



THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF CARTOGRAPHIC HUMANITIES

Edited by Tania Rossetto and Laura Lo Presti

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The Routledge Handbook of Cartographic Humanities is an ambitious undertaking to explore emerging conversations in geography, the arts, and the humanities. The spatial turn has led maps and mapping practices to become central elements of new fields of interdisciplinary inquiry, variously labeled as the spatial digital humanities, geo-humanities, deep mapping, or map art, among others. The result is a series of productive conversations, explorations, and field crossings between the humanities and mapping studies. The editors see the cartographic humanities as an emerging arena where geography, literary studies, classics, archaeology, art and media studies, and digital humanities are engaging with each other around maps and mapping.

Both editors are geographers at the University of Padua, in Italy. The forty-two chapters of the *Handbook* are organized into seven Parts, each aimed to illustrate some of the interdisciplinary conversations that have arisen around maps, mapping, and cartography: theory and trends; textural connections; mediations and intermediations; cultural digitalities; troubles and disruptions; elicitations and co-creations; and public cartographic humanities. Chapters provide examples for conversations across a dispersed scholarly landscape with fascinating examples such as Renaissance chorographies, experimental art maps, Indigenous counter-mappings, GPS “selfies,” and museum exhibitions.

“Part 1: Preludes and trends” sets out some of the key intellectual moves. Veronica della Dora’s opening

chapter—“Mapping Inner Worlds: Cartography as a Humanity”—focuses on maps as forms of texts and practices. As Matthew Wilson notes in a dust-jacket blurb, maps move, and, as I (1995) have suggested, maps have their own social lives. In this vein, Matthew Edney’s “Processual Map History” insists that maps should be understood not as static objects but as elements of unfolding processes and controversies.

Part 2: “Textural connections,” extends this attention to practice and form by working across ancient, archaeological, historical, and literary materials. Chapters such as “Charting Movement through Historical Sources”—from Tiago Luís Gil—turn to itineraries, marginalia, and textual traces as quasi-cartographic details, while other essays on fictional and zoocentric cartographies probe how non-human perspectives and narrative devices complicate conventional map-territory relations. The effect is to pull mapping deep into the narrative and material textures of cultural production, showing how stories and archives are themselves shot through with spatial diagramming and imaginaries.

Part 3 shifts its focus to cartographic media: maps in and as film, advertising, design, and visual art. Essays on worlds for sale in print advertisements (Davide Papotti) and on maps as design tools (Roger Paez, Manuela Valtchanova, Ferran Larroya, and Josep Perelló) unpack how cartographic imagery frames commodities, landscapes, and experiences. There, authors explore some of



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the ways in which the political economy of cartographic reason is translated as it circulates through late modern visual cultures.

“Part 4: Cultural digitalities” reflects on mapping in human and more-than-human environments with examples drawn from GPS selfies, platform interfaces, location-based games, and automated mapping cultures. The essay “A Humanistic Rewire of GIScience” by Bo Zhao is especially interesting. It challenges technocratic celebrations of GIS by arguing for decolonial, reflexive, and situated approaches that foreground power, difference, and epistemic justice in digital mapping practices. Bo Zhao’s critique of efforts to geocode the world draws on critical GIS debates about how spatial data infrastructures act as devices of governance and surveillance. In contrast, the other essays in “Cultural digitalities” are more descriptive of emergent digital practices and affects, and in some cases the underlying political-economic logics of platforms and data extraction remain in the background. Still, the section usefully repositions the digital map as a dense socio-technical arrangement rather than a neutral interface.

The essays in “Part 5: Troubles and disruptions” engage more directly with colonialism, race, gender, and the Anthropocene. Andrea Pase’s analysis of “emptying and filling” in maps of inland Africa shows how colonial cartography produced blank interiors to be claimed and exploited, and how later mappings layered new projects and imaginaries onto those spaces. Clancy Wilmott’s “Cartography Contra Colonialism,” and the chapter “Indigenous Cartographies” by Davi Pereira Junior and Bjørn Sletto foreground Indigenous mapping as a site of resistance and ontological conflict, where alternative ways of mapping land, territory, and relationality unsettle imposed grids and property regimes. Stephen Hanna’s “Black Cartography as Memory Practice” and Christina Dando’s analysis of gendered mapping cultures probe the racialized and gendered inscriptions of power in cartographic practice, while David Chandler’s discussion of mapping in the Anthropocene examines how earth-observation and risk cartographies reconfigure governance and responsibility at planetary scales.

The “Part 6: Elicitation and co-creation” chapters shift the tone toward participatory and reflexive practices, some with the explicit sense that people’s cartographies offer emancipatory potential. They include chapters on cultural mapping projects, auto-cartography, and collaborative

mapping of community narratives and heritage. Nancy Duxbury and W. F. Garrett-Petts explore participatory cultural mapping as community-centered work rather than technocratic inventorying, while Giada Peterle uses auto-cartographic techniques to probe the researcher’s own positionality and affective geographies. Stephen Hanna, Amy Potter, and Derek Alderman’s work on mapping historical tours shows how routes, stories, and embodied movement co-produce landscapes of public memory.

The final part, “Public cartographic humanities,” follows maps into institutional settings such as exhibitions, collections, and public cultures. Martin Brückner’s “The Social Life of Maps” and Tom Harper’s reflections on public map exhibitions attend to curatorial choices, display formats, and institutional settings, tracing how some maps become canonical while others remain marginal. Here, again, the *Handbook* insists on the performative life of maps: they are staged, circulated, and contested as public objects whose meanings are continuously negotiated. For those working in museums, archives, and public history, this section underscores the importance of curatorial cartographies and offers concrete cases that link critical theory to institutional practice.

The book is blurbed by geographers Tim Cresswell and Gillian Rose, who praise the volume as a “state-of-the-art” and “must-read” intervention that demonstrates the richness and critical potential of contemporary map studies. A third blurb by Matthew Wilson focuses on how “maps move” and how, in the process, mapmaking practices become more curious and more open, vibrating among different conversations, and avoiding the potential limits of canonical interpretations—something that is one of the successes and pleasures of the *Handbook*.

Handbooks can often be unwieldy and diffuse, and my first impression on receiving this volume was that it was of such a mixture, offering and suffering from the form of a handbook. It is massive in scope and coverage, with an impressive range of content, and an exciting opening of conversations across often un-trammelled intellectual borders. As a result, at times it does feel a little dispersed. The scale and heterogeneity of the collection make unevenness inevitable, and the theoretical line throughout can feel more gestural than fully worked through, while the Euro-Atlantic skew in contributors, case studies, and the debates around “cartographic humanities” itself does mean that the *Handbook*, at times, sits uneasily alongside

the global aspirations of “cartographic humanities” and its wider cousin “environmental humanities.” But my colleagues and I, from Classics, Geography, Romance Languages, and Renaissance Studies, used the *Handbook* to guide a periodic interdisciplinary seminar, inviting occasional contributors from the volume to join us on Zoom. In this context, the *Handbook*’s coherence and value became clear. Topics are well chosen. Chapters are relatively short, but synoptic or suggestive. And reading 2–3 chapters at a time as a conversational focus for each meeting worked well. Indeed, the *Handbook* offers an extraordinary repertoire of cases, concepts, and methods that make it invaluable for teaching and for situating one’s own work within a larger set of mapping and cartographic conversations.

Geographers have, in recent decades, grappled with finding an appropriate balance between the roles of traditional concepts of cartography and the emerging roles and possibilities of new technologies, practices, and uses for maps and mapping. The central questions involved have already been raised on multiple occasions by multiple writers—the NSF-supported Friday Harbor conference on GIS and Society (Sheppard 1995); *Ground Truth* (Pickles 1995); Denis Wood’s challenge “Cartography is Dead (Thank God!)” (2003); *A History of Spaces* (Pickles 2004); and “Revisiting Critical GIS” (Thatcher et al. 2016), among others—enough, perhaps, that the condition and its progress have been sufficiently diagnosed. The necessary concern now is for what is to be done about it: how are these emerging imaging systems and mapping practices changing the social lives of maps and the specific forms of “worlding” our world? How are geography and the wider

field of mapping practices to respond to new technologies and the political economies that have been emerging? What, too, could be done to better understand the likely consequences of these spatial practices and imaginaries for society? The *Handbook of Cartographic Humanities* is an important contribution to furthering the hopes of Friday Harbor to expand conversations about mapping practice, democratize map knowledge, and create spaces for a renewed politics of spatial understanding.

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