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Bridger, Alexander J.

Psychogeography, social psychology and personal/political changes

### **Original Citation**

Bridger, Alexander J. (2014) Psychogeography, social psychology and personal/political changes. In: SPS Annual Conference, 9-11th September 2014, Canterbury Christ Church University. (Unpublished)

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# Psychogeography, social psychology and personal/political changes

Dr Alexander J Bridger  
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# Aims of session

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- Explain the term 'psychogeography'
- Discuss academic literature on environments and why research needs to be explicitly political
- Discuss situationist, critical psychological, affective position
- Argue for academic, activist and artistic work – participatory research
- Provide reflections and implications of the research

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# Occupation, space and cities

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# Mainstream and critical psychologies

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- Limits of research from environmental psychology (cognitions) and social psychology (place identity)
- Turn to politicising studies of environments
- Cultural geography - subjectivity
- Critical psychology – mobile methods, situationist work
- Affect and psychoanalysis – unconscious/conscious
- Situationism – politics of space

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# Situationism and psychogeography

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- ‘Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise law and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviours of individuals’  
(Debord, 1955: n.p).



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# Situationist psychogeography: Concepts and 'playful' tactics

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- Play vs empiricism?
- Dérive
- Detournement
- Negation
- Creating 'situations'



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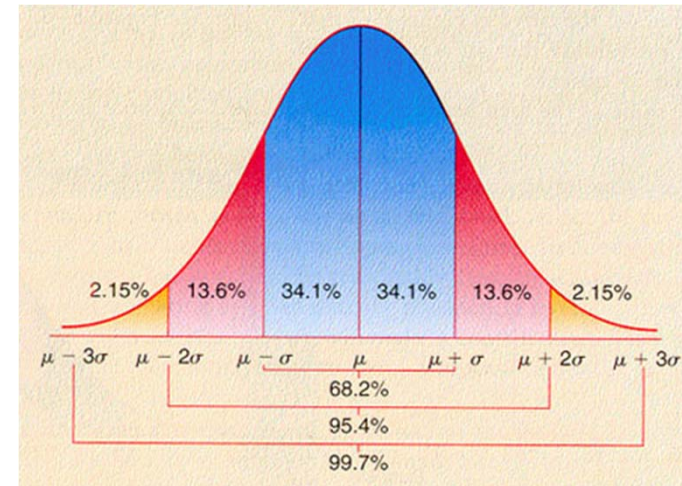
  
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# Methods/Practice?

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- Situationism and the anti-methods approach
- Tactics and strategies rather than methods
- Intervening and creating situations rather than simply measuring and interpreting environments

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# A 'how to' guide to psychogeography!

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- Begin with a theme to explore say consumerism, privatisation, surveillance and power relations in spaces ...
- Choose a psychogeography approach like a dice walk or a map swap
- Consider the following sorts of questions: What does it feel like where you walk? How do you engage with your surroundings? Do you notice any notable changes in ambience? What do you think of the environment? What do you think needs to be changed in the environment? What should the environment look like?
- Document and write up the *dérive*
- Conduct further *dérives*!

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# A psychogeographical study

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- My 'Visualising Manchester...' paper
- Site specific study – post IRA bomb and gentrification
- Themes: consumerism and privacy; surveillance and control



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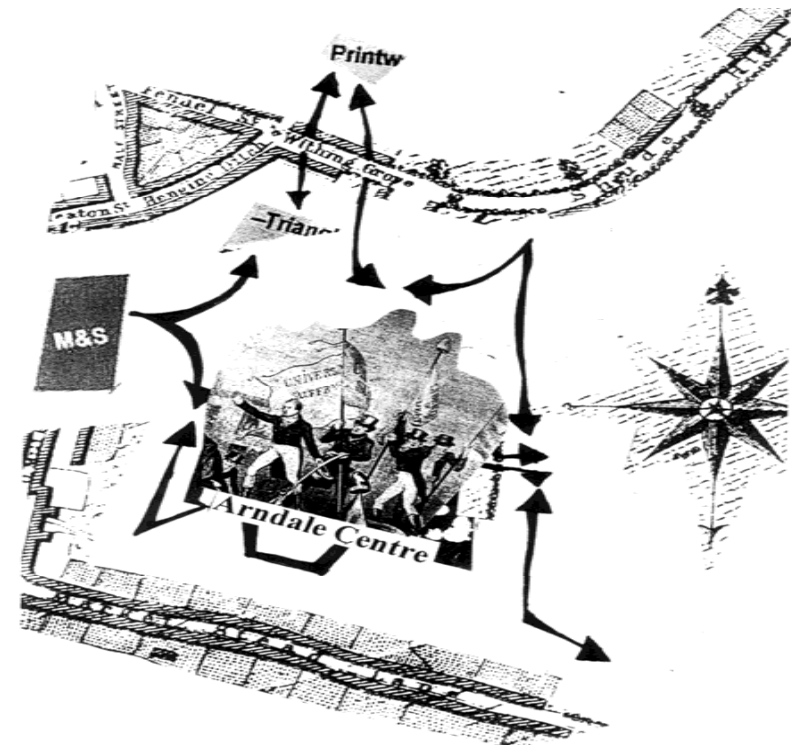
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- Not a 'garden path analysis' (Richards, 1998)
- Extract from *dérive* report: 'So then having walked endlessly around the Arndale Centre, the food court and the Arndale Market, I decided to walk through the glass tunnel to the building which houses Selfridges and Marks and Spencers. On route, I encountered many visual and textual motifs of consumerism such as 'The centre of your city', being encouraged to 'Shop. Eat. Relax. Treat' and to consider 'shopping, fashion, eating and drinking'. Here is evidenced a new Western discourse of consumption which can be linked to individualism and consumer citizenship' (Bridger, 2014: 88).



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- Contributing to psychogeographical studies
- Form, function and use of neoliberal environments
- Political analyses of environments
- Need for developing further psychogeographical work
- Research making connections with activist and art practice – participatory research

# Change?

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- Teaching and writing
- Psychogeography groups, individual and public activity
- Public consultations
- And deradicalisation and recuperation?
- ‘Creating situations’ and revolution?

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# What sort of environments do we want?

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- Chtcheglov's (1958) suggestion discussed here:

'Bizarre Quarter — Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation) — Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children) — Historical Quarter (museums, schools) — Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops) — Sinister Quarter, etc. And an *Astrolarium* which would group plant species in accordance with the relations they manifest with the stellar rhythm, a planetary garden along the lines the astronomer Thomas wants to establish at Laaer Berg in Vienna. Indispensable for giving the inhabitants a consciousness of the cosmic. Perhaps also a Death Quarter, not for dying in but so as to have somewhere to *live in peace* — I'm thinking here of Mexico and of a principle of cruelty in innocence that appeals more to me every day. The Sinister Quarter, for example, would be a good replacement for those hellholes, those ill-reputed neighborhoods full of sordid dives and unsavory characters, that many peoples once possessed in their capitals: they symbolized all the evil forces of life. The Sinister Quarter would have no need to harbor real dangers, such as traps, dungeons or mines. It would be difficult to get into, with a hideous decor (piercing whistles, alarm bells, sirens wailing intermittently, grotesque sculptures, power-driven mobiles, called *Auto-Mobiles*), and as poorly lit at night as it was blindingly lit during the day by an intensive use of reflection. At the center, the "Square of the Appalling Mobile." Saturation of the market with a product causes the product's market value to fall: thus, as they explored the Sinister Quarter, the child and the adult would learn not to fear the anguishing occasions

of life, but to be amused by them.

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- Blockholm – A new Stockholm in Minecraft: 'Blockholm is an exact replica of Stockholm reproduced in Minecraft. All districts, islands, streets, bridges, parks and squares are depicted as in real life with one big exception - we have deleted all the city buildings. Only plots are left. On October 24, we start to build Block Holm - a new Stockholm in Minecraft! Join in and take the first sod! Old Town is the first' (<http://www.blockholm.com/participate>).



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# Any questions?

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