

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MAP LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

BULLETIN

Will-o'-the-wisp, map collection tours, hauntology and deep time spectres.

Conference Paper

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Conference Abstract

In renewing ways to navigate the uncharted institutional spaces of interred maps and their containers, recent William C. Wonders map collection tours and "top-of cabinet" displays have been crafted to open up ways to re-read cartographic renderings as apparitions, situating their re-inscription and retention in the spectres of deep time. By incorporating tactile ambience, aural, and experiential movement, in-person tours aim to dislocate the map collection into Anthropogenic fragments (shales) and their impressions (fossils) that capture the uncanny energy embodiments of extractive dispossession, and the resulting wrack lines that continue to haunt the landscape.

Report

March 2020, the William C. Wonders Map Collection (situated on Treaty 6 territory) shelters in place as a global pandemic unfolds during the Anthropocene. Staff were temporarily exiled from the collection, which created a renewed sense (desire path) to re-navigate the collection upon our return. Since 2023 the map collection co-curators Larry Laliberte and Bonnie Gallinger have conducted 20 map collection tours and outreach events involving 200 individuals. The tours (assemblages of positionalities) draped the physical movements and the map collection with Henri Lefebvre's three tenets of the *Production of Space* - conceived, perceived, and lived.¹

Through *conceived* space, tours are introduced to maps as artifacts, abstract renderings produced by the dominant order of society. Within *perceived* space, tour groups examine the renderings while *on-the-move* encountering the collection through its institutional landscape. By the end of the tour, the goal is to passage into lived (representational) spaces of imagination and art. It is in this representational (lived) space that we conjure the map collection through hauntology. Beckoning maps, and re-reading their cartographic renderings as apparitions, situating their re-inscription, and retention in the spectres of deep time.²

Hauntology, a praxis that disrupts and dislocates the fabric of the normalized by operating in the fault lines of authorized histories (archives of the sanctioned), speaks to those/that 'who are no longer' and those/that 'who are not yet'.³

As Oodgeroo Noonuccal notes in the poem *The Past* "Let no one say the past is dead. The past is all about us and within."⁴ This is echoed in Sven Lindqvist's concept of Dig Where You Stand,

¹ wtf is geography?! [@WTFisGeography]. (2022, October 10). wtf is the "production of space?!" [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/WTFisGeography/status/1579484854580039683>

² Deep time is time measured in geological scales (eon, era, period, epoch). Time expressed in thousands, millions and/or billions of years. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/geology/time-scale.htm>

³ Derrida, Jacques. (1994). *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge.

⁴ Oodgeroo Noonuccal (2000) *The Past*. In S. Kleinert S, M. Neale M, R. Bancroft, T. Anderson (Eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*. (pp 99). Oxford University Press.



Left: Will-o'-the-wisp. Atmospheric ghost light seen by travelers at night, especially over bogs, swamps, or marshes. Also called bioluminescence and firefly luciferian. OpenAI. (2024). DALL-E3. [AI image generator].

Right: Dig where you stand. Worker's researching their own history - drilling down through institutional strata. OpenAI. (2024). DALL-E3. [AI image generator].

which states that history is important because "the results of history are still with us."⁵ History is still paying dividends, and "still conferring power on [certain] people."⁶ As Karen Barad reminds us, "Hauntings are not immaterial, they are not recollections or reverberations of what was [absent], rather, hauntings are an integral part of existing material conditions [presence]."⁷

It is through the lens of hauntology that a map can be examined within that separation between *absent* [] *presence*. A space "neither marking the sand nor bending the herbage".⁸ The space of "the dust of years that lay think upon the floor".⁹ It was within this space that the map collection

⁵ Lindqvist Sven. (1979). Dig Where You Stand. Oral History. 7:2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Barad, K. (2018). Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-turning, Re-membering, and Facing the Incalculable. In D. J. Cohen & E. Weissman (Eds.), *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy* (pp. 206-248). Fordham University Press

⁸ Hawker, R. S.(1867). The Botathen Ghost. In E. Rhys, *The hauntings & the haunted; ghost stories and tales of the supernatural*. (pp. 128-137). D. O'Connor. (1921).

⁹ Bierce, Ambrose (1890). The Middle Toe of the Right Foot. In Don Congdon (Ed.), *Stories for the dead of the night*. Dell Pub. Co. (1967).

co-curators paused to craft a collection engagement workshop for the University of Alberta's annual Festival of Teaching and Learning (FOTL) in May 2024. A workshop that strove to engage participants actively and tactilely with printed maps (to bend the herbage and stir the dust). A workshop that would be centred on transference through tracing upon translucents.¹⁰

In this space, and through hauntology, we are provided with a critical lens traversing the scales of past and present (interscalar vehicles¹¹). A way to interpret the silent stories that maps tell through what they choose to show or omit, allowing for revelations of alternate (counter) meanings to the dominant (colonial) ones. As Melissa Chomintra emphasizes, "paper maps play a significant role in teaching spatial literacy as they exemplify production techniques and cultural attitudes of the era in which they were created."¹² Printed maps are dynamic documents that continue to inform our understanding of ongoing historical, cultural, and environmental narratives.¹³ Maps are a perfect medium to capture absent presence, and facilitate discussion surrounding colonialism, dispossession, appropriation, disenfranchisement, erasure, authority and authorship.¹⁴

During the FOTL workshop various maps were introduced that participants could literally, via the translucent medium of tracing paper, draw upon. This included *maps of loss*, a selection of maps that capture ghosted landscapes that no longer exist (towns¹⁵ and wetlands¹⁶) along with maps that snapshot landscapes that are disappearing in front of our eyes—the most infamous of which, the glaciers of Western Canada.¹⁷

¹⁰ University of Alberta Centre for Teaching and Learning. Festival of Teaching and Learning May 7-9, 2024. Transforming Teaching and Learning Through Intersectional Equity and Connection.

<https://www.ualberta.ca/centre-for-teaching-and-learning/events/festival-of-teaching/index.html>

¹¹ Hecht, Gabrielle (2018). Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence. *Cultural Anthropology*, 33:1. <https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/article/view/ca33.1.05>

¹² Chomintra, Melissa (2022) Reflecting on Critical DEI Practices in Spatial Collection Development, Metadata, and Instruction. *Journal of Map & Geography Libraries*, 18:1-2, 68-86. DOI: 10.1080/15420353.2022.2128971

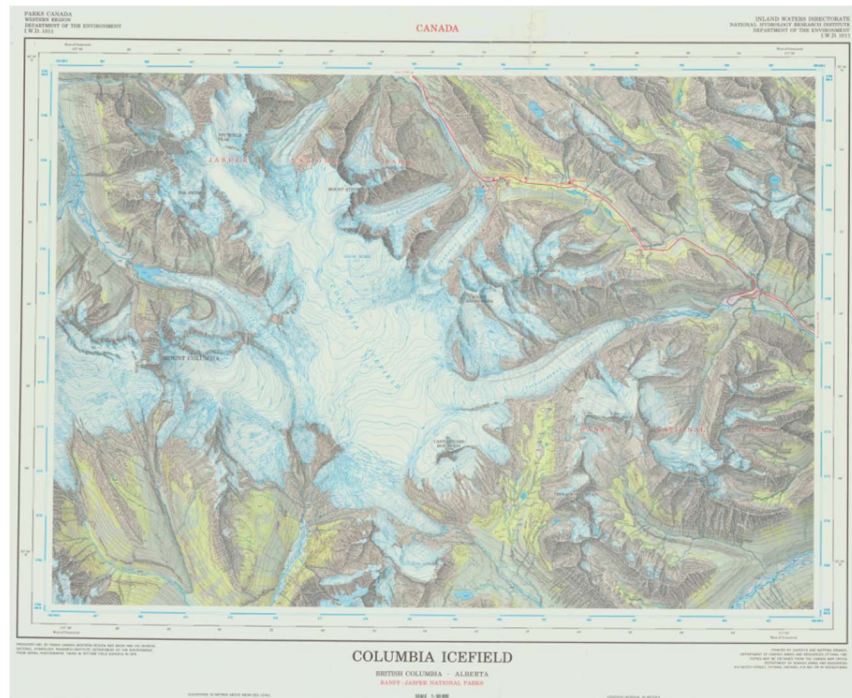
¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Kando Wheels Research Map (1977). Ghost Towns in Saskatchewan. https://archive.org/details/WCWdb_4523

¹⁶ Hind, Henry Youle (1858). Map of part of the valley of Red River north of the 49th parallel to accompany a report on the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition. https://archive.org/details/WCW_M000243

¹⁷ Parks Canada (1981). Columbia Icefield: British Columbia-Alberta; Banff-Jasper National Parks. <https://archive.org/details/NP041981>



Ghosting Glaciers. Parks Canada (1981). *Columbia Icefield: British Columbia-Alberta; Banff-Jasper National Parks.*
<https://archive.org/details/NP041981>

Also included were University of Alberta campus maps, a spatial extent where most of the participants spend a large portion of their time. As a result, historical maps of the University of Alberta were included, showing "River Lot 5" as it was in 1874¹⁸, alongside a selection of official campus maps produced from 1910 to 2015¹⁹. Entitled *Campus Corpus as Canvas*, participants were encouraged to trace, and overlay their own mental maps representing their day-to-day interactions with the campus. Zooming out from the campus, the workshop also had maps of the Edmonton Region that captured Indigenous communities like Papaschase that were later removed, and erased from the map, alongside wooded areas long since fractured by exurban housing, not to mention the footprint of the city of Edmonton that has expanded immensely (at the expense of farmland) over the past 100 years.²⁰

¹⁸ Dept. of the Interior, Dominion Lands Office (1883). Plan of Edmonton settlement, N.W.T.
<https://archive.org/details/CT-Edmonton-A16>

¹⁹ University of Alberta (1966). Campus Map University of Alberta Edmonton. <https://archive.org/details/UA-Campus-1966>

²⁰ Office of the Surveyor General. (1930). 315: Edmonton sheet, west of fourth meridian, Alberta. -- 9th ed.
<https://doi.org/10.7939/DVN/10167>

Finally, a selection of maps labelled "draw words write maps"²¹ were included. Within this group were early survey maps where landscape descriptions (bluffs of poplar, thickets of willow²²) were written across the maps. A spatial ekphrasis following survey tracks, rivers while circumscribing wetlands.²³ Maps with blocks of text detailing natural resources that would soon be exploited through extractive means.²⁴ It was also under the *draw words write maps* where participants were encouraged to write their own perceptions of the map alongside their graphite sedimentations (tracings) as another method of getting to the space between absent presence. At the close of the workshop most participants had selected one or more maps and combined/collaged them onto a sheet of tracing paper. Others did not trace at all and spent the session discussing the maps, speaking to their use in colonization and how these prairie settler geographies might be centred as evidence²⁵ for decolonial work.

Overall, the workshop provided a stimulating way to encounter maps at a very detailed personal level (a bird's eye view of a bird's eye view²⁶). While so much spatial history is online with a multitude of zoom, pan and download options, to engage with maps as printed artifacts (chemically processed cellulose fibres derived from wood) at a very close (eyes hovered mere centimetres away) personal mediumship (splayed fingers and thumb) participants (pencil in hand) created impressions, through graphite sedimentations,²⁷ deposited along the medium of translucent paper essentially crafting an opening volley in a process towards deep mapping a thesauri of remains.²⁸

²¹ Weltzien O. Alan. (1999). A Topographic Map Of Words Parables Of Cartography In William Least Heat, Moon's Prairyerth. *Great Plains Quarterly*, 19:2, 107-122.

²² Nelson, J. C. (1884). Treaty No. 6 N.W.T., Plan of Indian Reserve No. 136, Chief Papaschase. https://archive.org/details/WCW_M000654

²³ Topographical Surveys Branch, Department of the Interior (1912). Sketch map of the Third Meridian from the Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Base Line. https://archive.org/details/WCW_M000201/

²⁴ Baine, H. E. (1914). Portion of Northern Alberta showing position of outcrops of bituminous sand. https://archive.org/details/WCW_M000731

²⁵ Fujikane, Candace. (2021). *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future*. Duke University Press.

²⁶ The Tragically Hip. (2000). *The Bastard* [Song]. On *Music @ Work*. Universal.

²⁷ McNally, Emma. (2021). *Field Drawings*. In Phil Cohen and Mike Duggan (Eds), *New Directions in Radical Cartography : Why the Map Is Never the Territory* (pp. 327-331). Rowman & Littlefield.

²⁸ *Sedimentations, a thesauri of remains* (2024), Definitions used as part of the University of Alberta Festival of Teaching and Learning). <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MnvqRHavHQFgjJnCD2-VN7c6x2VnMWkwFPcFJqM7m4k/edit>