

MAP

Flat representation of the surface of the Earth (of the sky or planets) showing selected elements and spatial relations between them at a reduced scale by means of symbols or iconic representations.

The map shows content in two dimensions and usually is a static representation, although there are also dynamic forms (e.g. weather maps) or interactive forms. Maps have a variety of functions, e.g. they help to collect information about the place and space or facilitate orientation in a given area. On the one hand, they are an expression of an abstract view of reality, on the other hand, they play a key role in our experience of the environment and in thinking about a world in which perception and understanding takes place primarily through visual experience (Rodaway).

The experience of the terrain and space made possible by the map should be distinguished from the experience of the landscape. The map allows to cover the whole area with a single glance, situating the user outside it, while the landscape experience is local, prospective and results from immersion in the environment; the map is experienced visually and the landscape with the participation of all our senses; the map is based on abstract, measurable and objective calculations, while the landscape experience is subjective; the map separates the experience of space from the experience of time and the dynamics associated with it (the space is not perceived in terms of the time needed to travel through it).

Maps therefore universalise "topographical experience" (Frydryczak), which has an individual character and is the result of immersion in the landscape. They are a manifestation of a scientific view, abstracting from bodily, variable and subjective colloquial experiences.

From a historical and anthropological perspective, the map is the result of a view of the world that dominates in a given period and culture, emerges from specific social and political relations and reflects them. In Western modern culture, the map appears to be neutral, unrelated to any particular perception of social relations, but one can see in it a metaphor of the global power of capital (Bender). Western maps cover the Earth's surface with a system of "objective" coordinates and as such are to be "transparent", i.e. show the world as it is. However, what is considered to be transparent is what is known and what is own, and in this sense Western maps take over the image of the world, and thus favour the appropriation of the world itself (Lefebvre). The importance attached to the creation of maps was conducive to the emergence of European countries (Wood) and contributed to the development of mercantilist capitalism (Bender, Cosgrove) and colonial practices.

There are also alternative maps, such as those created by city dwellers using unofficial street and place names, those created by indigenous peoples referring to their memories and social relations or religious meanings and used to resist colonisers or to come to terms with their colonial heritage. Places shown on such maps are not so much identified by their location as by their associated history (Ingold). In this sense, a family tree can be considered a peculiar form of a map. Another type of maps are mental maps, associated with private topography. They are the worlds that everyone carries with them. Although their form is different, the aim remains the same: to facilitate orientation in space and to help people find their way.

The development of western cartography is intertwined with the development of geography, which was defined by Ptolemy as the art of representing the earth by means of drawing. The links between cartography and the history of painting (Alpers, Cosgrove) are also important.

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