

## Waters, Oceans, Maps – Archiving the Environment, Environment as American Archive

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This panel approaches the environment as/ in the American archive from two vantage points which offer multiple invigorating and generative overlaps: water and maps.

Having embraced hemispheric and transcultural approaches for decades, American Studies has more recently turned toward the oceans and, more broadly, water (Blum 2013, Mentz 2018), moving away not only from national(istic) but also from terracentric conceptualizations of literature and culture. Among other things, it has done so to more fully address ocean-centric epistemologies and the salt water bodies that cover 71% of our planet. After all, the “Archipelagic States of America” (Roberts 2021) and Turtle Island more broadly comprise not only parts of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans but also the Arctic Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea which in turn are all part of the world ocean that connects all dry land on this planet. In a time when anthropogenic climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss threaten this world ocean and the human and non-human life that depends on it, Serpil Oppermann suggests that we turn to “storied waterscapes” (2023). Exploring representations and cultural processes of meaning making of and around bodies of water may help us to better understand human relationships with the more-than-human world and its destruction that find expression, e.g., in dominant conceptualizations of oceans as repositories that have to hold our waste and provide infinite resources (Rozwadowski 2021).

Maps, charts, and other systems of orientation have always enabled humans to make sense of their relationship to waters and the environment. In the North American context, mapping and cartography have long served as prominent tools of imperial exploration, settler colonialism, nation building, and as a way of archiving human knowledge about specific (aquatic) environments. Maps generate “a cartographic hierarchy of space” (DeLoughrey 2) and offer a means to accumulate large amounts of data that might concern such diverse matters as history, water, or medicine (Schulten 4). Drawing on a critical understanding of maps, in the last two decades, more and more “alter/native movements” (DeLoughrey 2) have been central in fields such as literary cartography and allow us to make visible the intricate connection between maps, aquatic environments, and racial and colonial violence.

Both, maps and water, as material entities and as aesthetic formations, urge us to reconsider and to ‘remap’ archival and memory practices to generate other ways of making sense of the present, the past, and the future. Tidalectic approaches in decolonizing literary cartography mark “a significant break from colonial maps that depict land and sea as unmarked, atemporal, and feminized voids [...]” (DeLoughrey 22). In Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea Is History,” the Atlantic emerges as “a grey vault” that challenges place-based narratives and memory practices. Writers and artists such as Dionne Brand (e.g., *A Map to*

*the Door of No Return* 2001), or Rivers Solomon (*The Deep* 2021) have shown how cultural forms and practices can make memory and history despite and with the oceans. And while melting glaciers bring remnants, bodies, and matters of a long-gone past back into our present, desiccating lakes, such as the Great Salt Lake in Utah, expose tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, as well as other “high concentrations of neurotoxins and cancer-causing carcinogens” (Siegler et al.) making human life close to the lake impossible in the nearer future.

This panel explores the ocean and bodies of water at large *in* the American archive and the ocean (and water) *as* an American archive while simultaneously aiming to explore how various forms of cartographic archives about water (and land) connect to and inform cultural and literary meaning making processes. We invite contributions from the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, including Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, literary cartography, literary and cultural studies, environmental humanities, historiography, political sciences, maritime social sciences, and beyond.

**Confirmed Speakers:**

Judith Rauscher (Köln), “The Ocean as Living Archive in Contemporary American Poetry.”

Katja Sarkowsky (Augsburg), “Archives of Counterknowledge? Reading 'Water' in Indigenous Literatures.”

Please send your abstracts of no more than 300 words as a PDF to

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Please include your name, e-mail address, institutional affiliation, and a brief biography of 150 words max.