

The new temples are already cracked
future ruins
one day grass will also grow over the city
over its final layer

—Blixa Bargeld of Einstürzende Neubauten, excerpt translated from the song, *Die Befindlichkeit Des Landes*

Psychogeography: Introducing the Zone and the March-Riever

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Guy-Ernest Debord, in his *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, defined psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals,” applying the adjective “psychogeographical” to those investigations intended to reveal the geographical environment’s “...influence on human feelings, and, even more generally, to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery” (Debord, 1955). His definition imposed new structure on a form of urban exploration that had arisen from the streets and taken root in the literary traditions associated with the cities of London and Paris (Coverley, 2010).

Author Merlin Coverley articulates this best when he explains that, “psychogeography may usefully be viewed less as the product of a particular time and place than as the meeting point of a number of ideas and traditions with interwoven histories” (2010, p. 11). He identifies a number of predominant characteristics that are featured in the tradition of urban wandering. The central activity is exploration by way of walking. As the explorer increasingly strays from those paths that are designed to safely guide the pedestrian through limited portions of the city, he or she inevitably engages in

an act of subversion. Coverley also utilizes literary examples to highlight the ways in which urban wanderers of this tradition engage the city's mysteries, seeking to discover the nature of what lies beneath.

Approaches to psychogeography have become more varied as the literary tradition has progressed and new perspectives have graced the field. Though each new approach never completely supersedes the previous ones, a shift in the dominant form of the practice of psychogeography is clearly reflected in the relative popularity of an approach's modern literary representation. The earlier approach of the flâneur, that of the disinterested spectator who casually strolls the streets of Paris, stands in contrast to that of the later Situationist *dérive*, where the explorer embarks upon a strategic study of the influence of the geographical environment, frequently engaging in a type of reconnaissance in support of a political agenda (Coverley, 2010).

Iain Sinclair's modern characterization of the stalker also forgoes casual strolling in favor of employing a relentless pace in pursuit of one's prey, which, in his work, is the cityscape of London (1997). The stalker is not motivated so much by the outcome of calculated study, as by a sense of being compelled by a larger force to seek out the secret knowledge necessary to understand the true nature of what lies beneath the city's mysteries.

In her paper, *Stalking the East End: Iain Sinclair's White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings and Lights Out for the Territory*, Eva Yin-i Chen pointedly identifies limitations in two works that frequently serve as a source of inspiration for many who participate in modern psychogeography (2006). She aptly reveals how the assumption of privileged historical knowledge is a prerequisite that is detrimental to the acquisition of firsthand

experience and how, “exclusive interest only in the erased past and a denial of any redemptive quality in the present” inevitably lead to the suppression of alternative perspectives (2006, p. 225).

This essay proposes an approach to psychogeography that is inspired by elements of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky’s novel, *Roadside Picnic* and Andrei Tarkovsky’s film, *Stalker*. It is also influenced by the creative methodology and philosophy of the band, Einstürzende Neubauten, as well as the incredible work of Brian Henry, an instant film photographer who has expertly guided the author through countless abandoned and decaying hospitals, schools, and factories. The essay will define the characteristics of the geographical environment under exploration, the Zone; contrast it with the characterization of Edgelands; introduce the figure of the march-riever; and detail what sets this approach apart from those that came before it, by way of an examination of the march-riever’s methods. This approach avoids the limitations articulated by Eva Yin-i Chen, while making the practice of psychogeography more accessible to those who are not within range of a storied metropolis, such as London or Paris, or its surrounding areas.

In the highly regarded science fiction novel, *Roadside Picnic*, brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky chronicle the activities of Redrick Schuhart, a “stalker” whose profession entails risking his life to sneak into the forbidden “Zone” and smuggle out contraband for resale on the black market (1972). The rare treasures he locates are artifacts left behind by an alien intelligence after a brief, unexplained visitation of Earth. The artifacts would appear to have been casually littered by the visiting intelligence, and though they continue to be poorly understood by our scientists, these items hold

tremendous value to collectors; ranging from expensive trinkets to extremely rare pieces rumored to supernaturally change the course of the possessor's life. A stalker's trips to the Zone are extremely dangerous, as patrols of government soldiers at the perimeter are more than willing to shoot and kill trespassers. Additionally, the alien visitation has left behind countless anomalies that are both unpredictable and deadly, as well as toxic substances that may do grievous harm to the stalker and/or his offspring.

Roadside Picnic inspired director Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film, *Stalker*. Yet, Tarkovsky convinced screenwriter (and original author) Arkady Strugatsky to alter the script in such a way as to remove the more overt science fiction elements from the story (Dyer, 2012). The events leading to the creation of the Zone are now unclear, but the area's lethality remains intact. The narrative follows a stalker who sneaks deep into the Zone, not to smuggle artifacts out, but to guide two men, the Writer and the Professor, to a room that is said to grant the deepest wish of those who enter it. In his scene-by-scene analysis of the movie, *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room*, author Geoff Dyer likens the final script to "a parable with Stalker as an apostle, a holy fool" (2012, p. 105). Far from concerned about revealing the true mechanisms of the Zone to the viewer, Tarkovsky focuses on using the journey as an examination of how each man navigates his own life and reacts to the adversity he finds. The Stalker is invested in the Zone with his whole heart and soul, and he needs to see this faith mirrored in those he guides for his life to continue to have meaning. His reverence for this forbidden area, the place he feels the most alive, is something that all urban wanderers should recognize as kindred.

In *Roadside Picnic*, the Zone is an area that is littered with mysterious and deadly

refuse, following a brief alien visitation. In order to bring elements of the Zone in line with the reality of today's urban wanderer, the Zone could be re-conceptualized as a place in which nature has begun to reclaim the landscape from man. Here, the Zone remains "alien," in that persons unknown to us have come and gone, and we can only know them from the debris they left behind, encountering only the specter of their influence. Time and erosion ensure that no egoistic elements can last. On a long enough timeline, only the beauty of nature and the danger that comes with decaying structures remain.

Amidst Sinclair's London, the urban wanderer's ability to experience the dark energies and murky history of the East End is constantly at odds with the efforts of politicians, capitalists, and city planners to commercialize, sanitize, and make safe the cityscape and herd pedestrians along pre-planned routes that serve the designers' agendas (Chen, 2006). A slightly different dynamic is at play in those locations in which nature is in the process of taking back the landscape from man. In such cases, mankind has come and gone, having temporarily suppressed nature for our commercial, industrial, and residential needs, before declaring some of these efforts a failure and moving on, fencing off those areas that no longer harbor the populace or are marked for regeneration. The Zone remains abandoned, as tree branches extend through broken windows, grass shoots up from cracks in the floor, and the frames of decaying structures eventually collapse.

Whereas the labyrinthine forces of London's East End are in danger of being snuffed out by the modern realignment of the cityscape, locations within the Zone draw their magic from the beautiful interplay between the fading specter of mankind's influence and nature's resurgence. The urban wanderer of London and he or she who

traverses the Zone share in common the challenge of navigating prohibited terrain. In London, civil engineering is dedicated to keeping people on specific paths. There are barriers to discovering hidden portions of the city that reveal a more complex history. The perimeter of the Zone is fenced off, and signs warn of the consequences of trespassing and the dangers of areas that are off limits to those who are not authorized to be there. To navigate either without regard to the instructions of authority is an act of resistance. And, by straying, you step outside of a social contract that serves to physically protect you when you are within society's regulated boundaries. You take your life in your own hands, as public safety personnel may be either unwilling or unable to guarantee your safety if you have ventured into prohibited areas.

In his *Theory of the Dérive*, Guy-Ernest Debord described a failed rural expedition by a group of surrealists in 1923:

Wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there than anywhere else...At the opposite pole from such imbecilities, the primarily urban character of the *dérive*, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities that are such rich centers of possibilities and meanings, could be expressed in Marx's phrase: 'Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive' (1958).

Yet, one does not have to be in the midst of a metropolis to reflect upon man's influence and the mysterious possibilities and history of the landscape. The Zone is valuable, in part, because it puts us in a place to reflect upon the juxtaposition of the specter of man's influence with the timeless beauty of nature that will eventually consume all that man has

left behind. Our own lives and influence are finite, and places such as these allow us to engage and make peace with this fact, while also allowing us to dive headlong into the mysteries surrounding the debris we find there.

It is an asset that the Zone is not typically at the center of the urban landscape and may sometimes display a more rural character, not a limitation. Indeed, what percentage of wanderers who would enjoy taking part in psychogeographical treks live within reasonable proximity to a storied metropolis, such as London or Paris or its surrounding areas? Even if one does not live in or next to a famous cityscape with hundreds of years of human history, it is quite likely that one can visit a place within his or her local district in which nature has begun to reclaim the landscape from man. Are not abandoned hospitals, power plants, prisons, factories, and mental institutions, which represent some of the most thrilling locations through which to wander, usually found outside of the urban center? These places have much to offer us in our efforts to study the architecture that sits upon the landscape, the history that has taken place within, shifts in the ways that society has treated its vulnerable populations, and the mysteries that contribute to the character of these sites. Not only are these places just as likely to harbor dark energy and murky history as districts within a metropolis are, they are also subject to the dangers associated with unexpected inhabitants and collapsing architecture.

It is important to distinguish between this essay's conceptualization of the Zone and the characterization of the Edgelands, an area that has received a great deal of attention in recent psychogeographical study. Marian Shoard's essay, *Edgelands*, was the first to describe that geographical environment:

Between urban and rural stands a kind of landscape quite different from either.

Often vast in area, though hardly noticed, it is characterized by rubbish tips and warehouses, superstores and derelict industrial plant, office parks and gypsy encampments, golf courses, allotments and fragmented, frequently scruffy, farmland. All these heterogeneous elements are arranged in an unruly and often apparently chaotic fashion against a background of unkempt wasteland frequently swathed in riotous growths of colourful plants, both native and exotic. This peculiar landscape is only the latest version of an interfacial rim that has always separated settlements from the countryside to a greater or lesser extent. In our own age, however, this zone has expanded vastly in area, complexity and singularity. Huge numbers of people now spend much of their time living, working or moving within or through it. Yet for most of us, most of the time, this mysterious no man's land passes unnoticed: in our imaginations, as opposed to our actual lives, it barely exists (2002).

Later, she continues:

As we flash past its seemingly meaningless contours in train, car or bus we somehow fail to register it on our retinas. When we deliberately visit it, this is often for mundane activities like taking the car to be serviced or household waste to the disposal plant, which we choose to discount as part of our lives. If we actually live or work there, we usually wish we did not. Public authorities tend to have a similarly negative attitude towards these interfacial areas (2002).

Her insightful description of the edgelands gave direction to the pursuits of many aspiring psychogeographers.

In their book, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, Paul Farley

and Michael Symmons Roberts explore this area that is neither city nor countryside, but a place in between (2011). They profile locations such as landfills, lofts, and canals, in order to evoke the powerful mystery and beauty there. They are keen to recognize the rate of change in such places:

The edgelands are a complex landscape; a debatable zone, constantly reinventing themselves as economic and social tides come in and out. If parts of remote rural Britain feel timeless, then the edgelands feel anything but. Revisit an edgelands site you haven't seen for six months, and likely as not there will be a Victorian factory knocked down, a business park newly built, a section of waste ground cleared and landscaped, a pre-war warehouse abandoned and open to the elements. Such are the constantly shifting sands of edgelands that any writing about these landscapes is a snapshot. There is no definitive description of the edgelands of Swindon or Wolverhampton-- only an attempt to celebrate and evoke them at one particular time (2011, p. 6).

Though these characterizations of the edgelands share a few common elements with the Zone, an essential distinction must be made. The Zone, as conceptualized in this essay, is different by definition, and this has significant implications for the approach the explorer takes in engaging the landscape and his or her subsequent experience. The edgelands are defined, to a great extent, by where they are in proximity to the urban center and what can commonly be found there. The edgelands exist as liminal places, in between the city and the countryside. Yet, what is important in the conceptualization of the Zone is not proximity or location, but its very *nature*. The Zone is a different type of place in between; it is given definition as the border between man's fading influence and the

return of nature. An abandoned structure's proximity to the urban center is of little importance, so long as it is representative of the magic that is derived from the beautiful interplay between mankind's abandoned efforts and nature's resurgence. The edgelands' definition, by way of proximity and what can be commonly found there, leads to problematic complexity, as well. If an abandoned hospital is located on the border between the city and the countryside, then which characteristics is it thought to inherit from each type of place? Though such a structure would seem more at home in the city, there are times in which it may be found adjacent to the countryside. As a feature of the edgelands, this hospital would not be nearly as prototypical as the landfill, the gravel pit, or the canal, so how should it be considered? As a consequence of the way in which the edgelands have been defined and portrayed, the associated literature is awash with difficult questions about how to characterize the scale and scope of their defining elements. The conceptualization of the Zone eschews these problems by finding definition in the nature of what the specific environment represents, the beautiful interplay between the fading specter of mankind's influence and nature's resurgence, rather than the constraints of proximity or a specific country's prototypical geographical features.

As such, locations within the Zone may be those most capable of facilitating reflection upon our own lives and place in the universe, considering the juxtaposition of the specter of man's influence with the timeless beauty of nature that is in the process of reclaiming our abandoned structures. Young trees extend through collapsing walls. Vultures, snakes, and owls, the new inhabitants of the decaying structures, are startled by your presence as you wander from room to room. Our experience of time comes face to

face with the slow wheels of eternity. Though you may not continue to occupy this place, you may very well take something from it or leave something behind. It is such a place, a place in between, that you connect with your inner life and locate the greatest insights into who and what you are, without the use of the historical record, social status, or ethnicity as heuristics. And, though your trespass is temporary, you may begin to feel most at home during the moments that you are there.

When Professor Francis Gummere published his translation of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* in 1910, he described Grendel as a “march-riever.” In his footnotes, he defined march-riever as “a disturber of the border, one who sallies from his haunt in the fen and roams over the country near by. This probably pagan nuisance is now furnished with Biblical credentials as a fiend or devil in good standing, so that all Christian Englishmen might read about him.” The Zone is not a place for one to live. It is a place in between; it represents the border between man’s fading influence and the return of nature. The march-riever is one who seeks out this border and explores its many possibilities, utilizing a slow, measured approach that pays reverence to the unknown forces and dangers within and allows time for mysterious elements to be revealed to the careful eye.

Though sites such as abandoned hospitals, prisons, and mental institutions may harbor some level of dark energy within their decaying walls, it is not only the dark energy that the march-riever pursues. He or she makes use of opportunities for existential reflection and developing an understanding of how one’s inner, subjective experience can often have a stronger influence in determining what one sees within those walls than the historical account of what once took place there. He or she seeks to

experience the mystery firsthand, to come face to face with the source of endless possibilities. In *Roadside Picnic*, Redrick Schuhart, a “stalker” whose profession entails risking his life to sneak into the forbidden “Zone” and smuggle out contraband for resale on the black market, agrees to lead a dangerous expedition to locate the Golden Sphere, an alien artifact that is rumored to grant wishes to those who are in its presence (1972). In Tarkovsky’s film, *Stalker*, the narrative follows a stalker who sneaks deep into the Zone, not to smuggle artifacts out, but to guide two men, the Writer and the Professor, to a room that is said to grant the deepest wish of those who enter it (1979). Each time that the march-riever ventures out to the Zone, there is the excitement of knowing that all of the possibilities available to him or her have been reset, as change remains the only constant there. Decay perpetually leads to dramatic shifts in the architecture. New doors are opened where, before, there had been no passage. Visitors may come and go, stealing artifacts or leaving behind evidence of their vandalism or graffiti, with no city sanitation crew to follow and undo their impact. Animals take up residence and guard their new territory. You can never be sure as to whether someone or something new is now lying in wait.

Your safety is anything but guaranteed. A passage in *Roadside Picnic* demonstrates this idea well. Redrick explains why he doesn’t want a particular explorer to accompany him on his next trip to the Zone:

Austin isn’t a bad guy, he’s got the right mix of courage and cowardice, but I think he’s already doomed...the man has decided he’s got the Zone completely figured out, and so he’ll soon screw up and kick the bucket (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1972, p. 10).

The same idea holds true for the psychogeographer who explores those places in which nature has begun to reclaim the landscape from man-- just when you think you know what to expect of an abandoned site, you'll find new danger at your next visit. Perhaps a series of stairs or the top floor of a building will no longer safely hold your weight. Or, you may find evidence that someone has been sleeping there overnight, and his current whereabouts are unknown. Maybe, security has been stepped up, and patrols making their way around the perimeter are too frequent for you to make your move. The most rewarding sites are those that are either unknown to almost anyone else or those whose perimeter is guarded just well enough that it keeps out those persons who are merely there to vandalize or leave graffiti. By entering these sites, you step outside of a social contract that protects you when you are within society's regulated boundaries. You have trespassed, and no one else will take responsibility for you here. For the first time, that responsibility becomes solely your own.

The conditions of the Zone allow you to be more in touch with your own mortality. Physical decay and any number of other dangers represent a threat to your life. This, combined with our human experience of time coming face to face with the slow wheels of eternity, as is exemplified through erosion, collapse, and the resurgence of nature, facilitates contemplation of one's mortality. There is a great beauty in understanding ourselves in this context, and it requires slowing down and taking each step with care.

In *Roadside Picnic*, Redrick makes an observation after he has made his way safely back out of the Zone: "I take off my watch and look at it- my Lord, we were in the Zone for more than five hours! Five hours. I shudder. Yes, my friends, there's no such

thing as time in the Zone” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1972, p. 33). In Tarkovsky’s film, the character of the Stalker informs Writer and Professor, “This is the quietest place in the world. You’ll see for yourselves” (1979). It is precisely a place such as the Zone, far removed from our everyday experience of time, and free of distraction and noise, that allows one a sustained opportunity to reflect, to be as deliberate as one needs to be with every step, as if every step could carry with it dire consequences, in order for us to properly consider our own mortality and our relationship with the landscape. The busy cityscape of a great metropolis would be unlikely to offer adequate pause for a meditation of this type.

Yet, those who seek to unearth the mysterious energies hidden in the urban landscape share much in common with he or she who traverses the Zone. Both are in search of some version of de Quincey’s “Northwest Passage,” which Merlin Coverley refers to as a “psychogeographical metaphor for that concealed entrance to the magical realm” (2010, p. 101). Each wanderer seeks firsthand experience of those forces that are just beyond our grasp and those places that the casual pedestrian never lays eyes on. Each recognizes how the efforts of politicians, capitalists, and city planners to commercialize, sanitize, and make safe the landscape do much to repress, silence, and erase the vital core of what lies beneath.

This affront is not unlike or even unrelated to mankind’s suppression of nature. In his landmark interviews with Bill Moyers, comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell stated:

Nature religions are not attempts to control nature but to help you put yourself in accord with it. But when nature is thought of as evil, you don't put yourself in

accord with it, you control it, or try to, and hence the tension, the anxiety, the cutting down of forests, the annihilation of native people. And the accent here separates us from nature (1988, p. 24).

To the psychogeographer, modern restructuring of the landscape serves only to continue to distance us from those forces that connect past to present and mankind to nature.

The march-riever's approach to the landscape is an interactive one that carries with it a particular kind of care and reverence. Joseph Campbell explained that his studies of Native American history demonstrated that Native Americans frequently "addressed all of life as a 'thou...'" (1988, p. 78). He continued, "You can address anything as a 'thou,' and if you do that, you can feel the change in your own psychology. The ego that sees a 'thou' is not the same ego that sees an 'it'" (1988, p. 79). The march-riever holds the Zone in a similar regard, acknowledging mysterious forces beyond his or her understanding and a relationship between the way one engages the Zone and the consequences this has for the course of one's journey and what is revealed to the wanderer. This approach is borne out of a respect for nature and a respect for the dangers inherent to wandering through decaying structures on the verge of collapse.

In Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, the guide warns his companions, "It's not the place for leisurely strolls. The Zone wants to be respected. Otherwise, it will punish" (1979). In his detailed analysis of the film, author Geoff Dyer makes an astute observation regarding the Stalker's warning:

Everything that happens depends on us, says Stalker. The relationship between pilgrims - even the most skeptical or outright cynical, even those who don't

consider themselves pilgrims - and the Zone is absolutely reciprocal. To be *in* the Zone is to be *part of* the Zone. It may be impossible to tell whether a given action is initiated by people or place but the feeling that the Zone is an active participant in whatever occurs becomes increasingly tangible (2012, p. 90).

In studying psychogeographical explorations, which inherently involve an interaction between the wanderer and the landscape, we benefit from an examination of what the explorer brings to the scene and what he or she takes from it. The wanderer arrives with expectations as to what he or she will find, and these are mediated by experience and any knowledge of the site's history. An ethical explorer will leave no physical objects behind, as litter would only serve to distract from the authentic elements of the site. The explorer should not be the center of attention here. Rather, the focus should be on the landscape and the explorer's interaction with it, which also includes what he or she takes away from this exchange. Perhaps it is the experience of a thrilling exploration of a place that seems alive with mysteries and countless possibilities, while being host to any number of dangers that represent a threat to one's life. As was discussed above, a deeper consideration of one's mortality and place in the universe is another possible outcome. The psychogeographer may also take measurements, record observations in a journal, or compose photographs of what he or she encounters.

Examining the content of two of Iain Sinclair's modern classics, *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* and *Lights Out for the Territory*, Eva Yin-i Chen observes, "Past and present are juxtaposed, while London as myth and magic is interwoven with London as real and lived space by ordinary people on an everyday basis" (2006, p. 228). Indeed, the traditions of juxtaposing a location's past and present and using esoteric historical

knowledge to inspire the choice of one's path through the landscape appear to be hallmarks of the modern psychogeography practiced in urban cityscapes. These wanderers pair the urban environment they explore with its historical record.

Yet, an overreliance on esoteric historical knowledge will only serve to limit, rather than augment, one's interaction with the landscape. As stated above, Eva Yin-I Chen revealed how the assumption of privileged historical knowledge is a prerequisite that is detrimental to the acquisition of firsthand experience (2006). One's sense of awe and dread should not require a historical counterpart in the place under investigation. That is, the ability to experience and interact with the landscape need not be commensurate with one's level of historical knowledge. The Zone requires no special knowledge, no historical expertise. The experience itself is paramount, not synchronizing the present with the energies of the past. In the march-riever's approach, one does not seek to be pulled into the past. Rather, one seeks to see and experience the Zone for what it is *now*, a place in which nature has begun to reclaim the landscape from man. A careful, measured approach through this decaying, dangerous landscape facilitates reflection upon one's own life and place in the universe, considering the juxtaposition of the specter of man's influence with the timeless beauty of nature that is in the process of reclaiming our abandoned structures.

The experience you find here is your own, a reflection of yourself, in context, and each trek is impossible to replicate exactly—perpetual decay, the way light illuminates the scene, and variations in what you bring to the Zone, internally, will ensure that your visits will never be experienced the same way twice. This approach to psychogeography differs from other contemporary approaches by casting aside a requirement for particular

historical knowledge and embracing the process of change. In fact, its conceptualization has been strongly influenced by the artistic contributions of the band Einstürzende Neubauten. In the book, *No Beauty Without Danger*, composed of interviews with the band, Andrew Unruh explains the basic philosophy of Einstürzende Neubauten:

The existing, the now, has had its time, it's used up and put into question.

Something new is invented...It means constant change...It's not so much about physical destruction in a narrower sense, but about the breaking down of thought monuments (Dax & Defcon, 2005, p. 94).

Eva Yin-I Chen also identified how “exclusive interest only in the erased past and a denial of any redemptive quality in the present” inevitably leads to the suppression of alternative perspectives (2006, p. 225). She cites the scarcity of perspectives that are not male and white. She also poses the question of the part that other ethnic groups, living in modern day London, play in the recent practice of psychogeography:

Perhaps the Bangladeshis, being a part of the present, do not qualify as clues to a hidden and more authentic past. Or perhaps what does qualify as clues, being only of the past and the almost forgotten, cannot gaze back and contradict, safer for his mind to be projected on. Sinclair may attack the Thatcherite development of the East End which he feels has erased or selectively wiped out the dark energy of the place, but just like the Thatcherite reshaping of a conservative British national identity based on a selectivity that ignores class or race, Sinclair’s London, constructed to counter the dominant discourse, may also be guilty of a similarly selective or privileging strategy. The Bangladeshis occupying the present spatiality of the East End, as the racial Other of the Thatcherite Englishness, and

as such an overwhelmingly obvious part of East End's everyday reality, do merit more than silence and neglect in Sinclair's work, especially since this work makes its very aim the resistance to Thatcherite amnesia and erasure (2006, p. 248). Indeed, an overreliance on privileged historical knowledge to inform one's practice of psychogeography can carry the unintended consequence of suppressing alternative perspectives. History is not just a collection of facts, but, rather, a prevailing collection and interpretation of events that is not often exhaustive in its inclusion of the experience and perspectives of minority groups.

Yet, the modern urban wanderer's approach to psychogeography shares something in common with the approach practiced by the march-riever—a deliberate effort to avoid the shortest path and notice everything along one's journey. In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair writes:

Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself...the born-again *flâneur* is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing *everything*...Walking, moving across a retreating townscape, stitches it all together: the illicit cocktail of bodily exhaustion and a raging carbon monoxide high (1997, p. 4).

Sinclair's descriptive writing is extremely engaging, making great use of simile and metaphor and amplifying the reader's desire to follow his intriguing journeys. He has a keen eye for detail, and his memorable treks demonstrate the benefit of cultivating a habit

of taking enough time to open all of one's senses to the landscape, in order to experience that which is rarely encountered.

In Tarkovsky's film, the Stalker warns the Writer and the Professor, "In the Zone, the longer way, the less risk" (1979). In *Roadside Picnic*, stalker Redrick Schuhart traverses the Zone with care and caution. As he approaches each successive area, he throws metal nuts and bolts ahead of him to safely observe the presence of any unexpected phenomena before he puts himself in harms way (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1972). He narrates:

I throw the fourth nut. It doesn't go quite right. I can't explain it, but I can feel it in my gut—something's off...I take the fifth nut and throw it farther and higher. There it is, the bug trap! The nut goes up all right and starts going down fine, but halfway down it looks like someone tugged it off to the side, pulling it so hard that it goes right into the clay and disappears (p. 27).

Later in the story, he evaluates his options for movement, yet again. "All the landmarks agreed with the map, but Redrick didn't feel satisfied. The instinct of a seasoned stalker protested against the very idea- absurd and unnatural - of laying a path between two nearby hills" (p. 168). These passages exemplify an approach that makes use of both cautious observation and intuition. By slowing down, employing all of one's senses, measuring the behavior of the landscape against one's expectations, and taking each step as if it could lead to life-threatening consequences, the explorer not only averts many of the unexpected and unforgiving dangers of abandoned and decaying structures, but dramatically increases the odds of encountering aspects of the landscape that would otherwise remain unseen.

In his *Theory of the Dérive*, Guy-Ernest Debord explained:

In a *dérive*, one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view, cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones (1958).

Inevitably, this leads to the question of what method one should take to best locate and study these features. An explorer's keen eye for detail and ability to take note of everything he or she encounters can be an asset in such a quest. His or her collection of clues along the way may pave the way for amazing discoveries. Yet, what mechanism is in place to prevent details from accumulating to the point that one becomes bogged down or lost in too many associations, unable to regain the scent of the mysterious prey he or she began chasing in the first place?

The march-riever's approach to psychogeography makes conscious use of solar cues, the time-dependent effects of the sun. The approach is influenced by elements from Tim Guilford and Graham K. Taylor's essay, *The Sun Compass Revisited*, which explores the importance of solar-derived information to animal orientation (2014). They introduce their assertions by stating:

We argue that solar cues may provide guidance by modifying the appearance of the landscape, whether by giving direction to landmarks through shadowing, or by adding distinctive components to the visual appearance of a place that become

salient during learning and recognition (2014, p. 136).

They go on to explain:

We consider how the time-dependent effects of the sun can change the visual appearance of landmarks, and suggest that in extreme cases this could lead to a failure to recognize a place when viewed at an unfamiliar or incorrectly interpreted time. Second, we consider how the time-dependent effects of the sun can visually superimpose directionality on landmarks in the visual scene (p. 140).

To the march-riever, these time-dependent effects of the sun are phenomena that cut meaningful paths through the Zone, allow him or her to hone in on specific elements of the scene, and facilitate a study of the character of each site by way of an examination of the time-staggered photographs and notes that were taken within it.

When the landscape is too uniformly illuminated, it is easy for the explorer to become bogged down or lost in too many associations. When all is bright, everything is a candidate for examination, and the choices available to the wanderer become too vast. The march-riever is keen to the way that the time-dependent effects of the sun modify the appearance of the landscape, and the march-riever uses this awareness to facilitate choice in his or her path. Light cuts novel paths through the Zone by virtue of the way that it is selectively cast upon landmarks and architecture. In essence, sunlight creates doorways for exploration that are only open for a brief time, such that the mysterious possibilities of a scene may never be revealed exactly the same way twice. Time of day, season, and the perpetual decay of architecture align in a way that one may experience a room very differently upon subsequent visits. One should not expect a room's value to be immediately understood, so much as discovered through repeated study of the time-

dependent effect of the sun on its appearance. Though the slow collapse of architecture may present physical obstacles to the exploration of the Zone, sunlight pouring in through new cracks and tears reveals paths to access treasures previously concealed from view.

The time-dependent effects of the sun not only cut meaningful paths through the Zone, but also allow the march-riever to hone in on specific elements of the scene. Illumination adds definition and detail to certain elements, while shadows conceal those whose time has not yet come to be revealed. This naturally selective lighting frames the scene in a way that allows for a proper meditation regarding an illuminated artifact's contribution to the whole, facilitating more meaningful associations in the mind of the explorer.

Scenes are given definition through the time-dependent effects of the sun by the absence of illumination just as much as they are by the presence of it. Yet, what character can be ascribed to those scenes that are out of range of solar cues? There are abandoned structures whose windows are boarded up and who have not yet undergone enough decay to allow light to breach their walls. Without some source of illumination, their contents remain a mystery that invites speculation heavily influenced by expectations and projection. Many of our fears find a home in total darkness. While a flashlight or some other artificial light source could be used to find one's way, the explorer's experience of the scene and ability to document it are significantly limited by the absence of time as a form of context.

Alternatively, what about those scenes that are without the benefit of solar cues, due to constant and uniform illumination by artificial light? Uniform lighting fails to assist the explorer in narrowing his or her candidates for further exploration. It is as if the

explorer is operating under the light and lens of a microscope as large as his or her location of study, and all is completely exposed. Here, the explorer can be overwhelmed by too many choices and associations. Such a scene also runs contrary to the labyrinthine character of the sites that the urban wanderer seeks out-- those with hidden dark forces and secrets to be unearthed.

To the photographer, a reliance on solar cues is second nature, whether it is done subconsciously or with active awareness and effort. By utilizing photography in his or her treks, the explorer cultivates a mindset that is attuned to the time-dependent effects of the sun and comes away with a lasting record of what he or she encountered. In his *Theory of the Dérive*, Guy-Ernest Debord explained, “The exploration of a fixed spatial field entails establishing bases and calculating directions of penetration” (1958). While shadows may temporarily conceal important elements of a scene, the march-riever understands that those elements will be revealed with time, using solar cues to plan his or her approach and angle. With successive photographs informed by the ways that light cuts pathways through a structure’s interior and illuminates the artifacts within, the march-riever is drawn ever closer to the heart of mysteries contained within. Experimentation is encouraged and given room to develop. The time-dependent effects of the sun facilitate the march-riever’s study of the character of each site by way of an examination of the time-staggered photographs and notes that were taken within it.

The properties of instant film make it the ideal photographic medium for exploration of the Zone. As a vehicle for an unfolding narrative, instant film photographs are raw, mysterious, and unpredictable. No other form of photography so effectively pulls the artist into the process of illumination and discovery and makes him or her so directly

a part of the story. The appearance of instant film photographs can vary, based on temperature, applied pressure, and the age of the film that is used. The film is a perfect counterpart to the character of the Zone, its beauty derived from the magical interaction between a special chemistry, unpredictable variables, and mysterious possibilities come to life.

No other photographer better illustrates the magic of instant film than Brian Henry of Baltimore, Maryland. While presentations associated with this essay exhibit the author's own photographs, one would be remiss in his or her study of the potential of instant film by overlooking Henry's amazing work (2015). It was he who expertly scouted out abandoned hospitals, schools, and factories and guided this author through their decaying halls. His photographs push the properties of instant film to their limits, while depicting human portraits set amidst the beauty of isolation and decay. This author has been extremely fortunate to be given so many opportunities to explore alongside Henry, as it is he who has inspired the trajectory of this author's studies.

The most intriguing places for exploration are those that are littered with a history of our failures; yet offer a glimpse of the mysterious, eternal forces acting beyond us. As much as the Zone is somewhere dark secrets may be uncovered, it is also a place that continually reflects our nature. In Tarkovsky's film, the character of Stalker explains:

The Zone is a very complicated series...of traps, and they're all deadly. I don't know what's going on here in the absence of people, but the moment someone shows up, everything comes into motion. Old traps disappear and new ones emerge. Safe spots become impassable. Now your path is easy, now it's hopelessly involved. That's the Zone. It may even seem capricious. But it is what

we've made it with our condition (1979).

The Zone may be the location most capable of facilitating reflection upon our own lives and place in the universe, considering the juxtaposition of the specter of man's influence with the timeless beauty of nature that is in the process of reclaiming our abandoned structures. It is such a place, a place in between, that you connect with your inner life and locate the greatest insights into who and what you are.

Listen to my breathing
but that proves nothing

in the midst of my circles
but their centre I am not

motionless
waiting
waiting

When you come, you'll come with light
you'll come radiant
you consume my shadows
compute my notches
and break me open
open my lair
and read me aloud
so that I too
can hear
myself

When you leave you ask
which one of us do you believe
is the beloved? which one
is the beloved?

—Blixa Bargeld of Einstürzende Neubauten, translated from the song, *Fiat Lux*

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