

Smoothness vs striation in Huddersfield – a Deleuzian analysis

by David Upton

In 2022 weⁱ organised a weekend of psychogeographical events in Huddersfield. One of the events, which we described as a 'distributed street game', was based around the Huddersfield Yards. This essay describes that event, and applies Deleuze's concept of smooth vs striated space to analyse it.

1. Huddersfield and its yards

Huddersfield, a town in West Yorkshire, has a 'particularly rich and characteristic variety'ⁱⁱ of yards. These began in the late eighteenth century, as the woollen goods trade began to develop. This trade was to change Huddersfield: “in a time so brief that the memory of many living men doth compass it, a town but yesterday so obscure as scarce to be noted on the map, has come to be ranked among the chief industrial centres of the Empire,... to trace the swift evolving by which a straggling town, ill built, ill paved, badly lighted, with scant and vitiated supply of water, almost destitute of buildings and plesauces consecrated to the public needs and joys has matured into a noble municipality, quoted and appraised as a very type and pattern of civic enterprise...”ⁱⁱⁱ



A modern yard

Huddersfield was, and still is famous for its 'yards'. These were often purpose built, or formed by blocking off a street at one end, or by building alongside another building. The woollen mills rapidly developing in the area were often some miles distant from Huddersfield itself. (In the early days they needed to be near rivers to provide power.) However, finished goods were bought and sold in Huddersfield. One theory is that manufacturers built small warehouses and display facilities, and added offices and residential space for employees. This allowed them to display their wares to customers, but to make it difficult for rival manufacturers to see (and steal) their ideas. However, not all yards are of commercial origin: some seem to be largely residential, perhaps built and used by one family group.: “such an arrangement provided shelter, a sense of community, ease of access from a single approach road, and access to a single water supply”^{iv}, although the same authors also suggest that Huddersfield is unusually wet and windy and this may justify huddling together.

A parallel may be the Kasbahs of Morocco, walled villages or forts. Inside they are dark warrens of narrow alleys, relatively cool and sheltered from the sun, contrasting enormously with the vast

empty spaces of the Sahara next door. They too share barely adequate water supplies. They house shops and homes and artisan productions, eg carpet weaving. My own theory is that they were built because people cannot face staring at an effectively infinite empty space of desert, which sucks out their individuality, instead of allowing them to focus and reinforce themselves with their own artefacts and decoration. Whilst Huddersfield is not in the Sahara, it is surrounded by open countryside which was once difficult to penetrate except by horse or stage coach, then too expensive for most people.



Inside a kasbah

Whatever the reasons, yards were and still are a major feature of Huddersfield. Of over 60, about 30 now remain, and many of them have been turned into car parks or retail spaces.

2. Deleuze and the concept of striation.

French theorists Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and Felix Guattari (1930-92) use the concept of striation. This word is normally used in technical contexts such as geology, metallurgy and anatomy, and means “a series of ridges, furrows or linear marks”.

According to Fricot^v, “In chapter 14, ‘1440: The Smooth and the Striated’ of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari invent two concepts concerning space, which they name the smooth and the striated. Of the several models they develop to extrapolate their conceptual investigation, the maritime model tells us the most about difficult journeys undertaken. Not only is the sea given as a smooth space par excellence, alongside the desert and the steppes, but, simultaneously, the space most easily subjugated to striation. Consider, for instance, the lines of longitude and latitude, so crucial to navigation and the colonisation of such territories as Australia. Importantly, it is in the midst of this maritime milieu that we discover a site of contest between smooth and striated space A contest cannot be figured as a straightforward and symmetrical opposition, but an agonistic to and fro in which power relations become more or less coagulated and bare life comes to be manipulated. What interests Deleuze and Guattari in operations of striation and smoothing “are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of this striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces”.

We extend this concept to think about the Huddersfield yards. The yards can be seen as striations on the smooth surface of the moor, but also as striations on the already striated town: townlets within a town.

One commentator says: “In their writing Deleuze and Guattari have spoken of “smooth space” as a space of the nomad, a space which stands in opposition to the striated space of the state and which is characterized by a form of free flowing occupation (the nomad creates territory by ‘distributing himself in open space’) which over codes the forces of institutionalizations. Smooth space, the desert and the steppe, a space free from codifications which determine behavior is a metaphorical allusion to types of occupation which resist the political restrictions the city places upon us. When the nomad/State opposition is applied to space, the basic principle is that nomad space is ‘smooth’ and heterogeneous, while State space is ‘striated’ and homogeneous.”^{vi}

Clearly this is analogous to the yards, as a refuge from the moor, from others in the city, and as a means of building and reinforcing identity in an era where many people were moving into towns from the countryside, driven by the economic pressures of the Industrial Revolution.

3. Psychogeography and COVID: the virtual/ physical debate

The UK suffered from a COVID epidemic which began in early 2020. The first UK deaths attributed to COVID 19 took place in March 2020. A legally-enforced Stay at Home Order, or lockdown, was introduced in late March, banning all non-essential travel and contact with other people, and shutting schools, businesses, venues and gathering places. This was based on medical advice. The concept of the family group or work group was key: you could mix with them, but not with people outside these groups.

Since psychogeography is mostly practised by groups of people walking together in public places, the psychogeographic community had an immediate problem. The 4th World Congress of Psychogeography, which had been held for years physically in Huddersfield, responded with a 'virtual' conference in September 2020 and again in September 2021. Some interesting new techniques were foregrounded: for example, derives where the participants were in different places, but were linked by social media and followed common instructions. There were lots of panel discussions over Zoom. However, several people (myself included) felt that physical presence was important, and that Huddersfield had a unique psychogeographical personality which should not be allowed to fade away. When the Conference organisers decided to produce yet another virtual conference in September 2022, a group of us decided to set up our own mini-conference, in one weekend in August 2022. The Yards project was one event in this mini-conference. It has also been submitted to, and accepted by, the main conference, as an 'event' – though this likely to be no more than showing one or more videos about what we will by then have done in August 2022.

By mid 2022 most people no longer worried about COVID: although there were still many cases, most of them were mild. For example, London Transport and supermarkets no longer insisted that users wear masks, and most people do not. The legal situation was not clear. Initial cases of over-zealous police enforcement action gave way to allegations that senior government figures had themselves not observed the restrictions they had imposed.

I was therefore very interested in the interactions between the physical and the virtual in psychogeographic practice. The Yards project is an event designed to intertwine the two. This is done by:

- putting QR codes in specific yards on the day of the event, so that you had to be in that yard in order to access a particular page on a website which gave more (virtual) information about the yard
- geolocating sounds in yards, so that again you had to be there to hear a virtual sound in order to complete the experience.

So you can't participate in the event using only a computer; and you can't do it only by being there. You must be there with a device such as a smartphone or tablet. (This must be able to read QR barcodes, and have downloaded the Echoes Explorer mobile app, available free for Android or Iphone.)

In addition, making the event into a kind of game produces a third layer – the interactions between the participants. These interactions are 'real', but can only be seen virtually, on a central internet 'control' page, open to all participants. Hopefully these will be tracked and will lead to interactions. For example, we will ask participants to report (via Twitter using a tag) sightings of other participants. Although we cannot track or identify individuals, we do at least know where they are when they read a QR code (because we know where we put the QR code sticker.) We hope that participants will use this data to guide their own wanderings.

4. The characters of the Yards.

In our game/ derive, we chose to foreground the yards. We decided to put a 'character' or 'situation' inside each yard, using images and sound to show them. These are generated using animated images 'conjured up' when a smartphone is pointed at a QR code, and geo-located sounds played when a smartphone finds itself at a particular set of latitude/ longitude coordinates.

Please note, we do not want to oversimplify this complex situation. Yes, some yards were poor, some yards had bad sanitation, and people regularly died in epidemics throughout the nineteenth century. But, as the Huddersfield Civic Society (HCS) authors reported in 1986: “everybody with whom the authors have spoken who has actually lived in one of the yards has insisted that although life was indeed without frills and involved a constant exercise of financial brinkmanship it was not in the category of a Dickensian slum... although infant mortality and infectious disease statistics were horrifying enough.... they were not all that much worse than the national average of the day.”^{vii}

According to the HCS, Inhabitants of some of the Yards seem to have been relatively affluent, and many were respectable skilled men or professionals, eg an auctioneer (Lancaster's Yard), a doctor (Hammond's yard), a dental laboratory (Brook's Yard).

A further caveat. Far too many museums, for example, use techniques such as sound and video to lead visitors around their attractions, telling them what to see and what to think about it. This is often referred to as 'the experience economy' and “has relevance as a strategy of innovation and marketing for most branches. The reason for this is that all goods and services can be staged, and new experience stages can be designed. It is not primarily about what is sold (the content of the product or service that defines the experience-based strategy of businesses), but much more about the way it is sold through involving the customer...an experience can be a competitive advantage of products. The experience economy is the latest stage of an evolution aimed at extracting as much value from the market as possible.”^{viii} Our work is not intended to present reassuring solutions, or to align past reality with modern assumptions. We are not the Tourist Board.

Deleuze sees ontology as a process of creation rather than discovery. “The destiny of philosophical concepts and philosophical positions lie not with the truth or falsity of their claims, but with the vistas of thinking and living they open for us.”^{ix} So, our ambition is to foreground the yards in our participants' ontologies of Huddersfield.

5. The Luddites

The theme of the Luddite terror campaign also runs through the game. The Luddites, named after the (probably fictitious) Ned Ludd, were groups of people whose livelihoods were threatened by new Industrial Revolution machinery. Huddersfield was an early centre of Luddite activity, probably because two of the early inventions to start turning the woollen industry upside down were the gig mills and shearing frames. Both were being introduced between 1800 and 1820. Both mechanise the work previously performed by croppers, using heavy shears to trim the surface of a fabric. This is important to high quality finished cloth, in which Huddersfield specialised.

Cloth manufacture was distributed, with spinning, weaving and finishing being 'cottage industries'. Individuals or families bought in the previous stage of the product, took it to the next stage, and sold it on. They were entrepreneurs, working from home, perhaps more analogous to kulaks rather than to peasants.

The Industrial Revolution very quickly replaced this with a factory system, under which work was centralised in one large building, one capitalist invested in the building and new machinery, and one man owned the product at all stages, and employed all the spinners, weavers, etc. The situation was exacerbated by poverty: during and after the Napoleonic wars prices rose and wages fell. However, the Luddites were not a peasants' revolt: under the old system, the croppers were well paid. In effect they were small self-employed business men. Their problem was simply that the new machines, able to do the work of six men, and later of many more, undercut their prices. They reacted by a short campaign of violence: attacking mills, breaking machinery, and in a few cases murdering mill owners.

The local response was to use the Militia, a kind of volunteer 'Home Guard' that had been set up a few years, before in case Napoleon actually invaded England. This was made up, from senior to junior ranks, almost entirely of local men, though some of them had previous experience in the army or navy. In some cases, militia from other areas were brought in to assist, or even regular units.

They were a disciplined armed body, and seem to have been well trained, although for normal military operations rather than counter-insurgency.^x

A major exercise in 1795 included:

- “1-General salute and marched round in slow and quick time.
- 2- The manual exercise.
- 3-Primed and loaded with cartridge.
- 4-Fired one round by companies from flanks to centre ; began at the right.
- 5-Advanced in line and fired one round by companies from flanks to centre; began at the left.
- 6-Advanced in line and fired one round by companies from centre to flanks.
- 7-Formed a new line in the rear.”

These unified drill manoeuvres, together with the men's uniform appearance and firearms, imposed temporary control and power in the 'smooth' countryside around the isolated mills. It is significant that much of the drill involved forming and moving in lines – creating new striations.

In our analysis, the Luddites, attacking the isolated mills in the countryside, are what Deleuze would call 'nomads'. They are outside the striations, roaming freely, and pose a threat to the insular worlds inside the yards. The old free world of the individual 'cropper' was 'smooth' space, whereas the new factory to which his function was transferred was 'striated' by space, technology, militia and capital to dominate and control his activity. Yards, to the extent that some were built by individual mill owners, were a further symbol of this striation. However there was also a sense in which they were an 'anti-striation' – a local refuge in which your own rules took precedence over the town

rules, for example a semi-private place to display new products away from the gaze of rivals in the public Cloth Hall.

Within the game, Luddites and militia are represented by warnings, which show up on a quasi random basis in the yards when you read the QR code. Mostly the QR code brings images related to the yard. Sometimes, you see an urgent warning that the Militia are coming to arrest the Luddites, or that the Luddites are about to hold a meeting. Innocent bystanders are quite likely to be caught up and assaulted or arrested. Players should move on, tweeting a warning to others.

Luddite and Militia activity will be simulated to players by controlling the web site response to QR codes. On a mobile with a barcode reader, the phone reads a URL and allows you to link to that URL. The server you link to downloads .html code, as a web site page. However, if your request occurs at given semi-random times, the server is set to download alternative pages, giving warnings relating to Luddites or the Militia. ('Semi random' is based on the time shown by the remote server. If the 'minutes' value (ie it is 10 minutes past the hour) is divisible by 7, an alternative page will be served. This is to ensure that the normal page will be shown 9 times out of 10, but that if two people read the same QR code in the same place at the same time, they will get the same result – ie they will both get the 'normal' page, or both get the 'warning' page.

6. Game elements and the 'distributed reality'

During the time that the game or derive is running, it will generate different types of data:

1. each time a QR code is used it will report that someone is in the location of that code sticker, and this will be shown on the 'control page'.
2. If that sticker generates a response indicating the presence of Luddites or Militia, an alert for the yard will be placed on the 'control page'
3. Players will be encouraged to tweet comments or progress reports using a common hashtag #hyards
4. Players will also be encouraged to look out for other player teams, and to tweet when they find them.
5. Tweets with the #hyards hashtag will appear on the 'control page'.

Participants will be able to check the control page themselves to gain an overall view of the game: how many other people are playing, where they last were, and any messages they have sent, and to strategise their own play accordingly.

We will deliberately limit the duration of the game, so as to concentrate players in a limited time period, and increase the density of distributed data. Paradoxically, once the Echoes and web site servers are set up and running, the project will continue until they are stopped. The QR codes, which will be on paper stickers physically placed in some of the yards, will of course decay or be removed, but the geolocated sounds should remain geolocated indefinitely. In this sense, the game will continue to be available for a long time – but to remain valid as a game, it will require a supply of players.

For these players, the reward will be to add a third layer of experience to the real and the virtual devices described above. Sentuna assumes that “Virtual games are new worlds for the players waiting to be discovered”.^{xi} He also talks about the game (using Deleuze's term) as a 'phantasm': meaning perhaps the emotions and stories they access, rather than simply computer simulations of other places and people.

However, Deleuze's use of this word is problematical: he seems to change what he means by it, over time, as Villegas Velez investigates in a densely researched paper.^{xii} Leaving aside the

complexities of this argument, though, it is clear that the phantasm is not a simple simulation: it links at a deeper psychological level to the participants. “Perhaps... It does not matter whether the phantasm or the simulacrum is first. What matters is that they keep returning and that they exert their power of superior affirmation” (p 148)

If our derive/ game/ control structure takes off, this 'power of superior affirmation' should allow participants in our 'distributed game' to sense and to some extent internalise a new view of what may be to many a familiar reality.

People who walk past the yards every day may see them in a new way, as part of their own 'Huddersfield ontology' and their own memories and insecurities.

People who are new to Huddersfield may also come to understand the Yards not just as geographical artifacts, but as an expression of the variety and complexities of human life.

References on following page

- i Andrea Freeman, Tim O'Connor, Richard Byrne, Aled Singleton, Frank K Molloy, and the author
- ii Browning and Senior. 'The old yards of Huddersfield', page 3, Huddersfield Civic Society, 1986 – hereafter referred to as HCS
- iii County Borough of Huddersfield: Jubilee Handbook (1897) – available at [https://huddersfield.exposed/wiki/County_Borough_of_Huddersfield:_Jubilee_Handbook_\(1897\)#page/n13/mode/2up](https://huddersfield.exposed/wiki/County_Borough_of_Huddersfield:_Jubilee_Handbook_(1897)#page/n13/mode/2up)
- iv HCS, p 5
- v Frichot, H: 'Holey Space and the Smooth and Striated Body of the Refugee' , accessed via <https://swepub.kb.se/bib/swepub:oai:DiVA.org:kth-63484?tab2=abs>. This annoying reference gives no idea of where it was published, or when. Sorry.
- vi Esmaeli, Blog post, September 2009, accessed via <https://nooshinesmaeli.wordpress.com/2009/09/24/sep-25-the-smooth-and-the-striated-deleuze-and-guattari/>
- vii HCS p 41
- viii Lorentzen, A: 'Cities in the Experience Economy', European Planning Studies vol17 no 6, June 2009.
- ix May, T: 'Gilles Deleuze, an introduction', Cambridge University Press, 2005, p22
- x Potter Berry, R: “A History of the Formation and Development of the Volunteer Infantry”, 1903. Accessed via <https://huddersfield.exposed/api/content/books/ocr/9590/>: p 329/30 describe in some detail an exercise held in 1795.
- xi Sentuna, B: “What kind of an activity is a virtual game? A postmodern approach in relation to concept of phantasm by Deleuze and the philosophy of Huizinga”, SPORT, ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY, 2016, VOL. 10, NO. 1, 42–50, accessed via https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301774568_What_kind_of_an_activity_is_a_virtual_game_A_postmodern_approach_in_relation_to_concept_of_phantasm_by_Deleuze_and_the_philosophy_of_Huizinga/link/5ffaf248a6fdcdbc843e0e6/download
- xii Villegas Velez, d: “Deleuze and the Simulacrum, between the phantasm and fantast, a genealogical reading”, in Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 81 2019, p131-49, accessed via <http://www.homomimeticus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Villegas-Vélez-2019-—Deleuze-and-the-Simulacrum.pdf>