

Finding “The Other Paris” through Creative Cartography

Over seven weeks in July and August, I traversed the streets of Paris, distributing over 500 blank maps of the city to booksellers, tourists, businessmen and artists, among others. The goal of this pursuit was to investigate Parisian life according to Parisians. In the American eye, Paris is often seen as the City of Love and Light, and is reduced to monuments like the Eiffel Tower or the Arc de Triomphe. Indeed, when I first visited Paris, I was surprised and slightly disappointed at the reality of the city, which like all other cities, has flaws that are inconsistent with the idealized depiction of tourist destinations. This project sought to discover such inconsistencies, which render Paris a far richer and more nuanced metropolis than even the Louvre and Notre Dame could suggest. Essentially, I embarked on a search for “The Other Paris” by using creative cartography as a means of investigation.

I chose to use maps as a way to examine the reality of life in Paris because I believe that they can be a very powerful mode of both personal and cultural expression. Places are not mapped if they are not important or remembered, be they famous museums or nondescript *boulangeries* where someone goes every morning to get bread for their family. When people fill out a personal map, they are marking the places that are significant in their life, whether or not they intend to. By giving Parisians the opportunity to tell their story on a map, I hoped to unveil such places, which in turn would reveal the true character of Paris according to those who actually live there.

By the end of my seven weeks in Paris, I had given hundreds of maps to people in the streets and received over 50 responses from those I had met. These 50 different versions of Paris revealed secrets and memories of daily life in the city, a point of view that is often ignored. They told of the best view in Paris (from the Parc de Belleville), the best time to be in the city (when

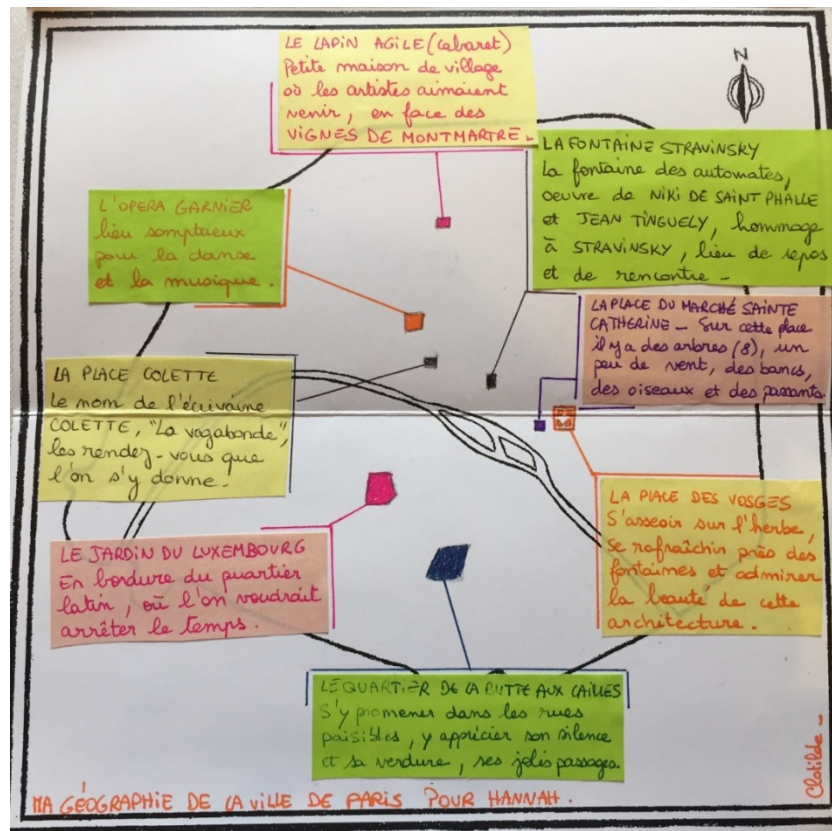
it's snowing), and where to find the best ice cream (Berthillon on the Ile Saint-Louis). They also told of the nightmare that is finding an apartment, of the hordes of tourists that render certain areas completely impassable, and of financial woes that prohibit living within city limits. The maps showed both the typically glamorous and surprisingly inelegant sides of Paris, from favorite parks to high levels of pollution. Finally, they debunked the notion of a romantic utopia and portrayed a far more complex city, with which each person has their own individual relationship. At the end of this report I have included four examples of responses I received, three of which are maps. The fourth example is a letter that was written to me describing a daily routine in Paris.

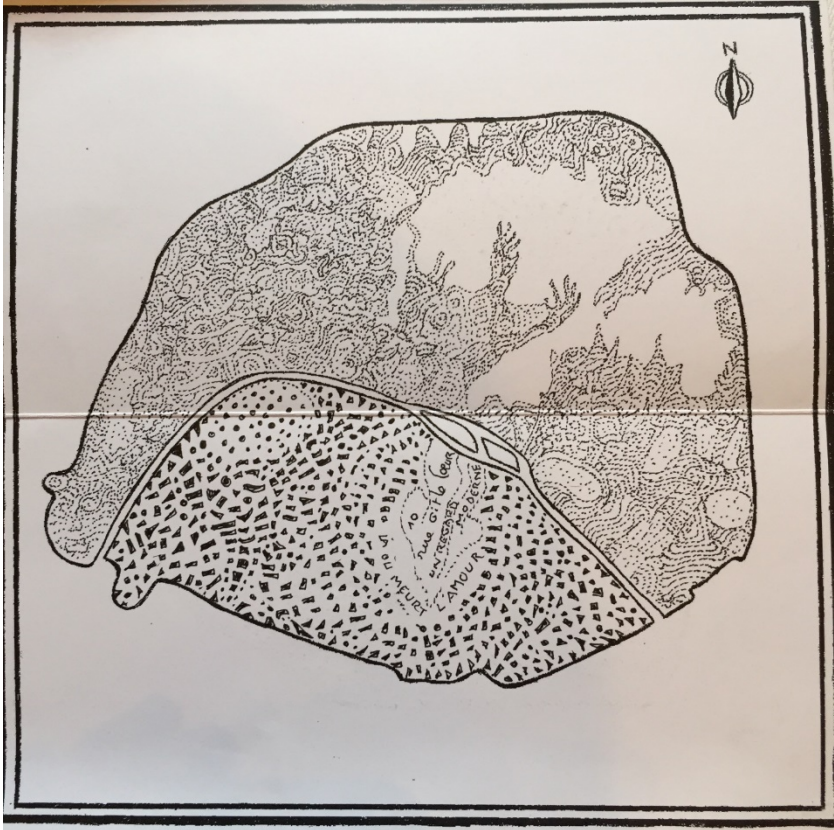
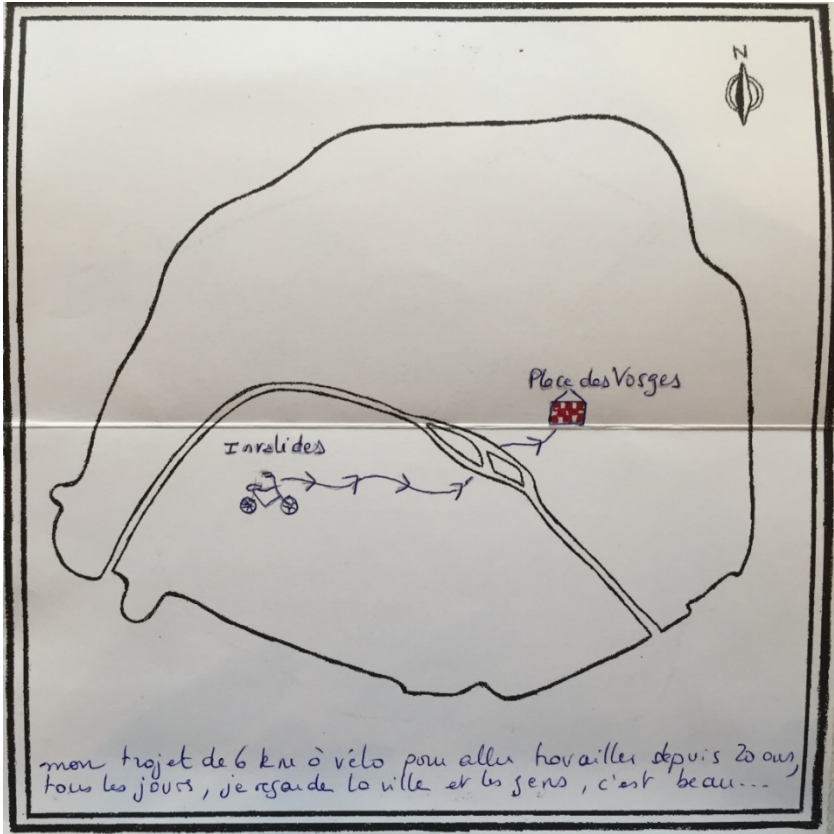
While the maps themselves are a fascinating view into the day-to-day lives of Parisians, I believe I gained more from my personal interactions with those I met on the streets while conducting the project. Some people simply told me stories about their lives, while others filled out their maps right in front of me, explaining everything they were marking down. Still others took me on tours of their favorite places, bringing me to little known bike paths and obscure bookshops in the Latin Quarter. Most people I approached were eager to tell me their own stories of Paris, and they were often quite appreciative that my interest in the city went beyond just tourist destinations. One afternoon in the Marais, I gave six maps to a man who spent nearly 45 minutes lamenting the behavior of tourists in Paris. He was frustrated with the speed at which they moved, rarely staying for long enough to get a feel for the city, and never stopping to take their eyes off of their iPhones or cameras and truly see what lay in front of them. He quite frankly told me that Americans were the worst, but that he was impressed that I expressed an interest in Parisians themselves, who are what give Paris its character. "Paris," he said "is nothing without Parisians."

Other people that accepted maps recounted numerous stories about their relationship with the city and how it had changed over time. It was incredible how something as simple as a blank map had the power to evoke such strong memories in many of the people I approached. One man I met near Notre Dame excitedly taught me the fundamental differences between Ile de la Cité and Ile Saint-Louis. He then fondly retraced his daily commute on a map, taking the metro line 4 from the suburbs and getting off at the station Cité so he could walk by Notre Dame every morning and listen to the bells on the way to work. In a small bookstore specializing in alpine literature, I introduced my project to two booksellers who agreed to take maps. We then spent the next hour discussing what seemed like the entire history of Franco-American relations as they contended that France would be the world's most powerful nation if Napoleon hadn't sold the Louisiana Territory. Another woman I met nostalgically told me about how her neighborhood had changed. Her friends had passed away or moved, and in place of her favorite café and *boulangerie* were a kitschy tourist shop and a new *boulangerie* that sold more expensive and poorly made baguettes. It never ceased to amaze me how many stories people were willing to tell as we stood on street corners and *quais* of the Seine, providing me with innumerable heartfelt snapshots of the relationship between Paris' cobbled streets and those that walk them every day.

By the end of the summer, I had walked countless kilometers across both well-known and obscure neighborhoods of Paris, heard stories about the city from hundreds of people in its streets, and gained a new perspective and appreciation for its complex reality. However I don't think I can realistically say that I understand Paris any better than I did before this project. In fact, it has only been complicated more for me, and the numerous stories that I heard demonstrate that Paris is special because of this mystique. It is a city known for having the most beautiful avenue in the world, but it is also a city where garbage collectors go on strike, and said

avenue is covered with trash on an unbearably hot August day. It is a city where McDonalds and Burger King lie two doors down from chic boutiques and vintage shopping destinations. Paris is a place of contradictions, where reality collides with fantasy, and it is often difficult to reconcile the two. In the end, I don't think that one can define a universal truth about a city so diverse and nuanced, and the maps clarified for me that it has no one "true character". Instead, they revealed that the reality of life in Paris is a mosaic of the ordinary and the extraordinary, characterized by an overwhelming sense of place and pride in being Parisian.





Charmante demoiselle,

Hélas nous ne savons pas dessiner. Par contre nous pouvons vous dire les endroits que nous aimons dans cette belle ville de PARIS!

Nous habitons Iry s/Seine en banlieue proche car financièrement nous n'avons pas pu acheter dans la capitale, mais malgré notre âge avancé 81 ans pour mon mari 75 pour moi, nous sommes un très couple heureux après 55 ans de mariage, nous adorons Paris et c'est pourquoi chaque jour l'après midi nous prenons le métro à Iry jusqu'à MONGE et descendons à pieds pour acheter notre pain dans une bonne boulangerie "KAISER" près de la place Maubert où nous vous avons raconté.

Ensuite direction 69 St Germain, place de l'Odéon rue DuFOUR puis la rue de Sévres où nous faisons quelques courses à la grande épicerie du "BON MARCHÉ" qui n'est pas bon marché du tout mais où l'on trouve de bons produits. Puis nous prenons le métro pour rentrer à Iry s/Seine jusqu'au lendemain pour le même programme.

Côté jardin notre préféré est le jardin du Luxembourg. Un autre endroit que nous adorons très Notre Dame est la rue St Louis en l'île.

Bien sûr la TOUR EIFFEL, le TROCADERO, l'avenue des Champs-Élysées et la butte Montmartre mais nous y allons moins souvent car c'est plus loin de chez nous.

Tout ça ce que nous pouvons vous dire, je ne sais pas si cela vous servira mais c'est pour répondre à la gentillesse de votre demande.

Sincères salutations.

Jepp