

For my doctoral work on female same-sex desire, citizenship and identity in Trinidad, I used maps as a way to gather data. I call my process Subjective mapping - because it maps a person's subjectivities - or the ways in which one is 'subject to' various forces, processes or phenomena. In my research, I asked participants to draw a map of where they feel safe to express themselves regarding their sexuality. This leaves open 4 points of interpretation: map, safe, express oneself, and sexuality. Subjective mapping involves the participant reflecting on their experiences in order to define these concepts as it pertains to them, but also to assess their own relationships to space.

Today we're going to talk about maps and mapping as a process. As we go through, I will make a few assertions about Maps.

Mapping has been called mental mapping and cognitive mapping by others who have used it, both terms pointing to the ordering/structuring of space in the mind/through memory, and through one's conscious and unconscious negotiations of space and social relationships. The maps created are unique, varying in content and form from person to person based on their interpretations of various concepts and spaces.

[SLIDE] To demonstrate this, we need not even look at subjective maps. More commonplace maps that we encounter every day are also subjective, [assertion 1] yet often taken as truth or true representations. This means that all maps are drawn from personal experience, whether that includes training in cartography, or travel, one's education and family life, one's religion or dietary decisions, etc. This also means that [assertion 2] all maps are partial, containing some information, never entirely complete.

We're going to look at a few maps of Brooklyn.

Map 1: What does it look like? what does it depict? [take student responses] how do you know? What information is there to help you read this map?

Map 2: Also depicting the neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, this map from Reddit and Flickr, depicts opinions on which areas are okay to live.

They are both maps of the neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, but they convey very different information, including social context and emotions. What do you think of these demarcations? Do you agree with this person's categorisations of the spaces/neighbourhoods? [take student responses]

Map 3: This is another neighbourhood map, this time a flyer for a tour company advertising a food tour [seen on the left, and zoomed in on the right]. What stands out to you about this map? Possible contrasts to the others we just saw? [take student responses]

[it's more free-form, not depicting the geography/roads/layout. The use of text and image. The whimsy. Yet still gives you an idea of where the neighbourhoods are located in relation to each other, plus additional information on what good food can be found.]

This pushes us to think more about maps, their dynamism and versatility regarding what information can be depicted in maps, but also how this depiction takes form or appears. This means that choices are made about what and how things are depicted in the map, leading us to [SLIDE] assertion 3: Maps are made; they are constructed. Therefore they are authored documents. If they are authored then their construction is mediated through the psyche/sight/site of the author [taking us back to assertion 1: maps are subjective].

So perhaps now we can pose the question [if not answer it]: What is a map? What elements make up a map? Or perhaps more in keeping with the constructed nature of maps, what do we recognise as a map?

SLIDE 7 According to OED Online, these are some of the definitions of a map. The first is very typical of geographic maps, pertaining to weather, landscapes, demographics etc. But the other definitions are better suited to our usage. Looking closely at the definitions, we can build on them to gain a more nuanced understanding of maps.

2. A diagram or collection of data showing the spatial distribution of something or the relative positions of its components.

II. Extended uses.

†5. fig. a. A representation in abridged form; a summary or condensed account of a state of things; an epitome, a summation. [alluding to partiality and incompleteness]  
b. An embodiment or incarnation of a quality, characteristic, etc.; the very picture or image of something. [alluding to abstraction]

6. fig. A conceptualization or mental representation of the structure, extent, or layout of an area of experience, field of study, ideology, etc. [symbolic depictions]

Wikipedia uses the phrase “symbolic depiction”, which shows that the map is not just a literal document, but that elements in the maps are often symbols or stand-in for something else. Thus many maps include a key, or an annotation of how symbols are to be interpreted. A red cross stands in for a hospital. If we look at the food map again [next Slide 8], each dish depicted represents a place to get that dish, a restaurant, but also it symbolises a culture. The various foods depicted on the map point to culinary diversity, and they can also be interpreted as cultural enclaves. I don’t know enough about Brooklyn to know if they are, but looking at the map, I wonder if these symbols are standing in for communities of people who are associated with these dishes.

Which brings us to another feature of maps [assertion 4]: They can be interpreted by the reader, with each reader receiving different information from it, and making different analyses. Meaning is not fixed. Maps are documents that one can continuously come to, and still find something new that went unnoticed before. This is especially true of maps that do not conform to expectations of layout or scale. One can interrogate the form that the map takes, but also the visual, textural, and content choices that were

made in the creation of the map.

Why those types of figures? Why those images? Why those colours? Why those places/people/objects? What symbols are used? What do they represent? In analysing maps, we should also ask: What is left out? What is being left unsaid?

[slide] According to Canadian Geographer Sebastien Caquard (2013), maps are visualisations of spatial information. He notes the use of maps in story-telling, often being connected to a narrative, even one that is not voiced or written but is instead subsumed into the map itself. 'Story maps', 'fictional cartography', 'narrative atlas' and 'geospatial storytelling' are some of the terms used to categorise work being done to connect maps and narratives. (Caquard 2013)

For instance, one popular story that has been mapped is The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (1300 CE), wherein Dante embarks on a journey through the nine levels of Hell/Inferno, up the seven terraces of mount Purgatorio/(y), and the nine spheres of Heaven/Paradiso.

The late 15th century saw a resurgence in interest in Dante's verses, with many painters taking to depict these worlds visually. Here are some of those depictions. [more modern digital image of hell: <http://www.florenceinferno.com/the-map-of-hell/>]

You may not look at these images and think 'map', but if we are to use our definitions, these paintings (1) convey spatial information, (2) they are a conceptualisation of space [much like the text itself]; (3) they are an abridgement of the text, (4) and are symbolic. This text is based on a Christian cosmology/ view of the world [more accurately, the view of the world-beyond this earth/the hereafter]

As a text that is already describing a spatial arena, it is easy to see how the Divine Comedy can translate into drawing/visual. But the same can be done for texts that are not directly describing a journey through worlds.

Texts provide spatial information - where is the text/ the chapter/ the scene set? Where are things/ objects/ places/peoples in relation to each other? What are the paths/movements of people/objects/ideas in the text?

After extracting this spatial information, where things are/were/move, you can begin analysing what these spatial relations mean by questioning Why things are oriented in the ways that they are? Why these symbols? Why these objects, etc? What do they tell you about the author, the text, the characters, the context, the situation, the interactions between the social and spatial relations.

### **Proposed exercise - 20 mins, debriefing and discussion 25 mins. TOTAL 45 mins**

On a piece of paper, write at the top, 'My Edible Campus'. Take 5 minutes to map out your eating habits, favourite or least favourite spots, whatever comes to you when you

think “edible campus”.

Exchange with the person beside you.

Look at the map and write down 2 observations, and 2 questions you have for the person who made the map. Also note, how does this map differ from your own?

We can go further in this exercise and have you interview the person who made this map.

When I used this technique, I asked some introductory questions with participants, getting to know them a bit, getting them comfortable before they drew. Some described the maps as they added elements to it, and others explained only after having drawn. I began by asking “Describe your map to me.” or “Describe what you drew here.” or “Tell me about it”.

Do that now with your partner. Take up to 5 minutes each, alternating the roles of interviewer and map-maker. Begin by asking them to describe their map to you, and ask any other follow-up questions you may need to understand or read the map, including the two you wrote down just from looking at the map.

As they do so, compare what they say to your notes - how similar/different were your observations and analysis from their description?

Did you have to ask your follow-up questions?

How did your observations and questions differ or relate to the other reviewer of the map?

What are some of the limitations posed by this tool?

- different interpretations by different people
- the interpreter needs the info from the creator to be able to assess it, like a key
- the maps are “incomplete”, they are “in process” -- made in a process and speaks to a process -- the process of the interview, of their own thinking through their response, of figuring out the best way to represent these ideas in a drawing or map -- they do not represent “Places to eat on campus” but “Places I eat” and also reflects how these habits change based on day of the week, time of day, whether or not we have company, whose company you have, my much money you have, how much appetite you may have.
- if we pull back a bit, perhaps compare maps, can we see how gender, race, social class, nationality, citizenship status, and other social characteristics of the individual are part of their spatial practices? In other words, how do these social factors influence the ways in which we engage with space?