Investigations in Place
Some Thoughts on Psychogeographic Mapping Strategies
in an Examination of the working Coasts of Maine

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Introduction: Psychogeographies after Topology:
Let us begin with something seemingly obvious: a place is more than the physical setting itself – it is much more than a space. Place cannot be separated from a vast array of components – both static and dynamic, as well as human and non-human elements, interactions, events and imaginations – all of which make it emerge as a specific place. But in seeing and describing “place” in this way, are we not now discussing “what is an event?” To say this, is just to begin to come to terms with place. Let us take a detour:

Mediators: Central to understanding a place as a specific place and not just another region of space-in-general is re-thinking how we interact with place and how we conceptualize some of the tools of this interaction – specifically the map. Mapping, while no longer conceptually imagined to be neutral by any contemporary cartographer, still largely privileges the measurable, and quantifiable over the non-metric and the spaces of qualitative difference. Which is to say geography envisages an object (the place) that is “out there” and that there are just divergent views on the meaning of this space (the traditional role of personal geographies and psychogeographies). Thus cartography imagines a metric place on which we can have differing and contested perspectives. Hence the place of psychogeography is imagined to be a secondary perspectival corrective and addition to metric forms of cartography. This accord in cartography seems to run counter to non-quantitative space (which is often conceptualized as non-Euclidean topological space) shown by contemporary mathematic theory to be morphogenetically prior to metric and exact forms of space. What does this mean for mapping? In short, forms of mapping such as psychogeographies to the degree that they are topological (qualitative mappings) are ontologically prior to metric forms of cartography – and this undermines the cartographic philosophy of humanist multi-perspectival realism.

Topological mathematics and the ontological priority of non-metric spaces: places that are an-exact yet rigorous:
Gilles Deleuze calls non-metric geometries such as topological geographies and qualitative cartographies “an-exact yet rigorous” morphological systems. By this he means that purely qualitative geographies are not subjective geographies, rather that both metric (exact systems) and non-metric geographies are rigorous (non-subjective1). It is just that qualitative systems non-fixable in specific terms (an-exact). These “topological” geographies and qualitative cartographies (psychogeographies) gives us some intimations of new possibilities for mapping. How do we map these spaces of difference? Of non-quantifiable -- pre-quantifiable difference? One manner is visible in weather maps,

1 We are not proposing a false dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity here. We are simply interested in pursuing the non-subjective nature of these works.
which track zones of intensities. While this works quite well at the level of macro abstractions, how do we track micro socio-political-physical intensities and zones of difference? Is this not what a psychogeographical map can do best? Which is to argue that psychogeographies (both human and non-human) are forms of an-exact but rigorous mappings that are of a place at the point that place emerges as place prior to being mapped in metric fashions – prior to being over-coded as specific spaces. Psychogeographies are no mere addition to other forms of mapping – but a mapping at the level of emergent intensities. (Let us just note in passing the psycho/psyche – the mental (the seemingly subjective) is now re-inscribed as the breath (psyche Gk. Breath) of becoming. In this sense, we follow the Greeks in seeing the internal as being a form of the outside. Breath also in the sense of that which has no fixed (metric) shape: psychogeography – could we not define this as a geography of becomings).

**The Map: Mapping the Map:**

To pursue the idea of a map at the point of emergent intensities is to question the viability of maps as reference documents. To map at the level of emergent intensities, we propose, is more than a clarification of the non-quantifiable. It, in actuality, exceeds an attempt to develop a more precise, more inclusive grammar of place. The map, in this case is in fact, indistinguishable from the mapping. The information described in the map is inherently caught up in the event of the mapping. Thus we must consider the map at the level of the diagram, which presents its own logic and demands an “understanding” through participation. By extension, a collection of these maps does not constitute an atlas, rather they are each evocations – and together a chorus. To listen alone is to be engaged. Put differently: the psychogeographic map is not first and foremost a tool to make invisibilities visible, rather it is a tool to allow invisibilities to pass into and affect an event, to allow invisibilities to act otherwise (for us the importance of this claim cannot be overstated).

While this might seem paradoxical or even absurd, we hope that this can become clear by examining a project we have been pursuing. Over the last year and a half, spurse has been working with CEI\(^2\), Shunpike Audio and communities along the coast of Maine to make a “complete” human and non-human psychogeographic mapping of the coast of Maine. This project began through an invitation from CEI to come to the coast of Maine and to use our artistic skills to give “traditional ways of living on the coast of Maine more visibility”. This intrigued us since we knew neither the coast of Maine nor what these traditions could be (nor were we certain what relevant artistic skill set we possessed).

A Place: Here we return to our question of mapping: we were being asked to make visible an identity of the coast:

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Coast: n: the shore of a sea or ocean [syn: seashore, seacoast, sea coast]
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\(^2\) CEI: Costal Enterprises Institute. They are an NGO who helps to funnel private and public monies to Maine coastal communities in need of assistance.
This definition, like many definitions, reads as though the coast is a static place; however even at the most basic level many coastal
regions are currently going through a series of radical changes – whether they be in Canada, the United States, Iran, Kenya, or Japan. These changes are due to the impact of many forces, one of the most critical is the rapidly increasing human populations in these regions. People are moving to these coasts not only because of the immediacy of the ocean or the sea, but to a large extent because of the lure of what the coasts symbolically represent, to what the “coast” means – e.g., a place to get away, a place of serenity, of nature, of quiet etc. Though it might be argued whether the coasts were ever a static place, there is little doubt that as the population density in these regions increase, the coasts are changing. This irony of coming to the coast because of an identity (the quaint, the peaceful etc.) and through doing this changing the coast irreversibly is a double tragedy.

What to do? In our preliminary research, we quickly came to see that the coast of Maine is undergoing a series of paradoxical changes. People are moving to the coast because of the lure of what it represents – a “lifestyle” of fishing, small communities, and the immediacy of the ocean. But in doing so, coastal access is threatened and the viability of a coastal life interdependent with the working water is undermined. The existence of a complex dynamic historical relation between communities, both human and otherwise, that cross from land to sea and back is at risk of being lost through the inability to recognize its complex dynamic actuality. But the more we looked and asked questions the more we found it impossible to picture the coast of Maine – it became this complex emergent shape-shifting event that we traversed in a vertiginous manner.

Thus:

Coast: v: to move along without or as if without further application of propulsive power (as by momentum or gravity), (archaic) to travel on land along a coast or along or past the side of something.

In this realization we came to see that rather than trying to present a “picture of Maine” that is now endangered or to try and capture a “disappearing Maine”, we should try and follow/trace the emergence that is the coast of Maine. And to do this in such a manner that we would act as a catalyst of new connections, new collectives, and new voices to emerge. (And to do this we did not need to make something “the coast” become visible – only to allow “affect” to pass across thresholds of agency – which is part of the importance of seeing psychogeographies as having a critical non-human component).
In this sense we saw our role to be one of participating in the fostering of what Giorgio Agamben calls “the coming community”. By this he means that community is not a stable entity in need of representation (a voice), but that community is always (also) a form of “coming community” – an emergent entity formed through linkages, the production of collectives which are not reducible to an identity insofar as they exceed identity in their absolute givenness (as such, they are also non-metric – the motley).

The "coming community" in this endeavour does not remain a concept. It implicates those who participate in its inception. Thus we, are participants and “recorders” from within and without, and we demand that traditional perspectives of cartography be transgressed. In the act of working to make the maps we resist the move to frame our role in relation to objectivity/subjectivity or to imagine that there are “sides to an argument” that are being laid out in mapping. We seek to work in a context of fully collaborative, and yet detached relationships. We seek neither to avoid leaving echoes of our recordings, nor do we restrict ourselves from engaging the particular communities present, replete with emotional, social, historical alignments. It is our interest to participate in something new, an emergent event that does not simply leave behind cultural foot-holds, but moves in concert with what arises. It is to re-imagine that the age of exploration was/is not simply a scourge of domination, but a redistribution of intensities.

Actualities: We proceeded by interviewing as many people as we could who lived and worked on the coast. These interviews were semi-structured and grounded in qualitative research strategies and ranged from one to two hours in duration. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, including on people’s work boats, in people’s boat houses, in kelp-drying rooms, at the lobsterman association local offices, on town docks, in fish auction houses, etc.. Approximately twenty interviews were conducted over the course of the Summer of 2005 in locations extending from the furthest westerly to most easterly points of the Maine coast. The remainder and majority (100+) of the interviews were conducted in September 2005 on a large boat which we outfitted to be a mobile research lab, which traveled to different points and islands along the central coast of Maine.

During the interviews which operated as extended discussions, we asked the participants to map their relations to the coast (in the most general sense). Throughout the conversations, we were in dialogued regarding their engagement with the Maine working coast, and prompted the participants to depict that which they were talking about on their map/diagram (e.g. some very direct questions: “Can you draw that for me? What would that look like? Where on the map that you’ve drawn would that be located?”) At the same time, we would make a parallel diagram of the conversation. It is worthwhile to note, in many cases, the participants were initially hesitant to put pen to paper, concerned regarding their artistic skills or accuracy of their maps/diagrams. However, after observing other non-metric diagrams we were generating, and through the process of prompting and co-diagramming, all but one of the participants put pen to paper at least once.
The interview sessions that were conducted on the boat were conducted in the context of the archive of interview materials and maps generated prior to the installation of the research space on the boat; during these conversations, we would often refer to other maps and diagrams – and thus in a very direct manner putting people in contact with other people/events/issues/feelings/immanences.

Importantly, the research vessel operated not only as an active research space (what we would define as a form of immanent commons) into the forces at play in coastal Maine, but also as a place for people to come and visit and engage with the growing archive of psychogeographies. To accomplish this, public visiting hours were announced in advance for the various sites at which the research vessel docked. During these peri-
ods of visitation, we addressed questions regarding the nature of the investigation, but one of the key things that we tried to accomplish was to bring participating visitors to-gether to come to terms with collective issues (which we did not determine in advance). Slowly through these extended discussions/mappings a coast began to emerge – not into visibility but into actions.

**Sustaining an Event: The Outside of Mapping:**
But to work at the level of actions is also to work at the level of encounters – particularly encounters with identity based discourses. In this case, we were continuously faced with questions of the politics of place and who gets to be considered “real Mainers” (vs. the actualities of “the coming community”). This tension between a “coming community” and a politics of identities made us realize that these methodologies of mapping the coast were ones of also re-mapping issues of “sustainability” back into the discussion. But again it was a question of needing to rethink “sustainability” in terms of what was actually emerging out of this process of mapping. How does one sustain an effect? How does one sustain affect? How does one activate and sustain a “coming community”?

Let us step back for a moment and consider sustainability more broadly first. Sustainability, in its current understanding, relies primarily on the western concept of Nature, which is often linked to the idea of balance and harmony. This conceptual tradition stretches back to the post Platonic Greeks, who imagined nature linked to the ideal and the timeless. But this conception seems far from the reality of actual natural systems, e.g., a meteor crashes and everything changes, volcanoes erupt, species emerge and disappear/become other... The science of nonequilibrium systems seems to suggest a model closer to reality in which stable states arise within fluctuating systems far from a fixed point of balance. This also works in an-exact but rigorous methods – statistically measuring potentialities in a dynamic system – there is clearly a direct relation between these methodologies and systems.

In addition, most theories of nature imagine the position of the human as an artificial element outside of and in contrast to nature. But this produces inexplicable paradoxes of the natural versus the artificial, nature versus culture, human versus the world. Yet it seems there is only one world – a world of mutation, change, transformation, emergence, quasi-stabilization, and rupture where there is no clear demarcation between any species, event, or territory whether directly human or not. (It is at this level of abstraction that the psychogeographic methodology seeks to work). The words “natural” and “cultural” are really simply convenient and highly problematic terms for a complex web of interaction and alliances where agency is distributed across the field of becom-ing.

For us as we traversed the coasts of Maine, we understood that one domain in which this was clearly exemplified is in the case of coastal regions. What is this complex actu-ality – the complex becoming? What is this space of dynamic and contested alliances between human communities, the land, marine ecosystems, the ocean itself, global economic forces, and other forces? Rather than imagining a coast as a known entity, this contested historical moment produces an opportunity to reexamine, rethink and
reimagine what the coasts have been, are, and might be. Rather than striving to maintain historical trajectories, is it not possible to let the “coasts” speak. But and here is the crux of the whole issue: in this re-imagining and in this allowing the “coasts” to speak, do we need mapping to make anything visible? Or (and this is admittedly a big “or”) can we work indirectly at the level of emergence? This needs to be said with more nuance: the becoming visible of the becoming emergent of an event is not dependant on representation but neither is it independent from re-presentational systems. The key here is that the question is not one of confirming or finding new identities but beginning to ask and activate the use an-exact but rigorous methods to allow immanent social/physical/political (etc.) forces to recombine into new emergent events (politics).

Coastal Maine: Psychogeographies of The Working Coasts:
As part of our ongoing investigations into the construction of the (temporary/situational) commons and one way in which we are working to bring to light the complex web of imminent actualities and forces of place, we obtained a series of psychogeographies of the working coast of Maine. Specifically, we developed/co-authored a series of psychogeographic mappings of the coast of Maine in collaboration with people who straddle land and sea: lobstermen, fishermen, fish plant workers, wholesalers, families of fisherman, dockworkers. (We also generated a vast archive on non-human mappings but we would like to leave the discussion of these to another time).

In presenting example psychogeographic maps from the project investigating the working coasts of Maine, it is important to understand what is concrete is not the map but the event that they catalyze. And that it is not the map per-se that catalyzes such an event – but it is a critical mediator that allows the event of the becoming community to occur. While a traditional map claims a certain objectivity outside of the subject where there is one-to-one correspondence between that which is being represented and the “map” regardless of who is authoring the “map”, a psychogeography emerges out of the authors’ experiences, engagements and alliances – under the conditions of placing the status of the “author” in question. It does not claim a decontextualized actuality, but rather a space of memories, histories, actions, engagements with events and relations conveyed by the “authors” and inseparable from the “authors”. It is combination cartography, concept map, and schematic diagram.
Figure 3. Two example maps of Maine: one historic, one extracted from the psychogeography below

![Two example maps of Maine](image)

Figure 4. Lee Hudson (mussel harvester, fish buyer and distributor), Hancock Point, 2005

Through the interview process during which the psychogeographies were generated, glimpses (that which is caught out of the side of one’s glance) into the vast complexities of the
Figure 5. Reed Wilson, Jr. (ex-canner, fisherman, marine researcher with over 60 years work experience on the coast), Eastport 2005 – the wharves and canneries of Eastport and where the fish are/were working coasts of Maine emerged. These are just some examples and details from some of the generated human psychogeographies of the varied forces at play on the working be
coasts of Maine. There are many ways in which these maps could be organized. We simply present some that we find notable. What is important is that, despite being presented in a manner so radically separated from the process, all of the maps convey the
Figure 7. Joey Donnelly (York Harbor interest, sailor), York Harbor, 2005 – moorings, docks, sailing, waves, land trusts

traces of non-metric information regarding the interplay between personal, social, historical, economic, political, atmospheric (etc.) forces. All of the maps serve as evidence of the events of the coast, and can (we hope) serve to further activate action toward an emergent “coming community” of coastal regions.
Figure 8. Ron Hinkle (kelp harvester/dryer, ex-urchin diver), Addison, 2005 – kelp, fog

Figure 9. Charlie Poole (Union Wharf owner, sailor), Portland, 2005 – Portland Harbour Building Blocks
Figure 10. Proctor Wells (fisherman/lobster trap designer, marine researcher), Phippsburg/Popham Beach, 2005

Figure 11. Tollef Olson (mussel/kelp aquaculture, ex-shipwreck diver, surfer), Portland, 2005
Figure 12. Sample interview diagrams produced by spurse, Maine, 2005
Select Bibliography

Rachel T. Fouladi is an Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University and member of spurse. spurse is an international interdisciplinary collective interested in the reconstruction of the commons, experimenting with ideas that are immanent and emergent from the materiality of things and fostering the unfolding of spaces of new visceral sensations and perceptions beyond subjectivity. Collaborative processes are integral to the way spurse works. This project, like many of our projects, involved the collaboration of many individuals and organizations, which due to space limits cannot be named here. For information on spurse and our collaborators, please see www.spurse.org