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SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN - MAPS AS TEXTS

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An Online Exhibit : *http://champlain.graeworks.net/exhibits/show/samueldechamplainmapsastexts*

This exhibit explores the "language" of Champlain's maps, their shared authorship, and the way that this narrative has evolved and come to be presented as the modern maps of the commemoration.

Abstract
This article, which was originally presented as an online exhibit, explores the "language" of Champlain's maps, their shared authorship, and the way that this narrative has evolved and come to be presented as the modern maps of the 2013 commemoration of Champlain's expedition to the Ottawa-Gatineau area.

Introduction
Samuel de Champlain is best remembered in Canada as an explorer of the North American east coast and the eastern Canadian watershed. But he was also an accomplished writer and mapmaker, producing numerous large-and small-scale maps, of which 23 survive today (Litalien, 372-374). This exhibit will examine four of his maps that relate to his 1613 expedition to the Ottawa River area. It is this expedition, this region, and people who lived here, that are the subjects of the recent 400th anniversary commemorations as well as the "Champlain in the Anishinabe Aki" colloquium. Accordingly, the exhibit will also consider the map at the 2013 "Canada's First Tourist" exhibit at the City of Ottawa Archives. No digital image of the large wall-sized map from the Archives exhibit was available for this online exhibit but the Archives was able to provide a link to a modern online map that is similar in style from the Canadian-American Center at the University of Maine.

The maps by Champlain in this online exhibit include one from 1612, a year before his first trip up to the Ottawa River. It shows his conception of the area based on information from others and is the most decorative of the three. The second map by Champlain was made in 1613, the year he made his first trip to the Ottawa River and is the focus of the recent commemoration. The third map is an incomplete work created by Champlain in 1616 and includes the discoveries of his 1616 trip to the Ottawa River area. The fourth map was made by Champlain in 1632 and is the most detailed of the four. This exhibit will use these four maps by Champlain as well as the modern maps as primary sources in an analysis that builds on five theoretical approaches.

There are varying theories about how Champlain learned his mapmaking skills. One is that it was while he was a young man working as a fourrier or junior officer reporting to the maréchaux des logis, the lodging master for the French army. In the late 16th century detailed maps of France were produced by this lodging service as they moved through the countryside, ahead of the army, finding and documenting towns and their respective facilities in which to accommodate the army. (Buisseret, 257-9) Another theory is that Champlain was a painter, who, in fact, made his first voyage to New France in 1603 as a passenger who came along to paint pictures of this previously unseen (by Europeans) land. (Buisseret, 256) The "painter" theory tends to imply that his technique was self-taught. But it has also been suggested that Champlain's original maps were just rough sketches, accompanied by detailed descriptions that he provided to an engraver for formal production as maps (Litalien, 372). But regardless of how he came to make maps, one

Figure 1. Champlain's Map from 1612
1612 Carte geographique de la Nouvelle Franse faictte par le sieur de Champlain Saint Tongois cappitaine ordinaire pour le Roy en la Marine.

work. British historical geographer Catherine Delano Smith says "a 'map maker' is rarely if ever a single person." The idea that the person who holds the pen might actually be responding to his own experiences as well as those of others, as well as being under the influence of yet others "could provoke map historians into useful further thought on the notion of 'whose map is it'?" (Smith, 199). We know from Champlain's accounts that he was in regular contact with local native people and, as was pointed out earlier, that there was content on his maps that could only have come from non-Europeans. There are also strong indications that Champlain's maps were a reflection of the engraver's input. It is also possible that content of Champlain's maps could have been influenced by the King, who funded his exploration, by fellow expeditioners with whom he travelled, and even by the French public, who were intrigued by news of the "New World." According to French historian Christian Jacob "The main task of the history of cartography is to interpret maps according to the categories of the culture which produced and used them" (Jacob, 196). If this is indeed the case, the Champlain maps present an interpretive challenge for us today, given the diversity of those who influenced him.

Champlain's maps are further complicated by the multiplicity of symbols that they display and that should be read as the social constructs that they are. Harley quotes D. F. McKenzie saying "maps clearly

qualify as texts inasmuch as they are 'constructions employing a conventional sign system'" (Harley, Historical, 84-5). Five years after Harley's death in 1991, Jacob expanded on Harley's earlier statement saying: "According to Harley, the map is a semiological trap and a frightening ideological weapon; it gives an objective and natural appearance to what is mostly a cultural and social construction. It presents a seemingly objective and irrefutable appearance of factual and topographical information (the world as it is), but beyond this facade lies an elaborate rhetoric of power which organizes the iconography, the social filtering and construction of the territory and the discourse of place names" (Jacob, 194). Champlain's 1612 map depicts a sparsely populated landmass, inhabited by virtually naked and what will have appeared to be "uncivilized" people. The map tells of a land offering an exotic array of plants and an abundance of fish and fur-bearing animals. The rhetoric of this semiotic text calls out to Europeans like a present-day grocery store flyer offering all manner of goods for the interested buyer, and real estate for the deep-pocketed developer. Clearly these maps, with their rich artistic displays were also tools of communication.

Maps as Tools

Figure 2. Champlain's Map of his 1613 Expedition
1613 Carte geographique de la Nouelle Franse en son vray meridiein [document cartographique] Faictte par le Sr. Champlain, Cappine. por le Roy en la marine.

Champlain's 1613 map (*Figure 2*), which reflects the voyage that is the subject of the 2013 commemoration, labels numerous features, including people, such as the *Algonquins and Iroquois*, rivers, such as *Les Trois Rivieres*, and lakes, such as *Lac Champlain* and *Lac St. Louis*. But a key difference between the map of 1612 and this 1613 map is the inclusion of *Hudson's Bay* which had only been explored by Henry Hudson in the years 1610-1611. A map that included this newly explored bay was published in Amsterdam in 1612 referring to the area, in Latin, as "Recens investigati ab M. Henrico Hudsono Anglo" (Wroth, 85). Champlain's 1613 map reflects this newly discovered (by Europeans) bay. As well, like the 1612 map before it, it shows mountains across the entire region. But it has distinctive clusters of mountains blocking the pathway that Champlain hoped to use to get to Hudson's Bay. As a tool and a guide for future explorers, this map directs the viewer not to consider the Ottawa River as a way to get to Hudson's Bay. Did this information about the Ottawa River come from Champlain's own observation, or was he told by the Algonquins and Tessouat that there was no way through?

The mountains that are seemingly blocking the way to Hudson's Bay on this 1613 map are indicative of Harley's suggestion that "Our maps are always an argument" (Harley, Historical, 86). If we read Champlain's map as a text, his argument seems to be: there is no passage to Hudson's Bay by this route. However, while Harley, in 1989, stressed the need to read maps like texts, historian and visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, in 2005, spoke of a "concern over the dominance of the semiotic, discourse around objects—and certainly images—[and how they have] been inflected through textual metaphors of "reading," of the signs and symbols to be decoded." But I will argue that as historians we need to be alert to both ways of reading images: we need to read maps critically as texts, but also allow them to speak to us on other sensory levels (Edwards, 37). Historian Jennifer Evans says "images do not passively mirror historical change but actively constitute claims to representation"(Evans, 433). Her comment echoes Harley's view, that maps make an argument. However, we must also recall that in these "actively constituted claims" and "arguments" we are hearing the voices of multiple speakers. While texts have a lexicon of words, the speakers in these maps have a lexicon of representations or symbols. And where texts are understood by the meanings attached to the words, maps are understood by the meanings attached to the symbols. But words and symbols are social constructs. And misinterpretation of the meanings of words can most assuredly happen in a verbal dialogue between two peoples, say French Europeans and Algonquin people, who do not share the same spoken language. In the same way, there might be misinterpretations in the meanings of the symbols they sketch for each other in their mapmaking. But over time, these misinterpretations may be avoided when each group comes to better understand each other's language – both words and symbols – even if it takes 400 years to do it. But what is to be made of the silences in the conversation and on the map?

Maps as Silences and Approximations

Geographically, Champlain's 1616 map (*Figure 3)* extends westward from that which is shown on the 1613 map, to show all of Lake Ontario, which both maps refer to as Lac St. Louis. The 1616 map also includes Georgian Bay extending into Lake Huron, which together are referred to as "Mer douce" meaning sweet or fresh-water sea and possibly part of Lake Superior. Champlain also incorporated into this map other bodies of water and rivers that were not part of his own expedition. These additions were based on unattributed sources of geographical information and map sketches given to him by the *Petun, Ottawa*, and *Huron* peoples that were part of his expedition, or that he met along the way (Wroth, 86; Lewis, 7-9). But this map is also interesting because it is incomplete, and because it disappeared from public awareness until 1953. It is unclear why Champlain left it unfinished, but it reflects a somewhat different style to the other maps. Perhaps due to its incompleteness this map is also the least decorative, containing only a simple compass and none of the "tadpole" style lakes that appear on his other maps. Rather the lakes are drawn as small circles or irregularly shaped bodies

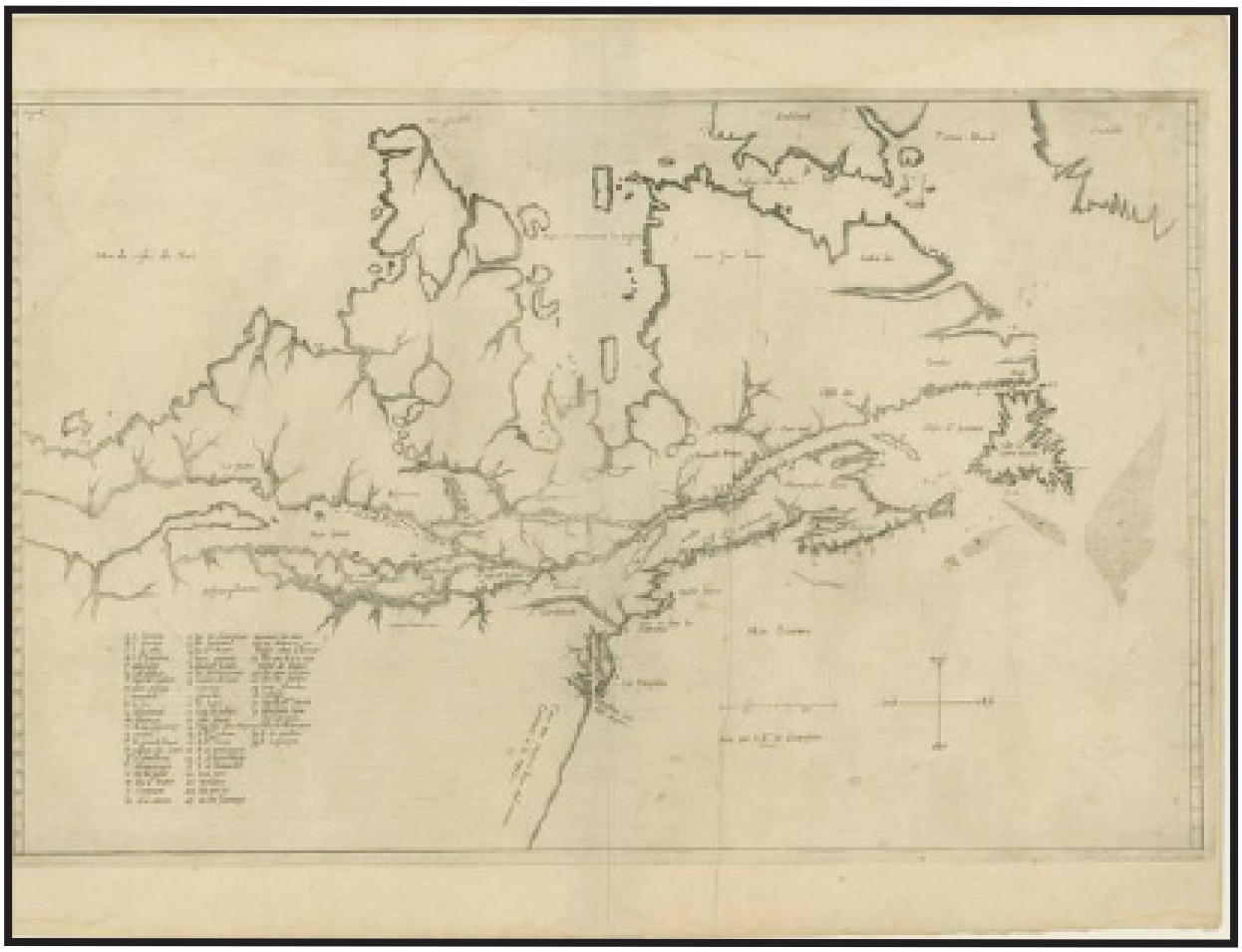

Figure 3. Champlain's Map from 1616

of water, based on Champlain's knowledge or the knowledge passed on to him by aboriginal people who knew the area. It also shows no mountains, villages, people, animals, or ships (Wroth, 85-6; Lewis, 7-9). Without these symbols the effect is to do what Harley calls "silencing" of the text or at least to make it quieter. But is there nevertheless something we can hear from these quiet maps – perhaps a subtle approximation of the truth?

Harley writes about the silences on maps…the bare places that seem to have no people, no hills, no animals, and no message. He says "Whether we want or not, the tendency of academic cartography is reductionist" (Harley, Historical, 87). In fact, throughout this article, Harley talks about the inability of maps to be objective and to represent the truth. It would seem self-evident that maps are are just abstractions and models of the truth. But is this not also true of all texts? The words in texts are also models, approximating and maybe even coming close to reaching some ultimately unattainable idea of reality. Champlain's maps were just this: approximations, representations, interpretations, models. There biggest failing was not that they were imperfect in the truth of their depiction, but that they failed to identify their sources, thus denying us the full richness of our interpretations. And in fact, it is Harley's argument that maps, when read as texts, can be read more effectively. If we approach maps as we would texts, we bring with us everything we know about reading critically. As Harley says "A textual approach alerts us to the shadows of other texts in the one we are reading" (Harley, Historical, 85). But Harley takes this idea a step further when he quotes D.P. Marsh

saying in his dissertation that "Indeed, it has been said of academic cartography that it produces 'a language or a form of rhetoric in which all sentences are expository and declarative ... there is only one rhetorical device, and that is the formulaic transcription of an impoverished reality using a vocabulary of only literal denotative meaning'" (Harley, Historical, 86). Clearly, if there is a tendency for maps to be "expository," and even if an innate limitation in maps is that they are "declarative," then critical reading of maps as texts becomes all the more important. But who were the critical or non-critical readers of these maps?

Maps as Charters of Conquest

Figure 4. Champlain's Map from 1632
1632 Carte de la Nouvelle France [document cartographique] : augmentée depuis la derniere, servant a la navigation faicte en son vray meridien.

What did Champlain's maps mean when read as texts? And were the meanings different for Champlain, for the King of France, for the people of France and for the aboriginal people who would never have seen them in their final form? From the European side of the Atlantic, there was a keen interest in New France. The town of Brouages on the west coast of France is thought to have been Champlain's birthplace. It grew into a trading port to the world during Champlain's lifetime, with a multilingual population that had much economic interest in the fur trade in New France (Litalien, 36-7, 53-4). But it was not just trade with the New World that interested France. French curiosity about the land across the ocean was substantial enough that it seeped into the national culture and arts.

Throughout France during the early decades of the 17th century a dramatic and exotic dance form called *ballets de cour* came to include references to the Americas as well as aboriginal characters. Canada was first mentioned in one of these extravaganzas in a way that is simultaneously bizarre, erroneous and offensive, in the 1631 lines of one libretto: "The monkeys and the Canadois / Have a nice intelligence; / The savages their fingers use / to groom themselves to negligence // That is all we know of such / affairs of the New World, / Voyaging costs too much / We don't expect a responding word" (Litalien, 43-7). In this strange lyric, there is, for us today, both a cultural and a political message that reflects the view of at least the librettist and perhaps the audience too. The first message is that there was a great deal of ignorance adrift in the populace of 17th century France about Canada and aboriginal people. And the second message is that this same population thought New World exploration was costing France way too much.

Harley proposed that, when we make maps, we impose our agendas and ideologies on them. His discussion revolved around the mapping in the present of events in the past saying that in making maps "we have created a new proposition of the world as much linked to our present agendas and ideologies as to those of the past. (Harley, Historical, 85). For Champlain, his transference of agendas and ideologies was not temporal, from the present onto the past, but rather contemporaneously and culturally from the European onto the aboriginal North American. This idea is reflected in Jacob's words when he says "we can see maps, when used by those who exert power in society (whether military, administrative, fiscal or demographic and whether at home or in the colonies), as self-legitimating devices" (Jacob, 194). But Harley adds that while maps can be used for social control they can also redirect that power dynamic back upon the map's originators. He says "The normal understanding is that we control the map: but through its internal power or logic the map also controls us. We are prisoners in its spatial matrix. ... in both cases a process of normalisation occurs. Standardisation is the golden calf of 'thematic' cartography: compilation, generalisation, classification, formation into hierarchies must all be done according to standard principles. The result is a highly artificial image which limits our ability to engage in interpretative manoeuvre" (Harley, Historical, 85). But recall that Champlain was a mapmaker who was trained under unusual circumstances, and was a mapmaker whose style was different from his contemporaries. Accordingly he may have circumvented some of Harley's "standardization," and the associated tendency of the map to redirect power and control back on the mapmaker. However, Champlain operated in an unusual power domain in which there were many disconnected stakeholders. Three key stakeholders and controllers of power operating in his sphere were the King of France, who was keenly interested in Champlain's work, the First Nations people on whom he depended for information, and the engraver who made the final version of the map for publication. But Champlain, away from home and away from France, also had substantial practical power of his own to create his maps as he wished without any real oversight. This 1632 map is the most complete of the four Champlain maps shown here. It confirms the existence of some of the features of the 1612 and 1616 maps, including the large lakes to the west. As well, this map significantly increases the number of town names given, especially to the east, indicating the increasing European population of the area over the preceding twenty year period. The conquest by the French was clearly under way. In the end, of course, none of these wielders-of-power – not the King, not Champlain, and not the First Nations people – retained the control they held in the 1613. The First Nations people would lose their power gradually, and the French relatively suddenly in the 1759. But this brings us back to the 21st century and the 2013 commemoration of the events 400 years ago.

Maps as Visual Aids within Exhibitions

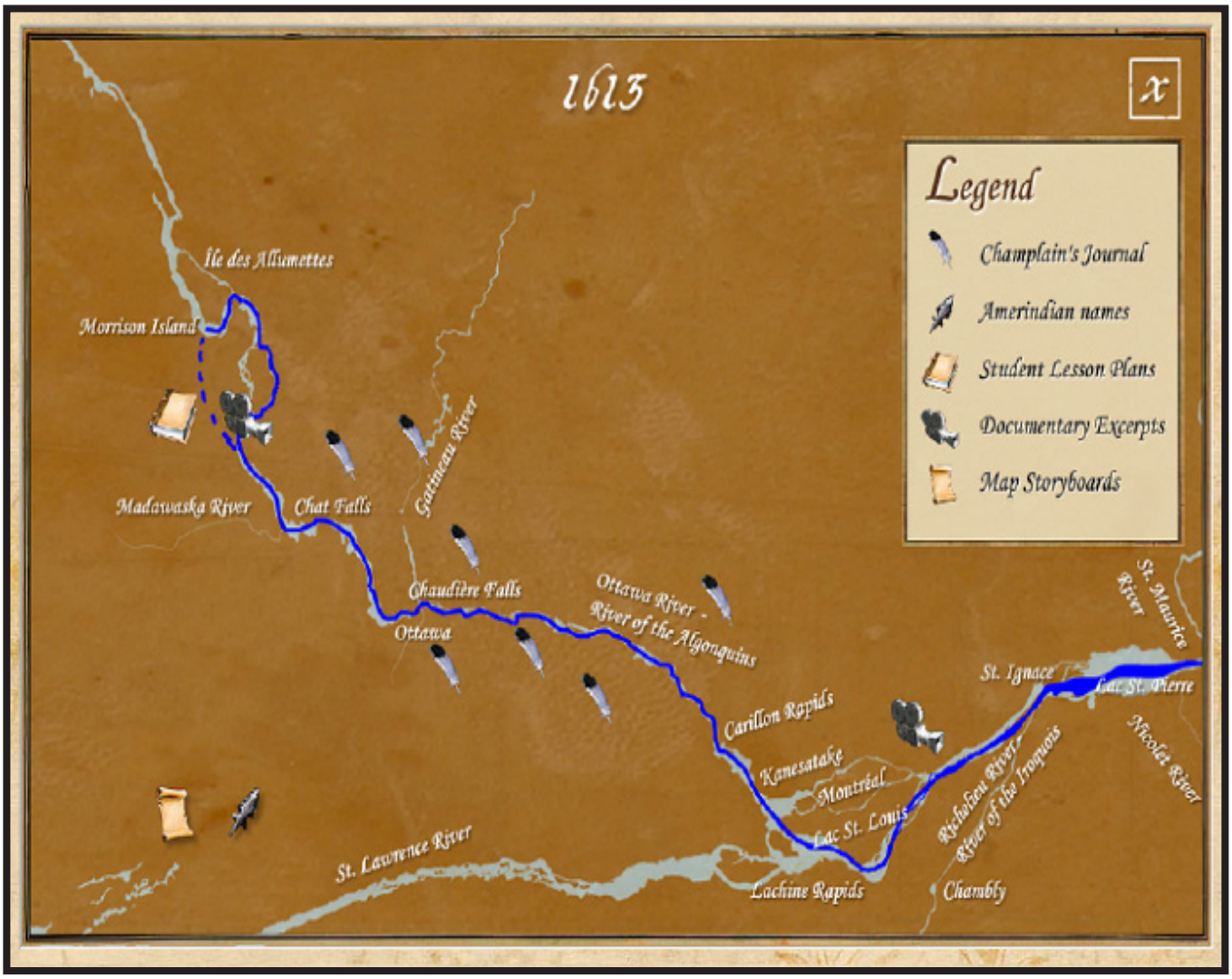

Figure 5. A Modern Map of Champlain's 1613 Expedition
2008 They Would Not Take Me There: People, Places, and Stories from Champlain's Travels in Canada, 1603-1616

The 2013 Champlain commemoration used a massive modern wall-sized map to depict Champlain's route in 1613 in the exhibit called "Ottawa's First Tourist." The large map from the exhibit was unavailable for my project, but the one shown here is similar in style, giving the river unadorned by trees, people, mountains or animals. Also in a similar way to the map shown in *Figure 5*, the large exhibit map did not give the relative proximity of the Ottawa River to the Atlantic Ocean or Hudson's Bay. In these ways these two modern maps are more barren and more focused. Re-playing Harley's words used earlier "Whether we want or not, the tendency of academic cartography is reductionist." But Harley goes on to say "It replaces the human entities of the past with its own graphic text, and redescribes them so that they take on a meaning which may be spatial but is not historical" (Harley, Historical, 87).

But while the modern maps in this online exhibit strip the land of everything – trees, mountains, … virtually all symbols – they reintroduce the different people that were a part of the narrative. The map shown here from an online exhibit created by the Canadian-American Center brings our contemporary interpretation of who we believe were the original players back into context of the narrative, using five unique icons. In a similar way, the large wall-sized map at the Champlain commemoration populated the terrain with text boxes about the Champlain expedition and the interactions between Champlain and the First Nations people. But both maps add a further narrative to their text that is not seen in Champlain's maps. Having what Harley would call "silent" spaces on either side of the river, they give a sense of the tunnel-vision that Champlain may have experienced going up the river and not knowing what was on either side of him except what he could see from the water. But is there more to the meaning of these silences?

It is interesting that Champlain, who knew little about the country around him, populated his maps thickly with symbolic people, plants, mountains and animals. While the modern map from the exhibit and the one shown here are both bare and blank. It is not clear why this is, but I will hazard a guess that Champlain's message would have been: "I know there are people, plants, mountains and animals out there on the land, but this is as specific as I can be." The modern mapmakers, on the other hand may have had a message like: "what is out there on the land is very complicated and attempting to place symbols would open up a huge debate, so we will focus our attention on what we believe to be true about Champlain's expedition and the original First Nations people who lived there." This seems to be what Harley was saying in another of his works on the history of cartography. He said that "The notion of 'silences' on maps is central to any argument about the influence of their hidden political messages." He took this statement further saying "silences on maps may also be regarded as discrimination against native peoples" (Harley, New, 67). Harley's perspective about discrimination does not reflect well on the intended messages of the modern mapmakers that I am examining here. However the modern maps were not silent, they just used a different sort of symbol from Champlain.

The large wall-map at the "Canada's First Tourist" exhibit included numerous explanatory text boxes to describe the events of Champlain's expedition. As well, being a part of a larger exhibit, the wall map was accompanied by a film about the interactions between Champlain and the First Nations people. The exhibit also had both aboriginal and European artifacts, each with their own explanatory text, and the map helped to put all of this in context.

The modern map from the Canadian-American Center, a sample image of which is included above, gives a very limited sense of the broader application from which it came. This sample image also gives a very limited sense of wealth of digital technologies available to today's cartographers. Digital humanities scholar Paul Arthur describes a new form of technological integration called a "mashup" saying "'Mashups' are at the most experimental technical end of the digital history field. A mashup can be defined as 'a website or application that combines content from more than one source into an integrated experience'. Locations on maps, for example, can be linked with photographic archives that in turn can be linked with historical commentary" (Arthur). It is worth going to the link attached to this essay to explore the "mashup" from which the map shown here is taken. It connects to route animations, film clips, school lesson plans, excerpts from Champlain's diary, and "Amerindian" place names. The silences on this map are not so much silent as buzzing with digital content. And although no doubt

much debate could ensue from the content, there is always a risk of that in a public history presentation. Harley would likely have supported this digital undertaking since it was his view that we should "use [maps] more imaginatively so that they can mediate humanity rather than the statistical abstractions of the past" (Harley, Historical, 84).

Conclusion

Historical theorist John Tosh says "In the historian's hierarchy of [primary] sources those that carry the most weight are the ones that arise directly from everyday business or social intercourse, leaving open the task of interpretation" (Tosh, 93). Champlain's maps were, on one level, tools of everyday business. But they were also strategic forms of communication for the King, the French government, and French society. They may even have been a kind of advertising. Whatever their primary purpose they offer an interesting point of reference for analysis as a part of the 2013 commemoration.

Christian Jacob, speaking about *world* maps, says that "Mappaemundi in the Western Middle Ages were linked with a vision of God, looking at the world from God's place and looking at God through the world he created" (Jacob, 194). Two hundred years after the end of the Middle Ages, Champlain drew maps not of the world but of New France. But he was not working alone. Reading these maps as texts, critically, we can see in these four 17th century maps, the hand of the native people, the engravers, and maybe even the King of France. We also see a vision of French exploration and expansionism. Four hundred years after Champlain we see in the modern maps a different vision, but it is one that has its own narrative and its own set of creators. The vision of the modern maps is one of *historical* exploration, but also one of unity, and as Harley would have hoped, one of mediation.

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