Traces

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Ruttier Writing Assignment: Traces

(Prompt Abstract: In the spirits of marronage, Dionne Brand's "Ruttier for the Marooned in Diaspora," and Sylvia Wyner's "1492: A New World View," make a language-based map that traces, or conceals the traces of, the way to a beloved place.)

Maps reveal inter-subjective, geographic, ideological, and cosmogonic details about the consciousness of their makers. The U.S. Navy's mid-20th century map of the island of Vieques, which echoes in the current Tourist Map of the island, conceals the traces of interred land mines and toxic weapons dumps by selectively, visually marking-off parts of the small island as *wilderness*. Pope Alexander VI's 1493 *Bulls of Donation* reveal his bloated, anthropocentric, and biocentric cartographic disposition about the western hemisphere as idolatrous lands ripe for the dominion of Catholic Princes; the *Other* (as land and as *homo sapiens* on the land) existed in a state of awaiting the papacy's and the crown's violent sovereign incursion as beneficent arrival. Since the 16th century, maroons in the Americas have covered their traces of flight, concealed their places of anti-Plantation vitality from the master's ways of seeing space. With these examples in mind, for this assignment, you're going to make a language-based map. The stakes of this assignment are to imagine how to orient others to one of your beloved *places*—so, to put into relation an imagined, and somehow representable, *there-and-then* with an imagined *who*.

The language below under the sub-section title "*Maps*" is from Trinidadian-born, Toronto-residing writer Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), which is a poetic, multi-genre, and multisensorial book. Caribbean and Black Studies scholar Omise'ke Nathasa Tinsley performatively reads Brand's *A Map* in her essay, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage" (2008) as a "shifting oceanography" (Tinsley 207). The "*Maps*" passage below from Brand's book precedes a "Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora" (Brand 212-213). A Ruttier is a maritime navigational lyric, a long poem learned by sailors—by heart. On a Ruttier's mind are song, memory, recitation, relation, the stars, and perspective-in-flux. On the mind of Brand's Ruttier is, also, the impossible diasporic prompt of "*putting the senses back together*" (Tinsley 211).

You will write a map that plays with the poetic genre of Ruttier. Your language-based map may be of a geographic place and/or a textual site. Your map *may either reveal or conceal* the way of getting *there*. Your map's notion of inter-subjectivity may be directed at an imagined human reader—and you will want to think about how you imagine racializing, gendering, and/or ungendering that reader, *or* it may imagine a differently categorized entity or being as its author and/or recipient (e.g., perhaps your map will be a smell-based one that you imagine your dog would make for you from a park to your

apartment.) This is also to say that this assignment has a serious and violent history in mind, and it has a playful spirit about what you—depending on your history, affect, positioning, etc.—may conceive of making with it.

In the spirit of the many maps in Brand's *A Map*, as well as the poetics of ecology and spatio-temporal upheaval in Sylvia Wynter's essay "1492: A New World View," consider directing *or* mis-directing the reader, depending on what and how you're mapping. Wynter writes that Columbus' proto-hysterical—and, for her, poetically inspired—challenge to scholars and nobles of his day argued that "*mundi mare totum navigabile*." Consider, too, how that enormous shift in the medieval imaginary of *all seas are navigable*, and, indeed, that all *must be* navigated for the glory of *one* "Judeo-Christian" conception of God to re-occupy Jerusalem, also violently collapsed the war-scarred concept of heaven onto the earth and seas. That is to say, his re-mapping of the world, and re-valuing of empirical ways of knowing the earth and seas, converged with the de-godding of the earth, which converged with secularized theological-juridical defenses of variably dehumanizing Indigenous (non-African) and (indigenous) African peoples, cosmogonies, and histories (an order of thought re-inscribed into U.S. law, which is subtended by slavery). *A la* the Martiniquan poet Monchoachi, the time when "the gods fled" the subjugated world continues to inform the episteme in which we are caught. With some of this language in mind, Will your map offer a portal to an un-de-godded elsewhere? Will it reclaim the here-and-now for another notion of *homo sapiens*, or for other creatures, elements, another conception of space and time, another poetics?

Evoke the geographic, textual, or, for that matter, oceanic place/site in your map. Imagine how to offer language-based mnemonics, a sense of scale, and a sense of orientation to and from other sites strictly relevant to your reader's capacity to navigate textual and/or geographic space with your Ruttier. You may write in verse, or not exactly, as in, instead, mix lyrical and musical elements into prose. You may also create an audio and/or visual companion to your written piece.