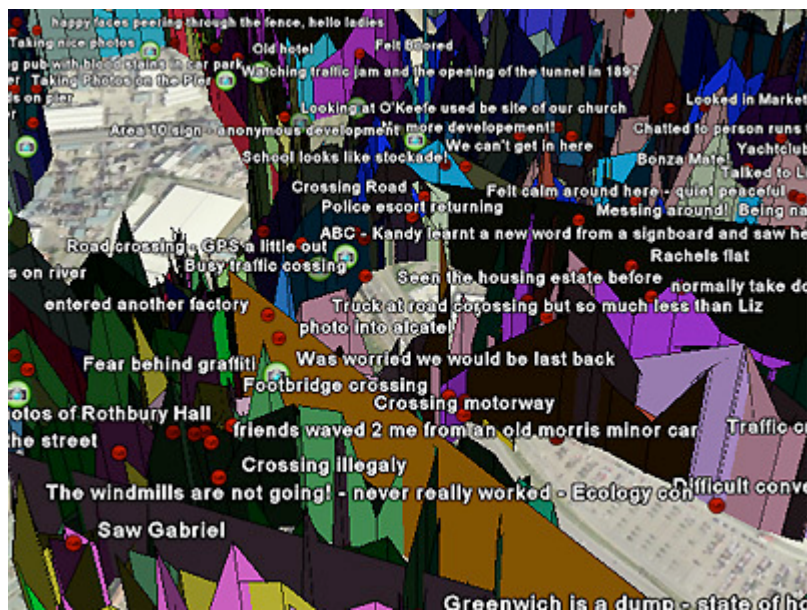


Mapping LiFE

March 09, 2008

Biomapping as User Research for Community Design



I just watched Christian Nold's Biomapping presentation from POPTech again, with Stu. To me, this an incredibly promising way to conduct analysis for the design of community spaces. Here's why (bear with me:)

This is where Biomapping fits into the web of things I have been thinking about lately: User Research by Interaction Designers, studies of vulnerability to natural hazards, Community Design Centers (like the one at [University of Arkansas](#)) and mapping cultural and quantitative information in GIS (not so easy). To conduct site analyses in environmental design fields, there is an overwhelming concern with the physical aspects of a site: soils, shadows, views, roads. This is necessary. What it leaves out is that, since we are designing for people, maybe we could use better information about how they respond to different places in a site, because all the physical elements are mediated through their experience. Mightn't our analyses better reflect humans experience? Not just the experience of the designer, but of people who use that space?

In hazard studies, people working in what's called the vulnerability perspective say that it is important to study

people's immunity to hazards rather than properties of the hazard itself. This makes sense if we are trying to mitigate the human impacts of disaster. Just as there is a shifting perspective in health studies that maybe we need to spend a little less time understanding the properties of the disease itself and more time understanding how lifestyle and social structure influence our exposure to it and capacity to cope with it. What can we learn by studying resilience and immunity?

This I think is the same idea. Getting closer to human experience with our analysis might allow us to design places that support people and their activities and respect their responses to it. Maps like Nold's make great "social objects" around which to have informed conversations within the community about making places we want to live.

Check out his project [here](#).

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