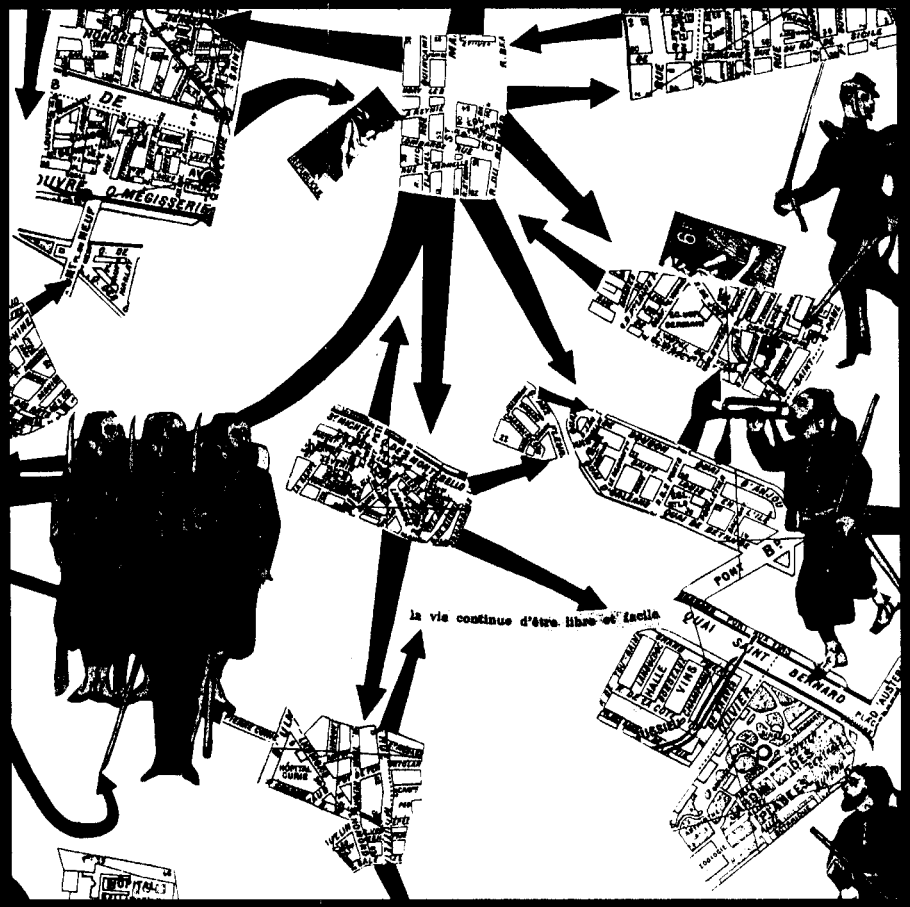

THE SITUATIONIST CITY

SIMON SADLER

Singer, Brooke
"EmergingWeb"

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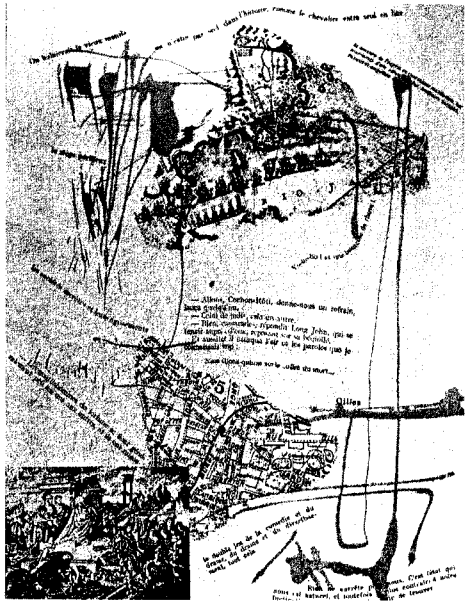
Figure 2.12

Guy Debord with Asger Jorn, page from Mémoires, *1959, screenprinted book.* Mémoires' *collage of text, maps, and illustration evoked the sense of reverie appropriate to psychogeography.*



Ledoux, Charles Baudelaire, and another situationist hero—the English romantic writer Thomas De Quincey, who had "drifted" through London in his 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. *Potlatch*'s list of sublime sources carried on, raising Le Facteur Ferdinand Cheval—the French postman who built a personal exotic palace in his spare time—to the supreme honor of "psychogeography in architecture" (fig. 2.11). Edgar Allan Poe, pioneer of the macabre and of the detective story, and *flâneur*, was deemed psychogeographic "in landscape."[21]

Eighteenth-century theorists had advocated the picturesque and sublime as stimulants to reverie. Then the intention had been to overcome the excessively ordered universe envisioned by the Enlightenment, so it seemed to follow that the sublime could induce new flights of fancy in a mid-twentieth-century city reshaped by the Enlightenment's progeny, modernism. 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 conjured up in Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires*, which left readers with the task of negotiating Jorn's inky dribbles through Debord's collage of text, maps, and illustration (fig. 2.12). It represented a drift from the ideal and the rational to the extraordinary and revolutionary.

Making sense of psychogeography

The eighteenth-century picturesque and sublime had paid homage to nature, depicting it as a force poised to subsume or overwhelm humanity, at odds with the pastoral vision of people at ease in an

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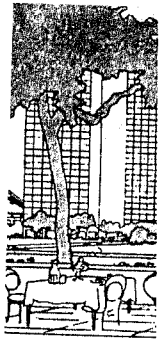

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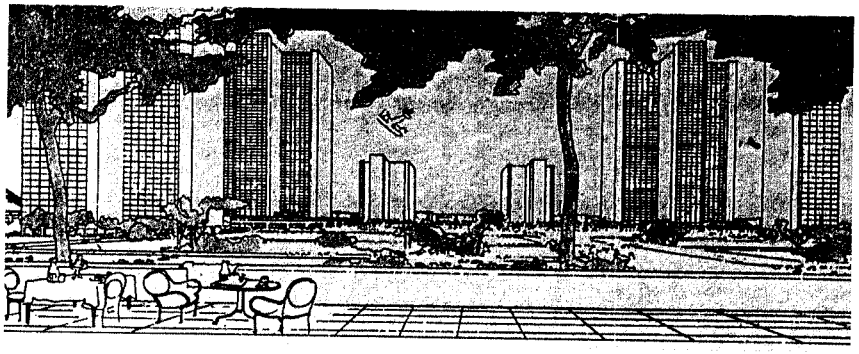
Figure 2.13

Le Corbusier, drawing of the Cité Contemporaine pour 3 Millions d'Habitants, 1922. In this classic image of modernism, Le Corbusier presented the ideal city as uncannily clean, unpeopled, and ordered, as if time itself could be arrested. Situationists found the image chilling; Constant's zestful renderings of the situationist city conveyed a very different sensation of the urban future (compare fig. 3.3).



ideal landscape. By analogy, the situationist city was at odds with the Corbusian vision of people at ease in an ideal urban landscape, a place where the struggle with nature, with the body, with space, and with class had inexplicably come to an end. Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine (Contemporary city) was forever contemporary only by freezing time and ending history (fig. 2.13). In psychogeography all the struggles were acute again, making a nonsense of the Corbusian fantasy of the city as something abstract, rational, or ideal. Debord reported that "the primarily urban character of the drift, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities—those centers of possibilities and meanings—could be expressed in Marx's phrase: 'Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive.'"[22]

As its name implied, psychogeography attempted to combine subjective and objective modes of study. On the one hand it recognized that the self cannot be divorced from the urban environment; on the other hand, it had to pertain to more than just the psyche of the individual if it was to be useful in the collective rethinking of the city. The reader senses Debord's desperation to negotiate this paradox in his "Théorie de la dérive" (Theory of the *dérive*), a key document first published in the Belgian surrealist journal *Les lèvres nues* in 1956 and republished in *Internationale situationniste* in 1958. The drift, Debord explained, entailed the sort of "playful-constructive behavior" that had always distinguished situationist activities from mere pastimes. The drift should not be confused, then, with "classical notions of the journey and the stroll"; drifters weren't like tadpoles in a tank,

"stripped . . . of intelligence, sociability and sexuality," but were people alert to "the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there," capable as a group of agreeing upon distinct, spontaneous preferences for routes through the city.[23]

One of Debord's priorities in hedging the role of spontaneity and chance in the drift was to create distinctions with its better-known surrealist precedents. "An insufficient awareness of the limitations of chance, and of its inevitably reactionary use, condemned to dismal failure the celebrated aimless ambulation attempted in 1923 by four surrealists, beginning from a town chosen by lot," he noted.[24] Debord had some tolerance for surrealist methods (he was amused by a friend who "had just wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London"), but while situationists made it their business to disrupt the bourgeois worldview, they had no wish to problematize all instrumental knowledge and action. Surrealist automatism was, they felt, creatively and politically exhausted, "a genre of ostentatious . . . 'weirdness.'"[25]

Debord was resigned to the fact that "in its infancy" drift would be partly dependent upon chance and would have to accommodate a degree of "letting go."[26] The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan had claimed that surrealist play oscillated between intention and automatism, and much the same could have been said about psychogeographic drift.[27] Debord and Wolman themselves decided that the drift was a combination of chance and planning that reached various stages of equilibrium.[28] In his concern that "letting go" might collapse back into surrealist automatism, Debord overlooked the fact that drifters could not completely "let go" even if they wanted to. Psychogeography was formed and validated by a situationist group discourse and culture that couldn't be just blanked out at will. In fact Debord presented the situationist maps of Paris and the "theory of the *dérive*" precisely in order to ratify group activity, codifying all sorts of overblown psychogeographic techniques.[29]

The result—an organized spontaneity—was something of an oddity, and it certainly didn't collate much real data. "A bar, for example, which is called At the End of the World at the limit of one of the strongest unities of ambiance in Paris, is not there by chance," *Potlatch* pleaded. "Events only belong to chance if one does not know the general laws of their category."[30] With its detective-style iconography, Ralph Rumney's situationist photographic record of Venice's streets, made as he stalked American Beat author Alan Ansen, looked suitably systematic (fig. 2.14). But it failed to yield anything remotely like "data," its author struggling to explain the significance of his encounters with children and with old acquaintances, account for the romance of Venice, and identify "sinister," "depressing," and "beautiful" zones. Rumney clearly lacked seriousness, leaving us uncertain whether his project was a failure or a wholesome pursuit of situationist play. At one point he attrib-

Figure 2.14

Ralph Rumney, Psychogeograp 1957, photographic collage. Th flawed, visual record of a psych

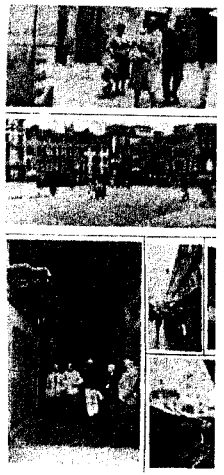


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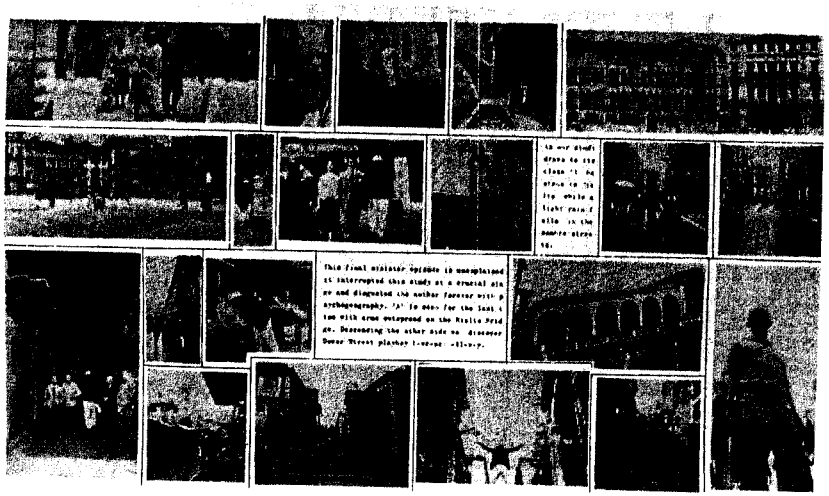
Figure 2.14

Ralph Rumney, Psychogeographic Map of Venice *(detail), 1957, photographic collage. The document was a rare, if flawed, visual record of a psychogeographic drift.*



uted Ansen's eccentric behavior in the photographs to the fact that he was "aware of the photographer and is showing off," and there was a note of capitulation to the impalpability of "psychogeographic" data as Rumney admitted that his report might have benefited from being conducted by "one more competent than the author."[31] Announcing his expulsion shortly after, the Situationist International regretfully noted that Venice had "closed in on the young man."[32]

In fairness, psychogeographers recognized that theirs was a necessarily inexact science, dealing with imprecise data. *Potlatch*, discussing recent tendencies in poetry, noted the failure of fixed literary form and then implied a link to the failure of fixed political and urban forms.[33] To seek fixed form was folly, the journal noted, since it denied the serendipitous processes that create literature, politics, and cities alike. And in any case, even if permanently fixed form could be discovered and isolated, it would be an impediment to the dynamics of creativity. So in their *Mémoires*, Debord and Jorn cheerfully resigned themselves to urban relativity, noting that "these ambiguities do not owe anything to psychology—cities are born from interferences of situations—the influences

follow each other surpassing each other while meshing."[34] "The sectors of a city are, at a certain level, decipherable," Debord admitted in his 1961 film *Critique de la séparation* (Critique of separation), as the viewer was shown aerial views of Paris. "But the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable, like all that clandestinity of private life regarding which we possess nothing but pitiful documents."[35]

The situationists wanted to keep a grip on reality nonetheless. The commentary of Debord's film *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* dreamily recollected the experience of the drift: "It was a trompe-l'oeil reality by means of which one had to discover the potential richness of reality," as if the special, unreal conditions of the drift might occlude a more profound insight into the city; a page of *Mémoires* complained about "false stonework—trompe l'oeil—never enough—never satisfying."[36] The Debordist element reacted quickly against those situationists for whom the mysteries of the drift were going beyond cool reasoning and heading down the same magic road as postwar Bretonist surrealism. In 1956 *Potlatch* attacked a "faction, comprising sometimes the most advanced in the search for a new behavior," which found itself "drawn to the taste of the unknown, mystery at all cost" and "to diverse occultist conclusions which border on theosophy." The article's tone became menacing: "The analysis and the representation of this last tendency eventually brought us to put an end to the relative political freedom which we had up till now mutually accorded ourselves."[37]

As in the stoic tradition of the male artist presented with the female nude, a degree of resistance to the charms of psychogeography was applauded. From the outset psychogeography was regarded as a sort of therapy, a fetishization of those parts of the city that could still rescue drifters from the clutches of functionalism, exciting the senses and the body. "We will play upon topophobia and create a topophilia," the Situationist International profligately promised,[38] and the overwhelmingly male-dominated group's penchant for girlie illustrations gave its architectural commentary an especially odd cast. A page of Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires* drew upon the old metaphor of the landscape as a female body (fig. 2.15). The chunks of female bodies, disarmingly chopped up, were "moving accidents"—"accidents" like the rolls and dips of the landscape, perhaps, or "moving" in the emotional sense, or in the way that they were encountered on the move, on the drift. The experience of delving bodily into the urban landscape was like being "half-buried between the mounds of Easter Island."[39] Another of Debord's metaphors, in distinctly poor taste, suggested that the drifter could rape the night streets of London's East End—"Jack the Ripper is probably psychogeographic in love."[40] The linkage of sexual prowess to the city and to revolution was completed by a famous piece of situationist-inspired May '68 graffiti: "I came in the cobblestones."[41]

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Figure 2.15

Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, page from Mémoires, *1959, screenprinted book. "Détourned" soft porn pictures of women were a frequent motif in situationist work, usually drawing attention to capitalism's ghastly capacity to make a spectacle even of the human body. The "détourned" images nonetheless conferred their capacity to titillate onto situationism, adding to its peculiarly risqué and seductive quality. In this page from* Mémoires, *the female body is compared to the cityscape, effectively appropriating the body for situationist psychogeography.*

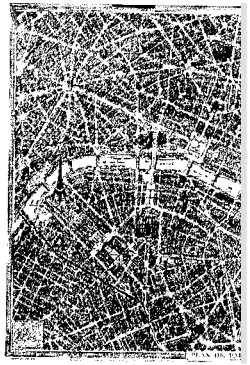
So psychogeography offered a sense of violent emotive possession over the streets. Exotic and exciting treasures were to be found in the city by those drifters able to conquer her, able to overcome the exhaustion and euphoria of the drift. "In 1953–1954," Chtcheglov boasted, "we drifted for three or four months; that's the extreme limit, the critical point. It's a miracle it didn't kill us."[42] In this will to possess the city there was something more than mere fetishization. Like the imperialist powers that they officially opposed, it was as if situationists felt that the exploration of alien quarters (of the city rather than the globe) would advance civilization. More poignantly for the handful of female or non-European psychogeographers, the drift could momentarily defy the white patriarchy of urban space-time, the likes of Michèle Bernstein and Abdelhafid Khatib "reclaiming the night": Khatib was twice arrested for breaking the police curfew imposed on Algerian residents.[43] Reports on psychogeography were presented as if they were produced by a military rather than an artistic avant-garde.[44] As well as having a nautical derivation, Debord borrowed the idea of drift from military tacticians, who defined it as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus."[45] For Clausewitz it had been an "art of the weak," for von Bülow a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision."[46] The power of psychogeography, it seemed, lay precisely in its intoxicating combination of subjective and objective—fetishistic and militaristic—approaches to urban exploration. Psychogeography was merely a preparation, a reconnaissance for the day when the city would be seized for real. The drift, Debord explained, "takes on a double meaning: active observation of present-day urban agglomerations and development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city."[47]

A passion for maps

Now that the drift offered a new way of surveying urban space, a new means of representing space on paper would have to be found. The 1956 *Guide psychogéographique de Paris* (fig. 1.5) and 1957 *Naked City* (fig. 1.32) served as alternative maps of Paris, Debord and Jorn representing the surreal disorientation of their drifts around Paris by scattering the pieces of map and the arrows showing their routes.[48] Maps had traditionally been made by those wishing to impose order upon the city: "without extraordinary assistance, how do you think that a private person could have emerged from this labyrinth?," Louis XIV's engineer had demanded to know as he introduced the new "scientific" survey of Paris in 1652.[49] In their maps, by stark contrast, Debord and Jorn attempted to put the spectator at ease with a city of apparent disorder, exposing the strange logic that lay beneath its surface.

The maps that situationists stared into became aids to reverie, suggestive of possible living environments. *Potlatch*'s editors imagined "the inviting aspect of certain localities in Ireland and elsewhere, which are shown on general geography maps in color or on partial Ordnance Survey maps with scales and cross hatchings; the determination of a passionate *organism* destined to function in this environment."[50] Situationist maps accordingly declared an intimacy with the city alien to the average street map. The narration to the opening sequence of the 1948 film *The Naked City*, an aerial view of lower Manhattan tracking northward, must have summed up the mood, the penetrating realism, and the sense of humanity that Debord and Jorn sought in maps: "As you can see, we're flying over an island, a city, a particular city, and this is the story of a number of its people, and the story, also, of the city itself. It was not photographed in a studio. Quite the contrary . . . the actors played out their roles on the streets, in the apartment houses. . . . This is the city as it is, hot summer pavements, the children at play, the buildings in their naked stone, the people without makeup."[51] Rather than float above the city as some sort of omnipotent, instantaneous, disembodied, all-possessing eye, situationist cartography admitted that its overview of the city was reconstructed in the imagination, piecing together an experience of space that was actually terrestrial, fragmented, subjective, temporal, and cultural.[52]

"One measures the distances that effectively separate two regions of a city," Debord noted, "distances that may have little relation with the physical distance between them."[53] But although Debord and Jorn made the physically coherent depiction of the city disappear their scalpel, they were not disillusioned with mapping itself. They were just unhappy with the structures and imperatives mapped out in the maps they chose to sacrifice: the depiction of a seamless Parisian spectacle by Blondel la Rougery's magnificent *Plan de Paris à vol d'oiseau* (Bird's-eye plan of Paris)—source of the *Guide psychogéographique*—and the banal indexing of the *Guide Taride de Paris*, sliced up to create *The Naked City*



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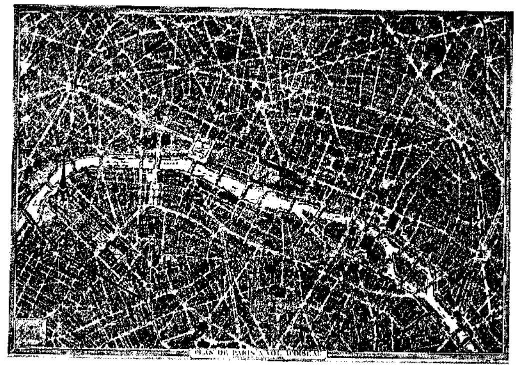


Figure 2.16

Blondel la Rougery, Plan de Paris à vol d'oiseau, *1956, drawn by G. Peltier. This huge and extraordinary map, the source of Debord and Jorn's* Guide psychogéographique de Paris, *came complete with its own booklet. The back cover insisted that "no work of comparable importance has been accomplished, for a capital, since the famous Turgot plan published in 1739," doubtless a fair claim, though its unconditional celebration of "The Spectacles" of Paris, which it carefully listed, was just inviting trouble from the situationists. It was a brave man, even so, who finally set to work on the map with a scalpel.*

Figure 2.17

Page from the Guide Taride de Paris, *1951, showing the 1st Arrondissement. The Taride street atlas became the source for Debord and Jorn's* The Naked City.

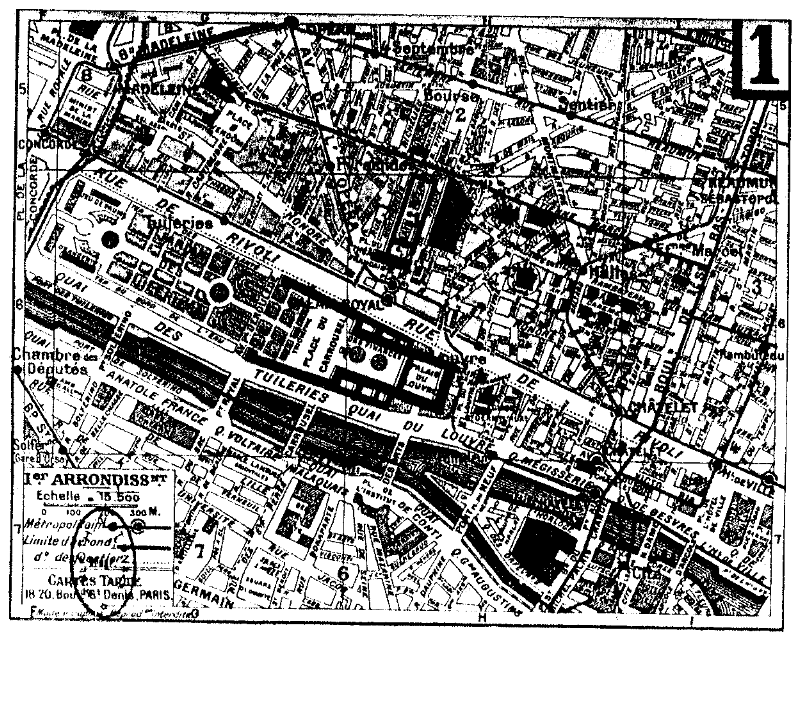
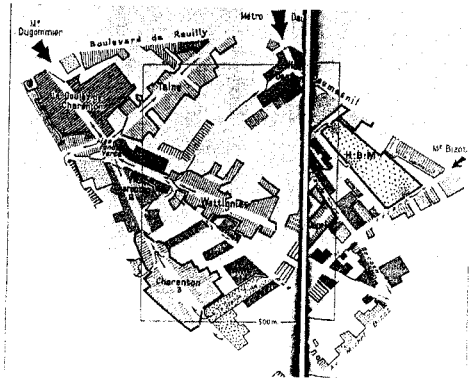


Figure 2.18

"The residential units of the sector," from Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe, Paris et l'agglomération parisienne, *vol. 1 (1952). Part of a case study of the Wattignies district in the 12th Arrondissement, the map was made by Louis Couvreur, a researcher working with Chombart de Lauwe. Its striking appearance, and its attempt to isolate the components of the city at large, were emulated in Debord and Jorn's* The Naked City.



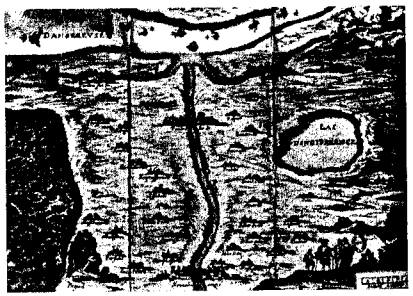
(figs. 2.16, 2.17).[54] The disturbed grid lines of the *Guide Taride*, still visible in the fragments composing *The Naked City*, emphasized the incompatibility of Cartesian logic with the real experience of the city.

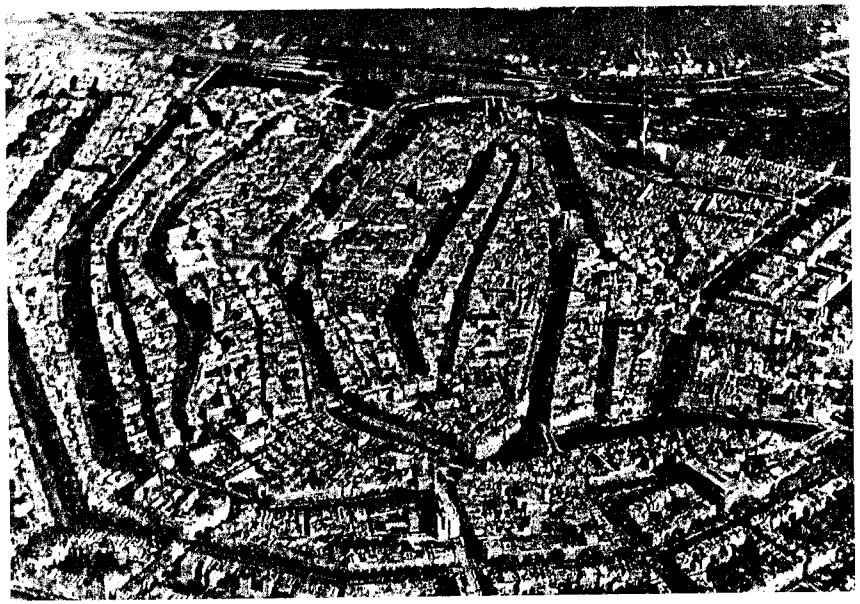
"With the aid of old maps, aerial photographs and experimental drifts, one can draw up hitherto lacking maps of influences, maps whose inevitable imprecision at this early stage is no worse than that of the first navigational charts," Debord insisted, trying to sound confident that his intuitive passion for Paris could be usefully reconciled with more conventional geographies, sociologies, and cartographies.[55] It was a brave claim. Debord drew overambitious parallels with the work of Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe and Chicago geographer Ernest Burgess: "ecological science—despite the apparently narrow social space with which it limits itself—provides psychogeography with abundant data."[56] *The Naked City* even adapted the rather abstract appearance of Chombart de Lauwe's map of the Wattignies district of the 12th Arrondissement (fig. 2.18).[57] But Chombart de Lauwe's map only *looked* fractured, and while its arrows had some relation to situationist arrows, both in appearance and in function—showing flows in and out of the *unité residentielle* (residential unit)—they said little about the relationship between the Wattignies unity and the city's other "unities," an all-important relationship in psychogeography.[58] Nor, for all its fascinating detail, did Chombart de Lauwe's geography tell situationists what the city *felt* like: Khatib championed situationist methods over "other means, such as the reading of aerial views and plans, the study of statistics, of graphs or the results of sociological enquiries," since these "are theoretical and do not possess that active and direct side" inherent in situationist approaches. "The situationists seem capable . . . not only of redeveloping the urban milieu, but of changing it almost at will," he noted, rejecting the notion of a scientific objectivity that would consider the city and its observer as discrete and disinterested.[59]

So *Internationale situationniste* tried another juxtaposition, between an aerial photograph of Amsterdam ("an experimental zone for the drift") and a 1656 *précieux* "map of the land of Feeling," alerting readers to the possibility of mapping states of consciousness and feeling during the drift (figs. 2.19, 2.20).[60] The *précieux* had mapped their ideal of tenderness as a debate between love and friendship; the situationists mapped the drift as a "discourse on the passions of love," the subtitle of the

Figures 2.19, 2.20

"Map of the land of Feeling, 1656" and "An experimental zone for the dérive*: The center of Amsterdam, which will be systematically explored by situationist teams in April-May 1960," illustrations for anon., "Urbanisme unitaire à la fin des années 50,"* Internationale situationniste, *no. 3 (1959). The juxtaposition emphasized the intimacy between environment and human emotion that was central to psychogeography.*





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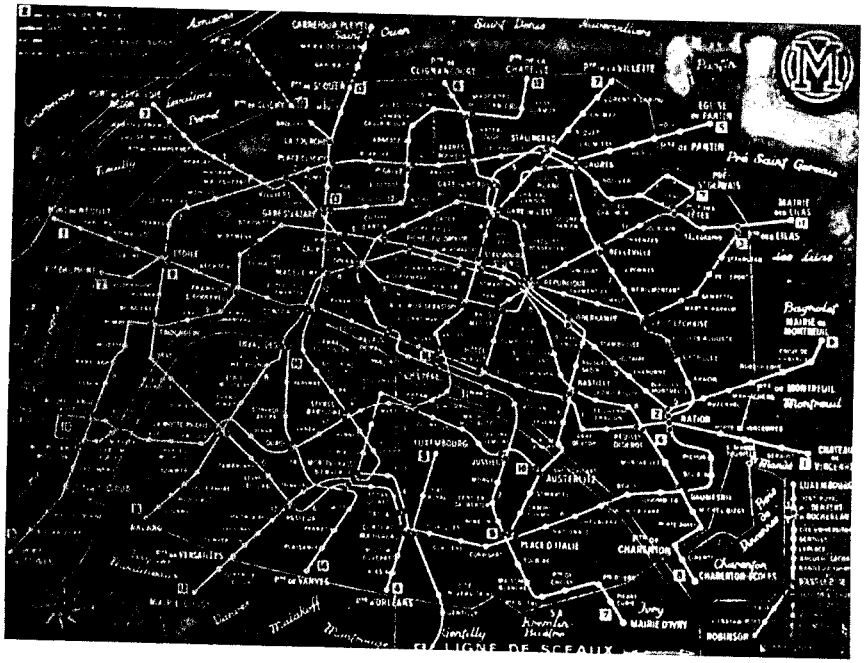
Métro map of Paris, c. 1955.



Guide psychogéographique, reminiscent of the way André Breton had compounded his excursions through Paris and through a love affair into his surreal novel *Nadja*.[61] No map, it seemed, could be read dispassionately. When Debord drew our attention to the wonders of the Métro map of Paris, and when he collaged into *Mémoires* an old map of London's railway network, he might have been construed as offering us some insight into the capital and social growth of cities (figs. 2.21, 2.22).[62] But he more likely enjoyed the way the drifting nets of track reminded him of psycho-emotional meanderings generally—a little like those that guided Jackson Pollock's drips—and resembled the courses of the drift, which paid so little regard to the internal boundaries of the city. Debord took care to use a map drawn before 1931, the year when London Transport rationalized it.

The drift could cover an area as small as the Gare Saint-Lazare (a "static drift"), but the *Guide psychogéographique* and *The Naked City* mapped the drifts at their grandest.[63] The scale of Thomas

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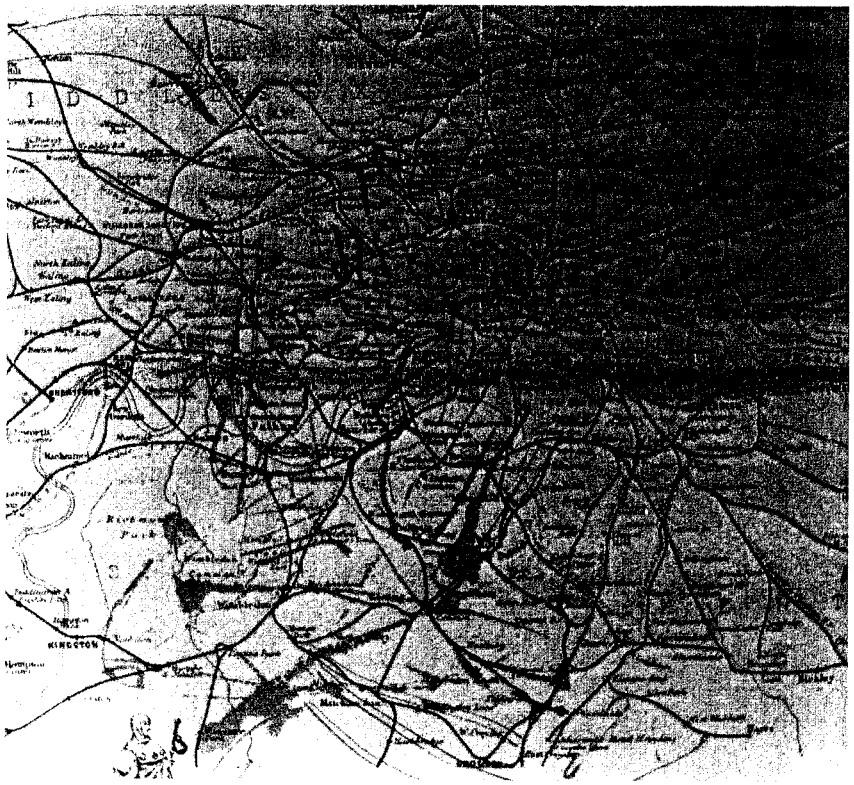
Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, page from Mémoires *(detail), 1959, screenprinted book, reproducing an early twentieth-century map of the London railway network. Debord compared the Paris Métro map to the seaport paintings of Claude Lorrain (figs. 2.6, 2.7) because of "the particularly moving presentation, in both cases, of a* sum of possibilities *" ("Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," 1955)—in other words, their stimulus to the urban imagination. Even though Debord insisted that the beauty of such maps was in their content rather than their appearance, they reminded the viewer of the new trends in* art informel *and abstract expressionism, like Jackson Pollock's seminal* Autumn Rhythm *(1950), which were trying to break away from modernism's hard-edge geometry; and, in turn, they evoked the labyrinthine plans for cluster cities drawn by the Smithsons and Constant (figs. 1.6, 1.12). The webs traced by both Paris Métro and London railway maps were of course akin to the routes taken by the situationist drift through Paris and London.*



De Quincey's "drifts" across London fascinated the situationists: "seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled on my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys," De Quincey wrote in 1821, that "I could almost have believed . . . that I was the first discoverer of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London."[64] The "northwest passage," like the "drift," was a nautical metaphor—the city imagined as a psychogeographic sea, pushing and pulling the sensitive soul along its eddies and currents. Nautically, there never was a northwest passage to the eastern Pacific (since the Americas are a continuous land mass), but psychogeographers believed that enough channels existed in the capitalist land mass to permit the drift a clean sweep across the city.

In short, the situationist maps described an urban navigational system that operated independently of Paris's dominant patterns of circulation. *The Naked City* helpfully explained itself on the reverse: "The arrows represent the slopes that naturally link the different unities of ambiance; that's to say the spontaneous tendencies for orientation of a subject who traverses that milieu without regard for practical considerations."[65] A sense of the wealth of information included in these maps dawns only slowly. Admittedly, they cover a rather compact portion of the center of Paris, but the infinite care with which they were cut implies that every street integral to each unity, and every street bordering it, was walked and considered. Here truly were examples of the general postwar mania for systems analysis, for modeling everything from traffic to the economy.[66] The earlier of the two situationist maps, the *Guide psychogéographique*, had, frankly, taken the situationist interest in charting each unity's "exits and defenses" and "fixed points and vortices" to obsessive lengths.[67] Its arrows restlessly danced between, in, and around specific streets, rendering the information almost impossible to absorb. The clean sweeps and sense of composition in *The Naked City*, the later of the two maps, were a result not only of a stylistic refinement, but also of an increasing confidence in psychogeographic judgment and of the need to clarify the shape of the situationist urban system.

It evoked beautifully the way in which some unities of ambiance acted as stations on the drift, junctions in the psychogeographic flow of Paris. The situationists coined a term for these junctions: *plaques tournantes*. The term punned on so many meanings that it is not possible to translate it straightforwardly. A *plaque tournante* can be the center of something; it can be a railway turntable; or it can be a place of exchange (in the same way that Marseilles is sometimes described as a *plaque tournante* for trafficking, or that Paris as a whole has been celebrated as a *plaque tournante* of culture). As a center for markets, drinking, prostitution, and drugs, Les Halles was clearly a *plaque tournante* in all these senses. Zola had described it

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as "the belly of Paris," an idea incorporated in Khatib's designation of it as "the transition zone of Paris," a place not only of commercial exchange but also of "social deterioration, acculturation, [and a] mixing of populations which is the favorable environment for cultural exchanges."[68] The Plateau Beaubourg next door was shown on *The Naked City* as if it were almost literally a turntable for the drifter, arrows fanning out in seven directions.

Panthéon and Val de Grâce, in contrast, floated almost freely, arrowheads positively recoiling from them. Panthéon is surrounded by an array of university and ecclesiastical buildings then out of favor with situationists, while access to Val de Grâce does indeed require the pedestrian to make an awkward two-step from the so-called "Continent Contrescarpe," virtually impossible without a proper street map, and therefore impractical for the purposes of the drift. From any direction, in fact, it is tricky to access, its perimeter protected by a daunting complex of buildings and railings. Its supposedly psychogeographic qualities only yield themselves to the pedestrian inside the buildings and grounds. If some unities were turntables, others were termini.

The plethora of arrows implied a massive number of permutations for drift, and Jorn and Debord's wish to squeeze so much psychogeographic information onto the map may account for their decision to explode the fragments, freeing room on the paper. If situationists spent as much time drifting as they claimed, then it is possible that all these permutations were tested. And the precision of the maps was achieved only by some tough-mindedness about which streets were truly capable of transforming urban consciousness. "Today the different unities of ambiance . . . are not precisely marked off," Debord complained. "The most general change that the drift leads to proposing is the constant diminution of these border regions, up to the point of their complete suppression."[69]

So some unities of ambiance were lost between the making of the two maps, and many others around Paris did not appear at all. The Ledoux Rotunda (the "Centre Ledoux"), for instance, was nowhere to be seen. One reason was surely the physical problem of psychogeographically mapping Paris right up to its boundaries, a vast project.[70] Arrows at the edges of the maps pointed into space, as if awaiting linkage with further unities. Wolman and Debord, although excited by their discovery of the Centre Ledoux, had been unable to find a satisfactory passage to link it to the rest of the system. Situationists also revised their selections in the light of changes in the fabric of Paris, for psychogeography was nothing if it was not responsive to such changes. In 1956 *Potlatch* regretfully announced that it was no longer worth making the journey to visit their beloved Square des Missions Etrangères or Rue Sauvage: the former because of the erection of temporary buildings in the square, the latter because it was being erased from the cityscape.[71] In effect the maps represented psychogeographic work in progress.

Because of its "annexation" by "the zone of Right Bank-style cabarets," the strip from Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, through Rue Descartes, to the Place de la Contrescarpe itself, headquarters of the Lettrist International, was removed in the second map as a diseased artery that was slowly killing a unity of ambiance.[72] Only its southern part survived, now linked directly to the Left Bank stronghold around Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

Debord and Jorn pasted down the chunks of map at some odd angles, as much as forty-five degrees from the mean. Reorienting the chunks in this way helped to represent the drifters' passages across the city as smooth flows.[73] In topological reality, the districts down the left side of the maps (from Banque de France through the Palais du Louvre and across the Seine to the Place de l'Institut, Carrefour de Buci, Saint-Sulpice, and Jardin du Luxembourg) lie along a straight north-south axis. But left like that, the reader of the map would have gained little sense of the supposed vortex of psychogeographical flow around the *plaque tournante* of the little Carrefour de Buci. Debord and Jorn instead kinked the chunks around Buci, showing it as a *carrefour* (crossroads) in a larger sense, a pivot for psychogeographic as well as traffic flows. And Debord and Jorn ruthlessly split areas in order to smooth them into natural passages. According to *The Naked City*, the main body of the Jardin des Plantes showed a stronger tendency toward the River Seine than toward its own annex just across the road, which was allowed to swing down to the bottom of the map.

The red arrows of the drift were left suspended upon the white space of the paper. One might expect that navigating these blanks, emptied of landmarks, would be problematic. But an assumption of psychogeography was that drifters alert to the feel of the city would find the psychogeographical "slopes" (*pentes*) meeting them as naturally as their last choice of book materialized to them in the library, or as emotions and relationships emerged to them during their day-to-day lives. Like Jorn's inky dribbles through *Mémoires*, the strengths and durations of the psychogeographic slopes were suggested by the weight, shape and patterning of the arrows on the maps. The arrows connecting Beaubourg and Halles, for instance, indicated an indissoluble bond between them. Debord advised drifters to allow themselves to be guided by those features of the street neglected by most pedestrians, like "the sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters" and "the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the contour of the ground)."[74] The determinants of drift, apparently, were alternations in emotional and ambient "intensity"; "the appealing or repelling character of certain places"; and the drifter's tendency to "drain" along relatively unresistant paths, the "fissures in the urban network."[75] The Lettrist International even "envisaged a pinball machine arranged in such a way that the play of

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the lights and the more or less predictable trajectories of the balls" would represent the "thermal sensations and desires of people passing by the gates of the Cluny Museum around an hour after sunset in November," as though drifters were like ball bearings, propelled through the city's channels by the energized "pins" of the unities of ambiance.

"We have since, of course, come to realize that a situationist-analytical work cannot scientifically advance by way of such projects," Debord pronounced, still anxious that psychogeography should develop into a serious discipline.[76] But in his *Mémoires*—the document that contained, in effect, his final reflections on psychogeography—Debord allowed a sense of the drift's romantic, automatist undercurrent to go on record. "A new current carries us slightly toward the left," one page of "détourned" phrases read. "We are just coming across an extremely powerful energy field that information centers have been unable to identify—the earth with its sounds—One needs time to get used to these night walks—They tell us that the continents are solid—A singular place! It's here that the tangled paths pass—The location of this castle is charming—But it's in the interior of the labyrinth, at once bland and beautiful, so sumptuous, dilapidated, disorganized, untidily stacked, luxurious and absurd, with rooms and hearts and gardens."[77]

This, evidently, was not an account of pedestrian circulation that an academic town planner would have recognized. True, academic planners might have sympathized with psychogeography's strenuous separation of the pedestrian and the motorcar—*The Naked City* showed the Rue Pierre et Marie Curie as a loose end with an arrow doubling back, warning drifters of the dire consequences of being swept away by the tides of traffic along the Rue Saint-Jacques. But while town planning separated different forms of traffic for the sake of comfort and efficiency, psychogeography separated them as a way of refusing the mechanistic functioning of the city. Those drifting through the city backwaters would enjoy a sense of encounter with the city, while those being swept along by the crowds in the *grands boulevards* were bound by an artificial imperative of speed, making savings on capitalized time, rushing toward sites of alienated production or consumption.[78]

Drifting as a revolution of everyday life

It was not that the drift ruled out places of activity in the city. In fact, psychogeographic analysis carefully noted variations in degrees of urban bustle as it attracted and repelled the drifters through the city.[79] But not any sort of spectacular "sound and fury" was acceptable. Tourism, for example, with its crass appetite for ultravisible urban spectacle and nervousness in the dark spaces of the ambient city, was as "repugnant as sports or buying on credit."[80] Most commerce was distasteful, Wolman and

Debord complaining that "the upper section of the 11th Arrondissement" was "an area whose poor commercial standardization is a good example of repulsive petit-bourgeois landscape."[81] The rush to work was disgusting—"never work," the situationists instructed, unwittingly associating themselves with those who, in Reyner Banham's withering remark of the time, "still gush on about the 'vitality' (i.e., crowds of unemployed) of south European city centres," and more wittingly with the radical geographer Elisée Reclus, author of the Paris Commune slogan "Work to Make Ourselves Useless."[82] Situationists regarded the best urban activity as human, unmechanized, and nonalienating, and their texts, films, and maps indicated some possibilities, variously idealizing the marketplaces, like Les Halles or the Rue Mouffetard, the traditional cafés, notably those around Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and the places of student congregation, such as those around the Panthéon.[83]

Psychogeography thus produced a social geography of the city, especially important at a time when social geography was still struggling to emerge from the shadow of academic geography. Against academic geography's "scientific" taxonomy of the physical factors that supposedly determine the character of a space, social geography theorized space as the product of society.[84] It was an approach pioneered in the late nineteenth century by the former Communard Reclus, who recognized in geography "nothing but history in space."[85] Situationists were naturally inclined toward the goals of social geography, which opposed academic geography's reduction of the city to "the undifferentiated state of the visible-readable realm" (to use Lefebvre's disdainful phrase) and to the homogenization of the conflicts that produce capitalist space.[86] Fragmented yet tied together by their arrows, situationist maps explored the very same "three orders of facts"—"class struggle, the quest for equilibrium, and the sovereign decision of the individual"—that Reclus claimed were revealed by the pursuit of social geography.[87]

But it was almost by default, creditable to the eccentricity, complicity, and tenacity of psychogeographical technique, that situationism yielded any worthwhile social geography, excavating a network of anti-spectacular spaces and discourses only by being part of it—café talk and shady goings-on in wastelands, parks, and alleyways. Nor would situationism have had it any other way. The publication in 1960 of *The Image of the City*, written by Kevin Lynch, a professor of urban studies and planning at MIT, marked a rising interest in "cognitive mapping," in the ways in which citizens perceive and interact with their city by first "imaging" it in their minds. 1950s situationist psychogeography, as it set out to study "the specific effects of the geographical environment . . . on the emotions and behavior of individuals," might have anticipated this new interest in the cognitive city.[88] But it was too busy campaigning for politicized and proactive citizenship to be greatly distracted by proper social geography and psychology, deemed of greater

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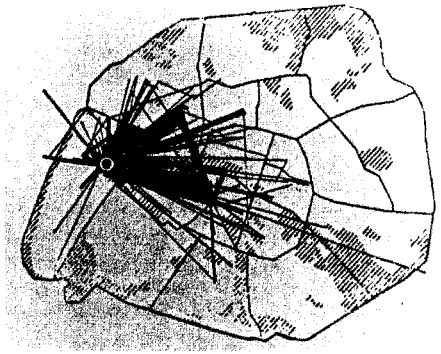
interest to the social planners that situationists reviled. And while Debord would have readily admitted that the city reproduced socio-psychological relations, he would have insisted that it was about a lot more besides, rejecting as he did anything sniffing of determinist vulgarity. The city as the terrain of passion was endlessly nuanced, and while a unity of ambiance was partly the product of certain social and capital relations, it was also subject to freak arrangements, to the inscription of ideas, to disuse and misuse, so that it was something idiosyncratic as well—rather as academic geography would have it.

Situationists uncovered the social body of "the naked city" by becoming streetwise. Drifters were effectively vagrants, on the lookout for refuge, and if the claims for three-month drifts were true, the unities of ambiance would have offered places to doss down, like discreet public gardens. The passages of the drift were lined with cheap shops and cafés; the ghettos offered not only an "ambient other" but also nonbourgeois, nontourist costs of living. Sent by the Lettrist International's notorious "alternative travel agency" on a mystery tour through neighboring *quartiers*, one was reminded of that extraordinary sensation of being abroad even when at home. Even in its own *quartier* the Lettrist International was close to nomadism: its headquarters were near the Place de la Contrescarpe, in the 1950s something of a no-man's land where tramps from the banks of the Seine and from the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève could meet without fighting. The situationists were a part of the bohemian youth hanging out in areas like the Panthéon and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, haunts of the transitory student and intellectual population. As Kristin Ross has explained, the bohemian will to link poetic with literal vagabondage, to create a sense of being constantly *dépaysé* (out of place), can be traced back to poet and Communard Arthur Rimbaud, who recognized in laziness a refusal of compartmentalized time, an intensity of physical sensation, and a glorious sense of weightlessness.[89] Coupled with his adolescent impulsiveness, it made Rimbaud a venerable predecessor to the situationists and the insurgents of '68.

Wandering around the city, drifting without destination, neither going to work nor properly consuming, was a waste of time in the temporal economy, in a society where "time is money." If situationist testimony is to be believed, the drift could consume monumental chunks of time; Chtcheglov put the limit at three or four months, and recommended a week as more satisfactory.[90] Debord recommended a day, and even these smaller periods of time, with "an hour or two at the beginning or end of the day" set aside "for taking care of banal tasks," would barely be compatible with a conventional sense of time management: "The times of beginning and ending have no necessary relation to the solar day."[91] Chtcheglov rashly looked forward to a society "where the principal activity is CONTINUOUS DRIFT," where the main

Figure 2.23

"Plotting of all the trajectories effected in a year by a student inhabiting the 16th Arrondissement," from Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe, Paris et l'agglomération parisienne, *vol. 1 (1952): "the central triangle has for its apexes the domicile, the piano lessons, and the course of political science." The figure was discussed by Guy Debord in his "Théorie de la dérive" (1956) and was reprinted in* Internationale situationniste, *no. 2 (1958). The habitual, repetitive journeys taken by the average citizen through the city were in stark contrast to the ideal of the drift suggested in the maps of the Métro and the London railway network.*



occupation was unproductive of anything except encounters with other people and with places, and of ideas about enhancing those encounters—those "situations."[92] At its best, drift was an unconventionally sociable activity as well, its preferred small-group organization resistant to organized mass circulation and sympathetic to the input of each group member.[93]

Drift therefore became a transgression of the alienated world. "A loose lifestyle and even certain amusements considered dubious that have always been enjoyed amongst our entourage—slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking nonstop and without destination through Paris during a transportation strike in the name of adding to the confusion, wandering in catacombs forbidden to the public, etc.—are expressions of a more general sensibility which is nothing other than that of the drift," Debord wrote.[94] He suggested games of "possible rendezvous" that would provoke situations, encounters in unfamiliar places in the city, games in which "the element of [spatial] exploration is minimal in comparison with that of behavioral disorientation."[95] Drift had to alert people to their imprisonment by routine. Debord cited Chombart de Lauwe's chart of the movements of a Parisian student as evidence of "the narrowness of the real Paris in which the individual lives" (fig. 2.23).[96] This chart, Debord reckoned, was "modern poetry, capable of provoking keen emotional reactions—in this case, that it is possible to live like that," a pathetic inversion of Baudelaire's euphoria at the "heroism of modern life."[97] Cutting freely across urban space, drifters would gain a revolutionary perception of the city, a "rational disordering of the senses" of the sort demanded by Rimbaud, encountering both the city's embarrassing contrasts of material wealth and its clandestine glories of popular culture and history.

Situationists had become alert to the possibilities of drifting into the "hidden city" by reading De Quincey. Admittedly, the drama of his "drifts" may have had something to do with the fact that De Quincey was tripping on opium, and the name of this drug, as well as those of marijuana and cannabis, hung in the air on the pages of Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires.* Like their Beat contemporaries, and their heroin-advocate friend Alexander Trocchi, the situationists regarded "creative" sub-

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stance abuse as another subcultural and consciousness-altering freedom. Drunkenness was routine, and their London haunt of Limehouse was a drugs ghetto, home to Chinese opium dens. The discovery of the city sublime was a serious business, De Quincey himself complaining that he "paid a heavy price in distant years, when . . . the perplexities of my steps in London came back and haunted my sleep."[98]

Language, time, and the city

Too much of the city had already been "written" in the language of spectacle, so psychogeographers unashamedly reread situationist meanings into the streets, an old technique of *flânerie*. Charles Dickens, former resident of Limehouse, had restlessly paced the streets of London and Paris, scouring the city for insights into the human condition, and Baudelaire insisted that Paris was "rich in poetic and marvellous subjects" for those sensitive observers drawn to the city's margins.[99] Walter Benjamin heard the call, asking "Who amongst us has not dreamt . . . of the miracle of a poetic prose . . . supple and staccato enough to adapt to the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the undulations of dreams, and the sudden leaps of consciousness? This obsessive ideal is above all a child of the experiences of giant cities, of the intersecting of their myriad relations."[100] Benjamin's attraction toward Baudelaire was partly an outcome of his association with Parisian surrealism; two decades later, situationist writing on the city swung between essentially realistic, political analyses and wildly poetic inscriptions, a technique learned from Louis Aragon's 1926 surrealist book *Le paysan de Paris*.[101] Ivan Chtcheglov's "Formulary" was particularly nostalgic for such texts: "We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun. Between the legs of the women walking by, the dadaists imagined a monkey wrench and the surrealists a crystal cup. That's lost."[102]

The will to recover the surrealist imagination originated in the Lettrist International's parent group, the lettrists. In a bizarre pictographic book of 1950, *Saint ghetto des prêts*, the leading lettrist Gabriel Pomerand represented the bohemian Left Bank neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Prés as, to quote Greil Marcus, "a labyrinth, where every chance encounter with a word, a picture, a building, or a person seethes with legend and possibility, opening into a secret utopia accessible to anyone capable of recognising it" (fig. 2.24).[103] Breaking away from the lettrists, the Lettrist International felt that the obsession with language for its own sake had been taken too far. Pomerand, the Lettrist International felt, had got the equation the wrong way around. He was using his experience of the city as a way of revolutionizing our consciousness of language. Situationists would use their experience of language as a way of revolutionizing