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Maps of the Everyday: Habitual Pathways and Contested Places

> Mapping is too important to be left to cartographers . . .
>
> —J. B. Harley,
> "Deconstructing the Map"

> What the map cuts up, the story cuts across . . .
>
> —Michel de Certeau,
> *The Practice of Everyday Life*

> Who is felt to belong and not to belong contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space . . .
>
> —David Sibley,
> *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*

In one episode of the popular television drama *The West Wing,* White House officials meet with groups that wouldn't normally have the ear of the White House.[1] The character C. J. is assigned the group "Cartographers for Social Equality" and meets with them reluctantly. The Cartographers for Social Equality had come to the White House asking for a mere million dollars or so to replace the thousands of Mercator projection maps still hanging in classrooms across the country with Peters projection maps that depict continents with more accuracy. In a scene where three (geeky) geographers demonstrate the different views of the world as evidenced by the Mercator projection map and the Peters projection map (Peters), C. J. is mesmerized, her "world view" decidedly shaken up, especially by an image where the map is flip-flopped so that the northern hemisphere occupies the "bottom" of the map, and the southern takes over the top (see fig. 3.1).

While some may be skeptical that different maps, created through different projection systems, could alter world politics or influence social justice

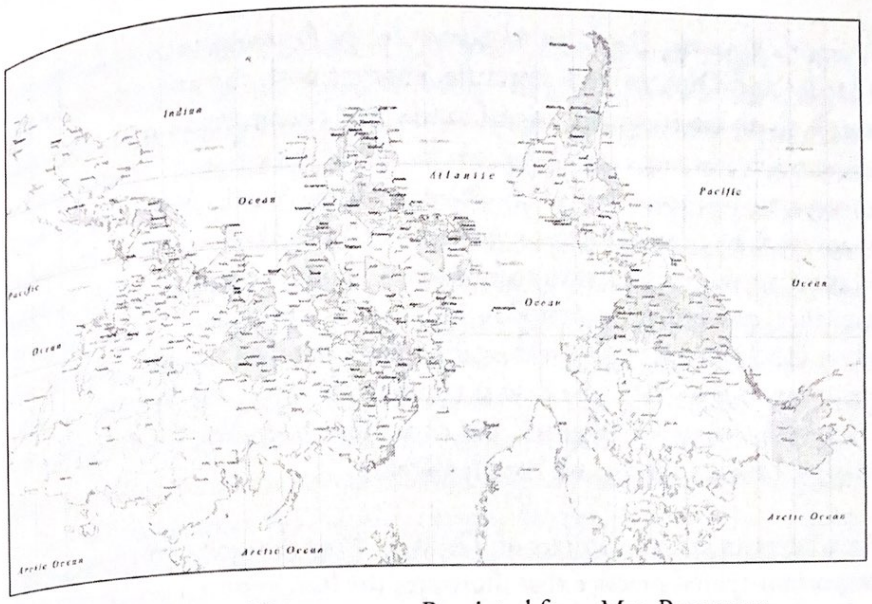

Fig. 3.1. Upside-down Mercator map. Reprinted from Map Resources, <www.mapresources.com>.

(Lemann), critical geographers insist on the connection. J. B. Harley, in "Deconstructing the Map," asserts the rhetoricality of maps:

> rhetoric is part of the way all texts work and . . . all maps are rhetorical texts. . . . All maps strive to frame their message in the context of an audience. All maps state an argument about the world, and they are propositional in nature. All maps employ the common devices of rhetoric such as invocations of authority. This is *especially* so in topographical maps. . . . Rhetoric may be concealed but it is always present, . . . (242, his emphasis)

Many areas of geographic study have changed dramatically in response to both poststructuralist claims about knowledge-making and new technologies, but perhaps none more than the science of maps and attitudes toward mapping. Our ideas about maps need to change in order to reflect how technology is revolutionizing map-making as well as map-reading, document design, and technological reproduction.

For decades if not centuries, the dignified authority of library atlas cabinets, flat drawers with neat stacks of two-dimensional maps, as well as the generally reliable accuracy of glove-compartment maps, led to dominant notions about maps not as "texts" to be interpreted but as documents to be trusted. Following Harley's lead, critical geographers address the politics of mapping and admit that map-making is a political and interpretive act, and scholars in human geography and cartography have acknowledged in recent years the rhetoricality of map-making. The collection *Writing*

Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape (Barnes and Duncan), for example, engages with the cross-disciplinary emphasis on intertextuality, signification, and deconstruction to argue that *discourse* creates maps and dominant images of regions, not measurements, surveys, or instruments. In *The Power of Maps,* Denis Wood asserts that maps work by serving interests, and this "interested selectivity," embodied in the map as both presences and absences, allows the map to work, to have meaning, and in turn, to reproduce the culture that creates them in the first place (1). In nearly every field or discipline, scholars use the language of mapping to show how the field is configured, where the borders lie, and who works where. (In rhetoric and composition studies, for example, see Phelps; Lauer; Sullivan and Porter; Glenn.)

As academics and the writers of *The West Wing* recognize, mapping is an important spatial practice that illustrates the link between geography and culture, between images of the world and world power, between the concept of space and actual places. Maps and their significance loom large in both traditional assumptions about the discipline of geography and in people's habitual ways of navigating the world. This chapter concentrates on mapping as another spatial practice that informs geographies of rhetoric and writing and that illustrates the complexity of thirdspace, where maps can be informative and useless, accurate and empty, image and text, exemplary of logic and measurement but also unreadable to a first-time user.[2] The maps we spread out onto a dashboard or view on a screen have very little to do with our mental maps, the images and associations of places that we carry around in our heads.

This disparity means that we must change our notions of mapping, just as we must re-imagine acts of writing, to account for paradoxical and contested places and for places that are laden with risk or the perception of risk for trespassers, the unwelcome, or "intruders" marked by difference. People move through space, in large part, very cautiously, particularly if their (visible) identity puts them at risk in certain areas or neighborhoods. Movement through the spatial world is determined largely by contested places and geographies of exclusion, by (invisible) markers of boundaries. In addition, even the finest maps—created via satellite and updated every twenty-four hours—cannot capture the contested places that are difficult even for insiders to characterize or predict.

Computer technologies and Geographic Information Systems have made maps more public and democratic, easy to reproduce, available in more than one dimension, and, via satellite technology, precisely "accurate." Like most

advances, this presents a double-edged sword, and the dual nature of these advances encapsulates the changing nature of geography and the complications of place and space. Maps achieved much of their cultural capital in colonialist and imperialist enterprises; obviously much rarer in ink on parchment, maps and mapping services are consumed today by many professional groups as well as by farmers or fishermen and all those whose income and livelihood depends on the weather. The group of consumers gets larger, too, when you add in the avid gardeners, boaters, golfers, and other middle-class outdoor enthusiasts who now want maps that move, as on weather sites, where radar images of rain march from west to east, illustrating a "speeding up" of weather patterns and the projected paths of fronts or storms. Maps are colorful, often portable, collectible, or valuable, but their value comes, of course, from the culture's demand for positivist, precise, measurable, and reproducible forms of "reality" and representations of regions that are meaningful to people.

Familiar to some readers, a poststructuralist critique of mapping is offered here alongside a practical fondness for maps, an admiration for their logic, and a confidence in their usefulness. Despite the wealth of persuasive arguments that maps are everything from inaccurate to instruments of oppression, I don't want to dismiss something that we depend on so much in the everyday. The image of travelers and tourists poring over maps is a common one, but walkers and residents also depend on different types of maps, memories, or landmarks to find their way around, even for such mundane activities as errands or appointments: street names, subway maps, big trees, crosswalks, billboards, hills or rivers, bus stops or benches, shops or stores, signs of all types. Habitual pathways, of course, are characterized by signs that have faded with familiarity; the routine byways of a pedestrian, for example, may have originally been marked by signs of the built environment, but they are no longer needed when the routine becomes naturalized.

The dignified authority of maps dies hard, but it has by now been challenged rigorously by a number of geographers and cartographers—and also by revolutionary technologies of map-making. Affordable software, increasing access to GIS databases, and a growing reliance on satellite imagery might be making possible the "democratization" of cartography, but technological advances, while they may be useful in settling disputes over boundaries and borders, do not alone make new maps "more" accurate or true. Harley worries, in addition, that the

> effect of accelerated technological change—as manifest in digital cartography and geographical information systems—has been to strengthen its posi-

> tivist assumptions and it has bred a new arrogance in geography about its supposed value as a mode of access to reality. (231)

In other words, there is a danger of investing in technologically sophisticated maps as the new source of truth without also acknowledging the shifting, fragmentary nature of all forms of knowledge and information.

If we assume that people who never leave their neighborhoods don't really need maps, that assumption ignores the power of a globe or atlas for armchair travel, for dreaming about traveling or imagining other places. Those who do explore unfamiliar places, by choice or by circumstance, often depend on a map and often have the experience of "Hey, here it is! Just like on the map, just like the map says." Something about maps is hugely satisfying, and there's nothing quite like "a good map" to a hiker, tourist, new resident, or real estate agent. However, as this chapter will argue, mapping takes many different forms, and we need to look beyond published and copyrighted two-dimensional maps to understand mapping as a spatial practice. Rhetorical mapping addresses questions of "How do you get there from here?" that have more to do with practices of the everyday than with expeditions of the Royal Geographical Society or van trips on blue highways. "Which bus will take me to Stop and Shop?" "Don't go that way during rush hour." "How far to a good flea market?" "Turn right where the old post office used to be." Since maps have been the subject of intense debate within human geography for several years now, it's important to contextualize that debate and to come to terms with the kinds of information that maps can and cannot give us.

Mental Mapping, Maps That Move

While print and electronic maps are the most familiar forms, "mapping" is increasingly used as a metaphor for charting, understanding, exploring, or organizing. Mental mapping and cognitive mapping are both terms used by educators and researchers to refer to a person's cognitive capacity to understand where things are in relationship to one another, sense of direction, or sense of distance. It's the ability to carry around in our heads organized information or images of cities, especially images that are "soaked in memories and meanings" (Lynch 1).[3] A form of imagined geography, mental maps hold the cognitive images in our minds about a place, a route, or an area. We have mental maps of our hometowns or the most familiar places of our childhoods; we have mental maps of our current neighborhoods or campuses. Based on these mental maps, many of us could give directions to a stranger or could sketch the way from A to B. In *The Image of the City,* Kevin Lynch introduced the concept of cognitive mapping to city planning

by testing the idea of "imageability" through interviews with inhabitants. Principles for urban design, Lynch believed, would develop from a comparison between group images of their city and visual reality. Residents were asked to describe places, sketch locations, or take an imaginary trip through the area.

The techniques of mental mapping are not only useful to city planners. Educators, like the fictional cartographers portrayed on *The West Wing*, know the importance of teaching children spatial sense: children should be able to make a short trip alone to the school library; or tell a driver how to get to their house; or know how far it is to other neighborhoods reported to have better playgrounds. The point of teaching "spatial sense" is not to turn schoolchildren into cartographers, but to make them safe in their lifeworlds and to expand those lifeworlds gradually without endangering or intimidating them. In geographic education, mental mapping usually begins with freehand drawings of a place, proceeds to fieldwork or other types of investigation, and then returns to revising or redrawing the original map, based on new knowledge and understanding (see Mental Mapping and Mental Mapping Project).

Geography educators argue, rightly, that it is an important form of visual and global literacy to be able to read maps. Children should understand something about the relative size of countries, the differences among continents, the way that the sun, for example, affects cultures in dramatically different ways. It matters, for purposes of employment or to increase one's opportunities, to have good map literacy or a strong spatial sense. For example, the navigational skills required for reading a map are similar to those found on a computer interface, but also in very practical terms, how can someone get to a job interview without finding their way there? Here's the case that geography educator Patrick Wiegand makes for children's spatial literacy:

> Children's need to understand the spatial relationships of the Earth's land masses will become more important. For example, increasing school use of the Internet and the opportunities offered by videoconferencing will enable children to undertake interactive investigations around the world. They will need a sharper awareness of where places are in relation to each other and how time zones operate. Having a reasonably accurate image of the way the continents are arranged around the globe and the limitations of world maps not only allows us to make better sense of travel and world events, it is [also] one of the building block of international understanding. (6)

Using mental maps, researchers have learned about people's ability to navigate space and to remember places based on mental maps. Wiegand

and Bernadette Stiell, in "Mapping the Place Knowledge of Teachers in Training," asked geography student-teachers to draw a freehand sketch map of the British isles—a "mental map" or "free recall" map as an admittedly partial test of place knowledge. The results, while varied in theme and significance, showed that "all students in the sample drew England 38 percent larger than its actual relative size. The Republic of Ireland and Scotland were shown 45 percent and 20 percent smaller respectively" (195). Similarly, in a large-scale study of mental mapping, researchers collected 3,568 maps of the continents drawn by students in seventy-five universities in fifty-two countries (Monastersky 222). A predictable "home-turf exaggeration" emerged, but even more striking was the consistent pattern by which Europe was enlarged in scale while Africa's dimensions shrank. No matter where students lived, they exaggerated the size of Europe, and a full 80 percent of the maps featured Europe in the middle (Monastersky 222). The point is not, then, that students need to be taught the right scale, but that mental mapping can tell us a great deal about how people perceive the world, and how ideology (i.e., Eurocentrism) is reproduced in images and school exercises.

The legitimate criticisms of mental maps are that most exercises or experiments using them require people to draw, and then drawing ability comes into the picture. Some research subjects may have very accurate and even unique mental maps but not feel comfortable with the activity of drawing or putting those images on paper. This has always been a disadvantage in using mental maps for research, and, of course, as composition readers know very well, cognitive research is often problematic when divorced from the social production of knowledge.

Mental maps, however cognitively housed, are socially constructed. They are a particular form of "imagined geography" that illustrate the complex relationships between the social and the spatial. Most importantly, maps and spatial memory have been shown to relate to gender and class. This means they are not "cognitive" topics but social ones. The research of Peter Orleans from 1967 in Los Angeles provides the most striking example of this: asking residents of L.A. to share their mental maps of urban space, Orleans questioned a wide range of groups and then created composite maps from their responses (Gould and White). Unsurprisingly, the higher the income and the whiter the neighborhood, the richer and more wide-ranging were residents' knowledge of L.A. White respondents from Westwood represented tourist areas and the coast, for example, while black residents in Avalon identified main streets leading to downtown, but other districts were vague entities. Finally, Spanish-speaking residents in Boyle Heights con-

structed the smallest mental maps of all, representing only the immediate area, the City Hall, and the bus depot (Gould and White 17). In other words, leisure time, access to affordable transportation, and above all, feelings of empowerment and safety allow people to explore little-known regions and to broaden and deepen their own "mental maps" of a place or region.

Soja pins a fondness for mental mapping on secondspace epistemologies,

> immediately distinguishable by their explanatory concentration on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind. (*Thirdspace* 78–79).

Artists and architects, urbanists and designers can be found in secondspace, according to Soja, where "the imagined geography tends to become the 'real' geography, with the image or representation coming to define and order the reality" (79). Despite his criticisms, others believe that mental maps and a variety of forms of mapping can become vital tools in exploring people's understanding of space, or the cultural and social spaces that mark inclusions or exclusions: "Just as individuals need cognitive maps of their cities to negotiate their spatial environment, so we need maps of society to intelligently analyse, discuss and intervene in social processes" (Gregory, Martin, and Smith 10).

One form of mapping can be found in William Least Heat-Moon's *PrairyErth.* Subtitled "A Deep Map," his book captures the character, history, and richness of Chase County, Kansas, in the Flint Hills, "the last remaining grand expanse of tallgrass prairie in America" (12). Using the image of a grid to organize Chase County into twelve quadrangles, and hoping that coordinates would lead to connections (15), Least Heat-Moon's chapters—his in-depth visits to each quadrangle—all begin with sections "From the Commonplace Book" and "In the Quadrangle." His deep map is mostly textual rather than visual; the rare visual maps he includes are two-dimensional and not even in color. But to make this map, for thirty months Least Heat-Moon walks across approximately 780 square miles of landscape and explores a dozen small towns; he searches county records, talks to residents, and collects Native American legends. Partly geographic and partly anthropologic, the deep map merges botany, geology, history, and anthropology; Least Heat-Moon is explorer and recorder and narrator. Least Heat-Moon's deep map is a story written geographically, and illustrates vividly how much we need stories for our maps as well as maps for our stories.

Within rhetoric and composition studies, Ralph Cintron uses mapping to situate his ethnographic study of *Angels' Town:* Chero *Ways, Gang Life,*

and Rhetorics of the Everyday. His second chapter, titled "Mapping/Texting," uses a map of Angelstown (the size of a double bed) as an example of the discourses of measurement, particularly reduction (17); distinctions between grids and circuity; and the rhetoric of place names (20). A map is "one kind of optical knowledge that comes into being after real space overwhelms the eye" (29); it is a material representation of space, one that furthers "the desire to conquer and colonize," desires made possible by the processes of mapping and texting (35).

Influenced by Lynch, Least Heat-Moon, Cintron, and others, I rely in this chapter on overlapping versions of mapping to argue that mapping as a concept helps us understand the social production of space and people's experiences in space, but our concept of mapping must include the realandimagined and needs to be drawn from the actual experiences of sociospatial beings. Mental maps are drawn by people's experience in space and with specific places or locations—experiences that have everything to do with class, race, gender, age, mobility, and sexuality. Identity is constructed in place, via place, and I hope to build on that assertion both by qualitative research methodologies and through the rich literatures of cultural geography.

A Study: Mental Maps and Living in Leeds

I often rode the bus in Leeds from St. Michael's to the Headrow, where