

The Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping: An Approach to Arts-Based Research and Critical Artmaking

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Biography

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Abstract

First, this paper explains the concept of the critical theorist, Fredric Jameson, for the aesthetics of cognitive mapping and its origin. Then the researcher distinguishes between traditional cognitive mapping and Jameson’s cognitive mapping model. Next, the paper offers an analysis of a contemporary example of cognitive mapping by the Romanian artist, Dan Perjovschi. Finally, the research proposes that Jameson’s model for the aesthetics of cognitive mapping can become a visual pedagogical tool for art researchers and students in art classrooms and museums to use to produce art that reveals more clearly the unseen connections between a problem or an object and its relationship to

the larger, invisible global world. Such cognitive maps are pedagogical in nature in that they let us actually conceptualize the complexity of interconnected economic, social, and political realities. They are aesthetic in that they produce new artistic forms actually capable of imagining this remarkable needed complexity.

Keywords

Critical Theory, Fredric Jameson, arts-based research, aesthetics of cognitive mapping.

Introduction

The noted critical theorist, Fredric Jameson, once argued that society is facing an increasing challenge, as we try to locate ourselves in terms of the largely invisible, global networks related to capitalism. In other words, we are unable to map our lived experiences as they relate to the larger economic, political, and social trends that occur globally. This condition of being unable to map and imagine our lived experience in a larger context is worsened by the growing greater fragmentation and dispersal of knowledge through the use of social media where falsehoods now often “trend” more frequently than facts do.

How can education intervene to rectify the problem? How in particular, can art help us map more precisely the complex totality of relationships that often exist and live through our actions without our even knowing of that circumstance? One possible response is found in Jameson’s call for an “aesthetics of cognitive mapping” (Jameson, 1991, p. 54). Jameson turns to innovative art practices, installations, and even film to discover new forms of mapping that can connect these seemingly disconnected or fragmented parts of our changing different experiences into one well focused entity. Such maps are pedagogical in that they let us think in terms

of totality, namely, the complexity of interconnected economic, social, and political realities. In this sense, these cognitive maps can offer effective pedagogical models for improving skills whenever we judge a situation by placing that situation in a larger context. Cognitive mapping can also empower people by helping them to situate themselves in the context of a larger world. Fortunately, arts-based research can develop this model by directly connecting it to education in new ways that Jameson may not have imagined.

This paper first defines a cognitive map using Jameson's perspective. It then offers an explanation of the similarities and differences between regular cognitive maps and Jameson's model and why his model is truly unique. Subsequently, the paper also offers an example of contemporary art to illustrate a cognitive map in the Jamesonian sense. Afterwards, the paper suggests that cognitive mapping is a viable and effective *production* model (an inspiration for art making) for art researchers and for art and museum educators. Lastly, the paper concludes by suggesting that such cognitive maps are pedagogical in nature in that they let us actually conceptualize the complexity of interconnected economic, social, and political realities. They are aesthetic in that they produce new artistic forms actually capable of imagining this remarkable needed complexity.

Theoretical Background

The Aesthetics of Cognitive Mapping¹

The aesthetic of cognitive mapping was first proposed by the American cultural and literary critic, Fredric Jameson, in a 1984 essay. It was published again in his book entitled, *Post-modernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The concept is a visual method for researchers, artists, educators or individuals to use to think dialectically about an issue or

¹In the following section "Traditional Mapping vs. Jameson's Cognitive Map" is the only instance where I use the concept of cognitive mapping or cognitive maps in their general sense. However, throughout the paper, I consistently refer to Jameson's model using the terms "the aesthetic of cognitive mapping" or "cognitive mapping" to refer to his specific model of cognitive mapping.

an object relative to the ideas of capitalism, postmodernism, globalization, colonialism, and dis-information. The aesthetic part of Jameson's model is necessary because it helps viewers recognize and examine the unseen connections between a problem or an object and its relationship to the global world. In short, Jameson argues that we cannot just think global capitalism per se; we first have to create new forms of representation that generate new, indeed more necessary, ways of seeing and understanding it.

Jameson's concern is that (modernist) aesthetics no longer corresponds well with the new global world economic system; thus, the solution is to develop a new aesthetic called cognitive mapping (Tally, 1996). Jameson's mapping strategy offers "a model of political culture" by helping us picture the greater complexity of relationships within a seemingly unimaginable, global, postcolonial world (Jameson, 1991, p. 51). According to Jameson, his model was developed by synthesizing two sources. The first comes from the urban theorist, Kevin Lynch's empirical work entitled *The Image of the City*, which studies "the way in which individuals in cities imagine their environment" (Tally, 1996, p. 402). Jameson criticizes this concept as rather limited by being "locked within the limits of phenomenology" (Jameson, 1991, p. 415). To connect this concept of mapping with any ideological critique, Jameson (1991) asserts that Lynch's concept of the city experience offers "a spatial analogue" of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's definition of ideology (1970), that is, "the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real condition of existence" (Althusser as cited in Jameson, p. 415). Maps are thus but imaginative representations of the conditions underlying lived experience, thereby escaping phenomenological description. Here, Jameson argues that Althusser's definition allows us to reconsider the "geographical and cartographical issues in terms of social spaces" (1991, p.52). Thus, he argues that such cognitive mapping will help individuals both orient and cognitively imagine the abstract capital system as part of the physical everyday life.

Jameson suggests that this synthesis of two concepts is what the cognitive map must deliver

in everyday life. *An aesthetic of cognitive mapping, therefore*, as Jameson defines the concept is “a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system” (Jameson, 1991, p. 54). The literary theorist, Lee Konstantinou (2009), saw this concept of an aesthetics of cognitive mapping as a “critical and aesthetic” call by Jameson to articulate the “figurations and representations of late capitalist or postmodern ‘space’ itself” (Konstantinou, 2009, p. 94). For example, the goal is to cognitively map one’s “social relationship to local, national, and international class realities.” (Jameson, 1991, 52).

Here the cognitive map works as a model for individuals to be able to develop a class consciousness that Jameson saw as the ultimate goal of progressive art practice. He hoped such class consciousness would help people in the postmodern moment determine their place in the social whole that was currently dominated by *the cultural logic of late capitalism* (Jameson, 1991). Thus, the new model can work as a precise “intersection of the personal and the social” (MacCabe, 1992, p. xiv). It is also a model which we can use to bring the local and the global together, indeed, the micro and the macro (MacCabe, 1992). Colin MacCabe, a critic and a distinguished Professor of English and Film at the University of Pittsburgh, has further asserted that the model is a “metaphor for the process of [the] political unconscious” (MacCabe, 1992, p. xv) becoming conscious. The political unconscious herein is how individuals are already part of a broader socio-political context of which they are most likely unaware, but which nevertheless shapes who they are and what actions they can or cannot take in their own society and world.

Traditional Cognitive Map vs. Jameson’s Cognitive Map

The concept of the aesthetics of cognitive mapping as proposed by Jameson has been discussed extensively in different fields, including cultural studies, literary studies, philosophy, politics, geography and geopolitics. However, the connections to cartography and a cognitive map have

rarely been explored in detail. Thus, here I explore how Jameson's model differs from, while also drawing on, the general history of cartography.

When we think of Jameson's model of cognitive mapping, we should realize that it is not exactly the general psychological concept of a cognitive map. While the first refers to "the mental patterns people construct as a means of apprehending the world around them" (Roberts, 2000, p. 141), an idea first defined by the American psychologist, Edward Chace Tolman, in 1948, Jameson's cognitive map as constructed and discussed here earlier, therefore, encompass a different, yet still close, comparison to the traditional cognitive map. Another aspect we should keep in mind is that both Jameson's model and cartographic art (the process of using maps as art) both draw their meaning from the field of geography. These connections between cartography in art and cognitive mapping can be seen in certain artwork starting in the 20th century, i.e., some avant-garde artists' renderings then and also seen in previous eras as well as other types of art forms. For example, in Robert Smithson's work entitled *Non-Sites* (1968), some of the Situationist International projects such as the *derive* by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn in the 1950s, and certain pop culture such as the Charlie Chaplin Production films, *The Great Dictator* (1940) and *Casablanca* (1942) by Michael Curtiz.

The use of maps by artists in the early 20th century generated still further development of cartography research, especially the connection between art and science noted by scholars during the 1970s and the early 1980s (Dodge, Kitchin & Perkins, 2011). This interest, according to the geographers Denis Wood, John Fels, and John Krygier (2010), resulted in a great deal of map art being produced in the 1990s and many exhibitions during the 2000s. The geographer Denis Cosgrove (2005) asserts as well that there was a parallel movement toward the critical approach to cartography during the 1980s as well as radical conceptual engagement with maps established by artists who used critical and postcolonial perspectives in their production of maps during the 1990s and the 2000s. This interest in using a form of cartography, especially in crit-

ical art, continued, according to the cultural critics, Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle (2015) and appeared in the contemporary art of the 2000s, thereby shifting attention from the map as an image to the process of mapping as a tool for actual activism and action. The growing fascination with the advancement of technology also inspired contemporary artists to explore these new concepts and use them to represent the world by using the Internet and GPS technology (Maniglier, 2015). In this cartographic and political works, the artists can reclaim certain creative methods to communicate in and against the modern global, now more extended world (Watson, 2009).

These major developments of maps, map making, and the map as a genre both in art and as art, and informed by the advancement of technology, contemporary philosophy, and political world events, prompted some artists to express a new concern about their complex world. Moreover, certain artists, both in general and in cartographic art, developed a “genuine and at times [a] militant curiosity” (Toscano & Kinkle, 2015, p. 23) about the changes that had been caused by the different stages of capitalism.

Nevertheless, not all art should be considered as a cognitive map just because of the use of cartographic forms in that art. While maps in conceptualist art or land art have challenged the postmodern loss of site and thereby worked as an instrument to “reconstruct the space-time that is broken apart in works of art” (Brayer, 2015, p. 60) and then lost in postmodernism (according to Jameson’s argument), Jameson now warns that “cartography is not the solution, but rather the problem, at least in its ideal epistemological form as a social cognitive mapping in a global scale” (Jameson as cited in Toscano & Kinkle, 2015, p. 249). Jameson also stresses this view still further by stating that cognitive mapping cannot “at least in our time” encompass “anything so easy as a map” (Jameson, 1991, p. 409). Indeed, cognitive mapping is a practice that tries to imagine something regular maps consistently miss, namely, the totality of global capitalist relationships, meaning the entirety of the structure of a society as a whole and a closely

connected entity where all forces affect the other forces controlled by the economic and political systems.

A Contemporary Example of the Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping

In 2007, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), in New York City presented an installation performed by the Romanian artist, Dan Perjovschi, as his first solo exhibition in the United States. Perjovschi actually executed this site-specific installation in the course of only two weeks in front of museum visitors (The Museum of Modern Art, 2007).

Using a marker as his artistic medium, Perjovschi drew commentary cartoons on the wall of The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Hall about the then current events of the world, drawing his inspiration from the media (The Museum of Modern Art, 2007). His drawings grew from his work ever since 1991 for the liberal newspaper *Revista* (Smith, 2011, p. 108). He took his cartoon style to exhibitions and galleries as graffiti and installations, using markers to express his opinions on global politics (Smith, 2011). Perjovschi and his wife, Lia Perjovschi, also an artist, were some of the rare radical artists' expressing themselves in an oppressed society then under surveillance (Smith, 2011). Perjovschi offered his own history about living under such conditions for nearly 29 years under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania (Smith, 2011). The illustrations in *What Happened to US?*, the space of the installation, and the invitation by The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) embodied both a transition and the accumulating power of this artist's own experience and vision, thereby becoming an honest representation of his own understanding of world politics and offering a glimpse of what actually transpires beneath the visual world one can see (Figure 1).

In these humorous, satirical, and yet serious and true cartoons, the artist narrates, uncovers, and makes more visible the reality of the global political, and economic forces that have shaped us and continue to shape us. The large-scale installation consists of simple, black-line cartoon

drawings produced by the artist and applied directly to the white walls of the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium at MoMA. To unpack the realities of his work here, I use lenses borrowed from theorists like Jameson and Theodor Adorno. The latter was one of the pioneers of the Frankfurt School of Thought. It originally brought together Marxism, sociology, and psychoanalysis to try and understand the complexities of the major economic and cultural shifts during the 20th century. By using these theorists' understanding of dialectics, aesthetics, and pedagogy, the goal here is to show how this artwork functioned as a successful cognitive map, as Jameson understood and expressed the precise meaning of the aesthetic of cognitive mapping.

The dialectic of this installation is also revealed through its form and content, its whole and parts, and its actual existence and presentation in this particular museum space. These dialectical pairs of elements “map” one onto the other, creating a new and original aesthetic capable of teaching the audience about the complexity of global political relations under late capitalism or more precisely, today's stage now delivering a global capitalism.

The Professor of Nineteenth-century Literature at Royal Holloway, the University of London, Adam Roberts (2000), asserts that Adorno believed that the formal qualities of a piece of artwork can be political, regardless of that artwork's subject matter. For example, even though Perjovschi's installation discusses politics, the work is also political in its formal qualities. The drawings at MoMA are, as mentioned earlier, an expansion of the artist's own style as a caricature artist. His medium, “the marker,” is a working-class medium, which some people might consider to be “low art” when combined with the style of art being created, namely, “cartoons.”

For these markers to be used and their results presented in a venue where “high” art is only supposed to be shown validates these low art mediums of “the marker and cartoons” by placing them on exhibit in an institution long associated with higher art. These cartoons also ironically and freely contradict their own forms, long known as being “fun” and “happy,” by now being serious and sad. The form is able to challenge its own limitations and the presumed

expectations of both “critics” and the public. An example of this concept and its viewpoint is an essayist who writes in his blog criticizing Perjovschi’s installation as childish, didactic, and lame, further claiming that this art works in a newspaper, but not in a museum (Oisteanu, 2007). Despite his unconvincing argument, this critique does demonstrate how much Perjovschi’s form challenged the low/high art distinction and questioned what art could be in the current times. The installation, I argue, reaches a wider audience precisely because of its shape and unique tool.

Hypothetically, once you see it, regardless of your level of education, and/or historical and social background, the simplicity of its form grabs your attention right from the start, and subsequently, as you move from “enjoying” the different shape to the communication, you realize the actual content and message it contains, which in this case clearly contradicts its appearance. Therefore, this art makes you wonder and question such illustrations and how they got into a museum and then think about other actual global realities. You then place each particular illustration in its own historical, social, and political context, which in turn gives you another different view and idea of the world system in which you currently live. The philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, and the literary scholar, Pavel Medvedev, further asserted that “the meaning of art is completely inseparable from all the details of its material body. The work of art is meaningful in its entirety” (as cited by Asher, 1985, p. 225). As such, the form found in Perjovschi’s installation, when considering details like its space and time, add to its inherent value as a successful cognitive map in Jameson’s view and applying his concept.

This work also has a pedagogical dimension that is clearly embodied in self-reflection and a dialogue with the audience. Theodor Adorno in his famous essay, “Education after Auschwitz” argues that “[t]he only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection” (Adorno, 1998, p. 193). The installation offers self-reflection in its content. For example, some of the illustrations critique the actual art market in which the artist is actually



Figure 1: A photo of the artwork *What happened to US?* Taken from: Griesel, T. (2007, May 2). *Installation view of the exhibition, "Projects 85: Dan Perjovschi"* [Photograph]. Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/24?installation_image_index=3 . Copyright 2019 The Museum of Modern Art.

engaged. Other illustrations also critique the ongoing social and political structures which he disagrees with, and yet lives in and is part of, and, cannot get away from them easily. In other words, the illustrations ARE commodities of an ongoing productive art market; YET they also seem to be quite critically aware of their own status as only commodities.

This particular dichotomy gives them a certain distance from their own commodity form. In

this sense, the artist as a subject is reflecting consciously on the reality he lives in and that affects him. Evoking Adorno's conceptualization of dialectical thinking in his book, *Minima Moralia* (2005), this installation is like a black comedy in which its own fragmented status is a symptom and yet a solution of the conditions it both reflects on and rejects. Thus, the self-reflectivity in this artist's work shows the wrong within the whole, and the inescapable nature of this wrong whole. In other words, it shows the damage found in the social totality from the local point of view in order to minimize the damage while also allowing the viewer to self-reflect at the same time.

Self-reflection can be explored using the theories of humor and laughter in order to examine both form and content in more depth. Since the form and content are contradictory in this artwork, where the form is satiric, the content is rather serious, so one might stop and think reflectively about what is causing the viewer to laugh. It is these very theories of humor and laughter that help when analyzing this work. While some may consider humor and laughter negatively and described them as "hostile and irresponsible" entities (Morreall, 2014, p.121) and the adherents of Superiority Theory, which claims that a person laughs because he or she feels superior, other philosophers and the scholars of Relief Theory may see that same humor and laughter as a way of relieving repressed feelings or the nervous energy created by either exterior or interior forces, such as oppression by a dictator, or one's own desires (Lothane, 2008; Morreall, 2014; Weeks, 2005). The philosophers supporting Incongruity Theory would argue that humor is a "violation of people's mental patterns and expectations" (Morreall, 2014, p.121), meaning that by the very incongruity of experiencing the unexpected, a person receives a shock.

Immanuel Kant added to the understanding of humor by calling it an activity abnormal to customary patterns of the mind, containing the element of playfulness and joyfulness (Morreall, 2014). However, one could just as well argue here that humor is not educational, in that it does

not allow us to face and recognize the real damage of global capitalism, which is not a laughing at all. On the other hand, Karl Marx's perception of comedy and humor was quite different. He believed it to a result of tragedy or even a necessary replacement for a "bad" past (Silberman, 2012). For some creative individuals like Bertolt Brecht (the well-known German playwright), humor is the dialectical process of revealing reality in greater clarity in order to cause social change (Silberman, 2012). It is how comedians and satiric writers and artists throughout history have used the serious comedic approach, from the Greeks through the Modernists, Brecht among them (Silberman, 2012). In his plays, Brecht creates a paradoxical situation, thereby "demonstrating the incongruities of capitalist social systems" (Silberman, 2012, p.170), thus illustrating an element of the Incongruity Theory of (Kant) as well as Frankfurt School's dialectical thinking, which inspired him. Unlike other Communists who preferred to use more violent methods, in his satirical plays, Brecht, according to Marc Silberman, an expert on the German cinema and Brecht's work, (2012), is able to both uncover and make visible realities often left unseen to challenge their historical construct. Utilizing dialectical thinking in his black comedies, Brecht seeks understand reality fully and even change and reconstruct it through his creative efforts (Silberman, 2012).

In this sense, both Perjovschi's and Brecht's humor are dialectical in their contradictory content and their forms, as they become tools for social change. The cartoons on MOMA's wall place one's brain into a dual condition of both wonder and contradiction. One sees a critique of the institution in which the art is set, as well as the precise aspects of global capitalism that this work contains and reflects and is part of. This contradiction amuses the viewer, and it is the realization that this amusement is derived from an abnormal situation ironically and yet deliberately revealed by the artist that is so revealing and educational. The viewer first experiences incongruity by examining the details of the cartoons, and this revelation of details then lead the viewer to ask specific questions like, "Why are we laughing at THAT?". The

answer then leads to a kind of uneasy feeling. This is the way that the cartoons (humor) cause critical self-reflection, by creating an experience of relief after the mental resolution of the incongruity produced through the original burst of laughter.

Indeed, that laughter is not an expression of happiness, according to Ola Sigurdson, Professor of Religious Studies and Systematic Theology (2013): “[t]his incongruity between expectation and actuality is the reason that humour can work subversively, as it produces ‘a consciousness of contingency’” (pp. 236-237). Thus, humor can often be used to deal with disappointment or failed expectations because the emotion becomes a useful way to cope when something goes wrong (capitalism and its affects). In this way, humor takes power away from a bad situation. If you can laugh at that bad situation, it can’t control you—this philosophy conceivable derives from the Superiority Theory.

Another interesting aspect of this artwork is including dialogue in its form, thereby being performative and letting the artist have people come to connect and interact with him. An interesting video on YouTube, entitled the “unmaking Dan” in the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA-Sofia) gallery in Bulgaria, shows a group of people performing an erasing of a Dan Perjovschi installation as a protest gesture about their consciousness of the reality depicted in this artist’s work. I found the video especially interesting in the pedagogical and aesthetic sense because in their responses during the performance, the performers show conflicting feelings between their act of erasing such a “great work” as one of the participants states in the video, which made him feel emotional, and the need to take a stand and respond to the sad realities the illustrations are revealing. The work delivers not only power in its meaning, but also has the potential of creating a dialogue that exists not just in theory, but in reality.

The work also communicates a temporality in form and an eternity in meaning. When thinking about the temporal circumstantial quality of the work, one might argue that this “un-making” of this installation by the audience as a dialogue also has another deeper dimension to

it. The erasing stands against the idea of “immortality” which serves, as the conceptual artist and the writer of the essay entitled “The Function of the Museum” Daniel Burren (1985, p. 190) suggests, a bourgeoisie ideology. Also, the act of erasing is reflective of a historical era that (multinational) capitalism offers, wherein history does not exist, and therefore, time cannot be tracked. In this way, the work contradicts itself as well as offering an opportunity for dialogue and reflection by its audience. Their response and then their performance demonstrate how they perceive the information the work delivers both as a pedagogical tool and an aesthetic experience.

Finally, Perjovschi’s artwork illustrates Jameson’s perception of pedagogy “that shows itself showing, that takes its own form as part of its content, that demystifies its construction and recognizes the commodification potential in the performativity aspects of all symbolic forms, even those advocated by proponents of proletarian struggles” (Lewis, 2009, p. 447). As discussed here earlier, the installation clearly contradicts itself by showing its own commodification in a form and content that is interrelated and interdependent so as to meet the aesthetics of cognitive mapping goal, i.e., giving the individual a heightened sense of his or her place in the current world.

Application of the Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping

The Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping as an Arts-based Research

In recent years, art education theorists have concluded that existing paradigms of inquiry into the social sciences have not provided a space for art research (Barone, 2006; O’Donoghue, 2009). Thus, the advancement of research in art education has contributed to what Research can become (Sullivan, 2006) by validating “the use of art as a serious form of scholarly inquiry” (p. 982). Indeed, education and arts scholars like Elliot Eisner (1991), Maxine Greene (1995), and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Jessica Hoffman-Davis (1997) have pointed out this aspect clearly

(Weber & Mitchell, 2004).

Art research methods allows artists to study their own complex practices with a unique flexibility that allows for a non-linear, robust, vital, and practical approach to research, thereby fostering new modes for continually questioning the nature of the knowledge and art that we construct (Baxter, López, Serig, & Sullivan, 2008; Sullivan, 2006). Other scholars believe that the goal of arts-based research is to bring the same tools usually applied in and associated with scientific research to the process of aesthetic inquiry (Weber & Mitchell, 2004; McNiff, 1998). There are many terms for these visual research methodologies, but herein the term, arts-based research, in its general sense works well as means to “[characterize] the way in which practice can result in research” (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.2).

While the existing literature on visual research methodology is insightful regarding the practice as research in the arts, it also lacks a clear understanding of the *politics* of aesthetics. Here Jameson’s theory of cognitive mapping moves a step forward, helping arts-based research reflect clearly on how the arts can offer unique potentials for a new kind of political education of the senses. At the same time, Jameson’s cognitive mapping theory has largely been utilized as a mode for *interpreting* existing works rather than as a *method* for practicing actual art making. Here visual research methodology can add to Jameson’s theory in important ways. In short, we have to dialectically synthesize the two concepts, so that cognitive mapping can in and of itself become a precise methodology for arts-based research.

This synthesis is possible because of the critical, overlapping features between the two. Both look at the relationship of part to whole. The arts educators and methodologists, Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (2004) clearly illustrate the power of arts-based research in self-study, as it can be “used to communicate more holistically, simultaneously keeping the whole and part in view” (p. 984). Weber and Mitchell (2004) further argue that arts-based research helps turn the personal into the social and turn what is private into what is public, which “leads researchers to

assume a more activist stance” (p. 984). If we think about this particular feature in terms of the *critical* stance on human emancipation, then the arts-based researcher may be able to critically examine his/her own personal *reality* and turn that reality into a social/public *reality*. By combining both features, an equally weighted, Jameson’s model of cognitive mapping can become a useful visual methodology. Further, in light of what the aesthetics of cognitive mapping can make possible if utilized as creative research, one can then consider Jameson’s views (1971) wherein he claims that “we are . . . so far removed from the realities of production and work that we inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience” (Jameson, 1971, p. xviii). In the modern age, we are removed from the processes that an object or (a commodity) lived before it reaches our hands, and that such an aspect actually flattens, and simplifies the complexities and complications of a reality that this object has lived already, the human labor that was put into that reality, the amount of time consumer, and so on. The artist-researcher can thus be in a unique position to overcome this division by inventing new forms of “seeing” that have not yet fully anticipated by the onward march of capitalism.

Finally, the applications of visual research methodologies, such as arts-based research when synthesized with the aesthetics of cognitive mapping, in light of Jameson’s claim, can help us see the realities of others by examining our own reality (at least by examining the production process of a single object that we do acquire), thereby allowing ourselves to see the universe we live in holistically, through recognizing the part we occupy and being able to look dynamically back and forth at the space around us and then the world around us. As such, we might come to understand the world and our place in it better. This process will give all individuals more awareness and understanding of the complex realities and the layers of meaning in the material life surrounding us and allow us to see the parts and the whole and their relationship dynamically and truthfully.

The Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping as Critical Art Making

This model of cognitive mapping might also be applied in classroom or a museum by educators. Wherein, educators could first offer a description of cognitive mapping as an aesthetic-political intervention. They can then provide examples from contemporary art for students to gain better understanding of how maps can take on a variety of innovative shapes. Teachers ought to stress how the mapping connections between the micro -and macro- relations of experience necessitate *aesthetic solutions*. Subsequently, participants (students or museum visitors) can work in groups or individually to apply a precise more aesthetic model. Participants can choose an object around them (e.g., their cloths, paper, or perhaps a piece of furniture from the class, or an artwork in the museum). Then, based on the theoretical background about cognitive mapping given them, they can use this object as a jumping off point to be able to look holistically at the world and seek for related economic, global, political, and cultural hidden connections. The goal is to locate and place the chosen object in a global context, as explained in the art example section here. For example, students can choose a current theme or object that is “trending” such as “Slime” that children now tend to make, or buy and play with, then examine this object (the slime) and place it within a global context where its complex realities are more precisely revealed and offered by students as an actual form of art.

Conclusion

Jameson called for a model of the aesthetic of cognitive mapping to imagine and represent the hidden complex dimensions of reality. Yet, he also stressed that this task is always a difficult, if not impossible one, describing it as an “unimaginable new mode of representation” (Jameson, 1991, p.54). However, by bringing this model of cognitive mapping into contact with arts-based research can offer new opportunities for tackling this very difficulty. Precisely, because the significance of cognitive mapping rests in its unique position at the intersection of pedagogy

and aesthetics. The pedagogical aspect is its dialectical nature, which allows for looking at things from multiple perspectives. Its aesthetic aspect is the possibility of inventing new ways of seeing and making.

Because cognitive mapping has *both* educational and aesthetic dimensions, Jameson's model for cognitive mapping can, as proposed herein, become a methodological starting point for an ever more critical and creative form of arts-based research (or other variations of visual research) undertaken by artists/researchers, educators, and students. The proposed methodology can help the artist/researcher develop an artistic creative project while yet being guided by a dialectical imagination and maintaining a personal critical commitment to political empowerment. The goal indeed is to help artists, teachers, and students create works of art that expand their own perceptions of the complex and interrelated social, economic and political realities existing in the world around them and take action to advance the living conditions of their own or that of others around them in the world.

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