





In the mid-20th century, a band of European avant-gardists began to interpret their cities as more than the functional by-products of society. These 'psychogeographers' aspired towards new ways of exploring urban environments which emphasised playfulness, wandering and spontaneity. Commuter channels and direct routes, they believed, were spatially and psychologically delimiting; to gain a fresh awareness of their environment, urban denizens must embrace creative and indirect ways of moving through it. They must, in short, value diversion.

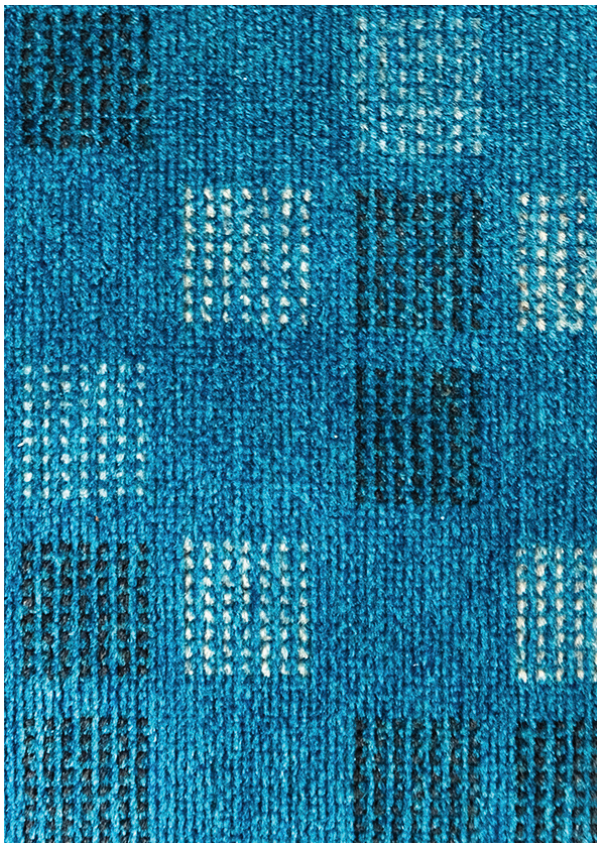
London-based art director and photographer Emilia Cocking stumbled upon the same realisation along her own career path. While working freelance all over London, Cocking found herself riding unfamiliar bus routes through areas of the city she'd never been to before. She noticed how our understanding of the place in which we live is determined by how we choose to get around it.

"The Tube detaches you from London, you surrender your sense of direction and pass whole communities by without noticing," Cocking observes. "I decided to force myself to see places that I'd never see otherwise, to pay attention to them." For her project, *On Diversion*, Cocking would pick a route, board the bus and photograph the textile pattern on the seats. At the end of the route she'd alight and retrace the journey on foot, collecting objects for the still-life arrangements along the way. "The journeying aspect of the project was structured. I knew where I was going, and I consciously used colour to guide me towards the objects. It wasn't until I began work on the compositions that similarities of shape and pattern emerged," she explains. "I just had to be patient, to let myself make mistakes, and the shot would eventually come."

Consciously or not, Cocking has an eye for essences. In *On Diversion*, each salient colour, curve, angle, and shape in a textile pattern is subtly encoded in its corresponding arrangement. The pattern on the Elephant & Castle to Stratford bus, for example, comprises rows of stacked red-and-grey rectangles embedded with the circular TFL logo and separated by horizontal white lines. Cocking's interpretation is a brilliant white polystyrene ball, representing both the white of the lines and the roundness of the logo, nested in crumpled red paper over grey-flecked fabric. The elements of a mundane pattern are recomposed to create a new, fragile harmony between them. Cocking explains: "I'd treat each item as a building block, with its own significance and origin, towards a final composition greater than the sum of its parts."

Her experience in art directing gave Cocking an understanding of the formal and aesthetic principles of landscapes. "I look at things more as an art director than a photographer," she admits. In this project, Cocking has documented the landscape through its found objects – *On Diversion* is a still-life series with considerable geographical scope, which elegantly captures the peculiar complexions of the uncharted parts of her city. **BJP**

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## Emilia Cocking



