



San Francisco Emotion Map

by Christian Nold

Common everyday maps typically show static architecture and exclude the people who inhabit and create the place. The San Francisco Emotion Map attempts to remedy this by mapping the space of human perception and experience.

Over a period of five weeks, 98 individuals took part in Christian Nold's Emotion Map project commissioned and hosted by Southern Exposure, a non-profit, artist-run organization located in the Mission District. A series of weekly workshops took place whereby the participants were invited to walk around the area using Nold's custom built Bio Mapping device. The device combined a finger cuff sensor which recorded the wearer's Galvanic Skin Response (GSR), an index of emotional response, with a Global Positioning System (GPS) which located the wearer's position on the earth. Derived from the polygraph, a system used by law enforcement agencies to identify when a person is lying, the finger cuff sensor is used in

a much more diplomatic way. Instead of handing over one's own biometric data to an authority for judging, the participant is instead asked to interpret their body's response allowing for a more subtle understanding of their experiences.

Starting at Southern Exposure, each participant walked for up to an hour throughout the Mission District and surrounding areas. Upon returning to the gallery the collected data was downloaded to a computer where each participant could view their personal 'emotion map' as a series of high and low peaks (represented on the map as dots of varying colors). The arousal response recorded by the device could be positive or negative and required active interpretation to make sense of. In the workshops, each participant studied their own track and then talked with the group about their 'emotion map' in relation to their experiences on the walk. As a result of this reflection,

they added annotations to points along their track that they considered memorable or important.

All together, 98 individuals' annotated tracks were gathered, combined, and overlaid in order to create the communal San Francisco Emotion Map. On the map, the overall pattern of dots shows where the participants walked. The color of the dots represents the combined emotional data of all the participants with red signifying high arousal and black signifying low arousal. When looking at the entire map, there is a general arousal gradient from high in the center to low near the edges. The density of red dots and annotations indicate hotspots of communal arousal, while the darker dots show areas of communal calm. There are a number of distinct clusters of red dots on the map. The cluster around Southern Exposure can be attributed to the participants' unease of being wired up with the Bio Mapping device, an unfamiliar piece of

equipment with many wires involved. Another vivid red cluster can be seen at the intersection of 24th and Mission. This intersection, centered around a major BART (local train) station, is extremely busy with social interactions. The workshop participants often remarked on the Evangelists, commuters, skateboarders, demonstrators, as well as the people outside of the local McDonalds. There are interesting arousal and annotation clusters around the three parks in the area - Dolores Park, Precita Park, and Bernal Hill. These areas provide inspiring views of the city as well as provoke reflection on past memories.

It is also interesting to look at the clusters gathered along the different roadways in the city. The heavily frequented Valencia Street shows up strongly while the surrounding residential streets seem universally calm. Cesar Chavez, a major thoroughfare through the south side of the city as well as an onramp to a major highway, appears to be

universally disliked for being a highly trafficked and noisy street. Clusters are also found on streets full of murals like Balmy Alley, as well as around the pocket parks like Jury Commons, where communal arousal and the large number of positive annotations indicate the hidden landmarks of the Mission District.

Apart from these communal patterns it is remarkable to look at the diversity and uniqueness of an individual's experience of the city. Some people's responses are shaped by their memories while inspiring views, old Victorian houses, or green spaces influenced others. There are still others who responded by absorbing the present.

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Download a PDF version of this map, individual participants' tracks and background information about the project and process at www.sfiomapping.net