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Citation: Bertolino, Nadia, Delsante, Ioanni and Haddadian, Shirin (2016) Consciously uncontrolled: a psychogeographic approach to urban mapping. In: Mapping urban changes. Institut za povijest umjetnosti - Institute of Art History, Zagreb, Croatia, pp. 559-573. ISBN 9789537875459

Published by: Institut za povijest umjetnosti - Institute of Art History

URL: http://ducac.ipu.hr/project/wp-content/uploads/Map...<http://ducac.ipu.hr/project/wp-content/uploads/Mapping_urban_changes_Mapiranje_urbanih_promjena.pdf>

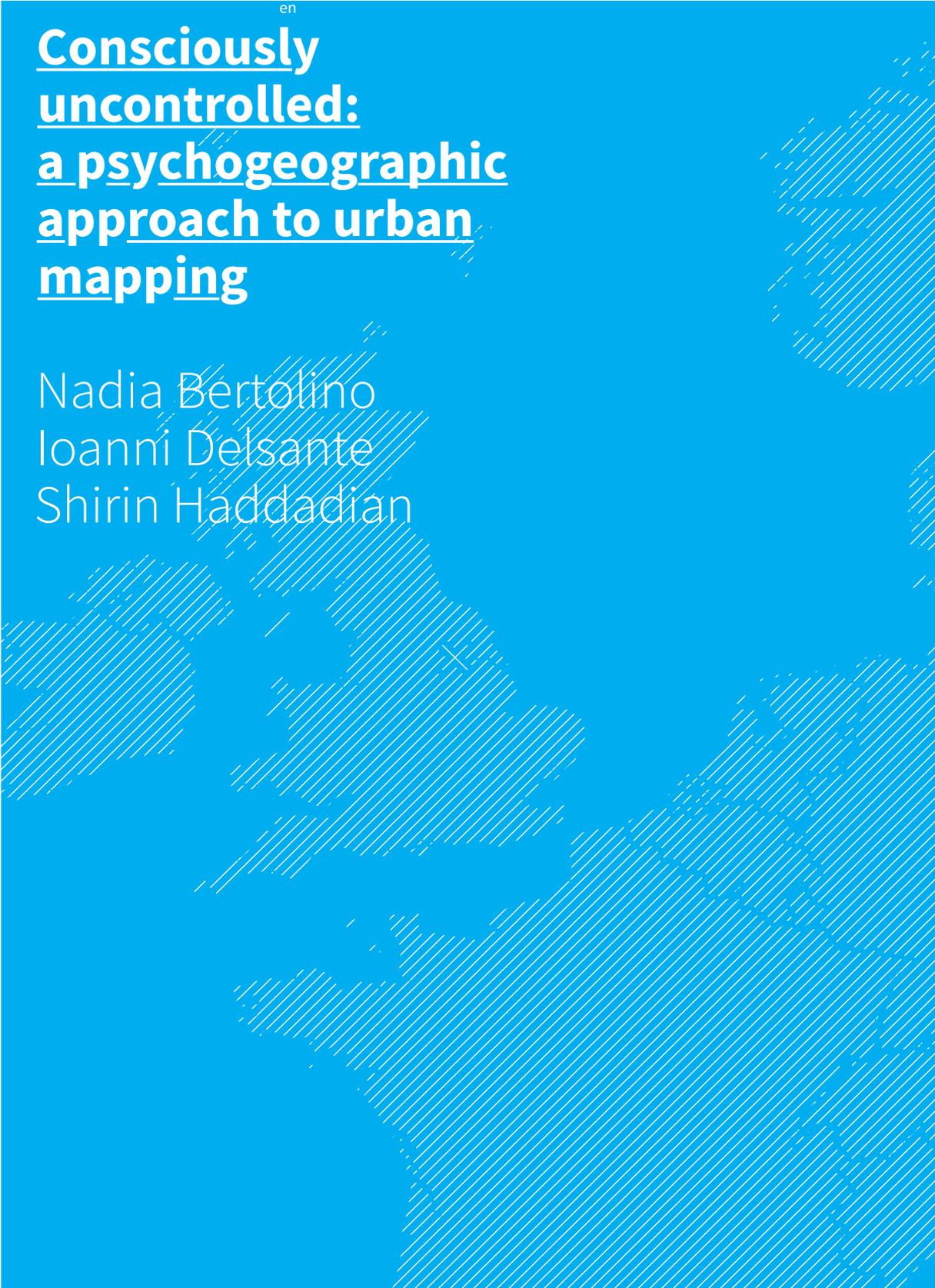
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Consciously uncontrolled: a psychogeographic approach to urban mapping

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This chapter focuses on the potentialities of mapping urban spaces through the *consciously uncontrolled* action of walking, observing, recording a place which is unknown. In particular, we first introduce a reflection about a particular technique developed by some postgraduate students at Sheffield School of Architecture¹ in 2015/2016 to interpret Debord's theory of *dérive* as a qualitative tool for mapping the "unexpected" within the post-industrial neighbourhood of Holbeck, in Leeds. In particular, the mapping technique developed by Haddadian and Yang as a critical application of Debord's theory onto a real case study is discussed: how can we use our body as a recording device and what is the value of such experience to map the urban space? The chapter will finally introduce a reflection on the possibilities and challenges to use the data collected through this method to shape the design thinking.

As a necessary premise, we first aim to clarify what is our understanding of *mapping* and what is the theoretical framework which suggests to define it as a creative agency. Mapping is here intended in opposition to the action of "tracing": "the map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself ... it fosters a connection between fields".² Thus, we assume that the agency of mapping can be an interpretative tool for the situations of daily life: it follows that it is "a way of re-presenting those situations, (...) of communicating a plot, of revealing a situation".³ In fact, the purpose of narrating urban "situations" through mapping puts forward the question about "what" and "how" to map, fostering the reflection on the interdisciplinary nature of mapping agency. Taking for granted that the urban cannot be narrated only through the visualisation of its spatial features, the methodology discussed here aims at integrating environmental and socio-cultural data, as seen and perceived by the observer. In so doing, we tended to "operate horizontally – surveying a field, examining the fissures and boundaries, the folds and overlaps, the tears and rips, the points where disciplines fall apart and come together".⁴ Our hypothesis is that critically reading Debord's theory and translating it into an original, yet non-literal, methodology to map the urban space allow "to reveal and realise hidden potential"⁵ of the place we investigate.

The original technique of mapping of Holbeck can tell a different spatial story, enabling the narration from multiple perspectives. Thus, we eventually aim to define a sense of the place, its atmosphere and relations through the exploration of "another spatiality which defies the codes of architectural tools, and another textuality within the discourse about architectural space".⁶ The drifting-inspired mapping technique allowed then to record not only the fixed architectural and urban elements related to the character of the

Mapping as a creative agency: theoretical framework

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physical space, but also those elements that determine considerably the atmosphere of the place and its transformation process over time. Seminal studies in Urban Geography⁷ suggest the value of walking through the city as a research method. In particular, walking for urban research can be defined as “a self-conscious, reflective project of wandering around to better understand an area’s physical context, social context, and the spatial practices of its residents”.⁸ Lefebvre offered an extensive call for a study of urban rhythms which included those of walking as a practice to understand space and time towards the comprehension of everyday life.⁹ Moles, for example, reflecting on her research on a public park, argued that walking as method “allowed me to really connect with the park; it allowed me to spend long amounts of time getting to know my research subject”.¹⁰ Drawing on these premises, this chapter questions what happens when the action of walking becomes *consciously uncontrolled*, where the term “consciously” refers to the preparatory studies¹¹ done before the urban exploration and “uncontrolled” refers to the action of walking through an unknown place, with no site maps nor destinations. Secondly, we reflect on how the data gathered through this method can be mapped, questioning what might be the most appropriate mode of visualisation able to narrate the complexity of the urban scene.

Unveiling hidden meanings: a dèrive-inspired fieldwork exercise

Walking as urban data collection method has a long history in scholarship. The *flâneur* is first described by Baudelaire as an individual wandering the urban crowd with no destination, nor purposes: *La foule est son domaine, comme l’air est celui de l’oiseau, comme l’eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c’est d’épouser la foule. Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l’observateur passionné, c’est une immense jouissance que d’élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l’ondoyant dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l’infini*.¹² Benjamin describes *flâneurie* as an open-ended, curiosity-driven process through which “true” patterns of human behaviours are observed and understood over time.¹³ Furthermore, according to Benjamin, being able to lost themselves in the city “requires some schooling”,¹⁴ and he continues that: “Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley”.¹⁵ Interestingly, this emphasises that the process of discovering the urban space, as a synthesis of geographical and social facts, “comes from being in, but not of, social interactions”.¹⁶ Although the archetype figure of the *flâneur* was introduced and became iconic in the 19th century, it was the work of the Situationists in the late ‘50s which enabled walking as a means of radical engagement with the urban.

Guy Debord's theory, first presented on *Internationale Situationniste* in 1958, suggests the *dérive* as "a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances".¹⁷ It is an unplanned exploration through the urban landscape, in which participants let their everyday relation fall and allow themselves to "be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there".¹⁸ Although solo *dérives* are possible, Debord suggests that the best numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people with the same level of awareness. The dialogue across different groups allows sharing impressions, decreasing the degree of subjectivity towards more objective conclusions. Debord provides also recommendations on the average duration of each urban exploration, considering one day as the typical time for it,¹⁹ while the starting and ending time are not seen as relevant factors determining the success of the experience. It follows that the *dérive* was to be more than just wandering: "it was a combination of chance and planning, an 'organised spontaneity', designed to reveal some deeper reality to the city and urban life".²⁰ The spatial field might be precisely delimited or vague "depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself" by moving to unfamiliar terrain. The spatial field might be a city, a neighbourhood or even a single building. One might explore a fixed spatial field, or one could start from a "possible rendezvous" (when the aim was disorientation rather than exploration), engaging strangers in conversation and creating various "situations" throughout the exploration. Debord gives some typical examples, such as going quietly into houses undergoing demolition, getting a ride in a transport strike without a destination, wandering in spaces forbidden to the public etc. The *dérive* is thus seen as a "kind of elaborate game, but one that leads to a radical reading of the city".²¹ It follows that such radicalization of the urban is strictly related to the search of alternative ways to effectively visualise such experiences, where old maps and aerial photographs can only work as a support for a different kind of representation. The new urban maps, drawing on a different way to look at the city, will be characterised by "inevitable imprecision" which, according to Debord, "is no worse than that of the earliest navigational charts. The only difference is that it is no longer a matter of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism".²² The new urban cartography derives from "the subsequent 'mapping' of an un-routed route which, like primitive cartography, reveals not so much randomness and chance as spatial intentionality".²³ As noted by Jenks and Neves, the urban seen through the lenses of psychogeography takes on the characteristics of a map of the mind.

In an attempt to relate urban theory and mapping methods, a fieldwork exercise has been conducted in Holbeck (Leeds) with MA students in Architectural Design at Sheffield School of Architecture. More specifically, it focuses on experiments with Debord's theory as a tool of critical urban exploration and mapping. Organised in small groups, their practices included first a subjective interpretation of the theory of the *dérive* and secondly the activity of walking through the city as a means of exploration and consciousness-raising with the intent to look at, record and map urban places from an alternative perspective. Translating Debord's theory into fieldwork practices for students arises many interesting challenges. The key principle here is that "students are fully involved in the process of critically examining alternatives and working up practical possibilities themselves".²⁴ This relates closely to the possibility to unveil hidden meanings of the place, and consequently to map those spaces, aspects and atmospheres which are not typically represented (nor recorded). In Debord's words: "The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few metres; the evident division of a city into a few zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places; all this seems to be neglected".²⁵

Holbeck transformation and urban form

Holbeck is placed on the south side of Leeds city centre and river Aire, and its urban history matches with specific features in terms of urban form, so supporting an interpretation of its urbanisation through four main phases. Historically composed by a small village well separated from the town centre (phase one, the historic village), from the 18th century a process of urbanisation took place due to very rapid industrialisation. The development continued till the first decades of the 20th centuries, even if various changes in terms of factory specialisation and land uses took place (phase two, rapid urbanisation). Heavy industry and high density contributed to the development of various issues, especially in terms of public health and social sustainability. From the 1930s "slums clearance" took place, leaving many areas unbuilt (phase three, urban decay). After the Second World War, the decline of heavy industries and a progressive process of de-industrialisation took place, accompanied by a huge decrease in its population. Even if some of the former industrial buildings and warehouses were reused for small scale manufacturings such as printing and pottery, many others were abandoned: Holbeck, the area to which the city owed its reputation for almost a century, was described as "wasteland".²⁶ Subsequently, in 1999, Leeds City Council entitled to part of Holbeck as "Holbeck Urban Village" (HUV) and produced a planning framework

setting out the visions and broad planning intentions for the area (phase four, urban regeneration). Some masterplans were designed (e.g. Urbed on Marshall's Mills) providing heritage conservation, mixed uses and some focus on public realm and permeability. Meanwhile, the northeastern part of Holbeck was designated as conservation area (2005) in order to safeguard and enhance the industrial heritage that had fallen to decay or disrepair. Envisaged as a "strategic housing and mixed-use site",²⁷ HUV is nowadays home to engineering and creative businesses, bars, cafes, restaurants and residential complexes, even if some criticism has been raised in terms of affordability and social cohesion. Following the 2008 financial crisis and the lack of any new development in the last 8 years, Leeds City Council in 2016 published a Supplementary Planning Document that provides a more integrated overview of Holbeck, its landmarks and industrial heritage together with potential areas of development.

An urban morphology analysis, delivered through a timeline provided by the availability of historical maps, shows phases and features of the urbanisation process in Holbeck. The 1837 and 1851 maps witness the presence of two settlements, the historical village on the west of the railway track, and the newly development industrial site (e.g. Temple Works) on the east (corresponding to phase one, and early phase two). The construction of the railway infrastructure largely influenced the urbanisation process, due to the presence of the river (e.g. height), the closeness of Leeds main train station and also by the opportunity of providing direct access to large factories estates. Anyway, the increasing densification of the area is consistently shown through maps till 1910, where large housing estates surround the industrial factories (phase two). High density is also witnessed by housing typologies like "back to back" terraced houses largely built on the area and around factories (e.g. Derwent Street). Even if the urban morphology shows a lack of overall planning vision as well as strong monofunctional areas, urban form reaches here its peak in terms of continuity and connection across the infrastructures. However, following "slums clearance" policies and de-industrialisation process, from the 1950s the area inevitably shows a lack of density, coherence and continuity (phase three). Large brownfields remain undeveloped, while others are not used. Recent developments (probably linked to land prices) focused on the area previously occupied by the historic village, completely demolished and replaced by malls, trade and light industries buildings and infrastructures. Recent plans and developments focused on some of the most renowned industrial estates (e.g. Holbeck Urban Village, Marshall's Mills) delivering a balanced mix of re-use and new development, but without addressing the overall vision and the real-estate led form of development.

In conclusion, Holbeck area went through very rapid industrialisation and de-industrialisation processes over a period of around two centuries (late 18th to mid-20th century). Relevant industrial and economic achievements were paired with huge social, public health and sustainability issues. Four main phases can be identified in this process, from the historic settlement to recent urban regeneration processes. The shift from one phase to another has been extremely rapid, and in most cases, we can assume, with the lack of governance, planning and long-term assessment. Multiple shocks have been superimposed to urban form and its cohesion, with an evident link to social and environmental matters. Even nowadays, 18 years after the HUV initiative (and the Urban Renaissance age), a mix of clusters and wasteland live side by side in this “broken” archipelago.

**Mapping
technique:
the body as a
recording device**

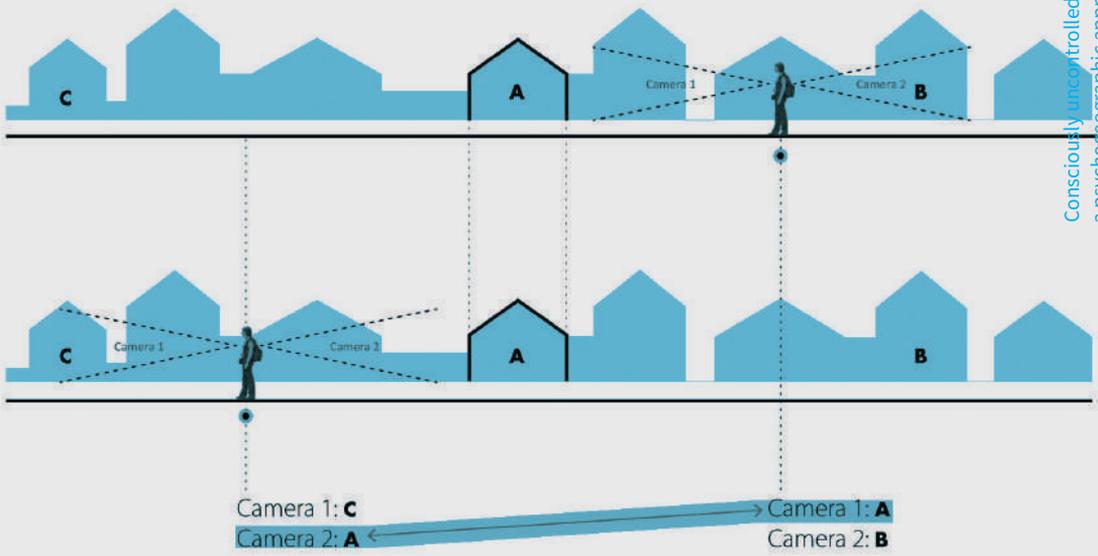
Among the six *dérive*-inspired fieldwork exercises delivered in Holbeck by the students, the method developed by Haddadian and Zhang seems particularly relevant to the subject of this chapter. The students had no previous knowledge of the site in order to allow them a purely personal experience of encountering the place. As we read in Haddadian’s exercise commentary:²⁸ “For us, it was important to keep a distance from the more practised ways of psychogeography such as following the CCTV cameras and urban signage or entering the forbidden zones. As Guy Debord writes, the drifters should let themselves ‘be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there’. So did we. We entered the place with mindlessness, having no clear purpose or assumption about what we should follow or be attracted to”.

It is interesting to notice that, consistently with Sadler, the two students slipped into the site, deliberately (“consciously”) denying some of the most frequent drifting techniques. Psychogeography was thus seen “as a sort of therapy, a fetishisation of those parts of the city that could still rescue drifters from the clutches of functionalism, exciting the senses and the body”.²⁹

All the groups involved in the fieldwork exercise were asked to record their experience, and produce an original map of Holbeck. In fact, the common task allowed the critical comparison across the different outputs and fostered the peer-to-peer understanding of the site. However, the team, consistently with their interpretation of Debord’s theory, has decided which recording technique would be appropriate. Concerning Haddadian and Yang’s work, they noticed that: “(..) while using a camera could help us record our experience, there was also the risk of distraction. Holding a camera in our hands and moving it towards different directions not only could make our movement difficult but also, distract us from the surrounding environment. To overcome this limitation, instead of holding



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FIGURE 1
Fieldwork exercise in Holbeck (Leeds).
Haddadian walks through the place,
while double-recording spaces, encounters,
scenes with the front and rear cameras.

FIGURE 2
A diagram showing how the agency of
walking through and double-recording
allowed to introduce the concept of
“temporality”.

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FIGURE 3

Holbeck psychogeography-inspired map, based on the authors' fieldwork exercise. It is interesting to notice the attempt to overlap their critical understanding onto an existing cartography to provide a comprehensive multi-perspective urban image.



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the recording device with hands and controlling it, we decided to attach it on our forehead, like a helmet cam (FIG. 3). This could help us move freely without worrying about the captured scenes. The camera was providing a video footage from its wearer's perspective, moving in accordance with the movement and speed of the body".

The body thus became the main device to collect visual data, where the final aim was to produce a movie able to narrate their complexity of the urban experience. The agency of recording and then editing the movie was considered by the authors an essential part of their urban exploration. Through using film as research they argued for the "emergence of a more creative and visual research culture",³⁰ which enabled the narration from multiple perspectives. However, the movie was conceived as a critical tool, a non-literal translation of what had been recorded through the authors' experience of the place. In fact, being inspired by an artistic technique, the movie allowed visualising "a series of layered exchanges between the image, its resemblance and hyper-resemblance".³¹ However, the concept underpinning the movie required the authors a further reflection on what kind of data were worth visualising: "However, using only one camera was not enough to get us to our desired point. This camera, attached to the forehead, was recording the data that we had found interesting or worth exploring. Yet, this was not all that we were after. We were interested in recording those sort of elements that had remained unnoticed or unseen. Inspired by Marx quotation in Debord: "Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image, everything speaks to them of themselves", we realised that we were looking for an image different from our own or in other words: the other side of what we were seeing. The solution was to use two cameras strapped to different parts of the body: one on the forehead and one attached to the upper back. The result yet was worth thinking about. While the front camera was recording images and scenes preferred by the holder, the rear camera was not focusing on anything deliberately. This status of not being consciously controlled lead us to see things that we rarely pay attention to or actually never do. While the front footage was showcasing the glory of a building, the one recorded by the rear camera was a close up of brick texture. Using the rear camera helped us to see things differently or from another perspective (FIG. 1)".

The movie based on this technique was a way to record Haddadian and Yang's psychogeographic experience of Holbeck, which allowed the introduction of a further variable, "time", in the process of mapping urban spaces (FIG. 2): "Things that due to their long distance to us were part of the future gradually came to shape the present and then became part of the past. The movies encouraged the viewer to remember the scenes that were replaced every

second by the rush of new ones. Watching the two recordings simultaneously, we noticed that the movies created a constant challenge for the viewer's mind, making it to retain and remember information at the same time". 569

As seen previously, psychogeography "demanded new forms of cartography, capable of representing states of consciousness and feeling".³² Debord in his popular map of Paris *Discours sur les passions de l'amour* sought to map out *unités d'ambiance*, or places characterised by special qualities. Yet the emphasis focussed more on the mutable elements of urban space as perceived by the observer. Interpreting the role that maps played in Situationists studies, Haddadian and Yang sought to visualise the "data" collected during their *dérive* in Holbeck first by the movie (recorded on field using the double-camera technique, and edited later) and then by graphically mapping their experience onto a neutral cartography of the place (FIG. 3). If the movie, on one hand, was a clear representation of their experience and resulted in an efficient tool to narrate the complexity of factors analysed (including time), on the other hand, the graphic map resulted in a less effective output in terms of urban research. A matter of rigour occurs in fieldwork activities inspired by Debord's position, which is only partially solved by the critical comparison with other wanderers' experiences. However, what seems to be particularly relevant in terms of spatial analysis is the multiple positions offered by this kind of representation. In fact, the subjectivity underpinning the map allows for new critical readings of the place and foster a radical understanding of the spatial and social dynamics in the process, which otherwise might be lost or underestimated.

Limits and potentials of psychogeography -inspired maps in spatial research

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- 1 In particular, the chapter introduces and discusses the outputs developed within the research-based design studio *After Belonging: stories of transitional space*, led by Dr. Nadia Bertolino in the first semester of the academic year 2015/2016 at Sheffield School of Architecture, Masters of Art in Architectural Design.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 1980), 13.
- 3 Igea Troiani and Tonia Carless, "'in-between': architectural drawing as interdisciplinary spatial discourse," *The Journal of Architecture* 20/2 (2015): 273.
- 4 Jane Rendell, "Working Between and Across: Some Psychic Dimensions of Architecture's Inter- and Transdisciplinarity," *Architecture and Culture* 1/1 (2013): 131.
- 5 James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: speculation, critique and invention," in *Mapping*, edited by Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion, 1999), 213.

Notes

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- 6 Mirjana Lozanovska, "The Problematic of Representing the Everyday," *Space and Culture* 5/2 (2002): 141.
- 7 Joseph Pierce and Mary Lawhon, "Walking as Method: Toward Methodological Forthrightness and Comparability in Urban Geographical Research," *The Professional Geographer* 67/4 (2015): 655-662; Alexander J. Bridger, "Psychogeography and feminist methodology," *Feminism & Psychology* 23/3 (2013): 285-298; Chris Jenks and Tiago Neves, "A walk on the wild side: Urban ethnography meets the Flâneur," *Cultural Values* 4/1 (2000): 1-17; Keith Bassett, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychogeographic Experiments," *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 28/3 (2004): 397-410; Henry Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life* (London: Continuum, 2004); Iain Sinclair, *Lights out of the territory* (London: Granta Books, 1997).
- 8 Pierce and Lawhon, "Walking as Method," 656.
- 9 Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, vii.
- 10 Katy Moles, "A walk in thirdspace: Place, methods and walking," *Sociological Research Online* 13 (2008): 7.
- 11 The preparatory studies in this case did not include any cartography-based analysis of the site, as it is usually done in architectural design. Instead, it was a purely theoretical work during which the students have been invited to reflect on the meaning of Debord's theory and the potentials of wandering through Holbeck to gather original data.
- 12 Charles Baudelaire, "L'artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant," in *Le peintre de la vie moderne III* (Paris: La Pléiade, 1863), 1156.
- 13 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, [1940] 2007), 25.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, *Berlin childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Harvard: Harvard University Press, [1932] 2006), 1.
- 15 Benjamin, *Berlin childhood*, 1.
- 16 Pierce and Lawhon, "Walking as Method," 656.
- 17 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" ["Théorie de la dérive," *Internationale Situationniste* 2 (Paris, December 1958)], in *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. Ken Knabb. Revised and Expanded Edition, 2006. <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>, accessed April, 2017.
- 18 Debord, "Theory of the Dérive".
- 19 However, Debord explains clearly that the duration of each *dérive* may vary significantly and it is a factor which is difficult to plan in advance: "But more importantly, a *dérive* often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or it may last for several days without interruption"; Debord, "Theory of the Dérive".
- 20 Bassett, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice," 400.
- 21 Bassett, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice," 401.
- 22 Debord, "Theory of the Dérive".
- 23 Jenks and Neves, "A walk on the wild side," 8.
- 24 Bassett, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice," 403.
- 25 Debord, "Theory of the Dérive".
- 26 Giorgia Aiello, "From wasteland to wonderland: The hypermedia(tiza)tion of urban regeneration in Leeds Holbeck Urban Village," *First Monday* (2010), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v18i11.4957>, accessed online on 1st April 2017 via: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4957>.
- 27 Leeds City Council, *Holbeck Conservation Area Appraisal*, 2005.
- 28 The following excerpts are from: Shirin Haddadian, "After Belonging: Stories of transitional spaces- Design studio portfolio" (Sheffield School of Architecture, 2016).
- 29 Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (London: MIT Press, 1999), 80.

- 30 Alison Kahn and Igea Troiani, "Connecting Narratives: Film as Research" (introduction paper at the one-day symposium Connecting Narratives: Film as Research, Oxford Brookes University, July 10, 2015).
- 31 Igea Troiani and Alison Kahn, "Film as Architectural Theory," *Architecture and Culture* 4/3 (2016): 488.
- 32 Bassett, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice," 402. The idea was also introduced by Debord in 1955: "(...) a renovated cartography seems appropriate for immediate utilization. The production of psychogeographical maps (...) can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but total insubordination to habitual influences". Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" ["Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine," *Les Lèvres Nues* 6 (September 1955)], in *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. Ken Knabb. Revised and Expanded Edition, 2006. <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/urbgeog.htm>, accessed April, 2017.

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