

WANDER

KEYWORDS: transurbance, deambulation, drift, periphery, trace, layer, embody.

PROMPT:

Your senses are a recording device. Wander through an unfamiliar terrain. Build thought with your body. Get lost. Look for signs of what was once there. See what is not there to make "something" appear. Construct a map, guide, or manual of this space.

SUPPORT:

Francesco Careri, "Errare Humanum Est." *Walkscapes: Walking As An Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Culidicae Press, 2002), 14, 41, 44.

Barbara Glowczewski. *YAPA peintres aborigènes* (Paris: Baudoin Lebon, 1991).

Francesco Careri, "Letterist Drifting (Dérive)." *Walkscapes: Walking As An Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Culidicae Press, 2002), 86-87.

Francesco Careri, "The Theory of the Dérive." *Walkscapes: Walking As An Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Culidicae Press, 2002), 92-93.

Eleanor Coppola, *Windows*, 1973.

The outcome cannot be taken for granted, but it brings remarkable rewards. I take them where they've never been as yet, I pull the rug out from under their feet and hijack them into uncharted territories. Usually at the beginning there's a mood of reluctance and distrust, doubts about what we are doing, the fear of wasting time. But in the end, for those who stick with it, there is the growing pleasure of finding new paths and new certainties, of building thought with your own body, acting with your own mind. Casting doubt on the few certainties you have just managed to put together thus far is actually a way to open the mind to previously unexplored worlds and possibilities, encouraging you to reinvent everything, from scratch: your idea of the city, your own definition of art and architecture, your own place in this world. You can break free of false convictions and start to remember that space is a fantastic invention with which you can play, like a kid. One motto that guides our walks is "lose time to gain space." If we want to gain 'other' spaces we have to know how to play, to deliberately get out of a functional-productive system in order to enter a non-functional, unproductive system. You have to learn how to lose time, not always seeking the shortest route, letting yourself get detoured by events, heading towards more impenetrable paths where it is possible to 'stumble,' maybe even to get stuck, talking with the people you meet or knowing how to stop, forgetting that you were supposed to proceed; to know how to achieve unintentional walking, indeterminate walking.

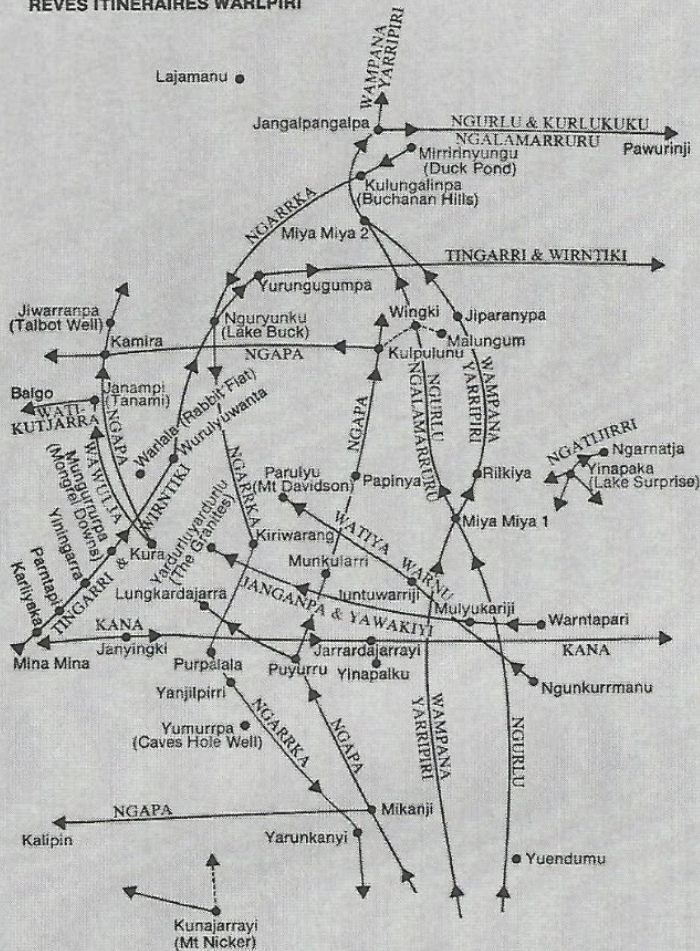
While in the settler's eyes nomadic spaces are empty, for nomads these voids are full of invisible traces: every little dissimilarity is an event, a useful landmark for the construction of a mental map composed of points (particular places), lines (paths), and surfaces (homogeneous territories) that are transformed over time.

The ability to *know how* to see in the void of places and therefore to *know how to name* these places was learned in the millennia preceding the birth of nomadism. The perception/construction of space begins with the wanderings of man in the Paleolithic landscape. While initial-

ly men could have used the tracks created by the seasonal migrations of animals through the vegetation, it is probable that from a certain period onward they began to blaze their own trails, to learn to orient themselves using geographical reference points, and to leave increasingly stable recognizable signs on the landscape. The history of the origins of man is a history of walking, of migrations of peoples and cultural and religious exchanges that took place along intercontinental trajectories. The slow, complex operation of appropriation and mapping of the territory was the result of the incessant walking of the first humans.

The 'walkabout' is the system of routes with which the indigenous peoples of Australia have mapped the entire continent. Every mountain, river and spring belongs to a complex system of path-stories—the *songlines*—that continuously interweave to form a single "history of the Dream Time," the story of the origins of mankind. Each of these paths is connected to a song, and each song is connected to one or more mythological tales set in the territory. The entire culture of the Australian aborigines—passed down from generation to generation thanks to a still-active oral tradition—is based on a complex mythological epic of stories and geographies that exist in the same space. Each path has its own song and the complex of the songlines constitutes a network of erratic, symbolic paths that cross and describe the space, like a sort of chanted guidebook. It is as if Time and History were updated again and again by 'walking them,' re-crossing the places and the myths associated with them in a musical deambulation that is simultaneously religious and geographic.⁸

RÈVES ITINÉRAIRES WARLPIRI



Songlines in the region of the Warlpiri language, Australia, 2000 AD

The walkabout of the Australian aborigines is a complex of sung itineraries that retrace places and the myths connected with them, as in a sacred dance through their own space and their own origins. In the map drawn by Patrick Mérienne some meanings of the terms are: *Ngapa*=rain; *Waiya-warnu*=seeds; *Ngarrka*=initiated man; *Wawulja*=invincible; *Yarripiri*=serpent; *Janganapa & Yawankiyi*=opossum & black plum; *Ngatijirri*=green parrot.

The Theory of the *Dérive*

In the years preceding the formation of the Situationist International, the Lettrists begin to develop a theory based on the practice of urban drifting. The time spent in marginal zones and the description of the unconscious city in Surrealist writings became a widespread literary genre in the mid-1950s, evolving into the Lettrist texts under the guise of travel guides and manuals for using the city. In 1955 Jacques Fillon wrote his *Description raisonnée de Paris (Itinéraire pour une nouvelle agence de voyages)*, a short guide with exotic, multi-ethnic itineraries to be completed on foot, from the departure point of the Lettrist headquarters on the Place Contrescarpe. But the first essay in which the term *dérive* appears is the *Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau*, written in 1953 by the 19-year-old Ivan Chtcheglov (alias Gilles Ivain) who, convinced of the fact that “a rational extension of [...] psychoanalysis into architectural expression becomes more and more urgent,” describes a mutant city continuously varied by its inhabitants in which “the main activity of the inhabitants will be CONTINUOUS DRIFTING. The changing of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in total disorientation,” through quarters whose names correspond to continuously changing moods.¹²

Guy Debord is the figure who collated these stimuli and completed the research. In 1955 he wrote his *Introduction a une critique de la géographie urbaine*, in which he set out to define experimental methods for “the observation of certain processes of the random and the predictable in the streets,”¹³ while in 1956 with the *Théorie de la dérive* a definitive step was taken beyond the Surrealist deambulation. As opposed to the Surrealists’ expedition, in the *dérive* “chance is a less important factor [...] than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortices that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.” The *dérive* is a constructed operation that accepts chance, but is not based on it. In fact it has a few rules: preparatory decision, based on psychogeographic maps of the directions of penetration of the environmental unit to be analyzed; the extension of the space of investigation can vary from the block to the quarter, to a maximum of “the complex

of a large city and its peripheral zones;” the *dérive* can be effected in groups composed 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;” the average duration is defined as one day, but can extend to weeks or months, taking the influence of climate variations, the possibility of pauses, the idea of taking a taxi to increase personal disorientation into account. Debord then continues, listing other urban operations like the “static *dérive* of an entire day in the Gare Saint-Lazare,” or the

possible appointment [...] and certain amusements of dubious taste that have always been enjoyed among our entourage—slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking non-stop 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.¹⁴

Lettrist Drifting (*Dérive*)

In the early 1950s the Lettrist International, which became the Situationist International in 1957, saw getting lost in the city as a concrete expressive possibility of anti-art, adopting it as an aesthetic-political means by which to undermine the postwar capitalist system.

After the Dada 'visit' and the Surrealist 'deambulation' a new term was coined: the *dérive*, literally 'drift,' a recreational collective act that not only aims at defining the unconscious zones of the city, but which—with the help of the concept of 'psychogeography'—attempts to investigate the psychic effects of the urban context on the individual. The *dérive* is the construction and implementation of new forms of behavior in real life, the realization of an alternative way of inhabiting the city, a lifestyle situated outside and against the rules of bourgeois society, with the aim of going beyond the deambulation of the Surrealists. Apart from having conducted their deambulation in the country rather than the city, the Surrealists are defined as 'imbeciles' for not having understood—though it was right under their noses—the potential of deambulation as a collective art form, as an aesthetic operation that, if performed in a group, had the power to annul the individual components of the artwork, a fundamental concept for Dada and Surrealism. The *miserable failure* of the Surrealist deambulation was due, according to the Situationists, to the exaggerated importance assigned to the *unconscious* and to *chance*, categories that were still included in the Lettrists' practice, but in a diluted form, closer to reality, within a constructed method of investigation whose field of action must be life, and therefore the real city. Lettrist drifting develops the subjective interpretation of the city already begun by the Surrealists, but with the aim of transforming it into an objective method of exploration of the city: the urban space is an *objective passionate terrain* rather than merely *subjective-unconscious*.

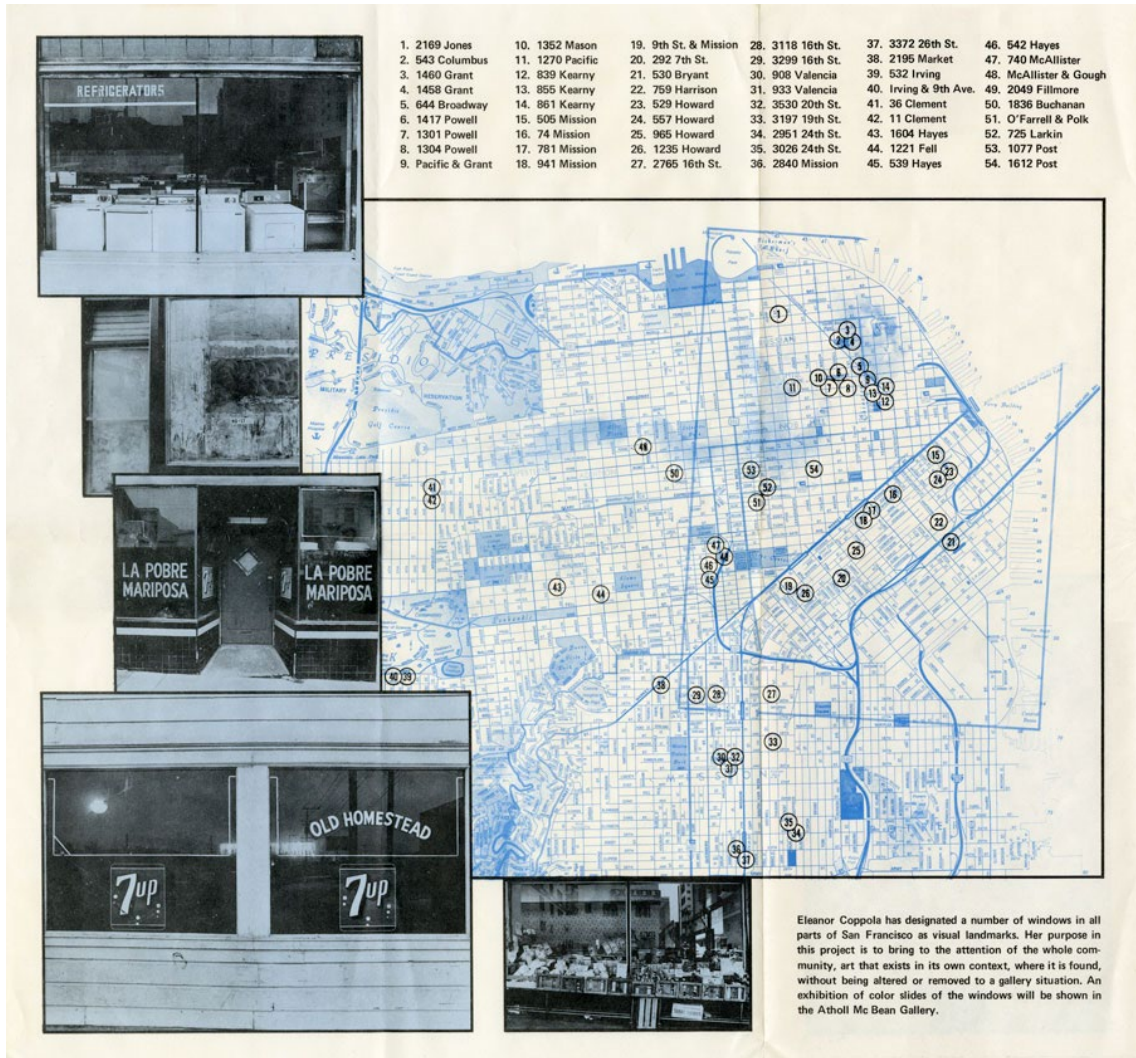
In Surrealism, attempts to realize a new use of life effectively coexisted with a reactionary flight from the real. And in this sense the importance attributed to dreams is interpreted by the Lettrists as the result of a bourgeois incapacity to realize a new lifestyle in the real world. The construction of the situation and the practice of the *dérive* are based,

instead, on concrete control of the means and forms of behavior that can be directly experienced in the city. The Lettrists rejected the idea of a separation between alienating, boring real life and a marvelous imaginary life: reality itself had to become marvelous. It was no longer the time to celebrate the unconscious of the city, it was time to experiment with superior ways of living through the construction of situations in everyday reality: it was time to act, not to dream.

The practice of walking in a group, lending attention to unexpected stimuli, passing entire nights bar-hopping, discussing, dreaming of a revolution that seemed imminent, became a form of rejection of the system for the Lettrists: a means of escaping from bourgeois life and rejecting the rules of the art system. The *dérive* was, in fact, an action that would have a hard time fitting into the art system, as it consisted in constructing the modes of a situation whose consumption left no traces. It was a fleeting action, an immediate instant to be experienced in the present moment without considering its representation and conservation in time. An aesthetic activity that fit perfectly into the Dada logic of anti-art.

The drifting of the Lettrists, which began as juvenile perdition in the Parisian nights, over time took on the character of an antagonistic theory. In 1952 a small group of young writers, including Guy Debord, Gil Wolman, Michèle Bernstein, Mohamed Dahou, Jacques Fillon and Gilles Ivain, broke away from the Lettrism of Isidore Isou to found the Lettrist International "to work on the conscious, collective construction of a new civilization." The focus of their interest was no longer poetry, but a passionate way of living that took the form of adventure in the urban environment:

Poetry has consumed its ultimate formalisms. Beyond aesthetics, poetry lies entirely in the power men will have in their adventures. Poetry is read on faces. Therefore it is urgent to create new faces. Poetry is in the form of the cities. We construct subversion. The new beauty will be that of the situation, temporary and experienced. [...] Poetry simply means the development of absolutely new forms of behavior and the means with which to be impassioned.¹¹



"In Eleanor Coppola's participatory Windows (1973), she proposed that visitors pick up a map and go out into the streets of San Francisco to complete the experience of the exhibition. The windows that were designated by the artist as rich visual pieces for the duration of the show varied considerably in type and neighborhood. Only the street addresses were provided. The viewer was left to discover each storefront or home, with its existing interior composition and changing reflections. There were no stated criteria for how she chose the particular windows, only the sense of her interest in framing the found elements as equivalents to art objects. Instead of making an intervention into the window displays or inserting the artist's own presence, this conceptually-driven work underscored the role of the author in creating a system for observation." (Zimbaro 2013)