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# The Lure of the Local

*Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*

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NEW YORK  
LONDON

# On and Off the Map

*It is not on any map; true places never are.*

— HERMAN MELVILLE



Previous page: 1759 Map of Georgetown Island (Courtesy the Georgetown Historical Society), surveyed by Jonas Jones. The island was parceled off into lots, showing only four houses standing on the three Points, including one on Kennebec Point, where the Todd

house was built twenty-four years later, and one on Bay Point (perhaps the long-sought 17th-century David Oliver house, since it was the site of a later Oliver house that burned in the 1950s). The colonial history of Georgetown was erratically mapped, with names

and even bays or islands added and subtracted on different charts. In 1759 the Kennebec Proprietors described "Rascohegan alias Parkers Island" (later Georgetown) as "in general very Rocky—more than half, except the marsh which is Considerable..."

WHEN I WENT A FEW YEARS AGO TO PAY MY New Mexico taxes at the local courthouse, a clerk and I pored over the county's huge crumpled, dog-eared property map. It overflowed her desk and fell in awkward pleats to the floor, sticking up like cowlicks in the many places where it was patched by penciled notes taped over each other. The information too was vintage. There was no record of the last two owners of "my" land, nor of its subdivision. For a panicked moment I felt my place did not exist.

Place history is most often recorded in maps. People from oral traditions carry detailed maps in their heads over years; the rest of us depend on outside sources. In the seventies, anthropologist Hugh Brody solicited "map biographies" from British Columbian Native people whose culture was threatened by an oil pipeline. Within this cross-cultural collaboration, memories and stories of land use and lives were overlaid upon official spaces; subjective visual layers together form a multivocal history approaching an "objectivity" that could not have been written in words alone. The same people also possessed a large old "dream map," covered with marks and trails revealed to them in dreams, which constituted another form of understanding of life as well as land.

The gap between image and lived experience is the space in which both dreams and ideas are created, as reflected by the Gitskan and Wet'suwer'en in British Columbia, who worked with a professional cartographer to create an atlas, "a beautifully crafted set of images" describing "how people immigrated to their present territories, the meaning of ancient place names, where berries grow, and where to catch salmon." The Inuits make relief maps that have been called "environmental mimicry." An Inuk elder told an anthropologist that he had drawn intricate maps of an area from memory but then had thrown them away,

because it was the act of making them that was important. The extraordinarily accurate Pacific Islanders' stick and shell navigation charts may date back forty thousand years. There are maps scratched into the earth and, in Kenya, detailed maps of rainfall are made with seeds on the ground. Inspired by indigenous cultures' inventive mapping procedures, Doug Aberley has written about local empowerment through homemade maps based on honest descriptions of what people actually know about where they live. In the process of "re-inhabiting" places, he predicts, "maps will also be sung, chanted, stitched and woven, told in stories, and danced across the fire-lit skies."

As a young man, writer William Least Heat-Moon was guided around Lafayette/Yoknapatawpha County for a day by William Faulkner's stepson: "Until those hours with him," he wrote, "I had never really known what it is to travel *into* a country, to go bodily into a topographic dreamtime." Kent Ryden calls Faulkner a "literary cartographer," fusing exterior and interior maps, nonfiction and fiction, to map the visible and the "invisible landscape." He points out that Faulkner's famous map of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, complete with references to events in his novels, "demonstrates a keen awareness of the way in which history piles up on the land, of the way terrain absorbs and recalls history, of the way narrative is an unstated component of any map and thus of any landscape." Faulkner's county map has no external boundaries. It is all center, which can be read as a metaphor for its lack of borders, its extension of the local into the global on one hand, or the local focus inward, on the other. I'm reminded of Blaise Pascal's definition of nature as "an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." In an almost feudal assertion of author(itarian) or artistic license, Faulkner inscribes himself as "sole owner and

The island's 80-mile coastline had provided harbors and temporary homes for European fishermen for over a century before English settlement began (encouraged by Massachusetts Governor Shute, who offered 100 acres, free transport, a paid

schoolteacher and a minister, to tempt colonists and rid the area of Indians). The original 17th-century grantees in the area were Oliver, Parker and Rodgers.

A wonderful series of names describes the lower Kennebec to the mouth: The Chops,

Long Reach, Doubling Point, Fiddler's Reach, Bluff Head, Squirrel Point (named not for the creature but for the ship that carried a governor to parley with the Indians on Lee Island), Parker's Head, Cox's Head, Gilbert Head, Popham, and Hunnewell Beach.

proprietor" of the 2,400 square mile county, with its population of "6,298 whites" and "9,313 negroes."

For most of us the map is a tantalizing symbol of time and space. Even at their most abstract, maps (especially topographical maps) are catalysts, as much titillating foretastes of future physical experience as they are records of others' (or our own) past experiences. For the map-lover, maps are about visualizing the places you've never been and recalling the ones you have been to. A map can be memory or anticipation in graphic code. While there are probably some armchair map-lovers for whom connoisseurship is paramount, most are lured by the local, imagining places as they peruse the spaces delineated. We are field trippers, hikers, explorers, would-be travelers, or just daydreamers. We can follow with a finger the channel between islands, imagining a smooth sail on a crisp clear day, or recalling the terrifying sound of nearby surf breaking on a reef unseen in the fog. We can spend cold winter nights poring over contour lines and wondering if there will be an open gate on unmarked ranchroads, trying to reconcile old, vague maps of desired places with new detailed ones that look like totally different locations, anticipating the moment when the backpack is cinched and the first steps are taken up that concentrically lined incline. The thin blue line of a stream can summon up a remote canyon leading to a long-forgotten ruin, the heat of the day, the talus rumbling underfoot, the prick of cactus on a bare leg.

Local places remain stubbornly hidden from the systems of control and ownership. John K. Wright notes, "the interior of my place in Maine, no less than the interior of Antarctica, is a *terra incognita*, even though a tiny one. Indeed, if we look closely enough ....the entire earth appears as an immense patchwork of miniature *terrae incognitae*." This might be a

description of Least Heat-Moon's intriguing book *PrairyErth*, a place portrait structured by the twelve quadrangles of Chase County, Kansas, over which the author walked and talked to assemble their stories. This "deep map" was an extended quest for the whole revealed by all the parts: "The least I hoped for was a topographic map of words that would open inch by inch to show its long miles."

Maps are "embedded in a history they help construct," according to designer Denis Wood. Where some aboriginal maps depend on inherited knowledge and mean nothing to the uninitiated, our own modern maps work in the opposite way—they make public that which we cannot see, and we are supposed to trust their accuracy and authority. Wood deconstructs the official North Carolina state highway map, its choices and legends, then concludes: "It is not that the map is right or wrong...but that it takes a stand while pretending to be neutral on an issue over which people are divided."

Official boundaries can also be internalized; county, state, and national borders have become identity makers. "Speaking of the new computerized "cartographic regime," John Hitt writes, "the whole earth is catalogued. Including, perhaps, your own home." Mapping in the Western world developed from the depiction of particular places, the warmth of narrative delineation (with pictorial cartouches and fanciful guesswork filling in the gaps of the unknown), giving way to the chilly climes of abstract documentation of neutralized spaces. As literate people began to describe and document further and further afield, the juxtaposition of local knowledge and foreign fantasy gave way to a mechanistic and "scientific" process that has become increasingly detached from place. Today, construction of a map may not even demand the cartographer's presence on the land. The narrative

The only extant maps of the long Native history of Sagadahoc are those made by archaeologists, marking the sites of shell middens and camp sites. They also make microscopic maps of specific excavations, test pit by test pit, stratum by stratum, arti-

fact by artifact. Sometimes these investigations reveal lost topographies—streams that have dried up or moved, forests that were cleared, fields that were plowed. We have considered mapping small areas in different periods, perhaps as a kind of artwork.

In the early '90s the Kennebec Point Associates commissioned a map made of the Point on which everyone's private names for places were to be recorded. Not much was new to any of us; our history is as communal as it is personal.

that leads from the concentric circles rippling out from "around here," to the rectilinear lines of official surveys, to photographs taken by machines from high above the earth is a story that begins here at "home" and ends out there in "space."

The need for a map to go to or imagine a place for purposes of religion or survival differs from the more cerebral or political need to fill in the blanks, to own vicariously by recording. J. B. Harley has demonstrated the map's "double function in colonialism of both opening and later closing a territory.... In this view the world is full of empty spaces ready for taking by Englishmen." Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps of North America omitted Native peoples and "took on the appearance of a window through which the world was seen"—the European view, or overview.

JOYCE KOZLOFF, *Eugene*, detail from *Around the World on the 44th Parallel*, 1995, ceramic tile mural in the Library of Mankato State University in Minnesota (tiles produced at the Tile Guild, Los Angeles). Since the 1970s, Kozloff has been making public art based in local information conveyed through regional decorative patterns. Eugene, Oregon is one of the twelve cities represented in this series of colorful, idiosyncratic maps that combine culture and topography to characterize a city. Eugene and the dense, misty forests of the Willamette Valley are represented by primordial foliage and Sahish Indian motifs. The other North American cities included are Toronto (icy Lake Ontario and symbols of English heraldry), Burlington, Vermont (Lake Champlain and the tie-dyes of the Counter-Culture), and Mankato (fertile farmland, boys fishing, and Woodland beadwork patterns).



The "naturalization" of maps—the myth that maps show the world the way it really is—veils the fact that maps are cultural and even individual creations that embody points of view. They map only what the authors or their employers want to show; resistance is difficult. They are "powerful precisely to the extent that the author disappears." Artists trying to combat and expose hegemony, on the other hand, put their names on their work and are vulnerable in their individualism; they lack the social power of the nameless mapmakers who, like the image-makers of the mass media, determine how we see and are not called upon to take personal responsibility.

*"The map is not the terrain.... What your map does not show," the skinny black man told her, "is that the floods in December washed away a part of the road. I see the floods didn't affect your map."*

— DONALD WESTLAKE

Two versions of a place can both be cartographically correct, but as John Hitt puts it, "each will reveal a completely different view of the landscape." Cartographer Mark Monmonier has written a book called *How to Lie with Maps*, and the introduction to *Goode's World Atlas* warns, "because a well-drawn map creates an aura of truth and exactness, the cartographer should caution the reader against interpreting the generalized data too literally." As "map feuds" develop, everyone is going to have to become far more map literate so as not to be fooled by exploitative agendas as we learn to look around.

If maps exist to order and record the world, the world fights back. Even the most seasoned map reader does not know what to expect until s/he gets "there" (chamber of commerce brochures notwithstanding). Not only do most maps omit vegetation, landmarks, and built structures, to say nothing of current history

Georgetown Island (about the size of Manhattan) is almost split in two by Robinhood Cove, which runs from the back of Sagadahoc Bay up past Robinhood village and into Hockomock Bay. A few miles up-river Georgetown overlaps on the west side

with Arrowsic. These two big islands are connected to each other by a bridge and to the towns of Woolwich and Bath by two more bridges, all built in the 1920s and 30s.

The USGS maps traditionally measure the coastline at 3,600 statute miles, but a new

study on GIS doubles it to 7,040 miles. If the tiny coastal islands are included, the Maine coast is another 2,471 miles longer (not counting some 1,000 ledges), all dependent on disagreements as to tidelines and where the seacoast stops and riverbanks begin.

and economics, but most are out of date, and the scale is beyond untrained imaginations. The topography changes slowly, but the landscape is constantly transforming itself. (So are we; the depth of individual emotion engendered by place is also unpredictable.) An apparently isolated stream has been polluted, a bridge has washed out, a back road has been paved, a forested area clear cut or slashed by a power line, a village abandoned. What looks like a secluded beach is noisy with jet skis. A picturesque local retreat is now a shoddy development or a gated hideaway ringed by *No Trespassing* signs. Much is revealed about how maps relate to places as we move back and forth between the two. All over the country, alternative mapping projects are being used as catalysts for bio-regional community organizing, augmented by conferences, newsletters, local history booklets, murals, and celebrations.

Geomatics, the new digital information technology that analyzes and manipulates geographical images, is beginning to be used by environmental activists and indigenous people to reclaim their lands, to monitor and protect their land bases—a better defense than guns, says Bernard Neitschmann. They are making syncretic maps that reflect traditional knowledge and occupancy history through memory. In Canada the Assembly of First Nations has involved sixty-one communities in remapping the Great Lakes Basin from an indigeneous perspective; the Nunavik Inuit are gathering information on ecology and land use; others use geographic information systems (GIS) to map fishing resources. Miskito Indians in Central America have produced a map of their ocean reefs (in their own language), working with small boats, scuba divers, and satellite images.

Yet some things remain the same. Tools for the analyses which would unveil the interests behind most

maps are not widely available. (What we can't see won't hurt us?) Satellite imaging is hugely expensive and used primarily for spying and other governmental agendas. Neither system nor images are made available to "locals," although there are any number of local uses for such technology. Access to new technology is always out of reach of the grass roots until someone resists through invention. For instance, John Broadhead, an environmentalist working with the Haida in the Queen Charlotte Islands, found the general public there baffled and put off by dense specialized data on the dangers of excessive logging; on a desktop computer with widely available software, he created a simple visual map of logging on the islands, which clarified damage to the ecosystems and proved to be a highly effective organizing tool.

The mapmaking process can also bring together disparate elements in a community. In the sixties, geographer William Bunge proposed a "Society for Human Exploration" that would map from different human viewpoints, including children's. (If only we could read animals' mental maps.) Local people would lead expeditions to create "oughtness maps," whose goals were to change rather than merely map the world. In the early seventies, the New Thing Art and Architecture Center in Washington, D.C., proposed a map of the Adams-Morgan community "drawn for the people who live there...to give our community a picture of itself—to define our territory." Architect John Wiebenson drew the map and "found all sorts of neat things that only the children know about"—like some park steps that make "great grandstand seats to watch the subway construction."

Mapping change is one challenge. Mapping desire for change is another, which has long appealed to visual artists. The Surrealists' 1929 map of the world parodied the hegemonic motives of mapmakers by

We read nautical charts more often than topo maps. The small islands immediately offshore from Kennebec Point are intimate elements of the local geography: the light-houses, now automated, on Seguin and Pond, the wooded strongholds of Salter's

and Stage hiding their Indian and colonial histories, the two rock Sugarloaves, and Wood, with its sandbar to Popham. Long Island, with its Spinney homesteads, should also be counted in, as it lies just across "the creek" (Long Island Narrows) from Bay

Point and boasts the grandest old house around, on Gilbert Head. (Elizabeth Etner, married at the time to artist Stephen Etner, wrote a romantic book in the thirties about fixing the place up, which entranced me as a child.)

eliminating the United States altogether, enlarging Russia, China and Alaska, and promoting Easter Island to the size of South America. In the eighties, several artists (notably "border *brujo*" Guillermo Gomez-Peña) mocked the West's successful imposition of "top and bottom" on a spherical globe—a view that has become so internalized that we have trouble even recognizing North America when the directional hierarchy is reversed and South America is given "top" position. Other artists, notably Peter Fend, have worked with the Petersen projection of the world—a correction of the four-hundred-year-old Mercator projection's scale distortions—which has a similarly disorienting (and imperializing) effect. At the time of the G7 Summit in Halifax, Canadian artist Peter Dykhuis made an exhibition of "world views"—world maps published by each of the G7 countries: "Seeing them all side by side, the differences between maps are striking. Aspects of their design and choice of colour seem to embody national stereotypes—the Japanese map looking understated, with light, cool colors, while the Italian map is bold and funky, with wildly curvaceous lettering. Each of these superpowers locates itself towards the centre of the world, and relegates the rest of the world more or less to the margins."

Equally selective from a subjective viewpoint, individual environmental memories have been developed into the concept of "cognitive" or "mental" mapping, which has been useful for a number of different disciplines, and is particularly appealing to artists. Mental mapping often reveals class lines, as in the centrality of a bowling alley or an upscale coffeeshop in people's lives. Bridging psychology and geography, for example, Florence Ladd asked a group of urban African American youths in California to draw maps of their neighborhood and received widely diverse interpretations of a single area which helped her to understand "where

they were coming from." Cognitive mapping can also be linked to the renarrativization of art by Conceptual artists and feminists in the sixties and seventies. In 1961, the Surinamese-Dutch Conceptual artist Stanley ("this way") Brouwn exhibited scribbled pencil maps made by people in Amsterdam from whom he asked directions to a well-known landmark. Unintentionally subverting objective space with subjective perceptions, these maps became compelling vortices of eye, mind, and body. A few years later, the Japanese expatriate artist On Kawara mapped out his daily life with date paintings, serial lists, maps, and newspaper clippings; the series were titled "I Got Up," "I Went," "I Met."

Some other artists who have employed the visual power of maps range from Smithson's "non-sites" (p.55) to the British "walking sculptors" Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, whose quite dissimilar arts consist primarily of documenting long walks through various international landscapes, to those like David Wojnarowicz, who have used maps as lifelines to connect body and travel; the routes on his collaged maps suggest bloodstream and nervous system. Douglas Huebler's early conceptual works (some titled *Location Piece*, others *Duration Piece*) transferred the sculptor's obsession with space and scale onto maps, freeing him from the physical object and permitting works that followed the forty-second parallel cross country through the U.S. mail, mapped the country state by state from an airplane, and were exhibited simultaneously in several places.

In 1972, Roger Welch made his "generation pieces" exploring the gestural vocabulary, subconscious associations, and conscious memories of his own family, often using old photographs to trigger dissimilar memories from those pictured there; in *Front Porch* (1972), he and his father and brother wrote captions to a photo taken of the three when the artist was an

Salter's is often thought to be so named because fish were salted on it, but it was owned in the 1600s by Thomas Salter, a grandson of John Parker. Now it belongs to the Bliss of Kennebec Point and is a favorite traditional picnic spot. Seguin is the high-

est and second oldest of Maine's 62 lighthouses. The wooden structure, first (miserably) occupied by one Count Polereczky de Polereca from 1796 to 1802, was replaced by stone in 1820 and by today's 40-foot granite tower in 1857. Seguin has its stories—of

pirate's treasure and a piano-playing ghost, another ghost who plays with a bouncing ball, and another who cries on the rocks for her drowned children. It is the foggiest lighthouse in the country, and its doleful double honk, not quite syncopated with Pond's one



ROGER WELCH, *The Laura Connor—Marshville, North Carolina Memory Map*, 1973. Work in progress: interview at John Gibson Gallery, New York. (Resulting diptych of ink, photographs, phototext, and wood blocks collaged on plywood, 48" x 170" x 4"). Welch wanted to break with the traditional artist/model relationship and turn the gallery into a studio. He sought out the oldest people he could find, from various backgrounds, who had lived as children in small towns here and in Europe, and invited them to the gallery to describe their hometowns before an audience, while he created a simple relief map. The four all-day "performances" were recorded and taped for inclusion in the final works. Welch recalls that "it absorbed some seasoned gallery visitors more than they had expected," and many returned week after week. In 81-year-old Laura Connor's interview about Marshville in "the horse and buggy days," she chides Welch when he asks her if something was on the "other side of the street": "You will say streets! We didn't have any streets...just dirt roads."

infant. While videotaping his father's recollections of his childhood home in New Jersey, Welch realized the artistic potential of the memory map. His 1973 New York exhibition consisted of a series of "performed" interviews with elderly New Yorkers which resulted in memory maps of their hometowns. He wanted to make work about "the importance of place not as a grand earthwork carved in the desert but as a personal, spiritual, mental form we each carry inside us, a sculpture carved by memory and exposed by simple conversation." Welch differs from most Conceptual artists in

his sincere interest in people and egalitarian collaboration with them, which is more often characteristic of feminist artists; and he differs from sociologists and documentary photographers in the inventive and often visually striking presentation of his data, arrived at, he says, by "chipping away at the real place and leaving exposed that memory place." In 1974, in Milwaukee, he interviewed Kitty Ewens, who was 100 years old, and the completed artwork inspired a six-generation family reunion. He has also worked with the future. In 1990–91 he asked children to draw over old photographs and describe the future of their town (Austin, Texas) as well as to project their personal futures. The next step would be to make the process and the results more accessible to a community that might emulate them, not as art but as a means of knowing themselves.

Artists are harking back to the premodern, subjective map that "concentrated on geographical meanings" and offered "as full an impression as possible of the lived texture of the local landscape." In the process, artist and viewers become acutely aware of migrations and colonization. Houston Conwill's ongoing series of public works are based on maps that overlay American physical geography with the events and inherited meanings of African American history. They document a complex spiritual pilgrimage through spatialized time. In contrast to Conwill's macrocosmic journeys, Aminah Robinson concocts from brilliantly colored fabrics layered microcosmic maps of her local neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio.

Even as artists and art writers have begun to read geographers, and geographers have begun to acknowledge the fact that theirs is a visual science, the theories may meet, but the ways of seeing remain distinct: "the geographer's work entails map interpretation as well as direct observation, and he makes no distinction between foreground and background," wrote Marwyn



higher note, was the mesmerizing background music of my childhood, sorely missed since automation made both boringly regular. In 1995 the present owners—Georgetown's Friends of Seguin—celebrated

its 200th anniversary with much fanfare. On a map the islands' forms are static, but from a boat they change shape and apparent size depending on the angle, and in a fog they loom with ominous unfamiliarity. We once

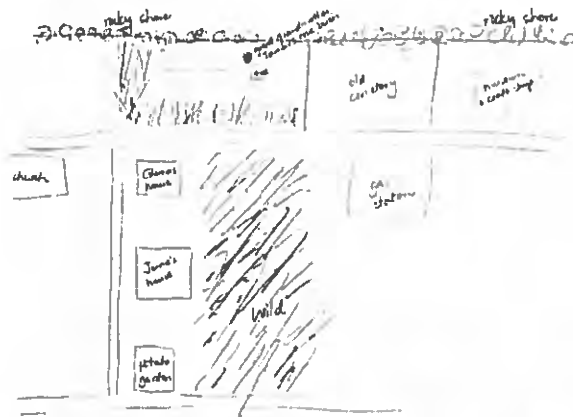
rowed to all of them for excursions; now motor boats make everything easier, although sailing in a small boat without a motor at the mouth of the Kennebec, with its colossal tides and currents, can still be an adventure.

Mikesell. Despite the centrality of maps, says Cosgrove, the field of geography has persistently ignored the graphic image. In the early seventies there was a call for the development of an "image geography," which would include ambience, meaning, and the likes and dislikes of people living in a place.

Since the late seventies, Canadian artist Marlene Creates has been making works that deal with human perception and occupation of places. Working in remote areas, she likes to overlay "a fragile moment on an enormous natural and historical past." Creates became interested in cognitive mapping when she noticed the differences between directions on the tundra given by Euro-Canadians and Inuits: the former focused descriptively on landmarks whereas the latter depended more experientially on contour. *The Distance Between Two Places Is Measured in Memories* (begun in 1988) initiated a series of works combining hand-

drawn memory maps of places in Labrador and her native Newfoundland where elderly people had lived long ago, with their portraits, photographs of the places now, and a small pile of stones, sand, sticks gathered there, suggested by the narrative. Thus document, personal recollection, and sensuous evidence form a multilayered portrait of the place recalled. Included, however implicitly, is the artist's journey and experience there, and the prevailing image of Labrador, in particular, as an empty, unexperienced place, and finally, its desecration by the military.

The beauty of maps, and the reason they aesthetically approach, even surpass, many intentional works of art is their unintentional subjectivity. This is why they have been so important to the cultural construction of landscape. A map is a composite of places, and like a place, it hides as much as it reveals. It is also a composite of times, blandly laying out on a single surface the results of billions of years of activity by nature and humanity.



MARLENE CREATES, detail of where my grandmother was born, from the series *Places of Presence: Newfoundland kin and ancestral land, Newfoundland 1989-91* (Installation of this section is 20' long, consisting of fourteen photographs on a wooden shelf under six memory map drawings and seven text panels, also "natural souvenirs": a framed group of aspen leaves and a single large beach stone.) The "Places of Presence" series, which reveals patterns of rural land use from generation to generation, centered on "three precise bits of 'landscape'" where Creates's grandmother, grandfather, and great grandmother were born. In the hand drawn memory maps and spoken texts, her Newfoundland relatives recall their lives and the land on which they were born. Some have remained there, others have moved. She sees this work, which she executed "with my heart pounding in my chest," as "a net that was set at one point in the flow of people, events, and natural changes that make up the history of these three places."

