

**Alba Newmann Holmes**

***The Situation in Harlem: Langston Hughes' Poems as Psychogeographic Map***

My current book project, *On the Map: Twentieth-Century American Poetry and Cartography*, examines the ways poetic structures, like cartographic structures, organize knowledge—how they can claim territory or order experience, while leaving openings for uncertainty and discovery. In each chapter, I pair the work of a poet with a specific understanding of or example of mapping. Four of the five chapters of this manuscript exist in draft form. My aim, in applying for LARC, is to spend the summer developing the remaining chapter, “The Situation in Harlem.” In this piece, I will focus on the poetry of Langston Hughes, arguing that his poems that name the streets of Harlem create a psychogeographic map of the neighborhood and of Hughes’ personal geography more broadly.

Psychogeography was championed by the Situationists, a mid-twentieth-century group of Parisian artists and urban planners interested in the ways in which human experience informs our sense of place and of cities in particular. As writers, film-makers, architects, and cartographers, they intervened into traditional means of representation—to challenge reified images of the city and recast urban spaces as dynamic processes, responsive to and generated by the movements, emotions, and perceptions of city dwellers. The maps they created—often dissected and reassembled collages made from conventional maps—reflected residents’ personal interactions with place.

I will use the notion of psychogeography to consider Harlem as a space in which African American artists, and Hughes in particular, were engaging with and reconfiguring their own sense of the city, through their artistic productions. Working as a member of a LARC group will allow me not only to read the texts central to my project, but to do so within an engaged community of scholars invested in similar questions. I want both to build and to problematize my own argument, and I believe our group will help me to do so in a more nuanced manner than I might working in isolation.

Each of the undergraduates in our group shares an interest in cities, as lived, imagined, and depicted spaces. Brynn Raymond’s work dovetails with my own in terms of site, historical moment, and literary figure. Her work will contribute to my own by bringing relevant historical texts and conditions to light; and together we will discuss Hughes’ poetry, his biography and his milieu. Grace Cohen’s project is an exploration and application of Situationist theory. Her project offers the opportunity to consider psychogeographic mapping in action, in a contemporary context—as a laboratory, in a sense, for the more theoretical aspects of my own work.

While at the University of Denver, I received a small grant to work with an undergraduate research assistant identifying the poems in Hughes oeuvre that contain specific place or street names and building a Google map of these. This was groundwork necessary for the chapter I will be writing this summer; it also gave me experience collaborating with undergraduates on research. There are no other internal or external funds available for this project.

