

Cartography as the Narrative of Space: A Map Lover's Discourse

for Ed & Ellen Fajardo, Patrons of the Arts

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As an amateur, or better still, an *amator* of cartography, I hope to offer a lover's discourse (*à la* Roland Barthes) on the unique pleasure afforded by maps, especially antique maps.¹ But before embarking on a voyage which departs from the geographical map,

¹For Philippine antique maps, the standard reference remains Carlos Quirino's work. See Carlos Quirino, *Philippine Cartography (1320-1899)*, second revised edition with an introduction by R. A. Skelton (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963), XIII. See also the following sources:

Atlas de Filipinas, Colección de 30 Mapas, trabajados por delineantes filipinos bajo la dirección del P. Jose Algué, S.J., Director del Observatorio de Manila, 1899 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900).

Francisco Vindel, *Mapas de America y Filipinas en los libros Españoles de los Siglos XVI al XVIII, Apéndice a los de America, Adición de los de Filipinas* (Madrid: Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales y Científicas, 1991).

R.T. Fell, *Early Maps of South-East Asia*, second edition (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 51-56.

Cheri Brooks, "Bridge to the Past: Maps Depict the Philippines' Place in History," *Mercator's World* (September-October 1997), pp. 34-41.

Jonathan Best, "Rare Books and Map Room at the GBR Museum," *Arts of Asia* (January-February 1998), pp. 54-65.

Armand V. Fabella, "Mapping the Archipelago," in *Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People, Vol. 3: The Spanish Conquest* (Asia Publishing Company, Ltd., 1998), pp. 20-21.

Rudolf J.H. Lietz, *The Philippines in the 19th Century: A Collection of Prints* (Mandaluyong City: RLI Gallery Systems, 1998), XII.

Gregorio Llorca Magdaraog, "Ancient Archipelago," in *Environment and Natural Resources: Atlas of the Philippines* (Quezon City: Environmental Center of the Philippines Foundation, 1998), pp. 92-127.

Thomas Suárez, *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Periplus Editions, 1999).

one must attend to some questions that come up. Why are artists (like Leonardo da Vinci, Johan Vermeer, Jasper Johns) enamored of geographical maps? Is there perhaps a relation between art and cartography?² At a time when contemporary art seeks new forms of expression, it may help to bring out “the cartographic eye” in art.³ Hopefully, the praxis of cartography can throw light on the impasse in art today.

The Icarian view

Where do we find the *liberation from gravity*, (also in the sense of “seriousness”) which animates present-day art in its quest for “the unbearable lightness” of a space with neither center nor horizon? It may be in Peter Bruegel’s 1558 painting of the “Fall of Icarus.”⁴ Borrowing a theme from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Bruegel presents a panoramic view with three characters in the foreground — a farmer, a shepherd, and a fisherman, too absorbed in their tasks to even notice the tragic event. To recall Icarus’ daring enterprise. His father, Daedalus, who is imprisoned in the Palace of Minos, decides to escape by air. He constructs a flying machine made up of wax and feathers. He then orders his son to fly but not too near the sun. Icarus, out of

The First Portuguese Maps and Sketches of Southeast Asia and the Philippines 1512-1571 (Porto: Centro Português de Estudos do Sudeste Asiático (CEPESA), 2002), 61 p.

Ambeth Ocampo, “Old maps, charts, and prints,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (October 16, 2002), p. A9.

² *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*, edited by David Woodward (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), XVI-249 p.

³ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *L’œil cartographique de l’art* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), 179 p.

⁴ See the last stanza of W.H. Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” which was inspired by Bruegel’s “Fall of Icarus” in the Musée des Beaux Arts of Brussels:

*In Bruegel’s Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.*

pride, disobeys his father. The wax of Icarus' wings melt. Icarus errs in space (isn't to err human?) before plunging into the sea.

In Bruegel's "Fall of Icarus," we gaze from an elevated site. From this high position, we obtain an overall view of the world. The world unfolds itself to us as a panorama, with all its minute details. It is this panoramic and plunging view, this macroscopic and microscopic view, this *view of the distant and of the detail*, evident in Bruegel's art, which Christine Buci-Glucksmann calls the "Icarian view."⁵

This Icarian view is "the cartographic eye." As Christian Jacob, the noted cartographic epistemologist reminds us: "To look at a map is to view the world from on high."⁶ It is in some way to be like God who sees everything. To view everything is to be everywhere, to feel sovereign, to experience the power of controlling everything and everyone. There is a compelling link between cartography and sovereignty, between maps and power.⁷

The Icarian point of view is also the painter's point of view. It is the point of origin — the point of the creation of the world, *where chaos becomes cosmos*, ordered arrangement. It is from this view that the painter masters the landscape from above. This aspect of domination is already contained in the profession of "land surveyor," for the "surveyor" is a kind of "overseer".⁸

Why do antique maps appeal to us? The appeal of antique maps comes from the unique synthesis of geography, exploration, trade,

⁵ Buci-Glucksmann, pp. 17, 21, 24, 27.

⁶ Christian Jacob, *L'Empire des cartes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992), p. 404.

⁷ "If one had to choose the single most telling motif, constantly recurring in countless world maps over the centuries, it is that of power, the controlling powers that shape the world's features and history. That power may be religious—Christian or pagan. It may be secular—conquest, trade or empire. It may be conceptual—the world map as a navigational instrument or as a thematic document. Or it may be scientific—cosmological or seismic. It is when these themes are unselfconsciously expressed that the world map receives most clearly the intellectual imprint of its time." See Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994), p. 2.

⁸ Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 3. Klein points out that the words "surveyor" or "survey" also have as their revealing cognate "surveillance" with, of course, its Foucauldian overtones.



1613 MERCATOR, Gerard 1512-1594 / HONDIUS, Jodocus 1563-1612 *Insulae Indiae Orientalis* 48 x 36 cm.

Mercator-Hondius, Insulae Indiae Orientalis praecipuae, in quibus Moluccae celeberrimae sunt, 1613.

Early in the 1600s, upon his return to Holland, Hondius brought Mercator's plates and after adding 36 of his own reissued the *Atlas* which went into a score of editions in various languages.

This particular map is one of the most colorful ever printed of the East Indies. At the right top corner appear two ships, a Spanish and a Dutch war vessels, firing on each other, based apparently on the celebrated sea battle between Admiral Olivier van Noort and Dr. Antonio de Morga in December 1600, just off Manila Bay.

travel, history, culture, commerce, science and art. Antique maps continue to fascinate us not only because they are coveted instruments of power, works of aesthetic beauty (often delightfully decorative)⁹ but because they are archives of information, and more importantly, documents of knowledge and creative imagination.

A map is not only an object of knowledge, beauty, and power. It is also a “metaphysical object” in the sense that it transports us from one world to another — from the “Old World” to the “New World,” to unknown worlds. It prompts us to wonder about our own being, our own place, our “own inclusion — inscription — in space and in time.”¹⁰ Cartography seems to thrive from a kind of ambiguity. Situated at the junction of exact science and art, it is based on physical description and mathematical theory. Yet it nevertheless finds it necessary to reintroduce the imagination into its theoretical principles and makes the map a representation.¹¹

The “cartographic transaction”

A map represents or more aptly, *presents* the world.¹² By a strategy of visual representation understood as “a highly artificial technology of signs invested with the unique power to imitate in a network of lines and colours” what we usually refer to as the “real,” a map renders the world visible.¹³ But maps do not only reveal but also conceal. They do not only display the world but they can also distort or idealize it. They can either enhance or erase existing boundaries and differences. Here, we come close to understanding what is truly unique to a map if we bear in mind that there is an important “cartographic

⁹ *Decorative Printed Maps of the 15th to 18th Centuries* (A revised edition of *Old Decorative Maps and Charts* by A.L. Humphreys), with eighty-four reproductions and a new text by R.A. Skelton, F.S.A. (London: Spring Books, 1965) VIII.

¹⁰ Christian Jacob, “The Map: a Metaphysical Object,” in *Orbis Terrarum: Ways of Worldmaking* (Antwerp: Museum Plantin-Moretus, 2000), pp. 76-83.

¹¹ Jean-Claude Greshens, “Avant-propos,” in *Cartes et figures de la terre* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980).

¹² On the important distinction between “re-presenting” and “presenting” or “making present,” see Leovino Ma. Garcia, “Refiguring Modern Philippine Art,” *Zero-In: Private Art, Public Lives* (Ateneo Art Gallery, Ayala Foundation, Inc., Eugenio Lopez Foundation, Inc.: 2002), pp. 55-73.

¹³ *Maps and the Writing of Space*, p. 3.

transaction" in the mapping of the world. The "cartographic transaction" brings about "the mental and material *renegotiation* of the lived space of experience."¹⁴ It should not surprise us then that cartography can be enlisted to serve the rhetoric of nationalism, the ideology of conquest or the politics of cultural difference.

To go more deeply into this "cartographic transaction" or transfer of the physical world into a conceptual map. Three *conceptual* stages comprise this "cartographic transaction": a *first stage* where space is *measured*; a *second stage* where space is *visualized*; and a *third stage* where space is *narrated*.¹⁵ The conceptual triad of number, image, and text accounts for the *conversion* of the natural world into a mental map. Let us briefly discuss the first two stages and dwell more lengthily on the third and last stage which is the focus of this essay.

In the first stage of *measurement*, we witness the land "surveyor," standing on the highest vantage point in the locality (mountain top or church belfry) to obtain accurate measurements of the landscape. With his surveying tools and the specialized code of geometry, the space of the world becomes quantifiable and mathematizable.

In the second stage of *visualization*, the cartographer creates graphic images that later "circulate in society as pictorial signifiers of specific social, political, or economic spaces."¹⁶ To convey the perils as well as the thrills of the Age of Exploration, the maps of Abraham Ortelius (who was a friend of Bruegel) abound with mermaids, monsters and fantastic creatures. The 1613 Mercator-Hondius map, which puts the Philippines at the very center of Asia, shows two ships — Spanish and Dutch — firing at each other. It proclaims Spain's naval might, alluding to the sea battle between Admiral Olivier Van Noort and Dr. Antonio de Morga in 1600, off Manila Bay. In the 1744 small version of the Murillo Velarde map, we see the figure of St. Francis Xavier approaching Mindanao, bolstering the eighteenth century's fond belief that this "Apostle of the Indies" had set foot there. The map makes accessible not only a space for exploration, conquest, missionary activity but also for commercial activity as indicated by the galleon and maritime trade routes on many maps.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5 (emphasis added).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.



Mapa de las Islas Filipinas, Manila 33 x 51 cm. (Detail)

MURILLO VELARDE, Pedro

1744

The narration of space

In the third stage of *narration*, space is narrated or recounted. Here, the task does not consist in examining in great detail a historical series of single maps of a particular place. Although this may lead to valuable insights on understanding the shape of a specific place, one should concentrate on the act or *process* of *mapping*. If one does this, the individual map will appear “as a hinge around which pivot whole systems of meaning, both prior and subsequent to its technical and mechanical production.”¹⁷

There is a *discourse* of geography. Maps may narrate a new social, economic, or political order. They can forge an identity — both cultural and national. Here, we note the importance of “chorography” (local maps like those of Fr. Pedro Murillo Velarde, the Spanish Jesuit cartographer to whom we owe what is considered to be the “Mother of all Philippine maps” of 1734) for a process of national self-discovery. Space is not to be regarded as a “void packed like a parcel with various contents,” an all-encompassing container of a physical world made up of material objects but as “the imaginative product of social (and political action).”¹⁸ If space is materially produced in architecture, urban planning, and civil engineering, geographical texts and images also “produce” social-cultural space. To quote J. B. Harley and David Woodward: “Maps are graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world.”¹⁹

To appreciate the map as a graphic representation of space, let us see the link between maps and picture making. This link goes back to Ptolemy’s *Geographia*. The only Greek word available to Ptolemy in referring to a “maker of pictures” was *graphikos*, a term etymologically linked to words ending in a form of *grapho* — *geography*, *chorography*, *topography*. The common meaning of the suffix *grapho* is not only to

¹⁷ *Mappings*, edited by Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 9.

¹⁸ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicolson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Cited in Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space*, p. 10.

¹⁹ J.B. Harley and David Woodward, “Preface,” in Harley and Woodward (eds), *History of Cartography, Vol. I: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. XVI.

draw but to record and write. During the Renaissance, *grapho* translated first as “pictura” gets replaced by “descriptio” in Latin (*description* in French, *beschryving* in Dutch). All these words of course depend on the Latin *scribo*, the equivalent of the Greek *grapho*. The word “description” as used by Renaissance geographers calls attention to the sense in which images are drawn or inscribed as something written. It calls attention to a mode of pictorial representation. *Grapho* suggests both picture and writing, image and text. As “description,” maps make us see and show us a knowledge of what is beyond the visible.²⁰ Maps then do not only provide us topographical information in the narrow sense—“the shapes of coastlines, the distribution of hills and valleys, the distances between human settlements” but enrich us with political, ethnological, strategic, social, and linguistic knowledge.²¹

To illustrate this, different narratives are told by the text at the back of the 1598 Petrus Kaerius map (the first separately printed map of the Philippines) and the text in the southwest medallion of the 1760 Murillo Velarde map. In the Kaerius map, the description (“Beschryvinghe” in Old Dutch) states that there are “inhabitants without laws” (“inwoenderen zonder Wetten”) who are “cannibals” (“Menschen eeters”).²² In the Murillo Velarde map drawn by Francisco Suarez and engraved by Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay, both Filipinos), we read:

These islands are numerous and very fertile. They supply gold, wax, sugar, honey, tobacco, ginger, anise, *sibucaw* or Brazil-wood, and all kinds of materials for dyeing, *sagou*, wool, cotton, cacao, civet, shell, lodestone, sulphur, resin, rice, salt, wheat, corn, lemons, Cayelac wood, all kinds of plants and a quantity of fruits and edible roots,

²⁰ See Svetlana Alpers, “The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art,” in *Art and Cartography*, pp. 51–96, esp. pp. 67–69. I have pointed out this meaning of *grapho* in a review of Lao Lianben’s exhibition entitled “The Writings of the Clouds.” See Leovino Ma. Garcia, “Lao Lianben at Galleria Duemilla,” *Asian Art News* (January–February 2003), pp. 85–86.

²¹ *Maps and the Writings of Space*, p. 11.

²² See Leovino Garcia, “‘Comment’ to Jean-Michel Poinssotte ‘Les Romains et l’extrême-orient: monde réel monde rêvé,’” in *Latin Humanism in the Asian-Pacific Area: Heritage and Perspectives* (Manila: International Conference of the Unione Latini nel Mondo, March 1–3, 1999), p. 37.


palo Maria ("du bois mairrain"), tamarind, cassia trees, Catbalogan grain, dragon blood, (*gayac*), sandalwood, (*Manungal*), which is better than quinine and many medicinal herbs, flax which is as strong as hemp, coconuts, bamboos, rattan and many kinds of palm, mahogany, horses, carabaos, cows, pigs, deer, game and much fish...

...These islands have an Archbishop, three bishops, one Chancellor, three governments, twenty-one provinces, eighteen presidios, an artillery foundry, printing houses...

...The Indios are well-built, have fine features and are dusky in complexion. They become good writers, painters, sculptors, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, embroiderers and sailors. The Christian religion is taught in Spanish, in Tagalog, in Sangley or Chinese, Pampango, Ilocano, Pangasinan, Cagayano, Visayan, Camarines and other languages.²³

Here, two different subjectivities are at work. The first one is disdainful; the second benevolent. The process of mapping undergoes a change. The narration produces or *projects* different spaces of meaning.

From amator to narrator

The reading or interpretation of maps is an invitation to travel — to venture on an odyssey of the imagination, to enter the space of what is more "real" than what we consider real — the space of fiction, literature, narrative. A map tells the story of space. Cartography is the narrative of space.²⁴ To name a place is already to tell a story. There are as many stories as there are names on a map. Like a lover, the *amator* of maps has always one more story to recount in the journey of being human. 

²³ Translation mine. For a longer discussion on the Murillo Velarde map, see Quirino, *Philippine Cartography*, pp. 45-61.

²⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood (London-New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33.