

**THE CONTEMPORARY DÉRIVE: A PARTIAL REVIEW OF ISSUES CONCERNING  
THE CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY***Phil Smith<sup>1</sup>*Senior Research Associate, Faculty of Arts, University of Plymouth  
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In 1972 the body of the situationist project lay in a Paris gutter beneath the fading graffiti of 1969: 'Same Again This Year'. The body was lifeless, its latest wound self-inflicted.

The Paris 'événements' of 1968 had propelled the situationists to somewhere close to the leadership of a pre-revolutionary movement, popularizing their ideas on the back of a wave of discussion, fighting, slogan-production and leaflet-printing. They had pointed to the free landscape that lay beneath the pavements – 'sous les pavés, la plage' - and students and workers had ripped up those pavements, deploying the surplus as ammunition. Utopian thinking and street-fighting briefly went hand in hand. So far, so generally assumed.

Opportunities are things from which revolutionaries have much to fear. What the situationists gained in breadth of distribution, they lost in temporality: their critique of everyday life and their analysis of the society of the spectacle were floated free from the deep structures they aspired to explain and change, and were, for a brief time, nailed to a superficial eventness. Turbulence exposed the stasis at the heart of situationist elitism. The danger of making half a revolution was expressed, this time, not in executions and punishments, but in nostalgia and instant history. Refusing, heroically, to participate in their heritage, the situationists dissolved their organization.

When Guy Debord pulled the trigger in 1972 it was to wound what he clearly regarded as already a corpse. He would remark later that the significant work of the group had been done by the late 1950s, the key tactics already in place: the 'drift' or

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<sup>1</sup> Mais informações: <http://www.mis-guide.com/ws/documentation.html>

dérive, an exploratory, destinationless wander through city streets, detecting and mapping ambiances; psychogeography, the mapping and describing of what would usually be taken for 'subjective' associations and emotions ingrained in the urban structure and texture and their effect upon people in those spaces; the making of 'situations', playful creations of an active life prefigurative of a utopian remaking of social relations; détournement, the transforming of dead art into a vivid social force by its disassembling and mis-re-application; and, in a complementary manoeuvre, unitary urbanism, the re-sculpting of the city for coherent and self-willed trajectories in resistance to the city's consumption in fragments.

All this lay dead in the gutter. Then, in 1994, Debord shot the corpse again, spectacularly, flattening it into a representation. Of himself. But if it was already twice dead by then, who were the original killers? And are they still at large? The prime (and usual) suspects are 'Art' and 'Architecture' (meander and straight line, rhizome and linearity; interchangeable *künstler namen*). Agencies apparently without agents; suitable assassins for a body without the characteristics of an organism.

What the situationists *had* added to their tactics after the 1950s was a grammatically conscientious and elegant prose account of their foundational critique of social relations, the spectacle: a re-territorializing of capital in which ideology, in the Marxist sense of images and ideas in the last instance serving and reproducing the interests of a capital-owning class, became itself the very substance and mechanics of the production of surplus value. Revolutionaries no longer had an enemy 'elsewhere', in officers' quarters, ministries, parliaments, company boardrooms, vestries. Instead the motion of exchange and communication had become agented. Not producers alienated from their products, but acts of production subjected to their representations, a spectacle in which what was most powerful was what showed itself. The practice of revolutionary art had become an irrelevance to revolution, and the only refuge for life.

The situationists' tactics were not sufficient to protect them from the spectacle. Nevertheless, these tactics have been widely rifled and appropriated; the most popular objects of selective desire: *dérive* and psychogeography. The other side of appropriation is exclusionary citation, a recent example being Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography* (2006) (1), which attempts to wrench psychogeography from its theoretical frame in the critique of the spectacle. Coverley follows Rebecca Solnit's lead in *Wanderlust* (2), contemptuously dismisses Debord as a comic neo-flâneur (3), detaching psychogeography from politics and origins; the situationist project a backdrop for a neo-romantic literature. Coverley is not alone, his tone echoed in Geoff Nicholson's *The Lost Art of Walking* (2008); even Andy Merrifield, a sympathetic biographer of Debord, perpetuates this flâneurizing of the situationists, describing the *dérive* as 'a dreamy trek'. (4)

*Psychogeography* ends, 'exemplarily', with a chapter on some of the 'names' of

contemporary anglo-psychogeographical art; exchanging motion for text, dispersed geography for a capitalized cultural property value.

Such is the state of the contemporary *dérive* within spectacular cultural relations; at the mercy of the subject of its own critique, in need of something more than a 'return' to the corpse in the gutter or to nostalgic Parisian 'drifts'. However, it benefits by such returns, even by the ascendancy of contemporary psychogeographical heroes. More importantly, by the sheer cheek of their plundering of situationist tactics and their shaking free from (and, thus, setting free of) theory, these luminaries set things in motion. A motion which, nostalgic or iconoclastic, other contemporary *dérivistes* should resist the temptation to repudiate, but rather to add to with new masses and new orbits, attracting, unashamed, both spectres and activisms. For the one without its many others is resource-less within the matrix of spectacular relations.

### The Petard

This paper attempts to make a path through the tangled landscape of varied contemporary practices inspired by and reactive to the *dérive*. Although the number of practices cited is limited, the intention is to make an exemplary critical journey that reflects, not least in its cul-de-sacs and spaghetti junctions, a problematic and contradictory terrain.



Blue Boy Walks, Wrights & Sites for Spacex Gallery, Exeter, UK, 2004

While the arguments of the situationists are fundamental to the paper, the task is not to measure proximity to the original, but relate the contradictions in contemporary practices to the contradictions in the original, charting the two sets of motions about each other.

A key contradiction in the original *dérive* was that between its destination-less, a-functional route – ‘the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground)’ - and its instrumental search for ‘the variety of possible combinations of ambiances, analogous to the blending of pure chemicals in an infinite number of mixtures’. (5) Such a tension between an ‘aimless stroll’ and an instrument of urban transformation is not a problem within the *dérive*, it is *the work of it*, just as the imbalance between the situationists’ bold ecological aspiration to ‘domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities’ and their uncertain, accompanying gesture towards playful-constructive behaviour’ (6) gives an inclination to the grounds for the *dérive*, a sloping between the ‘constant currents, fixed points and vortexes’ (7) of the city and their transformation into a unified psychogeographic playground, a site for a permanent *dérive* across quarters of bold, contrasting ambiances; crudely, a discrepancy between ends and means. The *dérive* appeared to turn back on itself and bite its own tail.

If ‘(S)eparation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle’ (8), then it would seem logical for the urbanism of the situationist resistance to be a unitary one. However, to then add to that unitary urbanism the upgrading of the functional *dérive* to a permanent ‘way of life’ (a posture first adopted by Gilles Ivain, on the fringes of Lettrism) is to crowd the playful utopianism of ambient mixtures. Hence this critical journey resumes with a delicate manoeuvre of re-separation (of the head from the tail), with the identification of an affordance for the *dérive* to wander from its theoretical roots and to find in the trajectory of ‘walking as art’ an escape clause from its self-negation. Then, with so much of Debord’s critique now accommodated as a default mode for the spectacle, and with the project of site-specificity questioned, a double-seeing, mobile and provisional, is necessary in the subsequent parts of the paper, to find some purchase on the spaces of the ‘drift’; in the periphery of the group *dérive*, in the voids of superfluous places, in the deferral between reconciliation and antagonism (with ‘and and and’ rather than sharp difference as a response to shortcomings) and in an asymmetrical strategy with a continuing role for a ludic psychogeography.

### The Killers

The answer to the question ‘who killed the situationists?’ is only important because there is a living, stumbling heritage to fight over, part of which is ‘the contemporary *dérive*’. The corpse walks. Indeed, it is an increasingly vivid and disputed



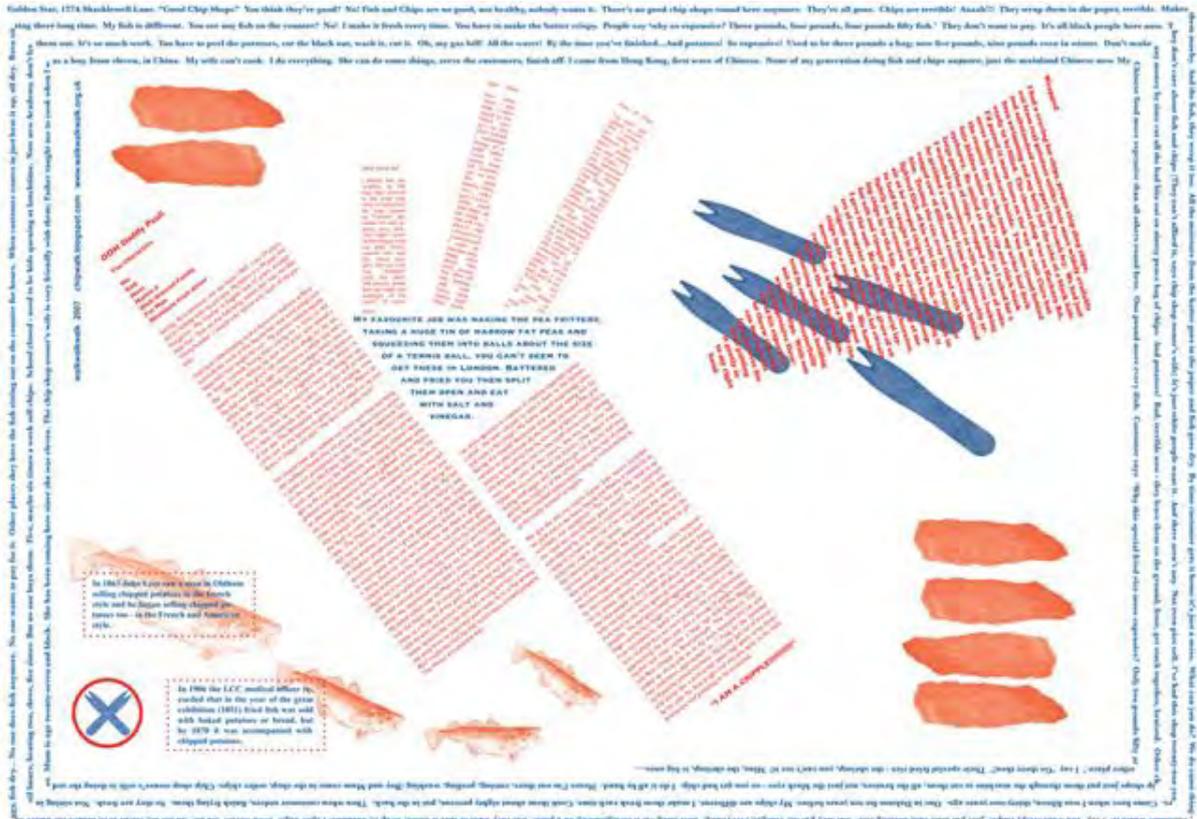
cadaver, greeted, in decentralized spaces, as a miraculous fulcrum around which all sorts of contemporary art practices and social activism might wind, lever and brace themselves. Questions of assassination and definition quickly become of importance to these new dérivistes, themselves soon under suspicion of resurrectionism. This is a doubly grave charge, for not only does their victim walk, a cannibalistic death on legs, but the value of their precious spoils, separated from the corpse of revolutionary politics, is always subject to the excessive appetites of others.

And yet, it seems that almost because of, rather than despite, the sclerosis and fragmented demise of the situationists, the dérive has a new 'permission' – an 'affordance' – to wander from its theoretical, anti-aesthetic roots.

A distinctive anglo-psychogeographical literature, in part characterised by its neo-romancing of the occult, has emerged from dérive-like walking. Unfortunately, the bulkiness of Iain Sinclair's later prose and his referential convenience has obscured the range of this literature, which includes the sonic 'workings' of the committedly magickal Alan Moore and Tim Perkins (9), Grant Morrison's Gnostic graphic novel series *The Invisibles* explicitly referencing the dérive in *You Say You Want A Revolution* (1996), the quotidian 'found' texts in the work of the poet Will Morris (10), and the vernacular posters and chip-papers of Gale Burton, Serena Korda and Clare Qualmann of walkwalkwalk. Once the occult frame is, at least, tilted, a more geographically and generically diverse set of preoccupations emerge. There are festivals of urban exploratory walking like the annual *Conflux* in New York or the ROAM symposium and festival of walking at Loughborough, UK in 2008. Psychogeographical influence is explicit in contemporary music-making, evident in albums like The Future Sound of London's *Dead Cities* (11) or John Foxx's *Tiny Colour Movies* (12). There has long been a momentum in site-specific theatre and performance, within which contradictory currents emphasize the spectacular and the ambient qualities of site. Site-based performance modules are taught at UK universities and colleges such as those at Plymouth, Dartington, Aberystwyth, Lancaster and Exeter, and site-based performative visual art in the Arts In Context module at The New School in New York; all with reference to the dérive. There are anti-architectural projects driven by the dérive, like those of the Stalker group based in Rome, seizing on space for the temporary use of marginalised groups. Walking in the city has once more become a political activism, expressed in the tensions at annual Walk 21 conferences. In Liverpool, UK, an Anglican priest, John Davies, explicitly uses dérive-like wanders to minister to his parish. In Paris, planner Frédéric Dufaux takes his students on 'drifts' to understand the unseens of local communities. Kinga Araya uses prostheses to re-insert body into landscape in her pedestrian practice, a dialogue with exile. A counterpoint to the ordered tourist gaze

becomes explicit in détourned guide-books like Anna Best's *Occasional Sights – a London guidebook of missed opportunities and things that aren't always there* (13), the Wrights & Sites 'Mis-Guides' to Exeter and Anywhere (14), and Kate Pocrass's *Mundane Journeys* in San Francisco.

REVISTA DIGITAL DE TECNOLOGIAS COGNITIVAS



Limited edition litho printed chip paper, 42 x 59 cm  
© walkwalkwalk, Gail Burton, Serena Korda & Clare Qualmann, 2007

These activists, artists and architects represent a sliver of the total under suspicion. The ranks of the Situationist International harboured their ancestral agents: Asger Jorn and Constant Nieuwenhuys, artist of détournement and architect of trajectory, occultist meanderer and trafficker of traffic. This paper *charges* their descendents with acts of value-less re-murdering; a forensic excuse to interrogate the divisive and paternalistic question: 'what *should* the contemporary *dérive* be?' A revival of the situationist project? A repeated and excessive murdering of it? Or a more ambitious anti-totalizing strategy in which individual tactics may become unrecognizable, unlocatable in the history of the *dérive*? A strategy that would carry this practice far from its origins, bearing 'marks' of its early, simple, changeable memetic qualities, but floated free from its 'tradition'?

## The Plot Line

The straight line has long been deployed by aesthetic walkers. Rather than following contours or increasingly institutionalized pathways like the official Coastal Paths in the UK or the ersatz, scallop-marked 'pilgrims' ways' in Europe (their symbols more likely to lead 'pilgrims' to local hotels than sacred places), the disruptively-applied straight line interrupts passivity and crosses boundaries, beating back at the beaten track. The straight line evokes an earlier, holier walk, like the non-representational lines on the Nazca Plains of Peru, or the 'Old Straight Track' first detected/imagined in the English landscape by Alfred Watkins in the 1910s (15). The straight line, impossible on the Earth's curved surface, a geometrical intervention in a world of texture, is the route of an idea, a magic that can walk the power of ideas into the body of the walker. Or it is a slice through borderlines of property and identity.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century English 'tramper' Stephen Graham (16) would draw an arbitrary straight route on his map in order to enjoy the negotiations with, and hospitalities of, tenants and landowners whose property he crossed. Graham's *ur-psychogeography*, 'walking abreast' with fellow English, middle class 'trampers' like Geoffrey Murray or Charles Hurst, is useful strategically as an alternative to the dominant lineage (at least within literary anglo-psychogeography) of Blake, De Quincey, the romantics and Machen. The tramper's ordinariness and a-mysticism offers a different trajectory of disruption; one based as much in re-weaving social relations as in modernist abstraction and fragmentation. It is a permission to engage different traditions as disruptions of disrupted walking itself.

In 1987 'walking artist' Richard Long carried a stone from Aldeburgh beach on the east coast of England to Aberystwyth beach on the west coast of Wales, then carried another stone back to his starting point (*Crossing Stones*, 1987); a banal kind of balance, an absolute reciprocity, reifying the walk as a settling of accounts in a dead economy, a parody of barter or exchange. Long's work has been an explicit attempt to work outside the economy of everyday accumulation, dematerializing industrialized sculpture, deploying the anachronism of walking as a self-consciously 'primal' art. He has declared that the unrecoverable walk itself is his art. The walks may be archaic disruptions, but their documentation is in high resolution, super-textured photographs and elegant texts, is retailed through the gallery system. The exchange value of these prints is raised by the inimitable strictures of the walks. While not exactly reclusive, Long is a distant figure. His is a spectral, enigmatic pressure upon the *dérive* and a patrician, pre-historic negation of it, subtle and masterly.

The asceticism of Long, and of the similarly inclined Hamish Fulton, exerts a canonical, exceptionalist, anti-quotidian force on the contemporary *dérive*, a pull



towards a formalistic, ideal walk, minimalist rather than ambient. Long and Fulton's texts are so smoothed and unspecific that they float a light-headed and mystical walking, resisting the specific by serial processes. Like the Fluxus instruction "draw a straight line and follow it" (La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris*) their product seems less about the act than its uncapturable conceptualization. When Nam June Paik performed Young's instruction for his *Zen For Head* (1962) he became stuck in its circularity, using his head as a paintbrush, dipped in a bucket of red 'goo'. This rough theatricality, so bitterly complained about by Michael Fried, protector of a formally consistent, and de-textured, modernism, is never far away in the work of ascetics like Long and Fulton. Huge landscapes are manipulated like film locations, there is always the sense that a ritual has taken place or is about to.

Spectral theatricality and dispersed hybridity characterize the contemporary dérive; qualities forefronted in works such as Forced Entertainment's *The Travels* (2002): its actors, sent to explore evocatively named but otherwise unknown roads, perform their stumbling across the uneasy textures of these places. In Simon Whitehead's *Walks To Illuminate* (2006) (17) the energy for illuminated shoes for night-time walkers in Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK, is gathered by daytime pedestrians wearing solar panels. The piece is as didactic as a Morality Play, but playful and quotidian too, as lovers, couples, friends use the walk through the darkness as a means to re-engage their relationships.

Nicolas Bourriard, in *Relational Aesthetics* (18) distinguishes 'relational aesthetics' from 'constructed situations' with the word 'and', dividing constructed situations as a 'theatre that does not necessarily involve a relationship with the Other' from relational practice which 'is always a relationship with the other'. But a relational art like Whitehead's is also a constructed situation, a provocation to the uses of a park. The multiplicity of *Walks To Illuminate* is companion to the 'not necessarily' of the constructed situation's solipsism. To invert it again, rather than as a contradiction of situationist ideas, the relational trend that Bourriard detects in contemporary art practice can be reconfigured as the exception to the situationists' iconoclasm, the escape clause that defers the neo-situationists' self-immolation. Where, in spectacular relations, art's representations are re-represented as cultural currency, in relational art there is no representation; theatre 'returns' as an ideal spectre.



Lake Guitar, Simon Whitehead, as part of *Marcheurs des Bois*, an ointment / Boreal Project (ointment.org.uk), Quebec, 2005.

In *dérive*-related relational art the conceptual straight line is *détourné* as a meander, but does not entirely lose its geometry, retaining a spectral quality, a 'pattern of patterns' or 'Li' (something between pattern and dynamic principle), a Deleuzian 'working' in the gaps, in the 'and and and'.

There are very few accounts of actual Lettrist or situationist 'drifts', those that survive are mostly unimpressive and rarely cited, evidencing only passing interest in 'ambience' or the potential for 'situation'-making. Ralph Rumney, expelled from the situationists, dismissed these 'drifts' as 'just wandering about and perhaps keeping your eyes open a bit' (19). In comparison, the variegation and sophistication of contemporary *dérive*-related art bodes rather better for its future than might be deduced from the often self-deprecating humour of those who seek to support the practice theoretically: 'Psychogeography had become a kind of expanded tradition. Any ideas regarding its potential 'radicalism' could be forgotten. Psychogeography is now a tradition in the sense of, say, Morris Dancing.' (20)

Although 'événements' caught up with them in the end, the situationist preference for distance (and inactivity) has floated an *ideal* 'drift', utopian and enjoyable, a disconnected asymmetry of effortless insouciance and fabulous prospects, a

wind-born betterworld. Dérivistes less fond or ignorant of the situationists have made or adopted their own mobile Cockaynes: aboriginal songlines, mazes of uncertain authorship, the Wild Hunt. The détournement of détournement reinvigorates the philosophical motion around and about dérive. These ideal walks are, when self-consciously adopted, part social animal, part idea; walks capable of taking a prowl around themselves.

The presence in psychogeography of occult arts, whether in actual practice or (more usually) metaphor, might have reduced some neo-situationist practice to airy, even reactionary, nostalgia, but it is disingenuous to suggest that that is its only effect. The occultist stratum, peaking in the 1990s, includes works and events as diverse as the London Psychogeographical Association's Winchester walk and pamphlet *The Great Conjunction* (1992), Manchester Area Psychogeographic's levitation of the Manchester Corn Exchange (1996) and *The Highbury Working: A Beat Séance* (1997), a mystical and poetic conjuring of local esoterica within an original soundscape by Alan Moore and Tim Perkins. Such acts/events fall comfortably within a British neo-romantic tradition almost personified by Arthur Machen, author not only of *The Great God Pan*, but also of *The London Adventure or The Art of Wandering*, but also within a wider European magical-literary tradition combining occult practice, walking and a fascination with place, alongside writers like Gustav Meyrinck, Paul Leppin, Arthur Kubin and Géza Csáth.

In both its continental European and British forms this occult-literary tradition saw a revival and a popularisation in the 1960s. Magic and conspiracy narratives were adopted by a counter-cultural left (and then by a wider section of society) in response to problems of power and hegemony that materialist politics were failing to resolve, and was accompanied by the adoption of a 'paranoid style' more usually associated with the political right. *The Great Conjunction* makes detailed reference to magic practices such as ritual slaughter among ruling elites and while at one level the pamphlet can be read as an enthusiast's arcane thesis there are hints of a resistance to a continuing elite geomancy. Such works may frustrate materialist neo-situationists, but they also serve as a tricky caricature of the situationists' own magical disconnections; revolutionary ends and inadequate means resolved by the sleight of an authorial hand.

One dériviste who has extrovertly engaged with the occult is Jim Colquhoun. There is a torque upon his rascally, portentous themes, a straining of contradictory impetuses that bends his walks against the contours of the ground. His walks are archaeological and aerial, tunnelling while mapping the trajectories of sea birds. But they also cut straight lines through time. No nostalgia here. Colquhoun's accounts splice unreliable press reports of extraordinary manifestations with doubtful accusations

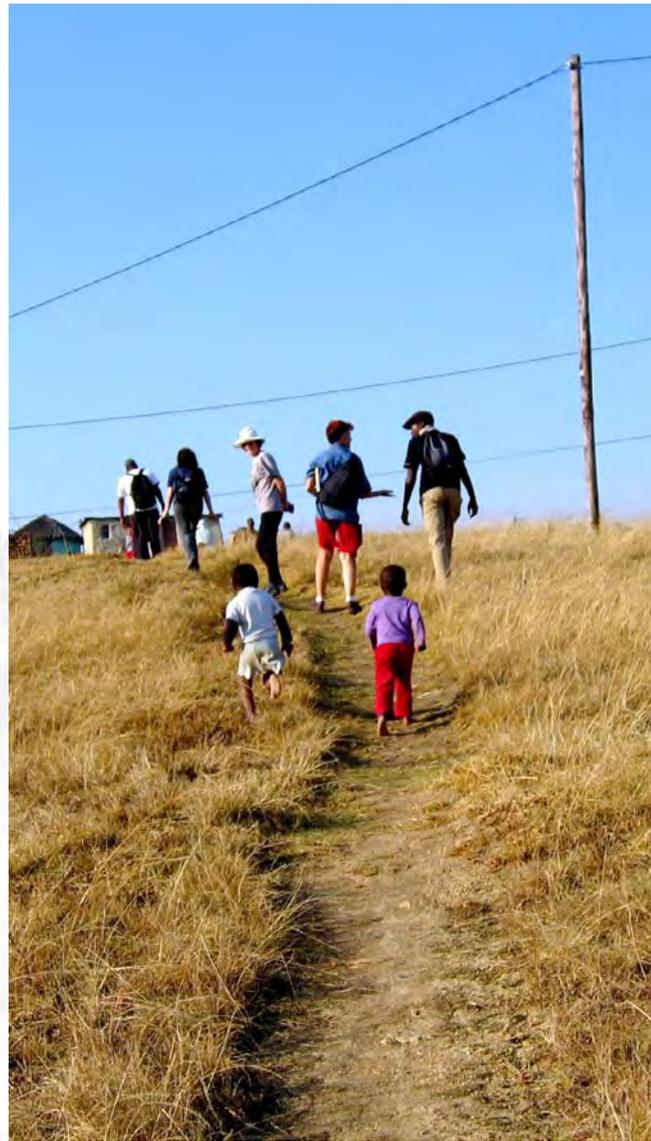


against himself. He attacks the narrative of the 'drift', the post-walk rationalisation and simplistic illustration. In his texts eccentric local histories disrupt, and local fauna intrude upon, the anthropocentric *dérive*.

In *The Black Drop or Once and Future Cathures*, a set of pamphlets produced in 2003, Colquhoun combines anachronistic illustration and typeface, ancient and contemporary opium use, press reports of an uncovered temple and the revelatory demolition of a maternity hospital. Into this he pours the subjective for a *dérive*-like exploration of itself. Tunnels stretch beyond expectations, the *dérive* travels beneath the streets of the city, the drifter experiences the fear of 'the millions of tons of rubble overhead', a fear of the city itself – Glasgow, formerly Cathures – imagined from below.

Colquhoun's rich documentations are a necessary corrective to the situationists' coy, linear, low-life accounts of the *dérive* and to the bias to literature in summaries of exploratory walking like those of Solnit's and Coverley's. Florid and tectonic, layers of meaning shift at each paragraph break, well-being and liberty are threatened. The local textures - geological, architectural and anecdotal - liquify. Utopia is a plot hatched by clowns. Colquhoun's drifters, A Company of Vagabonds, like the Stalker group's navigations by the 'lights' of urban voids, 'will identify those spaces which have slid below the ken of planners, developers, councillors and others'. Their ambitions are experiential and anti-architectural: 'spreading the message of the pleasurable negation of grids, fences, private property, danger zones, one way systems, reality tunnels, etc.' They set in motion their theoretical space 'based on such principles as amusement, drunkenness, derangement, chance, telepathy, beauty and concupiscence.' (21)

Where Colquhoun's deferral of a synthesis of critical exploratory wandering and ecstatic reverie is part of a double-walking that re-forms the tactics of the *dérive*, Solnit and Coverley's summary conflation of *flâneur* and psychogeographer is part of a project to return the *dérive* to a single romantic root (an exhumation of Debord's enthusiasm for George Borrow, re-animator of gypsy tales). In order to achieve this, their project restricts the *dérive* to the mental de-familiarizing of the city, and ignores the floating of theoretical space or the relational and tactical flexibility exemplified by activist-artists like Hilary Ramsden and Erika Block of Walk & Squawk whose *The Walking Project* (2006) connects people using 'desire lines' in the fields of South Africa with those who traverse similar paths across vacant lots in Detroit.



A Walk in Elandskop, KwaZulu-Natal:  
 Walk & Squawk's The Walking Project, 2003-6.

The failure and demise of the Situationist International was a very minor symptom of the 20<sup>th</sup> century crisis of revolution, the defeat of the Leninist project and the mid-century victories of state capitalism. In the society of the spectacle, the Leninist ordering of time disintegrated. The exchange of nationalisms, libertarianisms, liberalities and heavens is 'now' conducted at hyper-speed. Any attempt to build 'the party' as an elite, a shadow of the state's centralisation, awaiting the pre-revolutionary phase before opening the doors to the masses, is to make a museum. And in miniature that is what Debord did, in the form of a model of a museum of a museum. A cabinet of cautionary curiosity. Endlessly re-visitible.

The straight line of the situationists' narrative is blurred by the stuttering repetition of co-option. Revolution-in-the-revolution is the default mode of the intensified spectacle of Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988). Everything is 'pre', is imagined, is anticipated. In contrast, the stately dialectic of Leninism is like an exchange of stones from one shore to another. It is only in the

disruption of this dialectic, the deferral of synthesis, that the contemporary *dérive* can map its theoretical courses. Yet the Debordian amputation, cutting short the life of the situationists, models a *modus operandi*. In amputation, Debord cauterised the museum, froze it in time, removed its accidental irony. Inadequate as a dynamic model, the narrative has survived, perversely un-wandering; a useful way marker. But that is all it is.

### **The Dialectic Deferred - zombie environments and the suspension of economy**

The divorce of 'psychogeography' from 'situation' and 'spectacle' has partly reappeared as a tendency towards solo walking and the spectacular pilgrimage. The *dériviste* is redefined as long distance *flâneur*, a dreamer with books for sale. Or as a voluntary vagrant, setting out without a penny in their pocket to test the 'kindness of strangers', on a short cut to community.

Where the *dérive* continues to be practised as a collective act, documentation is often anonymous, freely distributed, gifts rather than commodities, and participation is gender-balanced, where solo walking is mostly male. The group *dérive* is a necessarily democratised event; it cannot sustain a leader for long. It tends, at its best, to be led by its periphery. Wrights & Sites' *Shed Walk* for Annabel Other's *Shed Summit*, (UK, 2003) was such a planned relinquishing of leadership to the group, soon led by its edges, diverting into gardens, through private gates, reversing and meeting unexpected hospitality from those encountered by its fringes.

The 'classical' *dérive*, still practised – destinationless, leaderless, themeless – is in tension (and close proximity) with much that passes for contemporary psychogeographical practice. But such a binary is destructive of the future of the *dérive*, siting it in the past, the division of activism from art (completing the project for literary-minded critics) among its effects. For such tactical issues, as also for their theorization, the contemporary *dérive* will do best when it resists the drift towards reconciliation or antagonism; when it defers such syntheses in favour of dispersal and diffusion.

In spatial terms it should seek those 'voids' where economy, for reasons of development, is suspended or diffused: on the fringes of academia, publicly-funded art and social developments, in and around redundant and incomplete properties, spaces locked by legal disputes, economically doomed and ecologically illiterate projects, particularly where such spaces are woven most tightly to the flows of capital and information. For the Stalker group of Rome these voids are 'increasingly the protagonist of the urban landscape... open spaces that had not been inserted in the system... spaces that inhabit the city in a nomadic way... a parallel city with its own dynamics...' (22). For the architect Tom Nielsen they are 'superfluous spaces' that 'haunt(s) not only the planners but the city itself.' (23) They hold no prefigurative ideal for a utopian city, but

in their dispersive, unforeseen consequences they are a model of excess in the landscape. Like absurdly large versions of Kinga Araya's prostheses, such 'ruins' (pre and post utility) are characterised by certain 'affordances' that destabilize not only the functionalist body but the anti-functionalist also.

The dystopian accumulation of such landscapes is evoked in movies of geographical catastrophe, such as George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) or Umberto Lenzi's *Nightmare City* (1980). The appeal of these micro-apocalypses to the dériviste is that they do not require an antagonistic or antithetical trajectory, but rather a zombie-like meander, 'the idea here is to voluntarily let oneself get overrun by the developments ... that lead to the unforeseen spaces and situations that these ... result in.' (24)

The dispersed authority of the *dérive*, a tactical passivity, is often reciprocated by concierges, guards and owners anxious to tell their secrets and display their goods. The ideas of the *dérive* are not incarnate in a leader or guide, but are argued out differently on each 'drift'. Robert Kirkman's serialised graphic novel *The Walking Dead* (25) describes the tactics and dynamics of a *dérive* in a world of superfluous spaces, a world in which the collective nature of the appetite of the living dead disciplines the 'drifting' survivors; nomadic arbitrators for and witnesses to their world. The banal encounters of zombie and survivor are overshadowed by lulls when the zombies and the living walk in relation to each other – straight line of appetite, weaving meander of wariness, a model for dérivistes walking in relation to an idea of walking, a 'drift' become symbolic, presumptuous and political by its deferral of synthesis.

### Spatial Rigours

The straight line and the meander are not merely concepts of journey, they are constituents of space. Doreen Massey has persuasively argued that space *is* its trajectories: "...as the product of interrelations ... as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist... as always under construction." (26) This mobility and provisionality, even in the theorization of space, has made work with the local and site-specific more problematic than before.

The cure-all of site-specificity has proved to be mostly side-effect, the term is now regularly purloined for 'Shakespeare in the Park'. Even open and sophisticated constructions of locus have failed to stem an incremental shift away from site-specificity. Just as the ideal space of the gallery had been replaced by the 'real' and the 'natural', so unease about an 'authentic' real or a 'primal' nature, has led to different, more mobile practices of sitedness: 'the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-

oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate.' (27) Describing the trajectory of artists who have made or responded to this change, Claire Doherty speculates that '(t)hough this may not always reveal itself as a process of *dérive*... (the artists) maintain that their status as artists allows them to circumnavigate predictability.' (28)

The disruption is disrupted, the *détournement* *détourned*, the abolition of art by *dérive* is ghosted by those who are 'allowed' by their status as artists to 'circumnavigate predictability' – colonial and complex. The art work becomes a setting of things in motion, including the status of the art and the artist, but there is no simple redemption of *dérive* in mobility or dispersal: as a character in George Romero's *Diary of the Dead* (2008) complains: 'the more voices there are, the more spin there is.' Mark Dion's improvisations with the appearance of archaeological digs and exhibitions (29), irritating archaeologists and provoking discussion about the authority and authenticity of their practice, or the interfacing with Reclaim The Streets activism in the situationist-influenced Interdimensional Pixie Broadcast Network's *détournement* of road signs (30), supplementing functional symbols with squids, blobs, fairies and punctuation marks, inserting fantastic nature into the driver's gaze, making traffic flow grammatical, are instances of sited works of *trajectory*, studiously indifferent to aesthetics despite the care and craft in their execution.



The Eye of Horus, The Interdimensional Pixie Broadcast Network, Exeter, UK, 2001.

These spatial rigours, with no easy redemption in either trajectory or specificity, have prepared the contemporary dériviste for the challenges of problematic, spectacular space, infected and compromised not simply in narrative, but in spatialization itself. Disruption and détournement have a rather different impact in spectacular spaces that are, by definition, in constant disruption and détournement, co-opting and accommodating, hybridic and dispersive, and that defer authority and authenticity. In an echo of the old 'revolution in the revolution', situationist practice needs to address the contradictions of its own spectacular qualities.

The layered and striated spaces of late capitalism have presented opportunities for rhizomic eruptions, spiking the planes by temporal or spatial accidents and deceptions, but when the social space is so enfolded, such rhizomic interventions are merely interventions among interventions. When companies can set up their own trading floors (Enron Corporation) then layering becomes increasingly hard to sustain, space becomes slippery, institutions self-organizing, but not self-regulating. In spectacular space, companies advertise their own failings, graffiti their product names, set out to erode the very idea of 'public'. In political space, agency retreats to more complex folds: 'the State and the transnational corporation long ago learned every trick of the autonomous rhizome... seemingly unguessable geopolitical agendas and alliances masked by multiple and purposefully multivalent levels of secrecy and deception (that) are bound to fool any linear, cause and effect theoretical or investigative approach. Geopolitical forensics... needs to employ a nonlinear approach that would, for example, seek to map the attractors and black holes, established pathways, and solidly supportable and predictable plans, actions and reactions, while also emphasising contingency, creativity, 'irrationality', and psychopathy.' (31) Mark Bonta is describing here an intellectual discipline for the contemporary dériviste. Low level paranoia, dispersive relativity, the scouring of dreams for evidence of agency, an open cosmology connecting all things; the mental meander necessary to successfully practice anachronistic, collective, exploratory walking is, by chance, enmeshing with enigmatic opportunities afforded by political voids, just as architectural voids afford it geographical stages.

Despite the dérive's antipathy to the super-sitedness of theatre (once exemplified by Peter Brook as a universalized "empty space"), the half-life of theatrical presence on the 'drift' is so openly marginal and manifestly diminishing, its very willingness to so publicly and unashamedly *decay* grants it a diffusive quality, in "direct, physical, celebrative interaction with spectators, acting out her/his (its) own performative functions with them through the text, as well as behind it and beside it" (32) - the performative text of the dérive is space. What Lesley Wade Soule has perceived in the actor who plays in the border between mimesis and its dispersal is what, when the spectator is abolished and made an actor in the art of walking, the collective dériviste can be: '*celebrative*, inviting (and inciting) ... to playful response and/or carnival

participation, and... *liminal/liminoid*, namely, free from sociocultural associations (often including gender), as well as from fixity of mimetic character. As an intense and liberated celebrant, the actor is... *demonic*, that is, perceived to possess potentially dangerous charisma... in the interaction between her/his celebrative and mimetic activities, the actor is ... *ironic*, playing - in collusion... - with oppositions between reality and fiction, identity and disguise, ignorance and knowledge.' (33)

But this is not the return of theatre that Buci-Glucksmann, in the context of painting, calls 'the height of modernity... the great angelic utopia of the baroque... a pure apparition that ma(kes) appearance appear, from a position just on its edges... the theatre of a painted visible where the eye would be at once in the wings and on stage.' (34) The contemporary *dérive* retains this binocularity of vision through space not art, through the exploration of the wings as parts of the machine for theatrical product, ie: representation, through an anti-mimetic floating free of theory, images and ideas: a mythogeography, developed in the practice of Wrights & Sites, emphasising the multiplicity of Massey's trajectories and, following her argument in *World City* (2007), asserting that any sited specificity (identity, collective or communal 'ownership', or performance) is only ever (temporarily) acquired by taking responsibility for a site's history of resources and crimes.

Theatre has recently sought to revivify itself in the specificities of site. Live art, similarly, in the specificities of body. The contemporary *dérive* can place itself between these two revivals, resisting a synthesis with either; placing itself in the wings, angelic and architectural. But any settling or settlement rests on a taking responsibility for the projects of unknown others, on 'random' acts of kindness.

### Everyday Problems

Thomas Struck's film *Walk Don't Walk* (2005) is, on a first viewing, a documentary about the everyday walking life of Manhattan from the 'fussperspektive', filmed mostly at ankle level. However, this everyday walking is disrupted by the extraordinary - foot fetishism, parades, amputation - before the film returns these to banality; a model photo shoot, the detritus of the parade, prostheses.

De Certeau has argued for the everyday, including walking, as the key tactical practice of a resistant urban life. Yet in the circularity of *Walk Don't Walk* there are excessive hints of problems with the practice of everyday life as a form of resistance; crystal moments instantaneously exaggerated and mutually accommodating. Doreen Massey has challenged De Certeau's social critique as flattering the stasis of authority and misleading the weak into reproducing the conditions of their weakness. Massey identifies unequal binaries: the association of space with the strategy of the powerful, and time with the tactics of the everyday; the fixed versus the transitory, the system opposed by the margins: '(A)t its worst it can resolve into the least politically convincing

of situationist capers – getting laddish thrills (one presumes) from rushing about down dark passages, dreaming of labyrinths and so forth. (Is this not another form of eroticised colonialisation of the city?)’ (35) Putting aside Massey’s conflation of the situationist *dérive* with a parody of ‘urban exploration’, she does appropriately identify the objectification of the female body in some psychogeographical mappings, but equally significantly she echoes, coincidentally, and in playful terms, Mark Bonta’s spatial riposte to the problems of an enfolded and enfolding, a-agented, emergent spectacle with extraordinary capacities to displace responsibility and to co-opt its enemies in ‘false flag operations’. Bonta proposes ‘holey spaces’ as the field of operations for subterranean *dérivistes* and rogue states, in defiance of the wilful openness of oppositional organizations like the Global Justice Movement.

### Back to Trajectory

It would be easy to allow the straight line and the meander, the functional everyday and the exploratory extraordinary, or the textural and the geometrical, to become spatialized in a simple binary tension. Instead we should rather suspend both their attracting and repulsing tendencies, deferring synthesis or conflict and, instead, adopt a manoeuvre pioneered by Mallarmé and inadequately developed in Symbolist Theatre; dissolving character first into the text of site (Axel’s castle) and then into the landscape of stage (Robert Wilson), to float these differences free from their origins, allowing an ahistorical engagement (such as taking responsibility for the actions of others from which we have benefited), a tracing of ideological trajectories and forces. This astronomical metaphor has one further useful application – in the similarity of satellite capture to the process of *détournement*. In satellite capture, space agencies use the complex interplay of massive gravitational forces (of sun, moon and earth) to radically change the trajectory of a satellite by using tiny amounts of energy from the satellite’s weak motors. For, at certain moments, the satellite will move under the influence of forces in very close balance with each other so that the slightest additional energy, the slightest change in location, can alter the trajectory radically through its transformed relations with the various forces of attraction. It is this asymmetrical effect, this engaging or riding of massive forces by the application of small (often ‘merely’ intellectual) resources that a political-scale *détournement* can achieve.

Such an attempt was *Exeter Everyday*, a ‘festival’ in the small city of Exeter, UK, in 2006, encouraging the acknowledgement of the role of the everyday in the continual re-making and re-ordering of the city by its citizens. Nothing was organized except the publicizing of the festival by Wrights & Sites. Different quotidian themes were announced for each day: feet and shoes (walking), beaks and paws (animals in the city), waiting, reflections in windows and glints in eyes, horizons and crowd scenes. Announcements and interviews with the organizers were carried in the local media and

posters were displayed. For those citizens reached by this publicity the everyday events of the city became briefly imbued with an apparent premeditation. But the interface with the 'everyday' was not simple. Challenging the narrative powers in the city was uncomfortable. In the High Street Wrights & Sites members carried posters advertising the day's theme. For early morning workers the posters often afforded a moment of rueful or amused recognition of the dominance of the economic, its momentary defiance by the reference to animals or accidental reflections. For the shoppers grazing the retail sector, however, the posters seemed to make uneasy reading, a satire at their expense, demeaning rather than re-arming, at best irrational and unsettling. The smooth space of the High Street with its wide pavements, frontages dominated by glass, and the almost visible decay and obsolescence of the commodities on offer – mobile phones, holidays, summer clothes – was quite capable of out-everyday-ing any group of disruptive artists.

What worried Doreen Massey about De Certeau's division of strategy and tactics was not its incoherence, but its 'dichotomisation between space and time, which posits space both as the opposite of time and, equally problematically, as immobility, power, coherence, representation.' (36) Which brings us back to the Situationist International murder scene. For the crime is not an attack upon a body, but upon a site. Not Paris, but the contradiction between local textures and the swooping vectors of Asger Jorn and Guy Debord's utopian maps, utilitarian, political contradictions where blueprints and satellite captures are activated to change the trajectories of huge numbers of people.

### **Alien versus Predator, Anywhere versus Everyday**

There was a telling encounter between Jacques Derrida and Daniel Libeskind at the 1992 *Anywhere* conference in Japan.

In an opening speech Derrida attempts to address the notion of 'anywhere': 'the point of view of this *anywhere*, of this indefinition of "where," of place, or space, of this sort of principle of indetermination that seems made to open space in space. The *where* is *any where*. The possibility of geometrical abstraction immediately affects "natural" place. It homogenizes it. It is as if place floated in space ... as soon as there is "where" there is "any," a possibility of substitution and repetition...' (37)

Libeskind counters this quotidianisation of anywhere in the first conference panel:

'I feel a certain domestication of the fantastic nature of anywhere has taken place. I actually wrote a little rejoinder... "Anywhere is not once, for if it were, it would crumple the "where" like the fully compressed bellows of an accordion in order to move more freely within it. There is no possibility of discourse, in my opinion, by saying anywhere... it isn't anywhere... leave it to its non-restitutive, non-replaceable greed..." I would ask the question: Anywhere anywhere? But certainly not here.' (38)

To general laughter, Derrida responds to Libeskind's hostile generalising, indeed dark-utopianizing, of anywhere by expressing his agreement.

Unlike the colonially-aspirational everywhere, anywhere is capable – as in the 'general laughter' - of sustaining an everydayness and an ideal, of mobilizing both Derrida's subjectivity and Libeskind's 'not here'. (39)

### Mythogeography

In July 2008 a conference and mini-festival of performances and artworks related to psychogeography – Territories Re-Imagined, International Perspectives (TRIP) - was held at Manchester's Metropolitan University, co-ordinated with a parallel set of events organized by the 'get lost' collective. While mostly self-selecting and unrepresentative, (absent were most, but not all, of the activists and practitioners referenced here), the event was nevertheless as revealing as any other gathering of moths around psychogeography's beacon: non-representativeness being a characteristic of the contemporary dérive, along with a detachment from political organization and a repeated re-founding on the basis of highly variegated trajectories. The pseudo-Leninist theoretical rigours, immersive lifestyle, disciplines and expulsions of the SI no longer apply.

The academics, academic-practitioners, mental-mappers, therapeutic psychogeographers, artists, urban naturalists, dissidents from New York's ConFlux, teachers, and activists from Manchester's anarchist and squatting scene brought together by TRIP exchanged information and descriptions of their multiple (and sometimes contradictory) interventional, aesthetic and critical practices. Given the lack of plenary sessions - significant in itself - there was no forum for coherent themes or extended, detailed debate to emerge. Instead, informal connections were made, networks strengthened and widened, and most of the papers given followed suit by adding to the layers of discourse.

Exceptional, in the sense of its potential effect on this loose movement's 'thinking', was Anna Powell's paper in which she attempted to layer elements of Deleuze's writings on cinema across Debord's writing on the spectacle, acknowledging and then actively and consciously ignoring/incorporating contradictions. Tentatively, here was a possible beginning for a more rigorous theorization of the sometimes accidental, sometimes pragmatic 'and and and' of contemporary psychogeography's associations and networks, without any reductive attempt to return to situationist history. Such a return was implicit in Steve Hanson's criticism of a psychogeography of the streets that restricted itself to the ironizing of appearance. Hanson called for a sharper intervention against trajectories of production and distribution (somewhat anticipated by Mark Bonta (above)); a call for some recognition of psychogeography's

roots in a form of classical Marxism, in tune with Doreen Massey's intervention in spatial theory in favour of space as trajectory, and an addressing of the wilful amnesia of those for whom not only the SI's organizational excesses, but also their intellectual legacy, are an inconvenience to street pranks and polite 'temporary uses of space'.

In Powell and Hanson's contributions, a necessary and hopeful, critical manoeuvring was perhaps prefigured: able to inform an anti-spectacular strategy of multiplicity, while engaging with the contradictions of the situationist theoretical tradition.

The touchstone of that strategy remains the *dérive*, practiced as both exploratory and experimental roaming. Anselm Jappe, like Andy Merrifield in *Metromarxism* and Guy Debord, chimes with Steve Hanson's criticisms and seeks to recover the strands of Marx's and Lukacs's theories within Debord's (as the completion of the victory of exchange value over use value and the consequent destruction of direct human community) counterposing to the spectacle a "(G)enuine community and genuine dialogue (that) can only exist when each person has access to a direct experience of reality, when everyone has at their disposal the practical and intellectual means needed to solve problems." (40) This demands a *dérive* rather different from the formalist, algorithmic events that sometimes pass for 'drift', or those textural attempts that stumble into whimsical occultism or local historiography. It is not that any of these tics and tricks are 'wrong', but rather that they are insufficient.



Mark A. James, *The Itinerant Toolkit*, Reg Vardy Gallery, Sunderland, UK. (2008).

Part of the problematic of the contemporary *dérive* is a lack of an accumulative discussion of the details of its practice. Non-literary accounts of 'drifts' are often less than engaging, failing to communicate atmospheres, intensities and re-arrangements. The temptation has been to treat the *dérive* at a general level. Without detailed discussion the catapults, community, democracy, provocations and tricks of the *dérive* are not passed on, are not developed incrementally. What passes for 'drifting' too often turns out to be a one-idea disruption, leaving its participants in solo reverie or subject to the banalities of the spectacularised street. Instead, the idea of a mutating 'tool kit', conceptual if not material, offers something more than this repeated starting over. Mark A. James's project/exhibition at the Reg Vardy Gallery in Sunderland, *The Itinerant Toolkit* (2008) - in which the artist tested out on a journey ideas and objects suggested by psychogeographers and walking artists - perhaps signals the beginning of a more serious, accumulative approach to complement the multi-layering exemplified by Anna Powell's paper at TRIP.

### Affordance

Unlike classical Marxism's motor of contradictions, Debord's analysis of the society of the spectacle is far less generous: 'The modern spectacle... depicts what society *can deliver*, but within this depiction what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible.' (41) Where fiction, myth, fantasy or religion once exposed those things that materiality or society could not deliver, the spectacle limits them to celebrating what it can. Despite Debord's orientation to the proletariat's self-organization, in his critique of the spectacle there is no equivalent to Marx's evocation of capital's contradictions.

Here is the problem re-conjured by Steve Hanson: how to reconnect with political dynamism, based on a Marxian critique of commodity-fetishism, but without reliance on fundamental social contradictions. Instead (and this is where Hanson's painful awareness of the limitations of an ironical *détournement* might itself be a limitation) psychogeography proceeds asymmetrically. Unable to ride the energy of fundamental social contradictions, psychogeography *is* the seeking out of the ironies that so worries Hanson. Given the almost total 'apparent' power of the spectacle, reinforced in Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, the construction of situations must rest upon a psychogeography that seeks out those ironies that allow small subversive actions to guide or reconfigure (*détourn*) far greater spectacular forces.

Wrights & Sites, influenced by the situationists among others, have deployed such a strategy in order to resist the monocular meaning of certain spaces, where the hegemony of local history, the heritage industry or tourist trade commands its own constructions of the city. Wrights & Sites have developed means of re-making these meanings based on multiple and variegated narratives: personal associations, histories

of signage, geology, crime statistics, dreams, mistakes, micropalaeontology and misspelling, calling this a “mythogeography”. This combination of the respectable and the unrespectable, the setting in motion of contrasting and sometimes contradictory narratives, ideas and images, has developed into a model for acting as well as thinking, and uses the devices of the monocular spectacle (guides, tours, walks, festivals, information centres) in détourned forms in order to deploy the spectacle’s own energies against it. As with the ‘researchers’ of ufology, mythogeography mimics the nomenclatures of sciences, deploying its ‘findings’ in a strategic game of peaceful conspiracy, attempting to place itself within a self-organizing enthusiasm for self-organization, conscious of the ambiguities of dynamic forms for which (both for forms and ambiguities) David Wade has borrowed the Chinese term ‘Li’ because ‘it falls between our notions of pattern and principle’ (42). Crucially ‘simple’ in using a small number of invariants by which to navigate ideological flows, and materially at work in the capture of satellites, (at present cultural, but perhaps, eventually, economic), this is an approach that might, one day, meet Hanson’s demands.

Instead of a spatially defined, ordered utopia, mythogeography proceeds by trajectory rather than architecture and art or anti-art and anti-architecture. Where useful to its asymmetrical projects it adds what it needs, from any discipline, to its conceptual and material orreries (‘itinerant toolkits’), curating artists’ and activists’ interventions in the streets, rubbish tips, sewers and monumental squares of the city (*misguided STADTverFÜHRUNGEN*, Wien Festwochen, Vienna, 2007, *mis-guided*, BBI, Fribourg, 2008). Asymmetrical ‘satellite capture’ is used to remove mediations and to engineer provocations and ‘offers’; its ‘unitary’ mission not the reintegration of the fragmented city, but rather that of the citizen with their own experience.

Mythogeographical walking – a detailed and accumulative practice of *dérive* - is about a meshing of geographical spaces, and their ghostly bathing in cultural motion pictures, about the geometrical connectivity of a fragmented self, the integrity of which is constantly modulated by neurological research, critical theory, and speculations about consciousness and transmission, and about direct experience of the unplanned route. Mythogeography’s ‘softness’, comparable to the ‘soft places’ in Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* graphic novels, welcomes in the academically unrespectable while refusing to collapse itself into any single branch of small-business esoterica. Another way of describing this ‘softness’ is used by Tim Edensor in relation to the body in ruined space ‘coerced and stimulated to perform in unfamiliar ways’ (43), drawing on the research of James J. Gibson into human perception and environmental ‘affordance’: ‘...visitors may clamber over old production lines and on top of obsolete machines... dance upon the boardroom table or spin round in the manager’s chair... Besides this liberating of the body’s movement, other spaces can seem strange and disruptive... This sensual unfamiliarity contrasts with the frequently desensitized outside world... that effectively insulate(s)

the body'. (44) The challenge is to accept the 'affordances' in the ruins of the spectacle itself, its wastes and excesses.

The key lies not in reproducing romantic urban nomadism (although that is, as Andy Merrifield has usefully re-emphasised, part of Debord's legacy (45)), but in generating 'anywheres' (46), not as an alternative meta-theory with a new narrative of origins, but as a conceptual (and mutable) tool kit for a widening affordance to be added to and subtracted from, according to practical *and* theoretical needs, both an art of memory and an actual, physical, memorialised landscape; both the assassination of the situationist corpse and the survival kit for avoiding its fate, the 'head shot' that finally puts not the corpse but the necessity to keep murdering it to sleep, that repeatedly defers our meeting with it, a training for more portentous and more perilous trajectories.

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