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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

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AN INTERPLANETARY DÉRIVE

Abstract

The following paper analyses my project *Brave the Heavenly Breezes* through Guy Debord's and the Situationist International's notion of *dérive*. It begins by detailing the project's design and plans before engaging in a theoretical analysis of it.

The French philosopher Guy Debord (1931-1994) was one of the founders of the Situationist International, an organisation of social revolutionaries composed of artists and intellectuals. They advocated the exploration of urban environments through arbitrary routes in what they termed a *dérive*.

According to Debord, "In a *dérive* 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 and the encounters they find there." It is a way to redefine and question the capitalist organisation of the urban environment and our relationship to it. In *Brave the Heavenly Breezes*, I conceived a space probe to undertake this *dérive* at the cosmic level.

Space probes are an expensive affair, the purview of a few national space agencies. As state organisms, they need to perform cost-benefit analyses and demonstrate the utility of each mission based on specific understandings of space and of the promises, mysteries and dangers it presents to humanity. The result is a utilitarian perception of space.

Brave the Heavenly Breezes is a project to create a space flâneur of sorts, a space probe with one and only objective: to transit through space drawn by the attractions of the heavenly bodies that cross its path. It is simple in construction but ambitious in its objectives: it aims to reconfigure our cultural relations to outer space.

The probe uses a solar sail for locomotion. It is to be launched towards the sun, go around it in a gravity slingshot and continue through the solar system towards the Kuiper Belt and beyond. It will carry no sensors, computer or communications equipment as it does not aim to do anything beyond traversing space. The refusal to engage in a productive endeavour, like Bartleby's "I would prefer not to", opens a new world of possibilities for new ways of relating with outer space.