

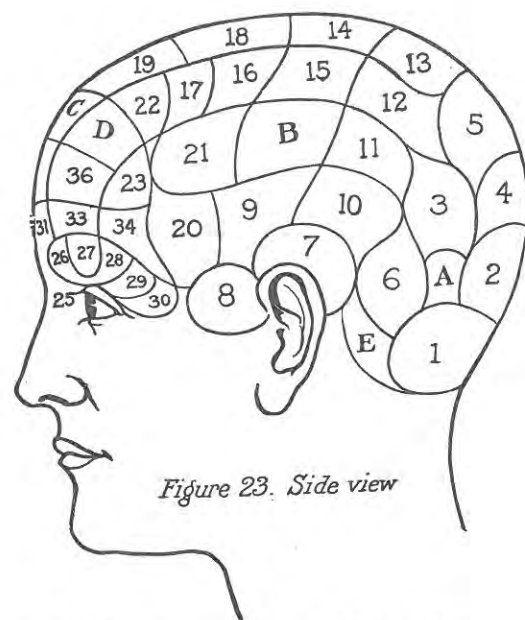
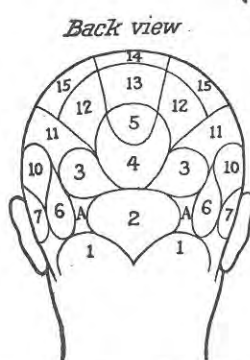
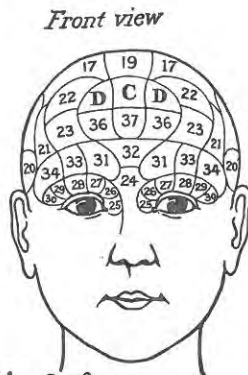


Figure 23. Side view



Back view



Front view

Location of the Organs.

MAPS OF THE IMAGINATION: THE WRITER AS CARTOGRAPHER

PETER TURCHI

TRINITY UNIVERSITY PRESS
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

A WIDE LANDSCAPE OF SNOWS

It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. . . . Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows?

HERMAN MELVILLE, *MOBY-DICK; OR, THE WHALE*

WE START with a blank: a world of possibility.

We desire to make a mark. To the extent that we want that mark to be original, meaningful, or admirable, the “dumb blankness”—or rather, our ambition to improve upon it—can be intimidating. The familiar image of an exasperated figure sitting at a typewriter, balled-up sheets of paper (spoiled blanks) in and around the trash can, is a depiction of the internal struggle every writer knows. Yet despite the hours we spend staring at the blank page or the blank screen, we can be so intent on what isn’t there, and on what we want to be there, that we might overlook the many uses of what *is* there.

Tens of thousands of years ago, before the first trails were etched into mud with the point of a stick, before the first pictures were scratched onto stone, and long before the first graphic depiction of places on anything like paper, there must have been something we might call premapping: the desire, and so the attempt, to locate oneself. Just as a dog will make its way through the woods drinking out of the same hollows and puddles season after season, early man must have found himself choosing one path (around the bog, rather than through it) over another. And as some paths became preferable, some places desirable, others avoidable, a kind of mental mapping occurred.

Mental maps are made by bees doing their figure-eight dances to point their pals to the pollen, by dogs wandering far from and then returning to the suburban yards meant to confine them, and by you and me as we decide the most efficient way to cross town during rush hour. Our mental maps are often not terribly accurate, based as they are on our own selective experience, our knowledge and ignorance, and the information and misinformation we gain from others; nevertheless, these are the maps we depend on every day. The most efficient way across the city may not be the shortest; we might prefer what we believe to be a more scenic route, or a more familiar route, to the fastest. Our *sense* of a place is in many ways more important than objective fact. The impressions we carry of the house we

grew up in and the places where we played as children are more important to us than any mathematical measurements of them.

The Earth itself was never blank. In places (the oceans, deserts of sand, deserts of ice) it may have seemed so, but in many more it was, if anything, dauntingly full—of trees, shrubs, cactus, volcanoes, boulders, rapids, chasms, and mountains. As soon as man began to discover those things and to think and then communicate about them, those geographical features existed, both for each individual and for that person’s community, culture, or tribe, under an increasingly dense overlay of story. The earliest identifiable maps in many cultures, including those of Native Americans, Inuits, and Aboriginal Australians, were created and passed on orally. For Native Americans, myths, legends, and personal history were vitally connected to natural features of the earth, and for Australian Aboriginals, the land was traversed by song-lines, or paths of spiritual energy. In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael tells us Ahab is headed for a “particular set time and place” he calls the “Season-on-the-Line”: “There it was, too, that most of the deadly encounters with the white whale had taken place; there the waves were storied with his deeds.”

The blank page, then, is only *a* beginning, as opposed to *the* beginning.

Even after we mark the page, there are blanks beyond the borders of what we create, and blanks within what we create. Maps are defined by what they include but are often more revealing in what they exclude. Aboriginal Australians and people of the Middle East, among many others, mapped locally. They did not attempt to map the entire world or even the places where they knew others lived. They were placing themselves. A map of bicycle trails in DuPage County, Illinois, is clearly not obliged to include roads, or train tracks, or bus stops; in fact, to include those things might make it difficult to read the information a bicyclist most needs. But won’t cyclists want to know where they will cross roads, and how large or busy those roads

FIG. 5 (FOLLOWING SPREAD) AN AZTEC MAP OF THE
HACIENDA DE SANTA INÉS, MEXICO, MADE IN 1569. FOOTPRINTS INDICATE
ROADS; PLANTS AND SHEEP REPRESENT CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

are? Won't some cyclists want to know the nearest commuter train stations, parking lots, and restaurants? Whether dogs are allowed on the trails? Horses? And what does the map do about those trails that, inconveniently, wander beyond the county line, and back? A map of bicycle trails in DuPage County that includes nothing except those trails in that politically defined area might not be as useful as we had hoped.



He had brought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.

"What's the good of Mercator's North Pole and Equators,
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?"
So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply,
"They are all just conventional signs!"

Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes,
But we've got our brave Captain to thank"
(So the crew would protest) "that he's brought us the best
A perfect and absolute blank!"

— FROM "THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK," BY LEWIS CARROLL



BLANKS WITHIN THE borders of maps can represent many things, among them the deliberately withheld. While some explorers persuaded Native Americans to draw maps on paper, those documents were not always reliable—due not to the cartographer's ignorance, but to his distrust. The sorts of things worth mapping (hunting grounds, sacred sites) were too important to be passed on to a mere curious stranger. (Europeans, though frustrated, may

have understood this reluctance; their ships' logs and chartbooks were often weighted or kept in metal boxes so that, if a ship were overtaken, information regarding trade routes, winds and currents, and details of coastlines and harbors could be thrown overboard, and so kept safe from the enemy.* The oral "maps" of Australian Aboriginals, like the stick-and-shell navigational charts made by Marshall and Caroline Islanders, were encoded, as they contained privileged information. For that matter, a landlubber would be hard pressed to make much sense of the information contained on a modern navigational chart of the Chesapeake Bay. To learn how to read any map is to be indoctrinated into that mapmaker's culture.

Blanks can also represent what is known, but deemed unimportant in a particular context, for a particular map. While it's useful to know where public libraries are located, and while some bicyclists no doubt make use of public libraries, we wouldn't expect to find libraries on that map of county bike trails. More ominously, Native American tribal areas were not included on early European maps of the Americas, giving readers of those maps the impression no one lived there — at least, no one of consequence. No landowners. These are the kinds of blanks that fire Marlow's imagination in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* — the blanks that certain minds found to be a call for colonialism and conquest:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth.

These days we believe we're well aware of the dangers of the imperial mindset, but many would argue that the urge to fill blank spaces is fundamental to the quest for knowledge. A tolerance of blank spaces could be a sign that our aggressive ten-

* Mappable information is suppressed even today, for a variety of reasons often political, military, or financial. An article in the *Nation* about cigarette smuggling says of Portette, "The bawdy port is what one anthropologist who studied the region calls a 'phantom town'—it's not included on maps of the country and has had, until recently, few connections to the official structures of the Colombian government."

dencies are under control, but it might also be an indication of insufficient curiosity, or evidence of intense self-interest. The National Parks program is an effort to preserve a kind of blank, to keep land of natural or historic interest from being “developed” or “filled in.” These are blanks we’re not only willing but eager to maintain. Canadians argue that most U.S. citizens are appallingly ignorant of their northern neighbor, unable to name even half the provinces; that ignorance is another sort of blank, the product of geography, politics, economy, and national identity.



I love white space, love the telling omission . . .

. . . and find oddly depressing that which seems to have left out nothing.

— LOUISE GLÜCK



SOME OF THE most famous blanks on maps were filled with drawings — of sea serpents, dragons, griffins, hippogriffs, and freakishly exotic people. This was less a matter of encoding than a matter of decoration, but in some cases those drawings represented an earlier day’s urban myths — the tales sailors and explorers told one another and the people back home. Far from being viewed as worthless, such maps were prized; for a very long



FIG. 6

time, decorative or fanciful maps were at least as numerous as what we might call “practical” maps. In the Middle Ages, when Christian mapmakers drew up *mappaemundi* locating heaven and hell, they were, according to historian Alfred W. Crosby, making “a nonquantificational, nongeometrical attempt to supply information about what was near and what was far — and what was important and what unimportant. It is more like an expressionist portrait than an identification photo. It was for sinners, not navigators.” George H. T. Kimble adds, “The great majority of these *mappaemundi* are to be regarded as works of art and not of information. . . . [Their authors] would have branded any man a fool who might have supposed that he could determine the distance from London to Jerusalem by putting a ruler across a map.” Geographic features, peoples, and nations were omitted; in their place were spiritual landmarks.

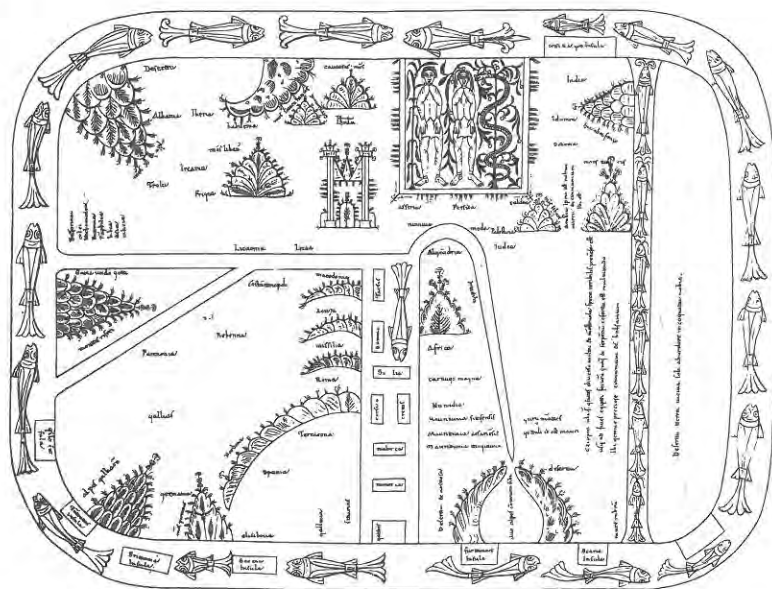


FIG. 7 A TWELFTH-CENTURY MAP MADE BY THE SPANISH MONK BEATUS OF VALCAVADO TO ILLUSTRATE HIS COMMENTARY ON THE APOCALYPSE. EUROPE IS AT THE LOWER LEFT; THE GARDEN OF EDEN, INCLUDING ADAM AND EVE, IS AT THE TOP

The believers who valued such maps included a great number of pilgrims, who found they needed a different sort of document to lead them on their physical journeys. Their pilgrimages, along with the need for accurate navigational charts, instigated a return to practical mapping that eventually led eighteenth-century French cartographer Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville to take a radical stance, renouncing decorations, and leaving blanks in their stead: "To destroy false notions, without even going any further, is one of the ways to advance knowledge." Some of his countrymen began to call themselves "scientific cartographers." As one introductory text puts it, "fanciful fripperies" were abandoned in the interest of stern science. (That phrase "fanciful fripperies" recalls Mark Twain's attack on James Fenimore Cooper's romantic

novels. Realism, Twain argued, is superior because its world is more nearly our own.) Thanks to Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville and his colleagues, a blank on a map became a symbol of rigorous standards; the presence of absences lent authority to all on the map that was unblank.

The logical end to such a scientific approach would be a comprehensive map of a verified world. In *A Universal History of Infamy*, Jorge Luis Borges describes such a map:

In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point.

But even that map includes only surfaces; there would be no indication of the layers of rock under the soil, or the soil under water. It would not include the migratory paths of birds or the echo of boys' voices. As Denis Wood notes in his provocative book *The Power of Maps*, to argue that sounds and smells are difficult to map, that a map is primarily visual, only underscores our acceptance of the conventions of maps — among them that maps are fixed in time and include only features considered relatively permanent.*

In the novel *A Mapmaker's Dream*, James Cowan imagines the attempt of Fra Mauro, an actual fifteenth-century cartographer, to draw what he hopes will be a definitive map of the world, based not only on existing maps but on the stories of travelers from around the world. He learns that there are an infinite number of

* Of course, our sense of what is permanent is constantly changing. In the nineteenth century, maps often indicated watering holes for horses. Today we define our location relative to roads, despite the fact that we see them being rerouted every day. It wasn't so long ago that roads and trails, packed dirt paths from one place to another, seemed arbitrary, not nearly as permanent as waterfalls or boulders. Where I live, deeds still turn up, occasionally, defining the boundaries of a family's land in terms of natural features—a creek, a live oak. Constant as they once seemed, the creek dried up a generation ago, and the oak has long since turned to fireplace ash.



ways to depict reality. As the magnitude of this realization settles in, he writes, "My map absorbs me with what it does not reveal." Later, despite or because of his efforts to be comprehensive, he tells us, "I am left with a sense of existing in an unfathomable void, surrounded by blankness."

Whatever a map's attitude toward blanks within its borders, virtually everything is left off of a map—and must be for a map to be useful. "No map can show everything," Denis Wood argues. "Could it, it would no more than reproduce the world, which, without the map, we already have. It is only its selection from the world's overwhelming richness that justifies the map."



Had you followed Captain Ahab down into his cabin . . . you would have seen him go to a locker in the transom, and bringing out a large wrinkled roll of yellowish sea charts, spread them before him on his screwed-down table. Then seating himself before it, you would have seen him intently study the various lines and shadings which there met his eye; and with slow but steady pencil trace additional courses over spaces that before were blank. . . .

While thus employed, the heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his head, continually rocked with the motion of the ship, and for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead.

IN *MOBY-DICK*, the whale is a blank on which Ahab writes his own story; Ahab's quest for the whale is the blank upon which Ishmael writes his.

FIG. 8 (PREVIOUS SPREAD) FRA MAURO'S *MAPPAMUNDI*, 1459. MAURO'S MAP, ORIENTED WITH SOUTH AT THE TOP, AND DENSE WITH DRAWINGS AND TEXT, REPRESENTS THE TRANSITION FROM MEDIEVAL MAPPING, WHICH PRESENTED AS MUCH CHRISTIAN DOGMA AS GEOGRAPHY, TO THE SCIENTIFIC MAPPING OF THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

The blank of the unwritten is the challenge we've chosen to face. We face it because, like explorers of the physical world, we want to know more about where—and why, and how—we live. We face it because we are, in some way, both inspired by and unsatisfied by what we know and what we've read. "Everything I have written up to now is trifling," Anton Chekhov told a friend, well into his career, "compared to that which I would like to write. I am displeased and bored with everything now being written, while everything in my head interests, moves, and excites me." Blanks of the unwritten include stories and poems we never commit to paper or are reluctant to write (too autobiographical; too distant from our own experience; too much like other pieces we've written; too unlike what we think of as "our" writing; etc.) and pieces we abandon midprocess, but also characters who fail to materialize, emotions that go unevoked, significant actions allowed to play out offstage—all the omissions of work we think of as unfinished, or insufficiently developed. When we drafted, a timid voice said, "Don't go there."

In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe characterized writers as "putter-inners" like himself (who legendarily sent his editor Maxwell Perkins trunks of manuscript pages) or "leaver-outers" like Fitzgerald, whose *The Great Gatsby* is a brilliant example of selection and compression, creating the illusion that much more is shown than we actually see. As Wolfe argued, however, those categories—like all categories, like all tautologies—are oversimplified:

Now you have your way of doing something and I have mine, there are a lot of ways, but you are honestly mistaken in thinking that there is a "way." I suppose I would agree with you in what you say about "the novel of selected incident" so far as it means anything. I say so far as it means anything because every novel, of course, is a novel of selected incident. You couldn't write about the inside of a telephone booth without selecting . . . a great writer is not only a leaver-outer but also a putter-inner.

The need for selection means that every story contains, and is surrounded by, blank spaces, some more significant than others. When we create a fictional world, our decisions include geography, or setting, but also where and when a narrative begins and ends, who it involves and who it doesn't, which actions and conversations are deemed worthy of inclusion and which aren't. In a surprising number of novels, the characters are effectively jobless; they have been granted psychic vacations from work by the author.



FIG. 9 THE WASHINGTON, D.C., METRO RAIL SYSTEM MAP: A WAY FINDER

Their occupations might be named, but they have no employers, no colleagues, no pressing work-related obligations; which is to say, they live in a world very different from that of most readers. (Long ago, bent over one of the blue-spined books I read the moment they entered the house, I noted that the Hardy boys, unfettered by schoolwork, lived in an endless teenage vacation.) In other novels, characters have no parents, no aunts or uncles, no grandparents; they celebrate no birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays. While we are often invited to watch characters copulate, we less often watch them defecate (an observation, not a complaint), and relatively few if any words are devoted to the nearly half of each day they spend sleeping and eating, dressing and undressing, trimming their nails, paying their bills. All of which is to say, even epic novels are silent about much in their characters' lives. Short stories and poems are, correspondingly, surrounded by even more blank space.

Readers may not think of those absences. We read an entire novel in which no historical or national events are mentioned, and (if the illusion succeeds) we accept the omissions. In this country, particularly in the past few decades, many writers have examined the domestic world to the exclusion of social and political issues. In "Stalking the Billion-footed Beast," Tom Wolfe argues that the only hope for the future of the American novel is a Zolaesque naturalism in which the novelist becomes reporter—a technique well illustrated, he asserts, by his own *Bonfire of the Vanities*. But no matter how much we attempt to record, every novel has its absences. As in a magic trick, the reader's attention must be deftly steered, the reader persuaded the world of the story is full, or complete, despite all that's missing. When the illusion is unsuccessful, the reader is aware of the absence, distracted by what he wants to know.

One of the great breakthroughs of urban mapping was the work of Henry Beck, who in 1933 invented the Way Finder for the London Underground. Until then, the map of the underground was "accurate"—it preserved the direction and distance of the

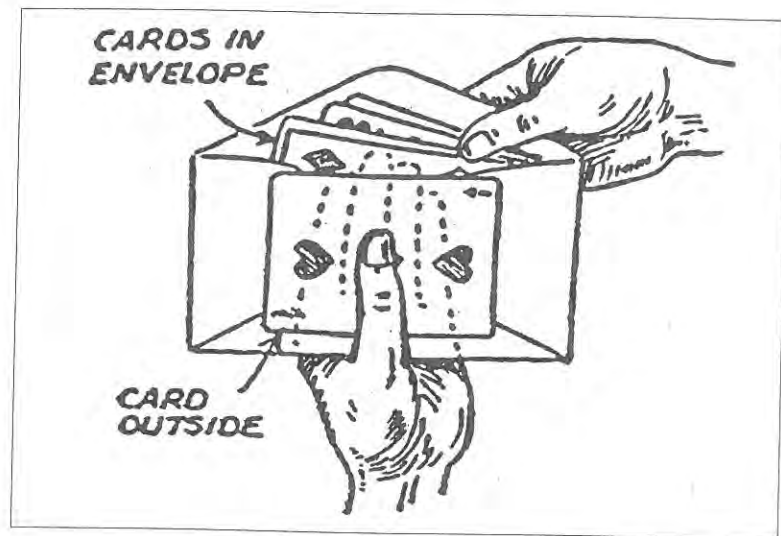


FIG. 10 DISINFORMATION DESIGN: AN ILLUSION REVEALED,
IN AN ILLUSTRATION DEPICTING TEN LAYERS OF DEPTH

train lines, listing the stops and intermediate neighborhoods. The problem was, the density of information made it almost impossible to read. Beck understood that what riders wanted to know was which trains stopped where, in what order. He color coded the lines and drew them at neat angles, ignoring precise distances and directions, omitting virtually everything except for the names of the stations. The Way Finder, which has been adopted by transportation systems around the world, is a demonstration of the usefulness of leaving maps blank, as well as evidence that the most accurate map, and the most detailed map, is not necessarily the best map.

As writers, no matter whether our tendency is toward expansion or compression, we must gauge what to leave blank, and why. We need to be sure to choose our blanks, rather than simply omit parts of the fictional world that seem too large or complicated or bothersome to include. In realistic fiction, we need to be par-

ticularly wary of unintentional voids in our characters' perceptions and thoughts. It is easier to write about a simpler world, one in which characters don't think about, don't imagine, everything we think about and imagine. The trouble is, unless we're writing the book for a Broadway musical, such a world is distractingly, disappointingly artificial. The challenge is to create a fictional world that is realistically complex. Then we need to create such a persuasive whole that the reader isn't distracted by the necessary absences. In *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative*, Edward R. Tufte discusses what he calls "disinformation design," and notes, "Magicians are preoccupied with . . . viewing angles, which make the difference between a successful deception and a disastrous exposure." We might resist thinking of our work as deception, but to the extent that we ask our readers to believe in people, places, and events called into being by inky squiggles on paper, we aspire to a kind of magic.

All earthly experience is partial. Not simply because it is subjective, but because that which we do not know, of the universe, of mortality, is so much more vast than that which we do know. What is unfinished or has been destroyed participates in these mysteries. The problem is to make a whole that does not forfeit this power.

— LOUISE GLÜCK

SAPPHO'S POEMS, or what we refer to as her poems, are, with few exceptions, fragments, and so both full of and surrounded by blanks. In Mary Barnard's translations, we're given the perfectly clear and plausibly complete—

Am I still sad
because of my
lost maidenhead?