

## "Oh, the Places You'll Go": Using History to Map Place and Self

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There are a number of challenges when teaching history to foundation or beginning design students; from their passion for studio classes, as opposed to the academic, the newness of the topic, and the lack of resources for teaching practitioners, as opposed to history students. Along with these are the first-year experiences of attempting to discover oneself as new college student, nascent designer and young adult; while literally having to find one's way around a university setting—buildings, people, schedules, and hopefully, syllabi. This finding of methods, resources and finding oneself, or the way to someplace you should be, is rooted very much in the concept of the map. This paper examines the use of maps and mapping as a resource and tool for teaching history to beginning design students using a research project-based methodology. Often a maze of information, both textual and visual, maps are an excellent resource to discover the past and fascinating to study as an evolutionary tool from paper to digital to augmented reality (AR). This research will consider historical and theoretical models of maps, mapping, space and data as a resource for the beginning design student.

One of the cultural and pedagogical shifts we have seen is the move from solely art history based learning to design history and visual culture. This has been positive in many respects as it

allows for the inclusion of the histories of technology and craft, as well as an understanding of how interconnected the world is as it becomes more visually centered. The multi-disciplinary growth of these fields allows for a more in-depth and creative understanding of our world. As Mitchell notes in *What Do Pictures Want* "history and comparative anthropology are not just description of events and practice but of representations of events and practices. Pictures are our way of gaining access to whatever these things are." (2005, p. xiv) We need to make the shift from merely interpretive and rhetorical understanding of pictures to their meaning and action, as powerful tools of communication that effect human emotions and behavior. (Mitchell 2005, p. 28).

Maps, while traditionally concrete, material objects, are more likely today to be moving, interactive and transient. Ideas of space, placemaking, boundaries and displacement converge in a very specific way with maps regardless of these changes. Icons, lines, the compass, and text are still all a part of the mapping experience that we all utilize. But how maps truly connect us is really a question of interpretation and understanding of how and why those elements all come together and ultimately create/recreate our world. My hope is that by looking at conditions and contexts of historical maps, and contemporary interpretations of them, then applying the concepts in a project, students will be able to reconsider not only where they live, but how they live, and the information needed to guide someone through that world.

A key task to teaching history to practitioners is to have them learn how to displace themselves.

To understand history, you have to displace your 19-year-old self from a technologically advanced world and attempt to envision a world where time and speed have different roles and values, where social expectations are vastly different from today. As a designer you have to displace your perspective on the world and broaden it to understand that of your client's view. The use of historical objects and practices as case studies is a way to understand history, displacement and making, particularly in regard to time, perspective and language.

A core element of history is time. Chronological approaches create a foundational understanding of the history of maps, while thematic approaches can help us interpret how understandings of time have evolved. Both of these are then utilized as tools not only of displacement for comprehension of history, but for learning how to consider differing conditions and responses to those through design. Here we can consider what our contemporary conditions are, "in its objects, discourse and practices and how...it become our reality." (Parikka 2012, p.10) Historically maps may have been flat and only found on paper or vellum, but today maps are multi-dimensional and linked to time. We follow each other's movements, respond in real time, we no longer just read maps, but understand place and self differently. Parikka suggests that the body is already mediatic (via perception and sensation, etc.) (2012, p. 22) therefore agency is now found not in events or progress, but the interconnectedness and immediacy of an experience; time becomes non-linear, altering how we can use it to teach design history. Today's interdisciplinary nature of both design history and design meet in the world of maps and mapping making it an apt tool for teaching.

To understand maps, and mapping as a practice, we must first consider the relationship between the object, creator and user. Maps "represent not just a surface, but a face that faces the beholder." (Mitchell 2005, p. 30) Theoretically new materialism considers this relationship between materiality, subjectivity and these subsequent powers, where the object (non-human), the human, and their relationship all have degrees of agency. This space between them, filled with reactions, comprehension, misunderstanding and interpretation of and to information, is exactly the thing which creates the effects of maps. When Andrews looks at the writings of cartographer Brian Harley, he notes that Harley, "[loots] not through the map at the world it depicts but inwards or backwards to its maker and outward or forwards to its readers." (2001, p. 2) Further, a map is useless unless someone reads it (Andrews 2001, p. 23) and acts upon it. Maps, and the act of mapping, can reveal historically and contemporaneously the evolving role of technology, visibility and the power of the relationship between the maker and user.

The people, images, and their agency enforced by their links all create the narrative of a map. Today the ubiquitous GPS, the 'mapping' of our friends' locations, actions and relationships and the

interaction between all these factors (imagined or not) are a network of the haptic, the visual, and the material, a new cultural phenomenon. Design students need to pay attention to how “ordinary connections and network aesthetics influence how we experience and engage an extraordinarily interconnected culture.” (Jagoda 2016, p. 7) LaTour, Law and Callon’s various works on Actor-Network-Theory should be considered not solely from the idea of a network, per se, but the agency that mobilizes the network. Connections are merely lines between two points if there is nothing to engage them. We can visualize that “a network is a complex and interconnected structure made up of groups of ‘nodes’ that are interconnected by links.” The best –connected of those central nodes are called “hubs” adopting instead decentralized or distributed modes of operation.” (Jagoda 2016, p. 8) The real power of the network though is found in its flow, as Jagoda states, “networks depend on an active flow.” (2016, p. 8). While these may be difficult to name and sometimes follow, particularly in interactive sites which by nature, are constantly shifting and re-organizing, recognizing their existence and power are essential to considering the importance of not just the maps, but the networks they create which are tools of the everyday. Further he suggests that contemporary networks leave traces of our everyday life, (Jagoda 2016, p. 16) I would suggest that these traces can be found historically as well, they require more ‘digging’ and have gaps, but our understanding of the everyday is rooted in these network traces of objects, materiality and images. How do these traces effect our understanding and relationship with time and history, and their relationship to one another? How we visualize the everyday, in fact, controls that narrative, spatially and through information, and is an essential lesson in studying maps and mapping.

The role and limits of knowledge have an impact on the construction of space, whether the traditional, physical concept of space, or mental or social space. While Lefevbre believed that physical space had no ‘reality’ without the energy that is deployed within it, and the modalities of this deployment, however, ... are still matters for conjecture. Energy/space-time condenses at an indefinite number of points (local space-times). (1991, p.13) The same idea can be applied to maps, and AR interpretations of space. Without the energy of agency, they do not truly function in terms of usefulness. If we consider a network as a collection then we can further comprehend Lefevbre’s thought that social space (which is a matter of relationships, hence maps) is more than a collection of things, data or simplified to a material form (1991, p. 27) but can be understood as the relationship between all of these aspects, material, agency, information, visualization, knowledge and the effective energy and power deduced from them and their linkages.

Agency, in particular, unfolds through everyday practices, and as DeCerteau considers everyday practice of the neighborhood, as “a structure of activities punctuated by spaces and relationships” where one can “trace the interlacings of a concrete sense of everyday life” (1998, p. 3). His work allows us to consider maps as a place, along with the rules of engagement and our knowledge, individually and socially. What he refers to as the “system of relationships imposed by a space.” (1998, p. 15). Further he states, “the collectivity is a social place that induces a practical behavior by which each dweller adjusts to the general process of recognition by conceding a part of himself or herself to the jurisdiction of another.” (1998, p. 15) Private and public practice collide, or are negotiated, in social

spaces, and the interactivity of maps becomes a resource for understanding what social and interaction means today and in the past. Space, regardless of its form, has rules and requires knowledge. Students need to understand these in order to work with them and utilize them in creating maps.

One of the considerations in studying the evolution of maps and mapping and what they are and what they mean. Traditionally we consider a map to be a two-dimensional representation of a geographical space/place. Mapping is what a cartographer would do—create that image. However, in investigating the whole idea of a map we see that it has been, and is today, much more complex. Denis Wood sees



maps as both a force of social energy and power. “Maps are engines that convert social energy into social space, social order, knowledge, [which asserts] the state of the world desired by its makers.” (Wood, 2010, pp. 6,4) This in fact, recognizes DeCerteau’s idea of the neighborhood and everyday practices, “maps affect behavior by binding people to each other through the territory they mutually inhabit.” (2010, p. 2) Where the early mapmaker “links, connects, ties these behaviors together by describing them on the common plane of the map” (2010, p. 2) today’s mapmaker of not just place, but information, works on multiple planes considering the haptic phenomena of the smartphone and similar devices. Dimensionality creates a different set of networks and expectations. As an aforementioned social construct, maps are

informed by their maker, the user, and the information which is meant to be utilized. In fact, today they go further than creating place; According to Andrews (2001) networks exceed rational description, so their cultural production is more interesting to consider. The question of their future history is what is in question. Since new ‘maps’ are interactive, thus constantly in a state of cultural production, which limits their linearity and disrupts our understanding of history – how do you capture constant change? Is linearity gone or just repositioned in regard to new structures and outputs? New narratives will require new forms of archiving. Visualizations have remained fairly similar: icons, directions, scale, line work, information, sources of information; the relationship between maker, user and information is now defined more often by behavior than the physical and the facts. The degree to which a designer and user control information is shifting and is very similar to the changes between linearity, structure and outputs.

*Figure 1 Hereford Mappa Mundi, c. 1300, Hereford Cathedral, permission of The Chapter of Hereford Cathedral and the Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust.*

Ways of understanding not only the diverse history of maps, but their role and future can become a project based exercise for design students. A review of maps with significant histories and influence followed by the creation of a contemporary mapping project would apply these issues around maps and mapping. In graphic design history classes I have started with the medieval Hereford Mappa Mundi (fig. 1) located in the Hereford Cathedral, England, approximately 3 hours northwest of London. A circular map of the world created on vellum between c. 1290-1310 it stands approximately 5’4” x 4’4” ,

making it one of the largest medieval maps extant. It is not so much a geographical map as a spiritual map: a spiritual perspective of the world complete with actual places, imagined beasts, and biblical events. There are “500 or so drawings include of around 420 cities and towns, 15 Biblical events, 33 plants, animals, birds and strange creatures, 32 images of the peoples of the world and 8 pictures from classical mythology.” (Hereford Cathedral n.d.) Jerusalem is at the center, with England in the lower left corner. Believed to be created by Richard of Haldingham or Lafford, it is an interpretation of the world as perceived by its maker with a clear Christian perspective, which included biblical, classical, mythological and contemporary references. It has a long history of disuse, but today can be explored through and interactive map via the Hereford Cathedral website. This interactive exploration offers four viewing options: the making of the map—a 3D scan, which investigates the condition and repair of the vellum; towns and cities featured, which includes Hereford, Rome, Jerusalem, and Paris; strange peoples; beasts; Bible stories; and lastly, myths and legends. It can be viewed in its original state, colored, or as a 3D scan.



Some six hundred years later British artist Grayson Perry created his *Map of Nowhere* (2008) a 60" x 44" an etching (fig. 2) which explores his belief system. It takes its formal inspiration from a now destroyed German map, the Ebstorf Map, which pictured Jesus as the body of the world, and the circular Hereford Mappa Mundi. (British Council n.d.) As a part of a series of similar maps including *Map of an Englishman* (2004) at MoMA, it includes an intense attention to varying scale, language and detail, as well as the very personal perspective of the artist. This particular aspect allows students to examine a non-traditional map and move from a broader world view to the personal through similar, yet contemporary mediums.

*Figure 2 Map of Nowhere, 2008, Grayson Perry, etching, Victoria Miro Gallery, permission pending.*

An example of more traditional, and common, map is that of public transportation. Two in particular are of significance. The London Tube, or subway system, is known for its graphic redesign in the early 1930s. In 1890 the London Tube was created, and by 1907 it became part of a transportation system which included the bus system as well. By 1908 publicity manager Frank Pick realized they needed to increase Tube usage and hired illustrator Edward McKnight Kauffer to create posters. While appealing, it still lacked a unified message. Next Edward Johnston created a new sans-serif typeface, in 1916, then in 1918 the bullseye sign/logo was created. These two features combined helped create a unified identity. Yet, it was not until the early 1930s that Harry Beck's re-design of the London Tube map (fig.3) that they were able to change public opinion regarding the anxiety of underground travel, altering perceptions of Tube travel, by compressing time and space visually. Whereas the earlier version followed the true path of the tracks, Beck's version worked from a horizontal and vertical axis grid, downplaying the overall geography of the sprawling city, but using the Thames river as a marker. The use of clearly punctuated stops, minus topographical roads created clarity, if not reality, for the rider. (Forty 1986)

This same system is still used today with small changes, including a price zone system. Visual unification through modern signage and type along with a radical diagramming of the Tube system created an easier travel experience for the user, fulfilling Pick's goals with Beck's ingenuity.

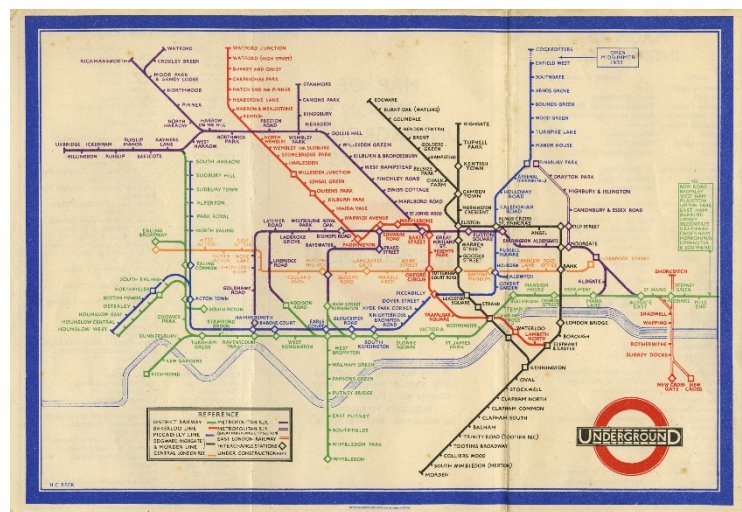


Figure 3 London Tube Map, 1933, Harry Beck, © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.



A less successful follow-up to the Tube map success was Massimo Vignelli's redesign of the New York City subway map. (fig. 4) In 1972 the Metropolitan Transportation Authority commissioned him to redesign the map. Vignelli, not unlike Beck, paid little heed to reality. He altered the color of the water and Central Park, which also changed shape from a rectangle to a square, and adjusted stop locations to along a grid, not following their true path. Vignelli also used a very modern font for its time, the now much maligned Helvetica. The organizing diagram principles of Beck's design which inspired Vignelli were not a success for the New York audience, who complained to such an extent that by 1979 the MTA was forced to authorize a more geographically realistic version. (Rawsworth 2012) Whether it was a cultural difference in audience, or aesthetic or reality concerns, the

same solution for two different cities was not possible.

Figure 4 New York Subway Map, 1974, Massimo Vignelli, Courtesy of New York Transit Museum.

Today both city systems have apps used on smartphones which give real-time stop arrival information, route planners, countdown clocks and comprehensive maps. These are generated by the transport authorities and private companies. Interactive design is placing the user in a position of greater control through knowledge, with time being the greatest qualifier. No longer does physical geography play such an important role, which leads to question: what will users want next?

University of Cincinnati students can ask this question on a more local level, by looking at the history of the unfinished, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cincinnati subway asking what could it be, what should it be, and what do users both want and need to know? How would such a system alter the urban experience? While unfinished due to finance and political reasons in the 1920s, Cincinnati's recent boom can be used as an opportunity to revisit the city's history and how it has evolved along with its demographics and technology. Maps offer an opportunity to reimagine place, potentially force change, and understand the modern conditions of a culture. By considering local history their own relationship with their environs is rethought and discovered not only in relation to themselves but their city overall, placing them as part of a larger culture.

The concrete, planar maps of the past have evolved into haptic, multi-dimensional tools in the palm of our hands. While using the same or similar visual imagery our connection to both place and each other is changing. Today's design student has to consider their world through a series of conditions, including a network of imagined and real interpretations of space, place and perspectives. We live in a period of

rapid information influx compressing change into narrower segments of time. The concept of mapping self and place through historical case studies of both art and design offers an opportunity to not only reconsider where we are, but how culture defines who we become over time. Our global society is functioning more frequently through a nationalistic lens, what difference does how we experience place make? How is technology changing how we experience the world? Can we imagine a world into being by studying the past?

Beginning designers must recognize design as an experience that goes beyond an image and textual relationship to one of emotion, experience and culture. In doing so a sense of agency and responsibility can be fostered with a more sensitive perception of how time, place, identity and culture are formed, experienced, and visualized. By examining the conditions and contexts of historical maps, and contemporary interpretations of them, then applying the concepts in a project, students will be able to reconsider not only where they live, but how they live, and the information needed to guide someone through that world.

Understanding what maps and mapping are through concept of space and place making, boundaries and displacement redefine maps as not just a graphic descriptor or diagram that links sites of a particular place or places on a common plane. We see them as Woods has mentioned, behavior affecting tools that bind people to each other through the territory they mutually inhabit. (2010) We can see them as everyday behavioral binders, with opportunities to control or possibly usurp quotidian neighborhood propriety, per DeCerteau, (1998) recognizing Lefevbre's (1991) multiplicity of spaces—knowledge, economic, physical—all through spatial practices related to time, and now the sensory experience of technology. We have moved from the compression of space and time of geography to one of expectations and social practice. History and design require an act of displacement – we must displace ourselves into the past and consider the socio-cultural order, events and concerns of that time. A designer must displace themselves into their client's world and its needs, students can learn this lesson through history. To design for the future we must displace ourselves from the limitations of today and envision a different world—moving forward.

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