

Progress reports



Cartography: performative, participatory, political

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Abstract: This report examines the ways in which mapping is performative, participatory and political. Performativity has received increasing attention from scholars, and cartography is no exception. Interest has shifted from the map as *object* to mapping as *practice*. Performativity is a cultural, social and political activity; maps as protest and commentary. The internet both facilitates and shapes popular political activism, but scholars have been slow to grasp amateur political mappings, although analysis of political deployments of mapping in state, territorial and imperial projects remains rich. Finally, some authors suggest that cartography be understood as existence (becoming) rather than essence (fixed ontology).

Key words: maps and politics, ontology, participatory mapping, performativity.

I Introduction

Maps are performative, participatory and political. These remain wide fields of interest, from theoretical and philosophical issues to interest in applied mappings. In one sense these topics cover what used to be called ‘map use’ and are now at least partially addressed by the new International Cartographic Association Commission on ‘Maps and Society’, but neither of these terms is entirely adequate. It is interesting that many of these interests are about *mapping* in practice, rather than maps (their form or design). We seem to be moving from a niche-based study of maps as objects to a more comprehensive (and potentially interdisciplinary) study of mapping as practice, the knowledges it deploys, and the political field of its operations.

II Performativity and map art

If artists have long been using maps, globes and geographic images in their works, this trend has exploded in the last decade. The term ‘map art’ has been used to describe these works (Wood, 2006a). Over 200 such artists were recently catalogued (Wood, 2006b) spanning most of the twentieth century (the first identified usage dates from 1924). Surrealists, Situationists, Fluxus artists, Pop artists and others have experimented with maps. For example, the Argentinean-Italian artist Lucio Fontana worked on a range of artistic works during the second half of the century called ‘Concetto Spaziale’ (or ‘Spazialismo’, spatialism) (Miracco, 2006). These works were not maps in the usual

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sense, but by cutting and slashing the canvas itself Fontana pointed to the plane of representation and the kind of space it sought to contain.

More recently, psychogeographers and map artists have explored the map as part of performance, and the map *as* performance. Pedro Lasch in his work *Latino/a America* (2003/2006) used a map of the Americas which he gave to Latino/a ‘wanderers’ crossing the border in order to ‘become attentive to different modes of wandering, of travel, of migration and immigration, with their attendant detentions and deportations’ (de Acosta, 2007: 70). Although useless as navigation, the map is part of the ‘practice of everyday lives’ in the words of de Certeau (1984). Certeau along with Bachelard’s (1958/1969) and the *dérive* (drift or semi-structured urban wandering) have proven very influential on a generation of psychogeographers. For example, Eric Laurier and Barry Brown, drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and science studies have extensively examined the kinds of spatial knowledges (including maps) produced and used during mobile moments, such as why we announce our location when making a cellphone call (Laurier, 2001). They argue that the notion of the cognitive map is flawed because it is not situated as a shared (social) practice (Brown and Laurier, 2005). Their work certainly extends, if not actively disenfranchises, the traditional purely cognitive account of wayfinding and navigation with maps:

[t]he real world skills of navigation are not, then, those of mental reasoning and spatial models; what we do find are map readers looking and reading signs, misunderstanding street names, grappling with more or less cumbersome paper documents and the like. Reading maps, we are arguing, is so much more than mental cognition, if it is that at all. (Laurier and Brown, 2008: 214)

In other words, using maps is a performance.

We find this in map art too. Art provokes, surprises, seeks truths, or proposes alternatives. Map art poses questions to the

discipline of cartography and geography, which tend to frame mapping as being about good aesthetics (map design) and straightforward representation. But this relationship may be changing. In one of Denis Cosgrove’s last papers, he argued that maps, map art and ephemeral mappings instantiate cartography as a cultural practice (Cosgrove, 2008). Speaking of a map of 9/11 distributed at Ground Zero in November 2001, he claims it is a ‘site specific and performative work intended as a direct intervention into the everyday ... life of the city, a way of “taking the measure” of the event’ (Cosgrove, 2008: 160). Cosgrove speaks not so much about the map’s power relations (that, for example, Brian Harley or John Pickles are known for) but its cultural import, easily weaving together mapping practices, ephemeral virtual maps and material cultural production to emphasize the ‘performative roles of the map as an object’ (p. 165) that he had previously set out in his book *Mappings* (Cosgrove, 1999; see also Della Dora, 2008). Although I might quibble with the implication that a political analysis of the map is narrow (‘public’ and activist mapping in particular are discussed below), work on cultural performativity is certainly advancing our understanding of how maps work.

In an earlier piece, Cosgrove made the case for the examination of art not just in pre-modern maps (in their decorative margins, for example), but for modern ones too (Cosgrove, 2005; see also Harley, 1989). Concerned that the history of cartography tended to emphasize artistic elements of mapping solely in terms of older historical examples, which then gave way to an era of modern scientific cartography, Cosgrove provided numerous examples of modern map art. These included not just the avant-garde artists already mentioned and catalogued in Wood (2006a) but more recent conceptual artists such as Lilla LoCurto and William Outcault (see also Wood, 2007) and popular culture. In doing so, he critiqued David Woodward’s implicit assumption that art is

about aesthetics while science is analytical (Woodward, 1987). Cosgrove argued for the 'constitutive role of visual images, including maps, in the practices of science' (Cosgrove, 2005: 36).

A different kind of map art has been produced by John Krygier and Denis Wood. It consists of an actual comic book instead of the traditional chapter or paper (Dodge *et al.*, 2009).¹ Krygier and Wood use this format to argue that maps are not representations so much as propositions or arguments: it is 'an experiment in rethinking maps and discourse about maps: a proposition about maps as propositions and about comic books as academic discourse in the form of a comic book of propositional maps' (Krygier and Wood, 2009). Non-representational theory is not new, as they admit, especially in art, and their title refers to Rene Magritte's famous painting of a pipe inscribed with the text 'ceci n'est pas une pipe' from 1928–29. I am not so sure that maps as propositions and not 'reflections' of the landscape is all that different either from what various critical cartographers have been saying for some time now, not just Brian Harley in the 1980s (Pinder, 2003), but also in the work of philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1979). Martin Heidegger's work on art also comes to mind (Heidegger, 1993; Dreyfus, 2005) since he approached it not just in terms of aesthetics or representation but also the work that art does to disclose truths. Nevertheless it is still pretty unusual to have academics producing comic books!

There is too much map art to adequately reference it here, but some recent key texts include *An atlas of radical cartography* (Mogul and Bhagat, 2007), the *Else/where* collection (Abrams and Hall, 2006), philosopher Edward Casey's latest book (Casey, 2005), Katherine Harmon's popular book *You are here* (Harmon, 2004), artist kanarinka's writings (kanarinka, 2006a; 2006b; 2009), and the book accompanying the Newberry's Library's exhibit for the Chicago Festival of Maps held in 2007–2008 (Akerman and

Karrow, 2007; for a report on the festival, see Jones, 2008). This latter was probably the biggest map festival ever held (in 2008 it moved on to Baltimore).

III Maps as protest and commentary

Working from the other direction and trying to redress the silences and erasures of mapping representations are a field of workers engaged in maps as protest or political commentary. This work is also quite extensive and includes participatory projects and public GIS/mappings, public protests, as well as analysis of political events. The *Radical cartography* atlas mentioned above perhaps epitomizes some of this work. Divided into two volumes in a slipcase, it includes 10 pieces, which receive a short expository essay (book one) and 10 folded maps (22 x 17 in) in book two. The *Atlas*, which featured in the 3Cs Convergence in North Carolina during October 2008, includes artists, activists and academics. Trevor Paglen, a geographer at Berkeley (perhaps the only geographer to have appeared on Jon Stewart's 'The Daily Show'!), intersects 'black ops' or secret military operations with his own countersurveillance: long-distance photography into secret military bases (Paglen, 2007), tracking spy satellites in orbit, and uncovering the military insignia worn by personnel in covert programs – the subject of his visit to 'The Daily Show'. In the *Radical cartography* atlas, Paglen maps extraordinary rendition, the extra-legal kidnapping of terror suspects, by tracing flights based on a network of observers in Europe and the USA. The map was also prominently placed on highway billboards across Los Angeles (Paglen and Thompson, 2006).

A second interventionist piece was produced by the New York City based Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) who developed a map of 'least surveillance'. Casting their work as 'tactical cartography', the IAA point to a 'long tradition of making maps that presents alternate interpretations of various landscapes and reveal implicit relationships

between power, control, and spatial practice' (Institute for Applied Autonomy, 2007: 29). They draw on tactical media or 'interventionist practice that creates disruptions within existing systems of power' (Institute for Applied Autonomy, 2007: 29) to produce anti-surveillance maps. In October 2001 they used data collected by New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and the Surveillance Camera Players to produce iSee, an interactive program for navigation. Using iSee (which was originally an exercise in media spectacle) users can plot the pathway of least surveillance between any two points in Manhattan. Art or politics?

A major factor in today's political activism is the internet. As the 2007 President of the British Cartographic Society (BCS) noted, '[t]he Internet is already a major force in the geospatial industry but it is set to grow as the worldwide computer-using community becomes aware to what geospatial data is and can do for them' (Cassettari, 2007: 9). This is not just a matter of Google, Microsoft or Yahoo Maps, but increased overall access to mapping, open source GIS such as Grass and MapServer (opensourcegis.org lists nearly 250 GIS-related open source programs; see also the Open Source Geospatial Foundation, www.osgeo.org) and the uptake of maps generally. Open source versus corporate mapping (eg, Google, but also 'Big GIS'; see Zook and Graham, 2007) may be one of the hottest and most contentious issues at the moment. Mary Spence, the 2008 President of BCS, strongly criticized corporate online mapping as destroying the UK's heritage and driving down map-reading skills (BBC, 2008). (Google replied that of course you don't want churches on sat-nav maps due to clutter.) What was less noticed was that she equally strongly praised online open source mapping projects, such as OpenStreetMap.

Maps and political participation make good partners. This is perhaps not so much a case of participatory GIS (PGIS), where academics still work with communities as the

enabler (or more generously the partner) but rather where communities work for themselves. The big question is sustainability (Ghose, 2005; 2007; Lin and Ghose, 2008) – after the academics have completed their project and gone home, how will it maintain itself? The relationship between communities, power and knowledge has received renewed critique in participatory GIS after the first flush of enthusiasm in the late 1990s/early 2000s (Elwood, 2006a; 2007). Elwood asks whose knowledge is included: 'what we can and should do is to identify key moments of inclusion and exclusion in the everyday negotiations of the research project' (Elwood, 2006b: 206). Dunn's important paper examines in what sense PGIS can be considered a democratization of GIS (Dunn, 2007), especially in light of the fact that GIScience is increasingly concentrating on technical factors at the expense of social and political dimensions.

Extending a theme I introduced last year, the influence of blogs and citizen activism on politics will surely only increase (Kline and Burstein, 2005; Armstrong and Zúniga, 2006; Hall, 2006; Perlmutter, 2008). Citizen political commentary is rising; according to a 2008 survey by the highly regarded Pew Internet and American Life Project, nearly half of Americans have used the internet and social networking sites to gain political information, to share their views and to mobilize others (Smith and Rainie, 2008). A word of warning: the blogosphere exhibits the 'long tail', meaning that a few blogs exert most of the influence. Visualizations by Microsoft's Matthew Hurst demonstrate that a few 'superblogs' dominate the discourse (Shadbolt and Berners-Lee, 2008). The digital divide has not gone away and the latter authors (one of whom invented the Web) call for a new discipline of 'Web Science' to understand both the technological *and* social factors at play.

Participatory and public maps are widely used in elections. In the USA, there are few serious political sites (traditional media

or citizen journalism) that do not employ mapping in some form. The 2006 midterms and the 2008 US presidential election were called 'map-changing elections' because they radically reorganized the political landscape. In most elections the majority of incumbents retain their seats – but not always. As the electoral landscape shifted, an explosion of maps was used to understand, prognosticate, compare and visualize. Often maps were used to report the election results, but more significantly political operatives increasingly turn to maps to organize their Get Out The Vote operations (Stoller, 2008). For example, Catalist, which was founded in 2005 by Harold Ickes (a prominent Clinton supporter) developed Q Tool, which can perform cross-tabbed 'microtargeted' voter analysis by marrying census and locational information. According to its chief technology officer, it can be used in the field to find likely voters in Atlanta, how many are African-American and even their previous voting history (V. Ravindran, personal communication 2008). Since the results can be exported to Google Maps, field operators can be quickly provided with detailed neighborhood maps for Get Out The Vote.

Perhaps the most visually stunning political map at the moment is CNN's 'Wall' technology; a huge touch-screen interactive map (base price US\$100,000) which the user manipulates directly (Farhi, 2008). These 'everyday mappings' of politics go alongside the work on how to map space as it is experienced (Pearce, 2008), ubiquitous cartography (Gartner *et al.*, 2007), maps and journeys (Brown and Laurier, 2005), ethno-methodology (Laurier and Brown, 2008), and cultures of map use (Perkins, 2008), not to mention feelings/emotions/affect and geospatial technologies (Kwan, 2007), and even humorous maps (Caquard and Dormann, 2008). In fact there seems to be so much mapping of the everyday that one pair of authors has called for an 'ethics of forgetting' (Dodge and Kitchin, 2007).

There are no surveys yet on the effects of online map usage but some geographers are starting to look more critically at amateur mapping. Sessions were held at both the AAG Boston and Las Vegas conferences and some of these papers are now appearing. For example, Kingsbury and Jones (2009) argue that Google Earth is too often seen as 'Apollonian' (sober, rational, controlling) at the expense of its 'Dionysian' side (alluring, frenzied, giddy). Drawing on Adorno and Benjamin, the authors seek to get beyond an either/or choice to a radical indeterminacy of these technologies.

Dodge and Perkins argue that we need to 'reclaim the map' since few geographers seem comfortable with them (Dodge and Perkins, 2008). Often maps seem to be unreconstructed objects, merrily aiding colonial projects (Akerman, 2009). As John Pickles said, maps can have this perverse sense of the unseemly about them (Pickles, 2006). If we do use them, it is with a profound sense of apology. For example, here is Joe Painter shyly confessing he is in love: 'I love maps. There, I've said it. I am coming out as a cartophile' (Painter, 2006: 345). If Painter can 'come out', others are still in the closet. Dodge and Perkins document a steadily decreasing employment of maps in leading geography journals, down from 2.5 maps per article in 1989 to 0.5 maps per article by 2006 in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. There is a divide between academic practice and the public:

On the street and in the pub, British geography is still about maps. This difference between our academic practice and everyday lay perceptions also reflects the gulf that has opened between school and university geography in the UK. 'Map skills' are still a central part of the National Curriculum, where pupils are taught spatial literacy, and where mapping is almost always assumed to be apolitical, neutral, and a scientific process. (Dodge and Perkins, 2008: 1272)

What role can geographers play? Can or should geographers be activists, public

players, or public intellectuals (Castree, 2006; Fuller and Askins, 2007; Anderson *et al.*, 2008; Castree *et al.*, 2008)? In this context counter-mapping is still alive and well among communities (Parker, 2006; Cidell, 2008). The approach here is ‘map or be mapped’ (Bryan, 2007), or perhaps more appositely ‘don’t hate the media, *become* the media’ (attributed to Jello Biafra). In similar manner to the democratization – if it is such – of the media and alternative political outlets (which need not be small; the online site ActBlue has raised nearly US\$100 million for Democratic candidates between 2004 and spring 2009) citizen geographers and cartographers are becoming increasingly visible – this is one answer to the issue of participatory or public geography (Elwood, 2008). Fuller and Askins note that ‘a new field of public geography is beginning to take shape’ (Fuller and Askins, 2007: 579) though they hesitate to give it the inevitable label ‘the participatory/public turn’.² See also Fuller’s first progress report on public geographies (Fuller, 2008).

There is also plenty of good work on more ‘traditional’ political deployments of maps. Christine Petto makes an important contribution to governmental or state mapping projects (Petto, 2005) and the transition from sovereign governments (*l’etat c’est moi*) to a new form of government cartography, grounded in scientific authority and the delineation of territory (*l’etat c’est l’etat*). Territories are literally delineated on the map and this is proving a rich domain for cartographic analysis (Culcasi, 2006; Fall, 2006; Sparke, 2006; Reisser, 2007; Dodds, 2008; Jones, 2009). Jones argues for a reconceptualization of border/boundary studies that accepts the categorical nature of borders (non-overlapping, mutually exclusive as exemplified by the choropleth map) and their need to be ‘re-narrated’ – in other words, how boundaries are performed as a process of bordering (Crampton, 1996; Newman, 2006). State formation through geographical knowledges, including mapping, remains an important topic (Black, 2008; Boria,

2008; Strandsbjerg, 2008). A timely new book on the imperial map (Akerman, 2009) demonstrates that political usages of maps do not depend on the form of the maps themselves – ironically there is no such thing as the imperial map, only imperial mapping *practices* (Edney, 2009). Finally, Agnew and colleagues show how innovative use of geospatial technology facilitates geographical contributions to public debate, in this case to assess whether the US surge was successful in Iraq (Agnew *et al.*, 2008). If the surge was successful there should be an increase in night-time lights as infrastructure is repaired. After examining publicly available satellite data, they conclude that night-time lights decreased overall, and also corresponded tightly with the map of ethno-sectarian violence. Thus they conclude that the surge has not worked but in fact helped to ‘provide a seal of approval for a process of ethno-sectarian neighborhood homogenization’ (Agnew *et al.*, 2008: 2293).

IV Rethinking maps?

Much of the work discussed above was addressed by Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge (2007; see also Dodge *et al.*, 2009). Kitchin and Dodge radicalize Edney’s argument to argue that there is no essential being to *any* map. For them, maps are fleeting, without any ‘ontological security’ (2007: 334). Borrowing a word from biology, they argue for an ‘ontogenetic’ approach to mapping.³ Maps are practices: ‘they are always *mappings*’; they argue that we need to shift from ontology ‘(how things are) to ontogenesis (how things become)’ (p. 335) and that ‘this is a significant conceptual shift in how we think about maps and cartography’ (p. 335; see also Del Casino and Hanna, 2006). In some ways this paper is a restatement of critical cartography which recognizes that being and becoming are not inseparable (part of our being *is* becoming). Nevertheless, by highlighting mapping practices, Kitchin and Dodge capture a powerful thematic, whether it be through map art, participatory mappings or

performativity. As Dodge and Perkins write elsewhere: '[t]here is real scope to begin to reinvigorate our own mapping practice, starting with how we teach students about the nature of maps, and how they can use them creatively to tell uniquely spatial stories' (Dodge and Perkins, 2008: 1275). Critical and creative research on mapping, whether in so-called Web Science, through critical cartography and GIS, or through studies of amateur public mappings show that the field is in transition, not *in extremis*.

Notes

1. The one I am using is 'Vol. 1, No. 5, September 2008' which was distributed at a symposium in Chapel Hill as a prelude to the Triangle Community Cartographies Convergence and exhibit and organized by the Counter-Cartographies Collective (3Cs).
2. This article is certainly a non-traditional piece of academic writing which takes the form of a light-hearted but serious conversation between the two authors. This is a good piece to remember Duncan Fuller, who sadly passed away as I was writing this report.
3. This is not a completely new idea. Wood examined ontogenetic aspects of mapping in his 1992 book *The power of maps* (Wood, 1992). The word usually refers in biology to phenotypic changes in organisms through maturity or adulthood. Literally the word means 'being' and 'birth'. In other words, the constant (re)birthing of the map 'brought into being through practices' (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 335). Again, this is not necessarily new. Philosophy has traditionally distinguished between the study of being and the study of becoming since the time of Plato's dialog the *Timaeus* (Plato, 1977; Sallis, 1999). This dialog even discusses what it is that could be the 'nurse' of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari write extensively on becoming in *A thousand plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

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