

Psychogeography: Framing Urban Experience

The cross-disciplinary thought given to the city, particularly over the past forty years, has led to its reconceptualisation in terms of urban -economic, sociopolitical, and more recently cultural- relations. This has provided the context for often generalised observations of subjective urban experience, recalling Simmel's investigations of industrial metropolitan individuality, and a recycling of artistic practices like psychogeography that engaged with the urban imaginary and everyday life.

Initially, “the word psychogeography,” so Guy Debord’s story goes, was a neologism, “suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for a phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953”. The *directeur* of the Lettrist International (LI), and from 1957-72, also Situationist International (SI), goes on to explain this phenomena as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.”¹ In practice, this was approached with emphatically un-academic methods, the most established being the *dérive*. With a backward glance at surrealist automatism, this recreational tactic properly entailed several psychogeographers together negotiating “urban ambiences” -frequently in Paris, but also in Amsterdam, London, Venice- talking and taking advantage of any bars *en route*. Such diversions were documented in written accounts and psychogeographical maps, and thus described in the LI’s journal *Potlatch* and the SI’s *Internationale Situationniste*. Moreover, the resulting conclusions were applied in proposals for a unitary urbanism that reimagined the city as a site of play, creating disorientating ‘situations’ for the ludic education of its inhabitants. Within this imaginary space, which we shall explore with reference to Michel de Certeau’s thinking about walking in the city,² the situationists rehearsed their vehement if oversimplified Marxism. However, so sincere was their desire to bring about the revolutionary collapse of the “spectacle”; to resist becoming spectators within the dominant

¹ DEBORD, G. *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* (1955) trans. Paul Hammond in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds.) *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings* (Barcelona: MACBA and ACTAR, 1996a) p.18

² DE CERTEAU, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley, LA and London: UCP, 1984) pp.91-110

bourgeois system,³ that the irreverent games of psychogeography had quietly disappeared by the time they visibly claimed the streets in the May 1968 riots. In 1961, Debord even intimated the practical impossibility of the psychogeographical project: “The sectors of a city ... are decipherable, but the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable, as is the secrecy of private life in general, regarding which we have nothing but pitiful documents.”⁴ Nonetheless, it was through those early experiments that the SI realised the strategic significance of the city and, in so doing, anticipated postmodernist analyses of Capitalist restructuring as contingent upon social production.⁵ As such, psychogeography’s ideological claims are best addressed now by academics such as bell hooks and Rosalyn Deutsche, just as they were provoked and probed initially by Lefebvre and his theories of everyday life.⁶ Wandering through academic disciplines to navigate contemporary spatial politics, these writers reveal and complicate repressive power structures built into urban planning and call for their radical realignment.

I will suggest that psychogeographical strategies, which have already been appropriated by art institutions to describe and define the contemporary urban experience of a cultural elite, can nonetheless offer a critical practice for achieving postmodern fragmentations of existing spatial hierarchies. By investigating the socioeconomic, political and cultural circumstances that motivated the rethink of everyday life in the city as contested space, I intend to identify aspects of psychogeography which retain their relevance today - such as the implications of the SI’s significant but largely overlooked Tunisian, Algerian and Congolese membership and base in the North African quarter of La Huchette- whilst challenging others -most notably the flagrant sexism- which are unsustainable. In this way, I hope to use psychogeography to determine a methodological approach for framing, and as such realigning, contemporary urban experiences.

³ See DEBORD, G. *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (NY: Zone Books, 1995)

⁴ DEBORD, G. (dir.) *A Critique of Separation* (1961)

⁵ For instance, David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

⁶ We will refer to: bell hooks *Outlaw Culture* (NY and London: Routledge, 1994); DEUTSCHE, R. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996); LEFEBVRE, H. *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. II* (1961) trans. John Moore (London and NY: Verso, 2002)

In order to map out psychogeography's boundaries, let us consider what was at stake for the SI. Debord's own *detourned* maps of Paris are a good starting point as attempts to capture a changing city. Indeed, in opposition to the totalising plans of architectural space that it subverts, *The Naked City* (1957) is a partial and fragmented interpretation of the urban as inhabited. Psychogeographical hubs, or *plaques tournantes*, are dislocated and suspended on a white ground, the places they reference recognisable only to those who know the streets. The connecting red arrows chart the sensory currents exerted on the individual, describing an experience of space that was being rendered obsolete. By the mid 1950s, post-war economic restructuring was becoming visible at street level: the increased affordability of the private car and the modernisation of shop and cafe frontages were making their mark whilst Debord made his maps; Malraux's gentrification of the Marais and Île St Louis would come soon after, in 1962. Meanwhile, the development of the *grands ensembles* -vast social housing estates on the city's periphery- marginalised those who disrupted the image of civilised cohesion in the centre. These transformations were symptomatic of a burgeoning consumer culture which, bolstered by the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957, transgressed national borders. It is worth emphasising here that, although Paris was at the centre of the SI's activities, their reach was Europe-wide. Indeed, the group's formation in 1957 followed the First World Congress of Free Artists (Alba, 1956) and ongoing meetings between the LI, the London Psychogeographical Society and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, formerly CoBrA (Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam). Thus, the SI's contempt for what they saw as the increasing homogenisation of space due to modernist fundamentalism was directed not only at Parisian, but at European rebuilding; it was on its own scale that they berated the uniformity of an International Style "clandestinely burdened with an excessively reactionary notion of life and its framework."⁷

In 1967, Debord would expound the political thrust of this statement, taking Marx and Engels' assertion that "the bourgeois ... creates a world after its own image" as the premise for *The Society of the Spectacle*.⁸ By this partial understanding of Marxism, a progressive notion of life's framework would empower the proletariat as "the *class of consciousness*

⁷ DEBORD, G. *Rapport sur la Construction des Situations* (1957) passage trans. Thomas Levin in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds.) *Situationists* (Barcelona: MACBA and ACTAR, 1996b) p.114

⁸ MARX, K. and ENGELS, F. *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) trans. Samuel Moore (London: Merlin Press, 1998) p.6

[sic.]".⁹ Lefebvre recalls an early psychogeographical experiment to this end in Amsterdam, during which two groups used walkie-talkies to link up areas that were spatially separated.¹⁰ Seeing communication as a means of transgressing geographical boundaries, the SI attempted thus to deny the city's spectacularly inscribed order; rather than take direction they wanted to create their own situation and mobilise individual creativity in turn. The concept of the situation was indebted to Lefebvre's own theorisation of everyday life punctuated by moments. Significantly, however, the moment was characterised as developing over time, with love his preferred example.¹¹ As such, whilst Lefebvre recognised the value of psychogeography in revealing spatial fragmentations that had begun in fact with nineteenth century Haussmannisation,¹² he doubted the efficacy of the SI's efforts to activate revolutionary change. With the benefit of hindsight, one answer to this criticism can be found in the LI's 1956 psychogeographical study of the *Continent Contrescarpe*, which has been read as a primer for the barricade of the Left Bank during May 1968:

The mere construction, at various chosen locations, of three or four adequate architectural complexes, combined with the closing off of two or three streets ... would without doubt suffice to make this neighbourhood an irrefutable example of a new urbanism.¹³

It might be added that the strategic violence of his new urbanism suggests the impact of military conscription -war being perhaps the ultimate situation- on psychogeographical outcomes. But by the time this proposal was realised, psychogeography and the theory of situations had been dropped and a permanent rift separated the SI and Lefebvre, who

⁹ DEBORD, G. trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1995) p.58

¹⁰ Lefebvre speaking in 1983, transcribed in ROSS, K. *Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview* (1997) in McDONOUGH (ed.) *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004) p.272

¹¹ Lefebvre points to the gradual shift from ancient abstract love to medieval romantic love. LEFEBVRE, H. trans. John Moore (2002) pp.341-5

¹² This term refers to the redevelopment of Paris following Baron Haussmann's masterplan (1852-71).

¹³ This is an idea discussed briefly by Levin in *Geopolitics of Hibernation: The Drift of the Situationist International* in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996b) p.136; LI, *Position du Continent Contrescarpe* (1956) in KNABB, K. (trans. and ed.) *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981)

repudiated the political naivety and dogmatism of its remaining members.¹⁴ Expulsions were a regular feature of SI meetings, with a blacklist appearing in most issues of the *Internationale Situationniste*; overall, forty-five of the SI's sometime seventy members were dismissed. As the group was whittled down to its hard, cynical core, attempts at the utopian reconstruction of society through play were quashed by repressive power relations within the group itself.

In its early stages, the SI was its own situation; bringing together aesthetes and politicos, it was a catalyst for inter-disciplinary exchange. With competing artistic and technical resources, the situationists engaged and idealised the complexity of the city's layered past. Theirs was a project imbued with nostalgia. Even as they criticised an ideologically backward-looking urbanism, the reference to Mauss's anthropological study of archaic gift cultures as the title of the LI publication, *Potlatch*, suggests a pre-modern model for a situationist society.¹⁵ The enthusiasm for constructing situations arose, in effect, from the desire to access a more authentic experience of everyday life beneath the surface of the individuating spectacle:

the reduction in the work necessary for production, through extended automation, will create a need for leisure, a diversity of behaviour and a change in the nature of the latter, which will of necessity lead to a new conception of the collective habitat having the maximum of social space...¹⁶

It was because of this search for social space that the *dérive* was considered most effective with “several small groups of two or three people”;¹⁷ as opposed to the solitary stroll of the bourgeois *flâneur*, psychogeography invoked a nomadic community. If this kind of nostalgia has since been characterised by Harvey as an evasive and conservative reaction to the

¹⁴ Lefebvre in McDONOUGH (ed., 2004) p.281

¹⁵ MAUSS, M. *The Gift: The Form and Reason For Exchange in Archaic Societies* trans. W.D. Halls (London/New York : Routledge, 1990)

¹⁶ NIEUWENHUYSEN, C. Another City for Another Life (1959) trans. Paul Hammond in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996a) pp.37-40

¹⁷ DEBORD, G. Theory of the Derive (1956) trans. Paul Hammond in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (1996a) p.23

globalisation of capital,¹⁸ then reading bell hooks allows us to locate and challenge his view. Recalling her own experience of growing up in a small, black community in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, hooks contrasts the “sense of being connected through … taking a walk” in a neighbourhood of known faces with that of entering the “*Twilight Zone*” in an affluent, predominantly white area. Observing privacy in this way as a bourgeois aspiration, she suggests that it stems from a culture of domination: on one hand, to demand privacy belies “a profound narcissism”; on the other, its effects are so often alienation and loneliness.¹⁹ From this perspective, strengthening social relations is a means of resisting the psychological conditioning first theorised by Simmel, who observed that the 1900s metropolitan individual assumed a *blasé* front to deflect the bombardment of swiftly changing stimuli.²⁰ Of course, the SI saw this process of domination as the calculated function (rather than repercussion) of the urban and its commodities -in particular, television and the private car- for the accumulation of capital. But, as we have seen, psychogeography also asserted the potential of technology to reverse the effects of its own production. Long before the ubiquitous mobile phone, Constant’s plans for the situationist city of *New Babylon* (1959) inferred that telecommunications could be used to meet “the real [social] needs of man”. This possibility resonates in cultural theorist McLuhan’s 1962 projection that “electronic interdependence” would precipitate a “global village”, albeit with the potential to induce tribal terrors.²¹ Such visions of connectivity are easily recognised in our own age of hypercommunication. And yet, the social cohesion they anticipate is arguably still illusory; bell hooks, for one, contests the reality of relations fragmented and deferred by mediation and suggests the real alienation of anyone unable to be alone.²² As such, it is perhaps the situationists’ always only imagined future even more than their claim to (a version of) the past that situates psychogeography in its own present.

¹⁸ HARVEY, D. (1989)

¹⁹ bell hooks (2006) pp.264-70

²⁰ SIMMEL, G. *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) trans. Edward Shils in LEACH, N. (ed.) *Rethinking Architecture* (NY and London: Routledge, 1997) pp.69-79

²¹ McLUHAN, M. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: UTP, 1962) pp.31-2

²² bell hooks (2006) p.271

Not entirely without irony, Debord would reflect on unrealised urban plans after disbanding the SI in 1972: “It is known that initially the Situationists wanted at the very least to build cities ... But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to do much more.”²³ Let us take him at his word and remember that it was not the city *per se* but rather its spectacular (urban) ideology that the SI saw fit to revolutionise. The very concept of the spectacle presupposes an urban imaginary, since it determines a spatial narrative that differentiates the urban condition from that of simply being in the city. So to resist representation, the situationists looked to literary and artistic models for alternative ways of playing space. With its distancing (and classifying) gaze, the gentlemanly diversion of *flâneurie* was proposed by Baudelaire as a means of conceiving art forms more relevant to industrial Paris. His reconception of the modern writer as "botanist of the sidewalk",²⁴ immersed within but separate from the crowd, found further influence in dadaist expeditions and, crucially for the SI, surrealist literature and geographical automatism. Indeed, their stubborn rejection of the surrealist unconscious belies the extent of surrealism’s sway, with the LI’s *Rational Embellishments to the City of Paris* a transparent inversion of Breton’s 1933 *Irrational Embellishments*. Thus, where Breton envisaged the towers of Notre-Dame replaced “with an enormous glass cruet, one of the bottles filled with blood, the other with semen”,²⁵ Bernstein suggested all churches be razed and new ruins built in their place. Whilst metaphor still had its place in their psychogeographical revisions, the iconic and the figurative were dismissed in the search for disorientation, and later proposals ranged from creating ambiences with atmospheric lighting and sound to transplanting a whole district from one city into another.

Just as it had the surrealists, the imaginary offered the situationists possibilities unfettered by practical considerations, and the whim that one day they might be realised: quoting Breton (to whom he dissentingly refers as “an author whose name, on account of his notorious intellectual degradation, I have since forgotten”) Debord concurs, “The imaginary

²³ DEBORD, G. On Wild Architecture (1972) trans. Paul Hammond extract in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996a) p.152

²⁴ For a discussion of Baudelaire’s concept of flâneurie see BENJAMIN, W. On Some Motifs in Baudelaire, Illuminations trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973) pp.162-72

²⁵ BRETON, A. Experimental Researches in ROSEMONT, F. (ed) *What is Surrealism?* (London: Pluto, 1978)

is that which tends to become real.”²⁶ This is a notion that demands further consideration in view of recent urban developments that appear to spatialise certain psychogeographical concepts. Celebration, Florida, for instance, is an entirely privatised but census-designated instance of New Urbanism founded in 1994 by that manufacturer of “dreams come true”, The Walt Disney Company.²⁷ More town than city, here you are encouraged to walk or cycle (there are no cars, only golf buggies): smooth jazz sounds from speakers in the pavement; residents live in houses that pillage an impossible history ending half a century before their building began; even the town’s name, an eponymous invitation, implies the perpetual leisure to which psychogeography aspired. Whether or not the SI inspired Celebration is moot: they would undoubtedly dismiss it as unmitigated spectacle, but it would be very surprising if its architects, including Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Cesar Pelli and Michael Graves, were unfamiliar with situationist ideas. Of more significance, however, is the observation that tactics intended to subvert the spectacle should in fact be used to sustain it. If *the dominant imaginary* is that which moulds reality and thus constitutes lived experience, then the possibility of this shared vision locates the spectacle as necessarily already present in the SI’s spatial revolution.

As long as they were realised on the page, the SI’s urban (de-)constructions could be written and rewritten multiply, creating a text of intersecting imaginaries accommodated precisely for their difference. Thus, alongside Bernstein’s proposal for Paris’ churches, we read alternative suggestions from Debord (“complete demolition”), Wolman (“left standing but stripped of all religious content”) and Fillon (“transformation into *fearful* houses”).²⁸ Needless to say, the execution of any of these possibilities would have negated all others, projecting an image of cohesion through violent social production. Instead, the conflicting coexistence of these imaginaries situates their subjects in relation to one another as well as the object of their critique. In his exploration of the everyday practice of walking in the city, De Certeau contrasts the Icarean view from the top of the World Trade Centre with those of

²⁶ DEBORD, G. (1955) in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996a) p.21

²⁷ See HERWIG and HOLZHERR, *Dream Worlds: Architecture and Entertainment* (Munich, Berlin, London, NY: Prestel) p.44-8

²⁸ LI, Rational Embellishments (1955) trans.Gerardo Denis in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996a) p.56

Manhattan's pedestrians in its labyrinthine below.²⁹ The panorama, he suggests, satisfies a scopic and gnostic drive to make a single sense of that which, perceived at street level, is constituted in fact by myriad and fragmented sensory inputs and as many ways of experiencing them. He surmises: "the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more." As a game to be played on the ground, then, psychogeography avoided the spectacular and totalising view of the urban planner. Rather than a unifying fiction of knowledge, the *dérive* offered the means to know something of the complexity of the city as composed of multiple subjective distortions.

Notwithstanding the intolerance that resulted in so many dismissals, the potential for inclusion was recognised by the SI, and their (supposedly) proletarian revolution demanded it. Thus, a calling card -part invitation, part threat- distributed throughout Paris in phone booths and on metro seats, and printed on the final page of their first journal:

YOUNG GUYS, YOUNG GIRLS

Talent wanted to get out of this and play

No special knowledge

If beautiful or intelligent

History could be on your side

WITH THE SITUATIONISTS

No telephone. Write or turn up:

32 rue de la Montagne-Genevieve, Paris 5e.³⁰

If their message belies a certain youthful arrogance, the SI's apparent openness to others - which is to say, those marginalised within the dominant culture- is further recommended by their membership. Amongst those counted as situationists were seven women, the most prominent being Michèle Bernstein, and men who had immigrated to France, many from the African colonies, including Mohamed Dahou and Abdelhafid Khatib (both Algerian), Ndjangani Lungela (Congolese) and also Mustapha Khayati (Tunisian). For these men in particular, engaging in the subversive activities of the SI brought significant risks. On a personal level, the spaces they claimed were spaces from which they might legally be

²⁹ DE CERTEAU, M. (1984) pp.91-110

³⁰ SI, *Internationale Situationniste Vol. 1* (Paris: SI, June 1958) p. 31 (own translation)

displaced, and Lefebvre recalls that Khayati, who never obtained dual-citizenship, “didn’t show himself very often ... because of his nationality ... he could have had real troubles”.³¹ Politically, meanwhile, the divisive Algerian War (1954-62) over the country’s decolonisation, characterised on both sides by the headline-grabbing tactics of guerrilla warfare, terrorism and torture, would have nuanced any contemporaneous reading of Algerian urban experience; and this in addition to racial tensions (inequalities) already inevitably existing within a colonising country. Thus, Khatib’s psychogeographical conclusion that Les Halles’ “social deterioration, acculturation and the intermixing of population” must remain centred for “a liberated collective life” mimics the language used by the establishment in classifying an area ripe for redevelopment to propose a model for society which radically inverts postcolonial spatial politics. In his calls for “cultural exchange”, Khatib’s idea of liberation strives towards shared understanding of a mutual other-ness, or what bell hooks has termed the ““subject-to-subject” encounter, as opposed to “subject-to-object””.³² That his imaginary was played out within a group suggests moreover the possible manifestation of such an encounter: the recognition of the (self as) other at least amongst members of the SI.

If Khatib’s account demonstrates how psychogeography could be used to complicate class-bound Marxist divisions of power, we must not exaggerate the impact of the SI’s minorities on its dominant critique. Underlying Lefebvre’s assertion that those marginalised by party politics -and here he cites the Algerian population- could gain a political voice only within alternative groups is the possibility that their language was already modified to find acceptance.³³ Moreover, the failure of the situationists to fully recognise others is explicit in their representation of women. Rumney’s admission that the SI was “extraordinarily anti-feminist in practice” comes as no surprise to anyone who has glanced at the *Internationale Situationniste*, scattered as its pages are with captionless images of topless young women. In contrast to the playful but sociopolitically engaged articles that they illustrate, these girly

³¹ LeFebvre in McDONOUGH (ed., 2004) p.274

³² bell hooks (1994) p.287

³³ As evidence of this we might consider Khatib’s reference to “Parisians and *those* foreigners who have spent some time in France [my italics]” by which he appears to distance himself from his own situation. KHATIB, A. Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles (1958) trans. Paul Hammond in ANDREOTTI and COSTA (eds., 1996a) p.73

pictures serve no apparent purpose other than the obvious one: to titillate a predominantly male readership.³⁴ This objectification of women for the male gaze has further implications for the practice of psychogeography as subject to male spatial perception, and here we might recall Debord's *detourned* maps, with titles that sexualise their content: *The Naked City* and *Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour*. Libero Andreotti has explained this eroticism as a straightforward demonstration of the *dérive*'s irreducibility to the "productivist imperatives of bourgeois living", his reference to Debord's knowledge of Madeleine de Scudéry's seventeenth-century description of the imaginary Land of Love perhaps included to pre-empt any suggestion of sexual difference.³⁵ It is, however, precisely those productivist imperatives and their consequent Marxist critique that have traditionally determined the 'real' urban as implicitly male territory. In an effort to situate the legitimised patriarchy of spatial politics, Deutsche's essay *Boys Town* -a scathing analysis of Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*- identifies his essentially modernist claims to total knowledge as the consequence of a binary way of seeing.³⁶ Thus she explains, Harvey's justification of postmodern fragmentations -that in fact undercut his self-asserted authority- by way of a "Marxist metadiscourse", sets up a linear narrative (object) to be read by a transcendent subject. Whilst psychogeography remained grounded, its territory constituted the relations it revealed, and so, like Harvey, the SI's spatial politics embraced the panoramic. In adopting Marxist dialectics to understand the spectacular urban realm in terms of a bourgeois-proletariat binary, the SI remained oblivious to the significance of other social relations sustaining the dominant culture, with the result, as Debord finally admitted, that "the hierarchical relationship that existed in the SI was of a new type, one turned on its head."³⁷ Even as Bernstein's psychogeographical practice actively complicated the patriarchal, class-bound terms of the SI's spatial conflict, any recognition of this (not least her own) is utterly undermined by the suggestion that "a lot of the theory ... originated with Michele rather than

³⁴ Let us be generous and suggest an attempt to create a situation, or moment; one of love.

³⁵ ANDREOTTI, L. Architecture and Play in McDONOUGH, T. (ed., 2004) p.222

³⁶ DEUTSCHE, R. Boys Town (1996) pp.203-44

³⁷ DEBORD, G. *The Real Split in the SI* trans. John McHale (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003) p.59

Debord, he just took it over and put his name to it.”³⁸ If psychogeography is to be useful in framing contemporary urban experience, the SI’s binary spatial politics must, as Deutsche’s thinking suggests, be fragmented to locate the divergent views their practice actually enabled.

If the SI was unable to appreciate the radical potential of difference for their psychogeographical project, Lefebvre points out that, since 1972, the majority of commentators have failed to acknowledge its existence.³⁹ This likely results in part from a tendency to conflate the practice of psychogeography with its surviving documents. In fact, the SI’s experimental use of communication technologies was an attempt to disseminate experiences as immediately as the “pedestrian speech act” occurred.⁴⁰ The reports that allow us access to psychogeography are traces, deferred through memory, but also a distinct concrete outcome deeply embedded (like the movement as a whole) in a Western art tradition. As such, they have been easily absorbed into cultural and educational institutions, notably the ICA London, the Pompidou and *October* magazine.⁴¹ Debord caustically addressed an already emergent pro-situ movement in 1972, denouncing the inversion of the SI’s intentions by those necessarily “dazzled by the SI’s success which, *in their eyes*, adds up … to something spectacular”. With the SI’s revolution realigned as cultural commodity, its spectacularisation is arguably complete. Indeed, whilst Deutsche defends art’s place in asserting postmodern fragmentations, she also demonstrates how it has been abused by the establishment to reinforce spatial hierarchies. Significantly, her observation that in recent years art and the gallery have become tools for “evictions” through urban gentrification hinges on a tacit understanding of (the popular perception of) art as reflecting and conferring privilege. With the assumption, then, that mainly advantaged -white, middle class, educated- people like me now come into contact with psychogeographical ideas; given the claim that these ideas are already spectacularly subverted, it is valid to ask whether psychogeography

³⁸ Ralph Rumney in conversation with Stewart Home in HOME, S. (ed.) *What is Situationism: A Reader*(Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996) pp.137-8

³⁹ Exceptions include Levin and McDonough, though a serious study is yet to be undertaken; Lefebvre in McDONOUGH (ed., 2004) p.274

⁴⁰ This is a term used by de Certeau to describe walking in the city. DE CERTEAU (1984) pp.97-8

⁴¹ Bob Black charts this process of historification in The Realisation and Suppression of Situationism in HOME, S. (ed., 1997) pp.134-41

has any place at all in framing heterogeneous experiences of the urban. Is it possible to achieve bell hook's subject-to-subject encounter using tactics that designate their user as already privileged within the dominant culture?

Of course, that this question can even be posed suggests how the city continues to be shaped and governed by repressive relations. As Deutsche's critique of urban regeneration suggests, recent developments have continued to valorise an image of civility at the expense of those whose culture, race, gender, age, class -and these are not discrete categories- disrupt it. Examples of spatial conflict in London include: the displacement of Hackney's inhabitants for the 2012 Olympics; knife-crime amongst young black men and its media representation; the panoptic surveillance in the city centre; increased security on the underground following the 7/7 terrorist attacks.⁴² Whilst bell hooks' retreat to small town living side-steps urban power structures, for those unwilling or unable simply to opt out of the city, there is a need to identify and address urban communities that complicate its dominant imaginary. Read as plans -directions for navigating certain European cities in the 1950s- psychogeography's documents merely attest its specificity. Understood, however, as an attempt at politically activating the everyday, psychogeography offers an approach for mobilising already existing experiences of the urban. As means of experiencing the city are themselves situated, achieving subject-to-subject encounters will require the flexible and responsive definition of the psychogeographical *dérive* favoured by the SI. Just as the situationists recognised the advantage of communication technologies in overcoming spatial boundaries, subjective urban imaginaries played out through mobile connectivity or web-based communities might in fact supplement face-to-face encounters for situating and fragmenting (rather than inverting) contemporary spectacular relations.

Psychogeography's most exciting but also most dangerous promise is that the means for radicalising spatial politics are already accessible at street level, through everyday experiences of the urban: exciting, because it empowers the subject; dangerous, because relations situating the subject and facilitating communication of experiences are already constituted by the urban. Thus, it must be acknowledged that the SI's psychogeography was situated foremost within its own present: the *dérive* was directly influenced by its artistic

⁴² Of course, this list is not exhaustive, and we might equally think of examples further afield: for instance, the gated communities brutally segregating migrant workers in Tambore, Brazil from its wealthiest residents.

predecessor, surrealist automation, and along with unitary urbanism was pitted in direct opposition to post-war urban developments. The situationists' activation of the city and, importantly, everyday life in this way as a space of conflict anticipated much later thinking about spatial relations. However, in the light of Deutsche's postmodern ideas of fragmentation, the oversimplification of the SI's essentially modernist, Marxist understanding of the urban as class-bound and binary is overt. Their own failure to recognise this as complicated by the psychogeographical activities and imaginaries of those marginalised by its terms resulted, moreover, in the hierarchies (inverted or otherwise) that they sought to overthrow. Nevertheless, it is significant that these cultural, racial and gendered complications can be recognised; traced in the psychogeographical accounts of grounded and heterogeneous subjects. Of course, any contemporary understanding of psychogeography is mediated and codified by the art institution, just as the documents displayed mediate the urban imaginaries they describe. Recycling its always only perceived terms, in turn, to attempt postmodern spatial realignments perhaps distorts the situationists' intentions beyond all recognition, as Debord suggested it would. And yet, merely considering psychogeography has suggested more porous ways of conceiving the urban and opened up technological possibilities for mobilising communities to challenge its dominant relations. With an awareness of its limitations, and ourselves as situated subjects, psychogeography might just inspire the subject-to-subject recognition needed to radically alter imaginaries. Ultimately, after all, there can be no (theoretical) substitute for active and situated participation in the urban realm.

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