

FLÂNEUSE

“She is a girl and would not be afraid to walk the whole world with herself.”



The Invisible *Flâneuse* (The Experience of Modernity)

The literature of modernity describes the experience of men. It is essentially a literature about transformations in the public world and in its associated consciousness. The actual date of the advent of ‘the modern’ varies in different accounts, and so do the characteristics of ‘modernity’ identified by different writers. But what nearly all the accounts have in common is their concern with the public world of work, politics, and city life. And these are areas from which women were excluded, or in which they were practically invisible.(...) The public sphere, then, despite the presence of some women in certain contained areas of it, was a masculine domain. And insofar as the experience of ‘the modern’ occurred mainly in the public sphere, it was primarily men’s experience.

[But] a particular concern for the experience of modernity has also run through literary criticism; here its early prophet was Charles Baudelaire, the poet of mid-nineteenth century Paris. Walter Benjamin’s essays on Baudelaire, written in the 1930s, provide a fascinating (though typically cryptic and fragmentary) series of reflections on Baudelaire’s views on ‘the modern’. (...) ⁽⁶⁾ in the essay written in 1859-60, *The Painter of Modern Life*: ‘By “modernity” I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.’ ⁽⁷⁾ This is echoed in Marshall Berman’s recent book on the experience of modernity, which describes the ‘paradoxical unity’ of modernity: ‘A unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”’ ⁽⁸⁾ It also recalls Simmel’s account of the metropolitan personality: ‘The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli’ (Italics in original). ⁽⁹⁾

There is no contradiction in locating the early experience of ‘modernity’ in the mid-nineteenth century, and its later expression in the arts at the end of the century. Baudelaire, on the other hand, considers the phenomenon itself, and not its causes. (...)

Guys, the (Baudelaire’s) ‘painter of modern life,’ goes out into the crowd and records the myriad impressions of day and night.



⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, New Left Books, 1973)

⁷ Baudelaire, ‘Painter of Modern Life’, p.13.

⁸ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, Verso, 1983), p.15.

⁹ Simmel, ‘Metropolis and Mental Life’, pp.409-10.



He goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty... He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city — landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun. He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footman, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children... If a fashion or the cut of a garment has been slightly modified, if bows and curls have been supplanted by cockades, if *bavolets* have been enlarged and *chignons* have dropped a fraction towards the nape of the neck, if waists have been raised and skirts have become fuller, be very sure that his eagle eye will already have spotted it from however great a distance.

[...] But if it is an inventory of the superficial and the merely fashionable, then that is the point—the modern consciousness consists in the parade of impressions, the particular beauty appropriate to the modern age. Guys is the *flâneur*, in his element in the crowd—at the centre of the world and at the same time hidden from the world.⁽²¹⁾

The *flâneur* – the stroller – is a central figure in Benjamin’s essays on Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris. The streets and arcades of the city are the home of the *flâneur*, who, in Benjamin’s phrase, ‘goes botanizing on the asphalt’.⁽²²⁾ The anonymity of the crowd provides an asylum for the person on the margins of society; here Benjamin includes both Baudelaire himself as a *flâneur*, and the victims and murderers of Poe’s detective stories (which Baudelaire translated into French).⁽²³⁾ For Benjamin, however, the city of the *flâneur* is historically more limited than for Baudelaire. Neither London nor Berlin offers precisely the conditions of involvement/non-involvement in which the Parisian *flâneur* flourishes; nor does the Paris of a slightly later period, when a ‘network of controls’ has made escape into anonymity impossible.⁽²⁴⁾ (Baudelaire, and Berman, on the contrary argue that the Paris increasingly opened up by Haussmann’s boulevards, which broke down the social and geographical divisions between the classes, is even more the site of the modern gaze, the ambit of the *flâneur*).⁽²⁵⁾

The *flâneur* is the modern hero; his experience, like that of Guys, is that of a freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others. A related figure in the literature of modernity is the stranger. One of Baudelaire’s prose poems, *Paris Spleen*, is entitled *L’étranger*.⁽²⁶⁾ It is a short dialogue, in which an ‘enigmatic man’ is asked what or whom he loves – his father, mother, sister, brother? his friends, his country, beauty, gold? To all of these he answers in the negative, affirming that he simply loves the passing clouds.

21. Baudelaire, ‘Painter of Modern Life’, p.11.

22 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 36.

23 Ibid., pp.40, 170. Elsewhere, however, Benjamin argues that Baudelaire is not the archetypical *flâneur* (ibid., p.69).

24 Ibid., pp.49, 128, 47.

25 Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, pp.150-5.

26 Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)* (Paris, Garnier- Flammarion, 1967), p.33.

These heroes of modernity thus share the possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary uprooting, of anonymous arrival at a new place. They are, of course, all men. (Women and Public Life) Men and women may have shared the privatization of personality, the careful anonymity and withdrawal in public life; but the line drawn increasingly sharply between the public and private was also one which confined women to the private, while men retained the freedom to move in the crowd or to frequent cafés and pubs. The men’s clubs replaced the coffee-houses of earlier years.

None of the authors I have discussed is unaware of the different experience of women in the modern city. (...) “The lonely crowd” was a realm of privatized freedom, and the male, whether simply out of domination or greater need, was more likely to escape in it’. He notes, too, that in the earlier period of ‘public life’ women had to take a good deal more care about the ‘signs’ of their dress, which would be scrutinized for an indication of their social rank; in the nineteenth century, the scrutiny would be in order to differentiate ‘respectable’ from ‘loose’ women.

⁽³²⁾ (...) they ^(women) have a totally different experience of the city from that of men. (...)

The dandy, the *flâneur*, the hero, the stranger—all figures invoked to epitomize the experience of modern life—are invariably male figures. In 1831, when George Sand wanted to experience Paris life and to learn about the ideas and arts of her time, she dressed as a boy, to give herself the freedom she knew women could not share:

So I had made for myself a *redingote-guêrite* in heavy gray cloth, pants and vest to match. With a gray hat and large woollen cravat, I was a perfect first-year student. I can’t express the pleasure my boots gave me: I would gladly have slept with them, as my brother did in his young age, when he got his first pair. With those little iron-shod heels, I was solid on the pavement. I flew from one end of Paris to the other. It seemed to me that I could go round the world. And then, my clothes feared nothing. I ran out in every kind of weather, I came home at every sort of hour, I sat in the pit at the theatre. No one paid attention to me, and no one guessed at my disguise... No one knew me, no one looked at me, no one found fault with me; I was an atom lost in that immense crowd. ⁽³⁷⁾

The disguise made the life of the *flâneur* available to her; as she knew very well, she could not adopt the non-existent role of a *flâneuse*. Women could not stroll alone in the city.

In Baudelaire’s essays and poems, women appear very often. Modernity breeds, or makes visible, a number of categories of female city-dwellers. Among those most prominent in these texts are: the prostitute, the widow, the old lady, the lesbian, the murder victim, and the passing unknown woman. Indeed, according to Benjamin, the lesbian was for Baudelaire the heroine of modernism; certainly it is known that he originally intended to give the title *Les Lesbiennes* to the poems

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³² Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, pp. 68, 166. In these references to Sennett’s book, I am again considering fairly uncritically (from any other point of view) a text on modernity. For a critical review of his use of evidence, his historical method, and his sociological explanation for the changes in manners, see Sheldon Wolin, ‘The Rise of Private Man’, *New York Review of Books* (14 April 1977).
³⁷ Quoted in Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York, Doubleday Anchor Press, 1977), p.12.





which became *Les Fleurs du Mal*.⁽³⁸⁾ Yet, as Benjamin also points out, in the major poem about lesbians of the series, *Delphine et Hippolyte*, Baudelaire concludes by condemning the women as ‘lamentable victims’, bound for hell.⁽³⁹⁾

The prostitute, the subject of the poem *Crépuscule du Soir* and also discussed in a section of *The Painter of Modern Life*, elicits a similarly ambivalent attitude of admiration and disgust (the poem comparing prostitution to an anthill, and to a worm stealing a man’s food).⁽⁴⁰⁾ More unequivocal is Baudelaire’s sympathy for those other marginal women, the old woman and the widow; the former he ‘watches tenderly from afar’ like a father, the latter he observes with a sensitivity to her pride, pain, and poverty.⁽⁴¹⁾ But none of these women meet the poet as his equal. They are subjects of his gaze, objects of his ‘botanising’. The nearest he comes to a direct encounter, with a woman who is not either marginal or debased, is in the poem, *À une Passante*.⁽⁴²⁾ (Even here, it is worth noting that the woman in question is in mourning – *en grand deuil*.) The tall, majestic woman passes him in the busy street; their eyes meet for a moment before she continues her journey, and the poet remains to ask whether they will only meet again in eternity. Her return of his gaze is confirmed in the last line: ‘*O toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais*’. Benjamin’s interpretation of this poem is that it is the very elusiveness of the passing encounter that fascinates Baudelaire: ‘The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight’.⁽⁴³⁾ The meeting is characterized by the peculiarly modern feature of ‘shock’.⁽⁴⁴⁾ (But if this is the rare exception of a woman sharing the urban experience, we may also ask whether a ‘respectable’ woman in the 1850s would have met the gaze of a strange man.)

The Invisibility of Women in the Literature of Modernity The rise and development of sociology in the nineteenth century was closely related to the growth and increasing separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres of activity in western industrial societies. The condition for this was the separation of work from home, with the development of factories and offices. By the mid-nineteenth century, this had made possible the move to the suburbs in some major cities (for example, the industrial cities of England, like Manchester and Birmingham).⁽⁵¹⁾ Although women had never been engaged on equal terms (financial, legal, or otherwise) with men, this physical separation put an end to their close and important involvement in what had often been a family concern—whether in trade, production, or even professional work. Their gradual confinement to the domestic world of the home and the suburb was strongly reinforced by an ideology of separate spheres.⁽⁵²⁾ (...)

To some extent the ‘separation of spheres’ was an incomplete process, since many women still had to go to work to earn a living (though a very high proportion of these did so in domestic service); but even these women, in their factories, mills, schools, and of fices, have been invisible in traditional sociological texts. (...)

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39 Benjamin, p.92-3; *Baudelaire, Selected Poems*, p. 224.

40 Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose*, p. 185; *Painter of Modern Life*, pp.34-40.

41 Baudelaire, *Selected Poems*, p. 166; *Petits poèmes en prose*, pp. 63-5.

42 Baudelaire, *Selected Poems*, p. 170.

43 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 45.

44 *Ibid.*, p.125; also pp.118, 134.

51 Maurice Spiers, *Victoria Park Manchester* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1976); Davidoff and Hall, ‘Architecture of Public and Private Life’.

52 Catherine Hall, ‘The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology’, in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London, Croom Helm, 1979)

This also meant that the particular experience of ‘modernity’ was, for the most part, equated with experience in the public arena.

The accelerated growth of the city, the shock of the proximity of the very rich and the destitute poor (documented by Engels—and in some cities avoided and alleviated by the creation of suburbs), and the novelty of the fleeting and impersonal contacts in public life, provided the concern and the fascination for the authors of ‘the modern’, sociologists and other social commentators who documented their observations in academic essays, literary prose, or poetry. To some extent, of course, these transformations of social life affected everyone, regardless of sex and class, though they did so differently for different groups. But the literature of modernity ignores the private sphere, and to that extent is silent on the subject of women’s primary domain.

This silence is not only detrimental to any understanding of the lives of the female sex; it obscures a crucial part of the lives of men, too, by abstracting one part of their experience and failing to explore the interrelation of public and private spheres. (...)

The real situation of women in the second half of the nineteenth century was more complex than one of straightforward confinement to the home. It varied from one social class to another, and even from one geographical region to another, depending on the local industry, the degree of industrialization, and numerous other factors. And, although the solitary and independent life of the *flâneur* was not open to women, women clearly were active and visible in other ways in the public arena. (...)

The establishment of the department store in the 1850s and 1860s provided an important new arena for the legitimate public appearance of middleclass women.⁽⁶⁰⁾ However, although consumerism is a central aspect of modernity, and moreover mediated the public/private division, the peculiar characteristics of ‘the modern’ which I have been considering—the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling—do not apply to shopping, or to women’s activities either as public signs of their husband’s wealth or as consumers.

We are beginning to find out more about the lives of women who were limited to the domestic existence of the suburbs;⁽⁶¹⁾ about women who went into domestic service in large numbers;⁽⁶²⁾ and about the lives of working-class women.⁽⁶³⁾ The advent of the modern era affected all these women, transforming their experience of home and work. The recovery of women’s experience is part of the project of retrieving what has been hidden, and attempting to fill the gaps in the classic accounts. (...)

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60 Thorne, ‘Places of Refreshment in the Nineteenth-Century’, p.236.

61 Davidoff and Hall, ‘The Architecture of Public and Private Life’; and Catherine Hall, ‘The Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick-Maker: The Shop and the Family in the Industrial Revolution’, in Elizabeth Whitelegg et al. (eds), *The Changing Experience of Women* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1982).

62 Leonore Davidoff, ‘Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *Journal of Social History*, 7, 4 (1974).

63 Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850* (1930, London, Frank Cass, 1977); and Sally Alexander, ‘Women’s Work in Nineteenth-Century London. A Study of the Years 1820–50’, in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), and in Whitelegg et al. (eds), *Changing Experience of Women*.

There is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*:

the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century. Nor is it appropriate to reject totally the existing literature on modernity, for the experiences it describes certainly defined a good deal of the lives of men, and were also (but far less centrally) a part of the experience of women. What is missing in this literature is any account of life outside the public realm, of the experience of ‘the modern’ in its private manifestations, and also of the very different nature of the experience of those women who did appear in the public arena:

... a poem written by ‘la femme passante’
about her encounter with Baudelaire, perhaps.





There is **an affinity** between shock and freshness in that both occur when the mind has passed its customary boundaries. This condition gives rise to another typical avant-garde quality, that of estrangement or cultural distance. Every genuine vanguard movement begins as an adventure into the unknown. Self-displacement, either as physical exile or as psychological alienation, is a recurrent experience of the avantgardes, an aspect of their combat with the social environment and the immediate past. One of the earliest vanguard appeals to abandon this “exhausting landscape” is the poem of Baudelaire significantly entitled “Le voyage”; it ends in the vow

To plunge to the bottom of the abyss, Hell or Heaven who
Cares? At the bottom of the unknown to find the new.

The avant-garde thinking, movement, the “Open Road,” is at once an escape and a malediction hurled at the “dark confinement” (Whitman) of social artifice. Strangeness arises either from a journey to the exotic place or from recasting existing form; that is, it arises either from travel or from revolution.

In my first years in Paris I felt a shyness about going into cafés where I wasn't known—a timidity peculiar, admittedly, in a man already in his forties. I preferred to wander the streets in the constant drizzle (London has the bad reputation, but Paris weather is not much better). The whole city, at least *intra muros*, can be walked from one end to the other in a single evening. Perhaps its superficial uniformity—the broad avenues, the endlessly repeating benches and lamps stamped from the identical mould, the unvarying metal grates ringing the bases of the trees—promotes the dreamlike insubstantiality of Paris and contributes to the impression of a landscape 'stripped of thresholds'. Without barriers, I found myself gliding along from one area to another. (This inside/outside dichotomy of Paris as experienced by the *flâneur* keeps showing up in Benjamin's notes: 'Just as "*flânerie*" can make an interior of Paris, an apartment in which the neighbourhoods are the rooms, so neatly marked off as if with thresholds, in an opposite way the city can present itself to the stroller from all sides as a landscape stripped of all thresholds.')





The last of the great literary *flâneur* was Walter Benjamin. In a 1929 essay he wrote:

The *flâneur* is the creation of Paris. The wonder is that it was not Rome. But perhaps in Rome even dreaming is forced to move along streets that are too well-paved. And isn't the city too full of temples, enclosed squares, and national shrines to be able to enter undivided into the dreams of the passer-by, along with every paving stone, every shop sign, every flight of steps, and every gateway? The great reminiscences, the historical *frissons*—these are all so much junk to the *flâneur*, who is happy to leave them to the tourist. And he would be happy to trade all his knowledge of artists' quarters, birthplaces, and princely palaces for the scent of a single weathered threshold or the touch of a single tile—that which any old dog carries away. And much may have to do with the Roman character. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who made Paris into the Promised Land of *flâneur*, into 'a landscape made of living people', as Hofmannsthal once called it. Landscape—this is what the city becomes for the *flâneur*. Or, more precisely, the city splits into its dialectical poles. It becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlour that encloses him.

In a single packed paragraph Benjamin pinpoints the exact nature of the *flâneur*. He (or she) is not a foreign tourist eagerly tracing down the Major Sights and ticking them off a list of standard wonders. He (or she) is a Parisian in search of a private moment, not a lesson, (...)

In any event, as Benjamin explains, the *flâneur* is in search of experience, not knowledge. Most experience ends up interpreted as—and replaced by—knowledge, but for the *flâneur* the experience remains somehow pure, useless, raw.

Walter Benjamin, speaking impersonally but probably referring to himself, recalls several aspects of the *flâneur*. For one thing, he or she is indecisive, unsure of where to go, embarrassed by the richness of his or her choices. As Benjamin puts it, 'Just as waiting seems to be the true state of the motionless contemplative, so doubt seems to be that of the *flâneur*.' Frequently the *flâneur* is tired, having forgotten to eat despite the myriad cafes inviting him or her to come in, relax and partake of a drink or a snack: 'Like an ascetic animal he roams through unknown neighbourhoods until he collapses, totally exhausted, in the foreign, cold room that awaits him.'





Eventually I was able to distinguish what Parisians had labelled a ‘stuffy’ *quartier* from a ‘happening’ one, a workers’ neighbourhood from the home of the young and up-and-coming, but these distinctions were all acquired later and in conversation. At first, when I had to depend on my own observations, Paris impressed me as a seamless unity in which, by American standards, everything was well tended, built to last and at once cold (the pale stone walls, the absence of neon, the unbroken facades never permitted by city ordinance to pass a certain height or to crack or crumble without undergoing a periodic facelift) and discreetly charming (lace curtains in the concierge’s window, the flow of cleansing water in the gutters sandbagged to go in one direction or the other, the street fairs with rides for kids, the open-air food markets two days out of every week, segregated into different stalls under low awnings: this one loaded down with spices, that one with jellies and preserved fruits, not to mention the stands of the *pâtissier* and the baker, florist, butcher, fishmonger, the counter selling hot sausages and *choucroute*—or two hundred kinds of cheese). That water in the sandbagged gutter reminds me of something the great American poet John Ashbery once said in discussing the peculiar unaccountability of artistic influence: ‘I found my poetry being more “influenced” by the sight of clear water flowing in the street gutters, where it is (or was) diverted or dammed by burlap sandbags moved about by workmen, than it was by the French poetry I was learning to read at the time.’

Imagine dying and being grateful you’d gone to heaven, until one day (or one century) it dawned on you that your main mood was melancholy, although you were constantly convinced that happiness lay just around the next corner. That’s something like living in Paris for years, even decades. It’s a mild hell so comfortable that it resembles heaven. The French have such an attractive civilization, dedicated to calm pleasures and general tolerance, and their taste in every domain is so sharp, so sure, that the foreigner (especially someone from chaotic, confused America) is quickly seduced into believing that if he can only become a Parisian he will at last master the art of living. Paris intimidates its visitors when it doesn’t infuriate them, but behind both sentiments dwells a sneaking suspicion that maybe the French have got it right, that they have located the *juste milieu*, and that their particular blend of artistic modishness and cultural conservatism, of welfare-statism and intense individualism, of clear-eyed realism and sappy romanticism—that these proportions are wise, time-tested and as indisputable as they are subtle. If so, then why is the *flâneur* so lonely? So sad? Why is there such an elegiac feeling hanging over this city with the gilded cupola gleaming above the Emperor’s Tomb and the foaming, wild horses prancing out of a sea of verdigris on the roof of the Grand Palais? This city with the geometric tidiness of its glass pyramid, Arch of Triumph and the chilly portal imprinted by the Grande Arche on a cloudy sky? Why is he unhappy, this foreign *flâneur*, even when he strolls past the barnacled towers of Notre-Dame soaring above the Seine and a steep wall so dense with ivy it looks like the side of a galleon sinking under moss-laden chains?



“An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon. Two or three hours’ walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect ever to see. A single farmhouse which I had not seen before is sometimes as good as the dominions of the King of Dahomey. There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles’ radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the threescore years and ten of human life. It will never become quite familiar to you.”

Henry David Thoreau



I kept coming back to this route for respite from my work and for my work too, because thinking is generally thought of as doing nothing in a production-oriented culture, and doing nothing is hard to do. It's best done by disguising it as doing something, and the something closest to doing nothing is walking. Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals. (...)

Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts. (...)

Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations.

The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. (...) A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making. And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can. Walking can also be imagined as a visual activity, every walk a tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known. Perhaps this is where walking's peculiar utility for thinkers comes from. The surprises, liberations, and clarifications of travel can sometimes be garnered by going around the block as well as going around the world, and walking travels both near and far. Or perhaps walking should be called movement, not travel, for one can walk in circles or travel around the world immobilized in a seat, and a certain kind of wanderlust can only be assuaged by the acts of the body itself in motion, not the motion of the car, boat, or plane. It is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile—it is both means and end, travel and destination. (Introduction, pp.5/6)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau remarked in his *Confessions*, “I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs.”

The history of walking goes back further than the history of human beings, but the history of walking as a conscious cultural act rather than a means to an end is only a few centuries old in Europe, and Rousseau stands at its beginning. That history began with the walks of various characters in the eighteenth century, but the more literary among them strove to consecrate walking by tracing it to Greece, whose practices were so happily revered and misrepresented then. The eccentric English revolutionary and writer John Thelwall wrote a massive, turgid book, *The Peripatetic*, uniting Rousseauian romanticism with this spurious classical tradition. “In one respect, at least, I may boast of a resemblance to the simplicity of the ancient sages I pursue my meditations on foot,” he remarked. And after Thelwall’s book appeared in 1793, many more would make the claim until it became an established idea that the ancients walked to think, so much so that the very picture seems part of cultural history, austere men speaking gravely as they pace through a dry Mediterranean landscape punctuated with the occasional marble column.

This belief arose from a coincidence of architecture and language. When Aristotle was ready to set up a school in Athens, the city assigned him a plot of land. “In it,” explains Felix Grayeff’s history of this school, “stood shrines to Apollo and the Muses, and perhaps other smaller buildings.... A covered colonnade led to the temple of Apollo, or perhaps connected the temple with the shrine of the Muses; whether it had existed before or was only built now, is not known. This colonnade or walk (peripatos) gave the school its name; it seems that it was here, at least at the beginning, that the pupils assembled and the teachers gave their lectures. Here they wandered to and fro; for this reason it was later said that Aristotle himself lectured and taught while walking up and down.” The philosophers who came from it were called the Peripatetic philosophers or the Peripatetic school, and in English the word peripatetic means “one who walks habitually and extensively.”





Thus their name links thinking with walking. There is something more to this than the coincidence that established a school of philosophy in a temple of Apollo with a long colonnade—slightly more.

The Sophists, the philosophers who dominated Athenian life before Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, were famously wanderers who often taught in the grove where Aristotle’s school would be located. Plato’s assault on the Sophists was so furious that the words *sophist* and *sophistry* are still synonymous with deception and guile, though the root *sophia* has to do with wisdom. The Sophists, however, functioned something like the chautauquas and public lecturers in nineteenth century America, who went from place to place delivering talks to audiences hungry for information and ideas. Though they taught rhetoric as a tool of political power, and the ability to persuade and argue was crucial to Greek democracy, the Sophists taught other things besides. Plato, whose half-fabricated character Socrates is one of the wiliest and most persuasive debaters of all times, is somewhat disingenuous when he attacks the Sophists.

Whether or not the Sophists were virtuous, they were often mobile, as are many of those whose first loyalty is to ideas. It may be that loyalty to something as immaterial as ideas sets thinkers apart from those whose loyalty is tied to people and locale, for the loyalty that ties down the latter will often drive the former from place to place. It is an attachment that requires detachment. Too, ideas are not as reliable or popular a crop as, say, corn, and those who cultivate them often must keep moving in pursuit of support as well as truth. Many professions in many cultures, from musicians to medics, have been nomadic, possessed of a kind of diplomatic immunity to the strife between communities that keeps others local. Aristotle himself had at first intended to become a doctor, as his father had been, and doctors in that time were members of a secretive guild of travelers who claimed descent from the god of healing. Had he become a philosopher in the era of the Sophists, he might have been mobile anyway, for settled philosophy schools were first established in Athens in his time.

It is now impossible to say whether or not Aristotle and his Peripatetics habitually walked while they talked philosophy, but the link between thinking and walking recurs in ancient Greece, and Greek architecture accommodated walking as a social and conversational activity. Just as the Peripatetics took their name from the peripatos of their school, so the Stoics were named after the stoa, or colonnade, in Athens, a most unstoically painted walkway where they walked and talked. Long afterward, the association between walking and philosophizing became so widespread that central Europe has places named after it: the celebrated Philosophenweg in Heidelberg where Hegel is said to have walked, the Philosophendamm in Königsberg that Kant passed on his daily stroll (now replaced by a railway station), and the Philosopher’s Way Kierkegaard mentions in Copenhagen.

And philosophers who walked—well, walking is a universal human activity. Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and many others walked far, and Thomas Hobbes even had a walking stick with an inkhorn built into it so he could jot down ideas as he went. Frail Immanuel Kant took a daily walk around Königsberg after dinner—but it was merely for exercise, because he did his thinking sitting by the stove and staring at the church tower out the window. The young Friedrich Nietzsche declares with superb conventionality, “For recreation I turn to three things, and a wonderful recreation they provide!—my Schopenhauer, Schumann’s music, and, finally, solitary walks.” In the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell recounts of his friend Ludwig Wittgenstein, “He used to come to my rooms at midnight, and for hours he would walk backwards and forwards like a caged tiger.

On arrival, he would announce that when he left my rooms he would commit suicide. So, in spite of getting sleepy, I did not like to turn him out. One such evening after an hour or two of dead silence, I said to him, ‘Wittgenstein, are you thinking about logic or about your sins?’ Both, he said, and then reverted to silence.” Philosophers walked. But philosophers who thought about walking are rarer. (Chapter 2: The Mind at 3 Miles an Hour/ 1. Pedestrian Architecture pp. 14/15/16)

This is what is behind the special relationship between tale and travel, and, perhaps, the reason why narrative writing is so closely bound up with walking. To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination, or to point out new features on a familiar route. To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide—a guide one may not always agree with or trust, but who can at least be counted upon to take one somewhere. I have often wished that my sentences could be written out as a single line running into the distance so that it would be clear that a sentence is likewise a road and reading is traveling (I did the math once and found the text of one of my books would be four miles long were it rolled out as a single line of words instead of being set in rows on pages, rolled up like thread on a spool). Perhaps those Chinese scrolls one unrolls as one reads preserve something of this sense. The songlines of Australia’s aboriginal peoples are the most famous examples conflating landscape and narrative. The songlines are tools of navigation across the deep desert, while the landscape is a mnemonic device for remembering the stories—in other words, the story is a map, the landscape a narrative.

So stories are travels and travels are stories.

It is because we imagine life itself as a journey that these symbolic walks and indeed all walks have such resonance. The workings of the mind and the spirit are hard to imagine, as is the nature of time—so we tend to metaphorize all these intangibles as physical objects located in space. Thus our relationship to them becomes physical and spatial—we move toward or away from them. And if time has become space, then the unfolding of time that constitutes a life becomes a journey too, however much or little one travels spatially. Walking and traveling have become central metaphors in thought and speech, so central we hardly notice them. Embedded in English are innumerable movement metaphors steering straight, moving toward the goal, going for the distance, getting ahead. Things get in our way, set us back, help us find our way, give us a head start or the go-ahead as we approach milestones. We move up in the world, reach a fork in the road, hit our stride, take steps. A person in trouble is a lost soul, out of step, has lost her sense of direction, is tacing an uphill struggle or going downhill, through a difficult phase, in circles, even nowhere. And there are the far more flowery phrases of sayings and songs—the primrose path, the road to ruin, the high road and the low road, easy street, lonely street, and the boulevard of broken dreams.

Walking appears in many more common phrases: set the pace, make great strides, a great step forward, keep pace, hit one’s stride, toe the line, follow in his footsteps. Psychic and political events are imagined as spatial ones thus in his final speech Martin Luther King said, “I’ve been to the mountaintop,” to describe a spiritual state, echoing the state Jesus attained after his literal mountain ascent. King’s first book was called *Stride to Freedom*, a title echoed more than three decades later by Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (while his former countrywoman Doris Lessing called the second volume of her memoirs *Walking in the Shade*, and then there’s Kierkegaard’s *Steps on Lifes Way* or the literary theorist Umberto Eco’s *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, in which he describes reading a book as wandering in a forest).

If life itself, the passage of time allotted to us, is described as a journey, it’s most often imagined as a journey on foot, a pilgrim’s progress across the landscape of personal history. And often, when we imagine ourselves, we imagine ourselves walking; “when she walked the earth” is one way to describe someone’s existence, her profession is her “walk of life,” an expert is a “walking encyclopedia,” and “he walked with God” is the Old Testament’s way of describing a state of grace. The image of the walker, alone and active and passing through rather than settled in the world, is a powerful vision of what it means to be human, whether it’s a hominid traversing grasslands or a Samuel Beckett character shuffling down a rural road. The metaphor of walking becomes literal again when we really walk. If life is a journey, then when we are actually journeying our lives have become tangible, with goals we can move toward, progress we can see, achievement we can understand, metaphors united with actions. Labyrinths, pilgrimages, mountain climbs, hikes with clear and desirable destinations, all allow us to take our allotted time as a literal journey with spiritual dimensions we can understand through the senses. If journeying and walking are central metaphors, then all journeys, all walks, let us enter the same symbolic space as mazes and rituals do, if not so compellingly. (pp.72/73/74)

An Odd Flâneur

Not that he had no noble self, even, preferably, a rather ghostly seeming self. A streak of vanity too was not lacking, but even that came to life only outside of him, so to speak. As in the pleasure that came to this Mr. Kähler whenever he was suitably dressed, proper to the situation where he presently found himself among people and things. The I-Thou relationship entered all his I-It relationships too, full of questions about a person's proper behavior with respect to every kind of externality. In an again completely self-oblivious effort, intended precisely with the utmost objectivity, adequately to encounter the respective Not-I. Already beginning in the question, May I sit as casually across from my wine glass as I doubtlessly may from my beer mug? Or by the bedside of a sick woman, very restless, almost desperately laying the proffered cigarette aside, and later, on his departure, outside, Please ask your wife to excuse me, but I really don't know how one should smoke a cigarette in a sickroom. Or: Would you rather yield to a car, even with its top down, when it's empty or when it's full? Or, in Kähler's style: Two officers meet in public, both decorated with high honors, one's barely perceptibly higher than the other's. Question: Which of them may bring up the subject of decorations?

In this way every relationship to other people was like that to things and that, precisely, with both on the same level-embroidered with good manners, correct manners, indeed manners finally made true, proper. Thus initiating an interaction, friendly while at the same time, in spite of its outmoded form, thoroughly democratic, without any below-and-above, above-and-below in this direct visual encounter, one on a fraternal level with everything.

I knew someone who knew how to get along without himself.

Eccentric, absolutely; the also comical oddity of daily practicing this association of a new courtesy and a proper understanding for his counterpart is obvious; ultimately Kähler himself even outdid it. When I ran into him again in the first months of the War in 1914, and saw this otherwise so tolerant, not exactly patriotic man nearly decorated with the Order of Merit, he answered my cold stare, after his features were overcome by growing sorrow:

If you don't understand me, who will? Don't you see that this miserable war offered me a unique chance to learn the proper treatment of grenades?

I've learned it, and it has nothing to do with service to the Fatherland.

There was nothing for me but shame, as it were, at such a truly Kählerish reunion with, or in, such folly. Nonetheless here too something remained: what comradely relations this absurd man sought, had, with the most alien things

In any case, in life it is not always unpleasant to run into such a fellow or better, a nonfellow. Kähler died on one of his frequent trips, incidentally among suspicious acquaintances, now vanished. His flâneur's *ars amandi* with everything laid out before perception had already ceased before that. He left no writings behind; where would he have found and no—stolen the words? and really, what else but good, quiet, attentive manners, in his dealings with all things? The hand here is not just, as I've said, the housewife of the body, but the signpost to the right word, only after which will things meet our extended index hand, word hand. Not much more could be done with Kähler, but every attempted interpretation could include a trace of such extended table manners, bedside manners. and their courteous attention.

Eating Olives Precisely

Moment and Image

If we're slack, we really don't notice what's happening. This is what occurred to a girl as her friend picked her up; she saw him again after a long interval. On the way home he gave her a belated letter that he'd written. Whereupon the girl put her friend aside and read the written word, which were more important to her than the ones he'd just spoken. Incapable of doing the immediate, she took refuge in love as a letter-fled experience as such, passed in the middle of experience over into something external to it, into a memory, or something already set, that replaced direct experience. That was easier for her to see than the here and now that mists over, and that we can never hold on to for long. But when one is powerfully and personally there, the Now grows empty in a different way.

Why aren't you taller?—we recall the father who said that to his lost daughter; some of that belongs here too, to the lived moment where one sees little just when one is directly in it, without any letter. Of course we know the will to keep returning to the site of some great happiness. Yet when the beloved who granted this happiness is far away, lost, or dead, a peculiar scruple, upon noticing it, turns away from her return. One not only feels that one's own existence should not be exploited in this way under the light. Rather, the darkness of the moment just lived immediately again back there cuts across, temptingly or destructively, a long-preserved memory. It cuts across the letter in memory that can make immediacy never brighter, indeed that lets it mature as an image. For to the extent that one is worth something, one does not just meet life immediately, but also holds it together in memory, paces off the frontline of the past as a train of images. But because one did not have the moment back then, not even in one's greatest fervor, its image will not come right. One turns back, and finds oneself refreshed in what one lived back then, but often less conscious of it, poorer in salvaged substance.

Here is the self and the hovering moment;

...time's indescribable motion on a Venetian afternoon.

It is a sense of time and my own life on which my mind is sailing so wildly; time emerging from the direction of my father and moving in the direction of my death and bearing and conterminating my life.

Venice is a separate country. It cannot properly be part of Italy, or part of anything.

It floats at anchor inside its own will, among its domes and campanili, independent and exotic at its heart, a collection of structures among the waters, monuments of independent will, a city of independent will.

Time is different here than on the mainland...











There is something primordial about traveling on water, even for short distances. You are informed that you are not supposed to be there not so much by your eyes, ears, nose, palate, or palm as by your feet, which feel odd acting as an organ of sense. Water unsettles the principle of horizontality, especially at night, when its surface resembles pavement. No matter how solid its substitute—the deck—under your feet, on water you are somewhat more alert than ashore, your faculties are more poised. On water, for instance, you never get absentminded the way you do in the street: your legs keep you and your wits in constant check, as if you were some kind of compass. Well, perhaps what sharpens your wits while traveling on water is indeed a distant, roundabout echo of the good old chordates. At any rate, your sense of the other on water gets keener, as though heightened by a common as well as a mutual danger. The loss of direction is a psychological category as much as it is a navigational one.



I **always** adhered to the idea that God is time, or at least that His spirit is. Perhaps this idea was even of my own manufacture, but now I don't remember. In any case, I always thought that if the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water, the water was bound to reflect it. Hence my sentiment for water, for its folds, wrinkles, and ripples, and—as I am a Northerner—for its grayness. I simply think that water is the image of time, and every New Year's Eve, in somewhat pagan fashion, I try to find myself near water, preferably near a sea or an ocean, to watch the emergence of a new helping, a new cupful of time from it. I am not looking for a naked maiden riding on a shell; I am looking for either a cloud or the crest of a wave hitting the shore at midnight. That, to me, is time coming out of water, and I stare at the lace-like pattern it puts on the shore, not with a gypsy-like knowing, but with tenderness and with gratitude.

This is the way, and in my case the why, I set my eyes on this city.

(pp. 42/43)

At sunset all cities look wonderful, but some more so than others. Reliefs become suppler, columns more rotund, capitals curlier, cornices more resolute, spires starker, niches deeper, disciples more draped, angels airborne. In the streets it gets dark, but it is still daytime for the Fondamenta and that gigantic liquid mirror where motorboats, vaporetti, gondolas, dinghies, and barges “like scattered old shoes” zealously trample Baroque and Gothic facades, not sparing your own or a passing cloud's reflection either. “Depict it,” whispers the winter light, stopped flat by the brick wall of a hospital or arriving home at the paradise of San Zaccaria's *frontone* after its long passage through the cosmos. **And you sense this light's fatigue as it rests in Zaccaria's marble shells for another hour or so, while the earth is turning its other cheek to the luminary.** This is the winter light at its purest. It carries no warmth or energy, having shed them and left them behind somewhere in the universe, or in the nearby cumulus. Its particles' only ambition is to reach an object and make it, big or small, visible. It's a private light, the light of Giorgione or Bellini, not the light of Tiepolo or Tintoretto. And the city lingers in it, savoring its touch, the caress of the infinity whence it came. An object, after all, is what makes infinity private.

(pp.80/81)



The boat's slow progress through the night was like the passage of a coherent thought through the subconscious. On both sides, knee-deep in pitch-black water, stood the enormous carved chests of dark palazzi filled with unfathomable treasures—most likely gold, judging from the low-intensity yellow electric glow emerging now and then from cracks in the shutters. The overall feeling was mythological, cyclopic, to be precise: I'd entered that infinity I beheld on the steps of the stazione and now was moving among its inhabitants, along the bevy of dormant cyclopes reclining in black water, **now and then raising and lowering an eyelid.** (pp. 12/13)

a text...

it is a clear, crisp saturday morning as autumn begins to nestle away summer. upon my return the weather here was nearly hot, endless days of over 25C, clear skies. as i visit more, i understand more and see things more integrated but still without language one is silenced from much. much transpired after we went in different directions. mine in the quest to find a boat maker. en route we stayed over night with friends of ma sandar's in pathein, on the delta ... that was truly a burmese experience! grass mat, cistern bath in the dark, a small candle, cold water and a small red plastic bucket. prior to that we went for a divine river ferry ride at sunset with my friend aye ko, the performance artist from pathein lives in yangon and also publishes a strong and significant magazine..a funny, kind and generous man with strong and passionate art..... in search of a boat maker, i thought. The rower stands high at the back which arcs upwards. The boats are small and bountiful. At any given moment there are hundreds of them crossing back and forth across the river. the rowing is rhythmic in the sound of the thick rope twisting with each thrust. pathein reminds me of venice as having water as an element in its essence. boats are vital. no one seemed to have any idea of where to find a boat maker. i had visions of a small scale factory somewhere along the river, far away, but soon learned that these boats are made in distant backyards, too hard to find. the knowledge of making is communal and verbal. we continued on to chaung tha, a fishing village and beach resort on the bay of bengal along a difficult but lusciously scenic red earth road through the delta rice fields. it took 3 hours to travel 40 miles. once again ma sandar knew people, contacts from her prawn business even though she had never been there. the sea felt like chocolate soothing the skin and coating my thoughts and feelings from the afternoon's intrepid events. after visiting the lobster pound at the fishing

village, inquiries had been made about a boat maker and a nga pi (shrimp-paste) maker and it seemed that there was a village across the bay to where we could go. over lunch from the sumptuous red snapper and other nameless fish, we dined on this delicious seafood given to ma san dar by her friend at the lobster pound. ma san dar and the taxi driver described the journey to the village. the boat fee would be 20,000 kyat. it would take one and a half hours to travel there, spend some time in the village and then to return. everyone agreed the price was fair. the single track undulating ‘cart trail’ not fit for automobiles through the village of grass stilted houses was intense in and of itself then add the midday burmese heat. i kept imagining the swim in the sea to come. in fractured english, ‘we go, but no foreigners allow to go over there, if we see military, we say nothing!’ what the hell does that mean! i query them anxiously as i attempt to understand exactly what is going on and just how much at risk i am. now very nervous and quite concerned, i learn about the regional insurgents and the threats in the international waters and the military camp with ‘large guns’. the taxi driver, a former seaman in singapore, describes the waters as dangerous, too. i take a moment to walk to the water’s edge alone to contemplate whether i should continue or if it is all too risky, inclusive of the fact that ma sandar cannot swim. something makes me go. trust. i decide to embark on my apocalypse now. we travel on a fishing boat, the ones with the exposed deafeningly loud motors. the men under the canopy at the rear, no women allowed there, so we are at the front of the boat sitting like two shan princesses on white plastic thrones. i am dressed in a white shirt and with my white skin, i feel like a shining beacon for the military to easily spot from afar in the jungle. i feel as reflective as a mirror in the sun. i want to enjoy the ride but am nearly too nervous knowing the next one and a half hours will feel like an eternity. i question my decision as the boat moves into the unknown across the large bay of shallowing waters. we pass a small sand island temporarily exposed at low tide. it is teeming with hundreds of vibrant fushia-orange-red crabs. the sun is hot, the sea breeze is refreshing and the motor is deafening. the shoreline afar seems

completely untouched, never visited, raw and natural. am i over romanticizing? the boat turns to begin heading up a forested river but quickly turns to the shore to stop at beach. the rep from the lobster pound, the one was appointed to converse with the military if need be... explaining that i am an investor in the company, hops off and disappears into the jungle. we change to a canoe, a dugout from ka nyin tree. They are the tallest trees in the jungle rising above the forest canopy. it is an extremely beautiful canoe. it is about the size of a two-three person birch bark canoe, only we are six people and it sitting barely two inches above the waterline. and like all canoes it requires stillness and balance. it is a very quiet as it peacefully glides through the murky waters of the tributary. i worry about ma sandar if the boat were to tip as it so easily could, but she is fearless. she tells me she is afraid of nothing. i believe her. it will be effortful to remain still and focussed for an hour in the dugout, but i am certain i will endure the circumstances no matter what. i just have not idea of where i am going. it is entirely new. strange. je suis l’étrangère. the passage narrows and the jungle is nearly within arm’s reach. a dog swims along with us. i truly wonder to where i am being taken. i remembered a similar boat journey along the shores of the amazon passing isolated huts with long docks poking out from the jungle with several children standing naked staring at eyes with curiosity and fear. it was daunting and poignant. the boat slows down at the tiny narrow dock emerging from the mangroves. i continue on a few paces. i am overwhelmed as i step into the absolutely most beautiful magical village i have ever seen. i am mesmerized. It is the scene in the wizard of oz when it changes from black and white to full technicolor colour. It is magic. It is tall like nyc. The two streets, if one could call them that. Walking and biking streets maybe three metres wide, immaculate, rich red sand and tall trees, very tall trees, verticality, slices of sunlight piercing the shade. The entourage strolled along the straight street, i absorbing everything. We stop greet people sitting and working on their open verandas. exquisite burmese wood and grass houses. there was even two movies houses!! The streets were

also lined with fences constructed from thin branches each nearly identical and extremely straight. This village understood precision and repetition, mass production of a sort. anyways, the fences were elegant, thin and appeared much taller than they actually were in fact, they were low and relative to burmese height. i try to amplify the second into minutes. will I be able to remember all of this moment? we continue with several dogs who seems to want to fight. the street widens and ends in the opening where I can see several boats in the trees ahead. to complete my good fortune, there is a dugout recently started. It takes about 4-5 days to make a canoe. The boat maker is a rich man in town as ma san dar informs me. He comes out of his home. he is elderly, and strong. wears very thick coke bottle large framed glasses. everyone is somehow involved in the explaining, translating, and demonstrating. so much is happening all at once, i hope that the video and the slides will capture the experience as usable imagery. always people moving in front of the camera. I do my best and enjoy asking questions and learning about the making, being shown the tools. this is anthropology as it finest except i am not wearing a safari suit. i think of margaret mead, clifford geetz andscott, wondering if they felt as i do. there is an aroma of fish drying in the sun. the jungle is teeming with bird calls. We continue along as they want to show me more. everyone seems to be making something, wood planks, fishing nets. We visit the monastery on the hilltop climbing the very broken stone steps. It is beautiful but boiling hot. the heat is nearly too much for me. we continue on pass some fields to the seashore where we wander amongst untouched very tall palms trees with these enormous exposed root structures, human height. the warm breeze blows in from the bay, the waves lap the shore, someone shimmies up a tree and knocks down several ripe coconuts. ma san dar is smiling away, we are all smiling. it is just too magical. we stop and drink the warm fresh juice. it is just all so perfect, idyllic, burmese, cultural, the explorer, the gatherer. we are where we started, we the fishing boat had stopped to change to the dugout. i am sad.



Perhaps that is the readiest way to grasp the meaning of the photograph in creating a world of accelerated transience. (...) the effect of speeding up temporal sequence is to abolish time, much as the telegraph and cable abolished space. Of course the photograph does both. It wipes out our national frontiers and cultural barriers, and involves us in *The Family of Man*, regardless of any particular point of view. (...) But the logic of the photograph is neither verbal nor syntactical, a condition which renders literary culture quite helpless to cope with the photograph. By the same token, the complete transformation of human sense-awareness by this form involves a development of self-consciousness that alters facial expression and cosmetic makeup as immediately as it does our bodily stance, in public or in private. This fact can be gleaned from any magazine or movie of fifteen years back. It is not too much to say, therefore, that if outer posture is affected by the photograph, so with our inner postures and the dialogue with ourselves. The age of Jung and Freud is, above all, the age of the photograph, the age of the full gamut of selfcritical attitudes. (...)

All meaning alters with acceleration, because all patterns of personal and political interdependence change with any acceleration of information. Some feel keenly that speed-up has impoverished the world they knew by changing its forms of human interassociation. There is nothing new or strange in a parochial preference for those pseudo-events that happened to enter into the composition of society just before the electric revolution of this century. The student of media soon comes to expect the new media of any period whatever to be classed as pseudo by those who have acquired the patterns of earlier media, whatever they may happen to be. This would seem to be a normal, and even amiable, trait ensuring

a maximal degree of social continuity and permanence amidst change and innovation. But all the conservatism in the world does not afford even a token resistance to the ecological sweep of the new electric media. On a moving highway the vehicle that backs up is accelerating in relation to the highway situation. Such would seem to be the ironical status of the cultural reactionary. When the trend is one way his resistance insures a greater speed of change. Control over change would seem to consist in moving not with it but ahead of it. Anticipation gives the power to deflect and control force. (...) We are no sooner in position to look at one kind of event than it is obliterated by another, just as our Western lives seem to native cultures to be one long series of *preparations for living*. But the favorite stance of literary man has long been “to view with alarm” or “to point with pride,” while scrupulously ignoring what’s going on.









































errare humanum est

The act of crossing space stems from the natural necessity to move to find the food and information required for survival. But once these basic needs have been satisfied, walking takes on a symbolic form that has enabled man to dwell in the world. By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man’s first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of *situated objects*. **Walking is an art from whose loins spring the menhir, sculpture, architecture, landscape.** This simple action has given rise to the most important relationships man has established with the land, the territory.

Nomadic transhumance, generally thought of as the archetype for any journey, was actually the development of the endless wanderings of hunters in the Paleolithic period, whose symbolic meanings were translated by the Egyptians in the *ka*, the symbol of *eternal wandering*. This primitive roving lived on in religion (the journey, as ritual) and in literary forms (the journey as narrative), transformed as a sacred path, dance, pilgrimage, procession. Only in the last century has the journey-path freed itself of the constraints of religion and literature to assume the status of a pure aesthetic act. Today it is possible to construct a history of walking as a form of urban intervention that inherently contains the symbolic meanings of the primal creative act: roaming as architecture of the landscape, where the term landscape indicates the action of symbolic as well as physical transformation of anthropic space.

This is the perspective in which we have taken a deeper look at three important moments of passage in art history—all absolutely familiar to historians—in which an experience linked to walking represented a turning point. These are the passages from Dada to Surrealism (1921-1924), from the Lettrist International to the Situationist International (1956-1957), and from Minimal Art to Land Art (1966-1967). By analyzing these episodes we simultaneously obtain a history of the roamed city that goes from the *banal city* of Dada to the *entropic city* of Robert Smithson, passing through the unconscious and *oneiric city* of the Surrealists and the *playful* and *nomadic city* of the Situationists. **What the roavings of the artists discover is a liquid city**, an amniotic fluid where the spaces of the elsewhere take spontaneous form, an urban archipelago in which to navigate by drifting. A city in which the *spaces of staying* are the islands in the great sea formed by the *space of going*.

anti-walk

Walking was experienced for the entire first part of the 20th century as a form of anti-art. In 1921 Dada organized a series of “visit-excursions” to the banal places of the city of Paris. This was the first time art rejected its assigned places, setting out to reclaim urban space. The “visit” was one of the tools selected by Dada to achieve that surpassing of art that was to become the red thread for any understanding of the subsequent avant-gardes. In 1924 the Parisian Dadaists organized trips in the open country. They discovered a dream-like, surreal aspect to walking and defined this experience as “deambulation,” a sort of automatic writing in real space, capable of revealing the unconscious zones of space, the repressed memories of the city. At the beginning of the 1950s the Lettrist International, disputing Surrealist deambulation, began to construct that “Theory of Drifting” which, in 1956, at Alba, was to come into contact with the nomadic universe. In 1957

Constant designed a camp for the gypsies of Alba, while Asger Jorn and Guy Debord provided the first images of a city based on the *dérive*. Lettrist urban drifting was transformed into the construction of situations, experimenting with playful-creative behavior and unitary environments. Constant reworked Situationist theory to develop the idea of a nomadic city—New Babylon—bringing the theme of nomadism into the sphere of architecture and laying the groundwork for the radical avant-gardes of the years to follow.

land walk

The second half of the 20th century viewed walking as one of the forms used by artists to intervene in nature. In 1966 the magazine Artforum published the story of the journey of Tony Smith along a highway under construction. A controversy broke out between modernist critics and Minimalist artists. Certain sculptors began to explore the theme of the path, first as an object and later as an experience. Land Art re-examined, through walking, the archaic origins of landscape and the relationship between art and architecture, making sculpture reclaim the spaces and means of architecture. In 1967 Richard Long produced *A Line Made by Walking*, a line drawn by stepping on the grass in a field. **The action left a trace on the land, the sculpted object was completely absent**, and walking became an autonomous artform. That same year Robert Smithson made *A Tour of the Monument of Passaic*. This was the first such voyage through the empty spaces of the contemporary urban periphery. The tour of the new monuments led Smithson to draw certain conclusions: the relationship between art and nature had changed, nature itself had changed, the contemporary landscape autonomously produced its own space, in the “repressed” parts of the city we could find the abandoned futures produced by entropy.

transurbance

The interpretation of the present city from the point of view of roaming is based on the “trans-urbances” conducted by Stalker since 1995 in a number of European cities. Losing itself amidst urban amnesias Stalker has encountered those spaces Dada defined as *banal* and those places the Surrealists defined as the *unconscious of the city*. Repressed memory, rejection, absence of control have produced a *system of empty spaces* (the sea of the archipelago) through which it is possible to drift, as in the labyrinthine sectors of Constant’s New Babylon: a nomadic space ramified as a system of *urban sheep tracks* that seems to have taken form as the result of the entropy of the city, as one of the “forgotten futures” described by Robert Smithson. Inside the wrinkles of the city, spaces in transit have grown, territories in continuous transformation in time. These are the places where today it is possible to go beyond the age-old division between nomadic space and settled space. **Actually, nomadism has always existed in osmosis with settlement, and today’s city contains nomadic spaces (voids) and sedentary spaces (solids) that exist side by side in a delicate balance of reciprocal exchange.** Today the nomadic city lives inside the stationary city, feeding on its scraps and offering, in exchange, its own presence as a new nature that can be crossed only by inhabiting it. Transurbance is, just like the erratic journey, a sort of pre-architecture of the contemporary landscape. The first aim of this book, therefore, is to reveal the falseness of any anti-architectural image of nomadism, and thus of walk-

ing: hunters of the Paleolithic period and nomadic shepherds are the origin of the menhir, the first object of the landscape from which architecture was developed. The landscape seen as an architecture of open space is an invention of the civilization of wandering. Only during the last ten thousand years of sedentary living have we passed from the architecture of open space to the architecture of filled space. The second aim is to understand the place of the path-journey in the history of architectural archetypes. In this sense we must make a journey, back to the roots of the relationship between path and architecture, and therefore between roaming and the menhir, in an age in which architecture did not exist as the physical construction of space, but as a symbolic construction—inside the path—of the territory.

toward a new expansion of the field

The term “path” simultaneously indicates the act of crossing (the path as the action of walking), the line that crosses the space (the path as architectural object) and the tale of the space crossed (the path as narrative structure). We intend to propose the path as an aesthetic form available to architecture and the landscape. In this century the rediscovery of the path happened first in literature (Tristan Tzara, André Breton and Guy Debord are writers), then in sculpture (Carl Andre, Richard Long, and Robert Smithson are sculptors), while in the field of architecture the path has led to the pursuit of the historical foundations of radical anti-architecture in nomadism, and has not yet led to a positive development. Through the path different disciplines have produced their own “expansion of the field” (Rosalind Krauss) for coming to terms with their own limits. Retracing the margins of their disciplines, many artists have attempted not to fall into the abyss of negation consciously opened by Dada at the beginning of the 20th century, but to leap beyond it. Breton transformed the anti-art of Dada into Surrealism through an expansion of the field toward psychology; the Situationists, starting again from Dada, attempted to transform anti-art into a unified discipline (*urbanisme unitaire*) through the expansion of the field toward politics; Land Art transformed the sculptural object into construction of the territory by expanding the field toward landscape and architecture. It has often been observed that the architectural discipline has, in recent years, expanded its field in the direction of sculpture and the landscape. In this direction we also find the crossing of space, seen not as a manifestation of anti-art but as an aesthetic form that has achieved the status of an autonomous discipline. Today architecture could expand into the field of the path without encountering the pitfalls of anti-architecture. The transurbance between the edges of the discipline and the place of exchange between the nomadic and the settled city can represent a first step. In this space of encounter walking is useful for architecture as a cognitive and design tool, as a means of recognizing a geography in the chaos of the peripheries, and a means through which to invent new ways to intervene in public metropolitan spaces, to investigate them and make them visible. The aim is not to encourage architects and landscape architects to leave their drawing boards behind, shouldering the backpack of nomadic transurbance, nor is it to theorize a total absence of paths to permit the citizen to get lost, although often *errare* could truly be seen as a value instead of an error.

The aim is to indicate walking as an aesthetic tool capable of describing and modifying those metropolitan spaces that often have a nature still demanding comprehension, to be filled with meaning rather than designed and filled with things. Walking then turns out to be a tool which, precisely due to the simultaneous reading and writing of space intrinsic to it, lends itself to attending to and interacting with the mutability of those spaces, so as to intervene in their continuous becoming by acting in the field, in the here and now of their transformation, sharing from the inside in the mutations of these spaces that **defy the conventional tools of contemporary design**. Today architecture can transform the path from anti-architecture into a resource, expanding its field of disciplinary action toward something close by, taking a step in the direction of the path. The following reflections are intended to be a contribution in this direction.

































Die Sohlen der Erinnerung

Die Stadt, die Frau und der Flaneur – ein sehr persönlicher Streifzug durch die Geschichte einer Denkfigur

Von Cees Nooteboom

Vor dem vornehmen „Hôtel des Indes“ in Den Haag, dessen Name noch alte Kolonialherrlichkeit widerspiegelt, steht ein kleines Standbild. Es stellt einen Herrn dar, bekleidet mit einem gutgeschnittenen Mantel, einem Schal, dem man trotz der Bronze ansieht, daß hier Seide gemeint war, einem Spazierstock mit elegantem Griff, einem lässig in der Hand gehaltenen Zylinder. Am Sockel steht in schlichten Buchstaben „FLANEUR“. Manchmal, wenn ich in Den Haag – meiner Geburtsstadt – bin, gehe ich hin und grüße ihn, denn ich habe ihm viel zu verdanken. Flaneur war eines der vielen Pseudonyme von Eduard Elias, jüdischer Schriftsteller und Journalist, Aristokrat und Kosmopolit, der einen unendlich leichten und zugleich melancholischen Ton kreierte hatte, um so zu tun, als täte er nichts. Er flanierte, er war ein Straßenschlenderer, einer, der vorbeikam und schaute. Daß er auch aufschrieb, was er sah, und daß man das täglich in der Zeitung lesen konnte und daß das folglich Arbeit war, fiel eigentlich niemandem auf. Er tat, was Flaneure immer tun, das heißt: tun, als ob sie nichts täten, und dabei die Augen sehr gut aufmachen.

Flaneure sind Künstler, auch wenn sie nicht schreiben. Sie sind zuständig für die Instandhaltung der Erinnerung, sie sind die Registrierer des Verschwindens, sie sehen als erste das Unheil, ihnen entgeht nicht die kleinste Kleinigkeit, sie gehören zur Stadt, die ohne sie undenkbar ist, sie sind das Auge, das Protokoll, die Erinnerung, das Urteil und das Archiv, im Flaneur wird sich die Stadt ihrer selbst bewußt.

Er kennt ihre Geheimnisse, ihre unterirdischen Wasserwege, ihre Launen und Schwächen, ihre nächtliche Stille und ihre euphorischen Momente, in seinen Sohlen, so Walter Benjamin, stecken

ihre Erinnerungen, die Dinge, die jeder bereits vergessen hat, weil sie einem nichts nützen. Er ist der ganz und gar unnütze und zugleich ganz und gar unentbehrliche Passant, seine Arbeit besteht aus dem, was andere versäumen: Während sie in der Stadt oder von der Stadt sind, ist er die Stadt, so wie die Bürgersteige, die Schaufenster, die Parks, die Verkehrsräder die Stadt sind, selbst wenn niemand ihn entbehrt, ist er unentbehrlich.

Ohne den Flaneur in Joyce, Baudelaire, Döblin, Proust wären „Ulysses“, „Les Fleurs du Mal“, „Berlin Alexanderplatz“, „À la Recherche du Temps perdu“ nie geschrieben worden.

Wenn ich sage, daß ich diesem ersten Flaneur viel zu verdanken habe, so meine ich damit nicht, daß er mich das Flanieren gelehrt hätte. Das hat man, oder man hat es nicht. Nein, er hat mich gelehrt, deswegen keine Schuldgefühle zu empfinden. Wenn ich an all die Stunden – und allmählich Jahre – denke, die ich durch die Straßen der Welt geschlendert bin, dann hätte ich in dieser Zeit die gesammelten Werke von Hegel und Kant mit der Hand abschreiben können. Statt dessen habe ich ein Buch gelesen, das nie zu Ende geht, ein Buch, dessen Kapitel und Buchstaben aus Gebäuden, Standbildern, Straßen, Autobussen und Menschen bestehen, vor allem vielen Menschen.

Und wahrscheinlich, denke ich jetzt im nachhinein, habe ich in erster Linie gestaunt. Gestaunt über die Vielseitigkeit von Städten, über die merkwürdige Art und Weise, wie sie plötzlich irgendwo mitten auf einer Fläche beginnen, über die täglich wiederkehrende Ebbe und Flut ihrer

Bevölkerung, über die Tatsache, daß aus allen Hähnen Wasser fließt, daß man immer wieder in allen Restaurants etwas zu essen bekommt, daß man sich so gut in ihnen verbergen kann, daß sie manchmal schon fast vor dem Tode stehen und dann doch nicht sterben, daß sie Kriege überleben, daß sie sich auf dem Untergrund ihrer eigenen Geschichte selbst in einem fort weiterbauen, daß man in ihnen in aller Öffentlichkeit alberner sein kann, unbemerkt sterben kann, seine Boten von Haß und Liebe an Mauern schreiben kann, daß sie unendlich arm sind und die größten Schätze beherbergen, daß sie die Vergangenheit in ihren Straßennamen bewahren, daß sie ihre Bewohner mal kosen und dann wieder strafen und daß diese Bewohner immer wieder namenlos verschwinden und die Stadt einfach weitergeht, eine Passage, ein Durchgangshaus, eine Seele, die ihre Bewohner dazu benutzt, um sich selbst zu behaupten.

Die Geschichte der Architektur ist auch die Geschichte der schlechten Architektur, denn, und das wird jeder Flaneur Ihnen bestätigen können: Eines haben alle Architekten, die guten wie die schlechten, gemein: Um das, was sie bauen, wenn sie bauen, kommt man im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes nicht herum, es steht da. Es steht immer und überall um uns herum. Wir sehen es sogar, wenn wir nicht hinschauen. Wer in eine Bibliothek, ein Krankenhaus, eine Kirche, ein Postamt, eine Zelle, einen Bahnhof, ein Kaufhaus, ein Theater geht, tritt in einen gedachten, entworfenen und schließlich gebauten Raum und hat in ge-

wisser Weise zu gehorchen. Richtung und Maß sind vorgegeben. Jemand anders hat bestimmt, ob er oder sie in einen hellen oder dunklen Raum kommt, sich vor einem Schalter bücken oder strecken muß, ob er oder sie erst eine gigantische Treppe – wie bei vielen Gerichtsgebäuden – hinaufsteigen muß, bevor man überhaupt hineingehen kann.

Wer mit dem menschlichen Maß seiner Schritte durch eine Stadt geht, ist Perspektiven, Artikulationen des Raums, Panoramen, über ihm aufragenden steilen Wänden, leeren und gefüllten Räumen ausgesetzt, die nicht er, sondern ein anderer erdacht und gestaltet hat. Er sieht, oft ohne es zu wissen, Verweise auf eine Vergangenheit, deren sich sogar der Erbauer vielleicht nicht mehr bewußt war, er sieht die Architektur der Not und des schnöden Mammons, der Hoffnung und der Niederlage, er/sie sieht Architektur, die sich in ihrer eigenen Geschichte verirrt hat, und solche, die die schmutzige Politik ihrer eigenen oder einer anderen Zeit widerspiegelt. Und hinter alldem sieht er – oder sieht sie nicht – den Architekten, der in seinem Gebäude verschwunden ist, Meister oder Diener, freier Mann oder einer, dem die Hände gebunden waren durch Regenten, Stadtverwaltungen, Auftraggeber – oder schlichtweg: durch mangelndes Talent.

Es gibt Städte, die sich, wie zum Beispiel Amsterdam, gleichsam selbst gebaut haben, und es gibt solche, deren Form und Standort von der Natur diktiert wurden; manche Städte erhielten ihre Gestalt durch den gebieterischen Willen eines Fürsten, andere durch die Furcht vor dem Feind. Seit Vitruv, der zu Beginn der christlichen Zeitrechnung lebte, ist über Architektur geschrieben

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worden, und wer das alles läse, würde rasch entdecken, daß sich eine Reihe von Problemen zwar, was Form oder Ausmaß angeht, geändert haben, nicht aber in der Essenz.

Auch vor dem Automobil gab es gigantische Verkehrsprobleme, auch früher mußten die Bewohner einer Polis ein Dach über dem Kopf haben, auch in der Antike mußte es öffentliche Gebäude für Funktionen des Gemeinwesens geben, und immer schon war es so, daß man innerhalb eines bestimmten bebauten Raums von A nach B wollte, und zwar nach Möglichkeit ohne Umweg. Der Archetyp der städtischen Ordnung wird in der klaren Sprache der Aufklärung von dem Jesuiten Laugier folgendermaßen beschrieben: „Ein jeder, der sich auf die Kunst versteht, einen Park zu entwerfen, wird keine Mühe haben, den Plan zu zeichnen, nach dem eine Stadt entsprechend ihrer Größe und Lage gebaut werden muß. Dafür braucht es Plätze, Kreuzungen und Straßen. Es braucht Regelmäßigkeit und Bizarrie, Parallelen und Gegensätze, Zufälligkeiten, die Abwechslung ins Bild bringen, große Ordnung in den Details, Durcheinander, Gewalt und Tumult im Ganzen.“ Gewalt und Tumult, davon erleben wir heutzutage genug, doch ein Jesuit, der für Durcheinander plä-

bei erwiesener Untauglichkeit, zum Teufel jagen, in den Straßen, Zentren, Parks, Häusern, Wohntürmen dagegen, die die Baumeister entworfen haben, wird man auch in Zukunft umhergehen, schauen, wohnen, essen, lieben, schlafen. Das Bühnenbild des Lebens steht, und es ist unveränderlich. Zwischen diesen Kulissen und Versatzstücken, in diesem von einem anderen bestimmten Raum, wird sich das Leben abspielen.

„Eine der Funktionen der Architektur“, sagt Edmund Bacon in seinem Buch „*Design of Cities*“, „ist das Schaffen von Raum, um das Drama des Daseins zu verschärfen.“ Nicht jeder wird diese Ansicht teilen, andererseits ist das Gegenteil, die neue Innenstadt als Massenschlafmittel, auch keine Lösung, mögen auch noch so viele Stadtverwaltungen anscheinend immer noch so von ihr angetan sein. Fragt sich nur, wer gefährlicher ist: der talentlose Angsthasen, der Verfechter des ewigen Kompromisses, der Erbauer, der die Stadt für die nächste Ewigkeit mit höhligen Häusern vollstopft, die ein niederländischer Journalist einmal so treffend als Totenkopfarchitektur bezeichnet hat – oder, auf der heroischen Seite, der Planer als Gestalter des Kosmos, der Erbauer als Lenker des menschlichen Schicksals, als Herold einer neuen Ordnung, als Exponent eines politischen oder ökonomischen Systems.

Immer wieder begegnen wir ihnen im Laufe der Geschichte. Im negativen Fall vergessen wir ihre Namen – ihre Gebäude stehen allerdings noch da –, im positiven Fall heißen sie Gropius oder Le Corbusier, van der Rohe oder Saarinen, Berlage oder Koolhaas – eines aber haben sie alle gemein: Sie greifen in das ein, was, steht es erst einmal da, unabweichlich Teil des Raums ist, in dem wir unser Leben verbringen müssen.

Dabei arrangieren sie nicht nur den äußeren Raum, den städtischen Kosmos, in dem wir uns bewegen, sondern sie machen sich auch Gedanken über den inneren Raum, in dem wir leben, das geschlossene Universum des einzelnen Hauses. Und damit stehen sie bei uns im Wohnzimmer. Wer ein tausendmal identisches Fenster für tausend identische Wohnungen entwirft, der entwirft nicht tausendmal die gleiche Aussicht, wohl aber tausendmal dieselbe Größe der Aussicht. Wer tausendmal das gleiche Schlafzimmer baut, kann die Bewohner der dreihundertneunundneunzigsten Wohnung nicht daran hindern, Liebe in der Küche zu machen, hat sich aber trotzdem, wie auch immer, in das Liebesleben sehr vieler Menschen eingemischt, die er nicht kennt.

Eine Massengesellschaft erfordert vermutlich auch Massenlösungen, mich freilich würde ein heiliger Schauer vor so viel Macht befallen, vor so vielen Möglichkeiten, gepaart mit so vielen Beschränkungen. Fehlgriffe haben nun einmal ein langes Leben. Der Baumeister Hippodamos, ein getreuer Anhänger des Pythagoras, der die Agora von Milet entwarf und geschlossene Wohneinheiten baute, die keinerlei logische Verbindung zum Rest der Stadt hatten bei gleichzeitigem Fehlen selbst einfachster Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten zwischen dem Wohn- und dem öffentlichen Bereich der Stadt, übte großen Einfluß auf die Endplanung des Forum Romanum aus, das wiederum das Modell für die zahllosen Siedlungen der Römer in ihrem unendlich ausgedehnten Reich wurde, die ihrerseits wiederum das Schachbrettmodell für die Städte der neuen Welt lieferten. Der unglücklichste Flaneur wohnt in einer Stadt, die lediglich rechte Winkel kennt. Und was mit der Seele passiert, wenn die weiblichen Rundungen aus Gebäuden und Stadtplänen verschwinden, wage ich nicht zu prophezeien.

Eine meiner frühesten Erinnerungen an eine Stadt ist die an einen Titel. Während des Krieges sah ich den Film „Die goldene Stadt“. Sogar vor einem Erschießungskommando könnte ich nicht viel mehr davon erzählen, als daß meine Mutter mir den Besuch dieses Filmes verboten hatte und daß eine blonde Frau darin spielte, die mich außerordentlich erregte, und daß es Bilder gab von einer Stadt in der Ferne, von der ich heute weiß, daß es Prag gewesen sein muß. Vielleicht ist in solchen Augenblicken mein Hunger nach Städten endgültig erwacht, vielleicht auch identifiziere ich Städte mit Frauen, jedenfalls stimmt es, daß große Städte eine erotische Wirkung besitzen. Es ist etwas Erregendes an großen Menschenmengen und dem Verschwinden in ihnen. Daß diese Erregung etwas mit Anonymität zu tun hat und mit Zufall, steht für mich ebenso fest wie die Tatsache, daß der anonyme Blick des Flaneurs eine voyeuristische Komponente besitzt, die ihrerseits wiederum etwas mit Poesie zu tun hat: Wenn Poesie gut ist, spricht sie immer im Namen von mehr Menschen als nur dem Dichter, und die Stimme des Gedichts wird genährt durch das Sehen des Dichters. Als Menge getarnt, zieht er durch die Stadt in all ihren Erscheinungsformen: Theater, Wohnzimmer, Machtzentrum, Schlachtfeld, Freistadt, Museum, Mutter, Monster.

Ich habe mich von Hausmann im Paris des Jahres 1968 über die Boulevards führen lassen, ich stand 1956 auf den versengten Straßen von Budapest, ich flüchtete vor dem Tränen gas der Polizei im Athen des Jahres 1967, ich ließ mich bis in Bernini Säulenarme, unter den Balken der Peterskirche, treiben, um die weiße vogelartige Gestalt von Pius XII. über den Häuptern seiner Gläubigen tanzen zu sehen, ich habe Rotterdam



brennen sehen, und ich strömte inmitten der euphorischen Menge des Jahres 1989 über den Kurfürstendamm.

Meine liebste Erinnerung jedoch hat nichts mit einem historischen Augenblick zu tun, es geht um einen ganz normalen Abend in Salamanca. Diese Erinnerung sagt mir, was ich von Städten will und wann sich das mit dem deckt, was eine Stadt von mir will. Es war im Jahr 1954, und ich fuhr per Anhalter durch Spanien. Die Entdeckung dieses Landes machte auf mich einen überwältigenden Eindruck. In irgendeinem Winkel meiner Seele muß eine Landschaft liegen, die den kahlgeschlagenen Landschaften der kastilischen Hochebene entspricht, auf der alle paar hundert Kilometer eine Stadt auftaucht. *Opdoem* heißt das bei uns im Niederländischen, und darin steckt das Wort *doem*, Schicksal, und zwar nicht zufällig: Der Anblick einer solchen Stadt, die schon von fern zu sehen ist, hat tatsächlich etwas von Schicksal und Vision an sich. Man wird wie mit einem göttlichen Finger im Rücken auf sie zugetrieben, und diese Treibjagd setzt sich auch innerhalb ihrer Mauern fort – in solchen Städten findet man, ohne eine Sekunde zu zögern, das Zentrum.

Im Falle Salamancas ist das die Plaza Mayor, der Große Platz. Ich nahm eine einfache Pension an der Südseite dieses Platzes und trank gerade etwas am Fenster meines Zimmers, als sich plötzlich, gegen acht Uhr, das Aussehen des Platzes völlig veränderte. Prachtvoll war er schon vorher gewesen: ein Geviert ohne Bürgersteige oder sonstige Erhöhungen, umschlossen von einem einzigen Gebäude, das auf vier langen Säulengängen ruhte. Im Grunde war es ein großes steinernes Wohnzimmer mit dem Himmel als Decke. Menschen bewegten sich mehr oder weniger chaotisch von Nord nach Süd und von Ost nach West, sie tauchten aus Geschäften in der Säulengalerie auf oder aus einer der schmalen Gassen, die auf den Platz mündeten, doch in diesem nicht benennbaren



Cees Nootboom wurde 1933 in Den Haag geboren. Heute lebt er, wenn er nicht auf Reisen ist, in Amsterdam oder auf Menorca. Er veröffentlicht Romane, Erzählungen, Essays, Reiseberichte und Gedichte. Mit seinem Roman „Die folgende Geschichte“ ist Nootboom bei uns auch einem breiten Publikum vertraut geworden. Die deutschen Ausgaben seiner Bücher erscheinen im Suhrkamp Verlag und bei Kleinheinholt.

Augenblick änderte sich das alles auf einen Schlag. Als wäre dies das Normalste der Welt, wurde innerhalb des Gevierts ein Kreis gebildet – da haben wir sie wieder: die weibliche Rundung –, ein sich bewegender, um genau zu sein: ein sich vor und zurück bewegender Kreis lebender Menschen, der sich langsam zu drehen begann.

Irgendwie war ich mir völlig sicher: So mußte die Welt aussehen. Ich saß erschlagen an meinem Fenster, verzehrt vom Verlangen, mitmachen zu dürfen. Doch wenn die Welt so aussehen sollte, dann mußte es erst Städte mit solchen Plätzen geben, und diese Plätze mußten exakt im Herzen dieser Städte liegen. Ich bin auf meinen Reisen ein Einzelgänger, doch in diesem Augenblick spürte ich, wie tief mich die Vision dieser völlig natürlichen Gemeinschaft der Menge dort unten bewegte. Sie taten das, weil der Platz es von ihnen wollte, vielleicht sogar verlangte. Doch sie hätten

es niemals getan, wenn sie es nicht selbst gewollt hätten. Ich wußte, daß dieser Platz mir etwas sagte, und ich konnte es, damals, noch nicht in Worte fassen.

Dreißig Jahre später besuchte ich in Berlin die Ausstellung „*Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*“. Es gab unendlich viel zu sehen, so viel, daß man jeden Abend in einer Art Betäubung, einem geistigen Dämmerzustand, ins Hotel zurückwankte. Ich, der ich noch immer meinen Platz suchte, sah, daß ganze Völkerschaften sich damit, das heißt: mit der Beziehung zwischen Menschen und dem Raum, in dem diese leben müssen, auf die unterschiedlichste Weise befaßt hatten. Konstruktivismus, Konkrete Kunst, von der futuristischen zur funktionalen Stadt, Dada und die Neue Sachlichkeit, Surrealismus und die Neue Wirklichkeit, kurzum, der gesamte Big Bang, aus dem das Universum der neuen Kunst und des neuen Bauens, sofern es das gibt, hervorgegangen ist.

Das Ironische daran war in meinen Augen, daß diese Ausstellung – im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes – dort stattfand, wo die ganze Entwicklung zeitweilig, aber immerhin sehr nachhaltig, gestoppt worden war: in Berlin. Die Ironie der Geschichte schlug sich nicht nur im Kleinen nieder – so zum Beispiel bei der Karikatur von George Grosz, ein Militär, der von zwei echten, lebendigen karabinerbewachten Militärs bewacht wurde –, sondern auch im Großen, denn bei der Architektur Ausstellung hingen all diese Projekte und Zeichnungen ungebauter Gebäude und Städte ausgerechnet in einer Stadt, die durch Zutun eines Herrschers, der selbst so gern Architekt geworden wäre, in weiten Teilen *entbaut* worden war.

Darüber hinaus war diese Stadt durch den Beschluß wiederum ganz anderer Herrscher zum Musterbeispiel einer doch sehr speziellen Art von Stadtplanung geworden. Schließlich gibt es nur wenige Städte, durch die eine Mauer läuft, und auch eine Mauer ist Architektur. Auf diese Weise wurde ich den ganzen Tag, auf der Ausstellung ebenso wie draußen, mit Architektur konfrontiert. Was passiert, wenn man eine Mauer mitten durch den natürlichen Fluß einer Stadt zieht, ist phantastisch: Die Stadt erleidet einen Infarkt und in diesem Fall einen von Dauer. Hier war also absichtlich geschehen, was in so vielen modernen Städten aus Versehen, durch Stupidität oder Blindheit geschieht, ein Verbrechen gegen die Selbstverständlichkeit, den natürlichen Fluß, die Menschlichkeit, die Körperlichkeit einer Stadt. Hier gab es keinen Platz mehr, auf dem sich Menschen als lebendige Menge im Kreis bewegten. Leere anstelle von Leben, Straßenbahnschienen endeten im Sand, Männer mit Hunden streiften durch diese Wüste, als suchten sie einen Goldschatz.

Dort, bei jener geheimnisvollen Wölbung, hatte Hüters Bunker gestanden, ein Stück weiter seine Reichkanzlei, von der aus er nachts, wie ein Dieb mit einer Taschenlampe bewaffnet und nur von Speer begleitet, zur Akademie der Künste ging. Zwei Architekten des Ungebauten, die sich die Pläne ihrer Gebäude anschauten, die nie gebaut werden sollten. Eine komplette Modellstadt war dort untergebracht, auf einer Länge von dreißig Metern auf rollbaren Tischen, unter dem Licht von Scheinwerfern, die die Sonne ersetzten. Holländischer Backstein hatte als Inspiration für die zartrosa Farbe der Zeichnung gedient, sonst aber war nichts Holländisches und eigentlich auch nichts Menschliches daran zu erkennen, da die Dimensionen dieser Gebäude die Menschen zu dem reduzieren sollten, was sie in Wirklichkeit werden sollten: manipulierte Zwerge, die unter einem 220 Meter hohen Bauwerk hindurchgehen mußten, um zusammen mit hundertsachtzigtausend anderen Zwergen einen Platz in der Kongreßhalle zu finden.

In meinen Gedanken, die etwas verwirrt waren von so vielen Tagen futuristischer Pläne und utopischer Projekte, von festlichen Menschenstädten unter einer Glaskugel, von Freiheitsgebäuden und Maschinenliebe, Massentürmen und Volkstheater, schob sich das Gutgemeinte durch das Bösegewollte, ich wollte zurück zu meinem Platz in Salamanca, Flaneur sein in einer Stadt von menschlichen Ausmaßen, ohne menschliches Treibholz unter Brücken und in Bahnhofshallen, Zeuge sein der Transaktionen zwischen Menschen in einer Stadt, die atmen konnte, teilhaben am Gespräch der Stadt, das in manchen Städten nun schon Hunderte oder Tausende von Jahren andauert, ohne je zu stoppen, das Gummurmel, Geschrei, Gejauchze, Geklage, Gesänge von Menschen, die alle zusammen, Lebende wie Tote, die Stadt sind.

Was wäre geschehen, wenn dieser Platz in Salamanca nicht erbaut worden wäre? Beweisen läßt sich das nichts, und doch drängt sich die Frage auf und zugleich die Frage, wer diejenigen sind, die die Macht haben, zu sagen, daß etwas gebaut werden soll oder nicht.

Flaneure mögen vielleicht keine Macht haben, aber sie brauchen auch nicht zu rechnen, keine Rechenschaft abzulegen. Sie machen ihre täglichen Runden, sie sehen, sie hören zu, sie schauen. Vielleicht sehen sie manchmal mehr als der Politiker in seinem Büro. Vielleicht lohnt es sich manchmal, ihnen zuzuhören: Durch ihre Sohlen spricht der Bürgersteig, die Lebensader jeder Stadt.

Aus dem Niederländischen von Helga von Beuningen



Hamish Fulton walking journey

BRITAIN
TATE

14 March – 4 June 2002

diert, hat bei diesem Stadtbewohner bereits gewonnen.

Von Laugier ausgehend, lassen sich Linien ziehen, weniger im ideologischen Sinn als vielmehr unter dem Aspekt der Einmischung, Linien zu L'Enfant, der den großen Plan für Washington entwarf, zu Le Corbusier, Taut, Hilberseimer, Wijdeveld. So sehr sie sich auch in mancherlei Hinsicht unterscheiden, eines haben sie offensichtlich gemein: Sie mischen sich ein. Es geht nicht mehr um die Architektur dieses einen prachtvollen oder nicht prachtvollen Gebäudes, sondern um den Architekten/Künstler, der in das Schicksal ganzer Massen eingreift. Der Architekt als Philosoph der Gesellschaft, der gleichzeitig – wenn seine Vorstellungen Wirklichkeit werden – die Macht erhält, zu bestimmen, wie, und manchmal auch wo, viele Tausende leben werden. Die Macht eines Menschen, der – an der Hand oder unter dem Schirm einer Regierung, eines Senats, eines Bürgermeisters oder auch frei – eine Stadt verändern, erweitern oder sogar neu erbauen darf, ist faszinierend und erschreckend zugleich. Damit liefert sich eine Gesellschaft regelrecht aus. Politiker, die man einmal gewählt hat, kann man später,

TRAVEL

Paris for the loiterer

The Flâneur:
A Stroll Through the Paradoxes
of Paris

By Edmund White
 Bloomsbury, 211 pages, \$22.95

REVIEWED BY MARTIN LEVIN

Among those of us who love Paris (in the winter, when it drizzles; in the summer, when it sizzles), the American writer Edmund White (*A Boy's Own Story*, *The Married Man*) must rank among those with the clearest, and sharpest, eye. This charming little book is the first in Bloomsbury's *The Writer and the City* series (coming soon, Peter Carey on Sydney), in which some of the world's best writers are meant to explore the cities they know best.

Unlike most travel books, this one is highly impressionistic, taking as its motif the *flâneur*, someone who strolls city streets without apparent purpose or goal.

The *flâneur*, in this case White (who lived in Paris from 1983 to 1998 and has written about it before, in *Our Paris: Sketches from Memory*) is not out to evaluate the city's sights and attractions, but to bring us its internal rhythms and its beating heart, its mulling brains and stirring libidos.

The book gets off to a very promising start, as White takes us through the Parisians' sense of self

and scape, their *soi-disant* "superior erotic sophistication" which leads to disdain for such American follies as the Lewinsky affair, while tolerating such entertainments as the *thé dansant*, in which elderly women ply young gigolos with free drinks.

The idea of the *flâneur* sets just the right tone for these opening sections, where White teases out Paris's familiar alienness; the invisible skull beneath the familiar skin. He praises the city's tolerance and openness, the sense that anything is possible and everything available.

But, while the *flâneur* is seduced by Paris, he is not blind to the superficiality of much of its life, such as the Parisians' need to be up on *l'air du temps*, the spirit and talk of the moment, making a fetish of the latest fashions and accessories.

White also thinks that the great literary and artistic Paris of our imaginations has all but disappeared. The city that within living memory was home to Sartre and Foucault and de Beauvoir and Matisse and Picasso and Piaf and Truffaut and Colette, and even Proust, now scarcely produces a writer or artist of international stature.

The *flâneur*, White writes, is one who immerses himself in the city. He gives us portraits of its great practitioners: Baudelaire, the 19th-century poet, whose "forays

are undirected, even purposeless — a passive surrender to the aleatory flux of the innumerable and surprising streets"; Walter Benjamin, whose essay, *The Return of the Flâneur*, and magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, are *flânerie* personified; and the photographer Eugène Atget.

When he wanders these streets, White's a delightfully erudite and anecdotal guide (there's a superb reading list at the end). In Paris, for instance, flirtation and *flânerie* are, well, bedmates. Ogling and eye contact are sports, not threats; the sidewalk is their playing field. We learn that Picasso, being advised to approach the first woman to catch his eye, did so, thereby meeting his second wife, Fernande.

The *flâneur*, White writes, is seeking experience, not learning. But he's so keen to take us on a *tour d'horizon* of multicultural Paris that he forgets his own lesson. At least half the book is given to the touristic margins: black Paris, Arab Paris, Jewish Paris and homosexual Paris (the true gay Paree?). White is often very engaging here; his section on black Paris — almost entirely *American* black Paris — contains nice sketches of clarinetist-saxophonist Sidney Bechet and chanteuse Josephine Baker. There's a touching meditation on the sad fate of the Turkish-Jewish banker-art collector family, the Camondos, now remembered



The Saint-Denis Gate and Boulevard: the joy of surrender to the flux of city streets.

only in a museum bearing their name (White is very instructive on the dizzying variety of Paris museums).

But this reader would have welcomed a slightly less polished and more aimless *flânerie*, a more direct surrender to the flux of the surprising streets. White could have recounted his own public flirtations (a biographer of Jean Genet, he has been an advocate for gay hedonism), or given us di-

rect reportage from the *souks* of largely Arab Belleville, or mingled with the tourists he describes on the Jewish Rue des Rosiers. Perhaps he could have taken us through that stroller's delight, Père-Lachaise Cemetery, posthumous home of, inter alia, Oscar Wilde, Jim Morrison and Victor Hugo, or maybe he thought it too well-trod to mention.

Although *The Flâneur* is often delightfully informative, I would

have welcomed some sense of the serendipitous accident that should be the mark of the aimless wanderer. White could have given us a bit more of what, in brilliant bursts, he shows he knows so well — the solitary walker's sharp encounter with the passing crowd.

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Meeting balances wandering. A crossroad of two othernesses, it welcomes the foreigner without tying him down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him. A mutual recognition, the meeting owes its success to its temporary nature, and it would be torn by conflicts if it were to be extended. The foreign believer is incorrigibly curious, eager for meetings: he is nourished by them, makes his way through them, forever unsatisfied, forever the party-goer, too. Always going toward others, always going farther. Invited, he is able to invite himself, and his life is a succession of desired parties, but short-lived, the brilliance of which he learns to tarnish immediately, for he knows that they are of no consequence. “They welcome me, but that does not matter... Next... It was only an expenditure that guarantees a clear conscience...” A clear conscience for the host as well as the foreigner. The cynic is even more suited for a meeting: he does not even seek it, he expects nothing from it, but he slips in nevertheless, convinced that even though everything melts away, it is better to be with “it.” He does not long for meetings, they draw him in. He experiences them as in a fit of dizziness when, distraught, he no longer knows whom he has seen nor who he is.