

## The Indeterminate Mapping of the Common

Doina Petrescu

This article is about mapping and its paradoxes: mapping as a tool to speak about the indeterminate relationship between humans and space, but also as a means to operate with this indeterminacy. These relationships can be represented, mapped out only if they are performed, acted upon, experienced through. This mapping 'from within' which relates the psyche and the body to the physical, the socio-political and the cultural space, has been explored by several art groups and socio-urban practices, starting with the great 'walkers' and 'wanderers' of history and including the Surrealists, the Situationists and contemporary urban research and media practices. The article takes as an important example the work of the French psychiatrist and educator Fernard Deligny and his methods of mapping 'autistic space'. 'Autistic space' and its tracing brings at its limit the question of indeterminacy within the common experience of space and its representation, a limit that challenges conventional notions of space and community. The main question addressed by Deligny's work is that of the 'common'. In a world dominated by the drives of separation (e.g. increasing privatisation, individualism, exclusion, segregation...) what are the means to construct the common? How can different ways of mapping contribute to this construction?

<sup>1</sup> This article is an extended version of the article 'Tracer là ce qui nous échappe', published in *Multitudes n°24* (2006): 45-42.

This text<sup>1</sup> developed from a concern with mapping and its possibility of researching the indeterminate relationship between humans and space. This indeterminacy could be represented, mapped out only if it is performed, acted upon, experienced through. Such mapping could be therefore considered itself as a relational practice, a practice 'from within', but not without a few questions: When, in what conditions could mapping become a form of collective practice? How could it create community? How do (collective) practices of mapping address the question of the 'common'?

### Roaming traces

In his book *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri suggests that the 'architectural' construction of space began with human beings wandering in the Palaeolithic landscape: following traces, leaving traces. The slow appropriation of the territory was the result of this incessant walking of the first humans.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Ed. Gustavo Gili, 2002).

By considering 'walking' as the beginning of architecture, Careri proposes another history of architecture – one which is not that of settlements, cities and buildings made of stones but of movements, displacements and flows .... It is an architecture which speaks about space not as being contained by walls but as made of routes, paths and relationships. Careri suggests that there is something common in the system of representation that we find in the plan of the Palaeolithic village, the walkabouts of the Australian aborigines and the psychogeographic maps of the Situationists. If for the settler, the space between settlements is empty, for the nomad, the errant, the walker – this space is full of traces: they inhabit space through the points, lines, stains and impressions, through the material and symbolic marks left in the landscape. These traces could be understood as a first grasping of what is common, as a first tool to size and constitute resources for a constantly moving and changing community.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This sense of appropriation, community and shared use resonates strongly with what is called in English 'the commons', a word that acknowledges the importance of naming in a certain way the land which marks the territory of a community. But the idea of the 'common' that we want to speak of here is maybe larger and more complex than that of 'the commons'.

How to make this 'common' visible, how to map these traces? The traces contain information, but how to reveal it, to communicate it in another way than by controlling, by imposing, by knowing before hand – how to map unknowing? What lines do we need for this mapping? What lines are those that map the indeterminate relationships between subjects and spaces? What kind of place is revealed through these lines? What kind of knowledge?

### *The lines that we are*

In some of their texts, Deleuze and Guattari use the notion of the 'line' to explain their metaphoric cartography of social space. This is because the 'line', as opposed to the 'point' is a dynamic element, it can create '*millieux*'. The 'line' constitutes an abstract and complex enough metaphor to map the entire social field in terms of affects, politics, desire, power, to map the way 'life always proceeds at several rhythms and at several speeds'. 'As individuals and groups we are made of lines which are very diverse in nature – we have as many entangled lines as a hand. What we call with different names – schizoanalysis, micro-politics, pragmatics, diagrammatics, rhizomatics, cartography – is nothing else but the result of the study of the lines that we are.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 151 (my translation).

The 'line' is somehow the metaphoric basis of all of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking. They mention several times the work of Fernand Deligny, a radical French educator and psychiatrist who worked from the fifties through to the seventies with groups of autistic children who had been written off as unmanageable by his fellow psychiatrists.<sup>5</sup> He worked in an unorthodox way, criticising the educational methods of the time that expressed the will of society to repress whatever deviated from the norm. Unlike his colleagues who worked in medical institutions and asylums, Deligny spent time with the autistics, living with them on an everyday basis. He did not presume that he could teach the autistic children anything, but hoped instead that he could learn from them. For someone who is autistic, language is not a means of expression, so Deligny hoped to learn by following and watching how the autistic move and create space. He formed a network of people who chose to follow his method of research, and formalised their surveys through maps and drawings. The researchers who were also living with the autistics, mapped the lines that the children traced on their walks and throughout their everyday life activities, discovering that there were fixed points where their movements concentrated, where they stopped and lingered, where the lines they followed intersected. According to Deligny, these were often sites with magnetic fields and underground waterways, and autistic children appeared to be especially sensitive to them.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari refer to Deligny most notably in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 1987).

Deleuze qualifies Deligny's approach of the autistic space as 'geo-analytical'; it is based on the analysis of 'lines', which map relationships between the psyche, the body and everyday life. This *geo-analysis* is not merely pedagogy or therapy but an attempt to invent through mapping ways of being and sharing with 'the other', the radically other, the one who does not live in the same manner, who does not have the same means of communication, the same logics, the same gestures: the autistic, the idiot, the fool ... There where nothing is common, instead of language, what is shared is the 'place' and

its occupation – and this place together with its different activities, gestures, incidents and presences is drawn on the map with different lines and signs. The drawing act is a ‘tracing’, *tracer*.

The daily courses of the autistic children were ‘traced’ through ‘customary lines’ and ‘supple lines’, marking where the child makes a curl, a *chevêtre*,<sup>6</sup> finds something, slaps his hands, hums a tune, retraces his steps, and then makes ‘meandering lines’, *lignes d’erre*. The lines developed in space are sometimes translated on the map as coloured patches, surfaces, erasures and signs. Tracing is ‘a language’ which can be shared by those that can speak and those that only know ‘silence’; some trace with their hands, others with their bodies. The lines that trace the courses are supplemented with signs that indicate movements or tools, like a choreographic notation.

They are traced at different moments in time on separate sheets of tracing paper – creating something like ‘a plan of consistency’<sup>7</sup> where the improbable ‘language’ of the autistic is ‘revealed’<sup>8</sup> through the superimposition of the different layers of tracing paper. This *plan of consistency* represents somehow the place shared by the tracers and the traced.

The presence of the tracers is also marked on the map – acknowledged as part of the language through which not only the autistic bodies express themselves but also, as Deligny puts it – ‘the common body of “us” and “them”’.<sup>9</sup> This place of the ‘common body’ which reveals itself in the process of tracing after years of uncontrollable and unforeseen movements, is called *l’immuable*, ‘the unmoving’.

## Psychogeographic mapping

The Situationists have also related the psyche to ‘place’, to space, through their psychogeographic practice.<sup>10</sup> They too have traced courses and drifts, but they were interested in the ephemeral, the randomness, the aesthetisation of the furtive passage, in ‘the ordinary’ within which they wanted to seize, to catch the unique, the exceptional. Deligny wished on the contrary, to recreate a common sense, ‘the common body’, an ordinary everyday life including those that were exceptional, incomprehensible, abnormal.

The maps of *l’immuable* differ from psychogeographic maps. The erring is not a *dérive*. The territory established in the Cevennes region by the network of people that chose to work with the autistics by following this method, is not the grid of the modern city that the Situationists wanted to subvert, but a place to be made; it is what Deligny calls with different names: *le réseau*, *le radeau*. This is not a

<sup>6</sup> ‘... a chevêtre (an “entangled curl”) is similar to a detour as long as the necessity, the cause of this detour escapes our knowing. The term of ‘chevêtre’ designates the fact that there is *something there that attracts* a perfusion of *lignes d’erre*.’ F. Deligny, *Les enfants et le silence* (Paris: Galilée et Spirali, coll. «Débats», 1980), p. 25 (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> This is Deleuze and Guattari’s concept developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

<sup>8</sup> cf. F. Deligny, *Les Vagabondes Efficaces et autres récits* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> F. Deligny, *Les cahiers de l’Immuable 1/2/3* : «Voix et voir», *Recherches*, n°18 (Paris: Avril 1975), «Dérives», *Recherches*, n°20 (Paris: Décembre 1975), «Au défaut du langage», *Recherches*, n°24 (Paris: Novembre 1976).

<sup>10</sup> According to the Situationists, psychogéography is ‘the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.’ Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, published in *Les Lèvres Nues* #6, 1955. In 1958, Debord also wrote the *Theory of the Dérive*, which served as an instruction manual for the psychogeographic procedure, executed through the act of *dérive* or ‘drift’.

political subversion through a sensorial and aesthetic experience, it is neither 'play' nor 'pleasure'. The maps of *l'immuable* try to reveal something other than 'the feelings and sensations related to a place'. This 'something other' can't be sized immediately, it is not in the realm of the movement, the spontaneous and the furtive but rather in the realm of the *unmovable*: tracing-erring in the same place for years, supported by the passion and the gaze of the tracers. If the context of the Situationist *dérive* is aesthetic, the roaming of the autistic is ontological. They do not *detour* and do not *drift*, do not play getting lost in the city, but turn again and again, in *chevêtre*, around the same place, while being lost for real. They can't really chose to do it in another way and can't communicate about it. The *chevêtre* is something different from the Situationist *plaque tournante*: it is not a term of a specific aesthetical lexicon but a marker of hidden ontological data, the designator of the 'escaping cause of that which escapes' our control and understanding while being fundamental.

## Locative mapping

Today, GPS technology allows for an accurate location in space.<sup>11</sup> This kind of tracing is not the tracing that pays attention to the 'close presences' of the tracers, but one which is connected to military technology and surveillance. The individual is traced, or rather *tracked*, as a point, which is precisely situated and controllable in time. GPS equipped pedestrians can now trace real time cartographies, as in the project 'Real Time' by Esther Polak (one of many other projects of this kind), which shows inhabitants of Amsterdam making visible a giant map of their city through the retracings of their daily routes.<sup>12</sup> This type of cartography has a lot of positive aspects<sup>13</sup> but – as remarked by the cultural theorist Brian Holmes, it also has an important weakness: it exposes the fragility of individual gestures to the surveilling satellite infrastructure, which supports and coordinates the GPS public infrastructure.<sup>14</sup> With these tools that are always traceable by global satellites and are dependent on global temporalities, there is no common and possible community between the tracers and the traced. Global time is not a 'common time' and the satellite is not a 'close presence'. The lines traced by locative technology are always 'exposed' and could never be secret, hidden, like *the lignes d'erre*.

As Holmes noticed, technological locative tracing (very fashionably used in recent years by many contemporary art projects) encounters here its own limit, which is in fact its own ideology: a kind of humanist locative ideology of 'knowing your place', which promotes and exposes at a global scale, the scale of the *Empire*,<sup>15</sup> the aesthetics of the drift, generalising cartography as individual tool, abstract and isolated,

<sup>11</sup> The Global Positioning System (GPS) is composed of twenty-four satellites 20,200 km (12,500 miles or 10,900 nautical miles) above the earth. The satellites are spaced in orbit so that at any time a minimum of six satellites will be in view to users anywhere in the world. The satellites continuously broadcast position and time data to users throughout the world. GPS was developed in the 1970s by the U.S. Department of Defense so that military units can always know their exact location and the location of other units. (cf. About.com, 'Global Positioning System' (2007) <http://geography.about.com/od/geographictechnology/a/gps.htm> [accessed 2007]. Contemporary Art, Architecture and Urban Planning projects today, use GPS and other 'situated' and 'locative' technologies to allow different ways of designing and inhabiting the contemporary metapolis.

<sup>12</sup> Esther Polak and Den Waag, 'Amsterdam RealTime' <http://realtime.waag.org> [accessed 2007].

<sup>13</sup> One of the positive goals is the creation of public data. In order to oppose the increased privatisation of geographic data, media activist groups organise tracing actions using GPS technology aimed at creating digital maps of important urban areas that can be freely used. See for example the OPENSTREETMAP movement, Open Street Map: The Free Wiki World Map, [www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org) [accessed 2007].

<sup>14</sup> Brian Holmes, 'Drifting Through the Grid: Psychogeography and Imperial Infrastructure', <http://ut.yt.to.or.at/site/index.html> [accessed 2007].

<sup>15</sup> I use here the concept of 'Empire' in the sense developed by T. Negri and M. Hardt in their book *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

while giving at the same time the illusion of communication and traceability.

For Deligny, in order to have an edge, a border, to have *something in common* with the autistic, you need an ‘outside’ and an ‘inside’. Also, for seizing a place, no screen or other ‘scopic’ prostheses are needed. What is necessary is what he called ‘this seeing’, a ‘seeing’ which is not related to ‘thinking’, a gaze which doesn’t ‘reflect’; *this* ‘seeing’ is for him the language of the children ‘who do not speak’.

## Everyday life mapping

The everyday tracings initiated by Deligny are not the tracings of the city users which caught the interest of the sociologist Michel De Certeau, who theorised the practices of everyday life at about the same time as Deligny’s experience in Cevenes.

De Certeau speaks about ‘the spatial language’ of walking but at the same time, he criticises its representation in the urban cartographies of the time. He speaks of the difficulty of representing the practice of walking rather than the walking trace;

<sup>16</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 97.

While making visible the walking trace, what made it possible remains invisible. This fixation of the trace is a forgetting procedure. The trace substitutes itself to the practice.<sup>16</sup>

De Certeau speaks about the impossibility of representing the very *act of walking*, which rather than a simple movement represents ‘a way of being in the world’.

But Deligny’s mapping escapes this aporia, because it does not pretend to ‘represent’ the act of walking: his lines do not seek to make the walking visible, do not conform to what has happened; the fact of keeping on tracing a map for several years, makes the act of tracing itself ‘a way of being in the world’.

For De Certeau, the rhetoric of walking is made of a series of tours and detours, the style figures that constitute the pedestrian discourse: walking is ‘the art of touring’. By contrast, the *chevêtres* of the autistics are not simple style figures – they do not belong to a ‘text’ or a discursive organisation. They are called customary lines, but are not yet a ‘proper’ that could be subject to *détournement*. For De Certeau, the walking body moves in search of a familiar thing in the city. He invokes Freud, saying that walking recalls baby’s moves inside of the maternal body: ‘To walk is to be in search of a proper place. It is a process of being indefinitely absent and looking for a proper.’<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.



But the autistic children have no origin to recall. Or, maybe, as Deligny suggests, their courses and their gestures recall a ‘world’ which is too far away to be appropriable, hidden in the prelinguistic memory of the human species. Therefore, if their movement is a language, still this language doesn’t *signify*, but simply indicates that the human *takes place*.

### Tracing without ‘control’

Contemporary urban cartography searches more and more for methods to represent flows of matter, information and persons. The lines of these mappings try to describe space in order to make it more efficient and more controllable. Tracing in the ‘control society’ (Deleuze) is different from Deligny’s tracing. We trace in order to make the flows more fluid, the city smoother and appropriable.

An example is Space Syntax’s cartography, which uses lines to represent degrees of connectivity within the city.<sup>18</sup> These lines are always, to simplify, ‘right’. They are approximations of the trajectories chosen by different persons in space. They are approximations of the number of persons (and cars) that have passed by during the time of observation. These traces are rarely those of the same people. These observations are a routine rather than a *custom*. The degree of connectivity of these routes are supposed to give information about the degree of sociability of space. Space Syntax (and contemporary urban planning) seek to emphasise the most connected routes, the diagonals, the shortcuts, the most secure routes; they are not interested in the hidden gestures and ‘delinquent’ routes like those taken by the autistic children. For Deligny, the human mapped through *chevêtres* has nothing to do with the quantifiable, abstract representation of the human – it is rather something unrepresentable which is immanently shared by *all* humans. It is (the) *unmoving*.

<sup>18</sup> cf. Space Syntax (2006) www.spacesyntax.com [accessed 2007].

### The ‘common body’ of an ‘impossible community’

*Tracing* is not drawing, it does not represent a social space in order to control or manipulate it. *Tracing* is not mapping in order to inform as do the GPS technologies. The ‘common body’ is not a cadastre – it is a moment in which the emotion – the *e-motion* is important. The common body is an *affected place*.

The ‘common body’ traces itself at the same time that it assembles. The common is always a common-there. It is made by the presence of bodies in the same place, it is a common which does not communicate, which is refractory to language, to domestication by language. It

<sup>19</sup> The term *désœuvrement* ('unworking') is used in the sense of Maurice Blanchot, who has developed this concept in, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, first pr. 1955), where he speaks about the impossibility of (common) language to seize the full signification of the literary word.

<sup>20</sup> F. Deligny, *Les cahiers de l'Immuable*, p. 24 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

reveals itself in bits and pieces that need time to be recorded together, as a fragmented memory of an ungraspable 'whole'. It reveals itself as *désœuvrement*,<sup>19</sup> as a still possible action of an impossible work.

What was still to be discovered between us and them, was the PLACE. When I say between, I do not mean a barrier, on the contrary the fact that it was something to share and discover and this was the place, the topos, the settlement, the outside.<sup>20</sup>

The community was then simplified to what was most ordinarily common – the place made out of traces, gestures, routes, trajectories and presences. The pile of tracing papers indicated the presence, the place and the time needed; because it is only by seeing and seeing again, in the same place and in time, a time spent in 'close presence', that the 'common body' could be grasped through lines. It could be grasped and unknown, because according to Deligny, 'the maps do not say much, they only can show that we *unknow* what is the human, as well as what is *the common*'.<sup>21</sup>



This is Deligny's answer to the question of mapping, but maybe also, his answer to the question of community. This question has been brought into debate by a number of contemporary thinkers who call for the deconstruction of the immanent notion of community, which has been particularly influential in the Western tradition of political thinking: community as the dominant Western political formation, founded upon a totalising, exclusionary myth of national unity, must



<sup>22</sup> I refer here particularly to the philosophical inquiries into the notion of the community of French thinkers like Jean-Luc Nancy (*The Inoperative Community*, 1983), Maurice Blanchot (*The Unavowable Community*, 1983) and more recently, the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben (*The Coming Community*, 1993). All these inquiries that continue in time and relate to each other, constitute somehow a whole movement of critical thinking that has influenced the contemporary take on the notion of 'community' in social science and political philosophy.

<sup>23</sup> Deligny's contemporary challenge could be interpreted in many ways – one approach is that of a few urban activist groups in Brussels, who are developing research on collective and subjective mapping tools such as open-source mapping softwares, which allow for collective production of knowledge and subjective representation of different types of space (geographical, social, political, economical, sensorial, affective, etc...) and at the same time, their freely shared experience. See Towards, (2006) [www.towards.be](http://www.towards.be) [accessed 2007].

Another way is suggested by the initiative of the OpenStreetMap movement which 'aims at creating and providing free geographic data such as street maps, as a reaction against the legal protection and technical restrictions on their use, which hold back people from using them in creative, productive and unexpected ways'. The open ended community of tracers use GPS technology, and combine individual and collective tracing with data collection meals and street parties. The OpenStreetMap is at the same time a political tool for subjective mapping and a device to create community. 'All of these restrictions and advances in technology like cheap GPS units mean you can now create your own maps, in collaboration with others and have none of the restrictions outlined above. The ability to do so allows you to regain a little bit of the community you live in - if you can't map it you can't describe it'; <http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/index.php/whymakeopenstreetmap> [accessed 20 August 2007].

be tirelessly 'unworked' in order to accommodate more inclusive and fluid forms of dwelling together in the world, of being-in-common.<sup>22</sup>

The mapping experimented by Deligny, constitutes somehow his own 're-presentation', his own enactment of 'the impossible community', the 'inoperative community', the 'unavowable community', 'the coming community' that haunt the contemporary imaginary. Deligny states that the 'common body' of this community which is impossible to write, to seize and to be mastered, can still be mapped as a PLACE. Indeterminately.

The autistic space and its tracing push to the limit the question of indeterminacy within the common experience of space and representation, a limit that challenges conventional notions of space and community. The lesson drawn from Deligny's work is that the process of place-making and its mapping are coextensive, and that the language through which a 'common' place is represented is always embedded in the way this place is inhabited. Such mapping analyses traces and leaves traces at the same time. Rather than theories, it produces practical knowledge and new experiences of place. We learn from Deligny that *tracing* is a patient and sensitive collective mapping, which needs time and attention in order to create the conditions for sharing, communication and communality. Its aesthetics are embedded in its ethics.

The question addressed to architects, urban planners and place-makers is how to operate with a space which is traced at the same time as it is lived and how to use this tracing to understand and eventually create more relationships between those who inhabit it. How to allow them to have access to and decide about their common *tracing* which is also the condition of their *indeterminate community*?<sup>23</sup>

Images are from the installation of Deligny's drawings in the exhibition, *Des Territoires* by Jean-François Chevrier and Sandra Alvarez de Toledo (Ensba Paris: October-December 2001). Photographs by Doina Petrescu.