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propaganda. Is it possible to see a cemetery and not be reminded of Mauriac, Gide or Edgar Faure?)

Museums should be abolished and their masterpieces distributed to bars (Philippe de Champaigne's works in the Arab cafés of rue Xavier-Privas; David's *Sacre* in the Tonneau on Rue Montagne-Geneviève).

Everyone should have free access to the prisons. They should be available as tourist destinations, with no distinction between visitors and inmates. (To spice things up, monthly lotteries might be held to see which visitor would win a real prison sentence. This would cater to those imbeciles who feel an imperative need to undergo uninteresting risks: spelunkers, for example, and everyone else whose craving for play is satisfied by such paltry pseudo-games.)

Buildings whose ugliness cannot be put to any good use (such as the Petit or Grand Palais) should make way for other constructions. Statues that no longer have any meaning, and whose possible aesthetic refurbishings would inevitably be condemned by history, should be removed. Their usefulness could be extended during their final years by changing the inscriptions on their pedestals, either in a political sense (*The Tiger Named Clemenceau* on the Champs Élysées) or for purposes of disorientation (*Dialectical Homage to Fever and Quinine* at the intersection of Boulevard Michel and rue Comte, or *The Great Depths* in the cathedral plaza on the Île de la Cité).

In order to put an end to the cretinizing influence of current street names, names of city councillors, heroes of the Resistance, all the Émiles and Édouards (55 Paris streets), all the Bugeauds and Gallifets,[2] and in general all obscene names (Rue de l'Évangile) should be obliterated.

In this regard, the appeal launched in *Potlatch* #9 for ignoring the word 'saint' in place names is more pertinent than ever.

1 The title echoes 'Proposals for Irrationally Improving a City' (*Le Surrealisme au Service de la Revolution* #6, 1933).

2 Of the various persons disdainfully mentioned in this article, Clemenceau and Edgar Faure were politicians, Gide and Mauriac were writers, and Bugeaud and Gallifet were nineteenth-century generals (the first responsible for the conquest of Algeria, the second for the crushing of the Paris Commune).

Internationale Lettriste, 'Projet d'embellissements rationnels de la ville de Paris', *Potlatch*, no. 23 (Paris, 13 October 1955); trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2002).

Vincent Kaufmann
The Poetics of the Dérive//2001

[...] In public, the Lettrists insulted Charlie Chaplin, celebrated the fall of Dien Bien Phu, and later made apologies for the Algerian partisans. In private, they cultivated their most secret gardens; they dreamed of labyrinths in which they could disappear and, when they couldn't build them, tried to transform the city itself into a giant maze. Such were the charms of the dérive, one of the major inventions of the Lettrist and later the Situationist movement, or at least one of its most characteristic practices. It would be wrong to conclude that the phenomenon was entirely new to the avant-garde, regardless of the originality of Ivan Chtcheglov's 1951 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' and the concrete experiences 'programmed' by his essay.

What exactly did the 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' and the psychogeographic experiments of the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals referred to in so many texts of the period entail? Primarily the desire to introduce poetry into a lived experience of the street, of the city. Psychogeography consisted in experimenting with the affective variants of the urban environment, an immediate aesthetic experience [this is obviously a paradox in terms of the Western philosophical tradition, which associates aesthetic possibility with distance and contemplation) brought about by walking around a city that is systematically explored. This is also the meaning of the dérive – literally, drift – which can be minimally defined as a controlled and, in principle, collective (in small groups) form of movement through several areas of the same city in order to distinguish, as objectively as possible, differences in ambience or atmosphere. Such practices were exercises in the recognition or interpretation of the urban fabric, or urban text, an anticipatory and ironic homage to all those who, ten or twenty years later, chose to drift more comfortably by means of the signifier. The Lettrist or Situationist artist was devoted to the interpretation of the city, the way others examined texts. He took pleasure in the city's streets, markets and cafes rather than its libraries and books. And like any form of interpretation, this involved a certain number of rules. It required a structure. You couldn't wander the city in any old way. Debord was very specific about this, especially in an article titled 'Théorie de la dérive' [Theory of the dérive]:

> Of the various situationist tools, the dérive is a technique for rapidly moving through various environments. The concept of the dérive is inextricably bound with the recognition of effects of a psychogeographic nature and the affirmation

of a ludic-constructive form of behaviour, which contradicts every conventional notion of an excursion or walk.

When one or more individuals are involved in the dérive, they abandon, for a relatively lengthy period of time, the customary rationales for movement and action, their relationships, their work and their own leisure time, to succumb to the enticements of the terrain and the encounters associated with it. The element of chance is less important here than one might suspect: from the point of view of the dérive, there is a psychogeographic contour map associated with cities, with their permanent currents, their fixed points, and whirlpools that make entering or leaving certain zones quite difficult.

But the dérive, as a whole, comprises both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction; the domination of psychogeographic variants through an understanding and calculation of their possibilities. ...

One can drift alone, but everything points to the fact that the most fruitful numerical distribution consists of several small groups of two or three individuals with the same degree of awareness; cross-checking the impressions of these different groups enables us to arrive at objective conclusions.

The dérive is a method of 'rapid movement'. It is impossible not to recall the title of Debord's second film, *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Unit of Time* (1959), devoted entirely to the lost children of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. They moved from one environment to another, from one part of the city to another, and, most certainly, from one café to another, just as they passed through time. The dérive is the projection onto space of a temporal experience, and vice versa. It is the emblem of lost children, who drift, who abandon themselves to a principle of pure mobility, absent the customary reasons for going places – a directionless mobility, unproductive, serving no purpose, which is open to the 'enticements of the terrain' and to encounters.

Yet those who drift are not passive, and we should not confuse the dérive with the contemplative charms of the conventional, or classically surrealist, promenade. From this point of view, we see that a not inconsiderable part of the 'Theory of the dérive' is devoted to explaining that although the dérive is to some extent a bet against chance, chance is not the key element. On the contrary, the dérive entails a preliminary determination of environments, the possibility of calculating them, of establishing some form of objective understanding. It was important to avoid any confusion or similarity with other forms of urban experience, especially those of the Surrealists, who were always suspected of subjectivity and passivity, of an allegiance to chance. From Debord's perspective, it would be highly unfortunate if the dérive were confused with the Parisian promenades of Breton and Aragon, which it resembles but with the addition of

an 'objective' understanding. The history of the avant-garde is inextricably linked to the notion of the promenade, a phenomenon it is difficult to escape even when it has been rechristened the 'dérive'.

Between the urban experiences described in books such as Breton's *Nadja* and Aragon's *Le paysan de Paris* [*Paris Peasant*] and the way in which Debord presented the dérive, there were a certain number of points in common that trace the outlines of a relationship. Although Surrealism and Situationism have other features in common, it is obvious that at this time Debord was uninterested in them, for rarely have avant-gardes maintained good relations with their predecessors, which they have always struggled to relegate to the past. Neither Breton nor the Aragon of the surrealist period would have disavowed the idea of being open to the enticements of the city or chance, or the rejection of ordinary activities and relationships, in short, everything that made the derive an aimless wandering and the absence of goals the opportunity for an aesthetic or affective experience. Even the group nature of the dérive, which provided the objectivity of the psychogeographic experience, would easily have found favour with Breton. Wasn't his entire urban experience associated with encounters and sharing? The surrealist *trouvaille* [the chance 'find'] so often sought in flea markets or elsewhere, was never individual. It only had meaning and reality if it was the product of at least two individuals; it too was part of a project to objectify desire. The surrealist promenades (at least those of Breton, for it was very different with Aragon) were no less productive of community or communication than those of the Situationists, or at least this was their intent. Similarly, the question of objectifying the aesthetic impression or sensation is already present and, as in the case of international Lettrism or Situationism, this objectification involved immersion in the urban milieu. (The only attempt at a surrealist dérive in the countryside turned out badly; Debord was quick to point this out in the same text, to highlight a difference that may not have been obvious.)

Psychogeography set in motion a surrealist experiment with the city. Many passages in Chtcheglov's 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' also reflect this, in a way that is both conscious and constrained: 'All cities are geological and you can't take three steps without encountering ghosts, armed with the prestige of their legends. We evolve in a closed landscape whose landmarks draw us incessantly towards the past. Shifting angles and receding perspectives enable us to perceive original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magic lands of folklore and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, small forgotten bars, prehistoric caves, casino mirrors.' This passage is not without ambiguity. It suggests, as was also the case with the surrealist experiment with the city, that psychogeography is fundamentally an experience of mobility, applied to space as much as to time. The objectification

of urban environments entails a capacity for movement that is both spatial and temporal: the ability to recognize the city in its geological dimension and concentrate on the different temporal strata of which it is composed, as reflected in certain buildings, forgotten bars, and endless walls – one can also drift through a Paris that is in the process of disappearing. This mobility is essential. Chtcheglov confirmed the importance in the conclusion of his 'formulary': 'The principal activity of the inhabitants will be to DRIFT CONTINUOUSLY. The change of scenery on an hourly basis will be responsible for the complete sense of disorientation.' To drift from space to space, temporality to temporality, and, while drifting, to enter a logic of disorientation, the logic of the Paris peasant: even if the lettrist project was more systematic, more constructed, it duplicated that of the surrealists while attempting to distinguish itself from it. Moreover, Chtcheglov notes that the past also encloses us, which impedes mobility and blocks the vanishing lines of the dérive. And if the Surrealists indicated which receding perspectives and shifting angles to follow, they looked too hard to find them in a past they were now a part of. Chtcheglov was interested in a 'new urbanism', characteristic of the utopian strain among the early Situationists. He introduced activism to the field of urbanism, something that was nowhere to be found among the surrealist dreamers, who were too passive, too ready to let themselves go, carried away by chance or the unconscious. To avoid this it was necessary to move beyond the past and passivity, drifting had to be more controlled, more systematic, and new cities and spaces had to be invented that would provide greater scope for the dérive.

I will return later to the utopian element in Situationism, which was especially evident during the first years of its existence, but want to point out that Debord himself never showed much enthusiasm for it. He often seems much closer to the melancholic aspect of the surrealist urban experience (that of Aragon in this case, who was much more Baudelairean than Breton). It was hardly arbitrary that the places he cared about, which served as landmarks for his dérives, are those that have since disappeared: the area around Les Halles, an emblematic crossroads, a meeting place teeming with life, or other areas that were still working-class in the fifties, any number of cafés, one more insalubrious than the next, no trace of which remains today or of their habitués: North African immigrants on Rue Xavier-Privas, Jews who spoke only Yiddish along Rue Vieille-du-Temple, Spanish Republicans in the 'Taverne des Révoltés' in Aubervilliers.

Debord's Paris of legend, the one he drifted through, is a Paris of the foreigner and the foreign, of disorientation, of travellers, of those who are away from home. It is also, on occasion, the subterranean Paris of truants and thieves. But it is especially a Paris marked by transience, condemned to a disappearance later

identified in *In girum imus nocte* ('Paris no longer exists'). It is the city of 'Andromache, I'm thinking of you', through which we can retrace our steps, possibly through Benjamin, to the sources of a perception of the city as both modern and melancholic, that is, to Baudelaire once more. The old Paris is no longer, the shape of a city changes more quickly than the heart of a mortal, and this is why, since Baudelaire, the city has served as a source for poetry. It does so in its temporal-geographic dimension, precisely because of everything that has disappeared, the remains of another time. We can say – appropriating the title of a book that meant a great deal to Debord, one he quoted often – that the psychogeographic investigation of the city was necessary because of what was assassinated by the boulevards of Haussmann's time, and the expressways and ring roads of Debord's: rupture, the abolition of the past and its symbolic efficacy, the interruption of space and communication, through which the society of the spectacle robbed the city without leaving any possibility for the dérive.

In the fifties Debord was a master of the dérive. He was during the sixties as well, according to several reports of the situationist movement (especially in London, but in Brussels and Amsterdam as well). He was a tireless drifter, he could walk across Paris, with friends or lovers, for days and nights at a time (wandering not only through urban space but through time, never as palpable as when life no longer conforms to a regular succession of days and nights). He initiated a number of his companions into the psychogeographic experience, taught them how to see a city. He participated in the riskiest dérives, including, at least since the period of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a fondness for exploring the catacombs of Paris (preferably the sections off limits to the public), at least one of which came close to ending badly when the lights failed. Obviously, there is considerable risk, when playing with lost children, of losing oneself for good. And even if no one ever really got lost in the catacombs, it would have been a fitting ending for such authentic amateurs.

In later years, Debord and his associates would imagine other labyrinths. The catacombs were replaced by the subway tunnels, which they explored after closing, or by homes in the process of demolition. Gradually, the cities as we know them today got the better of the dérive, which was unable to resist the relative uniformization of environments or the homogenization of life or the functionalization of urban space, its systematic exploitation. Les Halles disappeared, and with it the possibility of deciding what to eat in Paris, food now being shipped in, after being sterilized and packaged. During the sixties, Paris, like the rest of the world, was gradually deprived of the right to taste. Today, who would want to 'drift' down the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts or the Rue Mouffetard, surrounded by tourists from around the world? Certainly not Debord, whose exploration always led him to places and persons on the margins

of society, toward those who struggled to resist the spectacle and the forms of appearance it imposed. Like Baudelaire, he had his little old women, the blind men, the passers-by, and his swan. And, like Baudelaire, he loved them, spoke with them, spoke – and drank – a great deal in fact with the people he met during his dérives. Even hasty walks through changing environments do not stand in the way of authentic contact and dialogue. In fact, the opposite is true, and this is an essential difference with walks and travel in general. The dérive bears no resemblance to a tourist activity, spectacular or even voyeuristic (old Aragon, I salute you) activity. It is not, strictly speaking, an aesthetic experience, recycled, almost before it begins, into a book. On the contrary, it implies an experience 'from within'. Its authenticity requires this. The apparently serious term 'psychogeography' comprises an art of conversation and drunkenness, and everything leads us to believe that Debord excelled in both.

The dérive is a 'technique for moving quickly through varied environments'. It is a technique of transience, devoted to places themselves transient, like the passages that Aragon and Benjamin were once so fond of (and they also provide a clear illustration of what the lettrists called a 'situational' art, which was both temporary and lived). The city entered modern artistic consciousness because of its transformations and disfigurements, the mirror of a vanished fullness or unity that had to be reconstructed. There is nothing surprising, therefore, in the fact that, having been lost from sight after Breton and Aragon, it returned with the lettrists and was well positioned on their poetic agenda, because a new phase of modern urbanism had been established in the fifties, following the years of glaciation resulting from the Occupation and the war. Rarely have cities been transformed as they were during the 1950s and 1960s. They were reconfigured according to the needs of the automobile, and emptied of their inhabitants, who were forced to make room for stores and offices; they became places of separation and solitude. They were bathed in hygiene and light, the last empty and clandestine lots disappeared, and with them the dangerous classes. Fast cars, clean bodies. Everything is functionalized, identified, monitored, culminating in a process that had begun a century earlier under the auspices of Baron Haussmann's 'scientific' urbanism. From this perspective, the practice of the dérive appears as a military, erotic and (therefore) poetic attempt to conquer or reconquer the terrain lost-to-the enemy, a technique of subjective reappropriation of functionalized social space. Which again reveals the similarities with détournement: not only is the dérive an art of the detour, but, like détournement, it also implies an attempt to re-appropriate the urban space, it assumes a contested relation to a space considered to have been occupied by the enemy. As Debord suggests in his *Mémoires*, the drifters were modern Knights of the Round Table who had gone off in search of the Holy Grail. They had waged war on modern urbanism using their passion, their discipline, their virtue, their courage and their skill. And, like their legendary ancestors, almost to a man they ended up vanishing. [...]

The dérive can be compared to the technique of disorientation. It is not designed to help us understand a comprehensible and eventually presentable ego. Debord [notes] that 'What can be written down serves only as a password in this great game'. In place of surrealist writing, the dérive stepped in, descriptions of which – and they are rare – served as simple passwords for an initiation that took place on another terrain. The adventures of the participants remain clandestine, the players invisible. They literally melt into the landscape, disappear behind the drawings, maps, aerial photographs of cities and images of buildings, which adorn the early issues of *Internationale situationniste* as they do Debord's works, from *Mémoires* to *In girum imus nocte* and beyond. Maps of the heart on which to dream, on which to imagine desires as yet unknown, but which exist in the absence of any dreamer or any image, drawings and stones for experiences that cannot be transmitted. 'The sectors of a city are to some extent decipherable. But the personal meaning they have had for us is incommunicable, as is the secrecy of private life in general, regarding which we possess nothing but pitiful documents'.

Where were these dériveurs? They hid themselves in the sinuous folds of large cities. What they experienced is incommunicable, unrepresentable. It happened and will never return other than as allusions and suggestions, maps and drawings, photos of cities in which to wander. It will also return, but as if in relief, in the form of social criticism, that is, a description and denunciation of the way in which spectacular power dissects the urban landscape for its own profit, a form of criticism found in the pages of *The Society of the Spectacle* devoted to city and regional planning. In its mourning for the world, this book, one of Debord's most important, was not unrelated to his experience of loss, and in this sense it is much less theoretical than has been acknowledged. The pages on regional planning, beneath the veneer of theory, are also based on Debord's and his friends' psychogeographic experience. The theory of 'unitary urbanism', which the Situationists contrasted with the urbanism of power, was developed by drifting, by walking, by evaluating the ambience of the oldest parts of Paris and other European capitals. Debord found theory through the soles of his feet. While he could write in *The Society of the Spectacle* that 'the effort of all established powers, since the experience of the French Revolution, to augment their means of keeping order in the street has eventually culminated in the suppression of the street itself', it was because he worked to delay this suppression, because the dérive consisted, if not in re-creating streets, at least in occupying them for as

long as possible. *The Society of the Spectacle* imitated the absence of life, the raw material of the spectacle; it abolished any reference to the authorial 'I', to a lived singularity. Similarly, Debord's theses on urbanism and regional planning can be read as the exact opposite of the psychogeographic experience of the Lettrists and Situationists. Psychogeography was a conquest, or reconquest, of the reality of space. And the spectacle is what removed reality from space (as from life in general). Debord is quite specific about this: 'The economic management of travel to different places suffices in itself to ensure those places' interchangeability. The same modernization that has deprived travel of its temporal aspect has likewise deprived it of the reality of space.' At the same time, we can understand that the reality of space depends essentially on the subject's ability to occupy it. It is a matter of subjectivity or subjectivization, that is, of singularity, of differentiation, to which is opposed the generalized interchangeability brought about by the economic management of space.

Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord. La révolution au service de la poésie* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); trans. Robert Bononno, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 101–6; 108–18. Translation © 2006 Robert Bononno.

Georges Perec
The Street//1974

I

The buildings stand one beside the other. They form a straight line. They are expected to form a line, and it's a serious defect in them when they don't do so. They are then said to be 'subject to alignment', meaning that they can by rights be demolished, so as to be rebuilt in a straight line with the others.

The parallel alignment of two series of buildings defines what is known as a street. The street is a space bordered, generally on its two longest sides, by houses; the street is what separates houses from each other, and also what enables us to get from one house to another, by going either along or across the street. In addition, the street is what enables us to identify the houses. Various systems of identification exist. The most widespread, in our own day and our part of the world, consists in giving a name to the street and numbers to the houses. The naming of streets is an extremely complex, often even thorny, topic, about which several books might be written. And numbering isn't that much

simpler. It was decided, first, that even numbers would be put on one side and odd numbers on the other (but, as a character in Raymond Queneau's *The Flight of Icarus* very rightly asks himself, 'Is 13A an even or an odd number?'); secondly, that the even numbers would be on the right (and odd numbers on the left) relative to the direction of the street; and thirdly, that the said direction of the street would be determined generally (but we know of many exceptions) by the position of the said street in relation to a fixed axis, in the event the River Seine. Streets parallel with the Seine are numbered starting upstream, perpendicular streets starting from the Seine and going away from it (these explanations apply to Paris obviously; one might reasonably suppose that analogous solutions have been thought up for other towns).

Contrary to the buildings, which almost always belong to someone, the streets in principle belong to no one. They are divided up, fairly equitably, into a zone reserved for motor vehicles, known as the roadway, and two zones, narrower obviously, reserved for pedestrians, which are called pavements. A certain number of streets are reserved exclusively for pedestrians, either permanently, or else on particular occasions. The zones of contact between the roadway and the pavements enable motorists who don't wish to go on driving to park. The number of motor vehicles not wishing to go on driving being much greater than the number of spaces available, the possibilities of parking have been restricted, either, within certain perimeters known as 'blue zones', by limiting the amount of parking time, or else, more generally, by installing paid parking.

Only infrequently are there trees in the streets. When there are, they have railings round them. On the other hand, most streets are equipped with specific amenities corresponding to various services. Thus there are street-lights which go on automatically as soon as the daylight begins to decline to any significant degree; stopping places at which passengers can wait for buses or taxis; telephone kiosks, public benches; boxes into which citizens may put letters which the postal services will come to collect at set times; clockwork mechanisms intended to receive the money necessary for a limited amount of parking time; baskets reserved for waste paper and other detritus, into which numbers of people compulsively cast a furtive glance as they pass; traffic lights. There are likewise traffic signs indicating, for example, that it is appropriate to park on this side of the street or that according to whether we are in the first or second fortnight of the month (what is known as 'alternate side parking'), or that silence is to be observed in the vicinity of a hospital, or, finally and especially, that the street is one-way. Such is the density of motor traffic indeed that movement would be almost impossible if it had not become customary, in the last few years, in a majority of built up areas, to force motorists to circulate in one direction only, which, obviously, sometimes obliges them to make long detours.