Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany

New Worlds in Print Culture

Stephanie Leitch
Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany
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Acknowledgments

More than likely, this project began with my trick or treat rounds amongst my suburban neighbors who, for many years, opened the door to me in my “Indian” costume. For this outfit, deerskin from my father’s hunting excursions was sewn together sandwich-board style by my mother. I sported a headband of pheasant feathers and carried a slack bow. Although even a cursory look at the literature on Native American dress of any historical period would have disproved it in a second, my Halloween costume was universally lauded by my neighbors for being “authentic.” This project takes a critical look at the history of the cultural circumstances that produced this costume.

My mother hails from a German town on the Swiss border, north of the Alps and south of the Black Forest. While no Indians roam there, Germans I met as a child had an avid interest in the Native American, quite unlike my American friends who were obsessed with cowboys. To this day, German hobbyists of the “Indianer Clubs” stage mock battles and attend spiritual healing seminars. The figure of the Indian has been a positive trope in the contemporary German imagination since the novelist Karl May began his famous Winnetou series at the end of the nineteenth century. The Winnetou of May’s imagination is an Apache whose right-hand man, Old Shatterhand, is a displaced German. My mother read May’s books voraciously as a child, and I daresay that at least part of her decision to emigrate to a Maryland farm with Algonquian etymology originated in a firm German conviction that the frontier stretched just beyond the backyard.

This book represents a happy journey between the two worlds I inhabit and about which I have been fortunate to research and ruminate for many years. For imposing a deadline on these ruminations, I thank my editor Gary Taylor, whose visionary spark I also acknowledge here. Chris Chappell and Samantha Hasey at Palgrave helped bring this project together expediently. I owe a great debt to the two anonymous and careful readers of the manuscript and trust that they will hear their voices in what follows. I am also grateful for feedback I received on the versions of two of the present chapters which appeared as articles, “The Wild Man, Charlemagne, and the German Body,” in Art History 31:3 (2008); and “Burgkmair’s Peoples of Africa and India (1508) and the Origins of Ethnography in Print,” in The Art Bulletin 91:2 (June 2009).
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For the keen intellect, deft cuisine, good cheer, and warm heart of my husband Paul van der Mark, words fail where a good Barolo might not. My brother Erik Leitch, my pocket Renaissance man and astronomer, frequently offers me scope from his cosmographic travels. And finally, this work is dedicated to my three elders Roswitha and Arthur Leitch, and my late grandmother Erika Rist who, respectively cobbled together my first Indian costume, put venison on my plate, and taught me my first words of German. They are my pathfinders.
Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany
CHAPTER 1

Wonder and the Working Print:
An Introduction

In 1520, the Nuremberg artist Albrecht Dürer stood rapt before the Aztec treasures brought back to Brussels by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. He did not blink. Straining for words, he pronounced the marvels he saw there to be better than the “Prodigies” or the Wunderding(e) in Dürer’s German, employing a trope that connected these treasures to wonders, marvels, and prodigious occurrences. Two opinions offered as to what Dürer might have meant by “better than the prodigies” try to unpack the interpretative traditions that governed his response. On the one hand, Dürer’s positive appraisal of the ingenuity of these peoples and their products suggested that they were on a par with Europe’s, a bold sizing up often hailed as the first acknowledgment of cultural relativism by a Renaissance artist. On the other hand, if we characterize Renaissance wonder as “the central figure in the initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference,” then we are forced to reevaluate Dürer’s response as less articulate. Dürer’s use of wonder, whether he refers to the marvelous nature of these artifacts or to the producers themselves, is beholden to that same aesthetic response, that wide unblinking stare that begins with awe and ends in speechlessness. Although Dürer’s reaction has been mined for clues of a cultural sensitivity matching his own artistic exceptionality, the challenge facing Dürer—how to perceive and relay the stuff of new worlds—already had a history in Germany. For more than a decade prior to Dürer’s spellbound gaze, artists and printers in Augsburg—colleagues of his, in fact—had regarded the natives of Southeast Asia and the Americas not as ineffable exotica, but as peoples whose distinction from Europeans was not predicated on radical difference.

In contrast to the conventional images of exotics accompanying reports of New World discoveries printed in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, the illustrations by Augsburg printmakers featured in this study expressed the distinctive and unique qualities of non-European peoples in equally unique and distinctive ways. Produced in a dynamic merchant, patrician, and humanist milieu, these prints of Hans Burgkmair
(c. 1508) and Jörg Breu (c. 1515) were the first to release these native inhabitants from the shackles of a visual tradition of exotica that had grouped them together with marvelous beings, monstrous races, wild men, and barbaric Others, and considered them instead as fully human. The foreign native unveiled himself briefly in the early sixteenth century, shedding his exotic trappings ever so briefly before colonial Europe wrapped him back up in filmy Orientalist gossamer.\(^5\) In this period, he was parsed and studied, rather than swallowed whole.

**Humanists and Artists**

The confluence of international trade and the artistic energy galvanized by humanism in the early sixteenth-century produced new ways of looking at the world and of organizing visual thinking about humanity, a collaborative attempt to chart non-European peoples in terms less vague than “the Other.” Any discussion of Renaissance Others only derives sense from an exploration of the self, a project whose ubiquity in the early modern period was identified by Stephen Greenblatt’s seminal study, but whose precision was perfected by German engineering.\(^6\) German introspection and self-fashioning include the civic posturing that produced the largest printed chronicle and map of the world, the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, as well as representations of the shape and body of the wild man, who, here, represents a cipher of German humanists’ national self-appraisal. Humanists’ text-based excavation of German ethnography determined the profile of its people and what constituted membership in its group.\(^7\) A frank examination through the ethnographic lens of Cornelius Tacitus, the first ethnographer of German-speaking peoples, revealed a wild man surprisingly lurking at the base of the Germans’ own pedigree. This barbarian, who in many ways resembled the image of the Indian circulating in print, ultimately precipitated a need for a closer look at non-European Others and increased descriptiveness.

A fellowship of humanists stood at the helm of German self-fashioning in their intellectual concerns and in the circulation of their labors through the printing press. In addition to shaping the boundaries of the national self, humanist sodalities also systematized Renaissance cartography, organized natural history, inspired antiquarianism, and sponsored art making.\(^8\) In the sixteenth century, Augsburg was the gateway for the diffusion of new geographic information from Spain and Portugal and artistic styles from Italy. The local Welser and Fugger families oversaw a web of commercial networks, positioning trading posts in Venice and agents in Lisbon. These merchant bankers turned over to their humanist associates and the artists in their circle reports and artifacts from the newly discovered territories: parrots, samples of South American feather work, sketches that provided preparatory studies for Burgkmair, and even live human specimens wrested from their homes. Marginalia written in the local humanist Konrad Peutinger’s own hand in his copy of Ptolemy’s *Cosmographia* provides one of the first recorded instances of Indian “slaves” on the European continent. This note announces the purchase of natives from India by Peutinger’s father-in-law Anton Welser, as well as by Ambrosius Höchstetter and Konrad Vöhlin, members of other Augsburg merchant families.\(^9\) Peutinger reported these Indian natives to be alive and well and living in the German region of Swabia;
Burgkmair almost certainly saw and used them as models for his compositions (plate 1).

If, as this study assumes, Hans Burgkmair actually encountered natives of the Malabar Coast of India in his hometown of Augsburg, it was through his connections to merchants via humanist patrons. First-hand observations of artifacts and specimens collected by Augsburg merchants infused the canon with new data; local humanists processed the raw materials for the artists.\(^\text{10}\) Equally important as the new data were humanist proclivities for organization and interpretation. Burgkmair’s perspicacity, attention to detail, and categorization paralleled the intellectual currents of contemporary humanism. Humanist mediation kept these artists’ representations free from both the discourse of monstrous races that historically characterized travel accounts, as well as from the propagandistic and colonial taint that would mark images of these same subjects in the wake of conquest.\(^\text{11}\) As the artistic attachments of humanism have been explored by studies that show how material evidence challenged the boundaries of established disciplines and forced them to restructure, we can also argue for their role in a significant change in the way of thinking about a plurality and diversity of worlds.\(^\text{12}\)

The Working Print

The pictorial field of prints readily adapted itself to new possibilities and new functions. New genres took shape in the print’s experimental space, which offered itself as a space for recording observations, surveying topography, or providing paper surfaces for scientific instrumentation; prints tendered their space for new technology and new technologies of seeing.\(^\text{13}\) Recent studies have stressed the imperatives of these prints’ function, and because many of these prints are unique in form and content, and therefore escape easy categorization, they are perhaps best quantified by their use as tools.\(^\text{14}\) Svetlana Alpers’ work, for example, examines the role maps played in the development of visual technology and the ways in which certain types of knowledge were systematized by cartographic energy.\(^\text{15}\) We will examine here how printing could fix facts and warrant the presentation of visual observations, especially in cartography and physiognomy, genres that assert descriptive scrutiny and in many cases, establish the corporeal presence of an observer. Through these visual innovations, I explore how printed illustration became especially suited to ratify the claims of empirical observation and the important role it played in shaping the visual representation of facts.

Early modern prints were marshaled into reporting everything from marvelous occurrences to discoveries of new worlds, declaring themselves eyewitnesses to these sightings. Each chapter in this book offers a case study of the kind of work that print did in the Renaissance. Each weighs the role of the print in the construction of visual truth. In the early sixteenth century, and in Northern Europe especially, prints began announcing their function as purveyors of unmediated representations of nature. Truths struggling for acknowledgment in a variety of media forged accomplices in printed illustration, including broadsheets, religious propaganda, maps, herbals, portraits, as well as medical and artists’ manuals. Despite the black-and-white starkness of the sixteenth-century print, a surface ill-suited to the mimetic
copying of nature, it was here that some of the most repeated and insistent claims to reflecting the observed world were made.

Early modern prints are not the most obvious place to look for Renaissance contributions to the artistic tradition nor for the systematic pursuit of truths; both have been more fervently sought in media that aspired to mimetic likeness. Stories of art that located teleological progress in illusionistic naturalism revealed in narratives of deception or metamorphosis: the Ancients conferred the laurel of “truth in art” on works that deceived the eye, applauding as they watched dazed birds stub their beaks on Zeuxis’ fresco of painted grapes and Pygmalion’s marble Galatea become flesh.16 Italian Renaissance painters and sculptors revived the antique preference for illusionism, and from Giorgio Vasari’s Lives of the Artists (1550) forward, the story of the Renaissance has been told through the lens of artists struggling to revive formulae for proportions forgotten since antiquity and to unlock the enigma of linear perspective. Printed impressions on paper could not hope for trompe l’oeil trickery, and thus, set their claims to observed reality to different calibrations.

But, far from thinking themselves hopelessly handicapped in describing empirical observations, prints clamored that they were made “from life.” The framework for printed truths in this period was shaped by claims of accuracy made by a variety of printed genres. Sixteenth-century artists, especially in the North, looked to both the particularity embedded in portraits and in abstractions like maps for standards by which to assert precision. Albrecht Dürer, for example, slaved over complicated mathematical contrivances to achieve the formulae for proportionate, and therefore “accurate,” reproductions of the human body. However formulaic, both a textual and visual vocabulary for argumentative claims to observation develop in this period, claims that invoke a transparent relationship between nature and the authority of the eyewitness. Clamorings by way of labels that announced the images were made “from life”—in the form of contrafacere, naer het leven, nach dem Leben, ad vivum, au vif—suggest operative models of how prints and drawings authenticated subjects recorded in the presence of their makers.17 Surely these testimonies had visual counterparts that matched the text’s claims to authenticity. Rather than literally stating them, German printmakers staked silent claims to descriptiveness and likeness by visually asserting their endeavors as documentary ones.

Subjects that challenged what was already known, especially creatures that taxed the probable, advanced the development of a visual documentary vocabulary. Ancient and medieval accounts that studded the uncharted parts of the globe with monsters capitalized on their difference in order to distinguish these regions from a moral and theological center. Authorities such as Pliny, St. Augustine, and Isidore of Seville used the rhetoric of the eyewitness to their direct observation of these monstrously formed beings in order to enhance their credibility, a fiction that Anthony Pagden calls their “autopic imagination.”18 Albrecht Dürer, also not privy to a first-hand view of the beast, used the term “abkunterfet” (or, an image made from life) to label a print of a rhinoceros he never saw.19 Still, this claim was backed by the documentary vocabulary vested in print, because Dürer’s quadruped served as the source, as well as the last word, in the visual construction of the rhinoceros until the nineteenth century. The same sparseness of the visual field, coupled with the specimen’s surfeit of particularity, was used to substantiate the “wurmb” or hydra...
that was drafted by a South German artist (c. 1530), and was made popular through many printed editions.20

Burgkmair’s and Breu’s illustrations pushed merely rhetorical eye witnessing to assert a different kind of veracity, one steeped in visual rhetoric and with claims to autopic observation. The artists included in this study show an unprecedented visual engagement with their subjects within the context of shifting ideas of viewership from the late medieval to the early modern period. They transform the representation of the act of eye witnessing by investing it with guarantees of observational proof and develop the language of being there. The visual strategies they employ define an ethnography shaped as much by the new subjects they portrayed, as by concerns with how to depict them as the products of observation. This book contextualizes their innovations in arenas of concern and possibilities new to the Renaissance.

The print productions of these Augsburg artists established visual warrants to assert that their subjects were documented from life. In some cases, the subjects portrayed were actually the product of empirical observation. But their techniques were inflected by the surveying that characterized mapmaking, formulae established for proportions, mimesis demanded by portraiture, and the specificity that attended experimental sciences like physiognomy. These solidified into visual practices that tried to capture the particularity of the “world around,” which now included human races.

Prints propose an alternate way of looking at the stylistic ruptures traditionally associated with Renaissance art. Without the means to express truth as illusionism, the print in this period strives to capture the natural world, but in a highly constructed form. Instead of the privileged contributions of the revival of antiquity and the adjustments of linear perspective, this project emphasizes the role of visual technology in the development of Renaissance naturalism. By borrowing stylistic and compositional guarantees from other media in order to claim scientific scrutiny, artists included in this study introduced vocabulary both new to print and never before used in rendering racial difference. They suggested systematic comparisons of the sort that would later underwrite taxonomy, and other proto-scientific gestures like ethnography.

Ethnographic Impulses

The pictorial turn that this book tracks highlights a unique and early incidence of visual accuracy and an unprecedented investment in the practice of ethnography. Things never before seen, like rhinoceri, South American feather work, petrified remnants of the natural world, samples of blowfish, or even a group of new arrivals to Augsburg from India, inspired new ways of recording and organizing those experiences. This fusion of empirical observations and the novel representative strategies developed to record them built to a moment of visual sophistication and intellectual rupture. This breach occurred in a climate shaped by German humanism, artistic techniques developed in Italy, and mercantile interests in new worlds. A confluence of new standards for recording the observed world and new sets of visual guarantees reflected an ordering that begs for the term ethnography to describe it avant la lettre.
The term “ethnography” today is reserved for anthropology governed by firsthand and sustained research and is still very hesitantly applied to any image-producing endeavor besides photography, film, and video recording. Despite the widespread use of the term in the secondary literature, it is without a doubt, an anachronistic term for sixteenth-century methods of investigation.  

By ethnographic, I do not mean that the new visual thinking about humanity produced images of humans whose coordinates can be concretely pinned down on a map that corresponds to familiar national borders, or that they were the products of prolonged and scientific scrutiny. Early printed images were routinely recycled from models that approximated the needs of the printer; saints and sinners, as well as popes and paupers, did double duty for each other. When new world inhabitants enter the cast of representational desiderata, all nude children of nature including Adam, Eve, wild men, and wild women, became their go-to doppelgänger. Recycling Europe’s own to describe these new peoples represents a visual stride in the understanding of peoples from these regions.

Early representations of these new neighbors, when not simply recycled, still placed little premium on naturalism. This study operates under the assumption that naturalism walks a tightrope between the descriptive and normative, erring frequently on the normative side. If anything, this study exposes the assumed transparency of mimesis and naturalism and treats them as eminently constructed categories. The medium of print absorbed naturalism less readily than did other media, and the rampant practice of recycling, encouraged by ease and cost-effectiveness, only held up the process. While William Ivins has enshrined the standardization afforded by print’s exactly repeatable statement, it is difficult to argue for anything like ethnographic or even artistic intentionality in this impoverished medium fraught with technical shortcuts and iconographic shorthand. Yet, in some cases, even these expediencies marked radical departures from stereotypes.

In this project, the term ethnography is marshaled to describe the artist’s direction toward organizational structure, his impulse to group, to categorize, to locate, and to differentiate among a sum of descriptive detail. It also implies that he collected and reproduced his data in a comparative fashion; this gathering does not operate within any scientific framework and without any pretensions to ethnology, but was motivated by hunches about human diversity while alluding to their overall unity. Assembling particulars about language, religion, modes of dwelling, diet, and dress formed a standard approach to describing the inhabitants of foreign places—indeed the same questions had been asked about humanity since classical ethnographers such as Herodotus. Classical and medieval histories and encyclopedias that provided a model for telling about strange people, and textual ethnography can be found in contemporary books of customs, moral histories, costume books, and other precursors to modern anthropological texts such as cultural geographies and travel literature. Contemporary records of mariners and manuals for merchants provided a list of things for which those travelers should look when venturing into foreign markets. Ethnography was clearly being practiced on the amateur level, in some cases, printed as field guides for merchants who were also encouraged to observe and record their findings. Tallies of customs and habits of peoples made on the models of ancient histories were preserved in the vernacular how-to books
of the sixteenth century, as well as in the allegorical literature. The protagonist of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, the explorer Raphael Hythloday, for example, reports cultural customs of the salubrious Utopians using taxonomic categories gleaned from Thucydides’ and Herodotus’ histories that he carried on board. More’s case study of the exemplary society of Utopia presented a compelling foil to Europe in the form of an ethnographic sketch of the Utopians. In the shape of a Platonic dialogue, *Utopia* asks the reader to compare and contrast, to recognize antithesis, to explore virtues and vices, and encourages a relativistic study of societies.

More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Michel de Montaigne’s essay *Of Cannibals* (1580) form two milestones of textual ethnographic query in the sixteenth century. By setting up comparisons between the New Worlders and contemporary Europeans, More and Montaigne both dismantle the frail defense Europeans had erected between themselves and their “primitive” contemporaries. Both accounts offer sympathetic views of new peoples whose virtues exposed European folly and even barbarity. Both achieved their claim to unbiased recording by virtue of their narrators, both innocent rustics not driven by agendas, who characterize the new societies overwhelmingly in terms of “lack” of hypocritical trappings of European culture. Both promote the idea that an important fringe benefit of travel was perspective into one’s own society.

Whereas the ethnographic character of More’s and Montaigne’s texts has rarely been disputed, it seems strange that no one has tried to advance claims about contemporary images, or looked for images that expressed similar sensibility, inspired, or inflected this relativistic kind of thinking. Arguably, images are as sound a place to search as any, as they were responsible for conveying all other period novelties, and more concretely, could not express ideas through lack. The first “ethnographic” image-making endeavor is frequently identified with the publishing enterprise of the Frankfurt-based family of Theodor de Bry who, between 1590 and 1634 collected and printed the transcripts of the great European voyages to the New World as the *Grands Voyages*. The secondary literature sets the start date for the visual narrative of cross-cultural and ethnographic contact with the copious engravings accompanying de Bry’s thirty-volume anthology of the discovery reports. The current project’s reevaluation of ethnography revises this entrenched point of reference.

Retrospective assessment of the ethnographic merits of de Bry’s images accrued to the *Grands Voyages* via the anthropological texts that comprised the anthology, such as Jean de Léry and André Thevet’s account of their time spent amongst the Brazilian Tupinamba. Léry and Thevet’s documentary tendencies, as well as their refusal to link rituals such as cannibalism with complete alterity has driven modern ethnographers to search for the discipline’s origin in these texts. Claude Lévi-Strauss famously set foot in Brazil in 1935 with a copy of Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un Voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578) in tow, a book he considered a work of ethnography. Augmenting the ethnographic aura that surrounds the de Bry volumes are several firsthand sketches, such as John White’s watercolors of the Virginia Algonquians, which formed the study for only a handful of the engravings. The engravings in the published edition, however, retooled these first hand sightings along the lines of idealist European models driven by anti-Catholic polemic. Distilled from the accounts of conquest and retold by an exiled French
Protestant with an anti-Catholic agenda, de Bry’s images of Amerindians were hardly disinterested, let alone comparative, or judiciously weighed. Neither do they embody unmediated representations of nature, nor seek to organize them into rigorous categories, as even the broadest formulations of ethnography presume. Even when modern scholarship invokes ethnography to describe Burgkmair’s images, it employs an ahistorical and transdisciplinary notion of this term to indicate quasi-scientific observation of nature. This project inspects the art-historical conditions that could support the kind of investigation implied by ethnography.

Finally, the Renaissance notion of ethnography at work in this study treats “races” as groups of peoples, like More’s Utopians, who shared a common ancestry and who had habits and customs discrete from other groups. Renaissance racial constructions acknowledged diversity among peoples based on these habits and customs, and sought to differentiate peoples along cultural, religious, ethnic, and geographical lines. Governed by nonhierarchical ordering of the differences among ethnic groups, racial constructions were models distinct from the noxious ethnocentrism in later approaches to the study of human difference that produced systematic morphologic data and encouraged audiences to inspect, judge, and place them in artificial hierarchies. More importantly, this early sixteenth-century look at human diversity does not interpret the differences between peoples as a justification for their subjugation. Burgkmair and Breu parsed these differences for the study of variety, for the challenge of differentiation, and, in some cases, for the sake of stunningly novel models on to which they applied new artistic techniques—many undertaken in the name of deriving a rational basis for beauty. Their artistic choices gesture toward anthropology, and not the institutionalized racism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries backed by “scientific” warrants.

Organization: Management of Knowledge and New Facts

Ethnography borrows from the organizational principles that characterized other Renaissance fact-finding endeavors. The great organizers of the Renaissance were scholars and humanists who deciphered lost languages, neatly transcribed and numbered found inscriptions and spolia, organized their coin collections, catalogued and described nature, ordered fossilized and dried remains, devised ways to remember such, and recorded them for their colleagues and for posterity. The tools of the ethnographer partake of the same organizational constructions that governed other early modern attempts at canon formation, for example, in natural history, the taxonomic description in herbals and botanicals, and the parsing of difference and the systematization of knowledge found in the curiosity cabinets, or Kunst- and Wunderkammern. Paradoxically, whereas it was the object’s novelty, opacity, and resistance to categorization that earned it a niche in the cabinet in the first place, the Wunderkammer was not just a repository of random samples, but a venue for ordering the stuff of the world. The cabinet’s organization reflected the fluidity between things of artifice and unusual artifacts of the natural world; it was both the cabinet keeper’s burden
and sport to decide which was which. Because artifacts gathered from exotic places were also housed in these collections, the principles by which they were organized can shed light on how these were integrated into hermeneutic frameworks. The botanical and zoological specimens of the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi were crammed into the countless pigeonholes and drawers of sixty-six armoires that contained the chaos of his microcosm, “things from beneath the earth, together with various fruits, gums and other very beautiful things from the Indies, marked with their names so that they can be found.”36 As broad a classification as this reflects, nevertheless, the organization of exotic objects in a logical manner and their compartmentalization in separate cabinets, formed a de facto taxonomy. Horst Bredekamp suggests that parallels forged by placing artifacts of exotic origin into dialogue with indigenous objects “constitute the first evidence of a kind of ethnology that viewed foreigners with a certain respect . . . (and) integrated (their objects) visually in a nonhierarchical fashion.”37 The impulse of collectors to group products of non-European cultures together with European ones suggests a reception that viewed these cultures relativistically and produced presciently modern responses.

In what space was knowledge of nature constituted? Late medieval experimental science interpreted natural phenomenon by deciphering signatures inscribed on them. These signatures were linked to other signs via a system of resemblances, from which analogies were drawn. The explanatory mortar of these analogies formed the basis of natural history. In this landscape of billboards, per Michel Foucault, nature floated airlessly between the sign system and its interpretation, the oxygen forced out by a series of recursive analogies.38 Aldrovandi’s marking the “wonders of the Indies” with names in order that they could be located, processed for comparison, and digested, represented new possibilities for organization. Artists in this study also exposed Foucault’s hermetically sealed paradigm to the air; not interpreting peoples merely for the sake of moralizing, and in a space where particulars were not only adjustable, but also taxonomically and morphologically knowable.

In addition to wondrous objects, the curiosity cabinet also contained prints, books, and images, included because they either represented marvels of technology or portrayed marvels of the created world.39 Aldrovandi’s cabinet included bound volumes of things “dried and pasted,” which were supplemented with “3,000 other (examples) . . . which (he) had painted from life (al vivo).”40 Pictorial images, in the form of prints and drawings, expanded the group of known specimens. Even images of samples that were products of both observation and hearsay, like the strange Mischwesen called the monkfish, they qualified as parts of creation, and thus served to flesh out the canon. The encyclopedia of the microcosm was inclusive and often in search of supplementation. Like ethnography, botany was another body of knowledge in the process of canon formation in the early modern period. Botany as a field of investigation was concretized in illustrated herbals that transferred the garden plot to paper. The botanical book aspired to the ambitions of an apothecary garden with its mandate to instruct through comparison and encyclopedic inclusion.41 The illustrated botanical served as an ossified garden, a space impervious to the punishments of weather, an arena of knowledge that could be fixed by the exactly repeatable statement, a book that could replace travel or empirical experience. But volumes of collected specimens did more than simply supply ersatz representations of the
natural world, they also changed the terms of organization. The printed botanical
shifted the classification of plants away from their therapeutic properties to an or-
organization based morphologic principles. With these anthologies of images, natural
history took a phytographic turn, one grounded in the precise description of plants
that were catalogued with attention to form and structure. The removal of natural
specimens from their context facilitated and concentrated the naturalist’s concern
with description, and his resulting “painterly descriptions” inflected his habits of
observing.

Collection of objects, specimens, and flora from the natural world produced new
ways of looking at them and new stakes for observing them. It was the multipli-
cation of these empirical discourses fashioned for practical purposes, according to
Joan-Pau Rubiés, that made the possibility of ethnic and cultural diversity in this
period more than just an abstract idea. If empirical investigation reshaped man’s
experience of the natural world, did that experience translate into images used to
describe acts of eye witnessing? Late medieval accounts of monsters and marvelous
human races had all but bankrupted eye witnessing as a rhetorical strategy because
their authors simply reiterated what had issued from the fountainheads of antiquity.
Rarely did texts furnish images that could imply that the renderings were made
in the presence of these fantastic subjects. The translation of empirical acts into
representations required mediation between the descriptive and the normative. In
Aldrovandi’s microcosm, according to Paula Findlen, “the encyclopedia was located
neither in the text nor the object alone; rather it was the dialectic between res and
verba.” Perhaps it is in this liminal space that the subject rests uneasily as a visual
description. Prints also reside in exactly that liminal space between the normative
and the descriptive. By endeavoring to supply proof of observation, prints, and the
way that knowledge was systematized in them, answered for both some of the devel-
opments and some of the contingencies of facts in this period.

**Text Technology and Printing Problems**

This study engages a set of overlooked images in which the novelties of printing
and text technology in this period articulate themselves eloquently. Although prints
regularly accompanied the reports of the explorers and merchants that announced
the finds of the discoveries, many of these prints remain relatively unknown today.
This neglect is puzzling, considering that these pamphlets and broadsides are argu-
ably the most significant documents of the discoveries. Introducing novelty was a
task shouldered almost entirely by prints and printed pamphlets in the Renaissance.
Dubious artistic merit and uncredited authorship have kept them beneath the radar
of art history and relegated them to the status of ephemera, if not exactly detritus.
The expediencies and economics of the printing trade gave rise to multiple, un-
authorized, and sometimes adulterated copies of these prints that thwart attempts
to construct seamless genealogies of artistic authorship. Rampant borrowings and
frequent recycling of motifs within these genres produced a visual fluidity that also
frustrates classic concerns with artistic invention, and therefore, left them outside
the realm of consideration by traditional scholarship.
A broad cross-section of the mercantile, patrician, and humanist population informed artistic training and patronage. Acknowledging their contributions, this project embraces art history’s revisionist attention to visual culture uncharted by traditional art history, seeking to incorporate knowledge of and artifacts from cultures, not only beyond the reach of medieval cartography, but also outside Leon Battista Alberti’s cone of vision. Contributions of the strange bedfellows of merchants, publishers, and artisans overlooked in an earlier discourse that favored masters and masterpieces have been rehabilitated by recent studies of visual culture. This project consults their untidy paper trail of printed documents relating to the discoveries, correspondence among humanists, merchants, and factors in conjunction with the array of broadsides, maps, pamphlet title pages, and book illustrations to which their investigations gave rise.

While past print scholarship privileged connoisseurial questions of originality and invention, the concerns of early printmaking are better characterized by the evolution of the technology that purposely depended on the skills of the copyist. Current efforts to reinvigorate the reputation of the reproductive print have steered the path away from the inventions of A-list artists in order to inspect the technologies responsible for their renown. The contributions of “masters” like Raphael and Dürer have recently been weighed against the “commercial printers” like Marcantonio Raimondi and Theodor de Bry who expanded the audience for the peintre-graveur. Their print shops were responsible for setting masterpieces, in the case of the former, and news of the discoveries, in the case of the latter, into the broadest circulation. This book introduces other printmakers who helped define parameters for the field.

Like Raimondi and de Bry, Burgkmair and Breu’s productions were not always entirely of their own making; but their very collaborations and borrowings were critical to their innovations and to their successes.46

Many of these printmakers featured in this study are still relatively unknown outside of Germany. While Burgkmair’s printed work has been the subject of several German and international exhibitions, his profile in the English-speaking world awaits a monograph.47 His inclusion in the canon depends on the critical link he forged in the technology of print culture: Burgkmair’s renown comes from his work on several print projects made for a famous patron, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and is amplified by a technical development that emerged from this activity, the chiaroscuro woodcut.48 The chiaroscuro woodcut, an enriched print composed of a line block and multiple tonal blocks, elevated the status of the print to a work of art and Burgkmair to the rank of an early peintre-graveur.49 Burgkmair’s role in bridging the evolutionary gap between craft practice and artistic ambition by way of a technical improvement has recently been supplemented by scholarship that considers his work in the epistemology of science.50 The breach I posit for the ethnographic moment also borrows rhetoric from visual studies that situate other artistic ruptures in German visual culture in this period.51

Jörg Breu, on the other hand, has been rescued from oblivion by recent English-language scholarship that regards him as a minor craftsman in the realm of design, yet an important figure in his ambient.52 No one has given much play to Breu’s somewhat derivative woodcut cycle for Ludovico de Varthema’s Die Ritterlich vni
lobwirdig rayß (1515), the illustrated account of a Bolognese knight’s adventures in India. This study of Breu turns from questions of political identity, as well as from originality and invention that mark these rehabilitative studies, and queries instead his images of Hinduism and Islam to examine how his derivative borrowings inflected and made familiar the remoteness of classical Others.

The impact of the vernacular press on early modern social revolutions is a mainstay of Reformation studies, which has helped to identify critical issues and audiences during a period of unprecedented upheaval in early modern Europe. These studies investigate the role that printmaking had on collective identities, religious confession, the use and abuses of propaganda, and the chicken and egg relationship that the Reformation swept out with the printing press. Whereas polemical prints feature prominently as agents of change in the social landscape of early modern culture, there is scant scholarship, however, on secular printmaking in Germany on the eve of the Reformation. This book previews the role of secular printmaking before the Reformation and asks how prints of new people may have contributed to ideas of tolerance.

Modern scholarship on the European discoveries circa 1492 produced a discourse around the label “New World” that artificially separated the consideration of America from the East Indies. To consider the discovery of India, Asia, and America as discrete events is to forge an ex post facto distinction for the period before circumnavigation. This distinction forgets that Columbus was headed to Asia, mistakenly presumes that his reports, as well as those of his fellow discoverers, found their way to wide audiences, and labors under the assumption that precise accounting was made of the changing world picture as strict new boundaries were drawn. In reality, these lines and continental divides were negotiable for quite a while afterwards. In addition, precise geographical knowledge was limited to tight circles of humanists and, as John Elliott suggests, news of the discoveries generally made only a very blunt impact. The anachronism of the modern distinction between India and the Americas exposes itself most tellingly in early modern visual records in which East and West Indians are used interchangeably long after their coordinates should have been sorted out, according to a model that poses 1492 as a temporal break in the history of European thinking. The visual conflation of these stereotypes compels us to see past anachronistic geographical divides and to compare Amerindians with Asians and Goths with wild men.

Modern use of the ambiguous term “New World” to mark the discovery of the Americas plotted surveying lines on maps that did not necessarily correspond to the contemporary mental geography of early modern Europeans. The erasure of this divide is crucial to understanding the visual vocabulary of these prints. Broadening the “new world” to include Africa and Asia creates a conceptual model that allows us to consider the discoveries in tandem. Hans Burgkmair and Jörg Breu’s images of African and South Asian natives show us the necessity of weighing the impact of Asia in the making of America. Only by considering these European encounters with Africa, India, and the Americas together can we truly explore the fluidity of the visual tradition between Asian and American Indians. This book responds to revisionist calls by recent scholarship, particularly Claire Farago’s Reframing the Renaissance, to reject anachronistic and culturally
divisive nationalisms in favor of a Renaissance that was diverse, admitting of its own patchwork beginnings, grounded in exchange, and exemplary of complex connections between cultures that perhaps even invited relativistic assessments of each other.57 By looking past these standard epistemic breaks, I locate the moment of empirical and ethnographic discovery of new peoples in a time and place where no one has thought to look.

Chapter Outline

The chapters in this book are designed as a series of case studies of works by members of common artisan and intellectual circles knitted together by humanists, patrons, and printers. These personalities knew each other primarily by their artistic output. These chapters are related in the sense that the images that these artists both reference and forge were common intellectual property. The chapters resonate with each other insofar as each represents a phase or contribution to the project of unraveling the other in the Germans’ midst. While they evince development in the German view of non-European peoples, they do not assert a teleological progress toward anthropology, rather they represent trends in printmaking as a new technology, with all the attendant glitches, improvements, and piracy.

Chapter 2, “Centering the Self: Mapping the Nuremberg Chronicle and the Limits of the World,” examines the cosmographic framework of the period just prior to the discoveries of the New World within which the novelties of those discoveries subsequently came to be viewed. The chapter focuses on the largest printed atlas of its time, Hartmann Schedel’s Weltchronik or Nuremberg Chronicle from 1493. While the Nuremberg Chronicle still reflects ancient demographics that seeded the remote regions of the East with monsters, marvels, and prodigies, it lodges a scientific program at its core. Schedel relied heavily on contemporary travel accounts for the form, content, and illustration of his chronicle; the first step was to have Nuremberg replace Jerusalem at the world’s navel. These innovations would ultimately make Christian cosmography susceptible to cartographic revisions from sailors and merchants. The Nuremberg Chronicle destabilized the world picture of the late medieval Germans and awakened interest in other cultures.

Even as European explorers were discovering other lands, German humanists were discovering their own history. Chapter 3, “The Wild Man, the German Body, and the Emperor’s New Clothes,” demonstrates how the barbarian who sat at the base of the Germans’ pedigree required these scholars to make sense of the wildness in their own past. This “ancient German” was brought to light in the late fifteenth century by the revival of the text of Tacitus’s Germania (98 a.d.), the first ethnography of the German peoples. Long dormant, Tacitus was rediscovered by humanists who were simultaneously processing news of recently discovered lands and peoples. I argue that the vivid descriptions of Tacitus’s ur-German, a rude forest dweller, in many ways closely resembled reports of the peoples of the New World. Because no visual precedent existed for either Tacitus’s barbarian or the New World inhabitants, the long-established iconographic tradition of the legendary wild man stepped in as the visual model for both.