Nyctoleptic Nomadism: The Drift/Swerve Of Knowing

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This piece, included in the *drift* special issue of *continent*, was created as one step in a thread of inquiry. While each of the contributions to *drift* stand on their own, the project was an attempt to follow a line of theoretical inquiry as it passed through time and the postal service(s) from October 2012 until May 2013.

This issue hosts two threads: *between space & place* and *between intention & attention*. The editors recommend that to experience the drifting thought that attention is paid to the contributions as they entered into conversation one after another. This particular piece is from the *BETWEEN INTENTION & ATTENTION* thread:

Jeremy Fernando, *Sitting in the dock of the bay, watching...* * R.H. Jackson, *Reading Eyes* * Gina Rae Foster, *Nyctoleptic Nomadism: The Drift/Swerve of Knowing* * Bronwyn Lay, *Driftwood* * Patricia Reed, *Sentences on Drifting* * David Prater, *drift: a way*
“Child society frequently utilizes turnings, spinning around, disequilibrium. It looks for sensations of vertigo and disorder as sources of pleasure.” [1]

“To look at what you wouldn’t look at, to hear what you wouldn’t listen to, to be attentive to the banal, to the ordinary, to the infra-ordinary….” [2]

“What is audible relies on mobility…” [3]

Jeremy Fernando and R. Hamlin Jackson have written of drift as dream, as opposed to and embracing the clinamen, have written of the swerve, sleep, love, and knowledge as acts/positions of attention and intention. Paul Virilio and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have exposed perception and lapse, the supposition and surprise of what is not seen yet believed to have presence, and I have retraced Deleuzian/Ettingerian containments and frictions, their wanderings and co-emergences: in the echolocation of dreams, dreams enact themselves as nomads, and picnoleptic interruptions highlight attention unaware yet aware of itself as something other than intention, something other than presence, and a non-ontological sense of becoming shudders at the edge of sight/hearing/texture/tongue. [4] However, drift and swerve, dream and attention have been lived far differently by peoples whose selves are not constructed and individuated but rather imagined and webbed within an ever-present sense of being absent, being inattentive to the real. For Australian aborigines, “every person essentially exists eternally in the Dreaming,” an attentive intentionality that drifts, swerves, and collides, on batwings, through oceans of air and earth, with the musings of Western theorists, for whom dreaming exists finitely in the person. [5]
Drifting is partially nomadic in expression, a sense of homelessness and indirection that nonetheless carries the familiarity of knowing paths and landmarks one has traveled before, of knowing the intentions of finding shelter and food and connection at regular intervals. There is an expectation to drifting of destinations (plural), an island life in which stability exists within fluidity. And these characteristics may be selectively understood as aboriginal cultures understand Dreaming, as lives embedded and floating in an altered consciousness from which one does not wake while aware of being in-dreamed. There is a constant and deliberate inattention to what is absent that is occasionally interrupted by echoes of the non-dream, interventions by the dreamers outside the dream. Those who live in the Dreamtime listen and glide like bats around obstructions, drawn towards nourishment and secure yet temporary resting places.

Similarly, in "The Primacy of Perception," Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes of perception as extending beyond the immediately visible to the invisibility of what is assumed to continue the shape and texture of the partial present to an entire object that matches the concept of what the object should be, that is hinted at by the fragment perceived. In perception, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the visible (that which can be measured in terms of the visual response to its temporo-spatial location), the invisible (that which cannot be measured yet is assumed to be temporo-spatially located and thus present without a presence being available as scientific evidence), and the indivisible (that which cannot be divided, subcategorized, or separated without the loss of its identity) are recurrent and entwined. [6]

However, in contrast to the dreamy flotation suggested above, [7] Virilio posits in "The Aesthetics of Disappearance" that a frequency of interruption is key to understanding perception, a "picnolepsy" informed by the study of epileptic seizures. While the latter are surprising and relatively unexpected, the former are frequent and part of human experience rather than human malady. Catalepsy, a third form of temporo-spatial lapse, might also be characterized as possession, an interruption that does not offer release or
promise of return. Lapses, perhaps (more swerves), indicate a freedom in discontinuity that reveals intention as a lack of intention, and attention as continued return to an awareness of fragmentation rather than coherence. This is another experience of dream and one certainly of echolocation: sound and surface in wave resonance and interference, the interference calling itself to attention, the resonance to intention.

Dream and picnolepsy, perhaps one might suggest a nyctolepsy? The lapses of intentional immersion in dreams become attentive breaks in the catalectic possession of goals and consciousness. What is perceived is perceived through recurrent interruptions without perhaps awareness of the gaps between interruptions. One's attention persists because the object or subject of perception is continually brought forth into presence, in this case, a visual clamor for the focus of sight. Like Virilio's spinning child, the perceiver is more reliant on "vertigo and disorder as sources of pleasure" than on a stability of relative position to what is perceived. It is this instability that maintains the interest of the perception; this instability expects both the reappearance and the disappearance of what it has been perceiving, and the unheimlichkeit of this engagement/disengagement trembles the visible into visibility, the dream to Dreamtime, the nomad to drift.

And yet, attention rather than intention remains dulled to itself because of the expectations of its durability. One expects the interruptions between coherent experiences to silence and conceal themselves just as one anticipates the limitations of peripheral vision. This expectation carries with it a perception of the imperceptible: what is behind or beyond the wave-swerve of sound is still assumed to exist through the evidence of other perceiving senses and others' perceiving senses.

In drift and dream, extended interruptions become extended, uninvited yet inevitable attentions. Virilio writes of the sudden surprise of an epileptic seizure: the seizure begins
without expectation and ends without signaling the time or location of its disappearance. He terms this as “a certain automation”… “with the irregularity of the epileptic space, defined by surprise and an unpredictable variation of frequencies, it is no longer a matter of tension or attention, but of suspension pure and simple as departure from duration.” [8]

Proximity might then be considered as an expectation of duration (and proximity of sound as rhythm), while/but the experience of proximity would be interruption, picnoleptic (rhythm shattered, elongated, and stopped). Attention related to intention, then, attention dreaming through intention, would be a supposed elasticity and staccato within sustained phrasing rather than a fixed adhesion and slurring. To drift is neither gentle nor contiguous; it is an awareness of succumbing to potential violence and disintegration, to the not-being that the swerve of intention tries desperately to resist.

**Notes**


[2] Ibid, 77


[4] Ibid.


[8] Ibid, 67