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Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/90r5479j>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 3(2)

Author

Bishop, Karen Elizabeth

Publication Date

2011

DOI

10.5070/T832011635

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The Propositional Logic of Mapping Transnational American Studies— A Response to “DEEP MAPS’: A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects”

KAREN ELIZABETH BISHOP

In issue 3.1 of this journal, Shelley Fisher Fishkin offered a response to the essays by Günter Lenz, William Boelhower, Alfred Hornung, Rob Kroes, and Rüdiger Kunow collected under the title “Redefinitions of Citizenship and Revisions of Cosmopolitanism—Transnational Perspectives.”¹ Toward the end of her review of these five pieces, all of which were originally presented as part of a roundtable discussion at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Studies Association in Washington, DC, Fishkin does what the best scholarly engagements do: she lays the groundwork for a new project born of the dialogue in which she has just engaged. She offers up an initial proposal for what she hopes will be a “fruitful ‘next step’ for the field of transnational American Studies—for ‘Transnational American Studies 2.0’” (7), the Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects that she outlines in this current issue. Fishkin proposes that we pronounce these Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects (DPMPs) by sounding out their acronym, “Deep Maps,” which, in addition to facilitating the ease with which we talk about these projects, foregrounds the cartographical form they will take.

Fishkin expands on her original proposal—which, it is important to remember, was initially a response to an inquiry into how we cultivate a new non-Western cosmopolitanism alongside revised forms of national belonging—in her essay in this issue, “DEEP MAPS: A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects.” Here, in identifying the recent proliferation of transnational American Studies scholarship as a largely twenty-first century phenomenon, she recalls her 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association in which she wondered what “the field of American Studies [would] look like if the *transnational* rather than the *national* were at its center.”² In this most recent brief, her query is actualized. For the success of her

Deep Maps—and there can't be any doubt that these mapping projects will become an integral part of American Studies—depends on a scholarly methodology that privileges the transnational as a structure, a means, and a dynamic site of excavation for intellectual inquiry. The transnational, as it were, becomes in Fishkin's Deep Maps both the form and the content at the center of American Studies.

Deep Maps are open-access digital archives that collect all manner of multilinguistic primary and secondary text, paratext, ephemera, oral and written history, critical studies, and interdisciplinary and mixed media—to name just a few possibilities—in a series of overlaying and overlapping palimpsests built on a specific geolocation manifest on the surface of a digital map that serves as gateway to the archive. How the geographical location of an archive is decided depends on the particular goal of the scholar undertaking the project. It may be the site of a historical event, the place a work was written, published, taught, or banned; perhaps the birthplace of an important literary figure or a noted invention, the location of a conversation, a legal judgment; or it might be the site of a natural or biopolitical disaster, terrorist activity, or a burial site. Within these sites, a scholarly archive housing and responding to a particular text or event can be built.

Fishkin offers up a multitude of provocative examples of what a Deep Map might look like. She proposes a Deep Map focused on literary and testimonial accounts of Hiroshima or one on Dachau “as a site of transnational memory”; a Deep Map housing primary materials that inform the critical studies that comprise a work on the Philippine–American War; another dedicated to the Chinese in the nineteenth-century American West; and a potential series of Deep Maps, about which the author seems most excited, committed to understanding a “Transnational Twain.” In an extended conversation on the ways in which a Deep Map might enhance our understanding of the construction and dissemination of literary works in translation—and how these processes reveal racisms, cultural biases, and sociolinguistic misconceptions—the author also reflects on a map she is currently involved in drawing up dedicated to a comparative study of the extant translations of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the fifty-nine languages into which it has been translated.

In collaboration with colleagues from Stanford, the University of Maryland, and universities in China, Germany, Japan, and Taiwan, Fishkin is already exploring the technical and conceptual challenges that might arise from constructing Deep Maps. She has spent the past year presenting widely and talking with faculty colleagues around the globe about the scholarly potential that Deep Maps proffer. And here she invites us, her readers and colleagues in American Studies, to collaborate in developing these Deep Maps. Part of this invitation is necessarily a call to turn whatever disciplinary and institutional challenges Deep Maps present into opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration as well as cooperation among faculty, postgraduate and undergraduate students. Fishkin imagines projects that might require literary scholars to work with political historians; students of English

departments to collaborate with colleagues in foreign language or translation studies departments; ethnic studies professors to consult with architectural historians; or scholars from the digital humanities to call on the expertise of postcolonial theorists. The potential for interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars from American Studies and its contiguous fields and the pedagogical opportunities for students and faculty are myriad. These yet-unrealized collaborative and pedagogical possibilities are a large part of what makes the prospect of Fishkin's proposal so compelling and, indeed now that she has put the idea out there, seemingly necessary, as if Deep Maps had been a part of American Studies from the start.

That these maps are palimpsests—both inasmuch as the layers of any particular archive will be visible one beneath the other and because the maps themselves might be layered one on top of another or embedded one within another—also provide for new forms of collaborative writing and new reading practices. Scholars and students—and depending on how accessible open-access truly becomes, members of the general public—can work together to build their geo-archives or update existing ones. And while the author does not elaborate on the new reading practices her Deep Maps will cultivate—and this would be a study I would look very forward to reading—the possibilities are manifest. Deep Maps, as all maps, can be read as much synchronically as diachronically, an interpretive flexibility that fosters a deep and narrow understanding of how transnationalism plays out in the field as much as it actively forges the wider literary, historical, and geographical connections that comprise the transnational in the first place.

Readers of Deep Maps—as we see already in the reading of other digital archives, such as HyperCities or Omeka, both of which the author cites in her article as comparative models—will have to develop reading strategies that allow them to navigate embedded archival material efficiently for specific scholarly purposes or more as cyberflâneurs, moving *à la dérive* through layers and layers of primary and secondary source documents that make up lived and literary history. These strategies, both for the individual and as larger epistemological phenomena, will eventually become encoded and coded for, thereby affecting standards for how we read, but more importantly our pedagogical aims and efforts. In this way, Deep Maps form part of the very infrastructure that determines how we read transnationalism—and, as the author points out by way of postcolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo, become an effective counterexample to the ways that maps have historically served colonizing projects—at the same time they report on what comprises transnational American Studies.

How scholars decide where to locate an archive, according to what rationale or purpose, will also be of utmost importance. For by way of this initial decision, scholars are already invested in how we constitute place, an endeavor itself fundamental to how we define both the transnational and the American. Deep Maps will bring this construction of place to the fore, make it explicit, and compel those of us working in American Studies to reflect on how, to what end, and for what, we

make place—and space—both in the world of our scholarship and in our everyday lives. This self-reflective placial exercise is of particular import to an American Studies that seeks to engage with, if not also shape, the transnational. For the transnational at the center of American Studies is just one kind of transnational; other national literatures and histories have their own ways of understanding and engaging with the transnational. That American Studies scholars will need to choose where and how to identify place, and constellations of places, and to make visible and legible and meaningful that selection on a shared map will require a productive hyperawareness of how we are shaping a particular American transnationalism, as well as one that functions alongside other forms of global transnationalisms. By bringing the constitutive aspects of transnationalism to the surface, Deep Maps will allow transnational American Studies not only to better understand how it defines itself but will also allow the field to understand how contiguous transnationalisms—say, Latin American or Scandinavian or East African transnationalisms—are constructed. And this will only help us, to quote from the author’s vision for her Deep Maps, “to develop new ways of collaborating across borders and thinking beyond borders; of providing self-evident rationales for greater planetary awareness; and of helping the academy nurture the global citizens of the future.”³

The possible, indeed necessary, alliances between a transnational American Studies and other global versions of transnationalisms, as well as between scholars of American Studies and its neighboring fields that Deep Maps provide for, underscore the very nature of mapmaking as both world-building and as an innately collaborative effort. In his 2010 *Rethinking the Power of Maps*—the follow-up work to his highly influential 1992 *The Power of Maps*—Denis Wood explains the map’s propositional logic. He describes mapmakers as

extraordinarily selective creators of a world—not *the* world, but *a* world—whose features they bring into being with a map. Mapmakers propose this, not that, observe these things, not those, and not in blind obedience to sets of established professional rules either, but in flexible responsiveness to the living in which their mapmaking is embedded. The maps they make—the worlds they bring into being—change. These changes constitute a history . . . as the ways in which mapmakers propose to construe the world change. These changes respond to changes in the environments in which mapmakers are coupled, but they also stand in evidence of the mapmakers’ individual and collective autonomy. Maps emerge from mapmakers’ hands as responses to both outer and inner voices.⁴

I'd like to offer up Wood's description here of mapmaking and the role of the mapmaker as a model on which future makers of Deep Maps might depend. Wood's insistence that mapmakers selectively engage in building *a* world, not *the* world, is propitious for American Studies scholars whose work focuses on the transnational. For not only is an American transnationalism just one kind of transnationalism, as I argue above, but every Deep Map that American Studies scholars construct is just one possible world within the many that make up a transnational America. Wood's overview of the selective processes that mapmakers employ and his confirmation that these choices are the product of a certain being-in-the-lived-world also emphasize our need as scholars to be aware that we are always choosing to represent something, choosing to offer a particular work of literature, of translation, of historical memory as something keenly transnational and that this decision is always related to "the living" in which our making of Deep Maps is embedded. The maps we might make, the worlds we might actualize, will change over time and these changes will themselves make up a literary and lived history that shapes transnational American Studies.

Finally, Wood highlights the necessarily collaborative form of mapmaking even as he recognizes the individual mapmaker's autonomy. The maker of Deep Maps will construct her own map, a new world, but will do so only in response to a changing environment and contiguous cartographies. At the same time as they offer up representations of new, previously uncharted territories, Deep Maps will require a consciousness of other, already explored terrains to function. In this way, Deep Maps will ensure that a transnational American Studies remains always grounded, ever new, and a keenly attuned response to the multitude of voices at home, abroad, or somewhere in between that shape our field.

Notes

The writing of this commentary was generously assisted by an ACLS New Faculty Fellows award, with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

¹ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Redefinitions of Citizenship and Revisions of Cosmopolitanism—Transnational Perspectives: A Response and a Proposal," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2011), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1qw5364p>.

² Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 21.

³ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "'DEEP MAPS': A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects (DPMPs, or 'Deep Maps')," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 1–2.

⁴ Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 51.