

PGS versus GPS: On Psycho/Subjective Geographic Systems

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Looking back on several generations of mapping tools and projects , related in particular to the 'locative media' trend, still we feel that some levels of representation are missing in most of the maps that can be produced. We are interested in locating collectives and the activity of the multitude rather than into locating individualistic practices. We suspect that the logic under which some geospecific mapping projects are developed is the logic of the market or other self referent narratives.

A subjective positioning system would be developed after working on questions such as what is the meaning of location when the activities that are mapped are constituted by human practices? Some inmaterial entities are missing in the mapping of human activities, for example, how can you trace the influence of a writer in a network of conversations? When trying to give location to the inmaterial, ephemeral, distributed and non objective nature of for instance, human labor, human play and civil participation, it seems that all monitoring- based systems will fail in locating the subjective nature of flows of human activity and the processes involved.

Surveillance and Intelligence Systems (S.I.) are based on a logic of identification and tracking which becomes insufficient and dangerous. Insufficient because it doesn't relate to inmaterial information as joy, fear or participation and dangerous because it potentially may be used to execute surveillance and control. Within a spotting system using GPS or Radio Frequency IDentification (RFID) (1), who will guarantee that our privacy is protected and that the rights of secondary citizens (immigrants, sin papeles, homeless, sex workers, ...) will be respected and will not this technology for tracking bodies be only a way to control anyone that may be a menace to the dominating model?

Tracking technologies are insufficient to describe inmateriality. If the description of territories is only based on geographical data (GPS), how can we draw a clear picture of human actions, history and struggles? Furthermore, how can maps be made to represent the inmaterial labor of the people who cannot afford expensive technology when the techno- positivist approach to cartography is the only one proposed ?

A series of reinventions of the city are being performed by people trying to find alternative ways to live in urban environments. These reinventions work as multiple forms of appropriations and ways to bend city programs based on the most efficient ways to allow consumption. Different practices are working on ideas related to the free, the open and implementing ways to innovate in civil participation, self mediation and software culture (2). The writings and early psychogeographic interventions of Situationist International, of those as Asger Jorn, Constant and Guy Debord as well as the categories of daily consumption and rhythm analysis described by Henri Lefebvre are to be seen as operating in the cultural background of these reinventions. 'A different city for a different life' (Constant) may be the motto under which these innovations develop ways to alternate dominant narratives such as consumption, profit and competitiveness.



Constant Nieuwenhuis : Group sectors, 1959
Coll. The Hague's Municipal museum

Nevertheless we think we have to be conscious of marketing agendas always hungry for novelty. We can be sure that any possible form of innovation whether artistic or technological is potentially suitable for its incorporation into the market, even if these innovations deal with new ways to live the cities. What would be the ways to maintain independence from market logics?

(GPS as a means of counter- measure ?)

The use of Global Positioning System becomes powerful for independent media practitioners when it can survey the activity of police or other control forces. In this sense, it can be seen as useful when it counterbalances the forces of world government (3) but, even in this case, it reveals itself as insufficient since a place as a set of geographical coordinates does not contain the experience of the place. Furthermore, it fails when it's used in independent practices if we consider that it makes a lot of sense in terms of market logic.

Who is protecting our rights for privacy in an era of terroristic global fear? These threats to our privacies are being performed in increasingly sophisticated manners involving network technologies and data mining. Nevertheless the problem is not only the technical availability to track bodies but mainly the logic under which such 'identification' is being performed. To be spotted from a satellite means to be tracked as an identity, a defined object, to which some standard coordinates are related. Identity as these data sets, is soon to be swallowed back by a system based on market values.

(a consumption based system looks for identity as a datastructure).

A system working under a paradigm of consumption and infinite profit works under parameters of identification such as age, income, number of children. These parameters are those discrete units used in consumption computers if we may understand commercial structures as such. Our consumption is embedded into huge matrixes of indicators, commercial trends, value coordinates. As this complexity increases there is a suitable structure to synthesize into one body the interplay of relations between numbers. Acting as a body of relations, identity, identity models and consumer profiles are the most effective data structure to attach economic indicators (4). They get assembled in such ways that not only numbers derived from economy have a body to relate to, but also the model constitutes an ecology where individual adaptations and interpretations will grow and project (the ecology of the identity model for instance).

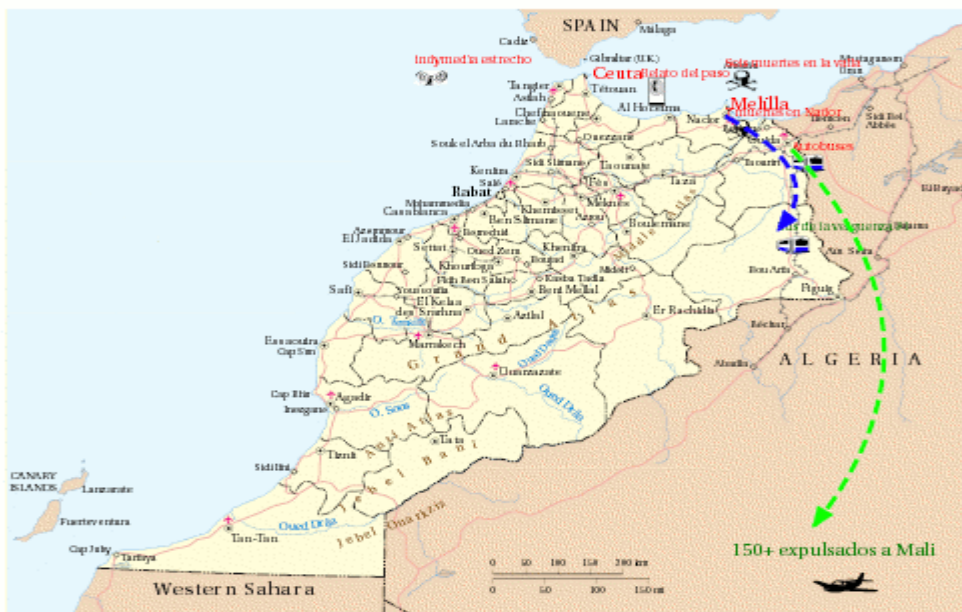
The logic of identification walks tightly along the narrative of war, a subject/object as the target for a gun machine. And war goes along another logic, that of the powerful, the rich and the right.

The mapping of subjective activity, that of a human being acting in her ecology is to be performed in a subjective way. This way may be psychogeographic, derived from the psychological perception of places. Mapomatix in this sense preserves the subjective nature of what it is mapping and simultaneously becomes a nomadic artifact that is a platform for collaborative activity. As a platform it gives materiality to other nomadic agencies. Mapomatix is a Psycho Geographic System (PGS), its nomadic nature gives presence to distributed counteraction.

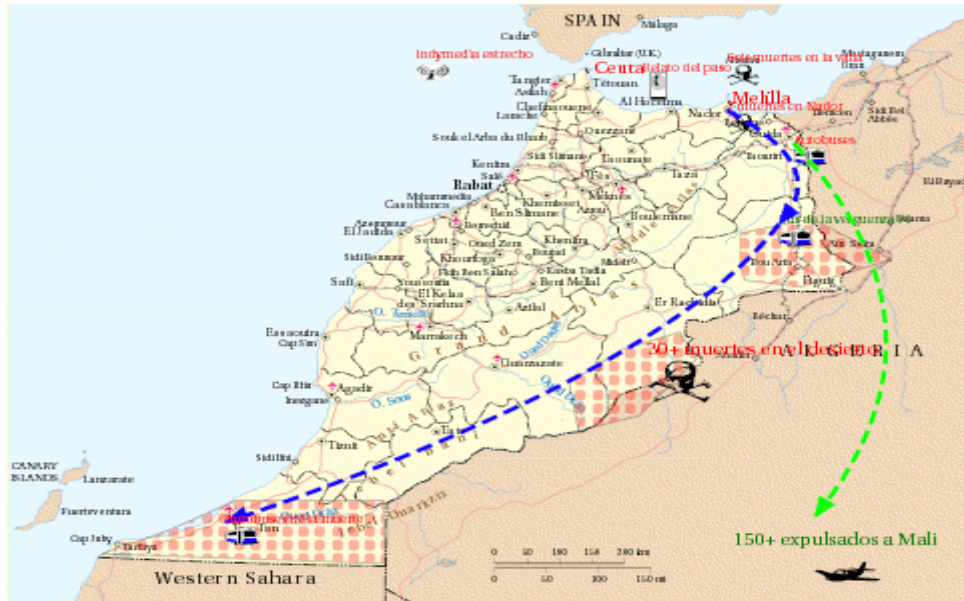
MapOMatix as a geo-wiki, a story-teller for the multitude (of some choices of implementation)

In the times of real-time fear watching, when centralized and controled instances deliver localized and time-stamped information, based on satellite data but processed through a chain controlled by big telecommunication companies, a need for a tool based on the exact negation of these characteristics seems useful and draws a line between service providers and self-organised groups of individuals.

* MapOMatix is not real-time : every piece of information entered into the system can be located at a precise time on the time scale. MapOMatix, in this sense is a geo-wiki where the state of each map at a given moment can be recalled at any time, enabling people to visualize the state of a conflict or a territory at a given date, keeping the history and the memory of all actions performed through time. Used in this way, it also reveals itself as a tool for the collective memory.



Efforts of Marrocan/Spanish authorities to close the gates of europe (10/10/2005)



Efforts of Marrocan/Spanish authorities to close the gates of europe (30/10/2005)

* MapOMatix does not guarantee any accuracy : the perception of events, place and space is relative to each individual, each one using her own subjectivity to describe her perception of territories. In some contexts (like repression against immigration floods in Marroco (3)), some accuracy is needed, but this accuracy is left to the people uploading their informations to the database. In some other context, like elaborating an abstract map of control structures or human organisations, geographical accuracy just doesn't make sense.

* MapOMatix is not centralized and does not apply any access restrictions to privileged users : The feed of informations comes from the actors of the self-organized group, not from a centralized and privileged data feed. We would refuse to enter data automatically using a bridge to a centralized system (satellite or G.I.S. data).

* MapOMatix does not require any expensive technologies : Another refusal is to let mapping techniques in the hands of high- tech users, privileged holders of up- to- date gadgets. Every piece of data located on the map can be uploaded using the web interface, all other ways of providing data to the system (through GPS telephones, PDAs) would be easy to achieve but the need for it is still to be debated. From its inception and in the context where it was conceived (the border conflicts in the Strait of Gibraltar), the need for expensive technologies has always been perceived as a restriction of many existing systems.

All these choices of implementation are based on a philosophy of bringing collaborative tools to social networks, all shareable and open- source. From the very beginning, all MapOMatix code is available on Source Forge (<http://mapomatix.sf.net>).

By many aspects, it is a continuation of former projects of free media hacktivists groups, in that case of the al-jwarizmi versus CNN (6) and gollum/GISS projects (7). MapOMatix is part of a wider project of free and uncontroled tools for the multitude, one very important feature is that these tools can be entirely controlled by their users. they are built in a logic of nodes and networks, where there's no centralized database.

Horizontal networks versus stratified models.

Spotting geographical locations, targeting and navigating are some narratives attached to GPS that are not so far from militar logistics or other kinds of methods based on stratification, verticality, identification, separation and distinction. We can relate to experience in different ways not all based on stratifying processes. A far more interesting ground of experimentation comes for instance from projects working on ways of materializing openness and the gift.

A geo-wiki as mapOmatix points towards a reinvention of locality, not as a source of time stamped information but as a ground for narration. These practices bring to the global space of the internet a structural shift in the modes of relation to experience. As narratives composed by open nodes that enlight a distributed conversation, different dialogues are being assembled as units of the multitude (monades (8)). These horizontal networks contain a space to participate and experiment developing models different from those of consumption.

(1)Radio Frequency IDentification (RFID) :

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RFID>

(2)A thorough landscape of psychogeographic reinventions from context weblog/straddle3.net. How does your city affect you?

http://straddle3.net/context/03/en/2005_11_04.html

(3)Nightmarruecos map made by indymedia estrecho:

<http://gollumlab.dyndns.org/mapomatix/cgi-bin/mapframe.pl?name=nightmarruecos>

(4)Molecules map, preliminary analysis of consumption molecules by elpueblodechina :

<http://gollumlab.dyndns.org/mapomatix/cgi-bin/mapframe.pl?name=molecule>

(5)AutonomiAerea map organised by www.rotorrr.org in Barcelona :

<http://gollumlab.dyndns.org/mapomatix/cgi-bin/mapframe.pl?name=alt-terrats>

(6)Al-jwarizmi versus CNN :

<http://www.hackitectura.net/aljwarizmi/>

(7)Gollum/GISS : free media infrastructure :

<http://gollum.artefacte.org>

(8) Monads in the sense of myriads of infinitesimal changes :
Gabriel Tarde (1893) Monadologie et sociologie.