known in the art world.

What Artists’ Maps Mean for Cartographers

Artists’ maps are hard to ignore in these fast-paced, technologically-driven, and rapidly globalizing times. The twenty-first century is an especially interesting and perhaps perplexing time for professional cartographers; a time in which “[v]irtual and actual mapping collectives such as OpenStreetMap present serious challenges to the theory and profession of cartography” (Gerlach 2010:165), and in which “cartography has been slipping from the control of the powerful elites [“the map experts, the great map houses of the West, national and local governments, the major mapping and GIS companies, and to a lesser extent academics”] that have exercised dominance over it for several hundred years” (Crampton 2010:40). Along with the concurrent rise of ‘counter-mapping’ movements, Denis Wood has also proclaimed artists’ maps as heralds of “the death of cartography”—by which he means “not the end of mapmaking,

but the end of mapmaking as an elite preserve of university-educated cartographers. [...] *The map is dead! Long live the map!*” (Wood 2006b:11).

Rather than lament and wait for this so-called “death of cartography,” I think professional cartographers should look to these artists’ maps, not as “heralds” of the end, but as sources of cartographic inspiration. Should these works merely end at ‘just being art’—too expressive, subjective, and aesthetic to fit into the more ‘rigorous’ standards of today’s academic cartography and GIS? Can they really be taken seriously as potential maps? Are they even maps? Whether cartographers choose to consider these works seriously or not, artists will continue to be making them, and probably in even greater numbers as mobile and online mapmaking technologies become increasingly more accessible.

A map is a representational and communicative form. So is art. Maps strive for accuracy, reliability, and objectivity (with the help of the “mask”). Art is also capable of achieving exceptional representational accuracy, such as in the works of the mid-19th century Realist painters reacting against Romanticism—but it does not have to. Art can protest, heal, play, inspire; it can dismantle assumptions and question hegemonic institutions; it can even be just for art’s sake. Historical mapmakers and cartographers have always incorporated at least some aspect of art to their crafts—from the elaborately decorated maps of the Age of Discovery riddled with frolicking figures and menacing sea monsters, to today’s aesthetic considerations in academic cartographic design. Academic cartographers understand that “Good maps, like good writing, are enjoyable to view and satisfying to use” (Tyner 2010:41). Would not artists’ maps be the perfect source of inspiration for cartographers?

My argument in this thesis will be that artists’ maps *do* merit a closer look from academic and professional cartographers. This intersection between art and cartography is an opportunity

to peer into a world of mapmaking *without the mask*. What lessons might these works hold? To clarify, my intent is not to discount the great achievements of academic cartography, or relegate cartographers as the victims of their own craft. I do not intend to promote artists' maps as the ideal direction for the future of cartography either. I believe that the fields of cartography and art each have valuable contributions to make in the world, but that they do not have to be exclusive of one another. The main intent of this thesis is to *explore* these artists' maps—a *terra incognita* still to many practicing cartographers. An exploration of the way artists use maps may shed wonderful light on some of the most important and profoundly interesting natures of maps that may have been ignored. By laying bare what they find beautiful about maps, by tearing maps apart, painting them, gluing them together, reorienting them, and playing with them, artists may be showing us maps for what they truly are and can be.

Methods of this Analysis

This exploration will be divided into two main parts. After having reviewed several artists' maps, many of them from Katharine Harmon's *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* (2009), Denis Wood's list of 218 artists (Wood 2006a), my own visit to AIGA Philadelphia's *MAPnificent!* exhibit, as well as the works of some artists who have not been included in these, I will place these works into two thematic categories. "Part One: Artists' Critiques on Maps" will deal with several works that present critiques or comments on cartography. As some of these works are political in nature, ideas and arguments from critical cartography will be borrowed, but not exclusively applied—as not all map artists intend their works primarily as political critiques (for example, some works are simply inspired by the look of maps). "Part Two: Artists' Mappings" will deal with works that are examples of the ways in which artists map their worlds—whether these are mappings of personal, fantasy, or real worlds.

My analysis of these works will be focused on their *cartographic* messages, with strong consideration given to the artist's own intent in creating the work (gathered through artist's statements, interviews, articles, and academic literature if available). Most artists today have their own websites providing a portfolio of sample works, along with their artist's statement, press releases, and transcripts of interviews, and I will consider these as my primary sources in the analysis.

A note on my selection of works: My exploration of artists' maps will involve a selection of works that have clear and compelling messages about cartography—whether a critique of cartographic conventions, a political statement, or a playful wink. Note that, with the sheer number and variety of artists, approaches, and nuances to consider, it is simply impossible to include or identify every possible work. So just as cartographers and artists must be selective in their representations of the world, so will I make a selection of works that I feel make compelling and effective points about cartography. I do not pretend that my selections are in any way indicative of “the best” or the “most exemplary” examples. My intent is to invite a closer look at the cartographic possibilities artists' maps hold, and not to rank them in any way.

This will also not be an analysis of the historical developments of map art. Denis Wood (2006b), Katharine Harmon (2009), Dalia Varanka (2006), kanarinka (2006), and Ruth Watson (2009) have all ably covered historical analyses of the origins, changes, movements, and influences on the use of maps in art—each from different views that converge into the wonderfully rich and fascinating story of how artists' maps came to be.

In summary, this analysis will consist of a close look at several examples of artists' maps, divided into two categories that will be broken down into thematic sub-categories: “Artist's Critiques of Maps” and “Artists' Mappings.” The analyses will be informed by, if available, the

artists' original intent in creating the work (as expressed in artists' statements, interviews, press releases, etc.), or an interpretation through secondary sources (such as reviews, books, or academic articles on the artist's work), as well as some of my own analysis—with a focus on the cartographic aspects of these works.

With the recommendations of my advisors, I will also include a section of my own personal contributions to this study of artists' maps—as someone in the unique position of having both training in academic cartography and a strong artistic inclination. Artists' maps are to me a playground of inspiration and ideas, and a captivating fusion of my interests in art and cartography. I will offer my insights, as well as share some of my recent projects that expand on what I have learned from this study.

PART ONE:

Artists' Critiques on Maps

In an analysis of the works of map artists critiquing or commenting on professional cartography, it may be good to first address the question of how artists' maps can be considered as maps. Some map art are simply artworks that resemble or use maps. Other works range from *performances* of mapping to visions of fantastic, deeply personal, and dreamlike fictional worlds. Can we call all of these works, "maps"? In order to make the messages of artists' maps relevant to cartographers, a way to relate the two very different approaches to mapping may help. A way to establish this is by asking the age-old question, "What is a Map?"

In preparation for his 1996 article in *Cartographica*, "What Was a Map? The Lexicographers Reply," J. H. Andrews compiled a list of 321 definitions of the word "map" drawn from "dictionaries, glossaries, encyclopedias, textbooks, monographs, and learned journals of the period 1649–1996" (Andrews 1992:1). Figure 1 shows a "Wordle" or word cloud visualization I made on www.wordle.net, of these 321 definitions (this idea is from John Krygier's *Making Maps: DIY Cartography* blog). The most frequently used words appear the most prominently in the graphic, and we can see that historically, at least among the definitions Andrews found, maps have been strongly related to ideas such as "surface," "earth," "representation," and "part"—which, when put together, forms the phrase: "a partial representation of the earth's surface."

related to the shape of that culture and its contours of power” (Crampton 2010:44). Maps, therefore, cannot be universally defined.

Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge suggest a rethinking of maps. Questioning the ‘ontological security’ of maps as objects, they suggest instead that “maps are transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context-dependent. *Maps are practices*—they are always *mappings*; spatial practices enacted to solve relational problems” (Kitchin and Dodge 2007:335). In other words, ‘maps’ exist in the *process* of mapping, rather than as static products of the mapmaking process. This idea of the performative nature of maps or *mappings*, also follows a general shift in the academic literature on cartography—“from a niche-based study of maps as objects to a more comprehensive (and potentially interdisciplinary) study of mapping as practice” (Crampton 2009:840). Many map artists, especially contemporary psychogeographers, are exploring this performative aspect of maps as *practices*, created in the moment of mapping rather than the produced artifact.

As we can see, no one definition of maps works in all contexts. Perhaps, then, a general definition could be applied to artists’ maps. Not all artists’ maps are accurate ‘representations of the earth’s surface,’ and not many are so obsessed with their reception as geographically accurate or objective documents. Not all artists’ maps are “maps” either, but instead are “mappings.” Definitions of maps, however, are fluid across history and dependent on cultural and political influences. What is common to most artists’ maps is that they are at least attached to some kind of geography—whether the idea or image of it. Crampton uses this deliberately loose definition in *Mapping: A Critical Introduction to Cartography and GIS* that may work well in conceptualizing artists’ maps: “as a human activity that seeks to make sense of the geographic world, it is a way in which we ‘find our way in the world’” (Crampton 2010:12).

With this broad definition in hand, I would argue that yes, artists' maps can truly be called *maps* or *mappings* in the sense of being ways of making sense of the world, geographically speaking. Most importantly also, while professional cartographers may frown on this, maps produced by the experts are also ways of making sense of the world; and therefore, we can think of artists' maps and professional cartography as being different approaches towards the *same goal*. Neither has to be wrong. And while artists' maps are not necessarily scientifically exact, or objective, neither really are professional maps, as we will see in the following sections.

Part One will break artists' critiques down into the following four sub-categories:

“Accuracy,” “Objectivity,” “Design Conventions,” and “Maps or Mappings?”

Accuracy

“A map is a conventional picture of a portion of the earth's surface as seen from directly above, showing more or less completely the various features of the country represented” (Finch 1920:ix).

So begins the introduction of a book published in 1920 titled *Topographic Maps and Sketch Mapping* by J. K. Finch, a Professor of Civil Engineering at Columbia University. Within the introduction, Finch describes the significance and benefits of the U. S. Geological Survey's method of representing topography for “modern [trench] warfare” during the “Great War,” in comparison to the methods used at the time in France and Germany: “For this work neither the size nor the method of showing relief in vogue in Europe before the war was suited, so we have seen, since the war began, the issue of new, larger and more detailed maps of much of France in which the accurate American contour method of showing relief is used” (x).

The accurate American contour method. Accuracy in maps is especially important for maps with direct societal consequences—such as those made for military purposes, and those

used in decision-making processes in planning or government. The accuracy of maps is also often taken at face value by the general map-using public, and this is especially true of GIS maps today with their computerized, uniform, and therefore seemingly ‘accurate’ look (Tyner 2010). Inaccuracies on maps can indeed have dangerous consequences—as Tyner describes one incident: “In the worst-case scenario, maps can and do kill. The most famous recent example is the 1998 tragedy of 20 deaths in Italy when a low flying jet plane cut the cables of a ski gondola that was not shown on the pilot’s map” (Tyner 2010:11). Accuracy, therefore, is an important part of defining ‘good’ maps, according to professional cartographers.

A very early example of map art that plays with the idea of accuracy is the *Surrealist Map of the World 1929* [Figure 2]. Originally published in Belgium in a special issue of the Surrealist journal *Variétés*, the *Surrealist Map* blatantly and completely does away with geographic accuracy. Featuring a world map that appears odd even at first glance, showing several missing countries and a wandering equator, *Surrealist Map* possesses a whimsical and playful quality. One will note that the United States, Japan and all European countries west of Germany have vanished, while many Oceanic countries have been enlarged considerably. In terms of ‘good’ maps, professional cartographers would shake their heads—by not being accurate, it loses its credibility.

As Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron and Andrew Eastman write, “The map shows the primary areas which magnetized surrealist thought” (Chénieux-Gendron and Eastman 1996:438)—particularly those most populated by indigenous populations untouched by white imperialism, such as American Indians and Eskimos in the Americas. In essence, this map is

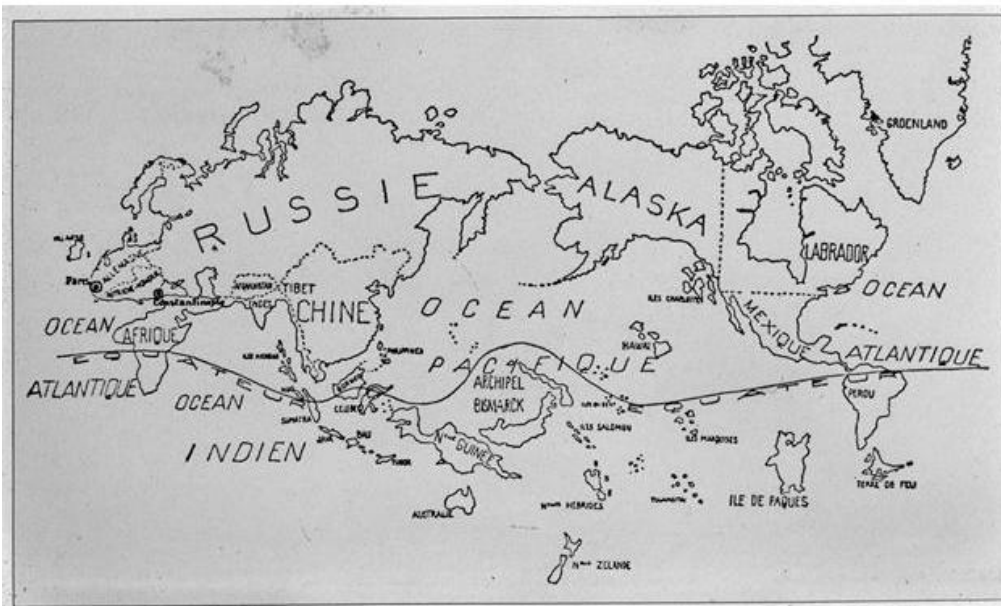


Figure 2 *Surrealist Map of the World 1929*. Anonymous.

meant to be a snapshot of the Surrealist movement’s anti-imperialist and anti-fascist ideals in 1929. According to David R. Roediger, *Surrealist Map* was a collective, affirmative response to poet Paul Valéry’s question in his “The Crisis of the European Mind” (1919), asking “whether Europe ‘will become what it is in reality?—that is to say, a little tip of the continent of Asia’” (Roediger 2002:171). The imagined map visually shrinks Western Europe and the United States down to what the Surrealists saw as a more ‘appropriate’ size, taken from the perspective of countries that have not yet been ‘spoiled’ by western imperialism. Another interpretation of the map is that it is, as poet Ted Joans puts it, a “map drawn to human scale” (Roediger 2002:173) through the removal of all overly industrialized, capitalistic, and mechanized countries.

Surrealist Map, according to Denis Wood, is “a map which strips the mask off and, in so doing, points to the presence of the mask on the normative maps of Western Christian culture” (Wood 2006b:9). The map defies cartographic conventions by not only appearing geographically ‘inaccurate,’ but also by missing any elements of the mask (source statements, grid ticks,

projection information, etc.)—and challenges the authority of “Western Christian cartography to map the world” (9). While it does not correspond to a conventional view of geographic reality, *Surrealist Map* asks us to consider if this can in fact be an accurate portrayal of the world. If not an accurate map in the conventional sense, it is an accurate portrayal of the world on a *Surrealist projection*. In fact, one might also note that Western projection methods are never truly accurate—especially at the scale of world maps. Philosopher and scientist Alfred Korzybski is known for having coined the term “the map is not the territory,” the concept that representative objects, such as maps, are not the actual objects, or the territories, themselves (Korzybski 1994). This concept is often used to explain how projection methods “which transform the curved, three-dimensional surface of the planet into a flat, two-dimensional plane, can greatly distort map scale” (Monmonier 1996:8). So if conventional notions of map accuracy are based on projection methods that already skew the appearance of countries (Think: Greenland on the Mercator projection), the Surrealists ask us: What makes this one any less accurate?

Another artists’ map that toys with accuracy is Stephen Walter’s *The Island* [Figure 3].

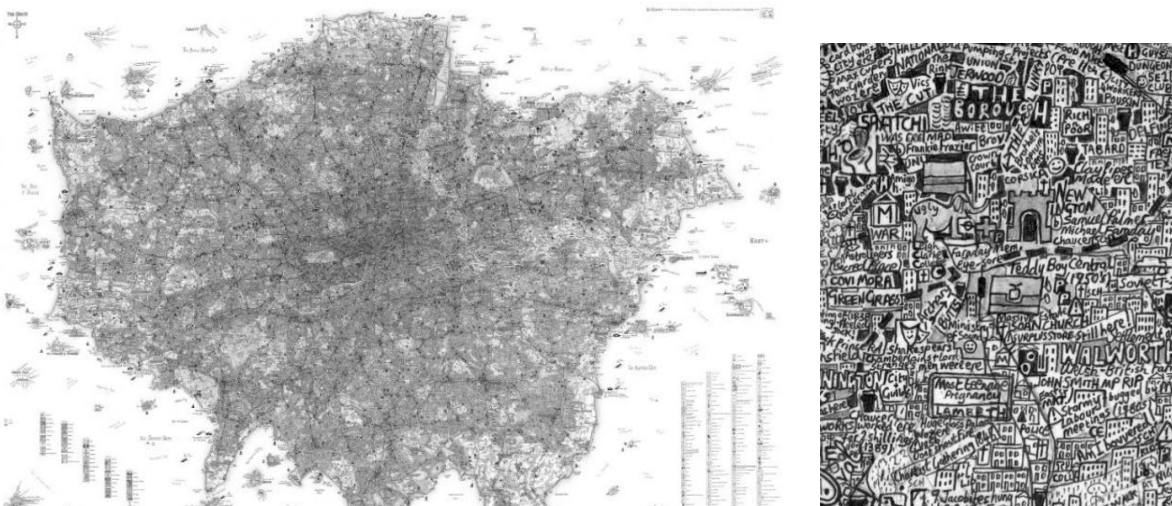


Figure 3 *The Island* by Stephen Walter, 2008. (Detail, right)

This piece, which took Walter two years to complete, presents a map of London—as an island. Walter, a native Londoner who loves his city, satirizes the London-centric view of the capital by portraying it as its very own island. Upon closer examination, Walter’s map is crammed with detailed and personal symbols, signs, and stories that fill every nook and cranny of the city. Stephen Walter writes in his artist’s statement: “Apart from its coastline, ‘The Island’ is geographically accurate and to scale, highlighting many of London’s main roads, railways, built up areas and its green spaces. It notes the city’s Victorian legacy, snippets of trivia, local knowledge, stereotypes, its place name histories and personal facts and opinions” (Walter). The map includes details such as the Gym where Arnold Schwarzenegger trained, where Winston Churchill went to school, and where Jimi Hendrix died.

Although geographically speaking, London is not an island, and so this map would be inaccurate in a conventional sense, Stephen Walter’s map is a *figuratively* accurate portrayal of the iconic city as he sees it. Interestingly, he includes some cartographic conventions, such as a north arrow and legends for reading the symbols, to the map. The detailed personal and collective mix of facts and folk stories about London that Walter fills the map with, also bring to question the nature of official knowledge: “Some facts from Wikipedia are blatantly untrue. However, the inclusion of some serve as a reminder that reputations and hype can often precede facts and figures that in themselves are selective in their very nature. They can often hold more poignancy in ‘the everyday’ than official knowledge and statistics” (Walter). Walter’s map seems able to portray life in the city, including its “secrets and its undercurrents” more personally and truthfully than a conventionally ‘accurate’ map would.

Objectivity

The objective appearance of maps, which Wood associates with the “mask” has been

tackled in many ways, but can perhaps be seen most clearly through artworks on the theme of “borders.” According to Wood, the “concern with boundaries is a theme common to much map art” (Wood 2006:10). One example is Alban Biaussat’s 2005 *The Green(er) Side of the Line* project, in which Biaussat set out to bring to life the Green Line—an armistice line drawn in 1949 in green pencil by Israeli military commander Moshe Dayan between Israel and the West Bank. As an allusion to the border, Biaussat used a 12-meter long green ribbon and green painted balls, and placed them in the landscape where the border would be. Interestingly, when Biaussat was picking the shade of green to use for the ribbon, people reacted to it saying “This is not the green of the Green Line” (Biaussat). “The color, like the notion of the border,” Harmon writes, “is a subjective construct” (Harmon 2009:23). Biaussat took several photos of the green ribbon stretched across various landscapes, tied to trees, weaving through windows, running through a butcher’s shop—sometimes flapping in the wind. The green balls represented points, between which a path can “take an infinite number of courses, a straight line being only one of them” (Biaussat). Both the flapping ribbons and the balls represented the artificiality and mutability of the Green Line. Biaussat’s intent was “to communicate, with a smile, a sense of absurdity when envisaging the likelihood of establishing borders in this landscape, if such a thing is possible at all” (Biaussat). By making the Green Line visible in the actual landscape over which it was drawn, Biaussat’s project shows us how a line drawn on a map, objectively, may not actually make sense on the ground, as well as how people conceptualize such an arbitrary line in their day-to-day lives.

Another work that involves a similar critique on the ‘objective’ act of drawing lines on a map is Qin Ga’s 2005 *Miniature Long March*, in which he had a map of China tattooed onto his back while completing the arduous trek along China’s historic Long March. As he reached each

of the twenty sites along the march, each chosen for their historic import, he had a tattoo artist update their progress on his back. Katharine Harmon writes: “In cartography, extreme hardship can be reduced to a simple line. Qin’s map is more complicated; it was laboriously and painfully made, and challenges any reductive legacy of the original Long March” (Harmon 2009:130). Has a conventional map ever been made with such embodied pain and experience?

Design Conventions

Professional mapmaking often involves a series of carefully made design choices—the width and color of roads, the size of the text and highway symbols, the color of water. Kristin Bly, in his *legend* series made in 2007, “meticulously and formulaically” blacks out all text and number characters from found maps (Bly). Figure 4 below shows *legend 14*. He writes: “the works are not intended to be hidden messages of location and travel, or topographical brainteasers. Ultimately, these drawings are meant to be somewhat beautiful fields of color, pattern, and shifting planes—albeit a beauty derived from a recipe intended to challenge conventional notions of aesthetic decision-making” (Bly). I find it fascinating that he creates beauty by deleting the cartographic design choices, basically leaving only the map’s color and roads. Perhaps this is a challenge to cartographers to rethink conventional symbols, or see how beautiful maps already are without the fuss.

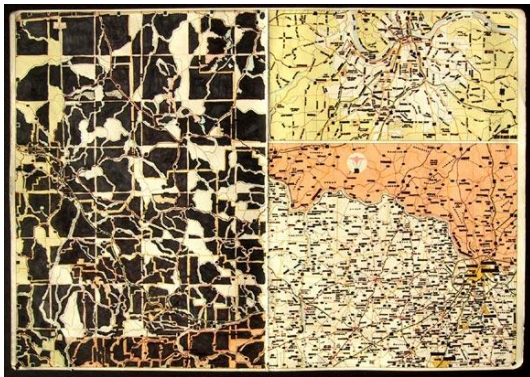


Figure 4 *legend 14* by Kristin Bly, 2007.

In a similar vein, Nina Katchadourian works with maps by cutting away everything but the roads, leaving behind thin, fragile tangles of paper. This is a disruption of “both the legibility of the map and our tendency to conflate the map’s symbols with reality” (kanarinka 2009:191). She subverts the map by laying bare its designed nature, showing it to us for what it is—not reality, but a product of design that is neither definite nor absolute: “[T]he resulting object points back to its material origins as a designed, constructed, and printed artifact, subject to transformation and dissent” (kanarinka 2009:191).

Maps or Mappings?

In 1955, Guy Debord, founding member of the Situationist International (SI) movement, defined psychogeography as “the study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (kanarinka 2006:34). Contemporary artists practicing psychogeography today have expanded this term to include “not only the study of the effects of the geographical environment on the behavior and emotions of individuals, but the production of affect in relation to the geographic environment” (34). Artist and psychogeographer kanarinka (a.k.a. Catherine D’Ignazio) describes that for contemporary psychogeographers, “The map is a machine oriented towards experimentation with the real [...] something like a cooking recipe” (kanarinka 2006:25). Instead of thinking of maps as produced artifacts, psychogeographers think of them as a set of directions and instructions to use to explore environments. The actual process of following the map’s recipe is the act of mapping. “The question now for artists (and likely for cartographers),” kanarinka writes, “is emphatically not how to make a ‘better’ picture or a more ‘accurate’ map. The world, in fact, needs no representations at all. It needs new relations and new uses” (25). This is a response especially to

the speed of changing times in the information age, when static images quickly become outdated and new information is constantly being pushed forward.

Practices of psychogeography also include mapping the “radically specific”—for example, Denis Wood’s 1982 *Boylan Heights pumpkin map* that shows all the pumpkins sitting on the porches in his neighborhood one Halloween, as well as other maps showing pools of light cast from streetlamps, and an overhead map of sewer lines leading into each of his neighbors’ homes. These types of specific, personal mappings, kanarinka explains, “make a political case that challenges the authority, embedded value system, and perceived utility of the map by displacing our attention to things that are definitively small, everyday, and personal” (kanarinka 2006:198). Who dictates what is ‘worthy’ of being mapped?

Jeremy Wood is known for his 1:1 maps of his GPS traces over land, water, in the air. With the help of a GPS and software that draws his movements, “he becomes a geodetic pencil” as he walks along, bikes, or flies over areas (Lauriault 2009:360). His GPS drawings are then superimposed over satellite imagery. In *My Ghost*, Wood creates a “personal cartography” of his daily life and journeys in London between 2000 and 2009. He writes: “We create unique textures of travels that are woven through the city. In the details of our digital traces we can find expressive qualities similar to those found in the marks made in a pencil drawing” (Wood). His GPS drawings, in which the act of drawing is embodied through his movements across space, are like a “visual cartographic diary” (Lauriault 2009:364). This is a new and exciting mode of drawing on a 1:1 scale.

Perhaps with greater access to new mobile mapmaking technologies and software, as well as changes in our relational interactions in urban environments as demonstrated by contemporary psychogeographers, creative *mapping* practices may be the future for maps.

PART TWO:

Artists' Mappings

Think of a line, the simple idea of a line drawn on a blank sheet of paper. A line that moves fluidly across the surface, smoothly and steadily; a line that halts as it cuts, dips, twists and turns. This one line alone drawn upon a flat plane already possesses all it needs to communicate what it has been put there to do. A line *creates*—out of nothingness, it creates something where emptiness was before. A line *divides*—left from right, up from down, in or out. Lines, when drawn or painted, are alive. At a talk in 1998 at Loughborough University, the late Richard Wollheim, a dominant figure in the philosophy of art, described drawing and painting in the following manner: “Drawing and painting, we do well record, are not only visual arts: they are also manual arts. The material residues of which the eye takes stock have been deposited by the movements of the hand” (Wollheim 2005). The manual nature of drawing is such that the hand unavoidably infuses the line with its own life, vocabulary, and personality—bold and aggressive, soft and flowing, restrained, assertive, carefree. There is, therefore, a kind of poetry to a simple line drawn by hand.

Mapping, at its purest, most fundamental level, is like drawing. You can take a stick and draw a line in the sand between you and me, point to where you stand and call it yours. Draw a border around your house, your neighborhood, your town, your country, and out to the ever-reaching cosmos. You can draw the roads, like a vast network of boundless capillaries, taking you from city to city, on a conveyor belt of cars. Mapping in its simplest form can be as ordinary as taking out a paper napkin and scribbling arrows, roads, and names to show your friend where to meet you. Maps are wonderfully intuitive guides for the lost or wandering soul.

There was a time when all maps were made by hand. When sea monsters inhabited uncharted oceans and anthropomorphized countries on propaganda posters quibbled amongst themselves. The manual nature of hand-drawn maps, though much less ‘reliable’ than today’s rigorous GIS maps, had a certain charm and personality that has been systematically stomped out by today’s computerized cartography. “Long before the hand had altogether been severed by the digital revolution, it had pretty much disappeared from mapmaking. Emblematic were the lettering devices common through the 1960s” (Wood 2006:8). The mark of a person’s hand is no longer relevant to the immaculately clean lines of our new maps, and they are left in the dusty tomes of cartographic history.

Perhaps as a kind of nostalgia to these times, several map artists find themselves drawn to an aesthetic charm they find in the look of maps. Some artists find inspiration in their visual iconography; some try to breathe new life into outdated maps by transforming them. Part Two will deal with such artists, as well as artists who are creating their own forms of mapping. The sub-categories are: “New Life,” “Personal Worlds,” and “Creative Mappings.”

New Life

Some map artists find something about the look of maps that inspires them to create their works. Perhaps it is something about their age, or the archaic systems they convey, but old, outdated maps seem to attract many artists. Josh Dorman, for example creates beautiful, dream-like worlds using outdated textbooks, topographic maps, manuals, and documents that he collects. In his artist’s statement, Dorman writes: “Paper that has lived a life and shows its age compels me to paint. I am intrigued by systems I do not understand and by information that is no longer relevant” (Dorman). In works such as *Drawing Board* [Figure 5], Dorman uses topographic maps and found images in intuitive ways to create new worlds where “printed text

on the maps can be altered, the locations become blurred, gravity sometimes fails” (Dorman). He sees the flat lines on maps as “both aerially imposed pattern and the scaffold of a fleshed-out landscape,” and as modes of representations that can be abstracted (Ollman). Combining paint and collage, he takes the viewer into completely new worlds that, like dreams, can be interpreted in multiple ways.



Figure 5 *Drawing Board*, Josh Dorman, 2007.

Claire Brewster creates delicate, intricate shapes from outdated maps. Paper maps have become outmoded by online map services and smartphones, and she breathes new life into them that bring beauty to her urban environment. She describes her work in her artists’ statement as being about “retrieving the discarded, celebrating the unwanted and giving new life to the obsolete. Claire uses old and out of date maps and atlases as her fabric with which to create her intricate, delicate and detailed cut outs” (Brewster).

Joao Machado and Matthew Cusick use maps to create pictorial collages. For Machado, maps are ways to explore and understand ourselves and the world: “Everybody needs a map to understand the physical world we live in. We look to maps to understand the spiritual world, as

in astrology, for example. We need maps to understand each other in this constant exploration” (Machado). Cusick uses maps specifically printed between 1872 and 1945, “a time of much mapping and remapping,” in his collaged paintings (Harmon 2009:78).

Personal Worlds

Maps are wonderful mediums with which to tell geographic stories. Some artists explore personal stories through maps. Others create fictions. Florent Morellet draws highly detailed fictional cities, with their own histories, economies, and climates. He also sees maps everywhere—in nature, in cracks in the wall. “I AM ADDICTED TO MAPS,” his artist’s statement says, “I get lost in an atlas for hours. [...] The maps that I study or imagine or create are the charts of human beings and their civilizations. Histories, economies, politics—every aspect of how men think and behave is there” (Morellet). Some of his works even use elements from nature, such as lichen, which he imagines as volcanic shapes and densely populates their shores.

Val Britton makes collaged drawings that draw from the language of maps, as ways to connect to her father, who was a truck driver who drove all across the country, and who died in her teens. She uses American road maps in her mixed media abstractions to explore the past and “make up the parts I cannot know” (Britton). Her maps create physical, psychological, and emotional spaces, and as her pieces are not pre-planned, her process is also one of meditative exploration.

Creative Mappings

Artists offer uniquely artistic and expressive ways to map. Some of these works use the beauty of art to pull readers into their maps. Elin O’Hara Slavick’s series *Protesting cartography: Places the United States has Bombed* or includes over 60 paintings of U.S.

bombing sites based on satellite imagery, to both educate herself and help educate others on the horrors of U.S. military interventions. She uses color to draw the reader into her maps, “so that she will take a closer look, read the accompanying information that explains the horror beneath the surface” (Slavick). Her works wear no objective masks and boldly put forth their messages: “I suppose I want to instill fear back in to us, but not fear of the peripheral world. We should be afraid of ourselves. Maps are preeminently a language of power, not protest. I offer these maps as protests against each and every bombing” (Slavick).

A particularly creative “map” is *Monumap: 115°/49° Roosville* by Gregor Turk, a sculptural “smelling map” and part of a series of 29 “Monumaps” representing one degree along the forty-ninth parallel between Canada and the U.S., the world’s longest straight border. He collected aromatic plant materials along the way and placed each of them on the shelf-like sculpture, creating a sort of map documenting each smell. The series was part of a larger installation of drawings, sculptures and artworks using materials found along Turk’s six month trek along the border, and was shown to both Canadian and U.S. audiences. “These exhibitions offered the viewing public an opportunity to question the artificial and seemingly arbitrary aspects of this particular border, the metaphorical qualities of borders in general, and the reliance placed on maps to convey, constrain, and/or alter our sense of place” (Turk).

MY THOUGHTS AS A CARTOGRAPHER AND ARTIST

Most map art are created by people who are primarily artists. On the other hand, not as many academically-trained cartographers, except perhaps with the exception of Denis Wood, have tried their hand at making map art. With the digital revolution in cartography, and especially with the growth in GIS use across industries even outside of cartography, most if not all academic cartography students today have a complete loss of touch with their medium—maps are clicked and typed, colors are chosen from an infinite palette of colors, lines customized from adjustable parameters. The only contact students have with their maps, if any, is what they end up with after hitting “Print.” Of course there are many benefits to computerized cartography, but I sometimes wonder about this digital distance students have with their work. As a person who enjoys drawing and painting more than a straight line, I sometimes wish there were still a manual touch to academic mapmaking, but alas...

My thoughts as a cartographer and artist stem from my daydreams about what it might be like to create academically sound, yet artistically liberated cartographies. Many cartographic conventions exist for good reason—like the use of blue for water that facilitates intuitive and efficient map reading—but they can also be at times restrictive. Conventions and standards are not flexible enough to accommodate less empirical, yet nonetheless subjectively ‘true’ experiences, such as the worlds of indigenous dream cartographies and Stephen Walter’s hypothetical, multi-layered, yet honest depiction of London. I think in our world of further globalization, Western cartography poses a great danger to wipe out the innovative and legitimate cartographic ontologies of other cultures. The world, to me, can be mapped in several ways; academic cartography being only one of potentially many. Paper napkin maps, lines drawn

in sand, a fold-out Rand McNally, artists' maps—as long as if the pure *spirit* of mapping is there, all of these to me are legitimate ways to map and make sense of our place in the world. And this is a very big world... Why should we ever make sense of it just one way?

I hope the future holds a path for me to explore these new mappings. Cartographic elements are showing up in a lot of my recent drawings and doodles. They are not mappings yet of any specific world, except perhaps the contents of my musings. I am also working on a web site called “Mappy Musings,” exploring some ideas I have about maps and the potential they hold for anyone with a true mapping spirit. Below is my most recent drawing, and the temporary link to this website is: http://eden.rutgers.edu/~kyamane/425/midterm_revised/fp_home.htm.



Figure 6 *Mappy Musings*, Kae Yamane, 2013. 4.5” x 9”, pen on watercolor paper.

CONCLUSION

Artists' maps offer professional cartographers a wide palette of ideas and considerations. At a time when mapmaking practices are spreading to wider circles outside of professional and academic cartography, artists' maps contribute to both critical discourses of cartography and creative mappings. By laying bare the "mask" long worn by cartography, artists help visualize critical cartographic issues such as accuracy, objectivity, and conventions. They also bring to question the nature of maps as objects, and the possibilities for new *mapping* practices. Artists' maps demonstrate mappings free of cartographic conventions—cartographies unmasked. Although their mediums and approaches vary greatly, they all offer a plethora of ideas and expressions on ways of experiencing the world. Unmasked, these mappings often show more nuanced truths that cannot be as expressively accommodated by current methods in Western cartography.

Artists' maps comment, critique, and protest cartographic norms; they breathe new life into outdated maps, create and explore personal worlds, and offer uniquely artistic geographical experiences. They show alternatives to the objective, accurate status professional maps must maintain. Although artists' maps may be more subjective and expressive, this is not necessarily a fault. Academic cartography excels in most cases in portraying an objective view of geographic reality, albeit with the help of conventions, but avoids subjective, emotional topics. Artists' maps can cover subjective topics with a nuanced accuracy. A collaboration between map artists and expert cartographers can cover both worlds. Perhaps the future of cartography will lie in an expansion of its techniques onto mappings of subjective spaces and the removal of the objective mask.

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