
AESTHETIZATION VERSUS ANESTHETIZATION - THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STRATEGY OF PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

Ljubisha Petrushevski

PVPU Euro College, North Macedonia, ljubisha@eurocollege.edu.mk

Marija Stojanova

PVPU Euro College, North Macedonia, operations@eurocollege.edu.mk

Ranko Cvetkovikj

PVPU Euro College, North Macedonia, president.eurocollege@gmail.com

Abstract: There is a reviving interest to the issue of psychogeography after the very coinage of the term by Lettrist's high priest Ivan Chtcheglov in the late 30s of the previous century, the continuation and the development by Guy Debord and the Situationists in the 50s and the 60s, and its postmodern definition in the theory of Fredric Jameson in the 90s. Psychogeography for Chtcheglov revolves under the concept of unitary urbanism while for Debord, the project of psychogeography is initiated by the invention of the practical technique of derive. On the other hand, Jameson's two famous concepts, those of cognitive and affective mapping, became the staple of any academic text dealing with the complexities of the increased digitalization of modern life. The article attempts to answer the following questions: What is the difference between these concepts and what are the aspects that unite them all? What is the importance of psychogeography in the era of digital and AI technology? And finally, is it possible to create your own aesthetics of life among the predominance of the docile, anesthetized culture

Keywords: Psychogeography, Derive, Situationism, Urban psychology, Anesthetization of life

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern cities are tourist traps. Millions of people are forced to move towards a preordained spaces and enjoy pre-packaged impressions. The time they spend is carefully divided between shopping, sight-seeing and eating. Consumerist culture does not stimulate the free exploration of the hidden city avenues, non-advertised events or secret sites known only to locals. You arrive in a foreign culture, in a foreign country where all you get seems conspicuously similar to what you already have at home. Apart from the tourist sites you don't really experience anything qualitative different. But then again, you have enough photos to post on the social media, or in other words, you have a representation of your experience that has to mask the lack of experience. The reaction to your posts brings excitement to what is in a fact a boring and tedious affair similar to your everyday boring practice of visiting certain places (school, work) which you automatically head on to oblivious to the effects the environment produces on you. You do what you have to do and you go where you have to go. There is no emotional need to know the places or to think what is attractive or repelling to you about these places. Why is that?

Some 150 years ago, several artists in Paris started questioning the way the urban architecture affects our desires. What is more, they started suspecting that the urban planning is important political and economic tool used by capitalism to pacify and anaesthetize the population. E. A. Poe was the first to learn that something strange and alien was circulating and directing the crowd. Discovering an alien presence of as the invisible attractor, he devised the character of the city *flaneur*, a self-conscious individual who creatively avoided the prescribes routes. Wondering aimlessly within the ever-growing urban crowd and looking for the unsought and long forgotten psychological avenues of the soul, the *flaneur* sought to experience the reality of his desires. The image of the *flaneur* got stuck into Ivan Chtcheglov's mind, the ideologist who influenced Lettrism and Situationist International. Chtcheglov realized the psychological propensities of the architecture. Being a poet himself he clearly linked the urban environment with the poet's desire for freedom. But he was a modernist and not a romantic poet. The escape from the urban areas and the exploration of the exotic places as a way to return to a natural self was not an option. He was a city dweller and decided to stay there. The freedom was to be regained among the architectural compositions designed not for the fullness of life but for the expression of power. As he famously uttered, "Architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space, of modulating reality, of engendering dreams". Urbanity therefore is the site for the power struggle aiming to control your own time, space and dreams. Chtcheglov insisted that reality is to be modulated and not simply accepted as it is. Thus, his project turned revolutionary. The objective of this article is to investigate the concept of the *flaneur* in its modern variation as developed by the Marxist criticism of urban planning. Situationism, and Guy Debord in particular, have developed the concepts of derive and psychogeography to contest the capitalist alienation of the urban spaces and to offer ways of creative use of the environment that aligns with the psychological predilections of a free conscious individual. Similarly, Frederick Jameson advocated to need to develop cognitive and affective consciousness of the environment in times

where the digital technology and the AI seem to have taken over the task of global coordination and mapping of the humanity.

2. SEPARATION OF SPACE AND TIME

“All space is occupied by the enemy. We are living under a permanent curfew. Not just the cops – the geometry.”, Raoul Vaneigem, Situationist International Capitalism is a war machine speeding up our daily lives. Time becomes a precious commodity. We waste hours and hours trapped in traffic jams or computer trains trying to reach or get away from work. Even tourism, instead of a leisure activity, has turned into a military exercise; airports, streets and theme parks are flocked with desperate souls clutching their mobile maps to make it to their designated gates, restaurants or joy rides. Top tourist sites resemble the nightmarish scenes from Dante’s *Inferno*. T.S. Eliot was right about London. Imagine the 21st century version of his *The Waste Land*: life has successfully been removed from London streets, cafes and salons. A thick fog of ether hovers above the South Bank, making its way to Westminster Bridge and all the way to Piccadilly. Blank faces wander around as zombie apparitions occupying the glittering metropolitan areas, pouring their alienated lives into theaters, stadiums and arenas. No tickets for West End, Millennium Dome or Emirates! Exhausted visitors from abroad stumble on the army of drained locals at London Bridge. After the long and torturing experience of the day, both endeavors to relieve their anxiety at the shopping arcades of Regent Street only to meet the automaton lookalikes who grapple sterilized items in the sterilized shops. Somnambulists from some Expressionist cinema resemble living people. Baudrillard pictures the similar headless mass of living dead occupying Beaubourg. As the sterilized culture cannot meet the demands of the addicted multiplicity, the very mass of their bodies will eventually crumble the poor building.

From the outset, the project of Situationist International (SI) uses the Marxist concept of alienation to reflect on the modern condition of the proletariat. Unlike Marx who locates alienation at the level of human labor, Debord claims that the proletariat is, “all people who have no possibility of altering the *social space-time* that society allots to them.” The separation of the autonomy over space and time that was effectively performed by capitalism removed the proletariat from the control of their lives. What they got in exchange is “a picture” of their life signifying that their life became, in Marx’s terms “real abstraction.” Most of Debord’s *Society of Spectacle* deals with the separation of time as the crucial aspect of capitalist mode of production. But time, in general is separation, or as Hegel puts it, “...time is a *necessary* alienation, being the medium in which the subject realizes himself whilst losing himself, becomes other in order to become truly himself”. Time for Hegel is the negation in essence and therefore it is a natural supplement to action. In other words, time alienates man in the process of his spiritual development. Debord was more interested in the “social measurement of time” which he finds related to the different modes of production in the society. His long investigation into the metamorphosis of time in history, reveals that the more time is socially controlled the more alienation is created. Debord distinguishes between the active time (the time for an action) and the passive time (the receptive time). The former – referring to the right time and the right action – freezes the time and cannot be measured; the other is the measured, or in his words, “clock-time”. This way, the active is a quality time while the passive is the quantity time. Debord assigns the crucial intervention of time with the development of the linear, *irreversible* time advocated by the capitalism. *Reversible time* in essence is an eternal present time, the time of the myths, the legends and of the folk tales, the time of the seasons and the religious ceremonies – an organic society mapping in calendars its life under the cyclical concept of time. The *irreversible time* in turn, has developed a consciousness of subjects obsessed with death, or as Hegel puts it, the subjects have developed an *unhappy consciousness*. The new administered clockwork time gives rise to the State as the absolute administrator of political, social and economic life. Debord comments,

“The triumph of irreversible time was also its metamorphosis into the time of things, because the weapon that had ensured its victory was, precisely, the mass production of objects in accordance with the laws of the commodity. The main product that economic development transformed from a luxurious rarity to a commonly consumed item was thus history itself but only in the form of the history of that abstract movement which dominated any qualitative use of life. Whereas the cyclical time of an earlier era had supported an ever-increasing measure of historical time lived by individuals and groups, irreversible time’s reign over production would tend socially to eliminate all such lived time.”

Debord conceives of a conspiracy of the state and the capitalism - of the political and the economic - behind the urban planning. Boredom becomes the tool of control or as Sadler observes, “If you think about urban development in the mid-20th century, it could be argued that cities were becoming more boring. The Situationists thought that by building more sterile, vacuous and boring cities, we were in turn making our lives more sterile, vacuous and boring. They believed that it was a conspiracy led by capitalism and the state, in an attempt to make us more obedient and productive beings by depriving us of the stimulus that make us really human.” The worker’s free time, aptly called *leisure time* became more boring than the workplace. Boredom prevails in social life, not due to the misery of the

workplace and the low wages that leave no space for pleasures, but due to the fact that the entertainment industry package is empty and shallow, leaving the spectator in the state of numbness and confusion. SI's long claim that boredom was the form of control reached the stage of "the ultimate mode of control, self-control, alienation perfected, a bad consciousness." (Marcus, 2009, p.47)

3. THE TRIUMPH OF THE SPECTACLE

Capitalism made it. The constant mobilization of the work force requires the complete anesthetization of life. In exchange for their bodies being used to energize the capital, the battery people from *The Matrix* enjoy in the comfort of their liquid capsules' amnesia. You get Netflix, Facebook and Black Friday, in exchange for your body being penetrated and utilized for work. For Debord, the spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a "permanent opium war" which stupefies social subjects and distracts them from the most urgent task of real life-recovering the full range of their human powers through revolutionary change. The urban geometry of the modern cities determines the movement of the citizen, creating and functionalizing their desires towards ever more consumption.

The *proletariat* demands to live its time - which Debord, in the spirit of Marx – calls "historical time". In order to achieve freedom, man has to self-determine his actions within the relation of his own time – conscious time being the historical time. The modern spectacle gives the illusion of the subject-object unity. Instead of being unified, the object – by not being realized – dominates the system. Therefore, all the externalized areas of human consciousness – the state, the religion – become independent entities. The spectacle, as the highest form of the lack of realization – offers the highest illusion of unity, by covering the abstract separation that exists in between the subject and the object, between the universal and the particular, between time and consciousness.

"The geometry is our enemy," claims Debord. He is asking for the abolition of everything that blocks human self-expression and freedom: work, capital, socially regulated art practices, division of time in labor, etc. The creation of situations is the creation of your own time and life. It does not depend on anything else outside of itself. Useless drifting (derive) is not an irresponsible exercise of futile protest against the speed of the modern life but a conscious modulation of the reality of your environment as an exercise of your freedom.

Punk's DIY philosophy ecstatically resembles the SI call for the need to create situations and to take hold of your own time and life. In short, punk's insistence on the street style and the creation of opportunities in life switched the theoretical interest from the closed doors of the academia and onto the streets, to the everyday experience and to the sites where people actually lived their lives. In philosophical terms, the recourse of the thought to the actuality of the living experience brought the pure immanence to work. The punks acted their words, and their look resembled their life. In their song *Why Theory*, the Leeds band, Gang of Four, commented on this relation. Exactly as Deleuze will formulate it few years after, they sang:

"The way you think, changes how you act"

Why Theory, 1981

Greil Marcus notes that the urge to enjoy, realize yourself as part of your social standing becomes the driving force of the capitalism of the 80s. The individual subject is pressed to engage on, "a personal quest for autonomy, self-realization, adventure, fulfillment, possibility, imagination, risk, and desire, literally taking fragments of May '68 slogans into their mouths;" (Marcus, 2009, p.126) What Marcus wants to point out is the ideology behind some popular movies like *Wall Street*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *American Psycho* that reflect on the unashamedly hedonistic policy of the corporate capitalism in the 80's, until the sex and drugs and power ideology led to financial cracks, moral dead-ends, and ultimately to psychological disorders. But what is more striking is the avant-garde element installed in the background, the injected overdose of *Nothing is True, Everything is Forbidden* free zone of pure pleasure. Reagan and Thatcher's administration successfully deterritorialized the vestiges of the avant-garde and reterritorialized the neo-liberal ideology under the banner of the expression of one's freedom. To risk means to consume, to take adventure means to join the masses in the entertainment industry, to realize oneself means to be part of the spectacle.

4. CONCLUSION: Ours is the best effort to get out of the twentieth century.

Freedom is entirely dependable on the ways one produces himself in reality. The real can be produced only consciously. What the spectacle does is prevent the people from acting their own lives. The separation consists in the following of the role models which are acted out. The acted gestures are somebody else's gestures. When this gesturing becomes an image, then life itself is not actually lived but is being represented outside of the living subjects.

The reality of the spectacle is so convincing that younger generations really have to use a lot of imagination to conceive a world outside the spectacle. Today, in the age of Facebook selfies, Disneyland adventure rides, shopping

mall's possibilities and some other spectacular modes of expressions of the entertainment industry, it is difficult to perceive the world before, the low-definition unspectacular society of the 50's and the 60's. Seemingly powerful and ever-present, the spectacle offers *dead time* to the spectators, to use SI terminology. It is a reflection of the saturation of the social relations of capital into image, into a representation, completely abstracted from real life. If the revolutionary urge of the 19th century was to get out of the dead time of the production plants, then the similar urge of the 20th century was to escape the deadness of the leisure time. In 1964, Debord wrote, "Ours is the best effort to get out of the twentieth century." But now that we are in the 21st century, do we still have the urge to escape the deadness of the spectacle? The digitalization of the culture has brought the unprecedented speed to the spectacle, and the spectators are not just passive, but are simply flabbergasted by the dizzying velocity of the events, unraveling in real time. Absence of logic, that is to say, loss of the ability immediately to perceive what is significant and what is insignificant or irrelevant, what is incompatible or what could well be complementary - high doses of this disease have been intentionally injected into the population by the spectacle's anesthetists/resuscitators. Everybody lacks time, always legging behind the latest technological innovations, always late for the show. Isn't this what King Crimson had in mind when they sang *Twenty first century schizoid man* in 1969? For Frederic Jameson, in times of the increasing dependence of digital tools in the navigation of your physical and cultural reality, it is essential that individuals develop their own sense of time and place in the forms of cognitive mapping (conscious self-positioning in space) and affective mapping (emotional response to the environment). For Debord, the repossession of your time is a revolutionary act. In order to act, one must identify oneself with time, since time carries the "constant negative movement" necessary for action. Time, when put in the historical context, involves the linkage with chance or as Bunyan claims, "Situationist practice would thus seem to be involved in the constant creation, negotiation and subsequent re-creation of successive *fields of chance*". To create the situations, one has to move with time, be time. Since time is transitory one must continually reshape his own context and position on the basis of his individual preferences. Being one with time carries another important sensation for Debord: since time is a passing phenomenon it alludes to the beauty of the moment and therefore it signals its own sublime character. Therefore, Debord enthusiastically proclaims that the creation of the situations and of revolutions is the creation of beauty. One must playfully use time: in fact, the new society should unite individual time into a collective time which for Debord "is playful in character". In other words, instead of the boring, tedious time of the spectacle that anaesthetizes the crowd, one should creatively devise his own time so that the active aesthetization of life replaces the passivity of the spectacle.

REFERENCES:

- Beller, J. (2003). The cinematic mode of production: towards a political economy of the postmodern. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 44(1), 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1473578032000110486>
- Bracken, L. (1997). *Guy Debord : revolutionary*. Feral House.
- Bracken, L. (2000). *The Spectacle of Secrecy*.
- Bunyard, T. (2011). *A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle*.
- Clark, T. J., & Nicholson-Smith, D. (1997). *Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International*.
- Corcos, A. (2023). "BY EVERY HYPER-POLITICAL MEANS": INTERNATIONALE SITUATIONNISTE AND THE REVIEW AS WEAPON. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 59(3), 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqad044>
- Coverley, M. (2010). *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials.
- de Bruin, B., Zaal, R., & Jeurissen, R. (2023). Pitting Virtue Ethics against Situationism: an Empirical Argument for Virtue. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-023-10381-5>
- Debord, G. (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Black & Red. (Original work published 1967)
- Gilman-Opalsky, R. (2011). *Spectacular capitalism : Guy Debord and the practice of radical philosophy*. Minor Compositions ; Brooklyn, Ny.
- Kapp, T. (2024). *Self-Published Psychogeographies: Zines, DIY Communities and the 21st Century Drifter*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Marcus, G. (2025). *Mystery Train*. Faber & Faber.
- Marcus, G. (2011). *Lipstick traces: a secret history of the twentieth century*. Faber.
- Dunayevskaya R. (2002). *The Power of Negativity*. Lexington Books.
- Rhodes, P. (2025). *A Psychogeography of Florence*. Springer.
- Sadler, S. (1999). *The situationist city*. The Mit Press.
- Schoonderbeek, M. (2024). *The Border Complex: Mapping Spaces of Simultaneity*. TU Delft Research Portal, 201–217. <https://research.tudelft.nl/en/publications/the-border-complex-mapping-spaces-of-simultaneity/Self->

Published Psychogeographies Zines, DIY Communities and the 21st Century Drifter. (n.d.). Retrieved January 19, 2026, from <https://content.e-bookshelf.de/media/reading/L-24282445-15e2d24805.pdf>
Tso. (2020). The Literary Psychogeography of London. Springer International Publishing.