

An introduction to (C)art Therapy: Sketch mapping workshops for early teenagers as a case study in Post-Representational Cartography

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Abstract: A growing body of critical and creative research on mapping is forwarding cartography’s post-representational transition towards the processual. While prior cartographic studies have considered the intersection of emotion and maps (see Griffin and McQuoid 2012 for an overview), no known study has explored the creation of a map as an emotional process for the mapmaker specifically. I investigate how the mapping process—that is, the actual creative creation of the map and the mapmakers’ experiences therein—has an inherent emotional dimension that can do (some sort of) good for individuals participating in the process. Specifically, I respond to three calls from the cartographic literature: 1. Kitchin and Dodge’s (2007: 343) call to “rethink cartography as a processual, emergent endeavor” by situating this work within a post-representational, ontogenetic framework; 2. Perkins’ (2008: 157) call for “different ways of approaching mapping and its use, that reflect this complexity and which are beyond the narrow hypothesis-testing of most contemporary mapping user studies” by looking to art therapy as a potential application and method, which appreciates and emphasizes the importance of qualitative data like self-reporting; and, 3. Boria and Rossetto’s (2017: 1) related call for “an enhancement of new practice-oriented methods of analysis” by integrating elements of ethnography and psychology into a creative spin on traditional cognitive sketch mapping studies.

In combining these threads, I seek insight into three research questions: 1. What impact does the process of mapmaking have on the emotional discovery of the mapmakers, and how can the mapmaking process better serve as a productive, therapeutic experience?; 2. What are best practices for using the mapmaking process as an artistic, emotional, place-based research method and pedagogical intervention, in this case with specific regard to adolescents?; and, 3. What other benefits does the process of mapmaking have on both map and mapmaker?

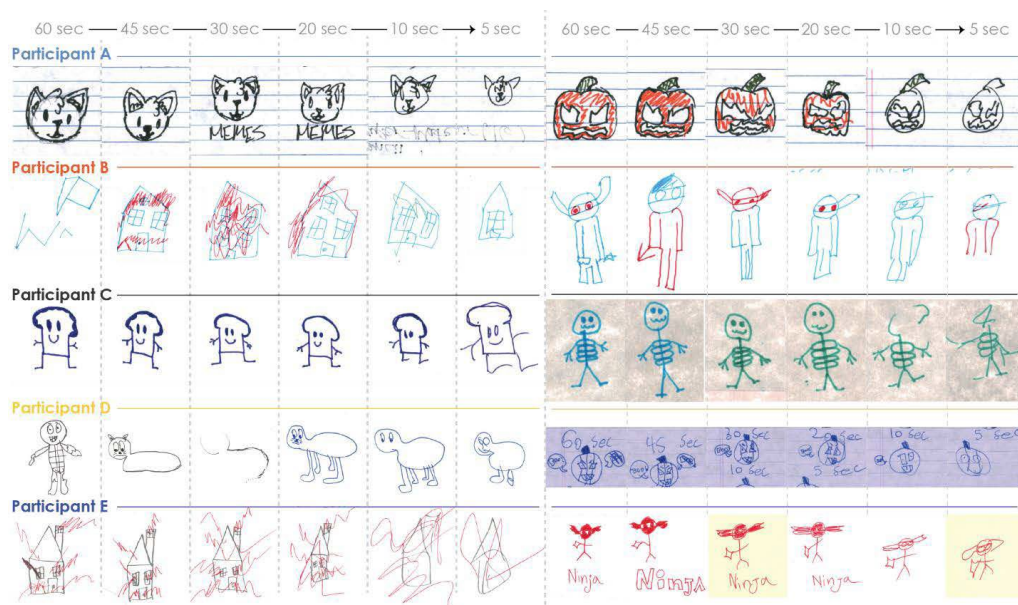


Figure 1. The results of a warm-up, quick-draw activity used to generate creative self-expression while introducing generalization as a mapping concept.

To answer these questions, I considered the *process* of mapping as art intervention programming for individuals to uncover the important role that place plays in life's experiences (affective geographies), specifically the emotions related to the creation of maps towards this purpose. I designed a workshop that used the process of *cognitive sketch mapping*—the representation of an individual's mental maps through artful practices (Gieseking 2013)—as a research method, educational activity, and therapeutic-like experience, to explore the place-associated emotions of early teenagers from the Bridge Lakepoint Waunona Neighborhood Center (BLW) of Madison, WI. The workshop sought so-called “useless maps” (D’Ignazio 2016: 38)—using the process of mapmaking to serve the emotional needs of the mapmaker rather than meet an externally-defined need or complete an artificial instructional exercise—to contribute to research deploying mapmaking for personal rather than public purposes.

Practical considerations and recommendations regarding creative cartographic workshop exercises and overall design emerged that can support thoughtful conversation on how to involve youth and others in mapping places of meaning and how to explore emotions about them, particularly places undergoing change. Relationship-building should be centered. For example, the process of mapping can do tremendous good as an art-therapy like intervention if the participants (teenagers) are thoughtfully considered and included at each stage of planning and conducting a mapping workshop.

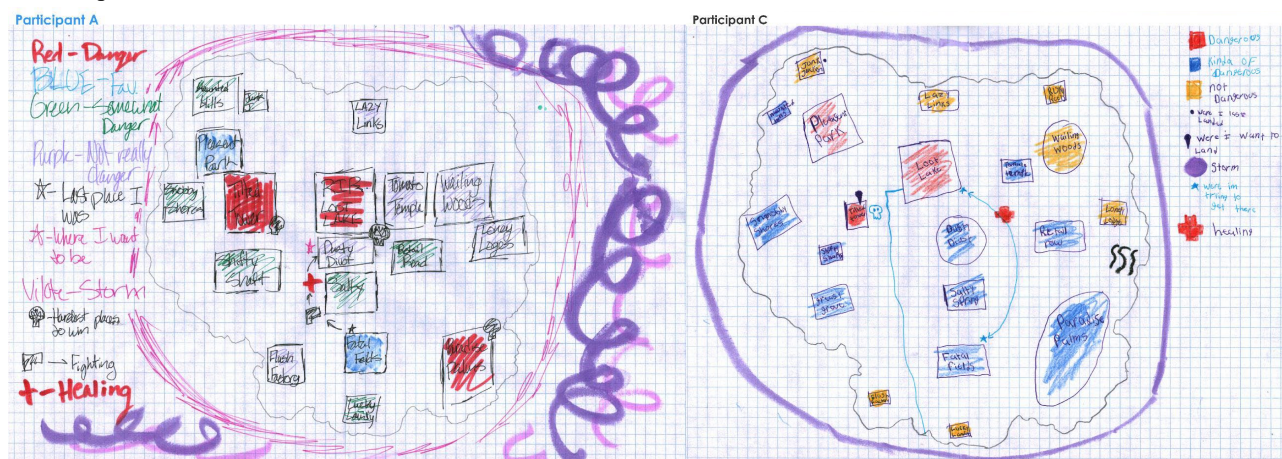


Figure 2. Selected results of a warm-up activity used to prioritize the youth's interests in a videogame called Fortnite within an exercise that highlights symbolization as a mapping concept.

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