

# **Title:** The City as a Laboratory of Shadows: Exposing Secret Histories While Thinking of the Future

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**Architecture\_media\_politics\_society. vol. 4, no.1.**

January 2014

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## **Abstract:**

This paper lays out a particular way of ‘seeing’ or looking at cities – one that allows us to see beneath the physical surface of buildings and infrastructure and which thus opens the door to considering the ‘shadows’ of a city as a source of inspiration. In these shadows, it suggests, we can see the city as a ‘laboratory of ideas.’ Specifically, the paper examines the city of Liverpool but its themes are applicable worldwide. It aims to expose Liverpool’s ‘poetic’ qualities and suggests that those best placed to understand it, and guide its development, may not be architects or planners, but rather those that inhabit it most intensely – its people. As a result, the paper becomes a tale about time and movement and the everyday (and night) life of a port city with a history stretching back over centuries.

Despite this history, the city has over the past two decades received a whole range of development grants that have and are, right now, changing the physical nature of its urban environment radically. In the context of these physical, externally funded changes to the city’s make-up that mirror conditions found in cities across the world, it is perhaps more important than ever to redirect our thoughts to what lies beneath the surface – to the city’s social, economic and cultural heart. The thinking and experience that underlies this suggestion began in the 1960s when architecture was taught alongside sociology. Imagine a radical School of Art & Design with a sociologist on the staff, in which Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses and Misuses of Literacy* was on the agenda, and the writings of the Marxist social theorist Raymond Williams were essential reading – *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in particular. This author comes out of this tradition, and it is in this tradition that this paper sees the future of cities to be a future without architects or, at least, a future in which architects do not dictate to the people for whom they design. It is an argument applicable across the globe.