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Monsters on maps, their decline, and knowing and not knowing the world

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by
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Abstract

This is an exploratory essay on the representational and metaphorical uses of monsters during the early modern period. In it, I argue that the cartographical uses of monsters are a component of a larger and pervasive discourse on colonialism throughout this period. The European imaginary, taken aback by the "cosmographic shock" of the Americas, struggled to incorporate the new image of the world with their sense of cultural superiority. What I show is a complex and often contradictory mix of ideas, images, and meanings, since so much of what was accepted as true before was so completely wrong. It is completely unprovable, but that is because this is about the past.
Ack: knowledgements

An immense and indispensible advantage of history – or poetry – is that it continually presents to us many other possible human ways of being, which might have other arrangements, communication, and patterns.


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By way of introduction
This is about some seventeenth-century maps and the monsters that are pictured on them, and then slowly disappear. It is about the dynamic relationship between the creators and viewers of these maps, between producer and consumer, and the way in which we can read these images and these relationships historically, as a way of unpacking, or at least examining, the changing ideas they represent, both intentionally and less so. It is also about the meaning of these ideas, which is about the Americas and about Europe, and about the Europeans’ figuring of “their” world. These maps also constitute a narrative, a positivistic bildungsroman, a journey from the symbolic, through the representational, to the so-called diagrammatic modes of illustration. It is about the monsters printed on maps, and how they reveal and enact many of the historically important tensions in this period.

This essay uses images, and tries to think with images as a component in the history of ideas. Although as documents, works of visual art or illustration are more widely open to interpretation than other, more “grounded” textual documents, these are nonetheless key documents in any culture that produces them. Textual artifacts are obviously important as well, but these too are subject to the rigors of interpretation. Like literary works, which are also used here, these maps and images tend to oversignify and produce more meanings than can be contained by the author’s intentions, but like visual work, like art in general, we must admit these irrational maps to history as well. This is, taken seriously, the use of postmodern thinking in historical work: texts always already contain contradictions, meanings are found in rupture, and in what has been effaced and scratched away.

That said, I do not posit any proof of a clear delineation between two distinct ways of thinking and seeing: life, and certainly any history, is too complicated for that. Rather, I hope to reveal a rather sophisticated discourse, told in many voices and by many hands over a long period of time, about knowing and not knowing how
to view the world. This discourse is deeply embedded within mainstream, educated, urban Europe: profiting hugely on the spoils of the Americas, trading with the east, expanding its military power, imploding throughout the long Reformation, engaged, like the people and characters in Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*,¹ in a violent and prolonged confrontation with this other – their selves – their epistemological baggage strewn to the maps’ frames, covered in blood, soaked in gold – these people bought, designed, coloured, and read maps, thousands of them, several of which will be used as primary documents in this work.

This is a narrative history of ideas. It has many, and of course contradictory stylistic and structural influences, many of which are not often invoked within academic work. Consider *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*,² a book which makes bold the faint connections between architecture, Dostoyevsky, and the contradictions of modernity exemplified in art (which can be considered cultural work focused in generic forms); while Berman revels in the Joycean hallucinations of Marx’s *Manifesto*, the hard facts of his own argument themselves dissolve, and there is the raw emotion, suffusing Berman’s prose, of a world of pain. Or consider *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*,³ which connects certain varieties of dissident thought across centuries, using coincidence rather than cause, from the Sex Pistols’ Johnny Lydon to the fifteenth-century Anabaptist heretic John of Leyton, youth culture at the end of the Great War and Dada, the students and situationists of Paris in 1968, and music at the end of the twentieth century more generally. Here is a historian whose primary documents are by nature ephemeral: concerts, songs, moments – and he mixes images, sometimes obviously connected to the text, sometimes not, with

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quotations, vignettes, and interviews. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, like all these examples, is a passionately argued and empirically unprovable thesis, done in words and photoessays and collage. As I hope to do with my analysis of these maps, these works use the technologies available to them to present and advance arguments, that is, use pictures and words to tell stories about pictures and words and about the people who made them and the world which all these things effect(ed). Even the historian's most stereotypical document – the printed page – means visually as well as textually: uniform row after row of type may signify as much (or less) as any image. A printed page can, and should, be considered a visual artifact as well as a historical one. A final and crucial influence on this work is Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and The Worms*, from which I take important elements of form and method. Like Ginzburg, I start to reconstruct moments from documents, and interpret them, with a postmodern awareness of any historical event's distance and unknowability. And, as argued in all these books and more, no one said this had to be boring. This essay is intended to be more evocative than evidential; it asks more questions than it pretends to answer, and it aims to complicate rather than resolve. Like histories, maps offer a culturally-specific epistemological shorthand with their own conventions and claims.

Given my use of words like "textual", it should be inferred that this history is deeply informed by literary theory and postmodernism, and as such, may well be a work not entirely disciplined. But "doing" history is an act, first, of imagination, of making more or less conscious choices (I prefer more) about how words mean, which words, and whose, and of sometimes having one's earlier imaginings overturned. This is not about things that happened; this is rather about how some people over a certain period of time went from one way of thinking – and picturing

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— to another. My interpretation of texts is therefore broadly literary, informed but not seduced by the ministrations of postmodern literary, historical, and artistic theory. I write, moreover, convinced that narrative is the form of writing proper to history, although that is usually largely unacknowledged. But any "writing" is not transparent, or value-free, or a neutral window to some clear and unambiguous past. There is no history, either, outside of the text. Consider, for example, Mark Phillips' *Society and Sentiment,* which provides an account of the varieties of historical writing before it became ensconced in the academy. The Rankean emphasis on a positivistic history, of building a transparent window into the past, is widely acknowledged to be epistemologically untenable, yet much historical writing persists in a pseudo-scientific mode. Even a watershed publication like *The Cheese and The Worms,* which insists on not knowing a complete story and on not necessarily being somehow broadly 'representative' while confronting a historical moment on literary terms — that is, how did Menocchio get from the books he read to the testimony he twice gave? Put another way, how did he read? — has not really prompted a widespread re-thinking of history-as-writing. Narrative, after all, does not have to be linear, and historiographical theory post-*Metahistory* can embrace that idea, and historians can practice it, by re-imagining the discipline in the way they write and present ideas.

These pieces of paper took shape several years ago — indeed, several years even before it took shape as a historical project. The images of monsters on maps, more than the maps themselves, interested me aesthetically, and amused me in their quaint proliferation. In occasional reading on the subject, the desired linear narrative

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is readily apparent: there are monsters, then fewer monsters, and as the maps become more accurate, monsters vanish.

I would argue that there is more to it than that: monsters, in my view, signify the unknown, and danger, and fear, and also speak to the literal depths of the ocean itself, to the changing image of the world, and indeed, to the irrational and an acknowledgement of it, through the users and makers of these maps. I will show that the use of monsters as visual shorthand for such complicated ideas was, indeed, quite common to the map, and that this points to the profound cultural and philosophical changes during this period – of both, paradoxically, the innovative and aesthetic power of the European renaissance and the profound destruction wreaked in turn on the rest of the world.

Historians of cartography have traditionally paid little attention to the ‘decorative’ elements in maps; indeed, maps themselves are usually read at face value and taken as an index of geographical knowledge. Only recently have maps been examined as part (indeed, a reflexive part) of a discourse of power and knowledge. This discourse is – in the early modern period, certainly – a top-down model, with powerful elites producing and consuming visions of the world acceptable to a European, colonizing ideology. Valerie Traub, for example, looks at the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality on the margins and frames of maps in “Mapping the Global Body,” and finds not only an erasure of difference but also an imposition of heteronormativity and a reconstruction of European gender roles. Traub also traces a powerful ideological urge not only to represent these Eurocentric conditions, but to impose them in the colonized world as well. Such an investigation, like almost

all postmodern cartography, takes its lead from J. B. Hartley, a scholar central to the revisioning of the subject, who emphasizes that maps are not value-free texts, but rather are laden with ideological markers, and can be analyzed as powerful representations of space: from “Deconstructing the Map,”9 which prompted an entire issue of the journal *Cartographica* in response, to the four-volume *History of Cartography* series, he described his task as “envisag[ing] cartographic images in terms of their political influence on society.”10 The political uses of maps, or their use as propaganda, has long been noted, as for example, in Hans Speier’s “Magic Geography,”11 which demystified and exposed the Nazis’ uses of maps to propagate the idea of a pan-European Germany. Maps (especially old ones) have long been prized as aesthetic objects and yet, as Hartley notes, “have been projected as ‘scientific’ images – and are still placed by philosophers and semioticians in that category” (280). In reading the secondary literature on the subject, the gulf between art historians, map collectors, and historians of cartography is generally quite wide. In “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” Hartley calls for a new understanding of the ways in which maps can function:

In the articulation of power the symbolic level is often paramount in cartographic communication and it is in this mode that maps are at their most rhetorical and persuasive...Alternatively, we may assess how artistic emblems – which may not be cartographic in character but whose meaning can be iconographically identified from a wider repertoire of images within a culture – function as signs in decorative maps when they are embedded in the discourse of the maps. (295)

Hartley’s own program partakes of that of the influential postmodern thinkers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault; he is primarily interested in the ways in which maps represent and articulate power, in a Foucauldian sense, and he reads them in broadly deconstructive terms. Derrida’s literary program tends to seek out the

margins, the awkward, and the fissures within texts, in order to unpack and reveal their structuring assumptions. In this intellectual context, the figure of the monster is both a convention and a metaphor, yet an unanalysed one.

Monsters are noticed, of course: while Frank Lestringant's *Mapping the Renaissance World* takes as its primary subject the sixteenth-century cartographer André Thevet, there is a moment of teratological explication:

A map at this time, although it is true that it had edges, could have gaps only if it masked them with a cartouche or with images of fabulous creatures...And they still designated, in a New France peopled with dog-headed or boar-headed men, or in 'islands of Griffins' in the vicinity of the mythical Southern Land, spaces that remained to be conquered. (113-4)

Lestringant devotes few moments to the monsters in his study, yet even this brief discussion is telling. A map "could have gaps only" if they were "masked" with a decorative element, and he links such masking to conquerable spaces – recalling Dussel's "I conquer," which for him is the colonizer's variant on the cogito\(^1\) – that is, it is linguistically a performative utterance, a calling-into-being like a king's "I declare," the Virgilian "I sing," the minister's "I pronounce," or Descartes' "I think", the form accomplishes what it refers to at the moment of its speaking. In *Image on the Edge*,\(^2\) Michael Camille explores the use of the margin in late medieval books, art, and architecture, and his rejection of an unconscious *horror vacui*, an irrational fear of empty spaces, is valid here as well – surely, all this is not without meaning – there is no reason that Lestringant gives for this perceived need to fill empty space. And this is the central question here: why all the monsters? And what (how) do they mean?

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One might imagine that such questions would be answered by art history, but these kinds of mass-produced maps do not attract the same kind of attention that a fetishized work of Caravaggio does. One historian, Wilma George, wrote *Animals and Maps* (1969), seeking to prove that early maps were "essays in zoogeography, as well as geography" (3). She looks, however, only at land animals, and discusses rather straightforwardly the placement and accuracy of the representations.

The maps are remote in many ways, and the ideological affect remains profound: this is what the world looks like. So as objects, these maps are so obviously central – as some future historian will look at our pathetic self-representations on cereal boxes, our dreams and moments and their diminishments and ends. But all these maps, however interpreted (a term we use in its broadest, most hermeneutically salient sense) are assertions of power, as Hartley notes, and whether that power is 'merely' epistemological – the claim to know a thing or place – or more obviously colonial, as in the declaration of one's dominion *terra incognita*, that is, unknown before conquered, is not relevant. I hope that I have adequately explained the need for a study such as this, defended my mode of presentation, because that is the purpose of an introduction. So, as when I attempt to use my contemporary urban maps, I find myself back here again, at the beginning.

This essay is divided into four (more) organizational rubrics. The first, "Monsters in the Mind," looks at late medieval and early modern teratology, and the epistemological frame of conceptions of the ocean. "Maps as Artifacts of Another Idea" discusses the history of maps throughout the colonial period, in terms cartographic, artistic, and economic. The section that follows, "Sameness and Difference," looks in detail at two seventeenth-century Dutch maps of England, and in doing so outlines the cultural changes that accompany the disappearance of monsters. The final bit, "Monsters, the Unknown, and the Construction of Empty Spaces," considers these signifiers of difference in a wider discourse, and as part of a larger narrative about colonialism and history.
Monsters in the Mind

Before their first appearances on printed maps, monsters have a complicated history. In medieval texts and records, descriptions often embody the doubleness implicit in the word itself: "monster" is derived from monere and monstere, to warn and to show – that is, they were understood as signs. Even only looking (as we are) at the variety of creatures understood to live in the ocean, and how they were understood to mean, the movement of these meanings will become clear. So, what were the things that were eventually pictured on maps?

Subject Area: Pre-Linnean Zoology

In historical terms, what were "animals"? And in this case, how does one distinguish natural animals from aberrations? The history of the cataloguing of animals – zoology, the ordering of living things – is divided by Linnaeus’ early eighteenth-century work, which to most historians of science (and, interestingly, the Library of Congress) marks the beginning of so-called scientific classification. (Throughout this period, the modern concept of "science" did not exist, but was rather in the process of being formed.) He published, in broadsheet form, his method of classification: a system of formalized naming that emphasized observable likenesses, and the grouping of the natural world using the familiar categories of species, genus, and so on. Earlier works draw from Aristotle's De animalibus and the work of Pliny the Elder, which provided the descriptive model

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13 There is a rich and developing theoretical literature on animals, which looks at topics apparently as diverse as experimentation, epistemology, vegetarianism, and art, and at the animal-as-other, an uneasy history of utility and metaphor, from cave walls in Lascaux to these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps, to Melville, Bugs Bunny and Laika (see my sonnet, "Laika").

14 See the introduction ("Las Meninas") to Foucault’s The Order of Things, and particularly (predictably) the bit about the Chinese encyclopedia, in which animals are ordered as a) painted b) shrieking and so on.

15 It certainly is striking that standardized nomination should be a feature of this enlightenment-era narrative and a feature of Adam’s dominion in the garden. This basic assumption about power in much western civ is noted as well by Erica Fudge, in Animals.

for most medieval bestiaries. Early printed works tended to be descriptive as well, and by the sixteenth century, many books of birds and four-legged animals and other animals were published all over Europe. These works, let loose in the marketplace, discussed and illustrated animals, humans, ‘fabulous’ creatures, among other topics, and veered from a scientific tone to something more digressive. An early catalogue, Conrad Gesner’s *De rerum piscium et Aquatilium Animantum Natura*, was printed in 1558 and part of a four-volume history of all animals. His work incorporated illustrations throughout, which had not generally been the case in earlier catalogues. Gesner includes a hydra, a bearded whale, and a monk-fish. While primarily descriptive, Gesner reports on the local and wider interpretations of strange animals. Ambroise Paré’s *Monsters and Marvels* (1585) is not a text about zoology; rather, Paré is interested in monstrosity and what causes it. Paré was a French naturalist with surgical experience, and he combines features of earlier books of wonders and signs with a more “scientific” approach. Most of this book focuses on human “monsters,” such as conjoined twins and people with birth defects,
and does not write of animals (save animal/human hybrids) until chapter twenty-three, which is on sea animals. Using Gesner’s illustrations, he describes a creature found on a beach, reputedly a Monk-fish, which appeared in the early 1520s. To the local Lutheran population, he noted, it was obviously a sign about the dangers of the Roman church. To Catholics, of course, it was Luther. Paré simply reports these interpretations, noting that in contrast to the cases of human monsters, which are caused by something, no one knows what is in the sea.

As in this example of Paré’s use of Gesner’s images, with the advent of “the exactly repeatable pictorial statement,” stories and images of large ocean animals circulate as well in reports of sightings, like A Relation of a terrible Monster taken by a Fisherman near Wollage, July the 15, 1642, and is now to be seen in Kings Street, Westminster. The Shape whereof is like a Toad, and may be called a Toad-fish, but that which makes it a Monster, is, that it hath hands with fingers like a man, and is chested like a man. Being near five foot long, and three foot over, the thickness of an ordinary man. The breathless account which follows describes the monster and its parts, and includes this striking account of popular hermeneutics:

A Butchers wife coming in hastily to see it, and hearing at the first that there was a strange fish to be seen, and being upon it in the stable where it lay before she was aware, thrusting in among others, started from it with a shriek, crying, Oh, the devil in the shape of a great fish, swounded, and was fain to be carried out. (2)

Then the fish’s dimensions are given, before the author moves into a more learned explication, noting in particular that the monster’s entrance into the river is remarkable since “(never any of this strange kind ever having been seen by any age before)”. In a single remarkable sentence, the author asserts his own ability to rank the creature as a monster of a high order, leaping in short order from ancient Rome to current events. He relates the story from Pliny of an unusual creature

which was in the year that Nero (that never-sufficiently detested Tyrant) was born in, of which he hath this note, that Monstrum praecebit monstra: and plainly divined that its arrival was ominous, as indeed all Histories do with constant content maintain and write, that all unusual births, especially out of their seasons, have ever been the forerunners and sad harbingers great commotions and tumults in States and Kingdoms, if not mournful Heralds of utter desolation.

The author goes on to relate the Toad-fish to present day events. It is clearly seen as ominous, and the description is couched first in the language of sin: “seeing the diverse sins which are by diverse Divines comprised in the nature of a toad, reign, and have their swing in our Nation” (3). To others, “those that profess skill in Prognostication,” the monster is so “hateful and odious, so much it portends danger the more dreadful and universal”. Strangely, and parenthetically, the author even doubts “if a creature we may call it, though truly it goeth against the hair,” casting doubt even on its animal existence. Besides the monster’s hyperbolic description, the two narratives – the woman’s reaction and the historical precedents – are sufficent evidence for this writer to deem the Toad-Fish a monster, and in this case, interpretable: the Toad-Fish itself becomes a text. The Relation complete, there follows an italicized prayer (fig. 3), which begs forgiveness from the Lord for various sins and loyalty to the King. What follows this rather unsubtle prayer is a complimentary Royalist account of a battle at Hull against an unnamed Scottish knight, 500 men, and four field ordinances. The textual object – an unillustrated six pages – does not directly articulate what the appearance of the toad-fish means, but it asserts that it does mean, and offers a range of choices, all linked with contemporary politics. The Toad-fish’s status as a signifier, however, is unquestioned.
Catalogues of animals would often be printed in large editions. They would incorporate these local stories and were often flush with illustration. These images — often, like the well-known case of Dürer’s rhinoceros, pirated — are more elaborate, yet obviously related to the ones we see on maps. Such texts as these — local pamphlets of sightings, descriptive catalogues, books of wonders, and stories from away, continuing in the tradition of John Mandeville and Marco Polo — speak to both the range of understandings of creatures like these and the changes in these understandings over a period of time. Indeed, if in this analysis, I cross genres with too much leaping, it is because, in literary terms, monsters do too. The shift, as described, is that from oversignification to smaller and more contained kinds of knowledge. From the attribution of divine messages portended by the appearance and record of a “monster” (a term which I hope by now is enmeshed in an early modern mental framework, a dialogue between the normal and its other) through Pierre Boaistuau’s demons in Les Monstres et Prodigues to Pare’s descriptions, monsters slowly do not signify; rather, they just are. Rather than books of wonders, or signs, or prodigies — considered by Norman Smith, in “Portentous Births and the Monstrous Imagination in Renaissance Culture”, to be the Weekly World News of the early modern press, ultimately good for a laugh and little more — by the early eighteenth century there is the official, Linnaean classificatory system and the official construction of category of the known. By definition, monsters fall out of that category, as surely as they fall off maps.

There is a relatively rich historiography on the monstrous more generally (especially on “monstrous” births), which has developed from a rather linear (read: medieval to modern) narrative — as suggested by Park and Daston in 1981,

from prodigies to wonders and marvels to ‘nature’ — to a later conception in which “sensibilities [...] overlapped and recurred like waves.” Postmodern cultural teratologists, like J. J. Cohen, are apt to see the monsters as a sine qua non other, or as “challeng[ing] a coherent or totalizing concept of history” itself, disrupting and conflating categories of human and non-human, human and animal, animal and non-animal. If we accept, in this case, that sea monsters became, in terms of the cultural circulation of knowledge that we’ve outlined here, simply animals, bereft of whatever meaning monstrosity confers, then we turn away from pre-zoology and the naming of animals to their representational existence on maps. Monsters remain metaphors, even while their signifying power declines, and the sites where we encounter them change. My own next sighting of monsters comes most elaborately on maps, throughout the seventeenth century in particular, and as they decrease, the idea of the monster changes too. The ocean-space itself is effectively colonized in this sense, intellectually and physically — with occasional bursts of foam and work like Moby-Dick, or The Whale interrupting.

Maps as Artifacts of Another Idea: the Visual, the Textual
(about looking at maps before looking at them)

Considered as artifacts of another idea, maps in the first European age of print themselves trace the emergence of something distinctly modern, a way of knowing—and seeing—marked with terms like rational, scientific, and of course, historically “modern”. Among emergent sixteenth-century technologies, the press itself—and specifically, its ability to reproduce images exactly—is the defining information technology of the period. From the re-discovery of Ptolemy’s Geographia in 1400 to its first print publication in 1483, many maps were made by its readers and editors, and these maps seem to suggest a slow movement away from a “medieval” T-O image. This imago mundi (fig. 4) rendered the world into the clearly delineated Europe, Africa, and Asia, with Jerusalem at the symbolic centre and the Mediterranean at its literal. Despite the uniformity of the T-map, it was, after all, entirely symbolic, without pretension to “direction” or “space”, which became key components of the printed map. What’s key about print is what Ivins suggests, its very reproducibility, its ability to put the same picture in the minds of many; yet in this case, the reproducibility of the T-O image, because of its simplicity, proved difficult to displace.

23 That is to say, knowing and seeing became even more interchangeable. Despite Descartes’ emphasis on the eye as a physical structure, as discussed in Downcast Eyes, Cartesian thought involves perception as the basic means of understanding the world. Oh, I see. Martin Jay. Downcast Eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought. Berkeley: U of Cal Press, 1993.
24 This aspect of the technology was emphasized by William Ivins, in Prints and Visual Communication. While it is true that prints slowly initiate a revolution in taste and the status of commercial art, it is integral to note as well that the repeatable image is also the basic element of a diagram.
For print historian Elizabeth Eisenstein, the T-O idea persisted until the sheer number of maps in the early age of the press allowed both a different image and a different mode of representation to emerge:

Some medieval coastal maps had long been more accurate than many ancient ones, but few eyes had seen either. Much as maps from different regions and epochs were brought into contact in the course of preparing editions of atlases, so too were technical texts.... Contradictions became more visible; divergent traditions more difficult to reconcile. (74)

That said, for Eisenstein, contrary to the redemptive vision of raw knowledge spread by heroic printers, and exalted by Febvre and Martin in *The Coming of the Book*, the intellectual character of the incunabula period was somewhat retrogressive, and for a variety of reasons. Printers would print whatever manuscripts were popular in their localities, and relied upon old favorites rather than on new authors. Indeed, the T-O world picture was promoted by the hundreds of versions of print Ptolemies, even after 1600. Materials of limited commercial potential – like portolani, the coastal charts used by mariners – would not generally attract the attention of a printer. Eisenstein emphasizes that this situation was not necessarily the ‘fault’ of retrogressive printers, but rather of the dominant intellectual habits of the time. And indeed, a map drawn by a copyist, while certainly suitable for specialists in a local circle, was easier to produce than a woodcut for print. This intellectual work was based on a compare-and-contrast method that Eisenstein describes as occurring slowly, over many generations, that eventually allowed works like Ortelius’ *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1572) to be produced, in six volumes, available hand-painted, and by most commentators the most important cartographic work of the century (and certainly the most popular – judging from the extent of its subsequent

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26 This term refers to printed materials from the 1450's to 1500 or thereabouts. Literally, “in the cradle,” that is, in terms of the history of print.
piracy). Until the late sixteenth century, the wealth of information produced by explorers and map-makers was only used in part; Eisenstein argues that the basic methodological information also needed to be interpreted as well, and then these two different bodies of work needed to be incorporated. In effect, Eisenstein makes complex both simpler versions of the argument on the role of print in the “scientific revolution”. It is not a sudden coming-into-discourse of a new world of textual knowledge, nor is it a prolonged case of cultural lag, promulgated by “medieval”-leaning printers. Rather, as she emphasizes throughout her study, it is a lengthy and contrapuntal exchange of priorities, desires, and technologies, strikingly akin to Thomas Kuhn’s characterization of other profound epistemological changes. The early and apparently heartfelt popularity of maps is often attributed to a kind of colonial dreaming amongst the nascent, yet burgeoning mercantile and urban populations of urban Europe – indifferent, as the Visscher example will show, to accuracy or even “content” per se.

As Michael Baxandall has emphasized, there was a commercial dimension to cultural products in this period. As noted, maps were expensive objects, and they enact a particular relationship vis-à-vis their “intended”: in the case of a painter and the work of art, the final product was

the product of a social relationship. On one side there was a painter who made the picture, or at least supervised its making. On the other side there was somebody else who asked him to make it, provided funds for him to make it and, after he had made it, reckoned on using it in some way or other. Both parties worked within institutions and conventions – commercial, religious, perceptual, in the widest sense social – that were different from ours and influenced the forms of what they together made.

27 In particular, see pages 508-519 in The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, v. 2. Cambridge, CUP, 1978. She also makes the nice point that, unlike the present, when a publisher will slap a new title on an old text, in the early modern period, he would claim to be selling Ptolemy’s Geographia, but with a new introduction, different maps, and so on, and both for the same reason: to sell more copies.

Among these social conventions, in this study the perceptual ranks of the utmost importance. Monsters were, to an extent, expected to be seen: there are medieval antecedents, a rich folk literature of sea-tales, a classical tradition, as well as the relational and active model which Baxandall's influential book implies. "What they together made": this idea of the largely unacknowledged role of the audience in the making of the work itself finds theoretical and historical parallels in, again, Carlo Ginzburg's "circulation of ideas" or Pierre Bourdieu's explication of the dynamics between different authors, audiences, producers, and cultural values in a literary marketplace. And in a theoretical vein, one thinks of Roland Barthes' evocation of a text as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash"; on these maps, these different quotations, conventions, and sources blend and clash across centuries, from the visual to the textual and back again.

Monsters are, after all, marginal. We - and as well as can be reconstructed, their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers - do not look at a map for what monsters may lurk about, but presumably for geographical information. Nor - or so cartographers assume - do we look at the borders, frames, and typefaces used in order to analyze the rhetoric of the map and its use of these creatures as shifting metaphors in the construction of power and knowledge. We are not supposed to look at the monsters: they are not what announces itself as important on a map. Deconstructively, then, that is what we can observe and seek to understand, rather than what "what cartographers tell us maps are supposed to be," as Hartley explains his Derridean program.

32 Nor are they real.
These early maps trace this movement through their own transition from the representational to the diagrammatic; that is, from an image which was understood as a picturing, to one understood as a statement of scientific fact. In the excision of monsters – again, to warn and to show – there is also the severing of the awkwardly representational from the discourse on knowledge generally, and a more broad point made about art’s irrelevance in the face of the enlightened drive to science.
Amsterdam was – admittedly, this was in their promotional literature at the time – one of the centers of fine-art printmaking at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, and while fine-art can mean prints, and reproductions of paintings, in this case it means primarily maps. At the end of the sixteenth century, Willem Blaeu produced a twelve-volume atlas, covering all the known parts of the world, each page hand-painted by his army of apprentices. These were extremely expensive, but were exported widely and popular among the super-rich; there are at least sixty-five copies still extant. That is the extreme high-end, but there were all kinds of maps printed – some in atlases, some within other geography-type books, some as wall-prints, and some meant to be unrolled and consulted. These were not used for navigation: even late maps contain obvious inaccuracies (California, for example, was pictured as an island as late as 1730). Rather, these maps were consulted and used for political ends, as in The Mapmaker’s Quest, when legislators and bureaucrats literally used a map to redefine rural space in seventeenth-century France, in turn reiterating and naturalizing the idea of property and class identity. Or they could be used in the exercise of a more symbolic power – as in these lines, spoken by Tamburlaine in Marlowe’s play:

Zenocrate, were Egypt Jove’s own land
Yet would I with my sword make Jove to stoop.
I will confute those blind geographers
That make a triple region in the world,
Excluding regions which I mean to trace,
And with this pen reduce them to a map,
Calling the provinces, cities, and towns,
After my name and thine, Zenocrate.
Here at Damascus will I make the point

That shall begin the perpendicular. (Tamburlaine I IV:iv, 69-78)

Not only will Tamburlaine conquer Egypt here, he will "confute those blind geographers" and redefine the land as simply as changing names on the map itself. The lines appropriate and twist an image familiar from medieval iconography of God-as-architect – or mapmaker. The thirteenth-century illuminated page shows the Deity measuring the radius of an intriguingly-rendered proto-world. And at the end of this long period (1802), the God-with-compasses again resonates in Blake's "Ancient of Days", a post-Newtonian measuring God. In the meantime, the device was also conventionally used to signify the cartographic profession, both on the maps themselves and in the heroic portraits of their makers such as Mercator. Through images like these, this iconic repetition that equates map and world gives one a sense of the cultural importance of the map-as-object throughout this period.

Maps were generally expensive, and when you look at other images that contain maps at the time, this signification is clear. Consider, for example, Holbein's "The Ambassadors," where globes are found in the mix of objects...
representing political and economic power — but note as well the refracted skull at the bottom, a *memento mori* in another visual dimension, which places globes among other vanities, its users unable to see the fact of inevitable death. Or, there’s Vermeer’s “Allegory on the Art of Painting”, a metaimage in which an actual map — one printed by Claes Jansz Visscher

in the 1650s — forms the backdrop to a female model decked out like Clio, the muse of history. As the viewer spies past the curtain in the foreground, geography, history, and painting are seemingly simultaneously reduced and valourized to the literary category of allegory, where every thing is something else.

For David Woodward, a historian of cartography who has written recently about the map-making scene in Florence in the sixteenth century, the cultural use of maps, distinguished from their navigational use, is what is important in tracing the relevance of maps to history at all. For besides being graphic representations of geographical space, maps in this period are also signifying commodities. And while fairly pricey ones, the business was booming in different cities around Europe, and certainly in Amsterdam in particular, at least booming enough to maintain a number of printers/publishers who specialized in that aspect of the trade, notably Handius, Plancius, Blaeu, Pieter van der Keere, and the
family of mapmakers discussed later, the Visschers. These men (and some women, most of their histories lost) were doing quite well in the ranks of Amsterdam's mercantile elite.\textsuperscript{36}

So as objects, then, what, and how, do maps in this period mean? To be sure, there is an explosion in what J.B. Hartley, the co-writer of the four-volume \textit{History of Cartography}, calls "cartographic consciousness". That said, however, scholars who have worked to develop catalogues and bibliographies of extant maps find a mass that defies classification: not only are there multi-volume atlases published and republished over several years by Martin Waldseëmuller, Abraham Ortelius and Gerhard Mercator, there were also cheaper and localized knock-off editions, single-sheet maps made with and without the original cartographer, and there are maps pulled from atlases and sold as broadsheets. So while designed for elites, maps were not necessarily restricted to them, and their popularity (over fourteen thousand different maps have been catalogued from the sixteenth century alone!\textsuperscript{37}) supports this idea.

Given such a mass of material, produced for so many different audiences, it is no wonder that the history of European cartography is itself quite the strange beast. It is not a predictable linear progression, a simple narrative of ignorance being slowly replaced by Enlightenment. Maps don't suddenly start being "true" at some point – these are, as art historians, cultural theorists, and postmodern cartographic historians agree – deeply signifying visual artifacts. And despite their pretensions to disinterestedness and the diagrammatic, these images are not simple reflections of some external reality, nor are they politically neutral. Rather, they present a way of seeing, a literal worldview, and a prolonged epistemological argument. In David Buissert's \textit{The Mapmakers' Quest}, maps are not only an attempt to display a way

of looking at the world, they are also deeply implicated in the wider context of the imposition of European colonial power. Buissert pays particular attention to military maps and local maps of rural areas, and the use of maps by high-level elites. But these are but two suggestive ways of reading maps; in his words, “cartography has both influenced and exemplified the course of modern European history in many hitherto unsuspected ways” (21). It is this reflexive and dynamic relation — maps both influence and exemplify a cultural and epistemological moment, which I argue is an intellectual crisis — to which I turn. They’re stunning examples of what Ginzburg famously termed the “circulation of ideas”; these ideas, upon closer examination, are filled with contradiction, fissures, and gaps. And there are a lot of reasons for this.

What happened over the long “renaissance” is the central problem of this strange breed, European historiography. This is a complicated moment, and while it is appealing to suggest that the strange becomes familiar, history (and the problems of its writing) rather follows Newton’s second law and becomes more complicated and chaotic, not less. The printing press, linear perspective, the breakdown of Catholic hegemony, the expulsion of Muslims from Spain early in 1492: significant moments, all of which changed the European world profoundly, as well as the ways in which Europeans thought about it. But the real earth-shattering “discovery” was Columbus’, and the slow interpretation of what it meant. But it was earth-membering, not shattering (for Europe, that is), an epistemological revolution that took centuries to absorb.

Through its physical expansion into and claims to knowledge of ‘the world’, Europe re-positions itself from the periphery, far from a literal and symbolic Jerusalem, to the centre, and indeed, it defines itself (as Hegel does in The

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Philosophy of History) as the centre of both history and geography. In Anthony Grafton's *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, for example, the discoveries (primarily the Americas) provoke a long-term challenge to forms of knowledge inherited from the ancient world, which leads - inexorably - to their radical revisioning known as the scientific revolution. That said, for Grafton this is a long-term change, not a sudden break with the past. The contours of his argument suggest that the new discoveries did not fundamentally change European thought or social structures, and that they rather served only to re-inscribe an already well-defined sense of European superiority and self. Dussel's *The Invention of the Americas*, in contrast, is a postcolonial history of Europe, which emphasizes the shock of discovery and its crisis-producing impact on the European mind. While the epistemological crisis was, I argue, profound, producing anxieties and tensions, aporias and fissures, these fissures and inconsistencies are themselves markers of the sensibility historians confidently term "renaissance."

The ocean, a forbidding, unknown, and unrepresented zone, became, by the Enlightenment, a domesticated vista: houses built on the waterfront would face the sea, rather than turn away from it. In *The Lure of the Sea*, this change in the idea of the ocean is read into the nineteenth century, as coasts answer to a romantic sensibility, its sublimity and unpredictability attracting first tourists and later, homeowners. The sea itself changes from an unpredictable danger zone to something benign and aesthetic. Consider its literary use – in Shakespeare, use is made of the other element we find on maps, ships and actually, shipwrecks. It functions as a plot device, but it is incredibly prevalent: Hamlet fighting the pirates, and the Turks, arrived o’er sea, torn at Othello’s hell. A Winter’s Tale. Antonio’s ships were wrecked for Shylock’s pound of flesh. Antony and Cleopatra lost it at sea, but Mariana and

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Perdita delivered. Ferdinand and the rest of the castaways were sunk by Prospero, playwright-in-waiting. He fooled them all. It makes things happen, a combination of randomness and agency, a roll of the dice. A pound of flesh. Viola became a boy, spat out on Illyria’s breast. The King my father’s wrack. I could go on.

On maps – and this, too, is telling – the representation of the ocean changes from something rendered physically, with roiling waves, ships, and monsters, to empty space. Representing, in whatever way, this unknown space, is typical of early maps; among the questions here are what the implications are of this historicized shift into not representing it at all, of representation rather through absence, and of the epistemological meanings of such representations and their lack.

The sense of “cosmographic shock” that is so aptly evoked by the integration of the Americas into the European world-picture is fraught, at times, not only with contradictions but also with a profound interrogation of its causes. Concurrent with the typical intellectual and cultural trends of western Europe in the renaissance – notions of individual liberty, self-consciousness, a renewed confidence in knowledge, and an openness to re-thinking old ideas – the Americas in this light represent both a promise and a warning. In The Invention of America, Edmundo O’Gorman claims that the “the secret meaning of American history” (14) lies within its epistemological founding and the contradicting claims for its identity in the century following Columbus’ landfall. In O’Gorman, the shock of the new is apparently too much for most European commentators, both textual and visual: in learned circles, the belief that the new lands were not truly new held firm for decades. The implication that this was a fourth part of the world did take shape, but by that point adherence to a Ptolemaic model of the world was itself obsolete. Indeed, much of the new cultural baggage imported from ancient Greece and Rome had to eventually be jettisoned,

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44 The Invention of America: an inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1961. O’Gorman does use maps which provide a second line of proofs for his thesis. The case of Martin Waldseemuller’s 1520 map is particularly apropos here: while it gives a slim coastline and islands of North and South America attached as one large (if abbreviated) continent, it includes in an inset a competing image of two disconnected landmasses, yet with present-day Florida emerging from south China.
in some cases, relatively soon after its discovery. The Americas, in this sense, represented a tremendous challenge to both conventional and more learned ways of knowing, demanding a response characterized by improvisation, and, between some lines, an awareness of a fatal hubris.

That is to say: not only did Europeans have to incorporate the Americas into their literal and mental worldview, but in doing so they also tacitly acknowledge their real lack of knowledge about the world, and the fallibility of their ancient sources. The anxious slips on maps: the monsters, which simultaneously invite and appal the eye, which block no routes and serve to mark both difference and danger, signify, yes, *here be monsters*, but also *here is water*, a space which is no longer a barrier; these also signify a thick residue of another anxiety, an admission of the unknown, an acknowledgement, however contradictory and defensive, that so much of what was thought true before was simply wrong.

I find that monsters are not only a telling and persistent metaphor for both these modes of colonization, but also one that turns up in unexpected places throughout this period. Maps are convenient artifacts, in the end, a visual relic of a way of knowing — *imago mundi*, a picture of the world. Small details, metaphors like these monsters, reveal a persistent uneasiness that offer a way of understanding a central historical moment — 1492 — and how that moment itself was understood.

A few caveats therefore: there certainly were maps without monsters, there were maps with more and less, there is the occasional monster much later. These two maps may serve as a particular kind of example. Produced in Amsterdam by father and son Claes Janszoon Visschner and Nicholaes Visschner in 1620 and 1670, it was the most popular of its kind and was sold both alone or as part of a twelve-map set of Western Europe. Father and son were both printer and publisher specializing in illustrated works, primarily copper engravings.

The 1620 map (fig.) has a thick and elaborate frame, itself a frame for illustrations of allegorical figures and heraldry. There are monsters and several ships in the water. In the 1670 map (fig.), the frame has been all but eliminated to a thin
and simple line. There are more and smaller ships, and no monsters; much of the
1620's visual abundance has been eliminated, and with significant effort – because
what is striking about these two maps are the similarities as well as the differences.
The map – England and its details – are exactly the same. This representation of
"England", then, serves my particular purpose here in a particularly striking way.

Nicholaes Visscher simply re-used the same plate that his father had
produced in 1620, but had also gone to the trouble to revise its 'ornament'
substantially. This is no small matter: there is considerable effort involved in
burnishing down a plate and then rebuilding the copper and then engraving a
different kind of detail. The changes are not merely stylistic or an index to taste;
rather, they speak to the cultural meanings of images and here can be considered
signs of the imaged monsters' end. The changes to the map – all, strictly speaking,
unnecessary, since this is not a pirate copy, the image and its plate were owned by the family, and copyright did not yet exist – are meaningful because they are direct evidence of the producer-consumer (artist-patron) dynamic that Baxandall describes.

These changes and the length to which Visscher went to achieve them are indicative of the kind of changes in worldview that I have described. Why include something, if it is extraneous and meaningless at one point and not at another? It is not just taste, and it is not just rationalizing the monsters away. Or rather, it is rationalizing the monsters away, another covering-over of the tensions, shock and fear that they represent.
Monsters, the Unknown, and the Construction of Empty Space

Let the reader recall Wilma George’s *Animals and Maps*, perhaps the closest respectable link to the present study, which aims to compare the animals found on maps from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries with their real-world counterparts, and ignores sea creatures since they are geographically non-specific (that is, live in the ocean) but also since they are so often so much more fabulous than beast. It’s telling, then, that sea creatures are ignored in favour of the more obvious information conveyed by the placement of an elephant in Africa, a rendering of a beaver in North America, and so on. However, just as some scholars have discussed the images of humans and humaniods on maps, and particularly the representations of ‘cannibals’, and others the allegorical female representations of continents (and the accompanying ideological semantics), the issue here is not whether these images of ocean-going animals had any existence in reality, but what purposes the construction and consumption of the images serve.

What is striking about these maps is the relative lack of land animals, and the long period of use (and overuse) of sea animals. And while some examples evince zoogeographical purpose, like Ortelius’ labelled map of Iceland and various creatures, some of these are clearly fanciful. If the reader is unconvinced, consider, from the same 1570 volume, the lute-playing merman hybrid.

These early maps trace a movement through their own transition from the representational to the diagrammatic. Over the course of the seventeenth century, as we have shown, monsters appear less and less frequently, and disappear altogether in the eighteenth. In the excision of monsters – part and parcel of the
enlightened conviction that everything could be known, and ultimately, be rational – there is also the severing of the awkwardly representational from the discourse on knowledge generally, and a broader point made about art’s irrelevance in new economies of knowledge-production.

But there is resistance, too, to this cultural shift and the vision that equates map with world not embraced by all. The point is that these monsters represent both the fear of the unknown but also the cultural anxiety of not knowing, and the subsequent erasure of the physical monsters indicates only that this anxiety had been subsumed into a new, “enlightened” mindset, a worldview that suppresses that reflexive monster into an undifferentiated grey, or the empty space of the ocean on a printed page.

This map, usually dated c. 1590 because of the map’s similarity to one published by Ortelius in the mid-1580s, is often considered enigmatic, to say the least. The fool is surrounded by Latin mottoes, the fool is the world, and enjoined,
"Nosce te ipsum," know thyself. In Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, he asks quite explicitly what is going on – why is everything strange? Why this preponderance of melancholy and madness?:

Of the necessity and generality of this which I have said, if any man doubt, I shall desire him to make a brief survey of the world, as [Cyprian] adviseth Donat, supposing himself to be transported to the top of some high mountain, and thence to behold the tumults and chances of this wavering world, he cannot choose but either laugh at, or pity it. S. Hierom out of a strong imagination, being in the wilderness, conceived with himself, that he then saw them dancing in Rome; and if thou shalt either conceive, or climb to see, thou shalt soon perceive that all the world is mad, that it is melancholy, dotes; that it is (which Epichthonius Cosmopolites expressed not many years since in a map) made like a fool's head (with that motto, Caput hellebore dignum) a crazed head, cavea stultorum, a fool's paradise, or as Apollonius, a common prison of gulls, cheaters, flatterers, &c. and needs to be reformed. (AM 176-7, 1638)

For Burton this is a true image of the world which acknowledges its madness and melancholy, and claims that its truth points to the larger problems of the world itself. And further – this image expresses something more than the traditional ship of fools or fool's paradise motifs do – it express that the act of mapmaking itself is implicated in this critique, that worldview and world-viewing are not all that separate. For the world to know itself as one would a map is fool's knowledge, hubristic, self-damnning, irrational, and possibly mad.

The maker of this map-image, Epichthonius Cosmopolites (an urban man of the world, anonymous), makes the graphic connection argued throughout, that the world is a map, that a map is the world, as an *imago mundi* is a picture and a worldview, and that the map is itself a construction of worldview. So while this dynamic circle is relevant primarily to these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century consumers and producers of images and metaphors, it is indicative of wider European habits of thought, of a worldview expressed in different forms. In this map in particular, this worldview – colonizing both of specific places and people as well as of other ways of understanding, of whole epistemological possibilities – is
literally the mind of the fool, straddling some other boundary between madness and non-rational truth. And yet this map contained within, an accepted and popular document of its period, can also be understood simply as a map with a really interesting frame — a copy, in fact, of Ortelius, which has quite a lot of monsters in its oceans. The fool frame becomes a linguistic hyphen constructed in an image, connecting map-world-mind in a disturbing graphic form.

Accounts of "monsters," then, are useful sources, although only as narratives which enact their author's expectations: the narrator expects to see sirens and mermaids, and lacking any, ordinary mammals simply become them.

Yesterday, when I was going to the Rio del Oro, I saw three sirens that came up very high out of the sea. They are not as beautiful as they are painted, since in some ways they have a face like a man. I have seen them on other occasions in Guinea on the coast of Manegueta. (Columbus' log, Wednesday 9 January 1493)

Columbus does not use the disconnect between his prior knowledge of sirens and the creatures before him as a way to interrogate his own preconceptions; indeed, Columbus' inability to question the truth of his sources is well-known. His typically medieval habit of using biblical knowledge, scholastic authority, and his observations, in that order, leads him to interpret his surroundings to fit the books that matter to him. As is well known and documented, Columbus expected to find the far east and as far as he was concerned, found it; he expected monsters and found them too.

In The Conquest of America, Tzvetan Todorov examines Columbus' mental habits, that is, his particular way of straddling the medieval and modern. In establishing a "truth", Columbus compares what he sees with first the Bible and then with ancient and modern sources. The evidence of his eyes is not a starting point, if it even factors in at all. In this case, Columbus' reality is the painting, and the physical,
living world is simply made to fit.

Even as monsters fade from maps, the destruction of new world civilizations continued at a feverish pace, and permanent European settlements had been established in North and South America. In the first hundred years of the invasion of the Americas, recent demographic work estimates that ninety-five percent of the pre-contact population were killed, directly or indirectly.\textsuperscript{46} Any accounting for this long-term massacre, which began with Columbus' second voyage, must consider not only the individuals directly involved but also the thought which attempted to justify it, that is, to mark the natives of the Americas as a new kind of ultimate other, and through that difference, a threat to an emerging, and vulnerable, European selfhood.

So on the maps – primary documents of this new world – the new is registered, and sublimated, as other. The 'cosmographic shock' is related to the epistemological shock of the Americas, and the sea monsters displace and refigure the anxiety of the unknown: while invoking the dangers inherent in the early European voyages, they also signify the epistemological shock that resulted from them.

They were always marginal; yet never more important as when they began to disappear. The ocean is smoothed over, emptied of ornament, and integrated, as a map dictates, into the known world. Labels like 'terra incognita' were no longer applied, and the 'true picture of the world', with all its well-documented problems, emerged in the early eighteenth century. Monsters were not pushed to the frames; they were dropped from the map entirely. Europe had indeed taken the Americas for its own, had recovered from the initial shock, had turned the original inhabitants of these lands into monsters, and they them had slain.

\textsuperscript{46} David E. Stannard. \textit{American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World}. New York; Oxford: OUP, 1992. See in particular Appendix 1 for a review of estimates of pre-contact population figures, and the chapter "Genocide and Pestilence" on the means of this depopulation.
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