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The ‘Mapping’ Metaphor in Cultural Studies

During the past few decades cartography has become the object of an acute interest among scholars in various fields. In the study of colonialism for example, in the history of science and medicine, in media history, the map has increasingly been regarded as a primary locus for the investigation of power relations, epistemological shifts, biopolitics, technological developments and their mutual dependencies. Also within the arts, the map has come to play an important role, both as an object and as a metaphor. To speak of a ‘cartographic turn’ in cultural studies is probably an exaggeration, yet the amount of work, much of it interdisciplinary in kind, that in recent years has been guided by the ‘mapping’ metaphor calls for an investigation of its uses, its limits and its further potential.

The text I would like to propose for the session is a short article by Denis Cosgrove entitled “Mapping/Cartography.” It charts the genealogy of the ‘mapping’ metaphor from its artifactual source in the thematic mapping of the 19th century to its transformation into a conceptual tool and a scholarly method during the second half of 20th century. In addition to the prevalence of the ‘mapping’ metaphor in cultural studies, some of the questions to be discussed would be first, the ‘metaphoricity’ of the concept. In different contexts, ‘mapping’ is used metaphorically to a greater or lesser extent. What is gained by increased abstraction and what is lost? Can a literal-metaphorical conceptual spectrum be outlined? Second, the spatial focus of concept appears to give short shrift to the temporal aspects of works of art. How have time and change been accommodated to a fundamentally static metaphor?

Article Suggestion:

“Mapping/Cartography” by Denis Cosgrove in *Cultural Geography, a critical dictionary of key concepts*, ed. by David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne.

