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"Phil Smith captures the wonder of childhood imaginations and reminds us of the importance of continuing to embrace desire, letting it play out through our imaginations. Alice and her friends encounter a world that seems at the same time completely familiar and bizarrely bleary-eyed; they are adept explorers of the everyday, finding the impossible all around them. In transporting us to this world from the perspective of a curious nine-year-old girl, Phil reminds us that those experiences carry with them a hidden danger: the wonders of the everyday waiting to be found are so tantalizing, so satisfying, that we may never emerge from them. This is what many of us are embarrassed to admit in adulthood – the compulsion to run away, to escape, never wholly vanished, we just suppressed it out of supposed necessity."

*From the Foreword by Bradley L. Garrett
(place hacker and author of Explore Everything)*

"Walking with Phil is like having my very own Doctor Who."
(Siobhan McKeown, film maker and dj)

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Foreword

Bradley L. Garrett

When we think about the spaces around us, the spaces that we inhabit, the spaces we care about, the spaces that matter, we begin to think of them as *places* rather than *spaces*. It's a slimy, smudged, shattered line between space and place, one that can be affected by our own thoughts, experiences and attachments and one that can be equally affected by the actions of others. Over time, often we find that unless we really work at it, spaces we call places begin to dwindle in number. For many people, home, work and the local pub or cafe are perhaps the only places left in adulthood – the rest of the world slips into an ethereal blur of places that could have been. We are, in the end, just too busy to keep trying to explore the world for new places or even to tend to places we know in a way that gives them the required thickness.

What would a world look like where our actions were driven primarily by desire rather than utility? What if exploring and imagining took priority over working, paying the bills and mundane everyday tasks? One vision of this world is perhaps rather dystopic. Here, hedonistic throngs eschew responsibility, wholly depend on the labour of others, eating and drinking, dancing and drifting their way through the world, leaving behind little beyond memories of good times and a few broken objects hastily swept under the rug. This rudderless lot have radically misinterpreted Buddhist philosophy, living not in the present as a state of concern, but allowing the past and future to fall away simply because too little attention was paid to either. In this rather decadent imagination, the credo of all might be "I want" rather than "I must".

Anyone who has children will be familiar with this behaviour; it's the natural state of youth. Why is it then that in our stable, reasonable adult years that we strived so hard to reach, we so

often look upon our childhoods with fond nostalgia and a vague impression of a paradise lost? Could it be that for many of us, we sense that the pendulum has swung too far the other way? What is it that still compels us to yearn for irresponsibility and reckless adventure? Perhaps it's more important than we realise to remember every so often what it is we want to do as well as what it is we need to do.

I grew up in Riverside, California, amongst the neglected remains of what was once the citrus capital of the Golden State. The condominium where I lived with my mother backed onto a few dozen acres of orange groves. My friends and I used to traverse the groves with a pellet gun shooting produce and lizards, spray-painting the bounding breezeblock walls and building forts in trees complete with central hearths, toilets and watchtowers. Every so often we would run away from home and live off oranges and irrigation water for a few days in a fort, pre-supplied for just such an absconsion. At other times, we would come back to the forts to find they had been raided by some unknown force, smashed up and robbed, branches sagging languidly, weighed down by wet toilet paper stolen from our ersatz loo. We would then stomp through the groves for hours, vowing revenge, but never actually encountering the culprits ("lucky for them!" we would shout).

My first kiss was on a windmill in these orange groves, atop a decrepit old hulking machine covered in graffiti that peeked just over the trees and only started up on the rare occasion that the temperature dropped below freezing in the Californian Inland Empire. In our teenage years, we had "orange fights" every weekend, where kids were split up into equal teams and try to nail each other with oranges from the opposing road. It was a messy business.

Throughout all of these citrus adventures, we were of course trespassing – and destroying other people's property to boot. But we never thought about any of that, not for a second. When I was in my late twenties and had long moved away from Riverside, I was told that our grove had been summarily bulldozed to build a school. Better than a shopping mall I thought.

I feel some sense of melancholy about the loss of the place. But I also know that as children we would have made the most out of whatever environment we lived in. Perhaps if the school had been built twenty years earlier, I would have fond memories of wandering around in the corridors after hours hunting zombies with that same pellet gun or geocaching secret stashes of stuff for others to find. We also would have made the shopping mall our place, somehow. What I can be sure of, in any case, is that those years were ruled by a desire to explore and a desire to explore together. At times, this led to conflict, heartbreak and loss but it also made our lives richer, more plentiful, more prone to encounter and surprise. As I grew older, I refused again and again to give over that desire to utility.

In *Alice's Dérives*, Phil Smith captures the wonder of childhood imaginations and reminds us of the importance of continuing to embrace desire, letting it play out through our imaginations. Phil reminds us of the continuing importance of transforming spaces into places. Alice and her friends encounter a world that seems at the same time completely familiar and bizarrely bleary-eyed; they are adept explorers of the everyday, finding the impossible all around them. In transporting us to this world from the perspective of a curious nine-year-old girl, Phil also reminds us that those experiences carry with them a hidden danger, the reason why we fear that rudderless lot: the wonders of the everyday waiting to be found are so tantalizing, so satisfying, that we may never emerge from them. This of course is what many of us are embarrassed to admit in adulthood – the compulsion to run away, to escape, never wholly vanished, we just suppressed it out of supposed necessity.

Even if we step over that line at times to escape into the wonders of the everyday we are so prone to ignore, to speak of the world as somewhere we simply go "out there" to encounter is of course too simplistic a formulation. Each of us builds very particular relationships to the people and places we encounter. Each of us will respond in different ways to the worlds constructed around and within us. And yes, this gets more difficult as we grow older and lose control of time. Yet as the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote, freedom is what we do

with what's been done to us. Sartre suggests that even a prisoner confined to a cell can make choices within that cell; the prisoner retains power of consciousness and is therefore free. The prisoner may find that the most alluring freedom then is in the mind, in the imagination, in the thoughts that cannot be imprisoned (yet) – there is always an open door in the mind, ready to run through.

In many ways, we all live in prisons now, though the walls may be difficult to render or even invisible. To be in the world today is to be chased constantly by an unknown spectre, the watchers, the guards of a panopticon. As the world becomes increasingly constricted, our behaviours surveilled, monitored and circumscribed, our ability to explore physically is challenged in new ways and we may find that our minds wander more; the mind will reach for the freedoms the body can't find. There is beauty and danger in this, as Alice, her friends and family, find. What we are left with at the end of these wonderful adventures is perhaps a sense that it is not the escape we necessarily covet, but rather the capacity to escape, if we so choose. Having that choice pulls the pendulum back toward the centre. And if Sartre is right, it is up to us to decide for ourselves how far we're willing to go to keep that door open. Some of us will inevitably get sucked through, never to return. Perhaps the rest of us can learn to live with that or to, at the least, be more sympathetic to the choices others make in (re)staking claim to their spatial sovereignty.

The Situationist International, that beloved group of Parisian urban explorers, once spray-painted a wall with the words "*sous les pavés la plage*" (under the cobblestones, the beach). It is a powerful phrase that has resonated for decades, far from the wall where it was initially penned. Its persistence as an idea is twofold. On the one hand, there is an obvious implication here of a city in the city, a hidden city, a city we perhaps can't see or don't know about and there is an imperative placed on finding that city at all costs, even if it means tearing up the city we know. More importantly however, the beach is a place of play, a place where childhood daydreams and mischievous adventures can stretch out, where beautiful castles can be built out of sand, though we all know the tide will eventually come in and wash

them away. And that of course is the point.

As Alice and her compatriots learn on their drift, on the path of a vanished father in search of what is beneath everything, the most important things in life are perhaps those things you can't hold onto – but in trying we make them matter. Watching the sand castles dissolve into the tide, we realise that the paving stones will also, in time, disappear, and that the world around us is, in the end, a vast crumbling fiction. It is that fiction Alice must come to terms with in her drift. In that light, perhaps the greedy sensibilities of the perpetual present make more sense, because if the world is going to be created and recreated in every instant, it may as well be created by us, in our image, in the way children do, without shame or concern, out of love and starry-eyed marvel. The challenge to us then perhaps is to retain those vivid imaginations and desires that lead us to be active citizens in the creation of places rather than simply passive spectators in our own lives, passing through spaces created by others. And yet in that process, we must hold on tight to the people and places we care about because the ride will be a painful one, once you decide to start carving your own path again, now with a fuller awareness of the possible consequences of those decisions. Get our drift?

Dr Bradley Garrett is a geographer at the University of Southampton with an interest in hidden spaces, secret geographies and places that do not appear on maps.

He is the author of *Explore Everything: Place-Hacking the City*, an ethnographic account of the activities of the London Consolidation Crew (LCC), a group of urban explorers who exposed parts of London that had been lost to time. The explorations of the LCC, via Garrett, have been featured by news outlets across the world.

His most recent book is *Subterranean London: Cracking the Capital*, an unsolicited photographic dissection of underground London from a range of (mostly anonymous) contributors.

Find him at www.bradleygarrett.com