



Visual Culture & Gender Vol. 7 2012

an annual peer-reviewed international multimedia journal

Karen Keifer-Boyd & Deborah Smith-Shank, editors. Published by Hyphen-UnPress

FEMINIST MAPPING EDITORIAL 2012

KAREN T. KEIFER-BOYD AND DEBORAH SMITH-SHANK

Humans make and use maps all the time to locate themselves and others in space and in time. We use maps to find our way and to show others how to get here and there. Artists, including Jaune Quick-to-See Smith¹, have remapped hegemonic perceptions of history of physical and conceptual geographies through their art. Mapping is a “spatialized analytic frame that can account for varying scales of representation, ideology, economics, and politics, while maintaining a commitment to difference and asymmetrical power” (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 25). As Katherine Harmon (2009) writes in her book, *The Map as Art*:

Is there any motif so malleable, so ripe for appropriation, as maps? They can act as shorthand for ready metaphors: seeking location and experiencing dislocation, bringing order to chaos, exploring ratios of scale, charting new terrains. Maps act as backdrops for statements about politically imposed boundaries, territoriality, and other notions of power and projection. (p. 10)

Various artists have explored the interplay between public and private spaces by mapping personal symbolic structures on geographic space or vice versa. For example, in 2012, Damien Hirst mapped the concept of augmented reality at the MoMA New York, at the Venice Biennial, and at the Tate Modern. For Hirst, augmented reality (AR) is the art

1. See Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *Memory Map artwork* at http://www.antogallery.com/smith_portfolio_04.htm

of positioning virtual artworks via GPS (global positioning system) at a specific site. Viewers at the site can download and launch the AR artwork on their smartphones, and then see the artwork in the display as an overlay on the live camera view of the local environment. Viewers become artists when they “launch” artworks into the local landscape.²

Feminist mapping makes “connections between the politics of knowledge, and the spaces, places, and locations that we occupy” (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 25). Nina Katchadourian's artworks in the form of “maps” and “charts and systems”³ are provocative maps of the everyday. For example, “*The Genealogy of the Supermarket* interrelates people who appear on common products in the grocery store and organizes them so that they appear to be members of one large family.”⁴ Katchadourian describes her *Sorted Books* project as follows:

The *Sorted Books* project began in 1993 years ago and is ongoing. The project has taken place in many different places over the years, ranging from private homes to specialized public book collections. The process is the same in every case: culling through a collection of books, pulling particular titles, and eventually grouping the books into clusters so that the titles can be read in sequence, from top to bottom. The final results are shown either as photographs of the book clusters or as the actual stacks themselves, shown on the shelves of the library they were drawn from. Taken as a whole, the clusters from each sorting aim to examine that particular library's focus, idiosyncrasies, and inconsistencies — a cross-section of that library's holdings. At present, the *Sorted Books* project comprises more than 130 book clusters.⁵

2. See video and still image documentation of physical spaces overlaid with virtual space at <http://www.allhaildamienhirst.com/>

3. See <http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/maps/index.php> and <http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/chartssystems/index.php>

4. From the artist's statement at <http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/chartssystems/genealogy.php>

5. Quoted from the artist's statement at <http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/language-translation/sortedbooks.php>

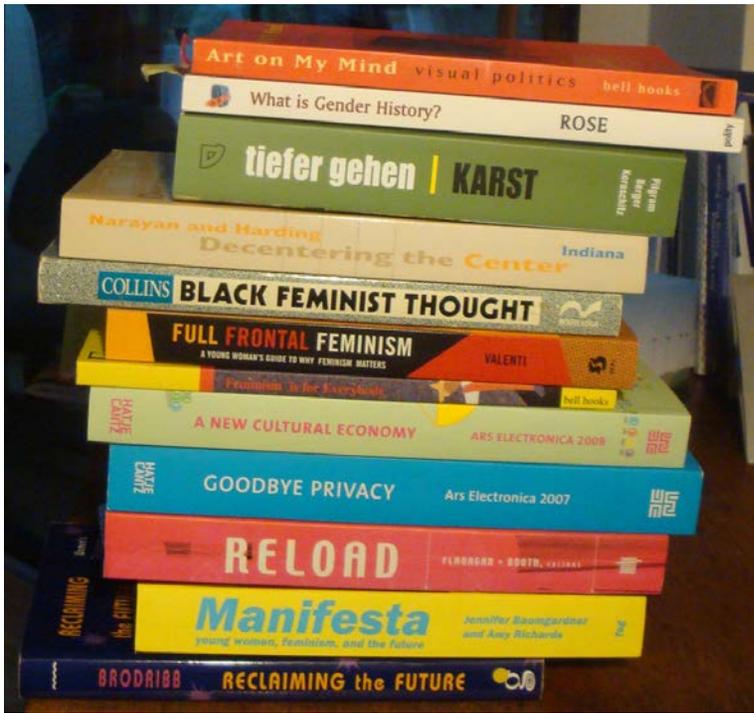


Figure 1. Book spine poem by Karen Keifer-Boyd

Art on My Mind: Visual Politics
What is Gender History?
tiefer gehen [deeper]
Decentering the Center
Black Feminist Thought
Full Frontal Feminism
Feminism is for Everybody
A New Cultural Economy
GOODBYE PRIVACY
RELOAD
Manifesta
young women, feminism, and the future
RECLAIMING the FUTURE

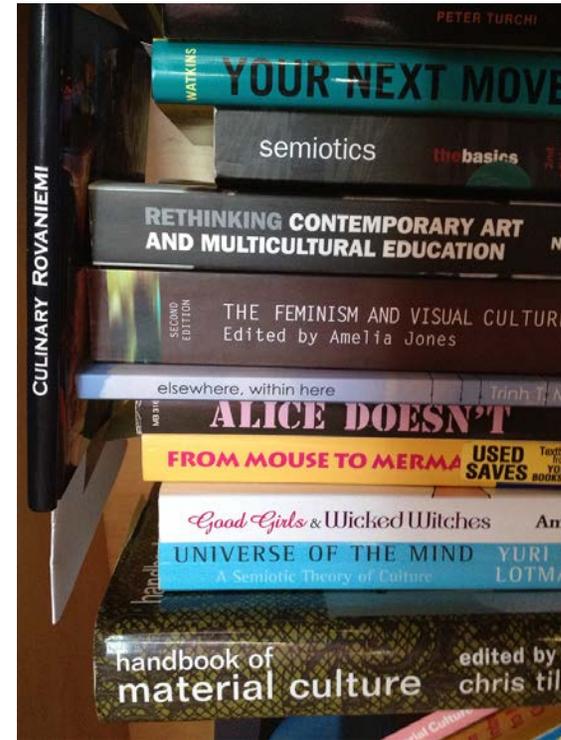


Figure 2. Book spine poem by Deborah Smith-Shank

YOUR NEXT MOVE
semiotics
RETHINKING CONTEMPORARY ART AND
MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION
THE FEMINISM AND VISUAL CULTURE
elsewhere, within here
ALICE DOESN'T
FROM MOUSE TO MERMA
Good Girls & Wicked Witches
UNIVERSE OF THE MIND
A Semiotic Theory of Culture
handbook of
material culture

Visualized stories of tropes, products, ideologies, and practices can be “maps that mobilize both histories and geographies of power” (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 31). Two examples of such feminist mapping are Anita Sarkeesian’s (2011) *Straw Feminist*, which presents visual examples of Hollywood tropes of the b/mad feminist, and *Code of the Freaks* (Chasnoff, 2011) that visually maps ideologies and practices toward differently abled bodies. These video projects use remix strategies to collage and juxtapose film clips layered with spoken commentary to politicize constructions of feminism and differently abled people. Figure 3 provides a list of several ways to think about feminist pedagogical mapping with links to examples.

[The 2012 Oscars and The Bechdel Test \(test mapping\)](#)
[Straw Feminist \(trope mapping\)](#)
[Code of the Freaks \(code mapping\)](#)
[A Digital Cartographies Project \(women’s lives mapping\)](#)
[Harassmap \(sexual harassment mapping\)](#)
[Occupy White Privilege \(privilege mapping\)](#)
[Black is Beautiful Institute \(concept mapping\)](#)
[Good Guide \(product mapping\)](#)
[Skin Deep \(product mapping\)](#)
[Gender Bias \(bias mapping\)](#)
[Diversity awareness \(awareness mapping\)](#)
[The Gift Economy \(values mapping\)](#)

Figure 3. Examples of feminist pedagogical mapping. Click on the titles of each to see the feminist maps.

While normative cartographic rules of borders, frames, and all else is *elsewhere* as separate or outside what is important, a feminist pedagogical mapping of knowledge and power is not additive, dualistic, or linear traces. Instead feminist cartographies (i.e., charting through visuals and writing) are relational spatial creations. A feminist pedagogy of mapping asks:

1. What is a power/knowledge matrix?
2. What does a spatiality of power look like?
3. What are the relationships between politics of location and knowledge in terms of accountability/responsibility, porousness of inside/outside of the body, and in relation to ideological land marks?

Feminist mapping makes the underlying epistemological assumptions visible, and tracks that visibility by making visible relationships. This demystifies and destabilizes the old cartographic binaries of inside and outside. It looks at ways cultural borders are crossed and the hierarchies of place are normalized. What kind of border crossings do you want and what are their ethical dimensions? Feminist mapping requires that we consider the entanglements of social, environmental, and health practices as relationships. Feminist mapping makes visible these relationships in a variety of ways that can be read by others and foregrounds questions of “intersubjectivity, connectivity, collective responsibility, and mutual accountability as fundamental markers of a radical praxis” (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 42). In *Visual Culture & Gender*, volume 7 (2012), three authors use feminist mapping strategies to begin to “theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history” and to envision a “solidarity across differences and unequal power relations” to change oppressive social, environmental, and health practices (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 44). Personal as political maps visualize relationships such as:

- you, social, environment, health performance
- you, local, regional, global
- you, gender, race, nation, sexuality, capitalism or other economic systems, social/economic class
- you, material practices, ideological practices
- you, colonial, neocolonial, imperial histories
- you, global, international, transnational⁶

6. “The transnational is connected to neoliberal economics and theories of globalization—it is used to distinguish between the global as a universal system, and the cross-national, as a way to engage the interconnections between particular nations” (Alexandra & Mohanty, 2010, p. 25).

In *Can we Talk? Talk: Fashioning/Re-fashioning and Mapping MySelf as a Border Crosser*, Sheri R. Klein (2012) approaches auto-ethnography using drawing and writing as means to talk about familial, professional, and painful subjects using humor. The spatial forms that knowledge of self occupies are visual and visceral. The life maps of known or imaginary places by Sheri Klein are embodied through the extension of self in visual narrative form.

To better understand my experiences in visual terms, I looked to *mapping*. Mapping is a process associated with the fields of cartography and the sciences, but is also a method used by social science researchers to collate and visualize complex sets of data. ... Visual data methods such as drawing, diagrams, and maps allow me to visualize my struggles, to explore connections between experience, facts, and my locations, and to address the ‘intense silence about the reality of class differences’ (hooks, 1994, p. 177). (Klein, 2012, p. 5)

Klein maps to understand the multiple disconnections between her academic persona and her working class Jewish background through discourses of clothing, appearance, voice, experience, and opportunities. Through artwork, poetry, and prose, she delivers a multifaceted account of her mapped journey.

In *Lippy Women: Feminist Art Activism on a Catholic Campus*, Sheila Hassell Hughes (2012) maps the thinking and activism of students, faculty, administrators, and staff at a Catholic university through a case study that started with the desire to work with controversial artworks and the determination and courage of undergraduate artist Rachel Ann Dennis. Her series of artworks entitled *Claiming the Labia* depicts a variety of labia to raise awareness of female genital cosmetic surgery, or “labia-plasty,” that she believed was the product of pornographic images. This conceptual guide map demonstrates the pedagogic and persuasive powers of feminist collaboration.

Mari Mäkiranta in her article, *Photography as Family Ritual: Visual Narratives in a Finnish Family Photo Album*, deconstructs the mapping of informal family photographs and through her analysis of

the photographs, demonstrates how they shape “memories, family relations and cultural meanings associated with gender” (p. 26). Mäkiranta demonstrates the overlapping structures of private and public memories associated with family photos of girls.

Smith-Shank and Weitz, in their visual essay, *Slippery Signifiers in Gayle Weitz’s Foxy, Chickenhearted, and Harebrained Humananimals* charts the territory between a naïve childlike gaze and an informed, critical, and feminist understanding. Weitz’s series of large-scale cabinet sculptures of wacky, wonderful, and weird creatures are at first glance the stuff of happy dreams. However as the map unfolds, nightmares of animal cruelty and genetic experimentation emerge, leading to a deeper and more disturbing understanding of the animals and ourselves.

The authors in *VCG*, volume 7, provide new nonlinear routes, and in Klein’s article the routes are rhizomatic roots, through feminist mapping. We invite readers to send feminist mapping with sorted book spine poetry that we will add to a webpage linked to volume 7. Send digital spine poetry images to us (see Figures 3 and 4) at kk-b@psu.edu and smith-shank.1@osu.edu.



Figure 3. Deborah L. Smith-Shank, 2012. Photo by Bill Nieberding used with permission.



Figure 4. Karen T. Keifer-Boyd, 2011. Photo by Donald Woodman used with permission.

References

- Alexander, M. J., & Mohanty, C. (2010). Cartographies of knowledge and power: Transnational feminism as radical praxis. In A. L. Swarr & R. Nagar (Eds.), *Critical transnational feminist praxis* (pp. 23-45). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Chasnoff, S. (2011). *Code of the freaks* (work-in-progress). Retrieved from <http://vimeo.com/20531038>
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Katchadourian, N. (2012). *Nina Katchadourian*. Retrieved from <http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/maps/index.php>
- Harmon, K. (2009). *The map as art: Contemporary artists explore cartography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Hughes, S. H. (2012). Lippy women: Feminist art activism on a Catholic campus. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 7, 26-38.
- Klein, S. (2012). Can we ~~talk~~? Fashioning/re-fashioning and mapping myself as a border crosser. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 7, 6-25.
- Mäkiranta, M. (2012). Photography as family ritual: Visual narratives in a Finnish family photo album. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 7, 39-48.
- Sarkeesian, A. (2011). *feministfrequency #6 the straw feminist (tropes vs. women)*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/user/feministfrequency>
- Smith-Shank, D. L., & Weitz, G. (2012). Slippery signifiers in Gayle Weitz's *Foxy, Chickenhearted, and Harebrained Humananimals*. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 7, 49-54.

About the Editors

This past year has been filled with new horizons and difficult loss. Debbie's mother died in March 2012, when her mother decided it was time to depart her earthly body and stopped eating. Karen's mother lost her voice since March 2012 when her brain no longer sent the speech signals to her mouth muscles, except on occasion with such statements as: "I want music." Debbie was appointed Chair of the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy (formerly known as the Department of Art Education) at The Ohio State University, and Karen received a Fulbright award as Distinguished Chair of Gender Studies at Klagenfurt Universität in Austria where she taught and lived for four months.