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I Map Therefore I Am Modern

Cartography and global modernity in the visual arts

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Envoi

In the Introduction I invoked the metaphor of the core sample to grasp the distinctive procedures of looking and writing that I bring to bear on map art in this study. The foregoing chapters might be conceived, therefore, as a row of six cores which, having been extracted from diverse sites in the larger terrain of map art, allow us to glimpse an underlying stratigraphy. Though closely defined, these samples are formally and conceptually rich. Individual works of map art, I hope to have shown, repay the strategies of concentrated, geographically-informed cultural analysis signalled here by the image of the core drill, through which more and more of their layered complexity is brought up to the surface. Whether in concretising, complicating or outright refuting geographical theories, querying prevailing spatial constructs or reimagining cartographic space altogether, the map artworks I have studied present multiple strata of significance and perform many forms of work on the objects, concepts and contexts that I pose alongside them. Just as actual core samples offer clues to a wider geology, the visual, conceptual and performative complexity encountered in these case studies indicates the complexity of map art at large.

The metaphor of core samples, drawn from distant points on the earth's crust, raises the question of whether the map artworks I have explored extend down towards a common conceptual centre or rather attest to the specificity of their own, local geologies. Although a cumulative vision of maps and global modernity has built up over the course of this study, it would be remiss to gloss over the points of dissonance at which the six case studies reflect back critically on another. Nikritin's *The Old and the New* intimates how modernity is haunted by the earth's lack of inherent order, meaning and orientation, yet Kocken's *Depictions* expose modern culture's presumption of geography's essential singularity, uniformity and measurability; Wood's *My Ghost* enacts the possibility of an

undisciplined mapping practice, in which everyday walking is a form of cartography, whereas in Greenaway's *A Walk Through H* this project is eclipsed by the task of overturning the received ontology that has traditionally governed mapmaking.

Nonetheless, across the varicoloured layers compacted in my row of cores, common structures loom into view. Together, my studies of map artworks present two major arguments. Part I focuses on the ways that map artists have explored the confected visions of modernity that maps project onto the times and spaces of a disenchanted world. Nikritin's painting *The Old and the New* shows how the mapped globe unsettles but also emboldens modern cultures, disclosing a meaningless and malleable earth to be remade by empowered modern subjects. The heterogeneous geographies of Hildreth's *Forthrights and Meanders* throw into relief the uniform temporality that conventional maps have inculcated globally; the *Depictions*, Kocken's series of digital collages, stress the centrality of maps in projecting and realising some of the most extreme urban and social designs of the twentieth century. while *Utopia*, Matoba's revision of the state-as-island motif, attests to cartography's performative power in constituting the spatial form of modern polities. My first main argument, articulated throughout Part I, is that map art, even in recapitulating these modern orderings of geography, interrupts, undermines and redirects the founding figures and narratives of rupture that constitute global modernity. Thus Nikritin's painting suggests that the ostensibly disenchanted globe is just as constructed, and certainly as constraining, as the premodern worldviews it displaced; Hildreth's mappings revel in the forms of polychrony and unevenness that are repressed in mapping's conventionally synchronised temporality; the *Depictions* accentuate unruly spatial practices that teem in the cracks of even the most centralised urban designs; and *Utopia* foregrounds the persistence of unfixed and hybrid transcultural flows that persist, though disavowed, athwart the borders and inside the geo-bodies of ostensibly homogenous nation-states.

Whether in reiterating, troubling or reimagining modern constructions of space, each of the map artists treated in Part I feeds into a cumulative picture of cartography's fundamental grasp of the world - its ontology. This "ontology of calculability", I suggest, discloses geographical reality as a contingent, simultaneous and measurable extension, which is amenable to programmatic intervention, redesign and political apportion. On this basis, Part II of the study argues for a specific view of map art's significance against the backdrop of the recent "undisciplining of cartography", through which mapping is "slipping from the control of the powerful elites that have exercised dominance over it for several hundred years", and thus opened up to an expanded field of

consumers and producers (Crampton 2010, 40). I reiterate my argument, here, in relation to Denis Wood and John Krygier's stirring survey of map art's politics, the clarity and stridence of which warrants quotation at length:

Art maps contest not only the authority of professional mapmaking institutions – government, business, and science – to reliably map the world, but they also reject the world such institutions bring into being. Art maps are always pointing toward worlds other than those mapped by professional mapmakers. In doing so, art maps draw attention to the world-making power of professional mapmaking. What is at stake, art maps insist, is the nature of the world we want to live in. ... Map artists do not reject maps. They reject the authority claimed by professional cartography uniquely to portray reality as it is. In place of such professional values as accuracy and precision, art maps assert values of imagination, social justice, dreams, and myths; and in the maps they make hurl these values as critiques of the maps made by professionals and the world professional maps have brought into being. Artists insist that their maps chart social and cultural worlds every bit as 'real' as those mapped by professional cartographers. ... The project of art mapping is nothing less than the remaking of the world. (2009, 344)

My chapters bear out many of the gestures that Wood and Krygier espy here, especially how map art highlights the performativity of mapping, privileges the role of imagination as much as representation in mapmaking and challenge institutional cartography's monopoly on authority in mapping. Overall, though, this study has taken a view of map art's import that is rather more differentiated and equivocal than Wood and Krygier's celebratory appraisal of the field. My analyses draw attention to tensions and dangers that attend map art, as well as its critical visions and liberatory gestures. Chief among the dangers is how many works of map art, even as they subvert, reclaim or otherwise reimagine received constructions of space, reproduce the underlying ontology of calculability. This study furnishes two examples of such recuperation. Matoba's *Utopia* undermines the received political geography of nation-states and Wood's *My Ghost* takes mapping back from institutional cartography for the formerly excluded people and places signalled by "the street". Yet both works remain contained within the determination of geography as a uniformly measurable extension - signalling the risk that even when imagining new political spatialities and

reclaiming mapping for a broadened social field, map art might ultimately further extend and entrench conventional cartographic modes, and received apprehensions of space.

My second main argument, therefore, is that map art's significance does not stem from artists' capacity to socially expand mapmaking beyond institutional domains (which is already being realised, unevenly, through mapping's digitisation). Rather, map art's unique value in relation to contemporary mapping cultures lies in how it might denaturalise, challenge and push beyond the ontology of calculable extension, through which institutional control over cartography was rationalised in the first place. This value is demonstrated in my analysis of Wood's *Meridians*, which, beyond reclaiming mapping for its excluded social others, exposes slippages and contradictions in digital mapping's undergirding ontology. If Wood renders the securely coordinated GPS geode spectral and strange, Greenaway's film *A Walk Through H* goes still further, displacing the cartographic disclosure of geography as extended measurable "space" altogether. The film offers what I have called "another *chorien*": a fundamental casting of geography that leaps free from the prevailing paradigm of calculable extension. Greenaway's maps neither calculate nor represent a singular preexisting reality. Instead, according to the film's dynamic *chorien*, mapping enacts and manifests multiple geographies that exist beyond synoptic calculation and control. In unfolding reimaged geographical ontologies, map art's project truly is "nothing less than the remaking of the world".

With its protagonist speculating elaborately on the unusual affordances of the maps he collected in life, Greenaway's film is exceptionally reflexive in imagining another conception of mapping. Yet it must be understood as a single sample, lifted from a terrain rich with promising uncored sites. Myriad other acts of *chorien* remain to be theorised in relation to the reigning ontology of calculability. The more digital mapping perpetuates and entrenches the inherited grasp of the earth as a singular calculable geode, the more important it becomes to explore map art's capacity to perform alternative *chorien*. As writing on not just map art, but also geography's broader visual culture accumulates and diversifies, it shall encounter - and I hope analyse - past, peripheral or proleptic ontologies, which, in holding out alternatives to the measurable and malleable modern geode, feed into a larger project of imagining geography otherwise.