

**SITUATIONIST
INTERNATIONAL**
ANTHOLOGY

THEORY OF THE DÉRIVE

Among the various situationist methods is the *dérive* [literally: 'drifting'], a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the *dérive* point of view cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.

But the *dérive* includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. In this latter regard, ecological science—despite the apparently narrow social space to which it limits itself—provides psychogeography with abundant data.

The ecological analysis of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, of the role of microclimates, of the distinct, self-contained character of administrative districts, and above all of the dominating action of centers of attraction, must be utilized and completed by psychogeographical methods. The objective passion of the *dérive* must be defined in accordance both with its own logic and with its relations with social morphology.

In his study *Paris et l'agglomération parisienne* (Bibliothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine, P.U.F., 1952) Chombart de Lauwe notes that "an urban neighborhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighborhoods have of it." In the same work, in order to illustrate "the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives . . . within a geographical area whose radius is extremely small," he diagrams all the movements made in the space of one year by a student living in the 16th arrondissement. Her itinerary delineates a small triangle with no 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 case, indignation at the fact that there are people who live like that)—or even Burgess's theory of Chicago's social

activities
doubtedly

Chance
methodolo
But the ac
tends to re
of variant
through a
more favor
of the déri
that the f
of fixating
to which t

An inst
inevitably
brated air
ginning fir
naturally
than any
a certain
put this
periment
same sor
random c
nificantly
to no ext
should go
as possib
"truly in

At the
character
formed c
expresse
is not the
very lan

One ca
numeric
people w
the cross
sible to
sition of
than fou
diminish
ten or t
multane
interest
being or

The a
between
no nece

activities as being distributed in distinct concentric zones, will undoubtedly prove useful in developing dérives.

Chance plays an important role in dérives precisely because the methodology of psychogeographical observation is still in its infancy. But the action of chance is naturally conservative and in a new setting tends to reduce everything to an alternation between a limited number of variants, and to habit. Progress is nothing other than breaking through a field where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes. We can say, then, that the randomness of the dérive is fundamentally different from that of the stroll, but also that the first psychogeographical attractions discovered run the risk of fixating the deriving individual or group around new habitual axes, to which they will constantly be drawn back.

An insufficient awareness of the limitations of chance, and of its inevitably reactionary use, condemned to a dismal failure the celebrated aimless ambulation attempted in 1923 by four surrealists, beginning from a town chosen by lot: wandering in the open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there than anywhere else. But this mindlessness is pushed much further by a certain Pierre Vendryes (in *Médium*, May 1954), who believes he can put this anecdote in the same category with various probability experiments on the grounds that they all are supposedly involved in the same sort of antideterminist liberation. He gives as an example the random distribution of tadpoles in a circular aquarium, adding, significantly, "It is necessary, of course, that such a population be subject to no external guiding influence." In these conditions, the palm really should go to the tadpoles, who have the advantage of being "as stripped as possible of intelligence, sociability and sexuality," and consequently "truly independent from one another."

At the opposite pole from these imbecilities, the primarily urban character of the dérive, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities—those centers of possibilities and meanings—could be expressed in Marx's phrase: "Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive."

One can dérive alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same awakening of consciousness, since the cross-checking of these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at objective conclusions. It is preferable for the composition of these groups to change from one dérive to another. With more than four or five participants, the specifically dérive character rapidly diminishes, and in any case it is impossible for there to be more than ten or twelve people without the dérive fragmenting into several simultaneous dérives. The practice of such subdivision is in fact of great interest, but the difficulties it entails have so far prevented it from being organized on a sufficient scale.

The average duration of a dérive is one day, considered as the time between two periods of sleep. The times of beginning and ending have no necessary relation to the solar day, but it should be noted that the

last hours of the night are generally unsuitable for *dérives*.

But this duration is merely a statistical average. For one thing, the *dérive* rarely occurs in its pure form: it is difficult for the participants to avoid setting aside an hour or two at the beginning or end of the day for taking care of banal tasks; and toward the end of the day fatigue tends to encourage such an abandonment. But even more importantly, the *dérive* often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or over a period of several days without interruption. In spite of the cessations imposed by the need for sleep, certain *dérives* of a sufficient intensity have been sustained for three or four days, or even longer. It is true that in the case of a series of *dérives* over a rather long period of time it is almost impossible to determine precisely when the state of mind peculiar to one *dérive* gives way to that of another. One sequence of *dérives* was pursued without notable interruption for around two months. Such an experience gives rise to new objective conditions of behavior, which bring about the disappearance of a good number of the old ones.*

The influence of weather on *dérives*, although real, is a determining factor only in the case of prolonged rains, which make them virtually impossible. But storms or other types of precipitation are rather favorable for *dérives*.

The spatial field of the *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the activity is aimed at studying a terrain or at emotional disorientation. It must not be forgotten that these two aspects of the *dérive* overlap in many ways so that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state. But the use of taxis, for example, can provide a clear enough line of demarcation between them: if in the course of a *dérive* one takes a taxi, either to get to a specific destination or simply to move twenty minutes to the west, one is concerned primarily with a personal trip outside one's usual surroundings. If, on the other hand, one sticks to the direct exploration of a particular terrain, one is concentrating primarily on research for a psychogeographical urbanism.

In every case the spatial field depends first of all on the point of departure—the residence of the solo *dérive* or the meeting place selected by a group. The maximum area of this spatial field does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs. At its minimum it can be limited to a small self-contained ambiance: a single neighborhood or even a single block of houses if it's worth it (the extreme case being the static-*dérive* of an entire day within the Saint-Lazare train station).

The exploration of a fixed spatial field thus presupposes the determining of bases and the calculation of directions of penetration. It is here that the study of maps comes in—ordinary ones as well as ecological and psychogeographical ones—along with their rectification and improvement. It should go without saying that we are not at all interested in any mere exoticism that may arise from the fact that one is exploring a neighborhood for the first time. Besides its unimportance, this aspect of the problem is completely subjective and rapidly

disap
In
plora
tation
speci
dinar
"poss
may
the s
one e
have
conve
by ch
vous.
choso
even
sible
speci
Th
bious
by ni
with
the r
acom
sensi
descr
Th
surve
yond
and
axes
centr
point
gions
dista
and
influ
wors
that
but c
To
preci
indis
leads
up to
Wi
all s
niqu
const
signs

disappears in the process of the *dérive*.

In the "possible rendezvous," on the other hand, the element of exploration is minimal in comparison with that of behavioral disorientation. The subject is invited to come alone to a specified place at a specified time. He is freed from the bothersome obligations of the ordinary rendezvous since there is no one to wait for. But since this "possible rendezvous" has brought him without warning to a place he may or may not know, he observes the surroundings. It may be that the same spot has been specified for a "possible rendezvous" for someone else whose identity he has no way of knowing. Since he may never have even seen the other person before, he will be incited to start up conversations with various passersby. He may meet no one, or he may by chance meet the person who has arranged the "possible rendezvous." In any case, particularly if the time and place have been well chosen, the subject's use of time will take an unexpected turn. He may even telephone someone else who doesn't know where the first "possible rendezvous" has taken him, in order to ask for another one to be specified. One can see the virtually unlimited resources of this pastime.

Thus a loose lifestyle and even certain amusements considered dubious that have always been enjoyed among our entourage—slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking nonstop and without destination through Paris during a transportation strike in the name of adding to the confusion, wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public, etc.—are expressions of a more general sensibility which is nothing other than that of the *dérive*. Written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game.

The lessons drawn from the *dérive* permit the drawing up of the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city. Beyond the discovery of unities of ambiance, of their main components and their spatial localization, one comes to perceive their principal axes of passage, their exits and their defenses. One arrives at the central hypothesis of the existence of psychogeographical pivotal points. One measures the distances that effectively separate two regions of a city, distances that may have little relation with the physical distance between them. With the aid of old maps, aerial photographs and experimental *dérives*, one can draw up hitherto lacking maps of influences, maps whose inevitable imprecision at this early stage is no worse than that of the first navigational charts; the only difference is that it is a matter no longer of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism.

Today the different unities of atmosphere and of dwellings are not precisely marked off, but are surrounded by more or less extended and indistinct bordering regions. The most general change that the *dérive* leads to proposing is the constant diminution of these border regions, up to the point of their complete suppression.

Within architecture itself, the taste for *dériving* tends to promote all sorts of new forms of labyrinths made possible by modern techniques of construction. Thus in March 1955 the press reported the construction in New York of a building in which one can see the first signs of an opportunity to *dérive* inside an apartment:

"The apartments of the helicoidal house will have the form of slices of cake. One will be able to augment or diminish them by shifting movable partitions. The half-floor gradations avoid limiting the number of rooms, since the tenant can request the use of the adjacent section on either upper or lower levels. This system permits the transformation of three four-room apartments into one twelve-room apartment in less than six hours."

(To be continued.)

GUY DEBORD

1956*

Inte

Detou
semb
avant
funda
detou
origin
another
scope

Det
doubl
coaxis
sense
becau
ligible
cheap
the C
1956)
this r
again
ical s

"De
uation
he go
"reinv
of the
grows
tion o
the "o
search
level.

The
prece
to a r
situat
avowa
life. S
ticing
Thu
presen
canno

rm of slices
by shifting
g the num-
e adjacent
s the trans-
oom apart-

DEBORD

1956*

Internationale Situationniste #3 (December 1959)

DETOURNEMENT AS NEGATION AND PRELUDE

Detournement, the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constantly present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde both before and since the establishment of the SI. The two fundamental laws of detournement are the loss of importance of each detoured autonomous element—which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely—and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.

Detournement has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old senses and their new, immediate senses. Detournement is practical because it is so easy to use and because of its inexhaustible potential for reuse. Concerning the negligible effort required for detournement, we have already said, "The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding" (*Methods of Detournement*, May 1956). But these points would not by themselves justify recourse to this method, which the same text describes as "clashing head-on against all social and legal conventions." Detournement has a historical significance. What is it?

"Detournement is a game made possible by the capacity of *devaluation*," writes Jorn in his study *Detourned Painting* (May 1959), and he goes on to say that all the elements of the cultural past must be "reinvested" or disappear. Detournement is thus first of all a negation of the value of the previous organization of expression. It arises and grows increasingly stronger in the historical period of the decomposition of artistic expression. But at the same time, the attempts to reuse the "detournable bloc" as material for other ensembles express the search for a vaster construction, a new genre of creation at a higher level.

The SI is a very special kind of movement, of a nature different from preceding artistic avant-gardes. Within culture the SI can be likened to a research laboratory, for example, or to a party in which we are situationists but nothing that we do is situationist. This is not a disavowal for anyone. We are partisans of a certain future of culture, of life. Situationist activity is a definite craft which we are not yet practicing.

Thus the signature of the situationist movement, the sign of its presence and contestation in contemporary cultural reality (since we cannot represent any common style whatsoever), is first of all the use

of detournement. We may mention, on the level of detourned expression, Jorn's altered paintings; Debord and Jorn's book *Mémoires*, "composed entirely of prefabricated elements," in which the writing on each page runs in all directions and the reciprocal relations of the phrases are invariably uncompleted; Constant's projects for detourned sculptures; and Debord's detourned documentary film, *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time*. On the level of what *Methods of Detournement* calls "ultradetournement, that is, the tendencies for detournement to operate in everyday social life" (e.g. passwords or the wearing of disguises, belonging to the sphere of play), we might mention, at different levels, Gallizio's industrial painting; Wyckaert's "orchestral" project for assembly-line painting with a division of labor based on color; and numerous detournements of buildings that were at the origin of unitary urbanism. But we should also mention in this context the SI's very forms of "organization" and propaganda.

At this point in the world's development all forms of expression are losing all grip on reality and being reduced to self-parody. As the readers of this journal can frequently verify, present-day writing always has an element of parody. "It is necessary," states *Methods of Detournement*, "to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detourned elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity."

The parodic-serious expresses the contradictions of an era in which we find ourselves confronted with both the urgent necessity and the near impossibility of bringing together and carrying out a totally innovative collective action. An era in which the greatest seriousness advances masked in the ambiguous interplay between art and its negation; in which the essential voyages of discovery have been undertaken by such astonishingly incapable people.

SITUATIONIST THESES ON TRAFFIC

1

The mistake made by all urbanists is to consider the private automobile (and its by-products like the motorcycle) essentially as a means of transportation. Such a misconception is a major expression of a notion of happiness that developed capitalism tends to spread throughout the society. The automobile is at the center of this general propaganda, both as sovereign good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market: It is being generally said this year that American economic prosperity is soon going to depend on the success of the slogan "Two cars per family."

2

Commuting time, as Le Corbusier rightly pointed out, is a surplus labor which correspondingly reduces the amount of "free" time.

3

We must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as a pleasure.

4

To want to redesign architecture to accord with the needs of the present massive, parasitical existence of private automobiles reflects the most unrealistic misapprehension of where the real problems lie. It is necessary to transform architecture to accord with the whole development of the society, criticizing all the transitory values linked to condemned forms of social relationships (in the first rank of which is the family).

5

Even if during a transitional period we temporarily accept a rigid division between work zones and residence zones, we must at least envisage a third sphere: that of life itself (the sphere of freedom, of leisure—the truth of life). Unitary urbanism acknowledges no boundaries; it aims to form a unitary human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved. But before this, the minimum action of unitary urbanism is to extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions. This terrain will be at the level of complexity of an old city.

6

It is not a question of combating the automobile as an evil in itself. It is its extreme concentration in the cities that has led to the negation of its role. Urbanism should certainly not ignore the automobile, but even less should it accept it as its central theme. It should reckon on its gradual phasing out. In any case, we can foresee that the central areas of certain new complexes, as well as of a few old cities, will become closed to automobile traffic.

7

Those who believe that the automobile is eternal are not thinking, even from a strictly technological standpoint, of other future forms of transportation. For example, certain models of one-man helicopters presently being tested by the US Army will probably have spread to the general public within twenty years.

8

The breaking up of the dialectic of the human milieu in favor of automobiles (the projected freeways in Paris will entail the demolition of thousands of houses and apartments although the housing crisis is continually growing worse) masks its irrationality under pseudoprac-

tical justifications. But it is practically necessary only in terms of a specific social set-up. Those who believe that the particulars of the problem are permanent want in fact to believe in the permanence of the present society.

9

Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things and of human beings trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life.

GUY DEBORD

Inter

[...] "process kindly against York.)

Howosophic nated motive [...] F "under of his he no psych forces "pract us exa his ac takes denies all pat to ans onme prison shave analo lems dation sorts

Min thing crime nizat who not t

The spok We "neig prote tecta