

## Mapping place

Denis Wood

Mapping place? Hard not to, when even the most ordinary topographic survey sheet, created with the maximum dispassion, can turn into what Brian Harley called ‘a subjective symbol of place’ when scanned by a human eye (Harley, 1987). At the time he was specifically referring to ‘Ordnance Survey Map, Six-inch Sheet Devonshire, CIX, SE, Newton Abbot’, a map of a piece of earth he had come to know intimately. He’d lived on it for seventeen years, both his children had attended school there, and that’s where he buried his wife and son. The map had ‘become a graphic autobiography’, it restored ‘time to memory’, and it recreated for his ‘inner eye the fabric and seasons of a former life’, all this, a ‘transcription’ of himself, accomplished by what he called ‘a very ordinary map’.

Twenty years later Florent Chavovet, who, thanks to his wife’s internship was stranded in Tokyo for six months with nothing to do, sharpened his pencils and began drawing what he saw. As he did he discovered a visual style of his own, which led to a book, *Tokyo on Foot*, organized around the neighbourhoods in which he’d worked (Chavovet, 2009). ‘Hand-drawn maps that are admittedly quite personal in their details introduce the neighborhoods’, he writes, introducing the book itself with a map of the city on which he’s located them. The maps are personal indeed, annotated with remarks like, ‘This is where I was grilled over the matter of the not stolen bike’. They also situate the illustrations that flesh out the chapters, which are thus revealed as little more than map annotations.

‘Devonshire, CIX, SE, Newton Abbot’ and this collection of Chavovet’s maps sketch a spectrum along which the mapping of place has fallen, from the most doctrinairely standardized to the most idiosyncratically individualized. ‘Place’, after all, generally makes reference to a location, but it makes reference to it with a purpose, with a function in mind; and the word is often used as a synonym for ‘apartment’, for ‘home’, for ‘neighbourhood’, for ‘city’, though only when preceded by ‘my’ or ‘yours’ or ‘our’. That is, *my* apartment is my place, *your* neighbourhood is your place, *our* city is our place; and as Harley makes plain, it doesn’t really matter if the map of that place is as devoid of ‘my’-markers as can be. It’s your place in any case, and a standardized map may be as capable – maybe even more capable – of evoking it as any other.

But because the *personal* character of place – Harley’s ‘subjective’, his ‘autobiography’, his ‘memory’ and ‘inner eye’ – is implicit, the *mapping of place*, as opposed to the mapping of a location which merely *happens* to be someone’s place, often implies some sort of personalization of the *mapmaking* itself, and this is what ‘mapping place’ is usually taken to mean: the mapping

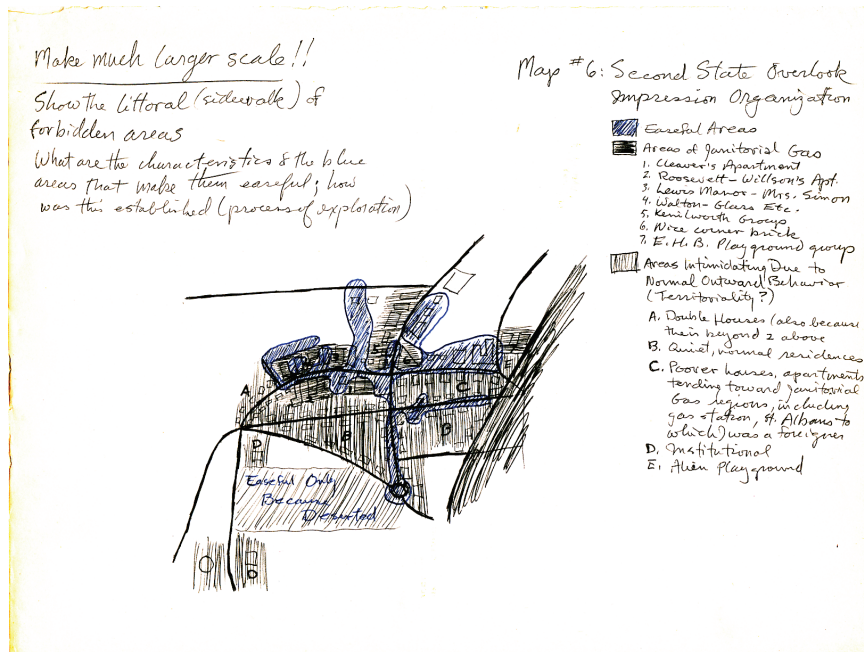


Figure 29.1 A map Denis Woods made in 1967 of a few blocks in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Reproduced courtesy of Denis Wood

of a location to reveal its significance to a *me*, to a *you*, to an *us*. Here, for example, is a map I made in 1967 of a few blocks in Cleveland Heights, Ohio (Figure 29.1). It was one of several I made as a graduate student at Clark University after having discovered J.K. Wright's thoughts about what he called geosophy, 'the study of geographical knowledge from any and all points of view' (Wright, 1947). I was eager to see what putting his ideas to work might feel like and I immediately started thinking about the geographical knowledge I'd evolved of Cleveland Heights since we'd moved there in 1956. I've written about this before (Wood, 2012, 2013) and published many of the maps I made at the time, but not this one, which strikes me as a particularly apt example of place mapping. It shows, in blue, the places where I felt comfortable ('Easeful Areas'), those where I felt less comfortable due to a variety of social constraints ('Areas Intimidating Due to . . .'), and those where the behaviour of janitors and custodians made me explicitly unwelcome, that is, places I'd been warned away from, places I'd been asked to leave ('Areas of Janitorial Gas'). The images flitting through my head were of sitting on those low walls that edge lawns, me and others, and being asked to leave . . . or not; of being allowed to yell and scream . . . or told to shut up; of being permitted on the premises – my apartment, those of my friends, my paper routes – or being warned off. This, of course, was no more than a sketch for a map I had intended to, to what? In any case I never did it, but this is so explicitly a mapping of place, of my place, of my place *in the world*, that it's a good place to begin.

## Feelings about places

Note that this isn't what landscape architects talk about when they talk about place: benches, gathering spots, water fountains. And it's not about character either, or about what Kevin Lynch called imageability (Lynch, 1960). It's not really *about* the world and so it can't be







Figure 29.3 Map of Turner's Hill by children from Turner's Hill Church of England Primary School (from Leslie, 2006). Reproduced with permission



Figure 29.4 Detail from the map of Turner's Hill (from Leslie, 2006)

show more wheels than buildings', Kim Leslie remarked in his *A Sense of Place: West Sussex Parish Maps* (Leslie, 2006), a collection of seventy-five of the parish maps he inspired for a project that was part of West Sussex's celebration of the millennium.

### Common Ground's parish maps project

Both Leslie's project, and Atkinson's map, grew out of Common Ground's parish maps project, which Common Ground had begun promoting in the mid-1980s. Sue Clifford and Angela King had created Common Ground in 1983 as a non-membership charity and lobby for what they thought about as *local distinctiveness*. Clifford has written:

In forging the idea of *Local Distinctiveness* Common Ground has been working on liberation from preoccupation with the beautiful, the rare, the spectacular to help people explore what makes the commonplace particular and to build ways of demonstratively expressing what they value in their everyday lives. We contend this should be an inclusive process, encouraging local people to debate what is important to them as well as luring the experts to appreciate a broader view.

(England in Particular, *n.d.*)

It was obvious to Clifford and King that these were things that could never be known, or even described, from the outside, and so it might be 'better to ensure that local culture has sufficient self-knowledge and self-esteem to be confident in welcoming new people and new ideas'. To this end they floated a slew of proposals and campaigns, among which was parish maps. By 'parish' they hoped merely to convey a useful sense of the local:

[t]he smallest arena in which life is played out. The territory to which you feel loyalty, which has meaning to you, about which you share some knowledge, for which indignance and protectiveness is easily roused, the neighbourhood of which you have the measure, which in some way helps to shape you ... It is in this sense of a self-defined small territory that Common Ground has offered the word parish, implying people and place together.

(Common Ground, 1991)

Because they needed examples to show people what they were talking about, in 1986 they commissioned eighteen artists – among them some big names (Anthony Gormley, Helen Chadwick and Conrad Atkinson) – to map places towards which they felt a particular attachment.

These maps travelled around the country in a 1987–88 show called *Knowing Your Place*, accompanied by a leaflet (Common Ground, 1991); the maps illustrated articles; and the maps appeared in Common Ground literature. A detail from David Nash's *A Personal Parish (Blaenau Ffestiniog)*, for example, decorated the cover of Common Ground's 1991 *Parish Maps* brochure; Ian Macdonald's *Echoes of Change (Cleveland)* took up most of the brochure's centrefold; and a detail from Simon Lewty's *Parish Map (Old Milverton)* concluded it. A larger detail from Lewty's map, in full colour, was wrapped around the cover of Common Ground's *From Place to PLACE: Maps and Parish Maps* (Clifford and King, 1996), where two of the artists, Lewty and Balraj Khanna, wrote about their maps. Six of the maps were turned into postcards, including Conrad Atkinson's *Cleator Moor*.

At the same time, a few parishes began making maps, and among these was one of Charlbury in Oxfordshire that Kim Leslie describes as 'a very modern and richly decorated parish map':



Steeped in detail through delicate pictures and text, it vividly brought to life this little Cotswold town and its surrounding countryside. And it wasn't made by professional map-makers, but local and very talented people who clearly had great affection for where they lived. Maps like this stir the imagination, they urge visits.

*(Leslie, 2006)*

It was only by chance that Leslie had come across a copy of this map as he was dipping into the map collection of the University of Sussex, but he was so taken with it that he made a point of visiting Charlbury and meeting its makers, who told him about Common Ground and the Parish Maps Project. Fired by the idea, Leslie proposed a Parish Maps project to West Sussex County Council after it began casting about for a way to celebrate the then forthcoming millennium. As inspired by the Charlbury map as Leslie had been, the council approved and authorized start-up money that let Leslie give talks all over the county, produce a fact sheet, organize a conference, and launch a newsletter. Elizabeth and Miles Hardy, who had led the Charlbury team, came down from Oxfordshire to share their experience, and of course Common Ground contributed.

The resulting maps were drawn, painted, stitched, embroidered, quilted, photo-collaged, even cast in bronze (Figure 29.5). Parish after parish participated: Aldwich, Apuldram, Arundel, Balcombe . . . Haywards Heath, Henfield, Highbrook, Hunston . . . Pulborough, Rogate, Selsey, Shipley . . . West Hoathly, Woolbeding and Linch, Yapton and Ford. By the time Leslie put an exhibition together in 2001, eighty-seven parishes had made maps of which the Worthing Museum was able to hang sixty-six, most of them originals. Over 2,000 volunteers had contributed to the making of the maps and, whether artists, calligraphers, gatherers of information, organizers, or fund raisers, all had given freely of their time. The money, from a variety of sources including local business sponsorships, treasure hunts, plants sales, and grants of various



Figure 29.5 Parishioners hold up part of the Parish Map tapestry of Thirsk, North Yorkshire, c.1989. Reproduced courtesy of Common Ground

kinds, largely went to the production of prints and postcards of the maps and the maps' professional mounting to costly conservation standards. The sale of these has raised surprisingly large sums of money for a range of parish projects. The Worthing exhibition was accompanied by a smart, full-colour catalogue that has helped to spread the word (Leslie, 2001).

The word has spread all over the place. There are way more than 2,500 maps of English parishes by now, and the idea has spread to Italy, where they're being promoted – as *mappa de comunità* – through the ecomuseum movement. Donatella Murtas, of the Istituto di Ricerche Economico Sociali del Piemonte (in Turin), who had come to see the Worthing Museum exhibition, later held exhibitions of a selection of the Sussex maps in Turin and Pietraporzio. Leslie in turn made presentations about the Sussex project in Turin, Biella, Genoa, and Argenta – Common Ground was also involved – and this has led to an expanding network of exchanges. It's a kind of marriage made in heaven because ecomuseums are explicitly about place and place identity, they're all about local participation, and they're committed to enhancing the life of their local communities (Davis, 2011). Through the rapidly expanding ecomuseum network, the Parish Maps idea is spreading around the world, with ecomuseums in Italy, France, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Poland, Turkey, Iran, Japan, China, Vietnam, Mexico, and elsewhere. Even when they haven't embraced a parish maps practice, usually the maps the museums produce have a profound place-based character.

### Neighbourhood maps

So do most 'neighbourhood maps'. These are maps made of neighbourhoods, often by kids, often, but far from always, as part of a school curriculum. The map making promoted by Youth Voices of KCET – the US's largest independent public television station – provides a great example. Youth Voices is 'A digital literacy and civic engagement program that invites youth on an exploration of their neighborhood, where they investigate the social, cultural, and political history and take a critical look at the issues facing their community' (Youth Voices, 2016); and for the past few years maps have been an important part of this process. Typically asked to address a series of questions first ('What is a place that has deep personal meaning for or in relation to you? What is a place with great colours?'), the kids are then asked to make maps of the neighbourhood. They often follow this with a clear overlay on which they're encouraged to elaborate, and sometimes even more layers. The maps are then used in varieties of further neighbourhood-focused activities. In India a campaign called Humara Bachpan has organized 35,000 slum kids into more than 300 clubs in better than a dozen cities, all across India, for whom mapping is a central activity:

Teams of young mappers and adult facilitators spend roughly 45 days traversing their slums. They learn the shape of their neighborhood, how streets interconnect (or don't), and the density of homes there. This information becomes the map's skeleton. Then, they fill in the specifics. They stake out what's needed through the eyes of children – where underserved public areas could become play spaces, where trash bins could be added in an area they regularly see littered with filth. Their ideal neighborhood is drawn and detailed onto the map. Then, after it's complete, leaders from the child clubs present their work to local officials.

(Sturgis, 2015)

The thing about the maps is that beyond providing a platform for observing and thinking, they put the kids' conclusions in a form that the officials find hard to ignore (Figure 29.6). The kids' maps have actually begun to have an impact.



Figure 29.6 Map of an ideal neighbourhood of Bhubaneswar, India, hand-drawn by slum children as part of child-led planning. Reproduced courtesy of Humara Bachpan

Not all neighbourhood mapping is done by kids. *Tracing the Portola: A San Francisco Neighborhood Atlas* was put together by Kate Connell and Oscar Melara as an interpretive ‘guide to finding the way through the Portola’s present and its history, a way to understanding the natural and historical forces that have shaped our neighborhood’ (Connell and Melara, 2010). They collected their neighbours’ stories to develop their history of Portola as well as the neighbourhood’s dynamics, and talked to others; and they’ve published their maps in poster form as well (Connell and Melara, 2011). One of their sources of inspiration was an atlas I’d made of Boylan Heights, the neighbourhood I lived in in Raleigh, North Carolina. Beginning in 1975 I used neighbourhood mapping as an exercise for the students I taught in landscape architecture studios, and the neighbourhood we worked in most frequently was mine. In the early 1980s we decided to make an atlas of the neighbourhood, for the neighbours, and eventually this was published, though only in 2010, as *Everything Sings: Maps for a Narrative Atlas*, ‘narrative’ because the intention was to tell the neighbourhood’s story through maps:

One way of thinking about Boylan Heights is as a place in Raleigh, North Carolina, bounded by a prison and an insane asylum and some railroad tracks and a little creek. But there are other ways of thinking about it too. You could think about it as a neighborhood; that is, as some sort of community, or as a marriage of community and place, or as those people in that place, their relationships, and their ways in the world; and thus, less a place than a process, a life process, a metabolic one. That would take an atlas to unravel: what a neighborhood is, what a neighborhood does, how a neighborhood works.

(Wood, 2010)

The second edition of the atlas, which came out in 2013, contained sixty maps, maps of the streets, of course, and the sewer lines, but also maps of the colour of the leaves in the fall, of



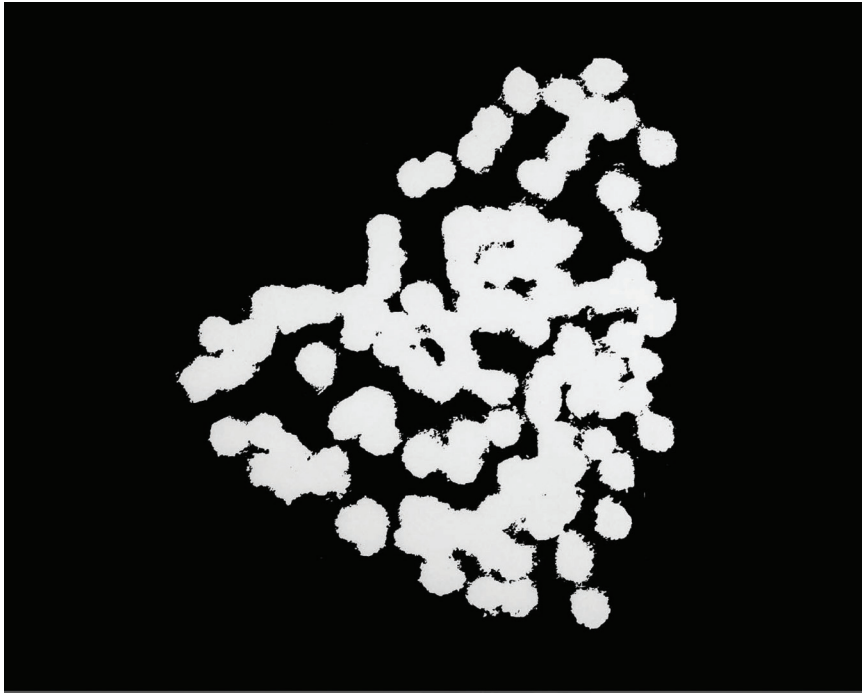


Figure 29.7 From *Everything Sings* by Denis Wood (2010). Reproduced courtesy of Denis Wood

the lighted pumpkins the neighbours put on their porches on Halloween, of the wind chimes that sounded, of the ballet danced by buses that passed through the neighbourhood, of the pools of light cast by the street lights on the streets at night (Figure 29.7). If the map I made in 1967 of a few blocks in Cleveland Heights was a mapping of place, this atlas is a mapping of place times sixty, a straightforward transformation of feelings into maps.

### Indigenous place mapping

Though the number of place atlases has been growing, their development has not always been so straightforward. Most indigenous peoples – maybe all of them – have strong feelings about where they live, about their place in the world, about *their place*. But it's one thing to have a place, to fully inhabit it – and for generations upon generations – and another to keep it against the incursions of outsiders, another even to make a map of it capable of standing in court against the claims of those who may have no more interest in the place than strip mining it for coal or hydraulic mining it for gold, no feelings at all for the *place*. This was the situation of many indigenous peoples – maybe most of them – in the opening of the twentieth century, pushed out of their places or wholly deprived of any claims to them, allowed to live in them, if at all, only by sufferance.

Indigenous mapping changed this, appropriately enough, since it had been 'official' mapping – that is, government mapping, outsider mapping – that had created the situation in the first place. Essentially the mapping was about securing title, or some sort of security, over territory in which to live; but to the extent that such territory was in any sense traditional, it was necessarily about place as well.

This had been one of the problems: indigenous maps tended to be about place, about things that really mattered, while the courts could only understand . . . *maps of property*. Indigenous peoples had demanded their places from the instant they lost them – and they'd often mapped them as well – but it wasn't until legal frameworks shifted that non-indigenous authorities were able to see and hear them.

This was precisely the case with the mapping that led to the Canadian territory of Nunavut, home of most of the Canadian Inuit. This not only produced the three-volume *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* (Freeman, 1976), with its *Land Use Atlas*, but a few years later the *Nunavut Atlas* (Riewe, 1992) which constituted the foundation for the territorial negotiations. These maps were all marked by novel mapping techniques as recalled by mapper, Peter Usher:

We were no longer mapping the 'territories' of Aboriginal people based on the cumulative observations of others of where they were (as one would for mapping the ranges of wild-life species), but instead, mapping the Aboriginal peoples' own recollections of their own activities. The second innovation was to record peoples' own perceptions of the history and significance of their traditional lands. This was done through mapping geographical knowledge and oral history as exemplified by place names and ecological knowledge, all of which were used as supplementary indicators of use and occupancy.

(Usher, 2003)

That is, though the goal was to be able to draw a line around Inuit territory capable of being understood by the courts, the only way to draw this line was . . . through place. Other Canadian Inuit live in somewhat similarly created spaces in Quebec and Labrador – Nunavik and Nunatsiavut – and still other areas are under negotiation for settlement.

Other Canadian indigenous groups had moved in related directions, some even earlier – it was the Nisga'a who had brought about the change in legal understanding that led to the Inuit efforts, and parallel efforts had been advanced by the Cree, the Dene, and others – but the publication of the *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* in 1976, and the publication in 1981 of *Maps and Dreams* (Brody, 1981) by Hugh Brody, who'd worked on the project, gave indigenous mapping the exemplars and publicity it needed to sweep the world, and similar projects began to be common in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Australia.

In fact it's Australia that makes it clear how far some courts have come in recognizing not only indigenous peoples, but the way they think about where they live. The aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing won their right to appear in court after presenting Australia's National Native Title Tribunal with a painting known as *Ngurrara II*:

Frustrated by their inability to articulate their arguments in courtroom English, the people of Fitzroy Crossing decided to paint their 'evidence'. They would set down, on canvas, a document that would show how each person related to a particular area of the Great Sandy Desert – and to the long stories that had been passed down for generations.

(Brooks, 2003)

The tribunal accepted the painting, one member commenting that the painting was 'the most eloquent and overwhelming evidence that had ever been presented' to them. In the end, of course, maps *were* made, though the court came close to expressing regret about the necessity:

Although the Court has to set boundaries in order to define the area of a native title determination, it is a fact that in the extremely arid region of the Western Desert boundaries between Aboriginal groups are rarely clear cut. They are very open to human movement across them. Desert people define their connection to the land much more in terms of groups of sites, thinking of them as points in space not as areas with borders.

Notwithstanding this concession, long lists of coordinates setting the boundaries concluded the decision.

## In the end

A painting such as *Ngurrara II* strikes some people as very much a map, others less so. So what? It's an image of the land imbued with all the stories, all the *life* these inhabitants had given it for generations; that is, it's an image of place and if their graphic conventions call for a painting instead of a map, what's the difference? Well, it's a big difference, one that underscores the importance of place *mapping*. Place mapping is about corroding or confounding or amplifying, in any event about *expanding* the reach of the map beyond its 'legal' role. As developed over the past 500 years by large, powerful, complicated societies, mapmaking has always been about propping up property and the nation-states that support, that guarantee it, that gain substance from its mapping. In the *News and Observer* this morning – my local newspaper – there were two articles about maps: one dealt with court-mandated revisions to voting maps that the court felt had been racially gerrymandered by the North Carolina legislature; the other with the state's imposition on property rights growing out of its 1987 Map Act. Those are the essential concerns of *maps*: state control (of voting rights in this case) and property. Froufrou about *feelings*, that should be left to poetry.

Place mapping challenges this whole perspective. Although, as Harley pointed out, the state's maps, when scanned by a human eye, are fully capable of transcribing anyone's relationship to the land. Maps created with this intention, that take it as their *raison d'être*, are enormously more capable, and so immensely richer in their ability to do so. The examples given here barely scratch the surface of a rapidly expanding world of mapping.

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