

Keep Walking Intently

The Ambulatory
Art of the
Surrealists,
the Situationist
International,
and Fluxus

Lori Waxman

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To Michael, Renée, and Jude,
for whom I would walk to the moon and back.

Part I: Surrealism's Ambulatory Dreams

A First Excursion

On a rainy afternoon in the middle of April 1921, a dozen men wearing hats and raincoats, many of them affecting canes and one of them cradling a large dictionary, led a group of fifty or so damp spectators around the muddy, foggy grounds of a decrepit churchyard in Paris's 5th arrondissement. The attendees endured taunts and insults, the shouting of nonsense words and phrases, an announcement of the intention to stand for political office, and random readings from the dictionary. After an hour and a half of this enactment, of walking to and fro, the audience began to disperse, whereupon they were offered envelopes containing items such as phrases, portraits, *cartes de visite*, landscapes, and five-franc notes covered in erotic sketches. The organizers and a few remaining viewers retreated to a nearby café, lamenting the outing's failure.¹

This rather sad group excursion marks a turning point in the history of vanguard twentieth-century art, an initial stirring of the Surrealist spirit, a foundational moment in the rapprochement of art and everyday life, and one of the first attempts to marshal walking as an artistic device. Conceived by André Breton and the Littérature group under the auspices of the Grande Saison Dada of 1921, the outing was meant to counter the boredom of Dada actions and publications, and as a rejoinder to an audience that had come to expect the shock of Dada productions. Instead of renting a hall and putting on a show of impromptu imbecilities, Breton imagined a series of *visites* in and around Paris to various sites of no particular historical or aesthetic importance, at least not to him and his compatriots. On blue posters pinned up along the boulevard Saint-Michel, a recognizably irregular Dadaist typography announced:

LA PROPRIÉTÉ EST LE LUXE
DU PAUVRE
SOYEZ SALE

EXCURSIONS & VISITES DADA

UN CULTE NOUVEAU :

DADA

DISTRIBUTION DE BAS DE SOIE A 5,85
LEÇONS DE COUPE

1^{ÈRE} VISITE: *Eglise* *Saint Julien le Pauvre*

PROCHAINES VISITES:
Musée du Louvre
Buttes Chaumont
Gare Saint-Lazare
Mont du Petit Cadastre
Canal de l'Ourcq
etc.

JEUDI 14 AVRIL À 3 h.

RENDEZ-VOUS DANS LE JARDIN DE L'ÉGLISE

Rue Saint Julien le Pauvre — (Métro Saint-Michel et Cité)

COURSES PÉDESTRES DANS LE JARDIN

ON DOIT
COUPER
SON NEZ
COMME
DES
CHEVEUX

Les dadaïstes de passage à Paris voulant remédier à l'incompétence de guides et de cicerones suspects, ont décidé d'entreprendre une série de visites à des endroits choisis, en particulier à ceux qui n'ont vraiment pas de raison d'exister. — C'est à tort qu'on insiste sur le pittoresque (Lycée Janson de Sailly), l'intérêt historique (Mont Blanc) et la valeur sentimentale (la Morgue). — La partie n'est pas perdue mais il faut agir vite. — Prendre part à cette première visite c'est se rendre compte du progrès humain, des destructions possibles et de la nécessité de poursuivre notre action que vous tiendrez à encourager par tous les moyens.

LAVEZ VOS SEINS
COMME VOS GANTS

* EN BAS LE BAS ■■■■ EN HAUT LE HAUT

Sous la conduite de : Gabrielle BUFFET, Louis ARAGON, ARP, André BRETON, Paul ELUARD, Th. FRAENKEL, J. HUSSAR, Benjamin PÉRET, Francis PICABIA, Georges RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES, Jacques RIGAUT, Philippe SOUPAULT, Tristan TZARA.

MERCI
POUR
LE FUSIL

et encore
une fois
BONJOUR

(Le piano a été mis très gentiment à notre disposition par la maison Gaveault.)

Excursions & visites Dada: 1ère visite, Eglise Saint Julien le Pauvre, Paris, 1921. Prospectus for a mock guided tour conducted by the Paris Dadaïsts on April 14, 1921. Machine paper, printed with black and blue ink, 22 x 28 cm. Text attributed to Tristan Tzara.

The Dadaists, passing through Paris and wishing to remedy the incompetence of suspect guides and cicerones, have decided to undertake a series of visits to chosen sites, in particular those which really have no reason to exist.—It is incorrect to insist on the picturesque (Jason-de-Sailly High School), historic interest (Mont Blanc), and sentimental value (the Morgue).—All is not lost but one must act fast.—To take part in this first visit is to account for human progress, the possibility of destruction, and the need to pursue our actions, which you must encourage by all means.

Under the direction of: Gabrielle Buffet, Louis Aragon, Arp, André Breton, Paul Eluard, Th. Fraenkel, J. Hussar, Benjamin Péret, Francis Picabia, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Jacques Rigaut, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara.

Trips were promised to the Louvre, the Buttes-Chaumont, the Gare Saint-Lazare, the canal de l'Ourcq, the Mont du Petit Cadenas, and the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. In the end, only the last was visited, on the aforementioned rainy day. Parisian journalists had been advised of the imminent adventure in the following notice:

MUST WE SHOOT THE DADAISTS?

This is the question recently posed by a magazine to its best contributors. Today at three o'clock in the afternoon in the garden of the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (métro: Saint-Michel), Dada will inaugurate a series of Excursions throughout Paris. Dada's friends and enemies are invited to visit with it, free of charge, the annexes of the church of

Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. There is, it seems, still something to discover in this garden otherwise beloved by tourists.

This is not an anticlerical manifestation, as one might be tempted to believe, but rather a new interpretation of nature applied this time not to art but to life.²

But if Breton, Jacques Baron, Roger Vitrac, and Louis Aragon, among others, all deemed the adventure a failure of one sort or another—due to the weather, the public's total lack of reaction, the "laborious nullity of the speeches" that strove too hard to be provocative, or an inability to break with the "Dada cliché" despite having moved from the auditorium into the open air³—the event should by no means be dismissed as inconsequential. Though Surrealism would not officially be announced until the fall of 1924, when Breton would publish his manifesto a few months after returning from another failed outing, the church visit nevertheless revealed distinct desires of a sort that would come to pre-occupy the group for years.

As articulated in the press release, they believed there was "still something to discover in a garden otherwise beloved by tourists"; rather than being organized in terms of anticlericalism, the walk was "a new interpretation of nature applied this time not to art but to life." In these words glimmer the Surrealist proposal for finding the marvelous in the banal, in the spaces of everyday life, spaces overlooked and underappreciated, sometimes to the extent of being outmoded or even ruined, spaces such as the nineteenth-century arcades that Aragon would walk up and down in his book *Le paysan de Paris* (1926), or the empty streets of the nighttime city that Breton would wander with his female companions in the books *Nadja* (1928) and *L'amour fou* (1937).⁴

To chance upon the unexpected and extraordinary in these places is to protest against their nullity and to offer a potentially powerful resistance to a cycle of consumerist decay, to the speed of fashion and of technology, to the need to be productive and economic.⁵ That this re-enchantment depends not on the representation of motion or place but on actual experience, the traversing of real space by real bodies in real time, finds its initial proposal in the journey to and around Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. The future Surrealists did not find anything extraordinary there—too rainy, too many people, too encumbered by Dadaist antagonism—but they made a first effort to re-enchant the quotidian pathways and places of the city by walking through them. It was an excursion that portended miles and miles more to come.

Quotidian Journeys

The Surrealists were walkers. To claim this is not to claim anything particularly unusual—Paris was and still is a city pleasantly and easily crossed by foot, all the more so in the 1920s and early '30s—but rather to highlight the city as the central place where many of them claimed for themselves this everyday mobility in their poems, essays, memoirs, novels, photographs, and, most importantly, in their lives. Walking comprises the most fundamental and definitive of human activities, so pervasive and common as to be beneath notice, yet it formed a core practice of the Surrealists, giving shape and possibility to so many of their experiments. Certainly they walked for the practical reasons that everyone else in Paris walked—to get from home to work to newsagent to store to café to home again—but they mostly ambulated about town for reasons that departed from such pragmatic necessities, even when they involved them. They walked to

go on journeys, to travel within the confines of their own city, to be on the familiar street but also to leave it for the unfamiliar hidden in plain sight. They walked to encounter the unknown and the mysterious, the dreamlike and the uncanny, be it in the form of an astonishing prostitute, a hallucinatory shop window, or a disfiguring shadow. They walked with one another and they walked alone, and they also observed how others walked, sometimes following at a distance.

A spread in the very first issue of *Minotaure*, the Surrealist magazine published from 1933 to 1939, reveals the capacity for an action as ordinary as walking to give access to the extraordinary. A chronophotograph unsigned but most likely the work of the physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey, circa 1890, illustrates the precise positions of the body as it moves through a series of fencing poses, positions otherwise invisible to the naked eye. The brief by Marcel Jean notes the medium's capacity for conveying duration in two dimensions, and for doing so better than paintings by the Futurists or Marcel Duchamp. But it is not scientific precision or comprehensiveness that interests Jean, rather the ability of the chronophotograph to portray the banal as something magical, and specifically the banal gestures of walking, running, and jumping, rendering them in "bas-reliefs of vapor or in sparkling flowers."⁶ The chronophotograph helps the naked eye perceive the magical lightness that an action as solid and grounded as walking might in fact promise to the willing rambler.

When something commonplace is appropriated for purposes that exceed convention, it bears paying special attention to how and why this is done. Walking is no exception. In terms of other kinds of quotidian events, the Surrealists also ate and drank, but those activities are rarely if ever noted by them or subsequent commentators in any

detail. At places like the Café Certa and the Café Cyrano, they hosted daily meetings, not in the model of the literary salons of other vanguard groups, not as a place to sit and discuss and be seen, but rather as centrifuges from which to proceed on an encounter.⁷ What actually transpired in those cafés is recounted less frequently than the promenade that led them there or on which they would eventually depart, perhaps triggered by a chance meeting of the sort Breton recounted in *L'amour fou*, when he observed a “scandalously beautiful” woman in a café and followed her out the door and into the street, where “the marvelous rush of evening made this liveliest and, at times, most disquieting part of Montmartre glitter like no other.” Breton continues: “And this figure was fleeing before me, ceaselessly intercepted by the darkness of moving hedges. Hope—what sort of hope?—was now just a tiny flame flickering beside me. And the sidewalks forked off inexplicably one after the other, in an itinerary just as capricious as possible. Despite appearances to the contrary, I wondered if I hadn’t been noticed, so that I was being deliberately led into the most marvelous roundabout path.”⁸ Inconceivable to remain inside, seated at a table, when the unknown asks to be pursued down the street. Even brothels might be treated this way: One anecdote tells how the poet Paul Éluard and the painter Toyen, out on a walk together, would sometimes stop at a bordello. While Éluard made use of the establishment, his friend, one of the founding members of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia, who had eschewed the given name Marie Čermínová in favor of the genderless Toyen, would wait. When Éluard was done, they would continue their stroll together on the promenade that led to the experience they were truly in search of.⁹ For all that the café or the brothel offered an enclosed setting for encounters, wandering the street offered infinitely more.

Various memoirists and scholars have noted the central importance of walking to the Surrealist enterprise. Often the term “flânerie” is used to describe their practice. Though the flâneur first emerged during the July Monarchy (1830–48) as a figure in panoramic literature, its more popular genesis dates to about two decades later in the writings of Charles Baudelaire.¹⁰ In his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire portrayed the flâneur as a “passionate spectator,” a man who finds newness and interest everywhere, who roams independently but is also at one with the crowd, electrified by its energy. Taken up by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, the flâneur became a more complex figure, one who looked on the city and the crowd with an estranged gaze, energized by it but also critical, fascinated yet never completely immersed, always somewhat out of place. With Benjamin, the figure of the flâneur began to resemble that cut by the Surrealists, who at the time he was writing had been roaming about Paris for a decade.¹¹

Reflecting on his days as one of the youngest members of the Surrealist group, Jacques Baron describes the “interminable promenade” that was the Surrealist experience: they were always going for walks, always moving. “Why are we leaving? Where are we going? Simply in search of a lost object, in other words, a lost secret.”¹² The writer Rebecca Solnit, whose book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2000) recounts the cultural history of walking, devotes an entire chapter to Surrealist deambulation, focusing on the first-person narratives that Breton, Aragon, and Philippe Soupault all structure around their own Parisian wanderings. In his treatise *Walkscapes* (2002), the architect and artist Francesco Careri introduces the notion of the “anti-walk,” positing the proto-Surrealist *visite* to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre and the subsequent Surrealist deambulations, as evidenced in their writings, as a kind of anti-art, a radical means of

breaking with traditional notions of the art object. The Italian art historian Mirella Bandini considers wandering to be one of the main Surrealist activities in the early period of Breton's group; she dedicates two chapters of her major book on the movement to these adventures. Literary historian Michael Sheringham proposes the street as "the central forum of the Surrealist engagement with Paris," an engagement activated through ambulation. In Roger Cardinal's various histories of the movement, walking is recognized for its elevation to the status of a creative act, one which allowed for the dominant influence of Paris itself, as the city was traversed on strolls that were "every bit as poetic an exercise as actually penning a poem."¹³

Apart from writers like Baron who were part of the movement, perhaps one of the most intimate acknowledgments of the importance of Surrealist deambulation comes from the late British critic, jazz musician, and Surrealist scholar George Melly, who in an eccentric book with the deceptively straightforward title *Paris and the Surrealists* (1991) recounts his first visit to Paris as a young man on leave from the navy in August 1949. Despite a letter of introduction to Pierre Mabilie from E. L. T. Mesens, who ran the London gallery specializing in Surrealist art where Melly worked, the visit was a failure in terms of momentous events or encounters. He spent the week wandering the unfamiliar city, feeling invisible, alone. It was, he realized forty-two years later, after a lifetime devoted to the movement, the closest he had ever felt to the Surrealist spirit.¹⁴

Melly's retrospective clarity points to a salient feature of Surrealist walking, the art of getting lost, and not simply on account of territorial unfamiliarity—though certainly they wandered eagerly in unknown parts of the city, sometimes with the help of "guides," as Philippe Soupault does throughout the book *Les dernières nuits de Paris* (1928),

accompanying and sometimes surreptitiously following a series of shady characters, or as the photographer Brassai did when he discovered the hidden areas of Ménilmontant, Belleville, Charonne, and Porte des Lilas with the help of Léon-Paul Fargue, the self-styled “Pedestrian of Paris,” who knew those areas well.¹⁵ But getting lost, meaningfully, mysteriously, fabulously lost, is no easy task. It is not at all the same as not knowing where one is. Walter Benjamin explains: “Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center.”¹⁶ To those who lose themselves in the city, the city comes astonishingly alive. Benjamin’s forest metaphor expresses this potently: the city as a living, breathing, growing thing, full of man-made elements that speak their own language, as birds and flowers do to the attentive pastoral wanderer. The city as a place not just of functional mobility but the kind of noninstrumental, inspiring movement otherwise associated with more natural settings.

And not just any city but Paris, the very city in which the Surrealists learn to lose themselves. Benjamin continues: “Paris taught me this art of straying; it fulfilled a dream that had shown its first traces in the labyrinths on the blotting pages of my school exercise books.”¹⁷ Losing oneself thus demands not only the confidence and ability to do so, but also a willing urban setting—just the kind of city that Baudelaire first recognized Paris to be in his lyric poetry of the mid-nineteenth century. Paris arguably possesses, or possessed, qualities more encouraging to the wanderer

than other urban settings, qualities sometimes linked to her feminine gender and the desiring ways in which one might therefore cross the city; her plethora of plazas and monuments, open to re-imagination and haunting; her warrens of streets and arcades, which cut through the city with an organic randomness. But those aspects of the urban environment that challenge the straying body and spirit existed in Paris as well, and increasingly so: vehicular traffic, which bodily threatens the pedestrian, especially one who is lost in reverie, and administrative rationalization, such as directional signage, building numbers, and broad thoroughfares, which make of the city an unpoetic machine.¹⁸ All this to say, if Paris was a city that could teach Benjamin how to stray, and on whose unfamiliar streets a lonely Melly could feel close to the Surrealist spirit, nevertheless wandering across her constituted an *art* to be deliberately practiced.

Two People Walking Near Each Other

The Surrealists often walked in the company of others. If the excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre gained little from its overly large audience, the potential for encounter and discovery nevertheless increased with the presence of a walking companion or two. Friendships formed on walks, ideas were debated and disseminated, discoveries were made—of uncanny landscapes, as in the midnight adventure that Breton, Aragon, and Marcel Noll undertook in the Buttes-Chaumont park, as recounted in *Paysan de Paris*; or of potent objects, such as the mask and shoe-spoon found by Breton and Alberto Giacometti at the Saint-Ouen flea market. In *L'amour fou*, Breton reflects on this last encounter and highlights the importance of making the momentous find with Giacometti. “I would be tempted to say,” he writes, “that the two people

walking near each other constitute a single influencing body, *primed*" (AF, 32–33). Likewise, the Surrealist project as a whole was less about solo than collective production.

Many of the earliest friendships of the movement were fostered through ambulatory excursions. These walks, the earliest on record, are also the most conventional, consisting primarily of friends going for long promenades. This makes sense, because the ideas of Surrealism had not yet been developed or were in their most preliminary stage.

Breton and Soupault came to know one another through the daily walks they took together in the fall of 1917, evenings spent walking up and down the boulevard Raspail or the boulevard Saint-Germain, discussing a previous generation of literature while trying to escape the atmosphere of war. That same fall Breton and Aragon also met, while both were interning at Val-de-Grâce hospital. They, too, spent their off-hours walking through a nervous Paris, reciting Rimbaud's poetry from memory, and even some of their own. Such footpaths run through Breton's daily life, friendships, and loves. In his memoir, the young Baron recalls his own impressionable first meeting with Breton, on a Thursday morning in 1921, when at the latter's suggestion the two set out for a walk, stopping along the way at a gallery where Breton had some business to do, eventually crossing the Seine and continuing out toward the Porte Maillot. They talked of painting, the Saint-Julien *visite*, Dada, Baron's family and school life, and eventually Breton introduced the seventeen-year-old to his radical idea for a revolution not of politics but of the spirit; for remaking life, a life grown diminished by the society in which they lived, a life that needed to be found again and intensified. How natural for such a discussion to be had while the body and mind course through the streets of the city, experiencing it as a laboratory for the new and unexpected.

Baron similarly places walking at the center of his friendship with Aragon, who would pick him up after school and recite verse to him as they traversed the city together. On one such occasion, passing a perfume shop, Aragon imagined decorating an apartment by covering its walls with the colored soaps displayed in the shop window, revealing a facility for detecting the unusual and embellishing it, a facility most ably practiced on the streets and in the arcades of Paris, as the reveries of *Paysan de Paris* evince, and as many of his walking companions have recalled as well, among them Breton and Matthew Josephson. Josephson, an American writer and editor who lived in Paris in the early '20s and kept company with the proto-Surrealist crowd, recounts how Aragon would exhaust him in their nighttime rambles, telling fabulous stories one after the other, stories that would often end up as chapters in future books, improvised in talk precisely as they later appeared in print.¹⁹

Another American poet who, like Josephson, avoided expat gatherings in favor of the company of the young Parisian avant-garde was William Carlos Williams. Soupault, in his afterword to the English version of *Dernières nuits*, which Williams translated, notes that the two of them often walked the city together, watching how strangers ambled about. The deserted streets and quays of nighttime Paris attracted them most of all.

Women, too, figured as important walking companions, but of a different sort. The evening strolls across the Parisian landscape that Breton enjoys with Nadja and Jacqueline Lamba in *Nadja* and *L'amour fou*, respectively, constitute the heart and structure of those books. But in each case, especially Nadja's, the woman acts less as a companion—friend, disciple, partner in discovery—than as a medium through which to tap the unconscious, the uncanny, the mysterious, and even hysterical aspects

of the city and oneself. As Breton describes her, Nadja is “a free genius, something like one of those spirits of the air.”²⁰ It is not the girl herself who finally interests Breton but what she offers him in her most inspired and haunted moments; at other times she bores him. Although the book transforms her into a powerful symbol, Nadja was in fact a real person, a young woman named Léona who was hurt by the working notes Breton showed her that revealed her transformation not into a character in a novel but rather a symbol, a figure whose worth resided not in her own person but rather the forces of magnetism, desire, and madness, which coursed through her.²¹

Similarly the prostitute Georgette in Soupault’s *Dernières nuits* acts as a figure through whom he can access the secrets of Paris—though only at night. Come daylight, she is transformed into a common twenty-two-year-old. But in the dark he accompanies her as she works her way across the city, and for many nights afterward he trails her secretly, as she goes knowingly about her business: “Georgette resumed her stroll about Paris, through the mazes of the night. She went on, dispelling sorrow, solitude or tribulation. Then more than ever did she display her strange power: that of transfiguring the night. Thanks to her, who was no more than one of the hundred thousands, the Parisian night became a mysterious domain, a great and marvelous country, full of flowers, of birds, of glances and of stars, a hope launched into space.”²² As a prostitute, a *streetwalker*, it was Georgette’s profession to walk the streets, as it was Nadja’s and a number of other enigmatic women encountered there by the Surrealists, including the ones who walked away, never to be seen again, leaving infatuation and missed adventure in their wake.

In simultaneously idolizing and objectifying the other sex, the Surrealists were in good historical company: Baudelaire famously described woman as she “for whom, but

above all *through whom*, artists and poets create their most exquisite jewels. [...] She is a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance."²³ For him, too, a woman was most magically encountered in the street, as is the majestic widow of his poem "À une passante," a fugitive beauty whose glance reinvigorates him—and whom he is never to see again.

If it is mostly prostitutes the Surrealists followed as mediums, Soupault's *Dernières nuits* brims with other types of shady characters who proved fruitful to trail. Having depleted his infatuation with Georgette via the rote business of sexual intercourse, Soupault picks up the path of her brother, Octave. The ringleader of the gang to which Octave belongs explains that Octave is always giving himself over to some experiment and that right now this involves walking. After pursuing him to the ends of the city and back again one night, Soupault reaches the conclusion that a love for the extraordinary, sometimes the dangerously fantastic, propels Octave's and his companions' wanderings. He writes, "Octave's perambulations might appear the whims of a sick person, Georgette's itinerary just professional, Volpe's actions not at all disinterested. But it was no less true that these explanations seemed to me really too simple. These lives possessed an inexplicable attraction which I called liberty" (*DNP*, 138–39).

Their "liberty," like Nadja's "free genius," qualifies them as mediums through which the Surrealist poet hopes to be taken on a journey through the city's unconscious. For one does not just go on a walk, one does not simply stroll, one must be *taken* by a mysterious force, giving oneself over to it, to chance, to the phenomenal. Walking alone did not necessarily curtail these forces, but walking with a companionable and like-minded soul, or following in the footsteps of the other's uncontrolled passions, promised even more.

Automobiles, Traffic, and Electric Streetlamps

Looking back on the early 1920s, on the kind of city he had walked so often with Aragon, Breton reflected: "It was a different kind of urbanism. [...] Cars belonged to the rich and encumbered the street much less. There were no red lights or green lights. There was less scaffolding; people didn't clean their houses. Less public works, thus fewer cranes, jackhammers, pits, barricades, bulldozers. [...] Roadways were crossed on wooden pavement. One could converse when strolling."²⁴ And conversing when strolling was key to the quotidian rhythm of a developing Surrealism, as was the pursuit of chance encounters, and the dreamy sort of straying where the reality of the streetscape morphed into a hallucinatory landscape.

But over the course of the 1920s, the years in which Breton would publish the Surrealist manifesto and in which the great treatises on Surrealist ambulation would be written by him, Aragon, and Soupault, the streetscape of Paris changed: irregular pavements gave way to smooth ones, the fluttering light of gas lamps dimmed in favor of electric bulbs, large plazas no longer plunged into dark obscurity at night, pedestrians found themselves herded along newly demarcated sidewalks and crosswalks. Much of this urban refitting was done under the influence of the automobile, whose presence on Parisian streets increased exponentially over the course of the decade, along with the related phenomena of noise, exhaust, traffic, and vehicular accidents. Where previously the streets danced with a kind of disordered ballet of pedestrians, horse-drawn carts, vendors, and the occasional automobile, by the mid-1920s a new kind of order reigned: minimum speed limits during rush hour, the division of roads into separate lanes, unidirectional

traffic, intersections governed by policemen with batons, and finally the American solution of lighted signals.²⁵ Each of these measures made Paris more navigable by car, more conducive to the fast, flowing circulation of the city, but they also radically altered the situation of the pedestrian, rendering him or her a secondary citizen of the street, one forced to capitulate to the dominance of the automobile. To ignore or misread traffic signs could engender bodily harm. An encounter with a car portended an accident, not a chance meeting, certainly not like the beautiful one that the Comte de Lautréamont infamously envisioned between an umbrella and a sewing machine.

Traffic avoidance, if not a determining factor in the where and when of Surrealist promenading, nevertheless resulted from some such decisions. They often walked at night, while the city and most of its inhabitants slept and vehicular and human traffic subsided. They walked in areas far from the elite and touristic crowds of the Left Bank and the Grands Boulevards, preferring the pedestrian zones of the flea market or the arcades. Favored by Aragon, the arcades provided sheltered pedestrian walkways along a kind of miniature city within the city, with shops, hotels, cafés, theaters, brothels, barbershops, and other sites that could be observed without fear of being run over. The passages, which date from the first half of the nineteenth century and originally provided the pedestrian protection from the traffic of a pre-automotive era, were under threat of destruction even as Aragon wandered their increasingly unfashionable corridors. He pinpoints the administrative rationalization in part responsible for this demolition, explaining that “the great American instinct, imported to our capital by a Second Empire prefect, has ruled the map of Paris into rectangles, making it impossible to maintain these human aquaria which, though already gutted of their original life, deserve notice for

the several modern myths they conceal.”²⁶ He finds the signs of these myths in the Passage de l’Opéra and in 1924 begins recording them in *Paysan de Paris*, the same year the passage was torn down to make way for a widening of the boulevard Haussmann to accommodate increased automotive traffic.

Taxis and trains also served the Surrealists to get around town, certainly, but the majority of their journeys were taken on foot and importantly so. For the experience of riding in a car, even in a congested city, is one of speed and of being cut off from the exchanges made possible among the people, monuments, and shopfronts of the street. Aragon gives a hint of this in *Paysan de Paris* when he describes the nighttime taxi ride he took with Breton and Marcel Noll on their way from Montmartre to the Buttes-Chaumont park. In the space of just two pages he notes the many miles of the city crossed on their way to the 19th arrondissement—the wholesale markets of La Villette, the Northern Railway freight warehouses, “a massive landscape of useful, dead buildings,” the huge Depot of Paving-Stones, the hovels of ragpickers and market gardeners—but though this territory seems ripe with Surrealist promise, it inspires none of the hallucinatory details and rich encounters of their subsequent ramble through the park, to which he devotes the following thirty-plus pages. The taxi ride generates a straightforward description and little more. The walk through the park, on the other hand, proceeds at a human pace, and the companions’ great receptiveness meets with encounter after encounter, of dead ends and lovers in the bushes, a bronze column that measures temperature, time, and atmospheric pressure, the Bridge of Suicides, various statues, a belvedere, and more. Aragon describes these sites as they come upon them and his prose strays wildly at certain junctures, suggesting the poetic depths made possible by their promenade, by the joining of unconscious and pathway.

Moreover, he observes, “in a given landscape, it is some absurdity and not the essential that catches your eye,” a perceptual situation nearly opposite to that of the taxi ride that brought them there (*PP*, 165).

When the Surrealists took the train, it was often precisely for the purpose of disengaging from the environment. They might endlessly ride the rails that looped around the city’s outskirts through the desolate landscape of the zone until falling into a kind of mental trance that gave itself over to automatism.²⁷ This form of locomotive wandering used the transportation system against its intentions, not to commute efficiently but rather to explore the unconscious by moving through the landscape as if sleepwalking.

A bookend to Baron’s comments about the inviting conditions for walking is provided by an article that appeared in the newspaper *Le Temps* on May 22, 1936, entitled “Le dernier flâneur” (The last flâneur). Journalist Edmond Jaloux deplores the impossibility and the sheer danger of wandering in the modern city, with its endless hazards, regulations, car horns, and jostling crowds of the dazed and breathless. Insofar as the flâneur was a historic figure who arose out of the particular conditions of the industrial city, with its emphasis on circulation, freedom of movement, and anonymous crowds, Jaloux’s lament can be understood as a nostalgic cry against technological progress and modernization, but to do so is to ignore the ways in which a rejection of some of the facets of the modern city can be a means of looking forward, a means of breaking with the present to secure a better future. The Surrealists themselves have often been described as flâneurs, but never to suggest that they were retrograde figures who idealized an earlier form of the city. On the contrary, their deambulation moves as a form of revolt against the stultifying regulation, logic, and

efficiency of modern urban life, a life they believed deadened the spirit under the pretense of civilization and progress. To walk as a meaningful practice within the modernizing city is to act both bodily and spiritually against the imperatives of utility, functionalism, and work, imperatives deeply tied to a changing technological and transportation structure.

The Reality in Surreality

Leave everything.

Leave Dada.

Leave your wife, leave your mistress.

Leave your hopes and fears.

Drop your kids in the middle of nowhere.

Leave the substance for the shadow.

Leave behind, if need be, your comfortable life and promising future.

Take to the highways.²⁸

This poem, written by Breton in 1922, rouses with the trumpeting tone of a call to arms. Breton means it literally: take to the highways, get out on the street, put shoe to pavement, walk, experience, encounter. But how? The excursion the year before to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre failed dismally, despite its engagement with real time, space, and action. It was too theatrical, too focused on shocking a passive audience. To really take to the highways would mean giving oneself over to whatever might be encountered there, including oneself. Out of this desire came a four-man stroll, undertaken by Breton, Aragon, Max Morise, and Roger Vitrac in May 1924.²⁹ Departing from the town of Blois, picked at random on a map, they continued haphazardly on foot for close to ten days, detouring only to eat and sleep. Wandering without

a goal was their goal, and over the course of the journey they encountered a few phantoms, came close to fisticuffs, and eventually decided to cut the trip short on account of mounting hostility, fatigue, and disorientation. Nevertheless, Breton would later conclude that “the exploration was hardly disappointing, no matter how narrow its range, because it probed the boundaries between waking life and dream life.”³⁰ The Surrealist laboratory could not conduct its experiments solely in the artist’s studio or the poet’s study or the philosopher’s mind; it needed lived experience and it needed the street—the ordinary streets that crisscrossed Paris—to achieve the “resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*.”³¹ So wrote Breton in the “Manifesto of Surrealism,” begun upon his return to Paris soon after the trip and published a few short months later.

The lessons of the countryside would be transferred to the far more fertile territory of the city, where one needed only be receptive to the “absolute reality” that was already there, lurking in common and forgotten places. Certain locales resonated more than others, pulsing with a potent magnetism hidden beneath an exterior banality. The flea market’s labyrinthine collection of the city’s detritus attracted Breton over and over again; he prowled the aisles of the Saint-Ouen market every Sunday for most of his life.³² There were also the arcades, outmoded monuments such as the Tour Saint-Jacques, working-class quarters on the Right Bank—the more trivial and underappreciated the locale, the greater the chances for adventure and sudden revelation. The very lack of culture in these places appealed, for being undigested, unprocessed and unplanned, empty of expectation but full of unpredictable promise. What was found there would therefore be all the more moving.³³

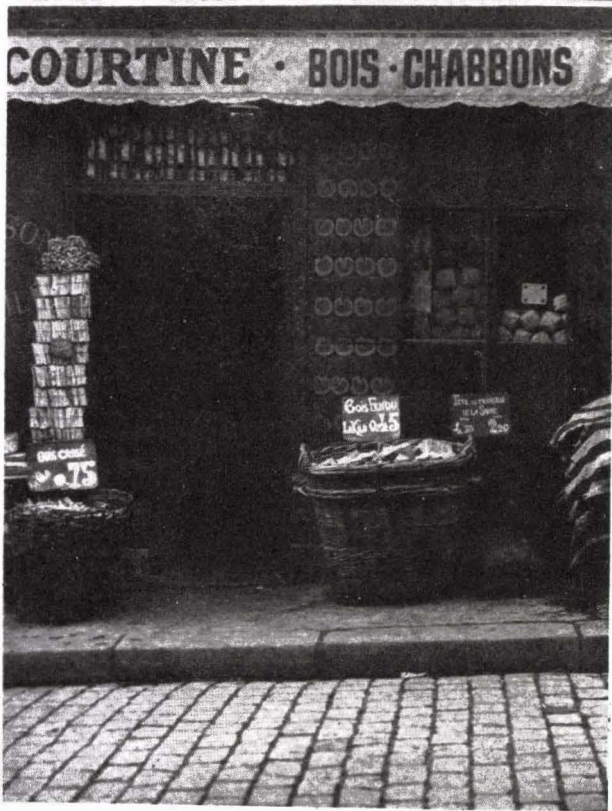
The evidence of these findings and of the perambulations that led to them exists primarily in Surrealist writing and secondarily in Surrealist photography. The Surrealist writers were poets, deeply engaged with the possibilities offered by language, but they were committed to direct experience first and foremost, and it was to record, analyze, and convey that experience that they sometimes turned to words on a page. Likewise, many of the photographers associated with the movement, among them Eugène Atget, André Kertész, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Brassai, stalked the streets of cities across Europe, on foot, ever on the lookout for chance encounters, ready to seize them with the help of the camera lens. Brassai, in fact, wandered Paris first and took pictures second, inspired to become a photographer by what he experienced on the street.³⁴ But photography, with its indexical makeup, has long had a leg up on writing when it comes to the reality factor.³⁵ And so the poets sometimes offered the reader a hint: Aragon opens a short story with the epitaph “*Vraiment*” (Really). Soupault calls *Dernières nuits* a “testimony.” Walter Benjamin concurs: “Anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else—demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature—will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.”³⁶

Certain paintings and assemblages also deal with the peripatetic urban experience, but work in such media are the exception, not the rule. As Benjamin explains, taking as example two of the Surrealist artists best known for their depictions of the city and its spaces, “No picture by de Chirico or Max Ernst can match the sharp elevation of the city’s inner strongholds, which one must overrun and occupy in order to master their fate and, in their fate, in the fate of

the masses, one's own."³⁷ Back to the words of the poets then. Full of sometimes unbelievable coincidences, happenstance, and strangeness, the Surrealists' strings of words are tied inextricably with what happened to their bodies and minds in space. Their texts are based in fact, not fiction.

Nadja provides a case in point. The historical record proves the existence of the heroine and her eventual descent into insanity, but beyond this the book integrates a variety of devices that testify to its genesis in lived experience. The diary structure gives exact dates and precise notation of real places and people: Breton first meets Nadja amid the crowds of the rue Lafayette, while walking in the direction of the Opéra, on October 4. Two days later he strolls down the rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, where he again crosses paths with Nadja, though they were planning to meet later that day at the Nouvelle France café. Everything is related in straightforward language and detail, a clinical style that has been linked to Breton's medical training and is discerned as well in the images that accompany his text.³⁸ These include portraits, reproductions of a theater brochure and Nadja's drawings, and photographs of places in and around Paris. All relate to specific passages in the book and relieve Breton from the task of literary description while allowing him to nevertheless point to the reality of the person, place, object, or occurrence.

Among these images are photographs of buildings and plazas that depict the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, the Place Maubert, various shop fronts and café exteriors, the Porte Saint-Denis, the Saint-Ouen flea market, the Place Dauphine, a fountain in the Tuileries, facades on the boulevard de Magenta, a billboard—sites where Breton, or Breton and Nadja, had endured “unbearable discomfort,” psychic predictions, hauntings, astonishing coincidences, and bizarre associations. Yet none of these occurrences can be seen in the photographs themselves, which are consistently bland,

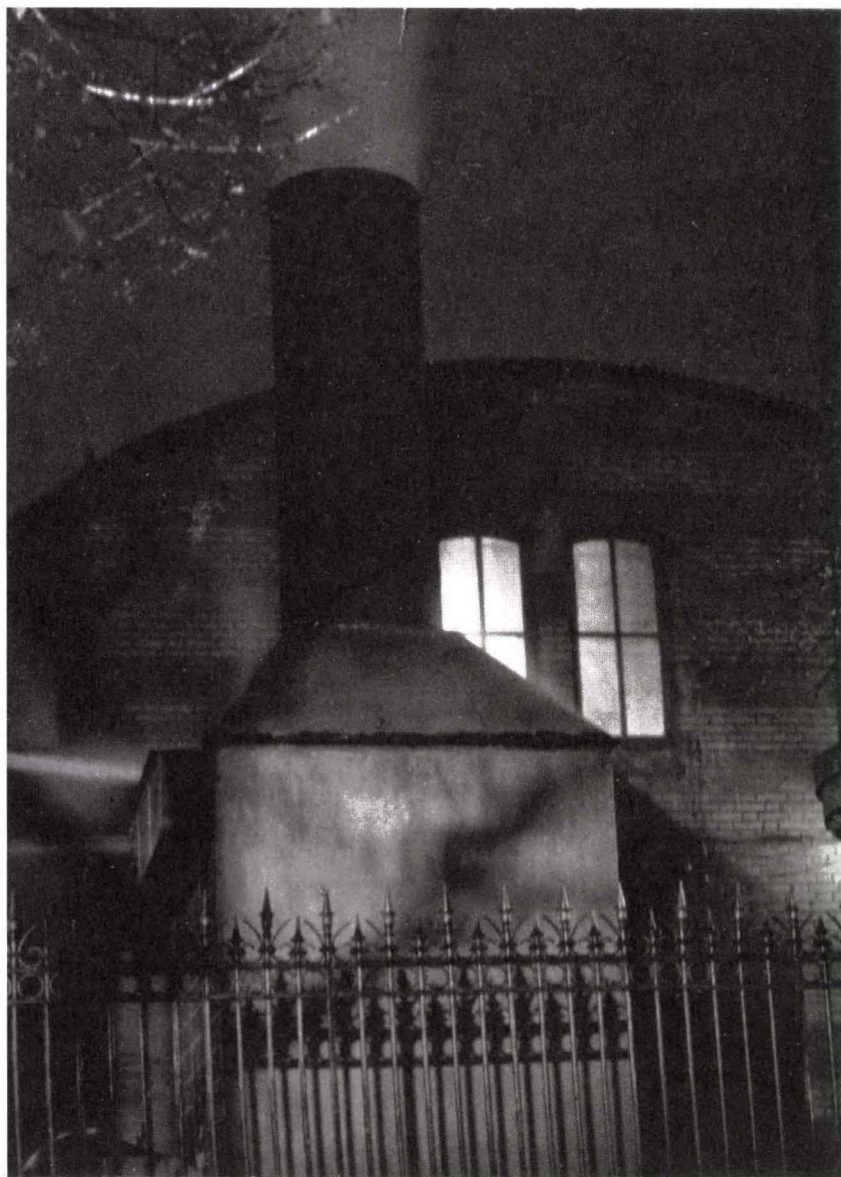


PL. 5. — LES MOTS : BOIS-CHARBONS.

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flat, and cold, revealing only commonplace detail, the surface of reality. (This is truest of early editions; in later ones the photographs degrade, sometimes to the point of illegibility.) Breton doesn't even attribute the pictures to a photographer, making them yet another device in the service of objective fact rather than invented fiction. And yet he commissioned them especially for the book from Jacques-André Boiffard, a former medical student who since 1924 had been working in Man Ray's studio and had made various contributions to the periodical *La révolution surréaliste*.³⁹ That Breton did not commission them from Man Ray, the great Surrealist photographer, but rather from the young Boiffard, who had not yet developed his own authorial style, suggests that their banal quality was desired, and most likely the result of a collaboration between Breton and Boiffard. The images, which must be read in conjunction with the revelations described in the text, indicate the possibility of finding the marvelous in the everyday, a conclusion that leads right off the pages of the book and into real life.

Breton also interspersed the text of *L'amour fou* with photographs. On the whole these are more explicitly Surrealist in that the extraordinary is visible within their frame. Among them they depict the Surrealist objects found by Breton and Giacometti at the Saint-Ouen flea market; a Giacometti sculpture; Man Ray's dizzying photo of a woman twisting in voluminous clothing; a reproduction from the *New York Times* of Australia's underwater wonder, the Great Barrier Reef; a close-up of rock salt crystals by Brassai; and three nighttime photographs, also by Brassai. These last images capture the narrow streets of Les Halles, filled with market workers unloading carts of food under spindly tree branches gleaming in the electric light of invisible streetlamps; the Tour Saint-Jacques looming askew against the night sky, clad in scaffolding that tangles with yet more



Brassă, *Usine, boulevard Saint-Jacques*, 1932. Photograph, gelatin silver print. Reproduced as part of "Nuits Parisiennes," in *Minotaure* 7 (June 1935).

tree branches; and the flower market, an alien landscape of ferns and hydrangeas, giving little sense of scale through the absence of any human reference point. Breton and Jacqueline Lamba visited these sites on a night-long walk through Paris, and the “wonderful dizziness” that these places inspire in Breton is directly visible in Brassai’s photographs, almost exactly as it is described in words (*AF*, 47). The relationship between text and image no longer consists in completion, as in *Nadja*; rather, each independently reveals the capacity of the city street to contain the fantastical.

The genesis of the images in *L’amour fou* bears this out: though Breton specially commissioned them from Brassai, whom he’d published many times in *Minotaure*, in fact they already existed in the photographer’s inventory.⁴⁰ Breton was not the only Surrealist who walked through this nighttime landscape sensitive to its mysteries; Brassai’s entire artistic practice depended on it. But where Breton’s encounter could be an invisible, internal one, Brassai’s had to be visible, external. The resulting photographs meld reportage with Surrealism (whereas Boiffard’s pictures, taken on their own, are simply reportage), and expand far beyond the small sampling included in *L’amour fou*. Brassai’s monographic *Paris de nuit*, published in 1933, presents the systemically edited result of three years of nocturnal wandering, camera at the ready. A 1935 issue of *Minotaure* contains a multipage spread by the photographer titled “Nuits Parisiennes,” a dozen images of a silent, still Paris at night, empty of people but full of lively electric lights and streetlamps, strange industrial structures that give the impression of being asleep, naked trees whose tangled branches fill the entire sky. A peculiar anthropomorphism haunts the city, given almost literal form in a close-up of the juncture between a corner pillar, whose shadow resembles the profile of a man, and a stone wall.

As factual representation, these images bear no trace of darkroom manipulation beyond cropping. Any sense of distortion emanates from a combination of the photographer's eye, his ability to find and isolate his enigmatic subject, and his deft mastery of the techniques needed to photograph the city at night, from using trees or walls to block the sources of artificial light to using fog or rain to disperse it. Photography itself testifies more directly to reality than most other media: as direct records of physical phenomena on light-sensitive paper, photographs have an indexical relationship to visible reality. In this they are able to provide a uniquely convincing link between reality and dream, hard evidence of the "absolute reality" Breton theorizes and describes in terms of his own experience. As Brassai reflected: "People thought my photographs were 'Surrealist' because they showed a ghostly, unreal Paris, shrouded in fog and darkness. And yet, the surrealism of my pictures was only reality made more eerie by my way of seeing. I never sought to express anything but reality itself, than which there is nothing more surreal."⁴¹

Walking in Pursuit of "It (?)"

Just as Brassai crossed Paris each night, the Surrealist poets rambled about the city on quests of their own. They wandered to experience, feel, and dream, to see—not to be seen. How others viewed them goes unrepresented. In Brassai's photographs people, when they're shown at all, rarely acknowledge the man behind the lens. Likewise, the writings of Breton, Aragon, and Soupault all employ the first person. They are never followed, never objectified; they pursue others, stalking prostitutes and hoodlums, oblivious strangers whom they identify as agents of that which they seek. But what were they seeking?

About a fifth of the way through *Nadja*, long before he encounters the heroine herself, Breton indicates his susceptibility and openness to this questing impulse and anticipates its culmination on the streets of the city. He writes: "Meanwhile, you can be sure of meeting me in Paris, of not spending more than three days without seeing me pass, toward the end of the afternoon, along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the *Matin* printing office and the Boulevard de Strasbourg. I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: namely that it (?) will happen here" (*N*, 32). The pronoun "it" normally refers to a thing, person, or situation previously mentioned or easily identified. Breton knows that his text contains nothing of the sort, and indicates as much with the parenthetical question mark. The vagueness of his claim is instructive: he strolls along the boulevards Bonne-Nouvelle and Strasbourg open to possibility. His posture is that of the adventurer who understands that nothing much is going to happen if he stays at home behind his desk, a notion confirmed back in 1924 on the journey taken with Aragon, Morise, and Vitrac through the countryside. "Experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed," Breton explained in his manifesto: "It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge."⁴² But emerge it must, and ambulatory adventure was a means.

That "cage" could take many forms—rationalism, common sense, the predictable, the familiar, ennui. As Aragon recounts in *Paysan de Paris*, it was this last that spurred him, Breton, and Marcel Noll to find their way to the Buttes-Chaumont park for a "somnambulistic promenade in the crotch of civic indulgence" (*PP*, 122). Weary of the parlor games being played at Breton's that evening, the three

friends decide to go for a walk. They stroll along the slopes of Montmartre, unexcited by any of its usual temptations, and eventually Breton announces that he does not want to walk any further. Into a taxi they go and off toward the park, unsure if the gates will be open at that hour. "At long last we were going to destroy boredom," exclaims Aragon. "The prospect of a miraculous hunt stretched before us, a landscape of experiences which could not but hold in store a multitude of surprises and—who knows?—some great revelation which would alter life and destiny" (*PP*, 110).

The desire to escape boredom could even be strong enough to risk danger. Aragon's *Paris la nuit: Les plaisirs de la capitale; Ses bas fonds, ses jardins secrets*, a short story published in Berlin in 1923 and inspired by his wanderings there, narrates a meeting with a demon, who asks the young Frenchman what he will give him if he shows him something new. The demon doesn't want his soul, just his body, and Aragon agrees immediately—anything for a chance to encounter novelty. The disorienting orgiastic voyage that ensues takes him magically across the world, through a convent, into a theater, and so on, until he is woken by a boy in the early morning, having fallen asleep at a café table.

Soupault, in the first chapter of *Dernières nuits*, makes clear the desperate nature of his own quest and the lengths he will go to indulge it:

Thinking it over as we were walking with soft steps under the trees of the Champs-Élysées, I seemed to catch a purpose: we were in search of a corpse.

If all at once we had encountered a lifeless form lying prostrate on the pavement, bathed perhaps in his own blood, or propped against a wall, we should have come immediately to a halt

and that night would have been ended. But it was that encounter, and that encounter only, which could have satisfied us.

I know, we know, that in Paris death alone has power to quench that pointless thirst, to bring to close an aimless walk. A corpse confronts us with eternity. (*DNP*, 20–21)

Caught up in an idealization of danger and the underworld, of nighttime escapades and suspicious behavior, Soupault's "it (?)" leads him to follow and then fall in with a gang of criminals as they make their rounds through the shadows of Paris. He himself is never in any real danger. He uses these other characters as mediums: they play the primary roles while he acts as a secondary participant, a feature that distinguishes his escapades from those of Breton and Aragon, which foreground the authors' own direct experience.

If Soupault in *Dernières nuits* depends on the adventures of others to satisfy his own quest, he himself sometimes provided the unpredictable antics through which his friends could witness the strange and unusual. Trailing Soupault through the crowded streets of the Right Bank in the early 1920s, Matthew Josephson recalls the poet "improvising a sort of walking poetry," somewhere between somnambulism and harmless lunacy, as he engaged in a series of impromptu actions with unsuspecting pedestrians and workers.⁴³ He might suddenly commandeer a vagrant's hat and panhandle in his place, begging money from passersby while charming them with a monologue of fancy nonsense. He sometimes played with his own identity, asking the concierge of an apartment building if he knew where Philippe Soupault lived or saluting a café waiter with that same name—as if Soupault himself had suddenly forgotten who he was, as if everyone encountered might also be named Philippe Soupault, as if

his own being had been multiplied tenfold but in different forms. Could one meet oneself out walking on the street?

That would be a startling encounter, an improbable and potentially revelatory confluence that could be triggered on an aimless walk. One such coincidence portended a conversion to Surrealism: In 1928 the Serbian poets Đorđe Kostić and Oskar Davičo were strolling about Paris when they found themselves on the edge of a manhole. Looking up they saw a bookshop, where the eleventh issue of *La révolution surréaliste* (*LRS*) was displayed, featuring a cover image of two workmen staring down into a manhole—a situation that uncannily mirrored their own. Struck by the coincidence, the two men joined the movement and became leading members of a Surrealist group upon returning to their home country.⁴⁴ This story points to the valued place of coincidence within the Surrealist framework and its relationship to urban wandering, raising the tantalizing possibility of other such concurrences between *LRS* covers and situations in the street. Cover images that might have been likewise encountered include, on the third issue, the photograph of a shop window where the reflection of building facades overlaps with the religious artifacts on display; on the sixth, a photo of sheets blowing on a clothesline; and on the seventh, a crowd of people looking up at the sky while standing in an urban plaza.

Nadja blooms with similarly ripe encounters, facts whose “connection cannot be avoided,” Breton explains, but between which he finds “it quite impossible to establish a rational correlation” (*N*, 59). As often as not these occurrences happen under the receptive posture of an aimless walk, such as the one Breton undertook alone on a rainy day in the country, when he met a girl who suddenly turned to him and asked if she could recite one of her favorite poems by Arthur Rimbaud—a poet whose work had deeply affected

Breton. Indeed, Breton attributes this encounter with the girl to the sustained emotional effect that certain Rimbaud poems continued to have for him, years after first reading them, as if the happenstance of the encounter somehow emanated from his own passion for the Symbolist writer.

Another day, while wandering an unfamiliar street near the Opéra a few hours before a date with Nadja, Breton crosses paths with her, even though she'd intended to stand him up later that afternoon. Not only have they met accidentally, she is holding the copy of *Les pas perdus* Breton loaned her and has read only one of its articles, "L'esprit nouveau," with its description of the unplanned encounters that he, Aragon, and André Derain each had had with the same beautiful woman in the street one evening. The essay lured Nadja to find it in the book, echoing the passionately missed encounters it recounts and the one she could not help missing with Breton, no matter how she tried. Later that night they dine together at a restaurant on the Place Dauphine and afterward stroll along the banks of the Seine, toward the Louvre, through the Tuileries, before finally landing in Le Dauphin, a bar on the rue Saint-Honoré. Nadja notes the coincidence of their starting and ending points—Dauphine, Dauphin—a peculiar repetition, one that Breton amplifies by noting parenthetically that people often comment on his resemblance to a dolphin (*dauphin*). The next day another unexpected meeting with Nadja occurs when Breton, who is sitting in a taxi with his wife and a friend discussing the young woman, suddenly senses her presence, despite the fact that he has been paying no attention whatsoever to the pedestrians on the street. He runs out of the cab in a random direction, and there she is.

"This is the second consecutive day I have met her," he writes. "It is apparent that she is at my mercy" (N, 91). She is at *my* mercy: in each of these instances and throughout the

book, Breton does not just happen upon but believes that he actively attracts coincidental encounters on account of his own strong desires. By contrast, Nadja (and the girl in the rain, and a hapless peddler, a waiter, and other secondary characters) gets tossed and turned, pushed and pulled by his force. The aimless walk sets the body and spirit in motion and opens them to these engagements, but it is Breton whose desires are presented as their source, and others who appear to be under his control.

These types of coincidences form some of the more striking examples of what Breton called “objective chance,” a term he borrowed from Hegel and used to recognize the magical power of what might otherwise seem like mere happenstance. Objective chance seeks to explain via a relation between natural or external necessity and human or internal necessity the occurrence of coincidences so startling that they seem as if they must reveal something.⁴⁵ Breton and Paul Eluard published a survey to this effect in a 1933 issue of *Minotaure*, asking: “What do you consider the essential encounter of your life? To what extent did this encounter seem to you, and does it seem to you now, to be fortuitous or foreordained?”⁴⁶ Chance was not mystical but an objective possibility, something to be happened upon with the right attitude.

Objective chance also found expression in more formal artistic production, including a play Breton cowrote with Soupault titled *If You Please*, published in the short-lived magazine *Littérature* in 1920 and performed at the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre during a Dada demonstration. The hero of the play, M. Létoile, explains that he sometimes paces up and down for hours between two houses or four trees in a square. The passersby smile at his impatience, but he is not expecting someone. “It’s positively true that he’s not waiting for anyone,” explains Breton, “since he hasn’t made any

dates. But, by the very fact of adopting this ultra-receptive posture, he intends to help chance—how should I say it—he means to put himself in a state of grace with chance, in such a way that something *will* happen, that someone *will* show up.”⁴⁷ M. Léoile’s confident openness finds its physical manifestation in a curtailed form of walking, a pacing that humorously mimics the posture of a person with a frustrated purpose, when in fact it reveals the very opposite—and suggests the importance of keeping the body in motion if one is to keep chance in play. Simply waiting on a park bench will not do.

One could also pace up and down the arcades, as Aragon does in the Passage de l’Opéra. Although *Paysan de Paris* brims with detailed investigation of shop windows and services and customers, Aragon counters that despite his gift for observation: “I love to be buffeted by the winds and the rain: chance is the sum total of my experience. I don’t have the feeling that this world is a determined fact” (*PP*, 71). He walks under a glass roof surrounded by building facades, and yet the uncontrollable elements lash at his side, however metaphorically. Even there, among pharmaceutical displays, chance will be encountered and seized.

Soupault, for his part, diverges from Breton in his conceptualization of chance. He too believes fully in its strength and impact, and *Dernières nuits* courses with coincidental encounters, strangers whose paths he crosses again and again, repetitions he takes to be of considerable importance. But he characterizes chance itself as something to tremble before, a treacherous force to which we are “slaves in perpetuity, subject to the grievous visitations of its harsh and malicious power” (*DNP*, 84–85). Yet he continues to seek it out, and finally toward the end of the book, after walking all night and then finding himself still walking the next morning, he makes a kind of peace with it:

During this sunny early morning walk I saw chance grow big before my eyes. It appeared to me like a powerful but accessible person who assumes the guise of thousands of human beings. [...] Still it grew, and after a moment I concluded that Paris, my city, was one of its favorite dwelling places. [...]

The loud noises of morning and the strong odors of spring circled about me as if to vouch for my reasoning. These noises, these odors were the toys of chance, like so many other things, for chance plays without ceasing, and takes the lead. I knew well, forsooth, that there are men who wish to wrestle with it, others who deny its existence, but others who count on it alone. There are others who accept its orders simply, perhaps, without thought and that morning I wanted to be like these last, who seemed closer to me, and stronger. (*DNP*, 122–23)

Chance, for Soupault, remains an undeniable factor of life. For him it is not so much a question of remaining open to it as not struggling against it, since it cannot be stopped. Perhaps it is the sunny morning air that changes his tone; he is no longer searching for a corpse across a dank, dark Paris but rather is watching as the city wakes up to a day that will undoubtedly be filled with the strangest circumstances, circumstances he is prepared to accept in all their importance and mystery.

Revolutionary Footsteps

Walking is not in and of itself a revolutionary or polemical act. If anything it is the very opposite: conventional, non-threatening, pedestrian, neutral. One foot in front of the

other takes one to work and home again. All humans walk, regardless of political stripe. And yet walking gives bodily form and force to insurrection, as people take to the streets to march collectively in protest of injustice and against corrupt leaders. Paris manifests a long, storied history of such urban revolutions—the years 1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, and 1968 foremost among them—and yet these were decidedly *not* the kind of revolution Surrealism would wage on the city's streets.

Yet it was hardly numb to them. *Nadja* is haunted by the ghosts of this insurrectionist past throughout. Various sites that Breton finds himself drawn to and where he experiences uncanny sensations are locations, symbolic or literal, of revolutionary activity, from the Place Maubert to the Panthéon to the Place Dauphine. These places witnessed, respectively, the sixteenth-century burning of Étienne Drolet, a heretic, now commemorated by a statue; consecrations and re-consecrations by successive governments, often as not by fire; the fourteenth-century burning of a Knights Templar and the execution, during the Reign of Terror, of Madame Roland and other supporters of the French Revolution. The historical memory that sticks to these locations, and which would have been familiar to Breton's contemporaries and readers, is notably of failed scenarios. The Surrealist endeavor does not fuse with revolutions past but rather rejects them, calling attention to the impossibility of a successful insurrection based on violent, popular, and political uprising.⁴⁸ Theirs would be a different revolution.

The Surrealist movement proclaimed itself revolutionary from the beginning. The same year as Breton's manifesto came a journal entitled *La révolution surréaliste* and a later one dubbed *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. The first issue of the former declared: "We must formulate a new declaration of the rights of man." But those rights were not the social and political ones demanded by

previous insurrections. The Surrealists did not call for the citizens of the city to rise up against the leaders who led them to a devastating war, World War I, in which many of the young artists and poets served and from which they recoiled profoundly afterward. Theirs was not a revolution for the masses but for the individual, not about social conditions but the human condition. They wished to liberate man from the invisible oppressors of the imagination, the mind, the senses, desire. They called for freedom from closed rationalism, deadening functionalism, reigning moral laws, and stultifying common sense; not for better working conditions but for no work at all. Like their revolutionary forebears, they too claimed this liberty through walking the streets of Paris, though not by marching or mounting barricades or shouting radical slogans. On the contrary, they walked not in pragmatic solidarity but imaginative solitude, seizing the anarchic possibility of the most commonplace of actions.

Benjamin, in his memoiristic essay "A Berlin Chronicle" (1932), frames his own way of walking in the city as a kind of individual act of rebellion: "Perhaps the same sabotage of real social existence is to be found even later in my manner, already described, of walking in the city, in the stubborn refusal under any circumstances to form a united front, be it even with my own mother." Recalling "the pedantic care with which, on these walks, [he] always kept half a step behind her," he rejected the obligation to walk in step with family, class, and whatever impending discussion was at hand.⁴⁹ Though in his reflection Benjamin alludes to what might be characterized as a teenager's stubbornness, his youthful experience of the possibility for walking against the norm is instructive and provides a model, however young and simple, for the Surrealists' own revolutionary steps.

In their revolt against functionalism and modernization, against utility and work, they too kept half a step behind,

or rather, at a unique pace unimpeded by such mundane obligations. Breton's own daily schedule reflected this as of 1926 when, having severed his ties with his employer, the art collector Jacques Doucet, he would write for most of the day and then, in the late afternoon, take it as his "occupation" to wander the streets, seeking out adventure and encounters.⁵⁰ *Nadja* is full of days like this, including the auspicious one of Breton's first meeting with the book's namesake, on a gloomy weekday afternoon in early October, amid the crowds of people leaving work. The extended passage that describes this event begins:

Last October fourth, toward the end of one of those idle, gloomy afternoons I know so well how to spend, I happened to be in the Rue Lafayette: after stopping a few minutes at the stall outside the *Humanité* bookstore and buying Trotsky's latest work, I continued aimlessly in the direction of the Opéra. The offices and workshops were beginning to empty out from top to bottom of the buildings, doors were closing, people on the sidewalk were shaking hands, and already there were more people in the street now. I unconsciously watched their faces, their clothes, their way of walking. No, it was not yet these who would be ready to create the Revolution. (*N*, 63–64)

There is an irony in Breton's skepticism about the ability of the common working people of Paris to rise up and his successive purchase of a tract by the man who helped organize the October Revolution. But it is an irony that signals at once his commitment to revolution and his belief that the imperative to work has profoundly crushed most of the people he sees on the street—except the young woman who

suddenly appears in his field of vision, poorly dressed and head held high, “unlike everyone else on the sidewalk,” whose heads must by comparison be bowed low and pathetic by the yolk of functionalism.

This is Nadja. He speaks to her. She tells him she is on her way to the hairdresser, but later admits she is going nowhere—even better. They walk, stop in a café, and begin a conversation in which Breton rails against work and the impediment it creates for a revolution of the human spirit. Nadja defends the common workingman, but Breton resists her sentimentality. “People cannot be interesting insofar as they endure their work,” he explains. “How can that raise them up if the spirit of revolt is not uppermost within them?” He is moved not by a man’s burdensome labor but by his protest against it. He speaks rapturously of “the relatively long but marvelous series of steps which man may make unfettered,” and wonders: “Do you suppose these people capable of taking such steps? Have they even the time for them? Have they the heart? [...] For myself, I admit such *steps* are everything. Where do they lead, that is the real question. Ultimately they all indicate a road, and on this road, who knows if we will not find the means of unfettering or of helping those unable to follow it to unfetter themselves? It is only then that we may loiter a little, though without turning back” (N, 68–69).

Just as this passage employs walking as both metaphor and literalization of revolution, so the act of walking provided a consistent tactic for the Surrealist rejection of workaday life—walking at night all the more so. If the average laboring man walked an efficient path from home to work and back again, every day of his life, setting out with the sun rising, returning home as it set, the Surrealists rejected this schedule and set out as the sun went down, returning home as it rose. Soupault gave multiple human

shapes to this notion in *Dernières nuits* when he celebrated the free rein of Octave, Volpe, Georgette, and their gang of nocturnal wanderers—none of whom earned their daily bread through conventional or sunlit means. Breton, deeply inspired by Soupault's volume, expressed this idea directly in *Nadja* when he wrote: "I prefer, once again, walking by night to believing myself a man who walks by daylight. There is no use being alive if one must work" (*N*, 60).

Brassaï pictured this fusion of revolution, nighttime journeys, and the refusal to work in his multiple series depicting the sights and citizens of the other world that was nocturnal Paris. In *Paris de nuit*, he melds Paris's sleeping machinery and architecture with portraits of those who live at night, engaged in a peripatetic alternative economy: prostitutes, scavengers, beggars. Under Brassaï's framing and lighting, these people do not disappear into the shadows of the city but rather glow at its center like beacons. His photograph of tramps under the Pont Neuf illustrates this: the original negative includes two archways of the bridge, a gleaming river and bank beyond, a big night sky above; the published print cuts much of this out to focus on the magical, fire-lit atmosphere of the tramps.⁵¹ Other nocturnal citizens appear busy at more conventional tasks—milkmen pushing their carts, market-hands unloading merchandise, welders blasting tramway tracks, operators running the newspaper press—but their rote labor seems to gain mystery at night. Even two policemen appear like figures of the imagination, captured with their bicycles in a blur of flying capes and glittering metal.

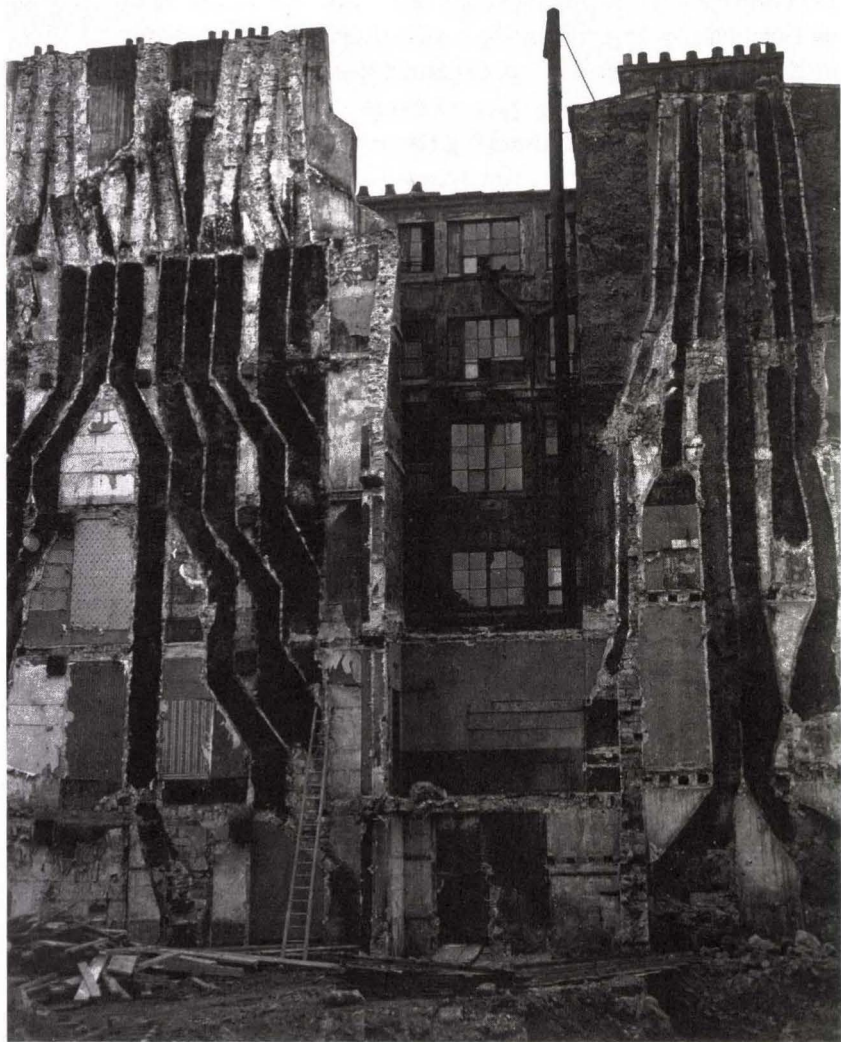
What would these various citizens have thought of Brassaï's surrealistic idealization of their nighttime lives? Would it have struck them as celebratory or strange, concerned or voyeuristic? In *Paysan de Paris*, Aragon muses on what the merchants of the Passage de l'Opéra would have

thought of his descriptions of them and their situation. Dread and consternation, incomprehension, even injury, he suggests, despite the fact that he writes in support of their struggle against the “monster” that is the Boulevard Haussmann Realty Corporation and its nefarious plan to “devour” the arcade and its residents. But he writes about this battle against modernization not in the language of *La chaussée d’Antin*, a bimonthly neighborhood gazette, but in a language, dark and zealous, that melds inventions and realities. That he writes about it at all, however, differentiates Aragon’s revolution from Breton’s—and, eventually, from the Surrealist movement as a whole, which became increasingly Bretonian and individualist. Where the former commits his oneiric driftings to the political and social cause of the threatened passages, the latter devotes his to the personal, using that which he encounters along the way toward a greater understanding and expansion of the self. The poets’ trajectories beyond these books bear out the depth of their division: Breton tried but eventually found it impossible to be a member of the Communist Party, while Aragon gave up the Surrealist cause to serve the Party for life.⁵²

Aragon’s attention in *Paysan de Paris* to the threatened Passage de l’Opéra signals another tactic of the Surrealist revolution, one apart from the imperative against working. The arcades as he describes them are notably unfashionable, a bit down at heel, with businesses like the Gelis-Gaubert barbershop, where “everything has remained faithful to the customs of yesterday” (*PP*, 76). It is this very quality that attracts Aragon and his cohort, be it for a stroll or for sitting down at the café Certa, where the Dada group used to meet “out of repugnance” for the more popular districts of Montparnasse and Montmartre (*PP*, 59). The outmoded energy of the arcades was important not in a melancholic sense, not out of nostalgia for the era in which they gleamed

with elegance and thrived with attractive customers, but in a revolutionary way, by exposing the relentless machine of modernization that threatens to tear down whatever stands in the way of progress and consumption. Capitalism can be resisted not just by exposing these outmoded objects and places but by re-enchanting them.⁵³ Thus Aragon goes beyond merely recording the believable details of the cane shop or the bathhouse; he creates a startling mythology out of them, slipping from careful observation to hallucinatory vision: the canes in their display window sway like kelp to the noise of seashells, with a siren singing among them, while the bathhouse, against the architects' innocent intentions, attends not just to cleanliness but also amorous trysts and the experiments of an incognito calorimetric laboratory.

Many of the Surrealist excursions can be understood through this framework of revolutionary re-enchantment. The *visite* to the churchyard of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre and the ones planned for the Buttes-Chaumont and elsewhere—if those places were not under threat of the modernizing pickax, certainly they had little appeal in terms of fashion, and yet the organizers described them as having something left to be discovered. When Aragon and his friends finally do visit the Buttes-Chaumont, in *Paysan de Paris*, they transform it from the artificial leisure grounds of the working class into a site full of mystery and absurdity. Likewise, the theaters, cafés, and boulevards that attract Breton and Nadja, places that were once either chic or bohemian but are now passé or decrepit, become in their encounter charged with an explosive atmosphere. The Saint-Ouen flea market, veritable repository of discarded, out-of-date goods, serves Breton and various companions repeatedly as a site for meanderingly discovering the marvelous in those objects fallen out of capitalist circulation. The market itself was threatened with destruction in 1926, because the



Brassai, *Murs détruits, du côté de Beaubourg*, 1931. Photograph, gelatin silver print.

fortifications where it was located were being demolished to make room for urban sprawl.⁵⁴

Breton and Aragon in these examples depend on the actual physical existence, however threatened, of the outmoded sites to which they are drawn. But what of that which has already disappeared? Two photographs by Brassai offer a kind of commemorative resistance to architectonic destruction, depicting traces left on the sides of buildings when adjacent structures were torn down. In *Bébé à la crème eclipse* (1933–34), a tall brick wall retains traces of its former inhabitants, at least for now, their ghostly presence emanating from the decorative moldings, painted plaster, and peeling wallpaper that so stubbornly cling to life after the rooms themselves have bit the dust. In between the rectangular surfaces, bare brick reveals how rooms and floors were once divided, where staircases ascended and descended, where people lived and worked and slept. But like Aragon's work on behalf of the Passage de l'Opéra, Brassai's pictures do not simply record this progress objectively. The ruins in *Murs détruits, du côté de Beaubourg* (1931) evidence a building with a dozen chimneys that used to stand in what is now a desolate construction lot, but they are also dark waterfalls of soot, cascading over a mountain of stone, and an abstract geometry of thick, linear shapes finding their individual paths up a brick canvas to meet forcefully at the top. In both photographs, graphic residue provides a striking geometry of contrasts and shapes, marking as aesthetic and evocative what would otherwise be deemed an unsightly urban blemish.

Like Aragon's re-enchantment of the arcades or Breton's of the flea market, Brassai accomplishes his magic of resistance on foot. The photographic print proves to the viewer the possibility of achieving something similar through his or her own peregrinations.

The Wandering Unconscious

“It is, rather, each step that I take that is a dream,” wrote Breton in his 1924 automatic text “Soluble Fish,” accurately describing the steps he had taken across the previous pages. He recounts a route through Paris as night is falling, along the rue Lafayette, past the corner of the rue de la Paix and the place de l’Opéra, a trajectory easy enough for the reader to follow at first, but one which quickly becomes a fantastical journey. Breton traverses wooden paving blocks but also passes inexplicably by “otters gloved in chalk.” “One of the prettiest bends of the boulevards,” he notes, features an orange-colored clearing for the graceful circulation of animals. Passing through an arcade, he glimpses a “bow-shaped instrument [...] incrustated with precious stones” in the window of a gunsmith’s shop—only to see the same odd object again later, this time on a clump of dried leaves.⁵⁵ Dream meshes with reality here, forming the surreality Breton theorized in his manifesto of the same year, breaching the boundary between his own waking life and dream life, thereby allowing for an exploration of his unconscious.

Central to the Surrealist project of tapping the unconscious was the tactic of automatism. In his manifesto, which was originally conceived as a preface to “Soluble Fish,” Breton indicates its importance by giving automatism as the very definition of Surrealism:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁵⁶

Though writing remains the most recognizable mode of automatist experimentation, the place of walking in “Soluble Fish,” itself an exemplary work of automatic writing, suggests another means. As historian Pierre Daix explains, it was the very limits of the collective writing experiments, which produced texts like “Soluble Fish” that eventually drove Breton and a few fellow poets to leave the café table for the country road, to embark on the storied excursion from Blois to Romorantin in May 1924.⁵⁷ In this context, that experimental country walk can be understood as an expanded kind of automatic writing, one written with the body in space rather than words on a page. The act of walking itself becomes a means of achieving psychic automatism, an undirected articulation of thought both triggered and expressed via the equally unstructured movement of the body down a dirt road. Or, even better, up the loamy streets of Paris, which Roger Cardinal dubs “the soluble city” as it dissolves under the wandering footsteps of the Surrealists, washed by their imagination to the point of becoming the location of the astonishing metamorphoses generated in a poetic text like “Soluble Fish.”⁵⁸

Moving through the city becomes a means of accessing the self, as the mind and body together rewrite a traversed territory according to desires, histories, connections, recollections. The directions in which the otherwise undirected body drifts reveal a psychic undertow of attraction and repulsion, which, if carefully observed, could provide a veritable psychoanalysis of the subject. Breton calls these lures “magnetic poles” and for him Paris is a veritable field of their energy. He is everywhere being drawn or repelled by plazas, buildings, signs, people, and objects. If some of this magnetism has a historical or an erotic explanation, these justifications are hardly objective. On the contrary, they point to the automatic nature of wandering and the access it offers to the wanderer’s unconscious.



André Breton, *Poem-Object*, 1941. Assemblage mounted on drawing board: carved wood bust of man, oil lantern, framed photograph, toy boxing gloves, paper, 45.8 × 53.2 × 10.9 cm.

In an essay from 1950, Breton even imagined a global experiment along these lines, one that anticipated by a few years the Situationist study of psychogeography. Breton proposed drawing a map for every individual that recorded their sensations while walking along a single street of sufficient length and variety. “The places he haunts could be shown in white, the ones he avoids in black, and the rest in various shades of gray according to the degree of attraction or repulsion,” he explained. “This classification should be ruled by a measure of objectivity, and there is no doubt that, in this as in other matters, the ‘privileged structures’ prevail in the choices that are made.”⁵⁹ What those “privileged structures” amount to is a key of sorts to individuals, who, if they pay sufficient attention to their own feelings while walking the city’s streets, will therefore encounter themselves.

Soupault’s antics of the early 1920s—saluting a waiter with his own name, as described above—lightheartedly anticipate this practice of walking the city to reveal one’s unconscious. Nevertheless it is a serious endeavor, and it is the venture Breton sets out to accomplish from the very first lines of *Nadja*. “Who am I?” he writes. “If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I ‘haunt’” (*N*, 11). Though he titles the book *Nadja* and spends much of it in pursuit of its eponymous heroine, in the end it is not a woman whom Breton pursues but his own authentic self. By walking the city, it becomes his double, mirroring the geography of his unconscious.

An alternate version of this situation appears in *Poem-Object*, an assemblage Breton created in December 1941. Along a meandering path formed by the meeting of black paper and wooden board appear a series of found objects: a carved wood male bust, an old framed photo of a male mannequin, toy boxing gloves, an oil lantern. The words of the inscribed poem, read in conjunction with these

objects, suggest situations encountered along the route of an evening promenade: “*ces terrains vagues / où j’erre / vaincu par l’ombre / et la lune / accrochée à la maison de mon coeur.*” He wanders in wastelands, overcome by the darkness (and its boxing gloves), underneath the moon (a mysterious figure, hovering in his rusty frame), hanging in the house of his heart (an empty oil lamp, needing to be filled). Indeed, this pictures the self-directed exploration of so many of Breton’s amorous strolls in *Nadja* and *L’amour fou*.

If wandering the streets of Paris offers Breton a means of discovering his own unconscious drives, for others it meant uncovering the city herself. Soupault accomplishes this most overtly. “O inviolable secret of Paris!” he proclaims at the end of the first nighttime promenade in *Dernières nuits*. “A prostitute, a sailor, a dog, helped me that night to glimpse you” (*DNP*, 21). He tracks the citizens of the nocturnal city, but it is the city he ultimately seeks. “It was Paris which I thought I knew and of whose sex and mystery I was ignorant, it was Paris unrecognized and rediscovered, the breath and gestures of Paris, Paris and her supple and silent nights—Paris and her folds, Paris and her faces” (*DNP*, 103).

A city is composed of more than its infrastructure, its Eiffel Tower, Trocadéro, avenue de l’Opéra. A city is also the people who have lived and died in it, fought and lost for it, come and gone across its territory, for all that their traces might be hidden from view. When Georgette disappears, Soupault wanders Paris in search of her, frequenting the streets she once regularly patrolled, detecting “phosphorescent traces of her passage,” glimpsing “her shadow or the memory of her shadow” in the rue Saint-Honoré or rue des Prêtres-Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois. Eventually these specters grow less pronounced, only to return in a flash. “Time does not wipe out the tracks of those who have gone,” he concludes, “but is content to hide them from our sight.

There remains either a scent or perhaps just some subtle difference in the atmosphere which brings them wholly to mind" (*DNP*, 156).

Breton too senses such invisible changes. His affair with Nadja long over, he finds himself "invariably disturbed" whenever he walks past the painted billboard that advertises Mazda brand light bulbs. Nadja imagined herself "as a butterfly whose body consisted of a Mazda (Nadja) bulb," an image echoed in the sign, which pictures two rams framing a gleaming bulb, recalling Nadja's habit of coiling her hair like ram's horns on either side of her head (*N*, 129–30). Illustrated by one of Boiffard's photographs, the billboard appears unremarkable, if a bit garish, certainly nothing that would normally cause psychic distress. But it has changed for Breton, as his own experience meshes with the city's: here at the level of personal memory, elsewhere at the level of a revolutionary collective past that lingers in statues, buildings, and certain local atmospheres.

Aragon, for his part, states from the beginning of *Paysan de Paris* that it is both the mysteries of the city and of himself that he seeks. He writes: "Our cities are thus populated with unfathomed sphinxes who will not halt the passing dreamer to ask him questions of life and death if he doesn't train on them his wandering inner eye. But should this sage spy them, then, interrogating these faceless monsters, he will discover in them the replica of his own abysses" (*PP*, 9–10). These mysteries reveal themselves to the observer of urban material, thus Aragon invites his reader on an exploratory journey in the Passage de l'Opéra: "Let us walk down the passage in question and examine it" (*PP*, 11). Why this arcade? The threat of destruction renders it all the more ghostly and potent. Why an arcade at all? They encourage mobility, which heightens Aragon's powers of observation. Their very name suggests it: "*Passages*, as if it were forbidden to pause

even momentarily while walking down them” (*PP*, 10). Amid every other form of urban infrastructure, they are uniquely strange, permeated by “the modern light of the weird [...] a greenish light, almost cavernous, reminiscent of the light beneath a suddenly raised skirt” (*PP*, 10). As that intimate glow suggests, the passages form internal and subjective corridors, whereas the boulevards traffic in external reality. Walking them, the observer gains access to both the city’s unconscious and his own, hence the new street sign Aragon wishes to see affixed to the arcade’s walls: *PASSAGE DE L’OPÉRA ONIRIQUE* (*PP*, 71). The arcade gives architectonic form to dreams, and walking it becomes a kind of somnambulism. Freudian principles of dream decoding might be applied.

The dreamlike people, places, objects, and visions that Aragon encounters within the arcade are comparable to those depicted in *Paris de nuit*. The setting for Brassäi is Paris as dreamscape: shadow falls upon shadow as the city sleeps, its machinery at rest, its atmosphere a soluble fog of hazy, dispersed light. Beyond this dreamy ambiance, Brassäi achieves in certain images a kind of doubling, a picture of reality that simultaneously points to something else.⁶⁰ The covers and endpapers depict the cobblestone ground of Paris; cropped and framed at an angle, they form a dizzying, all-over field of extreme contrasts, an abstract mosaic of black lines and irregular white squares, spinning off to the top left in an unstoppable, glistening flow, slipping down and to the right into an abyss. Is this what it was like to walk in Brassäi’s shoes, pulled from dark to light and back again? Depicting street and movement at once, the cobblestones announce the peripatetic nature of Brassäi’s book and invite the viewer along for the journey, one that continues uncanonically with the frontispiece, where the mosaic pattern of the endpaper spreads across the garden grounds of the Palais de Luxembourg. There a coquettish statue rises from a lane

endlessly crisscrossed by shadows, the first coordinate on a gridded map of dreams. The caption for the photograph suggests as much: "The shadows of the Luxembourg railings cast a chequer-work of dreams on the deserted garden walks." Shadows play a different role of suggestion in a later image of a tall stone wall shattered by the spindly, decapitated forms cast by a row of bare trees. This is the exterior wall of the Santé Jail, the legend explains, where "the guillotine truncates its victims."⁶¹ Even an open gutter doubles as something more than itself: seductive and snakelike, it wends its way around the dark posts of trees, curling up around the edges of a street, begging to be followed, making promises to the tempting pedestrian.

Aragon explains why so many of these walks occurred at night. In *Paysan de Paris*, whose English title has sometimes been translated as *Nightwalker*, he notes its propitiousness as a time for accessing the unconscious through the enmeshment of dream and reality. At the beginning of the nocturnal promenade in the Buttes-Chaumont park, he exclaims, "Among natural forces one power, acknowledged from time immemorial, remains as mysterious to man as ever, and an integral part of his existence: night. [...] Night gives these absurd places a meaning they do not recognize in themselves" (*PP*, 115–16). And not just the public gardens to which Aragon refers, but all that is encountered by these artists under dark: people, objects, actions, landscapes—all become empowered, enriched, even doubled by the magic of "the quotidian mystery" that is night (*DNP*, 50).

Two issues of *Minotaure* pay special tribute to the power of nighttime wandering. The seventh issue (June 1935), dedicated to *le côté nocturne de la nature* (the nocturnal side of nature), features a spread by Brassai titled "Nuits Parisiennes," of a silent Paris bereft of people yet full of living electric lights and strange but still industrial

structures. These photos accompany “Le jour est trop court” (The day is too short), a brief text about the wonders of the night by Edward Young, a late eighteenth-century poet admired by Breton. An excerpt from Breton’s *L’amour fou* presents the central episode of his book, the night-long walk with Jacqueline Lamba past the Tour Saint-Jacques and through the flower market and Les Halles, complete with Brassai’s haunting photographic illustrations of these places. The magazine concludes with a third spread by Brassai, which includes three more nighttime images bathed in a mysterious glow: one of boats docked on the Seine, the others depicting gargoyles on a roof, the city hazy and dappled with lit windows below. The brief text that accompanies these inanimate objects suggests the special ability of electric light to reveal the secrets of the night by capturing sleeping landscapes and delivering them alive.

The eleventh issue of *Minotaure* (Spring 1938) includes reproductions of ten Conté-crayon drawings by Georges Seurat. Though the complete run of the magazine features artwork by masters as diverse as Jean Millet, Tintoretto, Lucas Cranach the Elder and the Younger, Paul Cézanne, and Caspar David Friedrich, Seurat appears alone among his generation of Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist artists, a situation explicable by his exceptional attention to the atmosphere of nocturnal Paris, achieved through moody contrasts and lack of detail. The accompanying text, by Pierre Mabille, recognizes the ways in which the sketches harness the power of darkness. “Seurat’s drawings evoke the mysteries of dawn and dusk,” he writes. “At the hour of rising, how to know what the eye still contains of the dew of dreams and what it perceives already of the city? [...] A world lacking in detail encourages the astonishment of the poet. Beings and objects, having forgotten

their laborious fabrication, spring up without a past out of the nocturnal communion. Phantoms crystallize their fluidity.”⁶² Whether or not they were sketched in situ, the drawings must have stemmed from observations of the city during its bleakest and stillest hours. Robert L. Herbert, in his pioneering study *Seurat's Drawings* (1962), imagines that the artist “haunted Paris and its suburbs at dusk, in the early dawn, and at times of rain,” to create these miasmic pictures.⁶³ Reproduced in the context of *Minotaure*, they stand as meaningful forebears to the Surrealists’ own ambulatory traffic in nighttime indeterminacy, though they predate them by half a century.

Wandering through the Forest of Signs

In a 1927 painting, Joan Miró pictures himself walking along the river with his friends Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille, evoking the scene not with figures but with words, schematic markings, and compositional cues. “*Musique*,” scrawled at the top of the canvas, floats in the air above Paris, while the three men, represented by the phrase “*Michel, Bataille et moi*,” stroll along the bottom, on the riverbank beneath “*Seine*.” Five vertical lines, topped by dotted spirals, offer a second, schematized representation of all five subjects identified by the painting’s words. Since in Miró’s work of the time these kinds of lines often designate mobility, they could here suggest the various movements that comprise this promenade: wafting music, flowing river, and three friends ambling. The use of text provides a radical gesture, an eschewing of pictorial representation in favor of verbal signs that suggests semantic experimentation, the subject indicated not pictorially but verbally. Also something else,



Joan Miró, *Peinture-poème (Musique Seine Michel, Bataille et moi)*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 79.6 × 100.3 cm.

not intellectual but literal: Paris as a city of signs, of words imprinted on advertising posters, billboards, street panels, shop windows, and building facades.

This Paris is one encountered everywhere by the pedestrian. The situation is exemplified by the photograph Brassai took of Les Halles that appears in *Minotaure* and *L'amour fou*, its background an immense building covered in layers of words, some painted directly on the facade, others on wood or metal signs hung in between and overtop windows, announcing meats for sale and office space to rent. The words depicted—TRIPERIE, KEIM, VOLAILLES, GIBIERS, GRANDE EXPOSITION DE BLANC, BUREAUX À LOUER—provide some of the verbal elements of the walk-through poem that is the city. Breton doesn't need to record them in writing; it is enough that Brassai photographs them where they are found. The reader can imagine their effect on Breton and Jacqueline Lamba as they wander past. In "Soluble Fish," which has no such photographic accompaniment, Breton spells it out, describing the verbal landscape that surrounds a prostitute encountered on the boulevard des Capucines: "To her left, to her right, names of perfumes, of pharmaceutical specialties, were endlessly inscribed on the sidewalk in letters of every color."⁶⁴

These and other functional texts that everywhere decorate the city, announcing street names, product descriptions, services offered, and so on, provide the elements of a kind of concrete poetry. It is a poetry both written and read by the walking body, composed as it moves past this and that unrelated sign, taking found verbal forms not as useful information, but for their material, visual, and poetic possibilities. Throughout *Paysan de Paris*, Aragon records these notices directly, reproducing with typographic specificity the price list for seating at the Théâtre Moderne; the little drink signs posted everywhere at the Café Certa, in their charming

Tableau situé dans la petite pièce, au-dessus duquel figurait pour une consommation dont le nom m'échappe, une pancarte-réclame peinte par un des anciens garçons dans le goût des tableaux mécaniques de Francis Picabia, et qui a disparu depuis quelque temps. Un des charmes des cafés est dans les petites pancartes accrochées un peu partout ainsi, qui sont à profusion chez Certâ, qu'elles vantent le Martini, le Bovril, la Source Carola ou le W. M. Youngers Scotch Ale. Parfois elles se succèdent en cascade :

FLIPS. . . 3 F. 50

ROYAL FLIP 4 f.

IMPÉRIAL FLIP 4 f.

Liqueurs 3 f.

Grandes Marques . 4 f.

PORTO CERTA. 2 F. 50

ROYAL 3 F. 50

IMPERIAL. 5 F.

“cascading sequence” of FLIPS, ROYAL FLIP, and IMPERIAL FLIP; a trilingual advertisement heralding HIGIENIC PRESERVATIVE AGAINST VARIOUS MALADIES at the orthopedic truss manufacturer’s shop. The placards for offices on the second floor of the arcade are “signs in the midst of which I lose my bearings” (*PP*, 73), despite the fact that they are all about orientation. Even in the park Aragon finds words, inscriptions on a column that he copies down precisely over the course of eight pages: dates, acknowledgments, and dedications, plus population, governmental, and geographical data about the 19th arrondissement. In their exact reproduction, these signs often recall the cacophonous style of Dada typography found in such documents as the prospectus for the *visites* of 1921, only there the stylistic disorientation is deliberately orchestrated, whereas Aragon finds it already in place. A similar comparison can be made with the kind of collage found in Surrealist painting and prints, but where Salvador Dalí or Max Ernst assemble disparate subjects to create provocative mixtures, Aragon simply records the juxtapositions he finds while wandering.⁶⁵ The collage is there. Or rather, the collage elements are there; the ambulating body acts as the glue—the *colle* in *collage*—that sticks it all together.

But what does it all mean? Setting the urban scene on the second page of *Dernières nuits*, Soupault poses this question with wit. He and Georgette walk together along the boulevard Saint Germain. “Signs were made,” he says. “By whom, to whom?” (*DNP*, 2). The question goes unanswered, signaling the abyss of intention, association, and meaning that exists at the level of the city’s signage. Instead it is Breton who proposes a means for interpreting urban visual language, via a multiplicity of ambulatory encounters determined by billboards and signs of one type or another. There are those that register via homophony (Nadja and Mazda) and are transformed by the ensuing associations.

There are those that act as magnetic poles, like the words BOIS-CHARBONS, which, appearing on the exterior of various shops, guide an entire Sunday stroll in *Nadja*. (Curiously, the photograph linked to this story shows a shop front with an awning whose misspelled signage reads BOIS-CHABBONS. Apparently typos are not forceful enough to interrupt magnetic resonance.) *Nadja* conveys her own magnetic draws, pointing out to Breton as they walk along the boulevard Magenta the luminous sign outside the Hotel Sphinx, which lured her to take a room when she first arrived in Paris.

In each of these examples, the Surrealists find themselves being pushed and pulled by the names announced on the signboards of the city—not by their proper meaning, but rather by the special ability of these words to outlive their original definition and become available to other significations. In an essay on the everyday practice of walking, the French scholar Michel de Certeau describes something similar, but as it is experienced by all city strollers. He finds “the magical powers proper names enjoy” mobilized everywhere by the pedestrian, who drifts down this or that street based on an unconscious attraction to its name, “articulating a sentence that his steps compose without his knowing it.” The totality of these verbal possibilities produces a “second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning” that officially maps the city, and for de Certeau it is specifically the walker whose actions generate and are generated by it.⁶⁶

As if to help the reader who may have missed the importance of all these signs—not for their intended meaning but as some other kind of sign—Breton includes in *Nadja* a photograph that captures a notice painted boldly on the second story of the building housing the Humanité bookstore. Above an arrow pointing to the shop front are the words: ON SIGNE ICI. This refers to the fact that one could

sign up for (*signe*) the Communist Party in the bookstore (as Breton did himself a short time later), but as well it seems to function as a play on words, indicating that a signboard could function as an augury or signal (*signe*) for the individual. All that's necessary is to be open and sensitive to a level of meaning that goes beyond the functional. "You only have to know how to get along in the labyrinth," Breton explains in *L'amour fou*. "Interpretive delirium begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the *forest of symbols*" (*AF*, 15). That forest is the city, and the prepared man—the Surrealist poet—need not fear its signs, even when they are also symbols, as they always might be.

The metaphor is borrowed from Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances," which opens with the following lines:

Nature is a temple whose living pillars
Sometimes give forth a babel of words;
Man wends his way through the forests of symbols
Which look at him with their familiar glances.

As long-resounding echoes from afar
Are mingling in a deep, dark unity,
Vast as the night or as the orb of day,
Perfumes, colors, and sounds commingle.

Walter Benjamin explains in his analysis of the poem that "the *correspondances* are the data of remembrance," be it of prehistory, earlier life, the past, or the outmoded. They might be objects, words, smells, colors, or sounds. As in a dream or a temple, they return the gaze of the sensitive person but not, Benjamin notes, of the majority of modern citizens, whose overburdened eyes function in a state of "self-protective wariness" brought on by the facts of city life.⁶⁷

If for Breton certain signs, acting as magnetic poles, tap the pedestrian's unconscious, others express it directly. This is evidenced in Brassai's photographs of graffiti, crude images scratched into the stone walls of the city, markings found by chance while wandering the backstreets of Paris taking other kinds of pictures. In their first presentation, a montage of nine photos in *Minotaure* 3–4 (December 1933) depicting a fish, a heart with an arrow, simple figures, a hangman, and a leaf, Brassai compares them to signs discovered in the grottos of Dordogne and the Valley of the Nile. He explains: "This is not about playing, it is about mastering the frenzy of the unconscious. These abbreviated signs are none other than the origins of writing [...] the elements of mythology, no less."⁶⁸ Unlike the commercial voice of advertising billboards and the official one of municipal signage, graffiti speak for anonymous individuals, representing their repressed voices by way of primal and peripheral marks left forcibly on the surface of the city, to be read by passersby. Brassai would go on to document graffiti throughout his career, as he continued to walk the streets of Paris and other cities.

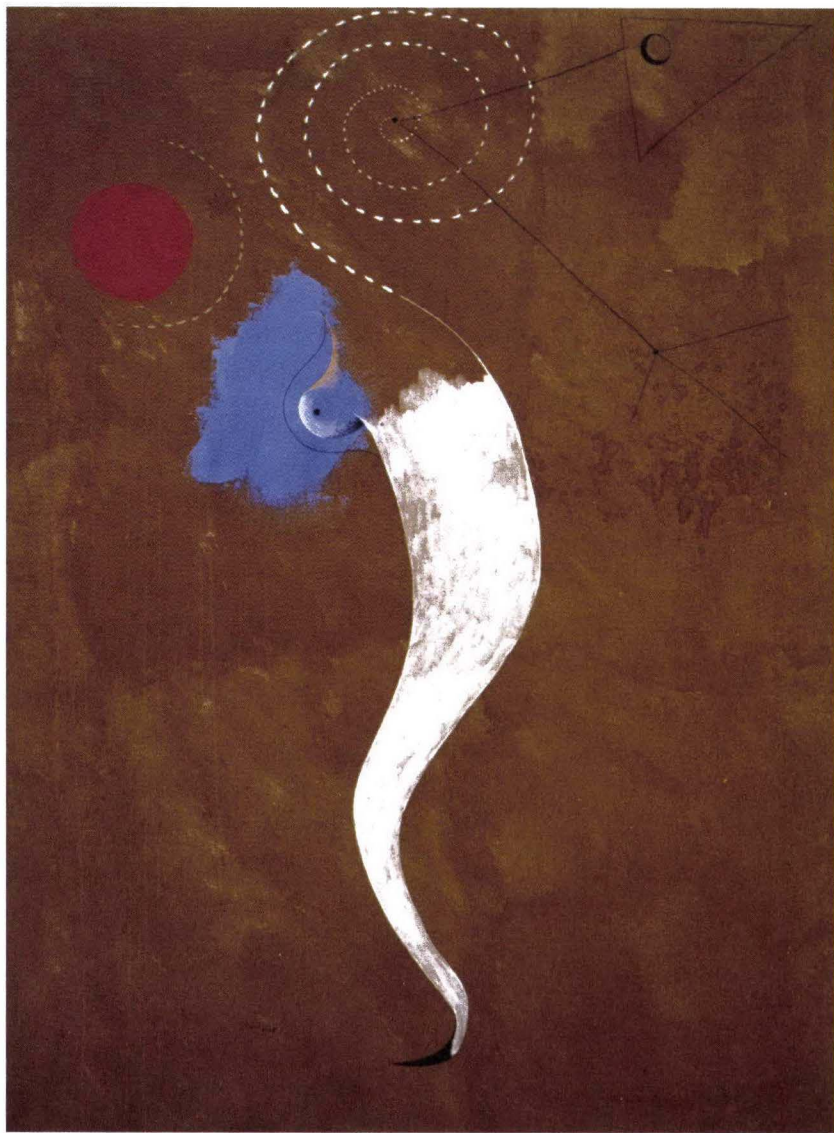
Marche Is a Feminine Noun

In 1937 Breton opened a Surrealist art gallery on the rue de Seine called Galerie Gradiva. A contemporaneously published tract discourses on the nature of this name, which Breton borrowed from an eponymous novella by Wilhelm Jensen famously analyzed by Freud. *Gradiva* "means primarily SHE WHO MOVES FORWARD," Breton wrote, and he cast her as a mythic figure who "haunts" men, "gliding at dusk through the corridor of poetic

premonitions,” “glimpsed here and there,” “between fantasy and reality. [...] On the borders of utopia and truth, which is to say right at the heart of life.” Later he defined Gradiva as “she who walks.”⁶⁹

Although the gallery took Gradiva’s name, her body is to be found elsewhere. Her image lurks in the paintings of Salvador Dalí, André Masson, and especially Paul Delvaux, where women, often naked, glide down deserted streets under mysterious currents.⁷⁰ But these women, like Gradiva, are not real people nor do they pretend to be; they are symbolic creatures, indistinct representations of female beings that walk across the canvas. What of the living, breathing women whom the Surrealists passed by in the street? In the pages of Breton’s and Soupault’s texts, testaments to experiences and encounters from daily life, walk half a dozen flesh-and-blood Gradivas, women both real and symbolic: Nadja, Jacqueline, Georgette, the unnamed prostitutes of “L’esprit nouveau” and “Soluble Fish.” These women are all Gradivas, moving forward, between dream and reality.

Surrealism has long given women a potent place at the center of existence, more so than many other artistic movements of the first half of the twentieth century. “The problem,” explains feminist scholar Gwen Raaberg, “arises out of a situation in which the concepts and principles that focused Breton and other Surrealists on the female also limited their capacity to view women as independent, active subjects. The Surrealists conceived of woman as man’s mediator with nature and the unconscious, *femme-enfant*, muse, source and object of man’s desire, embodiment of *amour fou*, and emblem of revolution. The concept of ‘woman’ objectified by male needs was in direct conflict with the individual woman’s subjective need for self-definition and free artistic expression.”⁷¹



Joan Miró, *Lady Strolling on the Rambla of Barcelona*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 130.1 × 96.8 cm.

These are the women, idealized but ultimately secondary to men, whom the Surrealists follow.

More often than not these women are streetwalkers, prostitutes who ply their trade on the street. A painting by Miró captures this intersection of walking, street, woman, and sex with an exceptional economy of means. *Lady Strolling on the Rambla of Barcelona* (1925) depicts an elegant female pedestrian as a blue breast perched atop a long white leg that ends in a pointy black shoe.⁷² With a leg in place of a complete body, the woman is defined from head to toe as a walking creature. The lines that compose her figure, from her spiraling crown down to her single foot, track the curving path of the Rambla itself as it travels downtown from Plaça de Catalunya to the port of Barcelona. But this woman does not just walk the street, she walks it as an erotic body—perhaps one for sale, a prostitute whose sexualized nature is announced by the emphasis placed on her sinuousness and her modeled breast, which suggests touch. She is a walking breast. The broken lines that form a spiral at the top of her body are like so many steps, and in replacing her head they recall the history that links thinking and walking. But since this woman is valued not for her mind but for her body, her schematic composition suggests instead that her entire being is determined by her streetwalking.

If the streetwalker acts as ambulatory object of desire, the pedestrian who roams the city in search of her is one whose actions are propelled by the drive for an amorous encounter. An anecdote from Benjamin gives a sense of the way in which romantic desire can electrify an urban stroll. In “One Way Street,” he describes arriving in an unfamiliar city to visit a female friend and walking the city for two hours before their rendezvous: “From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every streetcar came toward me like a fire engine. For she might

have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar.”⁷³ The very possibility of chancing upon this woman made everything Benjamin passed come passionately alive. For the Surrealists, this possibility exists beyond the expectation of meeting a specific, known woman; they walk the city primed for any unexpected meeting. All of Paris is a territory of desire: Breton met Nadja and Jacqueline Lamba while wandering the streets; the former became his lover, the latter his wife and mother of his only child. Paul Éluard discovered an impoverished performer named Nusch one day in May 1930 while strolling the boulevard Haussmann with René Char; four years later they were married. Enshrined in literature or not, these amorous engagements mark one type of culmination for the Surrealist quest that was urban ambulation.

On other promenades it was not an individual woman but the city itself—*herself*—that drove the Surrealists’ desirous footsteps. Sometimes this happened via the merging of a flesh-and-blood woman with the urban entity. In *Dernières nuits*, Soupault describes the extraordinary vision he had while following Georgette one night with his friend Jacques, as she herself “became a city” (*DNP*, 46). In the collages of Jean Lévy, which appear in *Minotaure* 10 (Winter 1937), cut-and-paste photographs of femme fatales become one with a Parisian ruelle and a bank of the Seine, as if the city’s infrastructure were literally constructed out of erotically charged female bodies.

By contrast, George Melly attributes London’s failed Surrealism partly to the city’s masculinity, which he argues kept it from being muse to the city’s male artists and poets. Melly also hilariously analyzes a series of proposals in the May 1933 edition of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* for the modification of Paris’s monuments as evidence of jealousy: the Surrealists’ mistress Paris was being threatened

by examples of erectile structures like the Eiffel Tower and the Vendôme Column. Architectural castration was deemed necessary.⁷⁴

Elsewhere are examples where no individual woman is evoked but rather a perception of the city, or part of the city, as female. In *Dernières nuits*, Soupault watches as the Eiffel Tower reveals itself as a woman capable of wrestling with the night sky. In *Paysan de Paris*, Aragon feminizes the passages, as if the arcades were the nether regions of the body of Paris. In the essay “Pont-Neuf,” Breton describes the Seine as a nude, recumbent woman with long tresses and the Île de la Cité as her torso, containing Paris’s heart. At the tip of the island, where one enters the Place Dauphine from the Pont-Neuf, lies “the sex of Paris.”⁷⁵ What then would it mean to walk into the Place Dauphine, to wander through the arcades? Rebecca Solnit suggests that in their metaphorization of the city as a female body, a sexualized female body, walking for the Surrealists becomes a sex act, one where “it is the arrival, not the consummation, that seems to count, and the foot that seems to be the crucial anatomical detail.”⁷⁶ Soupault makes this act abundantly clear in the passage that follows his vision of Georgette becoming a city. Leaving her to Jacques’s solo pursuit, Soupault continues to wander the Parisian night and finds the city transformed and erotically charged: “The avenue de l’Opéra was no longer the stream that I had always followed, nor the highway that one usually pictures. It was a great shadow flashing like a glacier, which one must first conquer, and then embrace as one would a woman” (*DNP*, 46). Jacques ends up sleeping with Georgette that night, an encounter that, in the end, amounts to “nothing much.” Instead it is Soupault who, having left the young woman behind, finds the ultimate encounter in an ambulatory embrace with the city.

The Anti-guidebook

In the midst of *Paysan de Paris*, the reader is suddenly imagined as a “stranger consulting [Aragon’s] little guidebook,” while strutting about the Passage de l’Opéra (PP, 71). It is a curious but not unreasonable proposition: What if one tried to use *Paysan de Paris*, “Soluble Fish,” *Nadja*, *L’amour fou*, or *Dernières nuits de Paris* as guidebooks for a walking tour of Paris? Brassai’s *Paris de nuit* could serve as an illustrated guide. Certainly these works are detailed enough, full of the names of streets walked and buildings walked past, of sights to see and adventures to experience. Scholars Marie-Claire Bancquart and Margaret Cohen have offered detailed studies that map the texts’ trajectories and visits, and Bancquart notes how everything in them happens in the present tense of the guidebook.⁷⁷ And yet though none of these texts or photographs is a work of fiction, they do not in fact offer paths that can be literally followed. Nor do they visit sights “one must see” but rather sites where something has happened or has been felt.⁷⁸ Further on in *Paysan de Paris*, Aragon himself admits as much, envisioning “the walker who, crossing the Buttes with my book in hand, realizes that I have scarcely spoken of this garden, that I missed the crux” (PP, 150). And yet he has described it in great detail, taking this turn of the path, encountering that statue bearing such-and-such inscription. But the imaginary readers-walkers will inevitably have got lost early on, no matter how closely they may have tried to match their own footsteps with the author’s. As Aragon explains, “I began to mix the landscape with my words” (PP, 151), words that, however much they might be triggered by the very real streets and paths traversed, in the end have less to do with them than with the author himself.

Aragon’s statement can be applied to greater or lesser extent to all of the works mentioned above (for Brassai replace

“words” with “vision”). Ultimately each of these Surrealists walks to discover himself—not the city traversed nor the woman pursued. Although their walking, and their verbal or visual representations of their walking, powerfully rewrite and re-vision the well-trodden paths of the commercialized, workaday city, reimagining it as a dreamscape rich with encounter and possibility, those dreamscapes are, finally, private ones. Despite the collective intentions and tactics of the Surrealist project, the task of using walking to achieve something beyond the individual would ultimately need to wait for a later generation: the Situationist International.

- 1 See Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 251–58.
- 2 The original French text is reproduced in *ibid.*, 254.
- 3 André Breton, radio interview by André Parinaud, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 53; Jacques Baron, *L'an I du Surréalisme* (Paris: Denoël, 1969), 46.
- 4 Louis Aragon, *Paysan de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926), trans. Frederick Brown as *Nightwalkers* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1960); André Breton, *L'amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), trans. Mary Ann Caws as *Mad Love* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).
- 5 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), ch. 6.
- 6 Marcel Jean, "Chronique: Chronogrammes," *Minotaure*, no. 1 (June 1933): 4.
- 7 Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Paris des surréalistes* (Paris: Seghers, 1972), 8–9.
- 8 Breton, *Mad Love*, 43 (hereafter cited in text as *AF*).
- 9 Vincent Gille, "Lives and Loves," in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 163.
- 10 For a history of the flâneur, see Christel Hollevoet, "The Flâneur: Genealogy of a Modernist Icon" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2001).
- 11 Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 156, 172–73; Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 201, 212–14.
- 12 Baron, *L'an I du Surréalisme*, 83–84.
- 13 Rebecca Solnit, "Paris, or Botanizing the Asphalt," in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), ch. 12; Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editoriale Gustavo Gilli, 2002), 21–22; Mirella Bandini, *La vertigine del moderno – percorsi surrealisti* (Rome: Officina edizioni, 1986), ch. 7 and 8; Michael Sheringham, "City Space, Mental Space, Poetic Space: Paris in Breton, Benjamin and Réda," in *Parisian Fields*, ed. Sheringham (London: Reaktion, 1996), 88; and Roger Cardinal, "The Soluble City: The Surrealist Perception of Paris," *Architectural Design* 48, nos. 2–3 (1978): 143.
- 14 George Melly, *Paris and the Surrealists* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1991), ch. 2.
- 15 Philippe Soupault, *Les dernières nuits de Paris* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1928), trans. William Carlos Williams as *Last Nights of Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1992); Brassai, *The Secret Paris of the '30s*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), n.p.

- 16 Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 8–9.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Keith Tester, introduction to *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 13–14.
- 19 Matthew Josephson, *Life among the Surrealists: A Memoir* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962), 115–16.
- 20 Breton, *Nadja*, 111 (hereafter cited in text as *N*).
- 21 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995), 275–76.
- 22 Soupault, *Last Nights of Paris*, 45 (hereafter cited in text as *DNP*).
- 23 Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (Greenwich, CT: Phaidon, 1964), 30.
- 24 Baron, *L'an I du Surréalisme*, 17.
- 25 Marc Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement: Transports et perception de l'espace, XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 201–18, 246–52.
- 26 Aragon, *Nightwalkers*, 10 (hereafter cited in text as *PP*).
- 27 Bancquart, *Paris des surréalistes*, 65–66.
- 28 André Breton, "Lachez tout" (1922), in *Les pas perdus* (Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1924), trans. Mark Polizzotti as *Lost Steps* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 78–79.
- 29 See Breton, *Conversations*, 59–60; Polizzotti, *Revolution*, 201–2; and Pierre Daix, *La vie quotidienne des Surréalistes, 1917–1932* (Paris: Hachette, 1993), 211–14.
- 30 Breton, *Conversations*, 60.
- 31 André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.
- 32 Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 123.
- 33 Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 172–76. Part of Durozoi's point is that their interest in these working-class areas is therefore also not socially motivated.
- 34 Brassai, *Secret Paris*, n.p.
- 35 Nevertheless, much Surrealist photography experiments in such a way as to play with this very aspect of the medium. See *La subversion des images: Surréalisme, photographie, film* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2009).
- 36 Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), in *Reflections*, 179.
- 37 Ibid., 182–83.
- 38 Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 48–51.
- 39 The original 1928 edition does not credit Boiffard, though portraits by Man Ray and a friend named Henri Manuel are attributed. The 1963 edition, revised by Breton, credits eight of the twelve street photographs to Boiffard; three of the remaining four have since been credited to him by independent scholars. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 65n30.
- 40 Brassai: *Paris le jour, Paris la nuit* (Paris: Musée Carnavalet, 1988), 16.

- 41 Brassai, from a 1980 interview, quoted in *Brassai: No Ordinary Eyes* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2000), 14.
- 42 Breton, "Manifesto," 9–10.
- 43 Josephson, *Life among the Surrealists*, 134–35.
- 44 Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 81.
- 45 On "objective chance," see Breton, *L'amour fou*, 19–25; and *Conversations*, 106–8.
- 46 André Breton and Paul Eluard, untitled inquiry in *Minotaure*, nos. 3–4 (December 1933): 101–16.
- 47 Breton, *Conversations*, 106–7.
- 48 See Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 82–106.
- 49 Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," 4–5, 11.
- 50 Polizzotti, *Revolution*, 263.
- 51 *Brassai: Paris le jour*, 12.
- 52 For more on Breton's and Aragon's relationships with the Communist Party of France (PCF), see Polizzotti, *Revolution*, 246–56, 277–79, 370–74.
- 53 Walter Benjamin first theorized the Surrealists' revolutionary use of the outmoded in "Surrealism," 181–83; more recent is Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 166.
- 54 Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 89–97.
- 55 Breton, "Soluble Fish" (1924), in *Manifestoes*, 104–5.
- 56 Breton, "Manifesto," 26.
- 57 Daix, *La vie quotidienne des Surréalistes*, 211–14.
- 58 Cardinal, "Soluble City," 146–47.
- 59 André Breton, "Pont-Neuf," in *La clé des champs* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1953), trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise as *Free Rein* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 222–23.
- 60 Rosalind Krauss, "Nightwalkers," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 36–38.
- 61 Paul Morand, *Paris de nuit: 60 photos inédites de Brassai* (Paris: Éditions Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1933), n.p.
- 62 Pierre Mabilie, "Dessins inédits de Seurat," *Minotaure*, no. 11 (May 1938): 3.
- 63 Quoted in Jodi Hauptman, *Georges Seurat: The Drawings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 13. The drawings are not dated in *Minotaure* but must have been made in the 1880s.
- 64 Breton, "Soluble Fish," 106.
- 65 Bancquart, *Paris des surréalistes*, 82–86.
- 66 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 104–5.
- 67 Translation and interpretation from Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 180–83, 189–91. The poem was originally published in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Payot, 1926), 18.
- 68 Brassai, "Du mur des cavernes au mur d'usine," *Minotaure*, nos. 3–4 (December 1933): 6; translation from *Brassai: No Ordinary Eyes*, 292.
- 69 Breton, "Gradiva," reprinted in *La clé des champs*, 19–22; Breton, *Conversations*, 144.
- 70 See Lionel Bourg, "L'endurance du voyageur: Déambulation et dérive, du surréalisme à l'Internationale Situationniste," in *Un siècle d'arpenteurs: Les figures de la marche* (Antibes: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000), 110–33.

- 71 Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism," in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (1991; repr. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 2–3.
- 72 See Robert Lubar, "Art and Anti-art: Miró, Dalí, and the Catalan Avant-Garde," in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, ed. William H. Robinson and Jordi Falgàs (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 345.
- 73 Benjamin, "One Way Street," in *Reflections*, 81.
- 74 See Melly, *Paris and the Surrealists*, ch. 3, n.p.; and unsigned, "Sur certaines possibilités d'embellissement irrationnel d'une ville," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 6 (May 1933): 18–23.
- 75 Breton, "Pont-Neuf," 225–26.
- 76 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 209.
- 77 Bancquart, *Paris des surréalistes*, 185–86; Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 82–103.
- 78 Walker makes this argument about *Nadja* in particular. It is from him that I've borrowed the term "anti-guidebook." See Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 53.

**Part II: Drifting toward
a Situationist Revolution**

An Interrupted Mission

In the spring of 1953, a group of friends set out to attend an opening in the bohemian Paris neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The reception was being held at À l'Étoile scellée, a gallery recently opened at 11, rue Pré-aux-clerics, where the director, André Breton, exhibited the work of first-generation Surrealist painters such as Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy, as well as a younger generation of artists who had attached themselves to the movement in its twilight years. The friends, however, would never see the work on display that evening. Their walk to the gallery did not end with complimentary glasses of wine and fancy small talk in front of strange, precious canvases but with repartee of an entirely different order, the kind made when one is brought into the local police station for drunken misconduct. They turned what should have been a brief dash into a marauding adventure with visits to some two dozen bars, where they became progressively drunker and drunker thanks to the Legros cocktails—a noxious concoction of pastis and rum—they consumed at every stop.¹

Landing in jail that night probably did not surprise the friends, though it might have occurred earlier in the evening and for slightly different reasons than expected—they'd set out on their excursion with the intention of disrupting the opening. They loathed what Surrealism had become and took frequent opportunity to define themselves in opposition to what they perceived as its descent into a doctrinal, formalist, and spiritualist position, one that betrayed the movement's original aims of revolutionizing the totality of life, and of doing so by moving beyond the art object. Calling themselves the Lettrist International (LI), the friends—who that evening included Jean-Louis Brau, Jean-Michel Mension, Pierre-Joël Berlé, Gil J Wolman, and

Guy Debord—theorized and practiced an updated version of the Surrealist goal, one that also sought to radically change everyday life, but without relying on chance, the unconscious, or the marvelous.² For the LI, these Surrealist tactics smacked of a reactionary flight from reality, a flight they had no wish to make. They focused resolutely on the present, concerned less with themselves than with the city they lived in and the lives lived there.

The long walk to À l'Étoile scellée was not an isolated incident. On the contrary, it was a central method of the Lettrist program. The members of the group had made it a strategic part of their lives to drift for hours, days, or even longer, rambling the less popular streets of the 6th arrondissement, the alleys of Chinatown, the Algerian blocks of the 5th, and even out to the Spanish suburb of Aubervilliers. For them, wandering was at once a game, a form of study, and a revolutionary device: a playful and passionate means of engaging with the urban landscape; a direct means of acquiring knowledge about it; and a rejection of the obligation to live a life limited by work, consumption, and passivity. They even coined a word to describe this activity—*la dérive*, meaning “the drift”—and eventually published a series of texts and artist books theorizing its practice and recording related findings.

Why isolate everyday urban life as the locus for stimulating social change? What did they want to change? And how could walking figure as a transformative mechanism for doing so? The various records left by the LI, as well as by their better-known successor the Situationist International (SI), offer many answers to these questions, but a quote from Debord offers some initial suggestions. In *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (1959), his memoiristic film that looks back to around 1953 when the *dérive* was invented, a voice-over narrates the

following while average Parisians are seen walking the city's streets: "Everyone unthinkingly followed the paths learned once and for all, to their work and homes, to their predictable future. For them, duty had already become a habit, and habit a duty. They did not see the deficiency of their city. They thought the deficiency of their life was natural. We wanted to break out of this conditioning, in quest of another use of the urban landscape, in quest of new passions." The scene ends with a rousing burst of Handel's "Thème cérémonieux des aventures," conversely full of excitement and promise. The camera pans up from the street, catching the tops of building facades on its way to the open sky, then comes back down to focus on the nighttime scene of rue Montagne-Sainte-Genève, a favorite haunt of the LI and the SI. Moments later it is daybreak. While a handful of cars move through the Place des Victoires, the voice-over laments, "Once again, morning in the same streets. Once again the fatigue of so many similarly passed nights. It is a walk that has lasted a long time." And then, continuing, "Really hard to drink more." The screen goes blank. Debauched rambling for days on end through the streets of bohemian and immigrant Paris did not, in fact, make the revolution happen. But it was the start.

The Revolution of Everyday Life

The overarching revolutionary program at stake was laid out by the Situationist International under the leadership of Debord, and propounded primarily through the SI's main organ, the *Internationale situationniste* journal. The SI existed from 1957 to 1972 and arose out of the fragmentation and

radicalization of a number of earlier vanguard art groups: the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB), based in Alba, Italy, from 1954 to 1957 under the auspices of artists including Asger Jorn and Giuseppe (Pinot) Gallizio, formed after the dissolution of CoBrA, a group of expressionist painters from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam, together from 1948 to 1951; and the Lettrist International, whose anti-Surrealist excursion unfolds above, splintered off in 1952 from the Lettrist Group, which had been founded by the poet Isidore Isou in Paris in 1946. When the IMIB and the LI came together at the First World Congress of Free Artists in Alba in 1956, the seeds were sown for the founding of the SI in July of the following year, at a meeting held in the picturesque Italian mountain village of Cosio di Arroscia.⁴

Such basic facts hardly give a sense of how or why these diverse movements—diverse in terms of geography but more notably in terms of artistic practice—were drawn together to form the SI, one of the more radical cultural factions of the twentieth century. As Simon Sadler explains in *The Situationist City* (1998), the unlikeliness of this collectivization begins to make sense when considered in terms not of difference but of shared ground. CoBrA and the IMIB, like the LI, were all resolutely political at a time when other vanguard movements were not. Furthermore, they held a common critical focus against the rationalism and functionalism that had come to dominate architecture, design, and urban planning under the ideals of such modernist figures as Le Corbusier. And while they were certainly not the only cultural workers to pay attention to the structures of everyday life, their radical call to wipe out the most spectacular of them put these groups at odds with the more accommodating conclusions of colleagues like the artists, critics, and architects gathered around the Institute of Contemporary

Art (ICA) in London, who were more interested in coming to terms with the spectacle than destroying it.⁵

But what exactly was the SI's revolutionary program? One place to look for its articulation is in a talk Debord gave at a conference of the Group for Research on Everyday Life, a gathering convened in the spring of 1961 by the sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Debord presented his text via a tape recorder, which he explained was a means of altering the commonplace form of the intellectual lecture and breaking with its illusion of dialogue between speaker and audience.⁶ His delivery served as a concrete example of his main argument, which focused not merely on the need to recognize and study everyday life—hardly an orthodox notion itself, having been “discovered” by Lefebvre in 1946 and still contested by a number of sociologists, including some present at the conference—but to change it. As Debord put it, “Everyday life is not everything [...]. But to use a facile spatial image, we still have to place everyday life at the center of everything. Every project begins from it and every realization returns to it to acquire its real significance. Everyday life is the measure of all things: of the fulfillment or rather the nonfulfillment of human relations; of the use of lived time; of artistic experimentation; of revolutionary politics.”⁷

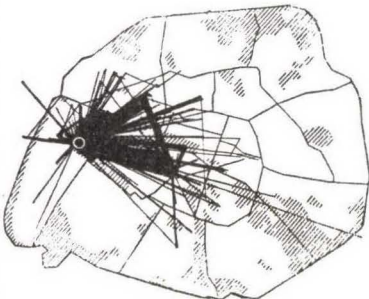
The quality of life equals the quality of everyday life, and Debord was deeply critical of the status quo. The average person, he claimed, exerts no control over his or her everyday life, living it passively and under various kinds of unquestioned, utilitarian obligations: to work and to consume foremost among them. Meanwhile these lives grow increasingly atomized and privatized, as the subsistence and leisure activities that make them up become ever more specialized and compartmentalized, separating banal office jobs in the city from isolated prefab homes in the suburbs via lengthy, dull commutes on the metro.

● VENISE A VAINCU RALPH RUMNEY

Le situationniste britannique Ralph Rumney qui avait mené dès le printemps de 1957 quelques reconnaissances psychogéographiques dans Venise, s'était ultérieurement fixé pour but l'exploration systématique de cette agglomération, et espérait pouvoir en présenter un compte rendu exhaustif autour de juin 1958 (cf. une annonce du n° 29 de *Pollatch*). L'en reprise se développa d'abord favorablement. Rumney, qui était parvenu à établir les premiers éléments d'un plan de Venise dont la technique de notation surpassait nettement toute la cartographie psychogéographique antérieure, faisait part à ses camarades de ses découvertes, de ses premières conclusions, de ses espoirs. Vers le mois de janvier 1958, les nouvelles devinrent mauvaises. Rumney, aux prises avec des difficultés sans nombre, de plus en plus ataché par le milieu qu'il avait essayé de traverser, devait abandonner l'une après l'autre ses lignes de recherches et, pour finir, comme il nous le communiquait par son émouvant message du 20 mars, se voyait ramené à une position purement statique.

Les anciens explorateurs ont connu un pourcentage élevé de pertes au prix duquel on est parvenu à la connaissance d'une géographie objective. Il fallait s'attendre à voir des victimes parmi les nouveaux chercheurs, explorateurs de l'espace social et de ses modes d'emploi.

Les embûches sont d'un autre genre, comme l'enjeu est d'une autre nature : il s'agit de parvenir à un usage passionnant de la vie. On se heurte naturelle-



Relevé de tous les trajets effectués en un an par une étudiante habitant le XVI^e Arrondissement. Publié par Chombart de Lauwe dans « Paris et l'agglomération parisienne ». (P.U.F.)

ment à toutes les défenses d'un monde de l'ennui. Rumney vient donc de disparaître, et son père n'est pas encore parti à sa recherche. Voilà que la jungle vénitienne a été la plus forte, et qu'elle se ferme sur un jeune homme, plein de vie et de promesses, qui se perd, qui se dissout parmi nos multiples souvenirs.



Ralph Rumney

Page from *Internationale situationniste* 1 (June 1958). *Internationale situationniste: Bulletin centrale* édité par les sections de l'*Internationale situationniste* was published in Paris from June 1958 to September 1969. Twelve issues of the journal appeared, each with a cover printed on a different sheet of colored metallic paper.

Debord's complaints weren't abstract or hard to substantiate. A common idiom of the time—*métro, boulot, métro, dodo* (subway, work, subway, sleep)—acknowledged the numbing rhythm of the contemporary cycle of life. More evidence could be found in the *Internationale situationniste* journal, the first issue of which featured a diagram depicting the movements of a Parisian college student over the course of one year. Her pedestrian trajectories add up, more or less, to a triangle whose three points consist of home, university, and piano lessons. (Perhaps not incidentally, the illustration also resembles a large fly squashed dead across a map of Paris.) Borrowed from a study published in 1952 by Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, one of the first French urban sociologists, the student's data was used by the SI not only to demonstrate the behavioral poverty and geographical imprisonment of a typical individual's life but as an example of a "modern poetry capable of provoking sharp emotional reactions (in this case, indignation at the fact that there are people who live like that)."⁸ To be aware of the inferiority and narrowness of everyday life must, they argued, lead to a critique of this situation, one that acknowledges how profoundly rich and energetic life could be. For Debord, these two insights were inseparable: to recognize the former is to admit a gross dissatisfaction with it, and to do so is to demand a better life. The poverty of everyday life thus poses a political question, one whose answer, he believed, "can lead to nothing less than a reinvention of revolution."⁹

From the very beginning, everyday life had been the focus of the SI's energy, a uniting goal Debord set forward in bold terms during the group's foundational meeting in Cosio. His report made clear the necessity to expand life beyond the Marxist demand to reorganize labor and production: "A revolutionary action within culture cannot have as its aim to be the expression or analysis of life, but

its expansion. Misery must be pushed back everywhere. Revolution does not only lie in the question of knowing what level of production heavy industry is attaining and who will be its master. Along with the exploitation of man, the passions, compensations, and habits that were its products must also wither away.”¹⁰

But what would it mean to expand life beyond its current state? What areas of life might most meaningfully be altered toward this goal? What are the risks if nothing is done? Debord continued, “Now, we must define desires appropriate to today’s potentialities. Even at the height of struggle between present-day society and the forces that will destroy it, we must already find the initial components of a higher construction of the environment and of new conditions of behavior—the latter through experimentation and propaganda. All the rest belongs to the past and its servant.”¹¹ The expansion of life would thus take place via the discovery and invention of new modes of desire, behavior, and environmental design. These would become known via such methods as the *dérive* and *détournement*, and be propagated through ventures like the *Internationale situationniste* journal, the distribution of political pamphlets, the mounting (and sometimes dismantling) of exhibitions, and the graffitiing of radical slogans on Parisian streets.

A key guiding principle for these experimental activities and radical demands was the idea of the game, of play as an integral component of everyday life—in place of more common objectives like profit or utility. “It would be futile to try to find any other motive behind our theories on architecture or drifting than a passion for play,” proclaimed Debord.¹² The notion of play as a fundamental activity and state of mind stems from Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, whose 1938 book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* examined play in European society. Huizinga’s

title, which translates as “man the player,” offers an alternative to the more common taxonomies of man such that his ability to play becomes his defining characteristic, rather than his powerful brain (Homo sapiens means “man the knowing”), his ability to make things (Homo faber means “man the maker”), or his vertical carriage (Homo erectus means “man the upright walker”). Whereas Huizinga differentiated between game playing and “ordinary life,” which he opposed to the former and characterized as bound by a sense of duty, the Lettrists and the Situationists sought to bring them together, to enhance the festive and spontaneous component of everyday life. In this, they radicalized Huizinga’s theory into a revolutionary ethics that abolished the difference between play and seriousness, art and everyday life.¹³ And they redefined the notion of what a game could be: instead of functioning on a competitive basis, like contemporary sports or chess, the SI argued for games whose goal was the collective creation of “choice ludic ambiances,” ambiances that would help turn everyday life into less of a preprogrammed, bureaucratic repetition of métro, boulot, métro, dodo, and more of an unpredictable, inspiring series of situations and encounters.¹⁴

Huizinga’s ideas were equally influential for Henri Lefebvre, the sociologist who hosted Debord’s tape-recorded talk and who, more importantly, was one of the foremost scholars of daily life and a partisan of the SI in its early years. The very notion of everyday life as a realm deserving of scholarly, political, and artistic attention owes much of its development to Lefebvre’s 1942 book *Critique de la vie quotidienne I*, in which he argued that everyday life was a modern bourgeois phenomenon brought on by the rise of the masses, the quantifiability of everything (work productivity, calories burned and eaten, miles traversed, money spent and earned), and the demise of the church and

the aristocracy. But Lefebvre did not just seek to elucidate this situation; he was committed to its transformation, to working against what he saw as a prodigious loss of diversity in the modern everyday, a worldwide tendency toward uniformity, rationality, functionalism, sign-making, systematization, repetition, and passivity at every level, from housing and fashion to eating, drinking, and living.¹⁵ Though Lefebvre does not appear on official Situationist membership lists, his ideas were assimilated by the SI and vice versa, and in *Le temps des méprises* (1975), his memoir of the time, he recounts the heady atmosphere circa 1958 in which he, Debord, and Michèle Bernstein (Debord's first wife and a long-standing member of the SI) came together with complementary ideas.¹⁶ Like many Situationist relationships—the group's membership, under Debord's direction, was famously rife with exclusions and resignations—it ended, as Lefebvre put it, as a “love affair” gone bad, with intellectual competitiveness and accusations of plagiarism, but more fundamentally as a split at the level of revolutionary praxis, with Debord taking the SI in the direction of total revolution and Lefebvre seeking more moderate (and achievable) means.

Nevertheless, the sympathetic and mutually productive discussions between Lefebvre and the SI, for as long as they lasted, fit as a radical node within the broader context of French postwar culture and its sustained interest in the everyday. But if the quotidian is to be studied and, more importantly, transformed, then the question of where the quotidian happens becomes foremost. In their answer to this question, which centered on the urban environment and more specifically the street, the Lettrists and the Situationists were in good historical company. The street has long had a privileged place in French popular culture, as a site that “unites the quotidian and the festive” and is opposed to the

“allegedly stifling, pompous, and enclosed world of high culture.”¹⁷ Generations of revolutionaries and vanguardists, from Charles Baudelaire to the Paris Communards, from Walter Benjamin to Louis Aragon, turned to the street for signs of life as it existed in the present and as they hoped it might in the future: more modern, more free, more full of adventure and mystery. But the SI were arguably the most radical and insistent of this loose historical group in their demand for the right to create utopia in the space of their own streets, a right that Lefebvre termed *le droit à la ville* (the right to the city) in his 1968 book of that title, and which more recently has been taken up by the social geographer David Harvey, who describes it as “not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire.”¹⁸

This idea of change, of the right to change the city in which one lives, might usefully be compared to artistic practice itself. Consider the way in which a painter or a sculptor traditionally works, using the raw materials of paint or stone to craft a finished artwork. Whether the process is additive or subtractive, the artist uses it to form his or her chosen materials into a desired form. Replace the materials of paint or stone with those of life itself—actions such as walking, drinking, and conversing, spaces such as streets, plazas, and buildings—and suddenly the possibility of creating not art but life begins to take shape. This, essentially, is what the Situationists demanded: the right to construct life out of one’s own desires, as artists have always done with art.

What this comparison also allows is a means of understanding Situationist ideas and practices within the larger artistic context of the time. Though the SI’s status as an artistic movement was and continues to be contested—by 1962 all of the more artistically inclined members and

affiliates of the group had either resigned or been excluded—nevertheless it owed its origins, as well as many of the tactics that sustained it at least through the early '60s, to the vanguard art groups CoBrA, the IMIB, and the Lettrists. Lineage aside, even more fundamental is the way in which the SI, as the above metaphor suggests, took the creative and constructive principles of art making and applied them to life making. As Debord explained in his speech in Cosio, acknowledging both a debt to artistic practice and a profound need to move beyond its traditional subject matter, “What alters the way we see the streets is more important than what alters the way we see painting.”¹⁹ He continued this theme in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste*, invoking agency and the desire to create something other than mere objects: “Art can cease to be a report on sensations and become a direct organization of higher sensations. It is a matter of producing ourselves, and not the things that enslave us.”²⁰ In the next issue, the editors reaffirmed this notion of creative agency taking over everyday life, and raised it to the level of an absolute: “Any creative effort that is not henceforth carried out in view of a new cultural theater of operations, of a direct creation of life’s surroundings, is in one way or another a hoax.”²¹

What these statements point to is not a wholesale rejection of art but rather a radical redefinition of what it could be, away from objects and toward action, away from high culture and toward a social and politicized one. As art historian T. J. Clark and translator Donald Nicholson-Smith have insisted, the SI, of which they were briefly members, was part of “a practice in which ‘art’—meaning those possibilities of representational and antirepresentational action thrown up by fifty years of modernist experiment on the borders of the category—might now be realized. This was the truly utopian dimension of SI activity.”²²

Among other moments of radical artistic exploration, the Dadaist and Surrealist excursions examined in Part I can be seen not just as historical precursors to SI adventures but as failed projects given new life by the SI. Of course plenty of other contemporaneous art movements could, and did, claim to be the inheritors of Dada and Surrealism, Neo-Dada, Nouveau Réalisme, and Happenings among them. If the SI dismissed the first two in terms of their production of mere commodities, a more trenchant critique was reserved for Happenings, the American art form developed primarily by Allan Kaprow, whose scripted performances, beginning in 1958, crafted crude yet lyrical “total” works of art in which audience members were bombarded with every sort of sensation and often found themselves playing participating roles. Held in such specific but disparate locations as a gallery, a church basement, a tire-strewn yard, or a farm, Happenings made an art out of unpredictability, the nonsequential, and multifocal situations, with the goal of making art into life by using it to approximate the everyday urban environment. The SI, for its part, condemned this conjuring of everydayness as a kind of “specialized production” and the participation it engendered as involvement in an “artistic spectacle,” one constructed “on the basis of poverty (material poverty, poverty of human contact [...]).” They contrasted this with the “material and spiritual richness” upon which they based their own constructions, which were never theatrically separated from real life by gallery walls or predetermined scripts, and therefore, they argued, directly implicated the lives involved.²³ In keeping with this comparison, Debord once suggested a possible development for a peripatetic form of theater that modified the *dérive* with what seemed like choice aspects of Happenings. He envisioned “a future (linked to the *dérive*) that would put actors in the street [...]. These actors would not have roles.

At most a *theme* [...] to intervene in urban life, also taking urban zones into account, of *settings traversed*. These actors could specialize in either scary or surprising roles; or represent sad or happy possibilities in life.”²⁴

Much as this unrealized idea proposed to revitalize theater by bringing it out into the street, thereby causing a confrontation between its traditionally sequestered gestures and the real life of the urban setting, so too did Debord on occasion advocate parallel uses of that most conservative form of art: painting. In an essay he wrote for the catalogue of a 1963 Situationist exhibition in Denmark, Debord approvingly related the story of a group of Venezuelan students who in January of that year had taken five paintings from an exhibition of French art at gunpoint, offering to return them in exchange for the release of political prisoners. Similarly he recalled how, in 1849 in Dresden, insurgents proposed (unsuccessfully) to take paintings from the local museum and put them on the barricades to see if they would keep troops from firing.²⁵ Although it seems the Situationists themselves never engaged in such radical treatment of the art of the past, one wonders what they would have thought of contemporary Belgian artist Francis Alÿs’s *Walking a Painting* (2002). As part of a solo exhibition at the Project, Alÿs had a painting taken for daily walks through South Los Angeles then left under veil at night in the gallery. The picture depicted the LA riots of 1992, which erupted when four police officers—three of them white—were acquitted of charges for beating Rodney King, an African-American man. While a painting hung on a wall might be an inadequate form of memorial, perhaps when put into motion on the streets where racial inequalities take place every day, traditional representation can rub up against living reality to create small but potent situations of critical commemoration.

Walking along the Left Bank

As passionate as they were about the need to revolutionize daily life, the Situationists were equally insistent on the geography of that life being urban, an urban life known through the direct experience of the moving body on the street. To continue the artistic metaphor used above, they took not only life but the city itself as their medium, a medium that needed to be reimagined and reshaped if life were to be truly worth living. The “new cultural theater of operations” they wrote about in their journal was not an abstract notion—it was the city, as illustrated in a leaflet published in 1958, where an aerial photograph of Paris was boldly headlined *NOUVEAU THÉÂTRE D’OPÉRATIONS DANS LA CULTURE*. And while Paris was not the only city where Situationist activities took place—Amsterdam, Brussels, and Venice were among their involuntary hosts—it was the primary one.

The Left Bank neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Prés lay at the heart of Situationist Paris, or rather just to the left of it. Shunning storied bars like *Les Deux Magots* or *Café de Flore*, which belonged to a previous generation of vanguard artists, the Lettrists found each other, and conducted their first experimental actions, in an area delimited by the down-and-out drinking establishments that they daily made their way between. The route consisted more or less of the following: begin at the Saint-Claude, just before rue de Rennes; then take rue des Ciseaux, continuing along until Le Bouquet, at the corner of rue du Four; further down that same street go to *Chez Moineau’s*, then maybe grab something cheap to eat at the sausage and frites joint at the corner of rue Bonaparte; return via rue du Four

and visit La Pergola, then the Old Navy. For a little more privacy they might go to a bench on allée du Séminaire at the top of rue Bonaparte or to the Place du Vert-Galant.²⁶ These details are related by Jean-Michel Mension, an early member of the Lettrist International excommunicated long before the formation of the SI. It jibes with other accounts of the time, including Debord's two radical memoirs—the film *Sur le passage* and the artist book *Mémoires*, with Asger Jorn—both of which were made at the end of the '50s and look back on the Lettrist activities in and around Saint-Germain-des-Prés during the first years of the decade. In a pair of the many snippets of appropriated literature that appear throughout *Mémoires*, Debord brought together the specificity of Paris with the idea of a new agency and the possibility of a life as rich as art: “It is in the streets of Paris that a new force will form, one which did not exist in the last century / décor in which life becomes, through its festivals, slowly but surely theater.”²⁷ Appearing at the beginning of the section subtitled “September 1953,” these phrases join with various local map fragments and photographs of Lettrist members on the street and in bars to point to the group's early years in the quartier as central to the formation of the SI's radical notions about the right to a better life in a better city, and how to go about claiming it.

In *Sur le passage* Debord characterizes the neighborhood more generally and also confirms it as the location where the SI originated. Images of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in 1952—building facades, people entering and exiting the metro, walking on the street—are accompanied with the following voice-over: “This neighborhood was made for the wretched dignity of the petty bourgeoisie, for respectable occupation and intellectual tourism. The sedentary population of the upper floors was sheltered from the influences of the street. [...] This neighborhood was the strange setting

of our story. Here a systematic questioning of all the diversions and works of a society, a total critique of its idea of happiness, was expressed in acts." The moving images end and are replaced by still photographs of the young Lettrists in a café. About the Lettrists the narrator remarks: "They said that oblivion was their ruling passion. They wanted to reinvent everything each day; to become the masters and possessors of their own lives."²⁸ But how to do this via the medium of the city? How to act on the idea of the city as a new theater of cultural operations? What exactly might those operations be?

A first place to look is in a newsletter published by the Lettrists, called *Potlatch* because it could only be acquired as a gift, as in the Native American ceremonies from which it took its name. In *Potlatch* the LI first articulated many of their critiques of urbanism and ideas for its transformation, most humorously in the unsigned 1955 article "Plan for Rational Improvements to the City of Paris."²⁹ Riffing off an equally fanciful survey that appeared in 1933 in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* under the heading "On certain possibilities for the irrational embellishment of a city," the Lettrists made known a series of idiosyncratic proposals that recognized the power of urbanism and sought to reclaim it for a playful citizenry. They called for the metro to remain open at night, long after the trains had stopped running, and for the stations to be poorly lit and therefore adventurous. They clamored for the transformation of rooftops into pedestrian spaces, complete with ladders and catwalks. Public gardens should never close, and they too should be dimly lit at night, if at all. Train stations should be modified so that departure information appears scrambled or absent, a situation they claimed would promote drifting: lacking information to travel to a specific place by a specific time, people would have no choice but to go on unpredictable

journeys. And in a demand that would actually be realized in 2003 by the German artist Leopold Kessler, the Lettrists advised that the public should be able to operate street-lamps via switches, ending the tyranny of surveillance by artificial light. For *Privatized*, Kessler surreptitiously altered eight streetlights on a single block in Paris so they could be turned on/off via remote control.

These suggestions tackled the effects of lighting, access, and order on urban behavior, while others dealt with the psychological and sensory impact of building design, both for inhabitants and, even more so, passersby. Railing against the reinforced concrete “slum constructions” of modernist “geniuses” like Le Corbusier and Auguste Perret, an earlier issue of *Potlatch* proclaimed: “Decor determines gestures: we will build passionate houses.”³⁰ Asger Jorn developed this complaint further in an essay that criticized designers who placed functionalism above all other factors. Arguing that “the outside of a house ought not to reflect the inside but constitute a source of poetic sensation for the observer,” Jorn hinted that facades could potentially take an active role in creating a playful environment worth exploring on foot.³¹ A real-life experiment of just this sort took place in the aughts under the direction of Edi Rama, a former artist and the current prime minister of Albania, one of Europe’s poorest countries. During his eleven-year tenure as mayor of Tirana, the capital city, Rama transformed it from a place of gray, communist-era apartment blocks to one covered in riotous swaths of color. Lacking funds to undertake major infrastructural repairs, he had it painted instead: checkerboards of pink, yellow, black, white, gray, and taupe dance across one facade; hot pink, baby blue, and mint green diagonals run along another. Rama has explained his intention to act as “an avant-garde of democratization,” combating the state’s “decades-long

debasement of the individual” by giving inhabitants a city of choice rather than a city of fate, one in which color can bring about “the creation of a new era for the city.” In this “utopia,” he says, “the hottest discussion in the coffee bars, in homes, in the streets was what are the colors doing to us.”³²

For the Lettrists and the Situationists, no aspect of the city could be left unexamined or unaltered—least of all its verbal components. The words that order the street through signage, illegal inscription, and advertising were reclaimed for something less bland, commercial, and staid. First on the list were street designations. “The dulling influence of current street names on people’s intelligence must be stopped,” wrote the Lettrists, so off with the endless names of town councilors, heroes of the Resistance, and especially the miles and miles of saints.³³ This last demand they actually effected, thereafter dropping the “saint” from all mention of street names that normally contained them: hence the address of their new headquarters at 32, rue de la Montagne-Geneviève, as advertised in the Belgian journal *Lèvres nues* in December 1955 (this was also the location of the bar Le Tonneau d’Or). Anyone hoping to use a standard map of Paris to actually locate the Lettrist International would have needed to look up the rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève—failing this, an anticlerical *dérive* might have been in order, of the sort taken by Gil J Wolman and recounted in *Potlatch*. Under the title “Take the First Street,” which could equally be a directional statement or an order of possession, Wolman briefly listed the streets of his drift through the 7th arrondissement, replacing their given names with comical and lengthy narrative ones that seemed more fitting. Thus rue de Ménilmontant becomes rue “Where-no-one-seems-to-notice-or-get-in-the-way, extension” and boulevard des Filles du Calvaire becomes rue “All-these-charms-Eugénie-that-nature-has-showered-upon-you-all-these-attractions-with-which-she-



Programme préalable au mouvement situationniste.

Cette inscription, sur un mur de la rue de Seine, remonte aux premiers mois de 1953 (une inscription voisine qui relève de la politique traditionnelle aide à dater avec la plus sûre objectivité le tracé de celle qui nous intéresse : appelant à une manifestation contre le général Ridgway, elle ne peut donc être postérieure à mai 1952). L'inscription que nous reproduisons ici semble être la plus importante trace jamais relevée sur le site de Saint-Germain-des-Près, comme témoignage du mode de vie particulier qui a tenté de s'affirmer là.

dont l'accable le pouvoir, toute expérience effectuée sur la vie quotidienne, c'est-à-dire pour la construire (démarche illégale depuis la destruction du pouvoir féodal, où elle s'était trouvée limitée et réservée à quelques-uns) se concrétise actuellement par la critique du travail aliénant et le refus de se soumettre au travail forcé. Si bien que le prolétariat nouveau tend à se définir négativement comme un « Front contre le travail forcé » dans lequel se trouvent réunis tous ceux qui résistent à la récupération par le pouvoir. C'est là ce qui définit notre champ d'action, le lieu où nous jouons la ruse de l'histoire contre la ruse du pouvoir, le ring où nous misons sur le travailleur (métallo ou artiste) qui — conscient ou non — refuse le travail et la vie organisés, et contre celui qui — conscient ou non — accepte de travailler aux ordres du pouvoir. Dans cette perspective, il n'est pas arbitraire de prévoir une période transitoire où l'automation et la volonté du nouveau prolétariat abandonneront le travail aux seuls spécialistes, réduisant managers et bureaucrates au rang d'esclaves momentanés. Dans une automation généralisée, les « ouvriers », au lieu de surveiller les machines, pourraient entourer de leur sollicitude les spécialistes cybernétiques réduits au simple rôle d'accroître une production qui aura cessé d'être le secteur prioritaire pour obéir, par un renversement de force et de perspective, à la primauté de la vie sur la survie.

Le pouvoir unitaire s'efforçait de dissoudre l'existence individuelle dans une conscience collective, en sorte que chaque unité sociale se définit subjectivement comme une particule de poids bien déterminé en suspens dans un liquide huileux. Il fallait que chacun se sentit plongé dans cette évidence que seule la main de Dieu, secouant le récipient, usait du tout pour ses desseins qui, dépassant naturellement la compréhension de chaque être humain

has-adorned-you-must-now-be-sacrificed, extension.”³⁴ Linking the action of the pedestrian with the poetic agency of the artist, Wolman’s *dérive* recalls the ways in which André Breton and Nadja were pushed and pulled across Paris by the improper meanings of various signs, but Wolman reinvents the game, playing not according to the principle of unconscious desire but psychogeographical observation (this was the Lettrist term for the human effects of the environment).

Street names comprised the most official aspect of the city’s verbal order, but they weren’t the only words posted there. Perhaps the most recognizable Situationist slogan of all—NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS (NEVER WORK)—first appeared on a wall in the rue de Seine in early 1953, scrawled by the young Lettrist Guy Debord, who left it there for all to see, taunting passersby on their way to work. On other blocks one could read alternate Lettrist tags: LET US LIVE, THE ETHER IS FOR SALE FOR NOTHING, LONG LIVE THE EPHEMERAL, FREE THE PASSIONS.³⁵ Although not especially sophisticated statements, they were chalked on the city’s walls with programmatic intention. In a 1955 issue of *Potlatch*, the Lettrists defended their use of graffiti as “add[ing] to the intrinsic significance of those streets—when they have one to start with. These inscriptions,” they explained, “[were] meant to make a whole range of impressions, from psychogeographical insinuation to plain and simple subversion.” The text concluded with a list of phrases to be inscribed on the walls of specific streets, where they would have the strongest impact on local pedestrians. For the little-known, psychogeographically rich and lamentably imperiled rue Sauvage, in the 13th arrondissement: IF WE DON’T DIE HERE, WILL WE GO ANY FURTHER? For rue d’Aubervilliers in the 18th and 19th, where the Lettrists often went wandering in the wee hours: REVOLUTION BY NIGHT. And with the intention of striking at the working

classes, across the 19th and 20th and near Renault factories: YOU ARE SLEEPING WITH THE BOSS.³⁶

Chalked slogans were not the only means by which they hoped to radicalize and alter the pedestrian's experience of walking through a particular part of the city. In May 1955 *Potlatch* reported that the Lettrist leaflet *Construisez vous-mêmes une petite situation sans avenir* (Build yourself a small situation with no future) had been posted in places that were found to be psychogeographically favorable. Seeking to extend the slogan's reach, the editors invited interested parties to collect placards at their headquarters and paste them around town.³⁷ The city was not a blank slate for the Lettrists, but it was a slate nonetheless, to be used whenever possible as a means via which to change Paris and the lives of all those who passed through it unquestioningly every day.

Paris Transformed

The Paris of the 1950s and '60s was seething and morphing under immense pressures related to population growth and rapid modernization—changes in everyday life that explain the intellectual and artistic focus developed at the time by the Lettrists and the Situationists, as well as academics like Lefebvre. Between 1945 and 1960, more than one million people migrated from the provinces to the city, alongside a smaller but substantial contingent of foreigners from North Africa, Spain, and Portugal. Paris grew abnormally dense (142 people per acre versus one-third that amount in London) and, with a housing crisis dating to World War II, the poor and immigrant segments of the agglomeration found themselves displaced to new projects in the suburbs, where some 60 percent of the population lived, subject to isolation, lack of services, and increasingly long commutes.³⁸

Meanwhile, French modernization was proceeding at break-neck pace, with large appliances appearing suddenly, as if out of nowhere, in French homes and streets thanks to the Marshall Plan. The standardized apartment became a site for individual consumption; the car a means of transport between home and work.³⁹ An advertising fragment collaged into *Fin de Copenhague*, an artist's book made by Asger Jorn and Debord in 1957, gives a sense of this promise—in English, for full effect:

What do *you* want? Better and cheaper food? Lots of new clothes? A dream home with all the latest comforts and labour-saving devices? A new car ... a motor-launch ... a light aircraft of your own? Whatever you want, it's coming your way—plus greater leisure for enjoying it all. With electronics, automation and nuclear energy, we are entering the new Industrial Revolution which will supply our every need, easily ... quickly ... cheaply ... abundantly.

Immediately underneath, in bold, jaunty script, came an ironic retort, in Debord's mother tongue: "... et voilà votre vie transformée!" (... there you go, your life transformed).⁴⁰

Amid this immense influx of people and objects, the spatial structure of the city itself underwent radical and abrupt changes equivalent in scale to those enacted by Haussmann in the nineteenth century. One government study of the mid-1970s concluded that between 1954 and 1974, 24 percent of Paris's buildable surface was either demolished or reconstructed—including parkland destroyed because of its "insufficient" use.⁴¹ If much of this was done in the name of new, efficient housing, more was done in the name of the automobile, to attend to the increase of cars in the Paris region. As Debord observed as early as 1955, and



Henri Cartier-Bresson, *1st arrondissement, Quai des Tuileries*, Paris, 1956. Photograph, gelatin silver print. Reproduced in Guy Debord's *Panegyric* (1997).

with a tone of ironic neutrality, “Today urbanism’s main problem is ensuring the smooth circulation of a rapidly increasing quantity of motor vehicles.”⁴² From a count of five hundred thousand on the eve of World War II, the number of automobiles in the Paris region had doubled by 1960 and doubled again in 1965; meanwhile the city’s street surface had increased only 10 percent since the turn of the century. Huge amounts of time, money, and space went toward making Paris a more car-friendly city, even though, despite its vast increase in numbers, the car was mostly a social symbol rather than a necessary commodity.⁴³ The boulevard Périphérique, an expressway with alarming accident rates, was laid down along the route of the city’s old fortifications—the Zone so beloved by earlier generations of the avant-garde, including the Surrealists. The river quays became highways, first with a project on the Left Bank, begun in 1956, and later on the Right Bank, where thirteen kilometers of car lanes were plunged through the heart of Paris, replacing one of its most treasured promenades—a tree-lined cobblestone walkway running along the edge of the Seine, as pictured in a photograph by Henri-Cartier Bresson and reproduced without attribution by Debord in his *Panegyric*, an elegiac posthumous volume full of scathing critiques of the new Paris. “To see the banks of the Seine now,” he wrote, “is to see our grief: nothing is found there now save the bustling columns of an anthill of motorized slaves.”⁴⁴

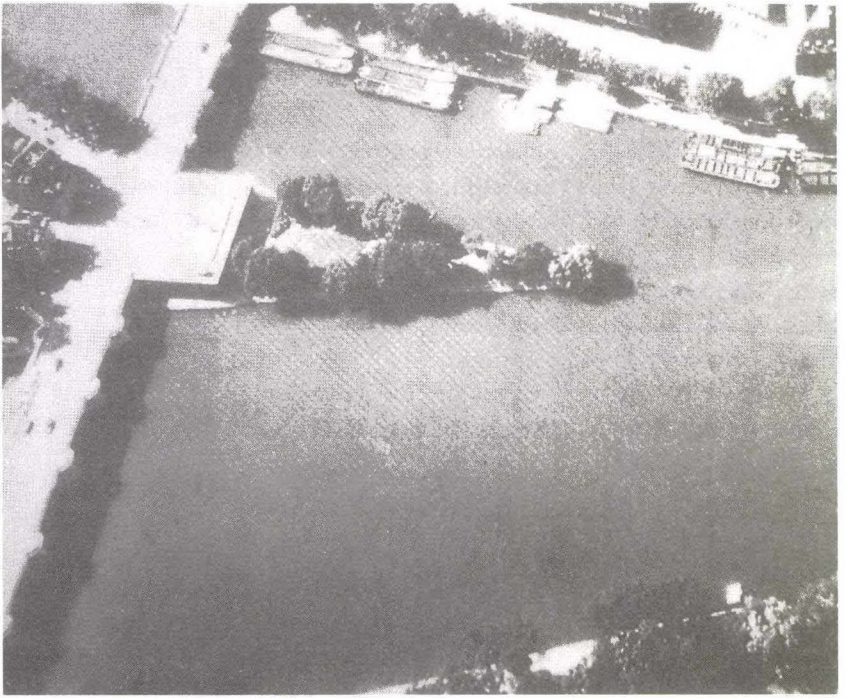
In a further effort to deal with traffic, city planners eliminated parts of sidewalks on boulevard Montparnasse, avenue des Ternes, boulevard Malesherbes, boulevard Haussmann, and boulevard de Magenta—effecting with this last yet another erasure of the city’s vanguard past, the site of one of André Breton and Nadja’s magnetic walks. The result was less space for pedestrians, fewer trees, and



Ed van der Elsken, A group of Cathérimettes celebrate the feast of Saint Catherine, Place Vendôme, Paris, 25 November, ca. 1950-54. Photograph, gelatin silver print. Cathérimettes were women who were still unmarried after twenty-five. Many of the photographs that appear in both *Mémoires* and *Sur le passage...* were taken by the young Dutch photographer, who arrived in Paris in 1949 and immediately fell in with the Saint-Germain-des-Prés crowd. He documented their daily lives, eventually publishing them as the semi-fictionalized photo-essay *Love on the Left Bank* (London: André Deutsch, 1956).

no more sidewalks in the old sense, just a pragmatic strip of raised pavement. Meanwhile, whatever surfaces weren't being given over to car circulation became devoted to car storage: beginning in 1949, parking was allowed on public thoroughfares despite public laws expressly forbidding it.⁴⁵ Sidewalks and plazas turned into virtual parking lots—as demonstrated in a contemporaneous photograph of Place Vendôme by Ed van der Elsken—further displacing pedestrians and asserting the rights of cars over people. Looking back on this development in the mid-1970s, a librarian at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris could comment: “Today the great majority of Parisians enjoy sufficient comfort to find at home the varied services which the street used to furnish. [...] As to the slight incidents of the street, they seem pale next to the televised news. [In any case] the noise and the gasoline fumes will have discouraged the stroller who would like to relax and breathe on a bench!”⁴⁶

It was a situation anticipated and virulently condemned by the Lettrists and the Situationists from the early '50s onward, as they not only claimed walking as a revolutionary tactic but raised serious protests against what they believed to be the alienating and spectacularizing effect of a city given over to the needs of cars rather than those of people, to functionalism rather than a more complex and playful life. They saw how “opportunities for uprisings or meaningful encounters” were being eliminated via the combination of isolating modernist housing units, streets given over to motorized traffic, and constant surveillance—essentially an effort to “do away with streets,” a conclusion they reinforced by quoting the chief of police, who'd observed that street demonstrations were no longer compatible with traffic requirements.⁴⁷ They saw the promotion of the car as a piece of capitalist market propaganda, and understood commuting as an extension of labor, with a corresponding



Photograph of Place Dauphine, Paris, ca. 1953–57, as reproduced in Guy Debord's *Panegyric* (1997).

reduction of free time, insisting instead, “We must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as pleasure”—a demand most easily fulfilled by going on foot, adventurously.⁴⁸ They promoted popular “resistances” as political acts against the spectacle and “the machines of consumption,” describing the August 1961 attack made by striking French miners on cars parked in front of a management building (most of which belonged to their own working-class colleagues) as “a gesture of self-defense against the central object of consumer alienation”—namely, the car.⁴⁹ And they railed vociferously against the transformation of Paris into a giant parking lot, where the Place Dauphine—the crotch of Paris according to Breton and no less adored by Debord, who included multiple photographs of it in his *Panegyric*, though out of a different kind of desire—becomes nothing more than an underground parking garage, just one example among many. The plan for this abominable new Paris, a Paris of decreasing adventure and difference, appears courtesy a schematic diagram by urbanist Janusz Deryng, published in *Internationale situationniste*. According to the journal caption: “In Januz [*sic*] Deryng’s ‘garage-nucleus’ project, ‘the parking lot determines the town plan’: towns are built around cathedrals for parking: and each of the 100 million French citizens De Gaulle anticipates by the end of the century will have no problem finding a spot for his car.”⁵⁰ Thank goodness.

A sole exception to this anti-car position existed in terms of an appreciation for taxis. Since these were not private vehicles but rather individualized forms of public transportation, the Lettrists discerned in them a certain promise for freedom of movement, noting how useful taxis could be on a *dérive*, allowing participants to suddenly shift the terrain of exploration or go directly to a specific location. Championing an idea proposed by a French journalist that

personal autos be forbidden within city limits and replaced by a large fleet of moderately priced taxis, Michèle Bernstein pointed out how such a development would amplify the adventurous possibilities of everyday movement, allowing “large sectors of the population to break free from the routes imposed by the Metrobus and enjoy a hitherto rather expensive means of *dérive*.”⁵¹

Thus it wasn't the car per se the Lettrists and the Situationists revolted against, but rather its role in the streamlining and compartmentalizing of urban life, and the way in which its particular form of isolated displacement had come to symbolize modern mobility. This mobility was physical but also economic: the car was “the commodity form as such in the twentieth century,” indicative of the state of the economy, modernization, and new methods of production.⁵² In their retrenchment, the LI and the SI made a break from earlier vanguard idealizations of modernity as engine-driven mobility—the dashed, fragmented surfaces of Impressionist pictures and the speedy, dynamic visions of the Italian Futurists—seeing instead the dystopian, totalizing reality that had resulted from the promise of the machine. In response, however, they never called for stasis. On the contrary, free, human-centered movement continued to hold a central place of importance: Pinot Gallizio, who yearly gave a piece of his land in Alba over to a Gypsy encampment, has been described as a “scholar of nomadism,” and Constant, the SI architect, was inspired by these same Gypsies in his original thinking about a Situationist city.⁵³ Thus while Situationist Paris, as well as the idealist Situationist city, called for a moving body to know its disregarded corners, it had little use for a motorized or sheltered one: speed and isolation diminish observational and experiential capacity. A taxi could help get you somewhere, but once there, abandon the vehicle and take to the street. Debord, for

all his adventuring, mostly kept to a very walkable segment of the city. As he explained in *Panegyric*: “The greater part of the time I lived in Paris; specifically, within the triangle defined by the intersections of rue Saint-Jacques and rue Royer-Collard, rue Saint-Martin and rue Grenata, and rue du Bac and rue de Commailles. Indeed, I spent my days and nights in this limited space and the narrower border zone that is its immediate extension—most often on its eastern side, more rarely on its north-western side.”⁵⁴

Devotion to one’s neighborhood, idealization of nomadism, and rejection of urban and vehicular modernity—how to make sense of the Situationist intersection of these seemingly conflicting ideas? One way of understanding this convergence is in terms of nostalgia, though not the kind of nostalgia that mourns for a picturesque past that never really existed and wishes to turn the clock back to that lost time only to freeze it. On the contrary, the critical nostalgia that social geographer Alastair Bonnett recognizes as Situationist is one deeply rooted in reflexive thinking, acting not as a conservative standstill but a catalyst for action against the status quo.⁵⁵ If they found certain aspects worth preserving in earlier models of urbanism—the organic wholeness of a city where life and work were not separated by an hour-long commute and where the street served as a ground for working-class festivity and encounter—it was out of a desire for a better future, not the recognition of a more perfect past. And if they turned to the age-old action of walking as a means of reclaiming and remaking modern Paris, it was not because they wished to live in a preindustrial town, or fancied themselves itinerant nomads. Walking, especially in the form of the *dérive*, forced one intimately into contact with the city as it was being lived and as it could be lived, absent the refrain of *métro, boulot, métro, dodo*.

Defining the Terms of Situationist Walking, or What Is a Dérive?

“What are you working on, exactly? I have no idea.”

“Reification,” he answered.

“It’s an important job,” I added.

“Yes, it is,” he said.

“I see,” Carol observed with admiration. “Serious work, at a huge desk cluttered with thick books and papers.”

“No,” said Gilles. “I walk. Mainly I walk.”⁵⁶

This dialogue takes place between three of the characters in Michèle Bernstein’s 1960 novel, *Tous les cheveux du roi* (*All the King’s Horses*). Geneviève, the narrator, and Gilles are loosely based on Bernstein and Debord; Carol is Gilles’s fictional lover. Though buried in a ninety-page novel—a parodic take on *Les liaisons dangereuses*, the 1782 classic and 1959 hit film, written to pay the bills—this passage has become one of the great summaries of the Situationist project, at least in the form in which it was later adapted. In 1966, as part of a student demonstration at the University of Strasbourg, pro-Situ student André Bertrand produced a comic strip called *Le retour de la colonne Durutti* in which a version of the conversation between Carol, Geneviève, and Gilles is spoken by a pair of mounted cowboys. By now one of the most frequently reproduced bits of SI ephemera, this appropriated comic, with its doubly appropriated dialogue, lays out the SI program at its most basic: reification plus walking. Or, more expansively: to see through the smooth facade of functionalist capitalism, it is necessary to move beyond the university and a reliance on books, to get out from behind the table and go out into the world, and the simplest way to do this is to walk.

But what did that most basic of actions mean? How did they do it, with whom, when, where, and why? As with their Surrealist predecessors, walking was an integral part of the Lettrists' lives long before it was theorized as a tactical component of a larger revolutionary program. Though the first of the walks that they would come to think of as *dérives* took place in 1952–53 among the young Lettrists Debord, Ivan Chtcheglov (aka Gilles Ivain), Patrick Straram, Jean-Michel Mension, Gil J Wolman, Mohamed Dahou, and various associates, the term itself did not appear in print until the release of the eighth issue of *Potlatch* on August 10, 1954. There, in an unsigned article titled “36 rue des Morillons,” the writer(s) looked favorably upon those who have searched for the Grail, not because of the object itself but the attitude of searching.⁵⁷ Never mind the religious bent of that earlier quest: it was a *DÉRIVE*—written in all caps to highlight the introduction of an important new term—admirable for its playful wandering, its belief in the marvelous voyage, its love of speed, and its relative geography.

Many more mentions of the term follow, including various efforts at a definition. These range from the simple—“The *dérive* is a technique for moving around without a goal. It is based on the influence that *décor* exerts”—to the poetic:

dériver divert water (13th cent., Job; gram. Fig. etc.), *dérivation* (1377, L.) *-atif* (15th cent.), from Latin *drivare*, *-atio*, *-ativus*, in a proper and fig. sense (from *rivus*, stream).

dériver remove from the water's edge (14th cent. B), camp. of *rive* (water's edge).

dériver (mar.) drift (16th cent., A. d'Aubigné, var. of *driver*), infl. By Eng. *drive* (push). Der: *dérive*, *-atio* (1690, Furetière).

dériver undo what is riveted. See *river*.⁵⁸

Not until November 1956, three years after the first *dérives* were known to have taken place, did an extensive definition finally appear. In Debord's "Theory of the *Dérive*," he explains the two-part nature of drifting and lays out a basic series of instructions for the novice *dériviste* to follow. He begins: "Among the various situationist techniques is the *dérive*, a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll. In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there." The *dérive* has two overlapping goals: "emotional disorientation" via ambulatory play, and "studying a terrain" in terms of its psychological influence.⁵⁹ These are the basics, but as with most systems, especially those that have taken on legendary qualities over the years, much remains to be clarified.

1. The *Dérive* as Playful-Constructive Behavior

"The first true *dérives* were in no way distinct from what we did in the ordinary way. We went on walks from time to time." From this rather unassuming and nonchalant comment by Jean-Michel Mension, one might gather that *dérives* were not so different from a typical stroll in the city. This conclusion would only be correct, however, if the people doing the walking were in any way average. They weren't. They rejected everything considered decent and necessary

in bourgeois society: they didn't work, didn't study, had no money, rarely knew where they were going to sleep, and mostly got by through thieving, conning, or hitting people up. Their attire, as described in a tabloid report on Mension and Lettrist associate Auguste (Fred) Hommel's arrest for stealing parked cars, was "very curious, including apple-green corduroy pants and ridiculously thick-soled shoes. To complete the picture, wild mops of thick—and possibly inhabited—hair." They drank immense quantities of alcohol; smoked a lot of hash, which at the time was common only among North Africans; and took ether, a cheap, legal, mind-blowing, and foul-smelling pharmaceutical. Some of them were downright thuggish, verbally and physically attacking strangers and enemies alike in the street.⁶⁰

The place of walking in this debauched milieu was as might be expected. Forbidden places held a deep appeal for being off-limits to the general public and consequently forgotten by them. Sneaking in and wandering around meant the breaking of rules and the possibility of knowledge recuperation. They took to "slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition" and spent other evenings drifting through the catacombs—accessible thanks to the work of Pierre-Joël Berlé, who'd received a tip about an entrance in exchange for agreeing to steal the lead from the underground lamps. Mostly, though, they moved from café to café becoming progressively drunker, making scenes, taking detours, wandering off to the Chinese or Spanish neighborhood for cheap food or a change of environment, and getting lost on the long journey home. Inebriation led the way. "Don't forget," writes Mension, "we were drunk, and distances are greater when you are drunk: you don't walk in a straight line, so ..."⁶¹

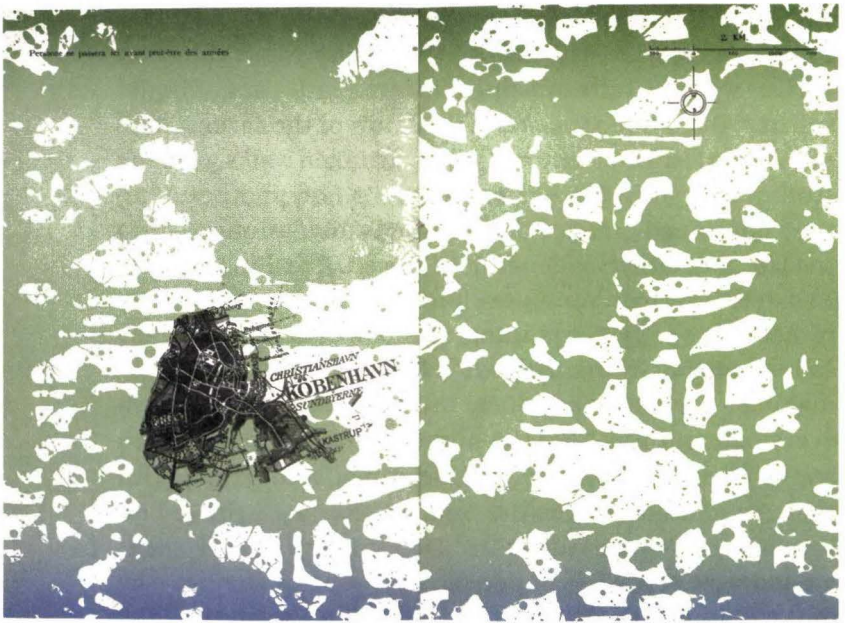
So: the existing accounts of *dérives*—in novels, artists' books, collages, maps, reports, and memoirs—are in great part records of extreme intoxication. It is no wonder that

most scholarly mentions of the *dérive* rarely give a sense of what actually happened on those journeys. The most prominent of the primary documents, published in conjunction with his “Theory of the *Dérive*,” is Debord’s “Two Accounts.”⁶² It tells the story of two drifts, the earlier of which exemplifies the goal of “emotional disorientation”—the result of the Lettrists’ initial experiments—the later the aim of “studying a terrain”—a more theoretical aspect developed subsequently. The former stretches from the evening of December 25, 1953, into the first few days of the new year and involves Chtcheglov, Gaëtan M. Langlais, and Debord. The three Lettrists make repeated trips to an Algerian bar in the rue Xavier-Privas, where they meet a mysterious West Indian man who tells them various not uninteresting lies about his travels and relations, and also threatens them. Next they find themselves in the middle of a dangerous, possibly drug-related dispute between the bar regulars and a group of Algerian gangsters from Pigalle. They become dead-drunk. Later, in a Jewish bar on rue Vieille du Temple, they again find themselves in the midst of a threatening scenario, when a man enters and addresses them menacingly and at length in Yiddish. They leave and, convinced they’re being followed, circumnavigate the city trying to give their pursuers the slip. This involves finding hidden staircases, rushing through traffic, dashing through La Samaritaine department store, and making rapid subway changes. On the whole, it is unclear if these events are real or if the friends are seriously paranoid; nevertheless, Debord’s style of writing conveys the narrative as if it were a completely factual report.

Signs of inebriation can be found in less overt traces too. The colorful ink splattered and pooled across the pages of *Fin de Copenhague* and *Mémoires*, the artists’ books co-produced by Debord and Jorn, can be read as vomit and spilled alcohol, especially in those images where the marks

splash across maps of Copenhagen, London, or Paris, linking, as it were, the acts of traversing those cities on dérives with the state of being under the influence of liquid spirits.⁶³ But while *Mémoires* is a memoir of the earliest days of the Lettrist International, when drunken walks were the stuff of everyday, *Fin de Copenhague* is not, and points to their continued practice of inebriated ambulation well into the late '50s. Other evidence does as well. Recalling a trip to Brussels with Jorn for an exhibition at the Taptoë gallery in February of 1957, founding SI member Ralph Rumney tells of getting drunk with some local university students, making a psychogeographical tour of the city, stopping in every bar, and finishing the night at the Manneken Pis, a statue of a little boy urinating. Rumney, who had no idea that the monument was the pride of the city, urinated on it to his companions' delight.⁶⁴ Debord, for his part, spent a good deal of his life under the influence of alcohol—he devotes an entire chapter to drinking in *Panegyric*—and some of that same time on foot. In a letter to Pinot Gallizio in the spring of 1958, he casually added: "Here, the ambiance of relentless work, broken only by a very drunken dérive from Thursday evening to Friday morning."⁶⁵

Intoxication may be disreputable but that doesn't mean it lacks a distinguished pedigree. Debord, who was well-read in the classics, considered the dériviste's great precursor to be Thomas de Quincey, the English writer whose autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822) examined the author's addiction to opium and its psychological effects. Key for Debord was de Quincey's discussion of his own condition in terms of endless wandering through London, making him a forefather of the dérive not just in terms of walking under the influence but of being highly attuned to the effects of the city simultaneously. In a 1959 Situationist essay on urbanism, a selection from



Double-page spread from Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Fin de Copenhague: Conseiller technique pour le détournement*: G. E. Debord (1957). All of the text and images in this artist book were cut from publications bought on a single trip to a newsstand in Copenhagen. The colorful splashes were made by Jorn who, standing atop a ladder, dripped lithographic ink directly onto the printing plates. The covers were made from flong, a papier-mâché mould, impressed with newspaper advertisements.

Confessions gives a sense of how close de Quincey's experiences in nineteenth-century London were to the Lettrists' in 1950s Paris: "Seeking ambitiously for a northwest passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems as alleys [...]. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these terrae incognitae, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London."⁶⁶

The first part of the quotation, which does not appear in *Internationale situationniste*—perhaps because the SI was by then more interested in promoting the *dérive*'s investigatory aspects—gives an even better sense of the parallels across the century:

I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages. [...] Some of these rambles led me to great distances; for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage ...⁶⁷

Here de Quincey conveys a sense of the inebriated individual's openness to setting forth in whatever direction, along whatever route, for however long and far as the city itself demanded—a state crucial to the functioning of the *dérive*, both in terms of playful disorientation and investigation. *Mémoires* contains various fragments from Baudelaire that reference *Confessions*, particularly the part of the story

where Thomas has returned to London and is wandering its streets in search of Ann, the young prostitute who is his only friend and with whom he has explored the city. Ann has disappeared, so London brought the young couple together but has finally kept them apart—an early example of the contemporary urban alienation the SI would critique.⁶⁸ The story of Thomas and Ann also appears in the SI essay as an example of the emotional problems and possibilities of a changing environment, an example importantly situated in nineteenth-century London, “the first urban result of the industrial revolution.” English literature of the time, it is argued, reveals an awareness of this changing terrain, de Quincey foremost among its practitioners.⁶⁹

If de Quincey stands as the *dérive*'s eminent, opium-eating forefather, his example suggests a pair of notable if not entirely direct descendants. The artist Francis Alÿs, whose *Walking a Painting* was discussed earlier, spent a week in 1996 ambling through the city of Copenhagen under the influence of a different drug each day. Unlike de Quincey's or Debord's experiences of inebriated ambulation, *Narcotourism* was, according to Alÿs, “about being physically present in a place, while mentally elsewhere.”⁷⁰ The experiment—which involved the ingestion of spirits, hashish, cocaine, speed, ecstasy, valium, and heroin—was thus less about using drugs to tune into the hidden contours of the city than to escape them, getting high to take a vacation from the city without ever having to leave it. For all the Situationist and Lettrist criticism of tourism, the idea of playing traveler within the confines of one's own urban environment subverts the order of urban experience, treating the city as a place of discovery. That said, Alÿs's focus on the ability of the mind to transcend the body's surroundings ties his experiment more closely to the Surrealists, though they too were deeply suspicious of tourism.

Then there's British author Will Self, who in 2007–8 wrote a column titled "Psychogeography" for the *Independent* and the *New York Times* blog *Necessary Steps*. A related article in the *Times* explains how walking has become a panacea for Self, who "used to be a prodigious drinker and drug-taker, famous for late-night altercations, [and his] not always coherent public appearances."⁷¹ Since going straight, Self has redirected some of the energy he used to expend under the influence toward walking. "Alcohol and drugs tend to keep you from taking walks," Self notes. "Or at least walks of the right kind." He doesn't clarify what he means by "the right kind," but it is instructive to note that the walks he does take are hardly conventional. Indeed, the impetus for the *Times* article was an epic twenty-six-mile walk Self undertook from John F. Kennedy International Airport in outer Queens to Manhattan after arriving on a flight from London the night before. Eschewing the standard subway, taxi, or hired car, the author instead set out on foot, traversing a nighttime expressway with no curbs (to get to his hotel), sauntering by an elaborate Christmas display in South Ozone Park (a neighborhood rarely seen by visitors to the city, never mind Manhattanites), and wending his way past a church featuring a Sunday-morning "Apocalypse" service amid the projects and vacant lots of East New York and Brownsville. Determined to find the exact spot along Eastern Parkway where a black and Hispanic neighborhood transformed into an Orthodox Jewish one, Self makes it clear that a dedicated psychogeographer can manage without the help of intoxicants. But since Self has replaced drugs with walking, his insistence that he's "not addicted," that he doesn't "need to *score* a walk" strikes a curiously defensive tone, suggesting that walking is in fact akin to drug taking, offering, just like a drug, respite from the dullness of standard living.

This forms a central theme in the most extensive known account of a *dérive*, a novel written by Patrick Straram circa 1953, until recently believed lost. *Les bouteilles se couchent* takes place over the course of a single Friday night in early March 1953 and follows the wanderings of Texlor, Straram's fictionalized double, through the streets and cafés of Lettrist Paris.⁷² He casually introduces people whose names will by now be familiar—Jean-Michel, Ivan, Joël—and, leaving one bar, walks to a nearby bistro. Guy is there, with some girl, quietly getting drunk. It is eleven o'clock, then midnight when Texlor goes back out to the street. The wine has gone to his head and he finds himself walking in "a labyrinth of phantasmagorical colors and forms, incapable of absorbing them." He is somewhere between being drunk and passing out, a state he describes as "a period of rare intensity, driven along by unrestricted wandering. One can still roughly recognize objects and people. But, with a certainty of soon muddling them into an indissoluble fog, one tries to register them, in an ironic effort at simulated equilibrium."⁷³ What could be more useful for the *dérive* than this unique level of mobile attention, aware and unsuppressed, delirious yet reflexive? Texlor continues on, the mystique of the night enveloping him. On the boulevard Saint-Michel, he hallucinates, spasmodically spinning around in a rainbow of colored lights and bodily sensations. Further on he encounters some drunk friends, shares more drink with them, and together they walk along, polishing off a few bottles of wine and engaging in a loony discussion about the properties of cement and horses in a bathtub. After breaking a glass at the next bar, they move on to Chez Moineau, a favorite Lettrist haunt. But not for long: soon enough, Texlor is out on the street again, feeling "the grip of a drunken night embrace him in its imaginary flora."⁷⁴

In a section that recalls the nautical metaphor of de Quincey's northwest passage, Texlor finds himself, come five in the morning, among a group of inebriated friends pretending to be the crew of a ship navigating the waters of the rue du Four—after all, he explains, it is March, the season of flooding. They name their vessel *Mascara 13°*, after an Algerian wine with high alcohol content, and use it to brave a stormy, murky way, full of obstacles. The crew understands one another and the marine situation so completely they need barely speak. But it is hard going: the sailors are tired; they're holding one another up. They have no idea how long they've been at sea. Finally they decide to abandon ship and take a canoe up the street to the metro.

After a few more adventures, some absinthe, and a nap on a bench in the Mabillon metro station, Texlor's story ends later that morning with the hair of the dog and a stroll: "He walked, calmly, while everything moved around him, strange but no longer full of secrets."⁷⁵ It had been quite a *dérive*, integral to a bohemian life committed to experimental states of being amid the everyday. It seems potentially endless, however hard it might be to imagine that such wanderings could be maintained indefinitely without serious harm to the self.

Indeed, the notion of a "continuous *dérive*" was promoted by Ivan Chtcheglov in his "Formulary for a New Urbanism," a legendary text written in 1953 but not published until 1958, when it was considered significant enough to be included in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste*. He describes an imaginary city in which the principle activity of the inhabitants will be drifting amid an ever-changing landscape of complete disorientation.⁷⁶ Chtcheglov later repudiated this notion, claiming that "the continual *dérive* is dangerous to the extent that the individual, having gone too far (not without bases, but ...) without defenses, is threatened

with explosion, dissolution, dissociation, disintegration. And thence the relapse into what is termed ‘ordinary life,’ that is to say, in reality, into ‘petrified life.’” He noted by way of proof: “In 1953–1954 we dérivé for three or four months; that’s the extreme limit, the critical point. It’s a miracle it didn’t kill us.”⁷⁷ They had reasons for believing such risks worth taking, as a deleted passage from the original “Formulary” makes clear. Here Chtcheglov explained that certain characters, like heroes and priests, had traditionally been given the task of living *en dérivant*, acting as specialists whose adventures could be experienced vicariously through projection and identification. The *dérive*, he concluded, thus has the potential to replace Mass and benefit the collective—leading it was the magnanimous role he envisioned for himself and his fellow Lettrists.⁷⁸

If the debauched beginnings of the *dérive* still seem somewhat predictably bohemian, an unconvincing origin for one of the central tactics of a vanguard movement, the SI offered their own account of the relationship between their theories and their way of life. “We unconditionally support all forms of liberated mores, everything that the bourgeois or bureaucratic scum call debauchery,” they proclaimed. “It is obviously out of the question that we should pave the way for the revolution of everyday life with asceticism.”⁷⁹ Imagine, too, the effect that the Lettrists would have had on those who witnessed their very public antics. If their clothes and hair were bizarre, they were also sometimes explicitly propagandistic: Mension was famous for wearing a pair of dirty white painter’s pants that made him a walking Lettrist billboard, with text written up and down the legs, advertising Debord’s film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* and proclaiming: L’INTERNATIONALE LETTRISTE NE PASSERA PAS (The Lettrist International will not blow over). Apart from the general ruckus they caused when drunk and rowdy and

moving through the streets, easy enough to imagine but also testified to continuously and with pride, there was in addition the scandal of white French youths cavorting in North African and other immigrant and ethnic neighborhoods, a rupture with bourgeois norms that would later find more coherent expression in the anti-colonialist tracts published regularly in their journals. As Debord reflected in *Panegyric*, “Our only public activities, which remained rare and brief in the early years, were meant to be completely unacceptable: at first, primarily due to their form; later, as they acquired depth, primarily due to their content.”⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the *dérive*'s revolutionary aspect only begins with its debauched origins. As the *dérive* continued to be refined alongside its practitioners' ideas, its radical possibilities were more consciously recognized, articulated, and expanded, to the point that Debord could reflect, in 1978, “We did not seek the formula for overturning the world in books, but in wandering. Ceaselessly drifting for days on end, none resembling the one before. Astonishing encounters, remarkable obstacles, grandiose betrayals, perilous enchantments—nothing was lacking in this quest for a different, more sinister Grail, which no one else had ever sought.”⁸¹ Debord didn't specify the ways in which the *dérive* contributed to their monumental goals, but each of its capacities that will be examined below—the *dérive* as play, despectacularization, confrontation with racism and sexism, and *détournement*—depends in part on understanding it in terms of agency. Remaking the world was only possible by being an active participant, and the *dérive* was one of the most accessible means for doing so. As scholar Greil Marcus put it, “For as long as [the *dérive*] lasted, you were in the world as if you were changing it, and there were intimations of utopia everywhere you looked.”⁸² That one could hope to accomplish this as a mere pedestrian was radical, but one

could not be just any pedestrian. As the editors of *Potlatch* made clear: “The adventurer is one who makes adventures happen, rather than one to whom adventures happen.”⁸³ But how exactly to make those adventures happen?

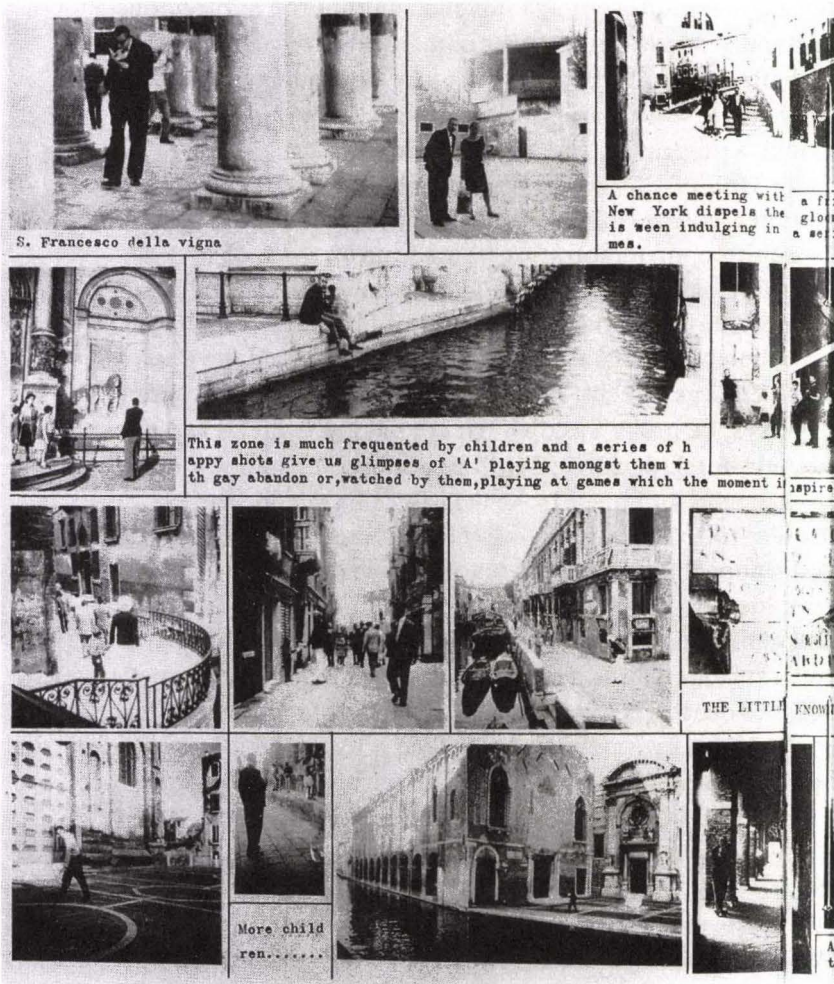
One place to start was with play. The playfulness of drifting was of the utmost seriousness, important enough for Debord to describe the *dérive* as the “application of [the] will to playful creation” in his speech at Cosio.⁸⁴ As noted above, the Lettrists and the Situationists owed their understanding of play to the historian Johan Huizinga, but they radicalized his ideas in their desire to expand playfulness to the whole of life. And they made the necessity of play clear time and again, in bold statements, experimental activities, and their material records.

They proposed games that anyone might play, like the “possible rendezvous” detailed in “Theory of the *Dérive*.” With the goal of inducing behavioral disorientation, a subject is sent alone to a specific place at a designated time. With no one to wait for, the subject naturally observes her surroundings and perhaps even engages passersby (who could, ostensibly, be equally unknowing players of the same game). She might meet someone. She might call someone up and ask for another location, which she’ll then have to go to. The possibilities, the reader is told, are limitless.⁸⁵ There were games played to turn unavoidable transit into something more adventurous, as when the attendees of the fall 1960 SI conference in London had to find their way, without directions, to the British Sailors Society in the heart of the East End, where a room had been booked for their purposes.⁸⁶ Some games manifested Huizinga’s notion of play in terms of community, of “being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation [...] of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms.”⁸⁷ See, for example, “La *dérive* de Polydore Bouffieux,” a charming

but obtuse photo-collage novella wherein the anonymous *dériveurs* travel through unnamed territory looking for tridents, encountering along the way signage, graffiti, fields, dead trees, stone bas-reliefs, a café, a fox, a pig, statues, a urinal, a doghouse, and a farm with cows.⁸⁸

One of the greatest game players of all was Ralph Rumney, sole member of the London Psychogeographical Committee, an organization he made up on the spot at Cosio. Lost in Cologne, without a chart or any understanding of German, he used a map of London to find what he was looking for: Daniel Spoërr's artwork-cum-restaurant and the Fluxus artist George Brecht. Drunk one night in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, he and a Swedish friend, having been kicked out of their hotel, decided to split up, one to the left, the other to the right, and meet in New Delhi. His friend made it all the way to India, only to find that Rumney had got to Sicily and stopped. Rumney even made a game of grave situations: after his wife Pegeen committed suicide, her mother, Peggy Guggenheim, had Rumney followed by private detectives while trying to build a case against him for aiding and abetting her death. (It was eventually dropped.) Since they were trailing him everywhere, he walked a lot, wearing the PIs out "by making them go on *dérives* without knowing it."⁸⁹

"The Leaning Tower of Venice," the most fabled of Rumney's *dérives*, presented a psychogeographical investigation of the floating city.⁹⁰ The first page declares: "It is our thesis that cities should embody a built in play factor. We are studying here a play-environment relationship." Rumney achieved this by documenting the trajectory of his friend "A," the Beat writer Alan Ansen, a tall man wearing a very large white boater that made it easy to spot him in the photo essay's tiny photos—a game-within-the-game for the viewer to play. As A wandered through the less-familiar parts of the city, he eschewed not only typical tourist behavior but



S. Francesco della vigna

A chance meeting with a friend from New York dispels the gloom. He is seen indulging in a series of games.

This zone is much frequented by children and a series of happy shots give us glimpses of 'A' playing amongst them with a gay abandon or, watched by them, playing at games which the moment inspires.

THE LITTLE KNOWN

More children.....

Detail of Ralph Rumney, "The Leaning Tower of Venice," 1957. Photo essay, 20 x 29 cm. "The Leaning Tower of Venice" was produced as a contribution to the first issue of *Internationale situationniste*, but it was never included owing to Rumney's expulsion from the group. After finally being published in 1958 across three issues of *ARK: The Royal College of Art Journal*, it was then lost until 1989, when it turned up in an exhibition, only to be lost again.

also that of any self-respecting adult Venetian: he mounted a stone lion outside the Arsenale, played kickball with a group of kids, crawled over a bridge, and followed the decorative lines of the pavement, among other shenanigans. What makes this game-playing interesting from a psychogeographical perspective is Rumney's claim that A's mischievous conduct was directly influenced by his surroundings, from the very fact of the Venetian location ("But, how would 'A' play in London?" he asks), to a sinister air felt in the region of the Arsenale, a chance meeting with a friend, and the inspirational discovery of the playing children.

Rumney's Venetian experiment exemplified not just the ideal of play but also the goal of de-spectacularization. Debord explained at Cosio how the spectacle, a primary cause of alienation, relies on nonintervention. Any attempt to destroy the spectacle would therefore need to provoke people into action, to turn them from passive actors into active "livers."⁹¹ Rumney achieved this by showing areas of Venice where tourists never went and by suggesting unknown routes through the city. Once learned, this tactic could conceivably have been applied by anyone anywhere, and thus its import was not just limited to one man's games in Venice and the psychogeographical data gathered therewith. Rumney notes in passing that Jorn conducted similar experiments in Denmark, and any number of Situationist *dérives* through Paris might also be considered under this framework, passing as they do through everywhere *but* the Champs-Élysées, the Louvre, or the fancy cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Just as the Lettrists and Situationists walked through the marginal parts of cities, some of them also did so as marginal bodies. Drifting freely through Paris was not a tactic that could be unconditionally practiced by the groups' Moroccan and Algerian members, or, under a different

set of circumstances, their few female associates. A note from the editor appended to Abdelhafid Khatib's "Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles" in *Internationale situationniste* (December 1958) explained that the study was incomplete on a number of fundamental points because its author had been the victim of police rules that, since September of that year, had forbidden North Africans from being out on the street past 9:30 p.m. After two arrests, Khatib had to abandon his study, which could only be conducted at night.⁹² Calling attention to this incident gave a sense of some of the limitations placed on the freedom of movement not just of the North African Lettrists or Situationists but of anyone else in Paris with dark skin—and protested this situation at the same time. It also underlined the oppositional nature of any *dérive* taken by one of these marginal bodies, for daring to stake a claim on the white, patriarchal city of Paris by making a dark self visible as an active, creative, and defiant presence. How this extended to women can be understood in terms of a general atmosphere of sexism perpetrated, for one, by the kind of soft-porn mass-media images the Situationists ironically appropriated in their publications. If those bikini-clad bombshells represented a standard ideal of women, that notion inevitably reflected back on real women, wherever they were, and especially when they were in the vulnerable position of being out on the street at night. For a woman to drift, then, was to reclaim the street and take back the night—long before either of those phrases would become standard cries of the women's movement.*

* Take Back the Night, founded in the 1970s, combats violence against women in part via nighttime rallies and candlelight walks through urban streets. Reclaim the Streets, founded in London in 1991, works to recoup roads for the enjoyment of people, not cars, through street parties; various interest groups, including feminist, gay, and environmental, have used these parties to assert their causes.

A final way in which to understand how the world can be overturned through the playful-constructive aspects of drifting considers the *dérive* in relation to the concept of *détournement* (rerouting). As developed by the LI and later refined by the SI, *détournement* is a method for taking preexisting cultural products and transforming them into something superior.⁹³ Given the plethora of old, traditional, conservative, and otherwise outmoded books, paintings, movies, and clothing (to name a few of the dominant cultural forms), the possibilities for reinvention appear endless and inherently critical—much more so than with production from scratch—because *détournement* always also acts as a testament to the inadequacy of past forms. How this applies to the *dérive* is twofold: first, the *dérive* as “architectural *détournement*,” a remaking of urban space not by building it from the ground up but by drifting through the city with the goal of adventure, transforming it through action and perception from a workaday place to one of encounters.⁹⁴

Second, the *dérive* as a *détournement* of walking itself. Here the definition of *détournement* needs to be expanded such that the notion of cultural production not only includes objects but also acts. That walking constitutes a cultural act should by now require little substantiation, but if the peripatetic adventures of the Surrealists and the Lettrists and the Situationists seem inadequate, consider some of the examples given by Rebecca Solnit in *Wanderlust*, in which she locates the origins of walking as a conscious cultural act in the eighteenth century, when Romantics like Jean-Jacques Rousseau made walking into an aesthetic experience whose history they traced back to Ancient Greece, where Aristotle’s disciples were known as the Peripatetics.⁹⁵ Solnit’s cultural history of walking covers the disciplines of philosophy, literature, and art, and might easily have been expanded to include film as well. If walking in Paris in the 1950s meant going to the

metro, to work, to school, to piano lessons, and home again, then the way that the LI and the SI walked—not knowing where they were going, under the influence of stimulants, following the invisible forces of the city, according to the rules of a game—was nothing less than a *détournement*.

A contemporary descendant of urban *détournement*—both in terms of walking and its effect on architecture—can be found in the style of movement known as parkour. Developed in the early 1990s by French teenager David Belle, parkour (from *le parcours*, French for “route”) is a discipline whose goal is to train the human body and mind to run an elegant, efficient, and improvisational path across any terrain. Parkour videos published on the internet, which have helped to spread it across the world, give a breathtaking sense of what this can mean: leaping off rooftops and over balconies, vaulting barriers, somersaulting from pillars, running up walls, sliding between railings feet first. Although this sounds like acrobatics, all of these actions connect fluidly from one to the other, with no breaks in between, and none are gratuitous: plummeting off a balcony gets the *traceur* (as practitioners are called) to the ground faster than taking the stairs; flying over a wall eliminates the need to go through an inconvenient door. Parkour treats architecture and urban space as an obstacle course to be traversed in a challenging and extraordinary manner. That some of the most electrifying online examples happen in the modernist wastelands of the Paris suburbs and the former Soviet bloc, where abandoned concrete plazas cry out for rejuvenation, suggests a radical means for remaking one’s own failed surroundings.

The history of the discipline is equally telling. Some of the ideas behind parkour can be traced back to French sports theorist Georges Hébert (1875–1957), who believed that modern conveniences like elevators were debilitating.⁹⁶ If this has obvious physiological implications, making for lazy

bodies, it has psychological ones too, in terms of a habituation to functionalism, mechanization, and inflexibility—exactly those aspects of urban planning and architecture that the Situationists protested. Parkour resists these norms of contemporary life because, as Belle explained in an interview with the *New Yorker*: “It’s a method for learning how to move in the world. For finding the liberty men used to have.” Ordinary life and its structures be damned; with enough physical and mental discipline and daring, even a bombed-out building in Beit Lahia, a city in the Gaza Strip, can become a place to express pleasure.

A second contemporary descendant of the *dérive*-as-*détournement* is *Street with a View* (2008), a web project instigated by artists Robin Hewlett and Ben Kinsley as an intervention in Google Street View. Launched in May 2007, Google Street View is a feature of Google Maps that provides viewers with 360° horizontal and 290° vertical panoramic views for many of the world’s streets. For example, typing “36 rue des Morillons, Paris” or “Square des Missions Etrangères, Paris”—to take two addresses mentioned in Lettrist *dérives*—into Google Maps brings up an interactive, prerecorded still image of these places as they exist today. A few clicks of the mouse allow one to “walk” further down the rue des Morillons or around the perimeter of the square. (Entering the square is impossible, however, since the Google Earthmobile, which captures the Street View footage, is a motor vehicle, and the square is limited to pedestrians—an irony not to be overlooked.)

When Hewlett and Kinsley learned that the Earthmobile was scheduled to drive through their Pittsburgh neighborhood, they decided to play an active role in what was recorded. Together with dozens of participants, they staged a series of tableaux along a local street, and for the next few years (until Google updated the view) typing “504



Photograph by Loulou D'Aki for Unicef of parkour in Gaza in 2015. Fahed performs a backflip off the edge of an elevated portion of a destroyed building onto a lower roof, in the city of Beit Lahia, in the Gaza Strip. The building was destroyed during the 2014 hostilities.

Sampsonia Way, Pittsburgh” into Google Maps called up a narrow street inexplicably filled with a high school marching band and lots of confetti.⁹⁷ Further down the street appear festive crowds of people, a (staged) moving-day scene, torn bed sheets hanging out of an upper-story window (who’s escaping what?), a mad scientist garage laboratory, a practicing garage band, a small crowd of marathon runners, a woman wearing a ham suit outside a meat market, a monumental chicken sculpture, a pair of firemen holding a rescue ladder and a stuffed cat, and a medieval battle scene. By refusing to sit passively by, to let their streetscape just be, Hewlitt, Kinsley, and the project’s participants asserted the exuberant life of their neighborhood and of themselves. They literally went out into the street and reclaimed it, and they had the boldness to broadcast their actions across the world as an example of what can be done any day, on any street, even in the face of a powerful new technology that can—but needn’t—reduce life to a homogenous virtual experience.

2. The Dérive as Psychogeographic Study

If the dérive begins in delinquent behavior, it also has a more serious side. The Lettrists saw the street as an adult playground, but they also saw it as a place for observing the effect of the city on its inhabitants. They dubbed this type of investigation “psychogeography,” and Debord gave one of the first definitions of it in 1955: “Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.” The word, he continued, was coined by “an illiterate Kabyle as a general term

for the phenomenon a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953.”⁹⁸ Debord encountered the Algerian man at a bistro on rue Xavier-Privas, a familiar stop on those first dérives, where the Lettrists often went to eat vegetarian cous-cous and smoke hash. They would walk the alleys of the Jardin des Plantes together, comparing each plant with the drugs on which they’d gotten high.⁹⁹ In keeping with these origins, one of the first examples Debord gave of psychogeography began with a terrain more typical of Central Asia than Paris: “It has long been said,” he wrote, “that the desert is monotheistic. Is it illogical or devoid of interest to observe that the district in Paris between place de la Contrescarpe and rue de l’Arbalète conduces rather to atheism, to oblivion, and to the disorientation of habitual reflexes?”¹⁰⁰ Though Debord does not attribute this observation to anyone other than himself, it is easy to imagine it arising on one of the dérives he shared with his nameless acquaintance, as they wandered from one end of the 5th arrondissement to the other.

The environmental factors that might condition such a walk is what psychogeography set out to analyze. According to Debord, this could include “the sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places.”¹⁰¹ To visualize the way in which these influences affected the pedestrian, various metaphors were employed. In an unpublished 1954 text, Ivan Chtcheglov wrote that the Lettrists’ adventures “resemble the magnetized balls of an electric pinball machine, [with] their irresponsible yet calculable trajectories.”¹⁰² A diagram of a Galton machine appeared twice in *Internationale situationniste*, first alongside an article about automation, then a few years later with the

caption “indicator of the path of the *dérive*.”¹⁰³ Invented by German mathematician Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855), the device acts like a pinball machine without the flippers and fun: balls dropped down the center of a board filled with evenly spaced pins land in a row of slots below, and though they inevitably deviate this way or that, most end up near the middle. The results model phenomena that are aggregates of many smaller, independent, and random events. The *dérive*, the editors of the journal suggest, operates likewise, with the pedestrian directed down this street in that mood, mostly in a predictable—and therefore observable—manner.

That said, psychogeography is neither an easy nor a stable subject for study. As the city inevitably changes, so do its effects. The information gathered on a *dérive* is always dated; often it becomes obsolete. In “The Form of a City Changes More Quickly,” the Lettrists offered updates on places previously suggested as sites for *dériving*, sites so dramatically altered that they were longer worth visiting. These included the rue Sauvage, “one of the most beautiful spontaneously psycho-geographical places in Paris,” now blocked off by a massive swath of postal service offices, and the Square des Missions Etrangères, an inner-city park to “be used for receiving visitors, for being stormed by night, and for other psycho-geographical purposes,” now occupied by prefab caravans.¹⁰⁴ They noted as well the fast movement of the red-light district, which had shifted to the border of their own street, the rue Montagne-Sainte-Genieve.

Such observations have since become the stuff of scholarship: urban theorist Kyong Park recently took Detroit as an example of the literal movement that has become an urban trend over the past few decades, in terms of population shifts from city center to suburbs to exurbs. By Park’s calculations, Detroit has over the past thirty-odd years moved a couple of inches *every hour*.¹⁰⁵ Of course,

not all cities change at the same rate all the time—certain political, economic, financial, climatological, or artistic factors can encourage or discourage transformation, good or bad, radical or gradual. But as discussed above, Paris in the 1950s and '60s, even into the '70s, was a city of rapid metamorphosis. By the beginning of the '60s, many of the areas championed by the Lettrists and the Situationists had succumbed to reinvention: the Gare de Lyon was surrounded by office complexes; the Halle aux vins and its charmingly named surrounding streets—rue de Champagne, Préau des eaux-de-vie, and so on—were destroyed and replaced by modernist university buildings. At the end of the decade, the market at Les Halles was moved to the suburbs and its glass-and-steel buildings torn down, while the nearby Beaubourg neighborhood was flattened to make way for the Centre Pompidou.¹⁰⁶ The psychogeographer had no choice but to *dérive* rigorously and often, taking no data for granted.

Given these and other observational challenges, certain directives were recommended. If the more playful aspects of the *dérive* demanded rules only insofar as all games are played by some set of rules, however idiosyncratic, its psychogeographical side necessitated more specific guidance. Gleaned from the experience of past experiments, the following advice appeared in Debord's "Theory of the *Dérive*": Small groups are better, allowing for cross-checking and more objective conclusions. Chance is a necessary but ultimately conservative element since it stems from habit. The urban environment, especially "the great industrially transformed cities—those centers of possibilities and meanings," is the *dérive*'s natural location. The average duration lasts one full day, from waking to sleep, but could conceivably be as short as a few hours or as long as several days. The terrain can extend across an entire large city and its suburbs or be limited to a single block of houses.¹⁰⁷

Sticking to these general suggestions promised to enhance the quality and quantity of data gathered on a *dérive*, eventually leading to the discovery of the psycho-geographical contours of the city, including its “unities of ambiance,” “principle axes of passage,” and the affective distances that separate different regions without necessarily correlating to physical space. These findings would then be used to draw up “maps of influence” that would reveal not the basic facts of the urban environment but rather their effect.¹⁰⁸

As an investigative enterprise, psychogeography had about it the twin aspects of detective work and clinical practice. The *dériveur* was one part private eye—roaming the city in search of clues, trying to sort out their significance—and one part psychoanalyst—analyzing and helping the inhabitant in terms of his or her relationship to the city. The first model was introduced by Debord when he titled a 1957 psychogeographic map of Paris *The Naked City*, naming it after an American film noir of the same name, a 1948 movie starring two determined detectives who roam New York unraveling a series of interlinked murders and jewelry thefts.¹⁰⁹ Ralph Rumney has suggested that the noir references can be traced back even further, to French author Léo Malet, one of the most celebrated crime novelists and an ally of the Surrealists throughout the 1930s.¹¹⁰

Malet’s most famous creation was Nestor Burma, an ex-anarchist, argot-speaking, pipe-smoking private detective who, beginning in 1943, sniffed his way across Paris solving crimes of passion, politics, and greed. What makes Burma a precursor of the *dériveur* and an *avant la lettre* student of psychogeography is the way in which Malet structured a subseries of the thirty-three novels starring his antihero: each of the eighteen volumes of *Les nouveaux*

mystères de Paris is set in a single arrondissement, and both the crimes and the ways in which they unfold are inextricably linked to the character and layout of their respective locations. *La nuit de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, written and set in 1955, begins with the murder of a black man in a seedy hotel, to the sounds of jazz playing loudly in a nearby club, and involves disreputable artists and writers, beautiful but lost young women, excessive drinking and drugs, and people getting by on money earned in indecent ways. Here as elsewhere, Burma learns everything he needs to know by paying close attention to the surrounding environment and to people's behavior, letting the streets and his feet lead him when he has no other clues to follow.¹¹¹

As Rumney himself knew well, a detective can also be misled: just like he'd taken his mother-in-law's hired snoops on a wild goose chase, the French artist Sophie Calle deliberately steered a private investigator through Paris in April 1981. For a project entitled *La Filature (The Shadow)*, Calle asked her mother to hire a sleuth to document her every movement for a day. Not knowing exactly when she would be followed, she made sure to fill all of her days with meaningful visits. The finished work contrasts the detective's factual photographic and textual record of Calle's trajectory with her own, which delves into the psychological motivations of her movements through the city. She writes, "I desire to show 'him' my streets, the places I love. I want him to cross the Luxembourg gardens with me, those gardens where I played throughout my childhood, where I exchanged my first kiss with a student from the Lavoisier school in 1968."¹¹² Hard to say who makes the better detective, Calle or her pursuer: How to judge her privileged position against his dogged superficiality? At the very least, Calle can be seen to have inherited the Situationist taste for game playing and psychogeography—along with a Surrealist penchant for narcissism.

Like the successful detective, the psychoanalyst must pay scrupulous attention to what passes before him, able to distinguish and follow clues that a less sensitive observer might miss. But the analyst, unlike the detective, practices his profession via transformative tactics, for curative ends. The relationship of this occupation to the *dérive* and psychogeography is expressed in a letter by Ivan Chtcheglov and published in *Internationale situationniste* 9. Writing from the informed perspective of the mental hospital in which he had been living for three years, Chtcheglov noted: “The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, its gestures, its strolls, its encounters) was *to the totality* exactly what psychoanalysis (in the best sense) is to language. Let yourself go with the flow of words, says the analyst. He listens, until the moment when he rejects or modifies (one could even say *detourns*) a word, an expression or a definition.” He concluded, “The *dérive* is certainly a technique, almost a therapeutic one.”¹¹³ It hopes to heal the city by appropriating it through sensitive footsteps and enlightened encounters. This would be the only way to practice a continuous *dérive*, Chtcheglov insisted, to take psychogeography as a profession and to be compensated as a specialist for assisting, observing, and correcting *dérives*. It would be a group therapy, and dangerous for the therapist, who would risk life and limb as do all true analysts.¹¹⁴ Though he does not himself say it, Chtcheglov’s own tragic history—a descent from the heights of Lettrist experimentation to the bowels of the asylum—suggests the reality of these fears.

Psychogeography was powerful stuff. Just as it could be used to heal, it could also be used to harm. In an editorial note that today rings all too true, the first issue of *Internationale situationniste* detailed experimental studies by the Canadian defense ministry and the Hungarian police, where subjects exposed to extreme isolation developed

extensive behavioral problems owing to lack of sensorial stimuli, while others were tortured through extremes of lighting, furniture, temperature, clothing, and films. The SI warned that artists needed to employ these new techniques for control of the environment, using them to liberate rather than repress, as those in power were sure to do.¹¹⁵

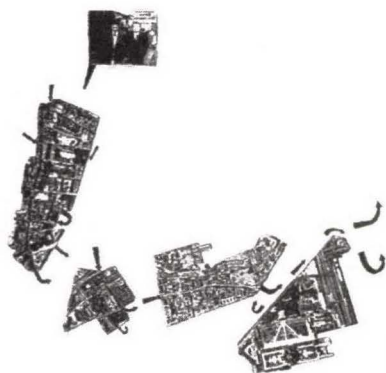
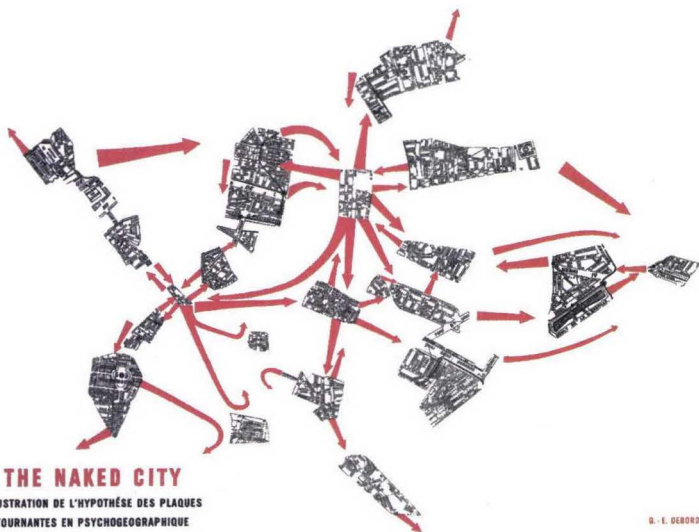
The psychoanalyst metaphor can be extended further. Just as some analysts extrapolate from their clinical data to build theories and practices for a future of better mental health, the Situationists proposed that the psychogeographic data gathered on their *dérives* could lead to improvements in urban planning and a rethinking of the city of tomorrow. Developments such as these would mean not just superior cities but a greater way of life. One of the major proponents of this premise was Constant, who in the mid-1950s began to envision what a city could be if planned from scratch according to the principles of higher recreation, psychogeography, and freedom from work. His elaborate proposals for a Situationist city will be discussed in their own section below; for now it bears recognizing the influence of his perspective as a visionary architect, one who saw beyond the existing city, beyond the altered city, toward the city completely reimagined.

The Lettrists coined a term for the type of urbanism that would utilize the lessons of psychogeography. They called it “unitary urbanism” and defined it as “the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with the experiments in behavior.”¹¹⁶ There was an urbanism that attempted to alter the modern idea of urbanism itself, of rigid functionalist planning that neglected the psychological impact of architecture on individuals and fixed the city in time. The Situationists Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem even went so far as to set up a mock Bureau of Unitary Urbanism at

10, avenue de l'Orée in Brussels, from which they issued statements and ran experiments and studies toward a revolutionary mode of integrated, psychogeographically based theory and praxis.¹¹⁷

What did they actually discover on these investigative dérives? The myriad publications of the LI and the SI brim with reports, collages, and maps that suggest a wealth of psychogeographic findings. Most of the details of these studies are now completely obsolete, as the authors themselves predicted, but this is not to suggest that the conclusions derived from this information have aged poorly, only that it remains an ongoing task to observe and gather data. Cities change constantly—even the best maps are essentially ephemeral, so why not cut them up and rearrange them accordingly? Which is exactly what the Situationists did. To indicate places of heightened psychogeographic effect, Debord produced a pair of maps in 1957—*Guide psychogéographique de Paris* and *The Naked City*—that remade the city of Paris according to which areas were compelling. Those that weren't simply didn't make the cut. From the 1956 *Plan de Paris à vol d'oiseau*, the standard map of the city, they snipped segments, each of which represented a “unity of ambiance,” a small section that, without necessarily conforming to any kind of official delimitation such as the boundary of a neighborhood, nevertheless constituted a cohesive place in terms of shared atmosphere.*

* As the dominant guide to the topography of Paris for most of the twentieth century, the *Plan de Paris* continues to exist as a ripe platform for artistic appropriation. In 2003, on the occasion of the exhibition “GNS, Global Navigation System” at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, a series of altered *Plans* were commissioned and made available for sale as multiples. *Topo-Typographie* by Franck Scurti identified street configurations that traced each of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Scurti suggests walking and language are thereby made equivalent, and encourages the map holder to go for a walk and spell out a phrase in space.



Above: Guy Debord, *The Naked City: Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique*, ca. 1957. Lithograph, ink on paper, 33.3 × 48.3 cm.

Below: Guy Debord, *Axe d'exploration et échec dans la recherche d'un grand passage situationniste*, ca. 1953. Collage.

A sense of just how much ground was deemed psycho-geographically irrelevant can be ascertained by comparing a conventional map to those produced by the SI. In an unnamed sketch made up of a large section of the 5th and 6th arrondissements excised from the *Plan de Paris*, Debord circled some three-dozen zones that constituted unities of ambiance. But however chock-full of unities these two districts may be, much more remains left out, including most major boulevards, government buildings, and tourist attractions. These were the parts of the city that functioned according to modern, bureaucratic, and capitalist standards, and were correspondingly well maintained. Those singled out by Debord and Jorn were decaying because they constituted the very opposite kinds of streets and structures: obstructive to rational rezoning, the ghosts of past forms of entertainment, or no-longer-useful government buildings.¹¹⁸ To map only these neglected sites was to protest against their deliberate usurpation and devaluation by the urban planners of the day.

Debord also produced a collage representing the four linked unities of ambiance discovered on a *dérive* with Chtcheglov in 1953. This *dérive* was a dead end of sorts, as indicated by the final directionless arrows and the collage's title—*Axe d'exploration et échec dans la recherche d'un grand passage situationniste* (Axis of exploration and failure in the search for a great Situationist passage)—but its findings were deemed significant enough to merit documentation. A picture of Debord and Chtcheglov walking on the street testifies to the importance of their drifting pedestrian bodies in gathering this data, while a reproduction of Claude Lorrain's painting *L'embarquement de Sainte Ursule* (1641) insists on the data's psychogeographical import. In this canvas, Debord believed, Lorrain showed himself to be “psycho-geographical in the juxtaposition of a palace

neighborhood and the sea,” areas not typically placed in proximity to one another, but whose closeness suggested fruitful if unexpected encounters.¹¹⁹

Perhaps the most important unity of ambiance was the one discovered through a series of *dérives* in spring 1953. The “Continent Contrescarpe” was found to be so promising, with such a particular aptitude “for play and for oblivion,” that the Lettrists chose it for their new headquarters on rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève. A detailed description of the psychogeographic contours and limits of this neighborhood, as well as its various dependencies, appeared in *Lèvres nues* 9 (November 1956), signed by the Groupe de recherche psychogéographique de l’internationale lettriste. As the authors note, despite the unity’s proximity to many nearby areas it is effectively isolated from them because of the organization of the streets; various frontier zones are delimited by way of example, as are the urban configurations that act as blocks and flows for drifting pedestrians. Rue Pierre Curie functions as a trap on the west side and is especially difficult to enter or exit.¹²⁰

It was Chtcheglov who first dubbed the area a “continent,” having determined that to discover the new laws of psychogeography, the Lettrists needed a continuous landmass to explore. He described the virgin Continent Contrescarpe as somewhat oval in form and in the shape of Chile.¹²¹ The metaphor was also employed in an undated *métagraphie* (a Lettrist term for the synthesis of writing and visual art), where Chtcheglov juxtaposed fragments of a map of the world over a map of the Paris underground, such that some of the more mysterious regions—bits of Greenland, Afghanistan, China, Alaska, and Zambia, plus a large swath of Arctic islands—stood in for the parts of Paris that remained unknown to the Lettrists, dark continents awaiting investigation.

What was known and what was yet to be known were of equal importance, and many reports took into account both types of knowledge. Case in point is the second part of Debord's "Two Accounts of the Dérive." A detailed narrative description of a two-man drift conducted by Debord and Gil J Wolman beginning at ten in the morning on Tuesday, March 6, 1956, the report is self-consciously psychogeographical. Debord explains how their route shifted this way and that, "despite their intentions," and how they encountered very little that pleased them—save a shop on rue Oberkampf called Delicatessen-Provisions A. Breton. (He does not, and need not, spell out the Surrealist joke of this encounter.) One area was too picturesque, another too repulsively petit bourgeois, a third dulled by monotonous facades. They discover a psychogeographical hub—what they call a *plaque tournante*, after the device used to shift the direction of a train from one track to another—at the far end of the canal Saint-Martin, where a ruined rotunda designed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux is "singularly enhanced by the curve of the elevated subway line that passes at close distance." Reflecting on their *dérive* late that night in an Aubervilliers bar, they determine that heading north-by-northwest from their starting point might be more promising, because it leads toward an area basically unknown to them. Debord ends the account with a call for systematic *dérives* of this unfamiliar region.¹²²

A dozen or so other reports exist, from those that provide an in-depth explanation of findings to those that merely note areas as favorable or not for psychogeographically inclined drifters. Thus the adventurous reader of *Potlatch* is directed to visit: "Contrescarpe (Continent); Chinatown; the Jewish Quarter; Butte-aux-Cailles (the Labyrinth); Aubervilliers (at night); the public gardens of the 7th Arrondissement; the Medical-Legal Institute; rue

Dauphine (Nesles); Buttes-Chaumont (play); the Merri neighborhood; Parc Monceau; île Louis (the island); Pigalle; Les Halles (rue Denis, rue du Jour); the Europe neighborhood (memory); rue Sauvage.” And to avoid at all costs: “The 6th and 15th Arrondissements; the grand boulevards; Luxembourg; Champs-Élysées; Place Blanche; Montmartre; École Militaire; Place de la République; Étoile and Opéra; the whole of the 16th Arrondissement.”¹²³

A number of these recommendations are followed up by Jacques Fillon in *Lèvres nues*. Under the mock heading “Itinéraire pour une nouvelle agence de voyages,” Fillon proposes a series of walking tours through Paris, each beginning in the Contrescarpe. He details cardinal direction and duration, and describes the climate, terrain, and population of each “region.” Hardly the typical tourist’s guide to Paris, Fillon’s text catalogues a city not of lights but of poverty and immigrants. To the north is a hilly area of little-known forces, inhabited by a very poor population of primarily North African origin. The south boasts a mild climate and sumptuously labyrinthine streets in the Butte-aux-Cailles. To the west, in the evening and early morning hours, one can find the depopulated Square des Missions Etrangères. To the northeast lies the Chinese quarter, with many parallel passageways that lead nowhere and complex, spicy food of little nutritional value. To the northwest, a day’s journey will bring one to the desert of Retz, with its eighteenth-century factories and luxurious vegetation. To the north, after traversing a practically deserted Île Saint-Louis, one can find an isolated Polish bar boasting good prices for vodka. Further north, at a distance of two hours by foot, stands Aubervilliers, a plain cut by unusable canals, cold climate, and much snowfall. Leap frog is played there while the Spanish-speaking inhabitants await the revolution, strumming guitars and singing songs.¹²⁴

Les Halles, the old food market located in central Paris, was the most repeated beneficiary of psychogeographical attention. Beloved by both the Lettrists and the Situationists, as well as the Surrealists before them, Les Halles made appearances in Debord's *Mémoires* and *Sur le passage*, in his and Jorn's psychogeographic maps of Paris, as well as in countless group and individual tracts. The most thorough was Abdelhafid Khatib's ambitious "Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles," published as the primary psychogeographical content of *Internationale situationniste 2*. Long and sober, Khatib's article maps the district in terms of its limits, ambient divisions, exits, and entry points via data gathered on numerous dérives. The area he defines as Les Halles constitutes four distinct but interconnected unities of ambiance and differs slightly from its official limits. Khatib is equally concerned with the routes that "any individual or group will, with apparent spontaneity, follow" through the neighborhood, and these he traces in one of two illustrations.¹²⁵

Khatib's text gives a sense of just what it was that made Les Halles so appealing. For one, its streets change nightly, as workers and goods and lorries and panniers form shifting barriers. For another, it is a "transitional zone of Paris" where "social deterioration, acculturation, and the intermixing of population mak[e] the environment propitious to cultural exchanges." The market was vast, unruly, constantly shifting, layered with history, profoundly pedestrian, and naturally unspectacular—everything a drifting psychogeographer could desire. And it was about to be destroyed, moved to the outskirts to make way for a controversial transportation hub, in what Khatib called "a new blow to popular Paris." But, as he reminds the reader, a Situationist does not just study the city as it exists, a Situationist also proposes modifications for its future. If Les

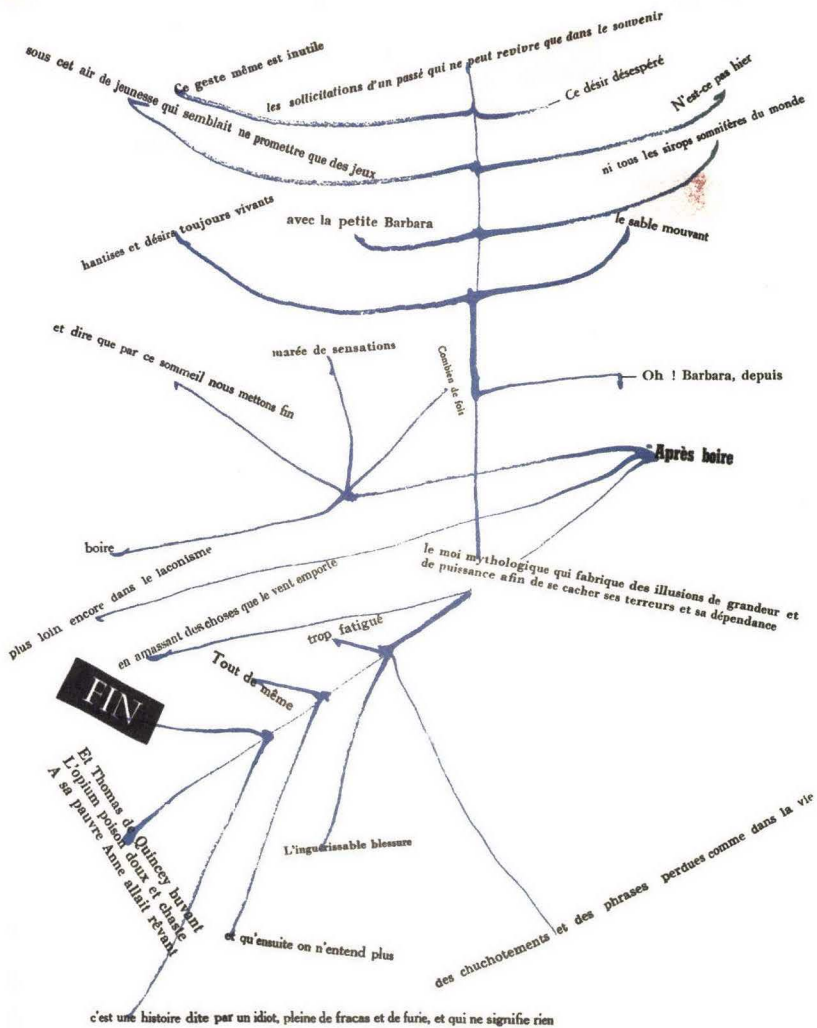
Halles was to be relocated, it should be replaced by pavilions corresponding to the four preexisting zones of ambiance, plus a series of ever-changing labyrinths. Following that, “an attraction park for the ludic education of the workers” would be fitting.¹²⁶

A number of Lettrist and Situationist maps have already been mentioned for the kind of information they contained, but they deserve consideration as well in terms of being *maps*. A map is not just a diagrammatic representation of an area of land and its physical features; it is also a tool for orientation, for planning a route, and for recording journeys already taken. Urban maps are communication devices innately tied to the movement of bodies in space, and the LI’s and SI’s persistent production of them testifies to a desire to transmit their knowledge and beliefs about the city to others. The Surrealists, notably, never mapped.

Debord saw great potential in maps, even preexisting ones. The *Plan de Paris* provided flexible source material. The Paris metro map was a paragon of beauty for its “particularly moving presentation [...] of a sum of possibilities”¹²⁷—for the plethora of places where an adventurous drifter could alight, but perhaps also for the interpretive openness encouraged by the chart’s abstract rendering. These approaches were certainly not those expected or encouraged by mapmakers, but the LI and SI had no love for the homogenizing and totalizing aspects of traditional maps. On the contrary, their interest was in what Debord called “a renovated cartography,” one that would inspire and record “wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences (influences generally categorized as tourism, that popular drug as repugnant as sports or buying on credit).”¹²⁸ Some of the ways in which these goals were manifested in

their maps have been examined above—most boldly via the fragmentation and rearrangement evident in Debord and Jorn’s psychogeographic maps of Paris—but other methods were employed as well.

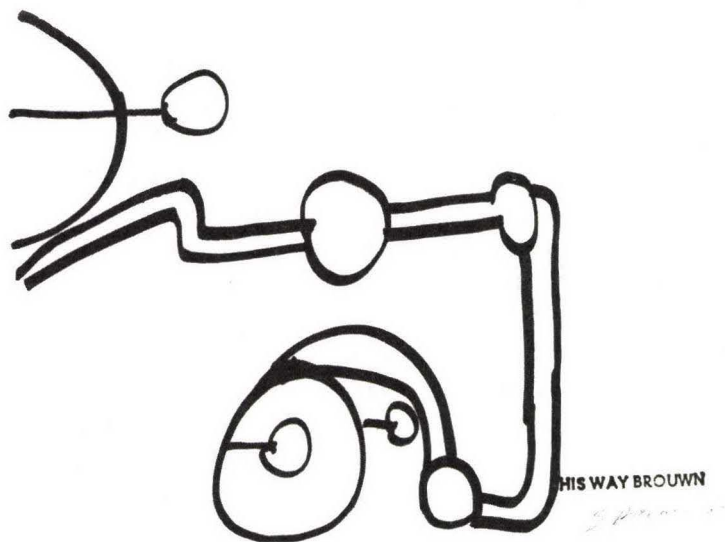
Perhaps the least conventional of these are found in Debord and Jorn’s jointly produced artist books, *Fin de Copenhague* and *Mémoires*. Two spreads in the former suggest themselves as alternative maps of Denmark. The first rearranges the locations of four Danish cities—Silkeborg, Copenhagen, Aarhus, and Kalvehave—into atypical relationship with one another, perhaps in an order that made more sense in terms of Jorn’s own experience. The city markers are superimposed ovetop a series of green drips and splatters that seem to stand in for the promontories and islands that compose Denmark, and a fragment of appropriated text running across the top left—UN SPLENDID PAYSAGE QUE BERNARD BUFFET A SOUVENT PEINT (A splendid landscape that Bernard Buffet has often painted)—reinforces this reading, even if via the non sequitur of a minor French painter. The random splashes that Jorn trailed across the pages of this book here take on a new likeness as terrain—in addition to their resemblance to sloshed alcohol, spewed vomit, bodily fluids, and Rorschach blots—but a terrain far more changeable and subjective than that usually found on maps. A few pages later this notion is reiterated in the layering of a more detailed fragment of Copenhagen atop a similar spread of ink spills, complete with scale bar and north arrow at top right, signaling the entire spread as a map sheet. Again, an appropriated phrase adds meaning: *Personne ne passera ici avant peut-être des années* (No one will pass by here for what might be many years) seems to refer not to busy Copenhagen but to the unbroken expanse of green over which its letters hover, a territory overlooked, ignored, and waiting.



Page from Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Mémoires: Structures portantes d'Asger Jorn* (1959). The text of *Mémoires* is sampled from classics ranging from Shakespeare to Racine; the images include fragments of comics and maps, architectural plans, soft porn, and photographs by Ed van der Elsken. Sandpaper covers were meant to abrade any books shelved next to it.

A number of pages in *Mémoires* act as charts on which to inscribe the trajectories and experiences of dérives. Unlike the page-filling splatters of the first book, *Mémoires* is run through with delicate, linear drips that suggest paths taken, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively. One page offers a map of behavior and impressions, with spidery blue lines linking together places to have a drink, to meet a young woman named Barbara, to feel a tide of sensations, to collect things blown by the wind, to be too tired to go on, and finally to end. Another features purple blobs and lines that record a drift in the neighborhood, down to the deserted quays, with a pause for a couple of drinks (“not drunk right now”), an encounter with a “real gamine,” who trembles like a child, lost in thoughts of Jack the Ripper, and finally a sense that the end of the world is near. On a third, teal marks connect the pieces of a “floating city” found “via the history of discoveries,” in “a game of life and of the environment.” Cut from the *Plan de Paris* are places and streets recognizable from various LI and SI communiqués: the Luxembourg gardens, rue Pierre Curie, rue Lhomond, the Arsenal, the Place des Vosges, and Les Halles.¹²⁹ A fourth combines abstract thought with concrete location, using a dense mass of light green scratches to drift between a sense of “the earth with its noises” and the Place du Panthéon; to be pushed by a new current a bit to the left; to observe what it takes to get used to nocturnal walks and to roam near the Hôpital militaire du Val-de-Grâce; to traverse a powerful field of energy as well as a charming castle.

Whether radical maps, memoiristic records, or some combination thereof, together these constructions suggest a parallel between the dérive and drawing. The colorful marks that fill the pages of *Mémoires* are at once the direct traces of the artist’s hand on the printing plate and representative of its correlate, the artist’s body drifting through



Stanley Brouwn, *This Way Brown*, 1960. Felt-tip pen and stamped ink on two pieces of paper, 24.5 × 32 cm.

urban space. They recall Paul Klee's description of drawing as a line gone for a walk, and also the Surrealists' transference of automatic writing and drawing from the written page to the bodily space of the countryside.

They portend as well ways in which drawing has continued to be linked to the act of walking. Some such occurrences are contemporaneous with the Situationists: beginning in 1960, Stanley Brouwn, a Suriname-born Dutch artist associated with Fluxus, stopped random passersby on the street and asked them to sketch directions to another point in the city. The drawings, made on blank sheets of paper supplied by the artist and later stamped with the title "This Way Brouwn," more closely resemble abstract mark-making than legible itineraries, and most would be impossible to follow without filling in the missing details, either concretely or imaginatively. This confusion is part of the appeal. "The fleet of streets, squares, lanes, etc. is sinking deeper and deeper in a network of 'This Way Brouwns,'" wrote the artist. "All direction is being drained from it. They are leading nowhere."¹³⁰ In 1966, conceptual artist William Anastasi began making what he called "Pocket Drawings" while walking the streets of New York. With a carefully folded piece of paper in his pocket and a sharpened pencil in his hand, Anastasi would go for a walk, hand in pocket moving with the rhythm of his body, blindly tracing its motions in dense scribbles oddly reminiscent of *Mémoires*, but by way of Surrealist automatism.

Departing from these paper-bound productions, some three decades later Francis Alÿs took São Paulo as a literal canvas. For *The Leak* (1995), Alÿs set out from a gallery holding a can of paint punctured with a hole just large enough to allow the paint to pour out in a fluttering blue line, creating a drawing that tracked his drift around the surrounding area, leaving a trail anyone could encounter and



Still from Francis Alÿs, *The Green Line*, 2004. Video, 17 min., 45 sec. Alÿs's action was performed in Jerusalem on June 4 and 5. A series of videos document the walk with audio commentary from various invited participants with a professional interest in the border dispute.

puzzle over, and even choose to pursue. He himself followed it back to the gallery, after he ran out of paint. When Alÿs re-performed his own action in Jerusalem a decade later, he instead used a leaking can of green paint that traced the path not of a random stroll but of the Green Line, the de facto border that divided the city after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. The original line on which that partition is based was made with a green grease pencil on an official map of the region by Israeli commander Moshe Dayan as part of a cease-fire agreement signed on November 30 of that year. Israeli political scientist and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti has pointed out that the width of the lines made by the grease pencil, multiplied to the scale of the map on which they were drawn, equals strips of land sixty to eighty meters wide—a large discrepancy for so fraught a piece of territory.¹³¹ The fifty-eight liters of vinyl paint that Alÿs used to visualize Jerusalem's twenty-four kilometers of the Green Line over the course of a two-day walk was thus both literal and poetic, serious yet ridiculous, a firm but inherently imprecise marking of a disputed border, one that is felt every day by the people who guard it and even more so by those who cannot easily cross it—felt, that is, but not otherwise seen. Lines on a map, paths across a city—these, Alÿs seems to be saying across the gulf of his two related projects, can be mysterious and fanciful, torturous and unbridgeable. But no matter how abstract the line, no matter how abstract the map, real bodies will be implicated.

The fragmentation of cities and their social fabric was of great concern to the LI and SI, and to social geographers like Henri Lefebvre and Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe. They believed that Paris, in addition to many other European cities, was under threat of modernist urban planning, a threat falsely smoothed over by the homogenization

and continuity of maps like the *Plan de Paris*. The *dérive*, as well as the various means through which its findings were recorded, including cutting up the *Plan*, was meant to reveal this ongoing state of deterioration.¹³² Toward these ends, the SI organized an elaborate series of *dérives* in the historic city center of Amsterdam, where two groups of three Situationists each would drift on foot for three days, keeping in touch with the help of walkie-talkies. Walkie-talkies were new tools meant to enhance the drifters' ability to reveal urban fragmentation by allowing for the discovery of disconnected neighborhoods to be communicated simultaneously across the city.¹³³ Unfortunately the *dérives*, which had been planned as part of an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, were aborted when the SI withdrew from the show over a dispute with the museum director.

If these *dérives* had taken place, however, the results, even with the help of walkie-talkies, would have been as ambiguous as all the rest of their findings. For even though the LI and the SI tried to drift as objectively as possible, nevertheless they could not escape the fact that they were their own experimental subjects. In this their practice differed from the work of Chombart de Lauwe and Lefebvre, who, as sociologists, found their subjects across the city at large. They differed as well from the kind of urban ethnography pioneered by the Chicago School in the 1920s—work familiar to Debord, who cited it favorably in his “Theory of the *Dérive*.” Although both the American sociologists and the *dérivistes* acted as “professional strangers” in the city, exploring it “as if it were a remote and exotic setting,” the former, as scientists, were obliged to read their encounters definitively, while the latter, as artists and revolutionaries, could revel in the extremes of their experiences.¹³⁴ Certainly the LI and SI believed that their methods portended a level of objectivity—and why not, given their conviction that

individuals were basically modeled by environmental influences, hence the focus of their entire program on urbanism rather than, say, on the unconscious—but whether or not one buys their argument, it is impossible to ignore the tension between the objective and the subjective aspects of their practice. Leaving aside the question of inebriation, and whether any kind of objectivity can be assumed on dérives taken under the influence, there remains the paradox that lies at the heart of psychogeography: it is both about the self and getting beyond it, to a consciousness of how the city feels. But the only way to know how the city feels is through one's own subjective, terrestrial experience of it.¹³⁵ The LI and the SI, social outcasts by their own choosing, had no one to ask but themselves. If the data they found was sometimes disappointing and often inconclusive and mostly bound to become obsolete, these limitations nevertheless have a positive counterpart: they insist on the need for the rest of us to go out into the streets and pay attention to how the city affects us all.

Welcome to Dériville

Most of the Lettrist and Situationist thinking about urbanism and architecture consisted of ways to alter existing cities, especially those that, like Paris or Amsterdam or Copenhagen, had emerged organically over the centuries but were now faced with the unstoppable ascendancy of the automobile and the totalizing forces of modernist planning. The great exception to this rule was *New Babylon*, the Situationist city envisioned by Constant.

Constant, born Constant Nieuwenhuys, was a founding member of CoBrA, the Imaginist Bauhaus, and the SI.

A painter of bold, primitivist canvases, he declared himself an “ex-artist” in 1956 and dedicated the next two decades of his life to planning the city of the future.¹³⁶ Though he never received formal training, he became the de facto Situationist architect, maker of endless models and plans envisioning the kind of city that would put all of the group’s ideals into play, ambitions so grand that by his own reckoning they demanded construction from scratch.

Many of the relevant principles were first articulated in 1953, in Chtcheglov’s then-unpublished “Formulary for a New Urbanism,” where the nineteen-year-old Lettrist dreamed the following:

The architectural complex will be modifiable. Its aspect will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of its inhabitants. [...]

On the basis of this mobile civilization, architecture will, at least initially, be a means of experimenting with a thousand ways of modifying life, with a view to a mythic synthesis. [...]

There will be rooms more conducive to dreams than any drug, and houses where one cannot help but love. Others will be irresistibly alluring to travelers. [...]

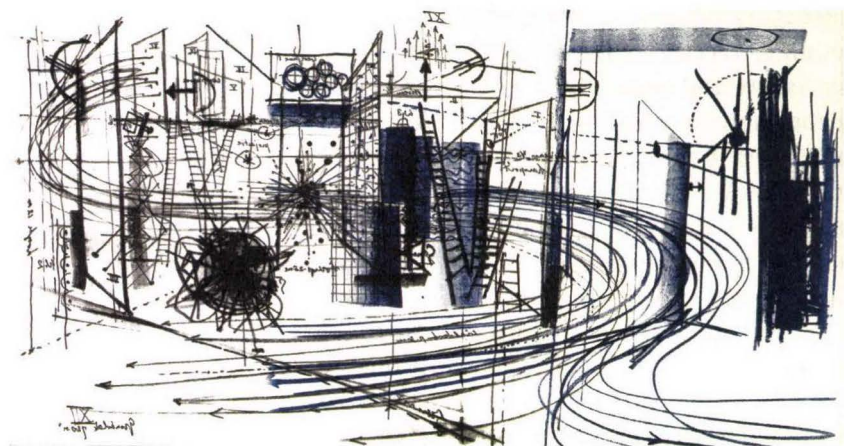
The districts of the city could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters *by chance* in everyday life. [...]

The principal activity of the inhabitants will be the CONTINUOUS DÉRIVE. The changing landscapes from one hour to the next will result in complete disorientation. [...]

We know that the more a place is *set apart for free play*, the more it influences people’s behavior and the greater is its force of attraction.¹³⁷

Whether the true task was to work toward establishing the conditions conducive to such advances or envisioning and constructing their physical form was a matter of serious debate that, together with other differences, led to Constant's resignation from the SI in 1960.¹³⁸ Card-carrying member or not, however, Constant continued to work on *New Babylon* until 1974, when, after mounting a retrospective exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague and publishing an accompanying catalogue that situated the project in a theoretical and historical framework, he finally abandoned his imagined city and returned to painting.

The relevance of Constant's city to a discussion of vanguard walking practices is signaled by its original name—not *New Babylon*, which was the appellation Debord came up with in 1959, but *Dériville*, which Constant had called it up to that point.¹³⁹ The latter points to drifting as a central source and primary activity, and indicates as well Constant's initial inspiration: the Gypsies he encountered in Alba, Italy, in 1956. *New Babylon* was based on the mobile, changeable encampment he designed for them at the invitation of Pinot Gallizio, who, in addition to hosting the Imaginist Bauhaus in his Alba studio, was also a local left-wing councillor and the owner of the land on which the nomads were living. Constant's idealization of the Gypsies and their itinerant lifestyle runs through his conceptualization of the Situationist city and is perhaps best expressed in the epigraph to his 1974 text, a quotation from Vaïda Voivod III, president of the World Community of Gypsies: "We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, a world of freedom, without weapons, where each man may travel without let or hindrance from the steppes of central Asia to the Atlantic coast, from the high plateaux of South Africa to the forests of Finland."¹⁴⁰ *New Babylon* would be engineered to promote playful, adventurous mobility, above all. Its inhabitants, with no fixed abode,

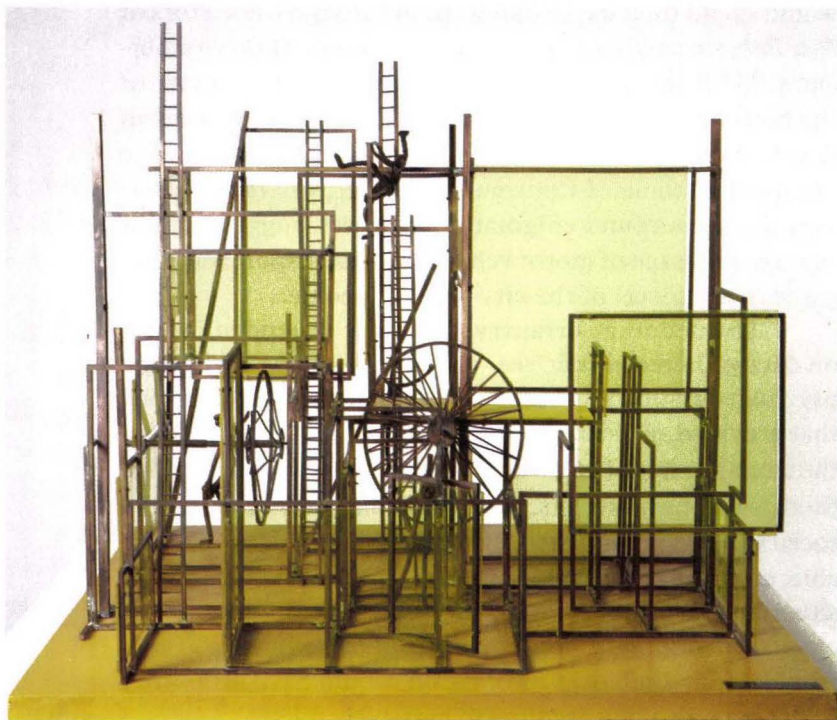


Constant, *Portfolio New Babylon*, *New Babylon 9*, 1963. Lithograph, 39.8 × 75 cm.

would spend their days “wander[ing] through the sectors of *New Babylon* seeking new experiences, as yet unknown ambiences. Without the passivity of tourists, but fully aware of the power they possess to act upon the world, to transform it, recreate it.”¹⁴¹ A vision of this perpetual movement can be glimpsed in some of Constant’s sketches, where energetic flow lines run round enigmatic structures, suggesting not the rapid passage of motor vehicles—all transport was relegated to a sublevel of the city—but of people.

To encourage errantry, Constant depended in part on data gathered via *dérives*.¹⁴² This aided in the design of a psychogeographically sensitive environment and also one that provided an ideal terrain for drifting. But not drifting in the streets as the LI and the SI practiced it—in *New Babylon*, there would be no streets, since traffic had been isolated and social space was everywhere. Instead, various kinds of traversable, complex spaces filled the city, open to the creation of situations and ambiances, to the occurrence of *dérives* and chance encounters among the inhabitants who, because of increased (and off-site) automation, would have little work to do and lots of leisure time to creatively fill.¹⁴³

One of the schematic principles at the heart of *New Babylon* was the labyrinth, both literally, in terms of a physical maze, and figuratively, as a disorienting state of mind. It encouraged the *dérive* in ways analogous to the tangle of small, warren-like streets that the Lettrists found in Left Bank Paris, and the chaos of a playfully intoxicated mind, which they found through drinking and drug-taking. Like the labyrinth, the *dérive* allowed for “the possibility of getting lost, retracing one’s steps, of choosing a different path.”¹⁴⁴ By way of contrast, the editors of *Potlatch* derided a sign hung outside the labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes. It stated: “No Playing in the Labyrinth.” To which they replied: “There [can] be no more succinct summary of the



Constant, *Ladder Labyrinth*, 1967. A sector of the "Yellow Zone" in *New Babylon*. Model made of brass, plexiglass, wood, 71.6 × 79 × 87.6 cm.

spirit of an entire civilization. The very one that we will, in the end, put down.”¹⁴⁵

The labyrinth could arise organically or through deliberate planning. A labyrinth-themed issue of the Dutch periodical *Situationist Times*, dated October 1963, brims with examples taken from a world of cultures across millennia, with models drawn from decorative patterns and gardens, biology and prisons, the city center of Amsterdam and parts of *New Babylon* itself. Alongside an aerial photo of Amsterdam was the plan for an elaborate maze designed by the Dutch wing of the SI (which included Constant), a two-hundred-meter-long structure blending indoor and outdoor characteristics, simulated weather, and other unspecified provocations; unilateral doors and the varied appeal of different sections were meant to determine viewers’ passage. Although intended for exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, the maze was never built.¹⁴⁶

Constant’s idea of the labyrinth went beyond most historical models. The traditional labyrinth, he believed, depends on a “static” understanding of space: a single center, with only one correct means of approach, however circuitous and full of false leads and dead ends. The “dynamic” labyrinth, by contrast, comprises multiple moving centers and no wrong way of getting there; no getting lost, only finding new paths; no stable structure, but rather one continually created and recreated based on the behavior of its inhabitants. For Constant, the dynamic labyrinth provides the very model of unified urbanism and constitutes the conceptual core of *New Babylon*.¹⁴⁷

It also served as an important structural component of the city: various maquettes, drawings, and texts testify to the physical presence of labyrinthian structures in Constant’s designs. The most thorough of these concerns the “Yellow Zone,” a playful sector for “ambient games”

so named because of the color of its flooring, which was meant to add to the islet's "joyful atmosphere." Constant described the zone's plan and functioning in *Internationale situationniste* 4; an editorial note explains his article as "the first itinerary in *Promenades in New Babylon*, a descriptive guide to the maquette-islands whose assembly constitutes a reduced model of the 'covered city.'" In the western part of the zone sits two "labyrinth-houses [...] formed by a great number of irregularly-shaped chambers, spiral staircases, distant corners, wastelands, cul-de-sacs. One goes through them adventurously," encountering rooms built for quiet, loudness, echoes, reflection, rest, erotic games, coincidences, and more. One passage features walls lined with large optical lenses instead of windows, while another skirts a series of hydraulic effects, where jets of water and fountains gush alongside bizarre constructions and a heated glass grotto provides a place for winter bathers to enjoy the stars. "An extended stay in these houses," explained the architect, "has the tonic effect of a brainwashing and is frequently undertaken to erase the effects of habits."¹⁴⁸ The whole and its parts act in the spirit of labyrinths everywhere, but taken to a marvelous new series of interconnecting levels, encouraging sustained disorientation and play.

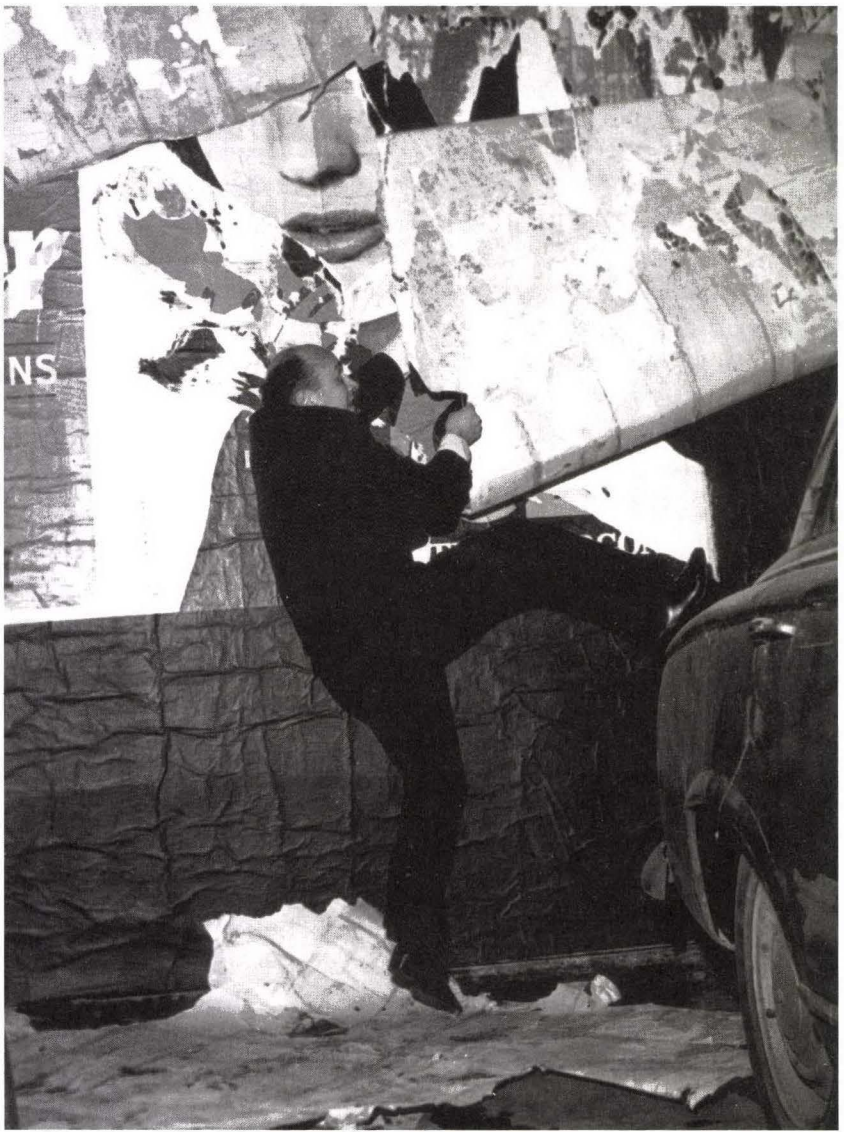
New Babylon was never realized, not even a small part of it. Nevertheless, Constant continually maintained its achievability, writing: "If the project we have just traced out in bold strokes risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical point of view, that it is desirable from the human point of view, that it will become indispensable from the social point of view."¹⁴⁹ But it was utterly visionary and idealistic, if less on a purely technical level than one of scale and, more importantly, social engineering.

In the latter sense it was entirely in keeping with the revolutionary ideals of the SI, so succinctly summarized in the title of a tract Constant published in the third issue of the group's journal: "Another City for Another Life." Here he explained one of the most critical aspects of the Situationist utopia, whether it took the form of a brand-new city or an altered one, whether it was accomplished or not: "We crave adventure. Not finding it on earth, some men have gone to seek it on the moon. We prefer to wager first on a change on earth."¹⁵⁰ *On earth*—the Situationist city, whatever form it took, was terrestrial. In this sense it fulfilled the indispensable role of any utopia, to act not so much as an architectural and social blueprint but as a motivator, a prod to action on terra firma, in everyday life.

Art on the Street

Chez Moineau's in the early 1950s served as the first Lettrist hangout, but plenty of other people frequented the bistro, some of them run-of-the-mill drunkards and down-and-outs, some of them Lettrist acquaintances. Two of the latter—Jacques Villeglé and Raymond Hains—were artists in their own right, practicing a form they called *décollage*, which involved roaming the city on foot in search of lacerated posters, tearing them off the sides of buildings, and hanging them in galleries as two-dimensional works of art. Later they called themselves the Affichistes, after the French word for poster designer.

The two men were part of the scene at Moineau's, though they were never official members of the Lettrist International. According to Villeglé, he and Hains were a bit too old to be part of the gang proper, though they



Jacques Villeglé on the boulevard de l'Hôpital, Paris, February 21, 1967.

were friends with Debord, who sometimes slept on stacks of harvested posters at their shared apartment, and Wolman.¹⁵¹ Neither Villeglé nor Hains followed the turn of the Lettrists into the Situationist International. Indeed, it was at around the time of the SI's founding, in 1957, that Hains and Villeglé were joined by François Dufrêne, a former member of the Lettrist Group and a founding member of the Lettrist International. Eschewing the position of the SI, which they judged too radical and politically naive, the three Affichistes exercised what art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has called a "conservative skepticism": pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of art but paradoxically insistent on making radical gestures with it.¹⁵² To understand how they accomplished their actions, and what, exactly, made them so radical demands an examination of the Affichistes' process and relationship to the streetscape. But first, a little history.

Villeglé and Hains began making *décollages* on the streets of Paris in 1949, a few years prior to the Lettrist invention of the *dérive*. Before that, Léo Malet, the Surrealist crime writer and forefather of the *dérive*, seems to have envisioned *décollage* as well. "The collage of the future," he wrote in 1936, "will be executed without scissors or razor or glue, etc., in short, without any of the utensils which were necessary until now. It will leave behind the worktable and the artist's cardboard surfaces and it will take its place on the walls of the big city, the unlimited field of poetic realizations."¹⁵³ Malet foresaw how, like the *dériviste*, the *décollagiste* would take to the streets, knowing that with the right attitude everything he needs is already out there enmeshed in the urban fabric. The trick for both figures was to walk the streets not in the dulled posture of the laborer or the bourgeois, but as an adventurous pedestrian, drifting through the city in search of encounters with heretofore ignored urban signs and structures. Where the *décollagiste*

played the role of thieving vandal, the *dériviste* acted the part of inebriated lout—a little bit of hooliganism went a long way. The former collected posters where the latter collected disorienting experiences and psychogeographic data, the city serving both as a primary medium.

The course of *décollage* arguably goes back beyond Malet to Kurt Schwitters, the Dadaist who lived in Hanover, Germany, until his work was banned by the Nazis as “degenerate art” and he fled the country in 1937. Art historians, including Buchloch and Brandon Taylor, have made formal comparisons of the *Affichistes*’ work to Schwitters’s collages, which he made from printed debris, differentiating them in terms of the latter’s painterliness and deskboundedness.¹⁵⁴ What seems equally if not more striking is the correspondence between their respective methods of sourcing this material. Schwitters collected the raw stuff of his collages everywhere—in waste bins and junk piles, while walking the streets of Hanover, and while traveling, when he’d wear a kit over his chest and back, with a front portfolio for work-in-progress and a rear compartment to hold materials found along the way.¹⁵⁵ His friend the sculptor Naum Gabo recalled how they would go strolling in the early 1920s, when suddenly Schwitters would stop and fall into deep concentration:

Then he’d pick up something that resembled a bit of torn, dirty paper, of a particular texture, or a stamp or ticket that had been thrown away. With care, with love, he would clean it and show it to you, triumphant. And only then would you realize what an exquisite fragment of color this scrap of trash held. It took a poet like Schwitters to show us elements of unsuspected and scattered beauty, which litter the ground everywhere around us and which we can find in the remarkable as in the insignificant, if only we

take the trouble to look at them, choose them, and adjust them in an attractive order.¹⁵⁶

The disruptive potential of Schwitters's urban straying should not be neglected on account of the poetics of unsuspected beauty attributed to it by Gabo. The capacity to notice such scraps amid the urban spectacle constitutes a resistance to the strictures of the modern, capitalist city. If Schwitters then went home and rearranged these bits and pieces into meticulously composed collages, that does nothing to diminish the radical powers he displayed in finding them in the first place—a power shared by the Surrealists and later manifested by the Affichistes, as well as, on a more conceptual level, the Lettrists.

Part of the force of Schwitters's collages was the transformation their materials underwent via their inclusion in his compositions. The Affichistes' *décollages*, on the other hand, are notable for the very opposite: the finished work is more or less identical to what the original found material looked like on the street. The artist alters little, relying on a combination of chance and selection, and the ability to tear a thick layer of posters from a city wall without getting caught. In retrospect, the Affichistes archived one of the primary sights given to pedestrians as they moved through Paris, "the capital of posters," more of them ruined than legible. Today their artworks exist as "the ragged memory of our era," as Villeglé put it, direct markers of the particular space and time from which they were removed.¹⁵⁷ A survey of his oeuvre from 1949 to the present bears this out: text graphics with plain, bold type and solid, primary colors feature early on; photographic imagery, a frantic noisiness, and the direct media presence of enlarged magazine covers dominate later. This situation extends not only to the graphic style and content of commercial posters, but also to political ones.

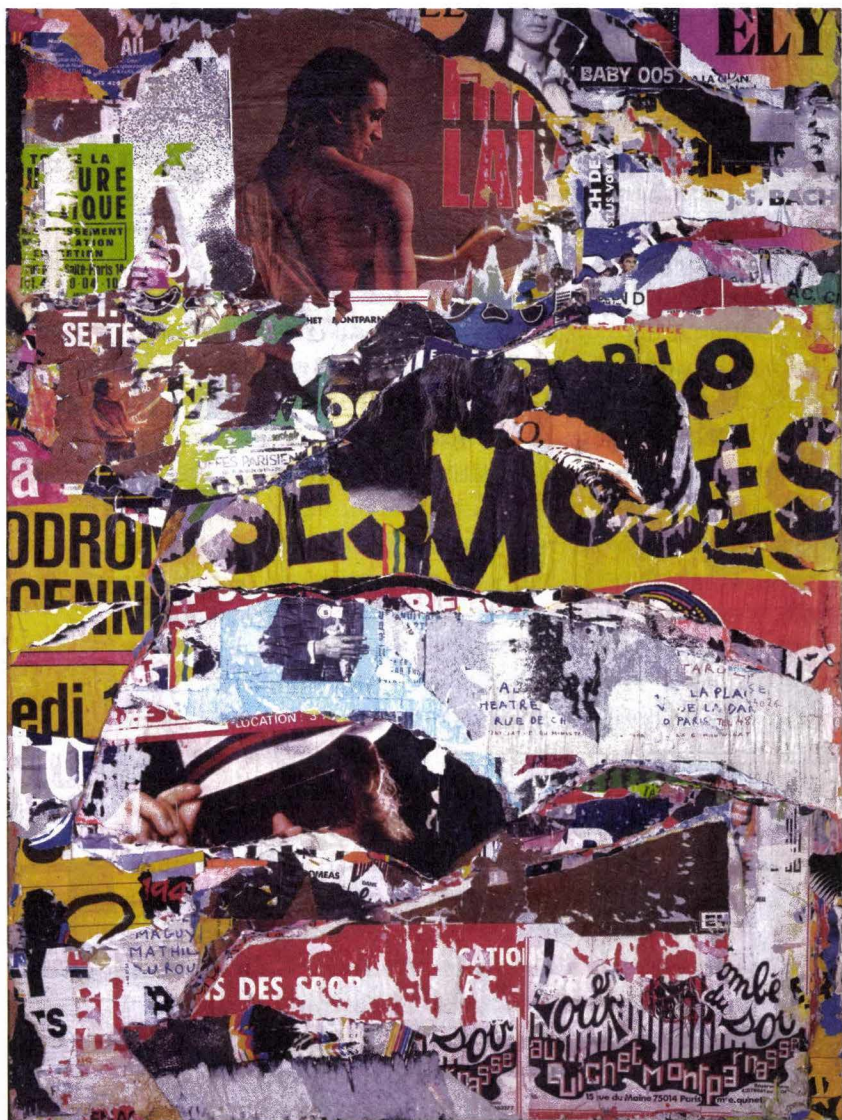


Jacques Villeglé, *Rue des Saints Pères – Carnaval de Venise*, October 24, 1950. Ripped posters on wooden panel mounted on plywood, 40.5 x 55 cm.

Works from the second half of the 1950s, by both Villeglé and Hains, sometimes feature notices relating to the Algerian War; those dating to the spring of 1968 ring out with the messages of student radicals and striking workers.

These two groupings of *décollaged* political posters differ in an important way: only those from 1968 broadcast an oppositional voice. The Algerian messages of the mid-'50s, on the other hand, came strictly from the pro-French side of the debate, because the Algerian opposition had been silenced at the time in Paris. In 1957, Villeglé and Hains mounted an exhibition of these posters at the Gallery Colette Allendy under the title "Loi du 29 juillet 1881 ou le lyrisme à la sauvette" (The law of July 29, 1881, or a swift lyricism), which referred to a law that restricted public posting in certain places, such as on government edifices and historical monuments. The law was in place not as a constraint but to reverse earlier limitations of where postering was allowed. With this title, the *Affichistes* announced that their work was about consumerism and spectacle, a critique of the ubiquitous ads that papered Paris, and also public expression, the right of the public to make its voice heard in urban spaces—a voice that, in the case of the Algerian opposition, had been muffled.¹⁵⁸ But not entirely: Villeglé argued that if these kinds of political posters "transmit the dominant culture's speech," then torn posters are "the antidote against all propaganda."¹⁵⁹ By exhibiting graphic material lacerated by anonymous inhabitants of the city, the *Affichistes* championed small acts of rebellion, deeds by which any member of the public could participate in what was otherwise a one-way monologue.

With their next group exhibition, "Lacéré Anonyme," which took place in 1959 at Dufrêne's studio, the *Affichistes* used a title that acknowledged the role played by their real collaborators, the "anonymous lacerators" who roam the city streets leaving their mark. That mark was both a political and



Jacques Villeglé, *Gaité* – Paris, June 12, 1987. Ripped posters mounted on canvas, 166 x 120.5 cm.

an artistic gesture, since this was “art” displayed in a gallery or a studio. Their reliance on conventional mechanisms of display—they even went so far as to affix the torn posters to a canvas backing—ought not be overlooked, however conservative it might seem. The Affichistes needed to transfer their work to the walls of the gallery: How else to promote the anonymous acts on the street that were ignored by pedestrians too distracted to notice them? How else to make visible what was not and could not be seen there, because it contravened official discourse? By placing posters on the quiet, orderly walls of an exhibition space, the Affichistes made it clear to viewers that this material was worth considering—both inside, where it could be most easily contemplated, and outside, where the newly sensitized viewer would hopefully learn to move like a *dériviste*.

A more lighthearted version of these tactics can be found in the work of Richard Wentworth, a British sculptor who since 1974 has been taking photographs of odd sights found while walking the streets of London, where he lives, and other cities as well. Under the heading “Making Do and Getting By,” Wentworth has catalogued “all the things we don’t notice because we live somewhere and get on with our lives.”¹⁶⁰ These include hammers and rubber boots used to prop doors open; disposable cups jammed between railings and pipes; a single red glove placed under the window wiper of a red car; the torqued shadow cast by the sun through a chain onto a sky blue wall; a missing post in a curvy concrete railing; strings that replace door handles; and a gutter, broom, and mop neatly lined up in a vertical row. None of these ad hoc solutions, found paintings and sculptures, or unintended comedies is especially peculiar or even original; on the contrary, they’re exactly the kind of thing no one notices. Except Wentworth, attuned as he is to the visual noise of the city, like his predecessors.



Richard Wentworth, "Making Do and Getting By" (1974–present). Above: *Holborn*, London, 2010; below: *Spitalfields*, London, 2010. Digital photographs, dimensions variable.

But whereas the Affichistes were concerned with the possibility of public expression, the Lettrists with the way the urban environment felt, and the Surrealists with how it meshed with the unconscious, Wentworth notices how objects have their meanings changed by anonymous people (whose handiwork he too gladly admits to stealing). Thus, when a doormat is shoved under a door to keep it open, the normal relationship between those two objects is disrupted and the displaced mat gains a new identity. As Wentworth's photographs reveal, these situations exist everywhere—on the sidewalk, in the gutter, across the road, leaning against a building, hanging off a fence. How to move through the city receptive to the things that are left behind, that behave against their nature, that are highly circumstantial, is partly a matter of attitude and partly a matter of going on foot. The kinds of observations Wentworth makes can rarely be perceived from the speed and remove of a motor vehicle, a fact he demonstrates by taking his photographs as he ambles, and also by giving occasional tours and printing up guides. The alert viewer walks.

The need to approach the city at the level of the pedestrian, if one is to have a hope of engaging actively and radically with urban life, is a lesson learned from the Affichistes and Wentworth, from the Lettrists and the Situationists, too. That this message has come from artwork hung on a wall in a gallery, from architectural models, and from tracts published in an avant-garde journal is not contradictory, even if the SI eventually believed it was. To understand why, it is worth returning to a statement Debord made in one of the first Situationist texts: "What alters the way we see the streets is more important than what alters the way we see painting." Debord is not negating the power of painting—or any other form of art—but rather insisting that what matters, in the end, is how any gesture, artistic or otherwise, can affect the

urban situation. And the urban situation, as all of these artists, architects, poets, and thinkers understood, extends from the layout of streets to the clutter on sidewalks to the shape and color of buildings to the slogans that decorate them and, most importantly, to the way regular people feel and behave every day as they walk amid it all.

- 1 Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe: Conversations with Gérard Berreby and Francesco Milo*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 117–18.
- 2 See “Amère victoires du surréalisme,” *Internationale situationniste* 1 (June 1958): 3–4 (hereafter cited in text as *IS*); and Guy Debord, “Contribution to the Debate ‘Is Surrealism Dead or Alive?’” (November 18, 1958), in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); all historic texts cited from this volume are translations by John Shepley and reprints. Notes
- 3 *Guy Debord: Oeuvres cinématographiques complètes*, 2nd ed., 3 videodiscs (France: Gaumont Video, 2005). Soundtrack transcribed and translated in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 31–32; all texts cited from this volume are both reprints and translations.
- 4 For more on the SI's origins, see Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005).
- 5 Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 4–7, 15.
- 6 Guy Debord, “Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life” (1961), in Knabb, *Anthology*, 68. SI members gave tape-recorded “lectures” as early as 1959, according to the official “Situationist Data (Chronology)” published in 1972 by Jean-Jacques Raspaud and Jean-Pierre Voyer, translated and reproduced in *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957–1972*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 179.
- 7 Debord, “Perspectives,” 69.
- 8 Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive,” *Lèvres nues* 9 (November 1956), reprinted in *IS* 2 (1958), in *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*, ed. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona, 1996), 22; all texts cited from this volume are translated by Gerardo Denis and Paul Hammond (*Potlatch*) or reprints. *Lèvres nues* was a Belgian Surrealist journal to which the Lettrists were frequent contributors (hereafter cited in text as *LN*).
- 9 Debord, “Perspectives,” 71–72.
- 10 Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency” (1957), in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 42.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Guy Debord, “Architecture and Play,” *Potlatch* 20 (May 30, 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 53 (hereafter cited in text as *P*).
- 13 See *ibid.*; Johan Huizinga, foreword to *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Keegan, 1949); and Libero Andreotti, “Architecture and Play,” in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 213–40.

- 14 Editorial notes, "Contribution à une définition situationniste du jeu," *IS 1* (June 1958): 9–10.
- 15 Henri Lefebvre, "The Everyday and Everydayness," trans. Christine Levich, in *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 7–10. Originally published as "Quotidien et quotidienneté," in *Encyclopaedia universalis* (1972).
- 16 For Lefebvre's version of the events, see his memoir *Le temps des méprises* (Paris: Stock, 1975), 109–10, 158–59.
- 17 Brian Rigby, quoted in Sadler, *Situationist City*, 69.
- 18 David Harvey, "The Right to City," in *The Emancipatory City? Paradoxes and Possibilities*, ed. Loretta Lees (London: SAGE, 2004), 762.
- 19 Debord, "Report on the Construction," 49.
- 20 Guy Debord, "Theses on the Cultural Revolution," *IS 1* (July 1958), in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 61.
- 21 Editorial Notes, "Absence and Its Costumers," *IS 2* (December 1958), in McDonough, 79.
- 22 T. J. Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith, "Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International," in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 485.
- 23 Editorial Notes, "The Avant-Garde of Presence," *IS 8* (January 1963), in *ibid.*, 147–49.
- 24 "Debord to André Frankin, Sunday" (July 24, 1960), in Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957–August 1960)*, trans. Stuart Kendall and John McHale (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 376.
- 25 Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art," in *Destruction af RSG-6: En Kollektiv manifesta-tion af Situationistisk International* (Odense, Denmark: Galerie EXI, 1963), in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 161–62.
- 26 Mension, *The Tribe*, 11–17.
- 27 Guy Debord, *Mémoires: Structures portantes d'Asger Jorn* (Paris: L'Internationale situationniste and Permild & Rosengreen, 1959), n.p.
- 28 Soundtrack transcribed and translated in Knabb, *Anthology*, 30.
- 29 Anon., "Plan for Rational Improvements to the City of Paris," *P 23* (October 13, 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 56. Twenty-eight issues of *Potlatch* were published beginning on June 22, 1954. Two final issues appeared under the direction of the SI on November 5, 1957, and July 15, 1959. A complete facsimile reproduction appears in Gérard Berreby, *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l'Internationale situationniste, 1948–1957* (Paris: Allia, 1985).
- 30 A. F. Conord, "Slum Construction," *P 3* (July 6, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 43.
- 31 Asger Jorn, "On the Current Value of the Functionalist Idea" (1956), in *ibid.*, 34.
- 32 Quoted in Anri Sala, *Dammi I Colori*, 2003, video, 15 min., 25 sec. For more on Rama's experiment, see Jane Kramer, "Painting the Town," *New Yorker*, June 27, 2005, 50–61.
- 33 Anon., "Plan for Rational Improvements," 57. An earlier article, spuriously attributed to

- Russian author Nicolas Gogol, focuses on the need to remove the word “saint”; see “Waiting for the Churches to Close,” *P* 9–10–11 (August 17–31, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 48.
- 34 Gil J Wolman, “Take the First Street,” *P* 9–10–11 (August 17–31, 1954), in *ibid.*, 48.
- 35 Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 345–46.
- 36 Anon., “On the Role of the Written Word,” *P* 23 (October 13, 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 55.
- 37 Anon., “Rédaction de nuit,” *P* 20 (May 30, 1955), repr. in Berreby, *Documents relatifs*, 205.
- 38 Pierre Couperie, *Paris through the Ages: An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Urbanism and Architecture*, trans. Marilyn Low (New York: George Braziller, 1968), n.p.
- 39 Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 4–5.
- 40 Asger Jorn, *Fin de Copenhague: Conseiller technique pour le détournement G.-E. Debord* (Copenhagen: Bauhus Imaginiste and Permild & Rosengreen, 1957), n.p.
- 41 Quoted in Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878–1978* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 309–10.
- 42 Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” *LN* 6 (September 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 18.
- 43 Ross, *Fast Cars*, 27–29, 53–54.
- 44 Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, trans. James Brook and John McHale (London: Verso, 2004), 39.
- 45 Couperie, *Paris through the Ages*, n.p.
- 46 Quoted in Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change*, 56–57.
- 47 Lettrist International, “Skyscrapers by the Roots,” *P* 5 (July 20, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 44.
- 48 Guy Debord, “Situationist Theses on Traffic,” *IS* 3 (December 1959), in *ibid.*, 81.
- 49 Anon., “The Bad Days Will End,” *IS* 7 (April 1962), in Knabb, *Anthology*, 82–83.
- 50 Anon., “Urbanism as Will and Representation,” *IS* 9 (August 1964), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 134.
- 51 Michèle Bernstein, “Dérive by the Mile,” *P* 9–10–11 (August 17–31, 1954), *ibid.*, 47.
- 52 On the car as central to modern French ideas of mobility, see Ross, *Fast Cars*, ch. 1.
- 53 Mirella Bandini, “An Enormous and Unknown Chemical Reaction: The Experimental Laboratory in Alba,” in Sussman, *On the Passage of a Few People*, 68; Constant, “New Babylon” (1974), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 154.
- 54 Debord, *Panegyric*, 37–38.
- 55 Alastair Bonnett, “The Nostalgias of Situationist Subversion,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 5 (September 2006): 24, 27, 34–35.
- 56 Michèle Bernstein, *All the King's Horses*, trans. John Kelsey (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 33.

- 57 Anon., "36 rue des Morillons," P 8 (August 10, 1954), repr. in Berreby, *Documents relatifs*, 178. The text does not explain that its title is the address of the Prefecture of Police for the city of Paris.
- 58 Guy Debord and Jacques Fillon, "Summary 1954," P 14 (November 30, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 50; Anon., "Toward a Lettrist Lexicon," P 26 (May 7, 1956), in *ibid.*, 60.
- 59 Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," 22, 24.
- 60 Mension, *The Tribe*, 15, 21, 25, 29, 101; see also Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, conversations with Gérard Berréby, contributions to the *History of the Situationist International and Its Time, Vol. II*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 63–66.
- 61 Mension, *The Tribe*, 105.
- 62 Guy Debord, "Two Accounts of the Dérive," LN 9 (November 1956), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 28–32.
- 63 Boris Donn   makes this observation about *M  moires* in (*Pour M  moires*): *Un essai d'  lucidation des M  moires de Guy Debord* (Paris: Allia, 2004), 17.
- 64 Rumney, *The Consul*, 46.
- 65 Debord to Pinot Gallizio, Saturday, May 10, 1958, in Debord, *Correspondence*, 112.
- 66 De Quincey, cited in Anon., "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s," IS 3 (December 1959), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 88. The original passage is quoted from Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), 60.
- 67 De Quincey, *Confessions*, 59–60.
- 68 Donn  , (*Pour M  moires*), 97–99.
- 69 Anon., "Unitary Urbanism," 88.
- 70 Quoted in Cuauht  moc Medina, "Fable Power," in *Francis Alj  s* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 77.
- 71 Charles McGrath, "A Literary Visitor Strolls in from the Airport," *New York Times*, December 6, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/06/books/06walk.html?_r=0.
- 72 Patrick Straram, *Les bouteilles se couchent*, fragments found and presented by Jean-Marie Apostolid  s and Boris Donn   (Paris: Allia, 2006). The time frame of Straram's story predates the invention of the term d  rive, which did not occur until that summer, but as Mension notes, they were d  riving long before they gave a name to the practice.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 76 Ivan Chtcheglov, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 17.
- 77 Ivan Chtcheglov, "Letters from Afar," IS 9 (August 1964), in Knabb, *Anthology*, 372. Chtcheglov was at this point communicating from a psychiatric hospital, where he had been committed in 1960 because of paranoid tendencies. Having been seriously damaged by the heavy psychiatric treatment then in fashion, he spent most of the rest of his life in institutions.
- 78 Ivan Chtcheglov, *  crits retrouv  s* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2006), 16. The version that appeared in IS was edited and illustrated by Debord without Chtcheglov's knowledge.

- 79 Anon., "Questionnaire," *IS* 9 (August 1964), in Knabb, *Anthology*, 141.
- 80 Debord, *Panegyric*, 15.
- 81 This passage comes from Debord's final film, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978). See Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 172.
- 82 Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 387–88.
- 83 Editorial notes, "Une idée neuve en Europe," *P* 7 (August 3, 1954), in Berreby, *Documents relatifs*, 175.
- 84 Debord, "Report on the Construction," 24.
- 85 Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," 26.
- 86 Guy Atkins, "Asger Jorn," excerpt (1964), in *An Endless Adventure ... an Endless Passion ... an Endless Banquet: A Situationist Scrapbook*, ed. Iwona Blazwick (London: Verso, 1989), 59.
- 87 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 12.
- 88 The unattributed booklet appears as an insert in *Situationist Times* 2 (September 1962): n.p. The multilingual *SI* periodical was published in the Netherlands by Jacqueline de Jong from 1962 to 1967.
- 89 Rumney, *The Consul*, 37, 66, 67, 94.
- 90 Part of the infamy of this project was that Debord used its late submission to *IS* to expel Rumney from the group. It was later reproduced in Blazwick, *An Endless Adventure*, 45–49.
- 91 Debord, "Report on the Construction," 25.
- 92 Anon., "Questionnaire," 18.
- 93 The primary Lettrist text on détournement is Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, "Methods of Détournement," *LN* 8 (May 1956), in Knabb, *Anthology*, 8–14. The Situationist definition is given in Anon., "Definitions," *IS* 1 (June 1958), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 68–71.
- 94 Anon., "Unitary Urbanism," 84.
- 95 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 14–15, 82.
- 96 Alec Wilkinson, "No Obstacles," *New Yorker*, April 16, 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/04/16/no-obstacles>.
- 97 An archive view of the project can be found on Google and at www.streetwithaview.com.
- 98 Debord, "Introduction to a Critique," 18.
- 99 Michèle Bernstein tells this story in a 1998 interview, quoted in Christophe Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord, 1931–1994* (Paris: Plon, 1999), 80.
- 100 Debord, "Introduction to a Critique," 18.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 102 Ivan Chtcheglov, "Introduction au content contrescarpe" (January 24, 1954), in *Écrits retrouvés*, 31.
- 103 Asger Jorn, "Les Situationnistes et l'automatisme," *IS* 1 (June 1958), 22. The same image appeared again, blown up to full page, in *IS* 7 (April 1962).
- 104 Anon., "The Form of a City Changes More Quickly," *P* 25 (January 26, 1956), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 59; Anon., "The Destruction," 45; Michèle Bernstein, "Square des Missions Étrangères," *P* 16 (January 26, 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 52.
- 105 Kyong Park in conversation with Rick Lowe, "Global Neighborhoods" (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, January 13, 2009).

- 106 Sadler, *Situationist City*, 61–66.
- 107 Debord, “Theory of the Dérive,” 22–24.
- 108 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 109 *The Naked City* has been analyzed in-depth by a number of scholars, foremost among them Tom McDonough. See his “Situationist Space,” in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 241–65.
- 110 Rumney, *The Consul*, 100.
- 111 A number of Malet’s Nestor Burma titles were turned into graphic novels by illustrator Jacques Tardi beginning in the 1980s. The first of the series, *120, rue de la Gare* (1943) has since been translated into English and published as *The Bloody Streets of Paris* (New York: ibooks, 2004).
- 112 The complete text of this artwork is reproduced in *Sophie Calle: M’as tu vue* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2003), n.p.
- 113 Chtcheglov, “Letters from Afar,” 372n52.
- 114 This unpublished part of Chtcheglov’s text appears in *Écrits retrouvés* (p. 28), where the whole is dated April 20, 1963.
- 115 Editorial notes, “La lutte pour le contrôle des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement,” *IS 1* (June 1958): 6–8.
- 116 Anon., “Definitions,” 70.
- 117 See Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, “Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism,” *IS 6* (August 1961): 116–18; and Vaneigem, “Commentaries against Urbanism,” *IS 6* (August 1961), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 119–24.
- 118 Sadler, *Situationist City*, 101–2.
- 119 Guy Debord, “Exercise in Psychogeography,” *P 2* (June 29, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 42.
- 120 Groupe de recherche psychogéographique de l’internationale lettriste, “Position du Continent Contrescarpe,” *LN 9* (November 1956): 38–40.
- 121 Chtcheglov, “Introduction au Continent Contrescarpe,” 31.
- 122 Debord, “Two Accounts,” 31–32.
- 123 Anon., “An Intelligent View of the Avant-Garde at the End of 1955,” *P 24* (November 24, 1955), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 58.
- 124 Jacques Fillon, “Description raisonnée de Paris (Itinéraire pour une nouvelle agence de voyages),” *LN 7* (December 1955): 39.
- 125 Abdelhafid Khatib, “Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles,” *IS 1* (June 1959), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 75.
- 126 *Ibid.*, 75–76.
- 127 Debord, “Introduction to a Critique,” 20.
- 128 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 129 Andreotti in “Architecture and Play” suggests that this page is related to the first part of Debord’s “Two Accounts” (238n11).
- 130 Stanley Brouwn, *This Way Brouwn 25–2–61, 26–2–61* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1971), n.p.
- 131 Quoted in *Francis Alÿs: Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic: The Green Line, 2004–2005* (New York: David Zwirner, 2007), back cover.

- 132 McDonough makes this argument in relation to *The Naked City* in his "Situationist Space," 252–53.
- 133 This analysis is offered by Lefebvre in Ross, "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview," in McDonough, *Guy Debord*, 279–80.
- 134 McDonough, "The Dérive and Situationist Paris," in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 58–61.
- 135 Sadler, *Situationist City*, 77, 82.
- 136 Constant, "Demain la poésie logera la vie" (1956), in Berreby, *Documents relatifs*; quoted in Sadler, *Situationist City*, 107.
- 137 Chtcheglov, "Formulary," 15–17. Constant complained about the chimerical nature of Chtcheglov's proposals but the precedent is convincing; see Constant and editors, "On Our Means and Our Perspectives," *IS* 2 (December 1958), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 77–79.
- 138 Sadler, *Situationist City*, 107.
- 139 Ford, *User's Guide*, 74; editor's note in Debord, *Correspondence*, 354n1.
- 140 Constant, "New Babylon," in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 154.
- 141 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 142 Constant, "The Great Game to Come," *P* 30 (July 15, 1959), in *ibid.*, 63.
- 143 Constant, "Another City for Another Life," *IS* 3 (December 1959), in *ibid.*, 92–95.
- 144 "Debord to Constant," Friday, February 12, 1960, in Debord, *Correspondence*, 237.
- 145 Anon., "Ariadne Unemployed," *P* 9–10–11 (August 17–31, 1954), in Andreotti and Costa, *Situationist Writings on the City*, 48.
- 146 For more about the Stedelijk Museum maze, see Anon., "Die Welt als Labyrinth," *IS* 4 (June 1960), in *ibid.*, 98.
- 147 Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation," in *ibid.*, 86–87; see also Jean-Clarence Lambert, "Constant and the Labyrinth," in *ibid.*, 95–109.
- 148 Constant, "Description of the Yellow Zone," *IS* 4 (June 1960), in *ibid.*, 102–4.
- 149 Constant, "Another City," 95.
- 150 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 151 "An Urban Comedy," interview with Jacques Villeglé by Nicolas Bourriaud, trans. Deke Dusinberre, in *Jacques Villeglé* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 143; Alison M. Gingeras and Bernard Blistène, "Raymond Hains, Palissade, 1976," in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, & Design from France, 1958–1998* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 146.
- 152 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Décollage: Les affichistes* (New York: Zabriskie, 1990), 4–5.
- 153 Léo Malet, "La poésie mange les murs" (c. 1935), trans. in Buchloh, *Décollage*, 3. The original text can also be viewed on the *Association Atelier André Breton* website, ref. 122000, <http://www.andrebretton.fr/work/156600100867930>.
- 154 Buchloh, *Décollage*, 5–6; Brandon Taylor, *Urban Walls: A Generation of Collage in Europe & America* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2008), 12.
- 155 Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 89; Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-matter* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 143.

- 156 Naum Gabo, eulogy for Kurt Schwitters, in Marc Dachy, *Kurt Schwitters: Merz; écrits ...* (1948; repr. Paris: Gérard Lebovici, 1990), 328–29.
- 157 Villeglé, “An Urban Comedy,” 136, 146.
- 158 See Hannah Feldman, “Of the Public Born: Raymond Hains and *La France déchirée*,” *October* 108 (Spring 2004): 75–85.
- 159 Villeglé, quoted in Kaira Cabañas, “Poster Archaeology,” in *Jacques Villeglé*, 77.
- 160 Richard Wentworth, lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute, fall 2001. The first of two planned volumes on the project has since been published; see Richard Wentworth, *Making Do and Getting By* (London: Koenig Books, 2015).

**Part III: How
Fluxus Keeps
Walking Intently**

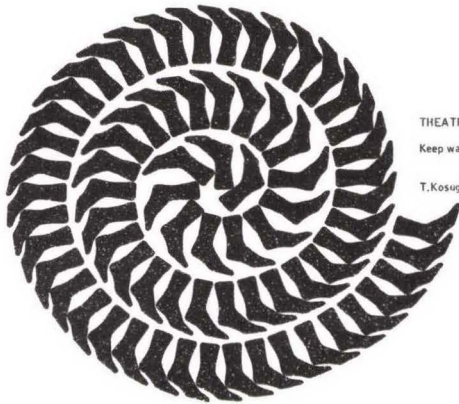
Keep Walking Intently

Three words compose the very simple phrase that Takehisa Kosugi, a Japanese artist and violinist, first published in 1963 under the title *Theatre Music*:

Keep walking intently

Just three words, and yet as a directive they offer no givens, no straightforward means of interpretation. How exactly does one follow these instructions, how does one keep walking intently? What does it even mean to walk *intently*?

One possibility is to focus on the physiological act of walking—a rather concrete response hinted at by the phrase's original presentation. In the February 1964 issue of *cc V TRE*, a newspaper put out by Fluxus, an international artist group to which Kosugi belonged, the title and text of *Theatre Music* appeared alongside a graphic spiral of feet, a snail shell of tootsies suggesting walking itself, slowly, one step in front of the other. And logically so: slowness and deliberation go hand in hand with the kind of focus demanded of intentionality. An adjacent advertisement, collaged from a mainstream publication, announced relief from corns and calluses—the typical situation in which attention is paid to perambulation (i.e., when it hurts). Never mind that, the combination of phrase, illustration, and advert suggests—don't just focus on walking when it causes you pain, do it whenever you find yourself in motion. Likewise, when *Theatre Music* was offered later that same year as part of the *Fluxkit*, a compendium of Fluxus editions by various artists, a card with the printed words and spiral design was accompanied by a large sheet of handmade



THEATRE MUSIC

Keep walking intently

T. Kosugi

Bean: To commit suicide; Jan. 3, 192 not much used. Perhaps orig. and strict for head.

Bean town: throughout the Under World Kansas City, "Kay See" and Boston excerpts from: Fluxus p. Alison Knowl

RELOCATION

(limited to 5 per year. A signed and n OF RELOCATION is provided with a

Bounds (which may be of any extent. Once set, a relocation within the bou

(Send subscriptions or inquiries to G

"0-0-0-0"

MY FEET™

THEY'RE

KILLING ME!

Why suffer agonies of

CORNIS &

CALLUSES

WIND, BURNING, ITCH-

ING, BURNING,

PERFECTING,

SHARPENING FEET

QUICK RELIEF!

**Tear out
this ad.**



PIEDS :

(1961)

Twelve Great Problems (Yes or No?)

Takehisa Kosugi, *Theatre Music*, 1963, as it appeared in *Fluxus cc V TRE*, no. 2 (February 1964). Detail, offset lithograph, black ink on white paper.

Japanese paper that, when unfolded, revealed the direct trace of the performance of the work: an inky print made by a bare right foot. These graphic gestures imply the act of walking, and paying attention to it is in keeping with the Fluxus *modus operandi* to consider some of the most commonplace actions in daily life, from making a salad to turning on a light switch.

A number of works by other Fluxus artists function in similar fashion, including Benjamin Patterson's *Stand Erect*, first published in his 1961 artist's book *Methods and Processes*:

stand erect
place body weight on right foot
lift left leg and foot with bent knee several inches
 above ground while balancing on right foot
extend left leg forward and place foot on ground,
heel first,
 several inches ahead and to left of right foot
shift body weight to left foot
lift right leg and foot with bent knee several inches
 above ground while balancing on left foot
extend right leg forward and place foot on ground,
heel first,
 several inches ahead and to the right of left foot
shift body weight to right foot
continue sequentially left, right, left, right until
process
 becomes automatic

These are fairly accurate instructions for how to walk. Their verbosity, however, means that anyone who tries to accomplish the action described—or even just to think about it—will be consumed with the specifics of an act rarely paid much heed. A series of related prints by Patterson, which date

to 1964 or earlier, translates this verbiage into a minimalist graphic that further insists on walking as something worthy of attention. In two of the extant versions of *Instruction No. 1*, hand-traced shoe prints offer a suggestive path for contemplating the act of ambulation: one shows two right footprints side by side, pointing in opposite directions, respectively stamped “NOW” and “LATER”—place your foot here now, place it here later, and see what happens in between. The other presents a square of alternating left and right shoe silhouettes, numbered one through four—step here, then here, then here, then here. It’s easy, you do it all the time, but perhaps there’s something more to it that bears notice.

The physiology of walking is not the only imaginable subject of *Theatre Music*. To walk intently might also mean to walk while contemplating the place being walked to or from; the environment walked through or something encountered unexpectedly within it; the person walked with or the people walked past; or even some thought completely unrelated to any of the above. As art historian David T. Doris discovered through his own private performance of Kosugi’s *Chironomy 1*, whose instructions read simply, “Put out a hand from a window for a long time,” the specified object or action serves as a “focusing element, the meditative stasis around which the world unfolds.”¹ Examples of walking as an effective conduit for the world can be drawn from the history of ambulatory artistic practices: the Surrealists walking the streets of Paris, night after night, intent on finding surreal encounters via friendship, mysterious women, alcoholic hallucination, and the strange effects of light and shadow; the Affichistes roaming that same city, looking for just the right swatch of torn posters; the Situationists rambling through marginal neighborhoods of Paris, studying the behavioral effects of the quarters and consciously playing

with them; Richard Wentworth, in London, pausing his strolls to photograph found sculptures and graphics. The personal applies too, as when I go on an urban forage and find mulberries above purple-stained sidewalks or lamb's quarters along the weedy edges of alleys. None of these actions is easy to accomplish without walking intently; all demand the kind of pace, environmental proximity, and floating but purposeful attention offered most readily by undirected urban ambulation.

Huh? Fluxus

Why the above interpretations and reinterpretations, historical and ahistorical, scholarly and personal, constitute an appropriate way to approach a Fluxwork has everything to do with the mysteries of Fluxus itself. Fluxus was less an art movement than an alternative attitude, a collective tendency, a voluntary association—even, according to its self-appointed chairman, George Maciunas, a way of life. It lasted officially from 1962 to 1978, but arguably began sometime in the mid- to late 1950s and has never stopped. Fluxus produced newspapers, newsletters, artist multiples, films, installations, and all kinds of events, from concerts to banquets to street actions large and small. Its name was first coined by Maciunas as the title of a magazine and only later came to be applied to a much broader set of activities, objects, and ideas. The Fluxus manifestos were never signed by anyone—not even Maciunas, who authored them. The disparate, nomadic, and shifting group of artists that made up its membership stemmed from countries across the world, including the United States, Japan, Germany, Korea, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, and the former Czechoslovakia, and while a handful of

original members can be identified, as well as various circles of latecomers, dozens of others also participated importantly in Fluxus activities at one time or another. And then there's the question of whom Maciunas excommunicated and why, and if and when he eventually reinstated them, as he sometimes did.* The group dynamics of the Surrealists and Situationist International seem almost straightforward by comparison.

But these are merely administrative details. The real challenge that Fluxus poses for art history stems not from dates and labels but the work itself. How to negotiate the difference between what Fluxus called an "event score"—simple written instructions, like *Theatre Music* or *Stand Erect*—and its limitless performances, be they historical, contemporary, nonexistent, or even imaginary?^{2**} How to get a full sense for a non-movement grounded in experience, performance, and daily life, given the limits of photographic documentation and retrospective memorialization? How to identify that which characterizes Fluxworks as a whole?

Fortunately, two artists long associated with Fluxus took this last task upon themselves and provided a list. Dick Higgins defined nine criteria for Fluxworks in 1982 and Ken Friedman updated them to twelve in 1989.³ They are: globalism, unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness,

* Who is and is not a Fluxus artist has long been a contentious topic. Ken Friedman lists the two groups of individuals he considers to be "original" members: the nine who participated in an initial festival in Wiesbaden, Germany (Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Arthur Köpcke, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Ben Patterson, Karl-Erik Welin, Emmett Williams, and Wolf Vostell) and those who came into Fluxus in the years immediately following (including Eric Andersen, Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, Yoko Ono, Tomas Schmit, Daniel Spoerri, and La Monte Young). See Friedman, "Fluxus and Company" (1989), in Friedman, *Fluxus Reader*, 243–45.

** Event scores were distributed in Fluxus newsletters and newspapers, in limited edition artworks and Fluxkits, in artists' books and exhibition catalogues.

exemplativism, specificity, presence in time, and musicality. Most of these attributes can be defined here in brief. Globalism refers to the international origins of the artists themselves, and also a democratic and anti-elitist position (this term can be confusing given the corporate connotations of globalism today). Intermedia is a term coined by Higgins to denote art made in a world in which no boundaries exist between the various media. Experimentalism suggests that Fluxus artists worked more like scientists than artists, trying new things, being open to chance, assessing the results, and working collaboratively. Playfulness means gags, which Fluxus was full of, but also the play of ideas and words. Simplicity connotes a simplicity of means. An exemplative work exemplifies the theory and meaning of its own construction. Specificity concerns the ability to be self-contained and unambiguous.

A few of the items in the list require more expansive discussion. On Fluxus as a unification of art and life, no more charming an account exists than the one with which Higgins opens his text “A Child’s History of Fluxus”:

Long long ago, back when the world was young—that is, sometime around the year 1958—a lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them).

They said: “Hey!—coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music.”

And when they saw that, it turned their minds on. And they began to ask questions. One question was: “Why does everything I see that’s beautiful

like cups and kisses and sloshing feet have to be made into just a part of something fancier and bigger? Why can't I just use it for its own sake?" When they asked questions like that, they were inventing Fluxus.⁴

The trick was not to make art that merely replicated the stuff of life—be it coffee cups, a morning kiss, or sloshing boots—in an art context. Although early Fluxworks were often performed in concert halls, that formal situation served as a necessary midpoint, where new perspectives on common phenomena could be registered. Such means, however, were directed toward an end that was located resolutely in real life itself. What was noticed outside the concert hall was what was ultimately important. As Fluxus artist George Brecht once noted, "Event scores prepare one for an event to happen in one's own 'now.'"⁵

The title of Kosugi's *Theatre Music* now becomes clearer: it implies that walking intently as an action could be performed equally on the street or in a recital hall, and that, regardless of location, the performer's entire experience constitutes something as important—and perhaps even as musical—as the melodies typically played in theaters. Patterson's *Stand Erect* does as well, offering walking up as a focused sensorial experience, the kind often found in the contemplation of an artwork but not of a common gesture. These Fluxworks share two central qualities. First is the banal and unspecialized nature of the action itself, which can be performed by any able-bodied person, professional or amateur, skilled or not, and in fact is already performed everyday by everyone, as they move about their lives. As Maciunas once wrote, "The best FLUXUS 'composition' [...] does not require any of us to perform it since it happens daily without any 'special' performance of it."⁶ Second is

the ability of Fluxus to make ordinary actions “anomalous,” as art historian Kristine Stiles has dubbed it, “thereby provoking, arousing, and vexing the mind and simultaneously energizing the body to animate novel ways and means to view and experience the world.”⁷

Given this emphasis on the familiar, and the fact that since the early 1960s Fluxus has scored every movement from sweeping to reading train timetables to eating lunch to sitting in a chair to taking care of children to passing through a doorway, it might appear somewhat beside the point to attempt to isolate those scores that concern themselves directly with walking. And even those scores that don’t implicate walking specifically but could, depending on their realization. For instance, Brecht’s *Three Yellow Events* (1961), reads simply:

Yellow Yellow Yellow

And yet, as Brecht explained, one of his own performances of this piece occurred while walking, when on a foggy evening stroll he saw three dandelions growing from a single point.⁸ Plenty of other scores suggest walking as well, such as Mieko Shiomi’s *Shadow Piece* (1963):

Make shadows—still or moving—of your body or something on the road, wall, floor or anything else.
Catch the shadows by some means.

One way to perform this piece is to try to catch one’s own moving shadow while walking toward it, an amusingly frustrating pastime common to young children and animals.

In any case, focusing on walking in the context of Fluxus *is* beside the point. But it is also not, because by finding an oblique angle through what would otherwise be taken for granted, Fluxus brings attention to all things

and to the specific action in question. So while walking can open the performer and audience up to finding the unexpected in the world, it does so as well on a more concentrated level, making, in the cases that will be examined here, the most unexceptional movement of all, walking, into something potentially incomparable. Sometimes this is achieved through plain old walking, as in the examples by Kosugi and Patterson, at others with a twist, as in a second piece by Patterson, also from *Methods and Processes*:

Close eyes

Walk to most distant visible point

Open an eye

This score involves a common enough action—walk to a far-off point. But by instructing the performer to close their eyes, Patterson renders the walk disorienting, even if performed in the safest and most contained of spaces (and potentially dangerous or endless if not). He sets the performer up for a journey that will likely involve more senses than a walker usually employs and might even end in a surprise.

By insisting on direct experience, be it with self-generated shadows or unseen roadblocks, Fluxus exhorts its importance in knowledge formation. As noted by art historian Hannah Higgins, who is also the daughter of Fluxus artists Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins, this was particularly salient in the 1960s and '70s, during the heyday of Fluxus production, when people began to rely on the kind of secondary processed information available through new trends like the internet and older ones like television.⁹ Given how virtual media has all but taken over as the provider of intelligence about the world today, Fluxus seems positively prophetic in its promotion of a bodily means of learning about the world.

To understand the radicality of this endeavor, it bears comparing this body to the ones implicated in other forms of performative artwork. The Fluxus body is neither the highly individualized, psychologically driven body of Surrealist ambulation nor the rebellious, overtly politicized body of Situationist drifting; it is not the gestural, expressionistic body of 1950s Action painting or the conceptual, militant body of '70s performance art. On the contrary, the Fluxus body is much closer to the neutral, focused figure that examined pedestrian movements at Anna Halprin's San Francisco Dancer's Workshop in the 1950s and later at the Judson Dance Theater in New York in the '60s, finding actions as common as walking to be fit subjects for serious dance.¹⁰ Without straying into the emotionally subjective, the overtly expressive, or the audaciously transgressive, the Fluxus body nevertheless constituted a unique interpretive participant concerned with concrete actions and their real, not symbolic, effects. "Any expression is objectivized and depersonalized to the point of becoming transpersonal," explained Dick Higgins. "One does not, as one does in so many works of art, see through the work to the artist."¹¹ One might see through the work to the performer, however, depending on the realization.

A caveat to these observations concerns changes in Fluxus's use of walking over time. In general, scores and events from the group's first few years differ markedly from those produced later on. The simple individual gestures of the 1960s gave way in the '70s to open-ended interactive activities epitomized by large-scale group endeavors like "Flux-Sports," a parodic Olympiad of wacky foot races and other contests. And whereas a sense of playfulness was almost always inherent in the earlier works, outright playing was often a part of the later ones.

While the centrality of an involved body might be obvious in terms of the simple event scores examined above,

and clearly remains so in the more elaborate activities of later Fluxus, it is equally true in terms of the many objects designed by Fluxus artists and produced by Maciunas for sale as multiples (which rarely sold). Neither Ay-O's finger boxes nor Maciunas's ping-pong rackets nor Alison Knowles's packages of beans were meant as static, representational sculptures but rather as things to puzzle over and play with, to stick fingers in, to fail to hit a ball with, to shake like a rattle, or even to cook up for dinner. These are artworks, yes, but they were meant to be *used*.¹² Hence the interpretive and active qualities of the implicated body—Fluxworks, be they object or event score, do not tell a person exactly how to perform them. Even when the instructions are explicit, as in Patterson's *Stand Erect*, the expectation is that something else might happen with each new iteration.

More often than not, however, the directions are as obtuse as La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #10* (October 1960), which reads simply:

Draw a straight line and follow it.

This score is obtuse not because it is difficult to understand but because it is so basic that it opens itself up to reinterpretation. Ken Friedman indicated this with the term "implicativeness," by which he meant that each Fluxwork implies many others, almost inexhaustibly so. Young's composition offers multiple examples, by him and other artists, some of which are intentional performances of the score, some not. Many of these involve walking—that is one way to follow a line, after all—though not the numerous versions created by Young himself, the earliest of which consists of a piece of paper with a single line drawn on it.

Knowles, one of the artists who performed Young's score, explained how for her "the implications of that piece

are very refreshing and stabilizing for whatever you are doing in your life.” She continued: “It took many hours with a plumb line to draw that line and then we could walk it.”¹³ Knowles doesn’t specify when, where, or with whom she drew and walked Young’s line, but others have. In an April 1963 newsletter, Maciunas suggested performing it on crowded sidewalks outside museums in New York as part of a propaganda campaign to bring attention to Fluxus. In 1964 Ben Vautier did just that, undertaking Young’s composition on busy Canal Street as part of the Fluxus festivities held that spring.

Then there are the artists who created works implied by Young’s score but not attributed to it. In Prague in 1965, Milan Knížák, the chairman of Fluxus East (east for Eastern Europe), scored *Line*, which instructs:

A line is drawn on the sidewalk with chalk. The longest line wins.

Surely that line is not just a dull white scratch on the pavement’s surface; it begs to be followed. Knížák must have known this, since a second score of 1965, *Walking Event*, directs the performer as follows:

On a busy city avenue, draw a circle about 3 m in diameter with chalk on the sidewalk.
Walk around the circle as long as possible without stopping.

A circle is a regularly curved line that eventually meets itself. Walking around the circle becomes another way of following that line. Because of its location on a city street, it also draws attention to the many other kinds of lines, painted or bricked, concrete or strung up, that order urban movement: lines that

separate cars from cars, cars from bikes, bikes from pedestrians, cars from pedestrians, pedestrians from café tables, slow traffic from fast. Drawing one's own line and following it acknowledges the existence of these bureaucratic graphics and insists on the agency to create them oneself. Similarly but more playfully, *The Human Celebration*, an elaborate parade orchestrated by Robert Watts and his students in San Diego in 1969, included a marcher who used cans of shaving cream to join the broken lines on the roadway together and others who pushed a pair of giant fake scissors, as if cutting along the dotted line. Another pedagogical experiment took place the year before, when Geoffrey Hendricks's class at Douglass College in New Jersey created a mile-long chalk line from the door of the arts building, registering the comments of passersby in captions written alongside.

Even work by non-Fluxus creators can be understood as iterations of Young's score. Consider the actions of extreme tightrope walker Philippe Petit, who in August 1974 illegally strung a wire between the towers of the World Trade Center in New York, then the world's two tallest buildings, and spent the next forty-five minutes walking, dancing, prancing, and lying down on it. At its most basic, Petit drew a line in an impossible place and proceeded to follow it. Thirty years later, contemporary artist Janine Antoni set up an inverse scenario a few neighborhoods north at Luhring Augustine Gallery, using two massive steel reels with a thick cord of hemp rope tautly strung between them. The sculpture, called *To Draw a Line*, provided the support for a pre-exhibition performance in which Antoni walked to the middle of the rope line, "drawing" it, and paused there, seven and a half feet above the ground, until she lost her balance and fell into the mass of raw hemp fiber that lay beneath. One scholar has even suggested a Fluxus-esque score for this gesture: "Walk on a tight rope. Fall."¹⁴

Just as lines can be drawn, they can also be erased. In 1962 Maciunas wrote the counter-score *Homage to La Monte Young*, which directed the performer to:

Erase, scrape or wash away as well as possible the previously drawn line or lines of La Monte Young or any other lines encountered, like street dividing lines, ruled [*sic*] paper or score lines, lines on sports fields, lines on gaming tables, lines drawn by children on sidewalks etc.

Homage acknowledges how full the world is of lines, and how much they dictate. If all these lines were removed, would we still drive on a particular side of the road, walk on the sidewalk, play within designated areas? Three scores written by Yoko Ono in 1964 pose similar questions:

Line Piece I

Draw a line.

Erase the line.

Line Piece II

Erase lines.

Line Piece III

Draw a line with yourself.

Go on drawing until you disappear.

If the first two scores in the series offer open-ended echoes of *Homage*, the third poses a philosophical puzzle. Does the self become the material of the line, a line that continues until it has walked to the edge of the earth, or at least out of view? Or does the self disappear *into* the line, becoming completely consumed with the act of drawing?

To link such a diversity of works back to a single simple score might seem far-fetched, but it is part of the very nature of Fluxus. "No incorrect forms present themselves," Brecht noted, and such is the permissive, exploratory engagement encouraged by Fluxus.¹⁵

Where Does Fluxus Come From?

Movement or not, there is some use to understanding Fluxus within the context of other avant-garde groups of the twentieth century. Many of the artists thought so as well, most of all Maciunas, who in addition to acting as chairman, designer, producer, organizer, and promoter for all things Fluxus, also made various attempts to historicize it through a series of graphic charts. (Having studied art history and worked as a graphic designer, Maciunas was perfectly suited in both temperament and skills to this task.) Four of these increasingly complex diagrams were eventually printed.

Fluxus Diagram, mapped out in 1962, was Maciunas's first attempt to place Fluxus and its intentions in a historical context. *Fluxus (Its Historical Development and Relationship to Avant-Garde Movements)* appeared in 1966 and offered Futurist Theatre, Dada, Marcel Duchamp, Haiku Style, Natural Events, and Jokes & Gags as some of the categories leading to the eventual emergence of the Fluxus Group; many pass directly through composer John Cage, whose name stands at the diagram's center line. An *Expanded Arts Diagram* appeared that same year, charting relationships across the performing arts, broadly considered, from the Roman circus to the Chinese Red Guards. Finally, the colossal *Diagram of*

Historical Development of Fluxus and Other 4 Dimensional [sic], *Aural, Optic, Olfactory, Epithelial and Tactile Art Forms* came out in 1973, offering a staggeringly detailed elaboration of the first 1966 chart, complete with dates and details of important artworks and events, as well as a few new or newly titled categories of influence, among them Surrealism, Vaudeville (for Jokes & Gags), Anti Art & Functionalism, and Natural Activities & Tasks; Dada is subdivided into separate categories for Paris, Zurich, Hannover, and Berlin; again Cage appears at the center of influence, now with years of important works listed, as well as key geographic locations—where and when, it seems, can sometimes be as important as what.

Like Dada and Surrealism, Fluxus set its sights primarily on the time, space, actions, and objects of everyday life, and less so on the special practices and places of art, believing that the separation of art and life was a false, bourgeois notion, one that did as much disservice to life as it did to art.¹⁶ All maintained, however, that much of what they produced, despite looking, sounding, or feeling unlike any other art, was in fact something to be experienced aesthetically—as well as socially, politically, or subjectively, depending on the framework. Artistic production could become a way of life, as life could become a means of artistic production. In *Paragraphs, Quotations, and Lists*, a score from spring 1961, Brecht brings this notion to the fore. He first itemizes a series of random actions, materials, and effects—“kicking a can, walking, eating a banana, kissing, urinating, tight shoes, pipe-smoke, splinter-ache, branch-shadows, water running, newsprint, itch”—everyday encounters normally experienced without reflection. Further down, he quotes Dadaist Tristan Tzara: “Art is not the most precious manifestation of life. Art has not the celestial and universal value that people like to attribute to it. Life is far more interesting.” Together, list and quote suggest that quotidian occurrences, even as banal as the ones

enumerated by Brecht, are more worthy of attention than the traditional stuff of art. On this Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus concur—think of the 1921 Dada *visite* to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Breton's ambulatory flirtations with Nadja, the above scores by Kosugi, Patterson, and Brecht—but between their positions exist important differences.

Dada, for one, functioned in great part on the basis of nihilistic destruction—of social mores, of the artist as hero, of the art object as a commodity, of traditionally defined boundaries between the arts, and of conventional forms of artistry. Fluxus negated many of these norms as well, but did so with a resolutely affirmative attitude, one that took great pleasure, production, and fun in occasional acts of destruction.¹⁷ Consider Robin Page's *Block Guitar Piece*, composed in 1962, in which the performer kicks a guitar off stage, outside, around the block, back inside, and up on the stage again. A photo of Page booting the fragmented neck of the instrument down a Manhattan street in the spring of 1963 shows a gently amused following of onlookers. Maciunas claimed that subjecting musical instruments to misuse and even outright violence—Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, and Robert Watts all took great liberties with cellos, pianos, trumpets, and more—was a way of demonstrating how sound is actually produced from material bodies.¹⁸ Music scholar Douglas Kahn backs this up, arguing that since the sound of destruction cannot be repeated, these Fluxus gestures are by default unique occurrences in time.¹⁹

A piece by Yoko Ono enacts another work of affirmative destruction. *Painting to Be Stepped On*, scored in the winter of 1960, instructs:

Leave a piece of canvas or finished
painting on the floor or in the street.

When Ono exhibited this work in 1961 at Maciunas's short-lived AG Gallery, located on Madison Avenue, a stained piece of irregularly shaped linen, apparently leftover from the creation of the adjacent *Waterdrop Painting*, was laid on the floor, one of many participatory and conceptual works on display. A paper card encouraged viewers with the phrase, "A work to be stepped on." By walking across this scrap, viewers became participants in the making of a new painting, one marked by their own shoes. A later version of this piece, installed for the "Fluxfest Presentation of John Lennon & Yoko Ono" in 1970, comprised an ink pad as a doormat and a floor covered with paper and paintings by other artists, for a bold, collective effort. Conversely, when in 1963 a copy of *Mona Lisa* was used as a doormat for visitors entering the loft where Henry Flynt's lecture against "serious culture" was being held, the painting was not walked into a new life but trampled out of the present one. Flynt, a musician and philosopher who would later vociferously rescind his membership in Fluxus, took Ono's affirmative score and realized it as a nihilistic one, intent on rejecting value rather than creating it.

Leaving aside the psychoanalytic, Fluxus and Surrealism have much in common, including an extraliterary notion of poetry as a mode of thought, the use of research as practice, art as a means or process rather than an end unto itself, the promotion of non-specialization and non-professionalization, and a belief in play. Fluxus, however, inverts the Surrealist strategy of finding the marvelous in everyday life by making it strange: Fluxus takes a realist tack, returning life to normal again, but with a new kind of attentiveness.²⁰ The Surrealist program was thick with egos and ideology, neither of which could ever be properly served by the open-ended nature of Fluxus productions, meant to be interpreted and reinterpreted in every conceivable way.

Hunting for Mushrooms and Walking on Water

Of the myriad influences on Fluxus, perhaps none is as compelling as John Cage. Maciunas directly acknowledged Cage's centrality in his diagrams, locating the composer as the single most important individual conduit for the Futurist, Dadaist, and Duchampian sources that so integrally nourished Fluxus. Higgins, who was less keen than Maciunas to establish a vanguard pedigree for the group and therefore rejected the notion of Cage (or anyone else) as father figure, nevertheless considered him to be an "uncle of Fluxus."²¹ Cage himself, when asked in an interview what he thought of the fact that many considered him to be "the spiritual father of Fluxus," replied that one might better think of him as a "root," adding modestly, "there were many roots and I was just one."²²

One of the first Fluxus festivals, held in Wuppertal, Germany, in June 1962, acknowledged Cage's importance via its name, "Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage," the *après* of the title a fitting tribute to the teacher who would have considered emulation by his students to be a gross failure. And teacher he was: a number of those who would go on to be associated with Fluxus first met in Cage's Experimental Composition class at the New School for Social Research in New York during from 1957 to '59.²³ These included Brecht—who invented the event score during the course—Higgins, and La Monte Young, as well as Scott Hyde, Allan Kaprow, Florence Tarlow, Al Hansen, Jackson Mac Low, and Yoko Ono's then husband, Toshi Ichiyanagi. Others were exposed

to Cage's work when he toured Europe, most importantly Darmstadt, Germany, in the summer of 1959, where Nam June Paik and Young were both deeply affected by his ideas.

All these facts do little to explain why Cage's ideas about concretism, indeterminacy, bruitism, simultaneity, or chance procedures (to borrow the terms Maciunas uses on his diagrams) proved so influential to Fluxus. One place to start is with two of Cage's works from the late 1950s, created while he was teaching at the New School. *Music Walk* (1958) is composed for one or more pianists who also play radios and produce auxiliary sounds by singing or other means. The duration is indeterminate. The score consists of a transparent sheet of plastic with five parallel lines drawn on it, ten unnumbered pages scattered with dots, and several transparent squares with lines intersecting at various angles. Much as the Fluxus event score is open to interpretation, every performer of *Music Walk* creates his or her own part from this abstract notation, darting from one "instrument" to another. The musician David Tudor, who performed it many times with Cage, explained the importance of movement to the piece, and thus the "walk" of its title. "The first thing you would do is decide where you had to go, and then you would either stay where you were for that length of time or else you would move to that spot and spend the time there," he said. "And then usually the piece changed according to the available resources. You purposefully place things out of view of the audience such as going backstage and then playing a phonograph or making an auxiliary sound."²⁴

Cage's related work from the next year, *Water Walk*, proceeds somewhat similarly. Scored for a solo performer, it makes use of thirty-four instruments, including a bathtub, pitcher, watering can, mechanical fish, bottle of wine, quail call, rubber duck, seltzer siphon, pressure cooker, and ice cubes. The piece lasts three minutes, and the performer must

use a watch to time his or her noise-generating motions—pouring the wine, banging a pipe on the tub, mixing the ice cubes, and so on, all of them as unskilled and comic and concrete as a typical Fluxus action—so that they follow the score, which is structured as a timeline. When he performed *Water Walk* in 1960 on the American television program *I've Got a Secret*, Cage explained that the title derives from the instruments, all of which are in some way related to water, and the fact that he spends much of his performance time walking from instrument to instrument.

In *Music Walk* and *Water Walk*, two unexpected elements are integral parts of the concert: the strange sounds created by playing nontraditional instruments borrowed from everyday life, and the vision of the performer(s) dashing this way and that, even offstage, to create some of these sounds. The commonplace objects, noises, and actions of life—including, in this case, walking—become something worth attending to, not for any symbolic meaning that they might hold but rather for the new experiences of the real they offer, however theatrically. Cage achieved this conclusion in part by staging his work where the audience was already expecting to observe art, but the effects were not meant to be limited to recital halls. On the contrary, Henry Flynt explained, “as Cage pursued his aesthetic, music became an attitude of listening, which could just as well be directed to environmental sounds.”²⁵ Given the emphasis on extra-auditory elements in both *Music Walk* and *Water Walk*, it seems plausible to extend Flynt’s observations beyond sound—not just inside the theater but also outside, as the audience takes what they learned during the performance and applies it to life itself.

Brecht, in a characteristically concise score of 1962, might be suggesting as much. In what could be read as a Fluxus version of Cage’s groundbreaking 4’33” (1952), which calls for the performer to enter the stage, sit at the piano,

raise its lid, close it after four minutes and thirty-three seconds, and exit, Brecht's *3 Piano Pieces* instructs:

standing
sitting
walking

Simple as it seems, this is the basic framework of Cage's composition (and not so far from that of *Music Walk* and *Water Walk*). Brecht's score, however, relates unambiguously to everyday life. The effect might be more or less pronounced depending on the realization, but regardless the score acknowledges these three common actions as being just as capable of, say, making music as would be verbs such as strike, blow, or play (all of which are only "musical" if applied in conventional fashion to traditional instruments). Fluxus as a whole can be seen as pursuing some of Cage's core concepts more emphatically out of the theater than Cage himself ever achieved, focused as he was on musical experience.

Except, that is, when he was in the woods. In addition to being one of the preeminent vanguard composers of the twentieth century, Cage was also an accomplished mushroom hunter and cofounder of the New York Mycological Society. He even, for a time, made part of his living selling rare wild mushrooms to some of the finest restaurants in New York. He studied them, identified them, ate them, and even fed them to friends like Marcel Duchamp, whose wife Teeny would make dinner from the basketfuls that Cage often brought to their weekly chess games.²⁶ And mushrooms, or at least mushroom hunting, have everything to do with walking and with paying attention to the surrounding environment.

How Cage first came to mushrooming is a tale he explains via his exodus from New York in 1954. When his building in Lower Manhattan was torn down, he decided

to move upstate to Stony Point, where friends of his were starting a co-op housing venture. Stuck in a shared farmhouse until his own home was ready, and missing the privacy he was used to in the city, he found himself taking more and more walks in the woods:

And since it was August, the fungi are the flora of the forest at that time the brightest colors (we're all children) they took my eye. I remembered that during the Depression I had sustained myself for a week on nothing but mushrooms and I decided to spend enough time to learn something about them.

Furthermore, I was involved with chance operations in music and I thought it would just be a very good thing if I get involved in something where I may not take chances. However, I've learned to experiment and the way you do that is if you don't know whether a mushroom is edible or not you cook it all up and you take a little bit and then you leave it until the next day and watch to see if there are any bad effects. If there aren't any you eat a little more, and presently you know something.²⁷

As Cage relates here, identifying mushrooms is something best not left to chance, though it of necessity involves careful experimentation. Hunting mushrooms, however, is an entirely different story, one that Cage told in many ways. In *Mushroom Book*, he writes:

Hunting for *hygrophoroides*, found
abortivus instead.
Returning to get more *abortivus*, found

ostreatus in fair condition. South to
see the birds, spotted *mellea*.

Hunting is starting from
zero, not looking for.²⁸

By continuously finding a different fungus than the one he was searching out, Cage realizes that the way to hunt mushrooms is to be open to whatever appears. Too much focus on a particular variety means that all others will be missed—and, given the fickleness of mushrooms generally, the one sought as well.

Cage continues in this vein in two later passages, bringing the action of walking into the pastoral picture:

Guy Nearing told
us it's a good idea when hunting
mushrooms to have a pleasant goal, a
waterfall for instance, and, having reached
it, to return
another way. When, however, we're obliged
to go and come back by the same path,
returning we notice
mushrooms we hadn't noticed going out.

i waLked
sLowly
not wanting any fUngi
to eScape my notice.²⁹

Here Cage indicates how the kind of focused attention demanded by mushrooming continually reveals newness in the environment. For Guy Nearing, a horticulturalist, the trail might not feel different enough in both directions; for Cage, it always could be, provided the pace was unhurried,

allowing the walker to take in the unexpected details encountered along the way.

All this is very much about mushrooms, but it is also about other things. Mushroom hunting offers a model for learning, observing, and having new thoughts. “Ideas are to be found in the same way that you find wild mushrooms in the forest,” Cage wrote. “Instead of having them come at you clearly, they come to you as things hidden.”³⁰ Since mushrooms themselves are so unpredictable, they mitigate the very possibility of boredom or of exhaustive knowledge. “The more you know them, the less sure you feel about identifying them,” Cage explained. “Each one is what it is—its own center. It’s useless to pretend to know mushrooms. They escape your erudition.”³¹ To what extent this statement can be applied to the world at large is revealed by considering Cage’s musical compositions. According to *Music Walk*, *Water Walk*, and *4’33”* respectively, it is just as useless to pretend to know walking, water, and silence (not to mention radios, bathtubs, and sitting). If something seems boring, pay more attention.

The broader pedagogical ramifications of these analogies go a long way toward explaining how Cage ended up teaching a second class at the New School on Sundays during the summers and autumns from 1958 to 1960: a Mushroom Identification course sometimes co-taught with Guy Nearing. Cage tells the story like this:

This summer I’m going to give a class in mushroom identification at the New School for Social Research. Actually, it’s five field trips, not really a class at all. However, when I proposed it to Dean Clara Mayer, though she was delighted with the idea, she said, “I’ll have to let you know later whether or not we’ll give it.” So she spoke to the

president who couldn't see why there should be a class in mushrooms at the New School. Next she spoke to Professor MacIvor who lives in Piermont. She said, "What do you think about our having a mushroom class at the New School?" He said, "Fine idea. Nothing more than mushroom identification develops the powers of observation." This remark was relayed to the president and to me. It served to get the class into the catalogue and to verbalize for me my present attitude towards music: it isn't useful, music isn't, unless it develops our powers of audition. But most musicians can't hear a single sound, they listen only to the relationship between two or more sounds. Music for them has nothing to do with their powers of audition, but only with their powers of observing relationships. In order to do this, they have to ignore all the crying babies, fire engines, telephone bells, coughs, that happen to occur during their auditions. Actually, if you run into people who are really interested in hearing sounds, you're apt to find them fascinated by the quiet ones. "Did you hear that?" they will say.³²

Although Cage limits the mushrooming analogy to music, and to the powers of observation as they exist in relation to sound (note that Cage uses "audition" in its archaic sense, to mean the power of listening), the implications go far beyond the auditory. This is not just about learning to appreciate all the sounds that make up our never-silent surroundings—it is also about doing the same with the rest of one's senses and even extending this to an entire world view. When Cage's students in his Experimental Composition class, who would go on to invent Fluxus, scored plain old

walking and running and shuffling, rearranged objects in the street, cleaned the sidewalk, and gave tours of curbs and alleyways, this is exactly what they were doing. And Cage was one of the ways they got there.

Picketing High Culture and Other Serious Absurdities

On the evening of Tuesday, September 8, 1964, a group of protesters paced up and down the sidewalk outside Judson Hall, on 57th Street just east of 7th Avenue in New York. FIGHT THE SNOB ART OF THE SOCIAL CLIMBERS! read one of the boldly lettered signs that hung around their necks. A printed leaflet, which identified the picketers as members of the Action Against Cultural Imperialism, articulated their cause and identified their target that day—Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose musical theater *Originale* was being performed inside as part of the New York Avant-Garde Festival. The pamphlet described Stockhausen as a characteristic creator of a type of music that pretends to have supremacy over all “plebeian and non-European, non-white cultures,” offering an uncompromising and expansively political argument to this effect:

You cannot be intellectually honest if you believe the doctrines of plutocratic European Art’s supremacy, those “Laws of Art.” They are arbitrary myths, maintained ultimately by the repressive violence that keeps oppressed peoples from

power. [...] Even worse, though, the domination of imperialist white European plutocrat Art condemns you to live among white masses who have a sick, helpless fear of being contaminated by the “primitivism” of the colored peoples’ cultures. Yes, and this sick cultural racism, not “primitive” musics, is the real barbarism. What these whites fear is actually a kind of vitality the cultures of these oppressed peoples have, which is undreamed of by their white masters. You lose this vitality. Thus, nobody who acquiesces to the domination of patrician European art can be revolutionary culturally—no matter what else he may be.³³

This was not the first demonstration against high culture held by the Action Against Cultural Imperialism. A small protest targeted at Stockhausen had been mounted the previous April at the performance space Town Hall; an earlier one on February 27, 1963, was directed at three venerable New York cultural institutions, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Philharmonic Hall. At each, a handful of picketers held signs announcing: DEMOLISH SERIOUS CULTURE! DESTROY ART! DEMOLISH ART MUSEUMS! Stockhausen was, in the end, not the target but rather a prime example of what Henry Flynt, the group’s spokesperson, explained as the connection between serious-culture snobbery, the insistence on its across-the-board validity, the institutionalization of taste and amusement, and human suffering.³⁴

The protesters outside Judson Hall, the third and largest picket, consisted primarily of Fluxus artists and associates Flynt, George Maciunas, Ay-O, Ben Vautier, Takako Saito, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, and Allan Kaprow, as well as filmmakers Tony Conrad and Marc Schleifer, and



The picket against Karlheinz Stockhausen's concert *Originale* at the New York Avant-Garde Festival, outside Judson Hall, 57th Street, New York, September 8, 1964.

poet Allen Ginsberg. Some confusion resulted from the fact that Higgins, Knowles, and Kaprow were also part of the performance of *Originale*—Kaprow was the director—and Ginsberg was included in a second festival event. A review in the *New York Times* the next day even insisted that the protest was part of the performance, though it was not.³⁵ And while it must have seemed plausible to the four artists who both walked the picket line and performed inside the concert hall that the two activities were compatible—Higgins later explained that he joined the picket because he thought it was funny—nevertheless Flynt and at least some of his cohort took the protest quite seriously. The language of the pamphlet was not meant to be satirical, and the extremity of its political claims, linking high culture with racism and imperialism, echoed, if anything, the all-or-nothing rhetoric of the civil rights movement, not to mention its physical form of putting active people on the street to stand bodily for what they believed in.

This was the era of powerful, defiant, world-changing marches, from Selma, Alabama, to Washington, DC. Tellingly, even the most minor of protests could generate hostility: During the picket outside MoMA, a museum official approached the protesters to notify them that the institution had never been picketed before and that they couldn't picket without its permission. He insisted that MoMA owned the sidewalk on which they were pacing and that they would have to move. These were outright lies: MoMA had in fact been picketed before; protesters in democratic countries do not need the permission of their target to demonstrate (and as it happened these protesters had received permission from the police); and institutions do not own the sidewalks outside their front door—the city and by extension its citizens do. What the museum demonstrated via this deceit was a fear of the changes that were

beginning to take place across the country and a desire to keep MoMA out of it. A humorous report on the picket that appeared in the *New Yorker* the following week suggests the broader context of this attitude: the author situated the protest outside “St. John the Precursor,” with church officials as riled and two-faced as the museum’s, commenting on a general resistance on the part of major institutions—religious, cultural, or governmental—to public criticism.³⁶

The museum official’s behavior revealed the power of a group of individuals walking together with placards in a public space, especially one adjacent to a powerful and symbolic place like MoMA. It is a power that functions both in terms of audience—of critical, marginalized messages being communicated to passersby—and also, as Rebecca Solnit has argued, in terms of the participants themselves. For Solnit, the effectiveness of public protests, whether they take the form of large processions or small pickets, is located in the marchers, who suddenly become a community unto themselves, an empowered force that refuses to consume the status quo and instead produces and proclaims its own meaning. In the civil rights marches of the 1960s, the anti-war demonstrations of the 1970s, the gay pride parades of today, and every kind of collective walking in between, ambulation becomes speech, a rewriting of history, “a bodily demonstration of political or cultural conviction, and one of the most universally available forms of public expression.”³⁷

In the case of the pickets Flynt organized, the message was a rejection of high culture. And, though none of the demonstrations were official Fluxus actions, the number of Fluxus members involved, including the chairman, Maciunas, plus the fact that Flynt’s report on the earliest protest had been published in the Fluxus newspaper and the address for Action Against Cultural Imperialism was 359 Canal Street, also known as the location of the

Fluxhall, Fluxshop, and Maciunas's loft, meant that they were perceived as such, and have continued to be.³⁸ Nor was the case against serious culture out of keeping with certain Fluxus attitudes, as exemplified in work ranging from Ono's *Painting to Be Stepped On* to Patterson's *Stand Erect* to Knížák's *Walking Event*, all of which rejected the norms of traditional art in favor of quotidian materials, events, and actions. Ben Vautier, who participated in both of the demonstrations against Stockhausen, would go on to promote his own form of protest against art, picketing in front of the Maeght Foundation, home to a private collection of modern art in the south of France, with signs bearing the slogan: L'ART EST INUTILE (ART IS USELESS).

Maciunas's own political position had been well articulated by this time. He believed firmly in a radical Left politics modeled on Soviet notions of collaborative culture—one outcome of this was his suggestion that all Fluxus artists copyright their works collectively—and spoke often of the need for Fluxus to provide a "common front." These beliefs were not necessarily shared by the other members of Fluxus, however, and even seem to exist in paradoxical relationship to the freedom of interpretation provided by the event score. Nevertheless, Maciunas argued that the kind of art practiced by Fluxus, because of its rejection of hierarchies, artificiality, and abstraction, could serve as an art for the masses in a Marxist-Leninist sense. He explained this in a letter to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, noting a desired confluence between the "concretist artists of the world and the concretist society which exists in the USSR," and expressing his desire to help Russia become a leader of revolutionary arts again.³⁹ Again, meaning as it was in the 1920s, before Stalin rejected radical art for socialist realism, back when an organization like the Left Front of the Arts, a wide-ranging group of avant-garde writers, photographers,

critics, and designers that produced the journal *LEF*, could play a significant role in structuring the new revolutionary Soviet society. Maciunas idealized *LEF* and connected it with Fluxus on an ideological level. "Fluxus objectives," he explained, "are social (not aesthetic)."⁴⁰

If one outcome of this belief in the sociopolitical possibilities of Fluxus was participation in Flynt's demonstrations, others were suggested in *Fluxus News Letter*, no. 6 (April 1963). Under the heading "Proposed Propaganda Action" appeared various means for sabotaging New York's transportation system, communications system, and art institutions. These ranged from disrupting traffic via the contrived breakdown of cars and trucks bearing Fluxus signage; to selling fake editions of the *New York Times* on street corners; to having all kinds of cumbersome objects like rented chairs, caskets, or coal delivered to the sidewalks in front of museums and galleries at opening time. The newsletter also listed a number of scores to be performed on the street, including Nam June Paik's *String Quartet*, played by dragging various string instruments on their backs as if they were toy wagons; an unattributed *Composition X*, completed by carrying posters announcing the closure of such-and-such museum due to a burst sewage line, leaking urinals, or some other scatological reason; and the aforementioned museum sidewalk version of La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #10*.

Some of these gestures were eventually realized in one form or another: "Fluxus" was printed on sidewalks and overtop preexisting posters throughout the city for people to notice as they walked by; Vautier undertook Young's piece in the spring of 1964, though on the decidedly uncultured space of Canal Street. Much more recently, on July 4, 2009, a counterfeit issue of the *New York Times* was distributed to the confusion and delight of pedestrians on street corners throughout the city by a secret consortium of activists and

artists unrelated to Fluxus, including the Yes Men. Sample headlines included: IRAQ WAR ENDS, Nation Sets Its Sights on Building Sane Economy, Maximum Wage Law Succeeds, and Nationalized Oil to Fund Climate Change Efforts. "All the News We Hope to Print" read the reworded quote that normally sits at the top left of the *Times's* front page.

The radical ideas proposed in the newsletter and articulated through Flynt's pickets failed to generate a sense of collective Fluxus political action. Instead the opposite occurred, with artists such as Young, Brecht, Robert Morris, and Richard Maxfield threatening to dissociate themselves from Fluxus and calling for Maciunas's resignation as chairman. Jackson Mac Low's long and scathing response to the newsletter called it "unprincipled, unethical & immoral in the basic sense of being antisocial & hurtful to the very people whom my cultural activities are meant to help."⁴¹ In the end, Maciunas backed down from these calls to arms, put an end to Fluxus participation in direct action campaigns, kept his leadership post, and managed to open the Perpetual Fluxus Festival at the Washington Square Gallery just a few weeks after the protest outside Judson Hall.

The uproar was not ultimately about abstaining from political action but rather from Flynt's mode of unilateral anti-art propaganda. In *Fluxus News Letter*, no. 7, dated May 1, 1963, Mac Low himself offered a number of suggestions for public actions. Fluxus, he believed, should be agitating against the war in Vietnam, US aggression toward Cuba, nuclear testing, racial segregation, and capital punishment. It should find ways of actively supporting strikers and locked-out workers, as well as walks for peace. No such engagements were actually made under the auspices of Fluxus, though a number of the artists were involved in the political protests of the time.

In the end, the kind of public action that would come to represent Fluxus looked as little like Mac Low's proposals as Flynt's pickets. But all, regardless of their content, functioned based on the kind of collective meaning making made possible by a group of people moving together in public. Willem de Ridder, a Dutch artist and Fluxus chairman for Northern Europe, provided a drily mystifying example when he and fellow artist Wim T. Schippers performed their composition *March* on December 6, 1963, in Amsterdam. The score instructed:

A route is designed and written down. The time of departure is decided and the date. You can print big posters and announce the march, giving the date, route and time of departure. 3 or 6 persons are selected to walk the march. They walk behind each other or in rows of two on the sidewalks following the route, starting in time. You can make photos to document the march. The march performers should obey the traffic laws.

What actually happened was more or less exactly that. The participants were de Ridder and Schippers, plus four other men, all respectably dressed. The event had been announced on posters throughout the city. Photographers, police detectives, and a television cameraman were present at the pre-announced departure, three o'clock in the afternoon at the central station, and followed the walkers on their procession across the Nieuwendijk, Kalverstraat, and the Munt to Rembrandt Square, where the demonstration ended after a total of seventeen minutes. Nothing had been visibly protested for or against. The marchers carried no signs or other forms of propaganda, handed out no leaflets, and supplied no press release or other statements to the effect of why they were marching.⁴²

From most perspectives, the gesture would have seemed utterly pointless. But as Dick Higgins has explained: "It is a great source of mental refreshment to do something for no particular reason, especially when it is not interesting or refreshing. One simply becomes very conscious of nothing in particular."⁴³ Perhaps the six men were making a case for the importance of doing something as quintessentially purposeful as marching but without any grounds, thereby allowing the mind and body to take in an unprogrammed experience. In the absence of telltale signs of meaning, of banners, fliers, or proclamations, they may have been setting up a situation in which the action could take center stage. Maybe they were marching for *marching* itself, to make the case that walking across the city could be something worth promoting, witnessing, recording, and, well, marching about. That was what their promotional posters announced: a march. What could be more Fluxus than an action—especially one like marching, with its militaristic connotations—opened up to new possibilities, to repurposing or even de-purposing, to play and the kind of emptiness meant to be filled by the world at large?

How the world comes to fill that meaning is worth considering. De Ridder and Schippers conducted their march in central Amsterdam in the early 1960s, a place and time of extreme permissibility. But what if they'd realized it in Birmingham, Alabama, or in Moscow? What if they'd been black instead of white, Asian instead of northern European, women instead of men? What if they'd been dressed as hippies or soldiers instead of gentlemen? Even within a city like New York, the meaning and reception of an action could change from one neighborhood to another: in 1975, when French conceptual artist Daniel Buren orchestrated *Seven Ballets in Manhattan*, sending a group of five people to parade set routes around the city while holding

placards bearing his signature colored vertical stripes, the participants found that each area had its own character and means of dealing with the out of the ordinary. Of the seven different sites they visited, from Chinatown to Central Park, the least interesting, reported art critic Lucy R. Lippard, was SoHo, where the audience, accustomed to all sorts of art happenings, “was jaded and unimaginative.”⁴⁴

Think of the differences implicit at the level of both race and location in two otherwise comparable scores, Robert Filliou’s undated *One-Minute Scenario* and Benjamin Patterson’s *Man Who Runs* (1963). The first, written by a self-described “one-eyed good-for-nothing Huguenot” (i.e., a white French Protestant with a glass eye), instructs:

A man runs out of the Chelsea Hotel, 222 W. 23rd Street, N.Y. He runs east to 7th Avenue
then south to 22nd Street
then west to 8th Avenue
then north to 23rd Street
then east to the Chelsea Hotel which he reenters at the same speed.

The second, composed by an African-American, was published in the first Fluxus newspaper, in January 1964, as a map of the midtown New York Public Library, with arrows showing the route to run, from the main entrance up to the third floor and out again. The performer of Patterson’s piece could be anyone, but imagine how it might have registered if performed at the time by Patterson, versus how Filliou’s would have appeared if performed by Filliou. How would patrons, librarians, and guards have understood a black man running in and out of the grand Fifth Avenue library circa 1963, the era of civil rights unrest? He would likely have drawn some apprehensive looks; he might even

have been stopped and questioned. As for Filliou, a white man running out of the bohemian Chelsea Hotel, around the block, and back cannot have raised more than a few shrugged shoulders—there goes another one of those crazy artists—if that.

These questions of geographic, temporal, and participant specificity apply to most of the Fluxus scores discussed so far, all the more so to those works realized in public space. Two are particularly worth reconsidering in light of this awareness: Milan Knížák's *Line* and *Walking Event*. Why? Because Knížák was a Fluxus artist who lived in Prague, and Prague in 1965, when these scores were conceived, had been under communist rule for nearly twenty years. Making a bizarre street-side spectacle by trying to draw the longest line possible or walking endlessly around a chalked circle is not the same gesture in democratic New York, whatever the neighborhood, as in communist Prague. Likewise, when Knížák and the critic Jindřich Chalupecký hosted Vautier, Higgins, Knowles, and a number of other Fluxus associates for three days of events in October 1966, every score they performed became something it could not be in the artists' free home countries. Granted, no Fluxus score is ever the same twice. The difference here, however, is not about the performer's interpretation or even environmental noise, but rather a radically other sociopolitical situation, one where society was policed at all hours, sometimes even by itself, where not following the rules of conduct could mean jail time or worse, where the very act of organizing an unofficial public gathering was cause for punishment. Knížák himself was kept under surveillance and arrested on more than one occasion for his art activities.

The Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek has celebrated actions like Knížák's in their context of Soviet repression, noting that "the truly heroic thing to do was [...] to *publicly*

do some small thing that perturbed the ritual.”⁴⁵ Knížák hints at the urgency with which he and his cohort acted, in an undated typescript:

Here in CSSR appeared activities known in the other world as happenings, events, actions, etc.....but there is a big difference between such activity at other countries, especially so called western countries and at CSSR.

Why?

I think—there are different beginnings, different backgrounds. Here there were no grandfathers of it. No connections. No names. No titles.

It comes immediately.

Fell from the sky. BETTER: it was spread all over. Grew out of people around.

Out of the people who hate it after. When it appeared.

IT WAS NECESSARY TO DO SUCH THINGS.

IT WAS NECESSARY.⁴⁶

It was *necessary*—not just to draw lines in the street, but to make every other conceivable gesture as well, and to make it count as something that was at least a little bit different.

In “AKTUAL—Live Otherwise,” the second manifesto for the AKTUAL group, with whom Knížák made many public works throughout the 1960s, this notion is explained:

Use every situation as an attack on your surroundings and on yourself. Use the means available with the directest possible intensity of effect. Make a game of many everyday situations, thus ridding them of all that is cramped and deformed. Exert an influence through every gesture, word, act, glance,

your appearance, through EVERYTHING. Simple, anonymous activity. There is no difference between a deliberately evoked action and a spontaneous one. Walks, dinners, trips, games, celebrations, journeys by bus and street-car, shopping, conversations, sports, fashion shows ... all done a little bit differently. Spontaneous rituals in the street.⁴⁷

What this actually amounted to could be quite modest: handing out paper planes to passersby in the district surrounding Prague Castle, walking around the city directing people's attention to things they would not otherwise have seen, organizing spontaneous children's games for participants of all ages. At other times AKTUAL's gestures were more elaborate and overtly artistic. In *A Short Carting Exhibition* (1962–63), they picked up rubbish ahead of the sanitation department and moved it to another location, arranging it into surrealist tableaux. No doubt there was plenty of sculptural pleasure involved in quickly creating these assemblages, but so too there must have been the fear of discovery—the need to keep one step ahead of the trash collectors, who might have alerted the police—and the imagined satisfaction of pedestrians stumbling upon these unofficial street works, which reclaimed the street as a space for free play.

In AKTUAL's most celebrated artworks, the *Demonstration for All the Senses/AKTUAL Walk*, which took place in 1964, and the *2nd Manifestation of AKTUAL Art*, held the following year, dozens of people and props were involved in a daylong series of scored events conducted publicly across Prague. In the first performance, which lasted several hours, participants carried common household objects down the street, were locked in a small room doused in perfume, encountered a man playing a violin and a woman listening to the radio,



Above: Milan Knížák, *A Short Carting Exhibition*, New World Street, Prague, 1963. From the series "Small Environments on the Street" (1962-64). Photograph of an action.
Below: Milan Knížák, *2nd Manifestation of AKTUAL Art*, Capuchin Street, Prague, 1965. Photograph of an action.

both of them lying down in the middle of the street, watched as a newly glazed window was broken, collectively destroyed a book, and more. In the second, which lasted eight hours, participants helped destroy a Renaissance art monograph and a number of paintings, witnessed a gun being shot, held a snowball fight with thousands of wet and unbound screenplay pages, nominated a ten-year-old girl as beauty queen, ate potatoes in place of Sunday dinner, walked single file to a park, built a bonfire, and tossed a hanky, necktie, stockings, and money into it.

These events were alternately nonsensical, uncomfortable, aggressive, entertaining, and banal. They did not add up to some greater allegorical meaning, though they may in some way have recalled the absurdity of everyday life in a socialist state.⁴⁸ Ultimately, however, what was meant by these gestures is indicated by the title of the 1964 provocation. *Demonstration for All the Senses* was an attempt to activate all the senses of the participants, to challenge their relationships to objects, sound, violence, group activities, and notions of private versus public space.

Having had their senses awakened in the collective first part of the manifestation, participants could then complete the individual second part, in which it was announced that everything that happened to them for the next fortnight would be considered part of the event. Suddenly, everyday life became one with a larger, freer, stranger world, in which the street is not strictly the place to dash to and fro in a hurry, under the watchful gaze of police and neighbors. It became a site for play and spontaneous interaction, in which messes are made and unusual behavior is allowed and people walk wherever they want, however they choose. That, at least, is the crazy hope expressed by AKTUAL and demonstrated, however briefly, by the absurd events they conducted in the streets of Prague.

Revolution in the Street

Streets may not be not the exclusive space of everyday life, but they are unique in their accessibility, familiarity, and impact. Even a Fluxus artist as heavily associated with multiples and theatrical events as George Brecht recognized this when he mentioned in a radio discussion, “the occurrence that would be of most interest to me would be the little occurrences on the street.”⁴⁹ Whether Brecht was describing the possibility of taking unplanned events from daily life as art or of realizing preplanned events as life is unclear, but that ambiguity perfectly suits what Fluxus artists ended up doing on the pavement.

Sometimes this could be both specific and banal. Brian Buczak’s *Falling Down on the Icy Sidewalk* consists of “slipping and falling down on the sidewalk when least expecting to do so.” Benjamin Patterson’s *A Lawful Dance* (1962) instructs:

A traffic light, with or without special pedestrian signals is found or positioned on street corner or at stage center.

Performer(s) waits at real or imaginary curb on red signal, alerts self on yellow signal, crosses street or stage on green signal. Achieving opposite side, performer(s) turns, repeats sequence. A performance may consist of an infinite, undetermined or predetermined number of repetitions.

Crossing the street according to a traffic light is standard pedestrian behavior. Doing this action over and over again

is not. Through nonsensical repetition, Patterson transforms the ordinary into something anomalous, enough so that when he and Higgins realized *A Lawful Dance* in Times Square, they attracted the attention of the locals—in particular a bevy of prostitutes named Bea, Lindy, and Shirley, “three overdeveloped young ladies with colossal hairdos,” according to Higgins’s description. “They saw me (and a group of others) crossing back and forth, and it occurred to them that it would be fun to join in. So they did, no questions asked.”⁵⁰

When these streetwalkers spontaneously took part in Patterson’s event, they received Fluxus in the best way possible, using it to turn their own workaday action into something playful and new. Walking was doubly implicated here, both in terms of qualifying the score and qualifying the audience. But even scores that don’t involve ambulation imply it when performed as street events, since most witnesses were pedestrians. They were going wherever they were going and likely not planning to encounter art along the way. And they were walking, because even if by the early 1960s cars had taken over the landscape, Fluxus was making its street works in cities that remained bastions of foot traffic, like New York, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Paris, London, and Nice. Lucy R. Lippard explains that “street performance was seen as a way of moving out of the art context, ‘turning people on, not artists,’ while taking note of the dangers of ‘doing things to people,’ exploiting an audience which had escaped art.”⁵¹ Stopping unsuspecting people in their tracks offered Fluxus the chance of waking them up to the possibilities of a life where moving through the city could be more than just a pragmatic affair.

The beginnings of Fluxus street practice are surprisingly accidental, mostly the result of calamitous circumstances, as when a near riot erupted in October 1962 during

a series of performances organized by sometime associate Daniel Spoerri in conjunction with an exhibition by Wolf Vostell at Galerie Monet in Amsterdam. The audience, jammed into the tiny gallery, was unresponsive to the performances, but when the artists tried to do some pieces outside instead, a group of students set fire to a large pile of paper, leading to the eventual arrival of the police, the shutting down of the event, and the arrest of the master of ceremonies. The artists, having had the rest of their performance schedule curtailed, decided to go on an adventure. "At last we took off across the back streets, chanting something a little Tibetan," recalled Higgins.

When we crossed one canal, Paik floated a flaming violin with a radio on it down the canal. At another canal, Tomas Schmit took a swim. Later on, Emmett Williams measured the bridge that I mentioned before with inflationary marks in such a way as to simultaneously perform his composition for millionaire and one-eyed poet (Filliou has only one eye). Williams was the millionaire and Jed Curtis was the one-eyed poet (wearing an eye-patch). I did "Danger Music No. 17." All in all, it was an amazing collage of pieces and all too concrete with Dutch nationalism.⁵²

Higgins didn't indicate if anyone else witnessed these performances, so the pleasure of doing them while wandering through Amsterdam seems to have been mostly about the free, urban interaction it offered the artists themselves. Here the Fluxus experience is especially close to the Surrealist and Situationist modes of spontaneous ambulation.

Audience was a central component of the success of Fluxus's next foray into the street, during the summer 1963

Festival d'Art Total et du Comportement in Nice, which had been organized by local artist Ben Vautier. "Nice festival in the casino was cancelled when officials chickened out, so most of the pieces were done on beach, streets & promenade—best festival so far!" reported Maciunas.⁵³ What made it so successful was working outside where pedestrians could stumble on Fluxworks unexpectedly. "In fact," he wrote, "it convinced me that the street is best theater to give concerts in—it's free, we don't have to advertise & we get big audiences. [...] These street performances are also a very good way to promote concerts in halls since it makes people curious about what the hell is this all about."⁵⁴ Maciunas's conclusions are corroborated by photographs of the festival, which reveal a notably run-of-the-mill crowd, curious about the strange acts they were witnessing: a besuited Vautier brushing his teeth after eating *Flux Mystery Food* (unlabeled canned goods) while Maciunas, in a bowler hat, looks on; Vautier, in pinstripes, signing human beings as works of art and offering certificates to his assignees, three middle-aged Niçois keeping dry under umbrellas. The successful sidewalk experiments of the festival set the scene for many more to be planned.

Upon his return to New York in September 1963, Maciunas established the Fluxhall and Fluxshop at the northwest corner of Canal and Wooster Streets in the artist neighborhood of SoHo. Alison Knowles explains that unlike in Europe Fluxus had no real audience or historical cultural situation to fight against in New York, so they took to performing on the street outside Maciunas's loft.⁵⁵ First came "Canal Street Open Saturday Nights," which involved four to ten performers realizing various street events. "Fluxus Street Theater," the following spring, included Robert Watts's *Two Inches* (1962), in which "a 2-inch-wide ribbon is stretched across the stage or street and then cut," with the ribbon splitting performed by motorcars. In a double

piece, Vautier realized Brecht's *Solo for Violin Viola Cello or Contrabass* (1962)—a one-word score, “polishing,” which he interpreted by rubbing a violin—while sitting on a loading dock entangled in string—Knowles's execution of Kosugi's *Anima I* (1961), which called for a performer to be wound up in seven hundred meters of cord. But while the setting was free and the street full people, that didn't necessarily guarantee an attentive audience. Signs were held up to announce the titles to passersby, but, as Knowles admits, they “of course took little notice.”⁵⁶

A photo in the July 1965 edition of the Fluxus newspaper records that one person who did take notice of Vautier was a policeman, which brings up an unavoidable element, if not necessarily a drawback, of working on the street. Although police presence shut down the near riot in Amsterdam—probably not a bad thing on the whole, since it was starting to turn ugly (Higgins had just punched an onlooker, who'd tried to burn him) and it freed the artists to go on their adventure—they do not necessarily make a poor audience, and they tend to participate to one extent or another. The police are expected to be observant and to actively maintain order, so what could be more appealing than to startle them with an out-of-the-ordinary occurrence that demands investigation but is not technically illegal? Even in Prague, where surveillance and the threat of incarceration were a fact of everyday life, Knížák/AKTUAL managed to involve the police as a useful element in their 1965 manifestation. A heated argument with a few officers about the mess created by the wet-paper snowball fight led to participants engaging in a hectic cleanup of the street. But, as Knížák makes clear in his report on the event, the cleanup was an essential and inextricable element of the action, one that would not have been possible without the insistence of the authorities.⁵⁷

In New York, where the police were perhaps not quite as reliable, a different tactic was taken to make an event out of tidying the street. The scrubbing was scored, permission obtained from the appropriate officials (in this case the parks department), and the performance realized. *Street Cleaning Event*, composed by Hi Red Center, a Tokyo-based group made up of Genei Akasegawa, Jiro Takamatsu, and Natsuyuki Nakanishi, consists of the following directives:

A small (about 4 sq. meters) area of sidewalk should be cleaned by Fluxus performers in a very thorough way, but using devices not normally used in streets such as: steel wool, steel brushes, powder cleaners, dental picks, toothbrushes, bleaches, cotton balls and alcohol, etc. etc.

The event was presented at Grand Army Plaza in midtown at three o'clock on the afternoon of June 11, 1966, by Barbara and Peter Moore, Geoffrey and Bici Hendricks, Dan Lauffer, Maciunas, Robert Watts, and others. The cleaners sported white lab coats and spent thirty to forty minutes carefully soaping, scrubbing, rinsing, and drying a large square of slate sidewalk, while a crowd of pedestrians looked on—one of them with bare feet, perhaps pleased by the prospect of finding a clean surface in Manhattan for walking. An earlier version was undertaken by Hi Red Center and associates in the Ginza district of Tokyo in October 1964, with the addition of surgical masks for the performers, in keeping with Japanese standards of hygiene. A later one, organized by Bengt af Klintberg on a cobblestone street in Stockholm in 1970, took some liberties with the score, dressing participants in regular street clothes and using buckets and brooms instead of more delicate instruments.

Each of these performances, despite their differences, brings attention to the act of cleaning, making it into something significant, not just a lowly job relegated to housewives and janitors, to be done when the father has left for work or the boss has gone home. The New York and Tokyo iterations, with their lab coats and straight faces, suggest this as serious, meticulous work, while the Stockholm version makes it fun, with casual clothing, laughter, and child participants. All three also elevate the sidewalk or street into a space worth cleaning. These are the places where walking happens—to signal them as something worth caring for is to ennoble both pedestrianism and its ground.

Street Cleaning Event also foreshadows the lifelong work of feminist artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles. In her “Maintenance Art Manifesto” of 1969, she calls for a recognition of the importance of looking after the world, from the home to the street to the earth itself, asking: “After the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?”⁵⁸ Since Ukeles, as a new mother and homemaker, found herself doing just that kind of undervalued work instead of having time to make art, she decided to exhibit quotidian maintenance practices as art and has continued to do so into the present. Over the course of nearly five decades, Ukeles’s endeavor has alternately focused on city sanitation workers, office cleaners, and landfills, but one of her best-known performances was done in 1973 at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. The iconic image of *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance (Outside)* shows Ukeles kneeling in jeans and a T-shirt on the front stairs of the museum, pouring a bucket of water over the steps that she has just mopped and scrubbed. As with Hi Red Center’s *Street Cleaning Event*, this gesture elevates not just the act of cleaning but also the space that is cleaned, the surface

on which we walk everyday into places—museums, office towers, homes—that are already valued.

Another tactic for ennobling the space and activities of the street is to bring the lofty down to them. Vautier did this when he took *God* for a walk during the 1962 Festival of Misfits in London at the ICA and Gallery One. The exhibition segment of the festival was held at Gallery One, where Vautier had set up an elaborate window display, including a black box with the following statements written in his trademark loopy cursive on its sides: “god,” “god as a work of art,” “god is in here,” “for sale as a work of art.” Normally the box, which was made in 1960, hung from a perch above the door, but photographs from the festival also document Vautier taking it for a stroll down a London street and through an ornate plaza, where he showed it to a well-dressed middle-aged man and other pedestrians.

Robert Filliou also endeavored to take art out of the gallery and into the street when he founded the Galerie Légitime in January 1962. Or rather, to take the gallery itself into the street: his exhibition space, in which he first displayed his own work and later held a solo exhibition for Benjamin Patterson as well as a group exhibition for Vautier, Williams, Page, Spoerri, Arthur Koepcke, and himself, was a hat (multiple hats, actually, due to theft and other vagaries). Its location was the streets of Paris, London, and Frankfurt, which Filliou would wander, hat in hand, pausing to display and discuss its ever-changing contents with curious passersby. The invitation card for Patterson’s show in Paris makes these peregrinations an explicit part of the exhibition, detailing the route that the gallery would travel over the course of the vernissage and inviting visitors to join them along the way. Beginning at four in the morning at the Pont Saint-Denis and ending at nearly eleven that night at the Galerie Girardon on boulevard Pasteur,

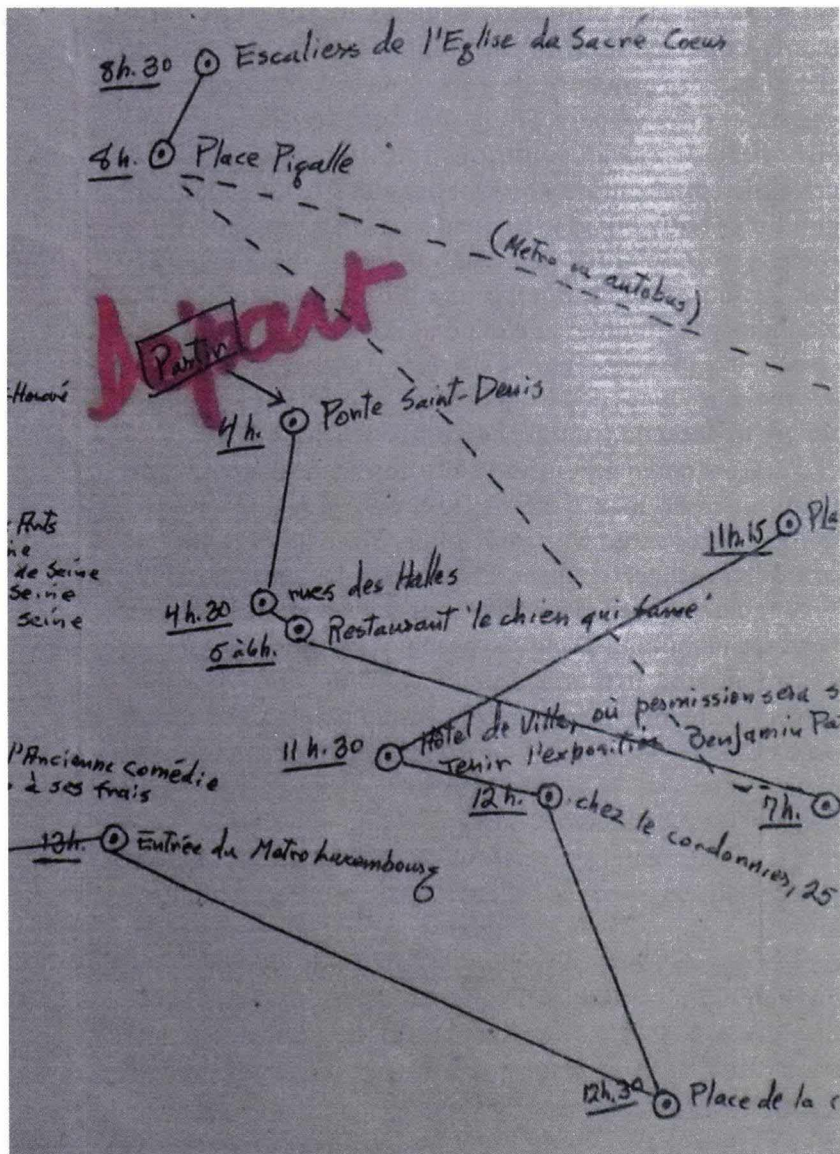


Ben Vautier taking *God* (1960) for a walk during the Festival of Misfits, Gallery One, London, October 1962.

the show traveled through Les Halles, up the stairs of the Sacré-Coeur church, to the tomb of Gertrude Stein in Père Lachaise cemetery, past Place de la Contrescarpe, up the stairs of the Opéra, along the Quai des Tuileries, and elsewhere. It was an ambitious tour traversing multiple arrondissements mostly on foot but also via bus and metro, and a decidedly broad introduction of Patterson's work to the city. Filliou noted in a 1962 statement that the gallery had an "air of living poetry, of action, of behavior [that] was hardly negligible" and depended on being worn in the street, on nights out, at openings, and so on. That was the source of its name, he explained: "I consider it legitimate for art to descend from its heights to the street."⁵⁹

How could an entire exhibition fit into a hat? How could a single man balance it all on his head? Emmett Williams answered these questions quite cheekily in one of his "Kunstfibel" collages, where a postcard image of three Portuguese women, each balancing a dozen baskets on her head while walking along the beach, is modified to become a cartoon stand-in for the Galerie Légitime. There's a whole history of people using their heads to display and transport commercial wares, and Filliou's vanguard endeavor fits right in. But though the small objects on exhibit in the Galerie Légitime were for sale, Hannah Higgins notes that it was ultimately an open-ended experience for visitors. They could receive it as a form of institutional critique, an anti-art gallery, a fashion statement, a cabinet of curiosities, a garbage can, or any number of other ways depending on their point of view—and on their decision to stop in the first place, since the nature of the gallery obliged pedestrians to pause and engage with a strange man and a strange thing if they were to experience it at all.⁶⁰

The Galerie Légitime was hardly Filliou's only street-side gesture. Around 1960 he and his colleague Peter Cohen



Detail of the program for "Street Performances," Benjamin Patterson's exhibition at Robert Filliou's Galerie Légitime, Paris, July 3, 1962. Layout by George Maciunas. Black-printed lithograph on brown tick wrapping paper, folded for mailing, 20.3 × 47 cm.

conducted *Performance Piece for a Lonely Person in a Public Place* in the bars, train stations, and parks of Paris. They sat, people watching, until each had chosen a passerby who looked how he himself might appear in twenty, thirty, or forty years. (The piece could also be adapted for an older performer, who would find someone who looked as he or she did twenty, thirty, or forty years prior.) The task was then to observe this person to discover something about one's own past or future.

Other street works followed, many of them noted in *The Eternal Network Presents: Robert Filliou* [sic], an alphabetized encyclopedia of Filliou's work. The category "Street" includes the ongoing "Birthday of Art," first announced on January 17, 1963, the celebrations for which have often taken place in the street, and "Artists-in-Space" (1982–84), whose goal of artist participation in the space program led to numerous street actions. The entry for "New York," a 1967 photograph of Filliou walking purposefully down 14th Street, bears the mysterious caption: "At that time Filliou planned a project 'to be integrated in the crowd.'"⁶¹ Absent of any further explanation, one can only wonder if that work was accomplished so successfully as to have gone unnoticed and unrecorded—as many must have. Alison Knowles recalls that whenever she and Filliou would go walking together on Canal Street in New York, circa 1962, they'd call it a *Fluxwalk*—a work with a title but no score, although it is easy enough to imagine one: "Go for a walk on Canal Street. Continue until you find the canal."^{62*}

* Rumor has it that a natural spring still flows deep beneath Canal Street, whose pavement follows the path of a stream dug in the early 1800s to drain a disease-ridden swamp into the Hudson River. Contemporary artist Matthew Buckingham tells this story in a 2002 postcard project that reimagines what Canal Street might look like today if a 1791 proposal to build a Venetian-style canal across Lower Manhattan had been realized. One can only imagine what fun Fluxus would have had if the Fluxshop/Fluxhall had been located canal-side.



**PORTUGUESE DANCERS CELEBRATE ROBERT FILLIOU DAY
AT THE ANNUAL FLUX-FISH-FEST IN NAZARÉ.
THE TRADITIONAL BASKET-HATS ARE REMINISCENT
OF THE LEGENDARY "GALERIE LÉGITIME",
THE COLLECTION OF SMALL ARTWORKS
THAT FILLIOU USED TO CARRY UNDER HIS CAP
AS HE STROLLED THE STREETS OF PARIS IN THE 60s.**

The notion of a Fluxwalk raises all sorts of possibilities for imagining Fluxus artists turning any old walk through Manhattan—or another city—into a Fluxwork. A precursor for this type of strolling appeared in the February 1964 edition of the Fluxus newspaper: a reproduction of a 1950 *décollage* by Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Villeglé. As discussed in Part II, the Affichistes practiced *décollage* by roaming the streets of Paris, finding by chance and selecting by design a swatch of intriguingly torn posters to cut down off the wall and display in a gallery. Given Maciunas's pro-Soviet politics and the fact that he was the *de facto* editor of the newspaper, it comes as no surprise that this was one of their more overtly political works, with the words SOVIÉTIQUE PATRIE (SOVIET FATHERLAND) and LIBERTÉ (LIBERTY) clearly visible. The Affichistes traveled the same streets as everyone else, but they saw and used its decor differently. Wolf Vostell, unique among Fluxus artists, was himself a practitioner of *décollage* in Paris in the mid-'50s.

Knowles, meanwhile, composed *Giveaway Construction* in 1963, which urges:

Find something you like in the
street and give it away.

Or find a variety of things, make some-
thing of them, and give it away.

As with the Affichistes, Knowles sets up a situation in which stuff that exists on the street is revalued. The possibility of modification sets her process apart from her predecessors, who kept their poster fragments as they found them, but the more crucial difference is Knowles's insistence on giving the work away. When the score was performed at an arts festival in Edmonton, Canada, in the late '70s, participants

told Knowles that the hardest part was getting passersby to accept the gift.⁶³ The challenge is double: not only does the performer have to move through the city open to new material possibilities, he or she also has to be able to convince a random pedestrian of the same. Unlike the Affichistes, there was no gallery to fall back on, where salvaged objects could be elevated by dint of context to new aesthetic heights.

Two additional scores are worth noting here for the spirit of generosity and discovery they share with Knowles's composition. From Bob Lens, an undated piece titled #185:

Wind materials you find
Around objects you find on a walk
Leave them along your path

From Yoko Ono, *Moving Piece* (autumn 1963):

Take a tape of the sounds of the stars
moving.
Do not listen to the tape.
Cut it and give it out to the people
on the street.
Or you may sell it for a moderate price.

In the first case, lightly altered found materials are left for other pedestrians to discover, a gentle way of helping those who might not be able to see the interest in, say, a piece of crumpled newspaper, but might notice one tied up with a long weed. In the second, something inaccessible is offered to passersby. What might come out of the exchange is the suggestion that if passersby listen carefully enough on a clear night, they too could hear something astonishing. Not a bad deal for a scrap of brown ribbon purchased cheaply on the street.

Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus

The heading of this final section is borrowed from the title of an important Fluxus exhibition held in Venice in 1990. Translated from the Latin it means, roughly, “where there is Fluxus, there is motion.” Movement in general has always been important for Fluxus. Certain definitions of the word itself, given by Maciunas in his early dictionary-driven manifestos, connote action and change, drift and variation:

Flux (fluks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *Fluere*, *fluxusm*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 2. Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes.⁶⁴

In terms of Fluxworks and Fluxus philosophy as a whole, this notion of flux as flow refers both to an open-ended understanding of objects and actions, of their meaning being unfixed and flexible, and also to the human body in motion.

The world gains meaning from the bodies that move through it, so it makes sense for artists to figure out ways of representing those motions, especially the kind of banal actions generally taken for granted. Pre-Fluxus, John Cage did this together with Robert Rauschenberg in the collaborative work *Automobile Tire Print* (1953), when he drove a Model A Ford over inked pavement and across a paper scroll. The resulting print indexically marks the movement of the rolling car, much as Nam June Paik would do in an early Fluxus performance of 1962 when he dipped his head, hands, and necktie into a bowl of ink and tomato juice and, crawling backward, dragged them along a thirteen-foot length of

paper in an abject version of Young's *Composition 1960 #10* that he titled *Zen for Head*. In Prague in 1966, Ben Vautier re-performed Paik's piece in a realization that must have made a central element of the artist's crawling: the audience was tightly seated on either side of the scroll, which extended beyond the doorway of a long room.

Crawling isn't walking. It rejects or is incapable of sustaining an upright gait. Babies crawl, since they have not yet developed the ability to walk; the injured crawl, since their bodies can no longer support them; and supplicants crawl, to show their subordination. Paik and Vautier tracked something like the opposite of walking, but regardless, familiar movement was what mattered. And what Fluxus managed to do, as explored in the following subsections, which act as a sort of organizational grab bag for Fluxus walking pieces generally, was to take different types of walking and reinvent them, flexing (or fluxing) their characteristic aspects of gender, religion, tourism, guidance, diversion, or confusion. The result could be challenging, revelatory, entertaining, or some combination thereof.

1. Walk Like a Woman

Many of Yoko Ono's works highlight the condition of urban women, a situation that changed markedly both in practice and in rhetoric over the course of the 1960s. Ono's scores implicate women's bodies because she, a woman, authored them, but also because they often directly invoke gendered activities or perspectives. Consider the composition *City Piece*, written in winter 1961:

Walk all over the city with an empty
baby carriage.

What would it mean to do this as a teenage girl versus a young, middle-aged, or old woman? Would the carriage pusher appear unnoticeable to passersby, a woman who just dropped her child off somewhere or was on her way to pick it up? Would she appear mentally unwell? Would she seem a metaphoric sight, a symbol of loss, a baby miscarried, a child drowned—or a symbol of promise, a life to come? A poem Ono had published the previous year, titled “a greenfield morning,” might be similarly read (though given the definition of greenfield as an undeveloped site being reviewed for development, the hopeful last construal seems the most plausible):

a greenfield morning
women walked around with
empty baby carriages

A central difference exists between *City Piece* and “a greenfield morning”: the subject “women.” *City Piece* doesn’t specify gender, and by eliminating this detail it raises the possibility of the performer being a man. Or does it? This was 1961, two years before Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was published and ten years before Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago established the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts. It was eleven years before Ono wrote her own feminist declaration, “The Feminization of Society.” Published in an abridged version in the *New York Times* in 1972, Ono’s editorial called for a feminization of the world, not for women to become more like men but instead for the world to become more “feminine.” In keeping with the largely essentialist women’s lib rhetoric of the time, she wrote: “What we need now is the patience and natural wisdom of a pregnant woman.”⁶⁵ *City Piece* raises a related notion poetically, by leaving the subject of its central action open to political questions: Do we automatically assume the actor

to be a woman? Does it have to be a woman? Why can't it be a man? Maybe what the world needs is more men pushing baby carriages.

A number of other scores by Ono involve the act of walking around the city, and while each of these has many possible connotations, some of the most interesting, as with *City Piece*, revolve around gender. Here are two versions of *Map Piece*, the first composed in summer 1962:

Draw an imaginary map.

Put a goal mark on the map where you want to go.

Go walking on an actual street according to your map.

If there is no street where it should be according to the map, make one by putting the obstacles aside.

When you reach the goal, ask the name of the city and give flowers to the first person you meet.

The map has to be followed exactly, or the event has to be dropped altogether.

Ask your friends to write maps.

Give your friends maps.

The second in spring 1964:

Draw a map to get lost.

Both of these scores propose an approach to the city that marries body and mind, physical fact and imaginary potential. The first suggests that the city can be anything you want it to be, if you're willing to ambulate through it via

proactively unconventional means. The second suggests the pleasures of being unfamiliar with one's surroundings, even if they happen to be known. These compositions also invoke, respectively, a sense of ownership over the city and a feeling of confident safety on its streets, neither of which is an attitude typically open to women—not historically, not in the early to mid-'60s, not today. (The irony of contemporary Take Back the Night campaigns is that women never really had them to lose.) Yet Ono proposes these positions as if they were available to anyone, regardless of gender.

Other scores recognize that all people walk differently, whether inherently or through conditioning or both, and that it might be worthwhile to understand these distinctions through direct experience. *Back Piece II*, from winter 1961, instructs:

Put the light out.

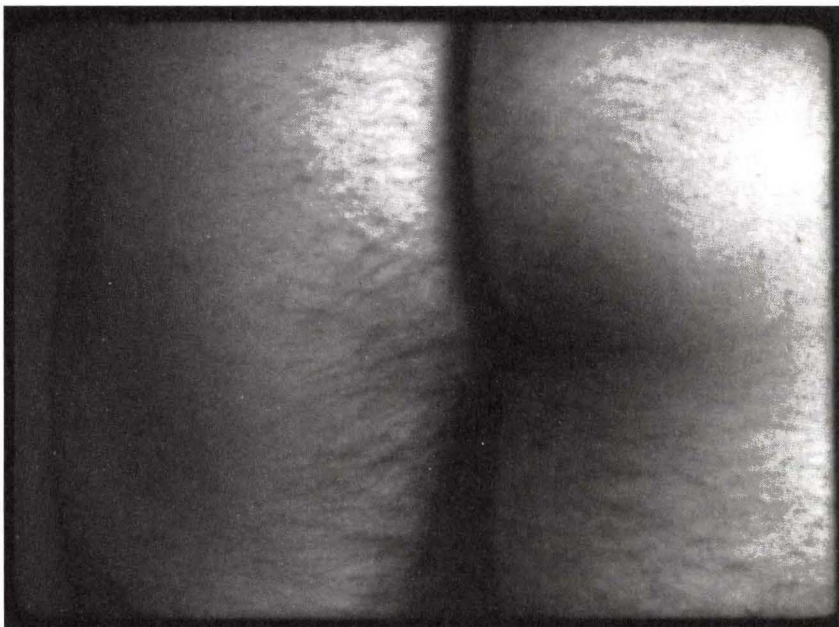
Walk behind a person for four hours.

This journey seems destined for disorientation. Following another person can be useful, however, as a means of shaking up habitual reactions, perspectives, and routes. *Walking Piece*, from spring 1964, suggests as much:

Walk in the footsteps of the person
in front.

1. on ground
2. in mud
3. in snow
4. on ice
5. in water

Try not to make sounds.



Still from Yoko Ono, *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, 1966. Film, 16 mm, b/w, silent, 6:15 min. The short version of this film was shot in New York and was also released in 1966 as *FluxFilm No. 16*, part of a multi-artist *FluxFilm* package offered for sale by Maciunas. It featured the behinds of Fluxus and non-Fluxus artists, including Bici and Geoffrey Hendricks, Benjamin Patterson, Ono, Carolee Schneemann, James Tenney, Pieter Vanderbeck, Ono's second husband, Anthony Cox, and their daughter, Kyoko. The long version was made the same year in London but stretched eighty minutes and purportedly included 365 participants. This version was never offered under the Fluxus name.

How does someone else walk on these surfaces? How do they react, how does it differ from one's own predispositions? Both of these scores can be read with gender specificity, simply by imagining one person as a man, the other as a woman. Ono made this explicit in *Walk Piece*, from winter 1961:

Stir inside of your brains with a penis
until things are mixed well.
Take a walk.

Having put one's mind in some kind of masculine order, go out and see what it's like to walk as a man.

The results might be surprising, Ono suggests in an essay on the male anatomy and its effects. "I wonder why men can get serious at all," she wrote.

They have this delicate long thing hanging outside their bodies, which goes up and down by its own will. First of all having it outside your body is terribly dangerous. If I were a man I would have a fantastic castration complex to the point that I wouldn't be able to do a thing. Second, the inconsistency of it, like carrying a chance time alarm or something. If I were a man I would always be laughing at myself. Humor is probably something the male of the species discovered through their own anatomy. But men are so serious. Why? Why violence? Why hatred? Why war?⁶⁶

By following her dry observations on the ridiculousness of penises with this series of staccato questions, Ono implies that violence, hatred, and war are all inextricably linked to the existence of penises—and men—in the world. Yet in *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* (1966), she goes to great lengths



Production still from Yoko Ono and John Lennon *Rape*, 1969. Film, 16 mm, color, sound, 77 min.

to make a more neutral presentation of male and female bodies. The film combines men and women almost equally, capturing their exposed buttocks in a tight frame that results in quadrants of flesh, hence the “No. 4” of the title. Since the telltale part of the human anatomy is facing away from the camera, the viewer is left to parse out identity based on subtle signs of difference, including hair, fat, and shape. Motion comes into play because the subjects are shot while walking, a fact that can be guessed by carefully watching the film and that is proved in a production still, which illustrates the simple rotating contraption on which they moved in place. The alternative would have been to have them stand still, with a resulting loss of dynamism and information, or to have them jump up and down, which would have risked grotesque slapstick. Nude walking achieves a balance of individuality and sameness, silliness and seriousness. In this, *Film No. 4* differs importantly from the English photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s pioneering late-nineteenth-century motion studies, which it superficially recalls. Muybridge’s images, in keeping with contemporaneous notions of objectivity, and of the body as a field in need of regulation and control, recorded the naked human form in a search for the truth of movement.⁶⁷ Ono parodies that pseudoscientific use of the camera, trading in Muybridge’s absolute description for a provocative joke.

A darker joke forms the basis of the feature-length film *Rape*, which Ono made with John Lennon in 1969. A score briefly summarizes the seventy-seven-minute semi-documentary:

A cameraman will chase a girl on a street with a camera persistently until he corners her in an alley, and, if possible, until she is in a falling position.

Shot in London by a two-man crew, the film fixes on an attractive young woman walking through a local cemetery. She is flattered at first, if confused by their attention. She gets ahead but they keep catching up, and the sound of their quickening footsteps begins to unnerve. Mostly she is polite and friendly, even flirtatious, swinging her hair around and smiling. She tries occasionally to reason with them in German, explaining that there is no point in following her since she is not famous. But they persist, and she grows increasingly annoyed and then distressed as they follow her across the cemetery, out into the street, and across the city in a cab. She becomes so panicky she nearly walks into the path of a truck. Finally she doesn't know which way to go, since it seems they are going to follow her everywhere. At this point the film cuts to black, then reopens as the crew are letting themselves into her apartment, where she is hiding. This pushes her over the edge. She babbles in German, calls a friend who offers no help, and cannot get out the door, which is locked. The film ends with her in this utterly helpless position.

The crew never touch the unwitting star of the film, played by Eva Majlath, a twenty-one-year-old Hungarian refugee by way of Austria, who was living in the UK illegally with hopes of becoming an actress. Yet by stalking her as she walks across London, they violate her right to privacy, to security, to freedom of movement, to unimpeded participation in public space. Why does she fall victim to this crime? The film offers no more information than the audio-visual scenario itself, so viewers are left to draw their own conclusions based on the woman's youth, beauty, fashionable dress, and lack of English, not to mention her inability to stop being polite, flirtatious, and otherwise stereotypically feminine. If it could happen to her so easily, in 1969 London, maybe something similar is happening to other women too.

The analogy goes further when considering that Lennon formed one half of the directorial team. He and Ono, who were married just a few days before *Rape* premiered on Austrian television, for which it was commissioned, were constantly subject to the violations of his celebrity, hounded by photographers, reporters, and fans, eventually fatally, when a stalker shot him on the sidewalk outside their apartment in New York. At a press conference the day after the screening, Lennon expanded on this connection. “We are showing how all of us are exposed and under pressure in our contemporary world,” he explained. “This isn’t just about the Beatles. What is happening to this girl on the screen is happening in Biafra, Vietnam, everywhere.”⁶⁸ Why tell this story of abuse through the pursuit of an innocent young female pedestrian? It must, unfortunately, have been the most believable scenario.

2. Walk with Pomp and Circumstance

Walking is undertaken daily, usually without pageantry. But it also forms a central part of historical and contemporary group activities involving ritual accoutrement, religious or secular significance, entertainment, and more—all of it ripe for Fluxus parody. Perhaps the most extreme case was the *Flux-Mass*, which took place February 17, 1970, at the Voorhees Chapel on the campus of Douglass College in New Jersey. Conceived by Maciunas at the invitation of Geoffrey Hendricks, who as a professor of art at Douglass had recently been elected to the board that controlled assemblies at the chapel, the *Flux-Mass* was the obvious thing for Fluxus to do in a Catholic church.

George Maciunas: "You say it is to be in the Chapel!"

Geoffrey Hendricks: "Yes."

George Maciunas: "Then we must do a Flux-Mass."⁶⁹

Maciunas studied the traditions of the Catholic mass and came up with comic interpretations for all its parts. One of the first elements to be performed was the offertory procession, in which bread, wine, and other gifts are brought down the main aisle and placed on the altar. For the *Flux-Mass* this was undertaken by a half-dozen priest's assistants in gorilla masks and a dozen choir members wearing bald caps, all of them joined together under a single cloak with holes cut for each participant's head. The procession advanced at an awkward pace, with everyone instructed to take four small steps per second to the beat of the rowdy "Second Air de Trompettes" by the baroque composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier.

The rest of the mass proceeded in similar spirit, and the whole resulted in extreme upset among the church fathers. The Catholic chaplain was so appalled that he decided Voorhees Chapel had been rendered unfit for the celebration of mass and did not hold it there again until a year later, after the performance of a traditional rite of cleansing. Hannah Higgins argues that the controversy stemmed less from the carnivalesque nature of the spectacle than the fact that the mass was "a kind of end in itself for the artists."⁷⁰ In other words, the artists did not care about the mass but rather used it as a convenient structure for a series of Fluxus gestures, much as they used the gym building next door to the chapel to hold *Flux-Sports* that same day. Chapel = mass. Gym = sports event. Neither ritual, religious or secular, was of specific importance, but was presented as the obvious form to employ for the given site, and one in

which all kinds of Fluxus performances and games could be framed and even, conveniently, elevated. As described by Larry Miller, a Rutgers student who took part in the festivities and later became a Fluxus artist, the Catholic mass was “a ritual readymade.”⁷¹ Maciunas, Hendricks, Knowles, and other participants cared as little about it as Duchamp did about bottle racks or urinals or bicycle wheels—whose selection was, likewise, neither random nor particularly profound.

Someone who does care very much about religious processions, as well as bicycle wheels, or rather the readymade that one of them was turned into, is Francis Alÿs, who in 2002 organized *The Modern Procession*, an update of traditional saints’ day processions and pilgrimages. The event was held to celebrate the passing of the Museum of Modern Art’s cultural icons from their home on 53rd Street in Manhattan to Queens, where the museum would occupy temporary quarters while its main building was being renovated. Accompanied by a twelve-member Peruvian brass band, more than 150 uniformed staff and volunteers from MoMA and other New York cultural institutions walked in the three-mile-long procession, some shouldering palanquins displaying art “icons”—stand-ins, which were built by a workshop in Mexico City, for Marcel Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel*, Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, and Giacometti’s *Standing Woman*. The artist Kiki Smith was also carried on a palanquin as a representative of contemporary art, but she appeared in the flesh—logically, since the reason why saints are worshipped through iconic representation is that they have long since passed from the earth.

The Modern Procession made creative and secular use of a religious form, but without any of the iconoclasm of the *Fluxus-Mass*. On the contrary, Alÿs’s ceremony worked because the museum is one of the most revered churches of today, home to artifacts treated like the religious relics of other times. By

maintaining the processional icon as a representative symbol of something sacred and the pilgrimage as a journey to a respected place, Alÿs highlighted connections between the religious and the secular, the modern and the traditional, as they are located in contemporary museum practice.

Fluxus also made free use of more secular ceremonial forms like parades and marches, though rarely with much ensuing controversy. In addition to De Ridder and Schippers's *March* and Watts's *The Human Celebration*, discussed above, are Eric Andersen's *Idle Walks*, enigmatic circumambulations sometimes realized with great fanfare and glee. One such iteration occurred when the performance group Berzerk led a two-hour procession across Roskilde, Denmark, at the 1985 Festival of Fantastics, while wearing a thirty-person costume designed by Andersen. *MassDress*, a length of blue cloth sewn intermittently with a leg, arm, cap, or vest, was filled half with Berzerk's own bodies and half with those of onlookers, creating a massive interconnected figure that collectively took over the city's streets, alleyways, and shops as it made its way through them.

The 1985 festival also hosted Philip Corner's *4th Finale*, in which the members of a marching band, each playing to their own tune, leave the stage and whatever building they are in, followed by the audience. The piece was first performed as early as June 1964, when Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, and others took to the stage at Carnegie Hall in New York and promptly left it, activating the spaces inside and out and in-between. In Roskilde it was performed by the Lynghøj School brass band, whom spectators followed from Staendertorvet square, down the street, through some fields, and on to the Viking Ship Museum, located by a fjord at the city's edge. What must hardly have been unusual behavior for the madcap Fluxus musicians back in 1964 proved difficult for the members of a school

marching band, trained to walk and play in lockstep. Corner notes that the Danish students were “not very disciplined about performing out from under the baton of the teacher,” a useful observation that gets at one of the work’s radical elements, the fact that every member of the band is expected to march to the tune of a different drummer, as it were. “If only the army could be like that!” Corner exclaimed.⁷²

3. Walk with Guidance

Fluxus artists sometimes took people to familiar places in unfamiliar ways, or at least suggested that they might go there. Such was the case with an early score by Benjamin Patterson. *Tour*, composed in April 1963, instructs:

Persons are invited and meet at designated time and place to commence tour.

After methods and general conditions of tour are explained, participants are fitted with blindfolds or similar devices and led through any area or areas of guides’ choice(s).

Duration exceeds 45 minutes.

Sufficient and responsible guides are provided.

Whether or not tours of this nature were ever actually conducted, what Patterson scored is an experiment in trust, communication, and potential disorientation. His tour engages the kind of heightened awareness triggered by blocking off the one sense on which we rely most heavily: sight. Imagine being led through MoMA by smell and sound. Imagine touring the Empire State Building by the feel of a stuffy, gravity-defying elevator and then the upper deck’s

FREE FLUX-TOURS

(EXCEPT FOR COST OF TRANSPORTATION & MEALS IF ANY)

- May 1: MAYDAY guided by Bob Watts, call 226-3422 for transportation arrangements.
May 3: FRANCO-AMERICAN TOUR, by Alison Knowles & Robert Filliou, 2pm at 80 Wooster st.
May 4: TOUR FOR FOREIGN VISITORS, arranged by George Brecht, start noon at 80 Wooster st.
May 5: ALLEYS, YARDS & DEAD ENDS, arranged by G. Maciunas, start 3pm at 80 Wooster st.
May 6: ALEATORIC TOUR, arranged by Jonas Mekas, meet at noon at 80 Wooster st.
May 7: MUSIC TOUR & LECTURE, by Yoshimasa Wada, start at 2pm at 80 Wooster st.
May 8: GALLERIES, guided by Larry Miller, start at noon at 80 Wooster st.
May 9: SUBTERRANEAN TOUR I, guided by Geoff Hendricks, start at noon at 80 Wooster st.
May 9: SUBTERRANEAN DANGER by Charles Bergengren, start 11 pm at 47 st. & Park av. island.
May 10 & 11: at 6am go to 17 Mott street and eat Wonton soup (says Nam June Paik).
May 12: SUBTERRANEAN TOUR III, arranged by George Maciunas, start 2pm at 80 Wooster st.
May 13: SOUVENIR HUNT, meet at noon at 80 Wooster st.
May 14: SOHO CURB SITES, guided by Peter Van Ripper, meet at 3:30pm at 80 Wooster st.
May 15: EXOTIC SITES, guided by Joan Mathews, meet 3pm at Oviedo Restaurant, 202W 14 st.
May 16: ALL THE WAY AROUND & BACK AGAIN, by Peter Frank, meet at noon 80 Wooster



Flyer designed by George Maciunas for *Free Flux-Tours*, 1976. Black offset lithograph on white paper, 31 x 23 cm.

fresh, breezy air. Imagine negotiating the traffic of Midtown or Chinatown with only one's trust in another person to depend on for safety and orientation. The possibilities are endless.

A more humorous tack was taken in the 1970s, when Fluxus tours were offered to the public. This occurred on at least two occasions, the first being the "Fluxfest Presentation of John Lennon & Yoko Ono," which took place in April 1970 in New York. "Fluxtour" tickets were printed offering admission to Cortland Alley, a negligible three-block-long Chinatown passageway, as well as to visit Jonas Mekas at the Hotel Chelsea, La Monte Young at his apartment on Church Street, James Stewart at the Anta Theater, and Lauren Bacall at the Palace Theater (these last two "through stage door"). Other tours were announced in the schedule of events but never printed up, including visits to a Chinese theater, abandoned buildings, desolate places, miserable shows, street corners, unknown places, and distant places, plus a special eight-hour walking tour of New York to be led by Maciunas. The printed tickets were to be sold to the public for ten cents each, but it's unclear if they were or if anyone actually tried to make use of them.

Like the 1921 proto-Surrealist *visite* to the churchyard and Lettrist Jacques Fillon's mock travel agency, the Fluxus tour takes issue with the typical touristic approach to the city, where only important monuments and beautiful places are visited, thereby ignoring more quotidian or problematic sights. If the Fluxtours raised this critique at the level of comic suggestion, the 1976 *Free Flux-Tours* acted on it. Nearly all of the tours were scheduled to begin at 80 Wooster Street, where Maciunas had moved his headquarters in the late 1960s, making the *Free Flux-Tours* a commentary on the gentrification of SoHo and the touristic attention it had lately been receiving. Instead of wandering the galleries and soaking up the artistic atmosphere, these



Christine Hill, *Tourguide?*, New York, June 18–September 30, 1999. Performance, guided tours of New York, organizational venture, and walking agency. Produced by Volksboutique with the Public Art Fund in collaboration with Deitch Projects.

tours were all about the places and perspectives otherwise ignored. Not all of the tours occurred, but those that did—including a dog poo souvenir hunt—appear to have been well attended and thoroughly enjoyed.

A quarter century later, not far from 80 Wooster Street, contemporary artist Christine Hill conducted a series of tours reminiscent of the *Free Flux-Tours* but with her own idiosyncratic interests as content. For *Tourguide?*, which ran from June 19 to September 30, 1999, Hill escorted paying participants from her “office” at Deitch Projects on Grand Street to various New York non-institutions, including, according to the project pamphlet:

The former site of Tunnel Stationers, renowned office supply store and provider of numerous anecdotes and lectures; a definitive example of the “99¢ store” as only New York can provide them; a McDonald’s (we in no way receive support from this chain—it’s simply part of our culture) featuring a doorman and uniquely friendly counter staff; the “door to nowhere” on Avenue A; the former residence of Conan O’Brien; the private residence of the Analogue Society’s own Minister of Audiology; our favorite luggage vendor; the best stamp and lettering shop in Manhattan; an exceptional mirror shop; and many more ...

In choosing this mixture of popular, bygone, and avant-garde culture, Hill’s project parodied touristic tours but was in no way a “poor Fluxus rip-off,” as she self-deprecatingly worried at the time. Ever the serious student of such structures and services as the office, shoe shining, massage, the thrift store, the pilot television show, and the apothecary, Hill read eighteen guidebooks to New York, spent two months

studying for an official tour-guide test, took improv comedy classes, set up a storefront office, and bought a sturdy but chic pair of walking shoes, all in preparation for *Tourguide?*⁷³ Having recently returned to the United States after spending six years in Berlin, she made the perfect alternative guide, both familiar with and estranged from her subject, wanting to reintegrate herself in it, and committed in her artistic practice to sharing her observations with others. Documentation of her tours shows them to have been well attended and at least as thoroughly enjoyed as those held by Fluxus.

While Fluxtours were being conjured in New York, an entirely other kind of tour was being invented by Willem de Ridder on the West Coast. De Ridder had moved from Amsterdam to Los Angeles in the early 1970s, and it was there he started to experiment with sound walks, using headphones and portable cassette recorders. He used these tools to devise what seems to have been the first audio-guide artwork in 1973, long before Walkmans made ambulatory listening commonplace, but still some time after the appearance of mobile cultural interpretation devices. Acoustiguide Corporation launched in 1957 with a tour of Hyde Park by Eleanor Roosevelt, played on then-new portable reel-to-reel players, to be followed two years later by an audio guide produced for the Phoenix Art Museum and narrated by Vincent Price, the American actor well known for his roles in horror films.

William Levy described what it was like to participate in an early version of de Ridder's walks. After being picked up at the LA airport, de Ridder dropped his sometime collaborator off on the side of the road with a tape machine, whose recording began: "Welcome to crazy America, Bill. Start walking in the direction of the curve. I will guide you to the house where we will live and work for the coming months. See the small path at the right—follow it." What ensued, explained Levy, was "a detour through breathtaking

landscapes, with special stories and music that made it into an exceptional theatrical experience.”⁷⁴ Forty-five minutes later, he was home.

What interested de Ridder most was the possibility of freeing sound from its enslavement to the image, a historical occurrence he dated to the introduction of talkies—movies with soundtracks, as distinct from silent films. By creating a set radio drama that interacted with a living environment, he believed that the listener could become both actor and audience, the theater building obsolete, and the entire world a stage.⁷⁵ With the invention of the Walkman by Sony in 1980, technology caught up with his ideas and he was commissioned to record audio guides through cities including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Vienna, and West Berlin. These were alternately broadcast on the radio or available for purchase or rental on cassette tapes. Some lasted just a few hours and were meant to be accomplished on foot, while others took days to complete and involved various modes of transportation. De Ridder also created audio walks for museums across the Netherlands in the early 1980s, instructing viewers to pay attention to everything but the art.

Did these dramatic guides really offer the listener a new way of seeing and interacting with the city and the museum, or did they do what Walkmans were so often accused of doing, of fomenting alienation by shutting the world out and replacing it with a cloistered audio environment? While the debate continues as to whether or not this is the ultimate effect of Walkmans, Discmans, and the now ubiquitous iPod, an early scholar of the medium concluded as early as 1982 that it was not the case. “The Walkman makes the walk act more poetic and more dramatic,” wrote Shubei Hosokawa, echoing de Ridder. “It transforms the street into open theatre.”⁷⁶ In any case, the interactive nature and site-specific content of

de Ridder's tours render the question of alienation moot: listeners must be constantly alive to the present, to balance what they are hearing with what they are observing through their other senses. Preconceived notions do not apply, nor, if the experience of the audio guide has been striking enough, will they be easy to slip back into once the tape is over and the headphones removed.

Although de Ridder continues to create audio guides, including a commissioned tour of the Tate Modern in May 2009, and an unofficial guide to the then newly reopened MoMA, in which he directed viewers to notice "little dots on the windows, weird things on the ceiling, and strange holes in the floor," he is no longer alone in his use of the medium.⁷⁷ Since 1991, the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff has made a career of site-specific audio walks for locations around the world, from a forest in the Canadian Rockies to a historic train station in Kassel, Germany. Using a binaural recording system and the sophisticated editing skills of her partner, George Bures Miller, Cardiff constructs complexly layered soundscapes that interact with the walked-through environment in engrossing and often uncanny ways. While her voice intimately guides the listener, the taped sound of her footsteps ensures the necessary pacing of the journey.

Her Long Black Hair, an audio walk offered in New York's Central Park during the summer of 2004, layers the believable cacophony of car horns, neighing horses, and geese with those of gossiping passersby. Cardiff observes a man sitting on a bench reading the paper and another taking a picture, and there they are, doing just that. The recording presents an enhanced audio version of the park, constructed in the studio from multiple local and foreign recordings, while the viewer simultaneously looks at it live. Meanwhile, Cardiff has begun her story, which centers on a few old photographs she found of a woman with long

black hair and a red leather trench coat, posing in different parts of the park. (Copies of these photos and others are provided in a satchel along with the Discman that plays the audio piece, all of it rented from an on-site kiosk.) Cardiff directs the viewer to each of these places, while pondering who this woman is or was, who took the pictures, how she felt when they were taken, and why they were thrown away. The overall effect combines escape with reality, fiction with nonfiction, the artist's vision with the viewer's own.

Everything takes place in the present, and yet it is constructed of both the past and the imaginary—not unlike the phantasmagorical worlds experienced by André Breton and Louis Aragon as they wandered the streets and arcades of 1920s and '30s Paris. But whereas they understood their hallucinatory strolls to be revelatory of their own unconscious, Cardiff's walks, though undertaken solo, are not about encountering the self but rather the world. Thirty-five minutes after it has begun, *Her Long Black Hair* is over and the viewer, having looped back to the park entrance to return the borrowed listening device, is left newly conscious of his or her surroundings and the individual and communal histories that structure them.

4. Walk for Fun

Playfulness is noted by both Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman as a criteria for Fluxworks. And while what they had in mind has more to do with a sense of play than outright playing, the latter was often a central element of the group's later productions, which functioned as games for adults, defined as such only because adults were involved, not because there was anything particularly adultlike about them.

A few early examples exist, including Paul Sharits's *90 Degree Angles, Street or Field Version* (1966), in which four male and four female performers in sweat suits walk or run forward, each carrying a ball or racket, turning right or left according to instructions given over a megaphone, the women responding only to a female voice, the men to a male voice. Mieko Shiomi's *Game around a Revolving Door* (1967) involves a series of convoluted rules that dictate how players move along a labyrinthian series of lines that extend from all sides of a central revolving door. Whether or not these scores were actually performed, what they lead to are parodic multi-event spectacles like *Flux-Sports*, *Flux Game Fest*, *Fluxlabyrinth*, *Flux Food Atlas & Snow Event*, *Flux Halloween*, and more.

Flux-Sports took place in a gymnasium at Douglass College. As much as its sister event, the *Flux-Mass*, made a high-spirited and good-natured mockery of the religious mass, *Flux-Sports* left the pride and skills of an Olympiad behind, instead holding contests that involved running while drinking vodka, eating porridge, playing musical instruments, carrying a lighted candle, or being tied up with as many inflated balloons as possible. Other events saddled competitors with "obstacle shoes" attached to stilts or springs, filled with shaving cream or crushed ice, or covered in grease. It was a group affair, with individual races and devices conceived by Larry Miller, Maciunas, Greg Calvert, the Fur Family of California, Sarah Seagull, Bici Hendricks, and Robert Watts, among others. Not all events occurred as announced on the schedule, but documentary photos and a few leftover props testify to the festive and ridiculous enactment of *Flux-Sports* in one way or another.

It had been some time coming. Maciunas and Watts had been dreaming of opening a Flux Amusement Center on Greene Street in SoHo since at least 1968, "a unique entertainment and game environment" where they could hold a

Fluxolympiad.⁷⁸ The center never opened, but the kinds of wacky sports-oriented games suggested in the prospectus are exactly the kind that eventually found themselves at play on the grounds of Douglass College. Another proposed work that was only later realized was the *Fluxlabyrinth*, constructed in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, in 1976 for the city's arts festival. The labyrinth evolved out of a number of earlier Fluxworks, including Ay-O's *Rainbow Staircase Environment*, first built in 1965 in the stairwell of 365 Canal Street and incorporating, among other devices, rope steps, missing steps, soft steps, and steps filled with balloons; his various undated and numbered *Exit* scores, which dictate situations where an audience must pass through a vestibule almost impenetrably modified by nails, ropes, wood blocks, a sloped floor, and balloons; Yoko Ono's *Portrait of John Lennon as a Young Cloud*, a maze with eight doors each opening in an odd manner (hinged horizontally at the center, hinged at the ceiling, with a missing knob, with an adhesive knob, etc.); her *AMAZE*, a sixteen-foot-tall Plexiglas maze with a toilet at the center; and a *Flux-Maze* by Maciunas and a dozen other artists, intended for installation in the René Block Gallery, Manhattan, in fall 1974.

The Berlin realization made use of these ideas and more by creating a multi-artist fun palace that offered endless obstacles, discomforts, and dangers. Visitors were forced to walk through the entire labyrinth because its many puzzling doors could be opened from one side only, and having gone through the first by turning its two knobs simultaneously, they had no choice but to proceed through narrow rooms filled with bad smells, a seesaw floor, shoe steps, a rubber bridge, a forest of rubber bands, brush walls, foam walls, and an inclined steel tunnel with bells.

Why some of these more ambitious projects were finally realizable in the 1970s has something to do with the

interest Fluxus had begun to generate among museums and galleries, be it through academic affiliation, the success of individual Fluxus artists, or curatorial intrigue with the group as a whole. The Berlin *Fluxlabyrinth* is a testament to this heightened institutional reception, given the elaborate, unconventional nature of the project and how successfully it seems to have been achieved. That said, a comparison with the various labyrinth concepts conceived by the Situationist International and Constant, as discussed in Part II, elucidates how relatively benign these Fluxus ideas were. The Situationist labyrinth and the Fluxus labyrinth have some factors in common: both aimed to disorient ambulatory viewers and to force them to engage in the surprising present of their surrounding environment. But the SI would never have been satisfied with 180 feet of preplanned childish obstacles; for their Stedelijk Museum maze, they wanted 650 feet that blended the museum with the city outside, insisting on the real world as the space of revolutionary change. Constant rejected the very notion of a start and a finish, of a contained and static space, of anything less than a new city constructed from scratch on labyrinthian principles. Not surprisingly, it is the *Fluxlabyrinth* that was finally built.

5. Walk Out the Door

It is tempting to end this book with a simple transcription of George Brecht's *Word Event* (1961), one of his most frequently published scores:

Exit.

But to do so would be to leave unexamined some of the larger questions that can be asked about the Surrealists, the SI, and Fluxus via their respective ambulatory practices. What each of these groups had to say about walking has been the subject of these pages, but what walking has to say about them is their tentative conclusion. What do Surrealist wandering, the Situationist *dérive*, and Fluxus's undefinable, all-inclusive actions reveal about these three key vanguard groups of the twentieth century?

To get at the answer it bears considering what Surrealism, the SI, and Fluxus had in common and what set them apart. There is much overlap: Each, after all, was led by a pope-like figure with socialist leanings who exerted control over the membership, activities, and ideological underpinnings of his organization. All three groups fashioned themselves self-consciously as groups, insisting on their collective and unique recastings of avant-garde undertakings. Their vanguard exploits, more often than not, resulted in the production of experiences rather than art objects.

Walking, an action as common to humans as breathing, was perhaps the ultimate material for these groups to have taken up and made their own. Committed to revolutionizing everyday life, they each took its ubiquitous physical gesture and used it tactically toward that goal. In its very banality and accessibility, walking needs constant redefinition—how better than by an ideologically and artistically organized group, led by a central figure like André Breton, Guy Debord, or George Maciunas?

For all his best efforts to play the role of pope, things eventually started to fall apart under Maciunas's reign. Like Breton and Debord, Maciunas was constantly writing and rewriting his group's membership list, displaying the show of power necessary to maintain some semblance of order in the face of the freedom that is the hallmark

of any avant-garde spirit. Yet while the Surrealists and Situationists themselves rarely confused their own adhesion to their respective circles, the same cannot be said for Fluxers. Who is and is not a Fluxus artist has long been a contentious topic, among the artists themselves as much as among scholars and curators. Furthermore, the comparatively neat theoretical bases of Surrealism and the SI, as articulated in signed manifestoes and other didactic documents, gave way with Fluxus to a self-fashioning chaos. Even Maciunas failed to sign the manifestos he wrote. On the whole, Fluxers did what they wanted to, sometimes under the auspices of Fluxus, sometimes not, sometimes both. And even though it is the Situationists who aggressively maintained that there was no such thing as “Situationism,” at least they all agreed to such a statement, publishing it as an anonymous item in the first issue of their journal, alongside precise definitions of related terminology—whereas all the Fluxers could ever seem to agree on was that there was nothing to agree on.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Maciunas’s repeated efforts at order, Fluxus functioned with a kind of messy, catch-all presence that paralleled the general counter-culture of the time. It is almost as if, by the mid-1960s and even more so by the ’70s, the kind of tight-knit group that both Surrealism and the SI constituted became an impossibility. In terms of walking, the sign of this is the almost uncontainable array of ambulatory gestures discussed in this final section, versus the tactical specificity of the Surrealists’ automatic deambulation and the Situationist drift. In terms of art history, it marks the very diffuseness, the playfully ungraspable and ultimately open-ended nature of Fluxus itself.

In keeping with that spirit, this book closes with an opening—much like Brecht’s *Exit* piece, which is more akin

to a beginning than an ending. Walking out the door means walking into somewhere else. Ken Friedman's *Cheers* (1965) instructs:

Conduct a large crowd of people to the house of a stranger. Knock on the door. When someone opens the door, the crowd applauds and cheers vigorously. All depart silently.

Bravo to you, whomever you are, whatever you do, the crowd seems to be saying. That's all; now we can go on our way. And you, the reader of this volume, you too can be on your way, just keep walking out the door you've opened, walk intently, and maybe look for yellow things or street lights or strange gifts on the street. Or forgotten parts of the city to discover. Or ghosts and potential lovers to lead you. Or, to quote from a score written by Tomas Schmit in 1965:

PLEASE SHUT THIS BOOK!, and take a walk!

- 1 David T. Doris, "Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus," in Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998), 103.
- 2 A good place to find them collected is Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn, eds., *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*, special digital edition (Performance Research, 2002), www.performance-research.net.
- 3 See Dick Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception" (1982) and Friedman, "Fluxus and Company," in Friedman, *Fluxus Reader*, 224–25, 244–51.
- 4 Dick Higgins, "A Child's History of Fluxus" (1979), in *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus, 1990–1962* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990), 172.
- 5 George Brecht, "Events (Assembled Notes)" (1961), in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why.*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Brasil: Centro Cultural/Banco do Brasil, 2002), 84.
- 6 George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, in Hendricks, *What's Fluxus?*, 164.
- 7 Kristine Stiles, "Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus," in *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University, 1958–1972*, ed. Geoffrey Hendricks (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 61.
- 8 George Brecht, letter to George Maciunas, n.d., cited in Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), 236.
- 9 Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 33–38.
- 10 A number of those who studied with Halprin in California, including La Monte Young, Robert Morris, and Simone Morris (later Forti), would go on to participate in New York Fluxus events. See Karen Moss, "Mapping Fluxus in California," *Fluxus Virus, 1962–1992* (Cologne: Galerie Schüppenhauer, 1992), 100; and Larry Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," transcript, March 24, 1978, in *Ubi Fluxus*, 227. Halprin's name appears (mistakenly as Ann instead of Anna) in Maciunas's 1973 "Diagram" under the category Natural Activities & Tasks, a direct influence on Fluxus.
- 11 Higgins, "Theory and Reception," 228.
- 12 This is a controversial issue among Fluxus artists, scholars, and collectors. Jon Hendricks, curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, focuses almost exclusively on understanding Fluxus through traditional object-based practices; scholars like Hannah Higgins and Kristine Stiles have taken an alternate approach, concerned with the experiential and performative. See Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*; and Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone, Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 62–99.
- 13 Estera Milman, "Road Shows, Street Events, and Fluxus People: A Conversation with Alison Knowles," in "Fluxus: A Conceptual Country," ed. Estera Milman, special issue, *Visible Language* 26, nos. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 1992): 103.
- 14 Lisa Moren, "Keep Walking Intently: Scoring Contemporary Art Actions," in "Fluxus After Fluxus," special issue, ed.

- Ken Friedman and Owen F. Smith, *Visible Language* 40, no. 1 (2006): n.p.
- 15 Brecht, "Events," 84.
- 16 See Estera Milman, "Historical Precedents, Trans-historical Strategies, and the Myth of Democratization," and Stephen C. Foster, "Historical Design and Social Purpose: A Note on the Relationship of Fluxus to Modernism," both in *Visible Language* 20, nos. 1–2, 17–34, 35–44.
- 17 See Andreas Huyssen, "Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context," in Jenkins, *Spirit of Fluxus*, 144; Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception," 220; and Friedman, "Fluxus and Company," 243.
- 18 George Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art" (1962), in Jenkins, *Spirit of Fluxus*, 156–57.
- 19 Douglas Kahn, "The Latest: Fluxus and Music," in Jenkins, *Spirit of Fluxus*, 115.
- 20 Steven Harris, "The Art of Losing Oneself without Getting Lost: Brecht and Filliou at the Palais Idéal," *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (Summer 2004): 2–3, 6.
- 21 Higgins, "Theory and Reception," 222.
- 22 John Cage, interview by Ellsworth Snyder, "John Cage Discusses Fluxus," in *Visible Language* 20, nos. 1–2, 60.
- 23 For more on the course, see Bruce Altschuler, "The Cage Class" in *Fluxattitudes*, ed. Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood (Ghent: Imschoot Uitgevers, 1991), 17–24.
- 24 Cited in William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 47.
- 25 Cited in Louwrien Wijers, "Fluxus Yesterday and Tomorrow," in "Fluxus Today and Yesterday," ed. Johan Pijnappel, special issue, *Art and Design Profile* 28 (London: Academy Editions, 1993), 7.
- 26 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 411.
- 27 John Cage, "Questions," *Perspecta* 11 (1967): 67. The irregular spacing is Cage's and appears in the original publication; this was a device he often used in transcribing his stories, so as to give them an unexpected or randomly determined pace or length.
- 28 John Cage, "Mushroom Book," in *M: Writings '67–'72* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 117.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 137, 171.
- 30 John Cage with Joan Retallack, *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 90; cited in Craig Dworkin, "Mycopedagogy," *College English* 66, no. 6 (July 2004): 607.
- 31 John Cage, *For the Birds* (Boston: Boyars, 1981), 188; cited in Dworkin, "Mycopedagogy," 606.
- 32 John Cage, untitled and undated story from "Indeterminacy," a series of stories told over the course of many years, sometimes in lectures, sometimes accompanying a dance piece by his partner, Merce Cunningham, sometimes in print. A transcription of this one is available courtesy the Little Cambridgeport Design Factory's Indeterminacy Project, <http://www.lcdf.org/indeterminacy/s/47>.
- 33 Pamphlet, "Picket Stockhausen Concert!," 1964, with text by Henry Flynt and designed by George Maciunas, reproduced in *In the Spirit*, 169.

- 34 Flynt made this argument in a lecture that took place shortly after the February 1963 protest. His complete report on both was published in the third Fluxus newspaper as "From 'Culture' to Veramusement," *cc Valise e TRanglE* (March 1963), n.p.
- 35 Harold C. Schonberg, "Music: Stockhausen's 'Originale' Given at Judson," *New York Times*, September 9, 1964, 46.
- 36 Donald Barthelme, "Marie, Marie, Hold On Tight!," *New Yorker*, October 12, 1963, 49–51.
- 37 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 217, 226–29.
- 38 Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, During Fluxus, Late Fluxus," in *Ubi Fluxus?*, 99.
- 39 George Maciunas, letter to Nikita Khrushchev, undated but likely ca. 1962, repr. in *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), 15. The letter went unanswered.
- 40 George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, reproduced in Hendricks, *What's Fluxus?*, 164.
- 41 The whole saga is described, alongside a transcription of Mac Low's response, in Smith, *Fluxus*, 114–15.
- 42 My description of this event comes from Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: 1950, Prosperity and Welfare* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 472; and Leontine Coolewijn, *Mapping the City*, exhibition bulletin (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2007), 28.
- 43 Dick Higgins, *Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964), 83.
- 44 Lucy R. Lippard, "The Geography of Street Time: A Survey of Street Works Downtown," in *New York—Downtown Manhattan: SoHo*, ed. René Block (Berlin: Akademie der Kunst, 1976), 197.
- 45 Slavoj Žižek, "The Sublime Theorist of Slovenia: Interview with Peter Canning," *Artforum*, March 1993, 85.
- 46 Undated, untitled, unpublished typescript reproduced in Monica Bauer, "Milan Knížák Is Fluxus East: Aktual and the Found Velvet Dwarf" (master's thesis, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1996), n.p.
- 47 Milan Knížák and AKTUAL, "AKTUAL—Live Otherwise," 1965–66, reproduced in *Fluxus East*, 87.
- 48 Petra Stegmann makes this point about the general relevance of Fluxus concerts in the Eastern bloc countries in her introductory essay to *Fluxus East*, 39.
- 49 "Excerpts from a discussion between George Brecht and Allan Kaprow entitled 'Happenings and Events' Broadcast by WBAI Sometime in May," *Fluxus cc five ThReE*, no. 4 (June 1964): n.p.
- 50 Higgins, *Postface*, 59.
- 51 Lippard, "Geography of Street Time," 183.
- 52 Higgins, *Postface*, 71–72.
- 53 Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, June 1969, repr. in J. Hendricks, *What's Fluxus?*, 190.
- 54 Cited in Smith, *Fluxus*, 125.
- 55 Knowles, in conversation with Milman, "Road Shows," 100.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *Milan Knizak: Lauter ganze Hälften: Auswahl der Aktivitäten, 1953–1985* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1987), n.p.

- 58 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Maintenance Art Manifesto" (1969), in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 622.
- 59 Robert Filliou, "De la galerie Légitime" (1962), reproduced in Kellein, *Fluxus*, 46.
- 60 Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 150, 154.
- 61 Michael Erlhoff and Robert Filliou, *Eternal Network Presents: Robert Filliou* [sic] (Hannover: Sprengel-Museum, 1984), 115.
- 62 Alison Knowles, "Assis tranquille, ne faisant rien," in *Robert Filliou* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1991), 34.
- 63 Knowles, in conversation with Milman, "Road Shows," 106–7.
- 64 This is one of the many definitions of "flux" that Maciunas collaged straight from the dictionary for use in his early manifestos. See George Maciunas, "Manifesto," 1963, repr. in Jenkins, *Spirit of Fluxus*, 24.
- 65 Yoko Ono, "The Feminization of Society" (1971), in Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks, *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society, 2000), 299–300.
- 66 Yoko Ono, "On Film No. 4 (In Taking the Bottoms of 365 Saints of Our Time)" (1970), in *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), n.p.
- 67 Craig Saper, "Flux Academy: From Intermedia to Interactive Education," in *Visible Language* 20, nos. 1–2, 89–90; Chrissie Iles, "Erotic Conceptualism: The Films of Yoko Ono," in Munroe and Hendricks, *Yes Yoko Ono*, 204.
- 68 Cited in Sukhdev Sandhu, "Eva Rhodes and Yoko Ono: One of the Most Violent Movies Ever," *Daily Telegraph*, May 5, 2009.
- 69 Cited in Geoffrey Hendricks, "The Flux-Mass of George Maciunas," in Hendricks, *Critical Mass*, 130.
- 70 Hannah Higgins, "The Ritual Readymade and Other Lessons of the *Flux-Mass*," in Hendricks, *Critical Mass*, 122.
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Lori Waxman
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of the Surrealists, the
Situationists, and Fluxus

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About the Author

Lori Waxman lives in Chicago, where she is the art critic for the *Chicago Tribune* and a senior lecturer at the School of the Art Institute. She performs occasionally as the “60 wrd/min art critic.”

A Note on the Design

Under the pseudonym Rrose Sélavy, Marcel Duchamp designed a small book in 1922 for his friend, the art critic Henry McBride. *Some French Moderns Says McBride* is a collection of McBride's articles from the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald*, reprinted with a trick: over the course of the book's eighteen pages, the type size increases every few pages, culminating in letters so large that a single sentence can no longer fit on one page. Just as Duchamp used found objects in his readymades, we have repurposed his design conceit for this book to suggest the change of pace associated with walking and reading or, perhaps, reading about walking.

Walking, that most basic of human actions, was transformed in the twentieth century by Surrealism, the Situationist International, and Fluxus into a tactic for revolutionizing everyday life. Each group chose locations in the urban landscape as sites—from the flea markets and bars of Paris to the sidewalks of New York—and ambulation as the essential gesture. *Keep Walking Intently* traces the meandering and peculiar footsteps of these avant-garde artists as they moved through the city, encountering the marvelous, studying the environment, and re-enchanting the banal. Art historian Lori Waxman reveals the radical potential that walking holds for us all.

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