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**Geography and vision: seeing, imagining and representing the world**


In *Geography and Vision*, Denis Cosgrove takes up the concept of human geography to explore the power and place of visual knowledge in the geographical imagination within the Western tradition. Superbly written and profusely illustrated, this book unfolds a historical review of landscape and maps with close connections made between pictorial image and vision.

With the exception of the introductory essay and chapter 12, the book is based on lectures delivered around the world, chapters from other books, and conference papers produced between 1995 and 2006, which have been altered to meet the essay format of the collection.

*Geography and Vision* has a loosely structured chronology through a series of wide-ranging topics which are broadly divided into three major themes. The first one explores a historical consideration of the role of vision and imagination within geography (Chapters One, Two, Three and Four). Starting with a sketch of a historical and disciplinary framework of geographic and cosmological visions, the meanings of cosmography and its relations to geographical and astronomical knowledge is explored in great detail. According to this sketch, geography was the central science in the first period of European oceanic navigation and colonization. Landscape visions were discovered and gardened in diverse and complex ways over the course of the sixteenth century. ‘Extra-terrestrial geography’ (Chapter One) offers a fascinating insight into ways that landscape was organised in a social, gendered, corporeal and cultural hierarchy widely recognised in the Renaissance as a dimension of Europe’s imperial embodiment. Meanwhile, landscape was discussed through metaphors of the garden and gardening in which the Europeans’ imaginative domestication of a new and global spatiality was most dramatically located and embodied. The essay of ‘Mapping Arcadia’ in Chapter Two draws on the deep historical connection between cartography and imagination as a cognitive and creative process. ‘Gardening the Renaissance world’ (in Chapter Two), the author moves the locus of discussion across the Atlantic to examine ways in which landscape ideas have been played out in the early and continued shaping of space and nature in the United States. In the essays of ‘The morphological eye’ and ‘Ruskin’s European visions’ (Chapter Four), the emphasis is placed on John Ruskin’s vision of the natural world and his influence on continental Europe.

The second major theme is addressed in ‘Cartographic visions’ (Chapter Five): the reciprocal relations between cartography and geographical vision which is introduced by Ruskin’s use of maps. It depicts the changes in the way we think of cartography as a practice, and maps as instruments, and the entire history of cartography as a struggle to realise a status for the map. The connections between the rhetoric of urban cartography and utopian visions from the Renaissance to today’s flexible digital mapping are explored in the cases of urban mapping.

The third theme of the book focuses on the metageographical features at the global scale (Chapter Six). The essay ‘Seeing the Pacific’ is on the American conception of the Pacific as the cultural and geopolitical vision of America as a nation. Furthermore the second essay ‘Seeing the Equator’ expands to the dimension of equator’s geography, a region marked by natural features as dramatic and by places as distinct as any on Earth. This essay seeks to express a cultural geography of a globally significant place – Equator, which cannot be seen and yet is the stuff of diverse geographical visions: an absent presence, a powerful reminder of images and vision.
Being derived from various origins, this book does not have a continuous narrative or theoretical development, though the broadness of this book reaches beyond any narrow disciplinary definition of geography and enriches the understanding of environment, culture and meaning from the contemporary interchange of disciplinary perspectives. Throughout the chapters, it is apparent that the author has been greatly influenced by the nineteenth-century art critic and social commentator John Ruskin. Concentrating on Ruskin’s writing and his use of maps, the author traced Ruskin’s thoughtful and passionate scrutiny of landscape, culture and modernity, though some of Ruskin’s ideas may seem quaintly old-fashioned nowadays.

In Cosgrove’s essays, it is not easy to discern an obvious methodology to analyse the relationship between geography and vision apart from the narrative of landscape evolution worldwide. To some extent, the essays are structured by a hypothesis about geography and vision, which is worked through a set of arguments and cases. The book is more like a collection of Cosgrove’s personal reflections on the intricate connection between seeing, imagining and representing. Landscape and map, the two geographical words appearing as conceptual pillars in this collection of essays, remain ambiguous in the ways of understanding their interaction between reality and imagination. The interaction of landscape and map could, perhaps, have been strengthened through a line of reasoning to unravel the mystery playing under the cover of geographical vision, and perhaps the complexity of seeing, imagining and representing could be more clearly communicated through case studies.

In terms of broadness and comprehensiveness, this is a thoroughly-researched book. The citations draw on a very broad literature, as is shown in the notes detailing the sources of particular concepts and oft-repeated quotations from the classical works of artists, poets and architects, which diversify our understanding of geography in the ancient world. I read the book with the benefit of some knowledge of geography and urban form, but had given little thought to the complexities of cosmography. For me, this was an extremely informative and helpful book. It explains some of the basics of powers embodied in geographical space and means of analysis.

Geography and vision deserves to be read widely. It is fascinating at both intellectual and academic levels. For those scholars without a significant knowledge of geography, the book offers a solid grounding for their further exploration. The quality of the scholarship and Cosgrove’s eye for details opens up new perspectives. It will be a key point of reference for scholars across the arts, architecture and humanities for years to come.