

[Hanson on Ferdinand, 'Mapping Beyond Measure: Art, Cartography, and the Space of Global Modernity'](#)

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Simon Ferdinand. *Mapping Beyond Measure: Art, Cartography, and the Space of Global Modernity.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. 260 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4962-1211-5; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4962-1758-5.

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Mapping Beyond Measure: Art, Cartography, and the Space of Global Modernity

In *Mapping Beyond Measure: Art, Cartography, and the Space of Global Modernity*, Simon Ferdinand offers an incisive discussion of map art, or artistic explorations of mapping as a theme and practice. Yet Ferdinand's book is more than a critical study of map-based artworks. As the shortened version of the title *Mapping Beyond Measure* suggests, it is also an interrogation of prevailing beliefs about cartographic measurements that provokes us to imagine new possibilities for understanding mapping. Indeed, Ferdinand advances an astute critique of what he calls the "ontology of calculability," or the paradigm according to which space is uniform and measurable via a series of neutral calculations that are representable in an objective way (p. 17). For this reason and others, Ferdinand's text is an indispensable read for scholars who work at the intersection of cultural geography, critical cartography, and the visual arts as well as historians of art and visual culture whose research centers on maps, mapping, and space. Those who deploy digital mapping to analyze art, literature, society, culture, and geography will also benefit from thinking with Ferdinand about the need to problematize emergent technologies that rely on Global Positioning System (GPS) data or utilize a geographic information system (GIS) to visualize spatial information.

Ferdinand's *Mapping Beyond Measure* consists of an introduction, six chapters, and an envoi. A particular strength of the book is Ferdinand's introduction. In it, Ferdinand methodically lays the groundwork for his investigation of map art, beginning with a discussion of two examples. The cartographic works are Solomon Benediktovic Telingater's cover design for Ilya Feinberg's book *The Year 1914* (1934) and Joyce Kozloff's collage of found images, *Boys Art #18: Mombasa* (2002). Through a process of close visual analysis, Ferdinand clarifies how the pieces of Telingater and Kozloff engage with notions of nationalism, militarism, imperialism, violence, gender, and power. Expanding on these readings, Ferdinand posits the following thesis: "map art plays out, and puts to the test, some of the central figures, myths, and narratives through which global modernity has been imagined and theorized" (p. 10). In the pages that follow, the author convincingly demonstrates that map-based art provides a unique medium through which to analyze how cartography has been used to imagine, construct, maintain, and contest asymmetrical relationships of power. He also drives home the larger argument that the study of map art must involve a parallel critique of the nature of

cartographic practices and maps as such.

Two additional strengths of Ferdinand's introduction to *Mapping Beyond Measure* are the ways that he situates his research within a larger genealogy of cartographic studies and cultural geography, and that he clearly defines his terms. For example, Ferdinand positions his understanding of maps in opposition to that of Katharine A. Harmon, author of the important book *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination* (2004). Ferdinand explains that, in contradistinction to Harmon's universalizing "humanist" perspective on mapping, he deploys a critical lens to historicize maps and map-making by connecting them to the emergence of modern states and global processes. To adequately contextualize this position and its attendant semantics, Ferdinand invokes Arif Dirlik's theorization of "global modernity" and Franco Moretti's articulation of modernity as a condition that is "one and unequal" (p. 8). Whether or not we agree with Ferdinand about the meaning of these contested concepts, he establishes a sufficient foundation for his main arguments by allying his work with that of Dirlik and Moretti, among others.

Each chapter of *Mapping Beyond Measure* centers on a specific map-based artwork produced by a diverse group of artists between the 1930s and the 2010s. Collectively, the works are representative of a variety of media, ranging from painting to digital collage to walking performance and film. Although Ferdinand gives several practical reasons for organizing the book as a series of interrelated case studies, I would have liked for him to devote the same level of care to articulating his rationale for selecting each case study. This minor shortcoming aside, Ferdinand offers a thorough discussion of his methodological approach and theoretical convictions that places the reader in good stead for anticipating how his interpretations will unfold.

Throughout *Mapping Beyond Measure*, Ferdinand deploys an interdisciplinary interpretive practice known as cultural analysis that is often associated with Mieke Bal. According to the practice, as Ferdinand recounts it, an author constructs a context for studying an artwork by placing it in conversation with discourses and theoretical texts, thereby producing tensile relationships between them that can then be parsed for meaning. To accomplish this task, Ferdinand deftly places examples of map art in dialogue with spatial and critical cartographic writings, working outward from there to generate cultural knowledge. However, this form of analysis has some pitfalls because it involves shifting the focus of inquiry from artworks to relationships between them and discursive and theoretical sources, in some cases to the detriment of interpreting the art. This shortcoming is sometimes apparent in Ferdinand's readings of map-based art. Indeed, there were several moments in the book when I would have appreciated more substantial investigations of the pieces that attended to their size, materiality, installation, and multisensory qualities, bringing their aesthetic and phenomenological dimensions to light more fully for readers.

Nevertheless, Ferdinand's *Mapping Beyond Measure* is admirable for many reasons. Ferdinand assembles a group of compelling cartographic artworks produced by Solomon Borisovich Nikritin, Alison Hildreth, Gert Jan Kocken, Satomi Matoba, Jeremy Wood, and Peter Greenaway. The case studies provide a rich introduction to specific artists' projects and issues that are germane to the field of map art more broadly. Moreover, the skill with which Ferdinand unspools his claims to advance wider, interlocking arguments is impressive. In chapters 1 and 2, Ferdinand explores Nikritin's engagements with mapping the globe and Hildreth's visual meditations on cartographic constructions of time and space. The author expands on this foundation in chapter 3, considering how Kocken's

artworks lay bare the dangers of glossing over the ontology of calculability. Similarly, the fourth chapter shows that Matoba's attempts to reimagine cartography for the global good still reiterate the entrenched paradigm. Pivoting from these disclosures, the remaining chapters chart new possibilities for understanding map-making by investigating how Wood's map art troubles the dominant paradigm and Greenaway's film goes beyond it.

Ferdinand is at his best in chapter 3, which centers on a series of map-based digital prints created by the Dutch artist Gert Jan Kocken in the 2010s. To make this body of work, Kocken used Photoshop to layer hundreds of images of found maps, plans, and aerial photographs dating from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Each of the resultant prints shows a composite view of a major European city, such as Berlin or Rome, during a period when it was under fascist rule or being altered by the violent events of the Second World War. Ferdinand places the prints in dialogue with Zygmunt Bauman's writings on the modern state in order to explore how certain powers have deployed map-making as an instrument of warfare and genocide, and a tool for visualizing utopian fantasies of spatial, social, and cultural uniformity. It is in this chapter that Ferdinand most seamlessly and thus compellingly navigates among art, text, and a variety of other sources. It is also here that Ferdinand uses his analyses of Kocken's prints to arrive at the crux of the book, or the author's conviction that the ontology of calculability subtends "modern mapping's world-shaping power" and, for this reason, must be interrogated and dismantled (p. 141).

In *Mapping Beyond Measure*, Ferdinand convincingly demonstrates how, by studying cartographic artworks, we can glean new insights about the role of map-making in the formation of modern institutions and processes of global modernization that shaped our past and continue to inform our present and future. The book grew out of Ferdinand's fellowship research at the University of Amsterdam and belongs to the series Cultural Geographies + Rewriting the Earth, edited by Paul Kingsbury and Arun Saldanha. As this series attests, Ferdinand's *Mapping Beyond Measure* participates in a broader scholarly discussion about the cultural formation of geographic knowledge and the ways that we think about and experience our place in the world through maps and other cultural representations of the earth. The book also provides a valuable resource for a growing number of historians who use digital mapping as a method of inquiry, as evidenced in the pages of the peer-reviewed journal *Artl@s Bulletin*, and other similar publications.

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