

[View this email in your browser](#)



### Way to Walk

EERC Newsletter

May 2020

Green Diversions

Dr. Jason Frederick Lambacher

Full Time Lecturer, Environmental and Global Studies, UWB

Teacher of a Discovery Core class called, The Art & Politics of Walking

### A Green Dérive

“When we are not sure, we are alive.” – Graham Greene

Dérive: A mode of experimental behavior... a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. – Guy Debord

The birdsong is loud and strong. Low tide on a boat-less Puget Sound emits a funky scent of briny sea and muddy beach wafting up the cliffs of Carkeek Park.

A hidden seal barks from a distance. Mingling with the early morning dappled sunshine in the verdant forest, the walk awakens the body-mind to new experiences of the senses, yet again.

I have been walking and running every morning as a way to calm and cope with the strange world of the pandemic. I have long had this morning habit, but in this time, under these circumstances, morning walks and runs have taken on a vibrant urgency. As the rhythms of life have been shocked into unfamiliar patterns – Camus writes that plagues “always take us by surprise” – the daily constancy of the morning walk gives steadiness to the day. And with it, a strengthened capacity to surf the waves crashing in with a little more equanimity and focus.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I noticed that was unconsciously changing my walking and running routines. Sometimes it was a subtle derivation from normal. A jaunt down a path never taken before. A

a deviation from the ordinary. Other times it was more conscious. A desire to strike out some place entirely different. A new direction from home. The pull of an unfamiliar neighborhood. A visit to a part of town or a park that, shockingly, I had never been to before, even though I had lived nearby for years. How well do we really know the place we live in?

I realized that challenging myself to break from walking routines in ways small and large is a method to build resilience in a time of rupture. Walking unfamiliar paths was giving me something important, a liveliness to match the turbulence of worlds turned upside down. Micro-explorations of nearby neighborhoods and parks challenged my attention to the here and now, to a body moving through space, a mind needing imaginative spark, a psyche in need of tranquility. Creating new cartographies on maps nearby home was nourishing on multiple levels.

In the mid-20th century, the philosopher Guy Debord wrote about psychogeography. A mix of psychology and geography, or the dynamic blending of mind and space, psychogeography, as defined by Debord, is the “study of the precise laws and specific effects of the... environment on the emotions and behavior of individuals.” Psychogeographers developed a host of ways to explore urban and pastoral environments. One technique in the toolbox is the *dérive*, an unplanned walk through a place. Debord conceived of the *dérive* for innovative experiences of the urban environment. We can extend the technique with attentiveness to natural elements of our local environment – a green *dérive*. Following aesthetic and emotional cues of attraction and repulsion during a walk, one can have creative and fresh sensations of place and self, however subtle the experience. Spontaneity and openness in this unplanned trek is key. Novelty challenges our attention. Receptivity to the landscape – both self-willed and manicured – propels the journey.

Nature is always captivating and the more we attend to, the more we see, hear, and feel. Yeats writes that, “The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.” We should heed the request to sharpen our powers of perception. To take the unfamiliar path. To linger to with something we’ve not really experienced before. A green *dérive* can invigorate the body-mind’s engagement with the natural world, right outside our door, anytime.

It’s easy for our attention to be frayed these days. The pandemic creates moods of stress and fear, tones that are magnified as we spend more time indoors, especially with technology. Drawing on William James’ work on attention, Stephen Kaplan advocates Attention Restoration Therapy (ART) for the anxious and uneasy. Drawing on research that shows how saturation in technology, in front of screens on yet another Zoom meeting, leads to mental fatigue and the erosion of wide-spectrum attention. In contrast, walking outdoors in a natural setting is restorative to attention, which is why nature walks are an important component of ART. Recent research on *shinrin-yoku* (“forest bathing” in Japanese) confirms these salutary effects. Measurable drops in cortisol “stress hormones” can be seen in as little as 10-15 minutes of walking in a forest. Anxieties can be processed, put in context, or forgotten

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼[RSS](#)

Tuning into the world right outside one's house encourages fascination with the quotidian. How come I never noticed that \_\_\_ before? And astonishment with the grand. How is it that the autopoiesis of nature persists – even flourishes – in a time when we are all worried about suffering and death?

Keats wrote about negative capabilities – developing capacities to live in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without reaching for facts and reasons.

We are all being forced to develop such inner resources during this pandemic. Walking, with its deep breathing and uniting of lungs and legs, helps in a deep way by providing calm equilibrium. Walking each day and helps us to find solace in uncertainty. Fresh discoveries enliven our senses and help us feel more comfortable with the unknown. Every walk replenishes, nourishes the contemplative mind, and puts anxiety in context.

We can add new leaves to our branches in this time of the pandemic by walking different paths. Even if we walk the same path every day, there is always something new to notice. But we can change up routes and routines with spontaneity and creativity. Create your own maps to sharpen attention to the world around you. Set forth on a green *dérive*. Better know the places and spaces where we live as we shelter at home. Escape confinement, embrace ambiguity, and welcome in the rejuvenating energy of spring. It is still happening, no matter what.



---

*Copyright © 2020 St Edward State Park Environmental Education and Research Center, All rights reserved.*

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

