

ON THE PROFESSION

Analytic Resources for Emerging Methodological Repertoires

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Novel methodological approaches are ablaze in the humanities and social sciences. Early adopters of network science, spatial data analysis, and digital humanities are enriching our fields with surprising findings. New methodological repertoires diversify the questions we can ask and the knowledge we can build across a variety of substantive themes.

But novel methods often demand novel resources to enable their deployment. In this edition of “On the Profession,” we feature cyber-infrastructure and analytic tools that enable fresh treatment of research themes old and new. Our purpose is to raise the profile of methodological innovators operating near the margins of the LASA community and thereby facilitate an expansion of our collective imagination about the kinds of questions we can ask and the types of tools we can use. We hope to inspire cross-fertilization over disciplinary and methodological boundaries that are often too impervious.

Paul Pierson in *Politics in Time* (2004) noted the poverty associated with a methodological specialist who claims, “I can model that,” when confronted with a unique or complex theoretical proposition, but whose “theoretical imageries” never lead her to imagine such propositions in the first place. We concur, but note that it can also apply in the opposite direction: methodological traditions have their own imageries, and so scholars who try on new methodological eyewear might be inspired with new propositions.

We feature two contributors, both of whom are partners to initiatives that exploit data intensity, computational capacity, and ingenuity. Historian Jo Guldi describes “Paper Machines,” a textual analysis and visualization tool she developed with colleagues to study vast collections of

documents, in her case with an eye toward the study of twentieth-century property law reform across the globe. Geographer Steven Manson, a member of the Scientific Leadership Group of the Terra Populus project, describes TerraPop and U-Spatial, two bits of cyber-infrastructure that underlie spatial data analysis applications across a wide range of disciplines—in his case for the study of changing urban and rural landscapes. ■