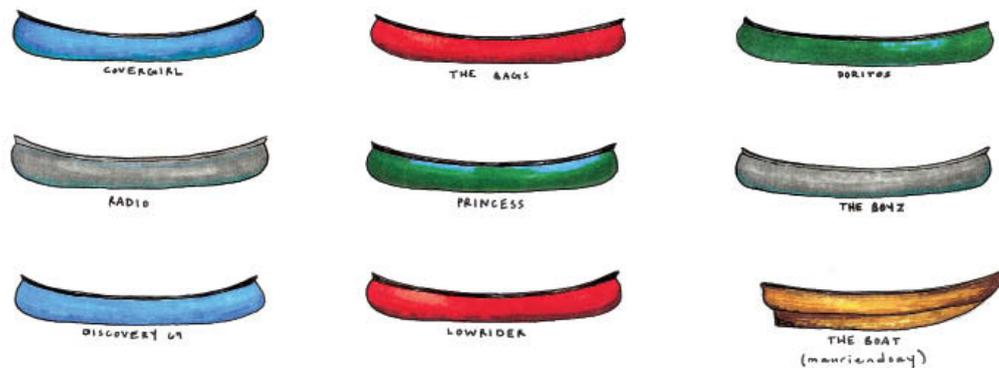


The Drift

Christopher Meerdo (A '13)

and then we named all the boats



Aimlessness is a quality that has profound aspects of civil disobedience when theorized within the correct framework: as a technique for an anti-dominant ideological critique through the means of the *Dérive*. Within Debord's framework of prompting us as social revolutionaries to remap our monotonous environments within a psychogeographic context, we can create multiple modes of experimentation, play, and co-optation through his basic framework. This summer, I and 24 others from Skowhegan descended upon the Kennebec River with this prompt in mind. In the small hours of the morning, bound by new friendships and matching pink watershoes from Walmart, we launched ourselves into the dense fog of the morning mist. With Marie Lorenz at the helm, our *Dérive* brought us to islands, inlets, rapids, embankments, hydroelectric dams, socioeconomically challenged pizza parlors, the rubble of post-industrial logging bridges, and an '80s metal cover band concert. Along the way we floated in tandem, alone, backwards, euphoric, constipated, weary, and above all, with enthusiasm and anticipation for our Drift.

As individual makers, our response to the expedition varied: a collaborative drawing tossed into the river in a bottle as a time capsule, accordion shaped drawing pads with reflexive graphite drawings, a tribute song to the Kennebec, a collection of river articles and other ephemera, the contact-microphone recordings of an oar, a rock splash, and an **archive** of photos and videos.

Jordyn Oetken, *Fleet (The Naming)* (2013), markers from Skowhegan break room on paper

One thing held these different projects together: the immediacy of responding to notions of atmospheres and the aimlessness that prompted them. We can consider these ruptures of passage as ways of pointing, of observing, of catching and releasing. Each bald eagle we passed caused a chorus of participants shouting "Rald Reago!" – a portmanteau of "Bald Eagle" and "Rodrigo" – a fellow participant (who is also lovingly commemorated on the year's group t-shirt). Inside jokes abound, but in these moments of pointing, we can reconfigure epistemological cartographic systems into a psychogeographic reformulation of memory and joy.

Later in the summer, I produced a television show in collaboration with Lindsay Lawson that aired on the local public access channel and was viewed by the school at the Southside Tavern in town. In the episode, *Wesserunsett*, the visible TV crew and our tour guide fellow participant Daniel Petraitis embark on a *Dérive* of our own, wandering the grounds of Skowhegan and pointing out objects and spaces, providing misleading and false information about the school. In the piece we address the tightly controlled myth of Skowhegan but also position ourselves as full participants in the reaffirming of that mythology. The film includes a concluding section of 3D scanned Skowhegan environments that produce a digital/mediated/simulacra *Dérive* that considers more the act of pointing and observation within a psychogeographic space. Through technological simulation, we consider the role of the contemporary *Dériveur*. Can Debord's prompt be activated through virtual means when those same modes of virtualization are responsible for the rigidity and predictability of our contemporary environments? I think perhaps I should have been live tweeting from my canoe.

In *Theory of the Dérive*, Debord reasserts an old Marxist theorem "men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves." Anthropocentrism aside, *The Drift* and *Wesserunsett* occupy different psychogeographical spaces. Both consider contrasting modes of moving through atmospheres and the resulting documentation, but the two raise the same question that lies at the heart of the methodology of the *Dérive*: what does the act of pointing tell us about ourselves and the way we operate within the dominant frameworks that Debord impels us to explore? XO



And then we went home

Daniel Giles, *Souvenir (The End)* (2013), inkjet print and pencil on paper

The Drift: Day One

Marie Lorenz (A '04, F '13)

The Drift was a boat excursion down the Kennebec River in Maine, undertaken by me and a group of 25 participants. Our mission was to get as far as we could from Skowhegan to the ocean in two days, to explore, and to treat the river as though it was a wilderness.

WITH:

Samantha Adler de Oliveira
Luis Alonzo
Trevor Amery
Prerna Bishnoi
John Dombroski
Anastasia Douka
Zachary Fabri
Mauro Giaconi
Daniel Giles
Joshua Haycraft
Shana Hoehn
Mira Hunter
Kristian Blomstroem Johansson
Nicholas Johnston
Lindsay Lawson
Christopher Meerdo
Harold Mendez
Joiri Minaya
Michaela Murphy
Jordyn Oetken
Omar Rodriguez Graham
Erik Swanson
Seneca Weintraut
May Wilson
Lindsay Zappas



July 30, 2013

We left camp on an incredibly foggy morning. As the boats pulled away from the bank, they seemed to disappear.



We got to know the boats and each other, and we watched familiar landmarks roll by as if on film.



We knew there might be some walking, but the difficulty surpassed my predictions. We had to walk around two dams—a two-mile trek with nine boats and hundreds of pounds of gear.



Below Waterville, we saw signs of bridges and dams that had been removed in the 1960's. From here on, the water flowed freely all the way to the ocean.



We pulled the boats up on a tiny island in the river. We hadn't come as far as I had thought we would that day, but I tried to put that out of my mind. It was, after all, a 'Dérive', and the crew seemed happy with our home for the night.

The Drift: Day Two

Marie Lorenz (A '04, F '13)



July 31, 2013

This is the tent that May built. She used driftwood and paddles as tent poles, and it slept six people comfortably.



When the sun rose the next morning, the island was strewn with color; canoes, tarps, backpacks, and campers; all waking up from a sound sleep.



Our mission the second day was to go slower and explore. Some of the boats grouped together in a formation known as 'canoodling'. It was a good day for taking it easy.



This was the stretch of river that I had been waiting for; a strangely inaccessible green belt, situated between Interstate 95 and highway 201. As far as our eyes were concerned, we were paddling through the wilderness, but if you listened carefully, you could hear the interstate rumbling in the distance. This is my favorite kind of travel; parallel to civilization but invisible.



We finished our trip in Augusta and were met by a crew of vans and drivers dispatched from camp. We performed a song that Luis composed for the occasion. "The Kennebec is like an angry wife..." it began.