Deep Play in the City

From the Situationist Dérive to Surre(gion)al Exploration

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2012

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Part I: Critique of the Dérive

Guy Debord describes the *dérive*, or *drift*, the classic Situationist mode of exploring the city, as "a *technique* of rapid passage through varied ambiances" involving "playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects."[1] The *dérive* was central to Situationist urbanism and was part of a project of challenging the ways in which Spectacular-Commodity Society dominates our experience and our sensibilities, and envisioning a new city beyond the limits of the Spectacle. This project can only be seen as entirely admirable.

However, some questions arise about the adequacy of the *dérive* as a mode of experiencing the city, and as a means of pursuing this admirable project. Does the Situationist *dérive* maintain too much of a distance from the urban phenomena it encounters or might encounter? Does it lack a sufficient level of passionate attraction to the urban milieu? Is it too focused on the world of visible things to the neglect of other modes of experience? Does it sometimes lapse into an anti-spectacular spectacularism? Does it uncritically preserve a traditional one-sided, masculinist perspective, exalting its own world of "power and adventure"? Does it sometimes fail to escape that curse of late modernity, cynical rationality? Do you somehow already know what the answer to all these questions is going to be?

Let us consider the idea of the *dérive* as: 1. "a technique"; 2. "of rapid passage"; and 3. "through varied ambiances." Some descriptions indicate that these qualities describe precisely the manner in which the Situationists carried out the *dérive*, either rushing around on foot or even taking taxis. But one must wonder why one would be in such a hurry if the point is to experience the city? Perhaps we should take inspiration from the "Slow Food Movement" and initiate a "Slow Foot Movement." Much of the appeal of the *dérive* is, after all, its driftlike quality, and *dérive rapide, much like cuisine rapide, seems* like a *contradictio in adjecto*.

Also, why must a *dérive* move not only with rapidity, but through "ambiences" in particular? This sounds rather suspiciously like sightseeing; and do we really need another *technique*, especially an italicized one? Perhaps we can't dispense entirely with means, but if the *dérive* were to slow down and become more patient and less goal directed, the *dériveur* might find more of what the city has to offer.[2]

The *dérive* can mean drifting outside the constraints of conventional perception. However, it can also mean going adrift and falling into the abyss at the far reaches of modernity. The *dérive* has sometimes drifted in the direction of proto-post-mortemism.[3] If we choose to go on a *dérive*, we must beware that it doesn't become a death *dérive*.

One sense of *dériver* is "to divert." But from what does the *dérive* divert us? The Situationist might reply that it diverts us, our experience and our lives, from the dominance of the Spectacle. This is the *dérive* as *détournment*. It's a detour well worth taking. But there is a moment of the *dérive*, a central, determining moment, in which it is diversion from the road we need to take, a detour from the way to the things themselves.

Perhaps the most obvious linguistic connection of *dériver* is with *la rive*. This term signifies a shore or bank, so *dériver* might suggest drifting away from the shore. And we do need to drift from the shore in order to explore the many regions around us. However, we must at the same time remain *riverains*, inhabitants of our little place on the shore, for if we don't learn to have deep and intense experience of that place, will we be capable of doing so anywhere else?

It must be recognized that the *dérive* is also described as "technique of locomotion without a goal," a very promising idea—a means that is not a means toward anything in particular. Also quite admirably,

[1] On surre(gion)alism, see Max Cafard, "The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto" in Max Cafard, The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto and Other Writings (Baton Rouge: Exquisite Corpse, 2004), pp. 5–17.

[2] All citations from Debord can be found in his "Théorie de la dérive" (December, 1958), trans. by Ken Knabb, online at www.bopsecrets.org, with the exception of several that are taken from his "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action"(June, 1957), trans. by Ken Knabb, online at www.bopsecrets.org.

[3] Generally, the term "dériveur" refers a dinghy, but it can also used to describe one who goes on a dérive. Very occasionally, as in the song "Dériveur" by the Belgian band Rose Cafard (www.cafardrose.be), it can refer to both.

we find that the *dérive* includes "playful-constructive behavior," so that it has something in common with a well-designed, or better, an undesigned or minimally designed children's playground (see the anarcho-urbanist idea of the Adventure Playground[4]). Best of all, they involve "awareness of psychogeographical effects," and thus they share qualities of surre(gion)al exploration, in that they usher one into the realm in which psychoregions and georegions intersect. And how is this geopsychic awareness attained? The participants, we are told, "let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there." So at this point passion takes precedence over action, the emphasis is on being drawn and being acted upon, allowing oneself to be affected by the spirit of place, the power of things, the lure of the phenomena.

But Debord immediately falls into a pseudo-dialectical trap. He concludes that "the *dérive* includes both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities." Some dialectics lead to neat syntheses, others lead to a balance or oscillation between opposing poles, but others lead to the utter annihilation of one or both of the contradictory terms. Some contradictions are in fact antagonistic and this unfortunately happens to be one of them. The quest for domination, including domination by means of supposed savoir-faire and calculative rationality, cannot coexist with a "letting-go," a passionate attraction that discovered an enchanted reality beyond itself, but instead annihilates the latter. Debord thinks that some sort of "ecological science, despite the narrow social space to which it limits itself, provides psycho-geography with abundant data." However, whatever ecological science he has in mind, far from providing any knowledge as domination of the phenomena, can give no more than hints of the infinitude of possibilities, and must coexist with the spirit of playful exploration, the spirit of the gift, and the cultivation of negative capability.

Henri Lefebvre, a major influence on and sometime collaborator with the Situationists, described in an interview his experience of the *dérive*. According to his account, in the *dérive* "one goes along in any direction and recounts what one sees." The goal, which he notes, "didn't always work," was "to attain a certain simultaneity" that would result in "a synchronic history." This cumulative history based on their collective experience is what the Situationists were aiming at in their idea of a "unitary urbanism." They would "unify what has a certain unity, but a lost unity, a disappearing unity."[5]

Debord describes this project of unitary urbanism when he explains "that the most fruitful numerical arrangement" for a *dérive* "consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness, since cross-checking these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at more objective conclusions." One would hope that Debord's vision of teams of Situationists rushing around Paris communicating through walkie-talkies[6] would be at least in part an expression of a comedic imagination. But in fact he seems to have been quite serious about a new urbanism arising out of such a fiasco, so that the Situationist could "draft the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city," uncovering "unities of ambience, of their main components and their spatial localization" and ultimately pinpointing "psychogeographical pivotal points."

Lefebvre notes that Debord finally gave up this project, which is not surprising, given its contrived and abstractly intellectual nature. One finds a certain latent Cartesian rationalism in the Situationist project that runs counter to their generally assumed commitment to the power of the radical imaginary. It's striking that in the theory of the *dérive* Debord gives few examples of what one *does* on a *dérive*, and no developed examples at all of what one *experiences*. As one of the slogans of May 68 said, "À bas le sommaire!"[7] Stop summarizing!

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[4] On post-mortemism, see, for example, "Nietzschean Anarchism & the Post-Mortem Condition" in The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto and Other Writings, pp. 59–91.

[5] Classically described by anarchist urbanist Colin Ward in "A Parable of Anarchy: Adventure Playground," in Anarchy 7 (Sept.1961):193–201. Descriptions of existing adventure playgrounds can be found easily on the internet.

[6] Interview with Kristin Ross, published in October 79 (Winter 1997); online at www.notbored.org.

[7] Or, in French, talkies-walkies. Perhaps this linguistic difference expresses the split between the Gallic prioritization of intellectual analysis, talking the walk, over the more practical but theoretically underdeveloped Anglo-Saxon walking the talk. The surre(gion)alist takes along a walkie-walkie.

Yet, here's what we are offered: "Our rather anarchic 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 no different from that of the *dérive*. Written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game."

Particularly since hardly anyone was allowed into this *entourage* and most of those who were admitted were eventually expelled, this passage fairly drips with an attitude of "cooler than thou." But a few questions arise about the summary nature of this account: What precious gems were found in the rubble of the demolition? Why exactly should we look upon non-stop hitchhiking to nowhere as anything more than a moment in an obsessive *death dérive*? What mysteries were uncovered in the darkness of the catacombs? Why are all the passwords withheld from poor us, as if we are to remain mere spectators?

In short, why doesn't Debord give us something more than project proposals? Are we to conclude that the *dérive* is primarily a form of conceptual art? It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that Situationism[8] could not break adequately with the traditional standpoint of theory in which the theorizing subject stands in a position of dominance over the objects of experience, that despite its attempts at "critique of separation," its theoretical perspective remained trapped within the ideology of hierarchical dualism. Not to mention that slipping into condemned houses merely because there's a "Do Not Enter" sign and "Il est interdit d'interdire" ("It's forbidden to forbid") would suggest a rather superficial, reactive mode of rebellion.[9]

The Situationists expressed considerable contempt for what they saw as the failures of surrealism. Their critique of the obliviousness of most surrealists to its susceptibility to cooptation by the society of commodity consumption is precisely accurate. But the critique misses the point in its implication that presenting evidence of cooptation is a mortal blow to any movement or tendency. Is there any aesthetic, literary or political movement that has been immune to cooptation by the society of consumption? Few of the Situationists have been around to see the extent to which Situationism and, of course, the May 68 revolt it helped inspire have themselves been co-opted. Have you gotten your "Soyez réalistes: Demandez l'impossible!" t-shirt yet? "Prenez vos t-shirts pour des réalitiés!"

I once went to an exhibit of works that a class of American students had produced after studying the Situationists for a semester in an art course. What was striking was the degree to which the critical edge of the movement had been blunted, as it had been filtered through forty years of history, the depredations of popular culture and dominant ideology, and, I assume, the ethos of the University and academic art study. A choice example was a poster that fairly accurately reproduced the *look* of a Situationist poster, but with the following text:

"The REAL terrorist is the college student who doesn't vote!"

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[8] A collection of over 350 slogans of May '68, some with images and commentary, plus links to some excellent May '68 resources, can be found at users.skynet.be.

[9] Yes, "Situationism." True, the Situationist International proclaimed in 1958 that "Situationism" is "a meaningless term improperly derived from ['situationist']," that "there is no such thing as situationism, which would mean a doctrine for interpreting existing conditions," and that "the notion of situationism is obviously devised by antisituationists." [See "Definitions" on the Bureau of Public Secrets website at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.definitions.htm]. But all this is far from obvious. What is clear is that such definitionism betrays a certain bad faith, unless taken ironically. As the Situationists knew well, calling something an "ism" often connotes that it is a sectarian tendency, possessing various dogmas and practicing various forms of exclusionism. This definition of an ism is what is intended in the famous anarchist maxim, "all isms are wasms." It's understandable that the Situationists would fear finding themselves dismissed as such a "wasm" and therefore consigned to the famous "dustbin of history." [N.B.: A "dustbin" is actually a "garbage can," though for some reason American leftists are uniformly incapable of that simple translation.] The truth must be faced: Situationism is a wasm, but it was an ism. Indeed, the Situationist International reveled in the agonies of its sectarian, ismic jouissance. According to one listing in a source sympathetic to Situationism, there were 72 members of the Situationist International, forty-three of whom were "excluded," and twenty-three of whom "resigned," some "forcibly." [See "Members of the Situationist International 1957 to 1972" on the Not Bored website at http://www.notbored.org/members.html] Situationism was an ism among isms in the annals of ismism!

Which, unfortunately, translates as "Be Realistic, Demand the Inevitable!"

Even worse is the cooptation of Situationism as part of oppositional lifestyle, or rather the image-of-opposition-al lifestyle. An example is the trendy *détournement* of comic-book images, which, framed tastefully, go well on the walls of a loft, and make a distinct contribution to the urban ambience. In the end, *dérivisme*, though seemingly a form of *non-arrivisme*, can in fact become an advanced form of *arrivisme postmoderne.*

So much for *récuperation.* Nevertheless, the Situationists must be given their due for pointing out the extent to which surrealism was being co-opted. Yet, granted their prescient insight into the degree to which surrealism would be integrated into the dominant culture, their general contempt for surrealism was badly misguided. Situationism for all its advances in the critique of the spectacle represented a regression from surrealism on the experiential level, and on the level of the creative imagination. For Debord, "the error that is at the root of surrealism is the idea of the infinite richness of the unconscious imagination," when in reality "the unconscious imagination is poor." One is reminded of Nietzsche's remark that when Kant proclaims that the dictates his Moral Law are "necessary," this only raises the question of why they were necessary *for Kant.* One is tempted to conclude that the primary fact revealed by Debord's statement is that his own imagination is poor. However this temptation should be avoided. What is in fact revealed is the abysmal separation, between Debord and his own imagination, which despite his pretentions often manages to leap over the abyss.

As much as the situationists are associated with "L'Imagination au Pouvoir," Debord has a shockingly enormous blind spot in relation to the imaginary. He quotes urbanist Chombart de Lauwe to the effect 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." The fact that he feels a need to mention something so obvious—and to quote an authority in support of such a commonplace—indicates a naive incapacity to grasp the centrality of the imaginary to the formation of any social reality. Such lapses seem to be related to the gap between his own vivid imagination and his goal-directed Prometheanism, which is accompanied by a fear of the anarchic powers of the imaginary that always subvert the ego and its projects.

Indeed, Debord sometimes expresses a Promethean desire to subject the wild and unexpected to the dictates of the will. He explains that "if chance plays an important role in dérives this is because the methodology of psychogeographical observation is still in its infancy," and that "progress" consists of "breaking through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes." As we will see, deep play, an alternative to dérive, means forgetting all such progress, affirming chance (even if it is just an illusion) and denying that chance can ever "hold sway." It means putting aside our purposes at certain times. It means overcoming the obsession with creating new conditions, and allowing them to manifest themselves—in our so called "environment" and in our so-called "selves."

After expressing considerable contempt for the potentialities of "open country" and rural nature, which he seems to think of as mere boring, empty space, Debord points out "the primarily urban character of the *dérive*," which is "in its element in the great industrially transformed cities that are such rich centers of possibilities and meanings." In explaining why such environments so rich in resources, he cites Marx's observation that "men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive."

This statement illustrates both the brilliance and the limitations of Marx, a genius who suffered from periodical attacks of the idiocy of urban life. He is indeed absolutely right in noting that men, human beings, always shape the objects of experience in their own image (contrary to the naive illusions of all ideological thinkers), but it is also important to understand that it is *men* who can *only* see what is in their own image. This is, in fact, the definition of a "man" and particularly "civilized man" as opposed to "human being." The child, entranced by the image and reality of the other, is still capable of deep play, finding in the other something that overturns all preconceptions. To grow up and be a "real man" is to forget this capacity (negating negative capabilities), to make one self into the image of the Other, and then always to find ones own supposed image in the other.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Debord's quest for unitary urbanism is his view of borders. "Today," he says, "the different unities of atmosphere and of dwellings are not precisely marked off, but are surrounded by more or less extended bordering regions." This should not be surprising. Any deep experience of regionalities subverts the idea of distinct borders. Just as one is constantly discovering new borders or borderings, one discovers their relative and imaginary nature. Regionalities are continually defined and undefined by borderless borders, entered through gateless gates. But Debord sees the multiplicity of borders and bordering regionalities as an obstacle to be overcome. "The most general change that dérive experiences lead to proposing is the constant diminution of these border regions, up to the point of their complete suppression."

Debord has a vendetta against the ordinary that blinds him to much of what the city has to offer.. In his opinion, most of urban life consists of situations that are "so dull that they give a definite impression of sameness," and it is thus necessary to "try to construct situations, that is to say, collective ambiences, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment." As usual, he reveals little about the nature of such moments, merely assuring us that "the powers of a situation will certainly expand considerably in both time and space with the realizations of unitary urbanism or the education of a situationist generation."

He is of course right in bemoaning the effects of a regimented, bureaucratized, technologized, mediatized, commodified culture of economistic production and consumption. He is unquestionably right when he says that we must move "beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle." He is also right in his perception that few in his time (just as few today) see the degree to which the spectacle degrades everyday life. What he fails to grasp is that human beings always resist the kind of reduction that he laments, and that they do so with a certain degree of success. They constantly "construct situations" and forms of self-expression that are diverse, creative, and astounding. Such forms pervade the urban landscape and are the subject-matter of surre(gion)al urban explorations. The city is a rich cultural ecosystem. Just as one finds much more biodiversity in a rainforest (or most other ecosystems) than in the results of a tree-planting project, one finds more diversity dispersed through the urban cultural ecosystem than will arise out of situations constructed by a cultural avant-garde.

It is appropriate but not without irony that Debord launches an attack on the heroic. He asserts that "the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives." This goal of breaking the stranglehold on the imagination of the spectacle and its rich, powerful, famous heroes is of course an excellent one. However, the Situationist project in its Promethean moment itself succumbs to the snare of the heroic will to power. It is important to ask whether in the wake of seemingly revolutionary transformation the putatively liberated subject comes to identify with an internal imaginary hero that replaces the deposed external one.

This is another way in which the Situationist project subverts itself. Yet despite all its internal contradictions, Debord's work remains of inestimable value, most particularly in his critique of the Spectacle, and The Society of the Spectacle remains one of those few invaluable books that can begin to shake the reader's faith that a ludicrously absurd and criminally insane social order might not be absolutely equivalent to the inherent and eternally ordained nature of things.

There is also an important core of truth in the *dérive* that should not be overlooked, even while considering the many divergences from it. This is expressed well in an article on Debord by Pierre Macherey, who notes that the originality of the *dérive* is that it proposes that one "traverse a preexisting space, that of the city, while rejecting the conventional manner of doing so, and instead rediscovering it in strange and unprecedented forms, as if one were exploring a *terra incognita*."[10]

Oh, yes, beginner's mind.

[10] Greil Marcus, in his rather romanticized and dramaticized presentation of Debord and the Situationists, is able (justly) to make much of Debord's critique of the Spectacle, and at least something of his ideas of détournement. However, he can find little to say about the nature or significance of the dérive. See Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1989).

Part II: Surre(gion)al Explorations

The defining moment of our epoch was the moment when somebody decided that everything needed a defining moment. What we really need to find is the undefining moment of each phenomenon. The anarchist moment. The moment when it is liberated from our definitions and dominations and is allowed to reveal itself in its wild becoming.

The kind of play to be considered here is related to but is not identical with carnivalesque play. The carnivalesque disengages and liberates us from the rigidities of social structure, from the iron chains of oligarchy, from the sedimented layers of desiccated culture, from the zombiesque world of social autonomism. It does this through celebrating all that is neglected, disfigured and repressed by the dominant structures of society and selfhood. The carnivalesque for all its creative affirmation retains a certain moment of reactivity. This is not at all a bad thing, since it is the source of much of the passionate intensity of carnivalesque celebration and of its invaluable function as one of the highest (and lowest) forms of ludic critique. It reverses the Napoleonic dictum and proclaims: "Le Pouvoir est toujours ridicule!" Deep Play does all the liberating things just mentioned and more, but does it through a kind of engaged disengagement, an engagement with things themselves that liberates us from each and every thing, even the thing called self.

Deep play is openness to the experience of diverse, interpenetrating regionalities. We might think that when we engage in deep play we are merely playing some kind of game, or even that we are pursuing some kind of game, that it is like a safari or a scavenger hunt for strange objects, which can then be exhibited in our dada collection, or used to expand our surrealist resume, or to add a notch on our Situationist revolver. But on the deeper level of analysis, deep play is not a big game hunt, nor is it playing a game in any usual sense. Rather it is entering into the play of things, and the many interpenetrating worlds of those things themselves (for there is no *thing in itself*, only *things outside themselves* and *outsides inside themselves*). Deep play is the interplay of psychoregion, mythoregion, socioregion, ethnoregion, bioregion, georegion, and all the other interpenetrating, mutually transforming regionalities. In deep play we enter into that interplay. If we want to think of it as playing a game, or hunting game, we must think of it at the same time as the game playing us, or playfully preying on us.

So what then is Deep Play in the City all about? It's about the Jewel Net of Indra in the Hood. You'll learn very little about it here. This text is not your neighborhood! There's no Thing inside the text.

Deep play is close to what Daoist philosophy calls *wuwe*i, an indefinable term usually defined as "doing without doing." Acting without the acting of an actor. Doing without the doing of a doer. It's also close to Zen mind, which has been described as "thought without a thinker." So when we go on a surre(gion)al exploration (of the city, for example), we take a tour without the tourists. It's a tour (a word that means "turn') of what is inside and outside. And just as when we breathe in and out, what is out is in and what is in is out. All of our experience is this turning back and forth of the inner and outer, exploring regions that are both inner and outer, and neither inner nor outer, and everywhere in between. The most widely practiced koan in the Korean tradition is "What is this?"[11] Deep Play is playing "What is This?"

In deep play, every object is a kind of koan. As the great New Orleans surrealist photographer Clarence Laughlin said, "Everything, everything, no matter how commonplace and ugly, has secret meanings. Everything."[12] The first step is to annihilate every thing's prefabricated meaning, which means that we have to annihilate our preconceptions about it, our imposed purposes and projects.

[11] Pierre Macherey, "Debord : Du Spectacle au Contre-Spectacle" Savoirs Textes Langage (CNRS), 3/30/05, online at stl.recherche.univ-lille3.fr (my translation)] In this matter, as in all others, it is important to give Situationism its due. All fully-justified defamation in the present text notwithstanding, Debord's Society of the Spectacle is one of the most important books of the 20th Century and is required reading, especially for those culture consumers and devotees of "theory" whose acquaintance with it comes primarily from post-mortemist cliché-mongering and name-dropping popularization.

[12] Martin Batchelor, "What is This?" in Principles of Zen (London: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 83–63.

It has been said that the answer to the koan is in the life of the practitioner.[13] Responding to the koan means living the koan. Similarly, surre(gion)al exploration presupposes being alive, and requires dedication to living the things one explores.

Deep play is related to the ancient cosmological anti-principle of *lila*, the ultimate play of the universe. *Lila* is the deepest play because it is prior to anything. It can't be *for* anything because it comes before there *is* anything. Indian thought sometimes says it's the play of Brahman, the ultimate reality. But since it is primordial it must play this Brahman too rather than being played *by* it. It's also sometimes said that there's another Brahman beyond Brahman that is a Great Nothingness. Which in this case rings true, since real play has nothing behind it, no pretext, Nothing.

If this seems too esoteric, we can also consider that this is closely related to what all of us call "play," the kind of play we reveled in before we learned games and long before we learned to keep score. We still remember a lot about it, even if we haven't consciously done much of it for an unconscionably long time. So when we engage in Deep Play, in the city or elsewhere, we have to seek (through not seeking), or merely allow to return to us, this spirit of *lila*, *wuwei*, or child's play. This may not seem all that easy, for along the way we will find a lot to accomplish, so we will have to escape the temptation to get hopelessly lost and end up accomplishing it.

Deep Play takes place within the world's great gift economy. It recognizes that we receive not because we deserve anything or because of anything we do. It looks upon everything as gratuitous, as Lagniappe, the free supplement. It's a little like those ads telling you that if you buy their product you get 20% extra free. But in this case, you just take the free part and refuse to buy the product. It's the extra that comes with Nothing.

The Road to Topia

Deep Play in the City is an experiment in TOPIANISM. *Utopianism* is the search for a higher, deeper or better reality in some other place. Or more precisely, in no place at all, but a no place that draws us on toward itself and impossibly creates itself somewhere, to some extent, along the way.

It cannot be denied that Utopianism has its place, or at least its no place. But if utopianism has been shamefully neglected, *topianism* has been all but ignored, and this is the much greater tragedy. There's a time and place for no place and there is a time and place for place. This does not go without saying. For as we know, for certain neurotics everything is always out of place. What is not always recognized is that these neurotics rule the world. For our neurotic civilization, place is always out of place. Its obsessive fantasy is to replace every place with a no place, an Atopia, that a million miles from Utopia.

Topianism means simply (and at the same time very complexly) *being here*. Our peculiar kind of human existence has been called "Dasein," using a German everyday deeply crazy word, which, since "da" means both "here" and "there," itself means both "Being-Here" and "Being-There" at the same time. Most of us know the feeling. Our existence may in fact not have to seem that way, and it probably didn't until fairly recently, but it's actually a good description of late capitalist, late civilizational, spectacularized, commodified consciousness, which doesn't know where in the post-modern Hell it is at any given time.

Surre(gion)alism proposes the alternative of "Dadasein," which dialectically posits the *da* of *da*, and ends up where it always was, *hier*. When we are fully here we are also fully there. Deep Play means being fully immersed in the thing that is here, and at the same time being fully absorbed in the surre(gion)al journey through which the thing takes us beyond itself and our selves. Topianism is this Dadasein.

The Topia that we seek in urban surre(gion)al exploration is the Dadaic City.

[13] Clarence John Laughlin, "The Art and Thought of An American Surrealist," Interview with Clarence Laughlin by Patricia Leighten in History of Photography 44 (April-June 1988), p.72.

The Ordinary

Gary Snyder has said that "the truly experienced person delights in the ordinary."[14] Deep play and surre(gion)al exploration are about having, without having, that kind of experience. Freud was once asked by a patient if he could cure her unhappiness, and Freud replied that he couldn't, but he could bring her up to the level of everyday ordinary unhappiness (coincidentally, what society expects and needs from us to keep us producing and consuming optimally). This is not the "ordinariness" of Deep Play, which is based on the thesis that both everyday, ordinary unhappiness, and also some of the more extraordinary kinds, result precisely from a lack of deep experience of things ordinary.

Everyday life, as many Surrealists and Situationists have enjoyed pointing out, is one of misery, but this is true only because the accent falls so heavily on the everyday and not on the life. Thoreau said in a similar vein that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."[15] This was, of course, long before everyone spent most of their lives on cell phones. In a way all that has changed is that a kind of personal autism has been replaced by a more collective variety, while the desperation persists. Deep Play promises no sure-fire cure for existence itself but leads us toward a certain enjoyment through desperately seeking nothing, taking the ordinary objects of experience as extraordinary gifts, and delighting in what is given. As Laozi said, we shouldn't destroy our lives contending for conspicuously exhibited "rare treasures," while overlooking those that lie around us, obscured by their ordinariness. As Varahamihira instructs us:

> The gold of poetry
> Gets smelted and refined
> From the speech of
> Unreflective men.
> Let us go
> Cheerfully among them
> With poised minds.[16]

Franklin Rosemont expresses beautifully this spirit of the gift of the ordinary in his definitive work on the scandalously neglected topic of Wrong Numbers.[17] In his *magnum opus* of Misnumerology he explains that "in every Wrong Number, the present moment is not only isolated but also intensified by the unexpected; while it lasts, it is the sole focus, the whole reality. Like poetry and love, the Wrong Number recognizes the present moment—the magical *now*—as the "open sesame' of freedom, the Marvelous, the fulfillment of our wildest dreams."[18] What we seldom realize is that the vast majority of Right Numbers are existentially and experientially wrong, since they are excruciatingly and deadeningly predictable. It is the Wrong Number that has the ring of truth.

But hung up as we are on rightness, we hang up much too quickly on the wrong ones (the *odd* numbers and *irrational* numbers in every sphere), with all their striking absurdities and sublime revelations. Why is one of the most hated characters in our contemporary abrasive society the miscreant who mistakenly phones us and hangs up on *us* in annoyance? On a superficial level, it's because of the culprit's bad manners. But on a deeper metaphysical level it's because this reprobate ruthlessly negates the entire mystery of our being (and thereby stands in for the entire social order of the crushing Megamachine and its insensate Technocracy that carries this out on the larger scale). One wonders whether such a person is capable of paying attention when it's the *right* number, in any sense of the term.

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[14] For example, Thich Nhat Hanh, in Zen Keys (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1995), p. 57.

[15] Gary Snyder, Practice of the Wild (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 153.

[16] Henry David Thoreau, "Economy" in Walden; online at thoreau.eserver.org.

[17] Andrew Schelling, trans., Dropping the Bow: Poems from Ancient India (Seattle, WA: Broken Moon Press 1991), p. 45. Thanks to Gary Snyder for drawing attention to this marvelous, incisive passage.

[18] Franklin Rosemont, An Open Entrance to the Shut Palace of WRONG NUMBERS (Chicago: Surrealist Editions, 2003).

The "playful science of wrong numbers" is, as we see, an indispensible sphere of inquiry that yields many unexpected rewards. But as Rosemont notes, it is also significant because it is "part of a larger science of neglected phenomena of all kinds," part of the "ecology of the disregarded."[19]

The Endotic

Another way of putting this is that surre(gion)al exploration, and perhaps especially urban surre(gion)al exploration, is concerned with the *endotic*, as opposed to the *exotic*. Conventional wisdom links the exotic to sophistication. But this wisdom is sophism. Often it is precisely one who is inexperienced in the most vital sense who seeks to delude others (and perhaps him or herself) through exoticism. The exotic signifies literally that which is from outside. The outside and outsiders are crucial, and they are most crucial when they cross the all-important, non-existent boundary and enter into the inside, overturning all the conventional ideas of inside and outside.[20]

But the mystique of the exotic is not related to the outside that challenges the limits of the inside by inhabiting it, uncovering its secrets, and perhaps subverting it or forcing it to be what it longs to be. Rather, the exotic outside retains an inert externality. The allure of the exotic object depends on maintaining a split between imagination and experience. That object subsists in a world of abstraction and loses its alluring qualities to the extent that it begins to be known more deeply and intimately, that is, the way the endotic is known. Endoticism focuses on the Thusness of things, their being-here, while exoticism requires that they always dwell in some exclusive, inaccessible, mystifying There.

.Georges Perec, in "Approches de quoi?" describes his approach to the endotic as a concern with "what happens everyday, the banal, the quotidian, the evident, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual" and with the questions "how can one account for it, how can one question it, how can one describe it?"[21] The surre(gion)alist concept of the endotic is similar to Perec's, except that Surre(gion)alism does not have much interest in "accounting" for endotic realities, and it takes a more dialectical approach to these phenomena. It is concerned not only that we focus intently on the evident, the common, and the ordinary, and allow them to reveal what they are, but also that we be open to finding the unexpected in the evident, the unique in the common, and the extraordinary in the ordinary. And that we explore the ways in which all of these things both are what they are not and are not what they are. We must be ready to discover that they all lead beyond themselves into other worlds, other regions of being and experiencing.

The passion for the ordinary and endotic is the practical negation of civilization's hierarchical dualism, which is founded on a heroically futile quest for a mythical ideal perfection, and in which everything can be ranked as higher or lower according to relation to this abstract ideal, ranging from the most lowly, insignificant, ordinary, endotic (the unfortunately real), to the most perfect, extraordinary, exotic, powerful, godlike (the triumphantly illusory). Surre(gion)al exploration revels in the imperfection of things, in their being merely what they are. They are all ephemeral, flawed, and incomplete—in short, they are part of the real world rather than a product of fantasy. They are valuable precisely because they are part of the beautiful, broken, and sad world.

This is what Zen aesthetics conveys through the concept of *wabi-sabi*. *Wabi-sabi* refers to "the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete" and "of things modest and humble."[22] It is "the exact opposite of the Western ideal of great beauty as something monumental, spectacular and enduring. Wabi-sabi is about the minor and the hidden, the tentative and the ephemeral: things so subtle and evanescent they are invisible to vulgar eyes."[23]

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[19] Ibid., p. 145.

[20] Ibid., p. 151.

[21] See Andrei Codrescu, The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto of Escape (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

[22] Quoted in Anna Botta, "The Alì Babà project (1968–1972): Monumental History and the Silent Resistance of the Ordinary" in Proceedings of the International Conference: The Value of Literature in and after the Seventies: The Case of Italy and Portugal; online at congress70.library.uu.nl.

[23] Leonard Koren, Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers. (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1994), p. 7.

It's a wabi-sabi world and surre(gion)al exploration is about discovering the beauty, truth, goodness, and sometimes even the very existence of the small, humble, unfinished things that surround us, things and qualities that usually remain hidden just beyond our focus of attention. It's about putting aside our presuppositions and waking up to these unpresupposing and luminous things. No one said it better than Leonard Cohen:

> "There's a crack in everything
> that's how the light gets in."[24]

The Surre(gion)al Object

Though descriptions necessarily address either one side or the other of this indivisible process, surre(gion)al exploration always *reveals both the depth of the thing and the beyond of the thing.* Breton writes of "the integral certainty produced by the emergence of a solution"[25] that one experiences when the Thing reveals itself in all its luminosity. The Surre(gion)al Object is such a Thing in that it is revelation that yields "certainty." But this certainty is the being of "a certain something," of a Thusness, a certain particularity that leads beyond itself, to a certain beyond, that is, a quite particular beyond. It is a solution that presents many further problems, an answer that poses an endless chain of further questions. Surre(gion)al objects are also "solutions" in that they dissolve our preconceived notions of things. They dissolve every thing, if they are not themselves dissolved in the "icy water of egoistical calculation."

They dissolve every thing, including themselves, in the sense that in exploring them not only do we discover Things but we also find that there are really no things, that each Thing leads us into a multitude of regions that give it meaning, that generate its thinghood and its nothinghood, that spawn uniqueness, specificity and Thusness, and also at the same moment lead all things outward into an infinitude of directions, and into an infinite of other realities that are not ultimately other. Determination is negation, so we must be determined to follow that negation wherever it leads. This is part of the meaning of meditating on Mu, "No!" or "Nothing!" The power of absolute negation propels us positively forward through "the Ten Thousand Things," so that as Zhuangzi said, we can stop struggling against the way of things and learn to ride the wind.

The Thing, the surre(gion)al, ultimately non-existent, noumenal object has something in common with Breton's *trouvaille.* Breton says that "what is delightful here is the dissimilarity itself which exists between the object wished for and *the object found.*"[26] This is an enormously significant point. Surre(gion)al exploration (like surrealist exploration in its most uncorrupted form) subverts the civilized . The psychology of the surre(gion)al, wild object is the opposite of the psychology of the civilized object. The civilized object always produces frustration and a sense of lack because of the necessary gap between that object and the object wished for. (This is also called "sarvam dukham.") The wild object is the object of play, so it cannot be wished for. It is necessarily a surprise, a gift, and a revelation.

The term "object" comes from the roots meaning "to throw" and "toward." It thus seems to imply an intentionality and movement in the direction of some thing. But paradoxically, and dialectically, the "ob" of the "object' has come to mean also a reversal of direction, and thus a movement *away* from some thing, a being-moved of the subject. So we become the object's object. We may seek to "have" some object but once we are in the presence of that object, in its force field, perhaps we should say, it has us much more than we can possibly have *it.*

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[24] Ibid., p. 50.
[25] Leonard Cohen, "Anthem."
[26] André Breton, Mad Love, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 13.

The Tathatic City

As we discover, the Dadaic City is also the Tathatic City. In all surre(gion)al exploration we seek the Thusness of things, their *tathata*. Han Shan, over a millennium ago, thought of this kind of exploration as a kind of tathatic *dérive*. As he says in the *Cold Mountain Poems*:

> Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
> And linger watching things themselves.[27]

"Zurück zur Sachen selbst!" Han Shan's brief lines sum up concisely the essentials of Deep Play. It is a truly free drifting in which we are carried along beyond the bounds of our own and the world's delusions. It is a discovery of Things Themselves that becomes possible when we "linger" while "drifting," doing without doing. Han Shan's drifting was like Thoreau's walking, for as he said, "in my walks I would fain return to my senses"[28]

Gary Snyder shows us that we can also prowl the urban woods and streams, the great wilderness at the heart of the city, if we know how to look for the things themselves there also. As he expresses it in one of the great texts of urban exploration, "Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information":

> Maple, oak, poplar, gingko
> New leaves, "new green" on a rock ledge
> Of steep little uplift, tucked among trees
> Hot sun dapple—
> wake up.
>
> Roll over and slide down the rockface
> Walk away in the woods toward
> A squirrel, toward
> Rare people!
> ...
>
> Drop under the streetworld
> Steel squeal of stopping and starting
> Wind blows through black tunnels
> spiderwebs, fungus, lichen.
>
> Gingko trees of Gondwanaland. Pictographs,
> Petroglyphs, cover the subways—
> Empty eye sockets of buildings just built
> Soul-less, they still wait the ceremony
> that will make them too,
> new, Big
> city Gods,
> Provided with conduit, cable and plumbing,
> They will light up, breathe cool air,
> Breathe the minds of the workers who work there—
> The cloud of their knowing
> As they soar in the sky, in the air,
> Of the Sea
> Of Information ...[29]

[27] Ibid.

[28] Han Shan, "Cold Mountain Poem 7," trans. by Gary Snyder, in Riprap & Cold Mountain Poems (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1958), p. 43.

[29] In one of his greatest essays, "Walking"; online at www.transcendentalists.com.

Even in this excerpt from the much longer poem, we can see how Snyder's exploration attends to a multitude of phenomena from many realms, and reveals the dialectical interaction between these realms. We discover an urban and at once more-than-urban world of sounds, sight, feelings, sensations, geography, geology, biology, sexuality, ecology, psychology, history, economics, social relations, class, anthropology, archaeology, architecture, the symbolic, the natural and the social, the atmosphere, ritual, imagination, technology, politics, and myth—to give a non-exhaustive list.

As Snyder summarizes the secret of this walk: "wake up."

Basho, another surre(gion)al explorer, wrote *haibun*, journal entries interspersed with haiku, that reflect a dialectic between nature, culture, history, and psyche. He begins "Narrow Road to the Interior" with the observation that "the journey itself is home,"[30] and he looked at all that appeared on the journey as a gift. In "the Knapsack Notebook" he describes a point at which he was overcome by fatigue and his burden began to weigh on him physically and mentally. "With each slow step, my knees ached and I grew increasingly depressed." And then:

> Exhausted! I sought
> a country inn, and found
> Wisteria in bloom[31]

He doesn't mention whether he ever got to the inn.

The City Seen

Sengcan (Seng-t'san), in the first recorded Zen poem (circa 600 C.E.), said:

> To ride the One Vehicle
> Do not despise the six senses."[32]

This is a good guide to surre(gion)al exploration. The vehicle takes us along the road, the path, the way—in the present context, the city street. If we don't have confidence in our six senses (the five conventional ones plus mind) the vehicle will get us nowhere.

The tradition that gave rise to Zen says metaphorically of our mind and other senses that we live in a house with six windows. It also says that we're like a crazed monkey that is trapped in this six-windowed dwelling. A psychotic little primate that seldom looks out the windows but spends most of its time bouncing against the walls and wreaking havoc with the furniture. In short, the Third Chimp is a Sick Puppy. Stated more historically, this means that since the beginning of civilization, and for very good practical reasons, we have created for ourselves a psychological pseudo-reality that is a weird blend of autism and mental hyperactivity. It is not coincidental that the vehicle has taken us precisely nowhere (Atopia again).

Deep Play means breaking out of the autistic fantasy world that we've lived in since the origins of civilization and domination, and allowing ourselves to experience the realities, the Things and the thinglessness, the Thusness and the regionalities that are the beyond of Things, that our six senses reveal to us.

One point of departure for sensory exploration of the city is the visual, the sensory realm that has gotten the most attention. New Orleans surrealist photographer Clarence Laughlin expresses important aspects of a surre(gion)al view of the object and the image in his idea of a *seeing* that dwells on the object (often images of decay and deterioration) but also goes far beyond the visual object into other realms. The visual image leads into a multitude of regions, which Laughlin explicitly identifies as psychological

[30] From Gary Snyder "Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information" in Mountains and Rivers Without End (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996), pp. 97, 100.

[31] Matsuo Basho, The Essential Basho, trans. by Sam Hamill (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1998), p. 3.

[32] Ibid., p. 65.

and symbolic, and which are also implicitly social, historical, cultural, natural, and metaphysical. He says

> I have tried to deal in an integrated and comprehensive fashion with the psychic significance of the multiple and often discordant forms that are found in the city of New Orleans, the time growths that completely render visible the psychological patterns of the era which evolved them (whatever that era may happen to be), [and] everything that embodies the spirit of 'place' or that indicates the meaning of a region at a particular period of time... This is symbolic photography.[33]

Laughlin says that from the photographer's "intensive seeing" there "emerges a *surreality* which definitely transcends the purely recording function of the camera. The surreality consists of the extension of the individual object into a larger and more significant reality—the submarine depths and fantastic jungles of psychological association and symbolic meaning."[34] Surre(gion)alism makes explicit the dimensions implicit in Laughlin's account and broadens the exploration, above all by shifting the focus more in the direction of the object, so that the revelation is less a one-sided psychological and symbolic revelation of the subject (individual or collective) through the object, and more of a mutual revelation of the subject-object field, through the regionalities that pervade both.

In 1853 the Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, a Bavarian nobleman and immigrant to the Crescent City, wrote his fantastic and phantasmagorical *Mysteries of New Orleans*, a rambling, utterly implausible, and captivating work that runs to over 500 pages of astute observations and hallucinatory imaginings.[35] In the Baron's inflamed imagination, New Orleans contained more of the mysterious, the bizarre and the grotesque than perhaps any place on earth. Part of the practice of expecting the unexpected is to investigate the extent to which even in a post-modern age of cynicism and disenchantment a city can still contain mysteries, secrets, wonders, miracles, magic, the bizarre, the uncanny, and the sacred.

Some of these mysteries are documented in *Geopsychic Wonders of New Orleans*[36], which, like Laughlin's work, begins with the visual but probes far beyond it. A milestone in the history of the surre(gion)al exploration of New Orleans, the work combines the inspired efforts of geopsychical writer, critic and photographer Eric Bookhardt and hermeneuticist of the absurd Jon Newlin. It manifests acute, awakened perceptiveness, intimate connection with the local cultural milieu and history, a brilliant sense of the ridiculous sublime, and a deep love of place, all combined with a certain ironic distance that keeps it immune from the kind of idiotic puffery and cliché-mongering that plagues localism in general and Big Easy-ism in particular. This work opens the gateless gate of Creole surre(gion)ality.

Bookhardt and Newlin explore the "signs" of New Orleans and find them to point in strange and mysterious directions. "These signs," Newlin says "are omens and portents." He describes "the sudden confrontation late one evening with a set of tile letters, embedded in the sidewalk of St. Claude Avenue near Poland Avenue, reading in a river-to-lake line of horizontals, Stop Don't Go Any Further." For Newlin, this "prompts two questions, For whom is this intended? Is it command or warning or both?" The sign can be taken as a koan, and if so performs a similar function as the koan "Mu." We must just keep in mind that we will find many other urban koans or signs that tell us "Don't stop!" and "Always Go Further!"

The Saturn Bar is the ultimate New Orleanian surre(gion)al social space, site of one of the most intense condensations of regionalities. "The ceiling—a mummy, elderly ceiling fan with dusty blade, a panorama of the galaxy and paintings nailed to the ceiling—there are paintings everywhere in the

[33] Mu Soeng, Trust in Mind: The Rebellion of Chinese Zen (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004), p. 154

[34] Keith E. Davis, Clarence John Laughlin: Visionary Photographer (Kansas City, MO: Hallmark Cards, 1990), p. 27.

[35] Clarence John Laughlin, "First Principles of the Third World of Photography: The World Beyond Documentation & Purism" in Franklin Rosemont, ed. Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion 4 (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1989), p. 96.

[36] Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, Mysteries of New Orleans, trans. by Steven Rowan (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). There were three different "Mysteries of New Orleans" works from the period, one in German, one in French, and one in English, representing the three major literate populations of the city at that time.

Saturn (subaqueous scenes, bullfights, swamp scenes, horses in pastures, postcard vistas of all climes, a beggar-thin hand throwing snake-eyes (with a Brueghelian tableaux beneath a shark about to gobble a smaller fish), cemetery scenes, symbolic portraits that might have been dreamed up by a cockeyed Redon); what is beneath the ceilings is no less bizarre—an Escorial of the bibelot—madonnas made entirely of glitter, a sea turtle mounted on the wall outlined in neon with, across its shell, the alluring word 'Candy.' Perhaps the most hallucinatory terrain for a cocktail ever conceived, carried out ruthlessly according to one of the most arcane Ninth Ward cosmologies ever to lurk beneath such a deceptively, preposterously ordinary exterior."

The text is atypically restrained in its commentary on the remarkable Chapel of St. Roch Cemetery. It evokes some significant aspects of the Chapel's mystique in describing it as "an old-world scene of devotion, fervor, immortelles and plaster casts of newly-whole physical parts, reminders of physical transience."[37] But it is much more than this. It is a powerful evocation of strangely intimate yet distant personal and collective history, revealing links to a communal ancestry in Southern Europe, evoking memories of ancient plagues juxtaposed with reminders of the city's own history of catastrophic epidemics. Its atmosphere is heavy with ambiguous nostalgia, and it shocks contemporary sensibilities with its petrified remnants of a past era of devotion. It poses a deeply ironic relation between past and present. And spite the ease with which it can be perceived as a cultural curiosity, it retains a strange and haunting beauty wrought by the ravages of time and now intensified by the flooding in Hurricane Katrina of the Chapel and its neighborhood (the neighborhood of my childhood).

A final example of an exploration of diverse regionalities that takes the visual as the point of departure is the work of New Orleans artist and ecologist of the imagination Jacqueline Bishop. She is best known for her strikingly powerful rain forest paintings, raging from apocalyptic Amazonian landscapes of fiery destruction and lush regeneration to minutely detailed and sensuously numinous orchids.[38] But many of her works emerge in part from the city and incorporate found objects that she collects in early morning walks through the streets of New Orleans. In some cases, the objects themselves become her canvas, as in an extensive series of paintings on discarded baby shoes. She says that "most people ignore or separate themselves from discarded objects on the street, which are considered unwanted, used, dismissed and abandoned." They are not only ordinary, but as discards they are even sub-ordinary. For her, they are aesthetic, cultural and historical objects, works of nature and art that can be perceived and appreciated for what they are and what they embody, and also for the ways in which they can be incorporated in further generation of form, meaning and value. In Bishop's aesthetic, the creative process is a dialectic between several levels of preexisting meanings and forms and newly generated meanings and forms. "As an artist I feel a mystery in the objects I find in the streets, for example, baby shoes, keys, nails, screws, door handles, human hair in the form of dreadlocks, silk ribbon and broken earrings, knowing they were used in a meaningful way by some human being I may never know. Collecting these objects and using them in my work is transforming them into another life, giving them another meaning."

In a project with college students called **"Discarded in Kentucky"** the students "investigated the streets and each collected a specific, discarded object that would be considered garbage, abandoned, something discarded, rubbish, rejected, or what might be considered landfill material." Each student then "discussed the materials in this object (natural materials or man made; wood, plastic, paper, metals, steel" and his or her connection to this object or how he or she might identify with this object (cultural, a religion, spiritual, gender, political, or aesthetically)" Finally, each student "transformed this unwanted

[37] D. Eric Bookhardt and Jon Newlin, Geopsychic Wonders of New Orleans (New Orleans: Temperance Hall, Ltd., 1992; reprint of 1979 edition). The book has no page numbers.

[38] Some excellent St. Roch cemetery scenes can be found online at www.asergeev.com. These are from a remarkable collection of 2254 images of New Orleans from 2005 and 2006 by Alexey Sergeev, a physicist interested in "quantum-mechanical perturbation theory, summation of divergent perturbation series, quasiclassical methods for resonant states." Extensive St. Roch scenes of varying quality can be found at www.flickr.com

object into something else, giving it new meaning, a new existence, whether it be functional or purely aesthetic."

One of Bishop's most recent projects was a unique effort to help people to see what usually remains unseen though it is right before their eyes. In a project called "Field Guide," volunteers used stencils of silhouettes of local native bird species to create 5000 images on a driveway in front of a complex of buildings that has been deserted since Hurricane Katrina.[39] The complex of buildings was once the Milne Boys' Home, a well-known local institution that is noteworthy in part because local music icon Louis Armstrong spent time there. The project calls attention to the abandonment of this site, which, like so much of New Orleans, including much of its population, has simply disappeared from collective consciousness, locally and throughout the United States of Amnesia, after the initial trauma and media bonanza of Katrina. But above all, the exhibit is for the birds. Five thousand birds may seem like overkill, but it is in fact about overkill, as the diversity of bird species in the region disappear from consciousness and then just disappear. It's an attack on oblivion and a wake-up call, with nature calling.

The focus thus far has been on the visual, but a large part of surre(gion)al exploration consists of careful, conscious listening and hearing. Two large areas for such exploration of the city are listening to the noise of the city, and hearing the many voices of the city. John Cage said that "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments."[40] Cage also said that "music is everywhere, you just have to have the ears to hear it."[41] Recent important explorations of both the Thusness of the music of everywhere and of musical regionalities include Steven Feld's "soundscape compositions" incorporating church bells, animal bells, and costume bells,[42] and, in a more urban mode, his recordings of the music, speeches, and sounds of the crowds at the Carrara, Italy anarchist May Day celebration.[43] Also of interest for their use of urban auditory source material are Quinn Kiesow's "Barcelona," "Madrid" and "New York."[44]

We will not run through all the senses here, but it should be taken as given that deep play will carry out its explorations through all of them, extending even to the most neglected and devalued of all, the sense of smell. Walter Benjamin has been justly recognized for his contribution to "the dialectics of seeing."[45] But the surre(gion)alist non-project, its synject, will require not only a dialectics not only of this over-privileged sense, but also and *especially* a *Dialectics of Smelling*, not to mention a dialectics of all the other senses. Though surre(gion)alists do not believe in self-identity, they are tempted to proclaim, "I smell, therefore I am," if only to give that most disparaged of senses its epistemological due, and to protest the fact that the onto-phallo-antinaso-logical tradition since the ancient Greeks has so discourteously and rather paradoxically snubbed, while contradictorily turning up, its nose at that very same humble organ, along with its scorned sense.

Granted, any American city is more of a challenge to the discriminating smeller than is for example an Indian city, in which the fragrances of diverse curries and masalas, food markets, herb and spice merchants, perfumes, incense and a thousand other scents reach out to the passer-by. Yet the smell of a crab, shrimp or crawfish boil in New Orleans is equally distinctive. As is the blooming of the jasmine, honeysuckle, sweet olive or magnolia. Yet there are thousands of more subtle scents that go unnoticed and remain for surre(gion)al investigation. But, however much we must attend to the specific phenomena, there is also a dialectic that encompasses all these visible things, audible things, tactile

[39] An extensive collection of images of Bishop's work can be found on the Arthur Roger Gallery site at www.arthurrogergallery.com.

[40] Images of work in progress on the project can be found at the art in Action c site at artinaction-nola.blogspot.comth-30th-with.html.

[41] John Cage, Silence-Lectures and Writings (Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 2006), p. 3.

[42] John Cage, "Anarchic Harmony," online at www.sterneck.net and many other places.

[43] Steven Feld, The Time of Bells: Soundscapes of Italy, Finland, Greece and France (Voxlox, 2004).

[44] Primo Maggio Anarchico: Carrara 2002 (FAI, 2003).

[45] Online at www.npr.org. Less interesting is "L.A.," in which he explains it all for the benefit of NPR listeners.

things, gustatory things, olfactory things, and leads us (as Laughlin emphasizes so strongly) to the most complex expressions of mind.

Surre(gion)al Lost and Found

One concise record of surre(gion)al exploration in New Orleans comes from an anonymous explorer in a message delivered not to the addressee but rather into the hands of fate (though perhaps the addressee will finally somehow find it here) . The text and accompanying drawing were left on a table in the New Orleans Public Library. It reads in part:

"20 March 1996 Day 3, New Orleans. Hello Elysabeth I write to you from the city of great noises, the city of sweet smells, the city where all who move are Dancers. I walk these streets with wide open eyes, opened palms, and it seems that the creatures I see live inside-out. Insides everywhere, bursting and color-full. Time is present always and it is hard to erase. In this city the layers are raw and exposed. On houses, there are many colors, one beneath the other, scattered away with weather and storm and time and so much work it takes to live! Bricks and metal and wood, all showing, surfacing. Insides-out..."

When Deep Play comes to full fruition, the streets will be filled with anonymous surre(gion)al explorers, wandering through the Tathatic City, eyes wide open, allowing the outside to rush inward and vice versa, perhaps like Han Shan leaving records of their astounding discoveries scattered across the landscape.

Listening to the Secret Mind[46]

In surre(gion)al exploration, the eye may be directed outward to the objects of vision, or it may be directed inward to the objects of mind. In certain very revealing cases, the eye focuses on what has passed through the eye of the storm, the storm in question being the tempestuous encounter with the traumatic real. What it discovers is the displaced perspective of the displaced, an anamorphic perception that is able to apprehend what could never be seen from the standpoint of the everyday, the stance of normality before the disruptive shift.

Such a traumatic encounter and such a process of displacement took place in New Orleans in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. They arose out of the loss of family, friends and neighbors, the loss of homes, possessions, and entire neighborhoods, and the loss of much of the personal and collective history of multitudes of people. The encounter with the impossible real can immobilize, but it can also liberate energies, and imagination. So along with the destruction and devastation, both external and internal, came an explosion of manifestations of personal and collective self-expression: a proliferation of internet archives, story projects, and photographic exhibits; a seemingly countless series of experientially-grounded documentary films; grassroots art and photography. The results of this outpouring constitute an extraordinarily detailed mapping of psychogeographical landscapes and regionalities.

Perhaps the deepest and most far-reaching of these explorations of the individual and collective, psychical and spiritual, imaginary and symbolic landscape of New Orleans is *The Post-Katrina Portrait Project.* Naomi Klein has written of what she calls "Disaster Capitalism," a monstrous system that preys on destruction, devastation and disorientation, and the "Shock Doctrine," its theoretical correlate, which stresses the vital role that collective trauma plays in expanding the parameters of exploitation. But there is also a Disaster Communalism and a corresponding Solidarity Principle, aimed at expanding the parameters of mutual aid, and these arise out of much the same dislocations. *The Post-Katrina Portraits* are in part a documentation of these phenomena.

Beginning a few days after Hurricane Katrina and continuing for over a year, Francesco di Santis drew portraits of a vast spectrum of people in New Orleans. This included Katrina survivors of diverse

[46] Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

ethnicities, social classes, neighborhood backgrounds, age groups, and personal histories. It included those who stayed through the storm, the flood and the chaos that followed, and those who returned in the ensuing months. It included a vast array of volunteers—young anarchists and anti-authoritarians, global justice activists, idealistic college students, youth group volunteers, Rainbow family Hippies, concerned Christians, neo-Pagans, social justice workers, and heartbroken lovers of the city.

Di Santis asked each person to write his or her Katrina story on the portrait, or to tell the story so that it could be transcribed verbatim. In all, he did over two thousand portraits that contained over two thousand first-person accounts of experiences and reflections on the meaning of those experiences. Hundreds of them are collected online and hundreds are published in art-book format as.[47] The Project is a profound and moving study of psychogeography, in particular the psychogeography of disaster and trauma, in which social geography is radically overturned, psychoregions are revolutionized, and long-obscured truths are illuminated by the clear light that shines forth out of the fissures in the contours of reality. For a moment, or perhaps longer, the real surges forth and leaves traces that are often lost, but are sometimes retraced by a patient and revolutionary psychogeographer.

The *Portraits* is a record of alienation and righteous indignation: "You are looking at the face of a traumatized Katrina survivor! Katrina came and uprooted my family and community like a thief in the night. Been to so many places. You can never know what it was like for me and my child to see everything disappear right in front of our faces. The media lies! So did the people that told me they were taking me somewhere safe, but instead tossed us under a bridge, held at gunpoint without food or water for days on end."

It is a record of the Dark Night of the Soul: "At night, it gets dark. Darker than I ever knew a city could become. Now the stars can finally be seen. Last night, I woke to the shaking of my room. The walls were rattling and the whole house moved. I clung to my bed. The earth was quaking and I thought, 'this is it.' Pieces of the world were coming apart and I tried to grasp onto the remaining fragments of reality—before it was all gone. I woke again." And a record of communal ecstasy: "I am in love. Completely, joyously in love. I have found my soul's match, my heart and mind's delight. I am in love with the people here. I have never been so continually inspired and amazed by the wonderful beings all around me. The volunteers whose skills seem boundless, their energy aflame, brilliant minds and spirits make me gasp with joy every day."

It is a record of the horror of abandonment (as in these excerpts from a Katrina diary written on a marker board in the flooded Charity Hospital): "Day 1: We are all ok... Day 2: We are all ok... Day 3: Help is on the way... Day 4: Where is the help? ... Day 5: Bodies floating in the water! WHERE IS THE HELP? ... Day 6: WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE!!" And a record of new realities surging forth from the breach: "What matters most is that within this system crack which was caused by Katrina we now have the chance to help enact a transformation of culture and civilization... All points radiating out from this our swampy heaven... all around me in this city I've seen art and music seeping up from the cracks in the hearts of people whose experiences and pain I can never understand."

Perhaps these few short excerpts hint at the vast scope of the geographies of the mind and spirit that are mapped in this project. The message of the *Portraits* is epitomized in one of the shortest and most eloquent texts, which implores the reader: "Open your eye, see what going on around you." This is in fact the project of deep play and surre(gion)al exploration: to see with an awakened eye

A certain kind of surre(gion)al exploration requires patiently wandering streets and alleyways, climbing rooftops, prying into neglected corners and abandoned attics, watching and waiting for what Cartier-Bresson's called "the decisive moment," the surrealist moment in which the visual image condenses in our perception many levels of reality beyond the conventional one.

[47] This phrase is inspired by Ed Sanders' reflections in his magnificent Poems to New Orleans (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2008; recorded version: Dallas, TX: Paris Records, 2007). In "My Darling Magnolia Tree," Sanders quotes poet Bob Kauffman's question, "Does the Secret Mind Whisper?" and explores its import in the context of destruction, loss, and memory. (pp. 76–77)

Another kind of surre(gion)al exploration requires patient tarrying with the people of a community, exploring every crack and crevice of their faces, every gleam or shadow in their eyes, listening intently to their stories. As di Santis expresses it, it means "receiving daily inundations of others' experiences as only the people who lived them could express," and in this way "entering a nuanced and beautiful reality" and "pursuing a sense of history or chain of events demonstrated by intense deliberations over single precious moments."

Significantly, di Santis notes that often the subjects "describe their acts and sentiments at decisive moments." This is Cartier-Bresson's surrealist moment in which levels of reality are condensed in perception, and it is the surre(gion)alist moment in which what the artist calls "a simple loyalty to the present time" allows diverse personal, communal and historical regionalities to converge in an experience.

Not all psychogeographers can spend a year or more drawing thousands of portraits and collecting thousands of stories, but before they claim their Master of Psychogeography degrees they must first find their own unique variations of such an engaged practice. Though they may love quick kicks as much as anyone, they will never settle for a "rapid passage through varied ambiances." There is no Cafeteria of the Real. It takes numerous lifetimes to explore a city, but fortunately, if we slow down enough, we can live many of them simultaneously.

Urban Surre(gion)al Exploration: Case Study

Debord gives as an example of a possible *dérive* itinerary, "wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public." This brings to mind a prime New Orleanian example of an urban surre(gion)al exploration. However, in near or below sea-level New Orleans, subterranean catacombs and caverns have to be situated at the superterranean level, unless one plans to do ones wandering in a submarine.

Each year at the conclusion of a certain celebratory event, a group of anarchic angels arrange a kind of celebration of the celebration, a meta-celebration, which is always held at a forbidden place, so that it can be what the most celebratory celebrations in a sense are, an exploration of various social, psychical and other regionalities that are commonly neglected, repressed or even forbidden.

What did the anarchic angels do in this case? What they did (largely without doing) was one part an act of imagination and ninety-nine parts a liberation of the spirits of the place, a letting be and letting do of those spirits. It was one part lighting candles to invoke those spirits and ninety-nine thousand parts succumbing to the powers of these anarchic divinities.

The local environment for this event was an eerie, deserted, slightly intimidating warehouse district in the dark of night. A chill autumn wind rushed through wide empty streets, vaguely illuminated by the dim yellowy glow of sparsely scattered streetlights. Large, blank-faced, monolithic structures lined the streets. In short, a more or less German expressionist setting. Very *M*-ish. Very disinviting, oozing vague angst and reification—an excellent dialectical contrast to what was to come. The specific site for the event was a huge, ancient abandoned power plant, towering above the surrounding structures, clearly marked "Keep Out."

One entered the mammoth structure through a small opening where a panel had been removed from the bottom half of a locked door. One then passed through a small room that leads through a passage into one of the structure's vast superterranean caverns. There one found great expanses of space lit dimly by flickering candlelight that trailed off into complete darkness. Small votive candles were placed one on each step of the stairways so that they created a narrow pathway of flickering light that spiraled up into the heights. One then ascended the precarious stairways, and crossed over catwalks and high walkways, some without railings, to finally reach the roof of the structure.

A set of beautiful images of this power plant can be found online.[48] These daylight images exude a strong wabi-sabi spirit of a place that has been creatively transformed by the subtle, miraculous power of long disuse, by the action of non-action. They present an astonishing contrast to the rather

[48] Online at postkatrinaportraits.org and with full resolution at www.flickr.com.

overpowering, mysterious, almost sublime force of the same spaces vaguely and evocatively apprehended by candlelight.

From the heights of the structure one discovered a panoramic view of the skyline of the city, the nearby Mississippi River bridge, and the river itself illuminated by the lights of huge cargo ships and tankers, towboats, ferries and other vessels. The anarcho-angelic beings had arranged for a large sound system to be transported to the roof. The music, though powerful enough to pervade a large outdoor space in the midst of a strong wind, was so distant from the street level that it could not be detected from below. On the rooftop, one found a diverse group of people, including artists, writers, musicians, poets, anarchists (angelic and otherwise), travelers, and post-Katrina volunteer aid workers, in addition to a contingent of dedicated party-goers. The edifice is crowned by a huge smokestack. Some of the more intrepid explorers climbed it, rather precariously, to some wooden scaffolding hundreds of feet above.[49]

I left before the climactic ending, described by a Canadian anarchist: "All was grand until the New Orleans Police Department showed up to raid the place... It was a fairly surreal affair; lying on the gravel roof of an abandoned power plant at two in the morning with a hundred other folks while being berated by gun- and riot-baton wielding cops." Despite the NOPD's reputation for excellence in arrests based on fantasized offenses—symbolized by the mythical charge of "leaning with intent to fall"—the police must have fallen under the hypnotic power of some spirit, perhaps the locally revered Goddess Eris, for no one was taken in.

[49] Online at flickr.com.

The Library of Unconventional Lives

Max Cafard
Deep Play in the City
From the Situationist Dérive to Surre(gion)al Exploration
2012

Scanned from Surregional Explorations (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2012)

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