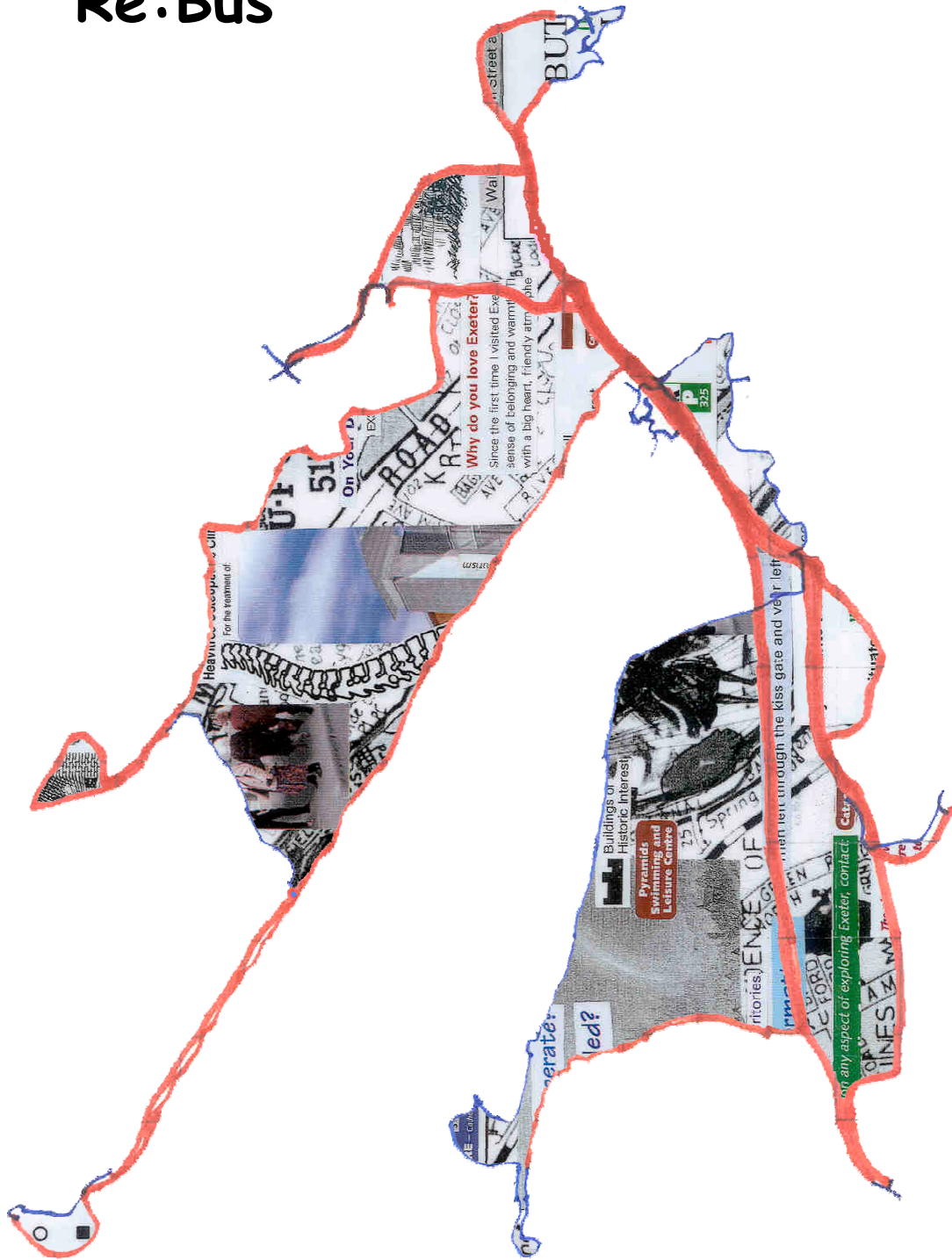


# Re:Bus



**Text: Phil Smith**

**Design: Mari Sved**

## Re:Bus

**A personal memoir with some keepsakes and hamfisted theories prepared by Phil Smith for all those participating by phone and email in the dérive held in Exeter, UK, on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2001 by Wrights & Sites core members: Stephen Hodge, Cathy Turner, Simon Persighetti and Phil Smith**



All the time we are in enemy territory. My default mode for the day: sensitised, wary without fear. It's not the people met or passing by. It's the territory itself. It's the hierarchy of its forms.

Chinese whispers in Topsham: I said to Stephen: "I just mis-read the sign on that shop 'No Groceries' as 'No Popery'!" And he misheard me, thinking I'd said 'No pot-pourri'.

Sometime just before 9pm. I'm on the last few hundred yards... I pass Stephen's home, the light is on, should I call in? No, I must get back home, this is much later than I intended. I look up. The prison wall looms over me. Tonight, the disembodied voices of the prisoners, howling their threats to each other, are silent. I look down – I see where Stephen has chalked on the tar macadam pavement as he passed on his way to call on me this morning:



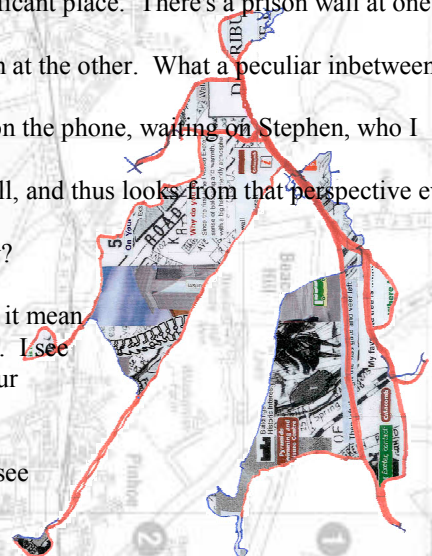
Just near the cross of 3,4, 9, 10. It's just after 5. So it must be dark.

This is perhaps a significant place. There's a prison wall at one end of your perspective, and a farm at the other. What a peculiar inbetween place you are standing in, speaking on the phone, waiting on Stephen, who I know lives opposite the prison wall, and thus looks from that perspective every

day of his present life. What do you see when you see a prison wall every day?

Danes Road. Misnomer. (I'm not sure what Danes Road means. Does it mean that Danish people live there?) I've been to your house on Danes Road. I see the hill. The points at either end, the contrasts. I see newspapers in your window, even though I know that they will no longer be there.

I see you waiting for Stephen. I see you walking down the hill. I don't see where you do next.



### Email from Dee Heddon: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2002

When I arrived in the office Annabel said, in a puzzled voice, 'there are a couple of very strange messages for you from Phil Smith'. Unaware of the project, she couldn't work out why you were leaving me such specific details of your whereabouts.

### Email from Dorothy Max Prior, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2002



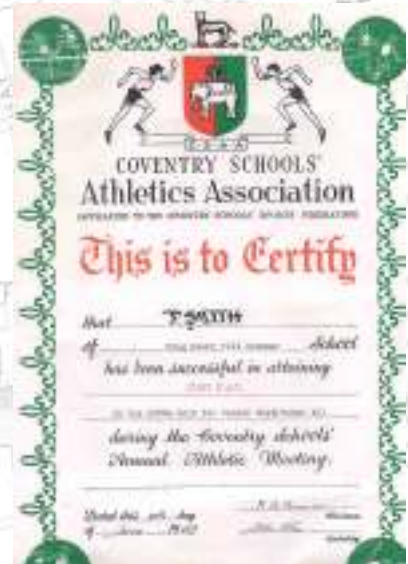
Back at our front door, sated, happy, beginning to feel tired for the very first time in a long day, feet, knees beginning to ache, but a good ache. 15 or so hours earlier, on this same spot, then clutching a cordless phone I was talking, for the first time in, what, almost 20 years perhaps, to Angie Farrow. Angie in New Zealand, me waiting for Stephen. It's the last time that day I can

get through to Angie. I email her later that night:

Angie, it was lovely to speak to you this morning - I have to say I was a little short of sleep and a little over-fulfilled in the excitement and anticipation department. And then - bizarre! Every time I rang thru' to you I got either an unavailable message or an engaged tone. Except for the once I dialled wrong and got "Who's Angie?" from a disgruntled New Zealander. The frustration!!

So here is a quick description of what happened:

Basically we walked to the top left hand corner of box 12 on the map - at first using a main artery road through Victorian housing, but as we hit the 30s council estates we followed a smaller road up a hill, came across a strange frog graffiti and began to feel we were on the trail of something - we cut off down a tiny lane, Quarry Lane and that was dark and the trees covered the roof of it - but it was being used by a handful of people going to work - at the end of this peaceful land we hit a stark concrete bridge over a large



road, then straight back into a tiny lane again - this time not for vehicles, we then came to what one of us recognised as the entrance to a former psychiatric institution so we followed the driveway and came to a sterile car park, took a left and came to Apple Lane Path - climbing round

the tank traps - we continued to cut a gree swathe thru' suburbia... passing backgardens and industrial estates as we went... finally emerging near to motorway services... not designed to be entered on foot - we stumbled across grass verges, past a strange shrine to commercial redundancy, steps leading nowhere, palm trees...

After breakfast - about 8.30am - caught the bus to the bottom right corner of box 3 - then another to box 17 where we immediately found our way to a strangely indeterminate place - the emptiness of an old quayside, the river there seeming to stretch unnaturally. A woman walked her dog towards the water and then stopped, flummoxed, as if unsure what to do.

The next bus took us back towards the centre of the city, but we got off halfway there and walked into box 16... across the steel Exe Canal Bridges - with their steel no man's land and tiny disused office stranded between the lanes of traffic, to one side a hut, half of which was horror story and disused, the other half brightly painted and a garage. The place seemed like a magnet for fishermen, runners, traffic, us...



We caught a bus into Exminster (16) and then out again and via 10 to 3. While I made phone calls the others had a coffee and then we set off again - 11.30 am - this time to the cusp of boxes 2 and 3 - Stephen



took the bus behind the other three of us - when we arrived we wandered down cul de sacs and at the end of one found a small path, then steps and at the bottom of these a bridleway - we followed this, at first through countryside, but then past back gardens, many fictionalised - roman statues, japanese stone gardens. Stephen arrived and we maintained walkie talkie contact with each of us describing what we saw without indicating our position, road names, etc - we eventually met up and caught a bus back to 3, where we came across a student photographing people waiting for buses.

We then caught another bus - at about 2pm - out to the cusp of boxes 5 and 6, where we could find no food on sale and where they rang a ship's bell to finish drinking so we caught a bus back to 3, wandering the centre of the city looking for some part of the centre that we didn't know, some cranny we had missed - explored loading bays, car parks, the backs of offices, found unfamiliar views of the cathedral, but nothing much, traversing the cathedral green, psycho-geographically becalmed I was led to a Moroccan cafe - the existence of which I had been blissfully unaware - suddenly we were in a room of cushions, a hookah being smoked, lamps and lanterns and piles of cous cous, roasted vegetables, red onions... Here we ate and then parted - I carried on alone, at about 5.30pm catching a bus first to the upper parts of box 5, where I wandered a council estate observing the elaborate Christmas rope lights on the outsides of houses, some of them dripping with these lights - they always come in batches, whether from neighbourly solidarity or competition I couldn't say, the brightest displays always off the main roads. Then another bus across the city to the southern part of box 10 where at about 7.10pm I found a pink icing sugar church, red sandstone illuminated



- in a dark graveyard of tilting stones..



i went in and found a pagan ritual in preparation, at which it was clearly the intention to consume an enormous quantity of mince pies. I must have seemed lie a thief, notetaking all the church's treasures and the people asked me polite, open questions like "are you local?" and "are you interested in church architecture?"

When I left I found, on the dark backside of the church a huge, old wall, leaning and keeling.. held up by two huge wedge like operations. I was struck by the thick deathly feeling of this wall and the thinness of my experience in side the icing church. I made my last phone calls,

caught the bus back to 3 - after a momentary panic that I was standing a stop where the service had already ceased for the night, then home on the cusp of 3 and 4, getting to my front door at 8.45pm.

I'm sorry i couldn't convey all this to you as it went along, but I tried!! I must ring you some morning and have a proper chat!!

Thanks for your Christmas message which I shall now read properly!!

Have a great Chrstitmas!

love Phil

## History

Was 19<sup>th</sup> December partly a practical reaction to the stultifying effects of funding applications that had bent our projects into ugly shapes for the convenience of government policy?

A chance to practise our wrighting without answering to those forces?



Was it also our first collective non-performance activity?

Wrights & Sites is an alliance of artists rather than "a company" evolving a single practise. More by accident than intention, Wrights & Sites satellite projects have been dominated by

performance. This was a chance to express another sort of trajectory.

Dear Phil

thanks so much for the messages - you missed me by moments every time, as i said mobile is best, but anyway it was great to come back and hear the messages, really good fun! so thanks for thinking of me.

as to memorabile images - i made up some stories about you and some rough characters, you alone by the quay and you having to persuade the clergy that you were trustworthy - and the colour pink stands in my mind....I have kept the messages and will listen to them again.

warm regards sharon x

Through the day I was in phone or email contact with Sharon Kennet, Angie Farrow, Bob Butler, Bess Lovejoy in Canada, Anthea Nakorn, Dee Heddon in Scotland, Clare Prenton, Sandra Reeve, Dorothy Max Prior and Mary Lidgate.

Not totally sure what you're up to on the 19th but it sounds mystical (Angie Farrow)

Sounds bizarre and interesting, i have a bit of a mad day on the 19th but am willing to give it a go if poss. (Sharon Kennett)

Sounds like typically crazy stuff to me. Count me in (Bob Butler)

Count us in. My mobile number is (Mary Lidgate)

What a mad idea! Thanks for map, arrived today! Will have my ansafone on at 5 a.m. but Good Luck!!! (Clare Prenton)

Sometimes the contact was voice to voice, other times leaving messages on ansaphones and voicemail.

Subject: derive

bessbess wbess we hbess wbess bess wbess bessbess wbess we hbess wbess bess wbess we hbess wbess we have movrd all around tge ity from tge cusp,o boxes 3 anbess we have movrd all around tge ity from tge cusp,o boxes 3 and 4 walked to 12 along country lanes hat have survived in suburbia toa shrin to commercial irrelevantmeetingpoint ofboxes 3 4 9 and 10. on the wy found a greographicalhubaround the exe canalbridges .he deserted hu, tge strange island of steel. will try to emaikaain allthe best phil tge



This email was sent from a BT Payphone. If you have any comments or queries on this service please feel free to <mailto:product.help.payphones@bt.com> or visit our web site at <http://www.payphones.bt.com/>

Phil,  
the emails were bizzarely beautiful! They barely came through, it seems something was up, words jumbled. But very poetically jumbled. I have this desire to make something out of them, only I don't know what. Did

anyone take photographs? Send me the re-cap thing you are writing.

Thanks!!

-Bess

[www.peak.sfu.ca/~bess](http://www.peak.sfu.ca/~bess) periodic updates on the colour of the streets

## Mythogeography

19<sup>th</sup> December was also a chance to test out some of the thinking that had developed from my earlier, opportunistic (mis)use of the word "mythogeography" – this had led us, via "psychogeography", the writing of Iain Sinclair, the work of Mike Pearson and his walks/performances, and much much else, to the Situationists and their practise of **dérive** or **drift** – a spontaneous and playful travelling and research through cities, seeking out those spaces where ambience resists the imperatives and spectacle of capital; seeking through a process of détournement (the redeployment of sclerotic art forms in the creation of ambiances) to make 'situations', that is locations where people can make experiments in new ways of urban living. At least that's what I thought I was partly trying to do. It was almost certainly very different for everyone else.



Then there was a call at 11.55 – from a meeting place of many points (3, 4, 9, 10). A crossroads of roads, canals, disused huts, rank smells (I'm reminded by 'canals' of a children's book I love called 'Lily takes a Walk' in which monsters leap from dustbins and street lights look like eerie faces – and a dinosaur appears in a canal. Only Lily and her dog see these magical things...) I love the thought of the everyday transformed.

Email from Dorothy Max Prior 14<sup>th</sup> January 2002

Is a site discreet? Or is it saturated with other sites? Talking on the phone or tapping out emails in the internet linked phone box I spoke to people in other places, I spoke of places I had been to and I wondered about the kinds of impression I was giving of those places, and where that 'took' my 'contactees'?

Dear Phil

So sorry not to have replied sooner - have been away etc.....anyway, now back to the fray.....Really enjoyed participating in your Journey - overriding impression of the real and surreal, things being normal and yet not quite....plausible but then again not exactly so.....believable, but, hang on a minute, no, or, maybe? Er, no, that can't exist, can it?? Are you really doing this, are you really there, do you exist, do I exist? Contrasts between light and dark, warm and inviting, as in the Moroccan restaurant - a friend of mine had been enthusing about this restaurant just the day before - and cold and dank and bleak, as in the disused/partly used building on the canal. The loading bays, not revealing much and the sugar pink Church.....The used/disused building sounded curiously like the building at the bottom of our garden, a rather spooky Victorian greenhouse. There are bullrushes near there too. This building, and the pink church are very vivid to me, actually reminiscent of something Eastern European...yes, indeed, sort of John Le Carre-ish, spies and coded messages, bleak landscape on the edges of sanity and reason, people wandering around, confused, bedraggled and quizzical. Not sure who to trust. Maybe one should leave those hookas alone.....  
Happy New Year to you all!



Anthea

Dear Phil,

I loved your description of your mad day in Exeter. The images of your journey were really evocative, but none of them triggered particular memories. However, the general idea of pursuing the aura or history of a place reminded me of a time in the mid eighties. I was travelling through India on a great train tour. I was in a very receptive space in my head in some ways, though terribly exhausted after weeks of working on a creative project with Travelling Light. India was an escape but it very quickly became a quest.

I was in central India and I remember feeling unbearably dirty and sweaty after days of travelling in open-windowed trains in the dusty climate. I was one of a small gaggle of tourists who arrived at one of Gandhi's ashrams to observe. A couple of rather portly Indians greeted us and began to escort us around the complex. They both lived on the ashram and were merely showing us around - not for profit, just out of common courtesy. As we walked, all of the other tourists peeled off leaving me alone with these two men. They talked about the way waste was recycled on the ashram, about the banyan tree, the way visitors were free to come and go and were always welcome. I remember feeling impressed by the coolness afforded by the trees and the enchantment of the silence. People lived within these spaces but you would not have known it. They led me into a little cell which had been the home of Gandhi's wife. Something very strange happened in that room. It had a dirt floor, a simple bed and a wooden shelf. There was a little Hindu shrine - very simple and that is all I remember. Suddenly, and for no reason that I can locate, I began to weep uncontrollably. I didn't feel sad, just relieved. I cried like that for a long time. The two men moved out leaving me alone. I could have stayed in that place indefinitely had I not been pressed to go. The men left me the address of the ashram as we were leaving. They said that I would be welcome to return and spend some time at the ashram. I didn't feel pressured nor particularly welcome. I vowed that I'd go back there.

When I returned home I had contracted a really serious illness. It was psittachosis, a kind of pneumonia that you get from bird droppings! I was so sick that evn the thought of returning to India repulsed me. I spent hours in bed with a raging fever and sometimes remembered in a rather hallucinatory way, how it had been in that little room. I tried to imagine the woman who had lived there all those years and what power she must have had to have left such an energy behind. Did I imagine that something seriously shifted in me after that experience? Am I being fanciful to say that I did pursue a much more spritual journey after the experience of India? I've never been back, but quite recently, the idea of returning was appealing. Maybe I will go back in a couple of years time.

That's my story. I write this from quite a different space in the southern hemisphere. It's hot, but the heat is feeling and invigorating. We are an island in a big, fat ocean and the weather never settles for long. Outside a gum sways lazily forerounding some 1960s university buidings. Massey has a beautiful campus, full of ornamental gardens and luscious native trees. A distant sound of cars and of lawn mowers. This is a dead time of the



year when most of the population is at the beach and the cities clear. I'm at work because I'm planning a couple of summer schools for January and February. The University is almost empty. I'm trying to ease my head away from Christmas but I'm having big trouble focussing. Sticky toffee.

Thinking of you, Phil and sending love.

Angie

Reading these responses is like I'm walking again.

## Planning

While as a group we have never made any 'official' collective commitment to a situationist project, and, indeed, I'm sure I'm not alone in having some serious reservations about some of the theory and history of the Situationists, nevertheless their ideas have become part of our language. 19<sup>th</sup> December was at least in part a testing of those ideas in practise. For that reason I've called the day a *dérive*.

3. On the bridlepath now. I see the gardens, the monuments, the creation of certain sorts of spaces, transforming the landscape into manmade constructions. I see you all walking behind these gardens. I imagine that the residents look out their back kitchen windows and wonder what those 4 people are doing walking along behind their houses. I wonder whether they wonder whether you are all up to no good. I think of you as sheep walking along the horizon. As the Famous Five minus the dog out for an adventure. I see you all holding little notebooks and jotting down thoughts.

(email from Dee Heddon, 3.1.02)

The original idea to do something probably stems from a fractious meeting we held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Simon suggested using buses to criss-cross the city. On 19<sup>th</sup> November I emailed everyone:

i think we need to do something

either lets do simon's idea of bus ride

i'm all for that

or

we should maybe do a 6am till 10pm walk across the city

derive

what do you thnk?

phil



Everyone responded positively and the idea developed by email. Looking through those early emails – I seem to be expecting that most of the day would be spent on buses and I was concerned that keeping to timetables would contradict the idea of a drift.

violent change to bus...  
in & out of the centre  
steamed up windows  
cinematic  
all facing in the same direction  
'audiences'  
can't reach out & touch anything..

(My notes)

But as the idea is discussed by email it becomes a freer combination of walking and bus-riding. Cathy emails on the 21<sup>st</sup> November:

Could we not really derive, i.e. drift?

Could that not include a fairly spontaneous mix of buses and walking?

Stephen responds:

Yes, let's drift (perhaps with a few low-key encounters).

If it goes well, let's organise something more public next time.

The use of buses does partly contradict the situationist *dérive*. There's the inconvenience of familiarity with some of the routes, and most services are signed with their destinations. But on 19<sup>th</sup> December our use of buses felt more like a means to the next part of the drift. There is a situationist notion of a **catapult** effect. Leaping on the bus in one district and fairly rapidly crossing the city to another confers on a drift an acceleration, a heightened sense of a place given by the suddenness of one's arrival in it.

going into the centre, (so bored!), along one of the main arteries – being sucked into the middle of an octopus – its hard beak...waiting to get there..

(My notes)

"These schemas are, moreover, an application of the *situationist principle of the catapult*... that an extreme acceleration of the traversal of social space, organised

temporarily and under utilitarian pretexts for example, could have the effect of suddenly launching the subjects, at the moment the acceleration ceases, into a *dérive* which they cover using their acquired speed.” (P. 107, **Theory of The Dérive and other situationist writings on the city**, eds. Libero Andreotti & Xavier Costa, ACTAR, 1996 Barcelona. )

## **Sequence of buses travelled on: Park & Ride, T, T, D, C, P, E, C, C, F, E, A, A**

### **Drifting**

An AA Insurance salesman approaches me on the High Street proffering his clipboard. “Sorry, I’m *dériving*.” He nods, knowingly.

The barmaid in the Poltimore Arms returns the acid banter of a regular, his body arched over his pint. This is a meeting place of sexual frustration and sexual disinterest, but for all the guy’s contempt he seemingly cannot throw off the hope of seduction. In the Gents toilet, over the lock in the cubicle there is a small, slightly damaged Bakelite sign: “Please Bolt The Door.” I’ve never seen that before. Managerial nervousness that individual anxieties might not be sufficient to enforce toilet discipline. Surely these places can be eroticised? The barmaid’s



young presence is financial. We may have missed something by not engaging with the half moon of men sitting round the end of the bar. Is there some connection between the bitter sexual frustration and the absence of food here? I have a feeling of wasting time. Of being cheated out of pleasure. That we had chosen too quickly. That there is a

principle at stake here: one should keep searching until one finds the unexpected, a moment that may only come when all seems hopeless. Or may not come at all. That’s perhaps the risk necessary for *dérive*, eschewing predictability and mediocrity.

As I jot in my Latvian notebook outside the NHS drop in centre in Bedford Square I am mistaken, by a woman emerging from car parked on double yellow lines, for a

traffic warden. "My husband... hit his head... blood streaming down his face."  
"Don't worry..." I tell her.

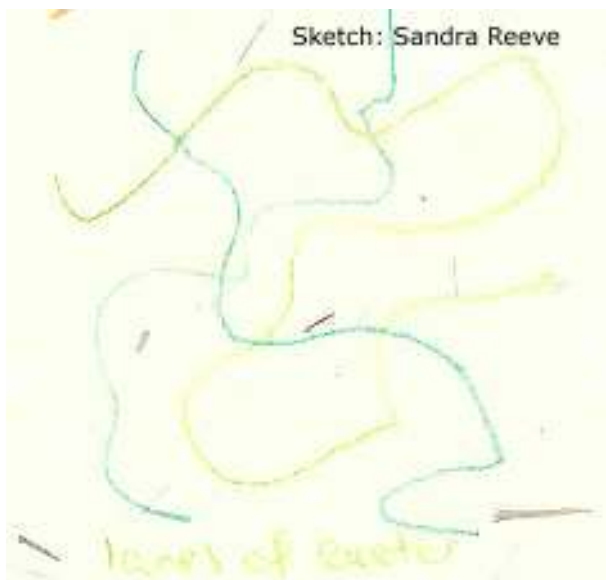
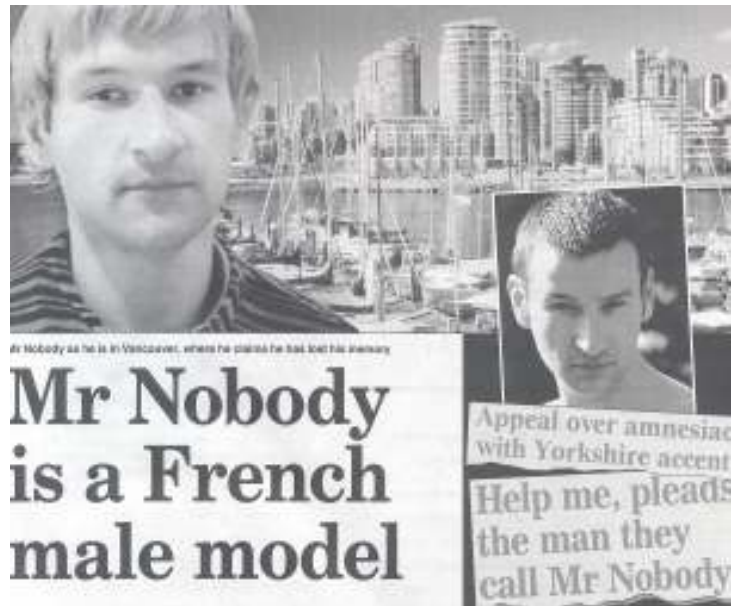
We make very little contact with other people during the day.

An elderly woman in a Topsham emporium tells me that she was in the RAF.

But I don't really know yet how to include other people in a drift.

In October I had been reading and working obsessively towards a theory of what we had been doing and might do. As a result of this hard day-dreaming I went on the *dérive*

armed with two concepts: **disruptive geography** and **reverse archaeology**. The former involves the subversion of a site's accepted meanings and its representations, the latter the deducing and provoking of the future from its ruins in the present. This 'memoir' is probably my main contribution to the former. For the latter I was seeking "hubs", places where there was a particularly high concentration of resistant ambience, places which share with the illustrations in a certain kind of children's encyclopaedia the sudden meeting of disparate cultures, histories, velocities, etc. "Hubs" that are nascent "heterotopias", Foucault's alternative to Utopias, spaces that 'contain' all other possible spaces. The following were detected:



**Lion's Holt:** the deep cut of the railway across which the site of the well of St Sidwella, decapitated martyr, pre-Christian water spirit, faces the ground of Exeter City Football Club, 'the Grecians', so named because their ground lies outside the city walls, in an area therefore allied in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 'Grecian' Whig gangs opposing the inner city Tory 'Trojans'.

**Quarry Lane/Apple Lane Path:** out of the Rifford Road council estate, below

a gash in the black rock, past the graffiti of a frog, the twist and dip into a narrow, tree roofed lane, passing workers on their way to labour, the rural relief truncated by our emergence onto a nakedly concrete bridge over a dual carriageway of traffic, the bleakness of the road emphasised by an anonymous hotel in the distance, then the dog-leg into an "unsuitable for motor vehicles" extension of the lane, a misty gateway, the entrance to the old Psychiatric Hospital, enter, follow the path, past the Park and Ride and a sharp left, the main building of the old institution silhouetted over the new housing, cut among the new houses, note the outline of the old tower echoed in a feature of one of the new houses (later noted a similar echo of the former hospital tower at Exminster in a nearby domestic building, but in that the echo was probably a contemporary one), a blankness of anonymous modern paths and there the name "Apple Lane Path"...



...follow it, past tank traps, preparations for a war that was fought elsewhere, across the railway bridge, suburbia on one side of the tracks, fields on the other, the path pitted with animal burrows, above us warning hands on posters, then into the floodlit industrial estate, the Path ominously metalled here, and it ends, as it all begins, passing through the space where rock once was – this time: sandstone. (Rather distended for a hub, I suppose.)

**Exeter Services at Junction 30 on the M5:** here there is a shrine to commercial



irrelevance. A palm tree. Steps up to a trashed and muddy space. Someone once thought this was an important decoration – something that drivers should see as they parked up. Now its disrepair, redundancy, disrespectedness – all lend it a resonance. Almost a subversive one.

... a palm tree? Somehow, it seemed more like Morocco than Exeter. I believe you were in square B12

Email from Dorothy Max Prior 14<sup>th</sup> January 2002

At the Services, Simon gives us all an envelope, a pamphlet of a selection of the

emails sent in setting up this day and a collection of photographs of crop circles:



Location: Unsettled, 1165m, 11m10m  
Date: 04/07/95 Crop: Oats.



rund in back yards, aleys, found ufamikiar vewsof the aedral - finall whenall seemed eclmed came acrossamoroccancafe whre people,smokes,hookahs, briht lamps and kntern. try toeml again, phil

**Al-Farid Café** : partly because when we walked in and Cathy asked if we could just have a couple of smaller dishes the woman who greeted us said: "you can have a glass of water if you want". The music of Cheb Mami. I got a feeling here that in Exeter eateries I've rarely felt before – perhaps at the Dinosaur Café – non-parochialism.

And so your tummies lead you to Cathedral Square. Where else? Everywhere you go, it is the spire you see. This is the centre of the compass, around which all other directions emanate. Every road leads from - and to - the Cathedral. And here you are satisfied. The Morrocan cafe- I think of my brother, he knows the owner, who also owns the Spanish Tapas restaurant. I see you sitting cross-legged, eating the samples, warm, comfortable, at last appeasing the rumbles. I particularly see Stephen enthusing over the vegetarian fare. I've not been in this cafe. I see lots of velvets, of deep reds and burnt yellows, cushions, pipes, wickers. I have been to Morroco. I look forward to comparing the two.

(email from Dee Heddon, 3.1.02)

The Cathedral has no spire.

### Reverse Archaeology

Why should the forms of urban gardens be any more or less dead than those of high art? These gardens are easy to dismiss as the products of kitsch or bad taste. So what?

These are – for the disruptive geographer, for the reverse archaeologist – new worlds created, the monuments to small habitations, the ruins of a future imagined in the plaster of saints, of approximations to relics of ancient Rome and Greece, from the suckable pebbles of Zen. But they are dislocated from the history of their references. They are playful. How serious are they? They might be very. These are futures halted in the early stages of creation – openly, ghostly, transparent mistakes, uneasy juxtapositions, half begun, beginning from ruins, starting with washed out representations, with a memory of how sites might be...



On the left hand side at the top of the right hand branch of Branscombe Close there was a remarkable garden, the entrance to a drive now part of a gateless fence, the drive itself part crazy-paved, what might be the remnants of an orchard beached up in a domestic garden, wonderful greys and deathly greens.

**Re:Buses**

These are buses in which no one can dream. The conditions of the bus continually

**FEEDBACK**

impose, shake the body, jerk the neck and back. "Like the dodgems." "Worse": a woman passenger.

Dear Editor...

**Lighten up drivers**

I couldn't agree more with "Anon" (Exeter) who said that certain Exeter bus drivers are miserable b\*\*\*\*\*s. I've very recently moved to Exeter, and having to use buses frequently was shocked to discover that quite a number of bus drivers (male and female) are the most grim lot I've ever met! What's the matter

**A bus driver writes...**

I would like to reply to Mr/Mrs "Anon" (gutless swine), regarding his/her letter about "miserable" bus drivers, published in the October edition of The List. I am a bus driver v I am not in a position age and lack of relev

Watching through the bus windows during the daylight I feel I'm watching categories. The geometry of theoretical shapes.



These daytime short bus journeys are intellectual and physical experiences for me. They never sink or plough into the location of a reverie.

*so fragmented - can't see the fragments only the ghosts of no longer relevant categories of housing types, etc.*

*(My notes)*

These short bus journeys are a trip through models. Types, forms, abstractions become visible. Details become transparent, washed out.



Idiosyncratic and individualised signs, features, mouldings pass too quickly to register.

(“traceability from pasture to plate”.)

“...one doesn't live somewhere in the city; one lives somewhere in the hierarchy.”  
(p.116, **Theory of The Dérive and other situationist writings on the city**, eds. Libero Andreotti & Xavier Costa, ACTAR, 1996 Barcelona. )



Things have changed. Night time. The bus is a warmer, brighter place than outside. We are a glowing bug of folks. Going out on the town or at last escaping from work. More danger, more fun. The lights in cafés and restaurants augur more than they'll deliver. Places look better than they are. Perfume. Lager breath. The average age of the passengers is dropping all the time. This is a

dreamier physicality. There is anticipation now – of the future, of the night ahead, a reverse archaeologist is excited by hopes even though, perhaps because, most will be dashed. But now, in the dark, hopes are on board.

A group of older lads kicking a football outside the half redundant shops on Beacon Lane. A younger mixed group, but a lot of them, some on bikes, all trying to out-gross each other, under the spectacular display of Christmas rope lighting on houses in Iolanthe Drive. Only now, in the night darkness, do I avoid the gaze(s) of others.



### The Etiquette Of Dérives

Perhaps like a good improvisation, dérivé is about receiving an experience and responding “yes, and...” Resisting only those suggestions that contain a predictable outcome. Defying commercial and employment imperatives. Beware art that one might



THE OLD HAUNTED TEA FACTORY [The original Douglas Hospital]

feel inhibited about détourning. One of my very few moments of discomfort on the 19<sup>th</sup> December was when we very briefly visited an installation at the Phoenix Arts Centre.

"I outlined a heart – three hearts on three sheets of paper – and he inked in a black heart with black ink, and a red heart with red ink. The third we left white. Then he wrote the texts in Chinese character: "All have sinned..." "The Blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanseth from *all* sin." And we were careful to make the red amply big enough to cover all the black. And lastly, "The pure in heart shall see God."

(pp 11-12, Flashlights On Chinese Life, Mabel Pantin, Church Of England Zenana Missionary Society, London, 1927(?) Purchased at Bounty Antiques, 76 Fore Street, Topsham for £2 on the 19th December.)

Our *dérive* never remotely felt like a performance. But it was in a heightened state that I travelled. (Was it that made me feel so guiltless?) That state involved an attitude, of resistance, of openness, of intense looking. Resistance does entail some sort of confrontation with how things are. Is that a head on confrontation? Or can the *dériviste* draw on a performance model to draw out and undermine negative social relations by meeting them with a Khlestakovian corporeality in the shape of one's own reserve? The sort of artificial blankness of a Louis Theroux or a Jon Ronson? A suspension of judgement in order to condemn more effectively? If so, are the following thoughts on **transparency** in site-specific performance applicable to non-performance drift? Is **transparency** the correct etiquette for a *dériviste*?

"... the performers were not 'absent' or self-denying, but (at moments) like photographic transparencies projected on to a screen. In these moments they were, in Simon Persighetti's words: "there but not there simultaneously". Their performances were encoded with colours, shapes, depth, etc. but these did not obliterate the screen/site. Rather the site could be read both through the performers' **transparency** and highlighted by the light thrown and the shadows cast by them. There was no attempt to pretend that the performers were innocently or directly revealing the site, but rather that the site was illuminated in a mediation, in an overlay of diaphanous images. It's important to emphasise here that "this invisibility", **transparency** or the marking of an idea of character rather than the "acting of characters" does not represent an absence of the performer from the site, or any lack of presence or competence on the part of the performers."

From *Acting and performance in site-specific projects: Forest Vague Panic and Church*, Phil Smith, August 2001

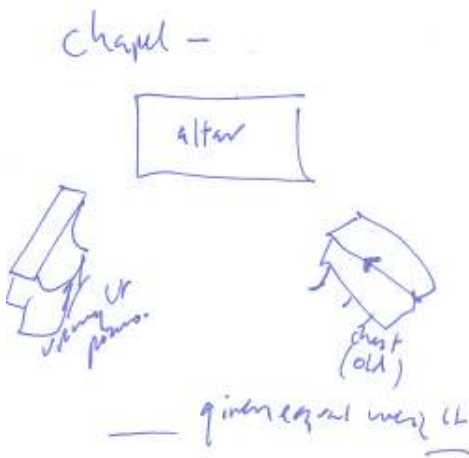
I only got to thinking about this because of where I ended up after I set off on my own after we had all eaten at the Al-Farid Café.

I knew you were not yet finished. That you had something left to find. And I knew you would go on alone to find that. I didn't know what you would find, though. But it seems appropriate that you ended your solitary search in a place of communion, where people were celebrating together, participating in their annual ritual of mince pies.

Email from Dee Heddon, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2002

Alphington Church - looking like pink icing sugar, illuminated red sandstone - the cross transformed into a snowflake - among the gloomy graveyard with its drunken gravestones - inside a pagan ritual in preparation with huge amounts of mince pies.... They're suspicious of me, a future thief casing the joint, making notes... a memento mori, plaster skulls with no jaw bones on a grave plaque - a saint with head on shoulders plus beheaded head in hands... devil in a boot hidden by the Christmas tree - they ask me polite, courteous questions: "are you local? Are you interested in church architecture".. man gives me a booklet - outside in the darkness is thick, leaning, keeling wall... supported by two ancient (wedge) rampart-like operations (?) - this wall has been falling over for a long time... the dark, thickness of the deathly, slowly falling wall and the thinness of the experience inside the church...

(My notes)



And the pink church is obviously a magnet in this locale. Churches so often are.

Email from Dee Heddon.

There is a psycho-geographic 'hub' inside the church itself: the Wheatley Chapel.

Upright piano, old chest and altar are given equal importance in the layout, at once banal and subversive to any theological hierarchy.

this is my favourite one

----- Forwarded message -----

Date: 19 Dec 2001 20:32:40 +0000 From: [phil\\_smith@btinternet.com](mailto:phil_smith@btinternet.com)  
 To: [bess@www.peak.sfu.ca](mailto:bess@www.peak.sfu.ca)  
 Subject: derive

hihi Beshihihhi Beshihi hihi Beshihi Bess - this wilhihi Beshihi hihi Beshihi Bess - this will be myhihi Beshihi hihi Beshihi Bess - this will be my last email of this juneyihihi Bess - this will be my last email of this juney so thank you for takhihi Bess - this will be my last email of this juney so thank you for takin part in isolidaity or the competition with neighbours i do not now - just ben to southern art of box 10 - sugar icing churc, inside thet think i a a thif an ask, me oenquestins like are you local? thy have turned heir cros into a snowflake. outside there is ahuge crumbling daehtly wall it,s been falling doen fot cere are twolarge wedges okdingit all u - the icing sugar church and h thik daehtly wall - my lest site on his derive, thank you, bess phil



And outside the pink church and the huddle of people, an old, old wall. Contrasting with the well kept pink church. A lay line? A

sketch: Sandra Reeves

boundary? A crossing? A fortress? Will you climb over it? What's on the other side?

Email from Dee Heddon, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2002

I wanted to stay at the church. But, just as Cathy and Stephen had to leave for a work meeting, Simon and now I were obliged by family commitments. The *dérive* is not an abstract event, it has to be carved out of social time. But I wondered how I could have acted at the church if I had stayed? Could I have found a way, in my heightened state, to bring the journey into the carol service without that being a crass disruption or a submission to the hierarchy of the event? Could I have found



a transparent means to resist, to disrupt the geography of the event?

The Situationists expressed a very deeply felt anti-clericalism. They called not for the transformation or re-use of church buildings, but their demolition. They defined the *dérive* as being as much a resistance to ecclesiastical as capitalist imperatives. Maybe, I am too influenced by my own past history to junk the geography of the church, even if its ideology no longer holds any appeal for me. Maybe I'm restoring the contradiction to the Situationists' Marxism – Marx famously described religion as "the opiate of the people", but he also described it as "a heart in a heartless world". Looking at that red sandstone illuminated so that it glowed pink, I was too aware of how sensually centred in its surroundings this building was, like flesh rising up from the shadows of the tombs. And the figures emerging from the night. The gathering within. The sweet food. The layers of material added and subtracted from. It seemed wrong that this should in any way be an exclusive place. Designed for a monolithic society, for a twisted version of "all", it seemed wrong that religion, as a form of identity, should restrict the use of this building. It was a hub that needed to be opened. *Détourned*. I wanted to stay and be disruptive, but I knew I should be getting home. And how would I have done it?



*"We hope that you have enjoyed your visit."*

### **Wormholes**

I think just mucking about is an important of *derive*. Phil

----- Original Message -----

From: "Catherine Turner" <[C.D.Turner@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:C.D.Turner@exeter.ac.uk)>

To: "Phil Smith" <[perform.smith@ukgateway.net](mailto:perform.smith@ukgateway.net)>

Sent: Monday, January 07, 2002 9:56 AM



Subject: Re: video tape

- > Oh God... so long as you make it clear it's just mucking
- > about!
- >
- > love, Cathy

On the bridleway a damp damaged VHS videotape cassette was hanging like a fruit from a bramble bush.

On the tape was a man who addressed himself 'your honour'. He said - 'my old man's a dustbin, he wears a dustbin lid'. After that it all goes a bit hazy for a while, until we discover a woman, who we assume to be his wife, crazily planting watercress under a full moon. It goes hazy again, and stays that way.

Or maybe:

What was on the video?

I think it was the video from a security camera from Tesco's. It didn't show anything criminal going on, but it showed one woman (a staff member, Tina) snogging her best friend's husband behind the household goods section. The other members of staff (not knowing the identities of the other people involved) had been using the video to tease Tina at the Christmas party but it all got a bit out of hand. Tina flounced out of the party in a strop, with the video, drunk on too many G & T's. She staggered off up the hill, threw the video in a bush and stood staring out at the industrial estate, swearing and smoking a fag. A male member of staff, Colin, caught up with her and they had a shouting match all the way back, waking everyone up. It was one of those arguments you hear at two in the morning - you know the ones. If we'd been there a few days earlier, we might have seen the remnants of tinsel, paper hats and Christmas deeley-boppers, which were all victims of the fray. But this was along the road and the nice road-sweepers cleaned it up. Tina still works at Tesco's, but she managed to get Colin sacked. He plots revenge from a sad, smoky office in Sowton industrial estate. Meanwhile, you have found the video and so may discover that the best friend's husband is in fact someone you know yourself.... and so this will plunge you into a moral crisis. Should you confront Councillor \*\*\*\*\* or should you send the video to \*\*\*\*\*? Should you sit quiet? But you know you won't because if you did there would be no story at all and that might work for the Royle family but it won't work for you!

There. I think that's the nearest I ever got to writing a soap episode. Don't give up the day job, eh?



Or maybe:

The video is a promo video for some kind of domestic appliance but the owner recorded over it here and there so that the original is intercut with very unsteady home movies which were eventually discarded because the contents could have fallen into the wrong hands such as YOU,VE BEEN FRAMED or READERS WIVES.

The tape is a wormhole to a barely decorated living room where three naked women converse in chipmunk, it is a wormhole to Das Sex Paradis, to "Syria" for "arabic chat" with Elisa, "28 ans, 1m 67". "Do you want to see more?" Is it at [www.fatayat.com](http://www.fatayat.com) ? Where is Das Sex Paradis? Really where is it?

"Do you want to see more?"

"More" – that's an industrial philosophy of the erotic. To increase, to accumulate the eroticism. Orgasm as a peak on a production chart. This is the economy of Das Sex Paradis: "more", "more", "more". The tape is long, a series of the same repeated sequences of adverts interspersed with short, attenuated softcore narratives, perhaps edited down and a taster for something "more" explicit. I can't understand the soundtrack, the moisture has made it sound like Pinky and Perky hyperventilating. We never see "more". But we are constantly encouraged to ring or log on or tune in for it.



Perhaps ten or so years ago, I went with Sandra, one of the 'contactees' for this drift, to see some Kathakali dancing. The performance lasted perhaps 2 hours. I remember few details of the performance itself but I remember the experience very well. After a few minutes in which the drummers had warmed up and the characters and narrative had been introduced we suddenly reached a plateau of heightened excitement which we never left.

phil  
i don't remember i'm afraid i have a terrible memory  
but we may have been  
to see or gone with a friend of mine who used to  
teach  
kathakali in bristol...  
love Sandra

That memory is analogous to the much closer one of 19<sup>th</sup> December. Despite momentary frustrations – on the bus, at the Poltimore Arms, and in the installation at the Phoenix – the experience was always heightened, always excited, intense and pleasurable. Rather than a

progression of rising peaks – the orthodox structure for heightened experience in an industrialised eroticism – this was much closer to climbing to a plateau and then tracing shapes across it. If one model is that used by the poet Basil Bunting, sculpting his long sound poem Briggflatts to the peaked structure of an orchestral symphony, then an alternative is that of the Nazca Indians tracing ritual shapes on Nazca Plains.

## Future

I was researching as well as playing. But both. Researching for future disruptions on a greater even more playful scale than the disruptions of this first *dérive*.

How lovely to be in touch this way. Thank you so much for involving me.

Maybe you would like to make your own drifts, invite some friends? Log your drifting? Document it as you see fit? Photograph, record, leave marks and send messages, use satellites to trace your position? Set up contacts with others – friends, colleagues – or make it more disruptive: fax, phone, email newsdesks, officials, random numbers.

If you do, why not make a record of your *derive*? Maybe circulate it to intimate friends and inappropriately official contacts: the Council Planning Committee, journalists, shop stewards? Can a report be a sentimental record and a piece of propaganda simultaneously?



Dérivistes should equip themselves with a tool kit – whatever's needed to document the drift and facilitate any disruptions along the way – chalk, sugar – whatever.

The philosophy of *dérive* is on the net, recoverable from public library systems.

A *dérive* is something its participants have to want to do. There is no missionary role for misguides or fellow-dérivistes.

Have an intense, exciting, excited, disruptive and archaeologically reversed time if you go on the plateau!

I was quite preoccupied when I spoke to you – aware that I didn't really ask anything, just listened for the most part ... raising the issue of how the witness can influence by their response – I felt that I was (for better or worse) a rather passive witness...

TRAVELWISE

travelling  
Public Transport  
0870 608 2608

DEVONTRIP

