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The power in maps: Reviewing a ‘youth violence’ systems map as discursive intervention

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Abstract: This paper offers a reflection on a systems mapping experiment undertaken as part of the *Redesign Youth Futures* project, which aimed to visualise the complex system producing youth violence in London. The paper brings together key ideas in the practice of systems thinking and mapping, with contributions from the literature on design and power, to theorise the map as an intervention in a discourse – in this case, the popular and policy discourse around youth violence. In doing so, it offers an account of how power is operant in and through such an artefact: in the embodiment of (and resistance to) ideologies or discursive themes, in the naturalization and normalization of certain ‘truths’ and the silencing of others, in rendering a system amenable to management, and through the selection of which perspectives and interests to represent.

Keywords: systems map; discourse; youth violence

1. Introduction

This paper offers a reflection on a systems mapping experiment undertaken as part of the *Redesign Youth Futures* project (DACRC, 2020), a collaboration between the Design Against Crime Research Centre (DAC) and Social Design Institute (SDI) at University of the Arts London, Represent Radio (a youth-led London radio station), UAL MBA graduate Louis Edwards, Dr. Alison Frater, Dr. Fernando Carvalho, and other partners including Power The Fight, Red-Thread and the UAL Public Collaboration Lab. It reflects on what was at stake in the construction of such a map – namely, conflicting narratives or accounts of youth violence – and offers an account of the systems map as a discursive intervention.

The initial aim of the project was to create a visual tool that communicates the complexity of youth violence in London, in order to encourage and support policymakers to take a ‘public health approach’ to addressing youth violence. The project has gone on to explore how that tool might be used by local government and other stakeholder groups, to that end (work which is still in progress). However this paper will just focus on the first stage of creating a visual, and will discuss exactly what such visual artefacts do.



Instead of treating the systems map as a mode of researching a situation, or evaluating it as a more or less accurate representation of the issues encountered in the field, the paper will theorise the system map (Fig. 1) as a discursive object. It will unpack the mechanisms by which it might reframe a narrative and generate different conversations. It does this by bringing together key ideas in the practice of systems thinking and mapping, with theories from the literature on design and power. A central concept will be the notion of ‘discourse’ proposed by philosopher and historian Michel Foucault; the idea that knowledge is not absolute but socially constructed, and changes across time and place (Foucault, 1991). This idea holds that we live and think within a specific discursive or ‘epistemic regime’, which determines what is considered ‘true’, and also what is visible or knowable: discourses ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1989, p. 54). The paper proposes that in deliberately attempting to resist certain themes and naturalised truths in a popular and policy discourse, the youth violence systems map is a visual and participatory interjection into those discourses, with the intention of disrupting and reframing some prevailing ‘truths’ about ‘knife crime’.

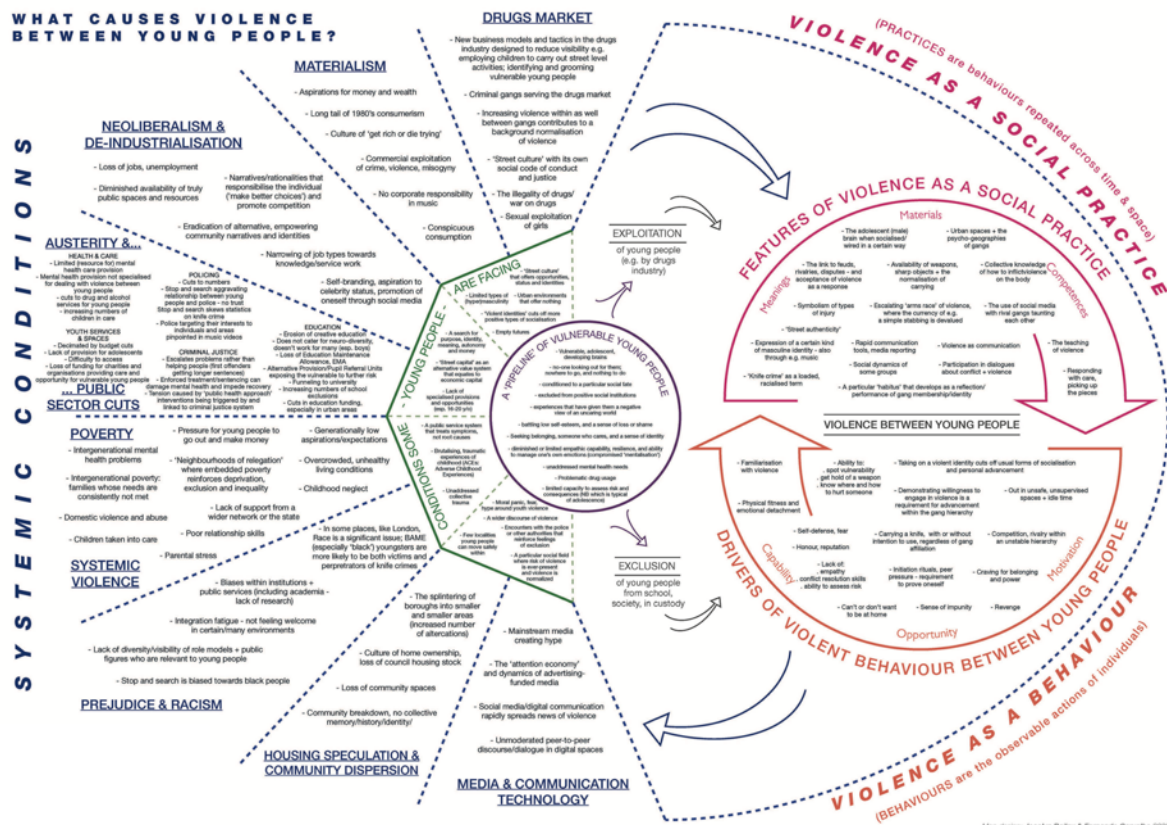


Figure 1. Youth violence system map (Jocelyn Bailey and Fernando Carvalho)

The structure of the paper is as follows. We begin by locating our project in the broader field of systems mapping, and outline the project background and methodology. We then discuss some key ideas in the literature on power that help theorise the map as an object that does something in the context of a discourse. Next, we highlight some dominant themes in the

discursive environment, and the means by which our map, specifically, intervenes and resists certain themes. And finally, we offer some initial reflections on sharing the map with different audiences.

2. Systems mapping as a body of practice

The project, and this paper, engages with systems mapping as a field of research and practice. There is a growing body of work connecting design with systems, as exemplified by the Systemic Design Association and its members' publications (Jones & Kijima, 2018; Sevaldson & Jones, 2019; Barbero & Pereno, 2020), and a range of other networks and schools of thought outside of that hub. In reviewing the intersections between design and systems thinking, Christian Nold notes that visualisation is the dominant mode through which design engages with systems (Nold 2021, p. 5). A variety of conventions and methods of systems visualisation have arisen over the years, such as causal loop diagrams (McGlashan, et al., 2016), rich pictures (Hindle, 2011; Checkland & Poulter, 2006; Checkland, 1981), gigamaps (Sevaldson, 2018), synthesis maps (Jones & Bowes, 2017), and so on.

Many of these methods share a common heritage in Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland & Poulter, 2006), which is a process of inquiry, through social learning, into complex 'problematical' situations. SSM recognises that 'the complexity of problematical situations in real life stems from the fact that not only are they never static, they also contain multiple interacting perceptions of reality' (p. xv), and, second, that they contain people who are trying to act 'purposefully'. The methodology is an answer to the need to find a path through the conflicting worldviews and purposeful agendas of involved actors. Creating visuals that depict the situation from the perspective of different worldviews is a step in this journey. SSM is thus seen as a 'problem-structuring method' (Hindle, 2011) when one is faced with an 'unstructured problem' (Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001).

There are two interesting points to note about SSM, for the purposes of this paper. First, there is a tension between the interpretive logic underpinning the approach, and what happens when you create a visual of something. It is clear in the SSM literature that systems are not seen to objectively 'exist'; the point of a technique such as "rich picturing" (Checkland, 1981) is to draw out how someone with a specific standpoint might conceive the situation in question, and, more than that, to find out where different standpoints conflict or overlap. However, in the act of creating a visual artefact, one calls something forth; one proposes the existence of something, ontologically, which, we argue, has certain effects upon viewers of that object. Second is the origin of the method, which arose as a result of experimenting with adapting systems engineering approaches to the problems of management within organisations (Hindle, 2011, p. 32). 'Management' is an important word to pause over, connected to all sorts of other words like "government", "persuasion", "control", "manipulation", "arrangement", and so on, and fundamentally concerned with how to make people

(and things) conform to a bigger plan. In other words, as well as being a methodology for researching systems, SSM is a practice of management. We will return to both of these points after a brief overview of the project's background and methodology.

3. Project context and background

Youth violence (often referred to colloquially as 'knife crime') is an issue that has risen in prominence in the UK in recent years – partly due to increases in incidents but also increased media coverage. There have been policies developed at a national level (UK Home Office, 2018) and city level (MOPAC, 2017), however stakeholders within the communities close to this issue regard these policy responses to be insufficient, even counterproductive (London Youth, 2018). Many local communities report that young people don't feel safe in London and that 'Stop and Search' practices have exacerbated concerns about racial bias (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019). At a policy level, there is much discussion of taking a 'public health' approach, as has proved successful in Scotland. In July 2019 the UK government announced it would 'introduce new legal duties on public services to work together to prevent and tackle serious violence ... [to] form part of its new 'public health approach' to tackling violent crime' (Brown, 2019). However, the practice at present lags behind the rhetoric. The practical challenges – e.g. of multi-agency working, or of adapting approaches to different communities – are exacerbated by the difficulty of making sense of the situation in the first place, which is complex and continually evolving, meaning even the most well-intentioned struggle to understand it, and design sensible interventions.

The project began when DAC and SDI were approached by the chief executive of Represent Radio who, working closely with young Londoners, and frustrated by what he saw as a system-wide failure to recognise the inherent complexity of the situation, wanted to do something to try and 'reframe' the narrative. The ambition – inspired by examples of systems maps for policymaking (Government Office for Science, 2007), as well as other visualisations such as the Million Dollar Blocks project (Kurgan, 2013) – was to create a visual tool that would aid progression toward a more holistic treatment of the factors driving violence and affecting young people.

4. Map-making methodology

When it comes to youth violence, there has been a deluge of popular commentary, a growing number of policy documents and some academic research; but there is also a wealth of lived experience that is not obviously represented in other accounts. One of the aims of our project, building on the SSM understanding that participatory approaches are appropriate in a complex situation, was to bring in multiple kinds of evidence and perspective, giving a platform to the voices of those with direct lived experience.¹

¹ However, it is important to say that giving a platform to the children and young people who find themselves caught up in violence is not straightforward. Involving vulnerable young people directly in research projects is ethically complicated, and secondary data is thin on the ground: when incidents are reported there is usually information about the victim, but very

We began with a workshop with expert stakeholders and people with lived experience of youth violence, asking the question, 'what causes youth violence?' (Fig. 2). And in parallel, Dr. Alison Frater began working on a literature review (Frater & Gamman 2020), which drew together a range of policy and academic research.

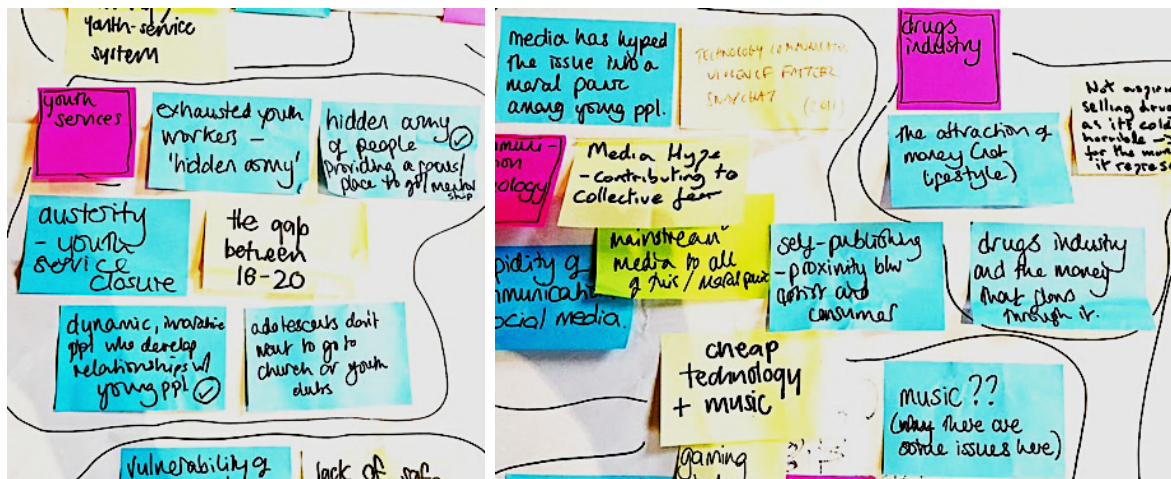


Figure 2. Brainstorming causal factors

Thematically clustering the answers from the first workshop produced a number of themes that were explored further through the literature review, and then tested in a second round of stakeholder workshops. At these, we brought in concepts from behavioural theory and social practice theory to generate further data. We asked participants directly to consider the 'meanings, materials, competences' (Shove, et al., 2012), and the 'capability, opportunity and motivation' (Michie, et al., 2011) bound up in youth violence. The outputs from all the workshops, the findings from the literature review, as well as two in-depth stakeholder interviews and other miscellaneous secondary data became our mixed dataset from which we drew upon in making the map.

Through a mixture of individual and group work, we experimented with synthesizing and representing this data visually, starting out with experimenting with different visual models to get the underlying structure of the map right. This required several iterations and group discussion of the relative appropriateness of what different structures communicated or implied: for example, too linear a visual structure implied more certainty about causal mechanisms and direction of travel than is evident in the data. Once the structure was there, we added a more granular level of detail. By this point, we were able to spend only limited time and resource refining the graphic quality of the map, and undoubtedly more work could be done at this level to make the map more legible and accessible.²

little about the perpetrator, especially if they are under 16 and their identity is protected. However it is possible to understand something of their experiences via the testimony of those people who work with them (see for example (Power the Fight, n.d.). Our literature review (Frater & Gamman, 2020) also uncovered more first-hand perspectives and primary data.

² Concurrently, we also worked with MA Data Visualisation students at London College of Communication, setting a design brief around finding new ways to visualise knife crime statistics and related data. The results of this project are published in a 'Knife Crime & Data Visualisation' catalogue (DACRC, 2020). The strong aesthetic sensibility of this student work is quite

Finally, we tested the map with a new group of stakeholders: local government employees from two London councils, and a group of young advisors to one. The aim of these workshops was both to check and validate our representation, and to explore if and how it might become a tool of management for those working on violence reduction, to support responses that recognise and embrace complexity.

5. The governing power of visual artefacts

Let's return now to those earlier observations about SSM, and think about what such a map might be doing when people engage with it. What is its role in managing or governing situations, people and things?

It is relatively easy to point to how the design of objects shapes human behaviour or action. We are familiar with such concepts as affordances (Gibson, 2014; Norman, 1990; Gaver, 1991), prescription (Akrich, 1992), persuasive technologies (Redström, 2006; Dorrestijn & Verbeek, 2013), and so on, as examples of how artefacts exert agency. But when it comes to visual artefacts there are also some subtler tactics in terms of how they shape perceptions, norms, beliefs and so on.

This is both about how ideas and arguments become embodied in material form, and how those forms do the work of persuasion.³ First, designed artefacts might be seen as the embodiment of discourse (Hepworth, 2018), in as much as discursive contexts both shape what gets designed, and reinterpret the meaning of existing designs. Studies that reflect on the genesis of a range of different designed objects (see for example Jeacle & Parker, 2013; Taylor, 2015; Connellan, 2010; Otter, 2007) highlight their emergence within a particular discursive regime, enmeshed in power relations and unavoidably shaped by them. What might be labelled 'design' processes, methods, or activities are better understood as conduits for the flow and material articulation (Keshavarz, 2015, 2016) of the discourses in which a design project and all of its participants are immersed. In our case, as a project team we immersed ourselves in multiple strains of a particular discourse, and the map emerged as a process of negotiation and debate about which ideas should be embodied, and how.

Objects then become carriers for meaning, although meaning is not inherent to those objects but produced and re-produced in tandem with a broader discursive environment. It is not inserted from above by some higher power, but generated through use, consumption and practices (Baudrillard, 1981; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Hebdige, 1979). Nevertheless, there is an ontological and ideological hinterland to artefacts. They imply the existence of certain kinds of object (e.g. a 'system' that produces youth violence as an outcome), and the validity of certain kinds of view, through the mechanisms of naturalisation and normalization. The banal details of everyday life, the inhabited landscapes of manmade

different to the simplified style of the systems map, and we are yet to explore what it might mean to bring some of these aesthetic modes to bear on the map.

³ There is an extended discussion of these points in Bailey 2021, Chapter 5.

things, add up to a form of persuasive power in the way that their quiet, unobtrusive presence comes to be taken as a natural and normal condition (Taylor, 2015). Ideologies become concretised in material form and continue to exert influence (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). They imply that this is how the world both is and should be. Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2014) finds this acutely at work in architecture:

As seemingly enduring, even timeless components of urban landscapes, they validate relations of power because they become the naturalized background for everyday life, lending themselves to hegemonic purposes. (p. 825)

Katherine Hepworth argues that communication design artefacts operate in a similar fashion, piling up around us, amplifying certain ‘truths’ and silencing others, furthering the perception that ‘the prevailing attitudes in our societies are natural, or common sense.’

Like countless mirrors reflecting and collectively exaggerating the dominant attitudes of our time, communication design artifacts extend governmental power into even the most mundane and seemingly innocuous situations and interactions. (Hepworth, 2018, p. 517)

This is why the choices one makes within a design process – of what to represent, and how, of what objects and ideas to normalize – can be said to be political (Rancière, 2004). Possibilities are both expressed and silenced through aesthetic decisions: as one option is made visible, as it comes into discourse, other potentialities fade from view.

Third, there are some kinds of visual artefact (of which the systems map is one) that, through making visible, render their objects amenable to management: one could even say they invent new objects to be managed. We might think of these as operating through a kind of *aesthetic or affective governmentality* (Ghertner, 2010; Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2014; Ashworth, 2017; Kantola, et al., 2019). It has long been recognised that information plays an active role in governing: Foucault (Foucault, 2007) powerfully argued that the gathering and representation of statistics made it possible to conceive of ‘the population’ as an object to be managed by the state. Building on this insight, Asher Ghertner (2010) argues that aesthetic modes of governing – through such things as maps and imagery – can be just as powerful as techniques based on statistical data, but have been relatively under-investigated. Katherine Hepworth (2018) notes that communication design artifacts are not deeply analysed in the governmentality literature (p. 506), a gap she seeks to fill in a series of studies (Hepworth, 2017; Hepworth, 2018; Hepworth, 2016). Ben and Marthalee Barton (Barton & Barton, 1993) examine ‘professional and technical visuals’ specifically, likening them to the seeing-without-being-seen power of the ‘panopticon’.

Finally, maps have an additional connotation when it comes to power games, via their entanglement with the projects of colonising, empire-building and nation-forming (Anderson, 2006; Kitchin, et al., 2011, p. 440). Power is constituted in the making of maps themselves: they embody a perspective (even if their effectiveness relies on an assumption of the ‘naturalness’ of the representation); certain things are shown and others omitted; they are

‘vested with the interests of their creators’ (Kitchin, et al., 2011, p. 441). And although systems maps are not geographic maps, the metaphor is telling. They turn abstract ideas into a visual landscape, a picture one can do something with. A map helps you work out where you are, or where you want to go. It supports decisions about direction. It tames a territory.

In the sections that follow we will go on to consider how these mechanisms are at work in the youth violence systems map.

6. The discursive context

But first, if our systems map is an interjection into a discursive context, what is the nature of that context? What sorts of ideas are normalised and naturalised by the visual objects of that discourse? What hegemonic themes are we attempting to disrupt or dislodge? What ‘truth effects’ are we questioning? In place of a thoroughgoing (visual) discourse analysis (Rose, 2001) of the contemporary UK dialogue around knife crime – which could constitute a paper in its own right – we present here a few significant examples that serve to highlight some dominant themes.

London Needs You Alive (Mayor of London, n.d.) was a social media and poster campaign launched by the Mayor of London, targeting young people. Each of the posters bears a close-up photographic portrait of a young person with a handwritten caption giving reasons why ‘London needs you alive’ – for example, ‘cos I’m the funniest guy in school’, ‘cos I wanna make a difference in the world’, or ‘my girls need me’. Although ostensibly framed around the positive attributes and ambitions of young people that are lost through violence, the imagery is remarkable for its (perhaps unintended) responsabilisation of young people. The focus is on the bodies of young individuals – they are what is literally depicted as the visual embodiment of the issue, thereby rendering invisible other systemic factors, while also seeming to imply that not managing to ‘stay alive’ would be at least partly their fault.

The *London Knife Crime Strategy*, a policy document published by the Greater London Authority/ Mayor of London (MOPAC, 2017), sets out a plan of action ‘to tackle the immediate threat to safety posed by knife crime in London’ and the detailed text is accompanied almost exclusively by images of the Mayor in conversation with police officers in different locations across the city. Occasional colourful callout boxes explain technical policy language/ concepts, saying things like ‘what do we mean by a ‘habitual knife carrier’?’, ‘stop and search – the statistics’, and ‘whole school approach to crime prevention’. It’s perhaps not surprising given that the strategy document is owned by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime that this bit of visual discourse naturalises the issue as a matter of crime, safety and policing. It features smiling, approachable police officers as the ‘good guys’ (and girls) active in the fight to discover and control the danger that lurks within communities and the city.

The ‘*Beyond the Blade*’ (The Guardian, 2017) newspaper series marked the death of each child as a result of knife crime throughout 2017. Although the wider project, led by Gary Younge, aimed to understand the complex causes of knife crime and find possible solutions,

the heart of the project was a timeline with sharp graphic shapes – reminiscent of blades, or shards of glass – in black, white and red, featuring a series of black and white headshots of each victim, next to a date, and a short written account of the death of that child. Once again, the bodies, faces and stories of young people are front and centre, set in a visual field that implies danger and tabloid tragedy.

Taken together these examples of discourse visually simplify the issue as synonymous with young people's bodies, and the police – and, of course, in depicting these elements of the system, they simultaneously render others invisible. They position violence as a latent capacity of – and risk to – young people, and something that must be understood, rooted out, and policed by responsible adults for the benefit and safety of the vulnerable and wider community. The lurking threat of violence, trauma and death is centre stage, an inevitable condition of the urban environment that young people must do their best to avoid. And in naturalising such 'truths' others are silenced.

7. Intervening into the discourse

So in what way does our systems map engage with these discursive themes?

First, in the attempt to bring the structuring context back into view. In our workshop conversations, when asked 'what causes youth violence?', the people with lived experience of this issue tended to respond with a broad and heterogeneous mix of factors, from environmental, political, cultural, historical, through to the personal, behavioural, psychological, and psycho-geographical. Long term structural changes in the economy sit alongside technological idiosyncrasies of the present moment, or the detail of where teenagers in specific areas tend to hang out after school. And although, to the uninitiated, it may not be clear how factors like 'youth centre closures' or 'education maintenance allowance funding cuts' act to contribute to youth violence, to those immersed in the situation, the connections and causality seem so clear as to be self-evident. Notably, these kinds of contextual factors may often be the result of policy decisions made by current or previous governments. From the perspective of those with lived experience, therefore, the situation has been produced by an accumulation of decisions by bureaucracies, media companies, technological corporations, and so on. It is not primarily produced by the bodies and behaviour of young people. And so, parts of the system map (Fig 3) bring that harm-producing context back in.



Figure 2. The structuring context

Second, is the attempt to counter the dominance of 'behaviour' as an interpretive lens, or at least to decentralise it slightly, through bringing in the notion of violence as a social practice.

Behaviour – or more accurately, behaviour *change* – has come to the attention of policymakers over recent years, as public problems have come to be understood as the aggregate of individual (problematic) behaviours (Halpern, et al., 2004; Jones & Whitehead, 2018; Leggett, 2014). Behaviour change theories and tools such as ‘nudge’ strategies (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and, indeed, ‘design for behaviour change’ (Niedderer, et al., 2018) have become popular in the hopes that successfully shifting behaviours will produce the desired policy outcomes (Jones, et al., 2010). Critiques of behavior change note that such theories have risen to prominence in a time of austerity, and been (mis)used to argue for greater responsabilisation of individuals, rather than, for example, a more robust social safety net (Curchin, 2017), and that behavior change-based interventions correlate with the withdrawal of other types of (more costly) public intervention or service (Julier, 2017). The popularity of behavioural insights and behaviour change tactics can thus be read within a broadly neoliberal rationality of government, where the reponsibilising of the individual (Clarke, 2005), the valorisation of competition as a natural good and organising logic (Davies, 2014), and the rolling back of welfare state provision, go hand-in-hand (Wiggan, 2012). In short, a behavioural lens makes it possible to blame young people for youth violence, and hold them responsible for preventing it.

Social practices, as an alternative way of conceptualizing human action, shift the focus of analysis away from the (deviant) individual. Social practices are routinised, everyday actions that are habitually performed, and meaningful, across any given social group (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, et al., 2012; Schatzki, 2005). Individuals are seen rather as ‘carriers’ of practices; their behaviours are the observable ‘above the water’ part of the social practice iceberg (Welch, 2016). Practice theory therefore offers a critique of the limitations of behavioural theories to interpret social phenomena – and develop effective responses. Targeting individuals’ behaviours will always be of limited impact, when the practice exists ‘out there’. Social practice theory has been explored and applied in the context of research into consumption (Warde, 2005), sustainability (Strengers & Maller, 2015), and health (Maller, 2015). It has also been used to theorise ‘designing’ itself (Kimbell, 2013). It has been less developed for use in policymaking, but is highly applicable (Doyle, 2013; Spotswood, 2016) pointing to a range of new policy levers and realms of intervention.

There are those who question whether social practices and behaviour change are theoretically incompatible. *Beyond Knife Crime* (Frater & Gamman, 2020) introduced Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) as a way of understanding embodied history: the cultures and long standing experiences of family, neighbourhoods and ways of being that violence is enmeshed in. This offers a useful ontological device that draws together, and provides a rationale for the link between, behaviours and practices, individuals and a social field, cultural norms and human action. And in very pragmatic terms, these two theoretical lenses offered different, complementary, insights on the issue. Practice theory can tell you what makes a practice possible or available but doesn’t predict whether an individual will ‘perform’ the practice at any given moment; behaviours can tell you more about the individual in the mo-

ment, but less about the social context, meaning, and wider reasons for a behaviour occurring. The right hand side of the map, then, is depicted as a reinforcing loop of practices and behaviours (Fig. 4).

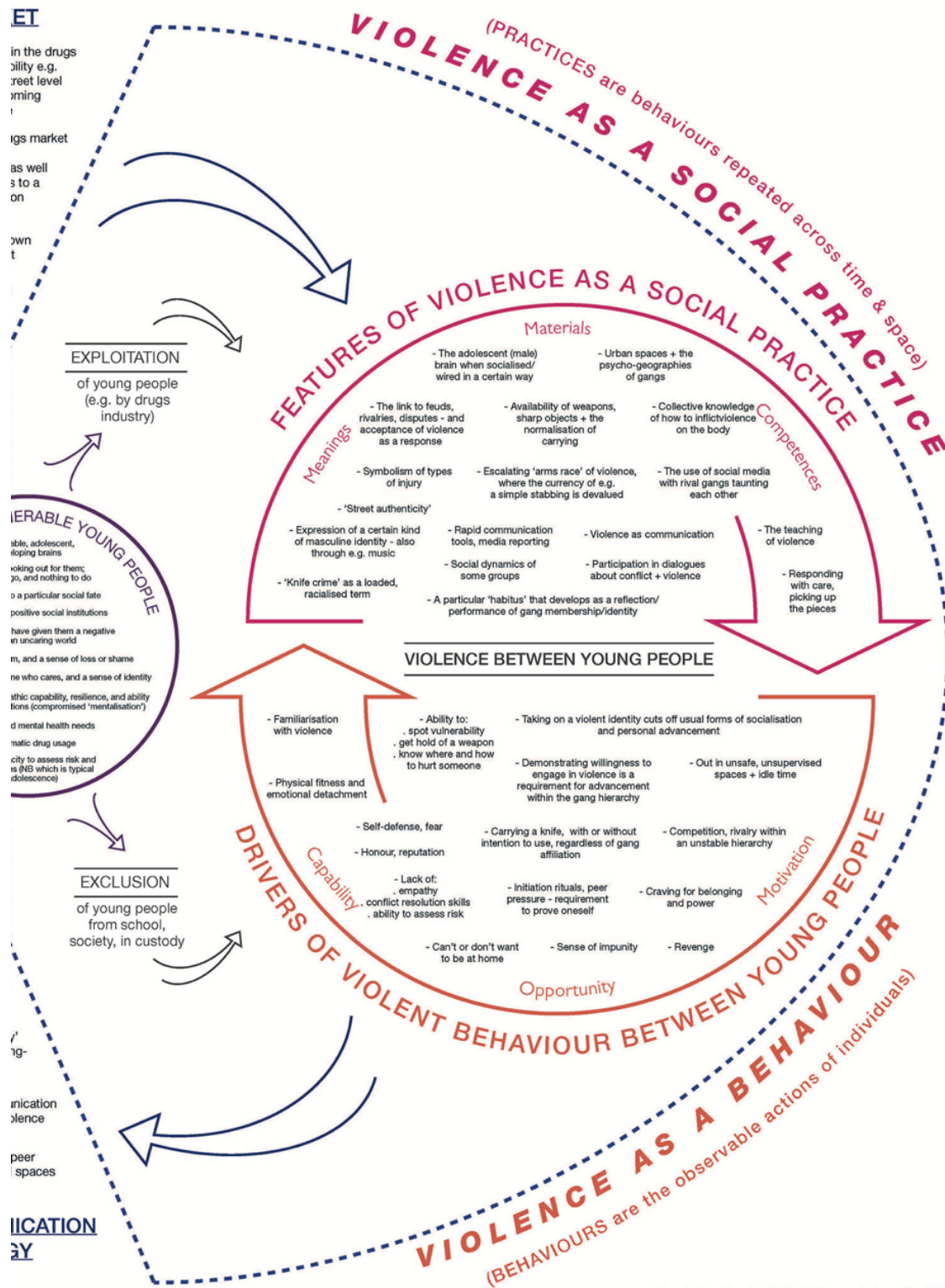


Figure 3. The reinforcing loop between behaviours and practices

Third, is the particular viewpoint the map adopts. This is a ‘panoptic’ map (Barton & Barton, 1993), a bird’s eye view that tries through its structure and shape to communicate something about the nature of the situation, as well as providing the granular detail on zooming in. This is partly to do with the primary audience that the map wants to speak to. Hepworth argues that the skill of design lies in using ‘aesthetic and functional techniques to produce work that resonates within the discursive contexts of its intended users’ (Hepworth, 2018, p. 507). In our case, the audience is primarily those kinds of people (usually adults) who are both trying to understand and/ or do something about youth violence, and who have the capability to make something change (however partial or small) in terms of politics, strategies and flows of money. The map gives them a picture that shares their habitual perspective on the world, that looks something like a technical diagram – a depiction of a machine. This is to drive home the point that youth violence is not (as one young person we spoke to said) an accident, or a surprise. It is not an aberration, it is a consequence of a particular harm-causing system: ‘the system produces these effects, and it has been for years’. The machine produces a ready supply of vulnerable young people, at risk of all sorts of things, including violence. The map also, in its panopticism, insists upon the inherent complexity of the issue, without (hopefully) being so confusing as to be unreadable. It is deliberately not reduced or simplified: the complexity is the point.

Finally, there is the visual language the map uses. There is no emotive photography. It deliberately stays away from anything like the reductive imagery of young (black) bodies. The graphic style presents a veil of objectivity. It looks like a rational, perhaps even boring, technical object. There is of course a contradiction here between the interpretive epistemology of SSM, and the communicative agenda of the artefact. We know this is an account constructed by a particular set of voices, we know it has a standpoint and position, we know it tells a specific story. But it performs as a factual object. This is part of how it (aims to) achieve its ‘truth effects’.

Reflecting on the four mechanisms described in section 5, then, how does this map operate as a discursive object? First, although it is not possible to somehow be ‘outside’ discourse, we attempted to be thoughtful and deliberate about which narratives and ideologies we were enshrining in material form, about which discursive themes our object was embodying – for example in resisting rolling with a neoliberal interpretation of violence which might characterise it as a natural extension of (male) competition, but rather placing neoliberalisation itself on the map as a contributing contextual factor. We insist on the context and draw the blame away from vulnerable young people, who appear as a minor part of the overall ‘causal’ picture. Second, the map naturalises a different set of truths about youth violence – primarily that it is a complex harm-causing system, not a set of deviant behaviours. Third, in the mode of aesthetic governmentality, it draws that system together and tames it for the governor. But, crucially – fourth – the perspective it enshrines and the interests it represents are of those with direct lived experience of, and most at risk of suffering from, youth violence.

8. Reflections on showing the map to people

Our testing workshops provided some initial insights on what happens when people are confronted with the systems map. Conclusions from these conversations are provisional, as these were conducted primarily as a prototyping rather than a research exercise: for example we did not survey participants' views before and after engaging with the map. Nevertheless two things were notable. First, although people often seem perplexed about what to 'do' with the map, it has each time sparked a wide-ranging conversation, operating as a platform for dialogue (or perhaps a 'boundary object'). Second, although they sometimes suggest additional factors or issues to add to the map, or propose possible uses the map might be put to, interestingly, no-one has yet told us that our representation of the issue is 'wrong'. They have suggested incremental improvements. And some council employees questioned its ability to be adapted to analyse their own organisational *response* to youth violence. But no-one has disputed the fundamental nature of the argument that the visual artefact embodies. We wanted to 'test' our argument, but those we have shown it to so far have taken the argument more or less as a given, and moved the conversation on to more pragmatic concerns. It may be, of course, that we are speaking to those who are already disposed to agree with the 'worldview' the map represents. Or it may be an indication of the naturalising power and truth effects of a systems map.

9. Conclusion

This paper has explored how systems maps participate in a discourse, with reference to a systems map constructed in response to policy and popular narratives about youth violence in London. This discussion has implications, first, for the design and systems mapping community. It provides a starting point for considering the power exerted through the making of maps and the representation of systems/ problem-situations by designers, and it highlights the unavoidably political nature of the practice. If we are not in the business of representing 'facts' but in that of embodying (or contesting) 'truth effects', then our own interpretations and consequent acts of materialisation and visualisation are in fact ethical choices that must be considered as such. We are not neutral instruments but mediators of discourse. Our whole selves – our standpoints, worldviews, naturalized assumptions, politics – are implicated. This suggests the need for rigorous reflection, reflexivity, and reading widely around one's subject, so that we are as aware as possible of the discursive ideas we are reproducing and normalizing, or alternatively resisting, through acts of representation. For the policy and 'design for policy' community, the paper provides an articulation of how visual artefacts exert specific kinds of governmental power that are different to, for example, written texts, and how they might function within wider dialogues on policy problems. It also serves the wider *Redesign Youth Futures* project – and future users thereof – by clarifying some of the aesthetic-political choices made in the construction of the map.

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