

Introduction to The Social Lives of Maps, Volume 3

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Volume 95, numéro 1, 2023

Thematic Issue: The Social Lives of Maps, Volume 3

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102338ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1102338ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Cape Breton University Press

ISSN

1718-1259 (imprimé)

1927-9264 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Beck, L. (2023). Introduction to The Social Lives of Maps, Volume 3. *Material Culture Review / Revue de la culture matérielle*, 95(1), 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1102338ar>

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Introduction to *The Social Lives of Maps*, Volume 3

Initiated in 2021, this three-volume thematic issue brings together 16 scholars from around the world to explore the many ways that maps lead and impact our own social lives. The project grew out of Martin Brückner's *The Social Lives of Maps in America, 1750-1860* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute/University of North Carolina Press, 2017). The purpose of this three-volume series of the *Material Culture Review/Revue de la culture matérielle* is to expand upon Brückner's insightful approach to understanding the lives of maps and to consider other geographies and temporalities.

This thematic issue explores maps of all sorts—such as GIS maps, paper-based maps, antiquated maps, artistic maps, and wayfinding tools accessed through mobile telephony. This means that for our purposes, and from a physical perspective, the map is defined by its materiality: whether in digital or spatial form, whether understood as a dataset or art-object, maps commonly transition during the course of their lives from one modality to another.

A twenty-year-old road map provides data on the roads and obstacles with which drivers might meet while in transit from one place to another. In the year in which it was first published, that map offered an up-to-date picture of transportation networks. Decades later, however, it

may be viewed as outdated in that newer roads will be absent, on the one hand, whereas newer technologies now allow us to wayfind using mobile devices, on the other. As maps age, they become rarified and imbued with value as collector's items or as research specimens, and in that way, old maps can be considered akin to community elders sought after for their currency as informants of political, social, cultural, and geographical change.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the preponderance of digital platforms means that maps today thrive as living organisms informed by the latest traffic patterns, place name updates, placement of signage, and so on: their online biographies demonstrate incredible resilience and a capacity to become intergenerational. Unlike you and I, the map's demise may be difficult to effectuate, precisely because the fallibility of material maps, which could be burned, torn, or lost, are nearly impossible to lose within the digital realm. Once scanned and made available online, digitized maps become immortal because metadata, data repositories, and the seemingly impermeable memory of the internet collude to perpetuate the lives of maps forever.

The introduction of mass-produced maps in the late medieval period has ensured that we often have more than one and sometimes thousands of copies of

historical maps, and each of these—along with their digital lifespans—lead their own lives. Each map individual may have drastically different experiences than others in her peer group published on the same day on the same printing press by the same technician. Similarly, there is stark variation in the quality of life of copies of the same map held by different institutions: maps, whether in the physical or digital worlds, are never the same and they undergo distinct experiences depending on where they live, how they survive exposure to the elements, who their neighbours are, and what accidents they might suffer. Each must be studied as individuals, but the possibility that individuals live double lives in the physical and material realms calls our attention to the complex possibilities for theorizing about their social lives.

Maps also help us understand our own lives. As Brückner establishes at the outset of his book, the map “acts as the material, visual, and emotive horizon binding multiple means of mass communication, structures of feeling, and everyday social habits” (1). During the period in which the United States both won its independence from Britain and engaged afterward in a destructive civil war, maps defined the social fabric of the young nation, inscribing within them our lives as citizens of whatever nation we call home. In this way, we belong to them much as they belong to us, being not just physical possessions, but also expressions of our identities alongside those of the people who created maps.

Maps as entities are often living in that they change from one edition to the next, undergoing a chrysalis or transiting through various stages of life: the road

map published 20 years ago has been updated and re-released each year thereafter by the publisher, who offers a more updated map as an inducement for the traveler to purchase it. As documents, maps are created; our interaction with them results in them aging; and at some point, the map may be discarded or destroyed. As commodities, maps experience a lifespan no differently than sentient beings—even in the digital realm where we, too, are immortalized through our interactions with the internet and with social media in particular. As Brückner points out, we often think about maps as being right or wrong, good or bad, or beautiful or ugly, qualities that mirror the sorts of judgements or assessments that we make of each other (4). At the same time, viewers make meaning, and a map’s value will be influenced by “the viewer’s class, gender, age, education, economic power, and ethnic origin” (9).

Brückner proposes four methodologies with which the social lives of maps can be viewed and analysed, and through these I will introduce the 14 articles included in this thematic issue. The first of these methodologies involves viewing the map as an environment or ecosystem whose inhabitants are images, personas, and avatars with relationships among themselves. The figural components of the map function as individuals within the map itself. Because all ecosystems interact with exogenous environments as well, the porosity of the interstitial zone between the map and that which surrounds or interacts with it also requires us to think about the map’s interior and exterior environments.

The interaction of map components is the subject of the article contributed by Virginija Popovaitė (Nord University,

Norway), titled “Maps in Translation: Following Maps Through Maritime Search and Rescue Operations in Northern Norway.” Popovaitė considers how digital maps and the data that they rely upon have social lives while they are being used and created in the field during Search and Rescue Operations. By viewing maps as more-than-human actors, she considers how maps in the digital world are constituted by elements such as the compass, gyroscope, radar, and an array of data; they also generate data and therefore are in constant flux. The concept of translation allows her to explore the fluctuating state of materiality as maps of this nature transit between the physical and non-physical worlds.

Heather Rogers and Kelly Chang (McGill University, Canada) also demonstrate this methodology in their article, titled “Mapping Ecological Imperialism: A Digital Environmental Humanities Approach to Japan’s Colonisation of Taiwan.” The authors assess the role of cinchona—a tree whose bark yields quinine alkaloids key to the treatment of malaria—in Japan’s imperialist expansion through both historical maps and digital mapping tools. They seek to provide the first detailed historicization of the intertwinement of nature, people, and nation building using maps as a platform for this knowledge, showing how historical maps and digital mapping tools can elucidate complex rooted networks within colonial societies.

The second methodology sees the materiality of maps interacting with the materiality of what surrounds them. These social entanglements connect that map to the broader world—in the hands of children, maps offer a picture of the world around them while serving a didactic purpose and providing a wayfinding tool.

Their production points to layers of materiality that stretch from the printing press and the brand of ink used to colour the map to the printing plates upon which it was etched and then to the paper upon which it is superimposed. The map finds itself sequestered within a book, placed into a student’s backpack, transported from the public realm of the classroom, where the child has doodled on its surface and circled their favourite places with pencil, to the intimate setting of a family home and child’s bedroom. There it may rest beside their favourite doll or sit abandoned on a basement bookshelf years later.

This is the methodology used by Cortney Berg (CUNY, USA), in her article, titled “Sanudo’s Vision, Vesconte’s Expertise, and the Ghost Hand: Reception of the Maps in the MS Additional 27376.” In the fourteenth century, Marino Sanudo authored his lengthy work, *The Book of Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*, or *Secreta*, and commissioned sets of maps to accompany the text, and dozens of copies of this work wound up as gifts that have since come to reside in the national libraries of various countries, including England and the Vatican. This article considers two such copies from the workshop of the influential cartographer, Pietro Vesconte, the MS Additional 27376 in the British Library with the MS Tanner 190 in the Bodleian Library, in order to compare the images and maps, and posit what the differences between the two illustrate about Sanudo as an author and a statesman. The author also turns from what the maps tell us about their creators to consider what experiences they have had themselves. Berg works to uncover a ghost hand that has intervened in these manuscripts in order to meditate on how

medieval maps become reinscribed as political documents about the state of the world.

Another approach to a map's materiality influencing that of its environs is taken by Adam McKeown (Tulane University, USA) in his article, titled "Mapping Ideas in the Fortress-Cities of *Civitates orbis terrarum*." Using maps from the influential sixteenth-century *Civitates orbis terrarum* series, this article considers how the two-dimensional ichnographic city plan, which emerged in the late fifteenth century, developed rapidly during the military crisis of the sixteenth century when many European cities scrambled to rebuild walls in response to new fire weapons. The two-dimensional city plan was instrumental in this sweeping and costly reconfiguration of the European built environment in that it allowed architects and civic leaders to see the urban complex as a continuous system. The new urban plans also had the effect of transforming the city into militarized space, however, with vectors of gunfire and lines of communication driving planning considerations. The city plans that survive in manuscripts and printed books testify to the enthusiasm for militarizing the human environment throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but they also reveal how artists explored and developed aesthetic ideals under the auspices of military optimization. The new designs tended to subordinate military considerations to Vitruvian ideals, to the extent that geometric regularity became for no practical reason an ideal of military design. Fortification designs in this way often possessed lives well in advance of any real-world manifestation of the infrastructure itself.

Marco Fratini (Fondation Centre Culturel Vaudois, Italy) also explores this approach in his article, titled "Les cartes comme instrument d'affirmation confessionnelle. La création de «Vallées vaudoises» entre XVIIe et XIXe siècle." Fratini undertakes an analysis of maps of the west Piedmont region and how events over the last several centuries have shaped them from both an endogenous and exogenous view, particularly when their creators hail from different parts of the world. He notes that maps are manifestations of power in a period in which cultural divisions among Protestants and Catholics became projected and reenacted by maps of the region through the appearance of religious infrastructure that underlined the area's complex spiritual identity. Maps could also serve as a source of propaganda, inciting disagreement within the user-viewer, who might wish to reach for a representation that better aligned with their socio-political and religious worldview.

With the third methodology, we examine map interactions between people of varying backgrounds to understand how maps impact their lives and how they respond to maps. These might include how we read maps by unfolding them, creasing them, downloading them, or swiping them out of the way. By thinking about our sensory experience of maps, we can illuminate entirely new dimensions of both our and their social lives.

Karen Rose Mathews (University of Miami, USA) explores this methodology in her article, titled "Mapping, Materiality, and Merchant Culture in Medieval Italy (12th-14th Century)." Over the course of the twelfth century, Pisan merchants formulated cognitive skills that fostered a perception and assessment of the world

through the lens of cartographic knowledge and inventories of commodities, places, and trade routes. The development of a “mapping eye” among the mercantile elite of this maritime republic combined two complementary visual systems. The production and distribution of Mediterranean luxury goods encouraged the development of cartographic tools to facilitate navigation and maritime commerce. In turn, the creation of portolan charts and texts, with their diagrammatic format and conceptualization of space into interconnected but distinct ports of call, determined the arrangement of goods acquired through Mediterranean trade in a series of heterogeneous visual ensembles that juxtaposed material objects of various media, origin, and signification. Maps, then, were products of human ingenuity and necessity that in turn transformed the ways of seeing of those who created and used them, formulating a visual matrix through which information was processed and defining social relationships between people but also between people and things.

Steffen Wöll (Leipzig University, Germany) also explores human-map interactions in his article, titled “Beyond the Artifact: Unfolding Medieval, Algorithmic, and Unruly Lives of Maps.” Wöll explores the social agency that maps have and exert among humans in different periods and geographical contexts by reflecting on medieval mappamundi and their influence on human decision making; the power of hand-drawn maps that graft human experience and witnessing upon the document’s biography; and the sometimes-fleeting materiality undergirding maps such as those of the Gaza Strip and that iterate the past existence of Chinese temples. By looking at different types of maps in interdisciplinary,

transhistorical, and global fashions, the essay also considers how peoples’ lives become transformed and even defined by cartography.

Elitza Kotzeva (American University of Armenia) also explores this methodology in her article, titled “Counter-Mapping for Resistance and Cultivation of Counter-Memory: Contemporary Social Life of Historical Nagorno Karabakh Maps.” She looks at the shifting borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan on twentieth- and twenty-first-century maps following political and military conflicts in the region to consider the ways that maps can be a source of comfort against the background of war and upheaval. In parallel, maps can also be source of provocation when they depict territorial rifts and changes in boundaries that incite emotional responses from their viewers and users. The region of Nagorno Karabakh has a vibrant cartographic history imbued with captivating storytelling abilities that describe and contextualize how conflict has impacted the area.

Social interactions between users and maps are also explored by Martin Vailly (European University Institute, Italy) in his article, titled “Poring Over the World at the Court: Coronelli’s Globes and the Social Lives of Maps in France (1680-1715).” Vailly examines the how maps structured both social relationships and the exercise of power at the court of Louis XIV to show that engaging with maps was a central way of negotiating social status and asserting one’s power at court. The agency of maps, given that their contents and materiality shaped the socio-political interactions they were part of, was made manifest through their varied purposes: to teach the shape of the Earth to children using printed maps and

globes; to discuss the latest victory of the royal armies using plans and atlases; or to entertain courtiers with an astonishingly decorated map. Vailly considers how Coronelli's terrestrial globe was used by the king for these purposes while meditating on the object's material life and interactions with different cohorts of users.

Johanna Skurnik (University of Helsinki, Finland) also investigates human-map relations in her article, titled "From Everyday Map-Things to Oblivion? The Social Lives of the Finnish Missionary World Maps." Skurnik investigates the social lives of the nineteenth-century mass-produced missionary world maps published in Finnish and Swedish in the Grand Duchy of Finland, at the time an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. The maps were produced to build broader support for missionary work. By analyzing the worldly experiences that the maps generated in their different users, Skurnik examines their *thingness* in Finnish society. She also studies the life cycles of these maps to theorize the continuities and changes in their relations to human subjects.

The last article that deals with this subject is authored by Bram Vannieuwenhuyze (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands), and titled "The Social Life, Death, and Rebirth of Jacob van Deventer's City and Town Maps of the Low Countries." Vannieuwenhuyze observes that most scholarship on Low Lands cartography concentrates on its extant products (maps, atlases, globes), their makers (surveyors, cartographers, publishers), and their production process (surveys, printing, objectives). Little scholarship has considered how sixteenth-century maps of the region were used. He identifies and

explores the sources we have at our disposal to reveal more about how the social lives of maps impact map viewers and users.

A fourth methodology considers the biography of the map as it transits through its life off the printing press to the trash bin. Graciela Favelukes (CONICET/Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina) demonstrates this methodology through her exploration of the process of reincarnating a map over several editions. In her article, titled "Voyages of a 17th Century Map of Buenos Aires: From Spies and Sailors to Printers and Scholars," Favelukes undertakes an exploration of the long and rich life span of a city map of Buenos Aires and its changing settings by following more than 15 versions of Barthelemy de Massiac's 1669 map of the city produced between 1669 and 1981 while shining light on the map's different uses and purposes over the centuries. Her analysis makes plain the political and social ideologies that influence the map and its contents. At the same time, she traces the complex lifespan of a map that, like the cat, has more than 15 lives.

The second article that explores a map's biography is by Sean Roberts (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA), titled "World Views: Cartographers, Artanship and Epistemology in Early Modern Italy." In it, Roberts considers how human experience enrobes the map with almost physical features—such as "eyewitness" experience and "hand-written" information, endowing maps with a sense of physicality and thus humanity. At the same time, the copy practices of the period mean that past maps become entangled and involved in the biography of new maps, making many cartographic

creations complex from a biographical perspective because these entanglements also point to the human intervenors, copyists, cartographers, scholars, and publishers who grafted past maps upon newer ones, as well as upon other visual contexts, such as paintings and book illustrations, that subsequently made their way onto maps. As a result, the role of the cartographer and their craft is inherently interdependent upon the livingness of the map as a document with the capacity to broadly project the human experience.

The third and final article that traces a map's chrysalis over time is contributed by Lynette Russell (Monash University, Australia) and Leonie Stevens (Monash University, Australia), titled "The Dutch East India Company (VOC) Tasman Map and Australia: Competing Interests, Myth Making, and an Australian Icon." Known as the Tasman Map, this document traces the voyages of Dutch navigator, Abel Tasman, in the South Pacific. The authors unpack the map's biography, from its origins to its transformation into a symbol of imperialism and power at the Mitchell Library at Monash University, Australia, which acquired the map in the twentieth century. Its presence there has given birth to new mythologies and legends about both the map, the man who inspired it, and the various constituencies that possessed or held the map over the centuries, as well as new modalities of the map's existence once it was transubstantiated from paper into the form of a mosaic for the Mitchell Library's vestibule. In today's world, the map and its discursive veins chafe against shifting social attitudes toward colonization and its impacts on the country's Indigenous people, making it a contested emblem of both violence and nationhood.

As guest editor of this thematic issue devoted to the social lives of maps, I observe that these important contributions to the subject emphasise the potential for future scholarship to uncover how modalities in particular—printed maps, material maps, mental maps, digital maps—give these objects an intransience or immortality. What does this ability to outlive one's biological or physical lifespan reveal about humanity's struggle to do the same, and how might it foreshadow human futurity as we realize the multiplicity of our own lives, whether online, on earth, and even after death?