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Deep mapping cartography's limits: the artfulness of rendering spatial practice

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Abstract:

Cartesian cartographies, writes Michel de Certeau (1984), make action legible by substituting trace for practice; alas, the "gnostic drive" (92) to capture everyday navigations "causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten" (97). Deep mapping (see McLucas 2000; Biggs 2010; Bissell and Overend 2015; Roberts 2016; Modeen and Biggs 2020) resists preemptive definition for it is *through its practice* that deep mapping becomes articulated as an apparatus of investigation. For me, deep mapping is situated, embodied inhabitation as a practice of ongoing and open-ended dialogue with the world. Deep mapping does not render down to a map in the sense of a Cartesian cartography, yet neither does it "counter cartography". Deep mapping is not defined through opposition so much as marked by iterative acts of interference with hegemonic forms of representing place, producing geographic knowledge, and rendering spatial research public. How might we render situated spatial practices like deep mapping without flattening, georeferencing, and vectorizing experiential knowledge? If mapping itself is taken to be a mode of immanent inquiry (Knight 2021), how might theorizations developed through spatial practice be recorded while centering the generativity of cartographic process?

Process philosopher Erin Manning describes the artful as "a working of the work" (2020, 44); artfulness is "not the work itself" (2020, 61) but what the work *does*—how it exceeds its form or rather, how form becomes conduit for what more the work can do (2016, 48). I offer 'the artful' to critical and creative cartographers as a conceptual framing for the ways in which our political, ethical, practical, and intellectual contributions are more than the maps we make. As a representational apparatus, cartography is concerned with tracing past action or observations. What a map of tracings can do is determined by its form. Approached as a mode of inquiry, however, cartography becomes an immersive practice whose maps are but partial carryings forward of how the practice made possible other ways of being in (and of) the world.

This presentation explores the artfulness of rendering spatial practice. My focus will be on `negative-spaces`, the website which renders my theory of deep mapping and which I submitted as my master's thesis in geography. While I submitted my thesis for institutional archival as a zipped folder of HTML documents, associated multimedia and styling sheets (see Demet 2024), a readily accessible version can be engaged by navigating to negative-spaces.github.io from a web browser. `negative-spaces` not only renders the effects of my deep mapping practice—viz., my theory of deep mapping—but enacts this theory as praxis. It is in its outdoing of form, I argue, that `negative-spaces` touches the artful.

I will begin by positioning myself as a longtime practitioner of critical Cartesian cartography and geographic information science, in addition to more situated and embodied mapping. Next, I will introduce `negative-spaces` via a guided tour of the interface. My theory of deep mapping unfolds across eight webpages whose formatting I designed myself. Text and multimedia, including pictures of Vancouver, voice recordings taken while walking the city, and scanned pages of my fieldnotes, are integrated together to give a sense of the multimodality of everyday life. There is no specific order in which to navigate `negative-spaces`, as I wanted my thesis to be itself a space for 'digital deep mapping' (Roberts 2018)—for learning through "disoriented discovery" (Kurgan 2013, 17) following ideas that grasp and pull the reader.

Following the website walk-through, I will describe the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of various structural choices. For instance, each page of `negative-spaces` has an 'asides' column which invites the visitor to take and make notes while reading. The contents of this column can then be downloaded as a text file. By staging a digital commonplace, `negative-spaces` invites a world of readers into ongoing and open-ended dialogue with deep mapping.

Moving on, I will elaborate the practical work carried out to construct `negative-spaces`. Before commencing my master's, I did not know how to code or style a website. I employed the same tactics of gleaning, bricolage, and making do so fundamental to my practice of deep mapping. My project thus became a research-creation (see Government of Canada 2012) endeavor: both the creation of my theory of deep mapping and the creation of `negative-spaces` (the critically informed work which renders my research public) were situated *within and as part of* my deep mapping research practice.

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I will conclude this presentation by discussing my choice to submit my thesis website as a .zip folder. Here, I will situate `negative-spaces` as a site of praxis, considering how the work works in excess of its final form. In her manifesto for research-creation, Natalie Loveless (2019) positions artistic form *as* method—a means of performatively challenging the hegemony of the monograph as the only intelligible form graduate dissertations may take. Never before in the University of British Columbia's history of electronically submitted theses and dissertations has there been an MA thesis consisting entirely of a website without a significant component submitted in linear text.pdf form. `negative-spaces` thus "do[es] something different *to*, *with*, and *in* the university" (Loveless 2019, 115, emphasis in original). Not only does the form of `negative-spaces` performatively refigure what counts as a graduate thesis at the University of British Columbia, it participates others as collaborators in counter-hegemonic spatial practice: to render my website locally requires the zipped folder be downloaded and unzipped, and the index.html file therein be opened with a web browser. In this way, my theory of deep mapping is not rendered once and for all but again and again, iteratively enacting interference.

My contribution brings the artful into cartography in ways that generatively foreground the entanglement of theory and practice. Approaching mapping from this inseparability raises questions worth carrying with us such as: How might cartographies include what haunts them yet exceeds representation?

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