

The Map Is Not The Territory ... but another version of reality

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The literature journal *Granta* recently explored the theme associated with the idea of *The map is not the territory* (Granta 2015). This led to several kinds of author responses, all of which broadly questioned the relationship of the representational model of reality with reality itself – whether textual, mappings or other representational media. *Granta's* own definition of the theme is somewhat less prosaic:

‘the difference between the world as we see it and the world as it actually is, beyond our faulty memories and tired understanding. It’s also about the borderlands of politics and reason, and of reality and transcendence, in contested territories.’

However, taking the idea behind *The map is not the territory* further may establish something of a guiding discussion for future Mapworks. For example, if one scrutinises further the quote by Alfred Korzybski and its context in *Science and Sanity* (1933, 58), a more enabling meaning for mapworking emerges and draws a closer parallel between the representational model of mathematics and that of human experience.

‘A map *is not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a *similar structure* to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.’ (Korzybski 1933, 58)

The issue for Korzybski is that both the representation and the human experience of the real world share a similar structure, captured with a common language. The oppositional tension posed by Granta between the thing represented (*of* the world) and its representation (*on* the map) is lessened somewhat when one considers Korzybski’s entire quote.

Korzybski’s emphasis is that each are different forms of *reality*: a map is as much a reality of the world in a particular, codified form, that also has its own reality as an object with a materiality, a temporality and as a thing with a meaning that is as evident as the visceral reality of the world itself. This relational possibility is therefore greater in scope and useful for many other types of mediated practices where a map in the hand *is* less about a dissonance created between the real and the virtual, than it is about the harmony that comes about through the actualizing of its potentiality. Thus, the idea behind *The map is not the territory* recasts and moves beyond the verisimilitude accuracies of the map against the world - i.e. focusing on difference – becoming more about the degree of correspondence - i.e. similarity and repetition of use.

As a landscape archaeologist I am concerned with re-imagining past realities. However, the evidence for them is always going to be fragmentary. This demands creative responses that are representational and contested *as much as* they are *detrterritorized* assemblages in which human experience permeates the non-representations and distorts them, say, with a Deleuzian twist. So where does this leave us? The map is not the territory, but it is rather a version of reality, albeit one that is in a reduced form, while exaggerating and amplifying traits of our reality.

A map for landscape archaeologists is a representation, as well as a device or tool that conveys meaning, providing access to other, alternative, and apposite views of the landscape, whether these are derived from literally mapping the surface remains in a landscape onto a map, or simply using a map to navigate as one moves. The map helps to articulate the interpretation and convey a spatial meaning to the arrangement of house platforms, ditches or postholes that one may find during an excavation. But as a codified pattern of symbols and items it partially obscures some of the meaning of those things in the ground, while amplifying lines of the relict or archaeological content on or below the landscape's surface.



Figure 1. 1-inch to 1-mile 3rd edition OS map (sheet number 69), inscribed with pen and pencil, and flecked with mud. © Historic Environment Scotland (MS 1732/14 - <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/872671>).

Two examples illustrate this. The first example is a 1-inch to 1-mile 3rd edition OS map that contains the scribbling and notes of several different archaeologists surveying sites on South Uist, Eriskay and Fuday in the early part of the 20th century (Figure 1). This work took place during a Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) survey (MS 1732/14 - <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/872671>). Here, the map is clearly used to visualize the areas of survey *before* field visits, but it was also used to make a cartographic (representational) reality of the site location - this is what is amplified. Furthermore, the map is also an assemblage of different events - some extra annotations were made in the field - while others were more accidental in character - such as the splatters of mud on the map that bring to mind the surveyor cursing himself as the map was dropped, but being thankful that the maps bought by RCAHMS were linen backed and mounted.



Figure 2. Archaeological mapworking – a context plan drawn during the excavations of the church at Reykholt, Iceland © Oscar Aldred.

In the second example, we can see the making of the map of archaeological context [2217 and 2243, as well as 2249 and 2246 in part] as a scaled transformation of the stone floor of the church at Reykholt, in Iceland, recorded before it was excavated. This mapwork representation of the excavation stone floor surface is not only a record, it is also more real than the actual surface itself because it was subsequently removed during excavation to reveal the other surfaces below it. Both the form of the map and the annotations remind the archaeologist (this author) what important decisions were made in the field, and which subsequently were used for interpretation in the publication of the excavation. The map might not be the only territory, but the other realities that were originally used no longer exist!

The map takes away none of the similarities between the world as it is and how we see, perceive and understand it, but it does when the focus is on what is different. The map is a kind of hyperobject, that has hyper-reality qualities that are Gaussian-like i.e. disturbingly fluid and mollusc-like but also more than empty containers in which entities are assigned spatial and temporal co-ordinates. A landscape under archaeological survey or a site that is being excavated is not only concerned with what is recorded for a faulty memory, but also lies beyond the conventional representation, allowing new forms of map and location to be created.