

# Vestiges of the real : cartographies of the psyche and the city

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## Vestiges of the Real: Cartographies of the Psyche and the City

Imagine a surface on which nothing is hidden, but not everything is visible. Like the enigmatic table connecting Lautréamont's umbrella and sewing machine, the surface is a map linking the psyche and the city. Here, heterogeneous contacts and dispersions that resist exact locations dispel homogenous and planiform arrangements charted from a monofocal perspective that allow the perfect representation of that which is mapped.

Such a map can never be just a re-presentation of territories, whether psychic or urban. The actual act of mapping creates that which is mapped. The map is neither an adequate imitation nor a transparent reflection of stable, pre-existing entities. Such a cartography is based on an efficacy to create and promotes an active engagement in the making and unmaking of both psychological and urban territories. Such a cartography casts doubt on stubborn mimetic prejudices of transparency seeking to reveal an unequivocal truth or unambivalent meaning. Such a cartography questions the referential and assumed objective accuracy of any map in relation to a represented object, and thus, the exclusive and constraining link between reality and representation.

In presenting various efforts in mapping the psyche and the city, this article is focused specifically on indexes of the unconscious on both an individual and collective level. Various shifts in methods of analysis pertaining to the unconscious are outlined in order to provoke speculation on the interrelationships between the psyche and the city and to question their reduction to predetermined categories of thought. In proposing a challenge to the hegemony of the visible, the intangible but palpable realms of the individual and collective unconscious are affirmed as domains to be exploited by architecture.

### Semantics of Desire

Sigmund Freud acknowledged that "like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be."<sup>1</sup> Freudian slip aside, the use of the verb "appear" reveals the sway of the Enlightenment on his attempt to illuminate the "dark continent" of the psyche and to map the uncharted territory of the unconscious. Seeing that which is hidden was for him primary. He believed that the very desire to know, far from being innocent, was itself ultimately derived from an "infantile desire to see."<sup>2</sup> Recalling his visits to Jean-Martin Charcot's clinic at the Salpêtrière in Paris, Freud admiringly states, "Charcot was a visuel, a man who sees ... he used to look again and again at things he did not understand, deepening his impression of them day by day, until suddenly an understanding of them dawned on him."<sup>3</sup> Further evidence of the primacy attributed to the visible by Freud is provided in his 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" which he defined as "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light"<sup>4</sup>.

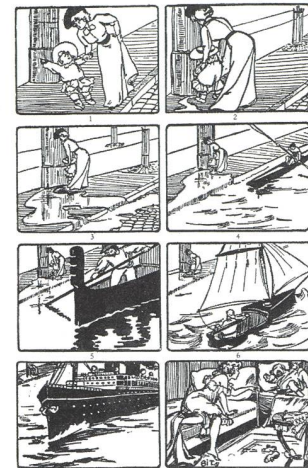
The desire to know through seeing also characterizes Freud's early work in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>5</sup> He discovered that dreams are related to hidden motives. In particular, dreams could be interpreted as "wishfulfilments," that is, as representing the satisfaction of drives or desires of the unconscious which had been repressed by rational thought. Dreams were considered in the context of the patient's account of visual representations, thoughts, and feelings through the process of *free association*. The relaxed drift of thought, once undirected and unimpeded by rational constraints, could freely yield to the unconscious. Characteristic of unconscious thought in general, dreams functioned, according to Freud, through condensation of several significant features of latent *content* into a composite figure designated as *manifest content* which the dreamer could consciously recall. Freud's hermeneutic of dreams dwelt precisely on unraveling the ambiguity between these two manifestations of content in the dream work. Distorted by the manifest content, latent content is an unconscious plot to be revealed through an interpretation that waits for the truth behind dream recollections, slips of the tongue, jokes, and so forth.

The successes of *free association* in allowing open-ended chains of multiple signs to emerge revealed flows of desire in the unconscious. Freud mediated these flows by subjecting them to a semantics of desire, a confirmational interpretation derived from the question, what does it mean? In attempting to answer this question, Freud's semantics of desire posited several privileged representations, namely, the *ego*, in place of an initial multiplicity. He distinguished between the *ego*, a conscious self attempting stabilization through will and reason, and the *id*, the seething cauldron of excitement-seeking wishes. Freud formulated, "where id was shall ego be", thus undermining the efficacy of free association with his agenda to recover true meaning from unconscious desires through images and verbal explanations and promote a conscious rational identity that is stronger than the unconscious. Analysis *cum* cure, Freud was determined to recuperate the *ego* and protect it from any threatening contaminations of the *id*. Despite the emphasis given to the unconsciousness in his analyses, Freud maintained a hierarchical disposition of categories by positing consciousness as being more fundamental than the other realm, a prejudice that ultimately predetermined his empirical inquiry. The danger of turning the psychic map into a truth was imminent.

## Dream City

Concerning the city, Walter Benjamin states, "I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out a sphere of life graphically on a map."<sup>6</sup> He was positioning reading and writing as a generative act rather than a descriptive tool. As an experimental cartography that fluctuated between memoir, aphorism, essay, and montage of quotes and images, the uncompleted *Pas-sagenwerk* mapped Paris as a complex mnemonic system. He turned to the underside of the city as the receptacle of a collective dream.

Acquainted with Freud's and Jung's theories of the collective unconscious, Benjamin insisted that the dream of modernity is a "collective phenomena."<sup>7</sup> From this, he formulated that "all collective architecture of the 19th century provides housing for the dreaming collective: arcades, winter gardens, pano-



Sigmund Freud, image taken from Sandor Ferenczi to illustrate the dreamwork, "Zur Harnsymbolik" from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900.



Passage Choiseul, Paris, from Susan Buck-Morss, the *Dialectics of Seeing*, 1989.

ramas, factories, wax-figure cabinets, casinos, railroad stations - as well as museums, apartment interiors, department stores, and public spas.”<sup>8</sup> His observation that as “wish symbols”, collective architecture is the “residue of a dream world.”<sup>9</sup> This can be compared to Freud’s understanding of dreams as being “wish fulfillments” of repressed desires. Such architectural remnants were the urban phenomena that had appeared in the 19th century, with the emphatic claim of the new, but had meanwhile lost their functionality while maintaining in themselves something unfulfilled.<sup>10</sup>

For Benjamin, society’s awakening from the collective dream of modernity was to be mediated by memory. He suggested a revolutionary potential inherent to memory echoing Marcel Proust’s distinction between *voluntary memory* designating a conscious effort to remember the past, and *involuntary memory* which was spontaneously provoked inadvertently by stimuli, thus breaking the apparent boundary between the past and the present. Memory served as the mechanism that allows both the past and the present to coincide in unexpected simultaneous relationships to each other. Elements of the past as well as unrealized dreams which place the present in a critical position are brought about. Benjamin delineated a dream city constructed of stratifications of heterogeneous fragments where a variety of lost fantasies and artifacts resided but had been superseded by current fashions and developments. Yet, these might be stumbled upon by the acute urban wanderer - the *flâneur*. The figure of the *flâneur* enabled Benjamin to articulate an act through which a series of reflections and memories are spontaneously triggered by phenomena of the urban environment. In contrast to the masses for whom the city is absorbed in a distracted state, the *flâneur* enacts a mobile geography of looks and glances that provides potential access to physical and immaterial realm of the urban environment.

The simultaneity of the past and the present for Benjamin revealed modernity not as rupture, but as the latest episode of the “ever-same” in a momentary anticipation of an unfulfilled utopia. Whereas Freud’s motive was to hermeneutically recuperate true meaning from dream-images, Benjamin intended to expose the collective dream of modernity as illusionary and ultimately, dispel its myth of progress. He intended to delineate how society could become critically aware of its own collective unconscious and “experience the present as the waking world to which the dream refers.”<sup>11</sup> He amassed evidence in the form of actual conditions excavated from Paris that would contradict modernity’s semantics of progress - its uncritical equivocation of technological advances with social improvements as well as ubiquitous imagery proclaiming an imminent utopia.

The *Passagenwerk* is a critical urban analysis, a cartography that questions established values and beliefs propagated by linear narratives promoting a historical account of modernity, where the present is assumed to be a culmination of the past. Benjamin countered such an understanding with a heterological method that “charted contradictory material terms within an unreconciled and transitory field of oppositions (i.e. antiquity-modernity, dream-awakening), the synthesis of which is not a movement toward resolution, but the point at which their multiple axes intersect.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, his mapping of the collective unconscious of the city, where its dreams and desires of progress are concur-

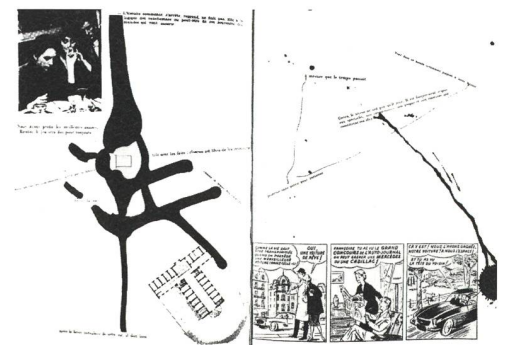
rent with a production and maintenance of the ever-same, proposed a synchronous and spatialized relationship of the past and the present, dream and waking, the petrified and the transitory. In direct confrontation with the myth of modernity, Benjamin attempted to undermine that myth's claim to a transcendent, fundamental truth by stripping history of its legitimating function in propogating a semantics of progress.

### Psychogeography

Reminiscent of Benjamin's predilection for the material realm of the city as being the inherent catalyst that could activate social consciousness, the Situationist International claimed that "there is nothing to be expected until the masses in action awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them."<sup>13</sup> Confronting this challenge, the Situationists proposed a *psychogeography* of the urban field. This entailed an "understanding of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behaviour of individuals and the collective, whether consciously organized or not."<sup>14</sup> As a method of urban analysis, *psychogeography* intended to cultivate an awareness of the ways in which everyday urban life was controlled, the ways in which this manipulation could be exposed, and the possibilities for constructed situations to subvert the status quo.

Another technique for urban analysis was the *dérive* entailing, similar to the stroll of the *flâneur*, a flow of acts and encounters during rapid passages through varied ambiances. The *dérive* acts as something of a model for the playful interaction between the subject and the city. The Situationists insisted that "the city could correspond to the entire spectrum of diverse desires and feelings impassioned in everyday life."<sup>15</sup> To *dérive* was to notice the way in which certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate collectively-grounded unconscious states of mind, inclinations, and desires with the hope of achieving a liberatory perception of hidden attributes of urban space. The *dérive* constituted an cartographic interrogation of multiple facets of the city, both conscious and unconscious, without creating a stable center of reference, with thought never in repose but in a constant state of flux.

In correlation to the *dérive* which engendered unexpected spatial links and temporal leaps in the city, *détournement* was a disjunctive editing procedure aimed at breaking prevalent illusions of representation. A favored technique of the Surrealists, *détournement* entailed a diversion, deflection, and displacement of elements from previous works that parodied and devalued their intended message in order to reinvest them with fresh meaning through their integration in a new ensemble. The material repertoire for *détournement* was provided in all aspects of modern visual culture - maps, graffiti, newspapers, photography, film, comics, and advertisements. Consequently, city maps were montaged with photographs to expose uncharted connections, utopian aspirations were expressed in the guise of seemingly nonsensical graffiti or grafted from newspapers, and speech bubbles of comics were replaced by revolutionary slogans. The purpose of these techniques, among others, was to realign the prevalent organization of space as structured by official channels of communication.



Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *détourned cartography* from *Mémoires*, 1959.

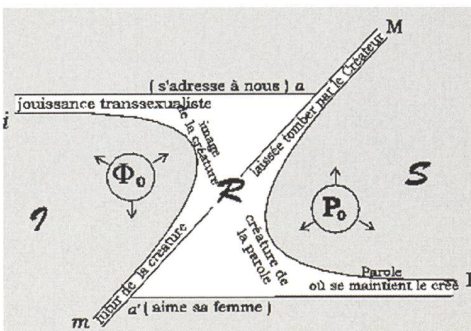
A mutual interference of independent forms of expression was advanced in order to alter their original determinant condition.

*Psychogeography*, *dérive*, and *détournement* were part of a generative cartography that constituted a concerted attack on the modern cultural objectives of the spectacle. This subject was most extensively treated in Guy Debord's book, *The Society of the Spectacle*<sup>16</sup> where the spectacle is condemned as an autonomous entity which perpetuates and expands its influences through the production and manipulation of representations. In targeting official representation and the technical rationality that it sponsors, the Situationists insisted that to transform perception is to change the structure of society. They acknowledged that dispersed practices elude any monocular representation which is blind to a vast array of conditions that do not fit its categories. Seeking to open space to difference and to overcome single rationales, the Situationists contested an inherent homogeneity of official versions of reality and its organization of space. In contrast, techniques such as *psychogeography* were concerned with diverse material forces of the city that would catalyze a reinvention of everyday life replete with real desires and collective pleasures. Such techniques sought to bring psychological geographies into contact with the ordered realm of the rational.

### Structure of Desire

Informed by structural linguistics which analyzed language as a system rather than an individual means of expression, Jacques Lacan's transformation of Freudian psychoanalysis entailed a mapping of the individual subject in relation to the symbolic web of meaning constructed in the collective realm of language. This required a shift from understanding meaning as a product of the sovereign speaking subject consciously using language as a tool for communication, to conceiving meaning as a result of a collective linguistic system where the subject is engendered or "spoken." Far from Freud's seething cauldron of instinctual energies, the unconscious, according to Lacan, was a realm of linguistic mechanisms, a text requiring deciphering

Lacan rejects the concept of the unconscious as the site for drives and desires. Rather than conceiving of the unconscious "as some obscure will regarded as primordial, its domain is that of concrete discourse, the field of the transindividual reality of the subject."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the unconscious, is that part of discourse that is not at the disposal of the subject. The subject emerges in the gaps that disable its attempts to craft a seamless and coherent account of self. He articulates the realm of collective symbolic interaction through language as the production of subjects, an artificially made world of constructed meaning. As an indictment of the *Real*, the sphere of symbolic interaction functions to conceal the lack of fundamentally stable meaning. The variability and unpredictability of the unconscious is attributed to the differential relationships established by infinitely shifting meaning of which any linguistic system is paradigmatic. For Lacan, this constitutes the spontaneity manifest in the unconscious. Formed and continually reformed in the collective realm of language, the subject will always be other than its ego, never quite coinciding with itself and always open to the inexhaustible character of networks of signification.



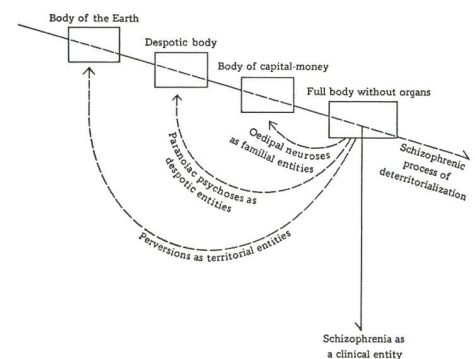
Jacques Lacan, diagram showing constitution of the unconscious according to linguistic structure, *Ecrits*, 1977.

In his cartography of the constitution of the subject, Lacan rejects a teleological perspective which supposes a predetermined sequence of stages moving towards a final outcome of normal identity. Instead, he maps the subject according to the inherent variability of identities formed through collective discursive interaction, where the identity is conditioned and situated but not reliably determined. The Lacanian subject is irreparably split, divided between self-certainty and its concurrent representations in language. Instead of the *ego* immediately experiencing its identity as its own, it is derived from illusory external images of wholeness and autonomy, where identification is anticipatory, imaginary, and counterfactual. With the infant's entrance in to the social symbolic order, Lacan effectively presents the subject as a series of fleeting events within language. Turning away from the unifying power of visual and verbal metaphors provided by Freud's interpretation of dreams, Lacan's model of the psyche posits a linguistic structure of heterogeneous metonymies vainly gesturing towards a whole where it is precisely the sense of wholeness that is lacking. Lacan's linguistic transformation of Freud's *image* of the unconscious to an intertextuality of constantly shifting meaning yields a subjectivity that is mediated entirely by language.

## Production of Desire

Freud's analysis of dreams functioned through a *metaphoric* free association with images, whether graphic or verbal, adhering to a semantics of desire (this means that). His metaphoric axis subjected unconscious desires to a semantic coding of a predetermined symbolic order. Lacan's analysis of the unconscious pointed to a *metonymic* structuring of desire which acknowledged an uncertainty of meaning and contingency in the fluctuating constitution of identities (not this, not that). This model of desire, no longer structured by any stable code, is deterritorialized by the infinite semiosis of language as a purely abstract signifying system.

Deploying Lacan's understanding of unlimited semiosis, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari reformulate their own deterritorializations employing the term *schizoanalysis* in order to identify spontaneous or unpredictable forms of the production of desire freed from social ordering (and...and...and). From the point of view of *schizoanalysis*, unstructured or deterritorialized desire is understood as constituting the positive potentialities of collective interaction or individual psychic functioning rather than a clinical exception to the norm - schizophrenia as breakthrough rather than breakdown. The radical instability of the schizo-subject disrupts any notion of equivalence or self-identity because he/she/it resists any form of substitution or coding. What is revealed by *schizoanalysis* is simultaneously produced. We never actually perceive the real. Rather, we create our "realities" within an unattainable real. Instead of allowing the analyst to hide behind the blank shield of scientific objectivity (Freud), or just as authoritatively, in the name of an originary lack (Lacan), for Deleuze and Guattari every cartographic act involves the risk of one becoming immersed in the very same constitutive and transformative processes enacted by the map. With the map, what is thereby discarded is the idea of images, language or any other form of cognition as a representation adequate to a pre-existing or persisting reality. Here, the strong distinctions between reality and



Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, diagram charting the lineage of schizophrenia as a clinical entity and as a process of deterritorialization, from *Anti-Oedipus*, orig. 1972.

representation, between a problem and its solution collapses - not to implode in the vacuum of simulation, but rather to give way to creative processes of auto-production (autocartographies).

Guattari states in *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, “not only does a map start to refer indefinitely to its own cartography, but it is the distinction between the map and the territory which tends to disappear.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, such *schizo-cartographic* enactments, in bringing forth new territories and frames of reference, do not rely on mimesis or adhere to models of adequacy and correspondence. “A schizocartography is not “second” with regards to existing territories it brings forth; one cannot even say that it represents them, since here it is the map that engenders the territory in question.”<sup>19</sup> The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself, it creates the unconscious. A schizocartography draws attention away from the stable identity of subjects and the city. A trajectory merges not only with the subjectivity of those who travel through a milieu, but also with the subjectivity of the milieu itself, insofar as it is reflected in those who travel through it. When “what is happening is perpetual movement”, Deleuze insists that the “cartographies of the unconscious indeed become the territory: the map expresses the identity of the journey and what one journeys through.”<sup>20</sup> Here, maps are always constructed through constant movement, never in a state of repose.

### Vestiges of the Real

That there is no invariant model for the formation of the subject is made evident by the shifts in methodology of analyzing the psyche - from an interpretation that recuperates and restores meaning in the case of Freud, to an interpretive procedure based on doubt and suspicion in the case of Lacan, to a radical non-interpretive enactment of subjectivities in the case of Deleuze and Guattari. Implicit in these shifts is the turn away from a *pleasure principle* that must eventually cede to the *reality principle* according to Freud, to a linguistic approach that makes both principles ultimately illusory and unattainable in an endless slippage of meaning and substitutions as outlined by Lacan, to the formulation of a performative principle of the production of desire by Deleuze and Guattari. Such a shift transgresses Freud's hermeneutical question, “what does it mean,” to face Deleuze and Guattari's question concerning the “machinery” in the production of desire, “how does it function.”

The same question must be asked of architecture and the city. How does it function? *Shizoanalysis'* performative principle of the production of desire poses a challenge for architecture discourses to constantly shift from one modus to another, never producing maps in the same manner, never invoking the same genealogy, and acknowledging that there is no profound truth to how things are constituted. This in turn questions the relevance of persistent cartographies that attempt to master the unknown by charting the terrain of knowledge under the law of the Same, where things can be rendered transparent, intelligible, and visible for the gaze of theory (slave cartographies). Such a performative principle in architecture would enable investigations of mutual, overlapping zones of indeterminacy between the psyche and the city, whose attributes are defined by mutual interferences rather than distinct identities as



evidenced in experiments such as the mnemonic cartography of the *Passagenwerk* by Benjamin and the itinerant psychogeography of the Situationist International. With no inviolate model for a foundation, the psyche and the city are always unfinished and outgrow themselves, transgressing their own limits and resiting any monological ordering principles. Both are coextensively rewritten and reread in immanent processes of production rather than predetermined according to transcendental principles of truth.

The underside of the psyche and the underside of the city form a connective surface where the unconscious of the individual is already crossed by the collective unconscious of the urban realm. Referring back to Lautréamont's table with the umbrella and sewing machine, people are always putting up an umbrella that shelters them from the unknown and on the underside of this firmament they record their conventions and opinions as so many vestiges of the real. Architecture as *schizocartography*, makes slits in the umbrella, ripping open the comfort of familiarity. But all too often, the slits are sewn back together, psychoanalysis misunderstood as reparation. Regarding *schizocartography*, always in movement and never in repose, there is an urgent and substantial challenge to architecture discourse in considering Deleuze and Guattari's statement, "a schizophrenic out for a walk is better than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch."<sup>21</sup>

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