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Thinking Globally, Mapping Locally: Styles and Discourse in Transatlantic Cartography

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Cartographic Styles and Discourse

Delia Cosentino, Guest Editor

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Thinking Globally, Mapping Locally: Styles and Discourse in Transatlantic Cartography

For a couple of decades in the early twentieth century, visitors to Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, Scotland, were treated to a dynamic lesson in the art of seeing their place in a changing world. The visit began on the flat top of a building situated on Castle Hill, in the heart of the Old Town; the rooftop terrace looks out over the immediate streets and buildings, and beyond that perspective, to the panoramic landscape cradling the urban settlement. Passing inside the darkened dome of the adjoining tower, a different view was afforded by a camera obscura projecting a detailed, miniature moving image of the town onto a table at the center of the room. A single chair allowed for quiet reflection, where the visitor could reconcile her own eye witness view of the outside landscape with the projected representation inside. In each subsequent story descending from the dome, the visitor's geographical situation was further articulated—both deepened and broadened. The Edinburgh Room featured a relief model of the city and provided a deep dive into its architectural developments; on the next floor down, the Scotland Room traced the nation with a large floor map. Subsequent, descendant rooms connected Scotland to Great Britain and to the larger English-speaking world. The next room below was dedicated to European geography and finally, the bottom floor, to the Earth, this vertical

organization of space drawing a through line between the local and the global.¹

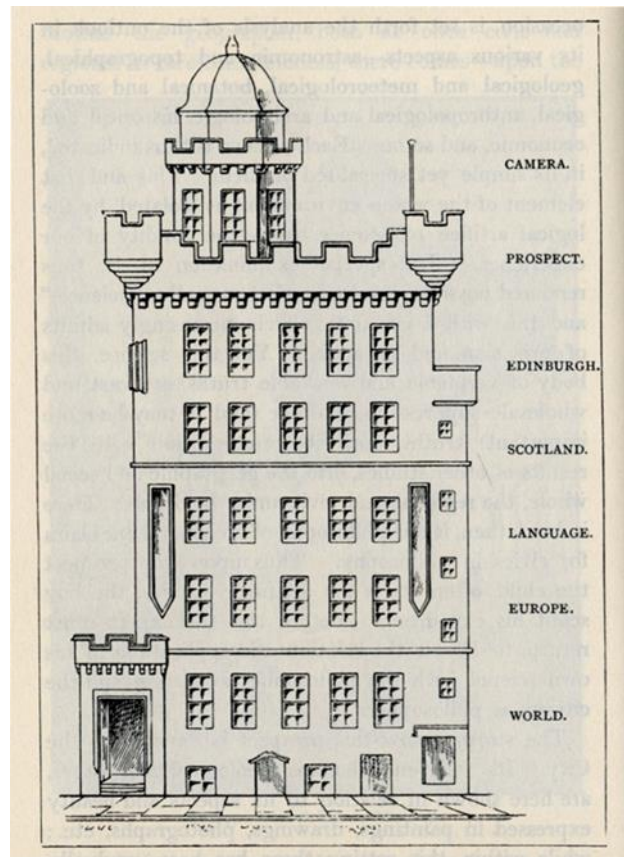


Figure 1. "Outlook Tower in diagrammatic elevation, with indications of uses of its storeys...; with their widening relations..." from Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1915: 324. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

¹ Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1915), 321-326.

As it functioned then, Outlook Tower embodied some of the fundamental principles of its designer, town planner and social geographer Patrick Geddes. For everyone, but especially the artist and the geographer whom he imagined stationed at the pinnacle, Geddes advocated for the primacy of close observation to make sense of spatial relationships; direct engagement and visualization, using available technologies to see things from a different angle, and studying cartographic representations are all essential to a person's holistic perception of space. His influential 1915 treatise *Cities in Evolution* suggests why no one is a simple spectator, but instead we all must take measures to make sense of the complexities of the urban fabric in constant flux:

...each [building] with its manifold warp of circumstance, its changeful weft of life. The patterns here seem simple, there intricate, often mazy beyond our unraveling, and all well-nigh are changing, even day by day, as we watch. Nay, these very webs are themselves anew caught up to serve as threads again, within new and vaster combinations.²

Within this churning landscape, Geddes acknowledges the contingency of the individual point of view, inflected with particular interests and differing perspectives: specific vision is embodied by the scholar, the artist, the antiquarian, the agriculturalist, the traveler, the child. Most helpfully for the present, Geddes and his Outlook Tower insist upon the idea that one's own knowledge and spatial relationship with vast global networks is situated first in the local and the concrete.³

Maps and Art History

This thematic volume brings together a series of articles by art historians whose own work is grounded in the local and the concrete, and whose

subjects are likewise rooted in a specific perspective on a particular locale. These contributing scholars are all engaged in the close study of maps with distinctive styles that have allowed for new questions to be asked about point of view, artistic choice, innovative strategies of representation, and relative power. Significantly, in attending to related queries, the contributions reveal both internal dialogues as well as broader links with greater transnational and even global forces. The study of maps as constructed images to be analyzed using art historical methodologies is not new, however in the current scholarly and temporal context, I assert that it is particularly important because of the way that such qualitative analysis is sometimes cast as monologic in contrast to the findings proffered by increasingly popular quantitative methods.

In the last few decades and with increasing urgency over time, art historians have taken a keen eye to the study of maps, as developments in critical cartographic studies have helped to expose how mapmakers' formal choices about perspective, scale, the representation of space parallel and in fact, overlap with strategies employed by artists. In the 1980s, geographer J. Brian Harley began to articulate what art historians—perhaps especially those using contemporary critical theory—would recognize as the concept of 're-presentation' with the then-jolting declaration that "far from holding up a simple mirror of nature that is true or false, maps *re-describe* the world...in terms of relations of power and the cultural practices, preferences and priorities"⁴ (my emphasis). Concurrently, following the eyes of Jan Vermeer and his contemporaries who included cartographic references in their work, art historian Svetlana Alpers revealed parallels between the descriptive nature of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish painting and the Netherlandish impulse to map. Alpers showed how both art and mapping in this context were clearly

² Ibid., 4-5.

³ Geddes further explains, "...[T]he primacy of the civic and social outlook, intensified into local details with all the scientific outlooks of a complete survey; yet all in contacts with the larger world, and these successively in enlarging social zones, from that of the prospect outwards—will now be sufficiently clear..." Ibid., 325.

⁴ J. Brian Harley, *The new nature of maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), 35 (posthumous republication of "Maps,

Knowledge, and Power," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, 9 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 277-312). This was Harley's early subversion of a more traditional, "positivist" model for cartographic studies, wherein he describes the map as a social construction that has the power to inscribe power on the landscape.

grounded in a cultural proclivity towards scientific and technical explanation and were explicitly linked through newly re-circulating ideas from the Roman Ptolemy.⁵ David Woodward's *Art and cartography: six historical essays* (1987) helped to formalize an art historical engagement that continues to lay bare the ideological and cultural contingencies of maps as spatial re-presentations.⁶

Art historians have subsequently participated in a more radical turn in critical cartography, shifting the conversation away from the map-as-object to the practice of mapping. This analytic turn was described neatly by geographer Rob Kitchin as "post-representational cartography" through which the ontological foundations of the map as a map are rethought.⁷ For instance, John Pickles recasts maps as 'inscriptions' to see beyond authorship and purpose of any discrete example to instead reveal broader cartographic practices.⁸ Kitchin has built upon the work of such theorists to show how maps, despite their fixed appearance, are unstable texts embedded in multiple processes which he describes as constantly shifting—reminiscent of the way that Geddes describes the complexities of the urban fabric. Using the specific concept of "unfolding mapping practices," Kitchin together with co-authors Justin Gleeson and Martin Dodge have shown how the production and consumption of a set of mappings make sense when analyzed relationally and in cultural context, including in response to media coverage and public reception.⁹ Various art historians have shown how maps and the territories they purport to represent are mutually engaged in the activity of co-construction, like Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, who in analyzing the role of cartographic imagery in the legitimization of Eastern Europe, argues for the submission of maps to post-modern criticism.¹⁰

⁵ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), chapter 4.

⁶ David Woodward's *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 1987) included essays by art historians Alpers, Juergen Schultz and Samuel Edgerton; in recent years, collections such as *The Ethnohistorical Map in New Spain* (edited by Alexander Hidalgo and John López for *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 61, No.2, Spring 2014) extend Harley's model into a set of art historical case studies.

⁷ Rob Kitchin, "Post-representational cartography," *lo Squaderno*, 15 (2010), 7-12.

⁸ John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ Kitchin together Justin Gleeson and Martin Dodge have modeled how mapping practices unfold in relation to their time and place ("Unfolding Mapping Practices: A

Another notable development in the overlap of the discipline of art history with maps is with the engagement of scholars with digital technologies to ask and answer spatial questions. In a recent special issue of *Historical Geography*, for instance, co-editors Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi and Joanna Gardner-Huggett focus on art historians' turn to making maps themselves with the help of geographic information systems (GIS) and other digital platforms "to ask provocative questions, assess complex data, and publish fresh findings."¹¹ Gagliardi and Gardner-Huggett advocate for digital methods for the quantitative analysis of complex data in part for its transcendence over conclusive rhetoric in favor of this more iterative research process that offers us the potential of rethinking dominant art historical paradigms. Miriam Kienle summed up similar benefits in a recent volume of *Artl@s Bulletin*, noting for instance, that "augmenting established art historical methods with new digital humanist techniques can help to broaden the discipline, particularly when demographics and statistical maps provide evidence of cultural exchanges that challenge canonical narratives of art history."¹²

Despite the capacity of a newly spatialized art history to 'horizontalize' art historical narratives, many scholars of what Paul Jaskot proposes we might call 'critical digital art history'¹³ have thoughtfully acknowledged various limitations to big data analysis whose goal is often to uncover broader, even global dynamics. Because data is not given but gathered within the constraints of its own epistemologies, because it is not neutral, it may simply reaffirm the structural biases beyond which we wish to see, researchers must grapple with and work with those realities. Visualization designs likewise can work to conceal, intentionally or not,

New Epistemology for Cartography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Cartographers*, 2012, 1-17).

¹⁰ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Mapping Eastern Europe: Cartography and Art History," *Artl@s Bulletin*, Volume 2, Issue 2 (Fall 2013). Magali M. Carrera also unravels layers of mappings to make sense of how a newly sovereign Mexico emerged cartographically in *Traveling from New Spain to Mexico: Mapping Practices of Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi and Joanna Gardner-Huggett, "Introduction: Spatial Art History in the Digital Realm," *Historical Geography* Vol. 45 (2017):17-36.

¹² Miriam Kienle, "Between Nodes and Edges: Possibilities and Limits of Network Analysis in Art History," *Artl@s Bulletin*, Vol. 6, Issue 3 (Fall 2017): 6.

¹³ Paul Jaskot, "Commentary: Art Historical Questions, Geographic Concepts, and Digital Methods," *Historical Geography*, Vol. 45 (2017): 92-99.

meaning that like the ‘silences’ in historical cartography, the display of geographic information in data analysis can be deceiving—especially when it comes to social hierarchies, perhaps most concerningly in terms of race and gender. For this reason, scholars like Joanna Drucker have encouraged thinkers to tread with care, underscoring the importance of integrating traditional art history with digital methods in the important mission to spatialize and globalize the discipline, rather than polarizing the approaches.¹⁴ Others have likewise emphasized how the digital and analog are best when working in tandem to tease out significant indicators.

Relational Thinking *in* Maps

In the midst of such fervent considerations, this volume of essays demonstrates another (complementary and in some cases, overlapping) way to spatialize and globalize art history, perhaps without some of the pitfalls described above—through the close consideration of the visual content of maps and by observing the discourses that open up from *within* their representational strategies. The contributors to this volume, each with her own theoretical framework and approach, might all be seen as reaffirming the foundational commitment of art history to the significance of the physical object within the space that it occupies. Juxtaposed with current discussions about how to balance traditional art historical methods against critical digital art history, such an approach not only re-centers the principle element of any art historical problem—spatial thinking around art forms—but it also does the important work of strengthening the source base from which broader inquiries might be drawn. That is, these case studies present new and refined data which *could* constitute a new set of points in a quantitative study, though that is of course not the crux of their contributions, nor is it why or how they came to be.

The maps at the core of each one of the essays are used to raise both small and large questions that

only a close study of the content, examined against a multidisciplinary range of information, materials, and methods, could address. In a couple of cases here, this has included employing digital techniques to get into and beneath the formal evidence, to more profound connections. In all cases, the probing of cartographic style has led to nuanced readings of the very particular epistemological frameworks through which each mapmaker encouraged viewers to see one part of the world, often obviously (sometimes obliquely) in contrast to other perspectives and/or other places. Maps, unlike other objects of art historical analysis that do not explicitly take space as its subject, have the special capacity to create and project relational frameworks with and through their physical forms and geographic situatedness. As these authors show us, an object-based approach to maps reveals ideas about a represented place that can be extrapolated to a set of larger, even global circumstances. Such information—the devil, one might say—is nestled in the details of the mapmaker’s unique perspective. The juxtaposition of varied cartographies in a single volume provides a special opportunity to contemplate the particular (geographic, temporal, political, cultural, racial, gendered) situatedness of each artist.

These essays take a close look at a range of maps made between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, in the American hemisphere and in Europe. Notably, the majority of these studies focus on mapped spaces of North and South America—whether by its occupants or by outsiders (colonizers), which attests to the fact that some of the most interesting and unexplored cartography relates to the uniquely contested nature of territory in this hemisphere. In some cases, the authors work to analyze previously unidentified artworks and styles, including contributions by indigenous and female artists, the spaces of marginalized peoples, and heterogeneous perspectives within colonized, revolutionary, and imperialist environments. The organization of the contributions follows a chronological arrangement; time is principal, then

¹⁴ Cited in Kienle, “Between Nodes and Edges,” 8.

space. Each author takes a different approach to the analysis of cartographic style and the particular discursive directions that those formal choices engender. All of them describe local realities which are inherently inscribed within broader global connections.

The first two articles reveal very different perspectives on either side of a clearly entwined, sixteenth-century transatlantic geography. A large, hand painted parchment map is the focus of Jennifer Saracino's essay, which takes us deep into Mesoamerican cartographic traditions as manifested in a circa 1540 representation of the island city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, two decades after its invasion by Spanish conquerors. Saracino's close read uncovers pictorial innovations suggesting the confidence of its native artists who are clearly aware of their European audience. In prioritizing their own lived space in the city using a culturally-particular cartographic language ultimately intended for the King, these indigenous mapmakers visualize their elite positioning in Spain's largest and most significant colony, an emergent global crossroads. A related economic network concurrently flowed eastward from Iberia to the Flemish lowlands, where the printmaker Marcus Gerards created a 1562 copper-etched map of his hometown, Bruges, which is the focus of the article by Elien Vernackt. As a member of the team which has worked over the last decade to produce a high quality, interactive digital image of the map, Vernackt details the clever ways that Gerards, who may have taken in the view from the local belfry (Bruges' version of Geddes' Outlook Tower), distorted the representation precisely because of the town's desire to revive its fading importance as a trading center for the broader European economy.

A triad of subsequent contributions invite us into three textured perspectives on 17th- and 18th-century South America. Catherine Burdick analyzes Jesuit chronicler Alonso de Ovalle's *Tabula geographica regni Chile* (1646) which constitutes what she calls 'a concluding instance of the pictorial mapping style of the long Renaissance.' Burdick

focuses on the engraved map's faunal images—largely abandoned as central figures in European mapping traditions by this point—as visual indicators (drawn from earlier exploration reports) of a colonized territory that remained still relatively remote and unfamiliar within the larger spread of the Spanish American Empire; Ovalle understood how the landscape's material resources could further benefit the Crown's global trade. Just a couple of years later, representing the opposite side of the same continent, Dutch cartographer Joan Blaeu's 1647 map of the Brazilian Captaincies of Rio Grande and Paraíba becomes the springboard for Carrie Anderson's exposure of imperial silences. By crafting a digital map that plots Dutch exchanges of linen for alliances with indigenous populations not shown in Blaeu's image but described elsewhere, Anderson opens up a rich discursive space in which the complexity of colonial relationships can be visualized beyond the colonizer's controlling perspective. Meanwhile, a completely different hidden reality on the same continent comes into view with Juliet Wiersema's examination of a stunning watercolor map of the Dagua River region (also featured on this volume's cover), in the vicinity of what is today Buenaventura, Colombia. Wiersema shows how the 1764 map preserves the otherwise unseen settlement of enslaved and freed Africans who controlled trade and transport in an incredibly inhospitable region of the Spanish colonial world, and whose very existence long remained silent in official cartographic displays of the larger area.

The final three articles bring us into the first half of the twentieth century with pictorial mappings whose formal elements communicate modern ideals built from and around social politics. Gail Levin explores the significance of two maps by the artist Jo Hopper; the images are wayfinding guides for collectors of Ed Hopper's paintings, but also serve to geographically contextualize his subjects. The maps suggest the influence of local and Parisian pictorial cartography of the era; they also, Levin argues, add context and complexity to Jo Hopper's largely unrecognized artistic contributions as a

modern woman artist whose own accomplishments have been unfairly overlooked and discarded. In the article by Fabiana Serviddio, we are given the sense of a reoriented American hemisphere on the cusp of World War II through the juxtaposed mural maps of the Argentine painter Alfredo Guido and Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias; their hybrid styles and subjects provide a complex vision of America that Serviddio says were meant to dispute dominant, totalizing, imperialist views eclipsing significant local perspectives. Covarrubias' transpacific meditations provided a fresh angle on regional heterogeneity, while Guido's lens monumentalized photorealistic images of indigenous America. In the final essay, Cosentino shows how Mexican artists and intellectuals of the post-revolutionary period reached back to the future to present a twentieth-century modernizing capital as heir to the sixteenth-century Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. An unexpectedly well-aligned coda to Saracino's opening chapter, my contribution demonstrates how the local cultural elite reckoned with cartographic history to produce an enduring framework through which the world might see a modern Mexico.