

**The Invisible Kingdom:
The History and Evolution of
Psychogeography**

by

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Time Based Art & Digital Film

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Preface

I have always been intrigued by the influence which space has upon the human condition. My personal artistic practices are deeply rooted in an attempt to reach through space and time, to elucidate and comment on the 'here and now' while assuming an awareness and paying tribute to context and the personal, historical and political events which have led to a space being more than just a geographical location.

Through this dissertation, I have endeavoured to investigate the origins and evolution of Psychogeography with a view to understanding my own practices, the artists who inspire me and those who have had significant direction and influence on the wider concepts, conventions and practices of Psychogeography as an artistic movement.

I would like to thank Alan Moore, Iain Sinclair and Bill Drummond for their inspiration and my family for their ongoing support.

Introduction

From the dawn of time, man has forged a relationship with his surroundings. While traditionally we have inhabited places due to geographic qualities and necessities such as water and shelter, inevitably, as populations grow, we have engineered the space around us to cope and built infrastructure to facilitate progress in the lives we lead. One of the key things to define at an early stage when looking at the way we interact with our surroundings is the difference between space and place. On the surface, these terms would appear interchangeable; they in fact have very different connotations.

While place is a largely geographical term, a physical point within a three dimensional location, it is in space that the human condition comes into significance. Space uses place as a basis but also attaches the relationship of humans within. Memories, significance, suggestion and feeling become intertwined within the buildings and streets creating a resonance that cannot be contained by pure topography. Lyotard writes that spaces demand 'the deflagration of the mind and they obtain it immediately. Without it, they would be places' (1991, p.185).

It is within expanses of space that Psychogeography exists. Space implies an emptiness that is there to fill, a blank canvas on which we can create our own interpretation of the world around us. The collision and

conjunction of politics, history, the evolving topographies of place, the psychic effect the space has on the human mind and the co-existence and awareness of layers of time stacked upon each other make up the amorphous field.

Psychogeography, can be loosely defined as 'The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres' (Debord, 1955). Psychogeographic practice involves movement through or positioning within space, whether corporeal or mental and searching beneath the obvious surface meaning for new and interesting interactions and observations on the journey.

The results are varied; often the movement may lead to personal documentation in the form of text, photography, sound work or film. In other instances, we may see a fictional work rise from the movement inspired by, or in response to, topographies navigated. It is, in effect, the running of interference on the familiarity of locale, challenging social perceptions and remapping existing boundaries and thoroughfares in new and unusual ways.

In the radio broadcast *Walking With Attitude* (2011), Alastair Bonnett, Professor of Geography at Newcastle University, suggests that one of the ongoing reasons for the continuing resonance of Psychogeography

is the 'profound dissatisfaction that many people feel with the contemporary city, a sense that the non-place urban realms which many of us live in are just not humanly satisfying so its no wonder that people are searching for the adventure and mysterious'.

This ongoing dissatisfaction may be viewed as a kind of social illness, the mind fighting against the infection of standardisation and the commodification of everyday life. Beaumont writes that the sudden, profound awareness of otherwise incongruous, everyday detail and wonder has a strong relationship with the convalescent, who 'occupies some indeterminate space between health and illness, even reason and unreason, is at once acutely sensitive to his environment and oddly insulated from it' (2010, p.63). It is perhaps this existence within a liminal physical state between illness and health and subsequent isolation from the surrounding world that makes, what on the surface appears inane, a rich source of wonder.

The driving factor behind Psychogeography is a connection with space and a desire to find new ways of looking at it via the act of moving within it. Walking is the purest form of connection; the act of walking may be seen as the closure of a mental circuit, our feet touching the ground which our eye is observing and our brain considering. Our position within the history of that space is imprinted, we have occupied it for an instant and our presence, however homeopathic has been recorded and

changed the space imperceptibly forever, 'without oneself walking and leaving footprints, one can only listen to and repeat the narratives of others who have walked the story' (Legat, 2008, p45). Nietzsche also touched on the subject of walking in relation to the human condition in *Twilight of The Idols* suggesting 'All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking' (2005, p.160). Only via direct interactions with the landscape that one inhabits, can we understand our own physical, social and mental position in a wider context and gain a deeper understanding of the space.

Chapter 1: Early Psychogeography: I Have Laid Foundations And Others Build Upon Them

There are specific artists and movements linked in time to Psychogeography, most notably the Situationist International who formally coined the term and defined various aspects of the methodologies and ideologies. Although this formalisation took place in the 1950's, the roots of Psychogeography stretch back through time. It may be suggested that man's relationship with space has probably existed for as long as man himself has and there are a great number of much earlier works that may be considered as prototypes for what has come to be known as Psychogeography. Among these we can look at the works of Defoe, Blake and Poe as examples.

Daniel Defoe in particular has written a number of works which could be considered as early Psychogeographic texts, most significantly with *Robinson Crusoe* (2008), a character who 'encapsulates the freedom and detachment of the wanderer, the resourcefulness of the adventurer and the amorality of the survivor. In short, all those characteristics necessary for the urban wanderer walking unfamiliar streets' (Coverly, 2006, p.36).

The character of Robinson as a Psychogeographic protagonist recurs throughout the development of Psychogeography, almost haunting the

movement in numerous works, most notably the films *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *Robinson In Ruins* (2010) by Patrick Keiller. In *Robinson Crusoe* (2008), the narrative is peppered with statistics and facts of the time, the trade worth of goods, the travelling times between geographic points and other social and economic data giving us a picture of the shape of the world at that point in time, a mechanism which is later revisited by Keiller in his trilogy of films.

In addition to introducing the figure of Robinson to the world three years earlier, Defoe in 1722 published *A Journal Of The Plague Year*. Given that the year in the title is 1665 and Defoe was only five years old, the book is a fictionalised account of a historical outbreak of the plague in London.

At that time, the general population did not have access to maps and knew their way around the city by landmark and region. With affected streets and neighbourhoods under quarantine, Defoe's narrator is forced to traverse the city in a non-linear manner, at the mercy of the available avenues, creating in essence, a new non-linear topography for the city, not dissimilar to the way the Situationists would later define and undertake their activities. Throughout the account, we are presented with historical reference material such as orders by the Mayor on changes in day to day life, tables outlining the numbers of deaths in certain areas and various advertisements for purported remedies and cures for the

outbreak, while the narrator recounts his travels and observations on the behaviour of the inhabitants and the changes the situation affects on the wider face of the city.

This re-navigation of a known space in a fictionalised context along with the utilisation of history and fact to underpin the narrative are ideas that have become ingrained within the realms of Psychogeography that we see in many modern day works by writers such as Alan Moore and Iain Sinclair in their fictional works.

The 1792 poem *London* , by poet and artist William Blake reads:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

In these opening two verses we are presented with a number of key Psychogeographic elements. We have the lonely figure of the walker; we are given the precise location of his travels, his observance of the people inhabiting the location and an idea that these people are under

constraint from certain social elements, which are expanded upon in the concluding two verses.

At the same point in time, following a period of confinement to his room under house arrest in Turin in 1790, Xavier De Maistre penned an exploration of mental space titled *Voyage Autour De Ma Chambre* (1871). With this text, he shows that even a single, dimensionally small space, can act as a suitable catalyst for creative thought and travel. Isolation from society leading to this type of productivity ties in with Beaumont's idea of convalescence and solitude leading to extraordinary awareness of everyday spaces.

Setting out, De Maistre writes:

I shall traverse my room up and down and across, without rule or plan. I shall even zig-zag about, following, if needs be, every possible geometrical line. I am no admirer of people who are such masters of their every step and every idea (1871, p.29)

Throughout the course of his journey, he mentally wanders; via his interactions with the contents of the room and the observations, memories and psychic spaces they conjure stating 'For it is well to observe that when the mind is thus travelling in space, it still keeps linked to the senses by a secret and subtle chain' (De Maistre, 1871, p.48).

Although De Maistre's regarded this work as a 'mere playful effort of his imagination' (De Maistre, 1871, p.iv), it has come to be accepted into the

canon of early Psychogeographic works and the ideas of re-imagining existing space in a much deeper and abstract way.

The term *robinsonner*, derived from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, has been applied to this form of mental traveller, a term first used by Rimbaud in his 1870 poem *Romance*. While the original line stands as 'Le coeur fou Robinsonne à travers les romans' (Rimbaud, 2005, p.40), the instance of *Robinsonne* has been translated in the English version as 'Crusoeing'. The title of the *robinsonner* as a mental traveller however, endures as the defining term, much in the same way that *flâneur* and *dérive* remain in their French versions in universal use.

Man Of The Crowd (Poe, 2003, p.163) also presents us with a flavour of what would later come to be known as Psychogeography. In it, an unnamed narrator, following a period of convalescence, finds himself in a coffee house in central London observing the flow of pedestrian traffic through the window. Disconnectedly observing, he goes on to break down these figures into social groups, describing each by their dress, mannerisms and social status. As time passes and evening encroaches he notes the change in the space and its inhabitants, from commuters and clerks to gamblers and drunks:

As the night deepened, so deepened to me the interest of the scene; for not only did the general character of the crowd materially alter (its gentler features retiring in the gradual withdrawal of the more orderly portion of the people, and its harsher ones coming out into bolder relief, as the late hour brought forth every species of infamy from its den).

Poe's Narrator suddenly focuses in on one individual whom, through visage alone he obsesses over.

I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. "How wild a history," I said to myself, "is written within that bosom!" Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view—to know more of him.

This target of the narrator's interest is followed through the night in a quest to discover his drive, unearth his secrets. By dawn the next day, having followed the man continuously throughout the night and growing weary, the narrator stands to confront him but the man continues past, unaware of his appeal to the narrator who concludes him to be a 'genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds'.

This general observance of the ambience of location, followed by the focusing in on a specific detail to a point of obsession and following to its, often indefinable conclusion, is a recurrent theme throughout modern Psychogeographic work where location and its contents start to direct the movement of the Psychogeographer.

This detached stalker, the flâneur, becomes a key figure throughout the history of Psychogeography. The term itself derives from the French verb translating as 'to stroll' but within the framework of Psychogeographic practice has come to take on a new meaning where 'the flâneur and flânerie become different and intriguing keys to understanding the social and cultural milieux' (Tester P.18).

Baudelaire, writing of Poe's flâneur in *Man Of The Crowd*, in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* (1981, p.399) expounds:

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird's, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate ob-server it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite.

This goes some lengths to establish the flâneur in the form that it has come to be used within the sphere of Psychogeography, as an individual with 'an ability to make for himself the meaning and significance of the metropolitan spaces and the spectacle of the public' (Tester, 1994, p.4).

The crowd is an intrinsic element in the composition of the flâneur, he is not a part of it, but relies on the ebb and flow and a social and cultural cross section of society, in order to gain a more complete view of the feel of a given space.

While Baudelaire investigated through his poetry and writing, the idea of the flâneur stalking the metropolitan landscape, it is in the works of

Walter Benjamin we see the next great leap in the evolution of what we have come to know as Psychogeography. Benjamin was a philosopher, historian and literary critic and it is his *The Arcades Project* (2002) that has the most significance to our understanding of Psychogeography.

The project itself was uncompleted at the time of his death and comprises primarily of quotes and references from throughout history that map the changing cultural, social and economic landscapes of the modern age.

The arcades, which lend themselves to the title of Benjamin's project, are a result of Baron Haussman's modernisation of Paris in the late 1800's where a new and more uniform topography was imposed on the city. Long, straight boulevards were introduced and even obligatory regulations applied to the facades of buildings, leading to the rise of arcades that connected the boulevards in a grid fashion along which shops and cafés grew, often constructed of cast iron and enclosed in glass. It was within these arcades that everyday city life took place and became the standard base of operations for the flâneur who could mix and observe the movements and activities of the crowd.

Referencing everything from the mass production and the introduction of iron as a building material and its architectural and aesthetic impact on Paris, through to critique and theory behind Surrealism and Dadaism,

The Arcades Project (2002) may be seen as a literary map of the 19th and early 20th Century. In true Psychogeographic fashion however, a map of thought and light, locations connected by ideas rather than physical points. It is, in some respects, a montage, collecting references and quotations and positioning them in the proximity of one another to create an avenue of discourse along which the reader will travel.

The main body of the text, titled *Convolutes*, is made up of chapters with short headings grouping together his research with titles such as *Iron Construction*, *The Flâneur*, *Hausmannization: Barricade Fighting* under which Benjamin curates material by other authors on a variety of subjects and intersperses his own comments. These generally appear as short paragraphs, sometimes even single sentences, recontextualised, giving the collected work a feeling of surrealist collage or the aimless drift of the flâneur, taking in all aspects of surrounding life. The structure of Benjamin's undertaking is briefly summarised in *Convolute N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress*: 'The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components.' (Benjamin, 2002, p.461)

An example of this constructed montage lies in section E1,2, titled, *Hausmannization: Barricade Fighting*, which covers the changes made

to Paris, Benjamin quotes from Marx, *The Class Struggles In France* that 'Perspectival character of the crinoline, with its manifold flounces. At least five to six petticoats were worn underneath.' (Benjamin, 2002, p.120), which, in its original context is used to describe conventions of dress within certain classes but in this new, stripped context, we see it used as a metaphor for the topography of Haussman's Paris.

Chapter 2: The Situationists And Their Definition Of Indefinable Boundaries

The style of social observance illustrated by Blake and Poe, and theoretical expansions by Baudelaire and Benjamin, became key components in the development of Psychogeography. It is the Situationist International who are considered one of the most influential bodies in the development of the movement, although they notably omit any clear references to their forbears and shifted their focus more 'towards the revolutionary politics with which it has since become associated' (Coverly, 2006, p.82).

Even in key texts within the Situationist canon such as *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 2008), the word Psychogeography itself is barely mentioned although the underlying challenges to established space and society are expounded at length.

The Situationist International evolved in 1957 out of the earlier Lettrist group who were a politically motivated group of artists, based in Paris, inspired by Surrealism and Dadaism and produced works within many aspects of art, including poetry, sculpture, writing and visual art along with more agitative activities such as surrealist demonstrations and hoaxes.

The most notorious of these public hoaxes perpetrated by the Lettrists was the Notre-Dame Affair, an intervention at an Easter Mass, televised live in 1950. Michel Morre, dressed as a priest, took to the pulpit and delivered to the assembled crowds and television audience, a sermon against Catholicism concluding with the line 'We proclaim the death of the Christ-god, so that Man may live at last'.

Events on 29th October 1952 proved to be a further catalyst for the split and subsequent formation of the Situationist International following another public stunt, a demonstration against an ageing Charlie Chaplin. *No More Flat Feet* (Berna, Brau, Debord & Wolman, 1952), an aggressive tirade, was written by four members of the Lettrist group, including Guy Debord and printed as a leaflet which was distributed into the crowd outside the Ritz Hotel in Paris where a Chaplin press conference was being held.

A notable precursor, and later a key member of the Situationist movement was Ivan Chtcheglov. At the time a member of Letterist International, his *Formulary For A New Urbanism* (1953), penned under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, sets out many ideas that would become staples of Situationist practices and observations. The essay itself was published in abridged form in *Internationale Situationniste #1* (1958).

Within *Formulary For A New Urbanism* (1953), Chtcheglov goes on to set out a re-imagining of the city into distinct zones or 'quarters', collective spaces where resources and social activities are grouped together. The opening paragraph encompasses many of the ideas that would become primary concerns for the Situationists and future Psychogeographers alike stating:

All cities are geological. You can't take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain shifting angles, certain receding perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors (Ivain, 1953).

Chtcheglov was, in 1959, incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital following a plot with his friend Henry de Béarn to blow up the Eiffel Tower because the lights kept him awake at night (Marcus, 2003, p.376). This could perhaps be seen as an ultimate act of Situationism, an extreme response to dissatisfaction with the modern world.

The younger, more left-wing group within the Lettrists, including Debord, split from the main body of Lettrism during this period, and formed the Lettrist International in 1952 that continued operating under various guises. The First World Congress Of Free Artists, held in Alba, Italy in 1956, saw the Lettrist International merge with a number of other similarly motivated individuals and groups including, The International

Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus and the London Psychogeographical Association, to form the Situationist International.

The newly formed Situationist International were primarily concerned with, and take their name from, the concept of the of the constructed situation, 'A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events' (Debord, 1958).

It is in the article titled *Definitions* in the journal *Internationale Situationniste #1* (1958), that we first encounter the term Psychogeography and a number of other terms that are related to the field. The terms; situationist, situationism, Psychogeography, *dérive*, unitary urbanism and *détournement* are laid out. Here, Debord defines Psychogeography as 'The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (Debord, 1958).

The *dérive*, literally translating as drift, was one of the key activities of the Situationist International. It is defined as a 'mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances' (Debord, 1958). The *dérive* consists of the participants putting aside any usual activities relating to work or leisure and allowing themselves to traverse their environment free of the

usual constraints of specific purpose. This freedom of movement allows location to be viewed in a new aspect, for chance encounters and unknown routes to be taken. Liberated from the usual limitation of reason, place becomes space and new critiques may be formed.

Another fundamental concept within the Situationist movement was the *détournement*, defined as the 'integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no Situationist painting or music, but only a Situationist use of those means' (Debord, 1958). This method of producing work generally took the form of collage with the juxtaposition of famous historical works, texts or figures of celebrity or political status and re-contextualising them in a transgressive manner.

While most of Debord's work survives as written text or vague recollections of actions carried out, one of the most enduring visual pieces he is credited with is his interpretative map titled *The Naked City*, published in 1957 (McDonough, 2004, p.58) was one of the last works published under the collective name of the Movement for an Imaginary Bauhaus in the immediate run up to the formation of the Situationist International. The piece, influenced by Chhtcheglov's notion of zones, depicts a map of Paris with distinct areas, repositioned and linked by a series of arrows printed in red, denoting the spontaneous movements of

the Psychogeographer while traversing these areas in disregard of the normal conventions of movement.

The Naked City (McDonough, 2004, p.58) can be viewed as a summarisation of the main concepts which would drive the Situationist International over the coming years 'particularly around the question of the construction and perception of urban space' (McDonough, 2004, p241) or as Debord wrote earlier in his *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* (1955):

The production of Psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences.

Paris in May of 1968 saw widespread dissatisfaction with conservative politics that had failed to adapt to the more liberal, cultural shifts of the time (Situationist International, 1969). The action began with protests by students at universities such as Sorbonne and Nanterre that then spread across the wider population leading to the first general wildcat strike. Throughout this action, the activities of the Situationist International and their political ideals seemed to resonate in a wider context, particularly within the student body. Situationist inspired graffiti appeared across Paris and the occupation of buildings and streets as front lines in a battle against authority could be seen as a large scale illustration of the practices the Situationist International had been developing. While these

actions were politically seen as a failure, they are regarded as a culturally significant period of change towards the acceptance of more liberal ideals.

Throughout the years, Debord actively expelled members who he felt strayed from his own opinions, or in many cases through conflicts of personality and ultimately in 1972, the Situationist International was dissolved as a body (Coverly, 2010, p.103). This move marked an end for neither Situationist theory nor Psychogeography however which continues to evolve and thrive.

Chapter 3: A Forwards Motion Through Space

Moving forward, as with many artistic movements, we see the overarching concept remain but the practices and formats of output evolving into new strands built from the original genus. While much of the work which we associate with modern Psychogeography leans towards the written word, there are also a wealth of film makers, visual artists and other transmedia practitioners who continue to explore space by new and interesting means. It is always worth remembering that, although we are reading an account of someone's activities in a book, that it is the concept, the journey and the response and reaction that is the art and the media exists merely as a vessel to communicate the idea.

As an example, Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1997), published in 1974, presents a more abstracted take on Psychogeography, the idea of the redefinition of existing space and highlights the experientially different interactions and interpretations of the same space by different people. An echo back to the mental travelling undertaken by De Maistre, this fictional account of the explorer Marco Polo recounting and describing at length the topography and distinctive moods and social tones of the cities he has visited to Kublai Kahn through a series of architectural, statistical or social observations. The complete text is made up of short accounts of different locales, each with a distinct mood and feel, but over

the course of the book, it becomes apparent that he is in fact describing different facets and areas within one city, Venice.

In light of this revelation, Kahn suggests 'Perhaps this garden exists only in the shadow of our eyelids and we have never stopped...to ponder what we are seeing and living, to draw conclusions, to contemplate from the distance.' (Calvino, 1997, p.93), a recurring Psychogeographic theme which encompasses aspects of both the internal and external, the flâneur and the robinsonner.

In the writing of J.G. Ballard, active from the 1960s until his death in the mid 2000s, we find another offshoot of Psychogeography. While not considered Psychogeographic by definition, a number of themes permeate throughout his works and he remains highly influential among modern day practitioners. His works are fictional and lean towards a dystopian futurist view and the psychodramatic effects of these landscapes upon his characters. He uses existing locations, notably focussing on areas that are a result of modernisation such as motorways, airports, shopping centres and car parks as the backdrop to his writing. In *What I Believe* (1984), published in the magazine *Interzone #8*, Ballard writes an autobiographical manifesto of sorts in which he beautifies the mundane and functional, opening with the resonant statement 'I believe in the power of the imagination to remake the world, to release the truth within us, to hold back the night, to

transcend death, to charm motorways, to ingratiate ourselves with birds, to enlist the confidences of madmen’.

The adjective ‘Ballardian’ is defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* as ‘resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard’s novels & stories, esp. dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes & the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments’. In this response to space, both physical and technological, we see many of the recurring themes established throughout the history of Psychogeography continuing. On the subject of Ballard, in a 2006 interview, Iain Sinclair comments:

I don’t think he’s in any way a Psychogeographer, and I don’t think he’d use those terms himself at all. I think the aspect of him they’ve drawn on is the notion of a spatial geography, of particular lines and movements that you make in describing a city’s geometry, which he does with the multistorey carparks and bridges and motorways and all of that. (Chapman, 2006)

In a move that retained the surrealist, playfully subversive machinations of the Situationists, in 1993, Fabian Thompsett, using the pseudonym ‘Richard Essex’ and Stewart Home ‘reactivated’ the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA). The reactivation itself is an interesting notion of re-appropriation given that the organisation never truly existed.

The LPA was invented by British artist Ralph Rumney as one of the organisations that would merge to form the Situationist International at the First World Congress Of Free Artists in 1956 to increase 'the internationalism of the event' (Essex & Home, 1993).

Essex and Home's LPA: East London Section produced a number of pamphlets, publications and interventions much more in line with the Dadaist schemes of the Situationists such as three sided football matches and surrealist invectives aimed at the Royals. In the first edition of their newsletter *ELPAN No. 1*, published in 1993 and subsequently available online, the article *We're Back* features the statement, 'The revival of the LPA corresponds to the increasing decay in British culture, and indeed of the British ruling elite. It has been, in fact, an historical inevitability' (Essex & Home, 1993). In this we can see a traceable line of confluence backwards through time to the political dissatisfaction and desire to critique contemporary landscape that lies at the foundations of modern Psychogeography as defined by Debord.

Since its definition by the Situationist International, Psychogeography has continually evolved throughout the last 60 years, and continues to do so. Works bleed across format and genre although echoes of its origins recur and are themselves re-contextualised throughout. Fictional works by Alan Moore for example, rely on Psychogeography, as do the

films of Patrick Keiller and Chris Petit and the art and writing projects of practitioners like Bill Drummond and Iain Sinclair.

Alan Moore in particular uses geographical and historical information, combined with mysticism as a narrative device, although more in line with Defoe and Blake's accounts of spatial navigation than the French Situationists. Throughout chapter 4 of *From Hell* (Moore, 1999), we see fictional avatars of the historically extant Sir William Gull and his coach driver Netley embarking on a journey, navigating London via the churches designed by architect Nicholas Hawksmoor. Over the course of the chapter, we are presented with real life facts about the locations and their history and mythologies. The chapter climaxes with the revelation that the seemingly disparate locations are indeed connected and plot out a mystical symbol across the map, the ritual giving the character the power to continue on his desired course of actions.

Keiller's trilogy of films; *London* (1993), *Robinson In Space* (1999) and *Robinson In Ruins* (2010) are notable works in contemporary Psychogeography. In each, we are presented with a series of static scenes with day to day activity taking place, very little action, and long, still shots of architectural and industrial landscapes while an off-screen narrator, credited only as 'narrator' retells the exploits of the neither seen, nor heard Robinson. The films revolve around the duo carrying out investigations into the continually evolving social landscape of Britain

and combine geographic and socio-economic statistics with fictional narrative that gives us an exposition of the characters without any of the traditional means. As a result, these slow, quiet pieces of work present the viewer with a mystery to decode, the combination of narration and symbolic signifiers often creating more questions and challenges than answers, as is often the case with Psychogeographic practices.

Filmmaker Chris Petit is another contemporary practitioner of Psychogeography and, in addition to making a companion film piece, covering Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital* (2002) project, he puts himself directly in the frame making semi-biographical accounts of his journey through a psychic landscape. His approach to the genre is best illustrated in his most recent work, *Content* (2009), a piece in which 'reflections on ageing and parenthood, terrorism and new media are woven into a consistency that's non-linear, but certainly not fragmentary.' (Fisher). Once again we see the Psychogeographer critiquing their relationship with the modern world they inhabit through their art.

Petit's approach is visually more dynamic than Keiller's and many of the shots are taken from inside a moving car. This mechanism gives us a perpetual feeling of movement through space, towards something, although the destination remains largely obscured. As with the core principles of Psychogeography, the beauty within his art lies in the process and the journey rather than in the finished, clearly defined

article. Although Psychogeography is based largely on movement through space, unlike the journey as a practical connection between points, destination is one of the least important aspects of the work; instead the connection becomes more pertinent than either the start or end points (Debord 1958).

While a majority of Psychogeographic practice appears to be centred around London and Paris as a result of their historical topographic reinventions as modern cities, Bill Drummond's approach to Psychogeography is less geographically confined by the boundaries of city and many of his works span the world, often using aspects of the more traditional Psychogeographic practices. His work titled *Make Soup* (Drummond, 2003) reads:

NOTICE. Take a map of the British Isles. Draw a straight diagonally across the map so that it cuts through Belfast and Nottingham. If your home is on this line, contact soupline@penkiln-burn.com. Arrangements will then be made for Bill Drummond to visit and make one vat of soup for you, your family and your close friends

The piece uses geography as a random factor to produce unpredictable results. Drummond's line will pass through urban and rural, rich and poor areas alike creating a variety of experiences and connecting with people with whom he would never normally have had any contact.

Responding to the urban restructuring of the streets of Paris in the 1860s under the civic planning of Baron Haussmann, Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle*:

The dictatorship of the automobile — the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance — has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-wider dispersal. Within this process various forms of partially reconstituted urban fabric fleetingly crystallize around ‘distribution factories’ — giant shopping centers built in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by acres of parking lots. These temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which casts them aside. (2008, p.123)

With this in mind, we can see this as a direct inspiration on Iain Sinclair’s series of walks around the M25 documented in his book *London Orbital* (2002) and also the collaborative film produced by both Sinclair and Chris Petit of the same title as a continuation and evolution of this theme.

In *London Orbital* (2002), Sinclair and various accomplices walk around the acoustic footprint of the M25, the acoustic footprint being a term used by the Highways Agency to define the distance from which you can hear the motorway, the Agency has the right to plant vegetation as far back as these footprints stretch in order to separate the road from the surrounding countryside.

Speaking on film in *London Orbital* (2002), Sinclair's explains:

I'd walked the M25's acoustic footprints. Waltham Abbey to Potter's Bar to Abbot's Langley, down the Cone Valley to Staines. Golf courses, asylums, boarding kennels for pets. A fractured narrative of deletion, exploitation, subterfuge. A landscape in which the future was auditioned and found wanting.

We were walking to exorcise the shame of New Labour's Millennium Dome. A wide berth around the tent on Bugsby's marshes. New Labour was Old Tory with better haircuts, classier denials, the elasticated grin in place of the lead filled handbag.

From this statement we see Sinclair carrying on the tradition of critiquing urbanism in a response to political and social movements of the time. Within the framing of the film, rather than focussing solely on Sinclair's walks, we briefly meet with other artists working on and around the road, each with their own concepts and motives for using it as the basis for their material showing that even something as mundane and practical as an orbital motorway can be a rich vein of inspiration for a Psychogeographer to tap into.

These works by Drummond and Sinclair quite clearly illustrates the world of modern Psychogeography re-appropriating ancient modes, in this case the act of circumambulation 'which has been carried out in many cultures, over many centuries, for a variety of reasons' (Keiller, 2010). Defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* as 'an act of worship by walking around a holy object', Sinclair defines the space within his circle, the M25, as sacred and mystical.

Long term associate of Bill Drummond, Gimpo, has also used circumambulation and the rise of the automobile as the basis for a Ballardian spatial intervention. He, along with Drummond, instigated *Gimpo's M25 Spin*. While Sinclair walked the boundaries of the M25, Gimpo, in order to understand what lies within, the circular and arterial nature is harnessed in a continuous 25 hour circular drive along its course. Bill Drummond documents this in his autobiography 45:

This is Gimpo's plan. For the next 25 hours, a certain Mr Green and I are going to drive around the M25. You have to drive 124.5 miles to get all the way round. Gimpo has a notion that if we keep driving for the allotted time, he will find out where the M25 leads. It is best not to rationalise Gimpo's notions. Gimpo loves the M25. Gimpo loves to drive. He loves to view the rest of the world through the windscreen and, when he is too far gone to drive, to take the film back home and watch it again and again and again. (Drummond, 2001, p.169)

Like the Situationists, and the flâneurs who walked before them, Gimpo embarks on a *dérive* under specific criteria but with an indefinable end result, beyond the journey itself. The durational performance, a now annual occurrence is open to any participants willing to undertake the ritual, each taking away their own experience and observations of the event.

There are numerous examples of the ongoing evolution of Psychogeography. Bill Drummond's ongoing projects, the almost anti-art, disinformative approach of Home & Essex and the walking of Nick Papadimitriou. In each, we see offshoots that both mirror previous

schema and move off in tangents to the established core and keeping up with issues topical to the artists.

Nick Papadimitriou considers his practice as Deep Topography (Rogers, 2006), attaching mystical importance to man-made, everyday occurrences such as concrete bollards and sewer systems, reimagining them as holy sites and future archeological relics, ripe for circumambulation. In the Resonance FM series of broadcasts, Papadimitriou and Director/Psychogeographer John Rogers traverse a number of fringe areas lying between the urban and the rural around London edgelands, resulting in frank discussions on wildlife, history, geography and often each other's philosophies. These journeys have a real sense of the early incarnations of the *dérive* where the aimless drift gives way to incalculable results, the transit far more significant than the destination.

Rogers' intimate film biography, *The London Perambulator* (2009) explores Papadimitriou through interviews with Iain Sinclair and Will Self and features extensive footage of Papadimitriou talking candidly about his work and his past. Through this exposition, we come to understand him as a figure, very much cast from the traditional mould of the *flâneur*. He talks about the historical and geographical research for many of the walks he undertook while working as a researcher for other authors, we learn that he had a troubled youth, leading to incarceration and, in later

life, a problem with drug addiction. His past, coupled with his apparent enthusiasm and obsession with the subjects he researches mirror Beaumont's theory, mentioned earlier, on the subject of the convalescent viewing the world as renewed and wondrous, in this instance, a convalescence from his difficult early years.

Of interest is Papadimitriou's branding of his style of Psychogeography as Deep Topography to distance his practice from the all-encompassing term of Psychogeography, as Sinclair notes, in an interview in *London Perambulator* (2009):

I like Nick's term Deep Topography very much, so much so that I've stolen it straight away...Nick really challenged this terminology and brought in Deep Topography which makes it seem like that very British tradition of the naturalist, the walker at the edges of the city, the liminal figure who does all of that and is not so conceptual in his practice and I thought this was therefore a very useful term.

The epic, 627 page Iain Sinclair edited tome *London: City Of Disappearances* (2006), stands as a testament to the variety and scope of practitioners of modern Psychogeography. The edition, which is split into editorial zones such as *Old London*, *Going West* and *North Of The River*, collects a large number of pieces of writing based on observations and interactions with space by acknowledged and respected practitioners such as Moore, Self, Home, Drummond, Papadimitriou, Lichtenstein, Petit and Keiller. Having traversed the fringes of London via Orbital, and walked a variety of routes and themes within the city, this curational project covers almost the entire space within the circle from a

wide variety of styles and purpose giving a gestalt overview of the psychological landscapes of London pieced together from a myriad of fragmentary, specific points in time, figures and changes in location.

The structure itself pays a homage to Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (2002) with different pieces falling under wider banners, not immediately relatable but when viewed as a whole, giving a broad view of a complex field of investigation and presenting the reader with a curated sequence of passages from which to build the topography and understanding of the space in their mind.

Expanding upon his Psychogeographic practices mentioned earlier, Alan Moore's *Unearthing* (2010) shows how the movement can be presented in a variety of media. Initially a text piece for *London: City Of Disappearances* (2006), it was later released in audio form with musical accompaniments and Moore himself narrating details of the geographical, personal and spiritual topography of his long-term friend and fellow writer Steve Moore, from before his birth to his present day activities, proving that Psychogeographic works need not be confined solely to written text. The release came with the audio on both vinyl and compact disc along with a full transcript of the text and a number of pieces of art directly relating to the written/spoken words in lavish packaging that shows that even within the confines of one project, the resulting material may be multifarious.

Conclusion

In the diversity of activities carried out by current practitioners, we can look at the topic of Psychogeography very much as being like a landscape. While there is an established layout, the methods of traversing it are manifold and the mapping and historic information surrounding it are as relevant as the current, and future recordings.

Mankind will always be tied to space and feel the need to respond, critique and interact with it as a response to the mundanity of daily life and a desire to impose a greater understanding of his position within time and space.

Although the majority of the developments mentioned previously are centred on London and Paris as a result of their historical status as modern cities, these are by no means the only spaces in which Psychogeography operates. The post Plague/Great Fire of London topography and Hausmann's reimagining of Paris have laid the blueprints for modern space. The increasing banalisation and homogenisation of the everyday and the subsequent movement towards Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* brought about by 21st century living, make it apparent that the resonance and relevance of Psychogeography continues to increase exponentially alongside it. I posit that even the course of this writing may be considered in some ways a Psychogeographic

undertaking. I have traversed the historical landscape of the movement and, while I have covered a great span of time and development, the route journey is by no means exhaustive and there may be any number of equally significant events laying at an arcade junction where my investigations have led to me following taking a right turn instead of the left. And so, in closing, I leave Moore's conjecture from his 1996 audio release *The Moon And Serpent Grand Egyptian Theatre Of Marvels* on the invisible kingdoms that we carry around within us and the mental topographies contained within.

Strung between the shimmering fabricated towns, inroads of anecdote, synaptic rails to bear the trains of thought, a beaded web across our gazetteer of the interior. Seen from above, the glittering threads of meaning run like mercury, converge on the imaginary capital, a shadow London, our idea of London, flickering in the forebrain. When we are not here, this apparition is our only London.

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