

Mapping in Arts and Humanities Research

Workshop 1, Maps of the 'real' Los Angeles and Hollywood

10am-3pm, Wednesday, June 14th, 2017

Room K4U.12, King's Building, Strand Campus, King's College London

Workshop led by Dr Mark Shiel, Department of Film Studies, King's College London

Welcome, in advance, to the first workshop on Mapping in Arts and Humanities Research. This document is a set of notes for guidance, which will hopefully help us structure and get the most out of our session. Hopefully, too, the event will be interactive, with some talking and presenting to the whole group by me mixed with a lot of examination and discussion of maps in small groups. The event should give us opportunity to consider maps in general, their usefulness and the methodological opportunities and challenges they present, as well as specific maps, their visual and textual communication, style, technique, function, manufacture, and history, and the ways that specific maps can shed light on, or complicate, particular research questions and projects.

To this end, I have created a Dropbox folder, which you will receive a separate email about, showing you how to link to and download the folder contents. The folder contains a variety of maps pertaining to Los Angeles, its history, and movie history in particular – the subject of much of my research, which I'll talk about in our workshop. Looking at these maps in advance will be important to the success of the workshop, and we will review them in detail together (though you don't have to write about them or take extensive notes in advance! just peruse them at your leisure in the next few days before we meet).

There are four key types of map represented and within each type various specific instances, from various time periods from the late 19th century to the late 20th century: 1) ordinance survey-type maps (what are usually called US Geological Survey maps in the US); 2) city and transportation maps; 3) maps designed for movie fans and tourists; 4) technical fire insurance maps of particular movie studio buildings and properties. Many of the maps date from the so-called 'studio era' of Hollywood cinema, the 1920s-50s, when it was at the height of its cultural and industrial influence in the US and around the world. You won't need to know much about movie history to appreciate the maps as maps, and I won't presume specialist knowledge of Hollywood cinema in the workshop. But the sample maps can serve to fuel our conversations in the workshop by providing us with a sense of the variety of maps and their ability to describe space and time in relation to just one sample research project.

Please take some time to look at the maps and ask yourself some questions:

1) ordinance survey-type maps (what are usually called US Geological Survey maps in the US) – what kind of a 'story' do these maps tell, about the history of Hollywood and its region from the 1890s to the 1970s? these maps are of the 'Hollywood Quadrangle', which contains the district known as 'Hollywood' but also other areas; do you know what lies to the north, south, east, and west of the area depicted in these maps?

2) transportation maps – you probably have a sense, even if you don't know Los Angeles, that it is a city especially shaped by automobiles and other forms of rapid and/or mass transportation; you probably also have a sense that Hollywood cinema has relied heavily on images of cars and other vehicles and the spectacle of moving around in them at high speed; what strikes you when looking at these maps of Los Angeles transportation? how do they promote Los Angeles? can you identify movie studios or related sites on them and see how they are and connected to the city as a whole?

3) maps designed for movie fans and tourists; these maps are the least scientific but sometimes the most fun, and sometimes the most culturally- and socially-informative too; they were mostly made and distributed for fans of the movies, for sightseeing tourists, or as souvenirs for visitors to LA or for people further afield who never visited but nonetheless wanted a sense of the place (and its legends); how would you characterise these maps, technically? how do they play with or distort real life and real places? what is the relationship between scientific mapping and mapping for entertainment?

4) technical fire insurance maps of particular movie studio buildings and properties – along with the geological survey maps, these maps are the most scientifically rigorous, and they're at a much smaller scale than the survey maps because they document particular city blocks, streets, and buildings, and, in their original form, they were all hand drawn by fire insurance technicians as part of the process of indemnifying movie studios against fire and other risks (the movie studios were big business); these maps indicate all sorts of detail, including building dimensions, construction materials, land use, and so on; given what you know of the movies (even if you don't know much), what do maps like these make you think? what does it mean to juxtapose these with a scene from a Humphrey Bogart or Elizabeth Taylor movie? what can we tell about how movies were made by looking at these maps?

Thinking about all of these maps together, what does the variety of maps tell us about mapping in general, or about Los Angeles and Hollywood in particular? How might these maps help or complicate a research project? What other kinds of evidence would be needed to make sense of them or see them in their proper context?

How do these maps and these questions relate to any project involving maps you might be working on yourself? What are the equivalent maps and issues you are faced with? What do maps enable us to do in our research that we wouldn't be able to do without them?

If you have studied maps before, great. If you haven't studied maps before, please don't be intimidated by any of these. You should feel free to make speculative comments in the workshop, free associate, ask questions, and so on.

Workshop plan (flexible)

10am-12pm – brief introductions, comments from Mark Shiel on maps and first principles, then on LA and Hollywood maps and research, then working through the above maps in small groups with occasional opening up of discussion to the whole room

12-1pm – light lunch provided

1-230pm – comments from a selection of participants on particular maps they are using in research (please feel free to nominate yourself to present a map on our data projector and explain briefly about it to the whole group, 5-10 minutes each), small group work and closer examination of details of various maps

230-3pm – opening up of discussion and reflection to the whole group, closing remarks, linking to Workshop 2 by Roland-François Lack on June 21st

Please make sure to bring along at least one map that somehow pertains to your own research (in digital form, scan, photo or other format, not necessarily super high-res but sufficient to be intelligible, so that you can show it to one or two other people in your workshop small group and/or to the whole group).

Please make sure to bring a laptop or tablet as every participant will need one to look closely at maps as we go along (there are also multiple big screens at the venue for projecting selected maps, but one laptop or tablet per person is required).

Wifi access will be available at King's and instructions for logging on to the King's network will be available at the start of our session, for those coming from outside King's. Eduroam is available, and also The Cloud.

It is advisable to download the Los Angeles maps entirely to your own laptop/tablet rather than rely on looking at them online (some of them are large files with high or very high resolution and you can zoom in on them to a high level of detail).

Thanks.

Dr Mark Shiel