

Book Review

Dodge, M., Kitchin, R., Perkins, C. (2009) **Rethinking Maps. New frontiers in cartographic theory.** London and New York: Routledge.

Rethinking Maps is a timely and much needed collection of essays encouraging readers to do exactly that; rethink maps. In tandem with the proliferation of digital cartographic technologies and vernacular mapping practices since the late eighties, there have been, and still are, lively conversations and discourses concerned with the crafting and performance of maps under the umbrella term, 'critical cartography'. The location and nature of these conversations are themselves disperse, so *Rethinking Maps* is a useful forum in which to bring together and situate the variegated trends throughout critical cartography. The editors, in the introductory chapter in particular, do an excellent job in working through systematically the numerous shifts in mapping theories, but are careful not to present cartographic history as a linear trajectory of progress or inevitable advancement. Nonetheless, the first chapter is attentive to both ontological and epistemological questions being posed of maps and mappings, specifically problematising the long-held assumption that the very nature of the map is one of secure and straightforward representation. Instead, questions should be asked not of *how maps are*, but *how maps become*. In doing so, the editors suggest that such questions will provide novel lines of research into contemporary mapping practices.

The essays that follow are an engaging, eclectic mix of conceptual discussions, analyses of 'applied' cartographies, ethnographic case-studies and a comic-book style intervention. To open the conceptually driven discussions, Jeremy Crampton traces how maps and mappings can be implicated in the way spatial distributions such as race have been framed by seemingly innocuous cartographic devices such as choropleth maps and clines. Invoking no less than Plato, Heidegger and Foucault, the chapter is a heady start, but worth persevering with as Crampton aligns classical renderings of space with more recent workings on emergent and processual spaces. Following arguments by cultural geographers, and recognising the performativity of maps, Leila Harris' and Helen Hazen's chapter on maps and conservation territories posits the vital contention that the experiences of non-humans, or more-than-human should be considered in the cartographic process if conservation areas are to be effective. In a change of direction, Tom Conley discusses the 'cartographic impulses' of cinema, informed by Gilles Deleuze's own writings on film, and inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's *39 Steps*. The chapter is an interesting foray into a filmic cartography, but readers not familiar with Deleuze may need convincing about 'deterritorialising viewers'. Jim Craine and Stuart Aitken also have Deleuze in their sights when working through their chapter on the affective and emotional lives of maps, though they take aim at neo-Deleuzian geographers who they argue have failed to recognise the body's capacity to transform digital signs and practices into affective experiences. Amy Proppen's chapter also calls for an apprehension of embodied knowledges when discussing visualisation technologies and a recognition of their potential for cultivating sustainable environmental practices.

Assessing the more 'practical' changes in mapping, Georg Gartner's chapter delivers a précis of the development of *Web 2.0*, "an architecture of participation that goes way beyond following hyperlinks", and its facilitation of a plethora of mapping applications which continue to pervade everyday life. Michael Goodchild follows with a history illustrating the ancient precedents of

mapping through its development to modern Geographical Information Systems (GIS), but warning that total representation of geographic information, “remains distant”.

Focusing on a theme continually referred to in the book, the ‘everyday’, Dominica Williamson’s and Emmet Connolly’s chapter provides an ethnographic moment in animating the performances of *theirwork*, a fledgling participatory online mapping project with the aim of heightening public environmental consciousness. Together with Chris Perkins’ chapter on the playful qualities of maps and mappings, which also serves to draw together some of the themes elucidated in the book so far, it’s clear that more experimental research is needed into participatory and everyday cartographies.

John Krygier and Denis Wood use a comic book intervention to set out their contention that maps do their work through a propositional logic, namely the cartographic proposition that, “this is there”. The comic is good fun, and used by the authors to take a swipe at some of the post-structuralist theories and their attendant long words that have suffused critical cartographies. That said, the comic animation belies the appended five pages of notes which, full of semiotic discussion and, long words, seems to undermine the wit of the chapter.

The editors conclude the book with a manifesto for rethinking and practicing maps over the coming decade. It’s a comprehensive list of ‘modes’, ‘methods’ and ‘moments’ which might be deployed when researching the lives of maps, mappings and mappers. Perhaps the most salient call of the manifesto is aimed at geographers who, despite their disciplinary attachment to maps, seem to shy away from using maps and mappings in their own work, concerned that geo-visualisations don’t carry the same kudos or critical power as say, reams of theoretical prose. This book might just encourage geographers to take joy in maps once again.

In an otherwise excellent book, the chapters by Gartner and Goodchild lack critical edge. Gartner appears to patronise the wisdom, and hence validity of crowd sourced data; a concern which is at odds with the book’s call for a greater attentiveness to vernacular practices. Goodchild’s history also, somewhat alarmingly, omits to discuss the huge arguments over GIS based modelling which raged in the 1990s. Elsewhere, and on more than one occasion, authors deploy the terms ‘democratisation’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘participation’ without blinking. Not only are these terms highly contested in themselves, but also the purported causal link between, for example, participatory mapping and sustainable environments is tenuous and gives no indication of what form participation might take in practice. Perhaps as the editors suggest, it would be better to elucidate empirically *how maps become*, not what they are *meant* to do before they’ve been brought into being.

Moreover, the editors recognise the great deal of research yet to be done into rethinking maps. As such, this book offers a number of different, novel and exciting registers through which maps and mapping practices can be animated and experimented with. If the likes of *GoogleEarth* continue to intersect and influence everyday spaces and movements, then attending to maps on bodily, affective and performative registers will become increasingly pertinent. At the time of writing, the book is still retailing at a prohibitively high price, but that aside, *Rethinking Maps* is an essential text for advanced undergraduates, postgraduates and academics, but also for mappers, enthusiasts and researchers. *Rethinking Maps* is a fundamental and provocative reminder that maps, mappings, mappers and their performances are anything but moribund.