

## Re-Imagining Boston

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### *Project Description*

We began with an interest in mapping South Station as a nexus point in the Boston metropolitan region, and pursued the idea of data collection. However, we felt that the project needed to engage with the actual space and create personal interactions. We therefore shifted from our original focus of information gathering and statistical mapping to using the act of survey to engage in Debord's *dérive*.

In our first stage of the *dérive*, we asked participants to identify their favorite place in Boston and elicited personal information. We hoped to have people map how to get from one place to the next, so that we could follow their instructions and continue the survey process at the next location. We also hoped that it would provide us with a form of trace, or record, for a map. We also wanted to see if we would push boundaries by asking for participant's cell phone numbers in case we got lost. Finally, in an attempt to provide connection between people being interviewed, we asked the person what they would like to know of the second and would contact them if they wished.

We found that the participants willingly gave personal information, but the map generating procedure was unsuccessful. The best elements of the *dérive* were generated by the participant providing a question for then next interview and the photographic documentation of the *dérive*.

The basic methodology of our final *dérive* was similar to the previous *dérive*: we selected participants at random to survey, and used their answers to determine our next location. This time, however, we asked fewer questions and selected questions to gain personal information that would contribute to our multi-media (psycho-geographic) map. We combined this information with video and photographic recording of the *dérive* process to create our final ten-minute audio-visual presentation.

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### *Theoretical Framing*

Our primary inspiration for this project was Guy Debord's "Theory of the Dérive." We were particularly interested in his concept of psycho-geography, or one's experience through the modern city being a chartable experience itself:

The lessons drawn from dérives enable us to draft the first surveys of the psycho-geographical articulations of a modern city. [...] With the aid of maps, aerial photographs and experimental dérives, one can draw up hitherto lacking maps of influence, maps whose inevitable imprecision at this early stage is no worse than that of the earliest navigational charts. The only difference that it is no longer a matter of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism. [*Theory of the Dérive*, Debord [www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm](http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm)]

We adopted some of the guidelines established by Debord for a successful dérive:

- 1) For our dérives, one group was composed of 2 people and the others of 3, according to Debord's suggestion that the most "fruitful" groups were of that size.
- 2) Each of our dérives were attended by a different assemblage of people within our project group (and one included people from outside our class), "It is preferable for the compositions of these groups to change from one dérive to another."
- 3) Our dérives took approximately six hours, reasonably close to the period proposed by Debord: "The average duration of a dérive is one day, considered the time between two periods of sleep."

Debord suggests that there may be two purposes for dérives, which are "[...] to study a terrain [and] emotionally disorient oneself." Our goal was the former: we wanted to create a new way of exploring Boston, as well as gain snap-shot understandings of what Bostonians find interesting. Through this, we constructed a psycho-geography of urban Boston according to people's favorite places in the city. We enfolded within the dérive the idea of survey (generated from an earlier conception of our project). As such, the critical elements of the project were the acts of interacting with participants, eliciting information from them, and recording their responses. The project result did not take the form of a traditional two-dimensional map. Instead, we sought to generate a multi-media representation of our journeys and interactions.