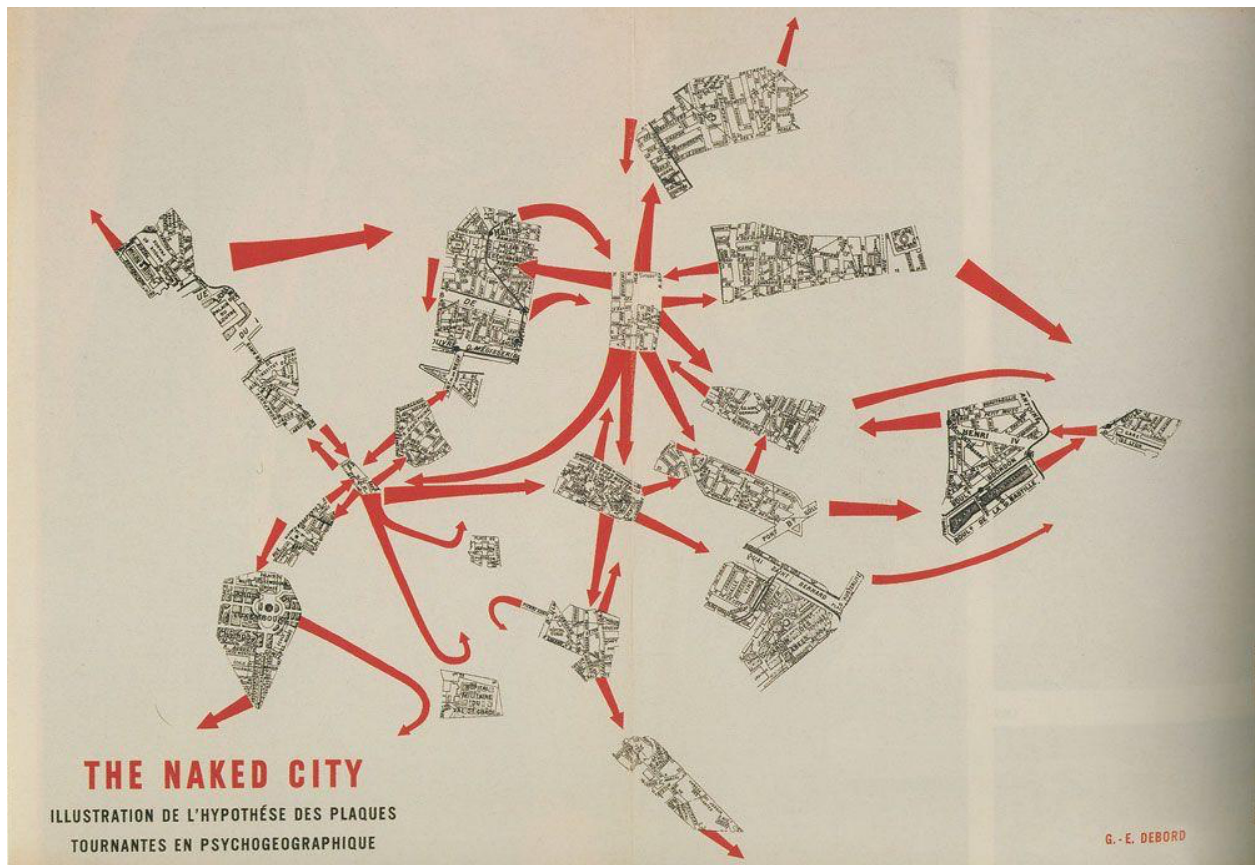


# *Station to Station*

on Teresa Piecuch's *Miejsca do miejsca*

Scott Benzel

*From Kether to Malkuth / There are you / You drive like a demon / From station to station*  
— David Bowie, *Station to Station*



Guy Debord, *The Naked City*, illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographie, 1957

Guy Debord's *The Naked City* (*Hypothetical illustration of rotating plaques in psychogeography*), 1957, features fragments of a city map rearranged and connected by emphatic hand-painted red arrows in perhaps the most singular visual example of Situationist

psychogeography. Kristin Ross calls it a “*careful survey of the residual and interstitial spaces of the city in a systematic search for elements that might be salvaged from the dominant culture, and, once isolated, put to new use in a utopian re-construction of social space.*”<sup>1</sup> The vectors of motion put forth by the arrows, per Tom McDonough, “*suggest forces of movement and “passional” attraction.*”<sup>2</sup>

The multiplicity of routes depicted within Debord’s map reflect the Situationist methodology of psychogeography and its practical application in the *dérive* or *drift*—in which a person or small group moves intuitively through urban space—a response to the Situationist observation that “*everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.*” (Debord)

In *Architecture and Play*, Libero Andreotti explains:

Central to the *dérive* was the awareness of exploring forms of life radically beyond the capitalist work ethic, as seen in the famous graffiti incitement, “*Ne travaillez jamais*” (*Never work*), made by Debord in 1953.

[...]

Debord was careful to distinguish the *dérive* from (its) precedents, emphasizing its active character as “a mode of experimental behavior”... where the art of drifting was a favorite way of cultivating that feeling of being “apart together” that Huizinga described as characteristic of play.

An important precursor to *The Naked City* and Situationist psychogeography generally was Madeleine de Scudéry’s ‘map’ *Carte du Tendre*, (*map of tenderness*), 1653:

Cited in a 1959 article in the journal *Internationale situationniste*, the *Carte* had been created three hundred years earlier in 1653 by Scudéry and the members of her salon and used the metaphor of the spatial journey to trace possible histories of a love affair. Key geographical features, through pathetic fallacy, mark significant moments or emotions (e.g, the “*lac d’indifférence*”). Positing this aristocratic diversion as an antecedent of *The Naked City* is another instance of appropriation, but despite its very different origins, the *Carte* did illustrate the key principle of the psychogeographic map: its figuration as narrative rather than as tool of “universal knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>



Madeleine de Scudéry's *Carte du Tendre*, (map of tenderness), 1653

The *Carte du Tendre* offers a model for visual narrative that is both instantly 'readable' and abstract in the extreme, attempting to trace the possible trajectories of love affairs, emotional entanglements, etc. via cartographic means.

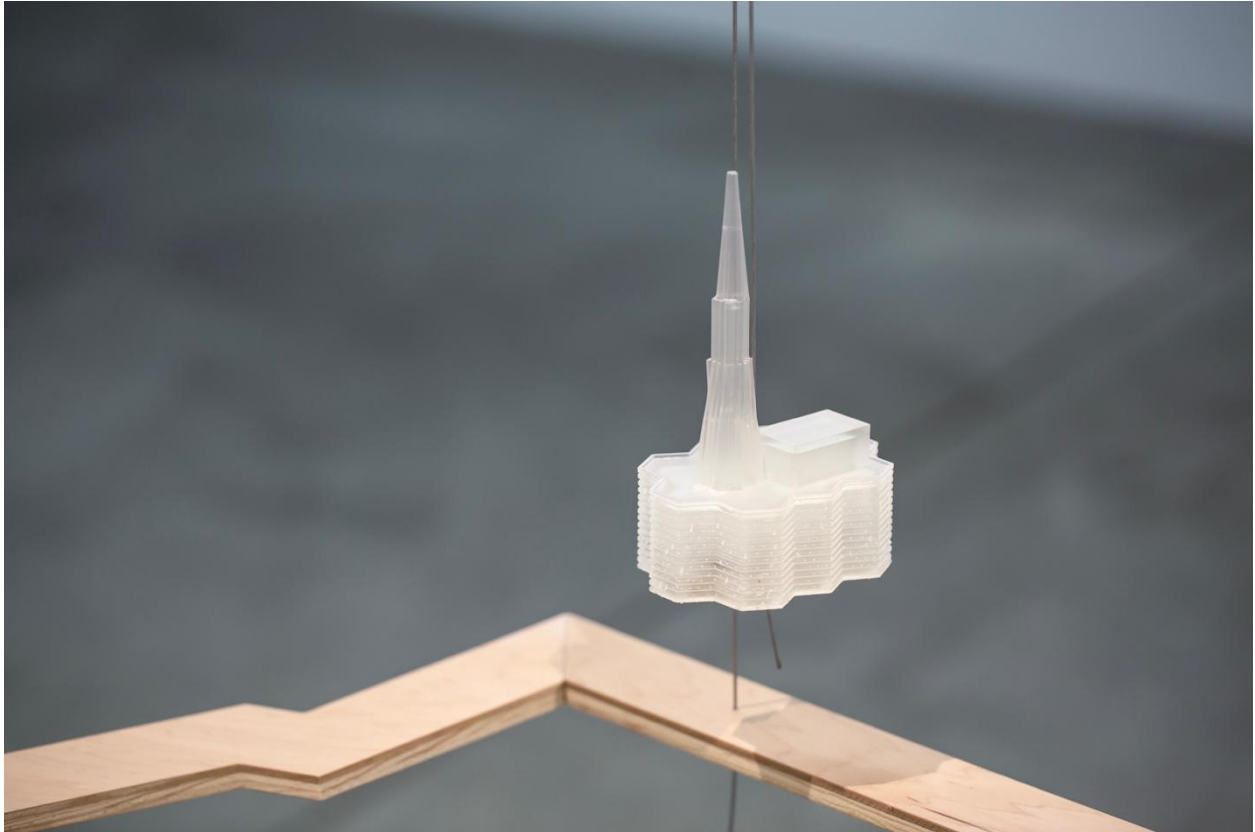
### *Lac D'indifference*

An early video work by architect-turned-artist Teresa Piecuch *From Warszawa to Ujście*, 2021, documents a trip across rural Poland from Warsaw to her hometown Ujście. The image is an extended shot on a handheld iPhone, the soundtrack Polish pop radio and Google Maps spouting directions in English. Rural landscapes sweep by, semi-urban labyrinths are navigated in brief flashes, then back to the landscape. A sort of automotive *dérive* (*drift*) unfolds, throughout which the unseen driver is supplanted, riding shotgun to the directions given by the polite-yet-determined near-human voice of the Google avatar. It's a road film pared down to minimalist, Taylorist-Fordist time-compression, but, as always with effective art, there's 'something extra', something incalculable, unquantifiable, something approaching *emotion*.

In the work's movement through the landscape, the *dérive* is subsumed to the technic: to the process of 'getting somewhere'. It is superficially reminiscent of a passage from a vaguely remembered pop-sci book by Malcolm Gladwell: invoking the *dérive*, Gladwell suggests that writers of popular prose lose themselves, Situationist-like, in the library stacks. Thus the radical anti-work, anti-bourgeois drift of Guy Debord and Co. is reduced to banal technics for finding good ideas for articles. However, there is something else at work in the video, something not quite explicable, that militates against Gladwell's library-roaming instrumentalization of the *dérive*: reminiscent of filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's ideas in *Sculpting in Time*, the piece is simultaneously a document of a passed time and a sort of emotional narrative: a psychogeography of spaces whose continuity blurs in and out of what could be called "emotional space", the space of memory.

Another early work by Piecuch, *From Ujście to Baborówko*, 2021, is comprised of jewel-like translucent 3d prints and a grid of photographs of the brick or wood roadside shrines that dot small towns across Poland. The shrines are examples of architecture at its most vernacular: conceived and constructed by lay-architects and townspeople on the edges of villages, representing both the adjacent communities and a sort of mass agreement that, like Cracker Barrels across the Southern U.S. and outlet malls and truck stops across the rest, the road requires places of worship and respite. After years of satellite social control, the Polish shrines are secular/religious hybrids remarkably unlike the bored-to-death stucco-secular religious architecture of, say, America. Bearing traces of pre-Christian Euro-paganism or the weird Roman herms with surprising-to-the-modern-eye detumescent marble phalli hanging from their pillars, the secularized religiosity of the Polish shrines is somehow more uncanny than that of the current roadside religious scene in America with its huge crosses dwarfing truckstops, billboards shouting "Jesus, he's just like us."

The two works are precursors to—almost the DNA of—*Miejsca do miejsca*, 2023. The piece is derived from the artist's memory of a ten year period—spanning childhood and adolescence—of walking the same route on a near-daily basis and the resulting emotional reactions to certain pieces of architecture. The process that resulted in the work involved training a Stable Diffusion AI model on Piecuch's impressionistic paintings and text relating to the structures, extrapolating the results into three dimensional structures using Rhino (one of the contemporary architects' go-to tools), 3D printing the results in translucent resin, and cutting a diagram of the path from ply on a CNC router. This circuitous route from memory to matter is both arcane and perfectly logical within the frame of Freudian/Surrealist dream logic. The resulting semitransparent, monochromatic 'buildings' look nothing like the originals, resurrected and transformed as they are by Piecuch's memory and the AI's intervention.



## ***Forgotten Desires***

*...drifting through the city for days, weeks, even months at a time, looking for what they called the city's psychogeography. They meant to find signs of... "forgotten desires" —images of play, eccentricity, secret rebellion, creativity, and negation. — Tom McDonough, Guy Debord and the Situationist International*

David Bowie's *Station to Station* begins with the quadraphonic effect of a train arriving in station. The addition of heavy phase to the train's regular beat suggests Bowie rolling in to Cherokee Studios, Hollywood at dusk in his borrowed VW on little to no sleep from the night and day before, near-zombified, beatific, running on automatic following the day's extended Kabbalah, milk, and cocaine sesh. He later claimed to have no memory of recording the album.

The phase-train transitions to a simple, machine-like drumbeat: *motorik*, the incessant beat invented by Jaki Liebezeit of Can and Klaus Dinger of Neu! that also propelled the music of Kraftwerk. Per Dinger: "*It's essentially about life, how you have to keep moving, get on and stay in motion.*"

Bowie's conversion to German *komische* (or *krautrock*, preferred moniker of many of the bands and early chronicler Julian Cope), like so many of the contradictory/syncretic impulses that fueled him, seems to have occurred in L.A., a place—like the new Germany or Europe

envisioned by the komische/krautrock groups—dominated by motion. Except that in L.A. the motion is almost entirely that of the isolated individual or dyad in the car on a freeway vs. that of Europeans masses cutting through the city or landscape by train. Bowie’s heavy stylistic borrowing (always more than a nod, often closer to a landslide or a sinkhole) was sometimes brilliant, sometimes cheeky, often ridiculous, but always reflected or anticipated some larger vibe shift, a fact that often propelled his records up the charts. Recording in LA, Bowie intoned:

*The European canon is here, it’s too late.*

*Drive like a demon*

*From Station to station*

The following year Kraftwerk, on *Trans-Europe Express*, returned the favor:

*From station to station*

*Back to Düsseldorf City*

*Meet Iggy Pop and David Bowie*

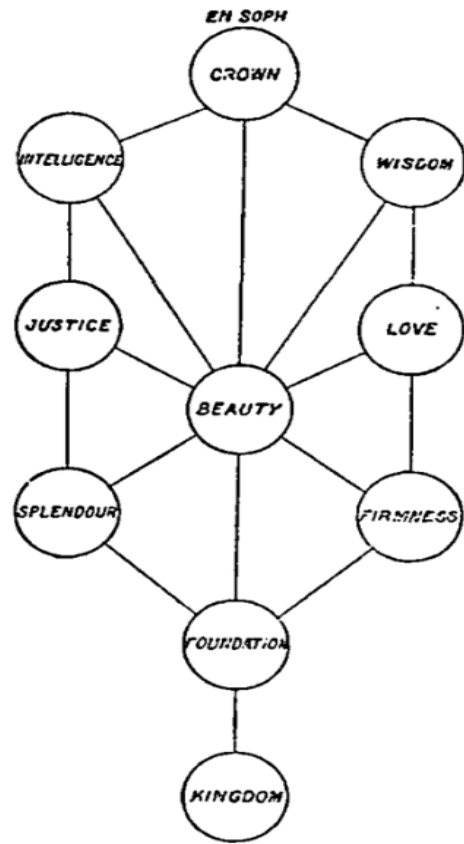
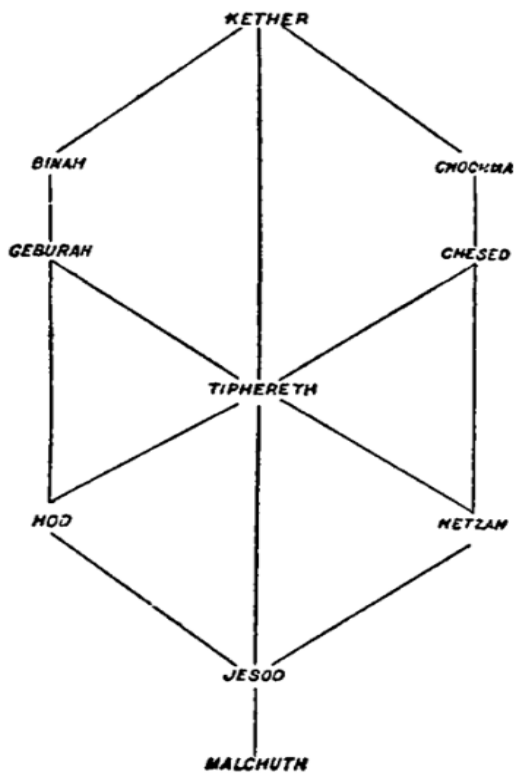
*Trans-Europe Express*

Back to Piecuch’s work: *the European canon is here* — the original structures that she passed were modernist Soviet Bloc edifices, 18th or 19th Century buildings or their recreations built after the devastation of WWII — and the *American canon* as well: “time-saving” electronics (AI), the infinite moebius-strip of California freeway, plastic resin, and ply. An accompanying minimalist soundwork, based on spectral analysis of the sounds of construction sites across Poland and performed on the piano by Piecuch suggests both the (mostly European) Spectralist movement and the (mostly American) Minimalist movement of the 1960’s.

Bowie’s title *Station to Station* contracts an archaic original meaning — a phone call placed directly from one location to another — with trains moving through the landscape (Bowie didn’t fly, he arrived in LA from New York by train) from station to station and the phrase’s more mystical possibilities: the Christian Stations of the Cross and the movements of the adept between the Sephiroth on the Kabbalistic tree-of-life that Bowie was obsessively studying at the time.



The lyric *One magic movement / from Kether to Malkuth* suggests the adept's journey from the topmost Sephiroth, *Kether, the Crown*, to the lowest, *Malkuth, the Kingdom*, or Matter, a downward-spiraling express route from pure transcendence to the lowest material realm...







Teresa Picuch, *Miejsca do miejsca*, 2023, installation view

## ***Memory / Matter***

*Proust...spoke of raising 'a vast edifice of memories', and that seems to me to be what cinema is called to do. It could be said to be the ideal manifestation of the Japanese concept of saba<sup>4</sup>; for, as it masters this completely new material—time—it becomes, in the fullest sense, a new muse.*

— Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

In his homage to the thought of Henri Bergson, Deleuze employs the term *contraction* to apply his image of memory as geological layering and compression to Bergson's idea of duration—the continuation of the past in the present:

Bergson always presents...memory and duration in two ways: “the conservation and preservation of the past in the present.” Or else “whether the present distinctly contains the ever-growing image of the past, or whether by its continual changing of quality attests rather to the increasingly heavy burden dragged along behind one the older one grows.” Or again: “memory in these two forms, covering as it does with a cloak of recollections a core of immediate perception, and also contracting a number of external moments.”<sup>5</sup>

*Miejsca do miejsca* toggles constantly between memory and invention, between the concrete accumulation and contraction of lived time and artistic invention, in a seeming attempt to, in some small way, “re-create” (as in ‘to alter’ but also ‘to revive’) the past. The model of a path walked almost daily for a decade marked out in CNC-cut ply, the ghostly 3d printed models of buildings—not the actual architecture but the output of an AI trained on impressionistic paintings made of memories of the feeling that the buildings invoked.

With this highly subjective but automated process of abstraction, the original material form of the buildings is lost, like lost wax in the casting process or the edges of the frame in the flashback sequences of old films, dissipating like vapor. So radical is the transformation, if we were to walk this path today, we wouldn’t recognize a single building represented here. And yet here they are, stubborn in their materiality, products of memory, AI, and plastic.

When John von Neumann introduced memory into computation with the Von Neumann architecture, the power of the early machines was expanded significantly. This capacity for storing programs and self-modifying code allows for changing code ‘on-the-fly’, rendering that which was previously fixed malleable, flexible and interactive. With generative AI, the possibilities for self-modification and interaction have been massively expanded, including the possibility of a previously unimagined level of psychic investment by humans:

An emotion cannot be encoded, nor does it pass into the code; it is not the code. However, it can influence the way in which the code is thought and written. The following objection might be raised: “We can say the same thing about other objects. After all, we also project our anxieties onto religious symbols or some other thing: what is the difference?” The difference lies in the distinction between projection and projective identification. The latter is a dialogue, an exchange that implies two autonomous actors capable of autonomous response and behavior. No symbol is an autonomous actor. It might be an object onto which we project our anxieties, but it cannot respond. The AI case is different: the human being translates parts of itself into AI and asks AI for an answer, a treatment of these parts, and AI can reply in a useful and meaningful way.

On the passage of memory to matter, Deleuze argues that “recollections do not have to be preserved anywhere other than “in” duration. *Recollection therefore is preserved in itself*”. The brain is composed of matter and therefore in the same state of flux as all matter:

There cannot be any difference in kind between the other states of matter and the brain. For in the latter everything is movement, as in the pure perception that it determines. (And yet the term movement obviously must not be understood in the sense of enduring movement, but on the contrary as an “instantaneous section.”)

Piecuch’s *Miejsca do miejsca* traces a physical path but also the journey of matter to memory and back, invoking both Proust’s ‘*vast edifice of memories*’ and a sense of the *uncanny* in its admixture of human memory and technology. That she does this by way of tools like Stable

Diffusion, Rhino, a 3D printer, and a CNC router suggests something about the current moment and its relationship to technology, to memory, to the virtuality/actuality of time itself. Deleuze:

We have great difficulty in understanding a survival of the past in itself because we believe that the past is no longer, that it has ceased to be. We have thus confused Being with being-present. Nevertheless, the present *is not*; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It *is not*, but it acts.

The virtual Being of the past makes it no less *real* than present experience. Because the present is always becoming, in motion, *motorik*, Deleuze suggests that the distinction between past and present is false. Sherry Turkle reminds us that we are still new to this moment of the technological actualization of the virtual. New to our psychological interactions with machines and still grappling with a time not so distant:

... when people from all walks of life (not just computer scientists and artificial intelligence researchers) were first confronted with machines whose behavior and mode of operation invited psychological interpretation and that, at the same time, incited them to think differently about human thought, memory, and understanding. In consequence, they came to see both their minds and computational machines as strangely unfamiliar or “uncanny” in the sense that Sigmund Freud had defined it. For Freud, the uncanny (das Unheimliche) was that which is “known of old and long familiar” seen anew, as strangely unfamiliar.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kristin Ross, *Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview, Guy Debord and The Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Tom McDonough, *Introduction*, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tom McDonough, *Situationist Space*, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1989: “Tarkovsky: his account of Japan, the journalist Ovchinnikov wrote: 'It is considered that time, per se, helps to make known the essence of things. The Japanese therefore see a particular charm in the evidence of old age. They are attracted to the darkened tone of an old tree, the ruggedness of a stone, or even the scruffy look of a picture whose edges have been handled by a great many people. To all these signs of age they give the name, saba, which literally means "rust". Saba, then, is a natural rustiness, the charm of olden days, the stamp of time. [or patina]. Saba, as an element of beauty, embodies the link between art and nature. In a sense the Japanese could be said to be trying to master time aesthetically.’”

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*. New York, Zone Books, 1991

<sup>6</sup> Luca M. Possati, *The Algorithmic Unconscious*. London: Routledge, 2021

<sup>7</sup> Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1984

