

# DENIS WOOD

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAT PIPER

*The process of mapping is much more than showing the beautiful artifacts of the world and our understanding of its relationships. Denis Wood describes his love for mapping and what it ought to be.*

## What got you into mapping?

It's a strange idea, but I never thought of myself as a "map guy" until I did an exhibition on maps, and then suddenly, people wanted me to do maps. In 1998, when Ira Glass interviewed me for *This American Life*, we talked about the maps I had been making of my neighborhood in Boylan Heights, in Raleigh. From there, I produced a book that included my maps, original map art, drawings, sketches, and the unfinished maps. Now, of course, all I do is maps.

In 1975, I was teaching landscape architecture. I was plunged into these studios, and I had no idea what to do; I knew nothing about landscape architecture. That uncertainty led to the mapping exercises that inspired my neighborhood atlas. All these pieces of my life came together in what I taught and in the maps I made. It's like these stories are all like spaghetti together. These maps were all things that I was deeply, deeply involved with, and they all led to deep maps.

## What did you mean by deep maps?

Deep mapping is about being in love. Making maps is a way of hanging onto that feeling and not letting go. That's what mapping is about: trying to recover, or hang on, or not let go of intense feelings that you are having about a place. It doesn't change you, but it's a way of trying to hang onto something that has already changed you.

## How has making maps changed your view of the world?

Well I entered undergraduate school hoping to be a historian, and then added English. There was a science course required, so I took geography and loved it. I then decided to triple major in all three, and applied to all three in graduate school. While at graduate school, JK Wright came to the campus, and his book had just come out: *Human Nature and Geography*. Wright talks about 'geosophy' in the book, which he defines as the study of geographical knowledge from any, or all points of view. The idea is that all people could be geographers and create an image of the world. I asked myself, well then, why not me? Or why not me from back in the 6th grade? Why not the me who rode in the back of a moving van to Cleveland Heights, and popped out into a new world? Out of this I created a series of maps on how I came to see, to discover, to know this world.

## Do you have any specific memories of making maps in school?

I went to Puerto Rico on a field course and created a project on the local music. I decided to study the songs of jukeboxes as we traveled from coast to coast. We stopped at every fifth place that we thought might have a jukebox. I noted the types of songs that were on the jukebox, creating these endless lists of completely recorded jukeboxes. We stopped a lot, and you don't go into a bar to record