

Introduction to The Social Lives of Maps, Volume 2

Lauren Beck

Volume 94, 2022

Thematic Issue: The Social Lives of Maps, volume 2

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1092682ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1092682ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Cape Breton University Press

ISSN

1718-1259 (imprimé)

1927-9264 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Beck, L. (2022). Introduction to The Social Lives of Maps, Volume 2. *Material Culture Review / Revue de la culture matérielle*, 94, 1–3.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1092682ar>

LAUREN BECK

Mount Allison University

Introduction to *The Social Lives of Maps*, Volume 2

As Bill Brown and Arjun Appadurai have observed, the biographical lives of things inform us about not only a thing's existence, from its creation until its demise, as well as how it has been used, valued, and commoditized. They also inform us about human interaction with things in ways that can allow us to understand the experiences of marginalized and unexpected interlocutors of a thing's existence. Maps as documents have complex lives. In some ways, maps might be considered eternal in that they are subject to revision and these updates comprise moments or stages of their life spans as living documents. In others, maps live short lives when inserted into books that get destroyed, deemed out of date, grow ragged and decrepit, or end up torn out of the book altogether and introduced into entirely new vertical contexts as wall maps.

Maps are everyday objects, but they are also highly esteemed and valued as antiques, rarified and conserved in the special collections of archives, libraries, and museums who catalogue their lives or provenance. Maps experience in this sense class and privilege much the way that humans do, which gives us pause to consider whether other areas of identity are experienced by maps as well. Contemporary mapping platforms such as Google Maps offer entanglements with our own lives; they collect data about our

movements, desires, and interactions, and attempt to interact with us through these connected nodes. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and responsive software designed to interact with humans increasingly make maps living interactions that adapt to and engage directly with us. Finding ourselves on an analogue, paper map offers a similar function in that humans consistently consult the map to both find and see themselves through it.

This thematic series of issues of the *Material Culture Review* engages with all aspect of the social lives of maps in any way that underlines this material object's lifespan. *The Social Lives of Maps* highlights and explores signature areas of a map's biography as an object, as a living entity subject to being updated and transformed for new audiences, and as a container of knowledge and wisdom capable of influencing human activity.

As the project's guest editor, I will reserve an analytical introduction for the third and final volume of the series, and take the opportunity here to introduce the five essays contained in *The Social Lives of Maps*, vol. 2.

The first of this issue's articles is by Graciela Favelukes (CONICET/Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina), titled

“Voyages of a 17th Century Map of Buenos Aires: From Spies and Sailors to Printers and Scholars.” The author 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 Barthelémy 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 next article is by Cortney Berg (CUNY, USA), 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 into these manuscripts in order to medi-

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

The third article is by Heather Rogers and Kelly Chang (McGill University, Canada), titled “Mapping Ecological Imperialism: A Digital Environmental Humanities Approach to Japan’s Colonisation of Taiwan.” In this article, 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 penultimate article is by Karen Rose Mathews (University of Miami, USA), 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.

The final article is by Adam McKeown (Tulane University, USA), 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, as vectors of gunfire and lines of communication drove 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.

In this issue, we also include exhibition reviews by Trudy Watt and Mohsen Veysi.