Modern Philosophy, departing from the works of Immanuel Kant, has incorporated the idea that human comprehension is founded, a priori, by subjective perceptions of space and time. Experiencing the tangible world leads to the rise and consolidation of knowledge, and should occur in a cognitive environment in which such perceptions are the fundamental references. It is in this sense that we may be defined as beings who intrinsically perceive a reality framed in dimensions of time and space.

Nonetheless, long before the advent of Kant’s philosophical system in the XVIII century, human minds had already prompted their own imaginary colonization of space. In this enterprise, descriptive talents have always been associated with the power of imagination. Is not ultimately the very idea of a map somehow dependent on a simulated point of view not evidenced by the ordinary experience?

Undoubtedly, Cartography can be considered as one of the first and most important cognitive human endeavors. The cartographic impetus addresses both the desire to know where one is, and the imaginative leap to gauge the extent of the world. Such drive is recognizable in the magnificent image recorded on Saint Isidore of Seville’s Etymologiae, written in the first half of the VII century: a map of a type “T” and “O”, in which the three parts of the world are represented: Europe, Asia and Africa, that one being the oldest picture of this exhibition.

It has been a long time we do not see or imagine the world the way Saint Isidore of Seville did. However, on deeper, essential level we are close to his view: our space representations are moved by acts of imagination and reveal cultural, intellectual and scientific habits, through which times defines the modern canons of spatiality. Each map merges in itself a combination of forms of representation and knowledge. That applies to Johann Schnitzer’s planisphere from 1486, which added to Ptolemy’s classic map the directions of the wind blown by the wind deities. It also includes the cartographical map devised by Pedro Torquato Xavier de Brito, from 1862, followed by a statistical information board about Brazil.

Therefore, there is no representation of space without imagination not displaying its art. Imagination is even present on Delarochette’s notable map from 1807, dedicated to pure description and registry, in which the main goal is to provide information with as much accuracy as possible. There is no room for fantasy on the map, except, perhaps, the belief that a country can be displayed choreographically, with no allusions other than to what space “naturally” exhibits.

More than a multidisciplinary art, cartography is a matter of beauty. More than affecting our desire to know and represent the world, the art of cartography touches the sense and the sensibility of our aesthetic emotions. With the Historica Cartographica Brasilis in Biblioteca Nacional, the National Library not only presents a part of its extraordinary collections, but also demonstrates that the exercise of imagination over space – in other words Cartography –, is a way of world making of its own. By showing some fragments of this art, the National Library reveals itself as a universe that contains countless other universes.

**Renato Lessa**

**National Library’s President**