

Final Paper

Deep Mapping Landscape as a Phantasmagoric Practice:
Excavating Theories, Practices, Aesthetics and Politics of the Contemporary Past

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A List to Begin

Let us start with a listing in alphabetical order: Aesthetics. Archaeology. Mapping. Memory. Politics. A collection of words integral to exploring another word, another proposition, a lateral intervention between Memory and Politics: Landscape. This paper presents an experimental journey through a conceptual territory inhabited by this vocabulary. Through close readings of archaeologist Michael Shanks's theory of deep mapping, William Least Heat-Moon's book *PrairyErth (a deep map)*, and Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, I will zig zag across the practices of sixteenth-century antiquarians, a 750-square-mile Kansas county that 3,031 residents called home in 1991, and the specific distribution of sensibilities that these projects engender. The aim is to uncover a mode of critically engaging the commonplace, often-looked characteristics of our contemporary landscape. This method might be called phantasmagoric, foregrounding tactics of estrangement to challenge conventional methodologies of geography, history, art, and archaeology.

The Archaeological Imagination

Michael Shanks is a Cambridge-trained archaeologist and classicist whose academic and artistic work has been devoted to subverting entrenched positivist conceptions of the archaeological discipline. Drawing inspiration from a remarkably varied field of references, Shanks's conception of archaeology "stretches from genetics to art history, includes laboratory study, fieldwork and survey, statistical analysis, and textual interpretation, combining media old and new."¹ Shanks aims to work in a constant double-movement between practice and research, whereby the academy becomes an art studio and "old disciplinary divisions give way to a

¹ Michael Shanks, "Archaeological manifesto," retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/112> on January 10, 2009.

committed address to matters of common human concern.”² With such an attitude, it is not surprising that Shanks sees Walter Benjamin as “one of the few historians who has dealt with this character of archaeological or material sources.”³ For Shanks, the *Arcades Project* is one of modernity’s greatest archaeological achievements, “a phantasmagoric collage of fragments, apparently unconnected remains of the life of a city.”⁴

The core of archaeology is the interface between materiality and temporality. However, the discipline is not situated in the past, as some would believe, nor is it motivated by a drive to reconstruct an imagined history. Instead, archaeology is concerned with the encounter of lived human experience and the past. Like memory, archaeology is performed in the actuality of the present, in a moment necessarily entwined with the past and projecting towards the future. Shanks writes, “Archaeology refers to ruination, the materiality which we are, to an order of temporality by which we are partially constituted. It deals with the gaps between things - the dirt which is trapped between floor tiles.”⁵ Concerned with garbage and lacunae, the often-overlooked and seemingly ordinary, archaeology shifts attention to impressions and footprints, requiring an “ichnography — a science of traces.”⁶

In Shanks’s thought, such a conception of archaeology coincides with a specific understanding of modernity. Echoing Andreas Huyssen, Svetlana Boym, and others, Shanks argues, “modernity is unthinkable without its museal and archaeological component.”⁷ Going further,

² Ibid.

³ Michael Shanks, “Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/227> on January 10, 2009.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michael Shanks, “The Archaeological Imagination,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/57> on January 10, 2009.

⁷ Michael Shanks, David Platt, William L. Rathje, “The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological,” in *MODERNISM / modernity*, vol. 11, number 1 (2004): 64.

Shanks argues that in modernity “we are all archaeologists, even if we don't realize it. We share now an archaeological sensibility - working on what is left of the past.”⁸ But the archaeological sites of modernity are not only the remains of buildings, the legacy of monuments, the archives of political leaders. Instead, places like “landfill sites are modernity’s ruins,” along with the forgotten corners of the metropolis.⁹

In order for the archaeologist to engage modernity’s ruins, Shanks argues that one must deploy both an “Archaeological Sensibility” and an “Archaeological Imagination.” For him, “Sensibility refers us to the perceptual components of how we engage with the remains of the past. Imagination refers us to the creative component - to the transforming work that is done on what is left over.”¹⁰ The practice of archaeology is necessarily both scholarly and artistic, equally committed to historical analysis and projective imagination, requiring traditional methods of academic research and the creative application of new media and modes of engagement.

Deep Mapping as Theory and Practice

Performing an archaeology of Shanks’s work itself, certain fragments consistently reappear. I would argue that his project is motivated by a desire to critically question how we relate land and inhabitation, aiming fundamentally to reconnect place and land with the rhetorical features of memory. Not specifically urban, Shanks’s work is focused upon landscape, a broader term that addresses both the city and the country, foregrounding the necessarily interwoven forces of natural processes and cultural production. “Deep mapping” is one of the methods Shanks proposes for uncovering and establishing new forms of connection between people and places. According to

⁸ Michael Shanks, “Archaeographer,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/44> on January 10, 2009.

⁹ Shanks, *The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological*: 67.

¹⁰ Michael Shanks, “The Archaeological Imagination.”

Shanks, “the deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the discursive and the sensual; the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place.”¹¹ This conception of deep mapping draws upon Shanks’s research into the practice of chorography, a term used to refer to antiquarian studies of topography, place, community, history, and memory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A particular form of pre-Enlightenment knowledge and practice, chorography was lost with the consolidation of disciplines of space and place in the late eighteenth century, subsumed under geography and topography.

The deep map is neither the exclusive product of imagination, nor a rejection of scientific methods. Instead, it intermingles fantasy and reality like a phantasmagoria, those particular nineteenth century forms of optical illusions produced by means of magic lantern. Or more broadly, as the Oxford English Dictionary says, a phantasmagoria is “a sequence of real or imaginary images like that seen in a dream.”¹² As artist Clifford McLucas writes,

Deep maps will not seek the authority and objectivity of conventional cartography. They will be politicized, passionate, and partisan. They will involve negotiation and contestation over who and what is represented and how. They will give rise to debate about the documentation and portrayal of people and places.... Deep maps will bring together the amateur and the professional, the artist and the scientist, the official and the unofficial, the national and the local.... Deep maps will be unstable, fragile and temporary. They will be a conversation and not a statement.¹³

Deep mapping plays the traditions of the humanities and sciences off each other, blurring the boundaries of fact and fiction, demarcating a new terrain of place-based subjectivities. By combining such a multiplicity of perspectives and temporalities, the deep map may give rise

¹¹ Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson, *Theatre/Archaeology* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 64-65.

¹² “phantasmagoria *noun*,” *The Oxford Dictionary of English* (revised edition), Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, Oxford University Press, 2005. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Harvard University Library. 10 January 2009 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e58180>>

¹³ Clifford McLucas, “Deep Mapping,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/51> on January 10, 2009.

to a “conversation” with the heterogeneity that constitutes the contemporary past of our common landscapes.

The Topographies and Temporalities of Deep Mapping

The deep map is a means of expressing the temporality of the archaeological. This implies that the primary time of the deep map is actuality, what Shanks defines as “a return of what is no longer the same, the conjunction of presents.”¹⁴ Defined as such, actuality is imbued with ambiguity and tension. It is neither past, present, nor future. It is instead a form of “percolating time that folds together the many fragmentary traces of pasts present in any one place.”¹⁵ As an expression of memory and place, the deep map operates in the same temporal dimensions as memory itself, where “there is no bottom line, no horizon, no past-as-it-was, no ordained chronology. There are instead but enfoldings.”¹⁶

To represent sites on a deep map requires a topology that can deal with the palimpsest that is landscape. As a layering of texts and images, the deep map is “a tangent to the past - a vector (from the present) touching the past at the point of sense and then moving off to explore its own course, partaking of actuality, the temporality of memory.”¹⁷ The deep map denies the construction of dualities between past and present, objective and subjective, real and fictive.

¹⁴ Shanks, “The Archaeological Imagination.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Michael Shanks, “Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/227> on January 10, 2009.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Deep Mapping and the Avant-Garde

The avant-garde of the early twentieth century and deep mapping share similar aesthetic sensibilities. For both, collage and montage are crucial techniques. The practice of collage consists of incorporating actual pieces of material “reality” in an artistic work. Montage is the cutting and reassembling of fragments of meanings, images, things, quotations, borrowings, to create new juxtapositions. Both tactics engender what Shanks calls a “questioning of the notion of representation as finding some correspondence with an exterior reality.”¹⁸

The quotation as material form and conceptual link is an integral building block for montage. The vast collection of quotations that comprise Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, a prototypical instance of deep mapping, creates novel juxtapositions of the dissimilar in order to achieve new insights and understanding. Referring to Benjamin’s explorations, Shanks writes, “This emergence of new meaning depends on the perception of instability, of retaining energies of interruption and disruption - the quotation interrupts the smooth surface or text; it is distracting. The interruption of illusion and distraction by collage sets off allusions through the juxtaposed, montaged elements. So the new understanding comes through contaminated representation rather than pure reference to the depicted subject matter.”¹⁹ The nineteenth century arcades of Paris serve as Benjamin’s common, allegorical landscape. While the French capital might have been the center of Europe’s transition to modernity, Shanks’s theory of deep mapping opens the possibility for excavating modernity’s ruins on the margins, as well as the center. In this paradigm, such a site as Chase County, Kansas, may become as evocative as Paris.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

PrairyErth: A Deep Map of the American Prairie

Shanks adopted the term deep map from author William Least Heat-Moon and his book 1991 *PrairyErth (a deep map)*. Densely distributed over 624 pages, *PrairyErth* is a collection of quotations, drawings, stories drawn from newspaper archives, personal narratives, and interviews that brings life to what might at first glance seem to be one of the most boring places in all of America: Chase County, Kansas. Almost a perfect, vertical rectangle, the county is defined by the straight lines of the 1785 National Survey. Overgrown by one of the last remaining grand expanses of tallgrass in America, Chase County is typically a blur to drivers speeding along I-35 between Kansas City and Wichita, the state's two largest cities, or those flying overhead along some of the nation's most common cross-country flight paths. Recognizing that "deep maps will be slow," Heat-Moon elected not to bypass this rectangle, a space that appears almost completely blank on standard maps.²⁰ Looked at more closely, Chase County is a quintessential border condition, forming the boundary between the wooded east and the open west. Moreover, it is flooded with ruins of America's westward expansion and the living legacy of the nineteenth century, also a crucial period in the nation's evolving modernity. To create *PrairyErth* Heat-Moon adopted the figure "the scavenger," a mode of being that Shanks describes as "recycling bits of the past otherwise discarded, making them live again, finding value where there was none perceived."²¹

Over the course of four extended stays, Heat-Moon accumulated more than thirty months deeply immersed within Chase County. He walked along the 403 miles of the county's gravel roads, passing many nights in his sleeping bag atop the Roninger or Bazaar Hills, in the roofless remains of

²⁰ McLucas, "Deep Mapping."

²¹ Shanks, "The Archaeological Imagination."

old schoolhouses, in the homes of some of the 3,053 residents, in the occasional motel. Throughout, he engaged in casual conversation with unemployed farmers, the county's lone barber, elderly women, employees of the area's six gas stations, an eccentric geology professor, disgruntled youth, and the local historian at the single public library, recording these people's stories.

Heat-Moon was confronted with the challenge of how to represent such a heterogeneous collection of knowledge and experience. He writes, "I arrived at this question: should I just gather up items like creek pebbles into a bag and then let them tumble into their own pattern? Did I really want the reality of randomness? Answer: only if it would yield a landscape with figures, one that would unroll like a Chinese scroll painting or a bison-skin drawing where both beginnings and ends of an event are...present."²² The least he hoped for was a "topographic map," made up of words that when read would inspire a journey through the region's many miles.²³

During a stint of writing and reflection in his apartment, Heat-Moon covered the floor with the twenty-five, large scale U.S. Geological Survey maps that included his landscape of inquiry. Each map was so detailed that "barns and houses and windmills appear."²⁴ Together, the maps formed a forty-two-square-foot paper land. As Heat-Moon traversed across the cartographic territory, he recognized a shape that might form a framework for articulating his research. Recounting this revelatory moment, he writes, "While thirteen of the maps contain only narrow strips of Chase, the central twelve hold almost all of it, and their outlines form a kind of grid such as an archaeologist lays over ground he will excavate. Wasn't I a kind of digger of shards? Maybe a grid was the answer: arbitrary quadrangles that have nothing inherently to do with the land, little to do with history, and

²² William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth (a deep map)* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999): 15.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

not much to do with my details.”²⁵ With this new form in mind, Heat-Moon would revisit Chase County, walking across it “grid by topographic grid, digging, sifting, sorting, assembling shards, my arbitrary course will be that of a Japanese reading a book: up to down, right to left.”²⁶ This grid became an organizing principle for constructing a montage of thousands of fragments, much like the alphabetical ordering offered by the dictionary in Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*.

Walking On, Below and Above the Grid

The form of *PrairyErth* follows Heat-Moon’s journeys across his arbitrary grid. Each book chapter is dedicated to one of the grid’s rectangles, with names such as “Saffordville,” “Gladstone,” “Cedar Point,” and “Elk.” Playfully engaging the aesthetic rigor of the U.S. Geological Survey, there is also a consistent structure across each section. Every chapter opens with multiple pages of quotations drawn “From the Commonplace Book.” These epigraphs are pulled from a vast field of sources, ranging from nineteenth-century accounts of crossing the Kansas prairie, to classical literature such as D.H. Lawrence, to contemporary environmentalist philosophy, to the musings of Walt Whitman, to academic treatises on natural history, to poetic fragments from the work of Joseph Brodsky.

It is through these fragmentary thoughts, snatched from the sediment of history and irreverent to disciplinary boundaries, that Heat-Moon articulates his specific position vis-à-vis mapping. On page four, he cites Barry Lopez’s *Desert Notes* (1976):

Your confidence in these finely etched maps is understandable, for at first glance they seem excellent, the best a man is capable of; but your confidence is misplaced. Throw them out. They are the wrong sort of map. They are too thin.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid: 15-16.

The deep map digs below, layering those glances that follow the first. Just below this passage, we read a fragment from Peter Steinhart's 1986 "Names on a Map": "Maps are a way of organizing wonder." Like Shanks, Heat-Moon's conception of the map is not as a form of objective, scientific knowledge, but instead a medium that creates frameworks for expansive site-specific thought and experience. The map is not exclusively representational, but an active agent in opening new potentialities of wonderment.

After the opening montage of thoughts drawn "From the Commonplace Book," Heat-Moon places us "In the Quadrangle," the title for the twelve sub-sections that begin Heat-Moon's narratives. The other sub-sections that follow all are distinctly named, but begin with a spatial preposition. Simply reading the table of contents can provide a summary of the English language's modes of expressing locational specificity and imaginary landscapes:

"Beneath a Thirty-Six-Square Grid"

"Beyond the Teeth of the Dragon"

"In Ecstasy"

"Underneath the Overburden"

"Within Her Pages"

"Outside the Z Bar"

"Down in the Hollow"

"Atop the Mound"

"Along the Ghost Highway"

"Beside Coming Morning" "

"Up Dead-End Dirt Roads."27

While not a standard map, *PrairyErth* is truly navigational, its structure providing pathways through stories tied to specific places.

²⁷ The emphasis on the prepositions is my own.

Deep Mapping the Often-Overlooked and “herky-jerky” Temporality

Heat-Moon’s focus upon Chase County is motivated by a desire to counter conventional modes of awareness and representation. He writes, “I began to like [prairies] not because they demand your attention like mountains and coasts but because they almost defy absorbed attention.”²⁸ And from the prairies, he acquired a specific pace and mode of engagement that echoes Shanks’s theorization of the deep-mapping archaeologist. Heat-Moon writes, “I learned a prairie secret: take the numbing distance in small doses and gorge on the little details that beckon. It’s not that I had to learn to think flat — the prairies rarely are — but I had to begin thinking open and lean, seeing without set points of obvious focus, noticing first the horizon and then drawing my vision back toward middle distance where so little appears to exist.”²⁹

The practice of deep mapping performs a double movement of estrangement. At once, the deep map defamiliarizes that which is ordinary by reframing it in a new context.³⁰ At the same time, the deep map expands the frame by incorporating people, places, and artifacts that are normally omitted. To create deep maps, a mode of sincere receptiveness and patience is essential. As Shanks writes, “An imperative here is to keep open things which are passed over in an instant.”³¹ Or, in Heat-Moon’s words, “What I cherish I’ve come to slowly, usually blindly, not seeing it for some time.”³²

²⁸ Heat-Moon, 27.

²⁹ Ibid: 27-28.

³⁰ I am assuming defamiliarization and estrangement here in relation to the concept of *ostranenie*, as developed by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky. In “Art as Technique” he writes, “Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” (Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1965: 12).

³¹ Shanks, “Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past.”

³² Heat-Moon, 81.

PrairyErth articulates the jumbled temporality of the archaeological imagination. Enmeshed in a description of Cottonwood, the county's largest town (population 966), Heat-Moon writes, "A few days ago, at the crossing of Broadway and Friend Street, I stood with an 1878 bird's-eye-view engraving of the town in my hands and compared it to what I saw, and it was plain that history in Cottonwood proceeds at about the same rate of an hour a year."³³ Traveling in time and place with Heat-Moon, we the readers are situated in a dense, multimedia imaginary of actuality. The recent past is made tangible through the engraving, viewed from a present conditioned by embodied experience. In this moment, time "moves even slower than the official state reptile, the ornate box turtle."³⁴ The rate of history is rendered nonlinear and revealed as uneven. Or, as Heat-Moon writes, we become aware of "'the herky-jerky passage of time."³⁵

Dreaming and Phantasmagoria

The art of dreaming is integral to the practice of deep mapping and is a consistent motif through *PrairyErth*. In the Commonplace Book opening the quadrangle of "Thrall-Northwest," Thomas de Quincey is quoted from his 1845 "Suspiria de Profundis": "The machinery for dreaming planted in the human brain was not planted for nothing. That faculty, in alliance with the mystery of darkness, is the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy. And the dreaming organ, in connexion with the heart, the eye, and the ear, composes the magnificent apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of that mysterious camera obscura — the sleeping

³³ Ibid, 52.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

mind."³⁶ But it is not only the sleeping mind that can dream. Modes of consciousness also take journeys of fantasy and illusion. Heat-Moon draws us into this specific domain of subjectivity. Guiding us, he writes, "Now: you are dreaming, walking in your dream, here in the hills, alone. If you continue you will find what I have hidden for you, if you want it."³⁷

PrairyErth can be read as a literary form of phantasmagoria. To walk with Heat-Moon through Chase County one is placed in a constant state of wonderment. While ostensibly non-fictional, the characters of Heat-Moon encounters are also unfathomable. Tom Bridge supposedly grew up on the eastern plains of Colorado during the dust bowl days when "the storm came on like a cliff...hundreds of feet high."³⁸ In 1966, Tom got lost looking for a house to buy in Chase County and stumbled into Saffordville, practically a ghost-town situated "at the bottom of a funnel" that completely floods at least once every year.³⁹ Already almost completely vacant from the 1951 flood, Tom found the one banker's son to ask for directions and shortly thereafter decided to buy a house right in the floodplain, knowing perfectly well that multiple times each year it would be submerged. Over dinner, Tom tells Heat-Moon: "This house is a riverboat that won't float. I'll look out a window and see carp jumping on the lawn. Frogs in the basement. Cordwood floating off the porch.... I turn off the electricity if water's coming upstairs. [My wife] Syble got shocked last time. You'll feel the electric current in the water, a kind of vibrating: it can kill you.... There's no question a flood is inconvenient."⁴⁰ But the Bridges do not have flood insurance. And Syble adds, "Tom calls us collectors who need a flood every so often to clear things out anyway."⁴¹

³⁶ Quoted in Heat-Moon, 93-94.

³⁷ Heat-Moon, 326.

³⁸ Ibid, 35.

³⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Not only is such a narrative seemingly implausible. Heat-Moon does not use quotation marks to distinguish dialogue. Those words that are supposedly not Heat-Moon's own are merely italicized, flowing smoothly in the body of narrative paragraphs. And the descriptive language used by interview subjects throughout the book is highly evocative and echoes the same turns of phrase and style of Heat-Moon's personal passages. This conflation calls into question the objectivity of the supposed interviews, establishing a dreamlike atmosphere where everything might actually be an illusion. This phantasmagoric sense is only heightened by Heat-Moon's meticulous attention to detail. No date is omitted, every person encountered is identified by both first and last name, and all spaces are indelibly described. Moreover, Heat-Moon's accounts of his own journeys and the stories of others are consistently interwoven with reprintings of newspaper articles from local archives and historic testimonies from the early settlers of Kansas. Like the nineteenth century phantasmagoria, *PrairyErth* establishes a "dialectic at a standstill," an unresolved tension between truth and illusion, subjectivity and objectivity, deception and liberation, and even life and death.⁴²

A Re-Distribution of the Sensible

The phantasmagoric maneuvers of the deep map establish a distinct political terrain. To begin to examine the contours of this politico-aesthetic topography, let us examine Jacques Rancière *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Rancière examines politics from the perspective of "the distribution of the sensible." With this phrase, he means "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the

⁴² Here I am referencing Walter Benjamin's conception of this phrase. In *The Arcades Project*, he writes, "Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions-there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thoughts. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest."

delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."⁴³ For Rancière, the sensible is not a static category, but a domain inhabited by constantly shifting definitions of what is common sense. For example, while today it is widely believed that the worship of images is not sacrilegious, during previous periods the representation of God was forbidden in vast sectors of society. It is such changing conceptions of prudence that constitute politics, as these shifts entail significant reformulations of what may be seen, heard, and said, thereby constituting the possibilities (and impossibilities) of individual and collective activity.

An active and ongoing process, "the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed."⁴⁴ As with any distribution, the distribution of the sensible establishes edges, demarcating what is proper and who can participate. These edges (and interiors) are conditioned by aesthetic practices. Rancière defines aesthetics as "a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of times."⁴⁵ Politics is the field within which the distribution of the sensible takes place, and aesthetics are the powers that determine the potentialities latent within this field. From this perspective, Rancière argues, "An aesthetic politics always defines itself by a

⁴³ Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetics of Politics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004): 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible, a reconfiguration of the perceptual forms."⁴⁶

The project of deep mapping aims at the remapping of perceptual forms.

The question is not whether a form of art such as the deep map is political. Or whether a certain politics is aestheticized. For Rancière, this is a mute point, as politics and aesthetics are necessarily always entwined. He writes, "Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perception, and the abilities of bodies."⁴⁷ Rancière shifts the question away from a vague and misplaced notion of an artwork's political commitment to art's larger role as a vehicle for constructing "regimes of sensible intensity." In this light, the lens becomes whether artistic practices enable opportunities for new voices, images, and practice to be seen, heard, and enacted or whether they increase control of thought, speech, and action.

This is how we may understand the political implications of deep mapping. By dislodging entrenched delineations between important and trivial, fact and fiction, objective and subjective, the deep map contributes to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible. As Shanks writes, "Archaeological evidence frequently provides insights counter to the great narratives of history that we have grown so used to over the last couple of centuries."⁴⁸ The practice of deep mapping can help us attend to materiality by saying "look at what has been

⁴⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁸ Shanks, "Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past."

omitted.”⁴⁹ Historically, what has often been omitted is the commonplace, which gains new perceptibility through aesthetic strategies of estrangement in deep maps such as *PrairyErth*.

Deep mapping’s modes of engaging the commonplace are specific to the aesthetic regime of our times. But it is not technological advancement that has made deep mapping possible. Modernity is in part defined by the development of mechanical arts (e.g. photography and film) and the use of these technologies to, as Rancière says, “confer visibility on the masses.” The historical shift from the representative to the aesthetic regime (a shift that does not imply a total break, but instead a change in primacy), was in part brought about by a re-evaluation of the “honour acquired by the commonplace.”⁵⁰ Balzac uncovered the character an epoch through the features, clothes, and gestures of an ordinary individual. Hugo revealed a civilization through a sewer. As Rancière writes, “All of these forms of cancellation or reversal of the opposition between high and low not only antedate the powers of mechanical reproduction, they made it possible for this reproduction to be more than mechanical reproduction.”⁵¹ It was not the introduction of new technologies that enabled this new vision of the masses and the concurrent re-definition of mechanical production as a mode of artistic practice. Instead, Rancière offers this eloquent aphorism: “The technological revolution comes after the aesthetic revolution.”⁵² The aesthetic works of Balzac and Hugo transformed the boundaries of the visible and invisible, the audible and inaudible, changing the way we see ordinary people and places. In this way, aesthetics condition the possibilities for our use of technologies, not vice versa.

In the course of the aesthetic revolution, “the ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Rancière, 33.

⁵¹ Ibid, 32.

⁵² Ibid, 33.

true. And the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph, a mythological or phantasmagoric figure. This phantasmagoric dimension of the true, which belongs to the aesthetic regime of arts, played an essential role in the formation of the critical paradigm of the human and social sciences."⁵³ In this re-formulation of what constitutes the human and social, it is the "phantasmagoric dimension of the true" that gains credence. The world of blurred fact and fiction created by authors such as Heat-Moon supplants the supposed objectivity of the scientific method. Characters such as Tom and Sibyle Bridge become a new authority. Living ghost towns such as Saffordville, Kansas become visible and audible. In this way, the deep map, a phantasmagoria of the details of the ordinary, becomes a destabilizing force in the aesthetic revolution.

The implications of the redistribution of the sensible enacted by the deep map are manifold. As Rancière writes, "Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done."⁵⁴ The new value and attention accorded the commonplace in the deep map stands in opposition to the histories of great names and events. A method for engaging materiality and a distinct form of material itself, the deep map privileges a confounding of traditional landmarks and the standard intelligibility of history, geography, and archaeology. To deep map means to scavenge through the remains of modernity's ruins, constructing phantasmagorias of our common landscape's contemporary pasts.

⁵³ Ibid, 34.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 39.

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