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Introduction

The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature and Mapping in Postwar America

Monica Manolescu and Will Norman

This interdisciplinary issue on ‘The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature and Mapping in Post-War America’ starts from two intellectual premises: the first one consists in acknowledging the relevance of cartography and mapping as modes of aesthetic representation and critical thinking in the United States after 1945, and the second consists in asserting the fruitful insights that can be gained by discussing postwar American literature and art together from the point of view of their common interest in cartography. This issue thus presents an interdisciplinary dialogue between American art and literature thanks to the choice of a third term, ‘mapping’, which provides a clear thematic orientation and also a theoretical and critical framework to the various contributions.

The articles published here were presented at the international conference ‘The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature, and Mapping in the United States, 1945-1980’ organized in Paris in 2018 and supported by funding from the Terra Foundation for American Art. The conference brought together scholars and practitioners in American literature, visual art, cinema and beyond, who reflected on the role played by strategies and metaphors of mapping in the constructions, reconfigurations and displacements of American space in writing and artistic form.

The concept of ‘cartographic imagination’ builds on the definition of maps as constructive systems and highlights the connection between maps and the imagination in various ways: by alluding to the fact that maps are the result of imaginative processes just as

they are the result of scientific procedures; by suggesting that maps invite the imagination to operate and to act upon them even if they appear as immutable and unalterable objects; by indicating that art and literature can be understood as forms of mapping that develop specific ways of reflecting on space and its representations. Gilles A. Tiberghien, in a book devoted to the study of ‘cartographic imaginations and imaginaries,’ starts from Nelson Goodman’s pronouncement that ‘inadequacy is intrinsic to cartography’ (15) and defines this inadequacy to space and referentiality as a creative premise. Mapping is thus understood as inextricably linked to creativity, to a certain latitude which is fundamental in the shaping and construction of the map. The ‘cartographic imagination’ clearly signals the departure from an understanding of the map as neutral, objective, mimetic and purely scientific in order to embrace the map as an ambiguous construction shaped by the imagination and also by the values and ideologies of the authorities that produce it.

The creative and the ideological dimensions of the map that have become prominent over the past decades have completely changed an older paradigm that associated maps and map-making with absolute epistemological and representational accuracy and transparency. With the advent of critical cartography, the map is no longer understood as a representation of the world, but rather as a ‘proposition about the world’ that ‘makes arguments’, while map-makers become ‘selective creators of a world’ (Wood 2010: 39-51). In the shift from ‘a representation of the world’ to ‘a proposition’, ‘arguments’ and ‘a world’, what comes to the fore is the idea of a tentative rather than a definitive assertion made in a given context. The manipulative power of the map has also been highlighted by geographers, like Mark Monmonier in *How to Lie with Maps*, which examines maps in contexts of political propaganda (the Cold War) and commercial propaganda as well (advertising). The ‘ambivalence’ of cartography thus becomes apparent (Besse and Tiberghien: 12), which has led some to

denounce its manipulative rhetoric and political complicity, but also to celebrate its huge potential for creative and subversive appropriation in the retelling of alternative histories.

Although critical cartography emerged in the 1980s, it should be placed in historical perspective as part of a critical reflection that had started much earlier in the fields of geography and cartography, especially in the United States (Crampton and Krygier: 19-24). Interestingly, while the supreme moment of critique of cartography from within the field of geography can be traced to the 1980s, such theorizations that lay bare the premises of map-making are predated by a whole series of reflections on cartography that can be found in American literature and art as far back as the nineteenth century (in literature in particular) and then more significantly after World War II.

J. B. Harley's article 'Deconstructing the Map' (1989), which is one of the seminal pieces of critical cartography, offers a particularly cogent discussion of maps as contested representations. Harley embraces Foucault's theories about the interdependence of knowledge, culture and power to view the map and cartography as 'objects of deconstruction' (1) which should be exposed as tools of colonial expansion, domination, surveillance and control. The nature of cartography comes into question at the initiative of geographers and cartographers themselves. Harley does not urge cartographers to give up cartography because of its ethically dubious complicity, but rather invites cartographers to escape 'normative models of cartography' and 'to allow new ideas to come in' (2). These 'new ideas' take first and foremost the form of an exercise in reflexivity: by decoding the map as embedded in ideologies, the cartographer acknowledges the role of map making in perpetuating and promoting practices that are legitimized and made possible by these ideologies, primarily colonialism. Beyond the important issue of colonialism, Harley's examination of the most widespread and banal maps (American road atlases) reaches unexpected conclusions: these 'mass-produced and stereotyped images' are shown to 'express a social vision' (14). They promote a certain vision

of America which affects Americans' perception of their country through their simplified rendering of infrastructure and their obliteration of 'landscape' and 'context' (14). Harley condemns road atlases as 'empty images' that need to be reassessed and reconsidered in order to become what he calls 'agents of change' (14). In this notion of change lies the potential for evolution that cartography carries. By suggesting that cartography can change as a discipline, Harley argues that this new cartography can affect social and cultural perceptions in a radical way. Harley's reading of Foucault (which he prefers to Derrida, since he considers the latter's undecidability paralyzing and inefficient) goes hand in hand with the striking idea (not developed in his article) that the power of cartography is reversible and transferable to non-conventional users and map-makers. In his conclusion, Harley adopts a constructive attitude, suggesting that the effort of deconstruction should be seen in a positive light as an attempt at reconstruction: 'By dismantling we build' (15).

This dialectical relation between dismantling and building in relation to mapping that Harley formulated in 1989 can be seen at work well before critical cartography emerged in the 1980s, in the work of artists and writers who adopt a reflexive attitude towards mapping and recreate both the processes and results of mapping in their work. Also, Harley's pronouncement sounds particularly apt in the context of the democratization of cartography and the emergence of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Cartography became 'unbound' and opened up to alternative communities of map-makers who are not professional cartographers (Pinder). Counter-mapping strategies have thrived over the past four decades and various community atlases have been produced, some of them in the United States, which have attempted to put silenced histories, toponymies and marginalized groups on the map (Solnit 2010, 2013 and 2016; Bhagat and Mogel 2010). Harley's complaint that American road atlases are 'anonymized' and suppress the richness of experience, landscape and history receives an adequate response from all these forms of counter-mapping that have succeeded in reinventing

the practice of cartography and making space precisely for those obliterated histories. The entanglement of mapping and politics becomes more and more prominent in recent examples of counter-mapping, that address the question of who and what is left out of the map, for example refugees and minority groups of different kinds. It can be noted that there is a convergence of visual and literary representations in certain examples of counter-mapping (the atlases directed by Solnit), which puts forth a larger, more fluid and interdisciplinary reconfiguration of cartography of a collective nature.

A certain number of critical cartographers have devoted a considerable amount of energy to attempts at cataloguing what they call ‘map art’, that is examples of maps in art and artists adopting procedures of mapping, from the beginning of the 20th century to the contemporary period (Wood and Krygier 2006; Caquard et al. 2009). The term ‘map art’ circumscribes an area of cultural representations at the intersection of visual arts and cartography from the perspective of cartographers. Geographers’ interest in art has also led to the organization of exhibitions in important institutional spaces such as *The Power of Maps* exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt – the Smithsonian Design Museum in New York in 1992. Concurrently, art historians and curators have also been busy exploring the topic of art and mapping in a variety of museums and exhibition spaces all over the world: *Cartes et figures de la terre* at the Centre Pompidou (1980), *Mapping* at the MoMA (1994), *Orbis Terrarum. Ways of Worldmaking* at the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp (2000), *Global Navigation System* at the Palais de Tokyo (2003), *Atlas Critique* at the Center of contemporary art - Parc Saint Léger (2012). Lavishly illustrated books addressed to larger audiences have been published, seeking to document the presence of maps in contemporary art (Harmon 2010). Academic scholarship on the dialogue between art and mapping (including American art) has grown steadily, produced both by art historians (O’Rourke 2013, Dryansky 2017) and philosophers (Casey 2005, Tiberghien 2007).

In Europe, artistic interest in the appropriation of maps became manifest with the avant-gardes. The *Surrealist Map of the World*, published in 1929 in the Belgian journal *Variétés* is a case in point. Dynamic processes of walking and mapping, in particular in urban contexts, are deployed by the Surrealists and later by the Situationists, with distinct agendas and objectives. In American art, it is especially in the 1960s that the map and mapping become privileged forms and procedures for artists from a variety of horizons and lineages (Manolescu 2018). Prior to this moment of climactic intersection in the 1960s, it can be claimed that American nineteenth-century landscape painting and photography also elaborated a reflection on land surveying in the context of Westward expansion. Similarly, in terms of periodization, in American literature, preoccupations with cartography are manifest in the work of the canonical writers of the mid-nineteenth century, like Melville and Thoreau, the latter being a professional surveyor (Nègre 2019).

Jasper Johns' map paintings from the 1960s demonstrate the artist's engagement with ubiquitous representations that carry huge symbolic meaning and that are usually taken for granted, used without critical distance or reflexivity (flags, maps, numbers, targets). Johns' paintings announce the interest of Pop art in popular objects and images combined with an expressionist execution. Other artists like Claes Oldenburg transposed maps to the field of sculpture, which was expanding and mutating at the time. His soft maps (for instance *Soft Manhattan Number 1 – Postal Zones*, 1966) undermined, through the use of a soft material (stenciled canvas filled with kapok), the conceptual rigidity of the grid and, ultimately, of cartography itself.

Starting in the 1960s, American conceptual artists and Land artists opted for various performative scenarios involving walking, following, mock sightseeing, and driving (as the article on Oppenheim shows), in which the exploratory process was supplemented by actual maps showing itineraries and locations. Robert Smithson's *Monuments of Passaic* (1967)

replayed the rituals of the Grand Tour in the entropic landscapes of suburbia, while Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969) adopted procedures of following strangers in the streets of New York, remotely reminiscent of Surrealist games. In all of these, the map is submitted to various gestures of alteration (cutting, folding, reshaping), adapted to specific aesthetic projects that seek to redefine the nature of the work of art and to rethink representations and material objects in relation to processes. The function of traditional exhibition spaces (the museum and the gallery) was radically transformed: artists preferred unconventional spaces in urban, suburban or remote natural environments, and maps often served to show locations, to materialize lines that connect points, to suggest a tension between the site and the gallery. Smithson's theoretical reflections on the dialectic of site and non-site moves away from the tradition of landscape painting and adopts instead the alternative of a "representation without resemblance" of the site, in which the map plays a major role. The map, then, functions as an important instrument and model in rethinking representation and experimenting with new possibilities of artistic expression. For other artists, the map is significant in terms of a critique of systemic forms of spatial and social organization, for instance in Gordon Matta-Clark's *Reality Properties* (1974), in which maps are included in a critique of urban planning, of the grid, of surveying, of bureaucracy and of the idea of property itself in the context of New York City in the 1970s. For artists like Vito Acconci (*Voice of America*, 1975), maps and grids are part of a critique of the constructs of Americanness and their dissemination during the Cold War.

Although maps do sometimes appear in American works of fiction or non-fiction (Thoreau's *Walden*, Nabokov's *Invitation of a Memory*) or in relation to them (Faulkner's map of Yoknapatawpha), the verbal medium of literature allows for an operation of transposition of the hybrid system of the map into words, narrative and metaphor. The visual character of the map makes it more easily transferable to the visual arts, but operations of translation

accommodate and reinvent the possibilities of mapping in the case of literature. The primacy of space in the construction of American national identity becomes forcefully apparent in nineteenth-century American literature, with emphasis on the ambiguities of surveying in the case of Thoreau, the tension between national and global frameworks, as is the case with Melville (Tally), and an interplay between place, geography and writing in African American literature (Madera). Questions of scale were crucial in the cultural debates of the nineteenth century, which were dominated by ideas of expansion and exploration that demanded articulations of the local and the global, home and elsewhere as these locations shifted and evolved (Hsu). These articulations echoed in the 20th century in Cold War contexts (science fiction literature) and also in transnational contexts (Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada or Ardour: A Family Chronicle*, 1969). Major eighteenth and nineteenth-century American myths and figures of surveying and organizing space were later revisited in twentieth-century American literature (Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*, 1989, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon*, 1997). Maps, guidebooks and orientation/disorientation are central to the predominantly urban spaces of literary modernism and remain central in many American texts of the postwar period (Bulson).

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the mapping procedures of a number of postwar American artists and similar procedures represented in postwar American fiction. The emphasis on road trips, highways and the exploratory possibilities of infrastructure is present in both American literature and art. Robert Smithson was an avid reader of Beat literature, science fiction and novels by Nabokov, and his road trips by car or bus across the United States and across the frontier into Mexico can be interpreted alongside the fiction of the Beat generation and emblematic road novels such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). Tony Smith's nocturnal revelation on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike in the early 1950s led him to recognize the aesthetic potential of movement and also to celebrate amorphous landscapes without cultural precedent, which are definitely reminiscent

of Kerouac's and Nabokov's novels. A reflection on the American specificity of such sites in relation to European landscapes and monuments is thus developed concomitantly in both literature and art at the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, in an interdisciplinary dialogue with transatlantic resonance. Such enlargements of perspective and tensions in cultural and spatial scales help us place American literature and art within larger frameworks and are instrumental in a 'global remapping' (Giles) that operates in transnational rather than simply in national contexts.

Finally, that ethical question of mapping the silenced and the marginalized that we have mentioned in relation to critical cartography is also visible in postwar American literature, which elaborates its own reflection on the topic. The so called 'emptiness' of certain American spaces (Harding) is addressed by a whole series of writers who seek to correlate voice and mapping, who render, in writing, the human texture of the 'anonymized maps' that Harley criticized. The constructive, reparatory and compensatory function of literary mapping thus comes to the fore and enables the creation of a space of 'recognition' ('recognition' being a word that Olson uses in 'Projective Verse', as Herd and Collis point out).

Creative practices (literature and art) and the humanities need to propose a reflection on the role of the intellectual (writer, artist, academic) in today's world, and to articulate that reflection with an actual practice of raising awareness to various concerning issues like the environment and the politics of migration. Maps and mapping are incredibly powerful tools in the process of combining a reflection on representing space with the ethical questioning of issues such as spatial politics and the Anthropocene.

It would be extremely interesting to pursue the analysis elaborated here and focus exclusively on contemporary material in order to examine the increased relevance of mapping for environmental issues discussed in literature and art, and the emergence of digital mapping as well. Digital cartography, maps and the digital humanities, the democratization of

cartography through GIS, locational media, everyday uses of digital maps are important concerns, which should be understood within a larger historical perspective, as inscribed in previous mapping practices, but also breaking away from them.

Our collection begins with an essay by David Herd and Stephen Collis which conceptualizes the period covered by this special issue by recognizing and conjoining two inaugural moments of significance for the US cartographic imagination in the mid-twentieth century: a new understanding of the spatiality of the category of the human, betokened by the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and the dawn of an intensified phase in the long history of the Anthropocene. By reading mid-century developments in American literature and political philosophy by figures such as Hannah Arendt and Charles Olson alongside more recent considerations of the impact of capitalism on climate change and mass migration, Herd and Collis make a powerful case for a cartographic imagination that might 'make space for the human' by conceiving of a space beyond the reaches of both Capital and the state.

Federico Italiano's essay also reconsiders the post-1945 period through developments in the way space was imagined. For him, the onset of the Cold War produced a contradictory tension between claustrophobia and claustrophilia in relation to space. The essay traces this tension through an investigation into the deployment of maps in a range of US science fiction, from Mordecai Roshwald's 1959 novel *Level 7* to John Carpenter's 1981 film *Escape from New York*. The figure of the map, repeatedly figured as an emblem of incarceration and mass violence, emerges as a means by which we can grasp unrecognized components of Cold War ideology. These first two essays, then, occupy and elucidate the Utopian and dystopian poles of the cartographic imagination as it took shape in the American post-war era.

With Christopher Ketcham's essay on Dennis Oppenheim, we shift away from the more synoptic perspectives offered by the first two essays towards a more focused analysis of

the work of an artist who took particular interest in mapping. Oppenheim's work from the late 1960s shows the artist building on the proprietary claims that many have seen as implicit in the practice of cartography, opening up the aesthetics of cartography to questions of territorial possession and violence. The essay excavates the spatial logics operating in Oppenheim's work, showing how it aims to find a way of mediating between the abstractions of cartographic impulses on the one hand and embodied sensory experience on the other.

In the second half of the issue, the essays cluster around a particular region of the United States, the West, where many of the tensions, valences and flourishings of the cartographic imagination have been focused throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Louise Siddon's essay examines the way that the Navajo Nation and its territory are represented in the work of the photographer Laura Gilpin in the late 1960s, and contemporary Navajo artist Will Wilson. Gilpin and Wilson both seek out ways of countering and offering alternatives to the Euroamerican epistemology of space. Siddons shows how the formal strategies employed by these artists, together with textual articulations of Navajo history and culture, open the cartographic imagination to conceptualizations of Navajo sovereignty.

James Swensen examines representations of the Western landscape from the perspective of 'The New Cartographics', a group of experimental photographers operating in the 1960s and 70s. Figures such as Kenneth Josephson, Michael Bishop, and John Pfahl returned to the work of nineteenth and early-twentieth century photographers who had been involved in the process of surveying and mapping the West, and found opportunities through parody and allusion to reflect on both the history of US photography itself and its complex relationship to the region. Swensen raises the question of how the self-reflexive explorations of aesthetic form by the photographic institutions of the post-war period might be understood in relation to other forms of exploration: namely the histories and ideologies of territorial conquest and domination shored up by the colonial practice of cartography.

These colonial histories and ideologies are also discussed in Daisy Henwood's essay on Rebecca Solnit's 1994 book *Savage Dreams*. Prefaced by Solnit's own alternative map of the South-West, *Savage Dreams* brings to the surface the narratives buried underneath the surface of the region's official cartographic image. Henwood shows how Solnit's countermapping exposes the coercive colonial and patriarchal logics underpinning the historical cartographies of the West, and articulates the interconnecting stories of the communities fragmented and isolated by the colonial practice of mapping. Deploying an ecofeminist framework, the essay argues for the power of countermapping in bringing together and narrativizing those features of the landscape that more orthodox mapping has tended to separate and reify.

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