

## Voyages Through Literary Space: Mapping Globe and Nation in Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*

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**Abstract:** In his youth, Richard Henry Dana Jr. rebelled against the conventions of his upper-class New England upbringing when he signed on as a common sailor on a merchant ship bound for Alta California. The notes of his travels describe the strenuous life at sea, a captain's sadistic streak, a crew's mutinous tendencies, and California's multicultural fur trade economy. First published in 1840, Dana's travelogue *Two Years Before the Mast* became an unofficial guide for emigrants traversing the largely unmapped far western territories in the wake of the Mexican-American War. Connecting Dana's widely-read narrative to current developments in the discipline, this article discusses strategies of visualizing literature and includes an exercise in 'discursively mapping' actual and imagined spaces and mobilities of the text. Considering strategies and toolsets from the digital humanities as well as theories such as Lefebvre's concept of representational space, the article reflects on the methodological and practical pitfalls brought about by the visualization of spatial imaginations as part of a more digitally literate and spatially conscious American Studies.

**Keywords:** space, literature, digital humanities, visualization, geography, mapping

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### Departure: The Atlantic World

We must come down from our heights, and leave our straight paths for the by-ways and low places of life, if we would learn truths by strong contrasts.

Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast*

When Richard Henry Dana Jr. returned to San Francisco in 1859 after an absence of almost a twenty-five years, he found out that he had become a man of considerable fame on the West Coast. Largely unbeknownst to himself, "almost ... every American in California had read" his travelogue *Two Year Before the Mast* (1840). As an adolescent, Dana studied law at Harvard when he caught the measles, leading to an inflammatory condition that affected his eyesight and thus his ability to read and study. The son of a well-to-do family, he surprised his parents and friends by deciding against the traditional coming of age rituals of the New England upper classes that included extended educational travels to the venerable resorts and institutions of Europe. Instead, Dana marched to Boston harbor. There, he signed on the *Pilgrim*, a merchant vessel bound for Alta California via Cape Horn and Chile, joining the ship's motley crew as a common sailor. Some regard the notes of his voyage to California, the strenuous life at sea, and brutal regime of the ship's captain as the inspiration for Melville's epoch-making *Moby-Dick* (Malanowski). Because the resulting book was one of the few (and of those, perhaps the most readable) depiction of California written in English, Dana shaped the expectations of many American emigrants who moved into the newly acquired Californian territories after the Mexican-American War in search for gold, land, and economic opportunities.

The present article retraces Dana's journey around the Americas and his time on the West Coast, connecting his widely-read narrative to reflections of past and present developments of a transnational and digital American Studies. The following reflections consider strategies of visualizing and mapping actual and imagined spaces and mobilities in literary and other cultural productions. They present an attempt of exemplarily interfacing techniques of close reading and literary critique with the possibilities that digital humanities tools as well as literary and cultural geographies offer researchers. In a practical exercise, this potential—as well as its technical and methodological challenges—will be tested by creating of a 'discursive map' that tries to illustrate the spatial imaginations and global connections in *Two Years Before the Mast*.

### **“The Wrong End of the Telescope”: Transatlantic America**

Dana was a child of New England and started his journey to California in Boston as one of the principal harbors of what David Armitage called the “Atlantic world.” In American Studies and elsewhere, the Atlantic turned into a focus of transnational research not least because it offers “one of the few historical categories that has an inbuilt geography, unlike the histories of nation-states with their shifting borders and imperfect overlaps between political alliances and geographical boundaries” (Armitage 11). From a U.S. perspective, the Atlantic was and continues to be a nexus of spatial imaginations and spatialization processes: First, as a frontier of European civilization that displaced the Mediterranean as the hotbed of culture and commerce. Second, as a canvas of maritime networks that mobilized the exchange of peoples (including merchants, migrants, and slaves), goods, and ideas. And third, as a dynamic space of colonialism, revolution, and independence.

Unusual as it was for someone of Dana's social standing, in the historical context of the mid-1800s his journey also exuded the westward-directed narratives of the expanding nation-state symbolized by frontier farmers, mountain men, and hyper-masculine trailblazers such as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. At their core, the discourses of utopianism and Otherness that energized the narrative formatting of western regions rested upon tensions of transatlantic mental geographies that separated but also connected the United States and Europe. The continental West became the physical and mental arena in which the postcolonial nation could transcend the binary that traditionally divided the world into European colonizers and the colonized populations of 'Other' continents. The revolutionary act of breaking through this seemingly 'natural' order meant that an American nation-state was able to mythologize itself as an exception—first through independence and subsequently during the course of westward expansion. As a result of Frederick Jackson Turner's historicizing of the frontier at the end of the nineteenth century, the nation *ex post facto* integrated itself within an alternative mental cartography that was neither driven by European imperialism nor by colonial subalterns. Instead, the West's spatial and sociocultural dynamics became part of an unprecedented spatiotemporal ontogenesis that gave birth to a uniquely American character and place in the world.

In literature, this character (sometime referred to as American Adam) became synonymous with the emergence of an equally 'exceptionalist' strand of national literature that developed during the American Renaissance between the 1820s and

1860s. The canonical works by Whitman or Melville, but arguably also by Dana, codified the central themes of America's transatlantic origins and continental identity.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, embracing these spatial metanarratives also meant that the progression of said history and identity became path-dependent on a specific geographic trajectory that linked epochal and ideological progress with the transformative and colonizing movement of American people and ideas, first on the continent and later in circum-Atlantic and Asian-Pacific regions. Despite its outspoken focus on the continent as an exceptional space, nation-building through westering remained closely intertwined with the Atlantic spatial imaginary; the more American authors and policymakers distanced themselves from the autocracies of Europe, the more they conjoined the epistemic stability of the American nation to its transatlantic history.

This correlation produced some paradoxical effects such as the notion that the exceptionality of the American space would reveal itself not from within the country itself but only from an Old-World perspective. For instance D.H. Lawrence pondered that "it is perhaps easier to love America passionately, when you look at it through the wrong end of the telescope, across all the Atlantic water" (54). Mastering the Atlantic thus became a prerequisite to mastering the West and, by extension, the promises held by imperial ventures across the globe. During his travels, Dana's initial enthusiasm regarding the westering of the nation gives way to more sobering experiences and a critical stance towards U.S. colonialism. Experiencing first-hand the aftermath of "intercourse with people from Christian America and Europe" in foreign spaces, he sees "the white men, with their vices" and diseases as "the greatest curse" for those who encounter them (Dana 308–9).

### **"A New World of Understanding": The Spatial Turn in American Studies**

Visualizing and theorizing flows of people, goods, and ideas across the transatlantic realm in literary and cultural geography must be seen vis-a-vis the spatial turn in academia. During the later decades of the twentieth century, this turn denoted a break with a conception of space that, with little alterations, persisted well into the present time as a product of Enlightenment and early capitalism and understood space mainly in physical and territorial terms (Engel 3, Günzel 13).<sup>2</sup> Based on ongoing debates, cultural geography went through four major paradigm shifts: environmental determinism, regional geography, the quantitative revolution, and most recently critical geography

1 D.H. Lawrence depicted the ontogenesis of the American Adam as the rejuvenating process of colonial subjects becoming independent citizens: "That is the true myth of America. She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing off of the old skin, towards a new youth. It is the myth of America" (Lawrence 57–58).

2 The historical background of the spatial turn, of course, is much more complex, going back to the assumption that "[t]he great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its preponderance of dead men ... the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault 22).

(Matthews and Herbert 50). Anchored in existentialism and chiefly interested in the social construction of space, the latter produced a wide array of poststructuralist approaches, among them Henri Lefebvre's seminal *La production de l'espace* (1974) whose English translation sparked renewed interest in the study of space in the humanities and social sciences. A new appreciation of spatial paradigms was thus "encouraged by the importation of French theory, in particular the work of Foucault, Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Virilio, which newly emphasized the power relations implicit in landscape under general headings like 'abstract space,' place, and 'symbolic place,' interpreted through new spatial metaphors like 'panopticism'" (Guldi).

Disruptive approaches upended traditional perspectives of spatial orders and narratives, for instance Jesse Levine's map "A New World of Understanding" (1982) that inverts the cartographic hegemony of the West world over a representationally subordinated Global South. Consequently, Sara Blair explains that "temporality as the organizing form of experience has been superseded by spatiality, the affective and social experience of space" (Blair 544). Places are therefore coming to be seen as "the outcome, not the backdrop, of social, cultural, political, and economic activity" (Powell 4). Since the 1990s, these ongoing developments manifested themselves in the transnational turn that has more recently unfolded into Atlantic, Hemispheric, and Transpacific Studies. They suggest a realignment of traditional East-West perspectives in favor of South-North and West-East dialectics of interpretation that reposition Latin America, the Caribbean, or the Asian-Pacific hemisphere as departure points of spatial discourses, hence destabilizing the conventional pillars of continental scholarship (Shu and Pease 13).

In her 2004 presidential address to the ASA, Shelley Fisher Fishkin endorsed an epistemology that positioned the United States "as part of a world system (and pay(s) increasing attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process" (Fishkin 2004: 21–22). This approach benefits from new critical perspectives on seemingly closed-off topics and essentialized identities, aiming at the "worlding of American Studies" as the scrutiny of "U.S. culture within the context of the Americas and larger world systems" (Adams 730). As a result, the nation-state forfeited its status as an exceptional and monolithic entity to be increasingly understood as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1). Transnational inquiries thus shifted their focus from the continental seats of territorial power towards peripheries and border regimes, as well as practices and conditions such as migration, (im)mobility, and diaspora.

### **Mutiny: Building Global Connections**

Viewed from these transatlantic and transnational outlooks, the themes that pervade Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* constantly test the stability of borders and geographically discrete cultural and ethnic configurations. The text contains a diversity of transnational connections of that present ample testing ground for space-centric research and an attempt of visualization to follow below. During his voyage around Cape Horn, Dana's mind wanders between visions of California as his port of

destination as well as his and his crewmates' social and geographical positionality. As the *Pilgrim* makes her way down the coast of the American continent, Dana's view of an interconnected world and sense of its scale grow in equal measure. A conversation with the ship's African-American cook gives insights into the resulting trajectories of transnational and multi-ethnic discourse when the cook asks Dana,

you know what countryman 'e carpenter be?' 'Yes,' said I; 'he's a German.' 'What kind of a German?' said the cook. 'He belongs to Bremen,' said I. ... 'I was mighty 'fraid he was a Fin ....' I asked him the reason of this, and found that he was fully possessed with the notion that Fins are wizards, and especially have power over winds and storms. ... He had been to the Sandwich Islands in a vessel in which the sail-maker was a Fin, and could do anything he was of a mind to. (Dana 46–47)

This sense of narratively (i.e. by superstitions and sailor's yarn) embellished spatio-cultural interconnectedness produces increasing spatial complexity, engendering in Dana a tendency towards fundamental and revolutionary change of previously held spatial imaginations. "Revolutions are matters of frequent occurrence in California," as he puts it (212). Toiling away under a sadistic captain who enjoys flogging subordinates who, irrespective of their racial or class background, have all become slaves under the heel of a tyrant that arguably served as inspiration for Melville's Captain Ahab. His violence and statements such as "'I'll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy up!' — 'You've got a driver over aft, you! Yes, a slave-driver,—a *nigger-driver!*'" lead to Dana questioning the United States' ethnic segregation, slave economies, and the basic tenets of American democracy itself (126).

### **Digital Humanities and Literary Geographies**

Drawing out these correlations means acknowledging the production of space in literature and asking for more systematic theoretical approaches to fill out "the outline of grand political overturns" in Dana's narrative (299). Frederic Jameson, for example, pointed to the vanishing of distinguishable cultural regions in the global environment of the "superstate" which are being erased by "the power network of so-called multinational capitalism itself" (Jameson 127). Others have emphasized the inherent masculinity of studying space, proposing that "to create geographic knowledge acceptable to the discipline—is to occupy a masculine subject position" (Rose 4). Embracing the interdisciplinary drive of the field of cultural geography, yet others are interested in the spatial dynamics of urban centers, suburbs, post-industrial wastelands, diasporic communities, barrios, refugee camps, ethno-linguistic borderlands, or cyberspace.

Concerning the digital nature of the latter, the possibilities offered by the digital humanities and methods such as distant reading are no longer orphan topics of the field. Italian literary scholar and founding member of the Stanford Literary Lab Franco Moretti promoted the usefulness of machine learning, quantitative analysis, network theory, and so-called computational criticism for the scrutiny of space in literature. In a radical approach, he argues that the sheer amount of literary data can no longer be effectively processed with time-consuming close readings. Instead

of relying on the biased and fallible human intellect, he therefore suggests a more mathematical treatment to make literature's vast cultural catalog more palpable. Or, as a more cynical commentator put it: "To understand literature ... we must stop reading books" (Schulz). On the one hand, widely available tools like Google's Ngram Viewer, geographic information systems (GIS), and mapmaking software provide instruments for the processing and visualization of space-related literary 'data.' On the other hand, this has led to a disruption of traditional representational power structures in the making of spatial discourses as the "business of mapmaking, of collecting spatial data and mapping it out, is passing out of the hands of the experts. The ability to make a map, even a stunning interactive 3D map, is now available to anyone with a home computer and an internet connection" (Crampton and Krygier 12). Critical cartography acknowledges this transition by combining "new mapping practices and theoretical critique (and) challenges academic cartography by linking geographic knowledge with power" (11). Some of its roots go back to nontraditional cartography such as Buckminster Fuller's "Dymaxion map" that projects the earth's surface onto a foldable icosahedron, revealing seemingly separate continents as an almost contiguous landmass and therefore de-emphasizing the East-West and North-South biases inherent in traditional cultural geographies.

In his essay "On Cartographic Techniques in Literature," Robert Smid utilizes diagrams, trajectories, and alphanumeric notations to "carr(y) out a reading of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* which focuses on how the diagrammatic inscription of the V2 rocket and its arc condition both the protagonists' movement on the novel's plane and the map-making instances in the narrative" (Smid 221). Apart from such intriguing yet largely insular forays, the usefulness of (critical) cartography and digital mapmaking techniques for literary studies remain uncertain. David Cooper and Ian Gregory caution that "identification and mapping of key words and emotional tropes may lead to the distorting marginalisation of the complexities and inherent contradictions embedded within literary articulations of space and place" (Cooper and Gregory 101, see Piatti 272).<sup>3</sup> And although some have stressed the "value of visualizing" certain spaces "not as a single entity but as a mosaic of interdependent, interlocking microregions, each with its distinctive landforms, climate zones, history, and blendings of culture," such a mapping of ever-smaller spatial units can obscure larger context and lead towards the balkanization of space (Kowalewski 16). Other questions impose themselves regarding distant reading techniques, for instance: How is a transparent and comparative criticism of sources possible if, as Moretti proposes, "we work on 200,000 novels instead of 200" (Moretti 1)? Digitized sources are regularly stored in protected archives and curated by information scientists untrained in literary studies and sometimes controlled by governmental or for-profit institutions. Finally, the elephant in the room materializes in the question of when (if ever) the algorithms of machine and artificial (intelligence) learning will be able to make sense of context, metaphor, irony, satire, or nuance?<sup>4</sup>

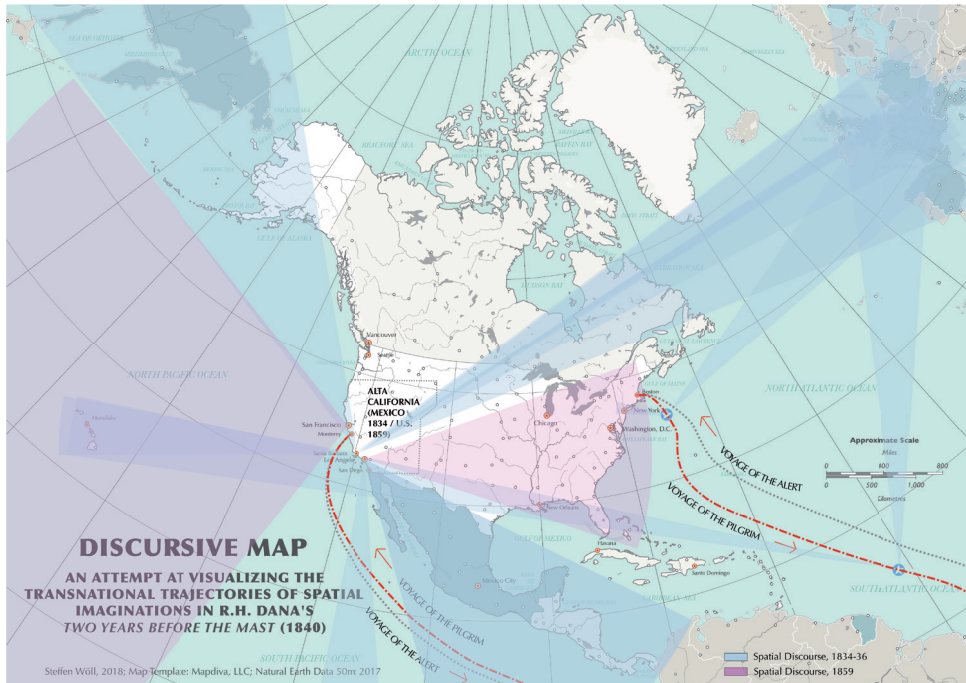
3 See also Mark Monmonier's *How to Lie with Maps* (1991) and Daniel Kahneman's "A Perspective on Judgment and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality" (2003).

4 Moretti acknowledges these issues and "the great challenge of computational criticism: thinking about literature, removing meaning to the periphery of the picture" (2). In a *New York Times*



## Making the Discursive Map

Acknowledging these challenges, the present article suggests a broader, more synthetic approach to the mapping of literary space. Instead of a concept adopted hastily, it approaches data-driven visualization as a supplemental tool for literary scholars. In *Mappings*, Denis Cosgrove rightfully asserts that “[t]he measure of mapping is not restricted to the mathematical; it may be equally spiritual, political, or moral. Similarly, the mapping’s record is not confined to the archival; it includes the remembered, the imagined, and the contemplated” (Cosgrove 2). A healthy amount of skepticism about trends toward fast-track digitalization in the humanities, however, should not be taken as negating the importance of mapmaking for the historical development of placemaking. In fact, spatial formats such as empire and nation-state are closely associated with a revolution in fifteenth-century mapmaking and printing that made available the “representational space of maps (to) the political practices of rulers and states” (Branch 1). From a twenty-first century literary studies perspective, however, other questions come to the fore:



**Figure 1:** Steffen Wöll, Concept of a discursive map based on Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840)<sup>5</sup>

review, Kathryn Schulz sardonically deconstructs the shortcomings of distant reading, noting that Moretti “defines ‘protagonist’ as ‘the character that minimized the sum of the distances to all other vertices.’ Huh? O.K., he means the protagonist is the character with the smallest average degree of separation from the others, ‘the center of the network.’ So guess who’s the protagonist of Hamlet? Right: Hamlet” (Schulz).

5 For a full-color, high-resolution version see <https://steffenwoell.github.io/img/discursive-map-rh-dana.png>.

- Which spatial discourses, interactions, and dynamics are at play in a text and how can they be represented and analyzed in an accessible manner?
- What are the possible benefits and challenges of such an undertaking?
- Does mapping literature invariably result in a reduction of complexity?

The above map does not readily answer these questions. Instead, it serves as a conceptual and exemplary implementation of these considerations by example of Dana's travelogue. The blue beams illustrate recurring or detailed descriptions of spatial imaginations during the *Pilgrim's* initial voyage from Boston to California, as well as during Dana's time on the West Coast from 1834 to 1836, where he was occupied with loading and processing animal hides. In his spare time, he went on extended excursions, visiting cockfights, eating frijoles, or watching fandango performances (Malanowski). In *Two Years Before the Mast*, he records colorful anecdotes of the social and economic life in what contemporaries called the Far West. In the 1830s, Alta California was still a part of Mexico and a sparsely populated region whose economy was less driven by "the mania for gold" in "those brilliant countries scorched by the ardent sun of the tropics" some commentators on the East Coast believed, but rather based on agriculture and the open range horse and cattle industries (Irving 1). Controlled by a ruling caste of Franciscan priests and based on indentured servitude and the forced labor of indigenous subalterns, a Catholic mission system stretched alongside the coastline to San Francisco in the North.

Dana's records depict this region as a spatio-cultural assemblage that was geographically liminal, ethnically diverse, contested, and highly interconnected with other transnational and multilateral (e.g. economic, ethnic, and environmental) spaces, as illustrated by the various blue (here: light gray) cones that emanate from it. In this view of California, Native Americans, Mexicans, Anglo-Americans, English, Scots, French, Irish, Germans, Russians, and Hawaiians – all with their own interests and traditions – create a shared space structured by social and commercial cooperation, whose multiscale composition becomes a source of constant fascination for the young man from the more ethnically uniform Boston.<sup>6</sup> Toiling at the fur company's hide house at San Pedro Beach, Dana writes:

We had now, out forty or fifty, representatives from almost every nation under the sun, two Englishmen, three Yankees, two Scotchmen, two Welshmen, one Irishman, three Frenchmen (two of whom were Normans, and the third from Gascony), one Dutchman, one Austrian, two or three Spaniards (from old Spain), half a dozen Spanish-Americans and half-breeds, two native Indians from Chili and the Island of Chiloe, one negro, one mulatto, about twenty Italians, from all parts of Italy, as many more Sandwich-Islanders, one Tahitian, and one Kanaka from the Marquesas Islands. (198–99)<sup>7</sup>

6 Sandwich Islanders (i.e. people from today's Hawaii) used Dana's hometown as a catch-all term for everyone who hailed from the United States, calling them "Boston" instead of addressing them by their Christian names (Dana 308).

7 While he viewed California as connected to diverse ideas, cultures, and places, this did not mean that Dana drew these connections uncritically or without judgement. For example, about a trip to Monterey he writes that "[t]he Californians are an idle, thriftless people, and can make nothing



Accordingly, the map's blue (here: light gray) beams appear eclectic and transnational in their outreach. From a software standpoint, this effect was achieved with the program *Ortelius*, using a layered SVG file as a canvas, removing most preset layers (e.g. current border lines and cities) but keeping intact topographical key features such as rivers and bodies of water. In drawing the map, one unexpected issue was finding templates with historically accurate borders, which were moreover rapidly changing during Dana's travels. In the end, I resolved to manually sketching the outlines of the historical region of Alta California as it existed in the 1830s. A possible long-term solution for this might be the creation of custom map templates—a demanding task that requires time and some cartographic and computer design expertise. A lighter teal color indicates the reference points of spatial imaginations, i.e. to fill in the endpoints of the 'discursive beams.'

Making the beams semi-transparent emphasizes overlaps and concentrations of spatial discourses. But it also exposes the main flaw of using beams or cones as part of a design philosophy that intends to function as a visual metaphor for imaginary 'fields of vision' which the text projects into certain places and regions. In an unwanted side effect, however, the conical shapes overlap at random points, producing confusing effects. For example, the areas with the darkest shades of blue (here: gray) (i.e. those with the seemingly highest concentration of spatial discourse in the text) appear in the Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay. The text, however, does not mention either location. More cartographically skilled colleagues suggested that using another form language (e.g. straight lines) would solve these problems. While this is true, it would in turn obfuscate central insights communicated by the map, namely the scalar contrast or difference in width between the (lighter) lighter and darker cones.

### Arrival: A New World (of Problems)

The latter represent the ways in which Dana imagined the region that had become a part of the United States at the time of his second visit to the West Coast in 1859, a decade after "California 'broke out,' as the phrase is, in 1848, and so large a portion of the Anglo-Saxon race flocked to it" (468). His spatial imaginations now exhibit a marked change regarding the region's role in both national and global contexts. Dana euphorically describes the transformation of San Francisco from what he knew as a picturesque, multi-ethnic, and dusty hamlet to what he now deems the capital of "the sole emporium of a new world, the awakened Pacific" and "one of the capitals of the American Republic":

When I awoke in the morning and looked from my windows over the city of San Francisco with its storehouses, towers, and steeples; its court-houses, theatres, and hospitals; its daily journals; its well-filled learned professions; its fortresses and light-houses; its wharves and harbor, with their thousand-ton clipper ships, more in number than London or Liverpool sheltered that day, itself one of the capitals of the American Republic, and the sole emporium of a new world, the awakened Pacific. ... I could scarcely keep my hold on reality at all, or the

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for themselves. The country abounds in grapes, yet they buy, at a great price, bad wine made in Boston and brought round by us" (94).

genuineness of anything, and seemed to myself like one who had moved in  
 “worlds not realized.” (465)

As visible on the discursive map, this triumphant but also more reductive imagination of San Francisco and California has merely two central reference points, as represented by the darker cones: First, the American nation-state in the East, of whom the Far West is now a ‘proud’ and important, but still largely remote and ‘passive’ member. And second, the Asian-Pacific hemisphere in the West, whose markets and resources the Far West makes accessible for the nation. Santa Barbara, for instance, suddenly turns into “a part of the enterprising Yankee nation, and not still a lifeless Mexican town” (475). The erasure of imaginative complexity associated with imperial worldviews thus might be one central insight imparted by the discursive map.

### ***The Horror Vacui of Methodological Emptiness***

Still, some doubts remain about the map’s contribution to more traditional, written analysis, especially because the map can hardly stand for itself and requires additional explanation. From a methodological angle, it appears problematic to diminish the thematic diversity that we as cultural and literary studies scholars engage with tools like close reading and alongside categories such as race, class, and gender. Thus, what might be the disciplinary benefits of creating potentially reductive graphical depictions illustrations? If anything, scholars should see this question as an invitation to critique and deconstruct even the most basic assumptions of such an undertaking and, while they are at it, the epistemic assumptions of map-making as one of the oldest instruments of exerting political / imperial power and ethnic hierarchies.

In fact, core methods of literary and cultural studies appear fundamentally incompatible and perhaps even antithetic to (digital) mapping and visualization as practices that traditionally hinge upon sets of empirical data. Taking recourse to Lefebvre’s conception of space, this antithesis lies at the fault line between “representational space” (i.e. theories, ideas, affects, imaginations of space that can scarcely be tackled by numbers, but need to be examined in a narrative manner) and “representations of space” as data-driven models, measurements, and demographics that clend themselves to visualization more readily (Lefebvre 33, 42). There are certain exceptions to this adversity between textual/cultural dynamics and visualization, which might provide some possibilities to visualize certain aspects of textual spatiality: The literal spatial narrative found within a story itself, usually the (imagined) movement of a character that can be broken down along the line of certain themes, tropes etc. However, such mappings provide few insights apart from basic information regarding movement and (im)mobility. They may nonetheless as a descriptive tool for researchers to better understand certain aspects of spatiality. As Lefebvre proposes, representational spaces are always embedded in historical contexts; hence visualizing the historical formation (or timeline) of a representational (textual) space might facilitate analysis of a text. In praxis, such approaches still carry risks of circular reasoning and self-fulfilling prophecies as researchers create a map and subsequently perform a historical reading of said map, arriving at the same biased conclusions that perhaps motivated the map’s creation to begin with.

Finally, one could think about mapping the (inter)textual relationships concerning particular aspects of spatiality to reveal shared characteristics or discrepancies that exist between spatial imaginations/representations either within one or among several texts. This approach enables literary cartographers to speculate how discourses create, promote, or subvert certain imaginations of space, for instance regional diversity or imperial homogenization in Dana's case. This approach might build upon the concept of collaborative "deep maps" or Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects (DPMP) as suggested by Shelley Fisher Fishkin, which "would put multilingual digital archives around the globe in conversation with one another, using maps as the gateway. 'Deep Maps' could be read as palimpsests, allowing multiple version of events, texts, and phenomena to be written over each other—with each version visible under the layers" (Fishkin 2011: 1). While this might be the most promising approach, it too is fraught with several challenges, notably the lack of a sound hermeneutic groundwork to facilitate reliable and comparable extraction and translation of texts into data that lends itself to visualization. Another key issue remains our (lack of) understanding of the concept of 'data.'

The literary medium, it seems, can hardly be apprehended in a purely quantitative manner and the task of counting words may well be left to linguists. Conversely, the 'discursive data' visualized on the experimental discursive map illustrates an uneven set of qualitative, interpretive, and observer-dependent parameters. This is good news as the humanities provide access to a multitude of analytical lenses with a seemingly endless combinatory potential to encode and decode qualitative data sets. On the downside, this might also be the *coup de grâce* to any hopes of a common visual language or method in the emerging field of literary geography. The *horror vacui* of methodological emptiness thus continues. This leads us towards a technique that might be called 'conceptual mapping' and that emphasizes the production of independent maps, guided by the rules of their creators' hand-tailored methodological design. These maps are experimental in form and scale and depict soft parameters (i.e. narrative, tropical, allegorical, metaphorical etc.) rather than empirically falsifiable data.

### **Conclusion: Learning the Digital Ropes**

For established practitioners, interested observers, and those currently planning their own projects, a digitally literate American Studies remains an open-ended endeavor and an ongoing learning process. On the one hand, the potentialities of the digital humanities promise radically new insights into seemingly closed-off topics and established readings. But they also necessitate leaving well-traveled analytical pathways while building upon the strengths of the field's inbuilt inter- and transdisciplinary foundations and foci across vectors of race, class, and gender. Like Dana, interested researchers need to leave their sheltered (yet at the same time immanently fragile) lives to embark on a methodological quest that does not always promise a clear reward at its end.

Like the Bostonian aristocrat who started a career as a sailor at the lowest rank, seasick, scrubbing planks, and taunted by more experienced seafarers and expert navigators, newly minted digital humanities scholars should be willing to suffer shipwreck in the troubled waters of an emerging field and be ready to start from

scratch, often gaining experience with new technologies instead of academic honors. In Dana's case, this notion surfaces in a transcontinental vision that painfully contrasts his self-imposed struggles in the Far West with his New England peers who opted for safer career choices in more well-established circles. "I could see them," Dana reflects, "walking off the stage with their diplomas in their hands while upon the same day their classmate was walking up and down a California beach with a hide upon his head" (Dana 319).<sup>8</sup> The pains of learning the digital ropes then might well be a long-term investment in the imagined spaces (digital humanities for us, California for Dana) that represent the future centers of activity and knowledge production.

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8 Dana nonetheless launched a successful career, working as "a maritime lawyer and advocate for the rights of sailors and the downtrodden everywhere. He defended fugitive slaves and their rescuers" (Malanowski). His temper and choices nonetheless remained fickle and driven by impulse rather than rationality. Although *Two Years Before the Mast* sold 200,000 copies, he declined a ten percent royalty deal and instead opted for a single \$250 payment and twenty-four free copies (see Dana xiii).

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