

My daughters are maps

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The body-scape, as a metaphor to describe and engage with landscape, is fairly common place¹, yet, when it comes to considering a map as another concept-metaphor to describe the landscape, there is a somewhat non-human representation tinge to it.² However, if we examine the relationship between a map and a body, there is an intellectual absence; relatively few returns are offered in a wide literature search. In this short think-piece, I want to problematize the map as a kind of body, and the body as a kind of map, and offer up an alternative means by which to think about the relationship between maps and bodies.

When map-thinking, takes place several different features spring to mind to do with their creation and usages. These are features such as the God's eye or the cartographic gaze, or a certain representational anxiety, as well as matters of codification, or the map as a kind of object, amongst others. Amongst, these, however, rarely does the body enter the frame. But when I think a little harder about each of these examples of map features the body is heavily implied. For instance, the cartographic gaze is concerned with the body's vision and the translation of what one sees on to the map sheet; the representational anxiety is rooted in the interstices of the body-mind; codification lies, perhaps, with cognition; and the map as an object is in the hand for navigation associated with body-memory to a large degree. The body, therefore, is tied directly to the production, the use and imaginative transportation of the map into the real world. It is as if the body directly mediates the set of relationships between the map and landscape as a kind of co-producer, as it were, in-between the real and virtual worlds; it is part of the same ontic dimension.

In contrast, when body-thinking about maps, a common emphasis is on the inside of *us*; clinical trials, disease and illness figure highly in an internet search of 'body as a map'. There is a kind of map psychosis. What this is about is primarily concerned with is the metaphorical use of maps in making map-like connections within the body, say along the circulatory system. While limiting to some extent – because it is about *us* - the affordances offered by thinking about the body as a kind of map allows the body to be understood as an inter-connected whole. The classic example, is the autopsy view of the body represented as an anatomic map (Figure 1) while also being translated into an artistic canon to explore ideas associated with the mapping of human experience (Figure 2). But the body as a map, as a literal object that is embodied, as it were, has another connotation which has been largely overlooked.

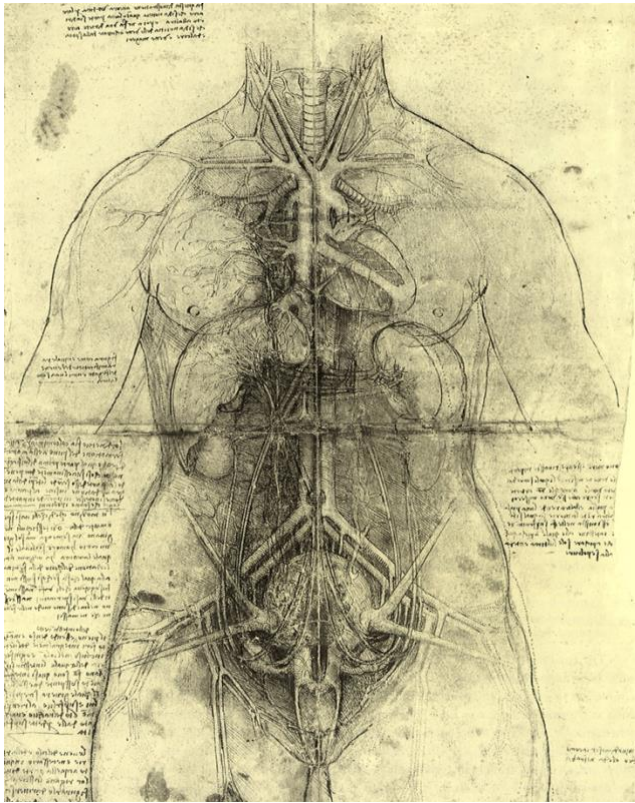


Figure 1 Anatomical sketch, from KnowledgeHi.com

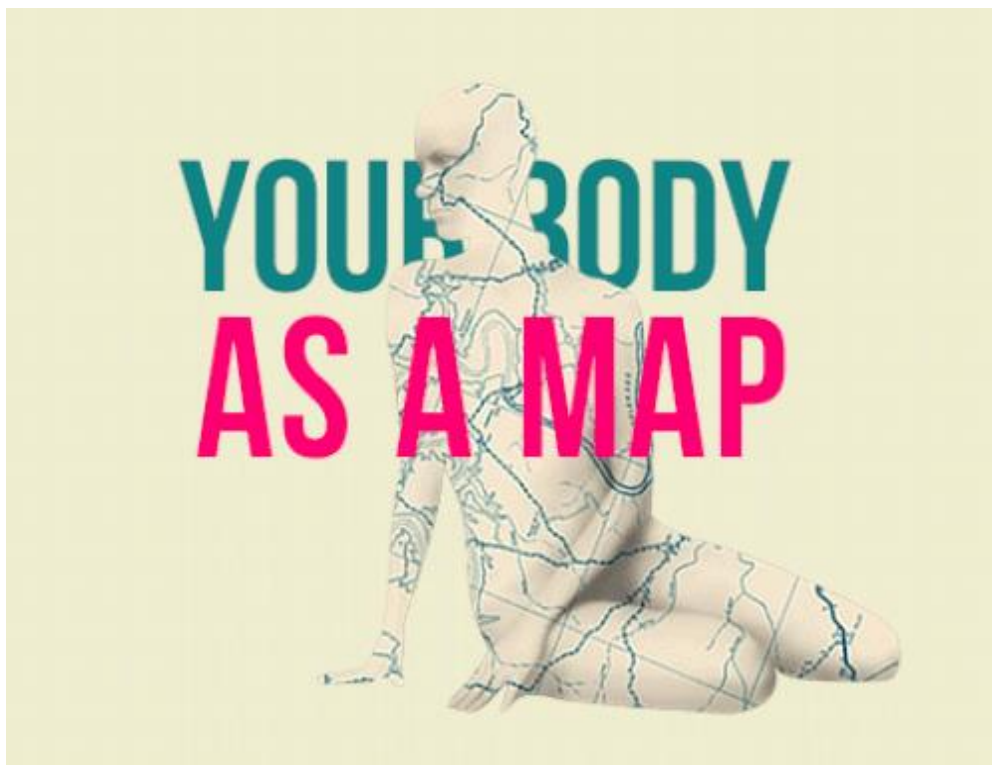


Figure 2 <https://conartistnyc.com/blogs/past-events/115-your-body-as-a-map.php>

I want to start by saying that my daughters are maps in themselves - one that lives in Reykjavík and the other in Cambridge. Not just in terms of their anatomical connections – their circulatory systems - but in two other ways. The first, in terms of their genetic make-up, and second, in terms of the signifiers of the environments that have been incorporated into their cellular make-up. It is the second of these that has the most potential in thinking about the map as a kind of body and vice versa. Inscribed in to each of their body's cellular make-up are physical indicators – a kind of codification, as it were – of the places in which my daughters live and walk. The assessment of these embodied indicators, called stable isotope analysis – both strontium and oxygen isotopes – can be used retrospectively to determine where people lived as children and the types of diet that they had. So, in a sense, these isotopes form a map of *where* people have come from and ended up, and what they have done in terms of the food and drink that have been consumed. The technique of isotope analysis is used by archaeologists to determine the place from which people spent their childhoods. Quite literally, these indicators are markers that have been ingested – a mapwork, as it were – from within the environments in which people have lived. Furthermore, the isotopes also act as a kind of geological footprint, incorporated into the body's bone and teeth. Places like Iceland have a distinctive isotope signature that allows it to be easily distinguished from other places.

Thus, the body is at least two kinds of map. On the one hand, the body has within it a distinctive DNA genealogy with which to connect generations and lineages together. These are map-like as they show how the ancestral 'landscape' is. But the map is used principally as a metaphor to describe the body. On the other hand, the indicators in the body that are examined by isotope analysis are actual imprints of the environment in which someone has lived. And they are more-than-representational because there is a direct, and tangible, relationship between the body, the indicators and the environment as they are inscribed into the body. The body is a map. This kind of map is less metaphorical and more literal in usage. In short, my daughters are maps.

The potential of thinking about maps as bodies, and bodies as literal maps, is to extend the existing discussion, and specifically the metaphors, that circulate between bodies, maps and landscape, primarily. What this may lead to, is the potentially exciting proposition that inserting more human-centred narratives and dynamic inter-plays when discussing maps.

¹ For example Porteous, J. 1986. Bodyscape: the body-landscape metaphor. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 30.1: 2-12.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1541-064.1986.tb01020.x/abstract>

² Corner, J. 2012. Representation and landscape: Drawing and making in the landscape medium. *Word & Image* 8.3: 243-275

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02666286.1992.10435840>