

Brainwashed - Nigel Ayers, "The Bodmin Moor Zodiac"

Written by Justin Patrick

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Since 2006 Nigel Ayers work has been focused on the investigation of folklore and geography of place, specifically his home in Cornwall, England. As part of his ongoing guerilla sign ontology campaign to boycott consensus reality he undertook a series of ritual walks into Cornwall's sacred landscape, documented in this book from 2007. Part narrative essay and part scientific log, with ample photographic evidence provided by his wife Lesley, it follows Nigel's journey into the Otherworld through the zodiac gateways of the Bodmin Moor.

[Earthly Delights](#)

As I read this book my consciousness was systematically disarranged. Nigel Ayers does to the landscape what William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin did with text, using *cut-ups* and *fold-ins* as a method for designing the ritual walking routes. He also employs the Situationist technique of

detournement

applying it to a territory or space, calling it

spatial detournement

. Contrasting this idea with the concept of

recuperation

(when originally seditious ideas and cultural works are appropriated by the mainstream) Nigel has created a technique for revolutionary rambling, where the walker, "reuses elements of a known territory to explore a new psychic space with a different meaning." This meaning steps past established boundaries leading the walker into frontiers that have not yet been demarcated.

The subject of his investigation is the terrestrial zodiac of the Bodmin Moor, an enormously scaled map of the stars formed by the features of a landscape, such as lanes, creeks, hedges and walls. The Bodmin Moor is famous for its many rocky granite tors. It is also legendary among cryptozoologists as being inhabited by the Beast, a phantom cat sighted on numerous

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occasions and rumored to have slain and mutilated livestock in the area. The idea of terrestrial zodiacs, disputed by the scientific establishment, remains a popular motif among folklorists and in occult circles.

The book is illustrated with trace maps of the ritual walks made by a novel use of global positioning satellites for each of the twelve zodiac signs explored. These are used comparatively with the shapes of Cornwall's Bodmin Moor landscape zodiac, illustrated with cut outs in the proper constellation shape from a road map, with the shapes made by the ritual walks. It is remarkable how close the GPS trace maps resemble the shapes of the constellations, and is part of what makes this book such an important artifact. The chapters for each sign also contain bits and pieces of curious lore about the star signs and the stories behind them. These chapters also describe things observed along the routes that correspond to the various characteristics associated with the zodiac signs and their constellations. This shows off the fractal concept Nigel calls "nested signs in nested landscapes." These parts of the text read more like a logbook, yet the way he manages to tie disparate ideas together holds my attention.

Audio field recordings were also made as part of the documentation of this psychogeographic project. Later they were used in a sound installation called *The Planetarium Must Be Built!* consisting of multiple CD players placed in a circle within a geodesic dome, along with visual material, and things to interact with such as books and texts. I am curious to hear these recordings and it would have been a nice touch if the book had come with a CD containing a selection of the recordings. However, with this book being a print-on-demand title I can understand how it might not have been easy logistically or cost effective to include a disc. Maybe they'll turn up on some future Nocturnal Emissions material (he has been known to use field recordings extensively in the past on such masterpieces as *Stoneface/SpiritFlesh* among others).

With the work recorded here Nigel Ayers has done a service to the field of psychogeography. While he does not encourage walking on the same routes as he made, stating rather that people should make up their own, he does provide a blueprint and methodology that can be used as a starting point for other people who wish to further explore and use landscapes creatively. The book, heavy with applied artistic theory, also shows him as being comfortably at home in the 21st century, a true multimedia and multidimensional artist working on several levels simultaneously.