



Counter-Mapping

Materials: Pencil, color pencils, paper

Alternatively: various materials such as glue, cloth, cardboard., colored paper, sandpaper, aluminum foil, wood, cork, etc.

Duration: >60 minutes / take-home assignment. 20-30 minutes for debriefing in class.

Introduction:

Counter-mapping is the practice of mapping that which is unseen or omitted on conventional maps. Counter-maps often play with framing, scale, and priorities among the social and physical geographies represented. Like any conventional map, counter-maps express a selective agenda and a hierarchy of realities represented. They may instigate debates by surprising the reader with choices that challenge the assumptions most readers make intuitively, based on the conventional maps they are commonly exposed to.

Prompt:

In this exercise, groups of participants are assigned a region, a neighborhood or detail frame on a conventional map to explore and “counter-map.” Each participant maps the zone with attention to a different experience of space, such as:

- Mapping distances as experienced by a person with limited mobility.
- Mapping the “scentscape” (odors).
- Mapping the “soundscape” (noise).
- Mapping without paper and pencil.
- Mapping from the perspective of urban fauna (What may stand out to foxes, rats or stray dogs?)
- ...

Be as creative as possible in choosing the focus of your map, and in choosing ways of representing the geography this focus creates. Remember that counter-maps do not need to adhere to geometrical accuracy and they may as well become three-dimensional objects.

Note for Instructors

In class, have students compare the different perceptions of social space represented in each group. Discuss how your choices of relevant actors, objects and graphical strategies differ. What are the visions for and critiques of the mapped space inherent in each of these choices?

Possible Take-aways: This mapping exercise creates awareness for the design choices behind every map, scientific, political or artistic. In the shoes of counter-geographers, participants make these choices consciously and without defaulting to conventional iconographies. Critically discussing the choices made in the process helps critically analyze maps as expressions of historically specific political agendas.

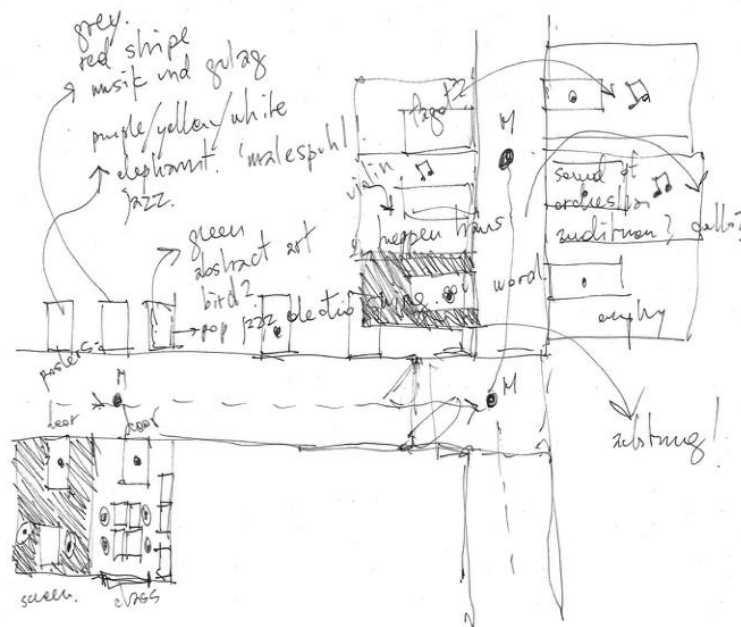


Fig. 1) Mapping soundscapes.