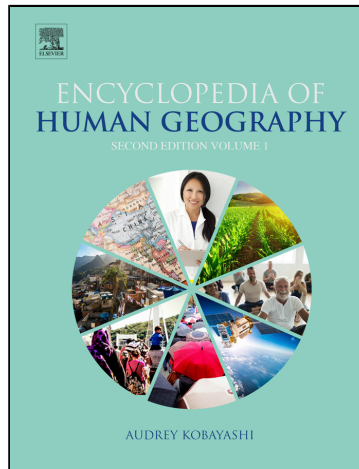


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Psychogeography

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Glossary

p-slopes This refers to the steepening of spatial relations on “mental maps” compared with standard maps, short for “perceptual slopes.”

There were three psychogeographies, that of the Situationists in the 1950s and 1960s, which dribbles into the present; that of the geographers, from 1967 to 1972, which flared, sputtered, and went out; and that of the psychoanalysts in the 1980s, which was born moribund. Despite their common interest in the relationship between the geographic environment and the mind, none of these had anything to do with the others.

Situationist Psychogeography

Disappointed and frustrated by the tattered remnants of Surrealism in the years following the Second World War, Guy Debord allied himself with Isidore Isou and his Letterists, only to break away in 1952 with a handful of others to form the Letterist International. It was in the following year that an “illiterate Kabyle” suggested “psychogeography” to Debord and the others to refer to what they were thinking about as “some provisional terrains of observation, including the observation of certain processes of chance and predictability in the streets.” In his 1955 paper, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” Debord argued that psychogeography could produce precise laws of geography based on emotions and individual behaviors, whether consciously or not. In 1956, Debord and Asger Jorn of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus organized the First World Congress of Free Artists in Alba, Italy, where they laid the foundation for the Situationist International, which came into being in 1957.

Another founding text, which called for life as a continuous *dérive* (literally *drift*), was Ivan Chtcheglov’s 1958 work “Formulary for a New Urbanism.” The *dérive* was the essential experimental psychogeographic method, which linked the urban and techniques of transient passages in different “ambiances.” Situationists used *ambiance* to refer to the feeling or mood associated with a place or to the effect or appeal it might have but also to the place itself, especially to the small, neighborhood-sized chunks of the city they called *unities of ambiance*, parts of the city with an especially powerful urban atmosphere. Debord complained that there was a neglect of the ways that *ambiance* could change in very short distances, perhaps as small as a few meters. These changes resulted in zones in the city of different psychic atmospheres, through which one strolled, attracted, or repelled by different places, as one sought the path of least resistance (which nevertheless was not related to the physical contour of the ground).

Situationists employed the *dérive* to rectify this neglect by discovering unities of *ambiance* as a basis for reconstructing the city as a terrain of passion.

In his “Theory of the *Dérive*,” Debord wrote about the *dérive* as both playful and constructive. The *dérive*’s antecedents included the Saturday night wanderings of Thomas De Quincey, André Breton’s Surrealist romance, *Nadja*, and Louis Aragon’s *Paris Peasant*, but unlike these, the *dérive* was usually done in small groups of two or three people. Such groups would allow individuals to check with each other in order to arrive at objective conclusions. For a limited time—the average duration of a *dérive* was a day—the members of these groups were to drop their usual everyday movements and be drawn by attractions of the terrain. There was nothing random about a *dérive*; rather movement was always in relation to psychogeographical relief, eddies, and points of attraction or discouragement. By letting themselves be drawn through the city *by the city*, the Situationists discovered its unities of *ambiance*.

Debord and his Situationist colleague, Asger Jorn, made two maps of Paris, the *Guide Psychogéographique de Paris* (1956) and *The Naked City* (1957). The *Guide* was subtitled *Discours sur les passions de l’amour*, below which it said, “psychogeographic slopes of the drift and the location of unities of *ambiance*.” The unities of *ambiance* appeared as fragments of commercial street maps carefully cut out to indicate each unity’s defenses and exits; the psychogeographic slopes as red arrows indicating the forces the city exerted on drifters freed from other motivations for moving: drifters would be pulled in the direction of the arrows from one unity of *ambiance* to another. The weight, shape, and patterning of the arrows indicated the lengths and strengths of the psychogeographic slopes.

The Naked City was about *plaques tournantes*. Literally hinges or railway turn-tables, *plaques tournantes* were what Situationists called those unities of *ambiance* from which the city could pull one in many different directions; that is, *plaques tournantes* were unities of *ambiance* that functioned as psychogeographic switching stations. The old market at Les Halles was a *plaque tournante*. So was the old Plateau Beaubourg. Debord’s invocation of objectivity was not idle.

Unities of *ambiance*, drifting, and psychogeography were but facets of a Situationist revolution in everyday living, and Situationists aimed at nothing less than the collective takeover of the world. Instead of ameliorating their condition and that of their society,

they aimed at provoking its crises on every occasion by every means, including game playing. Much of Situationist psychogeography had precisely this exciting ludic character. As for urban planning, the Situationists regarded it, along with aesthetics as a form of blackmail by utility, where utility was the very last thing Situationist psychogeography had on its mind. As Simon Sadler has said, "Psychogeography directed us to obscure places, to elusive ambient effects and partial artistic and literary precedents for the sublime. If we felt frustrated at the effort required to put them all together, we had missed the point. Psychogeography was a reverie, a state of mind ... It represented a drift from the ideal and the rational to the extraordinary and the revolutionary."

Although the Situationists played a central role in the events in France of May 1968, they dissolved themselves as a group in 1972, and Debord himself committed suicide in 1994. But Situationist activities, and psychogeography, in particular, had never been an exclusively Parisian affair. From the beginning it had been an international movement—for example, the London Psychogeographical Association was in existence as early as 1957—and though none of these "branches" were long lived, they did manage to seed themselves sufficiently in the consciousness of others to propagate Situationist, or at least psychogeographic ideas in fertile ground the world over. In New York, for example, Glowlab was founded by Christina Ray in 2002 to support work in psychogeography; and the following year Ray joined with the Brooklyn Psychogeographical Association to create the Psy-Geo-Conflux, an annual festival devoted to psychogeography. The London Psychogeographical Association continued in one form or another into the 21st Century and it, or the original Parisian version, spawned a sprawling, if thin, network of advocates, practitioners, and hangers-on. Notable among these are Will Self, whose *Psychogeography: Disentangling the Modern Conundrum of Psyche and Place* was published in 2007, largely a collection of his psychogeography columns for *The Independent*. Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25* came out in 2003, a psychogeographic tramp of 120 miles; and his *The Last London: True Fictions from an Unreal City* came out in 2018. Other important names in the contemporary London psychogeographic scene would include Ralph Rumney—ancient forefather—Peter Ackroyd, Stuart Home, and Patrick Keller. Merlin Coverley's 2006 *Psychogeography* covers this territory from De Quincey to Keller.

Psychogeographic activity has been noted in San Francisco, Portland, Providence, Boston, New York, Nottingham, Manchester, Glasgow (whose workshop for nonlinear architecture produced the exemplary "Psychogeographical Survey of Glasgow"), Exeter, London, and Paris, among other sites. Serious and joking, covert and out in the open, marginal and mainstream, Situationist psychogeography is alive and well, or at least as alive and well as it ever was.

Geographic Psychogeography

Ten years after Debord defined psychogeography for the Situationists and entirely unaware of its existence, the psychologist Robert Beck and the geographer Gilbert White, both then at the University of Chicago, used the term in a grant proposal for studying something similar. In 1966, White's colleagues, the geographer Robert Kates and the psychologist Joachim Wohlwill, then both at Clark University (where Beck would soon come to teach) edited a special issue of *The Journal of Social Issues* devoted to "Man's Response to the Physical Environment." In 1967, the psychologist David Stea, then also at Clark, offered the first course in psychogeography. Cross-listed as Psychology 207 and Geography 207, the course was universally known as, and soon formally called psychogeography. The following year, Ingrid Hansen sat for the world's first master's comprehensive in psychogeography. The field flourished for 5 years, produced theses and dissertations, but rapidly mutated into environmental psychology, environmental cognition, environmental modeling, participatory design, and other splinters. A faculty seminar that it spawned, soon enough a faculty-student seminar was responsible for launching the radical geography journal *Antipode*.

Despite their differences, the Situationist and Clark psychogeographies shared an interest in the city. The Situationists' unities of ambiance, the *dérive*, their psychogeography were, of course, but facets of the Situationist revolution in everyday living, and Situationists generalized these ideas in Situationist directions. Especially important was the work of Kevin Lynch. Lynch was Stea's prime influence, and the latter acknowledged that his interactions with Lynch between 1964 and 1966 influenced his work in the late 1960s on urban imagery. At Clark, Stea introduced his psychogeography students to Lynch's *Image of the City*, and for some this was decisive. Denis Wood, for example, left for Mexico immediately after reading *Image of the City*, where, in San Cristobal las Casas, he replicated what he could of Lynch's work. He returned in the summer of 1969 to expand the work into scales and modalities—auditory and olfactory—that Lynch hadn't considered and collected further "mental maps." These turned into his master's thesis, *Fleeting Glimpses*, which laid the ground for his doctoral dissertation, *I Don't Want To, But I Will*, on the evolution of the mental maps of American teenagers experiencing Europe for the first time. In 1971 he and Stea published *A Cognitive Atlas: Explorations into the Psychological Geography of Four Mexican Cities*; and they were far from alone in being affected this way by Lynch's example, as attested by the papers of Donata Franciscato, William Mebane, Peter Orleans, Thomas Saarinen (and so many others), then at the Universities of Houston, Harvard, California Los Angeles, Arizona (and elsewhere).

Lynch was a city planner at MIT from 1948 to 1978, though he continued to teach into the 1980s. Lynch said four motives informed his work: an interest in the connection between psychology and the urban environment; fascination with the aesthetics of the city when these were generally dismissed as "matters of taste"; questions about how to evaluate a city; and a commitment to pay more attention to the actual human experience of a city. In 1952 Lynch taught a seminar that explored how people found their way around cities, something he continued thinking about during an ensuing year of travel. In 1953 he pulled his thoughts together in "Notes on City Satisfaction," concerned with the psychological and sensual effects of the physical form of the city. In 1956 Lynch opened his paper "Some Childhood Memories of the City" with the question, "What does a child notice in his city?" and a 1959 piece "A Walk Around the Block" emphasized new work at MIT on people's impressions of places. The work was part of a project

Lynch directed with Gyorgy Kepes from 1954 through 1959 designed to unveil the elements in a city that were important in its perception.

Though Lynch and others did walk around the city, they did not *dérive*, and most of what Lynch learned came from a series of maps drawn by 30 residents of Boston, 15 of Jersey City, and 15 of Los Angeles. It was these he described in his 1960 *The Image of the City*, where he summarized his results in provocative maps that rapidly became iconic. In part this was a tribute to the attractiveness of the maps—as the attention paid Debord's maps is in part a tribute to *their* attractiveness—but Lynch's maps were an effort to come to grips with American cities by studying their inhabitants' mental images, and the sense that these maps were in some way *mental maps* gave them an auratic power that Lynch had surely never anticipated.

Lynch also paralleled the Situationists' interest in unities of ambiance and the spaces among which they floated. In an appendix to *The Image of the City*, Lynch gave detailed analyses of the "highly identifiable district of Beacon Hill," a unity of ambiance if ever there was one, and "the confusing node of Scollay Square." Lynch and his colleagues didn't just walk these streets, they obsessively mapped them, producing maps of steep streets, street cross-sections, inset doorways, brick sidewalks, bow front windows, ornamental ironwork, and even the subdistricts of Beacon Hill, an analysis that surely would have spoken to Debord.

The year that Stea brought Lynch to Clark also saw the publication of David Lowenthal's *Environmental Perception and Behavior*. Lowenthal's 1962 "Geography, Experience, and Imagination" had legitimated the study within geography of the way we perceive, experience, and act in the world, and his new volume sketched the dimensions of what was soon to be psychogeography, with articles by Beck on spatial meaning, Kates on the perception of storm hazards, and Lynch on the view from the road. Two Clark psychologists, Seymour Wapner and Heinz Werner, had just edited *The Body Percept*, a volume on body perception; and Clark geographer Martyn Bowden was touting J. K. Wright's recently republished 1947 paper, "*Terrae Incognitae*: The Place of Imagination in Geography," with its invocation of *geosophy*, the study of geographical knowledge from any and all points of view. Geosophy, perception studies, and mental maps fused into psychogeography.

A good deal of work was published. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a series of slim Place Perception Research Reports were produced by Jim Blaut, Stea, Merrie Muir, Roger Hart, and others, including Stea and Wood's *Cognitive Atlas*. The Clark University Cartographic Laboratory published Wood's thesis and dissertation in 1971 and 1973. In 1973 Stea and Roger Downs, a geographer at Pennsylvania State University, edited a collection of papers into *Image and Environment*; and in 1977 they came out with a comprehensive textbook, *Maps in Mind: Reflections on Cognitive Mapping*. The year before that Lowenthal and Bowden had edited *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy in Honor of John Kirtland Wright*; and most of these original players contributed pieces to a special 1987 issue of the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* devoted to these years and experiences at Clark.

In the end, though, "mental maps" was where people congregated. Contributory here was Peter Gould's 1966 paper, "On Mental Maps," whose findings about the perception of residential desirability were displayed as contour lines on maps (to be expanded in 1974, with Rodney White, into the book, *Mental Maps*). For a moment in the late 1960s, it seemed as though we could just slice heads open and inspect the maps lying there, despite the fact that the things we were calling mental maps ranged from the sketch maps we solicited from people; through maps like those of Lynch, Stea, and Wood summarizing content analyses of sketch maps; to maps like Gould's which were simply graphic displays of statistical analyses of rank-order lists. None of this was *wholly* divorced from the interests of the Situationists who, after all, had found in Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe's urban social anthropology "examples of modern poetry, capable of provoking sharp emotional reactions," and who imagined that "even Burgess's theory of Chicago's social activities as being distributed in distinct concentric zones, will undoubtedly prove useful in developing *dérives*." But it was nevertheless very far from Situationist psychogeography.

Yet there were some uncanny similarities. Trying to understand how mental maps developed, Wood had his teenage tourists map London, Rome, and Paris on successive days, altogether collecting over 300 maps. In his dissertation Wood displayed Lynch-like maps to show how the kids' knowledge changed with experience; but he also probed how the kids' knowledge about individual features—like the Thames, Tiber, and Seine—changed over time. He looked at the way the maps were organized, whether features floated around or were connected, and how connected they were. And he tried to understand something about the relationship between the kids' ideas of the structures of London, Rome, and Paris and the ideas of commercial mapmakers.

For this he gridded a commercial map so that he could assign its coordinates to every feature on each of the kids' maps. Had their maps been structured like the commercial maps, the grids he would get by connecting the coordinates on the kids' maps would resemble the evenly spaced, right-angle grid he'd drawn over the commercial map. It was easy to see that the kids' maps not only didn't much resemble the commercial map but varied widely among themselves. They also changed with experience, in most cases growing more like the commercial map. Looking at these grid transformations, as he called them, he had the feeling that he was looking at the very surface of the kids' mental maps. And as Debord had, when contemplating the psychogeographic relief of Paris, he too reached for a topographic metaphor, comparing geomorphic features to the surface of a mental map.

Despite similarities, Wood's p-slopes and Debord's psychogeographic slopes referred to different aspects of urban experience. By letting themselves drift, the Situationists rolled down psychogeographic slopes of attraction from one unity of ambiance to another. By comparing the kids' maps with maps one could buy in a store, Wood's p-slopes became measures of confusion about the structure of the city, the p-slopes steepening with uncertainty. Debord and Jorn's arrows tracked desirability, Wood's contours plotted knowledge.

These differences can be generalized to those between Situationist and Clark psychogeography. To a certain extent, both sciences grew from a deep dissatisfaction with post-World War II urban planning practices. Situationists were implacably opposed to the post-war reconstruction of Paris, and Situationist psychogeography constituted an alternative way of thinking about the city. But to the extent that Clark psychogeography is derived from Lynch's work, it *too* represents an effort to describe another approach

to thinking about the city. The obvious difference is in their situation, the Situationists *outside* the planning profession and so free to think about the problem as dictated by their roots in Surrealism and their commitment to dialectical materialism; Lynch *within* the profession, and so shackled to thinking through the problem from the perspective of city government with its grab-bag of service provision (especially of roads, sewer, and water), condemnation, ordinances, and incentives.

Consequently, Lynch focused his research on aspects of the city that could be shaped by city government. The characteristics of people's images that Lynch attended to were legibility and imageability, both of which government could shape, the first through the planning of roads and other macrofeatures of the city, the second through zoning ordinances and incentives. Understanding the public's image of the city could enable planners to make the city both more imageable and legible, easier to negotiate, and thus less intimidating and more friendly. Civic virtue should rise. This is a caricature of Lynch's thought, and if it hardly dominated the work of Clark psychogeographers, it was a persistent theme, not only in the on-going concern with imageability and legibility, but in practice, Stea, for example, leaving Clark for the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA, Wood for a career in the Department of Landscape Architecture in the School of Design at North Carolina State University. That is, whatever the orientation toward contemporary planning practices, Clark psychogeography was broadly complicit with the *idea* of planning and best aimed at ameliorating some of its destructive consequences. Unlike Situationist psychogeography, Clark psychogeography represented a march *toward* the ideal and the rational.

Despite this, the two psychogeographies were equally marked by a profound ambiguity toward the map or at least toward its universal claims to represent the world we live in with anything like accuracy or dispassion. Debord touted the objectivity of his data collection, but then exploded the map into shrapnel-like fragments propelled by the forces of desire; Lynch touted the subjectivity of his data and questioned the utility of comparing it to "proper 'objective' descriptions," and while he respected the plan of the city, he nonetheless drew maps whose elements floated above it, connected in the end to nothing but themselves. Neither Debord's nor Lynch's maps respected cartographic traditions, and both were designed to *contest* the privilege assumed so effortlessly by the traditional maps of planners. It was plain to Debord and Lynch—to everyone—that the world they wanted to live in called not simply for a different kind of planning, it called for a different way of thinking about how we actually *are* in the world, it called for a different world.

Psychoanalytic Psychogeography

Entirely unrelated to either of these was the psychogeography that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s among a small group of psychoanalysts. Henry Ebel noted that psychoanalysts such as William G. Niederland proposed that many fantasies involved geographical shapes. He christened the study of these fantasies "psychogeography." For example, Ebel pointed out the strong resemblance of Florida to a limp penis. This he advanced as a (doubtless partial) explanation for Florida's desirability by the elderly as a place for retirement. In 1986 psychoanalyst Howard Stein published *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography*. Two years later, with Niederland, he coedited *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Most of the work collected in this latter volume was written well before Niederland's 1978 proposal—some, by Freudian colleague Sándor Ferenczi, as early as the 1920s—but all the work explores how issues, experiences, and processes that result from growing up in a human body are symbolized and played out in the wider social and natural worlds. The editors understood this as the intellectual and historical foundation for the psychological study of images of the world and of society, but nothing since has been built on it.

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