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## Women on *dérive*: autobiographical explorations of lived spaces

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The project upon which this chapter is based, emerged in January 2003 from a reading of Guy Debord's 'Theory of the *Dérive*' published in 1958. This text has widely acknowledged significance as a radical critique of everyday life, and was chosen for our reading group, which had been formed in April 2002 as a result of the frustration we had felt within the male dominated academic environment of the Higher Education Institution within which we work.

We were intrigued by the possibilities attendant in psychogeographic study of the 'city' and the notion that one might engage in a '*dérive*', a drift through urban environs, in order to read such spaces. The Situationist praxis of reimagining the city centres on the concept of psychogeography, literally defined by Asger Jorn as 'the study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' ([1958] 1981:45). In opposition to rational technocratic discourses, the idea of the *dérive* attempted to retain, reinscribe and indeed, to reinvent, urban spaces where 'play' could spontaneously happen. The *dérive* is one of the most well-known and celebrated performative strategies of the Situationist movement for resisting capitalism's colonization of urban spaces and time. According to Simon Sadler, 'psychogeography was regarded as a sort of therapy, a fetishization of those parts of the city that could still rescue drifters from the clutches of functionalism, exciting the senses and the body' (1999:80).

Sadler emphasises the extent to which the Situationist International was overwhelmingly male-dominated, and was unable to problematise gender relations in an analysis which focused on the effects of capital and technology in inducing alienation and conformity. In this context, our research question was the extent to which the *dérive*, as a psychogeographic tool, could be operationalised by women whose time, and most usually, travels through space, were/are structured by the contingent demands of paid employment, and in some cases children and other dependent small animals. At the same time, the notion of the *dérive* stood as a critical commentary on the narrowness of our lives and their playing out in our spatial use of urban environments. The first part of our project was to chart our movements in time and space over a two week period, through map making and diary keeping. The second part, which emerged from the diary data, was to attempt a *dérive* in a more 'properly' Situationist style.

### 'The foundation for a civilization of leisure and play'? The Black's Reading Group

We felt that the group we formed as an attempt to find an/Other space, in which to think and talk was very much spatially driven. We all live in East London and work at the University of East London. The campus where we are based is marginalized, not only geographically, in relation to central London, but also socially and culturally. We decided to hold our meetings in central London, at a club in the West End's Soho district, 'Blacks'. There is an interesting analogy here: dislocating and decentering ourselves from the spaces and places we live and work, we repositioned ourselves in the very heart of the metropolitan urban space with which we feel more familiar and comfortable. Feminist geographers have richly theorized the ways that spaces of the city can be paradoxically friendly yet inimical for women (Wilson 1991), and as we will later see, the dangers of the

city are an element of the diary material we gained from the project, but also contain a possibly romantic evocation of urban life.

The choice of 'Blacks' as an arena for discussion was apt. It is a private club owned by a Marxist. The décor is bohemian and the 'committee' of permanent members are female. It is also not an excessively expensive place for a group of relatively plebeian academics to go out and enjoy themselves. In deciding to form 'the Blacks Reading Group', we would argue that we were experimenting with situationism. According to Debord (who met of course, with like minds in cafes and bars), a situationist is 'one who engages in the construction of situations', which 'would provide a décor and ambiance of such power that it would stimulate new sorts of behaviour, a glimpse into an improved future life based upon human encounter and play'. (Sadler, 1999:105). In this context the key idea of the group was playful subversiveness of the discourses around academic validity.

For Debord, the creation of the 'situation' is always a counter reaction to the omnipresence of the spectacle. The 'spectacle' for Debord (1988) is the representation of unreality, the integrated and sophisticated picture liberal democratic (and other) modernity portrays of itself, largely through the mass media. The role-playing and stereotypes of the spectacle can only be negated through the performance of 'lived experience.' Situationist praxis aims to disrupt the spectacle through carefully constructed situations that spur the spectator to resist passive spectatorship. The 'Spectacle' of academic role-play in this case involved the research 'clusters', which our School of Social Sciences imposed as a paradigm for the 'Research Assessment Exercise' (RAE) submissions<sup>1</sup>. Our group was defined by an absence of professors, productive necessity and male colleagues, and involved those with interests across/outside these clusters can be seen as an act of subversion which contests this academic 'performance'.

In our group, we tried to think and talk about some things we find interesting. We have found nice places to meet, good things to eat and we have drunk wine at lunchtime. Such is the stuff of subversion! The situationists saw pleasure and play as revolutionary tactics. Initially at least ours was a strategy of coping, and the Blacks reading group began its deliberations, not accidentally, with the reading of Foucault's 'Care of the Self'. Discussion focused on the notion that gaining space to think, talk and write is a form of care of oneself and a practice which needs to be preciously guarded. The group has emerged both as a site of resistance to 'the filling of the academic self', and a site of pleasure. Debord (1959) describes: 'the situationist experience of the *dérive* (as) simultaneously a means of study of, and a game in, the urban milieu'. And by playing the game of the *dérive*, we have enjoyed ourselves, and found we think, something to say.

### **Re-imagining the city? the Situationist '*dérive*'**

A defining element of the Situationists' praxis was a radical critique of the urban environment of postwar capitalism. As Simon Sadler puts it 'the benign professionalism of architecture and design had [...] led to a sterilization of the world that threatened to wipe out any sense of spontaneity or playfulness' (1999:5). In order to expose and contest this, Situationists used the *dérive* as a method of engaging people to freely use their city, for they believed that living in the city involved much more than inhabiting it in the forms laid out for you by the patterns of your everyday activity. As defined by Debord:

In a *dérive*, one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the terrain and the encounters they find there. (Debord, 1958)

Thus *dérives* involve exploring the city by placing yourself into and simultaneously creating unusual or new situations as a way of achieving personal freedom. This could not be gained by the simple fulfilling of pre-prescribed roles. Debord states at the end of the 'Theory of the *Dérive*', 'the difficulties of the drift are those of freedom,' adding: 'One day we'll build cities for drifting.' (ibid).

The recordings of drifters of course have an established *history* in European social thought. The notion of the 'flâneur', the bohemian observer who wanders the city and records both real and imagined (often eroticised) spaces, skulks in the corners and basks in the sunlight of cultural geographies modern and post modern. Paul Patton (1995) has asked to what extent such narratives of city space are written with respect to reality (and we assume, to fantasy). The *dérive* can encourage both a reading of the urban space, a decoding of its imaginaries, and an excavation of a particular 'reality' beneath. As will be seen from the diary material from this project, we found that both a lived daily 'reality' of the use of space was recorded and that in the recording, elements of fantasy are embedded.

John Lechte (1995:102-5), talking of the ways in which James Joyce has recorded 'strolling', 'wandering' and 'sauntering' in Dublin, has problematised recording the journeys of the flâneur. The practice of close description means that coincidence and chance encounters are rendered determined rather than contingent. Such descriptions don't capture the feeling of wanderings and musings. Lechte's description of the flâneur as ambiguous, and as perhaps best seen simply as a wanderer 'away from home' i.e. away from familiar surroundings, who records details of their surrounding is not dissimilar from Debord's understanding of those undertaking a *dérive*. This similarity may be important in understanding the specific problems we encountered in operationalising Debord's notion.

There are distinct problems with both the strolling flâneur and psychogeographer on *dérive*. Elizabeth Wilson (1995) provides an amusing and thought provoking discussion of the flâneur as an allegorical figure, wandering lonely as a cloud through the anonymous crowd of mid nineteenth century Paris. Whereas bourgeois men were free to explore the city, women were privatized and/or prostituted and thereby largely excluded from this 'male gaze' until tearooms and department stores transformed middle and lower middle class experiences of public life at the close of the century. Yet as Wilson suggests, the flâneur was, and is actually, an impossibility. The routines of the flâneur, she asserts, are just that. They are actually monotonous and the novelty of every strolling therefore compromised. It is difficult to see who paid the bills in the life of Baudelaire or Debord, and also, to see how the life of one who derives actually enables a questioning of the ordering of space. In being people who pay bills, we were able to attempt a *dérive*, after Debord, for about 6 hours on one day. In mapping our everyday spaces, routine was to leave little space for reflections of city space, and there was a need for more conceptual apparatus to explain what we *did* encounter.

What we came to take from Debord was the notion of a spectacular society which sits both easily and uneasily with lived experience. It might be glimpsed at home, at work, at play and the spaces in between. We thought that the *dérive* might function as a critical way of seeing, of imagining and experiencing our use of space, and in traversing this theoretical path, we were unsurprised to encounter Foucault.

### **Heterotopic emplacements**

The concept of the *dérive*, embedded as it is in a particular social and cultural context, seems to us more of a fantasy of drifting, rather than a realistic possibility. Teresa de Lauretis (1997) has stressed the role of fantasy in the formation of desires and subjectivities and has shown how through fantasies our lives become enriched and bearable. When we talk about our *dérive* experiences we draw upon real-and-imagined spatial experiences. Edward Soja (1996) has theorized the notion of real-and-imagined spaces, showing how they are interwoven in the inherent spatiality of our lives. Digging deeper into those real-and-imagined spaces, what the *dérive* seems to have unearthed is heterotopias or rather heterotopic relations (Foucault, 1984). We think that this idea of the heterotopic relation can apply to the ways our diaries represent our daily negotiations and resistances with the lived spaces of our lives.

The notion of *heterotopias* emerges as an effect of Foucault's attendance to the importance of space. In deciphering the complicated and often contradictory structure of various relational emplacements that constitute the outer space of our living experiences, Foucault turns his attention to what he calls 'different spaces', those emplacements 'that

have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected, or represented by them' (Foucault 1998: 177), so that they juxtapose several different kinds of space in one real place. These heterotopias are, for Foucault, found in all cultures, adopting different forms, degrees and spans of operation, and functions over time.

In being different, in being 'outside of all places' (1986:24), *heterotopias* interrogate discourses and practices of the hegemonic space within which they are localizable, they are 'a kind of contestation both mythical and real of the space in which we live' (Foucault 1998:179). As juxtaposed to *utopias* or unreal places, *heterotopias* are described as those 'real social places which surround us ..., sites which juxtapose in a single real social "place", several places' (Marks 1995:69). Having a system of opening and closing, *heterotopias* create transitory spaces, especially when subjects undergo crises. It is this system of continuous opening and closing that experiences of *dérive* enact, as subjects move in and out of various urban emplacements. For Foucault the function of heterotopias varies between two extreme formations. These are: '...a space of illusion that exposes every real space...as still more illusory' (or) 'a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled.' (Foucault 1986:27).

The *dérive* encourages us to see the spaces and places we occupy and move within, with a different lens. Our diary material contains moments, elements of heterotopia in various forms, from snapshots of well-constructed 'real' and personal 'utopia', to the sometimes rather painful exposure of the 'reality' that is our experience of city space. We have chosen to call these glimpses, 'heterotopic moments' in order to capture the experience of moving in and out of such spaces across time.

### **The research project**

An initial reaction we had to the 'Theory of the *Dérive*' was to question how much of London we actually use, and how often we journey into unfamiliar territory. Debord quotes a study by Chambert de Lauwe where:

...in order to illustrate 'the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives . . . ,' he diagrams all the movements made in the space of one year by a student living in the 16th Arrondissement. Her itinerary forms a small triangle with no significant deviations, the three apexes of which are the School of Political Sciences, her residence and that of her piano teacher... Such data—examples of a modern poetry capable of provoking sharp emotional reactions (in this particular case, outrage at the fact that anyone's life can be so pathetically limited) ... will undoubtedly prove useful in developing *derives* (Chambert de Lauwe 1952, cited in Debord 1958).

Whilst we were somewhat concerned that our own trajectories were probably 'pathetically limited', we considered what rich material might be gained from mapping everyday use of space. In addition, we wondered whether it was actually possible to construct the kind(s) of *dérive* Debord suggested, and whether one might *dérive* without dropping one's everyday activities as Debord required. Indeed, the conditions of possibility can be seen to trouble even those close to Debord in the early 1960s. Pierre Guillaume (1995) talks of the disjuncture between material burdens of families, 'work' and 'responsibility' against the 'hedonist' principle of situationist lifestyle: 'By the way, I was the only one having a child (sic), and I don't know of any situationist having one.'

Situationist psychogeography emphasizes that the organization and form of urban space is constituted through the Spectacle, and for Debord (1959), the point of the *dérive* is to enable people to look at their surroundings from a different perspective. What we intended was not this exactly, but a critical reflection on our daily use of space. Situationist Raul Vaneigem (1996:60) asserts that: 'people are murdered slowly in the mechanized slaughterhouses of work' and perhaps the key point of recording our use of space and time through diaries was to map the role of our 'work' (or at least the closely

institutional related aspects) in circumscribing the possibilities for creativity, reflection and movement. This can fall within the parameters of the situationist project, as to quote Vaneigem: 'The situationist destruction of present conditioning is already at the same time the construction of situations. It is the liberation of the inexhaustible energies trapped within a petrified daily life' (1996:60)

The initial process by which we hoped to record our daily use of space was by map keeping. The decision was that we would map our daily journeys and record them using the pages of the London A-Z for overground journeys, and also utilize the underground tube map. Yet this skeletal picture of our movement does not constitute the mapping of a *dérive*, in Debord's sense, and reveals the inadequacies of Cartesian spatiality (Ferrier 1990). Debord picks up on this in his first citation of de Lauwe who asserts: 'an urban neighbourhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighbourhoods have of it.' (de Lauwe in Debord, 1958). The image and impression of the spaces through which we move is a key to the notion of the *dérive*. In many ways, the *dérive* takes the form of a narrative: one goes along in any direction and recounts what one sees, a kind of synchronic history. So in addition to the recoding of our journey axes through map keeping, we decided to record our journeys, impressions and in some cases feelings/reactions in the form of a written narrative, by diary entries and reflections.

For two weeks the four of us recorded the time and axes of all journeys we took. Most of these journeys were outside the home, but there is some recording of domestic space and time, which we took to be an alternative space of journeying. Also recorded in the diaries, implicitly and explicitly is something of the character of the spaces through which we moved, described through our direct observations, our impressions and feelings. We were not on *dérive*, in Debord's sense of 'dropping our familiar relations', although we were recording detail, and in a group of a manageable number (he specifies that not more than four or five people can 'do' a *dérive*).

For Debord, *dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour. We decided to add elements of chance and unfamiliarity by injecting elements of surprise which one person would concoct and disseminate to the rest of the group. We did this on two occasions. On one day we had to 'spoil ourselves' and on the last day of the mapping project, we had to wear an item of headgear all day. In the latter case, this situation was constructed on a day that all four of us would be in work and teaching for part of the day. The point of these two exercises was firstly to create a situation and secondly to feel differently about ourselves in familiar space.

The art of the *dérive* itself cultivates a feeling of being 'apart together', that Johan Huizinga (1970) described as characteristic of play. Whilst we lived out our everyday lives and spaces, recording all the while, we were inevitably aware that others were recording also and literally had journeys of collision along corridors and in meetings at work. When we came to together to exchange diary material and muse our maps, a question, which remained, was what one might see differently if one 'dropped ones usual relations'. Central to the *dérive* has been the awareness of exploring forms of life radically beyond the capitalist work ethic. And we decided to do so for a day in the Easter vacation, by taking a boat along the River Thames. The point of our boat trip was to emotionally disorientate ourselves, and record our experiences of being 'somewhere else' apart-together. We hoped that by keeping the diaries and by attempting a *dérive* we would be able to understand how the findings of both differed, what the connections between them were, to ultimately explore the diversity of our experience.

### **Inscribing the 'Common place'**

Chombart de Lauwe finds that the student from the 16th district makes journeys between three apexes, the School of Political Sciences, her residence, and that of her piano teacher (Debord 1958). These journeys are both the boundaries of her life, and the process of experience of timespace by which her life is experienced. It is her journey in and through the public world (urban, modern, and Parisian), which connects her to the intimate spaces of living and production.

We were curious to know our own apexes. By recording our journeys and activities, it is possible to argue that we have mapped the axes of what constitutes for us, both as a group and as individuals, is our Common Place. Common Place, a concept borrowed from an exhibition curated by The Lighthouse, (Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City, Glasgow), in 2003, can be defined as:

the area beyond your house, the public places both intimate and expansive, that we occupy with other people. It is the buildings and connecting places, the places we spend our time in, walking, waiting, learning, playing and living. A combination of everything that we both acknowledge and take for granted; the places that are special, that are a chance encounter; that are purposeful or that are unaccounted for: a constant in our daily life and all that is public property. (MacDonald, 2003:6)

The Lighthouse model of the Common Place sees the city as a space of encounters, where we are continually bumping into each other, and working with the environment as embodied persons. However, the diaries and our mapping of the A-Z reveal that we share a Common Place in which the processes of housing and labour markets on the one hand, and social relations of affectivity and adventure on the other, had brought us to the same three corridors of the same building in the same University, to buy houses of a comparable kind in streets which are located on adjoining pages of the A-Z.

Against and through important shaping structures and processes, we can see our own unique trajectories, each her own unique configuration of spaces and connections, shared by and made through relations of a thousand kinds: strangers, acquaintances, lovers, children, colleagues, animals, shop keepers, gangs, friends, someone sighted in the street. All of these relations are played out in spaces where the built environment is not just a back-drop, the objects of everyday life our props, but an integral part of our journeying, our sense making, our knowing of ourselves and others. We found our journeying to be a delight and struggle, requiring adaptations and interventions to create different kinds of Common Place.

### **The use of diaries**

In this part of the chapter, we now turn to the diary text to think about the journeying which we recorded, followed by a consideration of the Common places through which we moved and experienced as heterotopic spaces.

The diary texts which follow cannot be assumed to be an unproblematic correspondence between our words and the actual experiences of places, but words are a way of linking consciousness to embodied experience, however incomplete. The purpose of our project was to explore further what women's lived experience of space 'is': in this paper we started with ourselves. We have begun to explore our space by writing ourselves into place. The fragments of diary are many and written from different locations, which themselves shift and change as our relations change, not only with an imagined place outside of the group, but between ourselves. The diary extracts show how we make our experience of space in and through our networks with others, and the rhizomatic quality of our journeying experience. However, our Common place is not necessarily the Common place of the reader, who may or may not recognize some of the names and places in fact or in fantasy. Expanding this idea is far beyond the scope of this chapter, but would draw upon Lefebvre's (1991) tripartite analysis of space as the conceived, perceived and the lived.

We have deliberately used our diary voices, and suggest that the contradictory, fragmented, multiplicity of the following sections reflects something of our experience. When women write ourselves into place, we re-open that which has been closed by dominant discourses, such as geography. We found the Common Place to be polyphonous and heterotopic, and think the collage of diary extracts reflects in form something of our experience.

### **a. Journeying**

We shared the journey to and from the University as a key structuring journey. For the two diarists with children, the other structuring axis was moving children around. For two of the diarists, movement was between city and suburbs, for the other two, more between different parts of the suburbs. Key arterial routes were revealed to us, especially the tiny number of specific stretches of specific roads for two of the diarists, and the journey into town via the London Tube system, whose trains touch the same platforms of the same stations at different moments. The data of our journeys record journeys as both real and imagined. There are many close details of journeys, by public transport, on foot, by car as well as journeys which we expect and anticipate, plan and dream. The London Street 'A-Z' maps and the diary text reveal the repetitious nature of our journeys, and yet we didn't record any journeys as based on remembered routes - even though in most cases they either were, or were based on what Merl on one occasion calls 'autopilot', by which she refers to the unthinking and routinised quality of many of our journeys.

An important category of journey was that of the planned journey. The exigencies of time pressure, managing our various social relationships and the state of transport in London all led to extensive planning activities, such as these:

*2.00p.m. C. is meticulously writing down for me directions on how to drive to New Cross. I am panicked by the complexity, although grateful to C. and get into the car at around 2.15 not being sure where I am going.' (Maria)*

*...following D. who is to show me a new route home to avoid A406 roadworks. Drive A12 turn off then through Wanstead to Whipps Cross Ticketty-boo! At the Bell (pub on corner) five mins from child minder at 4.55. (Erika)*

*As just passed S. on the stairs and it took her three hours to get in, I thought it would take an age to get home, but quick journey in the sunshine. (Erika)*

*I slightly cheated this as I had already planned such a trip - taking P. to the Coliseum for his birthday surprise. (Merl)*

A second category were that of difficult journeys, largely caused by traffic congestion and dangerous driving on the one hand, and the state of London's public transport on the other (in which the majority of journeys recorded were disrupted):

*[arrives at roundabout]*

*Excellent, will be on time for once.*

*[crawls around roundabout] Takes 40 mins to get to the childminder - a 3 minute journey usually. Oh for fucks sake! (Erika)*

*...back on the North Circular for the treacherous journey home. Terrible traffic and hey what are road markings for, then the Billet roundabout, special performance which was simply dangerous.... arrive home, sweaty and annoyed. (Judith)*

*3.45 To train to Central London*

*4.30 Institute of Education, Russell Square...*

*6.20 Back to Russell Square, can't enter the packed leaving train*

*6.45 Still on platform, with severe train delays, we are asked to leave the station*

*6.50 Trying to walk safely down slippery and snowy Southampton Road towards Holborn.*

*7.15 Outside Holborn get on a bus going to Waterloo Bridge*

*7.25 Walk down the stairs of Waterloo Bridge to NFT (Maria)*

*The journey into town ...was hellish...a convoluted route (thanks to closure of the Central Line) wasn't helped by the closure of Kings Cross due to overcrowding. 'Public transport in London is on the verge of collapse' - how*

*much worse does it have to get for us to declare that goal attained - public transport in London has collapsed. (Merl)*

Actual journeys however, whether planned or otherwise, were at times incomprehensible to the diarists. This third category created difficulties of recording data in terms of our project, but in a far wider sense, presented difficulties of knowing where we are, or how we had got there. Defamiliarisation might occur from the mis-match of expectation to what is possible, (changed routes by public transport); a map or diagram compared to on the ground; someone else's different route (e.g. taxi drivers), unexpectedness. This may raise considerable anxieties as well as pleasurable *dérive*-style experiences:

*...I have made this journey regularly for 3 years but have trouble tracing the bus route on a map. (Merl)*

*7.45 pm. All the way back home BUT missed A104 exit, found myself going to Barking again, panic, solid traffic on the A12, escaped somewhere in the middle, *dérive* through Wanstead and somehow magically found myself back, don't ask me how, I don't know. (Maria)*

Two convoluted journeys by taxi:

*3.30 Stratford from some strange itinerary that takes twice the usual time to get there! (Maria)*

*I don't know who was most relieved, him or me, to arrive at my little house (Judith)*

Semi-derivean experiences, such as these, which arise from unexpectedness, (the first from a glimpse of a rising sun, the other from the unusual occurrence of snow), transform the diarists' journeys:

*Turning back around the park I see the sun rise - first time since mid November. Big ball of fire - how glorious. The cloud has thinned but is still layers of grey-purple and salmon pink...What a stunning view. (Erika)*

*Walked to hair dressers. Snow was fantastic, both in the shade and the brilliant sunshine. By the lake was frozen, trees all knobbly. (Judith)*

A further category of imagined journeys were dreams and fantasies. The need to remember to record journeys was on Judith's mind when she went to sleep on the eve of the diary project:

*Woke having a dream about being on a journey; wasn't A-B type but just general sensation of 'walking around'...knowing... that I must remember to write it down... Struggled upon waking: where was I journeying? How can I write it down if I don't know the journey? (Judith)*

Her partner's need to remember to organise his forthcoming work journeys produced an analogous dream a few days later:

*7.30 M. woke me up shifting about. He sat bolt upright. 'I dreamt I'd been to Doncaster working' he said. 'I have a fear of working in Doncaster' he added. I went back to sleep and he got up. I could only doze and so then I got up. Bloody Hell. (Judith)*

Travel opportunities, real and imagined, provide opportunities for a peculiar mix of fantasy, experience and 'facts' which becomes psychogeographic knowledge about 'other' places:

*Over dinner...S. who is Finnish and has been in London just a few weeks reveals that her London guidebook says that Kings Cross is so dangerous that you shouldn't even get off the tube there...Along Grays Inn Rd, S. spots a man dressed in 50s gear and remarks upon him - as we continue*



*...we encounter more people ...dressed in 40s style...S. says here that guidebook mentions this too, special 'dress' events as a distinctive feature of London nightlife. (Merl)*

*I explain I have already been to Australia, China, Russia, Finland, Edinburgh and North Yorkshire already this year and its not even March and I haven't left England yet. She says, oh yes, the same. She and R. pop over to New York of an evening. ...I was able to reveal that there are at least 3 museums in Alice Springs....She knows the subway stations of New York. (Judith)*

These diary entries reveal the diversity of our experience of journeying in and through the Common place.

### **b. Some heterotopic spaces**

In this section, we think about the qualities of the spaces through which we journeyed, looking closely at their heterotopic character, ambiguities, pleasures and risks. In this first group of extracts, we have selected the spaces, or should we say the spaces selected themselves, on the basis of the specific relationships which each diarist has with it/them.

For Erika, a run on the Walthamstow marshes each morning with her dog Kevin produces lots of rich data about this unique urban space, including this insight into its temporary occupation each morning by what she calls 'the femalship of the city dwellers':

*The marshes are female spaces really - apart from the posh boys of the Lea rowing club and the park rangers...It's not just that the marshes are so good to run in, no cars, pollution, noise, look great etc (that draws me here every day)...it's the femalship of the city dwellers out amongst birds and bees in the early morning. (Erika)*

And a comment on the ambiguity of the marshes:

*...electricity pylons, 3 train lines/viaducts, the occasional park ranger in a car...and then the pre-industrial aesthetic, a whole load of people living in barges on the river. (Erika)*

Meanwhile, Merl journeys into central London, to find the Common-place in the process of becoming replaced by homogenising capitalism, a problematical replacement:

*Oxford St seems surprisingly slim pickings: rich material disappearing under thick homogenised commercial varnish. Wigmore is better: elegant buildings with pseudo-exclusive shops - caught between a refined regency past and a global capitalised present. (Merl)*

*...We approach the Brunswick Centre up broad steps to the Renoir - a clockwork orange streetscape, the Renoir a little beacon of middle-class sweetness and light. (Merl)*

One of Judith's spaces is the arterial London North Circular Road, along which she travels to and from the University, as well as to escape out of town. As such, the North Circular becomes a transitional space of anxiety and fantasy:

*Drove home nightmare traffic jams, sang a lot to boogie music and enjoyed escapist youth fantasies e.g. I am the dancing queen and enjoying it very much thank you. (Judith)*

Maria's apexes involve several trips to Central London, often for academic related purposes. This creates particular types of patchwork journeys over long periods of time, constructed by sticking together small journeys. In the following extract, Maria fulfils several obligations and organises the means of production for doing so:

8.45 Wesley Road - Leyton High Road - Stratford to drop my daughter and back  
9.10 Leyton High road to buy new tyre and put it back  
10.00 Usual journey to Barking [university]  
2.30 Journey back home to leave the car  
3.45 Train to Central London  
4.30 Institute of Education Russell Square for the launch of a book (Maria)

#### *The Common-place as risk*

In terms of both psychogeography and existing social divisions, these interim spaces are not merely familiar and comfortable, exciting or restful: the concept of risk can be used to explore the potential difficulties of such spaces, in the uncertainties and vulnerabilities which the Common-place presents.

In this extract, following the recent announcement of the murder of a female jogger in the news, Erika remembers herself as a woman running on her own:

*But going over bridge I can't stop thinking of the Victoria park femicide. And the 4 rapes at this bridge...Should I go back to carrying a knife like I used to when I run early?...some chaotic running thoughts this morning. I see so many more women than men...think that their dogs will protect them. Woman's best friend. (Erika)*

While Merl observes the mixed meanings of Whitechapel, the past and present hopelessly intermingled for all concerned:

*S. and D. later said that they felt unsafe making this walk but I didn't feel that way exactly...Some talk at the dinner table in Fieldgate St of the Ripper walk with the students...Whitechapel as a repository (reliquary?) for the Other, both historical and contemporary. (Merl)*

Both cases belie the easy separation at the ideological level between past as the blood stained, uncivilised Other and the domesticated present where such fears becomes sanitised, depoliticised, and denied, a process observed by Samuel (1996) as conducted in part by the commodification of our urbanised social life:

A taste for the gruesome is very much in evidence on London walks....'a spine-chilling look at historic London's dark side', conducted, it seems, by professional archaeologists or museum curators - is the title of one nightly tour, which leaves the Barbican at 8 p.m., 'on the trail of Jack the Ripper'; another 'A Bus Trip to Murder' is the night time offering of 'Tragical History Tours' which starts from the Embankment at 7 p.m., a round trip which makes a speciality of the supernatural and paranormal. (Samuel 1996:285)

The diary extracts here reveal the contingency of our journeys through the Common Place, and the gendered qualities of that journeying. Our subjective experience of imagined places impacts our actual use of places. The Common Place in this section is a space of threat, life itself is at risk, and a culture of violence is revealed alongside the mellifluous view of city life as a stream of (un)conscious encounters. We can see from these diary entries that the concept of risk has a temporal quality where the past, present and imagined futures are making connections.

#### *The Common-place as the space of objects*

Cities are not only the preserve of living creatures and the built environment, the social lives of things (Appadurai, 1986) mean that objects arrive and depart the Common-place, bouncing in and out of the diarists' material worlds, providing opportunities for the acquisition of new objects, in playing spaces of fun and (dis) pleasure:

*2.30 Westminster-Green Park-Covent Garden, time to spoil myself...Nine West, nice boots but did not buy them at the last minute (I am not satisfied)*

*with your services), up to Long Acre, Jigsaw, nice boots, Next, two sweaters, Baby Gap present for my student's baby, Beauty Shop: Estee Lauder for me!!! I love spoiling myself!!! (Maria)*

Meanwhile older and un-novel objects lose their exchange value. Having outlived their welcome by their previous owner, they can be glimpsed awaiting re-appropriation by the next:

*8.35-9.35 am to UEL from home  
Walking down Katherine Road - a backstage area (but where is the front stage? Indoors, in the houses?)- bins, old fridges, car batteries piled by the side of the road. (Merl)*

Another category relating to objects, is that of juxtaposition or displacement, producing sometimes humorous and/or surreal images of disturbance and harmony:

*The one grownup out on the street turns it into an extension of his domestic space, unrolling the extension cord so that he can take his vacuum cleaner out to his car and stand there with it in his slippers. (Merl)*

*See a couple of Wrens just before bridge by car park. They're hopping around the sign which says 'Nature Reserve' - appropriate I think. (Erika)*

These diary entries show how the flows of objects and people interact with the stability of the built environment, destabilising its meanings, and re-opening spaces for reconstitution by acting subjects. The mobility of objects is an essential form of *traffic* in the city.

#### *The Common-place as interaction*

Interaction was found to be in many forms, for example, the first category was that of the problem of encounters, a classic sociological problem of urban life presented as the problem of how actors should act when encountering another. This was identified by Simmel as a special feature of modernised, urban life, which produces endless encounters with strangers, and thus opens new possibilities of interaction, such as assuming particular modes of performing personalities (Frisby, 1992).

The data shows a sub-division between encounters with people who become known, and those who remain strangers. In the first case, the diaries show how this is specifically always through, and as relations in, a particular space and place. The exemplary model of this are these recorded by Erika on the Common-place of Walthamstow marshes:

*See the Jolly Man with dog...He's very cheery and camp and the dog is just an ugly, miserable old creature...  
See D. over other side of river - we wave, dogs both stand on back legs and whine...  
See Jogging Woman who lives in flat overlooking river - wave...  
Only talk to the man with the lovely brown Labrador who is scared of Kevin.  
(Erika)*

The second type, the encounter of the nameless stranger in the city, is managed by a performance of anonymity and, in Goffman's terms, the presentation of the self as unknown and unknowable, itself a form of recognition entailing practices such as acting upon or towards, at the meta level of interaction (Goffman, 1971). The model here are entries recorded by Merl on her night out in Central London, when strangers present themselves to be gazed upon as part of the spectacle of the city:

*Coming out of Bond St tube, a Jesus preacher with a mike tells us all off for looking miserable - he says it's because we're sinners. (Merl)*

*...as we continue to Kings Cross we encounter more people...the men in suits and shiny smooth hair, the women with elaborate hair and red red lipstick. (Merl)*

A second category of interaction we found was that of micro power struggle:

*Truck blocking road, so quick reroute down side road to get on to Forest Road. Feeling: 'If women mended roads they would not, I'm convinced, block the traffic to unload when they could easily have parked. (Erika)*

*On the way I stop at the cashpoint...this area is also being used by a group of young South Asian men as a smoking area. This produces a slightly blokey feel, not really intimidating but not welcoming either - I am definitely excluded. I inhabit the space on condition that I will leave immediately, that I am there for utilitarian purposes rather than (like them) just to hang out. (Merl)*

*Nightmare journeys. North circular completely jammed, Woodford: tarring road towards Highams Park, dreadful experience outside Budgens ('you want to get your eyes sorted luv' etc). (Judith)*

*On the A406 a car is beeping behind me, but I ignore it, or think there was something wrong with my lights (Maria)*

Sticky problems can be managed away, or shall we say massaged away, by widely shared discourses, in this example, one of accident is deployed:

*Car to marshes. Whoops - Bang into another car down Coppermill Lane. He was stationary, I was going less than 5 mph. Nothing could be done, car slid across the road, he was very sweet - but needs me to buy a new headlight. (Erika)*

A third category was that of the nature of interaction by the interdependent, and how this produces opportunities and constraints for the actors. In these two extracts, we can see how two of the diarists as parents realise their own lack of control over their childrens' respective, independent, trajectories:

*Walk upstairs to put J. to bed for nap. We find for the first time that he can get out of cot and run around... 'Oh no! ...nowhere we can incarcerate him'.. ..D and I are laughing: we're both always shocked at changes like this - it's bizarre. (Erika)*

*7.00 meet with friends to see Passage to India. OK nothing special... my daughter did not want to go for dinner after the play...came back home silent and reading via Hammersmith-Finsbury Park. (Maria)*

### **c. 'Indoors'**

In the areas of East London where the diarists live, the home is frequently referred to as 'Indoors'. While it is constructed as not for public consumption, nonetheless, there may be little privacy in a real sense, where the comings and goings of households may be well known, actual activities overheard, and missing data the subject of fantasy, speculation and rumour. While the Common-place more properly refers to the front stage area of street, the diaries reveal that the boundaries between inside and outside were often slippery, especially when moments of work and domesticity were hard to distinguish.

Moving beyond the Common-place defined as 'the area beyond your house', we will now follow the diaries into the homes of their occupants. These dwellings are revealed to be heterotopic in the classic sense of constituting a flow of openings and closings as discussed by Foucault. The homes present spaces of affectivity and of different kinds of work, especially domestic and academic. The homes do not easily hold their shape, the activities and social relations through which they form, meld and transform, fill them 'but for a moment': 'liquefaction' comes with each new moment (Bauman, 2003), in spite of the scaffolding of tasks outlined by the diarists, and the actual constraints of dependencies and time.

In the following extracts, the working lives of the diarists as academics is very significant. The structures of work and home, traditionally divided for the female sex, become indivisible, and synchronous, the two structures melting together. Here is a classic example of the liquid nature of Judith's heterotopic sofa:

*Warm inside the house, dozy, read a bit of modern Japanese society, got lost in the Muji etc and nodded off. (Judith)*

*4pm relaxed, happy, warm. Did some reading of Timespace by Thrift with close notes, this is fine. M. missed his evening class because of the snow. (Judith)*

The process by which academic production replaces or substitutes and thus melts domestic orientation was a continuing theme. In these extracts, the tasks are presented as qualitatively different task-moments which follow either in a sequence, or in a separated but parallel (time)space:

*J.'s lunch a messy struggle, upstairs to bath him, put him to bed for his nap, then do some work. (Erika)*

*Knackered. Food shopping first, then reading all day: 1 chap + 3 articles with close notes, well done, delighted. (Judith)*

*Walk dog around block - or was going to, but was writing this so D. did! (Erika)*

The following extract shows a form of liquefaction as clearly spaced in time, where the home space is first one thing, and then switches to become another. Firstly, Maria records enjoying a weekend at home with her family, and perhaps after a week of difficult journeys, the pleasure of stillness:

*JUST HOME!!! Yes yes yes!!! (Maria)*

But the following weekend, (the traditional period of rest under Fordist and pre-industrial regimes), the home changes to a production house for academic work, a factory in which she works for two days, more or less non-stop:

*Saturday 8th Feb  
Home all day: two books and a paper to be delivered by Monday.  
Sunday 9th Feb  
Home all day: two books and a paper to be delivered by Monday. (Maria)*

With yet more time needed, she must now encroach upon the traditional nine to five working week to complete this task, and so moves herself and the task to the University work space. But this presents both new opportunities and constraints, and she is faced with the need to knit together the different dimensions of the heterotopic university, if she is to successfully produce a coherent day:

*Monday 10th Feb  
11.45 Printing and mailing papers and books.  
2pm-3pm CNR seminar ...  
3.00-6.15pm More work with printing and e-mailing etc (Maria)*

The constraints on fluidity are most clearly represented where dependencies are to be found. Here, Erika experiences domestic tensions with a small child, and has difficulty synthesising all of the different kinds of demands:

*Much movement! Clean house from top to bottom...I clean, D. looks after J. even though he took him swimming, (Thinks) The only good thing about housework is that its good exercise. Will we ever have sex again? There is always so much domestic stuff to do and work crap - no time for us. (Erika)*

#### **d. The University as a Common-place**

Finally, the University itself can be understood a type of Common place. It is neither the home nor an exclusively public space, yet is paid for by public funding. It is common to all of the diarists, used as a thoroughfare and space of interaction by students and staff, as well as local people who use it as a cut through and young people who skateboard in the car park. It has a variety of temporary occupants and visitors such as delivery staff and those who live there. The university is characterised by many physical passing and meeting points as well as internal systems such as the snail and email systems. Its multi-site character and warrenesque layout creates almost infinite journeying and experiential opportunities for encounters of different kinds.

Whilst the University may be expected to principally be the site of academic engagement for the diarists, the diaries reveal the university to be experienced as characterised by a lack of opportunities for such work:

*Open day - got up and imagined journey to work in its entirety. Very bizarre. Couldn't remember anything e.g. when did open day start? What am I doing for it? M. wanted car...so he drove me to work far too early, no traffic jams, so arrived super early and had done all the work outstanding by 10.15...did sociological exercise with P., ...then to gender network meeting...then back for interviews...then cleared up lunch things (again!) since it is beneath men to do this unless you are married to them, then back up to office for student, who was LATE...then remembered I was on duty in the hall at the other open day (!) ...went to bus stop, no bus came, walked to Barking... (Judith)*

*10-10.25 from N block to LRC; 10.30-10.35 back again. 12.15-12.45 From N to A block and back again. UEL Barking to Vicarage Fields 4-4.20; inside Vicarage Fields till 4.50ish, Barking to home 4.50-5.40ish. (Merl)*

*Walk: to N102, do pigeon holds, then to office, tutorial with A., check email. Walk to A. block for meeting with S. and J. re new citizenship degree. J. has forgotten her hat! Walk to get coffee, and then to car ...back to office...see students...walk to lunch with A..back to N block, pop with A. for a unit guide, then back to office. Some strange looks on N block re banadana, walk to A. block to teach. The room is...locked. Walk back to office. Lots of emails. A406 home, detour via Wanstead - bad traffic. (Erika)*

This enables us to revisit the meaning of 'Indoors' and 'the University' for the diarists. As the above examples show, the production of academic work is as likely to occur at 'home' rather than at 'work' where the overriding sensation of the psychogeographic recordings are of a disjointed space which is not necessarily conducive to studying and creativity.

#### **e. Gaiety, or: 'if I can't dance this is not my revolution' (Emma Goldman)**

One of the tasks we set ourselves was to create an opportunity for 'spoiling ourselves'. Spoiling has been an important element of the group's activities, for example: being in Blacks, meeting first in *Patisserie Valerie*, the role of eating and drinking can be seen to off-set the domestic-work-journey apex outlined in the diaries. We began the Blacks reading group by discussing Foucault's idea of the *care of the self*, agreeing that gaining space to think and write is a form of care of oneself. This we believe we pursued throughout the whole project of forming the group, meeting, thinking and writing. However, spoiling meant different practices in a shared understanding of a Spinozist element of enjoyment and gaiety, a life drive towards good encounters. After all, gaiety, joy and happiness has always been an integral element of feminist praxis.

*Feed animals, let dog out, grab jar of toddler food and some cucumber chunks, then off to the pub down Ferry Lane to spoil ourselves with dinner out...J. was an angel and yet we've got indigestion and feel a bit uptight! Spoiling oneself means a child free zone. (Erika)*

Maria went shopping for clothes for herself, and Merl went to the theatre. Judith, as a woman without children, enjoyed doing something vaguely maternal, an unusual thing for her:

*One trip walking up the road for a card for my niece for a late birthday cheque, and this was nice. (Judith)*

From looking at the diary data we can see how heterotopic spaces create opportunities and constraints, and raise the need to synthesise and synchronise our social lives. At least parts of the diaries have picked up on the problematic nature of the spaces and journeys which we have experienced. And yet, we do not as a result demand the homogenised, sanitised alternative represented in the Common-place exhibition by the metaphor of:

shopping centres, particularly large ones...where there is always, with absolute 100% certainty, a place to sit down, a drink to be quaffed, a toilet to be found and a new product to be purchased. Such public realms are the utopia of late capitalism, places where all that is troublesome in the city is erased, where there are no homeless people, wailing sirens or speeding couriers. (Borden 2003: 49)

The diaries can be read at a higher level as a means of practicing care of ourselves. Through doing so, we have engaged in a social act of care for one another. In the course of making them, we have mapped the power struggles and contingencies with which we engage, but have made no plea for a sanitised and asocial alternative. There is a difference between a bloodless life, and the diaries, in which we caught sight of the collisions and divisions of our journeys through the *social* spaces of everyday life. It is through this that we glimpse what a truly 'Common-place' may mean, in its democratised, not sanitised, form.

### **Tales of the riverbank, or an attempt to 'do' *dérive***

We discussed our journey axes and realized that there was a completely different way of perceiving journeying on the river day-out. We've also considered the ideas of indulgence/playfulness as central in the concept of the *dérive*: As suggested: '(the) revolutionary idea of pleasure was a constituent feature of the psychogeographical 'research'' (Andreotti, 2000). Thus in this part of the chapter we will tackle two themes that have already emerged in the discussion of the diaries, namely, what we have called (1) misdirections and structuring contingencies and (2) the notion of the paradox with which we would like to conclude. Remembering the concept of the *dérive*:

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. (Debord, 1958)

Our difficulty has been in deciding to what extent and in what ways the riverboat trip to Kew Gardens constituted a *dérive*. Our idea had been to construct a space away from the work norm. At the same time this space was to be structured by the mundane/ness of everyday life, the pragmatic restrictions within which it was planned (the timing, only one day, framed by domestic, leisure and other responsibilities/commitments). There were also other structuring contingencies such as physical ability — two women had strained ankles — and all these parameters did determine which kind of journey should be selected. The following extract depicts some of these structuring contingencies:

*We decided to *dérive* and thought of Croydon, or even Luton, but sanity prevailed and we decided to have the sort of *dérive* where you sit down a lot and have a glass in your hand [...] This is not quite the world the situationists had in mind, the romantic image of a young man, wandering lonely as a cloud through a melancholy backdrop of houses. No doubt there should have been rain in the air, but our day was clear and bright, a glorious day for sightseeing, holidaying, picnicking... So we went for a sitting down journey, borne by the arteries of a London much older than*

*the buildings, gliding gently over riverbeds of fossils, algae and living creatures with no eyes and ears whose life is one great watery dérive.*  
(Judith)

And the extract thus shows the contrast between the drift of the dérive and the structuring contingencies within which we find the drift played out.

**a. Constructed dérive and Structuring contingencies**

The planning of the day unfolded through e-mails and phone calls. We set aside a day, and dropped our 'usual' activities following Debord's suggestions. Once on dérive, there was a dynamic that went beyond and sometimes in spite of our plans: the failure of the public transport, created so to speak the infrastructure of the dérive day.<sup>2</sup> The dérive day actually started with four women standing on different platforms of a collapsing public transport system, not knowing what to do — this is an instance of what we have called 'misdirection'. A dérive becoming structured by the failure of the public transport system, is obviously a post-modern contingency. We suggest that the spontaneous elements of the day make rhizomatic formations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) with a collapsing urban public transport system.

*I have a plan of taking the 11.50 train and there I am on the platform at 11.45, waiting for the train which does not come: guess what: a strike day! Good for them, bad luck for me. Down the stairs always carrying the basket, and to the cab's office just opposite the station. There is a cab just waiting for me, but what congestion! I arrive at Blackhorse Road station Veeeeeerrry late, I can't see Erika, 'what am I doing, what am I doing', there is Erika, laughing as always, I don't even have to feel badly (or so I think).*  
(Maria)

*A speedy walk to the tube to find I am exactly on time and Maria is nowhere to be seen. I panic, of course, that I must have got the time wrong and fret for five minutes. I then discover, from a pompous spotty man who needs oxy-clear grease stripping pore unblocker like the flowers need the rain, that all is chaos on the Barking to Gospel Oak line and Maria could arrive late, later, or even later than that. I have nobody's number on me and the mobile phone sits neglected in the unhappy car. Call D. to call M. (please let M. not be out!) to get Jude's mobile number and call her, and then wait for poor Maria who unlike me, seems always to be on time. The boys will sort it out I'm sure! Maria floats in with her picnic basket only a little flustered, I would be dripping sweat and gabbling explanation senselessly.* (Erika)

*We go down the station and the dérive starts on the train: we don't have a plan about how exactly we are going to reach Westminster, much giggling about that, a look on the tube map, itinerary decided: we are going to Green Park, change to the Jubilee line and we are there. As a matter of fact it is the same journey I had taken on our strike-spoiling day, which has actually been recorded in our two-week's diary. What a coincidence, but it turns out to be just an insignificant one compared to what will happen later on the day! Well, obviously we arrive very late and it's all my fault, but again, Judith and Merl are waiting for us on the top of the stairs, full of smiles, there is no space for feeling guilty when women meet to go on a dérive ... Why? I don't know, this is a dérive, remember, no need of causalities here, this is how things happen on a dérive ...*(Maria)

*We sit and giggle excitedly on the tube, and Maria shows me the contents of her picnic basket. A young man opposite to our left looks on with some distain, and clearly thinks we are ridiculous. He has the kind of jeans that hang below his arse and a miserable expression and I feel quite sorry for him. There is some discussion of the tube route. I let Maria decide, I feel too tired for any decisions today so we take the Jubilee line which I rarely if ever use and it is a good disorientating start.* (Erika)



*Merl and I spotted each other simultaneously and we waited wondering what was happening, and I rang M. for a phone number and had to borrow Merl's phone, a moment of anxiety, but they arrived quickly and it was in vain, and gladly so. On the return, a woman got on at Bank and sat opposite me, and I suddenly realised that it was Maria, which considering we had parted a while before took some adjustment for us both to understand that it really was us and we were not ghosts. (Judith)*

In using the notion of the rhizome, as a theoretical lens to look at the above diary extracts we refer to aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's thought mostly concerned with heterogeneity, minoritarian changes and unexpected encounters. What we want to suggest is that although there is not any linear causality between the terrible state of the London underground at the time and the way our *dérive* day was deployed, many complex and unpredictable connections can still be made between personal and public planes of reference. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988:7) have pointed out, instead of 'plotting a point' and 'fixing an order' rhizomes make connections with a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements, in our case: social activism (the industrial action on the railways); collapse of the public transport system of a metropolitan urban centre as an effect of privatization; anxiety feelings over lateness and failure of communication; personal phantasies constructed over the 'object of the picnic basket', and strong affects of gaiety emerging from our desire of subverting a daily routine of urban existence by testing the theory of the *dérive*.

***b. 'Spontaneous' moments of the *dérive* day***

An emergent category was genuinely spontaneous *derivean* experiences of which the failure of the public transport was just one. Here we will pick up the *derivean* experiences of picnics, sunshine, boats and tides.

*The picnic*

The picnic was supposed to happen in Kew, but since we were so late we decided to reverse the order and eat first, a spontaneous moment which arose from the transport failure. These extracts show different chains of dependencies:

*In search of the boat, we find out that it has gone and we would have lost it even if I had been on time, so plans revisited we enthusiastically adopt Merl's suggestion to have our picnic on the South Bank before the boat trip. (Maria)*

*On checking out the times for riverboat journeys, we find we have missed the morning floatings and must wait until 2 pm. Merl suggests that we eat our picnic across the river, and we do. We move through the crowds and sit on the scrubby grass, with many others. (Erika)*

*We arrive at the picnic spot, a barely grassy park, full of people lying in the sun, we criss-cross them and find the spot of our dreams. The picnic unfolds itself on the semi-green ground in all its splendour. (Maria)*

With the food we can see the unfolding of a 'colourful topoanalysis'— Bachelard's notion of 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives' (1994:8). This is illustrated by what we decided to buy for the picnic, which was diversely synthetic. There were only two exceptionally unexpected coincidences: the dried apricots and the colour of the picnic-set.

*I went to Budgens, (itself a site of many *dérives* of my own and others, and it must be said, however unkind it may be, that it is full of creatures with no eyes or ears) and picked a few things, bizarrely including a packet of dried apricots (which I have never directly bought before or since, although M. does) which Merl duplicated, this being the only duplication. I bought things because I thought they'd be nice to eat, although realised at the check out that this had resulted in nothing real to eat for a meal. (Judith)*

*Different kinds of bread, prepared salads from Marks and Spencer, hummus, smoked salmon pate, prawns in marie-rose sauce, marinated feta and olives, baby pomodoro, feta stuffed peppers and a tin of dolmades spread themselves out on Maria's picnic 'table' cloths. Others have brought juice but of course I have brought a bottle of wine...You can't be away from 'work', in such lovely weather with such lovely summery food and not have a glass of wine. This is just impossible for me to imagine. Judith and Maria seem surprised the food is so much, so good and so complementary. The only clash is a 'glut of apricots' as Merl describes them. The two packets remain unopened. (Erika)*

*There is a lot of food, all different, all picnicean, drinks as well, alcohol and non. Of course we eat it all, we are good at that! And we drink almost all the alcohol, we laugh a lot, comment on the unplanned variety of the picnic food, we try not to talk about work or about anything serious. (Maria)*

To top it all, the picnic basket was the highlight of the performative dimension of the day (Butler, 1990), an absolute fantasy object we used to signify our departure from the daily routines of our lived spaces.

*Back home, trying to stuff everything into the picnic basket (a present from my sister, on its maiden picnic), DONE. The basket as the picnicean cultural symbol dominates the scene and becomes the focus of some snapshots taken by Judith. (Maria)*

#### *The weather*

Unbelievably hot weather with dazzling sun also structured our psychogeographic experiences by changing the idea of how London is supposed to be lived on a working week day.



*as we cross the river on such a hot day, I momentarily reflect on how different this very experience of walking in London is. I don't feel like a tourist, because obviously I am not, but there is definitely a feeling of playfulness and anticipation for an unplanned day out on the river (Maria)*

*We move through the crowds and sit on the scrubby grass, with many others. The sun is hot, the air hazy and everything looks over exposed (Erika)*

### *The boat*

The boat was delayed, a further contribution to our experiences of uncertainty in transportation. As we were standing on the pier waiting for its arrival, two boats emerged almost simultaneously and we all recorded standing there, having no doubt whatsoever that the derelict boat, coming after the flashy one was ours!

*A large, beautiful swish one drew up - but moored at the next post along, and we realised that the next one coming, (a tiny, chugging, wooden, open topped thing which would not have been out of place on a small river in a provincial town) was in fact the boat for us. It was perfect in many ways, not least with its collapsible furniture and fittings, which came in handy for the bridges, and a woman serving drinks with careful hands. It was cold coming back, shivering in sunshine. I've got a photo of the three of them, all smiling, all with their jackets on. (Judith)*

### *The boat and the tide*



*A combination of the vessel and the tide produced a long, slow sailing under the dazzling sun, which, helped by the gin and tonics, was the perfect setting for letting ourselves be carried away both by the river and our thoughts. Gliding on the boat, time seemed to have disappeared. The supreme point of this unexpected drifting was the moment of encountering a bridge, the arches of which had become full with the spring tide. To our surprise, the boat undid itself to make space and pass under. We all recorded looking at the two men dismantling the boat in front of our eyes, with disbelief. There was definitely a change of dependencies there. The tide, the height of the bridge, the making and the unmaking of the boat, things still depended on other things, but the order of dependencies was definitely new. The opening and closing of the situation was created from the unforeseen, and rested on a different plane of rationalities, causes and effects: 'this is a dérive, remember, no need for causalities here, this is how things happen...' (Maria).*



*It's soooo hot, unbelievable, we sit there dazzled by the sun, the drinks and the commentary watching our captain undoing the ship to make it pass under a low bridge, arguing with some other navigators, we yet have to find out why, looking at all those luxury apartments with a view on the river...(Maria)*

*Under the bridges of Hammersmith and Putney, although it seems there are two or three of each. A perception shaped by my ignorance of what's out West, I'm sure. And then the turning point – the lowest bridge on the river, and some anxiety on the part of our 'Captain' about tidal flows or some such thing. Some shifting and turning about, then the taking off of the cabin roof, under the bridge by a whisker and some argy-bargy with posh people (that word again!) coming in the other direction over the etiquette of boating under bridges in adverse conditions. Hilarious and strange. (Erika)*

#### *The desserts in the park*

Our decision not to go into Kew Gardens was the last spontaneous moment, actually crossing the boundaries of spontaneity and planning, since it was a decision taken in the light of calculating the time we needed to go back and some pre-existing plans for the evening.

*We disembark and immediately plan our voyage home, making a decision not to visit Kew Gardens. I'm still not sure why we did so, but it made perfect sense at the time. (Erika)*

*... It's a very slow relaxing journey that finally gets us at Kew at around 4. We decide not to go to the gardens, since Merl wants to go back with the 4.30 boat, so we just have a quick walk and a quick lying-dessert-eating in a nearby public garden and this is it. Time to go back (Judith)*

*Time change. We are moving much more slowly, and indeed, not really moving at all. Yet we have slipped through a portal into a world of speed and snapshot. We four amble down the river a little, stroll back and then trundle no distance at all past twee little terraced cottages, to sit in a tiny park, which has fallen out of the sky and landed in just the right place by the jetty. Although ludicrously full, Maria's fruit tarts are just the ticket as we sit or lie on our bellies and ruminates with the aid of the plastic spoons that fell fortuitously into Maria's clutches as we left the boat. Picnicking is such a dreadful word – all speed and bad sandwiches. Grazing is much more apt for sitting around outside and eating slowly, but eventually, heavily. Yet for all our slowness of pace, the time evaporates. (Erika)*



Thus we see how structuring contingencies, (the timetable of the boat, the combination of the diarists pre-existing diaries) does not lock down the possibilities of grazing, and the disappearance of metronomic time.



*The journey back: not a dérive*

The journey back was experienced as the return into the single, hegemonic, dominant urban space

*This time we have a modern boat which moves much quicker, doesn't have problems with bridges, but still serving gin and tonics, which is good. It's also much cooler now and there is definitely this sense that that was it. (Maria)*

*We are back on the boat and Jude and I are at the bar to find there is no ice. Sitting down it is much colder on the return journey and my ridiculous hair wrapping itself around my face obscures my vision... My only recollection is how Battersea power station would make such a great space once reconstructed as a club, and re-thinking old thoughts about how much more there is to see, and how much more pleasant is the view of the north bank of the Thames. For this journey back, my eyes focus on the south bank for most of the time. (Erika)*

The psychogeographic experience of the return journey highlights the temporal quality of the hegemonic urban space, with the 'pace of city life' rushing towards the boat's inhabitants as they near their disembarkation point. We are left with the sense that the cold air and the beat of the clock replaces the sunlit idyll of the timeless gliding which has preceded it.

*Magical Encounters*

We now turn to an unplanned meeting between Maria and Judith on the underground: the synchronic situation par excellence. As Debord put it, 'this society is moved by absurd forces that tend unconsciously to satisfy its true needs.' (Debord, 1996:53). A structuring contingency was at play with problems on the Victoria line, so Maria and Erika are

required to adapt their route, opting for the Central line, having both said goodbye to Judith some twenty minutes earlier.

*I walk to the Central Line platform, get on the first train, walk along the corridor having spotted an empty seat at the other end of the coach, sit down and look up to see Judith sitting just opposite me. Can this be possible? (Maria)*

The *dérive* enacts a kind of urban roaming, where the art of drifting becomes a way of cultivating a feeling of being 'apart together', that Huizinga (1970) described as characteristic of play. Central to the *dérive* has been the awareness of exploring forms of life radically beyond the capitalist work ethic.

*On our dérive to Kew we tried not to talk about work, but only tried; I don't think we have liberated ourselves from this work tyranny: '...we try not to talk about work or about anything serious... (Maria).*

Derivean experiences enact a fluctuation between spatial and temporal registers, a kind of temporalization of space, which was a key situationist tactic and a distinctive quality of the *dérive*. This is why we argue that the first part of the Kew trip was a *dérive* or at least 'in the *dérive*', but not the return. We have come to understand the *dérive* as a theory of outward journeys: it can never be a return.

### **By way of conclusion...**

The spatial field of a *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself. It should not be forgotten that these two aspects of *dérives* overlap in so many ways that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state. (Debord 1958)

What Debord argues here, is that the derivean experience is two-fold and can be deployed as either a study of a 'terrain' or as an emotional disorientation. Interestingly, he argues that these two planes cannot really be isolated. This is the point where we think our experience has diverted from the Situationist conceptualisation. In charting our daily journeys, what emerged forcefully, was the impossibility of disorientation within the structuring contingencies of our everydayness. The only way to disrupt that patterning of our everydayness was to create specific situations such as wearing an item of headgear throughout one day, or the 'spoil yourself' directive. Yet even then, these disrupting moments were not totally inclusive or even disruptive, since in many ways, we were not 'apart-together', but simply apart.

The diaries did suggest that the patterns of our everydayness in the city recalled the pathetically limited picture de Lauwe painted, and which the *dérive* is supposed to contest. In an email exchange to establish a date for our Blacks meeting to discuss the diaries and the maps we recorded, Merl observed 'my maps are the saddest maps in the history of sad map making'. The rest of us could only concur. The imaginary space opened up by our attempt to do a *dérive* however, did enable a critical commentary on our movements and experiences in time and space. The Blacks reading group can therefore be thought of as the conscious creation of an alternative pragmatic space which had been set up to provide a heterotopia of potentialities, in contrast to the heterotopia of constraints which may be experienced elsewhere. As such, the making of the diaries is the creation of our own commonplace - and our decision to write about them reflects our wish for academe to become a 'Common-place' of a democratised kind.

Still, we did want to grasp the 'actual' experience of 'wandering lonely as a cloud' but also wandering 'apart together'. We wanted to follow the narrative line of the *dérive* wherein one goes along in any direction and recounts what one sees, a kind of synchronic history. What we think we did with the boat trip to Kew Gardens was actually to explore the plane of emotionally disorienting ourselves.

Writing about the diaries and about our 'dérive day' has been a necessity for us, something we did to open up space for reflection. Writing, of course, is not the only way in which this could have been done. Perhaps our decision to write can be inscribed, paradoxically, in the context of an increasingly production orientated academic environment. As an effect of the academic discourse around mass production, this chapter can be viewed as a sign of our reterritorialisation. As Deleuze and Guattari warn us: 'You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject' (1988:9). Within such a frame of reference we can argue that in forming the group we did take lines of flight in deterritorialising ourselves from the RAE dominated academic spaces. In writing this chapter however and possibly adding it to our 'research profile' we are in danger of being 'reconstituted' as RAE academic subjects, ultimately reterritorialising ourselves in the rigid and hierarchical spaces of academic institutions. In mapping the journey of the reading group so far, we can thus chart lines of deterritorialization and reterritorialisation, but following Deleuze and Guattari's thought (1988) we are mostly interested not in where we fled from or where we have landed onto, but mostly in what happened, what is still happening in the intermezzo, the in-between, in our lines of flight, in the process of our becoming other.

### Note

The Situationist articles and papers discussed in this chapter do not have page references as they come from the internet see <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en>

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<sup>1</sup> The RAE is a national Quality Assurance Exercise that takes place periodically. It is of vital importance as the results determine research funding of Higher Education Institutions.

<sup>2</sup> In February 2003 the running of the central line-one of the busiest in the London Underground system was suspended for almost three months due to a number of derailings, which brought into light the terribly unsafe conditions of the line. This suspension caused huge problems to the whole system and caused misery for all London tube passengers.