



## Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

1 | 2017

### Morphing Bodies: Strategies of Embodiment in Contemporary US Cultural Practices

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# The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature and Mapping in the United States, 1945-1980

Paris, 18-19 May 2018

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#### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/8791>

ISSN: 1765-2766

#### Publisher

AFEA

#### Electronic reference

Laurie McRae Andrew and Patrick Turner, « The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature and Mapping in the United States, 1945-1980 », *Transatlantica* [Online], 1 | 2017, Online since 02 December 2018, connection on 29 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/8791>

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## Introduction

- 1 “The Cartographic Imagination: Art, Literature, and Mapping in the United States, 1945-1980” was an international conference drawing together speakers and participants from across a range of disciplines at Reid Hall in Paris on 18th and 19th May 2018. Co-organised by Monica Manolescu (University of Strasbourg) and Will Norman (University of Kent), and funded mainly by the Terra Foundation for American Art, together with the SEARCH research group of the English Department at the University of Strasbourg, the Centre for American Studies at the University of Kent and the British Association of American Studies, the conference used the theme of maps and mapping to bridge studies in American literature, visual arts, cinema and beyond. Under the rubric of its stated interest in “the ways in which American space is constructed, imagined, reconfigured, displaced, and questioned in writing and in artistic form,” the conference brought together an international group of scholars and practitioners, and featured two keynote talks as well as ten panels and an evening reading event organized in collaboration with the association Double Change.

**Conference webpage:**

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/english/conferences/cartographicimagination/index.html>

## First Keynote Talk: Lize Mogel (independent artist, New York), “Spatial Politics,” 18th May

- 2 The conference began with a first keynote address from Lize Mogel, which both discussed her use of cartography in her own practice and announced a number of themes which would recur throughout the conference. As a co-editor of the *Atlas of Radical Cartography*, Mogel introduced artistic practices of radical mapping and counter-cartography, establishing a concern with the inherently political nature of mapping which would continue to form a focus across the conference. Mogel opened with an account of the “Sharjah CityMap” project, produced for Sharjah Biennial 10 (United Arab Emirates); a project which responded to the official cartography of tourist maps with an alternative form of mapping intended to represent the everyday use of the city’s spaces by its inhabitants. Mogel went on to provide an overview of the developments of mapping practice and theory through the period with which the conference was concerned, noting in particular the intervention of J.B. Hartley, who highlighted the political contingency of all forms of mapmaking. She expanded on this through a focus on the development of the world map as a symbol for the United Nations, and her own response to this in the project “Area of Detail,” which focused on the purported blank spot at the Arctic Circle in the centre of the U.N. map—and the geopolitical relations and conflicts this apparent blankness conceals. Finally, Mogel spoke about the relationships between cartography and embodiment, particularly in relation to public infrastructures. Here, she outlined her project “The Sludge Economy,” for which she made a cake decorated with a map of New York City’s sewage system, and spoke about her current work on the project “Walking the Watershed,” which continues to explore links between bodies, spaces, and cartographies. Investigating relationships between the practices of mapping and inhabiting spaces, between abstract and embodied cartographies, and between cartographic and political imaginations, this keynote established a number of themes which would be returned to in different ways across the two days.

### Panels 1A and 1B

- 3 Following the first keynote, the remainder of 18th May was spent in parallel panels, with a total of sixteen speakers presenting papers.
- 4 Panel 1A was titled “Mapping the South-West: Nuclear Sites and Indigenous Geographies,” and enacted a tightening of geographical focus. Daisy Henwood (University of East Anglia, UK) presented a paper titled “Ecofeminist ‘Lines of Convergence’: Mapping the Nuclear Landscape in Rebecca Solnit’s *Savage Dreams*,” which discussed Solnit’s text in relation to the paratextual map that accompanies it in order to explore how Solnit undertakes an active dismantling of cartographies; using narrative to insist on “lines of convergence” against the drawing of cartographic borders, and to counter the official “emptiness” of lands designated as nuclear test sites by telling the stories of their inhabitants. Then, Louise Siddons (University of Oklahoma, USA) spoke on “Seeing the Four Sacred Mountains: Navajo Sovereignty in the Photography of Laura Gilpin.” Siddons discussed the fraughtness of Gilpin’s attempt to represent the Navajo people to a white audience through the practice of photography in her book *The Enduring Navajo*. Exploring Gilpin’s aerial photographs as sites of contestation between Navajo and Anglo-American

epistemologies of space and time, Siddons then focused on sand paintings used in Navajo healing ceremonies, reading these as a form of cartography reproduced, in culturally and politically fraught ways, through Gilpin's photographs.

- 5 Panel 1B, meanwhile, investigated questions of cartography and embodiment by addressing the theme of "Drifting, Strolling, Walking." Monica Manolescu (University of Strasbourg, France) expanded on the conference's comparative approach to art and literature in her paper "Following Acts: Ways of Mapping from E. A. Poe to Vito Acconci," which traced a lineage between Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd" and Acconci's performance work *Following Piece*, exploring acts of walking and following as means of mapping in both literary and artistic practices. This paper's comparison of textual and artistic approaches to cartography was complemented by Joanna Pawlik (University of Sussex, UK), whose presentation "Strolling along Aardvarkly: Ted Joans Re-enacts André Breton's *Nadja*" focused on the relationships between surrealist artist Joans' Paris guidebook project and Breton's novel.

## Panels 2A and 2B

- 6 Panel 2A shifted the focus onto postwar American poetics, and the ways in which poets of this period employed and responded to the aesthetics and processes of cartography. Neil Alexander (Aberystwyth University, UK) presented a paper on "'this granite land': Lorine Niedecker's 'Lake Superior,'" examining the role of Niedecker's extensive cartographic and toponymic research in the composition of her serial poem, but also—echoing Henwood's earlier talk—emphasising how Niedecker insists on a "literary cartography" that is dynamic rather than static. Alexander read Niedecker's use of mineral circulation—both as geological and human processes—to emphasise movement and metamorphosis, in opposition to the map as a technology of closure. Tara Stubbs (University of Oxford, UK) gave a paper titled "'At a remove': Maps and Postcards in Elizabeth Bishop and Wallace Stevens," which placed the map alongside the postcard as figures for thinking about Bishop's "The Map" and Stevens' "The Irish Cliffs of Moher." Drawing on Jacques Derrida's discussion of the dangers inherent to postcards as means of textual communication, Stubbs explored poems, postcards and maps as approximations of lived experience, suggesting that verse functions at most as a mapping of experience. Daniel Katz (University of Warwick, UK) closed the panel with a paper titled "'The Territory Is Not the Map': Jack Spicer's Map Poems." Katz examined how the invocation of mapping in poetry amounts to both an insistence on what Spicer called the "outside," and also—picking up Stubbs' concern with the relationship between lived experience and poetic expression—the process of mediation by which the poem relates to this outside. And, echoing Alexander, Katz spoke about the ways in which Spicer's late "Map Poems" also concern themselves with itineraries, and with a form of mapping that is not static but involved with movement and transit.
- 7 Panel 2B, "National Spaces and the Idea of America," featured papers concerned with how writers map, and are themselves mapped within, both mainstream and hidden conceptions of America and its national space. In "The Fabled Districts of Human Love: National Space and Affect in Pynchon's *V.*," James Cetkovski (University of Oxford, UK) offered a reading of Pynchon's geographies in which, despite the apparent constructedness of national space, it is ultimately the shared imagination of that national space which contains the potential for affective human experience. Cetkovski's paper

itself, whilst centrally concerned with Pynchon's sense of the cartographic, also took significant steps throughout to map Pynchon's position within an American literary lineage, noting his credentials as somewhat of an outlier within his own historical moment. Stefania Ciocia (Canterbury Christ Church University, UK), in a talk entitled "Mapping Invisible Countries: Familial Rhetoric in Julia Alvarez's Diasporic Storytelling," outlined the pervasiveness of the familial in Alvarez's mapping of the Dominican diaspora and argued that whilst Alvarez successfully maps invisible spaces, this mapping is limited by a problematic reliance on genealogical predestination. In concluding her paper, Ciocia pointed towards Edwidge Danticat, a writer whose works centre on elective rather than biological ties in her mapping of diasporic identity. In "Mapping the Beats: Iain Sinclair's *American Smoke*," Jamie Harris (Aberystwyth University, UK) considered the fate of Sinclair's *psychogeographical* approach in a memoir-like text (published alongside a large fold-out literary map and an online interactive map) which, Harris argued, constitutes a way of mapping a new mythology of American space, across Kerouac's Lowell and Olson's Gloucester, forming a shield against the loss of his more familiar London: "a place at the end of time."

## Panels 3A and 3B

- 8 Panel 3A, on "Urban Histories," involved another narrowing of geographical and historical focus—this time onto the city of New York in the 1970s. Irene Valle Corpas (University of Granada, Spain) spoke on "Cameras that Map 1970s Manhattan: Between the Memory of the Underground and the Cinema of Gentrification," placing New York cinema in the context of the dissolution of the city's spatial and social form during the economic transitions of that decade. Corpas discussed filmmakers including Peter Hutton, Chantal Ackerman, and Jim Jarmusch, exploring the search for filmic perspective that could capture the city in a historical moment of geographical upheaval. Aimé Iglesias Lukin (Rutgers University, USA) presented a paper titled "Newyorkaises: Mapping in Latin-American Artists Living in New York c. 1970s." Taking its title from the notebooks of Hélio Oiticica, Lukin's paper focused on efforts by visual artists from Latin America, working in New York, to construct a sense of cultural identity using maps and mapping as conceptual paradigms. She examined work by Oiticica, Neville d'Almeida, Anna Bella Geiger, and Jaime Davidovich, exploring ways in which mapping provided these artists with a mechanism through which to take ownership of the "Latin American" label.
- 9 Panel 3B, "Strange and Estranging Spaces," featured talks by Maria Stavrinaki (Université Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne, France) on time, space and the "surd" in the earth art of Robert Smithson, and Federico Italiano (Austrian Academy of Sciences) on the cartographic imagination of American science fiction. Stavrinaki's talk outlined how Smithson reversed the ways in which conventional modes of mapping and geology tend to literalise scale, by accentuating the fact that geological time cannot be intellectually assimilated, nor practically domesticated. Italiano's talk analysed a number of works of American science fiction, in both film and literature, drawing attention to the simultaneous sense of claustrophobia and claustrophilia evoked in their repeated use of cartographic imagery. Italiano suggested that this contradictory position was rooted in the duality of the American frontier experience in which the desire to explore the wild was equally bound-up in the need to domesticate that wilderness; an in-and-outness which resonated with Stavrinaki's assessment of Smithson's politics, who at one point

stated “Sometimes I wish someone would free us from freedom.” Out of such resonances this panel revealed some engaging connections, in particular the comparison of John Carpenter’s film, *Escape From New York* (1981), with Smithson’s “Spiral Jetty” (1970), both works which map irrational spaces. Reading the dystopian prison island of Carpenter’s then-futuristic 1997 Manhattan alongside the land of Smithson’s surd where “logical purity finds itself in a bog” (Smithson) provided an unexpected stage on which to consider the “existential impasse” (Italiano) which the American cartographic imagination found itself in during the Cold War, an impasse which the ensuing discussion located partly in the transition from a global to a planetary perspective following the space race.

### Reading event, 18th May

- 10 Extending the involvement of practitioners in the conference, the first day was followed by a reading event involving the keynote speakers (Lize Mogel, David Herd and Stephen Collis) as well as Anne Savelli and Mathilde Roux, organised together with the association Double Change at the Atelier Michael Woolworth.

### Second Keynote Talk: David Herd (University of Kent) and Stephen Collis (Simon Fraser University, Canada), ‘Making Space for the Human: Rights, the Anthropocene, and Recognition,’ 19<sup>th</sup> May

- 11 In Saturday’s keynote entitled “Making Space for the Human,” David Herd and Stephen Collis considered what the response to mass displacement in the post-war period reveals about the current dynamics of human movement. Forming a bridge with Lize Mogel’s analysis of the spatial politics of the United Nations’ cartographic emblem the previous day, Herd and Collis introduced the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a way of contextualising the formulation of the category of the human just prior to the period now being defined as the Anthropocene. Focusing on the decade between 1948 and 1958 which saw a scale of human displacement unmatched until the current moment, Herd and Collis used the UDHR as a platform from which to consider how the response to this historical displacement, particularly detention, has come to characterise contemporary responses; citing, among other cases, the 30,000 people detained indefinitely without charge at Dover Detention Centre in the UK, in 2017. Addressing what they saw as a gap in previous critiques of the declaration as a literary text, Herd and Collis posed that the UDHR sought to spatialise an understanding of the human. Drawing on multiple and interdisciplinary perspectives in their approach to this totalising declaration, Herd and Collis demonstrated how, in light of the UDHR, the poet Charles Olson and the political theorist Hannah Arendt formulated a spatiality allowing for recognition in resistance of the violence of the nation state. They went on to explain how Olson and Arendt provide resources for thinking about the movement, categorisation and detention of people in the present moment and how recognition can open up the possibility of a new common space.
- 12 Once again, the second keynote talk was followed by a series of parallel panels taking place through the 19th May.

## Panels 4A and 4B

- 13 Panel 4A, “Philosophy, Identity and Impossible Maps,” honed in on how artists give form to a philosophical understanding of the relationship between space and identity. In a talk titled “Charles Olson’s Cartographic Anxiety,” Tim Woods (Aberystwyth University, UK) explored the geographic contradictions implied by subjectivity in *The Maximus Poems*; a subjectivity at once precisely placed and also dispersed throughout the text. Out of such contradictions, Woods argued, the subject’s cartographic search for a withheld identity produces an anxiety which forces Olson’s spatial imagination into a new interrelationship with the temporal, one which rejects sequentiality and instead allows time to be read as a space of events. Evangelos Athanassopoulos (University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne & CNRS, France) gave a talk titled “Here, Elsewhere, Everywhere, Nowhere: Robert Smithson’s Impossible Maps” in which he approached Smithson, for whom cartography is a way of giving form to representation, via Frederic Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, arguing that Smithson’s non-site deconstructs an anthropocentric representation of space and its phenomenological subject. Positioning the self as a fiction based on spatial organisation, Athanassopoulos spoke of the ways in which Smithson allows us to better grasp the space between the map and the mirror (or identity), and how his conception of mapping can be understood as an attempt to articulate the discursive organisation of space. In “Johns, Rauschenberg, Smithson: The American Cartographic Eye and the Reshaping of Pragmatism,” Aline Wiame (Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France) began with French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s concept of art’s cartographic eye; an alternative approach to artistic space in which painting is treated as a cartographic surface, embracing human and nonhuman vision. Building on Buci-Glucksmann’s recognition of this cartographic approach in the works of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Smithson, Wiame contextualised this association within the cultural, artistic and geopolitical shaping of American space as a singular territory, arguing that these artists gave a form to the space of American pragmatism, albeit one recast by growing critiques of imperialism.
- 14 Panel 4B, “Cross-readings: Fictions, Arts and Maps in Dialogue,” focused more closely on the cartographic imagination as a link between visual arts, performance, and literary texts during this period. Laurie McRae Andrew (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) gave a paper titled “Projecting Worlds in Postwar California: Reading Disneyland Souvenir Maps with Thomas Pynchon,” in which he read Disneyland’s 1958 map side-by-side with Pynchon’s novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, focusing on the cartographic imagination as an ideological mediation between geographical development, social change, and prospects of political action in postwar California. With a paper titled “Frictional Currents: Mapping New York City circa 1945,” Tatsiana Zhurauliova (University of Chicago, USA) shifted focus onto the earlier end of the conference’s period, looking at the mapping of New York City—and especially its sexual coding and queering—by following links between the depiction of Pavel Tchelitchev’s painting *Hide-and-Seek* in Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs’ *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks*, and the painting itself. Lastly, Fernando Quesada (Universidad de Alcalá, Spain) spoke on “Mapping the Environment in the American Performing Arts 1963-1975.” Focusing on the environmental theatre of the 1960s onwards, particularly through the distinction between found and transformed spaces for performance, he discussed ways in which environmental theatre reconceived the city as a score for action and performance, and

the role of mapping in this process; the transfer of the dramatic text into both space and map.

## Panels 5A and 5B

- 15 Panel 5A, titled “The Cartographic Survey,” examined the particular notion of surveying through linked readings of narrative texts, paratextual cartographies, and photography. In “Levity and Gravity: Cartology and Humour in Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*,” Doug Haynes (University of Sussex, UK) approached the relationship between mapping and humour through Pynchon’s novel, and particularly through the dialectical pairing of “above” and “below.” Haynes suggested ways of moving between ethical and comic resonances in the above/below relation, via a focus on the humorous appearance of the “Learned English Dog” in *Mason & Dixon*. This was followed by a paper from Yuko Yamamoto (Chiba University, Japan), titled “On Common Ground: The Cartographic Imagination of William Faulkner and Walker Evans.” Bridging literary and photographic cartographies, this paper traced the relationships between Faulkner’s surveying of his fictional Yoknapatawpha County and the photography of Walker Evans. Focusing initially on Faulkner’s production of a paratextual map of his invented county (in collaboration with editor Malcolm Cowley) for inclusion in *The Portable Faulkner*, Yamamoto’s paper went on to elucidate Evans’ use of this map in the production of photographs illustrating the article “Faulkner’s Mississippi” for *Vogue* in 1948. Using these examples, the paper explored relationships between the cartographic imagination, editorial relationships, and textual cultures in the postwar period. The final paper in this panel was presented by James R. Swensen (Brigham Young University, USA). Speaking on “The Topography of The Ground Glass: Art Photography and the Demarcation of the American West, 1970-1979,” Swensen continued the photographic focus introduced by Yamamoto, examining the inheritance of a tradition of photography associated with the nineteenth-century surveying of the American West by landscape photographers in the 1970s. Echoing the association between surveying perspectives and humour from Haynes’ paper, Swensen explored the function of both homage and parody in these later photographers’ overt relationships to their more straightforwardly cartographic forebears, noting especially how tools, techniques, and perspectives of measurement were re-deployed in comic form.
- 16 Panel 5B, “Medium and Materiality,” brought together talks on how artists negotiate and interpret the conceptual distance between mapped spaces and their cartographic representations across various mediums. In her talk, “Re-Bordering Representations: The Spatial Dislocations in Dennis Oppenheim and Jorge Luis Borges,” Pamela Bianchi (Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint Denis / Université Savoie Mont-Blanc, France) outlined the concept of the site as an inscription surface in Oppenheim’s work alongside that of Marcel Broodthaers and Gordon Matta-Clark. Bianchi analysed the echoes of Borges in Oppenheim’s interrogation of how space and place is perceived when geometrical boundaries are drawn on a specific location. In his talk, “Ewyork, Onolulu, Aris, Ome, Oston”: Cut-up and Unstuck Geographies of the 1960s,” James Horton (École Normale Supérieure, France) compared two sets of collage-inflected techniques taking place on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1960s: the “cut-up” of Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, and *décollage* deployed by *affichistes* and Fluxus artists. Demonstrating how these artists made possible a verbal and visual reordering of their environments, Horton posited “cut-up” and *décollage* as forms of remapping or counter-mapping. Returning to



Oppenheim in the panel's final paper, "Dennis Oppenheim's Road Work," Christopher Ketcham (MIT, USA) conveyed the centrality of maps and mapping in Oppenheim's sculptural practice. Ketcham demonstrated how Oppenheim sought to physically infiltrate the systems that organize everyday life, forcing those abstract systems to accommodate the body; a form of making space resonant with Herd and Collis's keynote.

## Roundtable

- 17 The second day of the conference was concluded with a roundtable discussion including Doug Haynes, David Herd, and Joanna Pawlik along with Larisa Dryansky (University Paris Sorbonne, France) and Arnaud Regnauld (University Paris 8 Vincennes-St Denis, France). Each of the participants spoke briefly about their routes to mapping as a thematic and methodological concern: Dryansky described her move towards cartography through the study of photography; Regnauld spoke on the relationships between mapping and hypertext fictions; Haynes talked of his belated turn to mapping, partly via *Roadrunner* cartoons; Pawlik introduced her concern with challenging Eurocentric assumptions of cartographic imaginations; Herd talked about the ongoing "Refugee Tales" project and the need for a notion of the map as something to be occupied. This was followed by a wider audience discussion which moved towards the contemporary moment, closing the conference with exchanges on Google, digital mapping, and cartographic power in the twenty-first century.
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## INDEX

**Subjects:** Actualité de la recherche

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