

Reflections on J.B. Harley's "Deconstructing the Map"

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When asked to reflect on Brian Harley's "Deconstructing the Map" (Harley 1989) for this special issue of *Cartographica*, I sat down on the sofa in my office and tried to recall my initial reading of and reaction to the article. What came to mind was less about articles, critiques, theories, or intellectual arguments and more about Harley the person, David Woodward and assorted graduate students, and the Cartographic Lab and History of Cartography Project at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. But there was also an intellectual impact on work I have done since those long-ago days. Not one I really want to write a typical academic article about, but more on that in a moment.

In 1988–1989 I was finishing my MS at the University of Wisconsin (UW)–Madison with David Woodward (on the maps and illustrations of F.W. von Egloffstein; Krygier 1990) while working as a cartographer in the Cartographic Lab. I was at UW–Madison more or less by accident, having stayed on after my undergraduate degree because of an assistantship offer working in the UW Cartographic Lab. Woodward was, basically, the guy who taught me map design, how to scribe and hand-shade terrain, and Harley was his boisterous pal from Milwaukee. It was an exciting time with a cast of curious characters. Those exotic accents! Harley was larger than life, effusive, affable – always with a bit of a devilish twinkle in his eye. Woodward was reserved, thoughtful, refined, and deliberate, with deep personal warmth that grew as one came to know him. I was a graduate student, learning to become a scholar. I was reading and thinking and discussing with, among others, Harley, Woodward, and graduate students such as Matthew Edney. This process of becoming was not merely an intellectual exercise (reading *that* article) but a social process whereby deconstructing the map and unshackling the history of cartography from its map-collector confines, mixed with the aforementioned characters, came to shape much of how I was to think and what I was to do later in my career in academia.

After a bit of digging in an old file cabinet, I found my notes from several of Harley's articles and with these notes (the content sometimes a bit embarrassing) continued the process of reflecting based on those notes. I chose to annotate a few pages of my notes in this article in an attempt to reproduce the scattered bricolage that is

the impact, on myself, of "Deconstructing," Harley, and everything else going on at that time. It is a map, not an image, and thus is selective and generalized, emphasizing what is important and leaving other details out. My reflection could be shaped into a seamless, linear verbal essay, but that would not reflect the reality, as it is, of the impact of the article, the ideas, and the people on the way I think and work.

The biggest impact of "Deconstructing the Map" was that it deconstructed me, the way I thought about my field, what I do and produce. But it was not only "Deconstructing" – it was also the efforts to deconstruct and broaden the idea of the map for the History of Cartography Project and, interestingly, Denis Wood's review of the first volume of the History of Cartography Project (Wood 1987), which deconstructed the constructions reconstructed after the deconstruction of the idea of the map in a frightening manner. My intellect was forever shattered, the norms always open to questioning, not only the norms of "maps" but also what academics said maps were and how they expressed their work. Thus, the work I am most proud of – the un-textbook textbook *Making Maps* (Krygier and Wood 2011); its quirky companion blog *Makingmaps.net* (Krygier 2005–2014); "Ce n'est pas le monde" (Krygier and Wood 2009), a peer-reviewed comic book chapter in Dodge et al.'s *Rethinking Maps* (Dodge, Kitchin, and Perkins 2009); and my ongoing psycho-geographic Unmaking Maps project. Harley's "Deconstructing" had a similar impact on the field of cartography and beyond. But it wasn't only that article and Harley. It was an amazing moment when a small cast of characters with vital attitudes and ideas changed the field of cartography.

My notes, on the published "Deconstructing" paper, are reproduced here, annotated with comments from additional scattered notes as well as my reflections from the perspective of 2014.

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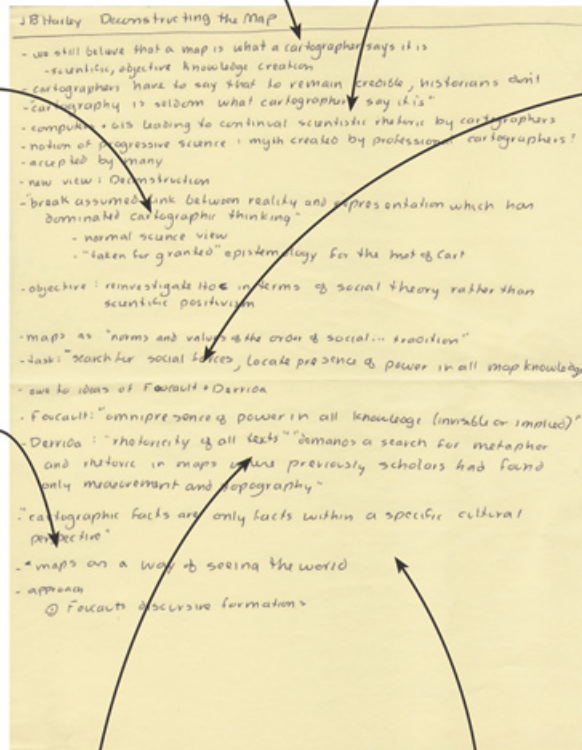
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I did not immediately recognize the “cartographers” Harley was talking about. As a practicing cartographer with an undergraduate political science major and philosophy minor, I didn’t associate science or positivism with making maps. Harley had to construct cartographer for me, even though I was one. *I don’t think the gulf between those who make maps and the academics who theorize maps has narrowed, 25 years later.*

Harley knew little about GIS or making maps with computers, yet he saw these technologies as scientific, oppressive – undermining his romantic notion of the map as a manually crafted object. *Harley’s anti-digital technology perspective has not held up well, given the current pervasiveness of digital mapping technologies at the center of “democratized” and participatory mapping. Alas, recent arguments against mapping at all, particularly in the realm of native land rights, suggest Harley’s anti-technology perspective might be reimagined as a component in theorizing the potential of “not mapping.”*

Actually making maps imbued me with a sense of the social inherent in maps and mapping. The rhetorical power of maps, their importance as authoritative components of scholarly communication. Clients adjusting and refining what they wanted mapped, the need, as a map maker, to play with “reality” and the power inherent in the conventions and rules.

After classes and seminars and a thesis on the history of cartography as well as being around David Woodward, Matthew Edney, and, once in awhile, Harley, the impetus for “Deconstructing” was clear. It grew out of a love of maps and their history (shared by all of the above). Careful attention to maps and mapping can only end with a clear sense of their social and cultural constitution. *All cartographers, even those who make maps, are social theorists of some sort.*



I did not know why we needed Foucault or Derrida to understand maps as social constructions. Making maps, for me, made that clear. Alas, Harley did not make maps. *It is, once again, the gulf between practice and theory.*

I began to know why we needed Foucault or Derrida to understand maps as social constructions. I became increasingly fascinated by the performance of academic endeavor. The books, articles, scholars, theories, concepts, but also the process of research - card catalogs (1989!), digging through the stacks in the library, inter-library loan, constructing the academic paper - quotes, citations, footnotes. *Undoubtedly, the inclusion of social theory in cartography has provided ample opportunities for the performance of academic cartographic endeavor.*

The idea of map makers reading Foucault and Derrida: how might this shape making maps? *Maps, despite technological innovations (interactivity, accessible software, crowdsourcing), mostly look the same as they did in 1989.*

Harley casts maps as scientific-totalitarianism while suggesting maps be socially relevant – a replacement totalitarianism? *In 2014 the realm of academic cartography is at a quiet stand-off: scientism vs social theoryism. Alas, some of the most interesting developments in mapping are not really coming from within academic cartography.*

Figure 1.

Harley claims that old, non-western and "nonconforming" maps were condemned by modern cartography. This seemed odd coming from one of the editors of the History of Cartography Project. *Is the history of cartography actually part of modern cartography?*

I recall rejecting the idea of dualisms and continuums in one of Woodward's seminars (maybe inspired by Harley). Woodward really laughed at that one. The practice of making maps revealed the false dualism of art and science for me – or of maps as some kind of hybrid of art and science. Harley's supposition that the art was being removed from maps and the science dominating seemed odd in the context of his condemnation of other binaries - true & false, objective & subjective, etc. *2014 and we still operate under a barrage of binaries in cartography.*

The Rules of Cartography

- discourse: "a system of possibility for knowledge"
- rules which permit statements, the order of those statements, the truth or falsity of those statements, the construction of some thing which orders/classifies ...
- cartographic rules: "theoretical + practical knowledge that map-makers employ to construct maps as a distinct mode of visual representation"
- 2 types of cartographic rules
 - ① technical rules - define in terms of a scientific epistemology
 - ② cultural rules - those beyond scientific procedure or technique
 - usually ignored, so they are a hidden aspect of the cartographers discourse
- scientific epistemology - real, objective objects are mapped, they enjoy an existence independent of the cartographer, mathematical expression of reality, systematic observation/measurement as only path to cartographic truth, that this truth can be independently verified, most precise instruments/measurement, classification, signs for representation, professional lit to monitor the application and propagation of the rules
- art being removed, asinine role at best
- science leads to better representation of reality
- proclaim old and non-western maps poor ~~and~~ realistic simulation
- reaction against nonconforming maps
- use of "true + false", objective + subjective, "literal + symbolic"

The rules make the map. They are not religious commandments, to be followed mindlessly. *Instead, rules revealed the range of possibilities, and reveal the (potential) for breaking the rules.* There is an odd pleasure in small, obscure, cartographic minutia - type placement or how to differentiate a dozen levels of roads.

Harley did not like computers and was not impressed by the buzz about the map production potential of the new Macs in the Cartographic Lab. He saw a strong elitism of the computer in making maps. *Alas, the computer has turned out to be a significantly more accessible map making tool than traditional map making methods.*

Harley was quick to cast maps as scientific totalitarianism while promoting the power of maps, when unleashed from scientific totalitarianism, to show vastly differing realities to suit the varied desires, intentions, and needs of different people and groups. *Despite the seeming contradiction, this idea came to heavily influence the emerging interest in "public participation" GIS and mapping. Alas, I don't think these contemporary, "democratized" maps are much different from the maps Harley was critiquing.*

Cultural rules of cartography

- related to value: ethnicity, politics, religion, class
- knowing the rules "may enable us to define an episteme and to trace an archeology of that knowledge through time"
- how such rules are manifest in maps - both ~~unconsciously~~
- ex) role of ethnocentricity in the construction of world maps
 - own territories at the center
 - colonial, legitimate, + promote the world view
- ex) rules of social order
 - hierarchicalization of space
 - maps reinforce social order
- power of map: calls itself neutral science
- Deconstruction + the cartographic text
 - maps as text: constructions employing a conventional sign system
 - best metaphor than mirror of nature
 - add myth, duplicity, narrative, intention
 - look for "unperceived contradictions or duplicitous tensions" undermining objectivity

I recall Harley going on and on about the importance of the paper map, in particular, he seemed to be enamored of large scale topographic maps. He saw the published map as democratic and humanistic form of geographical knowledge. A call to "save the map" – all of a sudden the topographic map is an exemplar of democracy, rather than a scientific oppressor. *25 years later the paper map has been significantly marginalized, and it does not seem to matter that much. Or does it?*

From Harley I got a sense that maps should stay the same, but cartographers should change. *I think Harley (and others working in the same vein) inadvertently inspired artists to take on mapping in a way that shaped a revolutionary change in maps themselves. What I don't see is that revolution impacting maps or cartography in general.*

The construction of maps, creating the cartographic text, for me, at least, made the revelations in "Deconstructing the Map" somewhat less than shocking (although, admittedly, the theories and theorists were a new way to approach this issue). *That means that critical insight can come from thoughtful construction as well as deconstruction. I think this perspective has long informed my academic work, including Denis Wood and my book Making Maps.*

Figure 2.