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The Map as Sign: Peircean Semiotics and the Map as an Actor-Network

The use of mind maps, concept maps, and topic maps are important to help individuals better comprehend existing knowledge, and to serve as software platforms for collaborative work. The latter is especially important in dealing with 'wicked' problems that require heterogenous groups working together contributing their unique knowledge from their own respective areas of expertise. The use of mind mapping programs such as Compendium, CMaps, and Freemind demonstrate various attempts to use visual representations to better understand and comprehend topics and concepts. The similarity throughout these various systems are the graphical representation of topics using geometrical shapes as nodes, and using lines to join the geometrical shapes, thereby creating 'webs' or 'networks'. While this is often a take-for-granted process, this paper would like to argue that the processes are actually impregnated with meaning upon analysis using Peircean semiotics and Actor-Network approaches. These approaches help to bring a new perspective to the process of facilitating using Compendium software. The icons used in the software are not merely graphical representations of concepts and ideas, but are also actively involved in shaping the entire facilitation process. The icons are active agents - they are *actors* from the perspective of the actor-network approach. By viewing the icons and nodes as active agents, an alternative direction of development in Compendium can be conceived of, one that could aid in the project of augmenting human intelligence.