

Ashley
Woodfall

Future
Stories

Project Details

Name of Researcher:
Ashley Woodfall

Project:
Future Stories

Output Type:
Multi-component

Key Words:
Photography;
Psychogeography

External Funding:
R3 & Feria Urbanism

Mode of Dissemination:

Exhibition

Future Stories, Bobby's,
Bournemouth, 17th–27th
March 2022

Articulations, The Lee's
Gallery, Bournemouth
University, 8th September–
19th December 2025

Publication

In Savage, J. (2022), *Future
Stories: Tales from the BCP
Future Lab*, Feria Urbanism:
Bournemouth

Public Talk

*Future Lab: Photographer's
Talk*, 19th March 2022,
Bobby's, Bournemouth

Synopsis

Future Stories is a multi-component submission by Dr Ashley Woodfall comprising photographic works produced as a practice research element within a wider community Future Lab research project. This project led by Jennie Savage on behalf of Feria Urbanism, sought to translate community insights into a tangible spatial design strategy for the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The photographic work was disseminated through the book *Future Stories: Tales from the BCP Future Lab*, two public exhibitions and a public talk.

The photography was created through a psychogeographic method that recognised a free embodied movement through the urban space as well as a pre-mapped structure to the moment of photographic framing and shutter release. Drawing on walking as practice-based research, the work embraces the psychogeographic *dérive* (drift) through urban space (Debord, 2008/1955) while combining it with a systematic structuring overlay that directed image-making. In this way, the method (partly) displaces the photographer's ownership of the decisive moment, creating a productive tension between drift and calculation and extending psychogeographic practice through an approach that recognises the value of both openness and system.

The methodology enabled the photographer to break from established habits of movement and attention, forcing engagement with sites and contingencies that might otherwise pass unnoticed. The resulting images moved beyond the pictorial or illustrative by treating the photograph not as an act of privileged individual expression, but as the outcome of an encounter between mapped instruction, embodied movement, subjective response and urban contingency.

The originality of *Future Stories* lies in the productive friction within a civic psychogeography that marries free-flowing *dérive* with a systematic procedure; unsettling authorial control and producing an embodied, reflexive account. Situated within a wider community research framework, the work extends psychogeographic image-making into a civic and speculative mode. It contributes new visual evidence to public discussion regarding possible urban futures.

Research Questions

In what ways can psychogeographic photography be developed through a methodology that combines *dérive* with predetermined mapping?

In what ways might this hybrid method affect photographic authorship, attention and the image making moment?

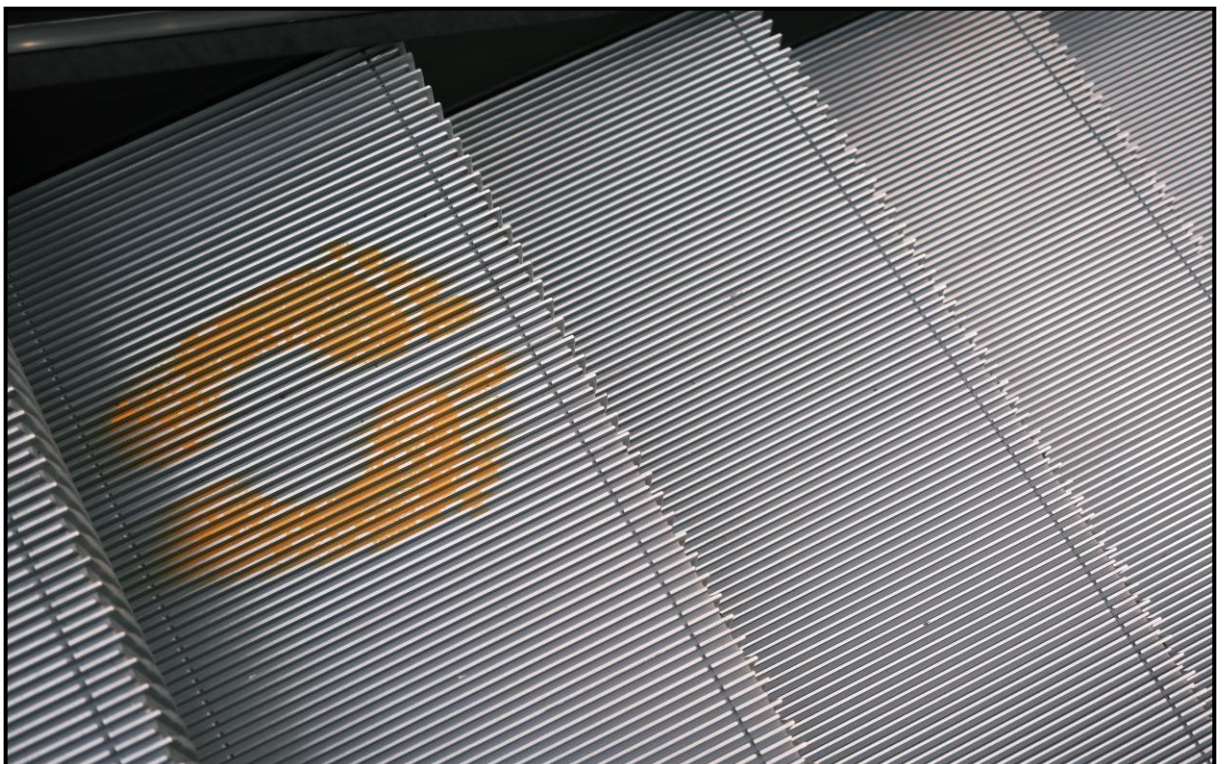
Research Aims

To develop a hybrid psychogeographic photographic method combining *dérive* and the systematic.

To test how this method disrupts habitual ways of seeing and framing urban space.

To produce an embodied and reflexive account of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres.

To contribute to wider public and stakeholder discussion about possible urban futures through photographic practice.



Context: Psychogeography, Drift and Structured Photographic Practice

Future Stories is situated within psychogeographic traditions of walking, spatial inquiry and image-making, but its contribution lies in reconfiguring these traditions through a methodological hybrid of *dérive* and the systematic. While psychogeography is often reduced to the free drift of the *dérive*, Debord's account makes clear that drifting involves both openness to encounter and the "knowledge and calculation" (2014/1958, p65) of psychogeographical possibilities. This provides a conceptual basis for the submission's originality claim: that psychogeographic photography can be extended through a structured, rule-based method without losing its embodied, affective and contingent relation to urban space.

This tension between mapped structure and lived encounter can be further articulated through Michel de Certeau's proposition that "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (1984, p129). For de Certeau, the map represents an abstract, organising order, while lived movement and narrative cut across those divisions. This distinction is especially useful for Future Stories, in that the project neither rejects mapping in favour of unstructured drift nor accepts the map as a fully sufficient account of urban space. Instead, it works in the gap between mapped instruction and lived encounter, allowing the photograph to function as a visual form of 'story' that cuts across the impositions of route, boundary and plan.

Debord defines psychogeography as the study of the "precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not" on emotions and behaviour. Although Debord did not move toward any systemising of movement through that environment, he did more than frame a casual wandering; recognising how space shapes subjectivity. His account of the *dérive* is therefore significant in that it resists simple opposition between free drift and a structured method. This is evident in Situationist mapping practices, which did not always confine psychogeography to the literal boundaries of the city being traversed. Debord suggested that psychogeographical inquiry might involve "arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions" and in doing so reveal one's "habitual influences" (1955/2008, p26).

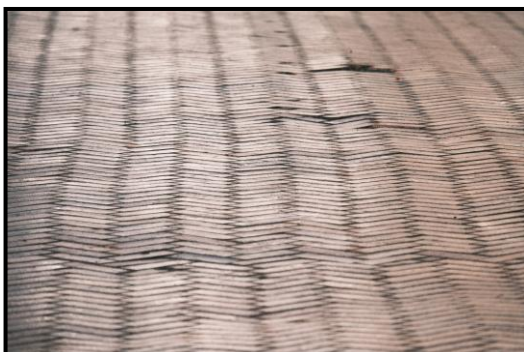


The *dérive* involves letting oneself be drawn by the attractions of terrain, but it also includes a conscious relation to structure, contour and spatial possibility. For practice research, this distinction is crucial: it allows psychogeography to be understood not only as movement through space, but as a research framework in which movement, attention, mapping and reflection can be brought into relation. This matters especially for photography. If psychogeography is framed only as spontaneous urban wandering, psychogeographic photography risks being positioned as a passive record of chance encounter. If, however, psychogeography is recognised as already containing a tension between drift and organisation, then the photographic practice can become a site in which those modes are actively tested. *Future Stories* is therefore not simply informed by psychogeography as a visual sensibility or conceit; rather, it treats the relationship between drift and system as a methodological problem. *Future Stories* originality lies in using predetermined systematic mapping to structure moments of photographic capture within a psychogeographic walk, thereby challenging habitual seeing and generating new knowledge about attention, authorship and urban futures. (Debord, 2008/1955; 2014/1958).

The 'British' revival of psychogeography provides context for this approach. Richardson (2015) identifies the re-emergence of psychogeography in Britain as part of a broader cultural turn towards place, walking, hidden histories and landscape intervention. Anderson (2020) similarly frames 'English' psychogeography as a mode of critical engagement with landscape, displacement and the anxieties of contemporary space. Together, these accounts show that psychogeography in Britain has functioned not only as a practice of walking, but as a means of reading, re-reading and re-articulating spatial experience through aesthetic and critical forms.

Richard Long's walking works are useful in situating this approach in that they provide an example of how embodied movement, documentary trace and systematic overlay can be combined within an arts context. Long is not a psychogeographer in the strict Debordian sense, but in establishing walking as a generative artistic act that can be organised through photographs, maps and text (Alfrey, 2012). Laura Grace Ford mixed-media *Savage Messiah* (2019) shows how psychogeographic drift can be bounded, serialised and reworked through visual-textual assemblage (Ford, n.d.). Within photographic practice Mark Power's *A System of Edges / 26 Different Endings* (2005) uses the *London A-Z* as structuring device, generating photographs at the map's edge-pages and directing attention to spaces that fall just off the edge. The work is systematic in that route and site are generated through cartographic procedure, yet it remains deeply concerned with liminality, memory and exclusion (Power, 2007; The Hyman Collection, n.d.). Together, these precedents informed the development of an arts/photographic method that can be both affective and systematic.

Against these contexts, the significance of *Future Stories* lies not simply in photographing urban centres through walking, nor in adopting psychogeography as a device. Its contribution is methodological - and civic. By using predetermined mapping to structure the moment of photographic framing and shutter release within a *dérive*, the work redistributes ownership of the image away from the photographer's habitual control of the decisive moment. The resulting photograph is neither a purely spontaneous expression of intuition nor a detached product of mapping; it is the outcome of an encounter between mapped instruction, embodied movement, subjective response and urban contingency. If, for de Certeau, the story cuts across what the map delimits, then *Future Stories* positions the photographic act as one such story: an image that crosses planned routes, everyday contingencies and subjective experience in order to generate new knowledge about authorship, attention and the lived and possible futures of town-centre space.





Research Method

Future Stories is grounded in photographic practice research as a mode of inquiry within a wider community research project; one concerned with possible futures for the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The psychogeographic method responded to Debord's formulation of the *dérive* as a mode of movement attentive to the emotional and behavioural effects of urban space, while also recognising his insistence that drift includes not only openness to encounter but also the "knowledge and calculation" of psychogeographical possibilities (2014/1958, p65). This distinction provided the conceptual basis for a hybrid methodology in which free movement through space was combined with a predetermined structuring devices.

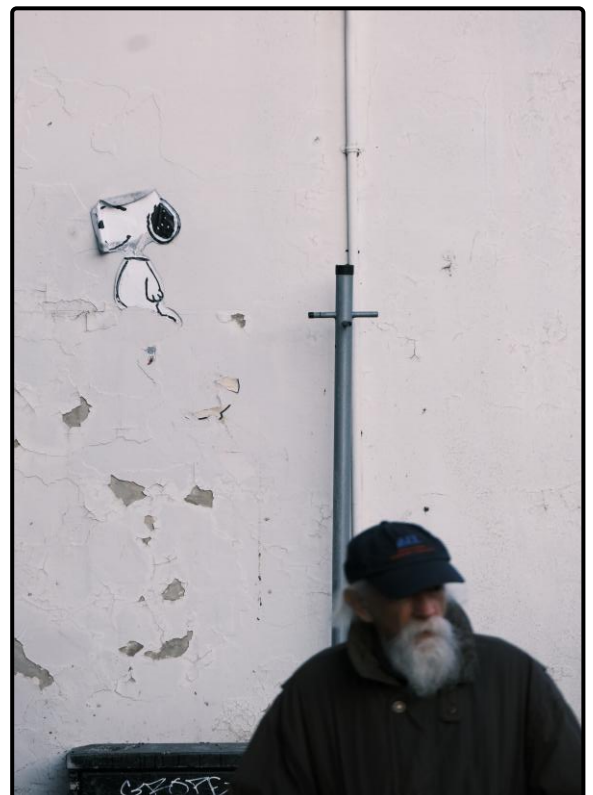
The research process began with the pre-mapping of streets and routes across the three town centres, with a series of regular expanding circles drawn on to each maps, and points noted on the maps where the circles intersected with roads and paths. These points then become a location from which the photographer would pause the drift and take a picture regardless of whether that point offered obvious aesthetic photographic opportunities. These mappings functioned as a procedural framework that structured the moment of seeing, framing and shutter release. In this respect, the project positioned urban walking as a form of systematic embodied spatial inquiry and used mapping as a means of interrupting habitual routes, compositional reflexes and established habits of attention.

Within the walking fieldwork itself, the method brought two modes into productive tension. On the one hand, the work embraced the phenomenological openness of walking: the embodied, situated and contingent experience of moving through urban space and responding to its atmospheres, rhythms and interruptions. On the other hand, the work imposed a systematic overlay through mapped instruction, so that image-making did not depend solely on the photographer's spontaneous judgement. This step displaced, in part, the photographer's ownership of the decisive moment and redistributed authorship across a set of relations: mapped route, bodily movement, urban contingency and subjective response. The images created therefore act not as the expression of autonomous vision alone, but as the trace of a negotiated encounter between system and drift. No aspect of that negotiation was treated as innocent or unimplicated, and no single element - map, body, environment or camera - was assumed to hold stable authority over the others.

In Future Stories, the pre-mapped route did not act as proxy for any objective or complete account of the space, but as a strategic device through which a lived encounter could be opened. The walk, and the photograph produced through it, operated less as confirmation of the space, than as a way of testing, traversing and complicating it. In a perhaps blunt and inverse sense, the pre-mapping provided the cut, while embodied movement and image-making generated the crossing.

Recent methodological scholarship has positioned psychogeography as a form of embodied spatial research rather than solely a literary or cultural tradition. From an urban planning perspective, İlkay (2023) argues that psychogeography provides an epistemological basis for examining the gap between “what is conceived” in planning and “what is experienced”. Reflecting on the connection between body and space, Kriegler-Wenk and Green (2025) position psychogeography as an arts-based embodied research method in which drifting is followed by creative cartography and documentation, so that sensory and affective encounters with urban space can be made communicable and reflected upon. Unlike this work the psychogeography within Future Stories is ‘front loaded’, but together, these accounts are especially relevant to Future Stories in that they legitimise various ‘flavours’ of psychogeography as method and knowledge-making.

Rigour is therefore derived from systematic process rather than claims to objectivity: the method was structured, reflexive and capable of being described, repeated and critically assessed. Routes were pre-determined in advance, with regular points mapped from which to stop and make an image, regardless of whether the site initially appeared pictorially promising. The resulting images were evaluated not merely for aesthetic quality and how they might inform the wider research project, but also for the extent to which they evidenced the operation of the method and generated insight into patterns of attention, subjectivity and urban experience.

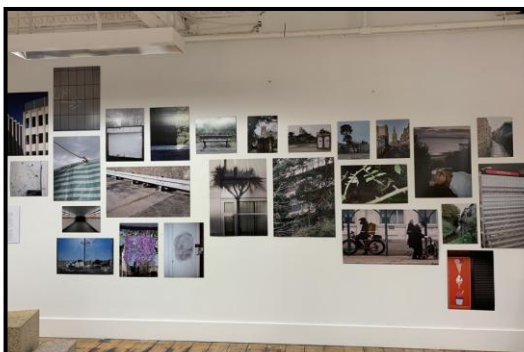


Research Insights and Contribution

The outcomes of the work were contextualised within the wider community research project through dissemination in the book *Future Stories: Tales from the BCP Future Lab*, a public exhibition and a public talk. This extended the method beyond observational image-making alone and positioned the work within a civic and speculative framework, where photography operated as both practice research and as visual evidence contributing to public reflection on possible urban futures.

The primary insight generated by *Future Stories* is that neither an unstructured *dérive* nor a fully systematic cartographic approach is sufficient, or even desirable, for accounting for contemporary urban space. Instead, the research identifies a productive space of tension between the two. The project demonstrates that systematic procedure does not erase the “being there” of the walk; rather, it can sharpen attention to the contingencies of the street that are otherwise overlooked by the habitual eye.

A key insight is the value of this negotiated encounter: a purely random drift can reinforce habitual ideas of visual interest, while a purely systematic approach risks sterility and insensitivity to the moment. The method deployed in *Future Stories* shows that pre-mapping (by directing attention toward seemingly unpromising subjects) makes psychogeographic image-making more reflexive by disrupting habitual aesthetic choices.



The project also contributes new understanding of photographic authorship. By allowing predetermined mapping to structure the moment of capture, *Future Stories* unsettles the photographer's habitual ownership of the decisive moment. The resulting image is better understood as the outcome of a negotiated relation among mapped route, bodily movement, urban contingency and subjective response, rather than an expression of autonomous authorship

In methodological terms, *Future Stories* contributes a hybrid practice that brings together free-flowing psychogeographic exploration and cartographic calculation. In doing so, it extends the lineage of British psychogeography into a specifically photographic and procedural register. Within the wider community research framework, the work further develops psychogeographic image-making into a civic and speculative mode, contributing visual evidence to public discussion about the lived and possible futures of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Exhibition

Future Stories, Bobby's, Bournemouth, 17th–27th March 2022

The exhibition was specific to the project and open to the public. Estimated 400 visitors. It acted to democratise the urban planning process and provoke active public debate, town centre pride and a shared dialogue (local press here: [Daily Echo 'Have your say on future of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch'](#)). See statement from the wider project lead Jennie Savage below.

Articulations, The Lee's Gallery, Bournemouth University, 8th September–19th December 2025

This post-project exhibition featured the photographer's *Future Stories* work and was open to the public. Estimated 1000 visitors.

Publication

Future Stories: Tales from the BCP Future Lab, March 2022.

The photography practice acted as foundational evidence for the book and wider project and directly informed subsequent local urban framework. Again, see the statement from the wider project lead Jennie Savage below.

Public Talk

Future Lab: Photographer's Talk, 19th March 2022, Bobby's, Bournemouth

The talk was attended by 30 members of the public and attracted a diverse range of participants interested in both the photography and the part it played in informing and shaping the wider project



Policy Impact / Public Reach

Jennie Savage the Project Lead for the wider community research project and author of the *Future Stories: Tales from the BCP Future Lab* book states that the photographic work “helped to bridge the gap between everyday lived experience and strategic urban design” and that through “synthesising and articulating project findings, [with the photography] embedded alongside text and illustrations to create a multi-layered, highly accessible “manual for change”.

Jennie also noted how the photography practice helped “capture complex socio-spatial shifts that traditional data-driven planning methods overlook”, and that the work helped “translate the key themes of the project and make them accessible to people working in a range of local contexts.

Exhibition: Photographic work was a central pillar of the public exhibition in Bobby’s newly opened gallery, (showcase at Bobby’s in Bournemouth). This exhibition democratized the urban planning process, using his imagery to provoke active public debate, town-centre pride and a shared regional dialogue.

Influencing Local Policy: The published volume has served as a foundational piece of evidence for local stakeholders. The insights visualised in his work have directly informed subsequent local developments, including the draft Christchurch Neighbourhood Plan Guidance and council high-street regeneration funding frameworks aimed at enhancing civic well-being.

Jennie concluded that the practice based photographic contribution to the wider community research project “represents an exemplary model of creative R&D and knowledge exchange. [The photography’s] ability to translate localised community truths into a compelling visual language provided the critical, real-world grounding necessary to shift this project from an academic exercise into a catalyst for public-realm policy. [The] practice-based research has achieved clear, lasting significance and impact within the fields of critical service design and participatory urbanism.”

The project, as a whole, was shortlisted for the *Royal Town Planning Institute* Excellence Awards

Follow-on-activity

The outcomes from this project fed directly in to working (as Co-I) with urban historian Dr Kate Terkanian on the *Coastal Stories, Coastal Communities* National Heritage lottery fund supported project. Within this project I extended the method from *Future Stories* in to marrying my own psychogeographic photography practice with leading photowalks with members of the public designed to elicit their stories of visiting Bournemouth town centre.

References

- Alfrey, N. (2012). Ten miles on Exmoor. Tate Papers, (17).
<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/17/ten-miles-on-exmoor>
- Anderson, D. (2020). *Landscape and subjectivity in the work of Patrick Keiller, W. G. Sebald, and Iain Sinclair*. Oxford University Press.
<https://academic.oup.com/book/36706>
- Certeau, M. de. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). University of California Press. (Original work published 1980).
- Debord, G. (2008). Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography (K. Knabb, Trans.). In H. Baiger & S. E. Mauro (Eds.), *Critical Geographies: a collection of readings* (pp. 23–27). Praxis (e)Press. (Original work published 1955).
- Debord, G. (2014). Theory of the Dérive (K. Knabb, Trans.). In: Katz et al. (Eds.), *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. Routledge. (Original work published 1958).
- Ford, L. G. (n.d.). *Dr Laura Grace Ford*. Goldsmiths, University of London.
<https://www.gold.ac.uk/art/people/ford-laura-grace/>
- Ford, L. G. (2019). *Savage Messiah*. Verso.
- İlkay, Y. (2023). Psychogeography in planning: A new methodological approach via representations of ‘body’, ‘urban space’ and ‘walking’. *ICONARP International Journal of Architecture and Planning*, 11(2), 584–603.
<https://doi.org/10.15320/ICONARP.2023.255>
- Kriegler-Wenk, Z. R., & Green, J. C. (2025). Psychogeography as embodied connection to place. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 27(6), E402–E408.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/amajethics.2025.402>
- Power, M. (2007). *26 Different Endings*. Photoworks.
- The Hyman Collection. (n.d.). Mark Power. A system of edges (aka 26 different endings). <https://hymancollection.org/bodies-of-work/mark-power-a-system-of-edges-aka-26-different-endings/>

