

## The Folly of Maps

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*IDEA: origin late Middle English, via Latin, from Greek idea, 'form, pattern', from the base of idein, 'to see'*

*MAP: origin early 16<sup>th</sup> century, from Latin mappa mundi, lit. 'sheet of the world'*

*FOLLY: origin late Middle Ages, from Old French folie, 'madness'*

Oxford Dictionary of English, Second Edition

There are parallel trails in the history of borders drawn to exclude and isolate, and the historical rejection of and disdain for the new ideas that arise in every age. The status quo of measure, possibility, and what is known, has been shaken up many, many times in history by the emergence of new paradigms, perspectives, richness of comprehension flying in the face of the familiar. Sometimes this leads to discovery, sometimes even to what will later be accepted and then pushed further again.

But sometimes the measure, distrust and commerce of new thought have led to the death of an idea, or its author, or both.

The 'frontier' is often defined as the space just ahead of the known edge and limit, and where it may be pushed out deeper into the previously unknown. The frontier in the world of ideas is not the warm comfort of what has been long assimilated; and the frontier in the landscape is not of maps, but of places beyond and before them...

The border along what has been claimed is not only that of maps – it is of concepts, functions, inventions and related emergent industries. Ideas and innovations are like the cloud shape that briefly forms around a jet breaking the sound barrier, tangible yet not fully mapped into measure. It is when things are nailed down into specific entities, calibrated and assessed, that the dangers may inflict themselves – greed, competition, imitation, anger, jealousy, a provincial sense of ownership either possessed or demanded.

A professor in graduate school told us about how just across the California/Arizona border, rusted out alone in the desert, you can see the very last, farthest westward metric sign, where this unfamiliar system died. The border between accepting new ideas

and shunning them for their newness is the death of possibility. This is mapped by patterns of oblivion, the whittling away of its traces, that is also the final unspooling of its initial pure momentum.

Ironically, I am writing this in a language (English) comprised partially of layers of de-contextualised phrases and concepts from the popular culture, iconography and common speech of other times, along with many roots derived from other languages. Etymology seduces through the flash of discovery of the long-lost direct meanings and signifiers of so many English words. These, in greatly diminished specificity and weight, now float like dead jellyfish in the ocean – solid yet translucent, and adrift where they once actively swam...

Physical maps are aligned along spaces exposed by retreating glaciers, the beat of waves, erosion over vast spans of time, frictive winds along soils and sands, magma erupting and cooling in jets and flows – and yet, it is as though the artifice of man is what we need as our omnipresent frame of measure.

The hurricane knows no latitude and longitude; the jet stream knows no politics or history; a flood knows no place names, only to surge along its course...

Human maps are ephemeral. Their lines are arbitrary, and often drawn from ego and its stealth, rage and stubborn compromises.

There are many outmoded globes of dead delineations, with old identities, colonisations, topographies, boundaries, politics – inscribed through ignorance of what lay beyond...

'Nature' is not *formed* by measure – only noticed, prescribed, translated, extrapolated from what otherwise would simply be wilderness. Territories were not *created* – they were only *found* by explorers. New ideas (that involve radical risk through a rupture of accepted convention) are just like the soils of lands before claims to them are staked – they exist, but have not yet been co-opted and commodified by measure.

The danger of measure is in its *quantification*, in the destructive and self-destructive compulsions this can release in humans.

We created categories of time not just for convenience, but also for measure, for genealogies and taxonomies, naming and codification. Just as we created categories of morality – as much in order to stratify as to lay blame.

Is it possible to re-map the ancient cartographies of our hunger for power, our profligacies, our prejudices?

Don't epiphanic new ideas rise more like breath: a form manifesting out of nothing, not yet fully defined by cold, precise measure?



The folly in maps is in their measure. The danger is in the sheer ephemerality of it all

finite

jealousy, provincial sense of ownership  
TO SURVEY AND ENTER A CLAIM TO A TRACT OF LAND AND POSSESSION OF LAND  
Maps are ephemeral. Their lines are  
ultimately arbitrary and often drawn with  
eyes and its race and its born compromise.  
The maps are in final forms  
and they are open  
and there are  
many of these  
besides  
the  
longitude,  
the stream, the sites or history, a  
flood knows no names of places, only to  
flow and move along its course

# Locate