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Mapping Discourse in R.H. Dana's Two Years Before the Mast

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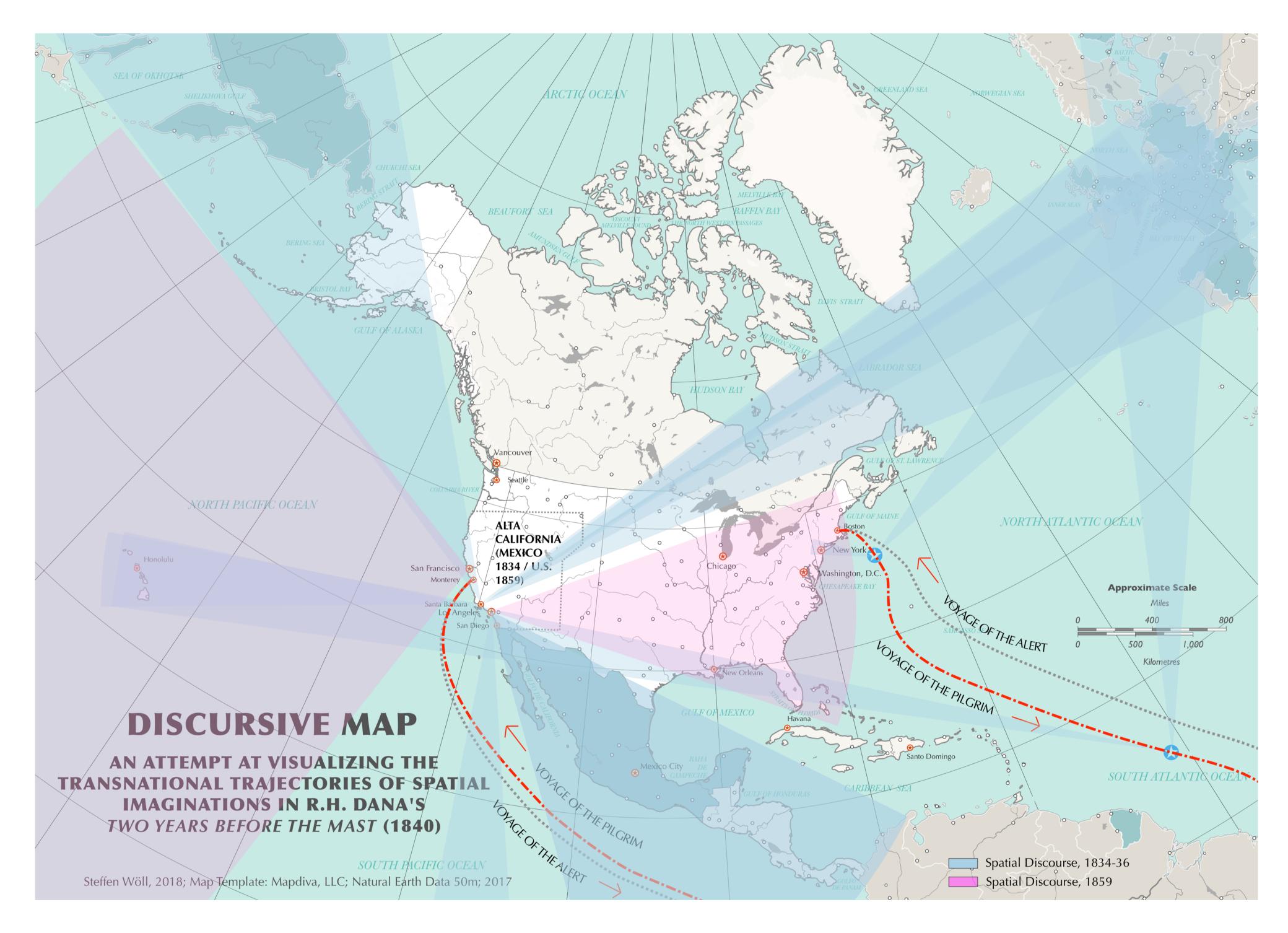
Dissertation Project: "The West and the Word: Imagining, Formatting, and Ordering the American West in Nineteenth-Century Cultural Discourse"

DESCRIPTION

When **Richard Henry Dana Jr.** visited San Francisco in 1859 after being away for almost a quarter of a century, he found that he had become a man of considerable fame on the West Coast. Coming from a well-to-do family, instead of traveling to the chic resorts of Europe, the young Dana had signed up as a common sailor aboard the *Pilgrim*, headed for California. Because the resulting 1840 book was one of the few (and perhaps the most readable) accounts of California written in English, it **shaped the expectations of many Americans** who moved to the newly acquired western territories after the Mexican-American War.

In my attempt of mapping the spatial discourses present in Dana's text, the blue beams visualize key imaginations during the *Pilgrim's* voyage and Dana's stay on the West Coast from 1834-1836 where he was occupied in processing animal hides and observing the social life in the towns that were still a part of Mexico. These 'discursive beams' appear diverse, global, and transnational in their outreach, revealing imagined connections of California with many locations on the globe. They depict California as an assemblage that was at the same time contested and highly interconnected with transnational spaces.

The purple beams represent Dana's vision of California during his second visit in 1859 and make visible a shift towards the role of the region in national and global contexts. Dana euphorically described the transformation of San Francisco from a picturesque village to the imperial capital of "the sole emporium of a new world, the awakened Pacific." This new imagination of S.F. and California had merely two large reference points. First, the American nation-state, of whom the region is a proud yet subordinate constituent. And second, the Pacific hemisphere with its markets and resources that are open for imperial exploitation.



REFERENCES

Dana, Richard Henry Jr. *Two Years Before the Mast*. Houghton Mifflin, 1911.

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