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Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect

Blank space in the perception and epistemology of maps: Silences and absences that articulate the world

Concept and organisation:
Toby Yuen-Gen Liang
Filipe dos Reis
Camille Serchuk

**19–20
March
2026**



Please register by 11 March 2025:
<https://www.globaldisconnect.org/registration/>

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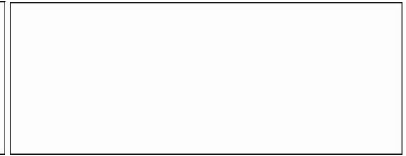
© Medium: Early representation of Newfoundland, Lower California, the Amazon, and the Ladrões, António Pereira, 1546, Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.



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Workshop at the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect

“Blank space in the perception and epistemology of maps: Silences and absences that articulate the world”

Munich, March 19-20, 2026

Co-Conveners:

Toby Yuen-Gen Liang, Academia Sinica, Taiwan;
Camille Serchuk, Southern Connecticut State University;
Filipe dos Reis, University of Groningen

Abstract

Blank space in visual and textual media and associated concepts such as silence and absence have long been overlooked or perceived as negative space, lack of information, or mere nothingness. Instead, ideas, practices, and habits of ontology, epistemology, academic disciplines, and quotidian observations have focused on “positive” articulations in these media as the shaping mechanisms of perception, knowledge, and reality. Yet increasing awareness among a growing number of scholars – in the history of cartography, philosophy, architectural history and theory, literature, Black and Indigenous studies, international relations, art history, musicology, and other fields – acknowledges the agency of blank space, silence, and absence and the integral roles they play in constructing perception and knowledge of the world. The historian of cartography J. B. Harley’s seminal 1988 article “Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe” draws on philosophical and psychological considerations of silence to identify how blank spaces and displaced knowledge have historically been integral to the development of modern cartography. In the 2007 introduction to *From Models to Drawings: Imagination and Representation in Architecture*, the historian-theorist of architecture Marco Frascari advances the fundamental realization that the substance of structures represented in two-dimensional architectural plans is the blank space in-between the lines that merely trace the outer edges of construction, substance that our eyes have been conditioned to disregard.

Harley's works have alerted scholars to the erasure that accompanies processes of representation and the political claims behind them. In his 2023 book *Blancs des cartes et boîtes noires algorithmiques*, Matthieu Noucher further asserts that "*Les blancs de la carte, coulis ou subis, regrettés ou revendiqués, savamment construits ou naïvement oubliés, sont le symptôme constitutif de toute opération cartographique.*" Likewise, scholars in fields such as Black and Indigenous studies have strived to recover the hidden experiences and epistemologies covered over by blank space. With such approaches in mind, this international workshop sets out to examine how blank space, silence, and absences were themselves articulations/renderings that played an active role in the shaping and forming of epistemology. We ask: how do blank space and the knowledge latent in or conveyed through them both inform and disinform to create perceptions of the world?

Revisiting Harley's still-powerful thesis, the core of this workshop focuses on presentations addressing the history and study of maps. It also welcomes research in other disciplines/fields, including visual and performance art, that connects to or furthers the study of blank space, silence, and absence in maps or elucidates new perspectives and understandings of these phenomena. The workshop embraces any geo-historical context and, particularly, traditionally under-represented areas of study. We encourage a variety of innovative or experimental presentation formats.

The workshop will take place on March 19-20, 2026 at the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect in Munich, which is a BMFTR-funded transdisciplinary institute for advanced studies based at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.



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Blank space in the perception and epistemology of maps: silences and absences that articulate the world

Munich, 19–20 March 2026

Workshop organised by Filipe dos Reis, Toby Yuen-Gen Liang and Camille Serchuk

Venue: Käte Hamburger Research Centre *global dis:connect*, Maria-Theresia-Strasse 21, Munich

Thursday, March 19

9:00 **Registration**

9:15-9:35 **Opening remarks** (Workshop co-organisers)

09:35-11:05 **Session 1: Blank space and fluidity of imagination**

Chair: Camille Serchuk (KHK global dis:connect)

DJOEKE VAN NETTEN (University of Amsterdam): *Blankness and whiteness: the case of the Arctic*

LUIS LOBO-GUERRERO (Groningen University): *Emptying-out the perception of empty sea-space in XVI C maritime charts*

SIDDHARTH PANDEY (KHK global dis:connect): *Mapping magic: flux, fluidity and the 'invisible' wonder of fantastical wayfinders*

11:05-11:15 **Round of introductions**

11:15-11:30 **Coffee break**

11:30-12:30 **Session 2: The role of blank space in new technologies and media**

Chair: Toby Yuen-Gen Liang (KHK global dis:connect)

PAULA MUHR (Brand University of Applied Sciences Hamburg): *Mapping the (un)knowable: the productivity of blank spaces in epistemic images*

MAGDALENA BECKER (Technical University of Munich): *Mapping ignorance: Blank space in 'air cartography'*

12:30-13:30 **Lunch**

13:30-15:00 **Session 3: Blankness in calamity and failure**

Chair: Clemens Finkelstein (KHK global dis:connect)

ADHEMAR MERCADO (Universidad Católica Boliviana "San Pablo"): *Reading the white space in the burn scar: fire, silence and the colonial gaze in mapping Amazonian fires*

LAURA BERTENS (Leiden University): *Mapping absence: the semiotic paradox of Alberto Burri's Grande Cretto*

FILIFE DOS REIS (University of Groningen): *From absence to imagination: mapping the Arctic and the open polar sea theory*

15:00-15:15 **Coffee break**

15:15-16:15 **Session 4: Recovery of indigenous knowledge**

Chair: Filipe dos Reis (KHK global dis:connect)

JONAS DANEN (LMU Munich): *Blank spaces and colonial vision: cartography and the making of New Netherland*

THOMAS BASSETT (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign): *Blank spaces and mapping practices in nineteenth-century West Africa*

16:15 **Depart for the LMU university library**

17:00-18:30 **Visiting the LMU university library**

18:30 **Depart for optional dinner**

18:45-20:15 **Optional dinner (self-paid) at the Türkenhof restaurant, Türkenstraße 78**

Friday, March 20

09:30-11:00 **Session 5: Recovery of communities**

Chair: Susanne Quitmann (KHK global dis:connect)

TOBY YUEN-GEN LIANG (Academia Sinica, Taiwan): *Architectural plans of fortresses and the conceptualisation of borderlands: Spanish Tunis in 1573–1574*

NARCISS M. SOHRABI (Paris Nanterre University): *Cartographic silences: Jewish spaces and the politics of representation in Iranian cities*

DORO WIESE (Radboud University): *Unsettling coloniality: white space in the cut-up poetry of Jordan Abel's (Nisga'a) Un/Inhabited*

11:00-11:15 **Coffee break**

11:15-12:45 **Session 6: Epistemic and ethical functions of aesthetic blankness**

Chair: Elizabeth DeLoughrey (KHK global dis:connect)

CRISTINA MORARU (George Enescu National University of the Arts, Romania): *Affective silences: the epistemic force of absence. A sound mapping experiment presentation*

SERGIO LOPEZ-PINEIRO (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee): *The blank as counter-myth: a potential for ethics of non-action*

CAMILLE SERCHUK (Southern Connecticut State University): *Muted margins: making meaning without ornament on early modern maps*

12:45-13:45 **Lunch**

13:45-14:30 **Concluding discussion**

14:30 **Depart for optional walking tour**

15:00-17:00 **Optional walking tour with RAPHAELA LOOSEN**