

The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France  
by Tom Conley  
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The Face of the Earth: Natural Landscapes, Science and Culture  
by SueEllen Campbell  
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Politics, and (therefore) national and personal identity are at the core of these two publications. The analysis of the remarkable period of European (and therefore) world history during the early modern period of the 15th and 16th Centuries in the first, provides the call for the kind of topographic descriptions compiled during the early part of the 21st Century in the second. Then as now, proliferation of technology and political change provide the background to these accounts, overtly in the first, occluded in the second.

Since the time of the cosmographer Ptolemy 1500 years before the early modern period, cartography had been held, like many other technologies, subservient to the principalities of warlords and the belief systems centred on the Church of Rome. The technologies emerging in the 15th Century – printing, perspective drawing, written forms of the vernacular, scientific method, and other matters of the Renaissance – began the process of rolling back superstition and the power vested through religion.

Maps are of fascination for our quotidian moments and occasionally become essential for our survival (even) to those on the move. A map confidently organises data gathered from the physical world and we accept its greater knowledge and authority as expressed in neutral appearances. We have only to remember the colours applied to groupings of countries, and projections favouring their placement in the frame, to know this is not true. These realisations, a placing of oneself in the world, are the maps of the mind at the centre of Tom Conley's fascinating account.

He begins by providing a window onto an arcane world, (not unlike our own though of a different era), and the inexorable processes through which knowledge was extended beyond the Court and the Church of Rome. The focus is on the various kingdoms that were to become the French nation, though the overall project employed 'European' experts of the day moving (and being moved) to the

research and production centres. Earlier travel writings complete with woodcut 'snaps' of scenes and activities sold as well then as they do today. But these lacked uses as tools to soldiers and traders, camp followers and mercantile pioneers – what was required was greater accuracy and brevity.

Individuals like Oronce Finé are traced as they think their way through from the cordiform 'whole world' map view, alerted to the affordances of 'the grid' by both mapmakers and typographers, to the regional almost localised renditions. Writings, from itineraria way-sheets to the sojourns of Rabelais's characters, concomitantly raised the desires of the traveling classes and their expectations of adventures to be had abroad, in the imagination and as experience, on the real roads and byways described in word and image. The bounds of the worldview began to spread with the continuing colonisation of the New World and, "in the singularization of experience that affects cartographic writing", in the island book, or *isolario*, (described as the beginnings of ethnography by 20th Century scholar Claude Lévi–Strauss). Andre Thevet's *La Cosmographie Universelle* took a form that layered in all manner of fact "that refuses to concede to an atlas structure", the precursor of other written forms, (from Swift, to the present day television documentary or celebrity adventure?)

The shift from woodcut to copperplate technology permitted advances in the acuity of the reproduction of drawings but the discipline of the atlas asserted itself in the work of Borguereau, in a perspective form and viewpoint that would be recognised by users of current internet map tools. The royal commissioning of this, like the corporate sponsors of today's manifestations, had a purpose beyond the altruistic – the consolidation of spheres of influence and profit. The Iberian destruction of the peoples of the New World motivated by plunder and religion was the turning point for the emergence of the 'internationalist' essay writer, the three Frenchmen, Montaigne, du Voisin and René Descartes. The carefully analysed differences in their cartographic writing enable Conley to arrive at a sentence that carefully locates the reader, the text and its writer. "One can move into space by surveying and arrogating it, and one can make it virtual, seemingly self-made, when a cartographic process is adjusted to the imagination of one's origins, growth, works, memory, and living itineraries."

Michel de Montaigne observed in his seminal *Essais* that "we need topographers to provide specific accounts of the places they have been." This Conley paraphrases as aiding in "the art of writing and composing a work that can extend itself in mental directions that will move long enough and far enough to yield a verbal geography that can be experienced through both intellectual and physical means."

Responses to the call over the centuries have been slight, from popular windows on the world like National Geographic, to some twenty writers, several from Colorado State University, who provide accounts in **The Face of the Earth**, edited by SueEllen Campbell,

not of the rural byways of medieval France, but of the remote areas of today's planet. A series of edited expressions of the culture that constructs our sense of 'the natural world' is offered, as "intriguing and suggestive examples of the many ways that we and our earthly surroundings are tied to each other." 'We' it must be pointed out concentrates primarily on the United States, Great Britain and Australia.

Four chapters, each with about a dozen sections describe the dramatic zones of internal fire, volcanoes and geysers; climate and ice; wet and fluid; and desert places. 'On the Spot' accounts describe the experience of being in such places and are interspersed with the more objective descriptions using the interdisciplinary languages of the sciences and humanities. A final chapter moves into the complexities of mankind's relationship with the physical world, steadfastly maintaining its neutrality, planted in the domain of the empirical. The contradictions of Heidegger's *dasein*, 'being-there', and the clear need for affirmative remedial reconstruction of the human role within the biosphere are left for the reader to imagine if not desire. Clearly the book is intended to elevate the knowledge levels of city-bound high school students, to stimulate and encourage expeditions to sparsely populated places, experience wilderness areas, to create space for mapping of the self to begin, for understanding the forces shaping the landscapes of history and the contemporary world. As a source book for constructing agendas it is admirable, though as there is not an image to be seen, it will appeal mainly to the already committed and serious student.

That student could be further galvanised by Conley's paraphrasing of Lévi–Strauss, "...we can only offer cosmetic reasons for granting humans the right of temporary residence in the nature of things. The gratuitousness of human presence in the world could not have failed to vex cartographic writers of the early modern age as well."

The self-made map approach to writing of the 16th Century, created for the first time a spatiality of narrative, a form that was perfected not in the 19th Century novel but through the development of narrative in 20th Century cinema, a subject about which the author is also a recognised contributor.

Conley's book is an engrossing read because to this reader, so much was new and expressed in such fulsome and scholarly detail. Thus it was a 'slow' read as, often using unfamiliar but resonant humanities-based terminology, so much background needed consulting. At times the detail discussed in the illustrations and maps is beyond visible comprehension on the (octavo) page and this reader had to track down larger images on the internet. (Perhaps a simultaneously published website containing links to images could have benefitted both these publications?) Fortunately, as with the genre of books that have followed the pioneering early modern writers, the images available have proliferated.