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*THE GOOGLE TRILOGY - COMPENDIUM:
Or on the Rise of the Media-Flâneur*

A layer of subtle threads connects digital cartographic techniques, map users, and mapping technologies. To each kind of map, corresponds a certain set of ideals, which informs the work of the map makers, and in turn produces specific subjectivities that operate in relation to specific mapping technologies. In other words, by looking at today's digital mapping, we can discern a set of particular ideologies that guide how maps are imagined, coded, designed and used, and how they operate across physical and virtual realities. More importantly, by looking at digital mapping, we can retrace how particular ideological constructions are mediated and conveyed by specific digital artifacts, and how the interweaving of these conceptual and technical threads informs the fabric of our very subjectivity.

Google's mapping project is the perfect exemplification: it consists of a layered entity revolving around two main poles: Google Maps, with its emphasis on routing and navigation, and Google Earth, with its emphasis on geo-visual exploration. When considered in its entirety, the assemblage of Google services, platforms, infrastructures, applications and technologies presents the world as a seamlessly searchable, movable and navigable representation. Technical descriptions of how Google mapping is configured (in terms of hardware, software, services and applications) can easily become outdated because of the company's constant updates. Nevertheless, what began as a series of mapping experiments in 2007 has grown to offer navigable photo-panoramas in 3D and cartographic maps in 2D through Google Maps and Google Street View, 3D

navigable aerial and satellite views through Google Earth, along with the celestial representations of Google Sky – ultimately configuring Google mapping as the most used and widespread mapping technology in the world. Google mapping is predicated on 'curating' and 'mobilitating' content. Its mission is built upon a constant movement, the foundation for any form of mapping and exploration, here defined in the form of the digital movement of its users and their data, and in that of the geopolitical movements of the company itself at a global level.

The end-goal of Google mapping is nothing more than the oldest archetypical obsession of any mapping effort: that of mapping a territory until the map itself becomes a territory in its own right. In a way, it seems as if Google's users can finally experience the map imagined in 1946 by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges in his *On Exactitude in Science*: a tale in which the Empire orders its cartographers to build a map so detailed that it ends up covering, and swallowing, the entire territory that it ought to represent.

And yet, digital mapping is inseparable from a subject always mediating his/her position and escaping fixity, in a process of spatial and visual mediation that I call *media-flânerie*. Historically, the word 'flâneur' gained cultural prominence in the 19th century, initially referring to people who loved to stroll and wander aimlessly. The flâneur was the first real connoisseur of the modern metropolis, and flânerie, from a cultural perspective, was the product of modern crowds, modern cities like Paris, and mass communication. But does it still make sense to talk of flânerie at a time in which people seem to be more and more confined by their technological devices? And what kind of flânerie is possible when public spaces of aggregation become increasingly

rarer and leisure walks have almost disappeared under the freneticism of western lifestyles? As modern cities radically change and become increasingly more networked, the concept of *media-flânerie* can reflect the specificity of a media saturated environment. For example, whereas flânerie existed in relation to moving through the specific architecture of Paris' arcades, *media-flânerie* is instead the product of new digital movements through software architectures, information highways, data aggregates, and hybrid interfaces. To each new set of movements and to each new kind of environment correspond new possibilities of *media-flânerie*. The *media-flâneur*, then, is the subject emerging from this particular intertwining of the politic with the poetic across new technologies of order and control, such as digital mapping, and through novel creative subversions of those very technologies. The suffix 'media-' stands for the important role played by multimedia technologies, but also, and more importantly, for issues of 'mediation' between predefined outputs and alternative goals that are at the core of creative exploitations of errors and glitches.

The flâneur, as it was first described by French poet Charles Baudelaire, and was later rethought by German philosopher Walter Benjamin, is also the subject who more than any other has represented and embodied scopopic movement, eventually becoming the archetype of the modern observer. Today, what we consider the realm of visuality is constantly processed and dislocated via media technologies within an environment understood in itself as media-process. Can we still think of the Benjaminian flâneur as the subject at the center of such a media-environment? Today's flâneur is concerned with urban spaces just as much as it is concerned

with constant streams of images offered by all kinds of unified interfaces, digital tools and ubiquitous screens – with his or her movements constantly shifting between physical and virtual places. The *media-flâneur* operates in the interstices between data collection, social media presence, and 24/7 surveillance, where almost everything is always ready to be quantified and assembled into some kind of big-data pool. The *media-flâneur* spans mass participation, swarming, hyper-connectivity, collective intelligence, alienation, disjunction, paranoia and individualism – often in quick succession. Yet, the *media-flâneur* is also characterized by an appreciation of gaps, errors, ruptures and instabilities, as if he/she could find in them a way of escaping the capturing devices of media-capitalistic assemblages in which he/she is always already participating.

THE GOOGLE TRILOGY sits precisely within this fragmented landscape of images, maps, media processes, and cultural reconfigurations - presenting, representing and expanding the concept of a *media-flânerie* in constant becoming.

Emilio Vavarella

