

# THE ART OF NAVIGATION

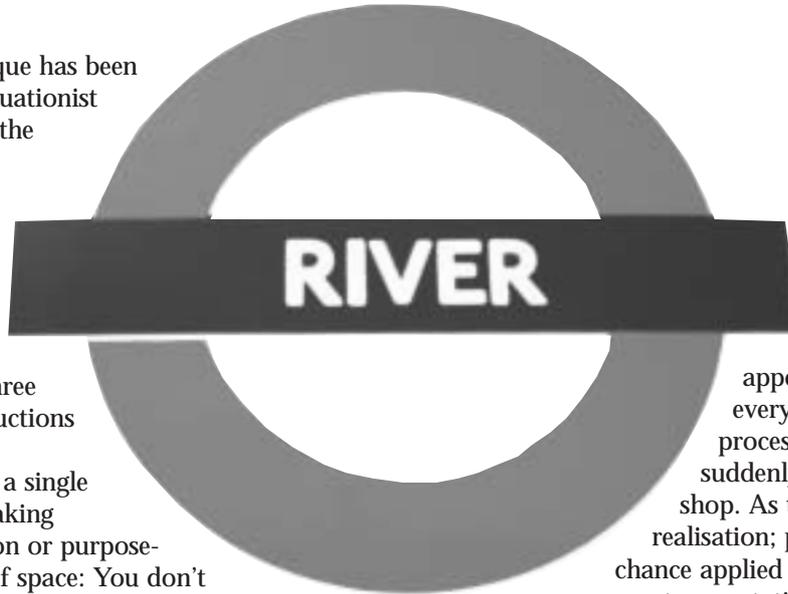
*If writing about music is like dancing to architecture what is an account of a walk?*

## *Perambology?*

The swarm technique has been used by pseudo-Situationist Groups, including the Manchester Area Psychogeographic Group, and has been called the “algorithm walk”:

Randomly generate a set of three left and right instructions and repeat them methodically from a single starting point, breaking habitual, destination or purpose-based navigation of space: You don’t take a walk, the walk takes you. Transit and those in it become separate, the walk becomes autonomous, walker becomes passenger, minus the usual prosthetics. When undertaken with several individuals or groups, each with different sets of instructions, chance overlap is possible and noticable. As natural solipsists, it’s easy to see the crowd as ambient: not a process we’re part of. Greenwich that Saturday afternoon should have been swarming already, but the Cutty Sark meeting point was unusually quiet, the first assumption to be challenged by the walk. Confusion surrounding the “noon” rendezvous was perhaps ironic, as the walk took place just below one particular omphalos of time. One more delightful confusion; when in the open space of the park, what constitutes “left”? The binary nature of the walk illuminates the non-binary nature of all space. But emancipation from traditional walking “genres” is perhaps impossible. Situationists, Psychogeographers, (LPA, MAP) all were cut from avante garde cloth, but is referencing them any less traditional than the Ramblers’ association or a city history walk?

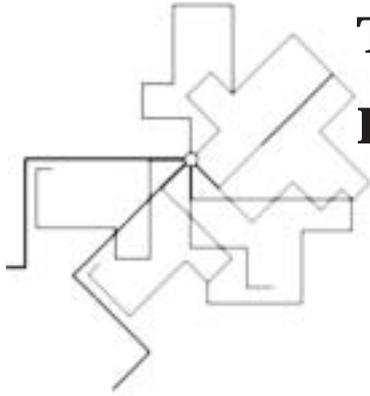
The poster advertising the event bore an illustration of overlapping root-like structures working outward, to mirror an earlier experience of swarming. This illustration would later be attacked by the very walk it championed, it sprawled on a future pub floor, a punch-drunk octopus. The flyer included a quote from A Thousand Plateaus by Deleuze and Guattari: “The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms,



*Steve Hanson*

from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other.” Pre-walk, these rhizomic forms appeared in cracks and branches everywhere. A simple mental process, if you need to buy a fork, suddenly you see them in every other shop. As the walk took over, a realisation; presumptions are questionable, chance applied to landscape creates its own movement, expectations are not the point, yet to have those expectations challenged validated the technique again. The walk initially moved through an underground car park, its passengers wondered how far “descent into the underworld” metaphors could be pushed, balked. The walk followed the rhizome presumption here only, as deep structure breaking out into surface structure. Once outside and above the car park it spiralled into a closed, repeat loop around the Cutty Sark and entrance to Greenwich foot tunnel. The tunnel was built in 1909, to allow people from south London to work in the Isle of Dogs, amenity improvement as heart surgery; another artery to the pump house. The foot tunnel entrance is appropriately cylindrical, with a spiral staircase inside, yet the walk refused to go in, always around. It displayed the tunnel, without allowing its use. At the bottom of the staircase is a straight route under the Thames, existing only in the minds of the passengers, and all the straighter there because the walk’s route was oppositely cyclical. In this sense the walk might as well have been in pre-foot tunnel Greenwich, it indulged a kind of time travel, broke its laws right under the noses of its judges. The walk’s passengers talked of metaphors for its movement; life spent within community boundaries (Greenwich? the south east generally?) before the foot tunnel made the opposite bank of the Thames accessible. Exclusion overturned for capital only. Yet comparisons could be drawn with post-1909 work patterns, commuting out of the area and returning, familiar, cyclical rites-of-passage. The clipper Cutty Sark, permanently dry docked in its own tourist aspic, as stuck as we were, built almost into redundancy on the threshold of the steam age. The passengers thought of migrating from Greenwich to work every day, travelled back further in time, from slavery days to the migration of the Windrush generation. The idea of circumnavigation (maritime or otherwise) of setting off from one point and returning there; escape, adventure, and its

# urban exploration N°1



**Time:** *Saturday October 11, noon*

**Location:** *Cutty Sark, Greenwich*

Swarm!

centre for  
URBAN AND  
COMMUNITY  
research

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"As soon as we begin to find our bearings the landscape vanishes at a stroke". Walter Benjamin - 'One Way Street', 1926.

negation, all exist in the Cutty Sark, as the walk moved past it again, and again, and again. Celebratory, millennial Greenwich, on the meridian, east meets west, yet poverty rarely meets wealth. The lacuna we were stuck in became a metaphor for other lacunae. Lacunae of information and of exclusion, "a cunning phrase", Michael Moorcock once railed, "can burn a town".

With dreams of escape, the walk's passengers talked themselves further out, to other loops; circle line, M25, with their links elsewhere, more rhizomes denied. They began to see something perhaps tautological - closed systems - everywhere. If your washing machine breaks and you need a replacement, you see them at every turn. The circular underground sign cut in half by the Thames signified the pre-1909 block to the Isle of Dogs the walk was experiencing right here in 2003. It took on increasing significance at each pass. The circular shape of the foot tunnel entrance mirrors that of the observatory overlooking it, which Charles II intended "for the perfecting of the art of navigation". Beyond the foot tunnel lay its successor, the Docklands Light Railway, another expected rhizome: The walk showed the network by denying it, if "rats are rhizomes" the walk's passengers were lab rats, stuck on a wheel in a self-administered experiment, adherents to the instrumental rationality of some nuthouse exercise yard. But was their "art of navigation" perfected or utterly flawed? The DLR is an assembly line, its product is a workforce to run an information-age assembly network. Fordist, a time and motion study with no operator as subject, drivers on

permanent leave. No surprise the walk looped this area of tourism, "tour" being derived from the latin "tornus", to turn, as in a lathe: Labour, travel, time and leisure. The lathe was the ultimate machine; it alone made other machines. The DLR's construction makes Canary Wharf viable, each commuter finding the right desk, just as the emails they send or receive find an in or outbox. Loops are here too, in the lacuna of empty office space (all the emptier since the walk refused the passengers' gazes: unwanted private space never equals public space) in the closed system of communications since WW2, behind all of which lies the clock, the cyclical time Greenwich lays scientific claim to. Yet the passengers experienced time like a déjà vu seance, not some efficient measure of space or rut cycle. The walk would have run the loop dogmatically, infinitely, but its worms turned, the passengers skived off to the boozier early. With all the metaphors of time and labour, they refused to clock in or out, especially not here. They escaped their cycle only after the swarm technique demonstrated its very nature.

This has not been the walk, its passengers, or the swarm. This has been a separate kind of perambulation which refuses to admit how many of its meditations were made in retrospect, whilst acknowledging that no meditation would have been possible without the strategy (passenger, walk, swarm) to unlock it. This perambulation bore no relation to any Greenwich, living or dead.

Please join us for future walks, (watch out for posters) or create one yourself, email [scapescape@hotmail.com](mailto:scapescape@hotmail.com) or [steven.hanson@virgin.net](mailto:steven.hanson@virgin.net)