PLACES AND SPACES: MAPPING SCIENCE EXHIBIT AT MCPL

by Julie Smith & Bryan Hook

This May at the Monroe County Public Library, the Places & Spaces: Mapping Science exhibit presents an inspiring combination of science and art. The exhibit features maps of mankind's scholarly activity generated from large scale scholarly datasets. Scientists, software developers, graphic designers, and artists collaborated to render abstract information into images that provide insight - not just visual eye candy.

"Geographic maps have guided mankind's explorations for centuries. They enabled the discovery of new worlds while also marking territories inhabited by unknown monsters. Just like old sea charts, maps of science help people navigate the world of scholarly activities," said Dr. Katy Börner, Associate Professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University and one of the curators of Places & Spaces.

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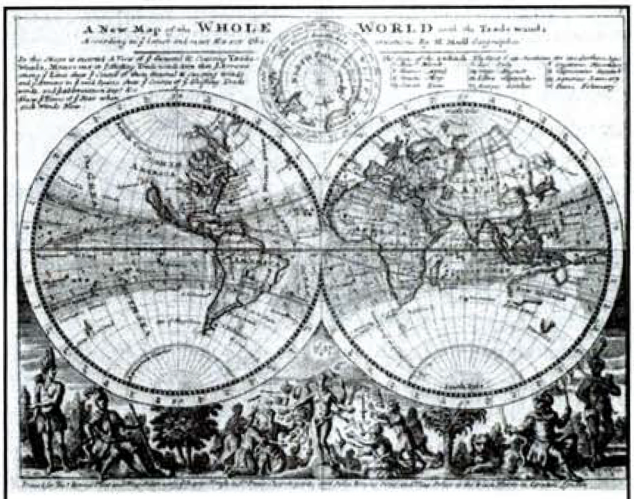
Maps of science help researchers to objectively identify major research areas, experts, institutions, collections, grants, papers, journals and ideas. More localized maps can provide details of a specific area and show its homogeneity or relative speed of growth. Patterns, trends, or outliers can be easily spotted. The old adage is true—a picture is worth a thousand words.

The display at the Monroe County Public Library features the first two of ten iterations of Places & Spaces, entitled "The Power of Maps" and "The Power of Reference Systems." The first iteration compares and contrasts early maps of science with early maps of the world. "Note that each of the six early maps of science displayed here uses a different metaphor," reads the information panel in the first iteration of maps. "We are interested in inspiring a discussion about which metaphors will be most effective in designing a visual index of mankind's knowledge."

The second iteration goes on to investigate existing and potential reference systems for scientific knowledge. This sequence begins with four familiar reference systems - the periodic table, a frequency chart, a sky chart of stars, and the more traditional cartographic map - contrasted with one-dimensional timelines, two-dimensional graphs and circular, geospatial, and topical reference systems for charting the structure and evolution of science.

The exhibit also features an Illuminated Diagram display by W. Bradford Paley, Kevin Boyack, John Burgoon, Peter Kennard, and Richard Klavans, Worldprocessor globes by Ingo Günther, and hands-on science maps for kids with paintings by Fileve Palmer. The exhibit opening was May 4th from 4 to 6pm and included "The Story of Science Maps," a talk by Dr. Katy Börner and light refreshments.

Kids can visualize science too! From now until May 10th, Places & Spaces is accepting drawings from kids ages 4-15 for a Kids Drawing Contest. Young artists are invited to draw their favorite science experiment or scientist and write a story about their work. An awards ceremony honoring contest winners will be held Friday, May 18th, from 4:00 – 6:00 pm. The first 25 entries receive free ice cream from Chocolate Moose. Winners get a one year membership to Wonderlab, a Science Experiments Kit and a Science Encyclopedia. Flyers can be found around town, or online at http://scimaps.org/.



This map, by Herman Moll, is a hand colored engraved double hemisphere map of the whole world featuring California as an island, a popular misconception at the time. At the turn of the 17th century, Herman Moll was the most famous map publisher in England. Moll's maps often include innovative details such as roads and distances between towns; and symbols, for example swords to mark the scenes of famous battles, and other notable events in human history. Moll was charismatic and had interesting friends including Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift (he provided maps for Robinson Carusoe and for Gulliver's Travels).

Places & Spaces is curated by Dr. Katy Börner and Julie Smith, School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University. The exhibit also receives input from the Advisory Board listed on the website. Margaret Harter, Community Relations for MCPL, is the adviser for the MCPL exhibit.

Places & Spaces is sponsored by the Cyberinfrastructure for Network Science Center, University Information Technology Services, and the School of Library and Information Science, at Indiana University; National Science Foundation awards IIS-0238261 and CHE-0524661, and Thomson Scientific. Much of the data used to generate the science maps is from Thomson Scientific.