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ANTIPODE

SYMPOSIUM

The Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute Then and Now…:

Commentaries on *Field Notes No.4: The Trumbull Community*

Looking Back to Detroit for a (Counter-Mapping) Path Forward

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Founded in 1968 by Bill Bunge and Gwendolyn Warren, the history and lasting influence of the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute can be told in many ways. For Bunge, they were a site at which to continue his "geographical expedition" as research method *and* at which to begin a pedagogical experiment in which "[l]ocal people are to be incorporated as students and as professors" (Bunge 1969, quoted in Heynen and Barnes 2011:v). They were *expeditions* turned inwards upon our own urban landscapes, attempts to "subvert the exploration practices of the 19th century" (Merrifield 1995:54) and, in so doing, to move explicitly towards a more socially just city. For his harshest critics, this subversion failed, producing little more than yet another colonial experiment by which geographers attempted to solve the world's ills, *this time with maps!* (see Figure 1 below).

Charting the full successes, failures, and contested results of the DGEIs is certainly beyond the scope of this review and likely impossible given that the very number of expeditions (as well as their aims and even locations) remains debatable. For

example, Ron Horvath (1971) writes a eulogy for the DGEI in *Antipode*, only for Robert Colenutt (1971) to respond that the work remains ongoing in the fourth DGEI, the subject of this forum; William Bunge decries the failures of the Vancouver Expedition in the pages of the Union of Socialist Geographers' *Newsletter*, chastising them for failing to heed the warnings of his own efforts in Toronto, only for expedition members to defend themselves in the next issue (Bunge 1976). All of this is compounded by the fact that many writings on the expeditions and their methodologies were simply never published or remain not widely available (Bunge's promised methodological text, "The Socialist Reconstruction of Geography", not the least among them).

Similarly, the influence of the DGEIs as research and pedagogical method emerges and disappears in disparate ways in the years since their heyday. Mott and Roberts (2014) note its somewhat superficial cooptation by so-called "Urban Explorers", while Pawson and Teather (2002) examine the benefits of using a form of Geographical Expedition as a means of incorporating fieldwork into undergraduate education (as do Boehm and Kracht [2007] for elementary students). Lane (2016) suggests expeditionary method is about "placing oneself in a situation where that situation can speak back", which, in turn, produces a slower, deeper form of science. With these contested histories and diverse influences in mind, I turn to the fourth DGEI and the documentation it has produced, the Society for Human Exploration's (1972) *Field Notes No.4: The Trumbull Community*, in a way which focuses on what might be considered "most radical" about the DGEI: "*who* was making the maps and the urgency felt by those mapmakers" (D'Ignazio 2013). In other words, as someone who has called for the "revisiting" of Critical GIS (Thatcher et al. 2016a), I wish to revisit the fourth DGEI in terms of what it can tell us about mapping and counter-mapping today.

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Figure 1: Union of Socialist Geographers (1978:38)

The way I wish to tell the story of the fourth DGEI is as a story about how data and maps, how the act of mapping, makes claims upon the world. On the one hand, it is an easy and time-tested critique of mapping practices to suggest that they lavish attention upon abstract representations of the world; that maps inevitably evoke a god's eye view of the world, a view from nowhere that irrevocably abstracts and then presents a specific interpretation of the world as the austere, authoritative one (Haraway 1988; Kingsbury and Jones 2009). There is, after all, much truth to the idea that he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (Lorde 2007). On the other, maps have real power (Wood 1992, 2010). They *do* shape what is seen and unseen, what is known and

unknown in both what they choose to represent and how they represent it. Maps are tools for the production of knowledge and, as such, they are always-already deeply political.

The DGEIs were built upon this latter understanding and it is through that commitment that I find the fourth DGEI (and the DGEIs in general) still profoundly relevant for radical geography: first, in how the fourth DGEI speaks to current understandings, practices, and critiques of participatory mapping and the participatory use of geographic information systems (PGIS); and, second, in how the techniques and methodologies of the DGEI itself demonstrate a relative lack in our own disciplinary history. As to the first point, the fourth DGEI embraced a doubly radical idea that not only could the lived, daily experiences of a community be made legible through mapping and visualizations, but that both the subject and creators of said representations must include members of the community in question. The members of the fourth DGEI did not enter Trumbull with "any preconceived notions about the research to be undertaken, and was thus able to respond to the daily struggles of the community and was thus able to respond to the daily struggles of the community" (Society for Human Exploration 1972:1).

The knowledge produced through mapping, though it took the form of official-looking tables, charts, and maps, was of the topics most directly of interest to the community in question. While perhaps impossible within the current context of results-oriented research funding in which expectations must always come before full investigation, the emergent praxis of the fourth DGEI addresses some of the specters raised by purportedly participatory mapping exercises such as the Bowman Expeditions[1] and other projects where the relations between the knowledges mapped, those mapping, and external interests, such as the military-state nexus, are obscured (Bryan and Wood 2015). While impossible to resolve the full set of tensions and power relations created by

1 See http://americangeo.org/bowman-expeditions/

and through mapping projects, the approach of the DGEIs is one means of moving towards a more reflexive politics of mapping (see, among others, Dunn 2007; Finn 2014; Schuurman and Pratt 2002). It is a praxis which provides one answer to Wainwright's (2013:71) question of how we represent "space and place after the postcolonial critique": through a radical, participatory, grounded empiricism, and the topics and knowledges it produces. For the fourth DGEI, this approach resulted in research into "problems of housing, police protection, and health services" as well as their intervention into "a locational conflict over the use of local recreation space" (Colenutt 1971:85). Beyond the DGEIs' epistemology and praxis, it is the quality and innovative nature of the maps and visualizations produced *through* these that I would like to call attention to in closing.

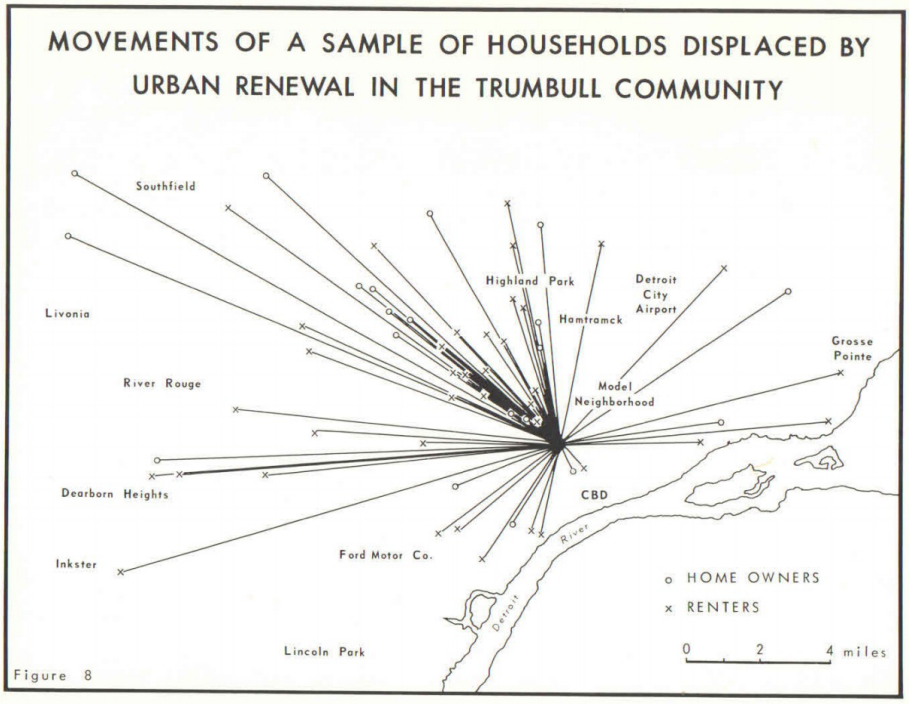

Figure 2: Society for Human Exploration (1972:25)

One of my favorite visualizations of 2015 was a set of maps linking vacant properties in Louisville to the owner of said properties (Shelton 2015). While I am not so great a cartographer to claim the ability to judge the maps in and of themselves, what I found most fascinating in them was the linking of seemingly disparate spaces together through their economic ties. While still visualized within Newtonian space, Shelton's maps suggest possibilities to rethinking Geographic Information Systems into, what Bergmann and Lally (2016) have suggested we call, Geographic Imaginary Systems: as means of bringing the "situated, dynamic, processual, relational, and contingent" understandings of space into our cartographic practices.

Table II, which lists the addresses of abandoned buildings and the addresses of said buildings' owners, and Figure 8 (reproduced above as Figure 2; Society for Human Exploration 1972:20, 25) remind me of these same practices. That the DGEI would engage in these types of visualization is unsurprising given their roots in the work of Bill Bunge, a pioneer of this type of spatial thinking.[2] It is also unsurprising that much of this work fell by the wayside in the years after the DGEI. There are tactical and social reasons behind the valorization of specific types of spatial conceptualizations over others (Thatcher et al. 2016b), and Bunge's own unceremonious exit from the academy certainly did not help matters (for more on the life and influence of the late Bunge, see Bergmann and Morrill forthcoming).

This forum is meant to resurrect the seemingly lost field notes of the fourth DGEI. But, as we bring these works back, as Bunge's own work is rehabilitated into geography (Barnes and Heynen 2011), we must not reproduce an artificial distinction between qualitative and quantitative. We cannot take the profound, radical, qualitative, empirical practices of the DGEI and ignore the equally significant quantitative visualizations. The

2 See his work on isochrone maps of Seattle; Figures 2.13, 2.14, 2.17 and 2.18 in *Theoretical Geography* (Bunge 1962).

ways of knowing produced in and through the creation and interpretation of spatial information can be just as critical, just as radical, as those produced through more traditionally qualitative means. The Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institutes embodied this spirit; they understood the power of said visualizations and their ability to make legible claims within systems of unequal power relations. The success of the fourth DGEI in resisting the transformation of Matthaei Field into a parking lot attests to this. The systemic inequities that made the DGEIs so powerful as praxis have not disappeared and so, as we revisit the fourth Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, we must keep firmly in front of us the power and creativity contained within their mapping practices and products.

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