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Abstract

Artistic practices of mobility bring to the fore situations and experiences whether they are shared, whether they restitute or are offered as moments to be experienced. The aim is not only to represent places, territories and spatial configurations but to generate processes in which the recipient is engaged in an experience of space, or an experience in which concrete space, displacement and movement are part of the work itself. The “spectator” no longer finds him or herself faced with something he or she needs to discover or contemplate, but rather is caught up in a process that he or she contributes to his or her own activity or movement. It can be argued that these approaches reflect new relationships that digital technologies contribute to creating between people and the space in which they are located. These relationships are concrete and practical but they are also – and inseparably – in the order of representation and knowledge. This will be discussed in this paper, starting from the distinction proposed in the original call for contributions as a heuristic opposition between the map and the probe. Research carried out in another context, the transformations of political borders in recent decades, will give a perspective that will extend and expand the theoretical effects of this set of conceptual oppositions.

I will start by discussing the introductory text to this symposium. This text is for a large part built around a distinction between two figures:

- That of the map – a fixed representation of space;

- That of the probe – that is to say, modes of exploration of a field of experience determined by movement and displacement.¹

Of course, this text clearly points out that these two cases, the map and the probe, are linked and mixed in many ways and are often complementary. We know that the techniques of sensing, used in the general sense that we adopt here, can participate in the creation of a kind of map of a territory being explored. Various surveying actions may be ported to a spatial configuration. For example, imagine a sonar screen that translates a set of feedback signals produced by variations in the depth of the seabed into an image. The notion that echolocation allows bats to build a mental map of their environment is based on the same principle.

However, the map and the probe are suggested here as being representative of two opposing models between which ways of thinking, perspectives and ways of being – but also approaches, practices and conceptions of art – are distributed.

On the one hand, the model of the probe is proposed as a way to approach the specificity of sound practices and more generally as an essential feature of artistic practices of mobility, since they engage a dynamic relationship between production and context. On the other hand, the model of the map refers both to the production of a detached,

¹ An extract illustrating this distinction: “We propose to consider mobile audio-technology from two points of view. These can be assimilated to maps and sounding. In the case of maps, we project space and trajectory through schematic representation while in the case of sounding, we activate the environment around us and in so doing collect information about it through feedback” (Locus Sonus, 2014).

autonomized representation – specifically an image – and the conception of the artwork as immobilization and externalization in the form of a symbolic object. The balance swinging between, on the one hand, the long history of images fixed in time and, on the other hand, real-time processes and interactions.

This distinction made between these two models invites us to question mobility, not only as a matter of circumstances – the fact that technological development puts at our disposal essentially mobile devices and that artists appropriate them to produce forms adapted to their functionality – but also as an approach – to these practices, their meaning, their consequences, and by extension, the issues they deal with.

To resume, one might say that the model of the map refers to a conception of art centered on the notion of representation, whereas the model of the probe emphasizes the necessarily fluctuating relationship of a subject's position, immersed in an environment that it explores.

Models of the card and the probe

It is first necessary to clarify the distinction between these two models. They appear to define two different types of relationships to the environment and two different ways of producing meaning.

A map involves the projection of a space situated beyond self as a remote representation, an image of the world. The probe assumes that the environment is perceived from signals that the subject projects, the effects of which it receives in return. This implies an activity or movement that produces a variation of the field which is therefore generated by the subject. The subject, then, finds itself inseparable from an environment that it “informs” in the sense that it generates its form that it captures as an information set.

Thus, what distinguishes these two models is primarily a matter of the subject’s position, taken in its broadest sense, and how it is defined by its position: overlooking externality on the one hand, immersion, proximity and mobility on the other.

These two different “positions” correspond to two distinct ways of constructing meaningful situations. The first is the complexity of a relationship between symbolic and mimetic elements and clearly belongs to the domain of the production of representation. It tends towards the production of an object – the map – that inscribes the representation, but also immobilizes the subject by constituting its *point of view* in an externality that we might consider as virtual – for example, we “overlook” a traditional map. However, as I will develop, this position might also be “within” the map. The probe involves emitting signals that are semantically neutral in themselves, but which, through the variations they return, become interpretable. However, the variation is produced by the movement of the perceiver or the perceived object. In any case, it is inseparable from movement in a field which is fundamentally dynamic.

It follows that the map gives us the projection of a representation of space that meets two requirements: that of a representation in which our presence acquires an identity, but also a pragmatic understanding of the possibilities of action. This both builds our relationship to the whole – with respect to which we are just an element – and guides us or provides us with a means of orientation and a relative appreciation of the elements arranged in that whole. From this point of view, the map says both “This is what your world looks like” and “This is where you find yourself.” It projects a version of the world, by definition invisible to me, as a spectacle but it also invites me to project myself into it, to inhabit the imaginary place I’m supposed to occupy, or to relate to the distant figure that is given to me. This imaginary immersion explains the evocative power of maps, their fantastic capacity of suggestion and their invocation of reverie. Hence the map is endowed with a narrative force. All maps tell a story.

The probe introduces us to an evolving environment whose limits are unperceivable and whose temporary center is always situated at the source of the probe itself. That which constitutes the subject as the center is not its fixity, but rather its mobility or its ability to detect the movement of a signal. This is the case of echolocation in bats, for example. There is center in this case because a signal is emitted, that is to say the transmission of a fraction of energy which loops back imparting its variation. Here too, a space is created, but rather than it being the space of representation, it is the space of exploratory activity, a sensorial extension and a dynamic reverberation. This space is no longer an emptiness defined and constrained by form, but a fullness – a medium traversed by undulations (waves). The probe implies the existence of a “field”, whether that “field” is material, energetic or informational.

The case of the map assumes that knowledge of external reality is embodied in a mediated form that is independent. It tells me that I know the world because I externalize a representation, and it is in this representation that I recognise it. And the act of knowing takes place through the transposition of what the map shows me onto the experience that I have of the world.

The model of the probe, on the other hand, refers me to the actual experience of the world in which I am and where my actions occur. It assumes that my relationship with the environment is continuous – because it is the repetition of emissions or probes that can reveal meaningful variations – and somehow immediate – because the sounding is both what informs me about the world and what binds me to it; it is my relationship to it. Here, the appearance of knowledge depends on the way in which exploration structures behaviour. Here, production in itself offers a framework of possibilities.

This is what I wish to approach by pursuing the idea that what distinguishes models of the probe and the map touches on the double question of the position of the agent and the method of producing meaningful situations.

I propose to place this in a singular context, which is that of changing borders at the beginning of XXI Century.

The border as flow control device

The issue of the map and mobility leads me to discuss the research in which I have been engaged over the last two years through the program *The AntiAtlas of Borders*.² *AntiAtlas of Borders* is a transdisciplinary research project that brings together many participants: researchers from different disciplines, artists and art theorists, as well as experts from the industrial sector and other professionals. It started from the observation that over the last thirty years there has been a considerable transformation of the nature of borders. They have become a major elements in the political, economical and human issues of our societies. They occupy a significant role in multiple ways, such as the issue of migration or the extension of the control systems or financial flows. Borders figure prominently in the collective imagination and they evoke the question of our futures as citizens of democratic societies. Significantly, many artists have begun to work on or around the issue of borders; intervening in border areas, hijacking surveillance systems or disrupting control devices.

Borders are posing the question of their own representation in new ways, not only because traditional forms through which they were represented have clearly become inadequate, but also because the very question of representation has become an issue and a subject of ideological confrontation. When, 25 years ago, the Berlin Wall fell and

² The activity of the *AntiAtlas* results in conferences, seminars, exhibitions, publications, as well as the development of transdisciplinary experiments. Website: <http://www.antiatlas.net/>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/antiAtlasdesfrontieres>.

the divide between the West and the Soviet bloc seemed to disappear, while the process of globalization grew and Europe widened, some thought we were witnessing the end of borders. We appeared to be passing from a partitioned to an open world whereas in fact, we have rarely traced as many new borders and, above all, we have never built so many walls and separating barriers in the world. Far from disappearing, borders are becoming increasingly present and increasingly active.

These evolutions do not only concern the lines that shape the world map, they apply above all to the reality of what is included in the very notion of borders. This leads us to question the relationship between modes of organization of space – the political, cultural, scientific and law enforcement uses made of representation and multiple forms of what may be called mobility. If we use the term *anti Atlas* it is also to underline the impossibility of accounting for today's borders solely through cartography, when the logic of the devices in which they are embodied is based on the flow of information (Parizot et al. 2013).

Traditionally, one represents borders using lines that draw territories in a cartographic perception of space. We do not always sufficiently take into account the fact that maps are not only a representation of the reality of border divisions but that they also help to produce them. This is true, in a general sense, in that classic borders, linear and abstract, were defined during periods that saw the appearance of the map in the modern sense of the term. The map imposed itself as knowledge strictly mastered in a mathematical framework and as increasingly precise and technically standardized

geometry. But it is also true, from a more practical point of view, the mere fact that maps were needed to designate linear boundaries and project them onto the varied and irregular reality of the terrain. Maps accurately reflect the reality of “traditional” borders. But these borders could not have been imagined, designed and then drawn as they were without the development of the cartographic representation of space.

To say that the cartographic representation of linear borders no longer reflects the reality of current borders it is firstly to witness the transformation of our relationship to space and the way we represent it. The linear representation of the classical map assumes a separation of spatial and temporal dimensions. It gave us a purely synchronic vision of territorial division, a given moment, fixed as an image and placed before the eye of the beholder and their external vision. This externality of vision is the fundamental condition of cartography, as the synchronic organization of the elements in the distribution of places is its working principle. Of course movement animates this space, but it is not noticeable, except through symbols that are also fixed and immobile. Canals or roads indicate the possibility of movement, but the movement remains secondary and determined by the organization of space. Today, however, it is rather the organization of space that bends to the logic of movement and flow.

This cartographic representation of space appears to be a satisfactory approximation as long as circulations fall into a roughly homogeneous scale. But when the movements diversify and dissociate to draw spatiotemporal spheres that are independent and largely separate, the spatial representation can no longer be reduced to the homogeneity of a continuous spatiality. Streams of flux are multiple and they are not reducible to one

another: financial flux, flux of goods, flux of knowledge and information, flux of people are obviously related and dependent, but they do not necessarily constitute a homogeneous whole. They draw relatively autonomous spheres that coexist in specific, complex forms of spatio-temporality. Borders as linear modes for dividing territories are metamorphosing into devices that are nonlinear, reticular, punctiform or “trajectal”, composing strongly differentiated strategies and hierarchical controls.

Thus, the issue of mobility has become central, not only because it is part of a situation, but because it produces form, value, standards and law. There is, for example, the emergence of a right to mobility, that is taken for granted by some but completely denied to others –including by means of violence – which is inseparable from the fact that mobility contributes to determining value in both economic and symbolic terms. It also produces poetic and aesthetic effects – that is to say that it engages the place of the subject as an actor and as a transformer of that space – that have become an intrinsic part of cartographic reasoning. The overlooking viewpoint from which we can build a static image of overall organization no longer exists. We are constructed in the perspective that places us in a moment that is relative to the path that constitutes our being.

The place of artistic practice as an exploratory approach

This is precisely what, in my opinion, characterizes the practices of most artists working, in one way or another, on or with borders. Borders have become a “field” of artistic intervention and not just an aspect of landscape, for example, or a decorative element

for a fictional work. It is the border itself, in its reality, that artists are confronting.

I introduced above the idea that what distinguishes the two models of the map and the probe, is both the question of the place of the subject – whether artist or viewer/listener – and the way of producing meaningful situations. The first component is definitely that of the point of view, the shift of the gaze from the exteriority constitutive of our traditional relationship to representation, to sensitive forms of exploration of situations. We can consider that the concept of immersion can account for what characterizes situations that are proposed, whether they are reported, documented, subject to restitution or whether they are directly engaged in a form of living experience. In all these cases we are dealing with the revelation of a hidden or imperceptible reality: the activation of situations that would otherwise remain unnoticed or indifferent; the deciphering of illegible processes and operations; the production of perturbations without which we would remain indifferent to situations completely integrated into everyday banality. And in all these cases the question is one of constituting situations as perceivable events doted with significance for us or, to put it another way, as explorable situations.

But it is the concept of exploration that I wish to retain, in its relation to aesthetic questioning. If the classical idea of contemplation seems to me to accompany – without difficulty – our relationship to objectified representation in plastic (fine art) forms – and thus corresponds to the model of the map – the idea, less widespread, of exploration – or the exploratory nature of artistic practices – seems to correspond to the kind of situation which the model of the probe accounts for.

The notion of exploration was already present in our first distinction between the two models of the map and the probe. If we accept that both correspond to types of practices, the first is a practice that proposes to build the relationship with its “object” through representation, where the second is a practice that proposes to seize a situation in a process of experimentation.

But posing alternatives in these terms can be misleading. Obviously, the representation may result from prior exploration, which is rendered when serving its purpose. And, in turn, it offers itself to the spectator as an object for exploration, an activity which is inventive in nature. In fact, the essence of the exploratory character in the probe model is that it is in itself that which constitutes the aesthetic relationship. It is considered as situation and as process, in the here and now of experience. The probe model proposes neither a totalising point of view nor a second hand and time-delayed experience. It offers us the dynamic but necessarily partial and provisional reality, a moving experience. It invites us to build knowledge by developing strategies that engage us as subjects. Subjects who are no longer facing objects, but engaged in situations.

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Biography

Jean Cristofol is professor at the Arts Academy of Aix en Provence (l'Ecole Supérieure d'Art d'Aix en Provence) where he teaches philosophy and epistemology. He also lectures at Aix Marseille University (Fine Arts). His research focuses on the relationship between art and technology and forms of temporality, spatiality and their mediation. In recent years, it has centered on notions of real-time, flux and fiction. He is member of the scientific committee of *L'antiAtlas des Frontières*.