

Presentation notes (7 min)

1

Through my Unit 2 journey, walking has become a practice for me to explore the surrounding space.

From tube to home and home to tube, sequences of elements come into my sight and fade away repetitively as the urban landscape unfolds into a dynamic space through my movement.

2

In Walking as a Research Practice, walking is “consciously deciding how to put our body into motion within an environment” to uncover “the bodies of knowledge sequestered in the phenomena that make up a site of research.” For me, walking offers a process to develop a sensibility towards the normalised spatial elements that I'm responding to and then to better understand urban spaces as a constructed reality instead of an obscure background.

3

How did my focus on space grow? Yes, it emerged from passing experiences, but articulating it began with a specific moment when I gazed at a railing and felt uncertain. It is a mundane structure, dividing up the space, but what does it do to my perception, and what don't I know about it? Maybe it's just me, but not knowing something trivial and mundane—especially when it's involved in setting rules—I feel anxious. This uncertainty has pushed me into finding out: using language, diagrams, and, later, walking and mapping.

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The first attempt was to write various definitions. The written language here offers a broad framework for gathering unspecialised knowledge around the railing. Although language is a tool for clarifying understanding, it also distances the railing from its materiality.

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This led me to another question: Can the form of knowledge diagrams inspire a holistic perspective, as I hope it will, that fills in what language alone cannot convey? Here, I extracted two references: an encyclopedia diagram called A Figurative System of Human Knowledge and the diagrams on "personal theory" from The World Explained by Erick Beltran, which shows a dynamic and complex process of individuals making sense of the world through "hunches, makeshift ideas, crude understandings and impromptu explanations...the limited knowledge and experience we have at hand."

8

The two references reveal the gap between the ambition to know everything and the complex, fragmented process of our cognition. While I used graphical expressions to illustrate the conflict between the two, I was also thinking about diagramming as a method, not just a tool for distilling and delivering information through some shared foundations but also exposing the structure or conventions through which we build understanding. By either embracing or resisting these conventions, we shape how we talk about and perceive reality.

9/10

Building on this perspective of seeing diagrams, along with my previous interest in space and spatial elements, I begin to see walking and mapping as methods, and my enquiry becomes: Can rethinking the visual conventions of maps inspire new approaches to designing documents for walking practices, which prompt a new perspective on experiencing and exploring urban spaces?

11

To me, mapping is about "selecting" and "representing". As a curious walker, the process of "selecting" opens and then shaves directions for my walking practice into the process of looking at the control mechanisms in the city. (Click!) As a graphic designer, I'm also questioning the conventional perspectives and geographical narratives in maps. Guy Debord's psychogeographic map, The Naked City, connects blocks of Paris using red arrows and encourages drifting to explore space. It shows the potential of maps for delivering political and social critique through an alternative "representing".

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This led me to my current studio project. In resistance to the conventional bird-eye view and image-dominated mapping, which feeds our impulse to totalise, I aim to emphasise the perspective of the pedestrian moving through the city. It's a document of a walk—an individual narrative with no set directions, where the scale is based on time spent walking. The entire document can be seen as a sample slice of the pedestrian's analysis of the city along their path, with each spread revealing a smaller segment captured within just a few steps.

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I worked on the form of the publication, including a continuous folding, a hand-held paper size, a reading order that creates a sense of moving forward, and thin paper that allows the preceding and following pages to be visible, creating a sense of continuity. Through these design choices, I can see how graphic design can introduce subjectivity to the act of mapping, shaping the experience of space and time through the properties of the publication.

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The text and its layout represent the negotiations between the pedestrian and the surrounding space, focusing on a moving and sensing body, fleeting thoughts, and emerging questions. Walking can be a critical tool for building an understanding of urban spaces. Along with the mapping and writing, my curiosity about spatial control mechanisms grows. Now my question is: How can graphic design practice critique the subtle power dynamics presented by these spatial arrangements?