

Walking the City: An Essay on Peripatetic Practices and Politics

By David Macauley

Ubi pedes ibi patria — Roman law
(Where the feet are, there is the fatherland)

Solvitur ambulando — Medieval maxim
(The solution is through walking)

1. Pre-amble

Perhaps even more than walking in the wilderness,¹ sauntering and strolling in the city and its suburbs involves multiple, repeated and deeply imbricated border crossings, including nested neighborhoods, traffic flows, ethnic enclaves, residential and commercial zones, subcultures, historical sites, sacred spaces and outcroppings of the wild in parks, cemeteries and abandoned lots. In this sense, urban walking is by its very nature a transformative practice because the moving body and the plurality of places it inhabits are constantly conjoined and then decoupled in new ways that come to reveal the metropolitan world in its manifold dimensions. In the following essay, pedestrian practices and problems in the urban environment are explored along with their broader relation to what may be called peripatetic politics. The withdrawal of the walker's world and the decline of the walking city are described in conjunction with an attempt to uncover the close connection between walking and place. In the process, the sites and situations of urban walking are elucidated, including sidewalks and

¹I consider the role of walking in the wilderness in David Macauley, "Walking the Elemental Earth: Phenomenological and Literary Foot Notes," in *Analecta Husserliana*, 71, forthcoming, and David Macauley, "A Few Foot Notes on Walking," *Trumpeter*, 10, 1, Winter, 1993.

streets, promenades and parks, and outdoor or indoor malls. By contrast, we can observe the manner in which auto culture tends to change or curtail contact with our surroundings, encouraging a kind of self-absorbed “sleep walking.”

Walking, though, might be re-rooted in and re-routed through the urban and suburban landscape so as to pose a challenge to social tendencies that accentuate forms of domestication or domination. By understanding the dynamic and democratic dimensions of walking, we can also begin to interrogate and critically contest the opaque and authoritarian features of urban architecture, private property and public space. If we follow walkers through city and suburban placescapes, we might begin to observe the implicit cultural politics at work in various orders of ambulation. The control and maintenance of space and place, the organization of speed and pace, and the erection or transgression of community ideas of citizenship or race are instances of such phenomena. Further, the similarities become noticeable between pedestrian activity and linguistic speech acts in terms of a rhetoric of walking — a trail of “foot notes” so to speak — within the processual setting and mobile text of the city. In short, an examination of walking in the city and suburbs shows us the many particular and overlapping “walks of life.”

At the same time, urban strolls are generally the most basic and direct mode of apprehending our surroundings, of attuning ourselves to the ambient environment. In this sense, they both orient the lived body while ceaselessly dislocating and relocating us within new boundaries, regions and territories. Indeed, walking enables us to question and transform the very rigidity of such social and political borders, while at once helping to build up a stable perceptual world. The aesthetically-inclined *flâneur* and the politically-informed drifter on a *dérive* are several kinds of itinerant urban wayfarers who establish a critical relation to the urban environment. However, in order to grasp more fully the diverse aspects of walking, one must attend eventually as well to dog walkers, exercising enthusiasts, shuffling shoppers and more pedestrian — common-place and foot-bound — practices.² By focusing

²It is important to keep in mind that there are actually many different possible forms of movement by foot, including the ramble (e.g., a wandering in a specific locale), goal-directed walks (e.g., to the corner store), the walkabout (e.g., in the outback), the stroll (e.g., along the beach), the saunter (e.g., in a park), wilding (e.g., in the woods), circuit walks (e.g., through museums or malls), the *dérive* (e.g., a politically-

on peripatetic activities, then, it is hoped that we can come to better understand our cities, surroundings and circadian activities in the borderlands that we routinely inhabit.

2. Withdrawal of the Walker's World

As inhabitants of a new and ever-accelerating century, we are arguably witnesses to a recession and long decline of the walking city, one that has stopped short of its complete disappearance. The world of the walker has been withdrawing due to developments from several directions, including the rise of swelling suburbs and now *ruburbs* (rural suburbs), the omnipresence of autos and the ongoing elimination of public spaces. For the past 50 years, cities have been increasingly organized for impersonal driving, private consumption and commercial advertising rather than human ambling, political participation and public revelation. Much of this change can be attributed to the transformations of the public and private spheres and the emergence of the social sphere, which redefines the nature and relationship of the other two realms.³

There are at least five spatial characteristics of early “walking cities” — cities around the world in early 19th century, circa 1815, where the most common, cheapest and easiest means of movement was human mobility, the walking body.⁴ These largely centripetal (tending toward the center) dimensions encouraged people to walk and should be seen by way of contrast with the increasingly centrifugal (tending away from the center) aspects of more recent suburbanization. First, walking cities were marked by relatively high human populations, congestion and concurrent intensity within their interiors. For example, in London, the largest city in the world at the time — with a population of 800,000 — one could walk from the outer edges to the center in only two hours. The same held true in American cities, which were smaller but had equally active inner environs. Secondly and related to this feature, there existed a relatively clear distinction between the country and the town. Little to no melding or conflation of the rural and the urban could be found at the time. Thirdly, the walking city was

engaged walk), and *flânerie* (e.g., an aesthetically-informed walk through the city).

³On the transformations in public, private and social space, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁴I follow here the work of Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 14-15.

informed by a variety of overlapping of functions. Neighborhoods were differentiated but not defined by exclusively residential, commercial, governmental or production centers, thus encouraging rather than discouraging accessibility via foot. One did not have to travel half way across town to shop, worship or vote as one might need to do today. Fourth, the residents of the city tended to live a very short distance from their places of occupation. In 1815, 80 percent of the citizens lived less than a mile from their work locations. Again, the proximity of living and working spaces facilitated walking. Finally, the perceived best locations and residences were close to the center of the city rather than on the outskirts. This fact, too, heightened the value of remaining physically close to places of urban activity that were accessible through walking.

Despite the rise of the suburb and the transformation of landscapes in the process, the city still retained a sense of form and limit for as long as suburban growth was regulated by walking distances and railroads. What was undermined largely through the automobile was the habitable and livable *pedestrian scale* in the environment. "Instead of buildings set in a park, we now have buildings set in a parking lot."⁵ As private cars replaced public rails, we have become dependent upon a single form of transportation that has recreated the landscape in its image. Differentiated place was increasingly subordinated to or transformed into homogeneous space. With the loss of walkable distances has disappeared the loss of walking as a regular means of circulation. "The motor car has made it unsafe and the extension of the suburb has made it impossible."⁶ What we often fail to remember in this regard is that speed and power need not become autonomous values or ends in themselves but should be constantly related to human needs, local scales and social purposes. As Lewis Mumford observes, if one desires to meet and speak with others on an urban promenade or esplanade, then three miles per hour might be too fast; whereas if a doctor is trying to get to an injured person, then three hundred miles per hour might be too slow. Correlatively, the fastest way to move a very large number of people within a limited urban environment is actually on foot, while the slowest way would be to put them in cars. Indeed, the entire population of historic Boston would have been able to assemble on foot in the Boston Commons in less than an hour's time; but if they had been transported by auto, the process would take many,

⁵Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1961), p. 506.

⁶*Ibid.*

many hours and probably not even been completed unless their unparkable vehicles were abandoned to the streets.⁷

Shopping malls — a completely privatized and also deprived notion of the ancient and very political Greek *agora* or “town square” and gathering place — have reintroduced walking in the suburbs and outskirts of many small towns but now entirely indoors. They turn the walker’s world inside-out or more accurately, *outside-in*. The sidewalk is rolled up and reappears in a purely commercial zone of exchange, largely absent of residences, the organic environment and places of public appearance and display. In many cities, there are even clubs whose members now go “mall walking” each day, circling a shopping center together, circuit upon repetitious circuit, presumably in part for exercise but also perhaps to shop on their breaks from walking. In most such malls, loitering without purchasing,⁸ displays of nonconformity and political protest are strictly controlled or prohibited, in contrast to the relatively looser and freer outdoor sidewalks. A considerable amount of urban walking nevertheless does still occur within buildings themselves — in the “second story world” (third-, fourth-, fifth-story, etc.) on both vertical and horizontal axes — across interior spaces and up and down stairs between floors — like movements inside a magnificent ant farm. We need to remain aware, then, of the troubling disappearances and unexpected re-appearances of walking in its many forms.

3. Place and Pace: Tracing and Effacing Our Steps

Walking locates the body in place. In the repetitious act of turning over our legs — of falling forward, then rising and collecting ourselves into a corporeal rhythm — we are as it were like large knitting (or perhaps sewing machine) needles stitching ourselves into the local fabric of the environs, grounding and rooting ourselves even if momentarily.⁹ In this sense, walking tracks, outlines or traces a place through the continuous trail left by the moving body and the memory of its motions. In route, the city is repeatedly taken in at a robust glance. The surroundings are actively synthesized in and through our bodies. We are oriented increasingly from single points to broader positions to localized regions and places. In the urban walk, there is a

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸The ban on loitering that is increasingly common both in public and private places through the U.S. is in effect tantamount to a ban on gathering.

⁹I elaborate on the phenomenological aspects of walking in Macauley, “Walking the Elemental Earth,” *op. cit.*

continuous stream of “information” parading past and through us, most of it more culturally encoded than in the countryside or wilderness. Like the catalysts and cues provided by a smell that takes us to remembrances of places past,¹⁰ walking loosens, unties and releases the mnemonic knots in the body, triggering an active engagement with and archival recollection of the places through which we walk. Of walking, the poet Paul Valéry has remarked:

As I went along the street where I live, I was suddenly *gripped* by a rhythm which took possession of me and soon gave me the impression of some force outside myself. It was as though someone else were making use of my *living machine*. Then another rhythm overtook and combined with the first, and certain strange *traverse* relations were set up between these two principles...They combined the movement of my walking legs and some kind of song I was murmuring, or rather which was being murmured *through* me.¹¹

In this description, we can observe the convergence, collaboration and confluence of the body, mind and place as well as the sense of being seized in the walk by something more-than and other-than oneself. There is an internal processing of that externality and perhaps, more exactly, a chiasmatic crossing of inside and outside via the “living machine” of the body.

With walking, the practice is itself the path, which always takes place in a place.¹² When this link is lost, it is often because pace overtakes and supplants place. The ground is not merely re-placed with the planting of new steps, but it is dis-placed — cancelled, removed or forgotten. Without availing ourselves of a regular walking, places are by-passed and effaced. In the process, we are courting topoclasm, place-alienation and the creation of non-places: sites without life. To the

¹⁰Like many other writers, Marcel Proust found much of the material for his work in walks that he took around his home.

¹¹Paul Valéry, “Poetry and Abstract Thought,” quoted in Roger Gilbert, *Walks in the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 18-19.

¹²As Siddhartha Guatama, the historical Buddha, reputedly remarked, “You cannot travel on the path before you have become the Path itself.” The notion of life as a path that is walked recurs in a wide range of Eastern works, including the *Tao Te Ching* and *Dhammapada*, where to cite one example we find, “Good people keep on walking whatever happens.”

extent to which city *sauntering* is “without the earth” (from *sans terre*) — due to the covering over, concealment and loss of contact with the elemental ground — it needs to be in the sense of being-at-home where one walks and thus a mindful and creative internalization of the enveloping landscape and skyscape. The environment must not only be kept in mind but in the body as well. Walking thickens the perceptual scene, welcoming us into a palpable density rather than drawing us out via an attenuated celerity. Unlike being in a vehicle, the surrounding is less frequently constituted as scenery and spectacle or postcard-like picture. Rather, the world is more readily experienced as inhabited placescape.

In addition to pace, another element of urban walking is the horizon, which is formed by the intersection of the sky and earth in the landscape (or, alternatively, the sky and water in the seascape). The horizon, in turn, defines the bounds and limits of perceptual experience, as the Greek term *horos* itself implies.¹³ Several forms of this perceptual phenomenon can be distinguished including the apparent horizon — the juncture of cityscape and sky for example — and the sensible horizon — the tangent plane relative to the surface of the earth at the position of the observer. The encircling horizon for humans provides a vanishing point, an edge-line so to speak, in observation from which sight takes its reference in going out and returning. It functions and appears like an occluding edge even if it is in fact not always one for all objects. In walking, one finds the horizon progressively swallowing up or revealing celestial objects such as the moon, sun and stars which lie in fact beyond the horizon and which wax or wane in size depending upon the motion of the earth and the time of day. When the ground surface is flat and opens up in front of us, the horizon that is formed is part of an ambient optical array. It is also, in this instance, the same as the skyline. Even when vast reaches of the city are not visible because of the outcroppings of buildings and other barriers, there exists something akin to an implicit horizon. By attending to the horizon, a feature of terrestrial perception which is stationary, we can become better oriented both in place and time during

¹³On the notion of the horizon within phenomenology, see, for example, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). For Martin Heidegger’s treatment of the horizon, especially in relation to time, see *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 416ff.

a walk by taking our bearings from the relative changes in our horizontal perceptions. The horizon and the earth-sky line from which it is often formed thus establishes us with a frame of reference, enabling us to govern our upright bodies — which ambulate perpendicularly to the horizon — through the environment. The horizon is strictly speaking neither a completely subjective nor objective phenomenon. Rather, it represents an ongoing reciprocity of the walker with his or her surroundings and an invariant dimension of environmental perception.¹⁴

While the walker might move rapidly at times during rush hour or with haste in order to make an appointment, the key to being emplaced is a relative slowness that elicits attention to detail in the surroundings and a sense of relatedness of events, objects and moments.¹⁵ In downtown areas of large cities, men average about five feet per second, 290 to 300 feet per minute or about three and one-half miles per hour in their walking speed. Some studies have shown a general correlation between the pace of walking and city size. The relatively high premium placed upon time in large cities may help to explain some of this connection (as does the fact that ambitious and aggressive people are drawn to an environment with a fast pace), but many people also walk quickly to heighten stimulation from the environment. Time of day, too, affects tempo and pace. Pedestrians, for example, tend to walk more buoyantly and more commonly in groups before lunch than other times and a bit more slowly after lunch, as one might expect.¹⁶

One of the values of ambling in the urban environment is the face-to-face contact that it encourages as the walker moves from place to place. This interaction has been vital historically to a well-functioning democratic society, where a public sharing of ideas, beliefs and concerns among citizens needs to occur on a regular basis. An activity as mundane as dog walking, for example, is arguably one means of soliciting such contact and conviviality in that it facilitates social exchange and can encourage civic virtues such as friendship,

¹⁴For further consideration of ecological optics, see James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986).

¹⁵Paul Virilio has described some of these dilemmas of speed relative to place, leading us into a world that is both familiar and strange. See his *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London and New York: Verso, 1997) and *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotexte, 1986).

¹⁶See William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 56-67.

neighborhood concern and community responsibility.¹⁷ The curious apolitical walking men and women of today, however, are often equipped with a battery-driven “companion” in the walkman that takes them out of place and relocates them elsewhere, inside a hermetic world, in the collectively-negated nowhere of mental space. The walkman is an escape from a shared setting, a retreat to the private realm *within* the public sphere itself. It is a withdrawal to a space that is programmed by oneself for oneself, absent of the chance sounds and surprising noises we normally find on the street, devoid of the possibility of true communication with others, who tend to avoid contact with these wired sleepwalkers. This phenomenon is evident, too, in the widespread use of mobile phones on city sidewalks, a practice which tends to inhibit association with others at street corners and intersections, where pedestrians coalesce into collective pools while waiting for a light to change or traffic to pass.

The particular places where people walk in the city are of course legion. Despite the multiple threats to them, wild and semi-wild regions are still profoundly present in our urban and suburban environs and often only accessible via walking.¹⁸ Parks, dog-walks, cemeteries, abandoned lots and walkable areas around rivers, reservoirs and fountains frequently abound with animal and plant life that peep or creep out at various times of the day. For example, in Manhattan, one can still find red-tailed hawks on a stroll through Central Park; in cities in the Southwest, coyotes regularly prowl the sidewalks and streets at nights with other pedestrians, while Canadian geese nest in the heart of many major urban centers. In thousands of suburbs, deer, raccoon and even bear are commonly observed by local walkers. Apart from learning of the presence of urban animals and plants by guided walking tours through menageries, arboretums, and theme parks, it might be possible to encourage the development of city life toward reintegrating the green with the gray, and the animal with the human, in a vision of what one writer terms a *zoöpolis* — a hybrid of the wild and civilized, the biological and political.¹⁹ Our cities are for the most part heterotopias (rather than static utopias or nightmarish dystopias), places with multiple and often contradictory functions, along with existing animal

¹⁷On Beacon Street in Boston, where I formerly lived, a man walks his Siamese cat, Otter, twice a day or more down the sidewalk, meeting or greeting dozens of friends, acquaintances and strangers on his way.

¹⁸See, for example, Steven Garber, *The Urban Naturalist* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1987), and Jennifer Wolch and Joy Emel, eds., *Animal Geographies* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

¹⁹Jennifer Wolch, “*Zoöpolis*,” in *ibid.*

and plant communities, and walking is generally the best means of experiencing these locations and nonhuman populations with the least degree of mediation.

At the same time, we should be aware that thinking about walking can suffer potentially from an over-attachment to romantic and narrowly naturalistic concerns.²⁰ Similarly, much writing about the environment tends to seek out and then valorize the perception of a natural world that is presumed to be autonomous from the social and human sphere. In the process, there is often a disregard of the built and especially urban realms, and a penchant to uphold natural place to the exclusion of a necessary movement through and transformation of it. On this count, many seemingly “natural” paths and places of walking in the city such as those in parks and public gardens are actually closely-constructed, highly-orchestrated and heavily-maintained settings. In Boston, for example, the well-walked esplanade along the Charles River (and in fact the entire encompassing Back Bay area) is what might be termed an *earth work* — as opposed to *art work* — an organic and very social place that is the result of concerted human action on transported soil and dirt, which itself undergoes erosion, accretion and ecological change.

4. The Agon with Autos: Sleepwalkers and Technomads

While walking in the contemporary world, we also need to remain actively aware of the problem of “technological somnambulism”²¹ and the possibility that we are *sleep walking* through heavily occluded environments, a phenomenon and problem that is magnified in urban and suburban areas, where mediation is heightened. We are, in other words, in danger of being only half-awake in our ambling. This metaphor suggests a lack of direction, a kind of cultural blindness, errancy and drifting brought on in part by an over-reliance upon relatively opaque technologies such as the car which — via the automotive and oil industries — has increasingly recreated cities in terms of *its* needs rather than *our* own and sewn the landscape with a network of streets and superhighways. Increasingly, we are transforming ourselves into *technomads* — wanderers via the prosthetic eyes, ears and limbs of technology as opposed to those of the walking body. Further,

²⁰On romanticism in relation to walking, see Anne Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of the Peripatetic in Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

²¹This phrase appears in Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

we are courting the risk of becoming *technobodies* where the body-environment relation is entirely reconstructed via the medium of technology, or where the body itself is greatly eclipsed. Even if the wheels of the car are considered an extension of our feet or as feet-in-rotation (as some theories of technology suggest), there is still a numbing effect on or *narcosis* of the senses — an “autoamputation” of the body which hinders self-recognition — that accompanies this (and every) attempt to extend ourselves, as Marshall McLuhan has pointed out.²² Such technological developments and redefinitions of the body pose potential challenges to practices bound with corporeal orientation to the extent to which they raise fundamental questions about human purposiveness, teleology, functionality, posture and locomotion. Hans Jonas, for example, has spoken of legs as “walking tools” and “external motor organs” because of the work they perform: “legs fulfill their purpose in walking as hammers do in hammering.” “We can say with some confidence,” he argues, that “the realm of voluntary bodily movement in man and animal (exemplified by ‘walking’) is a locus of real determination by purposes and goals, which are objectively executed by the same subjects that subjectively entertain them.”²³

The use of escalators, elevators and conveyer-belt like walking machines is emblematic of a wider transformation and loss with respect to walking. In such situations, we walk (or simply stand) *in* place but do not move *through* it in the manner of actively and corporeally inhabiting it, and we walk on machines that carry and conduct us, appearing in the process to be less alive at times than our creations. The automobile driver is arguably already a kind of cybernetic organism or cyborg who (that) is encased in a heavy metal jacket and tethered to many micro-machines within the more encompassing car. As Jean Baudrillard observes in his remarks on J. G. Ballard’s novel, *Crash*, “Technology is never grasped except in the (automobile) accident, that is to say in the violence done to technology itself and in the violence done to the body. It is the same: any shock, any blow, any impact, all the metallurgy of the accident can be read in the semiurgy of the body.”²⁴

²²Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 52.

²³Hans Jonas, *Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 57, 64.

²⁴Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 112.

In many regards, the *high-way* of the speeding auto is contrary to the *low-way* (and slow way) of the sauntering walker. Whereas the highway attenuates the perceptual scene, walking puts us back into the thick of things and carries us through a world of living beings. By contrast, driving ties the anchored actor and relatively passive observer to a mobile shell that narrowly limits environmental awareness while altering and often endangering the movements and lives of pedestrians.²⁵ Driving privileges the visual mode of perception in part by dimming down and displacing the roles of other senses. It tends to numb the legs and freeze into position the lower body and torso, making it difficult to turn around or to disengage from a forward-looking posture. When we must walk the route we have driven because of an automotive breakdown or accident, this difference becomes apparent, and an entirely new perspective can open around us, exfoliating many of the layers of mediation and mystification that we have learned to quietly accept, dutifully adapt to, and finally forget. Walking is thus practically (and not just theoretically) a means of overcoming the “geography of nowhere”²⁶ that the auto and its advocates have helped to inaugurate and implement.

Walking and driving illustrate a clash of ways of life and their attendant values. The collision or contest (*agon*) of old — perdurable and often conserving — and new — emergent and usually usurping — forms of living as defined by different technologies relative to speed, time, pace and place is manifest throughout the day and night in the intersection and border crossings associated with walkers and cars in the city: the contested places of the sidewalks, streets and parking lots. The political and more specifically class — and even class warfare — aspects of this *agon* were evident very early in the first auto accidents at the turn of the 20th century when wealthy car owners struck and killed immigrants, frequently causing community residents to retaliate against upper class “invasions” of their neighborhoods by assaulting motorists with rocks and firecrackers — sometimes to the point of riots. From 1901-1906, 34 anti-auto incidents were reported by the *New York Times*, including one that resulted in the death of a driver who was killed by a father of a pedestrian victim. Three-quarters of the earliest

²⁵See also Gary Backhaus, “Auto-mobility,” in G. Backhaus and J. Murungi, eds., *Transformations of the Urban and Suburban Landscape* (forthcoming) as well as Julia Meaton and David Morrice, “The Ethics and Politics of Private Automobile Use,” *Environmental Ethics*, 18, 1, Spring, 1996, and Anon., “Aberration: The Automobile,” *The Fifth Estate*, 21, 2, 1987.

²⁶James Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

victims of auto accidents, in fact, were pedestrians and especially children playing in the streets. Many rural residents were also annoyed by the arrival of wealthy urban drivers, who injured walkers, ran over chickens and dogs, whipped up large amounts of dust and deepened ruts in the roads. Because of such developments, New Jersey even tried to ban cars registered in New York, and the *New York Times* went as far to term autos “devil wagons” and call for an eight mile per hour speed limit in 1905.²⁷

From the pedestrian’s perspective, the car is less a carapace — a protective shield and shell — as it is for the driver than a potential weapon, less of means of transportation than a form of rapid transformation of the walker’s world, exposing his or her vulnerability. While elevating the driver to a kind of super-human with heightened speed and power, the car degrades the pedestrian to a threatened second-class citizen. “At street level — outside a vehicle — all modern cities are violent,” announces John Berger.²⁸ And Theodor Adorno draws this point out to its disturbing psychological implications. “Which driver is not tempted,” he asks, “merely by the power of his engine, to wipe out the vermin of the street, pedestrians, children and cyclists?”²⁹ In his “Walk through Rotterdam,” Mumford too reflects on the diminished status of peripatetic life in the United States, where “we have pushed the elimination of the pedestrian to its ultimate conclusion — the drive-in market, the drive-in movie, and the drive-in bank,” appending the black-humor afterthought that we are missing only the drive-in cemetery.³⁰ In this sense, the car has provided a machine and means to literally “drive ourselves crazy” as a culture — witness widespread road rage, frustration in traffic and drive-by shootings — as we lose contact with one another, create environmental uniformity and transfigure the landscape.³¹

One difficulty, of course, with overdrawing this dichotomy is that at another time and place the walker is often also a driver and vice-versa (although it is frequently only the enthusiastic peripatetic who

²⁷See Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

²⁸John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

²⁹Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).

³⁰Lewis Mumford, “A Walk Through Rotterdam” *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. 36.

³¹It is a rather curious phenomenon — and a sign of the times — when many people recognize their friends and neighbors only by the cars they drive.

respectfully remembers this fact). Another dilemma worth acknowledging is that with greater physical and geographic mobility (horizontal movement) provided by the car, many Americans have found a way to achieve more social mobility (vertical movement) that might otherwise have been denied to them. Nevertheless, the car poses a very real threat not only to the walking way of life but to the life of the walker him- or herself. In New York City, for example, one is more likely to be killed by a stranger in a car than by one toting a gun,³² and nationally more children are regularly slaughtered by autos in suburbia than by firearms in the city.³³ In New York, there were 12,730 vehicle-pedestrian collisions, approximately one every forty-one minutes in 1994.³⁴ Ten years earlier, 293 pedestrians were killed by automobiles while 300 died in London in the same year. However, while London has taken aim at significantly reducing these fatalities by introducing cameras in high-accident zones, enforcing speed limits, aggressively broadcasting public messages about the dangers of speeding, and embracing traffic-calming projects such as widening sidewalks, installing speed bumps and eliminating or controlling traffic on some congested streets, the efforts in New York have been much more minimal and thus less successful.³⁵ Indeed, the twin pursuits of pedestrian safety and reduction of traffic congestion are complementary rather than competing goals.

It may even be the case that “the swiftest traveler is he that goes a-foot”³⁶ when we realize the real but hidden social costs of transportation that must be factored in when calculating time in transit. In this regard, Thoreau argued that if the railroad circumnavigated the earth, he would still stay ahead of the “iron horse” by walking the same distance. In the present urban and suburban environments, we need to keep in mind the time, energy and money we expend in working to pay for or finance the

³²Clyde Haberman’s editorial column, *New York Times*, December 10, 1996 and April 25, 1997.

³³See Roberta Brandes Gratz with Norman Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998).

³⁴Nationally, more than 40,000 people are killed each year in auto-related accidents, with about 20 to 25 percent of the victims being pedestrians according to figures provided by the Federal Highway Traffic Safety Commission. See *ibid.*

³⁵See *New York Times*, “Danger Afoot,” January 12, 1998. In 1994, there were 159 pedestrian deaths in London; whereas in New York, there were still 223 deaths.

³⁶Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, edited by Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 47.

auto, car insurance, license and parking fees, traffic tickets, gas and oil, repairs and registration, costs to use turnpikes, tunnels and bridges, and road maintenance through taxes. The average American, in fact, spends up to one-fourth of his or her annual wages to enjoy the privilege (or necessity) of keeping a car. And while the average motorized speed in the city is roughly twice that of the pedestrian, when the social time necessary to produce the means of transport is added to time spent in transit, the average global traveling speed of modern man is less than that of Paleolithic people.³⁷

In the last several decades, there have been a number of proposals to ban cars from downtown regions so as to make cities more friendly to pedestrians.³⁸ While this goal might be admirable even if unattainable, Jane Jacobs argues that cars are not the essential and inherent cause of urban decay: “If we would stop telling ourselves fairy tales about the suitability and charm of nineteenth-century streets for horse-and buggy traffic, we would see that the internal combustion engine, as it came on the scene was potentially an excellent instrument for abetting city intensity, and at the same time for liberating cities from one of their noxious liabilities.” She continues: “We went awry by replacing, in effect, each horse on the crowded city streets with half a dozen or so mechanized vehicles, instead of using each mechanized vehicle to replace half a dozen or so horses.”³⁹

Still, the role of the auto in transforming urban and suburban landscapes should not be underestimated. In Boston, walkers have on average less than ten seconds (and sometimes as few as seven) to cross a street while cars receive upwards to a minute-and-a-half to continue on their ways. Pedestrians are routinely unable to actually cross the street before the lights — which are calibrated for traffic flow rather than walking distances — switch again to “DONT WALK,” and they frequently find the crosswalk blocked by the unyielding steel frame of an idling auto. In many suburban situations, the walker — unlike the auto owner — is even viewed with suspicion, as a vagrant, outcast or unwelcome outsider, and sometimes taken into custody for walking on the side of the road where no pedestrian path exists. Such social biases should at least give us pause to ask for whom (or what) our communities are organized. In cities such as Los Angeles, we may have unwittingly constructed the environment as a kind of *autopia* (auto

³⁷See Anon., “Aberration: The Automobile,” *op. cit.*

³⁸See, for example, Paul Goodman, “Banning Cars from Manhattan,” *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

³⁹Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

utopia), where the “freeway system in its totality is now a single comprehensive place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life.”⁴⁰ Despite these developments, it is helpful to remember that every trip we take by car begins and ends on foot (even if the walk is just from the house or apartment to the garage or parking lot) and that walking is often still the most convenient mode of movement within high density areas.

5. Peripatetic Politics: Power, Property and Propriety

Walking, then, should be considered a political and environmental practice. That urban walking is connected with power and politics is clear from a historical vantage point. In ancient Greece, many citizens ambled up to 15 miles — a four hour journey by foot over rough roads in the country — to the *ekklesia* (an assembly on the Pnyx held 40 times each year) in order to participate in public life, “ever delicately walking through the most pellucid air” as Euripides put it.⁴¹ In the fourth century B.C.E., students walked out from Athens along a wide pedestrian avenue to reach the gymnasium at the Academy in the northwest suburbs. Prior to becoming Plato’s celebrated school, they engaged there in physical training without clothes as part of a broad program for citizenship — a bodily belonging to the *polis* (city) — that also involved an early emphasis on voice projection and oral articulation in preparation for later public debate. For the Greeks, the way one walked was considered part of personal character and thus bodily comportment was connected with political power. Long strides were viewed as an emblem of “manliness” and a sign of leadership, a point made by Homer in his admiration of Hector: “the Trojans drove forward in close throng, and Hector led them, advancing with long strides.”⁴² By contrast, women were supposed to walk with shorter and more abrupt steps, and men who strode in such fashion were often considered effeminate or passive homosexuals. The upright (*orthos*) and erect posture suggested purposefulness and by extension rectitude — a notion that we have inherited from the Greeks.

As Richard Sennett has shown, the Greeks tended to create links between their bodies and their buildings, between the citizens and the

⁴⁰Rayner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 213.

⁴¹Euripides, *Medea*, line 824, cited in Ernest Barker, trans., *The Politics of Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. lxiii.

⁴²Homer, quoted in Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1994).

city, by relating physiological needs to urban political structures.⁴³ In addition to the gymnasium, where the bodies of boys were shaped for civic participation, the free-standing *stoa* — which helped to give ironic birth to the movement of worldly-withdrawal known as Stoicism — opened out into the *agora* and served as a place where citizens could gather to philosophize, dine or conduct business. In this regard, it possessed both a sheltering and revelatory function for the body. Daily participation in the life of the city generally necessitated that citizens lived within walking distances of the *agora*, although by the end of the fifth century, 40 percent of the citizens were making the long trek by foot on a regular basis. Within this public sphere of action, strolling male citizens participated in the democratic workings of the *polis*, walking about in the open air so as to learn about and eventually decide pressing legal cases, ostracize or exile serious violators of law, and make speeches, among many other activities.

As in modern society, where the walker looked — that is, one's gaze — was connected normatively to social and political values of the time. Youth in Sparta, for example, were expected to cast their eyes towards the ground when walking in public — as were modest women and ashamed men in Greece generally — and to keep their hands cloaked within their garments. The politically-free and proper Greek male kept his head straight and erect, his hands held firmly, his eyes open and his gaze steadfast as he walked through the world — traits that were no doubt tied to earlier expressions or appearances of strength in battle within a warrior culture. By contrast, it was commonly believed that madmen rolled their eyes, that slaves tended to hold their heads crooked, that dangerous characters squinted, and that passive homosexuals looked around as they walked.⁴⁴ Thus, one's gait, carriage and comportment were considered visible signs of authority or submission, of masculinity or effeminacy, and of class power or social disenfranchisement as walking came to be invested patently with notions of politics, gender and sexuality.

Socrates is perhaps the most well-known itinerant philosopher, walking and talking so as to encourage a dialectic, but eventually sentenced to death in no small measure because of the perceived political threat he posed to democratic Athens. Indeed, Socrates only leaves the limits of the *polis* on one remarkable walking occasion,

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Jan Bremmer, "Walking, Standing, and Sitting in Ancient Greek Culture," in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds., *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

recorded by Plato in the *Phaedrus*. Aristotle, too, returned to Athens — after teaching the politically powerful Alexander of Macedon — to found his school at the Lyceum, in the precincts of a sacred grove of Apollo Lyceus and a favorite haunt of Socrates. The school was also known as the *peripatos* — a covered walking place — and its members as *peripatetikoî* due to their supposed custom of conducting conversations while walking up and down in a covered ambulatory or because much of their instruction was carried on in ambulation. Historians have traditionally held that Aristotle walked each morning with his pupils in the loggia or among the trees, discussing difficult questions of philosophy.⁴⁵ This emphasis on walking to encourage reflection — an intimacy in effect between wandering and wondering — resurfaced in his own influential writings, often with a political import. For example in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle upholds the Athenian ideal of the leisured citizen or “gentleman” who walks slowly and with distinction through the streets, an emblem of being a “great-souled” (*megalopsychos*) individual and a paragon of one definition of man he gives in *De partibus animalium*: the animal who stands erect.⁴⁶ Finally, the role of walking as a common Greek practice with cultural significance is indicated as well by the famous riddle in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*: what walks with four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening? The answer, of course, is the human animal: *homo erectus*, *homo sapiens* or *homo faber* depending upon one’s perspective.

Later, in the 12th century, John of Salisbury spoke in his *Policraticus* of the feet of the commonwealth. “Those are called feet who discharge the humbler offices, and by whose services the members of the whole commonwealth walk upon the solid earth.” Included in this category were husbandmen, farmers, cloth makers, those working in the mechanical arts and other occupations useful to the corporate commonwealth.

All these different occupations are so numerous that the commonwealth in the number of its feet exceeds not only the eight-footed crab but even the centipede, and because of their very multitude they cannot be enumerated....But it applies generally to each and all

⁴⁵Some classicists believe that the claim that ancient philosophers taught their students through walking may have been exaggerated.

⁴⁶Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4, chap. 3, 34 and *De partibus animalium* in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. and ed., J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), Book IV, ch. 10, 689b 19-21.

of them that in their exercise they should not transgress the limits of the law, and should in all things observe constant reference to the public utility.⁴⁷

Thus, laborers were associated with the lowest and most earthly of workers and integrated at the base of the political superstructure and body-politic, like a foot on a person. The Middle Ages were an especially peripatetic period, as many thousands of persons travelled from town to town on foot, including troubadours, monks and wandering scholars.⁴⁸ The range of motley vagrants who roamed through Europe is evoked by Umberto Eco in his novel, *The Name of the Rose*:

false monks, charlatans, jugglers, invalid mercenaries, wandering Jews...lunatics, fugitives under banishment, malefactors with an ear cut off, sodomites, and along with them ambulant artisans, weavers, tinkers, chair-menders, knife-grinders, basket-weavers, masons, and also rogues of every stripe, forgers, scoundrels, cardsharps, rascals, bullies, reprobates, recreants, frauds, hooligans, simoniacal and embezzling canons and priests...false paralytics who lay at church doors, vagrants fleeing convents, relic-sellers, pardoners, soothsayers and fortunetellers, necromancers, healers, bogus alms-seekers, fornicators of every sort, corruptors of nuns and maidens by deception and violence, simulators of dropsy, epilepsy, hemorrhoids, gout, and sores, as well as melancholy madness.⁴⁹

More recently, Thoreau invoked the notion that walking is related to the political sphere in his claim that he could amble for half an hour and arrive at "some portion of the earth's surface where man does not stand from one year's end to another, and there, consequently, politics are

⁴⁷John of Salisbury, excerpt from *Policraticus*, trans. J. Dickinson in *The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed., James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin Mclaughlin (New York: Viking Press, 1949), pp. 129-130.

⁴⁸See the discussion of the lives and lyric poetry of some of these figures in Helen Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955).

⁴⁹Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans., William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 189.

not.”⁵⁰ In the city, this is clearly not the case, however, as power and politics are percolating at each corner and every stop sign.

Urban walks can lead us, too, into the border-bursting realms of crowds, solidarity, shared action and plural subjects. Walking in the city often occurs as a form of togetherness — even when we are alone among strangers — in which we assemble, disassemble and reassemble in shifting groups based upon happenstance or affinities of appearance and desire. Wandering out for a walk with a family member or friend, taking a turn around the block with the dog, or going on a stroll with a lover or spouse are enduring ways of establishing and maintaining intimacy and familiarity with a community. The walker in the modern or postmodern city tends to have less regular physical contact with others than amblers in earlier periods — when the streets and sidewalks were more hectic and less mediated by commercialism — though opportunities still abound in neighborhoods, parks and public squares. Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Man of the Crowd,” points to some of the exotic and erotic dimensions of walking among the masses as an anonymous man of the crowd disappears into the crowd itself holding within himself a secret that “does not permit itself to be read.”⁵¹ The French poet Baudelaire also suggests ways in which an urban walker might deliberately abandon his or her guard so as to be seduced, moved, excited, saddened and eventually abandoned by a chance encounter or fantasy with a beautiful stranger or intriguing passerby on a busy sidewalk. More generally, the goal as an impassioned spectator is “to become one flesh with the crowd” and “to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.” One should enter into the *hoi polloi* “as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy” to which one could be a mirror or kaleidoscope as expansive as the crowd itself so as to respond to and reproduce its flickering rhythms.⁵²

There is even a certain public skepticism and suspicion that can arise toward the lone walker. As Ralph Waldo Emerson remarks, “Who so goes to walk alone, accuses the whole world; he declares all to be unfit to be his companions; it is very uncivil, nay insulting; Society

⁵⁰Quoted in Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 60.

⁵¹Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd,” *Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed., G.R. Thompson (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

⁵²Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964).

will retaliate.”⁵³ In this regard, there are a variety of collective walkathons in most cities and suburbs, including those sponsored by the March of Dimes, cancer and AIDs support groups, and organizations raising money and awareness about hunger, homelessness and community health. Political walks in the form of demonstrations and protest marches empower people by taking to and taking back the streets.⁵⁴ City walking is tied as well to a host of social and political issues such as stalking (sexual threats), “take back the night” walks (feminism), streetwalking (prostitution), and walk-outs (labor practices and strikes).⁵⁵ In walking from neighborhood to neighborhood, one is also frequently crossing borders of ethnicity, citizenship and race, entering worlds that are relatively unfamiliar and thus potential scenes of political and cultural education, as when one “crosses the tracks” to witness poverty and discrimination or, alternatively, affluence and privilege.⁵⁶

Walking can be a profoundly democratic practice where all are literally placed on the same footing. This sentiment is revealed in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* when the narrator, a clerk, encounters an officer on the street whose station in life clearly ranks above him:

It tormented me that even in the street I couldn’t manage to treat him as an equal. “Why must you step aside first?” I’d rant at myself...“Why just you, why not he? There is, after all, no law about it...Why can’t it be on equal terms...I was fully set to do it, but all that happened at the very last moment was that I stumbled underfoot...just two inches away from him...I made a final decision...I made up my mind in an instant, shut my eyes and — we collided firmly...I did not yield an inch and passed him by entirely on equal footing! I had achieved my goal, I had sustained

⁵³Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Transcendentalist,” *The Portable Emerson*, ed., Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 100.

⁵⁴“Beneath the cobblestones the beach” was a Situationist reprise during the heady days of protest in Paris in the late 1960s, suggesting that there is a world beyond the immediacy of the streets.

⁵⁵On women’s issues and the notion of the gendered walk, see Deborah Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶On the subjects of race and class, see Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

my dignity, I had not yielded a step and had publicly set myself on an equal social footing with him.”⁵⁷

By contrast, some caste members in India step far in an anti-democratic direction when they treat “untouchables” as pariahs by wiping away their footprints in the dust and dirt after they have approached so as to render them *persona non grata*. In comparison with the days when many walkers were seen as vagrants, déclassé or simply members of the underclass because they could not afford “proper” transportation — a historical fact apparent in novels such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Thomas Hardy’s *Tess* — a renewed attention to walking possesses emancipatory possibilities.⁵⁸ Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara, Moses and other radical political figures of renown went on long walks, marches or pilgrimages as did Buddha and Jesus. As Bruce Chatwin claims with boldness, “None of our revolutionary heroes is worth a thing until he has been on a good walk.”⁵⁹

Urban and suburban walking raise issues related to trespassing and transgression, of crossing and marking the limit of the allowable. Walking de-limits boundaries, removes and reinstates a line or time with regard to permissibility or pass-ability. Private property and public space are always at stake in the walk, and in the process and procession of human bodies so are the borders of the appropriate and appropriated, property and propriety. On an extended walk, it is not uncommon to encounter fences, guard dogs and alarms that hinder or prevent one’s access to certain territories. The increasing surveillance of sidewalks and streets by circulating cameras and cops is in large measure a maintenance of traditional lines of power, notions of propriety, and institutions of property.⁶⁰ This fact and phenomenon is evident when loiterers, vagrants, and non-consuming walkers are threatened, harassed and arrested for not participating in the commercial spectacle, for merely

⁵⁷Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), pp. 61-65. Interestingly, in the same work, Dostoevsky characterizes the dark essence of humanity in terms of our upright posture and ability to walk: “I even think that the best definition of man is: a biped ungrateful” (p. 32).

⁵⁸Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, for example, begins with the line: “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.”

⁵⁹Bruce Chatwin, *Anatomy of Restlessness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 103.

⁶⁰On such issues, see Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space,” in Dennis R. Judd and Paul P. Kantor, eds., *The Politics of Urban America* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998).

being present in residential areas, or for walking across lawns, exclusive beaches or “private communities” (an oxymoron to be sure).⁶¹

6. Walking Through Walls: The City as Moving Text

Walking is a way of side-stepping domestication, of leaving the hold of the house — the household — but not necessarily the wholeness of home in the more inclusive sense of the environment. Walking methodically constitutes and yokes physical locations together in the action of the circumambulating body and surveying mind, stretching out and connecting a trail of sounds, sites, smells and sightings — opening up and revealing a series of land-markings. Although departing from a familiar scene such as the apartment or house, the walk itself cannot be fully re-domesticated; it is always a step ahead of the interpretation. There is an excess of the signifying environment over the synthesizing activities of the walker. This is especially evident in the urban milieu where there is a superabundance of sensations that register on the walker’s senses and subconscious, even if they may not be acknowledged completely upon their arrival. Thus, walking in the city can be viewed in terms of a rhetorics that recognize the turnings and tropes, the spatial semantics and somatic styles, and the gestures and proper names inherent to the activity. As Michel de Certeau has argued, walking possesses an enunciative function. Like speech acts, it involves an appropriation of the topography (as when speakers take on language), as acting-out of place (as when speech enacts language acoustically) and an active relating of distinct pragmatic positions (as when a verbal utterance becomes an allocution and is put into comprehensible action). We are, in other words, effectively engaged in “pedestrian speech acts,” and walking can be thought of in terms of its spaces or places of enunciation.⁶²

Several salient characteristics of such speech acts can be further identified in order to differentiate them from the existing system of physical spaces. According to de Certeau, three features in particular are prominent: the present, the discrete and the phatic. Walking is first of all a present actualization of multiple spatial possibilities, including inventive, surprising and spontaneous acts of the walker as she or he picks and chooses a path through the city or alternatively prohibits a

⁶¹Although tending to perambulate in the woods and the wilderness rather than urban centers, Thoreau helped to show how walks might be subversive and even antinomian by challenging the notion that “good fences make good neighbors,” to use a later line from Robert Frost.

⁶²Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

selection of options so as to avoid, for example, a construction zone, a dangerous neighborhood or a heavily trafficked region. The walker simultaneously creates discreteness by making or displacing choices from among the signifiers in the linguistic landscape. Through walking, one constitutes both a “here” and a “there,” a “near” and a “far,” as one does in verbal communication. This dimension underscores the close parallel between pedestrian and linguistic enunciation, introduces an otherness or outside in relation to the ambling self, and articulates the conjunctive and disjunctive dimensions to the places through which we walk. Finally, urban walking possesses a phatic aspect that involves the initiation, maintenance or disruption of contact and communication with other persons (and perhaps we can include animals and even artifacts with which one confabulates). As we walk, we regularly commune, acknowledge, and directly or indirectly converse with other walkers most obviously through utterances but also via the silent semaphores of our gestures and posture, our unfolding legs and swinging arms, our glancing eyes and flapping elbows.

These distinctions within a rhetorical ecology of ambling, too, could be expanded upon, as de Certeau suggests, so as to include an analysis of the modes of pedestrian enunciation in terms of their truth value (e.g., possible, impossible, or contingent), epistemology (e.g., plausible, questionable, excluded), and ethics or legality (e.g., the permitted, obligatory or forbidden). “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks.’ All the modalities [of pedestrian enunciation] sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to time, the path taken and the walker.”⁶³ Such a theoretical framework tends to stress the opacity and blindness of the migrational and metaphoric city that is inserted between or superimposed upon the lines and gridwork of a planned, coordinated and administrated city, calling attention to an oddity and uncanniness that does not come to a transparent surface, except when one rises up to view the city from above.

The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk — an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 99.

cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other.⁶⁴

Indeed, it is precisely the presence of monumental "letters" in the form of concrete, steel and glass buildings such as the 1370-foot World Trade Center situated in a massive rhetorical economy of excess and expenditure that provide for the scopic and voyeuristic possibility of a fictional reading of the complex urban text (via an aerial or bird's-eye point of view).⁶⁵

After pressing the parallel between pedestrian processes and linguistic practices, de Certeau, links walking to the realm of symbolic and mythic discourse along with aspects of "oneiric figuration," suggesting a connection between spatial practices and dreamed places — one that can be found in numerous literary writers. In describing the place of his childhood in Brooklyn, Henry Miller, for example, observes: "Suddenly, walking down a street, be it real or be it a dream, one realizes for the first time that the years have flown, that all this has passed forever and will live on only in memory; and then the memory turns inward with a strange, clutching brilliance and one goes over these scenes and incidents perpetually, in dream and reverie, while walking down a street."⁶⁶ In fact, de Certeau goes as far to suggest that to walk in the city is in some sense to admit that one is without a true place. "It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper," he writes. "The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place — an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁶⁵One might even be inclined to ask in jaded fashion, who needs to walk or hike up mountains when we can climb or ride up skyscrapers to gain a similar view?

⁶⁶Henry Miller, "The Fourteenth Ward," *Black Spring* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 8.

relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City.”⁶⁷ The urban landscape is, in other words, as much a product of imagination as it is physical processes — it is an admixture of images (and ideas) with infrastructure, a combination of cloud and concrete.

At this juncture, the role of proper names and place-names enters into the moving *topoi* of the urban text, particularly in the toponymy of streets, boulevards, parks, apartment buildings, public squares, subway stations, churches, schools and businesses. And while the nomenclature is not univocal or pellucid in meaning, it nevertheless assists us in making sense of our surroundings as we walk, de-marking and de-scribing zones of comfort, indicating direction, and confirming our itinerary. Such names and numbered streets can be said to form “sentences” that we compose and then enact without full awareness but which still orient our trajectories. For example, depart from 396 Beacon >>> cross Gloucester >>> turn at Massachusetts Avenue >>> pause and veer at Harvard Bridge >>> drift along Charles River footpath >>> and arrive at Emerson College. This phenomenon is most easily grasped perhaps in places such as “Alphabet City” in the East Village of Manhattan, in towns with streets following a lexical ordering of A, B, C, D, and so on, that draw focus upon the role of lettering, and in locations such as Mexico City where street naming takes on imaginative and magical hues.⁶⁸ As de Certeau remarks, such “names create a nowhere in places; they change them into passages.”⁶⁹ In the process of decorating and directing the wandering, these words and the walks to which they are wedded are transformed into “liberated spaces” so that a poetic topography is grafted onto the physical geography. “Things that amount to nothing, or almost nothing, symbolize and orient walkers’ steps: names that have ceased precisely to be ‘proper’.”⁷⁰

The idea of walking as a kind of transformative encryption and inscription within the physical environment is indirectly illustrated in Paul Auster’s “City of Glass,” part of his *New York Trilogy*. In this

⁶⁷de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁶⁸In Mexico City, common street names include Forest of Light, Tree of Fire, Forest of Secrets and Sea of Dreams. Work Street is very long while Love and Happiness Streets are short. Good Luck crosses Hope then runs into a dead end. Comprehension Street ends in Silence.

⁶⁹de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 105.

short story, buildings, streets and parks are incorporated into the emerging urban text of New York that is read and misread as one of the characters walks about town, seeming to trace out a daily trail of letters that suggestively spell “TOWER OF BABEL,” an enigmatic reference to the problem of the diversity of tongues and the Diaspora of language.⁷¹ In this manner, the ambling serves not only as a form of physical location within the city limits and a metaphysical location within the world but also as a kind of methodological constitution of meaning. Walking, we might say, is an automatic (and often unconscious) enactment of a form of *foot-writing* as opposed to the more manual (and generally conscious) markings of hand-writing, a signature of our sensuous engagement with the surroundings. In walking, we leave a series of *foot notes* in the margins (side-walks) of the urban text. In a sense, such urban walking and upright “writing” echoes, too, a much older notion of tracks as texts that can be potentially read, followed and interpreted by the skilled traveler, hunter or hiker given the appropriate training and patience. For the walker is not only tracking and trailing existing paths but also making and marking his or her own, in a vast over-determined but under-read palimpsest that can be followed by a wide range of pedestrians and peripatetics as well as tourists, dogs, surveillance cameras, stalkers, detectives, and sociologists. Urban walking, then, is a turning, touring, detouring and returning through the artifactual “canyons” and “cliffs” created by the facades of storefronts, hotels, office buildings and arcades. It is a negotiation inside the architectural mazes and labyrinths — via short-cuts, jaywalks, backtracks, bridge-crossings, overpasses and crowded subway undertows. And it is a movement between and through physical and perceptual walls that serve as interdictions, enticements or endpoints for the walker and those who attempt, despite the difficulties and (de Certeau might add) impossibilities, to effectively “read” and “write” their way through the textual rhetorics of the city.

However, as we saw, the city is not only a text but a terrain of human traffic, a place of contested powers. While revealing, the framework offered by de Certeau is limited in terms of its ability to provide critical analysis and to suggest modes of resistance for the walker. It is on the whole more poetic than political in its approach and given toward reinstating overly sharp oppositions between a metaphoric and literal up and down, between theory and praxis, and between the macroscopic realm of the social and the microscopic domain of the individual. Still, one of the values of focusing on walking as a method

⁷¹Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

of understanding the city is that it provides a “bottom-up” perspective. It ventures a street-level view from below in the shoes of ordinary citizens that counterbalances cultural and philosophical tendencies to “fall up”⁷² toward the universal or immaterial and to forget the particular and familiar — i.e., the pedestrian. At the same time, it is important to keep the larger context in view and not to “fall down” and become a purveyor of a reverse-privileging. In this regard, we must also try to hold before us the broader dimensions of power and politics in the urban world. It is in this direction that the Situationists attempted to take walking while still retaining the semblances of subjectivity and creativity that are possible via bodily locomotion about a large and seemingly mechanized city. In their practice of city walking, we can discern one alternative model for critical ambling and political peripatetics.⁷³

7. De-touring: The Path Not Taken

In formulating their critique of commodity culture and the tendency of capitalism to produce spectacles for non-participatory consumption, the members of the Situationist International developed a notion of the *dérive* — literally meaning “drifting” but more exactly, a method of “transient passage through varied ambiances.” Such walking involves “playful-constructive behavior” and an attention to the nascent field of psycho geography.⁷⁴ The *dérive* or drift combines both planning and chance into a kind of “organized spontaneity” as one navigates through the city. It negotiates a tension between a blind and random “letting go” and its opposite, an active awareness of psychological and placial possibilities. In this sense, it differs from the leisurely stroll or the plotted journey in that the *dérive*ing person or group must guard against becoming habituated to new routes, axes and paths. Through a radical

⁷²On the notion of “falling up,” see Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷³Another way of incorporating critique into pedestrian movement about the city is radical walking tours such as those that have been conducted in the downtown areas of New York City, where participants gather to visit and learn about by foot the sites of historical labor protests, strikes, clashes with the police and government or to commemorate events such as Stonewall.

⁷⁴Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” in Ken Knabb, trans. and ed., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 50. See also Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), and Guy Debord, “Two Accounts of Desire,” in Elisabeth Sussman, ed., *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957-1972* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 135-139.

walking that entails a cognizance of the ambient environment, the Situationists believed that one could ascertain the fissures and breaks in a city network, the prevalence of micro-climates, the nature of administrative districts, and most importantly, the manner in which sites are organized to attract or distract us. The *dérive*, too, is conceived so as to contain therapeutic potential, standing in relation to the city as a whole in a manner akin to the role of psychoanalysis at its best in relation to language. That is, it is designed to encourage a free flow of steps (words) that releases one from the banalities of ordinary life as it enacts a critique of functionalist architecture and Cartesian space upon which a dominant image of the city operates.

The *dérive* is most beneficially performed in small groups of two or three individuals who have political, aesthetic and philosophical affinities so as to better their chances of reaching more objective conclusions about the environment. In terms of time limits, the usual duration was the length between two sleeping periods (rather than a solar day), although according to their own accounts some Situationists sustained the walking for three or four days and several even pursued it for a few months. Unlike travel, then, the *dérive* is not a continual or nonstop undertaking, and persons pursuing such radical walks are admonished to be aware of the dangers of dissolution, disintegration and dissociation accompanying a drift. The spatial field of the *dérive* can be determinate or ill-defined, but it hinges upon the psychogeographical aims of the drifters, which can range from challenges to one's cognitive picture of the city to research on a local ambiance. Most drifts tended to occur in city regions because wandering in pastoral locales was deemed to be depressing by the Situationists — revealing their anti-ruralism. At one extreme of the realm of possibilities lies the static *dérive* — much like loitering *flânerie* — in which one might remain in a train station, for example, for an entire day, taking in the world as it walks by. Another pole is illustrated by the surrealist-like amblings of a figure who wandered through the Harz area of Germany while following a map of London, an aesthetic the Situationists seemed to tolerate as long as the automatist techniques posed a challenge to so-called bourgeois values. To the Situationists, the *dérive* is a “great game” that necessitates a certain sensibility in order to appreciate its varied dimensions. “Thus a loose lifestyle and even certain amusements considered dubious that have always been enjoyed among our entourage — slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking nonstop and without destination through Paris during a transportation

strike in the name of adding to the confusion, wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public, etc.”⁷⁵

As Guy Debord wrote, “That which changes our way of seeing the street is more important than that which changes our way of seeing a painting,”⁷⁶ and to this end the drift was partially directed. For the person on a *dérive* through a terrain of passion, the street unites the ordinary and extraordinary, becoming a gallery of sounds and sights that is not to be consumed in the commercial sense but rather actively engaged and even politically altered so as to reveal power relationships. Through an accompanying practice that the Situationists called *detournement* — a term suggesting a turning, diversion or deflection as, for example, when one reads “neighborhood” as “gangland” — they hoped this could be accomplished.⁷⁷ The *dérive* helps to invest the city with human meaning, a point Debord underscored in quoting Marx’s remark that “Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image: everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive.” By deploying aerial plans, *dérives* and the insights of psychogeography, the Situationists thereby hoped to explore the uses and structures of the urban environment, offer an alternative to social alienation, and develop new readings and experiences of the city. From this perspective, maps are decidedly not neutral instruments, and the walks that track them are “not down in any map; true places never are,”

⁷⁵Debord, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷⁶Debord, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁷⁷*Detournement* implies notions of detouring and subversion and is the process by which pre-existing elements (writing, cartoons, photographs, objects) are lifted out of their original contexts (which are usually heavily-coded or overdetermined) and then re-situated or re-territorialized via montage, erasure, insertion or modification in unfamiliar contexts so as to reveal their hidden, latent or “real” content. It is generally a consciously political (rather than aesthetic) re-contextualization and re-assembling of ideological “texts” so as to criticize the process or culture which produces and consumes them. *Detournement*, unlike Derridean deconstruction, relies frequently, though not necessarily, on illegalist and illicit strategies that take as their starting point a kind of cultural piracy, creative plagiarism and systematic misinterpretation in order to ferret out relations of power. In contrast to deconstructive techniques, *detournement* has few, if any, ties to the academic world; it can be practiced anonymously, and it can be exercised on a large scale by many people easily and cheaply. In Germany, for example, I have altered (rather than simply crossed out) graffiti that read “Ausländer Raus” (Foreigners Out) to say “Ausländer Rausch” (Foreigners Intoxicate/Celebrate), to cite one small example. See Knabb, ed., 1981, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 8-14.

to borrow a line from Herman Melville. According to Debord, “Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things and of human beings trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological claims, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life.”⁷⁸ In this way, the Situationists felt one could help attain the revolution of everyday life.⁷⁹

Walking is thus potentially a form of de-touring, of undoing or unpacking the psychological and political baggage associated with the soporific dimensions of tourism, travel and transit in the city. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in their multi-tiered network known as *Anti-Oedipus*, “the schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world.”⁸⁰ Henry Miller’s reflection on life in the New York streets, “The Fourteenth Ward,” seems to convey the unique state of mind that walking in the city can facilitate as the ambler takes on multiple and varying lines of flight, becoming-other (nomad, child, animal, plant, music, sky) and shattering the narrow confines of the calcified self:

Henceforward everything moves on shifting levels...we walk split into myriad fragments, like an insect with a hundred feet, a centipede with soft-stirring feet that drinks in the atmosphere; we walk with sensitive filaments that drink avidly of past and future, and all things melt into music and sorrow; we walk against a united world, asserting our dividedness. All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments....We walk the streets with a thousand legs and eyes, with furry antennae picking up the slightest clue and memory of the past. In the aimless to and fro we pause now and then, like long, sticky plants....One walks the street at night with the bridge against the sky like a harp...every

⁷⁸Guy Debord, “Situationist Theses on Traffic,” *ibid.*, p. 58. Today, we might be inclined to be more skeptical toward a notion of “authentic” and “genuine” life than those writing in earlier eras.

⁷⁹Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983).

⁸⁰Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 2.

door of the cage is open and whichever way you walk is a straight line toward infinity, a straight made line over which the breakers roar.⁸¹

In another story, Miller further develops the parallel between a kind of healthy embrace of schizophrenia and the perceptual, psychological and political release provided by walking:

As a human being walking around at twilight, at dawn, at strange hours, unearthly hours, the sense of being alone and unique fortifies me to such a degree that when I walk with the multitude and seem no longer to be a human but a mere speck, a gob of spit, I begin to think of myself alone...walking, singing, commanding the earth. I do not have to look in my vest pocket to find my soul; it is there all the time, bumping against my ribs, swelling, inflated with song....The dreamers dream from the neck up, their bodies securely strapped to the electric chair. To imagine a new world is to live it daily, each thought, each glance, each step, each gesture killing and recreating, death always a step in advance....These are the thoughts born of the street, *genus epileptoid*. You walk out with the guitar and the strings snap.⁸²

Here we should note not just the radical walker's ostensible break with power⁸³ but concomitantly the severance from an orchestrated spectacle — the nonevents in nonplaces we increasingly find outside real time.

In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari's notion and practice of "nomadology" articulates the possibility of deterritorializing space and opening it up to qualitative multiplicities, vagabondage and challenges to authoritarian, state and Oedipal influences that the nomad attempts to resist. Whereas the state striates the space that it governs — formalizing it with walls, roads or enclosures and universalizing it in the process — the nomad⁸⁴ tends to move through smooth space —

⁸¹Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-13.

⁸²*Ibid.*, pp. 22-25.

⁸³Deleuze and Guattari, along with Michel Foucault, R. D. Laing and other radical critics of psychiatry, seem to have over-romanticized some instances and notions of breaking with power among schizophrenics and the "mentally-ill."

⁸⁴Deleuze and Guattari make significant distinctions between nomads, itinerants, migrants and transhumants. While these differences cannot be explored here, it is necessary to point out that the nomad is not simply a

which is marked only by traits that can be displaced or effaced — following vectorial fields and distributing himself or herself within it, adding to a localized but undelimited field rather than isolating and monopolizing it. “It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism, but to control migrations, and more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire ‘exterior,’ over all of the flows traversing ecumenon.”⁸⁵ Following such an analysis and the attendant warnings, socially informed and politically engaged walkers should remain vigilant in observing and then resisting the manners in which their pace is controlled, their movements are restricted, their places of circulation are regulated and their habits are surveyed and measured.

Likewise, the idea of “dromomania” is relevant to a consideration and critique of urban peripatetics.⁸⁶ Dromomaniacs were deserters in the *ancien regime*, and the term is used in psychiatry for compulsive walkers. According to Paul Virilio — who has promulgated, extended and interrogated the concept as it relates to speed and space — all revolutions must wrestle with the paradoxical aspects of circulation, mobilization, migration and the moving masses. “Revolution is movement, but movement is not revolution,”⁸⁷ and so politics enters into the fray of organizing or controlling territorial and traffic flows, including the walking of foot soldiers and citizens. “We could even say,” Virilio surmises, “that the rise of totalitarianism goes hand-in-hand with the development of the state’s hold over the circulation of the masses.”⁸⁸ The police of the *polis*, in other words, patrol the public paths, guard the gates of the city, create filters and screens against the spontaneous fluidity of the crowds, and manage the immigrations, emigrations and internal migrations of the populace. As Deleuze and Guattari contend, the political power of the state “requires that movement...cease to be the absolute state of a moving body occupying a smooth space, to become the relative characteristic of a ‘moved body’ going from one point to another in a striated space.” Thus, “the State

continuous walker or wanderer. In fact, the nomad is not defined by movement like the migrant who moves from point to point but rather is one “who does not move” except while seated.

⁸⁵Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotexte, 1986), p. 59.

⁸⁶Jean-François Lyotard’s idea of drifting thought which accepts no truth value and undermines legitimations of those discourses which do is also germane to a theoretical consideration of walking. See his *Driftworks* (New York: Semiotexte, 1984).

⁸⁷Virilio, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 16.

never ceases to decompose, recompose and transform movement, or to regulate speed.”⁸⁹

8. Side-walks: Movement and Music in the Margins

Like all forms of travel and transit, walking in the city involves a *methodos*, a way through the world and thus a choice of routes in the environment. There are classic distinctions that can be made in the basic elements of any city, and five in particular have been identified and delineated by one noteworthy urban thinker and planner: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Paths are channels along which people move, whether potentially, habitually or sporadically, and where they lack identity or are easily mistaken for one another, the entire city image can be called into question.⁹⁰ Sidewalks are one of the most prevalent manifestations of the city path. As the word itself suggests, side-walks are in one sense the exteriors and margins of the roads, the “suburbs” (so to speak) above-the-curbs of the streets. In another sense, they are the thresholds of storefronts, houses and parks that they ring, directing people to their destinations. Sidewalks hold a vital place in our towns and cities, literally providing a platform for public life and an artery for regular citizen interaction. Their absence in many suburbs is a sign not only of the decline of walking but of the transformations that occur in moving toward exurbia, the domain outside the city landscape. Sidewalks, which are understood legally as public spaces, offer needed transitional realms between the intimacy of the home and the privacy afforded by the porch on the one hand and the frenzy of traffic and the anonymity of the streets on the other hand.

As pedestrians on the sidewalk pass in front of my property, they enter my sphere of influence. They enjoy or endure my landscaping and the architecture of my house. If I happen to be outside they might catch my gaze, and I theirs. A brief and distant intimacy connects these strangers with me because the public space of the sidewalk brings them, in a socially authorized and (usually) nonthreatening manner, into my world; when I use the sidewalk to pass in front of their houses, the intimacy is reciprocated. A very different and colder kind of relationship obtains in

⁸⁹DeLuze and Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁹⁰Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), p. 47.

neighborhoods where there are no sidewalks and pedestrians must walk in the streets.⁹¹

Good sidewalks must be judged ultimately in terms of their integration into the communities of which they are part. It is arguable in this regard that the peace of the sidewalks and streets is not kept primarily by the police or by laws that are promulgated and enforced. Rather, as Jane Jacobs has argued, it is maintained “by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves [such that] a well-used city street is apt to be a safe street. A deserted street is apt to be unsafe.”⁹² Following the work of urban sociologists and community planners, there seem to be a number of criteria that can be adduced and defended with regard to developing and maintaining places for walking.⁹³ Sidewalks should first be continuous and uninterrupted as far as this is possible in order to ensure the free movement of pedestrians. From the vantage point of local businesses, a regular pedestrian flow irrigates and nourishes the city centers and sites of enterprise. In Europe, a positive result of meeting this requirement is that pedestrianized cities and towns frequently retain the strongest local economies. In this sense, it might be said that where the sidewalk ends, so also ceases the community.⁹⁴ In addition, sidewalks need to be both clearly-defined and safe from the threat of encroachment by cars and other vehicles, which must be reminded repeatedly that they share the world with walkers. According to federal sources, vehicle accidents involving pedestrians are twice as likely to occur in locations without sidewalks or appropriate pathways.⁹⁵ Sidewalks, moreover, must provide easy access to the destinations that pedestrians seek. The organization of walkways prior to an understanding of the places where people actually do walk or need to go can lead to problems. This dilemma is evident in parks, on college campuses and other urban locations where sidewalks are often set up in advance of walking patterns, creating a criss-crossing and forking system of used, semi-used and unused paths that can be visually objectionable and practically unmanageable.

⁹¹Mike Greenberg, *The Poetics of Cities: Designing Neighborhoods That Work* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995), pp. 14-15.

⁹²Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961). See also Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

⁹³Greenberg, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹⁵Gratz with Mintz, *op. cit.*

Sidewalks, too, should have a rhythm that enhances, facilitates and encourages walking and that is related aesthetically to the landscape and surrounding objects and buildings. This requirement suggests that walking may possess a musical dimension⁹⁶ that is both spatial and temporal, one that is orchestrated and “played” as one is drawn by the progression of organic and inorganic “notes,” architectural “scores,” and visual “riffs” one encounters in the language of the landscape: the arrangement, repetition or syncopation of doors and fences, rows of trees and parking meters, clusters of benches, lines of windows, columns and telephone polls, planters and flower boxes, roof tops and even the regular cracks in the pavement. As we walk, we are propelled forward — as in a song — through expectation and anticipation and toward realization of another moment (place) that is intimately bound with and conveyed by preceding instants (locales). As Mike Greenberg suggests, “If the stride, roughly twenty-five to thirty inches for most adults, is the basic pulse of the pedestrian’s encounter with the city — the beat of the music of the street — then it seems reasonable to propose that the next level of grouping might comprise events that occur at some small multiple of strides, two or three, or at most four.” To this advice we may add a complicating perceptual twist: “A real building is in a state of flux as the people who see and use it are themselves in motion. As one walks along the street, buildings advance and recede, blanch and blush, spin on their toes and play hide-and-seek, reveal their seductive ankles or their proud heads.”⁹⁷ Finally, sidewalks should be built to accommodate effectively the many necessary public objects that are part of daily urban and suburban life such as mailboxes, newspaper boxes, benches, utility poles and bus shelters. This demand, of course, seems to mean that sidewalks should generally be *wide-walks* (we might say) so that the walker is not further marginalized in the urban environment.

An MIT study — the first of its kind — in which researchers recorded the impressions and later tested the memories of 27 people as they walked one by one around several blocks in Boston (along Boylston Street, through an alley, onto Newbury Street and into the Public Garden) provides some empirical information on the perceptions

⁹⁶I consider the musical aspects of walking more fully in, Macauley, “Walking the Elemental Earth,” *op. cit.*, commenting upon the walkabout and the songlines of the Australian Aborigines and the reflections of neurologist, Oliver Sacks, in his *Leg to Stand On* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

⁹⁷Greenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

and attitudes of pedestrians in an urban environment.⁹⁸ Spatial form — particularly spatially dominant buildings and open areas (such as a park) — is the major impression that registers on and remains with most pedestrians, followed by the quality and characteristics of the sidewalk or city “floor” and then the details or content of the fronts of stores.⁹⁹ The spaces best remembered by walkers seem to be those that are either defined clearly or that represent breaks in an overall continuity. Sixteen of the 27 participants in the study remarked on the very accommodating width of the Boylston sidewalk, including its state of repair or occasional rough surfaces, which can jar one out of a regular rhythm. The experimental pedestrians were very conscious, too, of “visual clamor” and multiple street signs, and there was a widespread sense of the dramatic differences between the back alley occupations of seamstresses, for example, and the well-dressed shoppers on Newbury Street, indicating perhaps a sense of class distinctions that are visible in a short and relatively average urban walk. The walkers showed as well some awareness and concern with the presence or relative absence of trees and revealed pleasurable feelings upon entering the green space of the Public Garden (in contrast with a general distaste for the alley and an annoyance with auto traffic, though only once they had to cross it). More generally, the research indicates how walkers are constantly searching for or injecting order into their surroundings so as to make sense of their disparate impressions and to join their perceptions into a coherent picture. To this end, many walkers tend to divide a walk into distinct regions — in this study three in number — and whereas relative newcomers to an urban landscape are not able to discover marked differences between spaces and places, the more experienced native is able to find similarities (though often imagined) between buildings, blocks, streets and neighborhoods.

⁹⁸Kevin Lynch with Malcolm Rivkin, “A Walk Around the Block,” *Landscape*, 8, 3, 1959, reprinted in Kevin Lynch, *City Sense and City Design*, ed., Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). On each trip around the block, the interviewer informed the walkers that they were about to take a short walk and were not to look for anything in particular but simply to talk about what they saw, heard, smelled or more generally noticed.

⁹⁹Few walkers commented on the sky, colors, wall materials and textures, upper floor facades, overhead wires or doorways.

9. The Art of Walking: Pedestrian Aesthetics

To better understand the role of walking in urban contexts and other domains,¹⁰⁰ it is helpful to turn very briefly to a few of its representations and transformations within art, literature and philosophy. If some walks might be conceived as rhythmic songs, the poem itself can also be construed as a kind of walk and the walk itself as form of poetic activity given their interrelated dimensions — a point made by the poet A. R. Ammons in a short essay, “A Poem is a Walk.”¹⁰¹ A few of these similarities include the creative use of the body and perception; the singularity, uniqueness and unreproducibility of most poems and many walks; the turns and returns involved in both phenomena; and the emphasis on motion which inheres in each that can be measured tellingly in units such as feet or meters. To these aspects we should add an attentiveness to the ambient surroundings, especially when the walk-poem or poem-walk is seen as a thick description or phenomenological embodiment of the landscape and topography, as it is in the case of poets like Wallace Stevens, who has gone so far as to equate the ambling self with his *Umwelt* in holding that “I was the *world* in which I walked.”¹⁰² As Roger Gilbert maintains, “Like walks, poems can be seen as exploratory movements that remain uncommitted to any particular goal or outcome beyond movement itself. Both walk and poem therefore offer especially pure instances of the aesthetic, conceived as the negation of practical or end-directed activity.”¹⁰³

In addition to poetry, the use of the walk in novels has been an especially effective method of describing and detailing the city landscape. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a paradigmatic invocation of a walk through an urban environment — very early 20th century Dublin — that comes to reveal a distinctively modern society while at the same time recalling a lost Homeric and Greek world from which its imagery and metaphors departs.¹⁰⁴ The experimental novel takes place during the course of one day in the very walkable regions along the Liffey River. In fact, the world of Dublin as it is made manifest through the

¹⁰⁰In his considerations of ambling in the wilderness, Thoreau also treated walking as an art, rather than as mere exercise or goal-oriented travelling. See his essay, “Walking,” in Thoreau, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹A. R. Ammons, “A Poem is a Walk,” *Epoch*, Fall, 1968.

¹⁰²Wallace Stevens, quoted in Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 250.

¹⁰³Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed., Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

extended walk of the main characters, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, is evoked with such verisimilitude that Joyce himself once remarked that if the city should disappear it could be recreated from the novel.

The *flâneur*, as explored by Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin and other cultural critics, is another kind of aesthetic walker, a spectator who discovers in the city a kind of gallery or museum. The boulevards, in other words, are places of seeing and being seen. In fact, through an active loitering and aimless strolling the *flâneur* can be said to represent a potential challenge to or critique of commodity culture with its highly regulated movements, spatial orderings, divisions of labor and structured sense of time. Some *flâneurs* even took to walking turtles (and lobsters) down the sidewalk so as to call attention to and contest the accelerated pace of the city and modern life. Elaborating on Benjamin's idea that in the city "perception is reading," Franz Hessel writes: "The real city stroller is like a reader who reads a book simply to pass the time and for pleasure," offering in the process a theory of the *flâneur* as essayist that recalls our earlier discussion of the linkages between walking, the city and texts. "*Flânerie* is a way of reading the street, in which people's faces, displays, shop windows, café terraces, cars, tracks, trees turn into an entire series of equivalent letters, which together form words, sentences, and pages of a book that is always new."¹⁰⁵

Rousseau also employed the walk in Paris as an aesthetic avenue to what he terms "reverie," a word whose etymology implies a roaming and wandering for delight as well as a departure from habitual paths and boundaries. While completing his last work, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Rousseau took pause to note on a playing card — perhaps his bookmark — an epiphanal thought. "My whole life," he noticed blithely, "has been little else than a long reverie divided into chapters by my daily walks."¹⁰⁶ With this idea given form, he proceeded to

¹⁰⁵Franz Hessel, quoted in Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flâneur, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Paperbacks, 1999), p. 66. See also Keith Tester, *The Flânerie* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰⁶Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 12. See also Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). Like Rousseau, Nietzsche developed a rather footloose style, finding in the process that pedestrian activity helped to generate very uncommon ideas and philosophical speculation. To Flaubert's remark, "One can think and write only when sitting down," he retorts, "Now I have you, nihilist! Assiduity is the *sin* against the holy spirit. Only ideas *won by walking* have

wander and write on — a project he had commenced in *Emile* and the *Confessions* as *promeneur solitaire* in an odd search, as he says in the “Fifth Walk,” for “a state where the soul can find a resting-place.”¹⁰⁷ In the process, he discovered that “Walking has something that animates and enlivens my ideas: I almost cannot think when I stay in place; my body needs to be in motion for my mind to be there.”¹⁰⁸

10. Post-amble

As we approach such a resting-place, we can close by raising the question whether walking is increasingly an exercise in bodily, cultural and political nostalgia given the near pervasive presence of the automobile, the airplane and the internet — which seem to defeat time and denature space through the ascendancy of speed. Are we, in other words, wandering away from walking and drifting toward a post-ambulating society? As Adorno puts it in *Minima Moralia*:

the body’s habituation to walking stems from the good old days. It was the bourgeois form of locomotion: physical demythologization, free of the spell of hieratic pacing, roofless wandering, breathless flight. Human dignity insisted on the right to walk, a rhythm not extorted from the body by command or terror. The walk, the stroll, were private ways of passing time, the heritage of the feudal promenade in the nineteenth century. With the liberal era walking too is dying out, even where people do not go by car.¹⁰⁹

Adorno’s assertion, while provocative, is surely going a bit too far. Lewis Mumford, on the other hand, offers a more optimistic counterpoise to Adorno’s view when he proclaims that “where walking is exciting and visually stimulating, whether it is in a Detroit shopping center or along Fifth Avenue, Americans are perfectly ready to walk.”

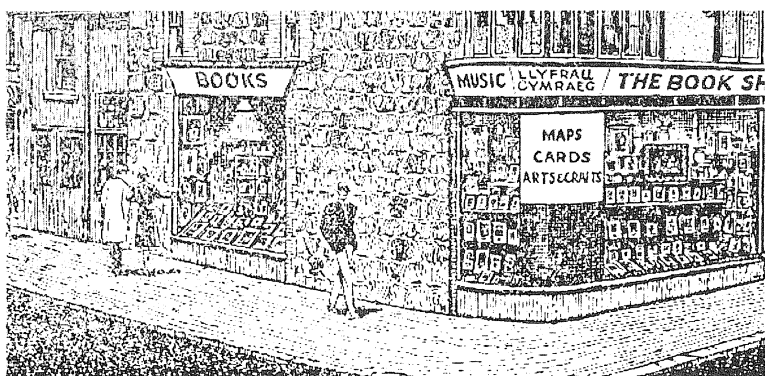
any value,” playing upon *das Sitzfleisch*, the posterior (or literally, “sitting-flesh”), with which “assiduity” (from *sedere*, to sit) is cognate (*Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Penguin Books, 1968], p. 26). Indeed, Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed greatest idea, that of the “eternal recurrence of the same” and the whole of Zarathustra as man and work were acquired through walking in the area surrounding Sils-Maria, “6000 feet beyond man and time,” as he says in *Ecce Homo*.

¹⁰⁷Rousseau, *Reveries*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, quoted in Van Den Abbeele, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁹Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

“The legs,” he adds, “will come into their own again, as the ideal means of neighborhood transportation, once some provision is made for their exercise.”¹¹⁰ What this provision must include is not only trees for shade and overhead cover, wide sidewalks for lateral movement and traffic flow, outdoor cafes for refreshment, benches for relaxation, and flower beds for aesthetic pleasure, but also a challenge to uniform zoning practices that erect monolithic commercial, industrial and residential areas which tend to preclude the walker. There are pedestrian outdoor “malls” in some urban areas, and solutions such as the “pedestrian pocket scheme” that attempt to counterbalance these developments have been thoughtfully proposed.¹¹¹ It should strike us as telling that many Americans will travel across the Atlantic to older European cities in part so as to experience urban settings that are scaled to a walker’s sense of aesthetic appreciation, bodily needs and desire for public participation. As Mumford himself concludes, “Nothing would do more to give life back to our blighted urban cores than to re-instate the pedestrian...to make circulation a delight.”¹¹² That seems like one worthy challenge for this new century.¹¹³



¹¹⁰Mumford, *The Highway and the City*, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹¹¹See Kunstler, *op. cit.*, as well as Peter Calthorpe, “The Pedestrian Pocket,” Richard T. LeGales and Frederic Stout, eds., *The City Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 351-356.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³I would like to thank Gary Backhaus for his sustained encouragement, Hugh Silverman for permitting me to present part of this paper at the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, and the faculty in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology for listening to an early draft of the project.