

Inside, In Between and Out:

How can Psychogeography be beneficial to teaching and learning in Higher Education?

Abstract: The traditional pedagogic approach to everyday life study and cultural theory raises the question of whether it allows students to fully experience the everyday life without leaving the physical classroom; or if, being directly and consciously engaged with the everyday environment helps students gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical lessons traditionally taught in class. By looking at Psychogeography praxis and adoptions within different conceptual learning spaces: the physical, the virtual and the conceptual space; as well as how Psychogeography-influenced writings can be used to read and learn more about the city, this paper examines how Psychogeography can be beneficial to the practice of learning and teaching in Higher Education.

Keywords: Psychogeography, pedagogy, Higher Education

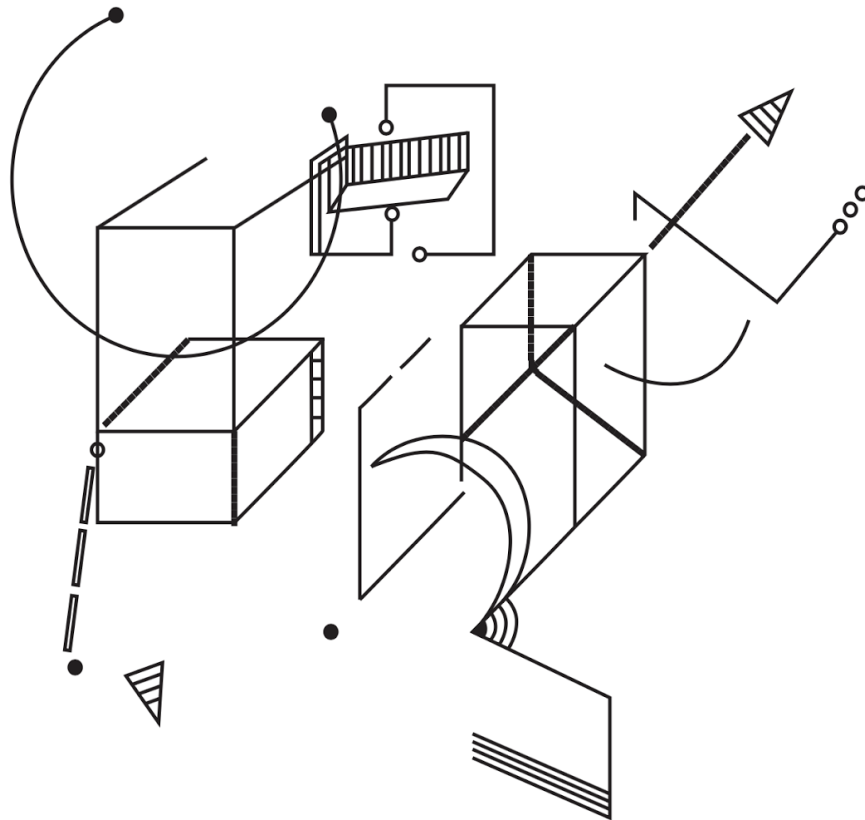


Figure 1. Diagram of a thinking process (Trieu, 2016).

Initially, I was intrigued by Psychogeography simply because I understood it in its literal term where psychology and geography intersect. These two fields of study adumbrate a sense of genuine entanglement that has constantly triggered my curiosity as a Design Management and Cultures student. As I read more into Psychogeography and its relevant concepts, I realised that Psychogeography is more than just the psychological effects of the urban environment. It could be a condition for imagination and creativity that directs Xavier de Maistre's 'Voyage Around My Room', a thought-generated factory that gives Virginia Woolf ideas for her literary works ('Street Haunting' and 'Mrs Dalloway') or a conceptual learning space for thoughts and wonders, for questioning and observing in a critical way.

In 1982, philosopher Frank Jackson proposed a thought experiment called 'Mary's Room', essentially questioning whether there is a fundamental limit to what we know about something that we cannot experience. Mary is a neuroscientist who knows every physical fact and theory of colors: from electromagnetic radiation, wavelength, intensity to spectrum of light, despite the world of only black and white that she lives in. However, one day, her screen experienced a malfunction and showed her an apple in color. This incident initiated an intellectual conversation known as 'the knowledge argument', in which Frank argued that seeing the apple had enabled Mary to learn and experience something new about colors (Jackson, 1982). Something, such as intangible properties and knowledge that cannot entirely described and explained by physical fact, but only through conscious experience (Jackson, 1982).

Psychogeography was first coined in the 1955 by Guy Debord in the 'Introduction to A Critique of Urban Geography' as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord, 1955). In this paper, I am exploring how Psychogeography is being employed in the current Higher Education teaching and learning approaches, and if, by any chances, it comes across as the 'conscious experience' that offers something new, something only curiosity can find.

INSIDE - Classroom Psychogeography

In the recent article published in the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, Richard Reynold, Joint Head of Academic Support at Central Saint Martin, suggested that the facilitation of inclusive Psychogeography in a traditional classroom plays a role key in the development of learning and teaching (Reynolds, 2016). According to his research through working with a cohort of around fifty students at Central Saint Martin over a period of more than ten years, 'student's characteristic attitudes and approaches to learning are influenced by, as well as,

expressed by the seating position that they elect to occupy' (Reynolds, 2016). In addition, W. B. Holliman H. N. Anderson (1986) from the University of Southern Mississippi demonstrated that there is a correlation between student seating occupation and academic performance:

A study of the relationship between student grades and (a) proximity (distance from the student to the instructor), (b) centrality (seating in the center of the room compared to seating toward the sides), (c) student density (presence of the students to the front, sides and back of the student), and (d) aisle seating is reported.... Students who occupied the front rows received higher grades than those who sat farther back. Centrality, student density, and aisle seating were not related to grades. Although these findings cannot be generalised freely, they indicate the value of studying ecological factors in classrooms (Holliman and Anderson, 1986, p.200).

For his research, Reynolds conducted two surveys: the first one is to identify the psychological impacts that different geographical seating occupations have on students; and the second one is to find out student's personal rationale for their seating position. Given a regularly rectangle lecture space, he analysed students' attitude towards learning based on a system of 'axis of attention' and 'axis of engagement'. The 'axis of attention' runs from the front of the room to the back, and expresses the degree to which any student feels personally involved in the content of a lecture, seminar or group presentation (Reynolds, 2016.) Meanwhile, the 'axis of engagement' runs from side-to-side in any learning space and represents students' learning attitude based on their positions from the classroom door: those who sit close to the door 'feel fully engaged with the lecturer's pedagogy or methodology of the course', however those who sit on the other side, further away from the door, tend to 'challenge' that pedagogy and methodology (Reynolds, 2016).

Reynolds's research suggests a great potential for inclusive Psychogeography approach to contribute to development in both teaching and learning, whether by intervening in the dynamics of learning space, or reinforcing the pattern of attention and engagement among students. However, there are a few restrictions in his conclusion in term of objectivity due to the limited number of participants. Within a physical classroom, there is no doubt that seating position has an impact, in a negative or positive way, on students' attitude and ability to absorb information. For instance, seating in the front, closer to the lecturer, will allow students to have a clearer vision and a better hearing distance. Hence it will more likely to boost to their academic performance. It is understandable to state that students who sit near the front are relatively more concerned with academic issues. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily prove the opposite as the reason students sit near the back might just be for physical and emotional comfort or simply no preference. For this reason, it is essential to consider every element of the learning space, from

dimension, density, the nature of taught disciplines to student's motivation and aspiration, in order to facilitate a successful and effective Psychogeography-based seating arrangement.

IN BETWEEN - Reading The City

The urban city has always been popular among generations of writers and novelist as either a story setting or a subject matter. Spreading over a period of nearly five hundred years, the literary legacy of Psychogeography has significantly and unquestionably contributed to our understanding of the cities in different time periods (*See Appendix for Timeline of Psychogeography*).

In his paper on "English Teaching: Practice and Critique" journal, Andrew Green - an English lecturer at Brunel University, suggested that personal understandings of space and place can be used as pedagogical and theoretical lenses to read the city (Green, 2013). By reading and responding to the meaning of a literary text, readers deepen their understandings of the cities and essentially become personal constructors of the urban spatiality. Conversely, authors' and readers' personal delineations of the cities 'lead to personal assumptions and expectations that are fundamental in shaping how texts are received and approached in personal reading and in the classroom' (Green, 2013).

Doreen Massey in her book 'For Space' observed that the city 'is always in the process of being made. It is never finished, never closed' (Massey, 2005). As a manifestation of space and a spatialization of time, the city has witnessed every historical and social progress which has more or less transformed. It takes sensitivity, a keen eye and the mind of a writer to observe and perceive these subtle changes of the city in a way that aren't normally described in a history textbook.

In a recent article in The Guardian, Elkin Laura, author of 'Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London' claimed that there is an undeniable connection between walking and creativity (Elkin, 2016). It is the streets where writers conduct their research and make observations of the everyday life. From Edgar Allan Poe's London - the city that is 'infested' with 'many individuals of dashing appearance' in the 19th century (Poe, 2009), the 'arcades, a rather invention of industry luxury' Paris of Walter Benjamin one century later (Benjamin and Zohn, 1997), to a more recent Lauren Elkin's Tokyo of 'a million eyes blinking in the dark', and 'helicopters drifted across the sky like mosquitoes' in 2008 (Elkin, 2016), Psychogeography-influenced literary works, prove to have played an important role in building perception and understanding of the past cities. It is only through the textual interpretation and contextualisation of their creative works that aesthetics of the past everyday life are made available to us.

According to Gulson Kalervo and Colin Symes in their journal 'Knowing one's place: Space, theory, education', reading is considered as an act of internalisation, a response to the possibility of space and place (Kalervo and Symes, 2007). Therefore, in the search of an appropriate literary comprehension, it is essential for the readers to position themselves in the context of the city (Green, 2013). However, as the act of reading in literature study often takes place in a traditional classroom, most of the time readers are dependent on their teacher's guidance to interpret and develop a textual meaning. For this reason, there is an inquiry whether the city itself can be employed to facilitate a conceptual reading environment where readers are allowed to be the constructor of the city, as well as their own learning experience.

OUT - Breaking The Habit

...it is not, after all, really a question about whether you can know the unknown, arrive in it, but how to go about looking for it, how to travel.

- REBECCA SOLNIT, *A field guide to getting lost*.
(Solnit, 2016)

In order to make use of our understanding of psychogeography - how our surroundings influence us, regarding the design of Higher Education pedagogies, it is essential to look at how we behave in different learning spaces and how these behaviours contribute towards our learning experience. The nature of Psychogeography practices often call for 'playful' and 'questioning' approach as suggested by Ben Highmore, Professor of Cultural Studies at University of Sussex in his book '*Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*' (Highmore, 2002). On the contrary, Dr Silke Lange, Dean of Learning, Teaching and Enhancement at Central Saint Martin, noted that today's lectures and classrooms are often 'associated with static, immovable furniture organised in neat room, all facing towards a whiteboard or screen' dictating a specific behaviour or pedagogies of structure and rules. Hence, in order to employ psychogeography as a potential pedagogic approach to Higher Education, it is crucial to design the learning spaces in a way that does not only encourage curiosity but also challenges the hierarchy of lecturer-student relations.

In 2014, Dr Silke Lange co-authored a book chapter with John. R. A. Smith, Senior Lecturer in Imaging Science at the University of Westminster, in which learning space is simply defined as a space in which learning happens. Three different conceptual learning spaces: physical - geographic, virtual - on-line and conceptual - state of mind are considered to allow different approaches to learning and teaching (Lange and Smith, 2014). Based on the facilitation of the three conceptual

learning spaces in various geographical sites within the city, Broad Vision – an art/science research and learning project at the University of Westminster, designed an experiential, student-led interdisciplinary module that aimed to promote collaboration and sharing skills between students from different disciplines (Lange and Smith, 2014). Qualitative and quantitative analyses of participations' responses showed that 'migration between the different physical learning spaces encourages different behaviour and responses to each space, by different individuals, based on unfamiliarity and imposed regulations'.

As Kashdan and Fincham (2004) in 'Facilitating curiosity: A social and self-regulatory perspective for scientifically based interventions' suggested some pedagogic design instructions that aim to encourage curiosity by 'creating tasks that capitalise on novelty, complexity, ambiguity and variety of surprise, and by 'purposely placing individuals in contexts that are discrepant with their experiences, skills and personality.' This is clearly illustrated in the Broad Vision's approach as there were also notions of 'curiosity' and engagement of novelty as the students were exposed to different disciplines from those of their own, and as lectures were designed from a student-led perspective in various unconventional learning spaces such as a cafe, a public place or a gallery residency (Lange and Smith, 2014).

Recently, the exhibition at the University of the Arts London – 'Practices of Enquiry: Making UAL teaching visible' showcased some of their teaching projects which were based on the idea of active enquiry as a response to their students' curiosity and creativity (*Practices of Enquiry: Making UAL teaching visible*, 2017). As a comparable approach to that of Broad Vision, its curator explained 'enquiry-based' as a process where learning is driven from being curious, asking question, a collaborative effort and a twist in the role of teachers and students.

From my intuitive perspective, Psychogeography, as an pedagogic approach or a pedagogy itself, has a lot to do with curiosity, unfamiliar 'context' and certainly a 'variety of surprise' elements. In essence, having a conscious mindset while engaging with novelty in a space where suitable activities happens, allows one to ask questions and learn. In a recent interview, when asked of the relevance that Psychography bears in our modern life, Dr Silk Lange shared her opinions:

It is about breaking a habit and being open to experiments....If you walk the same route every day from home to work, you just switch off and you don't look anymore because you've seen everything. But if you just make an effort of going in different route everyday, you will experience the world very differently. And I think you can translate that kind of experience to a way of living: be open, try different thing, don't just get stuck in one way, in the system...Maybe Psychogeography is almost like a mindset. It is about challenging yourself and becoming consciously aware of how you engage differently with spaces (Trieu, 2017).

Bibliography

- Debord, G. (1955) *Critique of urban geography (Debord)*. Available at: <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/urbgeog.htm> (Accessed: 3 November 2016).
- Elkin, L. (2016) *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. UK: Chatto & Windus.
- Green, A. (2013) 'London in space and time: Peter Ackroyd and Will Self', *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 12.
- Highmore, B. (2002) *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Holliman, W. and Anderson, H. (1986) 'Proximity and student density as ecological variables in a college classroom', *Teaching of Psychology*, 13(4), pp. 200–203. doi: 10.1207/s15328023top1304_7.
- Jackson, F. (1982) 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 32(127), p. 127. doi: 10.2307/2960077.
- K. Gulson., Symes, C. (2007) 'Knowing one's place: Space, theory, education'. Doi: 10.1080/17508480601123750.
- Lange, S., Reynolds, R. and White, D. (2016) 'A journey around my classroom: the psychogeography of learning spaces', *Spark: UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal*, 1.
- Massey, D.B. (2005) *For Space*. UK: SAGE Publications.
- Reynolds, R. (2016) 'Psychogeography and its relevance to inclusive teaching and learning development: why it matters where students choose to sit', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (10).
- Solnit, R. (2016) *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Great Britain: Canongate Books Ltd.
- Poe, E.A. (2009) *The Man of The Crowd*. BookSurge Classics.
- Practices of Enquiry: Making UAL teaching visible* (2017) [Exhibition]. Showroom Gallery, London. 9 January 2017 - 27 January 2017.

Trieu, N. (2017) 'Conversation about Psychogeography'. Interview with Dr Silke Lange for 19 January, .

Walter, B., Zohn, H. (1997) *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: Verso Books.

List of figure

Figure 1. Diagram of a thinking process.

Trieu, N. (2016). *Diagram of a thinking process*. [Illustration]

Appendix: The Timeline of Psychogeography

Century	Year	Psychogeography Milestones	Literary Context	Historical Context
17th		The emergence of the term 'flânerie', denoting strolling, idling, often with the connotation of wasting time.	Shakespeare: <i>Hamlet</i> . Death of Shakespeare. Descartes: <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> .	Europe: Early modern period. Political domination of King Louis XIV of Kingdom of France. Japan: Edo period. Vietnam: Dynastic era, Trinh-Nguyen War. Paris commune.
18th	1719 1794	Defoe: <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> . Maistre: <i>Voyage Around My Room</i> .	Birth of Ho Xuan Huong.	
19th	1821 1840 1863 1872	Quincey: <i>Confession of an English Opium Eater</i> . Poe: <i>The Man of The Crowd</i> . Baudelaire: <i>The Painter of Modern Life</i> . The word 'flâneur' first appeared in the 8th Volume, Great Universal Dictionary of the 19th Century by Pierre Larousse.	Lane: <i>The Arabian Nights</i> Gautier: <i>Capitan Fracassa</i> . Nietzsche: <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> .	Europe: Death of Napoleon Bonaparte. USA: First railway station opens in Baltimore, Maryland. Vietnam: Nguyen Dynasty.
20th	1905 1911 1925 1927 1955 1957 1973 1997 2000	Ford: <i>The Soul London</i> . Hassel: <i>Walking in Berlin</i> . Woolf: <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> . Woolf: <i>Street Haunting</i> . The term 'Psychogeography' first coined by Guy Debord. Establishment of Situationist International. Establishment of London Psychogeographical Association. Benjamin: <i>Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism</i> . Sinclair: <i>Lights Out for the Territory</i> . Solnit: <i>Wanderlust</i> .	Eliot: <i>Poems 1905 - 1925</i> . Fitzgerald: <i>The Great Gatsby</i> . Kafka: <i>The Castle</i> . Hemingway: <i>Men Without Women</i> . Tô Hoài: <i>Truyện Tây Bắc</i> Calvino: <i>The Baron in the Trees</i> . Sartre: <i>Existentialism and Human Emotions</i> . Barthes: <i>The Pleasure of the Text</i> . Tolkien: <i>The Silmarillion</i> .	Europe: Treaty of Rome and the European Economic Community. Nazi Party in Germany reconstituted. Roosevelt announces. Vietnam: French Indochina. Empire of Vietnam. Unification. End of Vietnam War. Doi Moi reform policy.
21st	2002 2006 2007 2015 2016	Sinclair: <i>London Orbital</i> . Coverley: <i>Psychogeography</i> . Self: <i>Psychogeography: Disentangling the Conundrum of psyche and places</i> . Ellard: <i>Places of the Heart: Psychogeography of Everyday Life</i> . Elkin: <i>Flâneuse</i>	McEwan: <i>Atonement</i> . Nobel Prize: Orhan Pamuk. Hosseini: <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i> . Lee: <i>Go Set a Watchman</i> . Pulitzer Prize: <i>Nguyen Viet Thanh</i> .	George W. Bush is elected. 27th G8 summit. Barack Obama was elected. Syrian Civil War. Same-sex marriage. Brexit Donald Trump is elected. Vietnam: Socialist-oriented market economy. Joint WTO.

*This is an original work of Ngoc Trieu in order to:

- Make it easier for readers to navigate themselves through the history of Psychogeography.
- Offer a list of recommended Psychogeography-influenced literature.