VISUALIZING MENTAL MAPS OF SAN FRANCISCO

groups.ischool.berkeley.edu/mentalmaps
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advised by Ray Larson
“An atlas may represent many places in the same way or the same place in many ways, and it is in the myriad of descriptions that the maps begin to approximate the rich complexity of the place, of a place, of any place.” - Rebecca Solnit
MENTAL MAPS
WHY?

• Every map has a perspective, every map is “wrong”

• Neighborhoods contribute to a sense of belonging/alienation
PROCESS

- Literature Review
- Interviews
- Synthesis
- Visualizations
- Atlas

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The Image of the City

Kevin Lynch
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

• semi-structured interviews
• mapping exercises
• evolving process
SAMPLING

- 22 interviews
- ages 26-70
- 57 maps sketched
- 18 neighborhoods
• Orientation
• Corridors
• Barriers
• Boundaries
• Stories
DATA AND TOOLS

- Shapefiles: sfgov.org, USGS, census, Zillow
- Other: Craigslist, Wikipedia, Burrito Justice
- Tools: ArcGIS, Adobe Illustrator, Processing, Polymaps/jQuery
ORIENTATION

“I don't fully know how the peninsula always lays out in cardinal directions.” - Bernadette

“I know which streets go in what direction. If I don't know exactly what street it is... when I cross a street, I'm able to orient myself based on what I'm perpendicular to or parallel to.” - Mary
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"I think of San Francisco as being a bunch of main streets in small towns, all smushed next to each other." - Petr

“There's big residential areas, like the Outer Richmond and Outer Sunset where I don't know them because I kind of feel like I never have a reason to go there. They're kind of worse than the suburbs in terms of being monotonic.” - Evan
SAN FRANCISCO’S DEADZONES AND CORRIDORS

San Francisco is a city of neighborhoods and for many of us, these neighborhoods are defined by the main commercial streets that run through them. The “main drags,” “commercial strips,” “downtowns,” or “corridors of activity” of each neighborhood are our destinations.

On the other hand, residential areas in a neighborhood may feel like a deadzone to us. Rows and rows of houses that we have no reason to visit unless we have friends in the area.

“I feel like the dead space is just homes, rows of homes.”

“I don’t know the big residential areas, like the Outer Richmond and Outer Sunset because I feel like I never have a reason to go there. They’re kind of worse than the suburbs in terms of being monotonic.”

“In my mind, in the city, every neighborhood seems to have a street in the middle of it that is the main shopping area that makes it seem like it’s a neighborhood. Like the Castro, around Castro Street. Richmond, around Geary Street. Pacific Heights has the Fillmore. North Beach has Columbus Street.”

Where are the deadzones and where are the corridors? Where do you feel like exploring?

Sources: census.gov; gispub02.sfgov.org/website/sfshare/index2.asp
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BARRIERS

“You don't go anywhere past that because there's a hill over here, there's a highway here and the roads kind of end. Why would you go past a divider like that?... the hills and the highway create a barrier.”  
- Petr

“There's a hill up into the Haight... It's not that far away, but I don't go there and I think of it as distant, even though it's not.”  
- Dan
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TRANSPORTATION

SAN FRANCISCO’S PEDESTRIAN BARRIERS

"I think a lot of the reason I don’t go to the northern part of town is because there are hills everywhere."

Steep inclines, busy streets and looming freeways. For pedestrians in San Francisco, these act as barriers, both physical and psychological, between the city’s neighborhoods.

"You don’t go anywhere past that because there’s a hill over here, there’s a highway here and the roads kind of end. Why would you go past a divider like that? The hills and the highway create a barrier."

"Where San Jose goes out and meets 280, that’s sort of a psychological boundary, further out and crossing that you just wouldn’t do. Potrero Hill, having 101 coming in is a really important psychological boundary. Mission and South Van Ness, they’re heavy use streets, South Van Ness more so because there’s more traffic. Mission is miserable for traffic but it’s great for foot traffic, so it doesn’t feel as much of a boundary I guess."

"Because San Francisco is so hilly, everyone knows how to get to different neighborhoods the bike way, the way of least resistance, the way to avoid certain hills."

"I think the streets are much more of an imposing barrier that I would never think about crossing. Past Market it’s like a freeway. The idea of getting beyond that it seems like a big boundary, almost like a river."

"Glen Park is not particularly known to me, and it’s not a particularly nice stretch to walk down there. We haven’t gone there because it kind of becomes large roads and stuff at that point."

Sources: gispub02.sfegov.org/website/sfshare/index2.asp; bard.wr.usgs.gov

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“It's one of those interesting things, unless you live directly on Haight Street, depending on the apartments available, you'll have one apartment in this neighborhood that will have different Craigslist postings calling it five different neighborhoods because they're trying to appeal to different demographics of people.” - Jerrold

“I don't have a good name for what's right across there, 'cause I don't think it's the Castro yet. But it's also not the Mission yet, but it's also not Duboce Triangle. And so I have no idea, like those two blocks down there, I don't know if they have a name.” - Angelica
BOUNDARIES

SKETCHING BOUNDARIES

Neighborhood polygon shapefiles from Zillow, the San Francisco Planning Department, the Association of San Francisco Realtors and Bernt Wahl's neighborhood mapping project.
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GAME

• Dataplay

• Worrying about being “right”
FUTURE WORK

- Restaurants
- Fog
- Micro-neighborhoods
- Paths
- The Wiggle
- Transportation Choices
- Class/socioeconomic issues
- Dioramas
- Just to name a few, given time and data
CONCLUSIONS

I want NEW WAYS of looking at the world. The planet is a friggin' OBLATE SPHEROID: we can put anything at the top! And I humbly suggest my kitchen, because then if anyone ever wants delicious tacos, all they have to do is GO NORTH.

Also, sailors will navigate the seas based on relative position to delicious tacos.

Sometimes, SOMETIMES, I worry my ideas are too awesome.

LATER:
Everyone always says, "I want to make the world a better place", but nobody's helping me print sweet new maps and make tacos for polar explorers!

Maybe they don't know where to go? I should get these maps out asap.

THANKS

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QUESTIONS?