

Summary of Learning Reflections - Mapping Worlds

Learning about maps in such detail has deepened my interest in them, increased the questions I will now ask about them, and greatly expanded my imagination. You can map everything and use anything to create a map. By turning things into maps a different perspective can be born. This new view can yield solutions, beginnings, ideas. The map can be used to influence, fool and fuel the world. Before this class I think I was unconsciously guilty of trusting in maps like everyone else, I doubt I will ever again be able to look at a map and not wonder who created it, why it was created and who for. I also now have a deeper respect for the amount of work that goes into creating a map and have felt the surging enthusiastic emotions of possibility and growth that come from making one.

Maps appear to change along with society, they embody the way we think and communicate information. Many old maps contain the mythology of unmapped territory and the seas are full of monsters that explain the disappearance of many explorers. The uninhabited earth began to lose its mystery when science began to measure and dissect it, and with it maps also faded from the mysterious. They became merely tools to get from A to B as explores set out on missions to separate reality from myth. Our modern day maps represent a networking process rather than a linear one as our world view expands and people innately continue to find new things to map and explore new ways to map it. Every story is a map and humans are continuously organizing information in their minds as stories. Maps capture a way to visualize complex relationships. "All maps, whether institutional or counter-cartographic, embody and produce power relations. They describe relationships between people and place.

They communicate through design" (Mogel). They are always social constructs, the mapping of a thought process or a conversation, a view from a person's lens.

Learning about map distortion was enlightening, especially when you find out that every map is distorted in some way, as no flat map can accurately map our global world. Every map has a map maker behind it and the map emerges from their own world. It is the creator of the map who decides what distortion to accept, what scale to produce it at, and what information to include, omit or exaggerate. It is the creator's bias which you see, whether the distortion is conscious or unconscious on their part, yours will be influenced by it. The way someone else chooses to see the world can color your own view. Area, shape, symbol, color, projection, boundaries, features and relationship between them, are all elements of a map that can be used to get a point across with a map. The choices made when making the map can be used to relate, promote and even manipulate the viewer depending on the motivation of the creator. The objective of a propaganda map is diplomatic and military whereas an advertising map will be commercial and financial (Monmonier, p. 87). There is a great power that comes with map making and one of the greatest powers comes from the creation of a new reality with its own creation. By mapping the "earth in the sky, and the sky on the earth (Cowan, 2007, p. 60)", we can then begin to see it that way.

A map unleashes unlimited potential when treated as the "beginning" of any process. Our traditional view, and one I held largely myself, was that a map maps out a journey that someone else has done. By treating a map as the very start of any process we can bring a new view of the world into being and open the imagination to new possibilities. "This is essentially

what maps give us, reality, a reality that exceeds our vision, our reach, the span of our days, a reality we achieve no other way" (Wood, p. 4). A map taps into the imagination itself, it depicts something that is not necessarily in front of us and obtainable to our senses and makes it real. Even when mapping territory, the map "goes to the heart of a tensions between reality and representation" (Corner, p. 221). When we come to map something that is conceptual we often find we are mapping the known rather than the seen, a deeper understanding rather than a sensory representation (Wood, p. 7). When we make visible the hidden and inaccessible we tap into intuition and bring a new reality into our present moment. The point then of this new map is to "present us not with the world we can see, but to point toward a world we might know" (Wood, p. 17). We can use map making to map space and time, movement and the imagined.

With knowledge of the hidden treasures of map making I can see how it can be used as a "collective enabling enterprise, a project that both reveals and realizes hidden potential" (Corner, p. 213). Maps are visual abstractions, artificial and fallible constructions. "By showing the world in new ways, unexpected solutions and effects may emerge" (Corner, p. 217), which can potentially affect the way people view the world and their future actions in it. Learning about mapping and making them has returned the mystery of maps to me and I can see how it could return the mystery and desire to the world "of places and things that have been otherwise excessively classified and structured" (Corner, p. 220). It can be used to re-frame the world, remove its boundaries, emancipate it and enable it.

When I look at a map now I will not only admire and quiz its construction, I will question it. I shall doubt it's accuracy, question what the makers motives were, who the intended

audience is. Think about what past or future is linking up with the present and how it manages to do it. I will approach it with "the intelligent plasticity and intuitive judgment that every wayfarer must preserve" (Wood, p. 26). Every time I make a map in the future I will try to construct it to initiate freedom and possibility and unleash the imagination from its oppression.

References

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