

notes on The Knowledge [or 'space on the run']

These notes examine The Knowledge from three different perspectives (scales); as a sculptural object viewed from above (as in plan), as a perceptual entity viewed through use and inhabitation, (seen from within), and lastly on an urban scale, as a potentially strategic mode of operation (contextualized within its wider landscape).

Scale 1.1: As a sculptural object, looked at from above, as in plan.

The Knowledge consists of learning 320 routes or runs mapped across an area within a six mile radius of Charing Cross. Each run has a start and end point. Students of The Knowledge must not only learn the route connecting the beginning and the end of the run but a minimum of 8 points around both these sites - [totalling total of 16 per run.] During appearances - where students are called to the PCO and tested on their knowledge - potential cabbies are asked by examiners to devise a new route between two randomly chosen points. On completing The Knowledge an approximate of 30,000 streets will have been memorized as a networked configuration in the mind capable of generating a number of potential paths on demand. It is not, as the induction leader at knowledge college articulated, 'about the learning the runs but about learning the map, the runs simply allow you to do that.' On arrival at run 320 the knowledge student will have travelled a total distance of 26,000 miles - the equivalent of going round the world.

The Knowledge spatializes the city in a networked manner, expressing it through connections recognized as multiple layers of connectivity between specific places and nodal points. Knowledge points constitute anything from landmarks to monuments, to hospitals, to restaurants, to city liveries, to housing estates. Within the syntax of The Knowledge, hierarchies between these locations is flattened, they are simply generative spatial anchors. The Knowledge reads the city not as a linear grid along causal lines but as a synthesis of a variety of points organized into an organic field. The one element of linearity in it, the line or route between points, is subordinate to its own status as a connecting vector; its main importance lies in its mobility, in how it might potentially connect the network of points in which its embedded.

As a total system, The Knowledge is destinationless. Once complete and stored in mind as a memory of the shape of city, the 320 fixed routes undertaken to learn it (and thereby form network in the mind) are discarded. Knowledge students are not asked routes they have learnt but random point to point configuration. The trajectories that emerge between points from the cabbie who has passed his knowledge are, similarly, not fixed but always variable and redirected by passing and random encounter with the passenger. The cabbie visualizes The Knowledge in the mind utilizing it as a generative tool to carve out a new trajectories. The routes prescribed in its initial accumulation are simply preliminary methodologies; adopted only to allow for total construction of the network in the mind, in order that, once sculpted and memorized, it will function to generate the most efficient route between related points.

Implicit to The Knowledge is a sense of space as potential; the cabbie is constantly actualizing potential routes within the city. Inherent to the system then, is a certain performativity, emerging both from the agency of the cabbie in his role as reader and activator of possible routes and in that his choice results in an active spacing of the city. Space is relationally constituted by spontaneous assemblages that, for a temporary moment, pull certain places into proximity with one another. Godfather of the short cut, the cabbie splices and shatters the geometry of the urban grid into a cacophony of potential paths and trajectories. The Knowledge is the generative tool that facilitates this transitory, mobile and ephemeral re-spacing of the urban grid.

To hack, which means to chop or to write and in the sense of a computer programme to

[illegally] gain access and recode also means to work as a cabbie. Post modern flaneurs, cabbies are experts in the hacking of the city's code, reconfiguring and rewriting space as they pass through it. As a system of orientation and navigation it can be read as a softly subvertive navigatory device; a complex mathematics of the everyday that fractures the geometry of the urban landscape by articulating the muted counter cartographies that lie dormant within it.

Scale 1.2: As a mode of inhabitation, seen from within.

As mode of inhabitation within the urban the knowledge presents a much more visceral and experiential perceptual mode of engaging with space than a traditional visual or Cartesian, architectural enframing of it. The cabbie is rooted in the city and not above it, his is a sonorous urbanism, replete with a kind of aurality throughout, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. In a literal sense, the cab is an architecture premised on the conversation. We hail a cab, calling it over to us, the cabbie is a listener, a speaker. To get in cab is more likely than not to engage in confessional banter with its driver and the cab itself is a kind of roaming urban soundmark.

knowledge students navigate the city on hondaC90's with directions written in textual form affixed to plastic clipboards and are dissuaded from using maps; the point is not to engage with the city through an abstract diagram but to experience it a more perceptual fashion. Within the system of The Knowledge itself a tradition of 'calling over' exists, wherein after the completion of the days run[s], the students must call them over, reciting them out loud. Partners form to call over runs to one another, using recital and repetition in preparation for appearances at the Public Carriage Office. Knowledge Point on Caledonian Road, one of several taxi universities students may attend and whose curriculum includes a series of mnemonic devices to aid in their endeavour, is filled with pairs of men and the odd woman aurally reciting sets of directions to one another. Entering the room is to be surrounded by the city fragmented and auralized into set of sentences and street names, a veritable orchestra performing the city as text..Thespatialpractic- The spatial practices of the knowledge re-invigorate impoverished Cartesian conceptions of space and tend towards encounters with the city that seem much more about experiencing the rythmic echoes of its bustling urbanity than they are about its pictorial enframing.

As a mnemonic device the knowledge is strikingly similar in its architecture to Ars Memoria, the ancient roman mnemonic technique utilized to aid orators in the narration and recollection of text. Ars Memoria functioned by the student creating an imaginary map of the city or the house in the mind and placing themes or blocks of text in the rooms or buildings of the imaginary space. Recalling the text was therefore a matter of journeying through this space, be it the city or the home, with the itinerary or passage triggering the content placed inside the spaces as and when passed by. This mental configuration allowed for a necessarily non-linear access to its content, that is to say if the student were to choose a different route through his imaginary space, he could recall the text in a different order. It was, then, a perceptual mode based inherently on simultaneity rather than linearity. The mind of student studying The Knowledge, like that of the Ars Memoria student, is filled with a network of locations and points, a database whose information can be retrieved in multiple configurations and in which connections are made between points via variable trajectories. Like the imaginary city in the mind of the Ars Memoria student, The Knowledge is an mobile algorithm imposed on the city, a set of instructions for remembering, that in its application generates a complex network of simultaneous points positioned in relation to one another, capable of being recalled in any configuration simply by journeying mentally between them.

As a non sequential ordering of space in which a multiplicity of conflicting and competing paths present themselves as potential trajectories at any one time, The Knowledge produces a fundamentally networked subjectivity, one that is predicated much more on resonance and simultaneity than the linear logic of visual or cartesian space. Navigating the city through The Knowledge means not looking down on it from above as in plan, but traversing it as if a section, in real time with the whole body, not so much following fixed trajectories but extracting them. A writerly textuality in the Barthes sense of the term, the Knowledge user does not encounter or frame space as an 'immobilized mass' but 'takes part in the world rather than taking aim at it'. The knowledge user rejects a scopic engagement with the world in favour of embodying

himself within it; His is an anthropological poetic and mythic experience of space, a spatial practice 'foreign to the geometrical' or 'geographical space of visual panoptic and theoretical constructions'.

Scale 1:3: As an urban strategy, contextualized within its wider landscape. The Knowledge is part of a large existing network comprised of numerous heterogeneous components, brought together into a coherent mobile ecology. Its institutional bodies include the Public Carriage Office, a host of taxi universities and the LTI, the monopoly on taxi vehicle manufacture in the UK. Its support systems include both formal 'taxi shelters', and a number of informal shelters comprised of additional cafes and coffee huts that have come to orientate specifically around cab culture. Newspapers, publications, community websites and dedicated garages also exist to service and support the needs of the network.

The network is to a large degree a self-regulating one, the PCO is the only institutional body that connects directly to the taxi network, handling the day to day licensing requirements of its drivers and vehicles, while the affixing of fares is handled by government. Interestingly the taxi meter, which in other countries constitutes a monitoring device and represents the presence of state control within the cab, in the London cab, is simply a measuring device, in place to help the cabbie calculate the fare. Accordingly fares are not declared in their entirety to any public body post their collection, and in fact the PCO have never been able to accurately calculate what the cabbie makes on an annual basis. Unlike any other transport facility, the taxi network organizes itself. The universities are run by ex cabbies, the official shelters managed by an independent charity set up to maintain them and the unofficial shelters spontaneous affairs run by local entrepreneurs. The innumerable media supports are similarly run by cabbies. There is no central body that regulates working hours or dictates 'company' policy. The cabbie is his own boss, owns or rents his cab, is economically responsible for its maintenance.

The network in which The Knowledge sits is constituted by a quasi autonomous field of relation and co-operation. Its constituent parts are highly mobile, in a literal sense, in terms of the taxi itself and its theoretically portable shelters and more abstractly in that its organisation is dynamic and changing; essentially members of the public, its own members, initiate and run its support systems. The Knowledge itself, along with its accompanying application procedure, is the only border to the larger network of which it is a part, a rite of passage into a decidedly heterotopic space.

A siteless site, a mobile, networked configuration The Knowledge and the larger network contained within its borders, can be considered heterotopic in that as an institution, to a large degree, it is a geographic fiction. Its continued existence despite the arrival of technologies that render it obsolete, further suggest it is simply about the maintenance of a quasi-autonomous culture that despite its sometime reputation as a white, male, paternalistic, affair allows for an alternative mode of living and different way of being in the city, one that erodes the prescribed codes of labour and dictates its own being in space. Not consciously formulated as a paradigm of resistance by its architects, but more an accidental activism collaboratively elaborated by its fluid membership, the taxi network, represents a kind of post cartesian territorial occupation of the urban that gently evades its normative spatial productions of site and subjectivity. Not so much a revolutionary space of opposition but more a kind of defiant parochialism, the taxi network is an autopoietic machine, a micro capitalism that's operational and self maintaining, continually engendering and specifying its own organization and its own limits.

appendix 1: cabbie lingo.

Be on foul

vb.

to exceed the number of cabs allowed on a rank

Bilker

n.

a person who seeks to defraud a driver of his
Or her fare

Bowler Hat

n.

a business man

Broom off

v.

to refuse to take a passenger

Butter Boy

n.

a new cabbie

Cotton

n.

the most direct route between two points

~ing up

vb.

to practice runs with your call over partner

Face

n. a slightly disreputable cabby specializing in airport pickups.

Gasworks

n.pl

the houses of parliament

Him and Her

n. pl
a couple

Kipper season

n.
a period when trade is slack

Musher

n.
an owner - driver as opposed to a cabby who rents his cab

Oranges and Lemons

n. Pl
the major arterial routes marked on the map in orange and yellow

Point

n.
a place of interest that must be learnt to pass the knowledge

Req

n. [abbr.]
requisition

Run

n.
one of the 320 routes contained in the blud book that must a cabby must learn to pass the knowledge

to call a ~

vb.
to rectie the route naming every street between the start and the finish point

Single Pin

n.
a single person

Stopper

n.
a particularly difficult run

The Drop

n.
the decrease in the amount of intervals between appearances at the public carriage office

Turn Around

n.
a run involving reaching a destination on the right hand side of a major road with prohibited right turns which requires the knowledge student to know how and where they can turn around legally

Wangle

n. & vb.
a scam perpetrated by garages whereby the garage lends a knowledge student a cab for 21 days in order for the student to take the driving test on condition that the student rents a cab from the garage after he or she has obtained a license.

Wedding cake

n.
the queen victoria monument in front of buckingham palace

Woosher

n.
someone who calls a run so fast its not possible to follow

