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Abstract
This paper examines instances of (dis)orientation instantiated by net art works which challenge, deconstruct, and remodel our embodied relationship with digital maps. I argue that such (dis)orientation can be framed as a tactical media practice that disrupts the feedback loop of cybernetic subjectivities by:

1. bringing into focus aspects of lived experience that do not fit the 'truth' of the cartographic representation, and at the same time underlining the ways in which representations participate in the (de)construction of lived experience;
2. challenging the attention economy and opening attention towards otherness and towards the intertwined shifting realities (grounds) of contemporary cultures;
3. questioning the imperative of usefulness inherent in mainstream applications of digital mapping.

The paper contends that such (dis)orienting gestures can be understood as a practice of care towards radical otherness.

Keywords
net art, cybernetic subjectivities, disorientation, tactical media

Introduction

Contemporary digital cultures have prompted fundamental changes in the lived experience and conceptualisation of spatiality and temporality.[1] Philosophers like Bernard Stiegler or Jean-Luc Nancy contend that these fundamental shifts are driven by a radical renegotiation of presence and the present, which results in generalised disorientation.[2] The urgency of this problematic in the context of contemporary cultures is underlined by a number of philosophical studies that address disorientation with respect to moral life,

phenomenological experience, modern philosophical thought, or the questions of being, existence, and language.[3] A wide range of media studies discourses insist as well (directly or indirectly) on the disorienting consequences of mainstream applications of contemporary digital technologies, under topics such as chronic distraction, the problematic influence of the internet upon our thinking and our brains, or the critique of contemporary dynamics of attention, among others.[4] According to these arguments, disorientation plays out on a multiplicity of levels, from macro socio-political questions to the moral life of individuals and communities and all the way to the very basic experience and embodied navigation of contemporary spatio-temporalities.

Upon this general background, the present essay turns towards the fringes of digital cultures, examining a corpus of selected net art works that problematise the embodied cycles of orientation and disorientation instantiated by digital mapping platforms and, more specifically, by Google Maps as one of the most prominent examples in this respect. We will initially look at various net art works included in the Google Maps Residency Program (2018-ongoing) at Off Site Project, turning then to Arram Barthol's work *Map* (2006-2019), Petra Szeman's *Trajectories* (2017), Jon Rafman's *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008-2020), and finally to *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (2007-ongoing) by Electronic Disturbance Theater. The common feature of all these projects is their critical relation to practices of digital mapping in general, and to Google Maps in particular, even if their respective approaches remain very different. The essay explores from a speculative philosophical perspective the ways in which the embodied cycles of gaining and losing orientation with the help of digital mapping tools in the lived space-time of contemporary cultures relate to larger socio-political problems, as well as the role of these cycles in the individuation of embodied subjectivity, and the potential consequences of their disruption in net art.

Glitching the orienting function of digital maps

I will start by kindly inviting the reader to engage in detail with the Google Maps Residency Program (2018-ongoing) at Off Site Project (hereafter [Google Maps]): https://www.offsiteproject.org/Google-Maps. [5]

Giving beforehand a straightforward description of [Google Maps] would arguably defeat the purpose of the critical exercise attempted here since it would be a way of structuring and orienting the spectatorial experience, hence obfuscating the disorienting qualities of this experimental exhibition project. Again and again, the spectator feels lost in this work, as familiar reference points are challenged and disturbed. First, the format of the exhibition

challenges established spectatorial expectations: the webpage of the project presents two embedded instances of Google My Maps (customised Google Maps) on which a total of seventeen artworks, divided into two groups, are inserted. The artworks are present on the maps as pins, trajectories, marked areas, or other symbols. Upon clicking, they open in the sidebar as texts, images, videos, etc. Often the entries for the artworks contain links towards external resources (some of which function, while others are broken), blurring the boundaries of the online exhibition space. Further complicating the spectatorial process, some of the artworks are themselves curated exhibitions in their own right.

The variety of formats is echoed by a variety of subject matters and methodologies, from documentary style works (eg. *Modern Ruin* by Juan Covelli), to speculative fiction (eg. *PET Mutation* by Nacoca Ko), to family histories (*How a Salisbury Family Escaped* by Lucinda Cusdin), to mapping collectives and networks (eg. *I Doxxed Myself* (*And Why You Should Too*) by Bob Bicknell-Knight), to more abstract audio-visual entries (eg. *Haʊ dɪd ju ɛvər ɪskeɪp* by Daniel Clark), etc. The diversity of the artworks is further accentuated by their intermingling on the map, their composing parts being intertwined, without clear separation lines between them, offering multiple reading trajectories and interpretations. A numbered list of artworks, with short descriptions and artist information, offers some help for the disoriented spectator, yet linking the entries in the list with the artworks on the map still requires a nontrivial effort, and the proximity on the map of component parts of different artworks hybridises the intended meanings.

Beyond the unfamiliar exhibition format, the problematic of disorientation constitutes an inherent dimension of the encounter with the work inasmuch as we are witnessing an intervention into Google Maps (a digital orientation tool that many of us are by now dependent on) that problematises its uncritical mainstream functioning and its orienting role. The subversion performed by [Google Maps] consists in bringing into the map remainders of embodied experience that do not fit the 'truth' of representation: the personal histories that permeate 'objective' geographies (*How a Salisbury Family Escaped* by Lucinda Cusdin), loosely defined socio-political networks of care that remain geo-politically unrepresented at the expense of national states and their absurd borders (*Wherever You Are I'll Find You: mapping sick, crip and disabled care networks across physical and digital spaces* by Romily Alice Walden), relationships between personal and public events modulated by geographical proximity (*An area of some important* by Letta Shtohryn), etc. All these are glitches in the map,[6] glitches that reveal (if that was ever in question) that mapping is not simply an unproblematic truthful representation, but is rather permeated by thorny ethical, political, and social questions that are to be continuously renegotiated.

If Henri Lefebvre is right in insisting that space is socially produced,[7] then the mapping practices of Google Maps can be seen as one of the main drivers behind the production of space in contemporary digital cultures,[8] and as one of the main factors in naturalising this socio-politico-economic production of space in the guise of an 'objective truth'. Therefore, the appropriation and misuse of Google Maps (détournement) in the works discussed here invites us to reassess not only our relationship with digital maps but also the contemporary experience of space. They seem to resonate in a way with the situationist practice of dérive in its commitment to reassert and research 'psychogeographical effects' that are integral to the lived experience of space.[9] A number of works in the exhibition critically address the tight intertwining between lived spatio-temporal experience (individual and collective) and its construction and deconstruction through digital technologies (eg. *Kiss me thru the phone* by Sara Gulamali & Maria Mahfooz, or *The New Bucolic* by Jack Smurthwaite), including the role of digital mapping tools in this process (*Ruta por España* by Marion Balac, *Privacy during the Pandemic* by Tamara Kametani, as well as the documentation of the offline work *The Sea Stayed Calm for 180 Miles*, also by Tamara Kametani, which is part of *The New Bucolic* by Jack Smurthwaite). What these works suggest is that digital mapping (as is the case with other digital technologies) is not simply a question of representation, but also opens the problem of the (de)construction of the very experience of reality.

Arram Barthol's artwork *Map* (2006-2019), which consists of a series of large-scale public sculptures designed to look like Google Maps pins, also brings into focus the 'real world' embodied consequences of the use of digital maps upon the ways in which we experience the world. Unlike the critical interventions upon the digital map from the [Google Maps] exhibition mentioned above, this work appropriates a specific digital icon and transplants it into the physical public space. The strange feeling provoked by encountering this very familiar symbol outside of the digital map raises stringent questions regarding the datafication and commodification of spatio-temporal experience by corporate interests.[10] Like [Google Maps], *Map* also questions the dynamic of orientation and disorientation instantiated by digital mapping tools. The pins turned into analog physical sculptures are stripped of their functionality and become vectors for interrogating the premises and consequences of current paradigms of digital mapping. The pins hence come to be disorienting rather than orienting: they open up a problem rather than offering a solution (a destination).

Reading *Map* alongside [Google Maps] – reading the critical intervention in the public space that problematises the ways in which it is shaped by digital mapping tools, along with the

playful interventions upon the digital map that question its underlying premises and consequences – helps us set up the focal point of this essay: artistic appropriations of digital orientation tools that open up for the spectator a critical disorienting perspective. Instead of an opposition between desirable orientation and dreaded disorientation, these works suggest that disorientation, for all its potential dangers, is an ethical imperative, just as much as orientation is. The problem is not that of simply arguing for orientation against disorientation or vice versa – both options would be hopelessly naive. As Marcella Schmidt di Friedberg shows in a text that aims to present the current state of research on disorientation in a variety of domains ranging from geography and philosophy to art, disorientation can be seen both as a negative, potentially tragic limitation, and, at the same time, as a way of breaking from traditional frameworks and opening new perspectives.[11] Hence, the question that we are facing is: how to understand and how to navigate this dynamic cycle of (dis)orientation in the context of contemporary globalised digital technologies? And, more specifically, how do the glitches in this system provoked by the works under discussion help us in this sense?

Technology, disorientation, attention

It is the time now to unpack in more depth what (dis)orientation entails in the context of contemporary cultures. From the perspective of the philosophy of individuation, Bernard Stiegler argues that the fundamental state of disorientation that characterises contemporary society is a direct result of ongoing accelerated technological change. For Stiegler, the socio-political collective is inscribed in a dynamic of disorientation and reorientation in which technology plays a pivotal role. Socio-political structures are disoriented by new technologies and need time (the lived time of embodied thinking and of collective political debate) in order to coagulate again in distributions more suitable for the new context. The disturbance that significant new technologies provoke is a necessary step in the being and becoming of the collective, yet, Stiegler argues, the contemporary condition is that of ongoing accelerated technological change which leaves no time for thinking and politics to catch up with the ever-new context – which, in turn, means that the development of technology is driven by outdated ideologies and philosophies, creating a vicious circle.[12] This dynamic results in alienation on the political level (political structures remain unfit for the larger context in which they function), technological level (technological individuation is foreclosed by being submitted to outdated goals), but also on the level of embodied subjectivity (the impossibility of navigating the spatio-temporal dimensions of contemporary cultures) – hence a widespread sense of disorientation for individuals and collectives.

Arguing for disorientation as a core characteristic of contemporary cultures does not imply, though, that prior to Western modernity the experience of the world was stably oriented, and neither that all embodied subjects are today feeling disoriented at all times. Rather, as Tora Lane and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback underline, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's insights, in our global world whose very ground is constituted by a common loss of ground, disorientation is what defines the present in its event, and not the loss of a previous orientation.[13] In other words, what characterises the contemporary condition is not only disorientation as a loss of direction upon a given ground (a given reality), but the impossibility of postulating an absolute common ground. One way of understanding this lack of common ground is by following Geoff Cox and Jakob Lund's contention that the contemporary condition cannot be characterised in terms of linear temporal logic, but rather supposes navigating multiple, often incongruent, temporalities of different contemporary cultures.[14] Consequently, living in contemporary cultures implies the necessity of continuously negotiating spatio-temporal frames that could orient, but that remain always only relative.

In this framework, orienting dynamics can prove deeply disorienting, even more so than disorienting impulses, and vice versa disorienting glitches are necessary for the continuous renegotiation of orientation. This is because being oriented upon a ground that pretends to establish one unifying, absolute frame of reference (one reality) fails in the trap of orienting without taking into account the complex environment ('natural' environment, but also social, cultural, economic, political, etc.) that grounds it and that itself is constituted by a continuous re-negotiation of (dis)orientations. In this sense, Michael Marder insists for example on the disorienting consequences of contemporary orientation driven by an economic logic.[15] Equating the basic meaning of orientation with dwelling, being able to act non-indifferently in an environment such that the relationship between the individual and the environment (a relationship which is life itself) is maintained, Marder argues that a cultural paradigm based primarily on economic concerns disorients because 'it actively orients without letting itself be oriented by the content of the dwelling it claims as its own'.[16] In other words, the contention here is that we are oriented in a system that is divorced from the conditions that support it (from its environment). Ecology is seen by Marder as an alternative to economy, an alternative that is disorienting in the first instance because it pays attention to the shifting configurations that characterise being in an environment, but that holds the potentiality of orientation as dwelling – orientation as the negotiation of an ongoing shifting problematic.

Importantly, from the perspective of the theory of individuation, the problematic of disorientation is closely interlinked with that of attention. For Stiegler, attention is an integral part of the individuation of embodied subjectivity, inasmuch as it accounts for the coagulation of objects in the phenomenal world (objects of experience emerge under

attention), but at the very same time it participates in the individuation of the socio-political collective – and at the collective level attention is expressed as care.[17] In his analysis of attention, Stiegler contends that contemporary capitalist markets in their interlinking with networked digital technologies strip attention of its long-term horizons and mutilate it into a form of drive that is to be immediately satisfied through consumption. This leads both to the inability to address (pay attention to) phenomena that develop over the long-term, such as the environmental crisis,[18] and to a lack of sense of life for the individual reduced to being a consumer. Yuk Hui suggests as well that one of the main factors that lead to alienation (and consequently disorientation) in contemporary digital cultures is that 'time and, equally, the attention of each social atom are sliced into ever smaller pieces and dispersed across the networks by status updates, interactions, advertisements – the mechanisms of tertiary protention – for marketing purposes'.[19] In other words, the reification, commodification, and control of attention feeds into the problematic of disorientation outlined above both at an individual and a political level. This view, formulated by Stiegler and Hui from a perspective grounded in the philosophy of individuation, is also supported by Media Studies research concerned with the shift in the contemporary performance of attention in the context of new technologies.[20] It is no secret that the Google Maps platform, heavily dependent on generating revenue from advertising,[21] is deeply involved in this fight for the attention of the user for economic profit. The 'truth' of the map that the platform proposes is permeated by the dynamics of the attention economy.

Upon this background understanding of the problematic of (dis)orientation in its interrelation with the question of attention, I propose that the net art works discussed in this essay, by drawing attention to interconnected, shifting spatio-temporal experiences (social and individual) that do not fit the truth of the representation offered by Google Maps, challenge the uncritical orientation subtended by economies of attention. They put the spectator in the (dis)orienting position of acknowledging (paying attention to) complex environmental, social, personal dynamics that do not simply add up to one unquestionable objective reality. This dynamic of ongoing (dis)orientation problematises not only the experience of the world with its multiple layers, but the very condition of embodied subjectivity.[22]

The individuation of embodied subjectivity

Petra Szeman's work *Trajectories* (2017) addresses directly the performance of embodied subjectivity in contemporary digital cultures, focusing prominently on the role that digital mapping technologies have in this process. Szeman constructs an animated 2D digital alter-ego that is used to explore the embodied experience of being immersed in a foreign cultural context (Japan), a (dis)orienting experience that is both enticing and threatening.[23]

The video starts with a game-like choice of characters, in which different versions of the digital alter ego are presented, contouring a loose personal history. The subsequent engagement with the individuation of embodied subjectivity in the work is hence set up as a computer game of sorts. While a simple audio narrative addresses in a theoretically complex manner the personal experience of (de)constructing oneself in a journey through Japan modulated by digital technologies and the imaginaries that they sustain – including among others planning the trip ahead on Google Maps – the alter-ego animated digital image retraces this personal trajectory by moving through a complex intermesh of photographies, game maps, animated mixes of video footage, photography, and digital backgrounds, as well as Google Maps imagery (often in Street View mode). A work that trespasses the border between philosophy and art practice, *Trajectories* is a powerful reflection on the (de)construction of embodied subjectivity through the appropriation and incorporation of digital technologies. Plunged in an unfamiliar semi-fictional environment that re-mixes through digital technologies the embodied experience of traveling through Japan – the experience of Japanese culture imbued with expectations themselves resulted from a technologically mediated (de)construction – Szeman's work subverts the common popular culture topic of the journey to the Orient in search of a true inner self. The embodied subject in *Trajectories* appears as an ongoing problem to be continuously renegotiated at the intersection of embodied sensation and screen representation. The work suggests that digital mapping technologies play an essential role in this process, resonating with Scott McQuire's claim that recent changes in mapping practices brought on by digital mapping platforms such as Google Maps directly participate in the individuation of contemporary embodied subjectivities.[24]

McQuire argues that one of the main distinctions between traditional mapping practices and Google Maps (as the most prominent representative of digital mapping platforms) is that the latter decisively alters the temporality of the map, both in the sense that the map is continuously re-edited at unprecedented speed rates, including the fact that real time data streams are increasingly integrated into the map, and in the sense that the user is offered dynamic, place-aware information. The possibility of doing so relies on the ability of Google Maps to both generate and extract vast amounts of data, in a dynamic that according to McQuire is a stepping stone towards apprehending and organising the physical world as data. Following Bernard Stiegler's insights regarding the intermingling of technology with psychic and collective individuation, McQuire notes that these fundamental changes in the dynamic of the map participate in shaping contemporary embodied subjectivities.[25]

The philosophy of individuation proposed by Gilbert Simondon, with the important interventions of Bernard Stiegler and Yuk Hui, allows us to grasp this claim in more detail. Simondon argues that in order to understand being and becoming one needs to turn a

critical eye towards the process through which individuals emerge. For Simondon all individuals exist only inasmuch as they emerge from a pre-individual system of relations, and their very being implies remaining in contact with this system of relations which constitutes their associated milieu (their environment).[26] This process through which individuals emerge and become is what Simondon calls individuation, and strictly speaking all that is, and all that can be perceived and thought are processes of individuation in their tight inter-relationality. In this context, for Simondon, 'the human' and 'technology' are not two opposed terms, but rather two complementary co-constitutive domains. Technology is posited as a mediation between the 'human' and nature,[27] that is to say between the human and its associated milieu (its environment), a mediation that, Bernard Stiegler will argue later, defines embodied subjectivity in the first place.

According to Stiegler, human embodied subjectivity always depends in its process of individuation on the mediation of a technological milieu; the human is always already technological and there is no human embodied thinking prior to technology. In anthropological terms, through a critical reading of Leroi-Gourhan's work, Stiegler's argument is that the history of technology does not start with a fully formed homo sapiens who invents tools, but rather with a being that is not quite human that invents the tools which, in the long run, shape it into being human.[28] In other words, as a species, we emerge already intertwined with our tools, and, moreover, the evolution of embodied subjectivity is always interdependent with a technological context – a process that Stiegler names 'instrumental maieutics'.[29] For Stiegler, the use of tools constitutes a new form of memory (epiphylogenetic memory) and hence a new form of temporality, which is intrinsic to what it means to be human.[30] The question that emerges is then: what are the consequences of contemporary technological contexts, characterised by widespread digital networks, upon the individuation of embodied subjectivities?

In dialogue with Stiegler's work, Yuk Hui contends that digital objects instantiate a new way of anticipating and constructing the future (tertiary protentions). According to Hui, the projection of the next moment in imagination is to an ever greater extent replaced by an algorithmic orientation based on previous traces that we have left in the digital milieu.[31] That is to say, imagination tends to be inflected by an automated orientation based on the (mis)representation of the self and of the world as computable data. In the last instance, the danger of the automatically orientated imagination performed by digital objects is a short-circuiting of the individuation of contemporary subjectivities. We could say that the non-teleological process of individuation is replaced by an operation in which we are modeled (and model ourselves) to fit our representations in the data flow controlled by market and national state interests. I call cybernetic subjectivity this type of individuation of embodied subjectivity caught in the loop of automated imagination.

It would be naive, though, to posit a natural human body before digital technologies. The task is rather to examine the ways in which digital technologies, as pharmaka (both poison and remedy),[32] can act as vectors of differentiation of potential futures – what Hui refers to as a pluralism of cosmotechnic regimes, i.e. a plurality of ways of being-in-the-world subtended by a multiplicity of technological systems and moral orders[33] – rather than factors of homogenisation as it happens in the case of cybernetic subjectivities as defined here.

In this sense, *Trajectories* engages with the contemporary construction of cybernetic subjectivities destabilising it by reflectively addressing its dynamic (in a complex methodology that combines the textual and the audio-visual) and glitching its process. It introduces a delay, a gap, a caesura in the reproduction of cybernetic subjectivity that disorients and invites further reflection. The embodied subject critically appropriates, deconstructs, and incorporates its image-double, represents it and plays with it, blurring the lines between self and image of the self, territory and map, and effectively recalibrating the experience of the world in doing so. The work intimates that the differentiation of experience can occur at the very core of embodied subjectivity in a complex dynamic of (dis)orientation, and hence suggests that the path towards the plurality of cosmotechnic regimes that Hui advocates passes through the playful, critical (de)construction of one's embodied experience and of the embodied subject. With respect to digital maps, *Trajectories* seems to hint that this (de)construction implies an appropriation of the map that questions its usefulness – as the voice-over states while the animated alter-ego wanders through Street View images of Yakushima: 'planning for something the week before is productive, but planning a month before is an out of body experience'.

Trajectories is not alone in this sense. Jon Rafman's *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008-2020)[34] is another intriguing example of challenging the imperative of usefulness inherent in Google Maps. Rafman's work is an extensive selection of screenshots, gathered by the artist from Google Street View. It appropriates the Street View imagery and, folding it against its intended use, transforms it into an aesthetic object. *Nine Eyes* transforms Street View in an immense dramatic performance and opens a gap in the acceleration of everyday life through an aimless wandering in the visual representation proposed by the map. The attention is shifted from useful orientation to contemplation attentive to the detail, attentive to the new and unexpected, and to the embodied sensations provoked by the images captured on Street View. There is also an intense sense of ephemerality, as the rapid rates of update are continuously replacing many of the current images. In Erin Manning's terms we could understand *Nine Eyes* as an example of the 'pragmatics of the useless' – refusing to take use-value as the measure of experience, bringing to prehension barely perceptible impulses ('the infrathin' for Manning) that do not fit smoothly in the forms of representation.[35] The uselessness of such works that explore the barely

perceptible resides exactly in the fact that they depart from the domain of the intelligible (and hence usable, exploitable, etc.), and constitute vectors towards that which is not (or not yet) known.

Google Maps and its underlying imperative of usefulness is once again glitched here by the useless intervention performed in Nine Eyes, an intervention that disturbs the very systems of value and knowledge that Google Maps is grounded in and reinforces. As in Szeman's video, what is ultimately at stake is the (de)construction of embodied subjectivity. Apprehending the world through Google Maps as useful exploitable streams of data[36] means at the very same time capturing the individuation of embodied subjectivity in the feedback loop of cybernetic subjectivities defined by their data images. The datafication of the world is translated at the level of embodied subjectivity in a system of surveillance that, according to Matthew Fuller, deconstructs the embodied subject in 'flecks of identity' (computable data abstractions) which are to be reorganised and integrated into the streams of data. Yet, we have to underline in view of the theory of individuation that the datafied 'flecks of identity' do not simply unmake a natural human subject, but rather at the very same time participate in the construction of the human subject as a consumer in capitalist markets (and as a citizen of national states).

In this sense, navigating the surrounding environment with the help of online digital tools is not simply a problem of representation, and neither is it a problem of the production of reality through the interplay of simulacra, as it could be argued following Baudrillard.[37] Conceptualising the online map simply as a neutral representation of an offline reality, or at the other pole as an interplay of simulacra, misses the intricate relations between the digital milieu and lived experience and fails to account for the processes of individuation that are at stake. The problematic that we are facing is rather that of a radical renegotiation of embodied presence (hence of space, spatiality, temporality) that nonetheless is canceled (by being short-circuited into cybernetic subjectivity) at the very same time that it is instantiated.

The (dis)orienting gestures performed by the net art works that we have discussed introduce a caesura in this automated orientation of the subject. They can be understood as tactical media appropriations of digital mapping (in the sense that Rita Riley gives to this term), that engage with these technologies in a manner that resists and problematises them from within, without pretending to inhabit an oppositional outside and without necessarily having clear-cut objectives (political or otherwise) to achieve. As Raley argues, such tactical appropriations of mainstream technologies can provoke unpredictable consequences not only on the technological level but also in the socio-politico-economic associated milieux intertwined with them.[38] The relevance of such projects resides in opening up a problematic field, rather than in the palpable results that they generate. It is this opening of an unsolvable problem that is (dis)orienting, that asks us to continuously renegotiate the

frameworks that could orient us. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that (dis)orientations are not simply openings towards a utopian better world beyond the constraints of orientation, but rather can imply serious risks.

Tactical media appropriation

Transborder Immigrant Tool (2007-ongoing) by Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab tactically engages with the problematic of (dis)orientation as instantiated at the embodied intersection of the digital map, the territory that it charts, and the socio-political conditions that subtend them. The work consisted of a mobile app intended to guide individuals who were attempting to cross the Mexico-US border towards water supplies placed in the desert by various volunteer organisations. At the same time, the app would randomly play back audio files containing poems written by Amy Sara Carroll. The poems, read in multiple languages, engage with the desert environment of the area. The app was never actually deployed due to fears for the safety of the users.[39] While the development of the app stopped around 2012, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* is listed in Rhizome's *Net Art Anthology* as an ongoing project, underlining the fact that the public reactions and the debates that it provoked are considered to be integral parts of the work and that, consequently, the work does not have any clear ending point.

It is painfully clear here that disorientation is not a utopian alternative to orientation. The danger of getting lost is literally death. In the first instance, *Transborder Immigrant Tool* is primarily concerned with orienting its users, with mitigating the hazards of disorientation and providing useful information, hopefully diminishing their suffering and improving their chances of survival. Yet, at the same time, unlike mainstream orientation tools (such as Google Maps) that uncritically celebrate the construction of fixed frames for orientation, *Transborder Immigrant Tool* introduces (dis)orienting vectors in the very process of orientation that it proposes. The immediate usefulness of the information provided is complexified by the introduction of the poems, suggesting that there are more ambiguous and less obvious needs to embodied subjectivity, which might be just as important as having enough water and finding one's way to physical safety. If the GPS coordinates are unambiguously useful, the poems constitute vectors of (dis)orientation. But even beyond that, if the work is intended as an orientation tool for the people attempting the dangerous border crossing, its value lies just as much in the poignant problems that it raises on a political level and the (dis)orientation that it provokes among its US audiences. Hence the insistence of the authors on considering the public reactions as an integral part of the work. In this sense, the work is (dis)orienting and hard to digest because it challenges the

systems of value proposed by capitalist global markets and the politics of national identity, prompting its audiences to renegotiate their individual and collective identities.

Bringing to attention the dangers potentially involved in the dynamic of (dis)orientation, *Transborder Immigrant Tool* resonates with a number of contemporary theoretical discourses that point out the potential value of disorientation without underplaying its risks. Fintan Walsh, for example, discusses dis-orientation as an unsettling, dangerous, but potentially affirming experience in the context of non-normative sexual orientations and their intersections with processes of migration, mobility, cultural diversity, exchange, and global capitalism.[40] Building on the work of José Esteban Muñoz and Sara Ahmed, Walsh suggests that queer dis-orientation is both a symptom of not fitting in a heteronormative spatio-temporality and an opening towards new ways of being in the world.[41] From a different perspective, Liat Ben-Moshe argues in the context of an activist push for prison abolition that the experience of disorientation, even if often unpleasant and jarring, can teach us about how to live responsibly in changing circumstances by inducing an 'epistemic humility' which supposes acting without pretending to have a clear blueprint for the future, without pretending to have a clear and unambiguous system of knowledge that could orient us.[42] Ben-Mosh builds here on one of Ami Harbin's theses regarding the relationship between disorientation and moral life, namely that one of the potential positive effects of some types of disorientation is inducing 'epistemic humility', drawing attention to the fallibility of knowers and knowledge systems[43] – which also highlights, turning to the angle adopted by this essay, the fallacy of generalising and automatising orientation at individual or societal levels, which impedes the possibility of 'epistemic humility'.

Disorientation is hence not simply a positive alternative to an always biased orientation, but rather an open problem in which the subject is potentially in danger and ultimately risks dying. Yet, at the same time, disorientation can constitute a vector of change towards new ways of being-in-the-world. If we take into consideration the argument that the contemporary condition is that of a fundamental disorientation involving a continuous renegotiation of its very ground (i.e. 'reality', 'world'), and that being strongly oriented already means being detached from the conditions of one's being and becoming (from one's environment), then, the dynamic of (dis)orientation – with the invitation towards epistemic humility that derives from it – becomes an ethical responsibility.

In the case of *Transborder Immigrant Tool* the dynamic of (dis)orientation is directly and unambiguously connected with the question of care towards the other, which brings us back to the problematic of attention discussed above. Stiegler points out that at the level of

politics (collective individuation) the problematic of attention plays out as the question of care, that what is at stake in the problematic of attention on a political level is care with respect to otherness.[44] Tactical media works such as *Transborder Immigrant Tool* tend to confirm this position through practices of care that intervene in the public dynamics of attention (putting the problem in a new light with renewed urgency, creating debate, etc.) and by opening a space of attention beyond immediate usefulness defined in the prevalent system of values.

In order to understand the intimate relation between attention and care as it is instantiated by the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (and the other works discussed in this essay) I propose to think about attention in the Blanchodian sense of attending to the other as other, i.e. not taking the other to be an object in my world (which reifies otherness and opens the way for exploitation) and neither considering the other as another subject like myself (which reduces otherness to a diversity of the same, stripping it of radical difference). Such an understanding and performing of attention are fundamentally different from the ones proposed by the attention economy. Critical discourses concerned with the fallacy of the concept of attention as understood in the context of attention economy cogently point out that, rather than a scarce objective resource, attention is intrinsic to the (de)construction of embodied subjectivity in its interlinking with technology and socio-political collectives and strictly speaking it is not measurable and quantifiable.[45] Understanding and performing attention as a scarce resource that belongs to the individual means once again being caught in the feedback loop of cybernetic subjectivity – in the sense of foreclosing the process of individuation of embodied subjectivity by neglecting and expelling the otherness inherent in this process. Hence the potentiality of disrupting this feedback loop (with all the dangers and promises of such a move) through tactical performances of attention that destabilise the automated orientation which creates the future in the image of the present by excluding the other. In this sense, the reification and exclusion of otherness and the short-circuited cycle of cybernetic subjectivity are two facets of the same problem, playing at the same time on an individual and a collective level.

Conclusion

To conclude, I understand the net art works discussed in this essay to be tactical media interventions that glitch the mainstream functioning of digital mapping tools and that, in doing so, raise stringent questions about the experience of living in contemporary cultures. I have touched on three deeply interrelated ways in which these glitches are (dis)orienting, all relating directly to the problematic of attention:

1. bringing into focus aspects of lived experience that do not fit the 'truth' of cartographic representation, and at the same time underlining the ways in which representations participate in the (de)construction of lived experience;
2. challenging the attention economy by opening attention towards otherness and towards the intertwined shifting realities (grounds) of contemporary cultures;
3. questioning the imperative of usefulness inherent in mainstream applications of digital mapping.

Glitching the dynamic of attention in these intertwined ways, the vectors of (dis)orientation proposed by the tactical appropriations and interventions in Google Maps analysed here open up a potential disruption of the feedback loop of cybernetic subjectivity – i.e. a disruption of an inadequate conception and performance of embodied subjectivity based on a narcissistic short-circuited cycle in which the subject constructs itself to fit its representation in data (the modern human as the indispensable consumer and citizen) excluding otherness from its individuation.

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Notes

[1] See for example Heise 2013, Crary 2013, Wajcman 2015.

[2] Stiegler 2009, pp.1-7; Nancy 1997, pp. 4-9.

[3] Harbin 2016; Ahmed 2006; Schuback & Lane 2015.

[4] See for example Hassan 2012, Carr 2010, Beller 2003, Hayles 2007.

[5] The project appears in the sidebar menu of the Off Site Project website as [Google Maps], a spelling which I will adopt here as an easy way of distinguishing between the art project and the Google Maps platform itself. Off Site Project is an online curatorial platform founded by Pita Arreola-Burns and Elliott Burns in 2017. I am discussing here [Google Maps] as it appeared in August 2023.

[6] I use the term glitch here in the sense proposed by Rosa Menkman: a break from an expected or conventional flow of information or meaning, fostering a critical potential. Glitches in Menkman's definition are not necessarily limited to a technological malfunction but rather extend to larger socio-political and cultural systems. See Menkman 2011.

[7] Lefebvre 1991, pp. 31; 68-168.

[8] See McQuire 2019.

[9] Debord 1956, p. 19. The (mis)use of (old) maps and the declared goal to draw up new maps of 'psychogeographical' influences (p. 23) are integral to the practice of dérive as theorised by Guy Debord. Despite these similarities, the disorienting impulses offered by [Google Maps], and more generally by the works discussed in this essay, remain different from dérive. Arguably, the politics of these works are much more heterogeneous and convoluted than the unified ideological background of situationist practices. See in this sense the discussion of tactical media below.

[10] See the documentation of the work at: https://arambartholl.com/map/.

[11] Schmidt di Friedberg 2018, pp. 1-11.

[12] See Stiegler 2009.

[13] Lane & Schuback 2015, pp.xi-xii; Nancy 1997.

[14] Cox & Lund 2016.

[15] Marder 2015.

[16] Ibid., p. 41.

[17] Stiegler 2012, pp. 104-105.

[18] This argument also resonates with Jussi Parikka's analysis of slow contemporary violence inflicted upon the environment, a violence that mostly goes unnoticed when attention is grabbed by the increasing acceleration of contemporary cultures. See Parikka 2016.

[19] Hui 2016, p. 251.

[20] See for example Beller 2003, Carr 2007, Hayles 2010.

[21] See McQuire 2019.

[22] To be clear, the claim here is not that one can gain unmediated access to the 'reality of individuation' by bypassing the misrepresentation performed by mainstream digital mapping practices. Embodied experience in its conscious and unconscious aspects, individual and collective, affective and rational is nothing but an intensive field of individuation that is never solved without a reminder in systems of representation. I claim that the works discussed here glitch a particular system of representation and highlight aspects of processes of individuation that are in excess of what can be comprehended in this system. This does not mean that they offer an unmediated truth, but rather that they invite critical practices of re-mediation aware of their dangers and shortcomings. In the process of doing so the very constitution of embodied subjectivity comes to be problematised.

[23] The work can be found in the Selected Videos section of Szeman's website: https://www.petraszeman.com/videos.html.

[24] McQuire 2019.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Simondon 2013, pp. 24-25; 63-65.

[27] Simondon 1989, p. 9.

[28] Stiegler 1998, pp. 141-142.

[29] Ibid., pp. 158-160.

[30] Ibid., pp. 142.

[31] Hui 2016a, pp. 221-222. The analysis of imagination in Hui's text is more complex than I can unpack in the limits of this article. Engaging with the work of Kant, Heidegger, and Stiegler, Hui argues that transcendental imagination as the coagulation of time becomes a passive force of synthesis – instead of being an active one – if the recognition process is short-circuited by automated tertiary protentions (cf. Hui 2016a, p. 244). What is at stake in the automatisation of transcendental imagination is in this sense the very synthesis of time and, importantly, Hui argues in a Heideggerian framework that this disruption of the synthesis of time is at the same time a disruption of care (Hui 2016a, pp. 246-252).

[32] cf. Stiegler 2014, p. 12.

[33] Hui 2016b, pp. 19-20; 281.

[34] The work can be accessed at: https://9-eyes.com/.

[35] Manning 2020, pp. 15-31.

[36] Fuller 2005, pp. 148-153. Let us note here the intimate interlinking between the problematic of surveillance, that plays a pivotal role in Fuller's definition of the 'flecks of identity', and that of attention.

[37] Baudrillard 1981.

[38] Raley 2009, pp. 1-30.

[39] See the entry for Transborder Immigrant Tool in Rhizome's Net Art Anthology: https://anthology.rhizome.org/transborder-immigrant-tool, and Gaby Cepeda's accompanying essay: https://rhizome.org/editorial/2018/jun/04/american-hospitality/.

[40] Walsh 2016, p. 15.

[41] Ibid., pp. 140-141.

[42] Ben-Moshe 2018.

[43] Harbin 2016, pp. 91-93.

[44] Stiegler 2012, pp. 104-105.

[45] Terranova 2012; Braunstein 2014.