

## 12 Mapping and Counter-Mapping Pedagogies

In Conversation with Shibboleth Shechter

### Maps and mapping as pedagogic artifacts

*Nataša:* Shibboleth, tell me a little bit about your interesting work with maps and mapping.

*Shibboleth:* Mapping is integral to spatial design practice. We map to survey a site and capture both tangible and intangible qualities at the start of the design process. But what I'm trying to do with the maps in my work goes beyond that; I am looking at mapping as an equivalent form of knowledge to language; equivalent to reading a book about the subject or writing an essay.

I am unsure whether I have yet found the way to fully articulate this pedagogy to my teaching colleagues and students. For instance, we did a project, and one of the students, working with a colleague was interested in mapping the range of doors in the local area. The tutor suggested that they categorize the doors by historical period – Victorian, Georgian, and so on. This advice is contrary to the point of the exercise as I see it; that is to let students discover what is significant about the doors to them. This could simply be that one is yellow and another one is red and one is blue (Figure 12.1).

Fig 12.1

It is about not looking at them (doors) in a way that is entirely governed by a curriculum, that straight away goes “Okay, this is how we traditionally categorize architecture.” It is about how the student understood the task, about who they are, as a person and how you relate to a place or an object. The fact that the door is Victorian, is the knowledge that comes from the tutor; the knowledge that to an international student potentially may not be obvious (Figure 12.2).

Fig 12.2

*Natasa:* It sounds to me that you are really thinking about bringing in the students' world and trying to make it surface, their world

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*Figure 12.1* How to experience a door? A door of the Jason Downer House (1874) at 1201 N. Prospect Avenue (originally 7 Prospect, corner of Juneau and Prospect): High Victorian Italianate design by E. Townsend Mix, photo by James Steakley, Wikimedia Commons.

view and their background and their prior knowledge, as that is important.

*Shibboleth:* The students are tasked with creating personal thematic maps of a local area. But, I think sometimes there's a resistance,

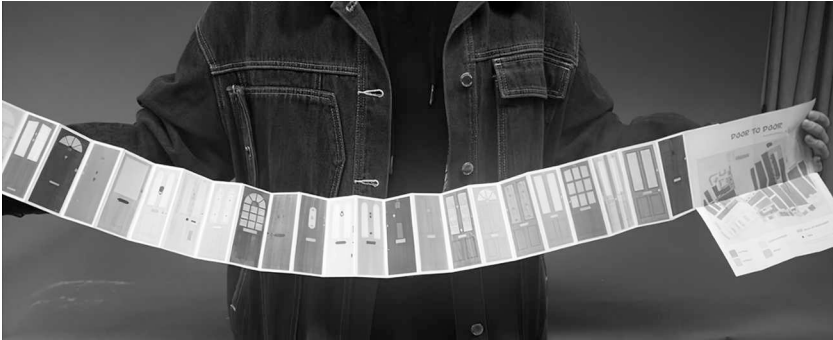


Figure 12.2 Hui Ye, Door to Door, 2021–22, with the permission by Hui Ye.

coming from educational systems that teach them to think that we expect something predetermined, that there's a right way to do things in order to succeed. They think they should choose to map the architecture of the area in a specific way because they are studying spatial design. This relates to larger questions around assessment in higher education.

*Nataša:* If you look at the building, there is much more than the design and style to it, it has socio-cultural meaning, history, character, environmental embeddedness ...

*Shibboleth:* Yes, they can choose to look at anything that interests them; this can be architecture but could also be street fashion; what people wear, how and where, this is also spatial. But students struggle to make this connection; or perhaps more accurately, we struggle to articulate it. If somebody would tell me I could do whatever I want, look at whatever you want, I would go "Wow!" But to students coming out of today's secondary educational systems, this is not an easy concept to grasp.

*Nataša:* Because, as you said, that is the legacy of previous education that very much ingrained that kind of thinking.

So, what are your students doing through their mapping task?

*Shibboleth:* I want the students to explore who they are through mapping, and what they bring with them from their lived experiences. This is valuable to any kind of knowledge production, but arguably, particularly to art and design. The way the physical world around us shapes who we are and vice versa; what we bring from ourselves into the world that

290 *Examples through Practice*

we're going to shape. I want them to understand the value of being able to bring their identity into the design process.

There are the issues of power involved in design, and we have to be aware these political, cultural and social complexities involved in design. I know it may not be easy for a first-year student to understand, but I do want them to start to think about that. Just the other day I overheard a student say to a friend: "I just wanted to design pretty things, and all of a sudden I have all this social responsibility to think about." This is why I talk to them about the power of maps and about how our identity is shaped by the world around us and how in turn our identity informs how we see the world and choose to shape it. It is important to understand this and I believe mapping is a tool that can support this relational aspect of understanding the world.

From early childhood, we understand the world through our body, how our body feels in space, how it moves; and mapping has probably always been one of the very basic ways that humans communicated to each other this understanding of the world around them – where there is something scary or dangerous is, where you can get food, and so on. I suppose even today maps are important for daily survival in the city; we can check on Google maps how to get from place to place and where to buy a specific food.

Arguably, maps were almost as important as language historically (Figure 12.3). But they are still an important part of our daily life, they have

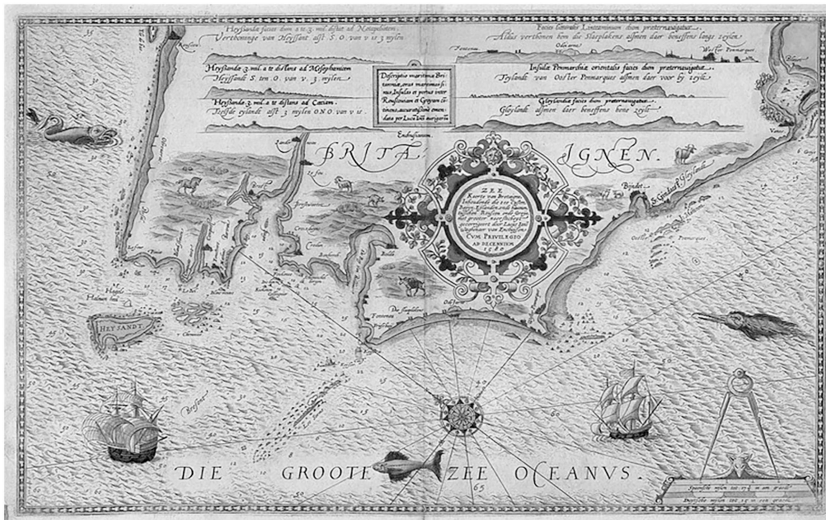


Figure 12.3 A1580 map of Bretagne (Lucas Janszoon Waghenauer Carte de l'ouest de la bretagne.jpg).

lost that very basic significance- we don't use mapping in that same way to communicate. I believe that maps have that power to help us explore, analyze, and unpack a lot of complexities that we're struggling to explain in words. Counter-mapping practitioners are doing just that; they use mapping to challenge ingrained, Western ways of understanding the world.

Fig 12.3

### Counter-mapping

*Nataša:* How do you define counter-mapping?

*Shibboleth:* It is about questioning the power of Maps. As Denis Wood (2010) observes, maps actually preceded states; they didn't exist before somebody put them on the map. Every map is created by a certain author with a particular intention; whether political or commercial. Counter maps question that power and where the power lies. There is a wealth of scholarship on counter-mapping; but in very simple terms it is about questioning how traditional canons of knowledge are represented in maps.

For an undergraduate student, it is quite hard to understand the possibility of questioning, for example, the tradition of Western thinking and how it has shaped the world. But maps and mapping can support such understanding in a direct way that is harder to articulate with language. I show my students the 'upside-down' world map ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-up\\_map\\_orientation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-up_map_orientation)). It explains in a very simple, direct way, very complex issues of power, colonization, and decolonization.

*Nataša:* Yes, these are big things because they require a change of the mindset, and I don't think that's easy, and I can imagine it can be hard. Maps as you mention are so important, I mean look at us using GPS and Google Maps all the time.

I think with counter-mapping, you're also considering the geopolitics of mapping. At different times in history maps were decisive in the destiny of many people, in terms of where borders are and who can decide that. Well, they are still decisive. Mapping has been used to decide not only geographical, but alongside that, socio-cultural, economic, and political positioning of people, let us just think of the Berlin Wall as a boundary on a map (<https://brilliantmaps.com/east-german-west-berlin/>). So, maps are not only simple or innocent graphical representations, direct representations or translations of spatial positioning of things, but they're much more than that.

292 *Examples through Practice*

How do you see the work that you are doing with students in terms of relational pedagogy? As I understand it, you encourage students to think about the exercise of mapping and creating those maps in the way that supports them to see the map beyond the disciplinary boundaries of design, so it's an interdisciplinary approach. You want them to see that, okay, there are some things in the environment, and they are spatially positioned or you will encounter some things as you walk around and explore a particular area, but all these things would have different meanings and the meanings through students' own interpretation: how they see things, or what they bring in. It is about their own identity being brought in, incorporated in it. They are not only mapping things but also how humans relate to things and the environment, these relationships between humans and things, other beings, and space, humans and other humans, how all these things interact and create the meanings and ideologies of a space.

*Shibboleth:* Yes, this is the big intention, but I feel I am still far from achieving my aims for the cartosemiotic pedagogy I am envisioning, I am hoping that with and through mapping, we can start to discuss a lot of issues that are very important in higher education today, such as decolonizing the curriculum or internationalization. I truly believe that mapping offers the potential to really discuss these issues with the students, in a way that we may not be able to do through other forms of knowledge.

I am particularly interested in how, through the exercises of mapping, we can discuss how we all see the world differently. This is obvious, but extremely important to make explicit. When you compile 70 personal thematic maps of the same area together, such a difference (in individual maps, choices, and experiences) becomes evident in a very powerful way. This brings us to another relational aspect of the project. Through doing this exercise, I hope that students will get to know the local area of the university where they will spend a large percentage of their time. I believe in the importance of the civic university; the role of the university within the locale in which it is situated. Undertaking the mapping exercise at the start of their learning journey, supports students to form a relationship with the local community.

My current third-year students talk about how that exercise transformed the way they feel about coming to campus. They now feel at home, they like the area. I had an open day yesterday where my student ambassadors talked about the importance of the mapping exercise. How it forced them to explore the area, try new restaurants, talk to different

people, go inside buildings and more. It is great to hear it coming from them, that this was a significant learning experience. I don't think this relationship with the local, and more importantly, the understanding of its importance, would have formed if I gave the students a lecture or a book to read about the value of such an endeavor.

*Nataša:* So, they engage with the local community and that really makes a difference.

*Shibboleth:* Yes, it has made a difference to the rest of their three years on the course. Of course, there is a wealth of scholarship on the value of such place-based learning and education, which links to the relational themes of your book.

### **Linking with the community and ... graffiti**

*Nataša:* Absolutely You are encouraging students to go outside, get out on the street to connect their curriculum with the roads and parks and all things outside and with the local community. A lot of them are international students and some come from faraway places and in that sense, this whole exercise becomes truly international and links to an idea of multimodal identity that I think is especially relevant to international students. In that way, you are connecting local and global perspectives and experiences. These maps can be learning artifacts that serve students' and your own exploration of how students relate to local communities, what that means for them and how that connects to their past and their futures.

*Shibboleth:* Yes. We have students that come from contexts where it is still difficult to talk about issues of power; and recent events have made this even more evident. Through the mapping project, by creating personal maps we can discuss in an informal and creative way issues that would otherwise be very difficult to talk about.

For example, the local area of the college is famous for its graffiti. Of course, graffiti is illegal in the UK, but the consequences of getting caught are not as severe as in other countries. Quite a few international students choose to map graffiti, as for them, this phenomenon, which, for locals, is part of the everyday, is unique (Figure 12.4). Talking with the students about graffiti led to very interesting discussions that touched on issues of power that perhaps would not have been raised otherwise. Such group talking about the maps enabled students to learn about each other's cultures in very interesting ways. For example, one student mapped all the

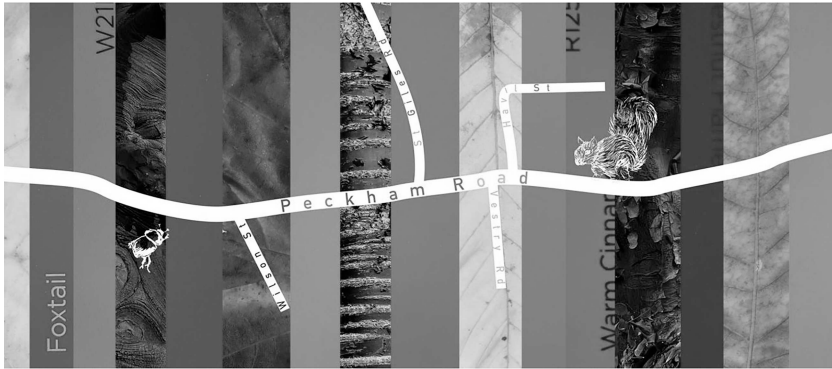


Figure 12.4 “My First Autumn Happened in Camberwell,” map by Ninn Requis, 2021–22.



Figure 12.5 Yilin Cao, Graffiti map. 2021–22.

leaves because it was autumn and she said she’s from a place where she never saw autumn in her life; they don’t have seasons (Figure 12.5). The weather and how it shapes who we are is so simple and basic, but somehow, so profound when we talk about it in the context of how it informs our spatial understanding and relationship to place.

Fig 12.4

**Nataša:** And it contests the boundaries. It does “internationalization” in a different sense from institutional expansionism or to attract overseas students for economic reasons.

I must say that I am particularly fond of street art through my interest in murals. I mean, murals can be so artistically accomplished, beautiful, and profound. Graffiti with plain letters may be a bit unsightly perhaps from



an aesthetic point of view and many may not be nice to see or read. Yet, both graffiti and murals can carry important messages in terms of social or political issues and are a form of public expression, art for all or an act of activism, or simply a way to express oneself and share one's art and skills, as well as giving voice to often unheard people. I know that some cities around the world organize festivals that involve mural artists in painting murals around the city, and that is legal. It can turn cities into open space galleries to experience art in a different way, to make you see the built environment differently.

Fig 12.5

*Shibboleth:* I think you captured it very well, and there are other aspects to it, which I'm not sure; I'm still capturing either in words or in my writing, but I think that's what I'm hoping for. I hope it is an interesting exercise for my students as well.

*Nataša:* And there is a potential of this mapping exercise to be used not just in design but in other disciplines.

#### Learning from and through artifacts and more-than-humans

*Shibboleth:* Two years ago, I went to a talk by Tim Ingold. He was saying how he thinks scientists have stopped looking and that's where they can learn from art and design. Mapping can support both the looking and visualizing of what we see.

*Nataša:* That is brilliant, to regain the capacity to look. To pause, to inspect, to slow down.

*Shibboleth:* Yes, Tim Ingold talked about how difficult it is to slow down in this way, in an environment where you are expected to constantly confirm to measurable outcomes. In art and design education, there is still some, although limited, space and scope to just walk around and explore.

*Nataša:* Yes, that is right. In terms of teaching and knowledge production, I think we need to move a little bit towards appreciating and understanding that knowledge comes in different forms, other than verbal language, and these different forms are not substandard or lack seriousness and serious inquiry.

Just what you were saying about things such as you know, the maps that are created by students, they can facilitate a transformative dialogue among students, and in-between students and the teacher. It is important to consider the more-than-human as well, because that's at the core of the



Figure 12.6 “Mapping the Personality of Second-hand Camberwell,” Mia Fawcett-Wolf, 2021–22.

tradition of mapping and doing design, where the traditional task is to create an artifact, right?

*Shibboleth:* We talked about social relationality, but of course these maps also engage with more-than-human (environmental) relationality (Figure 12.6). Many students tried to map the ‘local signs’ of climate change and global warming; which is very hard to capture, yet really interesting in terms of such more than human aspects.

*Nataša:* An artifact is something that can be a physical object or digitally represented. So, we can invite students to critical questions surrounding artifact production. How do we affect the world around us by producing different things and placing them in certain orders, places, motion, and why? How do things that affect us act (on us)? I think this kind of discussion can be generated through the maps that come out of your mapping exercise and generally human-created artifacts, right?

*Shibboleth:* Yeah, definitely.

*Nataša:* In terms of the digital, digital mapping and digital processes in creating maps are also informed by the personal and

social, political, economic and cultural. It is about the power of the software as well and knowing how to use digital software. Your students also create these maps digitally?

*Shibboleth:* Yes. There are very interesting things with maps and mapping around the digital which I haven't explored in depth with my students, such as questioning the power of the digital maps that we use every day. I do start the project talking about this. I introduce the project brief by saying that Google Maps are not neutral. I give a couple of examples where Google Maps display different borders in disputed areas, depending on where you are located geographically; and, of course, there are commercial reasons behind some of the results you get when searching for a restaurant, for instance. But, there is scope and need to interrogate these aspects further.

And of course, it is important to discuss that digital tool have made it easier for anyone to create maps. Collaborative community maps are an important tool in counter-mapping practice. This is relevant to a discussion on digital relationality.

Fig 12.6

### The mapping and counter-mapping task

*Nataša:* Let's go back to the actual work that your students do. What do you exactly ask students to do for the mapping exercise, what is the actual task?

*Shibboleth:* Very simply I ask them to create a personal thematic map of the neighborhood of the college. The personal map can focus on one specific theme: favorite places, things you value, things that remind you of home, where you feel happy. The map can also depict a combination of different themes and idea. This academic year we also introduced a pre-exercise. We had a big map of the local area and we gave beans to each student to throw it on the map and they had to start (the exercise exploration) from that point where the bean fell. This is because in previous years, most students didn't venture beyond the main street outside the college. It meant that, prompted by that bean throwing, students looked at a wider local area which was a bit more experimental in their choice of thematic lens to develop the maps.

This year, to tie in with my PhD research, the mapping project was accompanied by a series of lectures using Dennis Wood's semiotic mapping codes as a structuring framework. In the first lecture I defined maps

and mapping and explored the power of maps. The lectures that followed looked at mapping through scale, time, language, icons and place (following Wood's approach). I discussed complex concepts in the lectures, but I also just showed lots of interesting maps as a visual stimulation for their own creations.

We have a large cohort of students, thus they are divided into groups, and each student is allocated a tutor that guides them through the development of the map in weekly tutorials. The discussion in the tutorials ranges from developing the thematic concept to the practical skills that students might need to master to achieve their creative vision. In previous versions of the project, when the individual maps were complete, I published them as an online publication. However, this academic year we curated an exhibition bringing all the maps together. This final phase is extremely important for the type of relational pedagogy that the project progresses and for a curriculum that addresses issues of identity. I think the students really enjoyed thinking about how their maps relate to each other; they also had fun, the importance of which is often underestimated. I think this phase probably needs more thinking and time to enable students to discuss and explore each other's maps.

*Nataša:* Indeed, in the semiotic approach to mapping by Wood, they can understand these different elements or codes of mapping – some of them are more kind of iconic in terms of representations or how maps represent things (so that a map resembles shapes or experience in the world) and some are more symbolic, then there is a matter of scale, proportion and other things that are related to the content and symbols of the map.

### **Developing relational higher education practices**

*Nataša:* To wrap up, what do you think about this idea of relational higher education and pedagogy? We discussed it in the beginning through your practice in Art and Design, and actually as a broader practice in your field. What do you think about relational principles and dimensions through different modalities of communication and being in higher education?

*Shibboleth:* I think the questioning that you are proposing in this book, of what knowledge consists of, how we acquire it and from whom, is amazing.

When I started my teaching career, a colleague called my work relational. I had to look it up and read about it. Coming to academia from a community engagement practice, my pedagogy from the start involved

collaboration with local communities, and a questioning of normative assumptions in higher education about where knowledge is produced and who learns from whom.

Like many academics, I find the current climate of higher education and the gap between my values and what I do every day concerning. Such work as you and Alin are doing in this book gives hope to a potential different future. I do, however, think that perhaps such relational pedagogy needs to be introduced in primary and secondary education and is perhaps even more important at those stages of development. More and more, we are getting students that are not open to the type of relational exploration we are trying to progress, and we find that a large amount of our time is spent teaching students how to learn.

*Nataša:* That's true because it then becomes a hard job for higher education to unpick the mindsets and ingrained practices, I completely agree.

*Shibboleth:* As you argue in the introduction to your book, the relational pedagogy you are proposing could provide answers, pedagogically speaking, to many of the issues we are facing in the current higher education climate. For instance, a few weeks ago we were informed that from the next academic year, we should expect higher numbers of students with no increase in space provision. A pedagogy that questions the very nature of where and how we acquire knowledge, that proposes dissolving physical and virtual boundaries and structures could provide a solution to what, on a superficial level, seems an impossible problem to resolve (Figure 12.7).

*Nataša:* Yes, such vision is not impossible, on the contrary. I think higher education is slowly moving towards that relational cross-disciplinary space of being, teaching and learning. Projects and programs that adopt a futuristic outlook are

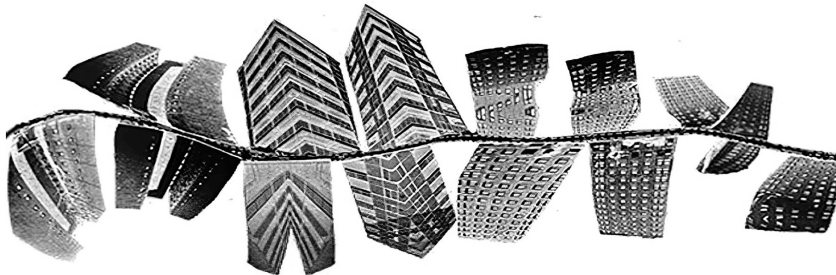


Figure 12.7 Reflection upon Reflection map, Osk Conway, 2021–22.

300 *Examples through Practice*

growing I'm just saying that this kind of thinking, a relational kind of thinking is being applied in this way and many other ways, and it is exciting, people are opening up to these ideas. It feels exciting to be part of it.

You are doing an amazing job, Shibboleth, thank you for your relational pedagogy through mapping and counter-mapping. It can inspire other disciplines because maps can be related to and applied in almost any discipline. Through your cartosemiotic pedagogy, you are supporting students to develop relational awareness or consciousness and become more of relational agents in the world.

Fig 12.7

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