

# Google Mapping *Blow-Up*: A Desktop Remediation

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## **Google Mapping *Blow-Up*: A Desktop Remediation**

By Cáit Murphy

This desktop documentary (<https://vimeo.com/1121241319>) retraces the London filming locations of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) via Google Maps Street View and satellite technology. In the film, protagonist Thomas (David Hemmings) is a fashion photographer living in Notting Hill at the height of the "Swinging London" scene. On a whim, he wanders through Maryon Park with his camera, taking some snaps of a secret affair. He becomes captivated by what he believes to be evidence of a murder in his prints. He visits the park again to discover the body and later, a third time, to see that it has vanished. The film ends when Thomas plays a "virtual" game of tennis with a mime group, showing an aerial shot of Thomas fading into the park's landscape. As a spectator, this park has always captivated me (and many others). The impetus for making this video came from an article I wrote during the pandemic in 2021, where I "travelled" to these filming locations using Google Maps. After attending workshops led by Kevin B. Lee and during my PhD research on Alexandre Astruc's theory of the "caméra-stylo", I decided to blend the two interests. [1] How can I express subjectivity and cinephilia through my desktop camera/screen/interface?

On a practical note, my method is inspired by the desktop filmmaking aesthetics of Jessica McGoff's *My Mulholland* (2020), which resituates the themes of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) within the surreal perils of Internet exploration and being a cinephile in the digital age, using typing as a stream-of-consciousness narration. [2] Seeing my desktop as a mechanical extension of my embodiment, I intuitively engage in what Catherine Grant has

proposed as the “material thinking” of videographic criticism that involves *touching the film object* virtually and digitally with “eye/ear-hand-touch pad-virtual object/screen coordination and interaction.” [3] Rather than manipulate *Blow-Up* as a digital file per se, I manipulate my desktop’s many windows and applications in an attempt to materialise *my* extra-textual experience of the film for others. Thus, I’m also interested in what Lee and Lého Galibert-Lainé have called “desktop subjectivity”: “the unique form of first-person perspective that results from linking the spectator’s gaze with the author’s desktop.” [4] I wanted to convey for the viewer the haptic sensation of zooming in on pixelated, low-resolution images. My desktop functions as a kind of first-person “camera” – ironically remediating Thomas’s profession (and even Astruc’s vision of a “camera-pen”).

A fan or cinephile can’t really “live” in a film, but we can be “inside” these texts (to invoke Henry Jenkins) by taking culture in our own hands *digitally* (in both senses of the term). While cinephiles and fans might be separated on cultural grounds, Jenkins surmises there is little difference between them – evidenced by the admittedly *fan-nish* activities of video essayists and “aca/fans”. [5] I watched fans’ videos of their visits to Maryon Park on YouTube, noticing the parallels between Thomas’s excited discovery of the illicit affair and fans’ excited “discovery” of the mysterious park. The tangibility of really *being* there and *touching grass* promises a more authentic experience beyond the Internet. [6] It led me to think about the resonance of Antonioni’s film in the digital era – how can I match the text with the present day?

Firstly, *Blow-Up* is a *cinephilic* text and Thomas’s obsession with photography might be compared to an obsession with cinema. [7] His repeated cropping and zooming in on objects

seems to predict the ability for video essayists to slow down and “zoom in” on particular aspects of film texts. [\[8\]](#) Secondly, *Blow-Up* is already reflexive as a meditation on indexicality and mechanical reproduction. Thus, its exploration of the “virtual” and the “actual” finds heightened resonance in an era of algorithmic co-creation, social media influencers, synthetic media, and virtual reality. Perry Bard’s crowdsourced *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (2007-2017), Jennifer Proctor’s (2010) digital remake of Bruce Conner’s *A Movie* (1958) and AI-generated remakes of Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962) shown at the Festival of AI at King’s College London in 2024 were key references for me for their remediation of prescient themes from older films. [\[9\]](#) The contrasts between “then” and “now” become clear in such remediations, but existing themes are also heightened. [\[10\]](#) As I include in the video, a simple Google search for “fashion models” shows images of real, living women alongside copious AI-generated models, seemingly exacerbating the film’s existing theme of superficiality.

By using the Internet and Google Maps, I wanted to expand *Blow-Up*’s transnational identity. The film was essentially the product of movement and transference. *Blow-Up* was adapted from the short story “Las Babas del Diablo” by Argentine-French novelist, Julio Cortázar, as a transnational co-production between Italy and the UK. As an outsider making his first English-language film, Antonioni approached London with a new eye that wasn’t affected by familiarity. He mapped his version of a neighbourhood-like London onto spaces that are not really in proximity to each other, as noted by Murray Pomerance and Adam Scovell, respectively. [\[11\]](#) Adding to this transnational angle, the scope of *Blow-Up*’s admirers stretches globally, as a quick search on YouTube will show. I incorporated four of these videos as an alternative collective geography with a globalised angle, with the tennis match recreation made by film students at Brown University. [\[12\]](#)

With Pomerance's and Scovell's prior research in mind, I found out for myself that Thomas's route really is convoluted to follow. Luckily, Maryon Park is more or less the same as it was in 1966 (excluding Antonioni's many authorial augmentations to the park's natural settings). Over twenty-four hours, Thomas visits the park three times, so I wanted to evoke this feeling of repetition of a highly charged location. I show multiple angles of the park, including satellite and drone views not seen in the original film. Some filming locations (like the exterior of Thomas's studio on Pottery Lane) have not changed much; however, the "dosshouse" off Consort Road and the bright red buildings Thomas drives by are gone and are visibly omitted from the video.

The experience of wandering – which is how Thomas finds the park – was also something I wanted to explore. Galibert-Lainé examines in their video essay *Flânerie 2.0* (2018), in reference to Walter Benjamin, that "flânerie is the art of tactile perception" in urban spaces. Wandering and letting one's gaze "slide" on pedestrians, streets, and buildings without fixing one's gaze was how the flâneur experienced shifting modernity. As Galibert-Lainé points out, Benjamin's envisioned flâneur was always a potential consumer. But the contemporary flâneur "scrolls, he clicks, he navigates with the tip of his finger" on websites. Thus, the cookies left behind by our sliding gaze on these products are essentially the trail of flânerie. [\[13\]](#) Galibert-Lainé notes that nowadays, people in cities guide their tactile perception towards their smartphones. As Dean Keep has analysed, the prosthetic, intuitively handled smartphone encourages us to capture fleeting, mobile life on the streets – we are both flâneurs and "phoneurs". [\[14\]](#) As a "digital flâneuse" in London, the fear of getting lost prevented me from *really* wandering around as Benjamin's flâneur might have done or how

Thomas did in 1966. I was consistently distracted by looking at my screen to determine my location.

Google Maps and smartphones have made travel easier and potentially safer, but it's important to acknowledge the nefarious aspects of these technologies. [15] Google Maps' supposedly empirical, "objective" view of space is shaped by colonialism and capitalism. [16] The way Google Maps satellite imagery looks is heavily determined by hegemonic corporate decision-making about the visibility and labelling of geographical spaces. [17] This point was highlighted in James Bridle's notable satellite imagery project "Dronestagram". [18] The mapping technology is not neutral and its satellite view does not entirely reflect reality on the ground, adding to the mysteriousness of its imagery. And building on the conspiratorial themes of *Blow-Up*, surveillance and privacy are an inevitable aspect of Google Maps. Despite its face-blurring feature, Street View renders us all subjects of its mechanical point-of-view. [19] By circumstances of people "wandering" on Google Maps, curious sightings abound, also making us all potential detectives: from true crime stories and secret military bases to Street View images of Jean-Luc Godard strolling in his neighbourhood in Rolle, Switzerland (made into a short film by Robert Luxemburg, set to Georges Delerue's "Thème de Camille"). [20] When I found the "figure" lying down in Maryon Park through satellite imagery, my mind instantly assumed the worst. But I couldn't zoom in close enough to determine the truth. I'm perhaps no better than Thomas in my voyeurism and morbid curiosity, making me question the ethical implications of using the technology.

What I saw on Google Maps was supposedly empirical and indexical but did not provide me with a sense of the “real”. Thomas’s dissection of large prints of black-and-white grain – like enhancing images on a computer screen – is a practice that is now the basis of a visual culture (albeit of pixels) where indexicality is under threat. Online accusations of uses of AI in images coincide, understandably, with the increased visibility of AI to make propaganda and spread disinformation. [\[21\]](#) Whether or not the murder ever happened in *Blow-Up* seems to matter little to Thomas (or the plot) by the film’s open ending. Thomas’s virtual game of tennis suggests his embrace of an invisible augmented reality. But is there still a “real” that is important to reach? The appealing “auratic” experience (or however it might be described) of touching and caressing the indexical object, sculpture, or building with our gaze is part of what drives mass tourism (and many fan practices). But, like many tourists, even as I experienced the park in person, I recorded what I saw through the threshold of my screen. My experience was still mediated by a camera – this time my own handheld smartphone, and not Google Maps or others’ cameras. My experience of London on the ground was still partly virtual, suggesting the inescapability of screens and cameras today.

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## Notes

[\[1\]](#) Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-stylo,” in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed., trans., Ginette Vincendeau and Peter Graham (BFI, 2022). First published in *L’Écran français*, no. 144, 30 March 1948.

[\[2\]](#) I was also informed by Lee’s *Transformers: The Premake* (2014), and its style of database filmmaking and crowdsourcing footage on YouTube. See: Kevin B. Lee, “TRANSFORMERS: THE PREMAKE (a desktop documentary),” Vimeo, 6 May 2014,

<https://vimeo.com/94101046>; Jessica McGoff, “My Mulholland,” Vimeo, 6 June 2020, <https://vimeo.com/426494447>.

[3] Catherine Grant, “The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea? Videographic Film Studies Practice as Material Thinking,” *Aniki* 1, no. 1 (2014): 49-62, <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/47473/>.

[4] Lého Galibert-Lainé and Kevin B Lee, “Troubling the Desktop,” *Filmmaker Magazine*, 14 March 2019, <https://filmmakermagazine.com/107208-troubling-the-desktop/>.

[5] See: Edgar Pera, “Fans & Cinephiles (Henry Jenkins Interview),” 2 December 2015, <https://edgarpera.org/2015/12/02/fans-cinephiles-henry-jenkins-interview/>.

[6] The phrase to “touch grass” is Internet slang that means leaving the toxic, intangible online space and engaging with the real world. As an order, “go touch grass” can be considered an insult.

[7] *Blow-Up* even evokes ‘the wind in the trees’ in *Le repas de bébé* (Louis Lumière, 1895) that captured the early audience’s obsession with the cinematic apparatus. Antonioni, too, is keen to capture the wind in the trees in Maryon Park. See: Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or the Wind in the Trees* (Indiana University Press, 2006), 8; Nico Baumbach, “Nature Caught in the Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema,” *Comparative Critical Studies* 6, no. 3 (2009): 373-383, DOI: 10.3366/E1744185409000858.

[8] For example, the fixation on Cary Grant’s socks in *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) described in: Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*, 31-32.

[9] See: Perry Bard, “Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake,” Vimeo, 8 July 2017, <https://vimeo.com/224732919>; Jennifer Proctor, *A Movie by Jen Proctor* (2010), <https://jenniferproctor.com/A-Movie-by-Jen-Proctor>; “AI ‘Remakes’ of *La Jetée* (Chris



Marker, 1962),” King’s College London, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/events/ai-remakes-of-la-jetee-chris-marker-1962>.

[10] It is also worth noting Shezad Dawood’s reworking of *Blow-Up* for the installation “Make it Big” (2005), which comments on globalisation and identity in the twenty-first century.

[11] Murray Pomerance, *Michelangelo Red, Antonioni Blue: Eight Reflections on Cinema* (University of California Press, 2011); Adam Scovell, “On Location: The London Park from Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up*,” *Little White Lies*, 2 September 2019, <https://lwlies.com/articles/on-location-blow-up-michelangelo-antonioni-maryon-park/>.

[12] See: Amorphous Blob, “Blow Up (1966) Tennis Scene Recreation,” YouTube, 24 November 2010, <https://youtu.be/3iZ5gPqHfM4?feature=shared>.

[13] Lého Galibert-Lainé, “Flânerie 2.0” (2018), <https://lehogalibertlaine.com/flanerie-20-francais>.

[14] Dean Keep, “Smartphones and Evocative Documentary Practices,” in *Mobile Story Making in an Age of Smartphones*, ed. Max Schleser and Marsha Berry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 42-43.

[15] Google Maps can be usefully employed for location scouting, as Jesse Eisenberg did for his film *A Real Pain* (2024) by visiting Poland on Street View during the pandemic. See: IMDb (@imdb), Instagram, 14 March 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHMJfAGsaB2/?igsh=MWJud3BieDh5MWhsbw==>.

[16] See: Jason Farman, “Mapping the Digital Empire: Google Earth and the Process of Postmodern Cartography,” *new media & society* 12, no. 6 (2010): 869-888, DOI: 10.1177/1461444809350900; Paresh Dave, “Google Lifts a Ban on Using its AI for Weapons

and Surveillance,” *WIRED*, 4 February 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/google-responsible-ai-principles/>.

[17] See, for example: 7amleh: Arab Centre for Social Media Advancement, “Mapping Segregation: Google Maps and the Human Rights of Palestinians,” (September 2018), [https://7amleh.org/ms/Mapping%20Segregation%20Cover\\_WEB.pdf](https://7amleh.org/ms/Mapping%20Segregation%20Cover_WEB.pdf).

[18] See: James Bridle, “Dronestagram: The Drone’s-Eye View,” booktwo.org, 8 November 2012, <https://booktwo.org/notebook/dronestagram-drones-eye-view/>; Dronestagram (@dronestagram), Instagram profile, <https://www.instagram.com/dronestagram/>.

[19] This machine vision is captured eloquently in Timothy Thomasson’s generative panoramic installation “I’m Feeling Lucky” (2024). See: Timothy Thomassen, <https://timothythomasson.com/i'm-feeling-lucky>.

[20] Robert Luxemburg, “Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville on Google StreetView,” YouTube, 21 February 2018, <https://youtu.be/X2ryBq31pHs?feature=shared>.

[21] See, for example: Molly Roberts, “Royal photo fiasco shows why no one believes what they see anymore,” *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/03/11/catherine-royal-family-photo-ai-editing/>.

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## **Filmography**

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## **Biography**

Cáit Murphy is a final-year PhD candidate in the Film Department, Trinity College Dublin. Her thesis investigates the re-imagining of Alexandre Astruc's theory of the "caméra-stylo" (1948) in the social media era and is funded by the Provost's PhD Project Award. She is a lecturer in Digital Theory and Practice. She has published on the topics of the Wes Anderson TikTok trend, on generative AI and surrealist body horror with *Convergence*, on Claire Denis's personal use of Instagram with *NECSUS*, on film sound and genre with *Sonic Scope*, and on Claire Denis's "accented style" with *Film Matters*. She is an early career research resident in the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts & Humanities Research Institute.