Kris Darby

Framing the Drift and Drifting the Frame: Walking with Wrights & Sites

The proliferation of pedestrian performances since the beginning of the twenty-first century has led to an active rethinking of the defining parameters of site-based practice. Does the action of walking deterritorialize or strengthen the boundaries of site, or is the terming of 'site' itself redundant for these types of performance? In this article Kris Darby examines one of the most influential types of walking practice on this mode of performance, that of the *dérive* ('drift'), and its subsequent adoption and renovation by arts collective Wrights & Sites. Beginning with a contextualization of 'drifting' within the Situationist International, this study then focuses on key terms derived from the collective's use of this type of walking in their performance work. The three types of drifting defined by Wrights & Sites – reconnaissance, group, and simultaneous – are then analyzed, illustrating how, through 'framing', the defining parameters of site begin to shift further. The article concludes by suggesting that Wrights & Sites' drifting can be termed *situation-specific* rather than site-specific, due to its movement across multiple places. Kris Darby is a PhD student in the Drama Department of the University of Exeter, whose research concerns an expansion of the defining properties of pedestrian performance.

Key terms: situationism, drifting, walking, flâneur, mythogeography, mis-guide.

We started taking people out on exploratory walks. And we soon discovered that we weren't the first group to do this sort of thing. Among many others, there'd been a group of artists and revolutionaries, mainly in Paris – called the Situationists – in the 1950s and 1960s. They went on long walks as a kind of rehearsal for changing the world.[1]

WITHIN the last decade pedestrian performance has become more and more proliferative, no longer just a motif of site-based practice.[2] In this article I wish to address one of the most influential types of walking in this burgeoning mode of performance – that of the *dérive* or 'drift'. In order to illustrate its significance in this field I have decided to focus on an arts collective that 'has emerged in recent years as one of the foremost exponents of a creative walking practice',[3] namely Wrights & Sites. The purpose in this is to highlight the range of applications of drifting, and also to illustrate how such a type of walking has evolved within the context of performance itself. I wish to suggest here, in agreement with Carl Lavery, that for works operating on such a scale 'existing models of site-specific performance are no longer tenable',[4] as the parameters of site become ever more difficult to discern through the scale of Wrights & Sites' drifting and the 'constantly shifting sense of place' this entails.[5] I wish to suggest that for such works there is more of an adherence to what curator Claire Doherty terms *situation-specific*, 'which acknowledges place as a shifting and fragmented entity'.[6]

Before examining this type of pedestrian performance it is important to address briefly the original context in which it was developed, since the surrounding ideology from which it sprang has also been influential to many artists and performers who employ drifting in their work. Therefore the structure of this analysis will principally entail a comparison between the Situationist model of the *dérive* and Wrights & Sites' interpretation of this type of walking in their site-based pedestrian performance work.

Towards a Situationist City

Before the war, Dada had 'brought the artist, or group of artists, directly to the site in

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question' and the Surrealists' '*automatic writing*' of space with the feet had led to walking becoming akin to 'a state of hypnosis'.[7]

> In the aftermath of the war, the streets were radicalized as never before and revolutionary change was in the air. If the urban wanderer was to continue his aimless strolling then the very act of walking had to become subversive, a means of reclaiming the street for the pedestrian.[8]

Next in this legacy of spatial story-makers[9] were the Situationist International, a group of artistic and Marxist-influenced radicals that operated between 1957 and 1972. Originally 'a playful avant-garde movement' known as the Lettrists, they eventually joined forces with other groups such as the Imaginist Bauhaus to become a 'radical political organization'.[10] Dismayed by the banalization and spectacularization of society and its emphasis on consumption and separation, the Situationists strove to combat this with a series of manifestos and theories.

It had been less than a century since civic planner Baron Haussmann had reconfigured Paris, widening its streets into long sweeping boulevards and converting its winding passages into arcades. This alteration, made at the request of Napoleon III, had allowed for 'the rapid circulation of troops and the use of artillery against insurrections'.[11] Such a wave of architectural change had given birth to the passive *flâneur;* however, with change again on the horizon in the form of functionalist architecture, a more politicized walker was born in Paris.

Preference was now being given to 'the rapidly increasing quantity of motor vehicles', which began the process of converting Paris into a non-place of speed and efficiency. The Swiss architect and urbanist Le Corbusier had already presented a vision of a Paris of the future entitled *Plan Voisin* in 1925, with 'architecture events'[12] that threatened symmetry, separation, and homogeneity. Andy Merrifield asserts that for the Situationists such separation 'in the city and in activity spelt separation in the mind, alienation, false consciousness, a retreat into contemplation'.[13] People had become 'spectators of their own lives',[14] nothing but consumers of meaning,[15] and the Situationists took it upon themselves to shake people out of this mentality. To combat the encroachment of boredom on society one needed to disrupt such rigidity and become instead a *producer* of meaning, by making the cityscape a stage[16] – to create situations.

The Situationists' goal was that of 'unitary urbanism', a city of the future built *with* the city of the past, an 'ensemble of arts and technics'[17] that placed its population at the beginning of the process of urban design. Their leader Guy Debord, in an essay entitled 'A Critique of Urban Geography', outlined the term *psychogeography*, 'a pure science'[18] which concerned itself with the creation of a psychic cartography born from a documenting of the different feelings of the city. This was a two-fold plan: 'active observation of present-day urban agglomerations and development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city'.[19]

Détournement and *Dérive*

Its mixture of empirical data collection, combined with an artistic subjectivity, gave the term a 'pleasing vagueness' for Debord.[20] Its intention was to provide a fresh perspective of looking at existing topography, and within this slippery term the Situationists created two weapons: *détournement* and *dérive*. The first concerned the artistic arrangement of different (often opposing) objects either physically or through writing, print, and indeed architecture – 'the adaptation of dead art into disrupted forms'.[21] Its emphasis on the 'cheapness of its products' (it could be literally any series of objects) was specified with the intention to make it accessible to all as 'proletarian artistic education' (Debord and Wolman, 1981, p. 11). The Situationists' second weapon, the *dérive,* would help facilitate this act of *détournement* by turning to an action that was also cheap and available to most, that allowed the individual simultaneously to discover and transform the city[22] – that of walking.

Debord saw the spectacle as 'the gap between the vision',[23] the 'gap' representing a period of time, an 'era' that I feel could also

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be read literally as a physical divide between spaces, something that the walker can overcome through 'a subversive rhetoric'.[24] Firstly, the Situationists needed to get a sense of the 'zones of different psychic atmospheres'[25] already existing in the city, and walking acted as a means not only to reach them but to discern between them far more subtly than by motorized transportation. The Situationists referred to such movement as a 'passional journey',[26] a 'mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences'.[27]

> But the *dérive* includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities.[28]

The state of mind needed to drift can be a difficult one to grasp, due to its being 'playful-constructive'.[29] It requires an ability for a group of people to 'drop their usual motives for movement and action' and lose themselves in the 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes',[30] but at the same time necessitates a form of anchoring in which they analyze the different psychogeographical ambiences they walk through.

This is a challenging notion for the walker to take in – to get lost in a city as the Surrealists did, but at the same time be aware of a great process in which their observations must follow the flow of the *dérive* and yet also adhere to 'its relations with social morphology'.[31] In his drifting through Northampton with poet Lawrence Bradby, Carl Lavery compared it to 'an actor seeking to improvise through structure' with the body functioning as a 'tool which both registers what is there and rewrites it'.[32] From such 'rewriting', psychogeographical maps are constructed and then the first steps towards unitary urbanism are made.

From the beginning the Situationists had renounced the *dérive*'s connection with that of the 'journey and the stroll',[33] suggesting that it is a form of movement without a fixed destination, yet not without purpose.[34] The walking route is not determined by short cuts, familiar places and the physical terrain, but instead directed solely by its psychogeographical effect on the walker in the moment.

> The 'drift' rejects the normal constraints on walking – a destination, a route, a commercial, consumer, devotional, or leisure purpose. Instead the *dérive* is a usually day-long exploration of the city as if it were alien, unfamiliar, a-functional, a museum, a playground.[35]

Therefore the *dérive* is a type of walking that places emphasis on the senses in which one is led by in-the-moment thoughts, feelings, and sensations that prompt a liquid-like drifting through the city. It highlights 'the gaping holes'[36] left by spectacularization and attempts to fill such gaps at once imaginatively, intellectually, and physically. Yet despite the seriousness of its intent to change society, it actively encourages play and the 'invention of games of a new type'.[37] It involves a very intimate group walk which does not have a physical destination but an ideological one: to remap the city through more useful means – becoming a 'physical town replaced by an imaginary city'.[38] This for Carl Lavery is where the 'political aspect of the drift resides' through being able to 'recreate your own city'.[39]

The Making of Situations

After having analyzed the city in such a way, the next step envisaged by the Situationists was to use these psychic maps as a replacement for civic maps in a bid to create a city built not *for* its population but *by* them. However, by 1962 'the Situationist movement had split' due to 'tensions between artistic and political priorities'[40] before finally dissolving in 1972. The Situationist legacy therefore is one of seductive manifestos and theories that were hardly realized. As 'the actual results of all these experiments are strangely absent'[41] a further 'gap' has been created that has proven irresistible to many walking artists and practitioners who wish to fill it – a gap that pedestrian performance has attempted to overcome 'by making us more sensitive to the rhythmic dialogue that occurs between our bodies and the landscapes we walk through'.[42]

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One of the major purveyors of the *dérive* from within an arts and performance context is artist–academic collective Wrights & Sites. Formed in 1997 and consisting of four members – Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, Phil Smith, and Cathy Turner – their use of walking was initially born out of their experiences of a large-scale site-specific project they created in 1998 entitled *The Quay Thing*. As Hodge observes, by 'moving rather than staying still, we found an opportunity to sidestep many of the problematic, time-consuming issues of management and of access (licensing, health and safety, and most significantly permissions to use sites)'.[43]

It was while making these performances that the group found enjoyment in the exploration of the sites themselves and the walking it entailed.[44] This led to the *First Sketch for an Exeter Mis-Guide* (2001) and a series of experimental walks entitled *Lost Tours 1* (2003).

> Rather than inviting audiences to a specific site to see performances, we were now inviting people to investigate with us by walking with us, finding places along the way, jumping fences and making cuts down alleyways. [45]

Persighetti's outlining of this transformation is reflected quite significantly in the change from 'audience' to 'people'. The act of reconnaissance, of collecting data *for* site-based performances, became now a process shared with members of the public, and it is clear to observe how the Situationists' walking practice struck a chord with the group, becoming one of their 'adopted ancestors'.[46]

Such an influence is reflected in Wrights & Sites' practice through an incorporation of Situationist ideas, particularly with regard to *détournement*[47] and the study of maps.[48] It is however in the Situationists' desire for the creation of situations that we can begin to observe a point of correlation with the performativity of walking and *situation-specific* pedestrian performance.

However, complications arise in Wrights & Sites' work due to the fact that walking is utilized both as a means to create artistic events/installations/performance walks, but also as something that could be termed a performance in itself through its deviation from everyday public perambulation. It sets itself apart from such conventional movement through the city, resisting the 'embodied sense of self-awareness [that] delimits the range of potential manoeuvres, gestures, and styles'.[49] Like the Situationists before them, Wrights & Sites accomplish such a divergence through play, the a-functionality of which 'offers no "real" threat to the functions of the space'.[50]

Nicholas Whybrow presents an interesting term that could be applied to such sites, that of *Schauspielplatz* or 'place of performance' which 'involves the spectator-citizen's participation in the playground (*Spielplatz*) that is the 'unofficial' or 'unaccounted for' city.[51] Situations are slightly askew with the movements of the city's population, and it is this deviation that attracts attention and the creation of performance. The genesis of the situation lies in the divergence from the normal or banal, akin to the degrees of site-specificity outlined by Stephen Hodge in his continuum for site-specific performance.[52]

If 'performance is barely perceptible in the urban flux',[53] a slight digression prompts the distinction between the public space and performance space to become blurred. This for me is resonant of Carl Lavery's description of his 'drifting', which he states led to enhancing his attachment to place through the initial estrangement it instilled in him by becoming a 'space' as he walked.[54] There is something more sophisticated now occurring than a simple 'making strange' of place, as for Wrights & Sites drifting is 'not a contained even', meaning that, due to the porous nature of walking, material seeps in and seeps out.[55] This prompts a liquefying of the boundaries of site itself, allowing the drifter to 're-engage creatively with [their] environment'.[56]

Returning to the Situationists' texts, one could draw parallels between Wrights & Sites' work and what the Situationists refer to as being 'pre-situationist'.[57] The Situationists understood that in order to reach the stage of massive city-wide situation-making, the population would need to be given some initial guidance.

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If we imagine a particular situation project in which, for example, a research team has arranged an emotionally moving gathering of a few people for an evening, we would no doubt have to distinguish: a director or producer responsible for co-ordinating the basic elements necessary for the construction of the décor and for working out certain interventions in the events; . . . the direct agents living the situation, who have taken part in creating the collective project and worked on the practical composition of the ambience; and finally, a few passive spectators who have not participated in the constructive work, who should be reduced to action.[58]

Debord outlines a series of roles for the 'research team' to adopt in order to guide their 'passive spectators' in the creation of a situation. However, such clearly defined roles cannot be wholly applied to Wrights & Sites' work. For instance, there is not *one* director, and in fact all these roles have the potential to blend with one another. The creation of a situation is an action that cannot be separated from Wrights & Sites' drifting, and, as Phil Smith asserts, drifts 'do not have leaders or guides'.[59] Although each of Wrights & Sites' drifts may begin and indeed end with the decisions of four 'directors', the nature of the drift accommodates a certain fluidity between roles, allowing all walkers the opportunity to cycle between them.

Deviations

Despite being labelled as proponents of 'neo-situationism',[60] Wrights & Sites demonstrate a marked deviation from Situationist ideas, both in terms of their overarching objective and the manner in which they utilize the drift. The principal deviation is from the Situationists' unrealized plans for 'unitary urbanism', stemming from the group's suspicions of 'utopian planning and centralist means'.[61] Instead of working towards a fixed and rigid objective, Wrights & Sites have instead expanded on the potential uses of drifting within the site. Their drifting outside of urban space in *Possible Forests* (2006–7) is a clear signal of such divergence, illustrating a focus on the walking itself rather than a desire to engage solely with spatial politics within the city. Rather than just drifting in small groups of people who have all 'reached the same awakening of consciousness',[62] Wrights & Sites have walked alone (*Everything You Need to Build a Town is Here*) or in groups comprising over a dozen people (*Mis-Guided in Zürich – Mind the Map*).

Such a shifting nature to the dynamic of their drifting has invariably meant that the different ancestries of each member's practice[63] became all the more clear in places. This is the principal reason why I feel they have been able to avoid collapsing such ideas into 'a finally resolved unitary "truth"',[64] as the Situationists desired, due to the diversity of interests of individual members.

Furthermore, Wrights & Sites counter another of the Situationists' stipulations of the *dérive* by walking with people of varying degrees of receptiveness to the mindset of the drift, embracing diversity over homogeneity in a walking group. This is important because such a shift allows for their drifting to have a secondary process aside from the making strange of place – that of learning how to walk differently through becoming 'active spectators'[65] rather than the 'passive spectators' as outlined by Debord.

This is one of the reasons why Wrights & Sites drift 'at a slower than normal walking pace' rather than the Situationists' rapid passage,[66] due to the inclusion of this secondary process which allows for the narrative of the walk to develop.[67] According to Phil Smith, such narratives are not guaranteed or even necessary, but occur through the collecting and composing of 'certain things' observed while drifting.[68] The walking itself becomes an act of 'awakening', encouraging a more dynamic relationship between the perception of place and the exploration of it.

'Making Strange'

Merlin Coverley in *Psychogeography* suggests that the '*dérive* takes the wanderer out of the realm of the disinterested spectator or artistic practitioner and places him in a subversive position as a revolutionary following a political agenda'.[69] In relation to the drift, Wrights & Sites would be situated between 'artistic practitioner' and 'subversive revolutionary'.[70] Cathy Turner quotes Brigadier

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Walking 'in groups comprising over a dozen people'. From *Mis-Guided in Zürich – Mind the Map* (2005). Photo: Stephen Hodge.

Shimon Naveh as an indication of this: 'The disruptive capacity in theory . . . is the aspect of the theory that we like and use. . . . This theory is not married to its socialist ideals.'[71] Wrights & Sites have diluted the political overbearing of the Situationist manifestos, instead focusing on the immediate response that drifting proposes – that of seeing place differently through subversive means.

However, in the same paper Turner illustrates her apprehension about such a premise:

> I'm sometimes troubled that we and people discussing our work tend to stress the possibilities of 'making strange' as though this guaranteed revelation and as though revelation ensured that the structures revealed were somehow dealt with.[72]

Turner's questioning as to the long-term effects of the 'making strange' of place illustrates further how abstracted the drift and *détournement* have become from their Situationist ideology. They are not used here by Wrights & Sites as a stage in a process that would subsequently lead to a complete renovation of society. They have become instead the event itself, one that exists at instances on a larger scale than conventional site-based performances. Each drift is specifically driven by an impetus from within the site itself, originating from a 'situation', making it akin to works termed *situation-specific*.[73]

Turner's summation that the Situationists did change the world – 'or at least change the relationship to it – if only partially and temporarily'[74] – chimes with Wrights & Sites' ideology as a whole. It is an altering of the perceptions of place that the group advocate, and the partiality and temporary nature of such a change is what lends itself neatly to performance. Through a combination of their own experimentation and a myriad of influences in walking and performance they have contributed two key terms to pedestrian performance discourse inspired by such a premise: 'mis-guide' and 'mythogeography'.

The 'Mis-Guide'

The 'Mis-Guide' was originally a character from Wrights & Sites' *The Quay Thing*, 'whose information veered wildly between fact and fiction'.[75] Such character traits became one of the cornerstones of the group's drifting practice, upsetting conventional navigation

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of place through the creation of their own 'mis-guided' walks. Their subsequent 'mis-guided' tours chime with Debord's dislike for the habitual influence of tourism,[76] acting as a 'resistance to the monocular-identity by tourist boards and local councils'.[77]

This has led to a desire to present place as something to be experienced through the consolidation of multiple drifts led by different impetuses. Walking becomes 'a means to excavate the layers of factual and fictional stories, meanings, associations, and experiences'[78] of place, and each impetus or 'frame' represents one of these layers.[79] Drifting here has been used to devise unconventional tours of locations both for visitors and locals, allowing them to explore and interact in different ways with place. Wrights & Sites *détourn* the tour by becoming not just orators of site but writers also. This is important to note because, as Turner states, the Mis-Guide,

> like the situationist *dérive*, is not, or not only just a throw of a die, a whimsical suggestion for experimental tourism. What it brings to the space matters – inevitably – as well as what it finds within it. The tensions between the two are also productive.[80]

Turner, chiming here with Debord's views concerning the dangers of 'exoticism',[81] illustrates a prominent challenge of site-based performance: that of 'the friction of what is *of* the place and what is brought *to* the place'.[82]

Walking enhances the potential productivity of such a meeting as it lessens the sense of imposition prevalent in fixed site-based performance work. Wrights & Sites bring only themselves and other drifters to the site, sometimes with the inclusion of a 'toolkit'.[83] This toolkit highlights further the sense of impermanence in their walking; it may contain 'notebooks and cameras to document elements of our journey; chalk to leave ephemeral signs for sleeping residents; postcards and stamps to send messages from here to elsewhere; plastic bags to discard material in; torches in order that we can leave the street lights behind'.[84] The only signs of their presence are chalk dust and the odd *détourned* creation, an act of impermanent writing and temporary sculpture. Their 'raw material is the drift' itself,[85] again illustrating the relationship between the material and the immaterial in site-based performance.

As mentioned earlier, one of the beneficial characteristics of Wrights & Sites' initial walking work lay in them being able to access sites without permission, akin to the 'loose lifestyle'[86] presented by the *dérive*.[87] This sense of trespass is only a fleeting occurrence and those who drift with Wrights & Sites are physically aware of themselves as being 'brought' to the site, which then heightens the exploratory impulse to find something for themselves 'within it'.

Mythogeography

Wrights & Sites' second term, 'mythogeography', elucidates on the range of impetuses for drifting, as it 'places the fictional, fanciful, mistaken and personal on equal terms with factual, municipal history'.[88] Rather than solely limiting themselves to the incorporation of 'modern science'[89] through Situationist psychogeography, the group draw from 'different varieties of narrative'[90] both from within and without the site. They adopt a mindset that allows the incidental to take their train of thought elsewhere, through what they term 'wormholes',[91] in which the presently observed site undergoes an imaginative layering susceptible to constant revising throughout.

However, Wrights & Sites also encourage the introduction of different ideas from within the drifting groups themselves. In their *Possible Forests* they drifted 'with specialists in diverse fields (geography, architecture, psychology, choreography, scenography, organizational development, design, and virtual worlds)'.[92] Such walking and talking into existence,[93] combined with the properties of the drift already outlined, helps facilitate such dialogues across disciplines.

Peppering the psychogeographic atmospheric impressions of space, Wrights & Sites layer the mythogeographic collection of information born from historical research and conversations with locals native to the specific site – 'where strangers are changed into

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friends'.[94] It is such conversations that have proved to be one of the cruxes of their drifting[95] and to signal a further deviation from Situationist theories. Turner states that they

> do not see the *dérive* as a self-contained movement through space, even when undertaken by a group. There is always the possibility of interaction with the material elements around us and with the other inhabitants of the city. We are not detached observers but participants.[96]

Turner here highlights a further level of complexity when examining the performativity of the walking, one that again requires a slower pace than that found in the situationist *dérive*. Not only is there a spectator–performer relationship occurring between members of Wrights & Sites and the rest of their drifting group, but also between the group and the site itself. Yet walking causes the parameters of site and performance to become neither 'fixed or graspable yet both seem to be glimpsed in passing'.[97]

Turner's reference to the group's role as 'participants' and not guides is echoic of Smith's assertion that 'we have neither a leader nor an agreed manifesto'.[98] Smith contends that mythogeography 'is self-reflexive in the sense that it regards the mythogeographer, the performer, and the activist as being just as much multiplicitous and questionable sites as the landscapes they move in'.[99] Wrights & Sites' egalitarianism as a collective presents another stage in the audience's transition when walking, to that of not just performing *with* Wrights & Sites, but *with* the site also. This chimes with Jen Harvie's view of Situationist interventions as 'acts meant to be seen and to see things differently',[100] suggesting that the drifter is a performer to those members of the public within the site, but also an active spectator to the performances of the site itself.

To make further sense of such a proposition, I will now examine the three principal categories of Wrights & Sites' drifting: reconnaissance, group, and simultaneous.

Reconnaissance drifting places walking right at the beginning of the process of performance creation. Generally, the only spectators of such drifting are those native to the site in question, who may be approached in a bid to attain mythogeographic data. In *Everything You Need to Build a Town is Here* (2010), for instance, the company spent many months drifting through the town of Weston-super-Mare, collecting material for a large-scale site-specific project which consisted of forty-one signs located at specific locations in the town. Like concise pages of a *Mis-Guide* book,[101] each sign acted as a provocation, a part of a mnemonic, happened on by chance, that would draw the reader's attention to 'the overlooked, the unremarkable or hint at an action which would divert the reader from their everyday activity'.[102]

Drifting played an important part in ascertaining the 'eight interconnecting layers'[103] or themes that Wrights & Sites' would consolidate through repeated drifts. It also allowed the varying 'zones of ambience' regarding each theme to be located through more just means, as the collective were not restricted to the popular routes favoured by walkers, but were able to deviate from these. This mixture of signs located in areas of varying scales of public exposure therefore catered for different scales of response from people who discovered them, ranging from the open to the intimate. Through their walking Wrights & Sites engage with site on both a macro and micro level, accumulating material from and for the site in question, in a bid to encourage possible performances of/with/in a site.

Group Drifting

Wrights & Sites' second type of drifting is an amalgamation of reconnaissance and analysis, an 'an exploratory wander party'.[104] In *Lost Tours 1*, for example, this took place in the second phase after the early reconnaissance drifts, acting as an 'evening of public mis-guided tours . . . drawing on material encountered whilst on the previous drifts'.[105]

Wrights & Sites' model for such drifting is based on a theme or idea that, while not outlining a specific location to walk to, gives structure to the aimless nature of the drift. Themes such as 'allotment drift', 'gendered drift', and 'peripheral vision drift' are referred

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to as a 'frame' for walking in the site, in which a facet of it is given emphasis.[106] For Hodge a 'frame can act as a filter or a signpost, and give focus, although sometimes the frame itself may drift during the drift'.[107] This is the reason why Turner feels that Wrights & Sites' drifting is 'more carefully targeted than the Situationist *dérives*', as 'several of the walks direct attention to particular areas of concern'.[108] They show awareness of the many atmospheric impressions of place but choose to focus on a specific set, leaving room for potential drifters within their walking groups to pursue other 'frames' for themselves. This is an extract from *Mis-guided in Zürich – Mind the Map*:

> Since this is 'exhibition street' I propose that as we walk along it we become curators, looking for the objects through which we might present the fabric of the city: bits of thread, scraps, lost buttons, forgotten notes, old tickets. As curators, we are also detectives, looking for clues to the city's identity – or perhaps we are surveyors for a new kind of map.[109]

The group dynamic encourages discussion as the exploratory nature of such a premise, and allows for others to point out and highlight sights that resonate with such frames that may then dictate the direction of the drift. In *Lost Tours 2*, Wrights & Sites 'led a three-hour pilgrimage-cum-mis-guided tour, carrying a small shed down to the sea and back,' as part of the 'Shed Summit' at Welcombe Barton in North Devon.[110] In *Subverting the City: a Mis-Guide to Milton Keynes* (2005),[111] before daybreak participants were taken blindfold to the outskirts of the city whereupon, after removing their blindfolds, they drifted in search of the city's 'heart'.[112] In *Mis-Guided in Zürich – Mind the Map*, 'the route was planned, but never walked or researched in advance'.[113]

In *Four Mis-Guided Tours* (2006) each of the company led a tour in Central London, focusing on 'The Problem of Shopping', 'Out of Place', 'Scales', and 'Masses', all starting and finishing at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.[114] For *North, South, East, West* (2007) the company each took a point on a compass walking from 'nowhere' and followed one direction, 'renaming locations and constructing new signposts en route – finishing by planting a new polar flag after ninety minutes'.[115]

Group drifting in the creation of site-specific pieces therefore offers an impartial means by which to engage collectively with a site through a type of walking that advocates a desire to transgress beyond the surface details, the familiar routes, and the tourist attractions. With regards to its performative qualities, for the drifter the frame creates a psychological border around a specific idea or theme, and their walking with Wrights & Sites allows them to discover such 'frames' physically in the site.

However not only are they tasked with sustaining a psychological connection *between* such frames, but they also have to *transgress* them – to become a polar explorer, a forest builder, a curator, detective, or surveyor of the city, by stepping 'through the looking glass'.[116] The performativity of such a transgression helps sustain the co-existence of varying frames within the drift, further accentuating its divergence from the everyday navigation and perception of place. However, when drifting there also becomes a desire within group members to find appropriate objects for themselves to show others, and it is this 'showing and telling' combined with the peripheral led nature of the drift[117] that further suggests an adherence to performance.

Simultaneous Drifting

> Too often, it seems that the drift is nostalgically imagined as a way of recovering an authentically human, pre-technological mode of social space. Such a thesis is problematic, for it overlooks how technology unwittingly produces a new demand for pedestrian performance in a manner that contradicts its initial intention.[118]

Such a 'contradiction' can be observed in Wrights & Sites' third type of drifting, which experiments with the way in which it can be documented through technologies that are now everyday in the twenty-first century. Their simultaneous drift work (2005–2007) consisted of them each conducting a drift in a different location, filmed either by them-

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From *Subverting the City: a Mis-Guide to Milton Keynes* (2005). Photo: Stephen Hodge.

selves or with an additional camera operator. In one of these drifts all four members would begin and end their drift at exactly the same time, and not be allowed to communicate with one another,[119] while in another each drift occurred sequentially.

In all of the four video examples the 'camera operator would stay in visual contact, but could choose what to focus the camera on',[120] providing an additional layer to the project. The resulting footage was then shown as a simultaneous split-screen presentation, acting as a 'visual conversation'[121] in which the viewer could observe moments of correlation and tension between each video as they *détourned* one another. Within this format the group have experimented further outside the video series, by increasing and decreasing the distance between them as drifters (from drifting separately within the same site to drifting in separate countries), and trying out a range of different frames within the same drift. For example, in Paris, Hodge attempted to find the 'world in one street',[122] while

> at the same time, instead of drifting the whole city, Simon walked the same micro-area of Manchester, again and again. And in Bilbao, Cathy explored static drifting. And on the island of Herm, Phil traced the structural pattern from a leaf he found that morning on to a map of the island, and then attempted to walk it.[123]

Again we observe the plurality of interests found within Wrights & Sites' members, here represented as four 'frames' within one. Like their group drifting, such video documentation acts as an illustration or indeed provocation to encourage new ways of exploring, perceiving, and indeed sharing fresh perspectives of place.

Dissemination of Subversion

By expanding the potential of the Situationists' act of 'transient passage', Wrights & Sites have been able to disseminate the spirit of subversive, rebellious walking to a much wider and more diverse body of people. Despite deviating from the Situationists' overall objective of unitary urbanism, the dual nature of the *dérive* and the paradoxical mindset it proposes has retained its prevalence in Wrights & Sites' work, becoming something more performative.

The act of drifting, in which the walk itself is led by the group, provides an interesting foundation for the incorporation of imaginative suggestions. These occur in the form of

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'frames', a prominent motif in performance, but here imaginary ones suggested to the walking group who then use them as lenses to isolate events appropriate for such a frame. By framing something for themselves, they isolate it from its surroundings, albeit temporarily, converting place to space and establishing the boundaries of their own 'performance site' within this overarching frame. Directing the attention of others in their drift to such a frame consolidates its existence and makes such an everyday object or event performative. Whether videoed, photographed, written down, moved, or replaced, once the drift moves on, the frame itself becomes something temporarily memorialized. For Jayne Rendell,

> walking temporarily positions the subject in motion between a series of scenes that at times might resemble dialectical images; depending on the histories of a precise combination of objects at a particular location, these scenes might be constellations where the thinking stops, allegorical compositions or montage constructions.[124]

The plotting of such 'scenes' or frames may allow for the 'narrative of a walk' to develop, in which connections are established that in themselves refine the initial frame proposed by Wrights & Sites. It is the action of walking that not only facilitates a physical connection between these frames in tandem with an imaginative connection, but also allows the drifter to acknowledge the significance of what is brought to the site and what is found within it through the recognition and overstepping of certain psychological boundaries.

Yet in addition to the framing of the performances of the everyday, a further frame exists within the drifting group itself, stemming from the sense of collective imagination mentioned earlier. The sustaining of such a frame is one that is realized through drifting, in which the walking spectators make their own journey from that of passive spectators to active ones. The passive spectators frame themselves in relation to Wrights & Sites (the 'performers'), creating a demarcated space. The active spectators however share and sustain an imaginative frame *with* that of Wrights & Sites.

Here the drifting group begins to become what Smith terms 'lodge-like' or a form of 'nomadic architecture'.[125] There is a sense of demarcation still prevalent but it is imaginative, not physical, and susceptible to the changing nature of the drift. The active spectator's 'performance' is often a subtle one, its subtlety tempered by a need also to be in an appropriate mental state to observe the performances of the site itself. Once the drift is completed the 'active' role assumed by the spectator should transgress into their daily walking life. This for Persighetti is the handing over of 'the journeys and the directions to anyone who wishes to participate in their own explorations'.[126] This is to encourage the creation of further pedestrian performances and new ways of seeing place through a self-subversion of one's own walking practice.

The initial conveniences of walking for Wrights & Sites have, as evidenced here, subsequently led to a disruption of some of the paradigms of site and the defining of its boundaries. This is why the group's works can be more neatly categorized as *situation-specific,* as they operate over numerous locations and establish a sense of *dislocation* – encouraging us no longer to look with the eyes of a tourist, but to become implicated in the jostling contingency of mobilities and relations that constitute contemporaneity'.[127]

The 'framing' that the group encourages embodies the 'pleasing vagueness' of the Situationists' psychogeography, its motivations susceptible to momentary encounters while walking. In the absence of clear and sustained boundaries determining site, performance space, and audience space, in addition to the roles of performer and audience, Wrights & Sites' drifting becomes a constant act of *situating*. It attempts to seek a collective sense of genius loci within its drifting group, 'prioritizing the moment over time, direct experience of multiplicitous complexity over the singular simplicity of distanced reflection'.[128]

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28. Debord, *Theory of the Dérive*, in Knabb, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 50. Such a dual mindset chimes with Phil Smith's description of mythogeographic drifting as the carrying of 'a second head' in order 'to always walk with one's own hybrid as a companion': *Mythogeography,* p. 113.

29. Debord, *Theory of the Dérive,* p. 50.

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32. Bradby and Lavery, *Moving through Place*, p. 45.

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47. Examples of this in Wrights & Sites' drifting are outlined by Phil Smith: 'In a council workyard we might reposition discarded road signs, in an urban edgeland we might remake the parts of a burnt house into a ceremonial doorway.' See Wrights & Sites, 'Mis-Guiding the City Walker'.

48. Stephen Hodge. inspired by an anecdote of Guy Debord, overlaid 'a map of Paris on to London' and attempted to walk it through 'a walk of coincidences'. See Wrights & Sites, 'Simultaneous Drift'. Their *Possible Forests* also involved the creation of different maps of an imagined forestscape.

49. Tim Edensor, 'Walking through Ruins', *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Ashgate, 2008), p. 125.

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58. Ibid., p. 44. It is important to note that the Situationists believed that this 'temporary subordination'

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contains 'provisional terminology' and is not perceived as a means to create a 'continuum of theatre' but a possible replacement for it.

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62. Debord, *Theory of the Dérive,* p. 51.

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66. Wrights & Sites, 'Simultaneous Drift'.

67. Smith, *Mythogeography,* p. 119. In support of this the 'psychologists M. and H. Bornstein interpreted the higher walking speed of people in larger cities as a response to stimulatory overload: "increased walking speeds serve to minimize environmental stimulation",' See 'The Pace of Life – Reanalyzed: Why Does Walking Speed of Pedestrians Correlate with City Size?', *Behaviour,* CXXIII (1992), p. 78.

68. Smith, *Mythogeography,* p. 119.

69. Coverley, *Psychogeography,* p. 97.

70. Claire Doherty proposes that in relation to peripatetic practices, 'a distinction should be made between the strategies of the activist and the trickster, though their intentions may be similar – namely to provoke social conscience'. See *The New Situationists*, p. 12.

71. Wrights & Sites, 'Simultaneous Drift'.

72. Ibid.

73. Doherty, *The New Situationists*, p. 7.

74. Wrights & Sites, 'Simultaneous Drift'.

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76. Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,* p. 7.

77. Smith, *Crab Walking and Mythogeography*, p. 84.

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