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## Subverting cartography: the situationists and maps of the city

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**Abstract.** It is increasingly recognised that cartography is a *contested* practice, embedded within particular sets of power relations, and that maps are bound up with the production and reproduction of social life. The author begins by emphasising the importance of these issues for considering how the city has been mapped and represented through cartographic schemes, and draws on debates around the power and politics of mapping, and contentions that maps are 'preeminently a language of power, not of protest'. However, it is argued that maps and mapping have not been entirely the preserve of the powerful, and the main part of the paper is devoted to examining some specific challenges to 'official' cartographies of the city. The author focuses on the radical art and political group, the Situationist International, and its avant-garde predecessors of the Lettrist International, who sought to appropriate urban maps and cartographic discourses and to develop a new form of 'psychogeographical mapping' during the 1950s and 1960s. The paper provides an account of their subversions, and an assessment of how their concerns might inform contemporary discussions on cartography and the mapping of urban space.

### Introduction

In this paper I am concerned with maps and ways of mapping the city, and with the possibilities of developing subversive practices in these fields. A critical interest in theories and practices of representation has been at the heart of much contemporary writing about the modern and postmodern Western city, and it is widely recognised that questions of representation are bound up with issues of social power. An appraisal of maps along these lines has sometimes been hindered by what Brian Harley (1989, page 82) once called "the illusion of cartographic objectivity", but in recent years an important critical literature on the power of maps and mapping has also emerged in a variety of disciplines; a literature which has explicitly connected cartography, especially in its Western forms, to these wider debates. One of my aims in the paper is to draw on elements of this work, and to discuss briefly some of its implications for thinking about cartographic representations of the city and attempts to map urban spaces. This leads into debates around the power and politics of maps and forms of mapping, and what has recently been termed more widely as a "cartographic anxiety" (Gregory, 1994) in geography and related fields.

My primary aim, however, is not to provide an assessment of cartographic conventions, or an analysis of how maps have been used strategically to exert power and control over space, though these are my starting points. For in later parts of the paper I want to do something quite different: that is, I want to concentrate on some specific attempts to counter 'official' cartographic schemes and representations of space in the 20th-century Western city, and to use maps of the city and discourses of cartography tactically and transgressively for political ends. My argument will be that, although practices of mapping and surveying have been inextricably tied up with issues of power, they have not been the preserve of powerful social groups in

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society. I will therefore consider some of the potential for subversion, and move on from deconstructive efforts to "subvert the apparent naturalness and innocence of the world shown in maps" (Harley, 1992a, page 232), to study other means of subverting cartography.

One way of trying to oppose dominant cartographic representations of space might be to reject them altogether; to renounce their privileged view, and to cultivate other mapless ways of seeing and experiencing urban areas. The practices I want to discuss include an element of this attempt at negation, which sometimes manifests itself as a form of destruction or what might be termed, borrowing from Stephen Heath (1974, page 120), a "*depropriation*" of cartography. But they do not involve dismissing the language of cartography altogether and embracing the idea of "cities without maps" (Chambers, 1994), for they are also concerned with the *appropriation* of maps and cartographic discourses. On the one hand, those using these practices try to think about how existing maps and cartographies can be reused, reworked, turned around, or disrupted to open up new social and political possibilities. And on the other, they try to trace out how different forms of mapping, based on different values, desires, and needs that challenge the status quo, can be developed. The title of this paper, "subverting cartography", should therefore be taken in a double sense: it refers to attempts both to subvert existing maps and cartographic conventions, and to produce other subversive maps and forms of cartography.

The focus here will be on the Situationist International, a radical art and political group of the 1950s and 1960s based in Western Europe, and its avant-garde predecessors in the Lettrist International, who collectively developed a theory of "psychogeography" and "psychogeographical mapping" as a means of exploring and trying to change the city. As well as introducing their concern with maps and ways of mapping, I will examine some of their own mappings of Paris which provide a striking contrast to conventional cartographic representations of the city. In considering their ideas and activities, my intention will not be to present a ready-made alternative model of mapping which can be dusted off, wheeled out, and put into action by those struggling against dominant representations of space and powerful interests. Even if such a thing were possible—and as I will show later, I find the notion problematic—the group did not provide it. However, I want to suggest that the situationists offered an interesting cut into the theme of subverting cartography, and that an appraisal of some of their ideas might prove useful not only for developing critical approaches to cartographic activity, but also for producing other, more diverse, ways of mapping urban space.

Before introducing the group, I first need to consider some general issues about cartography. In particular, why am I focusing on *subverting* cartography? Why might it be important to develop a critical or subversive perspective? Part of the answer lies in the powerful nature of many maps and practices of mapping that draw on Western cartographic conventions, and the interested visions of urban space they project. To assess some aspects of this power—and some of the ways it has been deconstructed in recent years—I now want to turn to an early attempt to make sense of the geographies of Paris through techniques of mapping.

#### The power of maps and mapping

"[T]he 'reality' represented mimetically by the map not only conforms to a particular version of the world, but to a version which is specifically designed to empower its makers."

Huggan (1989, page 118)

'A vision of Paris as it had never been seen before'—that was the promise of a new map of the city, which was unveiled to the public in 1652. In a text to one side of the map, the King's Engineer Jacques Gomboust described how it had been made according to "the rules of geometry", by the use of "new practices" and "rare inventions" in the fields of surveying and mathematics, and how it would therefore replace the previous "false maps and bad representations of this great City" (cited in Marin, 1988, pages 169 and 170). Having thus assured the reader of the map's scientific credentials, Gomboust drew attention to the multitude of streets, churches, hospitals, schools, houses, and other public places of the city, all carefully measured and represented in graphic form, and asked: "without extraordinary assistance, how do you think that a private person could have emerged from *this labyrinth*?" (Marin, 1988, page 170, emphasis added). Only through the scientific techniques of mapping, he seems to suggest, and through the representational logic of the map itself could the 'private person' escape the labyrinthine structures of the city and survey them from a distance.

Although the context of my paper is far removed from this particular period, I have started with Gomboust's depiction of Paris because it provides an opening to some of my initial themes (for a fuller presentation of the map see Marin, 1988, pages 169–179). To begin with, it illustrates something of the power of many maps and their ability to provide a commanding view of the city. As the comments by Gomboust imply, maps have long been used in attempts to tame the urban labyrinth, and to represent its spaces as 'legible' and 'knowable'. Through a variety of abstract codes and conventions—in this case 'the rules of geometry' and methods of cartographic projection—they shut out the city's noise and confusion, its energy and incessant movement, and transform its messy incoherences into a fixed graphic representation. They provide a method of distancing the city, and of enframing, ordering, and representing its spaces as external objects—ones that can be appraised as distinct static entities.

Much of the power and authority of maps comes from this 'knowing' perspective, and from its grounding in a rhetoric of scientific accuracy and truth. The agency of the author of the map is sidelined or even erased entirely, and in the absence of a clearly marked point of view the map assumes a more general tone: it appears as the universal point of view. The effects on how the map is viewed and used can be profound. "Soon enough we have forgotten this is a picture someone has arranged for us (chopped and manipulated, selected and coded)", notes Denis Wood (1993, page 70) in his appraisal of the power of maps. "Soon enough ... it is the world, it is real, it is ... *reality*" (punctuation as in the original). It is moves of this sort that have sometimes allowed cartography to be presented as a neutral and disinterested science, impartial in its effects. But it is also moves like this that many writers have been concerned to critique in recent years.

The need for such a critique is readily apparent in relation to Gomboust's map. Despite its references to the use of 'geometry' and accurate measurements, his representation does not provide a neutral and impartial view of the city. Rather, it presents a particular view constructed with particular interests in mind. Not only was the map explicitly committed to honouring the King and conveying the supposed majesty of the 'great City', but it was also shaped by the conventions and power relations of the time. As Louis Marin (1988, page 173) points out, in its choice of signs and codes, and in its decisions about what to show and how to show it (mansions are depicted "realistically", private houses are marked by "dots"), the map and its makers obeyed "the norms and values of the order of social and religious tradition". But if this holds true for his map, then it also applies for other cartographic



representations of the city. A similar process of "ideological filtering" in early town plans has been noted by Harley (1988, page 292), but rather than seeing this as something unusual, he describes it as a "universal" process and an often unconscious way in which powerful interests are reproduced. He further regards it as just one illustration of how appropriate maps are to manipulation by powerful groups (page 278). The point is put even more forcibly by Wood (1993, page 78) who, commenting on Harley's essay, stresses that this manipulation is not confined to a particular historical period or context, but is rather a property "*inherent in the map*".

As these comments suggest, there has been increasing concern to examine or deconstruct the powerful perspective of maps and mapping in the West in recent years. Although this growing critical literature has many different angles and components<sup>(1)</sup> it has particularly stressed two of the points raised above. The first is that cartography is not a neutral activity, ensconced in a disciplinary space outside of political matters, but is a *contested* and *contentious* practice which is always embedded within the power relations of a particular society. The second is that the map does not provide a direct view on reality like a "transparent window on the world" (Harley, 1990, page 4), or reflect it like a "mirror of nature" (Rorty, 1979), but can be better understood as a form of discourse which is actively involved in the social construction of that reality. Like all forms of representation, maps show some things and suppress others, make some things visible and others invisible, and through a process of including and excluding they construct visions of the world which "embody the interests of their authors, indeed *are* the interests of their authors in map form" (Wood, 1993, page 71).

The critical interest in cartography has developed alongside a wider interrogation of theories of representation in the humanities and social sciences [in human geography, see for example the essays in Barnes and Duncan (1992) and Duncan and Ley (1993)]. As with that general reappraisal which has especially targeted 'naive realism' and 'mimesis' for critique, the theory of mimesis in cartography has been scrutinised and claims of its universality and neutrality undermined [in the context of colonisation, see Huggan (1989)]. Considerable attention has also been paid to relations between cartographic discourses and systems of power-knowledge. Developing this theme in the essay already cited, Harley (1988) focuses on some of the rhetorics, codes, and conventions that have historically characterised much Western cartography, and shows how maps and forms of mapping have been used by powerful social groups in different political contexts to fulfil their own interests, and to order space and exert control over others (see also Sack, 1986). But in a later essay he also highlights what he calls the "*internal*" power in cartography. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, he insists that cartography itself involves the exercise of power through its procedures of classifying, categorising, hierarchising, normalising, disciplining, and so on, and that maps work as a form of power-knowledge:

<sup>(1)</sup> For general discussions that are having a wide influence, especially in geography, see for example Harley (1988; 1992a), Wood (1993), and John Pickles (1992). Although these authors have different concerns, they all draw on various strands of literary and social theory in their studies, and question many of the theories and conventions of Western cartography, highlighting their *particularity* and their *contingent* nature. For arguments about the cultural specificity of cartographies, see also David Turnbull (1989) and Barbara Belyea (1992). I do not want to imply that an interest in power and politics is completely new—after all, it has long been recognised by many practising cartographers—but one of the distinctive aspects of this literature is its systematic examination and deconstruction of cartographic discourses, and its insistence on approaching maps as "accents within a wider theory of representation" (Harley, 1992a, page 232).

they are, to use Foucault's own phrase, a "technology of power" (Harley, 1992a, pages 243–247).<sup>(2)</sup>

This recognition of the power and politics of mapping clearly has far-reaching consequences. It shows that, although maps of the city may be alluring figures, seeming to offer a guide and sense of order, they are also deeply problematic. Appeals to maps can never be disinterested because they always involve questions of social power. In addition to these concerns, however, there has also been growing unease about the will to map itself, and about attempts to survey the city from a detached viewpoint. These procedures are no longer associated with illumination in some accounts, but with the 'fiction' of totalising knowledge and a desire to 'master' the heterogeneity of urban spaces. In a vivid passage which is becoming one of the paradigmatic statements of this position, Michel de Certeau (1984, page 91) describes his delight in rising above the streets and looking out over Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Centre. From that height one is like an "Icarus flying above these waters," he suggests, who "can ignore the divides of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below" (page 92). He argues that a similar "scopic drive" lies behind many other attempts to set the city at a distance and attain a panoramic view, whether in the form of a medieval painting depicting the city from a bird's-eye position, or the "facsimile" produced by the modern city planner or cartographer. But, unlike some commentators, he argues that these perspectives do not provide a superior way of knowing the 'real' world; on the contrary, they separate the subject from the city, the observer from the observed, and transfigure the subject into a "voyeur" while simultaneously setting up the city itself as an inert object or text, to be viewed or read. For him, the "panorama-city", constructed by the elevated gaze or totalizing map, "is a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (page 93).

In part, this is an argument about the limitations of trying to understand the city through forms of surveying and mapping. These perspectives, de Certeau claims, are condemned to remain ignorant of the everyday practices of ordinary practitioners and walkers, who live "below the thresholds at which visibility begins", who make use of "spaces that cannot be seen" and whose paths "elude legibility". But more radically he suggests that the surveying view constitutes a form of panoptic surveillance: it is linked to the functionalist schemes of the "ministers of knowledge" who take as their object the "Concept-city", and it is bound up with the dominating regimes of administrative power and control (de Certeau, 1984, pages 94 and 95). The force of this becomes apparent when he remarks that the "voyeur-god", created by the fiction of the panorama-city, "knows only cadavers" (page 93). With this image the visual-based knowledge of surveyors and cartographers is associated with death; and from this, as Christopher Prendergast (1992, page 209) comments, "it would seem plausible to construe the view from on high as animated as much by an impulse to annihilate as by a will to administer".

De Certeau rarely elaborates on the specific procedures underpinning regimes of domination, which is hardly surprising given that his main aim in the book is to produce not so much a Foucauldian analysis of disciplinary mechanisms and techniques

<sup>(2)</sup> Foucault's conception of power as 'omnipresent' would appear to make Harley's distinction between 'external' and 'internal' power in cartography difficult to sustain. The fact that Harley does retain it, while at the same time citing Foucault, is perhaps indicative of his interest in using such work as an 'intellectual strategy'; that is, as one way of looking at maps which can be supplemented by other "equally enriching" approaches, including those associated with deconstruction and hermeneutics (see Harley, 1992a, page 247).



than what might be described as its joyous reciprocal: a study of "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals" (1984, page xiv). However, his account has informed several debates in urban studies in recent years, especially over visibility and the claims of 'modernist' Grand Theory (for example, see Deutsche, 1991; Harvey, 1989a). Rather than enter into these discussions which raise many critical questions, at this point I merely want to note that de Certeau's arguments have important implications for any attempt to picture the city from afar—including surveys and cartographic practices—and to constitute the city *as a view*: to immobilise "its opaque mobility in a transparent text" (de Certeau, 1984, page 92). Along with other critiques of technologies of mapping, and of privileged and disembodied claims to knowledge and 'Truth', especially from feminists and postcolonial writers who have argued that they have frequently upheld the values of white, male, Eurocentric, and elite observers, the arguments outlined here have contributed to what Derek Gregory (1994) has identified as a "cartographic anxiety".<sup>(3)</sup> The discussion in this section has only been a rapid sketch, in which I have often glossed over differences between positions and historical precedents (Daniels, 1991), but I now want to start moving in a different direction. Having established some of the powerful and problematic qualities associated with cartographic schemes, I want to consider what this might mean for attempts to use maps and mapping in politically challenging and subversive ways. In other words, I want to ask: what are the possibilities of subversion?

#### Possibilities of subversion

"The ideological arrows have tended to fly largely in one direction, from the powerful to the weaker in society. The social history of maps, unlike that of literature, art, or music, appears to have few genuinely popular, alternative, or subversive modes of expression. Maps are preeminently a language of power, not of protest."

Harley (1988, pages 300–301).

Although these comments by Harley were made in the context of some "preliminary ideas for a wider investigation", which he believed would need to be explored in specific situations, they illustrate what I think has been a trend in much critical discussion about cartography: a tendency to associate maps and mapping with the powerful. In the attempt to shatter 'the illusion of cartographic objectivity' there has been an emphasis, as in the discussion above, on how maps have functioned in political contexts—enabling the exercise of power and control—as well as on the power of cartography itself, its links with methods of surveillance, and the social and geographic concentration of the means of cartographic production. As I hope is clear, I think this emphasis has been very important, and still is important, for opening up space for debate. Indeed, it is particularly crucial in the light of recent technological developments like some of those in geographical information systems where the "question of representation, of regimes of truth and configurations of power, knowledge and spatiality, is simply never allowed to *become* a question"

<sup>(3)</sup> In using the term, which echoes Richard Bernstein's (1983) account of the "Cartesian anxiety", Gregory specifically has in mind the "radically unsettling" effects of deconstructive criticisms and other interventions which have revealed some of the suppressions and contradictions inherent in claims to truth, and "made the closures and certainties of the objectivist tradition within human geography increasingly suspect" (1994, pages 71–75). One effect has been to leave maps and the metaphoric of mapping "problematic", and this is something that concerns him throughout much of the rest of the book (see pages 6–7).

(Gregory, 1994, page 68). But I also want to suggest that at times it has risked putting forward an overly one-dimensional negative view of maps and mapping as not just embroiled in power relations, but as solely a discourse of the powerful, or as necessarily the product of an oppressive will to power. This has not been univocal, of course, and there have been a large number of exceptions, some of which I will mention later, but in certain areas the possibilities of subversion have appeared slight.

A tendency among geographers to focus on "images produced by the powerful" and "hegemonic representations" in the context of the modern or postmodern Western city has been noted more generally by Gillian Rose (1994, page 47). She suggests that the relative neglect of oppositional cultural practices in geographical research on representations of urban places may be linked to what appears to be a widespread use of a "binary model of culture", in which "culture tends to be understood as a process constituted in two parts: hegemonic and counter-hegemonic" (page 48). For a number of reasons attention is then directed at the establishment of hegemonic ideology, and an interest in power slides into an interest in the powerful. Her own preference is for a more fractured and dynamic notion of cultural hybridity. Although she stresses the tentative nature of her argument, which is developed more fully in her paper, it does shed light on some of my own concerns. For Harley's comments, cited above, also seem to depend on a binary model of culture, in which maps are seen as *either* a discourse of power, imbued with the ideology of the powerful, *or* a discourse of protest, with their own "genuinely popular, alternative, or subversive modes of expression". Although this division of the field is useful for underlining his central point about the role of maps in the enforcement and reproduction of power relations, it not only raises difficult questions about the potential 'alternatives' ('popular' and 'alternative' in relation to what? and for whom?), but also constructs a hegemonic-counterhegemonic vision which must inevitably neglect other uses, other possibilities, which do not fit its 'either-or' logic.

Harley's later adoption of a more deconstructive approach, influenced by Jacques Derrida, in some ways bypasses the difficulty. It certainly expands the potential for subversion, shifting the onus away from the development of alternatives to the reading of existing maps in an effort to expose the conflicts and competing discourses hidden or suppressed within them, and to "subvert [their] apparent naturalness and innocence". As another commentator puts it, deconstruction poses problems for "any discourse which proposes itself as an exact map of reality" and shows that "what seems to be a plenitude of presence is always already divided within itself" (Hart, 1986, pages 113 and 110). But again the main focus is on "the presence of power—and its effects—in all map knowledge", and on reading and interpreting powerful representations (Harley, 1992a, page 232). In making this point, I do not mean to critique Harley's project so much as to mark out what I take to be the accents and aims of his more theoretical statements, and to point towards other possibilities.

For a stronger emphasis on resistance and oppositional practices, we could turn to a later paper by Harley. In his account of the 'Columbian encounter', he notes that "in some Indian cultures, maps were part of the intellectual apparatus by which the imposition of colonial rule was resisted", and that "making a map became a conscious strategy of resistance" (1992b, page 527). However, in the rest of this paper I want to concentrate on a different mode of subverting cartography. This does not constitute an attempt to produce a 'popular' counterhegemonic form of expression, but rather involves a tactical artistic and political use of urban maps and mapping. As I outlined earlier, my focus here will be on ideas and practices employed by the Lettrist International and Situationist International groups in the 1950s and 1960s.



The attempts of the groups to appropriate discourses of cartography, and to deconstruct and reconstruct maps, can be related to a variety of oppositional projects which *have* attracted the attention of geographers and cultural critics in recent years. In this context we might mention not only the later work of Harley, but the efforts of Fredric Jameson, Edward Soja, and others to rethink notions of 'cognitive mapping' in response to the transformations which they associate with postmodernity (Jameson, 1991);<sup>(4)</sup> the urban maps created through the geographical expeditions initiated by William Bunge during the late 1960s and 1970s, which openly announce their commitment to social change and include 'oughtness maps' which indicate how the city might be (Merrifield, 1995; Wood, 1993, pages 188–189); and the more abstract cartographies of thought and 'invisible maps' of Gunnar Olsson's experimental writings (Olsson, 1991a; 1991b; Philo, 1994). We may also consider the work of postcolonial, feminist, and diverse politicised writers and artists on parodying, dismantling, displacing, and decolonising official cartographies, and developing different forms of mapping—including those which move away from two dimensions to become "multiple and intersecting, provisional and shifting" (Rose, 1993, page 155), and which "do not replace one authoritative representation with another but with multiple names and multiple maps" (Nash, 1993, page 54; see also, for example, Crouch and Matless, 1996; Godard, 1987; Huggan, 1989).

This brief and partial selection is highly disparate, of course, and contains very different approaches developed in different contexts, but it is connected by a common concern to *engage* with cartographic discourses, often in their relatively conventional forms, rather than to abandon them as inherently oppressive or as the property of dominant social groups. It is such an engagement with cartography and the possibilities of its subversion that I want to explore in the following study of the situationists and maps of the city. I realise that the term 'subversion' is itself contentious and that it does not provide any easy solutions to the difficulties just identified about thinking through ideas about power and cultural practices. I also recognise that, according to some commentators such as Margaret Cohen (1993, page 111), after a lengthy period of popularity on the academic left over the last decade, especially in the USA, the concept is now arguably losing some of its appeal. Cohen even goes so far as to talk of the "death-knell of subversion". However, I have adopted the term partly because the practices I am examining belonged to a long line of self-styled subversive activity, and were themselves self-consciously developed as being subversive, and partly because I think that its emphasis on tactics, and on social and psychic disruptions, is still productive in considering and developing forms of radical cultural politics (on tactics, see de Certeau, 1984).

#### Interventions: the Situationist International

"We wanted to break out of this conditioning, in quest of another use of the urban landscape, in quest of new passions."  
 Debord (1992a, page 32).

The "mobile and endless labyrinths" of the city, spoken of by de Certeau in relation to the view from above, were of perpetual fascination to the situationists, especially during their formative years during the 1950s. Guy Debord, a prominent member of the group who effectively became its self-appointed leader, once described "the great industrially transformed cities" as "those centers of possibilities and meanings" (Debord, 1981a, page 51), and his assessment characterised the interest of the

<sup>(4)</sup> The connections and tensions between Jameson's notion of 'cognitive mapping' and the concept of mapping suggested by the situationists is an issue that I have started trying to explore elsewhere (Pinder, 1994).

Situationist International in urban environments.<sup>(5)</sup> Unlike de Certeau's high viewer, however, who sought to appraise the city by "flying above these waters", and unlike other surveyors gazing from a distance, they largely rejected the elevated perspective and sweeping panorama. Instead, they were more akin to de Certeau's pedestrians and walkers and favoured an immersion in the streets. They wandered through the spaces of the everyday and tried to map out the play of power in the city, as well as the play of possibilities: the potential openings to a new and richer life that they believed was currently suppressed by existing social relations.

Many of the ideas and activities of the Situationist International (SI) can be traced back to the avant-garde groups that immediately preceded them, and to a tradition of artistic and political intervention associated with Dada and surrealism. They also need to be understood in the context of Western Marxism, and especially the reappraisals of Marxist theory and Hegelian philosophy in postwar France where Debord and some of the main theorists were based. The SI was founded on 28 July 1957, at a conference in the north Italian town of Cosio d'Arroscia, out of three small groups: the Lettrist International, which initiated many of the cartographic practices I will be discussing; the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus; and the London Psychogeographical Association. Members came from all over western Europe and in later years a number of Americans were also involved. It remained a small tightly organised and largely underground group, and by the time it was officially disbanded in 1972 a total of seventy individuals from sixteen different countries had participated. Despite its deliberate avoidance of most official media channels—the group once declared that it was "in the catacombs of visible culture" (SI, 1981a, page 60)—it became increasingly well known in the late 1960s, especially after its involvement in the 1968 revolts in Paris. Through its writings, art works, actions, 'situations', and other activities it had an important influence on artistic, leftist, and academic circles and continues to have a wide influence, even though its traces have often been largely unacknowledged.<sup>(6)</sup>

The group's primary concern was with contestation and revolt in a variety of forms. According to Debord, in an article issued in 1963 (1989, page 148), one of the SI's tasks was to contribute to the "theoretical and practical articulation of a new revolutionary contestation". But he stressed that this action was part of a "unitary approach", and that it had to be combined with the group's simultaneous manifestation as an "artistic avant-garde" and as "an experimental investigation of the free construction of daily life". As his stance suggests, the situationists' interests ranged wide and they addressed many different fields in their writings and actions; fields which included art, cultural production, urbanism, the geographies of everyday life, and international events such as the wars in Algeria and Vietnam.

<sup>(5)</sup> When citing situationist and presituationist writings, I will refer to the English translations where they exist. For the date of original publication, see the bibliography. Many of the situationist texts come from the twelve issues of the group's journal, *Internationale Situationniste*, which was published between 1958 and 1969, and reprinted in a single volume in 1970.

<sup>(6)</sup> The group's impact on postwar culture, along with its various works and publications, were the subject of an exhibition in 1989, which visited Paris, London, and Boston. For an excellent general account of the SI and its relation to "a postmodern age", see Sadie Plant (1992)—the first full-length study of the group published in English. Other good introductions include those by Peter Wollen (1989) and Alastair Bonnett (1989); and a useful critical perspective is provided by Stewart Home (1988), and a solid narrative is offered by Jean-François Martos (1989). Despite the SI's disbandment in 1972, Debord and many other former situationists continued to write, agitate, or produce art works after that time. Some of the group's spirit has also lived on through various so-called 'pro-situ' groups, journals, magazines, and other miscellaneous activities.



Their approach to urban questions shares important links with that pursued by the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who was similarly trying to respond to the changing conditions of everyday life and the urban landscape, especially in France, around the same time. The connections are not surprising as the situationists had a close association with Lefebvre for several years before they split up acrimoniously in the early 1960s.

During the 1960s the situationists became particularly occupied with theoretical and political critique, and tried to rework Marxist analysis to confront what they believed were fundamental changes in social conditions since Marx's day. Their most influential statement came with the publication of Debord's book *La Société du Spectacle* in 1967, which documented and criticised what he saw as the increasingly total nature of alienation in capitalist and bureaucratic societies, and the emergence of a "society of the spectacle" which left people as passive spectators of social life (for a translation see Debord, 1994). But as Debord pointed out in the tract cited above, such theoretical perspectives were meant to be part of a wider approach, and the potential for using artistic means to challenge dominant society was most fully explored during the group's early years. The role of art in the situationist programme was a source of much controversy and it led to many heated exchanges between different factions within the group. However, many of the first situationists had roots in the art world, including the former members of the Cobra group Asger Jorn and Constant, and it was in the initial period of 1957 to 1962 that the SI's manifestation as an artistic avant-garde was most apparent when it used diverse artistic and political means to develop what Debord would later call an "opposing project of liberated creativity" (Debord, 1989, page 148; for a critical discussion, see Wollen, 1989; Bonnett, 1992). It was also around the late 1950s that urban mapping and geographical investigations were placed at the centre of the situationist programme.

Despite the central importance of geographical themes for the group, they have received scant attention from most commentators. Even the majority of geographers mentioning the situationists have done so via Debord's theory of the 'spectacle' and have largely neglected their earlier interest in urban space (for example Harvey, 1987; Ley and Olds, 1988). A notable exception has been Alastair Bonnett who has, in several illuminating papers, drawn on situationist writings to discuss their relationship to geographical study and poststructuralist theory, and to assess their transgressions of the boundary between art and everyday space (see Bonnett, 1989; 1991; 1992; also Bell, 1991; Thomas, 1975).<sup>(7)</sup> In particular he stresses the importance of the group's proposals for "a new form of geographical investigation that can enable the revolutionary reappropriation of the landscape" (Bonnett, 1989, page 136).

In turning to the situationists' cartographic concerns, and in framing them in terms of the issues about power and subversion raised earlier, I also want to emphasise their radical intent. For although they recognised the problematic qualities of cartographic schemes, they did not dismiss them altogether; on the contrary, I want to show how they regarded the use of maps and mapping as an intrinsic component of their efforts to contest and change the social organisation of urban space.

<sup>(7)</sup> While I was writing the final version of this paper, a further essay on the situationists' spatial concerns appeared by Thomas McDonough (1994). He particularly focuses on one of the maps constructed by Debord, entitled "The naked city", which I will discuss later, and provides a remarkably rich detailed reading of the artefact. Perhaps what is surprising is not so much the coincidence of our interest in the map than the way that, as he notes near the beginning of his paper, so "little attention has been accorded this document, despite the fact that it has become an almost iconic image of the early years of the Internationale Situationniste" (page 60). Although our accounts overlap in places, the frame and trajectory of my discussion are different, especially in my more general focus on subverting cartography.

#### Psychogeographical mapping and the city

"[P]sychogeography: The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."

SI (1981b, page 45).

Soon after the SI's foundation, Constant and Debord (1958, page 31) suggested that the "minimum programme" of the group involved both the experiencing of complete spatial settings in the city, and the search for "new modes of behaviour" in conjunction with those settings. Further, they stressed that this should extend to the transformation of the urban spaces themselves, through the construction of "situations" and other creative activity, and to the establishment of a "unitary urbanism" involving the conscious and continuous recreation of the environment according to "progressive plans in all domains". The project clearly involved a number of dimensions, and elsewhere the situationists argued that maps and techniques of mapping could play a particularly important role in its development, contributing to the tasks of studying the city and of exploring the possibilities for change.

The roots of their conception of mapping lay in the activities of their avant-garde predecessors, the members of the Lettrist International (LI), who had begun to develop a theory and practice of "psychogeography" in the summer of 1953. The LI was mainly based in Paris, having split from the Lettrist Movement the year before to pursue a more overtly political and interventionist agenda, and included Debord and Michèle Bernstein who later became prominent situationists. In his essay "Introduction to a critique of urban geography", which was published in 1955 in the Belgian journal *Les Lèvres Nues*, Debord (1981b) provided the first formal definitions of psychogeography and set out some of the scope of the concept. Through psychogeographical studies and mapping, he and the other lettrists aimed to examine how subjective feelings and desires are *affected* by the geography of the urban environment, and at the same time how feelings and desires *affect* and give form to that geography. In other words they wanted to consider the relationships between social space and mental space and between urbanism and behaviour, and to explore ways in which they interact and interweave with each other and, ultimately, the possibilities of their mutual transformation through a process of urban revolution.

As a process of research, psychogeography included paying attention to the "sudden change of ambience in a street within the space of a few metres; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres", and "the appealing or repelling character of certain places" (Debord, 1981b, pages 6-7). All these phenomena seem to be "neglected", suggested Debord, or at least they are "never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account". The concept also led to more direct studies of the power and politics of the built environment. In a 'psychogeographical essay' on Les Halles in Paris, for example, which was one of the favourite sites of the LI and the SI in the city, the situationist Abdelhafid Khatib (1958) discussed the character and atmosphere of distinct zones in the region, and 'mapped' their relation to each other through detailed written descriptions. His report, intended as a riposte to government redevelopment plans and proposals to expel the local population to the suburbs, characterised Les Halles as a "zone in transition" after the theory of urban structure associated with the Chicago School of sociology. It particularly focused on the spatial constitution of powerful interests, and noted how a concentration of financial and commercial institutions to the west of Les Halles Centrales, shaped like a triangle with the Banque de France at its centre, formed both "practically and symbolically a defensive perimeter for the smart districts of capitalism" (Khatib, 1958, page 17). As an Algerian living



in Paris, Khatib felt the effects of police power himself while he was carrying out the research, when he was arrested twice for defying a nighttime curfew on North Africans. To illustrate some of his findings he included a segment of a map of Paris, outlining the area's "unity of atmosphere", and a larger section with additional markings and lines, showing some of its discontinuities and breaks in relation to adjacent parts of the city.

In line with Debord's (1981c, page 23) assertion, made the year before, that psychogeographical research has a "double meaning", and involves not only the "active observation of present-day urban agglomerations" but also the "development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city", Khatib's essay ended with a variety of such hypotheses for the transformation of central Paris and Les Halles. These included replacing existing buildings with small easily modifiable "architectural complexes" to facilitate the construction of situations, and creating an environment of perpetually changing labyrinthine forms. This alternative spatial arrangement seemed to be valued for its ludic potential, in opposition to the functional and commercially driven plans of the government, and for its resistance to the logic of rational urban planning and the administrative gaze.

Given the subject matter and politics of psychogeography, it clearly rested on quite different techniques from those usually associated with distant observation and surveying. It depended on a more critical attitude to visibility—the group shared many aspects of the interrogation and even denigration of vision characteristic of much 20th-century French thought (Jay, 1993)—and an involvement with, rather than detachment from, those everyday practices that de Certeau (1984, page 93) argued were "foreign to the 'geometrical' or 'geographical' space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions". One of the main procedures was the practice of the *dérive*, a type of free-form but critical drift through urban terrain. Initiated by the lettrists in the early 1950s, it was later defined by the situationists as a "mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society", and a "technique of transient passage through varied ambiances" (SI, 1981b, page 45). It was not unlike an urban wander or stroll, often in small groups of two to three people, on average for a day though the duration varied widely. But it differed from most conceptions of idle meandering, loitering, or *flânerie* in a number of ways, including in its emphasis on "playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord, 1981a, page 50). Part of its purpose lay in allowing participants to drift from their usual activities and to become more aware of their surroundings while simultaneously seeking out ways of changing them.

In their *dérives* and psychogeographical studies, the lettrists and situationists did not simply cast aside existing maps of the city but, rather, frequently alluded to their potential usefulness, especially for providing a basis for exploring and straying. Among the maps they favoured for these purposes were ordinary street plans, which could help in the organisation of investigations into "a fixed spatial field" and in the preliminary stages of research such as "the determining of bases" in an area (Debord, 1981a, page 52), and the products of sociological and academic studies. For example, maps based on ecological theory, and specifically the urban models of Ernest Burgess and the Chicago School, were referenced by Debord for their potential usefulness for developing *dérives*. He also singled out for discussion a sociological map in Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe's (1952) study *Paris et l'Agglomération Parisienne*, which outlined the movements made by a student living in the XVIth arrondissement of Paris during the course of a year, by the use of black lines on a plain plan of the city. For Chombart de Lauwe it was supposed to show "the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives ... within a geographical area whose radius

is very small" (cited in Debord, 1981a, page 50), and it was reproduced by the situationists in their journal for similar purposes—to illustrate the constraints on many people's spatial mobility, and the prevalence of habit and routine in shaping urban journeys.<sup>(6)</sup>

Other maps were appreciated for the horizons they appeared to open up, and for their intimations of different ways of seeing which were at odds with the geometric visions and mimetic grids of modern surveyors. Included here were old plans and charts, several of which appear within the pages of the SI's journal, and even transport maps such as those for the Paris metro which Debord once enthusiastically endorsed for their beauty and potential promise. "I scarcely know of anything but those two harbours at dusk painted by Claude Lorrain, which are at the Louvre and which depict the very border of two extremely dissimilar urban ambiances, that can rival in beauty the metro maps displayed in Paris", he remarks. "One must understand that in speaking here of beauty I don't have in mind plastic beauty—the new beauty can only be a beauty of situation—but simply the particularly moving presentation, in both cases, of a *sum of possibilities*" (1981b, page 7, translation modified). In the same essay, he also mentions other ways in which the experiments of the *dérive* could be enhanced by the use of cartography. These included the simple and playful device of transposing maps of different areas, and to this end he recounted how a friend once "wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London". Although he admitted that this game is "only a mediocre beginning", he nonetheless suggested that, along with other cartographic exercises, such activities "can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences". In his desire to transgress the lines of habit without becoming subordinate to the dictates of chance, he articulated a common theme in situationist writing.

Taken together, these references and practices suggest a way of seeing maps that is far removed from traditional categories of cartographical assessment. Maps are valued according to their potential use and their ability to serve particular ends, rather than in abstract terms as being either 'true' or 'false', 'accurate' or 'inaccurate', 'literal' or 'symbolic' (Harley, 1988, page 278). They are made to speak to a form of sociospatial praxis that is ultimately committed to changing the urban scene. But although the situationists recognised that ordinary maps could occasionally contribute to this project, at least when used in certain ways, they also believed that traditional forms of cartography had severe limitations. Perhaps partly for this reason, psychogeography largely seems to have involved a process of *mapping* rather than a specific act of *map making*. Having said that, though, the situationists did attempt to produce their own psychogeographic maps during the late 1950s, and they also spoke of 'renovating' cartography.

#### The 'renovation' of cartography

"Among various more difficult means of intervention, a *renovated cartography* seems appropriate for immediate utilisation."

Debord (1981b, page 7, emphasis added).

<sup>(6)</sup> The diagram appeared in the first volume of *Internationale Situationniste*, 1958, page 28 (see *Internationale Situationniste* 1970). For some insightful comments contrasting Chombart de Lauwe's studies of Paris with Debord's own approach to the city, especially in relation to their mutual interest in "urban quarters", see McDonough (1994, pages 67–68).



In February 1957, almost two years after Debord made this call for a renovated cartography, an exhibition was advertised for the Taptoe gallery, in Brussels, entitled "Première exposition de psychogéographie". Among the works due to appear were photographs by Bernstein and Mohamed Dahou, who were then members of the LI; paintings and ceramics by Jorn, the leading figure of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus; and further paintings by Ralph Rumney, a representative of the London Psychogeographical Association. All four would soon become situationists, after the foundation of the group later that year. At the top of the proposed programme was a series of five "psychogeographic maps of Paris" by Debord, who was then a member of the LI. The titles immediately distance them from ordinary maps—"The naked city", "Discours sur les passions de l'amour" (more often known by its main title "Guide psychogéographique de Paris"), "Paris sous la neige", "The most dangerous game", and "Axe d'exploration et échec dans la recherche d'un Grand Passage situationniste"—and with their hints of scenes, events, and atmospheres they seem more like names of tales and adventures than cartographic representations. The first of these is the most widely reproduced and, according to McDonough (1994, pages 61–62), did in fact take its name from an American detective film of 1948, which in turn borrowed it from a book of crime photographs published slightly earlier. In the end none of Debord's maps was actually shown at the exhibition, but at least two—"The naked city" (figure 1) and "Guide psychogéographique de Paris"—were published around that time by Jorn's Bauhaus group.<sup>(9)</sup>

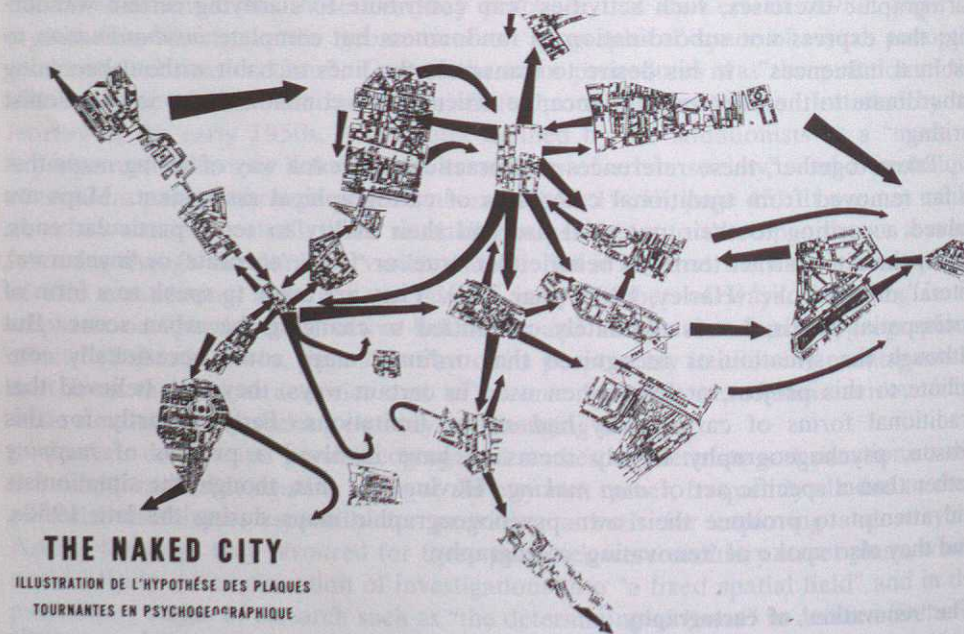


Figure 1. Guy debard: "The naked city", 1957.

<sup>(9)</sup> Both of these maps were displayed at the retrospective situationist exhibitions in 1989. "The naked city" was published in May 1957, but information about the last three maps mentioned above seems slight.

These two works are recognisable as maps if the term is taken to mean "a graphic representation of a milieu" (Robinson and Petchenik, 1976, page 16),<sup>(10)</sup> but they are also quite unfamiliar. Constructed out of arrows and pieces of map, they have a broken and fragmented appearance totally unlike the fullness of most cartographic representations. The fragments were plundered from existing plans of Paris through a process known as *détournement*. Along with the methods of psychogeography, this was another key tactic developed by the lettrists and situationists in which objects, images, or words were ripped out of their original contexts and then juxtaposed—carefully and deliberately, not randomly—to create new meanings and effects. In relation to Debord's cartography, it was an attempt to disrupt existing representations and convey different visions of the city. Rather than being entirely new products, his psychogeographic maps were thus modified or 'improved' versions of ordinary maps. This was in keeping with the situationists' wider argument about *détournement*, namely that because of its critical status as a kind of 'diversion' or 'hijacking' of material, "there can be no situationist painting or music [or cartography?], but only a situationist use of these means" (SI, 1981b, pages 45–46).

At one level Debord's maps might be read as purely deconstructive gestures. The Western map typically "replaces the discontinuous patchy space of practical paths by the homogeneous, continuous space of geometry" (Bourdieu, 1977; cited in Harvey, 1989b, page 253) and, as I discussed earlier, this has profound implications for the ways in which urban space is conceived, used, and produced. Through *détournement*, Debord shatters the ordered and functional representations of Paris created by such maps, and subverts their illusion of reality. The fragmentary quality of his plans serves not only to critique orthodox visual-based attempts to survey the city, but also to reveal some of the fissures, fractures, and conflicts of urban space which are usually elided by these representations. The 'discontinuous patchy space' referred to by Bourdieu thus makes a return, in place of the constructed sense of continuity and geometry. This sense of revealing or unveiling previously hidden aspects and of bringing them out into the open is another of the connotations, beyond the allusion to the film noir, of the title 'The naked city'.

The maps are not just a critique of conventional cartographies, though, and nor are they simply a depiction of fragmentation and separation. To begin with, the pieces of map are brought together by numerous arrows which lead from one segment to another, or suddenly curl away from certain areas. They thus convey a sense of unity and disunity at the same time: a feeling that the city is tied together, but is also fractured and in pieces. In this way they seem to replicate something of the paradoxical 'dual nature' of capitalist abstract space which the situationists and a number of other theorists have characterised as being simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented, whole and broken, continuous and cracked (see Lefebvre, 1991, pages 355–356; Soja, 1989, pages 118–131). More fundamentally, however, Debord's plans are also intended to function *as maps*, as representations of urban space and of information gleaned through psychogeographical investigations.

<sup>(10)</sup> Robinson and Petchenik compare their definition with the slightly narrower one proposed by the International Cartographic Association in 1973: "A map is a representation normally to scale and on a flat medium, of a selection of material or abstract features on, or in relation to, the surface of the Earth or of a celestial body" (cited in Robinson and Petchenik, 1976, page 17). A concept of scale is something noticeably absent from Debord's maps, or rather, as I will show, it is considered in psychogeographic terms and not as a purely 'physical spatial' phenomenon. For a more recent attempt to define the meaning of the term 'map', see Vasiliev et al (1990).



The difficulty of representing and communicating the meaning of urban areas is briefly raised in one of Debord's films, *Critique de la Séparation*, which was first shown in 1961. "The sectors of a city are, at a certain level, legible," intones the expressionless voice of the narrator as the film gazes down on several scenes, including a panoramic shot of the Quai d'Orléans and an aerial view of Allée des Cygnes in Paris. "But the meaning they have had for us, personally, is incommunicable, like the clandestinity of private life, of which we possess nothing but pitiful documents" (Debord, 1992b, pages 47–48, modified translation from Marcus, 1989, page 433). However, if there is an air of resignation in this excerpt which suggests that incommunicability is inevitable and beyond being resisted, then this is less apparent in Debord's other writings. For one of the purposes of psychogeography and of his cartographic schemes seems to have been to engage with precisely these issues, and with the questions of trying to comprehend the city, however imperfectly and provisionally, and of communicating that knowledge to others for political ends. He once argued that, "The lessons drawn from the *dérive* permit the drawing up of the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city" (Debord, 1981a, page 53), and his *détourned* maps, beyond their deconstructive role, can be seen as an attempt to give graphic form to these surveys.

#### New maps for the city

"With the aid of old maps, aerial photographs and experimental *dérives*, one can draw up hitherto lacking maps of influences." Debord (1981a, page 53).

The communicative function of Debord's maps becomes clearer when their constitution is considered in more detail. The segments of maps which compose the plans are, in general, meant to represent what Debord called the "unities of atmosphere" in Paris. They were cut from existing maps and placed according to the "main components" and "spatial localization" of those areas (Debord, 1981a, page 53), which were established through psychogeographical studies. Notions of scale and direction were reworked in the new constructions, and distances between different segments do not correspond directly to physical distances in the city, but rather to the supposed effective distances based on influences, connections, similarities, and dissimilarities. The maps aimed to reveal some of these connections, as well as "axes of passage" and "exits" and "defences" of the various areas, and hypotheses about the location of "psychogeographical pivotal points" (*plaques tournantes*).

In short, the maps present aspects of what Debord called the "psychogeographical relief" of the city (1981a, page 50). He believed that when people immerse themselves in the streets on the *dérive*, put aside their usual daily concerns, and follow their inclinations, they tend to find themselves drawn to certain zones, routes, and encounters, repelled by others, and excluded from some altogether. The arrows are supposed to show some of these tendencies, inclinations, attractions, and exclusions and the routes and movements that the situationists found to be particularly prominent on their own wanders. By using the physical metaphor of "relief", and by referring to the existence of "constant currents" and "fixed points and vortices" in the city, Debord implies that the paths of the *dérive*, far from being haphazard or random, are to some extent shaped by social and cultural forces (hence his description of prospective psychogeographical plans as "maps of influences"). His situationist colleague Jorn (1985, page 535) makes a similar point when he describes the arrows as representing the "inclines" (*pentés*) that link different "unities of atmosphere" in Paris; and his choice of noun, with its connotations of a physical slope, tellingly echoes Debord's suggestion of determination.

A sense of operating within limits and constraints, and of having to make do with a spatial organisation that is not of one's own choosing, is further evoked by the actual construction of the maps. As I have noted, they are based on the manipulation and displacement of old plans of Paris, and this means that, although they work against the grain of these schemes, they still operate within a similar structure, and use pieces of them as basic materials. This slightly ambiguous positioning is one of the reasons why Debord's representations cannot be described as being part of a completely 'alternative' and 'counterhegemonic' cartographic strategy. However, his maps do not remain on the same plane as the existing maps of Paris. As I have described, an obvious difference lies in their spatial orientation. But there is also a question of temporal orientation, for rather than focusing solely on what exists, on the present city and its present cartographic schemes, the maps have a more hypothetical element and look towards the future and the possible. One of the purposes of psychogeographical maps, according to the situationists, was to assist in the drawing up of hypotheses for a new social space, and even to provide outlines and initial blueprints for the construction of urban utopias. This aspect is suggested by Jorn's remark, cited by Khatib (1958, page 13) in his report on Les Halles, that psychogeography is like "the science fiction of urbanism". It therefore seems that the psychogeographical maps do not try to 'capture' the city from a single position, but rather oscillate between a number of different positions or perspectives: between actuality and the imaginary; between what exists and what might exist; and between the dead weight of past urbanism, with its dominant representations of space, and the possibilities of a new urbanism informed by different spatial representations.

From this discussion it should be clear that Debord's maps challenge conventional cartographic practices in a number of ways. In place of a totalising and distant view of the city, they offer a fragmentary and partial portrayal of its spaces; and in place of the rhetoric of neutrality characteristic of much map making, they draw attention to their fabricated nature, and to the ways in which, as Wood put it, they have been "chopped and manipulated, selected and coded". Like much modernist art, they therefore highlight the problem of representation rather than try to push it to one side. It is perhaps worth stressing the adjective *modernist* here because a profound questioning of spatiality and modes of representation, which a number of commentators have associated with the advent of *postmodernism* in the humanities and social sciences, is also at the heart of many currents of modernism, especially those associated with creative cultural work and the *avant-gardes* in the early years of the 20th century and with groups that came in their wake. Rather than seeing the current interest in issues of representation and *postmodernism* as entirely antithetical to those earlier modernist concerns, or as marking a fundamental break from them, it is thus possible to trace some important connections between them (see for example Gregory, 1994, chapter 3). The position of situationist ideas in these debates about modernism and *postmodernism* illustrates how difficult it is to maintain any simple division between the two terms, and how misleading the dualism can be.

The psychogeographical maps are also unusual in their emphasis on the interactions between people and the city, and on representing movements through its terrain. Most orthodox cartographies follow a disembodied and desocialised form, and present a static representation of a geography in which there are no signs of the actions of map makers themselves. In Debord's works, though, such actions are paramount: they are inscribed onto the map itself. Through movements and activities in the city particular areas are enunciated or brought into existence, and these



appear on the maps as islands of urban fabric. Others are avoided, skipped over, or passed through without being acknowledged or registered and so seem to vanish altogether. The plans thus demonstrate something of the *interdependence* of behaviour, subjectivity, and urban space. In contrast to many maps, they do not "imply an absolute sense of space, a real topography which is essentially knowable" (Pile and Rose, 1992, page 132); rather, they suggest that urban space is always constituted through social, subjective, and psychological dimensions.

And yet there are obvious problems with how such maps deal with these issues of action and subjective experience. If they counter the disembodied and desocialised nature of conventional cartography by, to some extent at least, bringing feelings, desires, and experiences of the body back in—an enormously important move given the role of the geometric and visual logic of mapping in the production of abstract space and the occlusion of the body (Lefebvre, 1991)—then they refer to *particular* bodies and *particular* experiences. This particularity is not explicitly addressed, however, and the routes and paths of the maps remain undifferentiated. Are they to be taken as personal portraits of the city and that alone? It seems not, given the importance Debord attaches to psychogeographical mapping for building up a collective understanding of the city and his references to "psychogeographical pivotal points" and "relief". But it is unclear how general these findings were supposed to be, and how far they were the product of universalising from individual experiences. What about constraints imposed on mobility by sexual violence against women, or racist and homophobic attacks (Pain, 1991; Rose, 1993, page 34; Valentine, 1989)? Although Debord's maps are self-consciously partial and fictional, as in being literally 'something made', they therefore still efface certain questions about the cartographic process, and make it difficult to pursue a critical and reflexive engagement with its particular assumptions and power relations.

As a consequence, his cartography seems to be in danger of falling into the trap, which Steve Pile and Gillian Rose (1992, page 132) have identified with the act of mapping more generally, of denying "not only difference but also different kinds of difference". Part of the difficulty stems from trying to work from within the context of conventional cartographies. Whereas ordinary plans can be used to trace the operations of walking and acting in the city, as a transcription of paths and trajectories, this crucially misses "the act itself of passing by", as de Certeau (1984, page 97) points out. The survey transforms everyday activities "into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map", and although this makes them "legible", it also "causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten". Despite subverting such cartographies, Debord's own psychogeographical representations face a similar problem. For bodies and practices only appear in his maps as traces of actions and interactions with urban spaces—paths followed, places 'cited'—and this too means that much is missed, repressed, or forgotten. It ensures that 'the body' remains undifferentiated, and that a multiplicity of experiences and feelings risks being collapsed into the one.<sup>(11)</sup>

I use the word 'risks' because I do not think that such a collapse is inevitable, or even complete in this case. It is certainly true that Debord's maps miss out a substantial part of what psychogeography, with its interest in the sensuous and emotional, was supposed to be about. Further, as static representations they freeze some of the fluidity and movement that was the hallmark of psychogeographical investigations. Although they attempt to image what de Certeau calls a "*practised place*"—a place which is enunciated and not simply physically given—they ironically end up appearing

<sup>(11)</sup> For an important feminist critique of the repression of the body in another context, that of time geography, and of the "masculinist, bourgeois and racist" implications of the reduction of the body to a path through transparent space, see Rose (1993, pages 29–38).

to fix its mobile elements in a spatial form, and to transform them back into the realm of a "place": "an instantaneous configuration of positions", composed by a system of signs and ruled by the law of the 'proper' (de Certeau, 1984, page 117). These problems perhaps help to explain why, as I noted before, the lettrists and situationists seem to have favoured a rather vaguer notion of psychogeographical practice to the action of making a map. Certainly they published few formal examples of détourned maps besides those created by Debord, and their other 'mappings' were usually more distant from the conventions of cartography, and involved different means of representation such as written reports, photographs, and film.

As I have tried to suggest, however, Debord's maps resist the homogenising designs of many cartographies. Despite their limitations and problems, they have a variety of openings and aspects, and can be made to speak of many different senses of the city: of separation and unity; of hurried movements through the streets, and drifts and languid strolls; of noise, confusion, and bewilderment as well as legibility and coherence; and of constraint, exclusion, and spatial entrapment, as well as mobility and circulation.<sup>(12)</sup> Through their arrows and fragmented appearance they refer to some of the realities of modern urban experience, and respond to the difficulties of representing urban space. And at the same time they seek to point towards opportunities for subversion and radical change: to paths and routes that might be pursued by other pedestrians and dwellers, and détourned for their own ends. Far from being commanding visions of the city, they therefore appear as more provisional and partial statements which oscillate between different conceptions of the urban scene: a patchwork city, known through actions and footsteps; an abstract space, carved out by capital and planners, but to some degree reappropriated by those on the *dérive*; and a potential social space, based on psychogeographical possibilities. This experimental aspect perhaps becomes more evident when the maps are read in their original context. There they provide a record—a trace rather than a formal tracing—of some of the activities pursued by the lettrists, and later the situationists, in Paris and other European cities during the 1950s. And there they can be seen as problematical parts, but also in my view challenging parts, of the wider attempts by these groups to study and transform "those centers of possibilities and meanings".

### Conclusions

In this paper I have introduced some of the ideas and activities of the LI and the SI, and begun to assess their concern with maps and mapping the city. I have also tried to place their interventions in terms of wider debates about the power and politics of these practices, and aspects of the contemporary anxiety about cartography. By focusing on the groups' interest in psychogeographical mapping, their use of existing urban maps, and Debord's attempts to 'renovate' cartography, my intention has *not* been to present their ideas as a counterhegemonic mode of expression, or to imply that their maps are intrinsically subversive. There are many difficulties with their conceptions of cartography, some of which I have touched on briefly, and if

<sup>(12)</sup> The ability of détourned maps to convey a sense of fear and constraint in the city, as well as spatial freedom, has been shown more recently by David Bell (1992) in a short striking extract from a collaborative project on the 'psychogeography' of a subway in Birmingham. His report includes a map depicting experiences of the zone during the daytime, as an inviting and spacious "fantasy island" and "*rus in urbe* perfected". But it is followed by a sharply contrasting map representing the same place after nightfall, as a "panic subway" and a threatening and fearful "place to rush through", in which one must "never turn around". Although he does not mention it here, the form of his cartography is clearly influenced by situationist ideas.



Debord's plans of Paris are read as maps, then they undoubtedly help to reproduce certain dominant conceptions of the city just as they help to disrupt others. I would further contend that a subversive practice of cartography cannot be something absolute, singular, which stops when 'false' representations of the city have been overturned and a 'true' vision has taken their place. Rather, it must involve a more continual process that constantly turns against itself, subverting the subversions, critiquing, and moving on.

The need for a self-critical provisional approach was recognised by Debord. He argued that psychogeographical research on urban settings "entails bold hypotheses that must constantly be corrected in the light of experience, by critique and self-critique" (1981b, page 7), and he frequently referred to the need for critical interventions to assess the validity of their findings. One of the problems of his maps lay in translating this critical fluidity into a graphic form, given the fixity of spatial representations. However, if his own efforts were flawed, and if the LI and the SI more generally did not supply a ready-made form of mapping which is automatically coherent and subversive, I would contend that their activities still raise important issues about cartographic practices and attempts to represent the city. In particular they underline some of the creative potential of maps and mapping, and the ways in which they might be reworked, reappropriated, and used for diverse ends.

As I noted, this position runs counter to the spirit of some critical accounts which seem to imply that urban mapping is necessarily linked to the strategic exercise of power, systems of planning, and surveillance, or even the "cadavers" of de Certeau's "voyeur-God". But it also ties in with a variety of other projects in which authors have insisted on exploring the dimensions and limits of cartographic discourses, in the belief that different conceptions of mapping can be developed. Along with various writings that have cast the mapping impulse in a different light to the surveying view discussed earlier, they serve as a reminder that processes of mapping have multiple aspects, multiple possibilities, which cannot be reduced to the logic of panoptic regimes of domination. As Gregory (1994, page 7) argues, a "cartographic anxiety" need not lead to the abandonment of images of mapping, but can rather provide an opportunity for reflecting on some of their problems and potentialities.

Despite the problems of the lettrist and the situationist programme, I would argue that by working with (rather than abandoning) ways of mapping the city, and by trying to deconstruct and reconstruct existing maps to release different meanings about its spaces, the groups contribute to the sense of possibility referred to above. They help to foster a *subversive attitude* to cartography, which approaches maps not as copies or tracings of the real city, as forms of overcoding structures which can be judged in universal terms of 'truth' and 'error', but as things that work, that perform, that affect the ways in which urban spaces are conceived and lived. Instead of functioning as all-encompassing surveys from afar, maps thus become part of a more mobile engagement with urban space, and a means of moving from position to position; of experiencing the city from different positions; of opening up ways of seeing its spaces rather than closing them down around a single truth. In this experimental movement and in the possibilities it unfolds we can perhaps glimpse an outline of some more diverse, open, and politically challenging forms of cartography that might be developed in the future.

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