



INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

CHECKING IN ON CRITICAL CARTOGRAPHY: NEW DIRECTIONS AND OPENINGS, WHAT WORK REMAINS, AND HOW WE MIGHT PURSUE IT

Craig Dalton
Hofstra University

Jim Thatcher
University of Washington Tacoma

For many geographers and cartographers, the term “critical cartography” evokes a particular period of geographical discourse. What began with a series of appeals to consider the aporias and silences in maps, and to situate them within the cultures that produce and interpret them (Harley 1989), became the strong polemics of what’s now referred to as the GIS wars (Schuurman 2000). Interpreting maps to show their social, political foundations using linguistic and discursive concepts undoubtedly is and has been a productive form of critical cartography, particularly with the inclusion of theoretical concepts beyond the limited English-language translations of Foucault available in the late 1980s (Rose-Redwood 2015). However, focusing on that period, those tools, and those sources limits our view of what critical cartography can be, and more significantly, what it can do.

Critical cartography, even when narrowly defined as a self-identified practice, has changed over the last thirty years, spreading to new fields and engaging with new and previously neglected forms of mapping, such as indigenous mapping, art mapping, and counter-mapping. It has also deepened in its conceptual foundations, examining the many identities and subject formations of mapmaking, questions of participation and democracy, and the roles technologies play in the production, dissemination, and interpretation of maps. In light of these shifts, Crampton (2010) has cast critical cartography as an explicitly productive enterprise, one in which the meaning of critique rests in finding the limits of a discourse and a search for alternatives. Within critical cartography, maps themselves are no longer seen as static, produced objects, but rather as objects processually and continuously (re)produced in both their creation and consideration (see Edney 2019 and Rossetto 2019 for recent discussions).

It is fair to ask then, what is critical cartography now and what might it become? This collection explores the contours of those questions. While no means intended as a definitive corpus, the collection instead serves as a series of signposts for the praxis of critical cartography writ large. Through these pieces and others, a few broader trends emerge.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

One trend is the increasing role of political economic questions and approaches in critical cartographic work. Tracking broader trends in geography, critical cartography has long engaged questions of inequity and empire, but current work is breaking into new fields involving labor, value, space, and maps. In this special issue, this is apparent to some degree in all of the articles. Alvarez León's article on street maps by and for self-driving cars tackles new questions of the production of space for self-driving cars and the associated questions of power and access to newly emerging technologies. What are the terms of service and access when the map is made to be read by a machine? Wilmott's article takes up a related theme in exploring what it means to map lands in nominally open-source ways, opening space for questions over the gap between ownership of data produced and the act of mapping—with those whose lands are being represented. Our article posits that the economic strategies of major technology companies may be impacting how smartphone users know where there are and where they are going. Cowart and Powell's piece on Guerilla Cartography graphically articulates struggles involving class and capital accumulation in multiple contexts.

EVERYDAY

A second trend that runs clearly through these pieces is an eschewing of arcane or purely historical cases in favor of the everyday processes and experiences of maps and mappings. Wilmott entwines everyday, embodied practice with theory. The Guerrilla Cartography maps discussed by Cowart and Powell's touch on a myriad of issues that are part of everyday experiences—maps of water, food, housing, and the lack thereof. Our own article engages the mobile map applications used by students, and billions of others, for the banal task of navigating their local environments. Alvarez León's piece takes those quotidian maps into the realm of automated driving, as an emerging technology aimed at daily transportation practices.

RESISTANCE

Third, critical cartographic work increasingly engages forms of cartographic resistance, by confronting dominant or hegemonic geographic knowledges and/or through efforts to create alternatives. Guerilla Cartography's call to map is an unmistakable case of mapping in self-conscious, critical ways, particularly empowering people to make maps of and for themselves. Likewise, Alvarez León engages questions of access to street map data and hacking practices that repurpose its utility in other contexts, and Wilmott's concept of "mapping-with" opens up a new performative, theoretical praxis for constructing alternative visualizations and data ontologies.

These themes—of the political economic, of the everyday, and of resistances to the normative visualizations and knowledges said visualizations impart—are but a few of the present, exciting trends in critical cartography. Others include feminist approaches, privacy and surveillance, volunteered vs. contributed geographic information, indigenous mappings, and a myriad of other cartographic knowledges that receive little attention in mainstream scholarship. The articles in this collection touch upon many of these themes: Wilmott's process of "mapping-with" as a means of engaging indigenous mapping in a nominally volunteered context, Cowart and Powell's guerrilla approach echoing some of the calls found in feminist mapping praxis, and so on.

These vibrant themes pulse across an *existing* critical cartography that offers alternative paths to understanding and living amidst the continual swirl of new technologies and techniques, and new embeddings of maps and visualizations into our daily and professional lives.

REFERENCES

- Crampton, Jeremy. 2010. *Mapping: A Critical Introduction to Cartography and GIS*. Chinchester, UK: John Wiley and Sons. doi: [10.1002/9781444317411](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444317411).
- Edney, Matthew. 2019. *Cartography: The Ideal and Its History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. doi: [10.7208/chicago/9780226605715.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226605715.001.0001).
- Harley, J. B. 1989. "Deconstructing the Map." *Cartographica* 26 (2): 1–20. doi: [10.3138/E635-7827-1757-9T53](https://doi.org/10.3138/E635-7827-1757-9T53).
- Rose-Redwood, Reuben. 2015. "Introduction: The Limits to Deconstructing the Map." *Cartographica* 50 (1): 1–8. doi: [10.3138/carto.50.1.01](https://doi.org/10.3138/carto.50.1.01).
- Rossetto, Tania. 2019. *Object-Oriented Cartography: Maps as Things*. New York: Routledge. doi: [10.4324/9780429437441](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429437441).
- Schuurman, Nadine. 2000. "Trouble in the Heartland: GIS and its Critics in the 1990s." *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (4): 569–590. doi: [10.1191/030913200100189111](https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200100189111).

