

Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
Seminar Description for 2021
Ayesha Ramachandran
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature

How to Do Things with Maps

This course begins with the premise that maps both create narratives and influence the shape and interpretation of texts. As historical objects, maps offer narratives about how we imagine and organize ourselves in psychological, spiritual, social and political terms; but the map has also become a charged concept in contemporary literary and social theory, codifying ideas and expectations about space, place, orientation and itinerary. Thus, we will trace the shifting intersections between cartographic technologies, social-political conflict and literary form, moving from the “cartographic revolution” of the sixteenth century to the grand digital-spatial dream of Google Earth. Topics covered will include: spatial literacy in verbal and visual texts, cartographic technologies and instruments; maps in books and as books (atlases); and textual uses of various mapping practices (spiritual, geographic, conceptual, data-driven); these topics will be anchored in readings of Camões’s *Lusiads*, and Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, and Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, with a variety of complementary materials (travel accounts, navigational tracts, broadsides, poems, maps, globes, atlases). Depending on interest and the participants, the course can engage more with political/historical/social/empirical questions or slant more towards intersections between cartography and literature—though it will contain some combination of all these things. Our materials and methodologies also mean that the course can function as an alternative introduction to themes in book history and the digital humanities (if there is sufficient interest). This class will make ample use of online digital materials from the Beinecke Library, the Newberry Library and John Carter Brown Library.