

Borders in the English-Speaking World: Mapping and Countermapping

International conference organized by UR SEARCH

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University of Strasbourg

Keynote speakers:

Ladan Niayesh (Université Paris Cité/LARCA)

Michael Darroch (York University) and Lee Rodney (University of Windsor) - The research-creation hub IN/TERMINUS

Donna Akrey and Taien Ng-Chan (Artists, Hamilton Perambulatory Unit)

This conference organized by the SEARCH research group at the University of Strasbourg starts from two intellectual premises: the first consists in acknowledging the continued relevance of a reflection on the history of borders, border representations and bordering practices in the English-speaking world, and the second in asserting the importance of mapping and countermapping as powerful modes of aesthetic construction and critical thinking in relation to borders.

How do borders as spatial and geopolitical entities emerge as objects of simultaneous mapping and countermapping leading to competing or alternative discourses that reveal underlying ideologies, specific tactics of representation and creative appropriations? How do literature, art, historical discourses and material culture perform acts of mapping and countermapping in the representation of borders, alongside or against maps?

We welcome proposals that examine the representation of borders in the English-speaking world from the perspective of mapping and countermapping within a large temporal framework (from the Middle Ages to the contemporary period) and in a variety of discourses and media (literature, art, historical discourses, geographic and cartographic representations, material culture).

Maps as constructive systems are the result of imaginative and ideological processes as well as of scientific procedures. Although they may appear immutable and unalterable, they are expressions of a cartographic imagination (Tiberghien), predicated on specific contextual considerations, shaped by representational conventions, informed by given epistemologies, political agendas, cultural approaches (Lounissi, Peraldo & Trouillet). Shifting points of view and competing political frameworks often lead to distinct perspectives on maps and mapping, giving rise to phenomena of countermapping, especially in representations of tense borderland regions. The ideological dimensions of the map that have become prominent subjects of academic research over the past decades have completely changed an older paradigm that associated maps and map-making with absolute epistemological and representational accuracy and transparency. The advent of critical cartography in the 1980s consecrated the map as a “proposition about the world” and map-makers as “selective creators of a world” (Wood, 39-51). The manipulative power of the map was highlighted by geographers like James Ackerman in *Decolonizing the Map* or Mark Monmonier in *How to Lie with Maps*, which examine maps in contexts of colonialism, as well as political and commercial propaganda. However, we have recently witnessed a distinct approach in the acknowledgement of the “ambivalence” of cartography (Besse and Tiberghien, 12), which has led to the denunciation of its manipulative rhetoric and political complicity in colonial and warfare projects, but also to the celebration of its huge potential for creative and subversive appropriation in the retelling of

alternative histories, in the emergence of experimental modes of representation, communal or subjective. From the “deconstruction” of cartography (Harley) we have moved towards a phase of “reconstruction” (Besse) that recognizes the creative power of the map over time, its adaptability to multiple appropriations, and its participation in the creation of hybrid forms of knowledge and aesthetic representation together with literary and artistic discourses.

After 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 decades and various community atlases have been produced which have attempted to put silenced histories, toponymies and marginalized groups on the map, reexamining centuries of history (Solnit; Bhagat and Mogel; Russert and Battle-Baptiste). All these forms of counter-mapping have reinvented the practice of cartography, making space for obliterated histories and place names.

The conference seeks to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue between geography, history, literature and art within the combined thematic, theoretical and critical orientation provided by our keywords (the nexus of borders, mapping and counter-mapping in the English-speaking world). Our four Canadian guests will lead a “walkshop” during the conference on the Strasbourg/Kehl border which all conference participants are invited to attend.

Proposals in English or French (up to 300 words), accompanied by a short biographical notice, should be sent to Marianne Hillion (mhillion@unistra.fr), Monica Manolescu (manoles@unistra.fr) and Ghislain Potriquet (potriquet@unistra.fr) by May 1st 2023.

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