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Poppy Thomson is an emerging curator and art historian currently completing an Honours degree in art history and curatorship at the Australian National University. Poppy has curated numerous exhibitions including *Off the Loom* at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space Manuka, *Metamorphosis* at Tuggeranong Arts Centre and *Sound, Image, Text* at the ANU School of Art and Design Gallery Project Space.

Figure 1: Bonita Ely, *Murray River Project 1979: near Corryong a fast flowing mountain stream,* 1979, photo courtesy of Bonita Ely: https://bonitaely.com/murray-river-project-1977-

Figure 2: Cathryn Boch, *untitled,* 2016, (one of 10 untitled works), mixed media, approx. 266 x 540 cm, photo: Jean-Christophe Lett

Bonita Ely and Cathryn Boch: Mapping the Political, Mapping the Personal

"… why do we map things? What do we map? We map what we want to exploit, what we want to know about. We don't map anything we're not going to use."[1]

Maps are a lens through which we physically comprehend our surroundings. We use maps all the time, and yet we rarely encounter them as anything other than an exploratory, or exploitative, device. How might we reconcile the visible terrain of our environment with the tangible and intangible traces of our place within it – our effect on it, and its effect on us? In the wake of a warming planet, Bonita Ely and Cathryn Boch employ cartography as artistic device to demonstrate that our connection to environment is neither symbiotic nor reciprocal.

[1] Dr Bonita Ely in an interview with Julianna Enberg, 'Dr Bonita Ely Oral History: James C. Sourris AM Collection of Artist Interviews, (2019), https://vimeo.com/408645575

Bonita Ely is a seminal figure of the ecofeminist movement in Australia. *The Murray River Project* (1977-2009) is not the momentary, stagnant rendering of an environment under duress, but rather an ongoing documentation of geographical change. Here, Ely is almost akin to a scientist conducting a longitudinal study where, to quote Wagner, 'time becomes space', viscerally rendered in the flowing ribbons of the Murray.[2] In 1977, Ely's photographs included temporary grids that mimicked cartographic studies as she traced the cut of the river all the way to the sandstone cliffs of South Australia.[3] Now, the photos are in effect a performance of environmental degradation as the man-made traumas Ely warned of decades ago manifest their full and violent effect on the terrain in which she grew up.[4]

Cathryn Boch initiates another kind of topographic inquiry, knitting together diverse geographies to present an encounter with what is close, but also incredibly foreign.[5] For Boch, the map is an invitation to consider movement in which permanent ties are rare, if not entirely ephemeral.[6] The roadmaps, atlas pages and maritime charts are poetically threaded together by the paradoxical tool of Boch's sewing machine – tearing as it joins.[7] Born and raised in Strasbourg (on France's boarder with Germany), the political and cultural negotiation of environment is integral to Boch's practice.[8] Both the land which she references (the Brazilian Amazon, the Syrian desert, the Mediterranean Sea) and the materials she invokes are exposed to ordeals of growth and decay - eroded and reshaped, but not without retaining their original palimpsest.[9]

While Ely maps the slow violence inflicted on a specific region and Boch brings into immediate conversation a plethora of geographies, both artists posit cartography as a political

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[2] Croggon, Nicholas. 'Bonita Ely's art of ecology', *Art & Australia*, 48(1), (Spring 2010): 47
Wagner, Parsifal, Act 1 (1882)
[3] 'Bonita Ely' in *Water,* edited by Chris Saines, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, (2019): 85-86
[4] 'The Murray River Project, 2009, *Bonita Ely,* updated 2022 accessed 23/05/22, https://bonitaely.com/murray-river-project-continued
[5] Davies, Lillian. 'Catherine Boch, Galerie Papillon', *Artforum,* (February 2017), https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201702/cathryn-boch-66110
[6] Neveux, Pascal. 'Une Archéologie du Sensible', *Documentsdartistes,* updated 2022, accessed 24/05/22, https://www.documentsdartistes.org/artistes/boch/repro.html#
[7] Neveux, Pascal. 'Une Archéologie du Sensible', *Documentsdartistes*
[8] Davies, Lillian. 'Catherine Boch, Galerie Papillon', *Artforum,* (February 2017), https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201702/cathryn-boch-66110
[9] 'Cathryn Boch', *Module of Temporality,* updated 2022, accessed 2405/22, https://moduleoftemporality.com/en/artists/cathryn-boch/

and personal device. Overall, by situating maps in an artistic context, we may begin to reflect on why we map our environment, and truly consider what exactly it is we are mapping in this instance.

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