

THE MEDIALITY OF MAPPING
TRANSMEDIAL APPROACHES TO SPACE
AND CARTOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

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INTRODUCTION

Tanja Michalsky, Tommaso Morawski

The essays collected in this volume are the fruit of two international workshops organized between 2019 and 2021 at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome.¹ Although different in title and participants, both events shared a common goal and a common premise. They started from the observation that today cartographic images have become more accessible than ever before, increasingly ubiquitous, and integrated into everyday practices. We are surrounded by maps of all sorts: digital maps, maps of all scale like world-maps or maps of our streets and local environment, maps of distant conflicts, crimes, diseases and epidemics, weather maps, survey maps, bio-maps, maps of the unconscious, etc. The advent of this cartographic age is not without consequence. Its effects reverberate not only on the practical level of everyday life but also on the entire field of knowledge, changing thereby its epistemological, theoretical, and paradigmatic structures. Evidence of this new trend is the growing interest in cartography that has developed in various artistic fields or the birth of ‘map studies’, a transversal and transdisciplinary research area strongly influenced by humanistic approaches and methodologies. Due to its pervasiveness, the map is emerging today as a privileged media system with which to investigate and to question the transformations of our spatial consciousness and geographical imagination. Maps are the documents through which we read the history of space, and it is through the study of maps that we can assess the scope and significance of different ‘spatial revolutions.’ But what is the relationship between what the philosopher Immanuel Kant called the “human standpoint on space” on the one hand and on the other its cartographic production and domestication?² And no less important: what does it entail on a theoretical and methodological level to investigate the history of space starting from the mediality of cartographic languages?

To answer these questions, scholars from different disciplines were called upon: not only geographers or historians of cartography, but also art historians and philosophers, architects, film theorists, and scholars of literature and

visual culture. The aim was to initiate a multi-voice discussion on the categories of analysis and the research methods of map studies. The endeavor was informed by an awareness that, as Roland Barthes once pointed out, in order to be interdisciplinary “it is not enough to take a subject (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists in creating a new object, which belongs to no one.”³ The “disciplinary no-man’s land”⁴ we are reflecting upon is cartography, and the new object of enquiry that is investigated here is the concept of the map as a medium.⁵

The main topic of this collection is the mediality of maps and mapping. According to Christian Jacob’s “phenomenology of cartographic perception”, the map is a “technical prosthesis that extends and redefines the field of sensory perception.”⁶ It is a “mediation”, an artefact that takes the place of an impossible sensory perception, giving access to “new visual worlds, and in so doing, to new fields of knowledge.”⁷ Starting from this conception of the mediality of maps, the aim of the volume can be summarized as follows: to write the cultural history of space through the history of the cartographic medium. Indeed, we believe that one could adapt to the relationship between space and maps what Walter Benjamin observed at the beginning of the twentieth century regarding the intertwining between cinema and aesthetics, media and the historicity of perceptual processes: that the “way in which human perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs – is conditioned not only by nature but by history.”⁸

The essays collected in this volume offer persuasive proof of one point: writing the media-history of space through the prism of the map is only possible if we start from a general consideration of the hybrid and potentially nomadic nature of cartographic languages. Particularly important in this regard is the study of the encroachments that take place in both directions between the visual and discursive spheres.⁹ This sort of research can be conducted either by examining, on a general level, the similarities between “how we read and gaze upon poems as if they were maps, and how we read and gaze upon maps as they were poems”, as in the case of Tom Conley’s essay, or by adopting a transmedial approach to maps, thus focusing specifically on their processes of “remediation” and their relation to other media. This new perspective on cartography seeks to hold together technological changes, imaginative or perceptual transformations, the history of space, and its different technological articulations. It is based on the assumption that we would be unable to recognise the performative power of a medium to represent, configure, express, construct or communicate the world if we grasped it in isolation, as if it were just a monad without doors or windows. A medium is not only that which mediates between two or more elements, but, as Bolter and Grusin suggest, a medium is also “that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and

social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real.”¹⁰

Following this line of research, most of the contributions explore the mediality of cartography by focusing on the processes of remediation, metamorphosis, transmedial translation, hybridization, and coupling—processes born out of the encounter between the medium of the map and other types of media, supports or devices, such as texts, books, films, paintings, urban plans, etc.¹¹ For example, the essay “A Matter of Interpretation: Pre-modern Christian and Jewish Maps of the Holy Land” by Pnina Arad takes as its starting point the incorporation of cartographic images into guides for pilgrim. Focusing on the devotional function of maps of the Holy Land, her contribution highlights the differences between the Christian tradition, which referred to the topographical language of maps as a reflection of the life of Christ and as a physical trace of the sacred past, and the Jewish tradition, which instead used cartographic images to make visible the physical manifestation of the Promised Land and the covenant between God and the people of Israel.

There is also a group of essays dedicated to the relationship between maps and views.¹² Tabea Braun’s essay “Views like Maps: On a Late Eighteenth-Century Idea of Making Spaces Completely Available through Images” focuses on a particular case of symbiosis between topographical views and maps as a technique of assembling pluralized images; this technique was developed in the late eighteenth century, aimed to present space as a continuum, and offered semantic potentialities that were more than just an additive function of several individual images. The function of the map as the privileged visualization tool for documenting the fragility of the lineage landscape of the Pearl River Delta in China and tracing its biography is the focus of Hong Chan Wan’s essay. Here, the top-down view typical of urban planning is contrasted with an alternative model of cartography in which different spatial scales intertwine in order to render the multiple and nuanced perspectives that invest the landscape with its character as a life-world.

From landscape we then turn to architecture. Taking the case of the ‘architectural map’ of *Roma Interrotta* as a starting point, Ioanna Angelidou deepens the relationship between the architectural and cartographic imagination. The mediality of the map is here at the service of a “conceptual archaeology”, necessary to re-imagine Rome’s urban landscape as it could never be. The relationship between cartography and architecture is also addressed in Giorgio Mangani’s essay, which proposes interpreting the spatial language of Raphael’s *Stanza della Segnatura* in topographical terms, as if it were a map. Likewise, Michal Lynn Shumate reflects on the similarities and processes of remediation that characterize the relationship between the map, the list, and the domestic inventory. What emerges from her reconstruction are the fami-

ly resemblances between these models of writing space, whereby the “inventory can be read as a spatial, premediated map and the index as a despatialized, remediated inventory.” Just as one can map domestic space, one can also map the space of films. This is the idea on which Marcello Tanca and Marco Maggioli’s essay is based. Taking the film *Parasite* as a paradigmatic example, the authors propose to interpret both the film and the map as a “simulating machine.” That is, as a “tool of symbolic reproduction-production of reality in which the relation between mimesis and creation is shaped around dynamics of cross-fertilization.”

In the last part the focus shifts to digital cartography. In her essay, Eva Watolik identifies in the travel set *Norway Through the Stereoscope*, published in 1907 by the New York publishing house Underwood & Underwood, a media assemblage that anticipates and prefigures the space exploration models typical of geo-media such as Google Maps and Google Earth. Pasquale Fameli, on the other hand, focuses on those artistic practices that in recent decades have questioned the panoptic function of the digital map as a tool for representing space. He does this in order to detect its critical function and its usefulness as a medium to rewrite or re-imagine space as a living environment. Ana Peraica’s essay sheds light on the relationship between map and landscape, highlighting how in augmented reality a new form of place, the virtual place, is reshaping our perception of real space by altering its meaning. Mario Neve’s concluding essay takes stock of the cartographic revolution produced by the advent of an “algorithmic worldview”; in this context, Neve draws attention to the way digital technologies are progressively undermining our “capacity to sense the world.”

Although the essay collected in this volume do not cover the entire history of space and do not exhaust all possible inter- and transmedia relations, the media constellations discussed in this book testify to the great variety, both historical and thematic, of the processes of remediation and the various practices and functions associated with them. They therefore provide a starting point for exploring the mediality of the map and its connection to human spatiality, regardless of whether we are dealing with physical, geographical, mental, or cognitive space.

Notes

¹ The workshops organized at the Hertziana were respectively titled: *Travelling Maps. Cartography’s Nomadic Languages across Art, Literature, Politics and Media* (September 9–11, 2019) and *Remediated Maps. Transmedial Approaches to Cartographic Imagination* (April 12–14, 2021).

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge 1998, p. 159.

³ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, ed. by Richard Howard, New York 1986, p. 72.

⁴ Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map. Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History*, trans. Tom Conley, Chicago et al. 2006, p. 3.

⁵ For the map as “medium of knowledge”, see Tanja Michalsky, “Kartographie als Medium der Wissens- und Informationsorganisation”, in *Gerhard Mercator*, ed. Ute Schneider und Stefan Braken-siek, Darmstadt 2015, pp. 15–38. For a more detailed analysis of the map as a “medium of perception”, see Tommaso Morawski, “The Map: A Medium of Perception. Remarks on the Relationship between Space, Imagination and Map from Google Earth”, *Aisthesis*, 13, 2 (2020), pp. 185–197. For media theory applied to cartography and cartographic imagination, see Tommaso Morawski, “A Media Theory of (Western) Cartographic Imagination”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Cartographic Humanities*, ed. Tania Rossetto and Laura Lo Presti, London et al. 2024, pp. 127–134.

⁶ Jacob 2006 (note 4), p. 105. For a phenomenological interpretation of the cartographic device, see also Tanja Michalsky, “Karten unter sich. Überlegungen zur Intentionalität geographischer Karten”, in *Fürstliche Koordinaten. Landesvermessung und Herrschaftsvisualisierung um 1600*, ed. Ingrid Baumgärtner, Leipzig 2014, pp. 321–340.

⁷ Jacob 2006 (note 4), p. 29.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings et al., Cambridge et al. 2008, p. 23.

⁹ The history of philosophy itself, generally considered an exclusively discursive phenomenon, can be read through this hybrid lens. For an attempt in this direction, see Tommaso Morawski, *Mappe della ragione. Kant e la medialità dell’immaginazione cartografica*, Macerata 2004.

¹⁰ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge et al. 1999, p. 65.

¹¹ For an introduction to these topics, see *Verkoppelte Räume. Karte und Bildfolge als mediales Dispositiv*, ed. Ulrike Boskamp et al., Munich 2020 (Römische Studien der Bibliotheca Hertziana, 46).

¹² On maps and views in general, see Tanja Michalsky, *Projektion und Imagination. Die niederländische Landschaft der Frühen Neuzeit im Diskurs von Geographie und Malerei*, Munich 2011.