

The new theatre of the world: map mashups and web 2.0 space

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While the 19th Century attributed the flat world to the dark Middle Ages and its primitive believe in the edge of our earth, the 21st Century is facing a strange comeback of this image. It was the French astronomer and, a late if not a retarded romanticist, Camille Flammarion, who is to blame for the simplified view of the middle ages as the period when people believed in a flat earth. He is the probable author of an anonymous wood engraving from his 1888 book *L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire* (The Atmosphere: Popular Meteorology) depicting a missionary who just discovered the end of the world and the point where it touches the sky. This influential misinterpretation ignored the fact that the image of a spherical world was not only known to the Middle Ages - as we can see from the name and the illustrations of the famous Johannes de Sacrobosco tractate from the 13th century, *De sphaera mundi* - but it was actually a more prevalent model of earth.

The image of the flat world is more dominant today than it was ever in our history. The new edge and the point connecting heaven and earth is this strange but popular pin head called pin marker on Google maps. This marker is a visual metaphor which connects the objectifying and satellite image of earth with the subjective and earthly interests of its inhabitants. In the name of this symbol numerous mashups were created which always experiment with new and different interconnections between the phenomena on our modern flat earth. The modern day missionaries on this new flat world have found not only one point connecting the earth and the sky as the Flammarion engraving suggests but are continuously creating thousand of networks and mashups indiscriminately connecting different places, things, people and entities.

How did we get from this myth and prejudice of the flat earth and the dark Middle Ages to this most popular metaphor and vision of our world today? How did the flat world open a space for these prolific hybrid connections, new networks and mashups? Flammarion was wrong about the flat world of the Middle Ages but there is

an important transformation that happened during the 16th Century which explains the phenomenon of mashups. This change in the cosmography and mapping of our world is closely related to the ascension of secularization, science and technology - which started the age of colonization and globalisation - leading to the flat world of today.

The historian and the philosopher of science, Alexandre Koyré, describes this shift and transformation as the destruction of the cosmos, by which he means the destruction of the original, etymological sense of cosmos as the beautiful and well arranged unity, interpretation - which is common in the discussions of ancient cosmography. This nicely arranged universe was closed and hierarchically organised under the Aristotelian and later biblical models which we can see on the famous map by Peter Apian from his 1540 book *Cosmographia*. The earth in these models is not flat but closed, and organized in terms of different spheres from the changeable and unstable sublunar world, to the eternal and spiritual firmament. Everything has a stable place in this division between the lunar and sublunar spheres which was given by Gods' creation. The political, theological and cosmic orders are all closely interlinked expressing the hierarchical ideal of a closed and completed universe in which earth had its firm place in the sublunar sphere.

During the 16th Century a new model of the world and universe emerges shortly after the first sea voyages. It is the model of an open and infinite universe that is levelled and secularized without any hierarchy and it is waiting for us to be explored and conquered. This idea brought the destruction of the cosmos and disappearance of the finite closed, and hierarchically ordered whole. The development of science and technology went hand in hand with the rise of new maps and models of the universe and populated our closed world with new lands and new entities with which we have to create new relations and networks. This process is described by Bruno Latour as the proliferation of hybrids and the rise of the so-called non - human actors in the 16th Century. The renaissance maps were the first tools for creating the constantly changing and dynamic networks between the human and non-human actors - whose numbers are still growing in the age of mashups. Mashups are tools which allow us not only to make sense and experience our technologically saturated world, but to also create new and unexpected connections and networks between the human and non-human actors, between people, data and the things from the outside world. The division between the lunar and sublunar spheres, between the space of instability and corruption and the space of eternity and spirituality is questioned with every new

and unexpected territory, but also by science and technology and the new entities they discover and invent. The world simply ceases to be a moral lesson and becomes a space for exploration and experiments with new networks.

Five hundred years after these first models of the open universe new type of maps and models are emerging. Everyone can add nowadays and name a new layer of the world, create his own custom map and discover and share new data territories. It is the age of mashups and personal geographies when millions of Google map and Google earth users launch daily their textual and graphic adventures on the interactive models of our planet. They colonise the objective and universal representations of earth by monitoring, sharing and annotating different data of their rides, hikes, weddings, first kisses etc. They put themselves, their families, hobbies and different obsessions on the surface of earth to re-claim the territory. By doing this they reverse the history of mapping.

A long time ago mapping shifted away from trusting the human body as an agent of recording spatial information to the use of different instruments (compass, astrolabe etc) and objective representations. The map mashups return to the pre-modern condition when the individual and the human body were the referential point for all spatial information. Nowadays we annotate any type of data with GPS coordinates as we walk around the city. We can post in real time a personal opinion, evaluation or upload a picture from any place in the world. Map mashups are not only a scientific and topographic model and they do not consist only of grids, metric system and frame, but they start to define also an 'experiential' and even 'moral' space. They are closer to a thematic map but, moreover, they bring to maps again values and not just facts. The unornamented graphic representation of the 18th and 19th Century maps are submitted to the ornamental possibilities of the mashups on which we can place photos, videos and any type of graphic. These new baroque maps have their own elaborate lettering, cartouches and pictorial symbolisation which bring together aesthetics quality with scientific precision.

Maps cease to be the objective images of the common world and are becoming again a place of utopian visions, ephemeral interests, grand and even apocalyptic stories. The return of the flat earth is this return of a world in which facts are not separated from values and nature is not separated from politics. The personal geography of mashups leads to a total annihilation of all hierarchies and differences in order to connect everything with everything else. Are mashups the icons of the

new cosmology? Do they bring the return of the repressed values and beauty or do they lead to the further destruction of the cosmos? Are mashups and other web 2.0 phenomena like social tagging symptoms of the end of our fascination with technologies and the return of man to the centre of the universe? Are we experiencing some type of 'sampled' humanism on these new models, or do they only reinforce the posthuman erasure of all differences between humans and non-humans, between what is embodied and what is digital? How do we evaluate the infinite linking of small and big, human and non-human, ephemeral and cosmic on these new maps? Will the interconnection of everything with everything else bring a total relativisation, far more extreme than the renaissance destruction of cosmos, or we can expect some new form of a closed and hierarchical world with one goal – survival?

Mashups are the continuation of the dramatic changes in the way we represent and perceive our world (the planet and the universe) ever since the 16th Century, but also a revival of pre-renaissance experiences and values. It is important to place them in this broader context and discussion of transformation of models and maps of our world because this process exists in parallel with other major transformations in our culture and society. Maps and models of the universe always play a crucial role in how we perceive our place in the universe as humans, especially now when we are challenged by many new and emerging technologies. Mashups are this most recent response to a very complex world of the web 2.0 technologies with its diversity of content, quantities of data as well as numbers of users, digital identities etc. There is a need for tools which will help us grasp the complexity of data we produce and consume and make them more synoptical but also useful.

Mashups however are not only visualisation tools used for the data chaos, they are also active tools with which we can place the humans back into the picture, collectively envision our world and universe and take part in what can be described as microglobalisation. Mashups are not only the new means to create more hybrid networks in which humans and non-humans dissolve but they are also phenomenological tools with which to place back human experience into the technological world. All the new geoware, geotagging and the different ways of how to monitor and annotate space are the new compass and astrolabes with which we explore the hybrid worlds between the digital and the physical, the human and the non-human, the known and the unknown or the emergent. They are also personal tools with which we make sense of the technological universe.

Contrary to the networks, they connect not only the humans with the non-humans but also transform the whole relation between what is small and big, private and public, local and global and in the most general sense - the human and the cosmic. These hybrid connections and similar misalliances are norms rather than a chance encounters in the case of mashups. How do we evaluate and speak of this extreme linking of everything with everything else? How do these new maps that mash different content change our view of the common world and our place in it? How did the world flatten so much in opening this new space for networks, mashups and hybrid connections?

The flat world of the 21st Century with its globalization 3.0, web 2.0 and other attributes is a world of networks and mashups where humans and non-humans, things, machines, institutions but also people, data and objects are all in constant flux, creating new types of constellations and connections. Everything is levelled to such a degree that we could agree with the visionaries of the *Internet of Things* and RFID technologies where soon all things will chat with each other but also no one will be able to spot the difference between humans. This flatness of our world has a paradoxical and interesting effect which we can describe as anthropomorphisation of technologies which runs in parallel with an intense dehumanisation of people: software is increasingly 'social' and biological, for example a SUN product will bring a new 'participation age', CISCO describes their technologies as a 'human network', Microsoft has its 'People_Ready' business slogan - to name but a few of the many examples attempting to humanise technologies.

The goal of these technologies and phrases is not to create machines that think or feel like humans, nor to transform humans into machines, but to preach this strange symbiosis where both can live together in peace, harmony and equilibrium by supporting each other. This strangely sampled humanism is reinforced by radical posthumanism of thinkers when they speak of humans: like the 'wireless bipeds' of William J. Mitchell which he uses to define humans, or his concept of the self as a programming entity 'Me++'; Donna Haraway's concept of cyborgs; GenRich humans by Lee Silver; Metaman of Gregory Stock, ex-humans by Hans Moravec; transhumans and other beings which populate much of our writings on the post-modern man. This common flattening of the difference between what is human and nonhuman is also closely connected to the classical concept of network in Bruno Latour's writing and in the concepts of Actor Network Theory which emphasis this as the basic character of our modern world.

How is the idea of a human and non human network, of anthropomorphised technologies and dehumanized people connected to the current mashup phenomena? While the idea of a network only describes the process of anthropomorphisation of technologies and the dehumanisation of people, mashups are a more normative concept; they actively support and create new forms of networks. The mashups are a means of experimenting with different connections, they are means of what Bruno Latour calls 'cosmopolitics' - the normative involvement in the creation of new hybrid collectives. Mashups also give us a unique opportunity to study, in real time, different hybrid and experimental collectives.

Mashups are simply an outcome of the intensive interactions and connections between humans and non-humans happening during the recent few centuries. Different networks, hybrids and translations between human and the non-human characterize our entire modern and postmodern world: it is impossible to draw a clear line between culture and nature, technology and politics today. While this idea of networks was more a metaphor in the 80s and 90s, with the advent of Internet and development of web 2.0, with mashups it became literally true. The mashups represent this new cosmography of the web 2.0 universe where millions publish, share, organise, annotate and mash content. We are basically not only witnessing the personal colonisation of media and public space, but also the whole globe. This renaissance colonisation is where modern and postmodern globalisation are changing in these new maps - into something which could be described as 'microglobalisation' - done by everyone individually - creating new models of the physical world as well as the virtual world through inhabiting Second Life.

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