

New York Drifters: Tehching Hsieh and David Wojnarowicz

The Loiterer

Walk down most streets in New York with a keen enough eye and you'll likely notice a sign instructing you to keep going. No Loitering, it will say, by a storefront or on the railing of a community park. These signs feel somewhat emblematic in a place whose own truisms emphasise its aversion to stasis and indolence – the speed of a New York minute, the city that never sleeps – but they also speak of the law's iron hand in regulating urban spaces. To loiter, they suggest, implies intent, to commit a crime or just to linger. These signs sit within the network of textual or typographical surfaces of any given street, and announce in the accusatory mood that public space is not so public after all, not free to inhabit merely as you please, precipitating a kind of double vision in which a person's behaviour might seem innocuous and suspicious all at once. In a tape journal from an April evening in 1982 the artist David Wojnarowicz recalls a scene, observed just moments before whilst he was 'sat against' a wall 'down on the Lower East Side', which illustrates this vividly:

there were some Puerto Rican kids sitting on a stoop across the street, and there was a woman standing next to a garbage canister like she was trying to figure out which way she wanted to go, and there were cop cars turning toward the precinct. (Wojnarowicz 2018: 57-58)

This observation offers several narrative possibilities. At first glance it might seem a scene simply of people minding their own business; kids playing a game, a woman taking a moment, police officers doing the rounds. Yet even though the joining of these distinct rhythms of bodies 'sitting' or 'standing' and police cars 'turning' and weaving is hardly an uncommon phenomenon in the city, there is still something ominous in their succession here. It is as if the appearance of the cop cars alters the earlier part of the sentence and with it the possible fates of the figures it describes, who are there lingering in a state prior to the police's 'formative' call, appearing 'not to be in a condition of trespass prior to the call', to cite Judith Butler's account of Althusser's notion of 'interpellation' (Butler 1993: 81). The police are the agents of this subjectivation, of the kind that No Loitering signs already initiate graphically and silently, and their arrival refocuses the details Wojnarowicz chooses to mention – the

kids being Puerto Rican, the lone woman's apparent confusion – such that it reads like an act of profiling, a quotidian observation which ventriloquizes the suspicious gaze of the law, looking for signs of a disturbance to the peace. The kids on the stoop and the woman by the garbage could be read, least generously, as delinquents up-to-no-good or as a vagrant about to rummage the trash can for food, or they could be figures of sympathy, signs of dereliction like the 'three little puerto rican kids' Wojnarowicz spots on Avenue A in another essay, 'doomed kids' standing in relief to 'the poverty of the block' (Wojnarowicz 1991: 200). They may even remind him of himself and the 'four days sitting on some stoop' he recalls from being homeless at seventeen (3). They are characters in passing tableaux that could be mischievous or distressing or totally innocent. Loitering in this sense comprises an arena of misapprehensions, where a narrative surplus is attached to behaviours that could *just* be sitting or standing, and the transgression of the social order those behaviours anticipate is imagined.

Had Wojnarowicz paused somewhere else nearby that evening in April 1982, a little further south-west toward NoLiTa, he might have spotted in DeSalvio Park another loiterer with a certain intent. The artist Tehching Hsieh was then living on the streets for his 'Outdoor Piece 1981-1982', a performance work hard to detect as such but well-known in artistic circles. That summer, articles about Hsieh's project appeared in the New York Post and the Wall Street Journal. It has even been given the semi-fictional treatment in Rachel Kushner's 2013 novel The Flamethrowers, whose narrator recalls seeing the character 'Sammy', close to Hsieh's chosen American pseudonym Sam,

in my little park at Mulberry and Spring. He slept there sometimes and I figured he was homeless but he didn't quite look it, this young Asian man with shoulder-length hair. There was something too careful and precise about it ... (Kushner 2013: 59).

This is a different kind of double-take. What is in question is not the fact of the loiter but its authenticity, marked by there being 'something' off. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has suggested that 'dirt' and 'uncleanness' can be conceived of as 'matter out of place', as all 'that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained' (Douglas 2002: 50), and it takes only a minimal leap to see how a rhetoric of

pollution can be deployed to describe the homeless, in their transgression of the city's 'maintained' patterns of being. Edward Koch, the New York Mayor at this time and advocate of 'right to shelter' policies in the 1980s, once described homelessness as if it were an adjunct to pollution itself, and to other social issues that disrupt patterns, writing of the city's obligation 'to dispose of its garbage, to care for AIDS patients, to shelter the homeless' (Koch 1989: 23). There is something telling about the way this list proceeds and what it implies, a mantra of state protection which frames the AIDS epidemic and the housing crisis around the preceding image of 'garbage', suggesting a larger ideological aim of dealing with 'matter out of place' in its numerous forms. Perhaps mayoral campaign statements in city magazines aren't likely to hold up favourably to close reading, but this syntax of association, like Wojnarowicz's simultaneous glance at stationary bodies and moving police cars, neatly embodying their tense co-existence, bespeaks an attitude toward order and placement that is in the air in 1982, informing both Wojnarowicz's writing and Hsieh's foray on the streets. It is present in Kushner's construction too, then, as a paradox; what is 'out of place' about this ostensibly homeless figure in the park is that he seems a bit too in place, 'too careful and precise'. This apprehension is no doubt helped along by a certain retroactive knowledge on the part of the character, who has just been told by one of Sammy's friends that 'He's living outside this year. He doesn't enter any structures.' Learning that Sammy's homelessness is a performance art project serves to re-emphasise the past feeling that something 'didn't look' right, and Kushner's novel seeks to imagine with a certain hindsight what it would have been like to witness furtive and evanescent works like Hsieh's at the time of their occurrence, before they are made conspicuous by art history.

The audience for this work, which is to say the numerous other walkers of the city's streets, were largely unconscious of the fact. Hsieh was not a celebrity and his practice didn't involve the kind of performative excess which might announce that his being on the streets was not out of necessity, but the avowal of a durational performance, the artist's subjection to his own law of not entering an inside of any kind for one year and thus forcing himself to sleep rough on the streets. This moment in The Flamethrowers is an intriguing citation of Hsieh in that it raises the question his practice implicitly asks about how we read others, about whether we

could distinguish homelessness from its performance, and whether loitering in the name of performance is still loitering exactly. That there are ways of looking more or less homeless is something Wojnarowicz remembers from his own days living rough ten years earlier. He recalls procuring meals from a 'bum kitchen down on the lower east side' (whereas Hsieh, being financially capable, allotted money to buy food, often from a hole-in-the-wall at 89 Mulberry Street in neighbouring Chinatown.) The 'workers' at this kitchen, Wojnarowicz writes, were 'friendly to' him and his companion because 'we looked clean compared to the others', when 'really I had dirt scabs behind my ears I hadn't washed in months' (1991: 6). This is not quite the same as the 'careful and precise air' of Hsieh's self-imposed privation, which is characterised more by an uncanny 'something' than a particular sign of hygiene or its absence 'behind' visibility, but taken together these instances are revealing of common expectations that underpin perceptions of homelessness within the theatre of urban reading.

Having loitered with these initial examples, this article will proceed to treat the relation between Wojnarowicz and Hsieh in a manner akin to their movements, navigating the same cityscape several paces apart, perhaps unwittingly passing by one another from time to time. I will suggest an affinity between these two artists, who have so far received no sustained comparison, by attending to their respective acts of drifting, a process of loitering made mobile and peripatetic. By the time Hsieh began his 'Outdoor Piece' in 1981, Wojnarowicz had long been off the streets and was embarking upon his own artistic career, although his visual and written work often refers back to his homeless days. Both artists lived and worked downtown and both exhibited work at the Exit Art gallery on the Lower East Side. They were both relative outsiders, an undocumented immigrant and former rent boy respectively, with little to no formal training or initial links to the city's art world, although recognition would follow later. In bringing these artists together I am not seeking to offer a formal comparison between them; they work in different mediums and pursue different ends. The fact of their historical co-existence, however, as contemporary artists who experienced homelessness and incorporated it into their practice – for Hsieh as the thing itself, and for Wojnarowicz as the frame for later textual and photographic performances – provides an occasion to consider how they both trouble conceptions of inhabiting urban space. Attending more fully to the

case of 1980s New York however, and to the provocations of Wojnarowicz and Hsieh's work, will first involve a detour elsewhere, to the legacy of an earlier period in an altogether different city.

The Flâneur, The Dérive

Several recent texts by Kenneth Goldsmith and David Kishik attest, in imaginatively adapting and rewriting Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project, to the predominance of nineteenth-century Paris as a lens through which to see twentieth-century New York. The ubiquity of Paris as a conceptual blueprint in accounts of 'the city' writ large is indeed such that it might seem impossible – or just unscholarly – to turn a corner without encountering the ghosts of Baudelaire and Benjamin. Loitering and drifting are tropes with an extensive family history, the remit of various figures across time and culture, from the agoraios of the Ancient Greek marketplace to Benjamin's Parisian repertoire, incorporating such personages as the prostitute, the gambler, the sandwich-man and, of course, the flâneur. Benjamin supposed that these latter two figures were not so dissimilar, that the 'sandwichman', the human billboard sandwiched between boards advertising public events in 1930s Paris and closely associated with homelessness, is the 'last incarnation of the flâneur' (Benjamin 1999: 451). This statement is consonant with the flâneur's status as a figure without a continuous history, a dream-image ready for remaking in other historical moments, yet the dexterity it suggests also obscures the matter of lived realities. Susan Buck-Morss describes Benjamin's gesture as a wishful form of 'sympathy' for the poor, and the 'solidarity' which arises from this 'empathic identity (Einfühlung)' is a 'purely mental event', offering no way to meaningfully make these figures 'become one under its sign' (Buck-Morss 1986: 110-11). Any such unity would no doubt be illusory and unevenly distributed: how could the sandwich-man, who sleeps under the bridges of the Seine, enjoy the same spoils as the 'flâneur of a hundred years earlier ... with his dandy-like appearance', a figure who 'looked back to an era when leisure was a way of life'? (Buck-Morss 1986: 109).

This conceptual snag has consequences for the verbs we assign to urban types, and the flâneur loafs rather than loiters, or loiters at leisure without bearing the brunt of its reality. This is evident too in Benjamin's description of the 'intoxication' that strikes one who

walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts – until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air. (Benjamin 1999: 417)

This passage suggests a delicate tipping point between flânerie and precarity. Its sense of exhilaration reads uncomfortably, linguistically fixated upon associations of homelessness – ‘hunger’, ‘animal[ism]’, fatigue – whilst also discarding them as mere inconveniences in the quest of attending to the ‘magnetism’ of the city’s topography. Renouncing satiation is here cast as a form of rigour, recalling Benjamin’s suggestion elsewhere in the *Arcades Project* that homelessness is an important way of knowing the city better, for ‘what do we know of streetcorners’ if ‘we have never felt heat, filth and the edges of stones beneath our naked soles’, if we have never scrutinised the ‘paving stones with an eye toward bedding down on them’ (Benjamin 1999: 517). Conferring the homeless with a special form of urban knowledge may be a form of Einfühlung that seeks to acknowledge our own complacency, signalled by this strange ‘we’ that calls upon ‘we’ the bourgeois readers, but it similarly makes a thrill or a virtue, as in the flâneur’s wild aimless walk, of a state of being as much about survival as it is curiosity. Benjamin’s urban subject wanders, and in so doing wonders at the fruits of aimlessness, of being absorbed in the city’s landscape, but the parameters of such an expedition are clearly marked by an ultimate destination, ‘his room’. The homeless have no such surety of an interior; instead, they are themselves received ‘strange[ly]’, forced to wear cold ‘air’, destined not to wander but drift.

In this regard Benjamin’s account of the flâneur gone wild anticipates the later development of psycho-geographic thought that has hardly been less influential in the canon of urban walks. Guy Debord’s 1956 ‘Theory of the Dérive’ lays out a movement through the city that is not unlike this instance in Benjamin: ‘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' (Debord 2006). In the dérive the inconvenient 'need for sleep', like the appetite of Benjamin's walker, is held off for as long as possible and can yield athletic feats, like 'certain dérives of sufficient intensity' being 'sustained for three or four days' or even 'pursued without notable interruption for around two months' (Debord 2006). The register of Debord's document is systematic, delineating 'persons during a certain period'. Whilst it remains silent and thus general about the nature of those 'persons', the continual use of the word 'certain' ('certaine' in the French) is revealing, for it suggests that the dérive is by design distinguished from a life that exists outside of it, as opposed to other 'persons' for whom drifting is the everyday. Yet however consuming a 'two month' dérive may be, its temporality is profoundly different to that of, say, Wojnarowicz's two years spent living on the streets, or even Hsieh's performance, which is similarly formal in its delineation of a 'certain' period but pushes it to its limits, claiming the totality of a calendar year as a measurement of experience. These artists works' expose the dérive at its extreme, its potential to become at its limit a form of homelessness, no longer a psycho-geographical exercise but a state of privation. Putting the notion of the dérive as formalised practice under the pressure of Hsieh and Wojnarowicz's drifts through New York illuminates a theatrical spectrum in which the figures of leisure who occupy one end of it, those urban explorers par excellence, cut from the Parisian mold, are free to try on or try out the trappings and sensations of aimlessness for purely psycho-geographic ends, protected by the certainty of a domestic return.

Take, for instance, Wojnarowicz's account of a twilight walk that under one aspect reads like an amped-up dérive:

Some nights we'd walk seven or eight hundred blocks practically the whole island of manhattan crisscrossing east and west north and south each on opposite sides of the streets picking up every wino bottle we found and throwing it ten feet into the air so it crash exploded a couple of inches away from the other's feet – on nights that called for it every pane of glass in every phone booth from here to south street would dissolve in a shower of light. We slept good after a night of this in some abandoned car boiler room rooftop or lonely drag queen's palace. (Wojnarowicz 1991: 5).

This walk fulfils several of Debord's conditions, firstly that the most fruitful urban explorations happen in 'small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness' (Debord 2006). Wojnarowicz and his companion are on the 'same level' to an almost antagonistic level, their spatial awareness of the street and of one another such that their bottle-throwing results in explosions methodically landing 'a couple of inches away from the other's feet.' Similarly, Wojnarowicz's walk does not keep to the parameters of the 'solar day', though it works against Debord's warning that 'the last hours of the night are generally unsuitable' (Debord 2006), for he and his companion light the way using the 'shower of light' of smashed-in phone booths, destructive acts which suggest a radically different mood to the generative activity of psycho-geography. The city itself presents caveats for Debord's model, too; as David Kishik writes, Manhattan's 'gridiron street plan' makes 'it much harder to get truly lost there' (Kishik 2015: 183), and Wojnarowicz's drift is indeed conditioned less by the contingent psychological cues of the dérive than the city's inescapable network of 'crisscrossing east and west north and south'. A walk which gains its momentum from 'being receptive to whatever reaches your senses', Kishik writes, 'is a somewhat privileged experience', and depends often on having a 'place where we can crash at the end of our meanderings' (Kishik 2015: 183). On the surface Wojnarowicz's walk, a repeated occurrence, tends to end up this way, stopping in the precarious 'abandoned' or 'lonely' setting ironically dubbed palatial. Yet unlike a dérive, which makes an enemy of sleep as the necessity that brings about the walk's cessation, Wojnarowicz's drift nights seem a way of accessing 'good' sleep, of releasing rage and exhausting the body such that it can rest somewhere, unlike the 'four-and-a-half-day torture of little or no sleep' which he narrates at the beginning of the piece (Wojnarowicz 1991: 3).

The purpose of reading this instance in 'Self Portrait' against the grain, as a form of dérive, is less to suggest a failed or incomplete relation between Wojnarowicz and Debord than it is to witness how possible correspondences between them reveal what the dérive, in contrast with drifting while homeless, takes as given. Its point of origin is both the set of assumptions it makes and the literal point from which it departs, either the 'residence of a solo dériveur or the meeting place selected by a group', comprised of people who presumably travel to that place from their own respective residences (Debord 2006). But what if there is no

residence? The deictics of Wojnarowicz's prose are uncertain; the delineation of 'here to south street' is ultimately meaningless in so far as there is no tangible 'here' given as a point of reference, and thus of origin. The very notion of residence is improvised and precarious, and this is what makes 'the homeless person', Kishik continues, echoing Benjamin, the 'true inhabitant' of New York, the 'city that lacks insidedness, even if his testimony is rarely heard' (Kishik 2015: 183). Using the written word and the camera, Wojnarowicz and Hsieh offer a corrective to this erasure, putting forth the little-heard testimony of an urban subject who is nonetheless oft-seen; one who, unlike the flâneur or the practitioner of the dérive, appears to have no such easy access to cultural or material 'insidedness.'

The Drifter

Wojnarowicz's 'Self Portrait in Twenty-Three Rounds', as its title suggests, is one example of such a testimony. It serves a documentary function as an autobiographical work that narrates the experience of homelessness, but in turn frames such narration explicitly as a work of self-portraiture. 'So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze' the first sentence reads, equal parts impressionistic and aggressive, framing this prose portrait with an irreverent and contingent picture of becoming – 'Conception's just a shot in the dark', it later reads – that traces the precarity of vagrancy back to a beginning (Wojnarowicz 1991: 3). As an extended attempt to leave a trace Wojnarowicz makes a style out of destruction and aimlessness, proceeding through different tableaux without a logic of succession, and the piece unfolds via extended and unwieldy sentences. Punctuation is as sporadic as the violent ways in which he punctuates his night-time drifts, smashing panes of glass whenever it 'called for it.' These gestures of rage are a way of writing oneself out of disappearance, leaving a physical trace of drifts by leaving debris on the street that is then re-constituted in the act of recollection years later as an artist casting a backward glance.

Yet one of the attendant dangers of drifting, too, is the risk of being overly visible. Hsieh's performance of homelessness is shaped by this possibility, its performer an illegal immigrant who risks exposure to the law at every turn. Part of the

predicament of being undocumented is to remain untraceable, and this is mirrored by the work itself. 'What does he make?', Kushner's narrator asks on first hearing about the artist Sammy. 'Nothing', Sammy's friend replies, 'He makes nothing. He's living outside this year' (Kushner 2013: 58-59). As is often the case with performance art, the question of what 'makes' or constitutes the work itself as art object is vexed by the fact that, as Peggy Phelan writes, 'Performance's only life is in the present'; once it 'participate[s]' in 'the circulation of representations of representations' it becomes 'something other', for this is a form that 'becomes itself through disappearance' (Phelan 1996: 147). All that is left of 'Outdoor Piece' are traces, comprised of photographs Hsieh took of himself in various seasons and in numerous states of array, sometimes with his hair grown out, other times more 'careful and precise'; a video documentary which captures episodes of his drifting through the city, as well as maps that Hsieh used daily to graphically trace his walks, marking places he stopped to eat, sleep and defecate.

The map, Hsieh's curator Adrian Heathfield writes, is a 'bio-graphology: a faint trace of a bare life' (Heathfield et al. 2015: 45), recalling Michel de Certeau's claim that the 'thick or thin curves' of a walk's transcription on a map 'only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by' (Certeau 1984: 97). Certeau addresses this failure in representation by considering 'walking as a space of enunciation' (98) that has echoes of the dérive, the 'long poem of walking' that 'manipulates spatial organizations' (101). Written in to this account of urban walking, enunciatory where the trace is inscriptive, is a relation to virtuosity and thus to artistry, transposable to the 'relationships between the "hand" ... and the finished painting' (98). This conception of the walker's 'appropriation of the topographical system' (97) bespeaks an agency that will thus always lead back to the expression of the subject, constructing a path uniquely theirs even within the busy semiotic network of spatial practices, one drawn by their own 'hand'. For Debord there are several kinds of drawing involved: the 'lessons drawn from dérives enable us to draw up the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city', to 'draw up hitherto lacking maps' (Debord 2006) transforming the drift into a form of work that yields a newly shareable knowledge.

Hsieh's maps, on the other hand, are testament only to a 'bare life' made legible by the interludes of corporeal needs. It is a matter of survival, of performance in its barest form as the simple execution of human functions. Nonetheless as an artwork Hsieh's drifting is of course a form of creative production and a way of knowing or articulating the city, but is difficult to recognise as such because it is, at least at the moment of its iteration, excluded from the 'inside' of cultural recognition, the interior spaces of galleries or publishing houses. This lack of visibility at the same time allows Hsieh to evade legal scrutiny, which demands a different kind of testimony from an undocumented immigrant, that of the courtroom. 'Outdoor Piece' involves a complex negotiation of testimony and subjecthood, inviting contemplation of what it is to have a home. Frazer Ward locates in Hsieh's performance an unwillingness to yield to the 'dominant tendency in the literature on performance art', which foregrounds a 'focus on subjectivity' that would invite such questions as 'what was Hsieh like? What kind of person would put himself through such things?' (Ward 2012: 134). Hsieh's position with regard to personhood is vexed in so far as the 'illegal alien has a curious status as subject because he or she is so often unable either to be represented or to represent him or herself, as such (because illegal aliens as a group are necessarily officially invisible)' (136). The illegal alien navigates the public sphere as a stranger, lacking documentation and thus the 'attributes available for identification', instead assigned 'only what we might see as secret attributes (illegality, alienation, marginality, otherness)' (146) which are nonetheless still vulnerable to exposure, as when Hsieh was brought to the attention of the police in the street during an altercation with a homeless man. He was forced into detention for fifteen hours, involuntarily breaking the pact of the work, but was later released, and the judge allowed him to stay outside the court for the reason that it put his artwork in jeopardy. His illegal status went unnoticed.

Hsieh occupies, in this sense, an 'excessive position' in relation to his 'own flaunted illegality', so his self-imposed 'privation must then 'also be seen as a paradoxical exercise of a privilege, suggesting the 'hauteur of the dandy rather than the existential grind of the stoic' (Ward 2012: 140). Yet dandies don't live outside for entire years, and 'Outdoor Piece' is far from an overtly theatrical work. This is not to say that it isn't an act of personation, performing the quotidian

realities of the marginalised with recourse to Hsieh's own affinities, in his own words, 'with those who live at the bottom of society' (Heathfield et al. 2015: 326), taking on a 'careful and precise' character. 'Outdoor Piece' is the first of Hsieh's performances where he uses his real name rather than 'Sam' as if, in discovering 'that no one (least of all immigration enforcement) came looking for him', he 'liberated himself from the fear of discovery' and 'regained his true name' (Chambers-Letson 2017: 41), a social becoming through disappearance. The relationship between drifting and citizenship, by its nature antagonistic, is easily made romantic in a manner somewhat written in to the American tradition, dating back to the naturalist discourses of Thoreau's Walden, for example, and the figure of the 'drifter' as outsider bears a certain relation to cool. Jean-Michael Basquiat, another artistic lightning rod for 1980s New York, writes in a rough notebook scrap that when 'I feel like a citizen it's time to go and come back a drifter' (Basquiat 2015), speaking to the fantasy of escape offered by the figure of the drifter, who travels to an indeterminate elsewhere to reach true alterity. But this journey, as Hsieh and Wojnarowicz's work shows, can happen within the city itself – you don't have to leave the polis to disappear.

Where Hsieh's drifter is positioned on the threshold of visibility, without access to normative citizenship in the first place, Wojnarowicz reworks his experience of homelessness into images of the drifter as cruiser and vagabond par excellence. Arthur Rimbaud in New York, which Wojnarowicz shot in 1978-1979, features the artist's friends as models sporting a mask of Arthur Rimbaud's face in various New York scenes, from a seedy strip of West 42nd Street to a deserted Coney Island. Rimbaud is transplanted from history as a surrogate for Wojnarowicz's own teen years on the streets, his iconic youth and renegade spirit shaping an aestheticised self-portrait of the artist as a young man. Originally conceived as a photo montage, the series travels between locales in a manner consonant with the drift, moving from cafes to movie theatres and the waterfront piers where Wojnarowicz cruised, ending ultimately with Rimbaud's overdose. This photographic project participates in a degree of self-mythologizing, making its authors' own experience of homelessness into a form of art practice; as such, it does not perform a drift 'away' from citizenship. Instead, the marginal figure of the drifter becomes another kind of citizen, elusive and allusive, recuperated from total disappearance with a certain

theatrical flourish. Wojnarowicz's reworking of Rimbaud speaks to the drift's role as a narrative instrument, a figure for lawlessness and the romance of being lost in, or to, the city. Yet to be lost presumes that somewhere you are found, are seen, are recognised. The drift as it emerges from Benjamin and Debord abstracts the noun from the participle, framing it as a discrete practice which re-writes the city, an extension of its practitioners' 'anarchic' lifestyle' (Debord 2006). This is not to disavow the dérive, but rather to demonstrate what it misses, making an episodic structure out of a condition that for many is a life sentence, a continued drift between invisibility and exposure. The suspended teleology of drifting spotlights the fissure running down the middle of the very notion of the performance; on the one hand it is approximation, imitation, with a beginning and end; on the other, the doing itself.

The life of the drift is also contingent upon the historical instability of city spaces, and New York is not only different from Paris but from itself, the site of ongoing gentrification and divergent political epochs. As an example DeSalvio Park on Mulberry and Spring, where Kushner's narrator spotted Hsieh asleep, is currently under long-awaited reconstruction, flanked by a new luxury development. The city's changing faces in turn raise questions about ways that drifting, as an occasion for artworks, might be preserved. Just as the matter of re-housing the homeless has been a contentious issue throughout New York's various history, with policy 'much changed' under Giuliani from 'what it had been in the eighties and early nineties', moving in a 'paternalistic direction' (Main 2016: 6), is there not also an ambivalence about the ways that artworks which narrate or perform the lack of a home come to find domicile? This is mappable in terms of the cultural 'inside' of the exhibition space and the ways it might domesticate a work. The first exhibition of Hsieh's 'Outdoor Piece' took place at the non-profit art space Franklin Furnace in Tribeca in 1983, and was curated by Jeanette Ingberman, co-founder of the Exit Art gallery; an exhibition proposal suggests that 'Ideally, Hsieh would like to end' the piece 'by opening the exhibition on the last day of his performance. His first act of going inside would be like re-entering the womb after a year's absence' (Exit Art: undated). This metaphorical return echoes Hsieh's own view, as communicated in an interview with Ingberman and Papo Colo, that being 'outdoors' is 'my symbol' for the world 'outside' the womb, turning upon the notion

of exhibition as a re-housing, the return to an existential centre whose lack was central to the piece itself (Ingberman 1981-82).

Although this did not come to fruition – the exhibition took place in the year after the performance’s end – it also speaks to the particularity of spatial contexts as narrative frames for the work itself. It is hard to ignore, for example, the fact that Hsieh’s retrospective for the Taiwan Pavillion at the 2017 Venice Biennale was held in Palazzo delle Prigioni, a seventeenth-century prison building attached to the city’s majestic Palazzo Ducale. The exhibition’s title? ‘Doing Time’. Similarly, the 2018 Wojnarowicz retrospective ‘History Keeps Me Awake at Night’ at the Whitney was hung in the gallery’s new building on Gansevoort Street, overlooking the Hudson River piers where Wojnarowicz had cruised among the secret community of gay men and vagrants lingering there awake at night, piers that have since been demolished or refurbished to more savoury ends. To observe the tensions or affinities between institutional spaces and the provocations of the works they house offers an analogy for thinking through the difficult relation between drifting and homelessness that is presented by Hsieh and Wojnarowicz. Just as spaces can sit in tense relation with previous occupants and difficult histories, not to mention the social contexts of the surroundings beyond their thresholds, so must criticism bear witness to the experiences that the givens of ‘walking’ and ‘drifting’ are haunted by. To construct a ‘theory’ or an aesthetics of the drift can be to all too easily ignore the privileges which make its delimitation possible, a form of motion that is haunted at its edges by an extreme, and by those with little choice but to keep walking.

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