'YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT AND WALK'

Re-imagining and re-making urban planning on foot

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> Walk the city or town, touching its skin, sensing the pulse of its veins and nerve endings. Sense the thriving zones, the dead zones, the invisible spaces beneath your feet.
> Wrights & Sites, *The Architect-Walker* (2018:58)

> [W]alking is a mode of making the world as well as being in it.
> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* (2001:29)

When author and activist Jane Jacobs first set out her critique of modernist urban planning, she emphasised the need to walk. In her early essay 'Downtown is for people', published in *Fortune* magazine in 1958, she insisted: 'No one can find what will work for our cities by looking at the boulevards of Paris, as the City Beautiful people did; and they can't find it by looking at suburban garden cities, manipulating scale models, or inventing dream cities. You've got to get out and walk' (Jacobs 1958:134). Her immediate target was the redevelopment of inner cities through projects that were then razing blocks and proposing in their place spacious, ordered and symmetrical constructions. Rather than revitalising downtowns, she believed these new spaces would deaden them, especially through banishing the street. In walking, she claimed, you see the falsity of many of the assumptions on which these projects depend, along with all manner of clues for alternatives. The best way to plan for downtown, she contended, was to learn from its current uses by walking its streets and looking. Ordinary citizens could, in

this sense, be recognised as the real urban experts: 'what is needed is an observant eye, curiosity about people, and a willingness to walk' (242).

Urban planners and designers in many parts of the world have, in recent times, been paying increased attention to walking. Often citing inspiration from Jacobs, initiatives and agendas for 'walkable cities' and 'walkability' have gained prominence. They are identified with improving such positive attributes as health, sustainability, social interaction, cohesion and 'liveability' (Gehl 2010, Speck 2013, Laker 2017). They are promoted through national and international networks and organisations and subject to measurements and rankings. At the same time, interest in walking methods has intensified among urban researchers, activists, artists and practitioners. While ambitions vary, central concerns include embodiment and sensory exploration. Bodily movement through cities is understood as enabling multi-sensory engagements with their spaces and places, beyond only visual apprehension. It invites consideration of the materialities of bodies and spaces, and of how they are mutually shaped and constituted (Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2018, Brown and Shortell 2015).

Yet, the challenges and problems facing urban pedestrians clearly continue in ways that vary greatly socially and geographically. Automobiles largely remain dominant. Pedestrian infrastructures are frequently inhospitable, polluted, obstacle-strewn or non-existent. Walking is shaped and constrained by the commodification, privatisation and fortification of public space, by the production of built environments that discriminate and disable, and by violence along the lines of race, gender and sexuality. In the affluent world, there are further the atomizing distractions of mobile technologies and screens, which redirect ever more attention from immediate surrounds. Planning debates on urban walking, meanwhile, tend to be led by transport studies concerned with measuring the extent of walking, and with how it functions as a means of transport alongside others. Efforts to address walkability consequently centre on the roles of built forms and design interventions in increasing those numbers, while less attention is given to experiences and practices of walking, which are often treated in instrumental and undifferentiated ways (Middleton 2011).

Questions, therefore, need asking not only about those walking experiences and practices and their diverse positionalities but also about the power relations through walking environments are being planned and produced, and the values that they embody and shape. These questions concern the politics of walking, a subject that has been attracting increasing critical attention within and beyond academia. But Jacobs's injunction 'to get out and walk', which I take as my title, directs our attention also to the perspectives that walking practices can bring *to*

planning. That is my primary concern here as I move from Jacobs and some of her contemporaries to more recent forms of pedestrian performance so as to consider some of the roles that walking can play in questioning, troubling or informing aspects of that field. What can be learned from its creative and improvisatory qualities? How can it be understood as a mode of making worlds? And how might it relate to construction and architecture?

Urban planning and 'foot people'

Jacobs's article in *Fortune* magazine was accompanied by drawings of downtown spaces in the United States. They were produced by British architect and designer Gordon Cullen ('who likes to draw cities the way people actually see them, from eye level'), with captions by the architectural critic Ian Nairn ('who did the walking').[1] Introduced as prominent contributors to 'human scale' design in the UK, they depicted spaces favoured for accommodating and stimulating pedestrians, among them San Francisco's Union Square and New York's Rockefeller Plaza. An exception was a bird's-eye drawing of a generic modernist urban landscape with high-rise housing blocks and monumental buildings set back in green spaces. This contains no pedestrians, only empty roads and parks. They present it as 'the city grandiose' and as the promise of most urban redevelopment projects: 'pompous, formalistic patterns that look fine from the top of a tower or in an architect's perspective, but will be an oppressive void to the poor pedestrian' (caption in Jacobs 1958:139). It is reminiscent of the earlier urban visions of Le Corbusier, who viewed streets as historical relics and 'appalling nightmares' that should be abolished. He did not deny the potential pleasures of walking but believed they depended on it being segregated, preferably in spacious parks between crystalline towers, well away from the noise of highways (Le Corbusier 1948 [1929]:119).

The drawing encapsulates what Jacobs opposed. That is not only in terms of urban form with its zoning of functions, its super-block design with wide-open spaces and self-contained units, and its foundation on a tabula rasa that sweeps away all history and mixing. It is also its perspective: distanced, aerial, and reliant on maps and models. Jacobs emphasized the street and its untapped potential instead. And she stressed grounded observation based on walking and looking and on asking basic questions about what makes some places work better than others in terms of their *action*. When a few years later, she published her classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, the question of perspective was central. In the introduction, she recounts walking and discussing Boston's

North End with an urban planner friend. They agree on the area's life, health and well-functioning qualities, which the planner admits to appreciating and even relishing while walking its streets. Yet, the planner's training still leads him to conclude that it is a 'terrible slum' that must be replaced (Jacobs 1992 [1961]:10–12). What ultimately matters to him are less the evidence from his eyes and feet, or even statistics that reveal the comparative healthiness of the area, but the models and visions in which he has been schooled, and the failure of reality to match these criteria.

Jacobs's attacks on the detrimental consequences of such planning perspectives are well known. Also celebrated is her attention to street life, which she unfolds through the early chapters of *The Death and Life*, initially from experiences around her home on Hudson Street in New York's Greenwich Village. She contends that there is too little recognition of pavement practices, their skilled movements, their improvisations, and their dance-like forms. We need to open our eyes to the streets and to their 'intricate ballet' for there is to be found a complex and 'marvelous order'. This lies under the 'seeming disorder of the old city' that planners all too readily condemn (Jacobs 1992 [1961]:50). Looking back some decades later, she made a short-hand distinction between 'foot people' and 'car people', and she suggested that her book was immediately understood and recognized by the former. She regarded foot people as 'collaborators' in the sense that much of the book was based on observing and listening to them, and in turn the book gave 'legitimacy to what they already know for themselves'. Although she noted: 'Experts of the time did not respect what foot people knew and valued' (Jacobs 1993:xii).

That might have been a dominant view when she was writing at the end of the 1950s, but others were simultaneously re-claiming foot knowledge and skills. To cite only a few examples, the sociologist Erving Goffman published the revised version of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in 1959, and he was soon developing his interest in how people manage and negotiate encounters and interactions in streets and public spaces. That same year the urban planners Kevin Lynch and Malcolm Rivkin published 'A walk around the block', in which they attached microphones to people's lapels and asked them to tell what they could see, hear or smell as they walked through Boston's Back Bay: 'everything and anything you notice' (1959:24). Their study came out of Lynch's work with colleagues at MIT on how ordinary people experience, perceive and orient themselves within cities, and how a technically-minded planning practice could be made to take these matters more seriously. This led to Lynch's seminal *The Image of the City* (1960), which spawned extensive further research, especially in environmental

psychology and geography. Similarly approaching urban design from the perspective of human activities and movement was Cullen's *Townscape* (1961), the composition and imagery of which remain remarkable for the ways in which they assess and convey the roving perception of pedestrians. It was additionally a formative period for the Danish urbanist and architect Jan Gehl, who graduated in architecture from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1960. Within a few years, he embarked on observational and analytical projects in Italy and Copenhagen that paved the way for his pedestrian-centred design projects that have burgeoned globally since the establishment of Gehl Architects in 2000.

But I want to bring in here another short text on urban walking that appeared the same year as Jacobs's article and that has attracted great interest in more recent times: Guy Debord's 'Theory of the dérive'. This was published in the second issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste* where it set out the significance of urban drifting for the recently established situationist group.[2] Debord quickly summarises the main components of the dérive: that it is best conducted on foot in small groups of two or three people; that its length varies but on average spans a day; that it differs from strolling or commuting through its orientation that is both 'playful-constructive' and analytical; and that it involves processes of letting go, allowing oneself to be drawn by the terrain and what is found there, and addressing constraints and possibilities through critical exploration (Debord 2006 [1958]:62–64). Extracted from its context within this avant-garde milieu, as it so often now is, much of it might appear today as a fairly uncontroversial set of guidelines for exploring urban spaces and their ambiences and, as such, not entirely alien to Jacobs and Lynch.

Debord was, like Jacobs, vehemently opposed to the effects of modern planning, in his case particularly lamenting its hand in destroying Paris. He shared with Lynch, meanwhile, the interest in taking the measure of cities not through statistical reports or aerial photographs but through bodily senses and movements, and in uncovering and mapping their contours and currents. Debord and his colleagues called this psychogeography. Lynch inspired research in psychology and geography at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, which independently later also adopted the same term (Wood 2010). But Lynch and those following him presented this in terms of human perception and 'cognitive mapping' that were meant to inform planning and policy, with the intention of making them more responsive to the needs and experiences of inhabitants, for example, through improving urban legibility and imageability (Lynch 1984, Wood 2010). Debord, in contrast, conceived psychogeography in revolutionary terms as intent on exposing and undermining dominant planning ideologies, and

on transforming everyday life and its spaces. His critique went deeper than that of Jacobs, too, as he understood urbanism as an appropriation of the environment by capital and the commodity form, and insisted that a truly democratic urbanism depended upon overturning the rule of both.

Elements of this more radical sensibility can be glimpsed in Debord's essay. He advocates techniques of 'behavioural disorientation', for example, and likens the dérive to the 'anarchic lifestyle' of his group. But it comes through more strongly when read in the context of the group's wider critical accounts of urban developments along with their efforts to develop ways of constructing situations and collectively changing urban environments. This raises questions about the role of walking in relation to such ambitions and the basis of the radical claims made on its behalf. In particular, how did such apparently ephemeral practices relate to urban transformation and construction? While these questions are beyond the scope of this chapter as they pertain to the situationists (see Lavery et al. 2018), they will be taken up in relation to more recent pedestrian performances below.

Walking, experience and lived space

More than sixty years on from Jacobs's original essay, many urbanists seem to have been heeding her call 'to get out and walk'. Walking tours now regularly honour and activate her urban perspectives through free self-organised 'Jane's Walks' and 'Jane Jacobs Walks', held every year by volunteers in hundreds of cities around the world. Bringing together citizens to walk through their neighbourhoods, they aim to provide opportunities to observe, question, discuss and re-imagine their places.[3] More generally, there is currently a wide interest in walking methodologies and their potential for addressing urban questions and problems. Decades on from Lynch and Rivkin's 'A walk around the block', it has become increasingly common to adopt walking interviews or 'walk-alongs' in urban ethnographic research (Kusenbach 2003). Conducted with groups or individuals, they have been used specifically to address experiences of urban development, planning and design, and ways of developing a corporeal and sensory connection to places and research participants (Degen and Rose 2012, Holgersson 2017, O'Neill and Roberts 2020). The conversations they enable between place, participants and researcher are valued for allowing the discovery of new themes, narratives and spaces, both physical and epistemological (Moles 2008:8). Transect walks, deliberative walks, and improvisatory performance walks have also become tools within participatory community planning, seen as a means of enabling dialogue

between 'experts' and 'locals' around issues of concern (Lindell and Ehrström 2020, Roe and Scott-Bottoms 2020).

If the attraction of walking for some researchers lies in how it can enable insights by walking and talking *with* people through their spaces, others focus more on investigating urban issues through their own walking experiences, observations and encounters, whether alone or with others. Writing about walking through industrial ruins, for example, cultural geographer Tim Edensor highlights the materialities of spaces and their effects on the body. He foregrounds the 'continual bodily improvisation' and sensual experiences involved, and the difficulties of representing them in narrative form. He further explores how this practice can productively defamiliarise the regulatory regimes and spatial orderings found in more typical pedestrian environments in western cities (Edensor 2008:127; other examples include Sidaway 2009, Ebbensgaard and Edensor 2020). More in the spirit of Jacobs is Mindy Fullilove's (2020) recent advocacy of 'stroll and scroll' walks – a term she adapts from the Japanese environmental psychologist Hirofumi Minami – as a means of observing, documenting and reflecting on the qualities of urban neighbourhoods. Learning to see main streets on foot is, for her, crucial to supporting and improving them.

Theorisations and uses of such walking methods vary considerably, but a common thread, already evident in Jacobs and Lynch, among others, involves attending to space as lived and experienced. That is important in relation to planning theories and practices that treat space in more abstract and instrumentalized ways, and that consequently overlook or suppress the sensing, emotional and materially situated body in an effort to establish their rationality and impartial professionalism. It potentially connects with epistemological critiques of planning expertise that emphasise how knowledge is embodied, situated and embedded in power relations (Sandercock 2003). At the same time, in the context of sometimes celebratory references to walking methods in social research, caution is needed. As the geographer Hannah Macpherson notes, something of a 'methodological orthodoxy' has coalesced around a number of claims. 'Walking methods do not simply "reveal" people's lived perceptions or responses nor do they unproblematically open up new spaces of disclosure,' she argues. 'Rather, walking and walkers' bodies bring with them their own politics, cultures, histories, habitual responses and lived experiences that must be taken into account' (Macpherson 2016:426). In a manner akin to Edensor, she emphasises how spaces and landscapes come about through walking practices and associated circumstances, and how 'the complex relationality of landscape' is – like that of space – 'multiple, interdependent and always in becoming' (431; see also Massey 2005:59). Walking methods

may therefore limit and close down research as well as open it up, including in relation to the differentially positioned people doing the walking.

Understandings of walking also often rest on a problematic opposition, which is frequently derived from Michel de Certeau's writings on everyday life, and which has since been reproduced by many leaning on him since, between practitioners who operate 'down below' and a powerful system that they manoeuvre within but to whose production they remain 'blind'. This supports a tendency to counterpose walking and planning and to see the former as subjected and regulated by also a source of creative reworking and even subversion. According to Certeau, the 'long poem of walking' reworks planned and scripted places, its drifts and improvisations 'enunciating' elements while abandoning others. Not having its own space, it operates within that of the other. He writes: 'the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers' (de Certeau 1984 [1980]:117). Similar identifications of walking with operating and making do within an already defined field, and with creatively reworking from below, are common in discussion of much contemporary walking art and performance, in which there has been a surge of interest in recent years. In turning to specific modes of pedestrian performance developed by the UK-based group Wrights & Sites in the remaining sections, I want to consider further ways of critically engaging with urbanism and planning on foot. How might these go beyond familiar oppositions, and what are some of the challenges and tensions involved?

Wrights & Sites: disrupted walking

Wrights & Sites is a group of four artist-researchers – Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, Phil Smith and Cathy Turner – who are best known for their 'mis-guides' to cities, both printed and performed. Soon after the group's establishment in 1997, its members moved beyond theatrical modes of site-specific performance and associated expectations of audiences to explore places through walking. In their own words, they 'became more interested in journeying, in displacement and disruption, in the porosity of the city, and the acts of walking and teaching with each other and those we invited to join us or chanced across en route' (Wrights & Sites 2013:151). Their early publication, *An Exeter Mis-Guide*, produced in collaboration with visual artist Tony Weaver, focused on their home city in South West England. As the title implies, this is no ordinary guidebook but is rather billed as 'both a forged passport to your "other" city and a new way of

travelling a very familiar one' (Wrights & Sites 2003, back cover). It invites readers to explore multiple cities within their city through means such as focusing on different senses or framing journeys in specific ways. What might be discovered by touring based on touch, smell or sound? Where might children lead us? How might we go 'walking in a place we think we know but allowing in a sense of don't know' (Wrights & Sites 2004)?

The group has since developed mis-guiding through tours, projects and publications. There is an openness to their mis-guides, which have broadened in scope and subject to include *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere* (2006a) and *The Architect-Walker: A Mis-Guide* (2018). In each case, the texts are presented as *a* mis-guide and not *the* mis-guide, with readers invited to use their instructions as they wish or indeed to make their own. Readers are also asked to interpret the references to 'city' in ways that are 'appropriate to your location or ambition' and 'walk' in similarly open ways that are 'appropriate to your circumstances and mood' (2006a, pull out section). The proposals for action are less scripts than framing devices and provocations. These provide a structure and focus for participation while also encouraging improvisation and drift. Referring to the 'mis-' part of the title, group member Phil Smith comments on it intending 'no deception, but rather an upset, a making-strange of familiar, aesthetic and industrial routines' (2006:35). This connects with the group's concern with 'disrupted walking', which involves unsettling or breaking from routinised and instrumentalised movement from one place to another. It is about becoming more conscious of the passage itself along with its alternative possibilities.

Writing collectively and individually, the group members consider their relations with previous art movements, practitioners and walkers. Included here are *flânerie*, the early twentieth-century avant-gardes of Dada and surrealism, the post-war letterists and situationists, and conceptual and land artists. Some of the invitations in the guides bring to mind the 'scores' produced by Fluxus artists during the 1960s. Most obvious and commented upon, however, are connections with Debord and the situationists (Smith 2015, Hancox 2012). Mis-guiding and disrupted walking recall in particular situationist techniques of 'behavioural disorientation' that were intended to defamiliarise spaces and situations so as to enable them to be experienced afresh. That was not only through the dérive itself but also through practices of *détournement* whereby elements of an existing text, map, film or even urban space were reworked or hijacked to create new effects. Versions of this tactic are found in *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere,* where habitual perceptions and movements are playfully challenged through proposals for small deviations or 'catapults' that suddenly or randomly shift location, such as taking

an arbitrary bus or taxi ride. A fuller example comes in the entry 'Out of place', which echoes situationist cartographies in suggesting the superimposition of one space or time on to another, for example, by overlaying a map of Moscow onto one's own city, or by taking a guidebook from one place and using it in another and being guided by the results (2006a:16–17).

Interest in the potential revelatory functions of such defamiliarizing strategies runs through much modernist literature and art. The situationists saw disrupting routinised perceptions as necessary for combatting the alienating and stultifying effects of the society of the spectacle. It was a step towards gaining more consciousness of the ways in which the space-times of our lives are shaped by forces of capital and the state and towards struggling for re-appropriating those spaces and times. Questions need asking about the adequacy of such strategies today, especially given the ways in which so many modernist and avant-garde methods of collage, superimposition and aesthetic disruption have become staples of the advertising industry and its extensions into urban development. But in contrast to some contemporary versions of literary psychogeography that privilege the individual (usually male) wanderer's subjective experiences of the city, and his supposed abilities to unlock its mysteries, Wrights & Sites conceive disrupted walking strategies in dialogic and porous terms as 'tools for playful debate, collaboration, intervention, and spatial meaning-making' (2013:149). Through collective action and exploration, a significant aim is to draw critical attention to the ways in which places are currently framed and the interests involved, something that often goes unnoticed or is taken-for-granted. What tactics are employed in current framings? What rules and regulations are at work? What stories are told about a place, and how might these be productively disrupted or reworked? (Wrights & Sites 2018:79).

Instigating such questions is important in the contexts of urban developments that are driven by the needs of capital accumulation, and that put considerable store on making place images and narratives for securing competitive advantage, with art often conscripted into these agendas. There is a need in particular to address the material and discursive constructions of public spaces as they are threatened or enclosed through privatisation and commodification, and as conceptions of 'walkability' remain framed by imperatives of commerce and tourism, purged of anything that might disturb their flows. The tactics of Wrights & Sites do not suggest uncovering the 'truth' of place through a critical process of unveiling. Rather, they question how truths and frames are being made, and for what purposes. To signal this concern with collective myths and stories, they coined the term 'mythogeography' for a lens that places 'the fictional, fanciful,

mistaken and personal on equal terms with the factual, municipal history'. It further 'suggests performance through the participation of active spectators as researchers of the city, allowing authors and walkers to become equal partners in ascribing significance to place' (Wrights & Sites 2004; see also Smith 2010). Power and struggle are clearly central to questions of whose frames and stories prevail, and how. But in proposing alternative frames, the mis-guides seek to open grounds for learning about and building other cities within the city.

Playing in the city

One significant frame, which takes us back to why Jacobs wanted planners to get out and walk, concerns everyday urban life and finding ways to notice its existing performances and choreographies. In *The Architect-Walker*, Wrights & Sites present a mock press release that announces a week of festivals 'celebrating the everyday'. A blank space for the city's name allows readers to insert that of their own. But besides the festival programme and a proposal for accompanying statements across social media, nothing is planned. Nothing, that is, other than the already unfolding everyday activities of the city. The simple idea is to frame the ways in which, every day, people make and re-make their city. Besides being a tongue-in-cheek take on urban festivalization, the proposal underlines how 'the city is as much created by the everyday use, activity, actions of its citizens as it is by those large-scale decisions that are made about its laws, its policies, its architecture and design, its timetables, its civic symbols' (2018:57). Similar to how Jacobs framed her street so as to bring attention to its intricate order and ballet, the mis-guides encourage attention to existent everyday spatial practices and performances, and to how their ecologies might be sustained and supported. If this risks seeming banal in the face of current urban problems or as inviting only accommodation to the fundamental existing order, it points towards often overlooked grounds from which any real urban change must be forged (Lefebvre 2014 [1947–1981]).

This connects to an associated question about urban play. What can those planning and designing cities learn from improvised play, whether in the street or on the beach? Referring to a game of hopscotch being marked out with chalk on a street or square, Wrights & Sites write: 'When a child sets up such a game in a street, she is also asserting her right to make use of the street as more than a highway or byway'. They add: 'What kinds of rules would you invent to playfully take over public space?' (2018:22). The idea of learning from improvised children's games is significant within modern urbanism and design. In insisting that streets

must be about more than flow and circulation, Jacobs wrote extensively on children's 'unspecialized' and 'incidental' sidewalk play, the significance of this for lively and diversified streets, and its attractions relative to its separation into specially designed playgrounds. She was particularly acerbic on how planners use arguments about city child-care to justify doing away with streets altogether (Jacobs 1992 [1961]:81–88). Learning from children playing in the streets was also significant for efforts to rethink urbanism and architecture from *within* the modern movement, notably by the architects Alison and Peter Smithson. They drew on walks and observations in London's East End during the 1950s and on photographs by Nigel Henderson of children playing in working-class Benthal Green. Including scenes of chalk-drawn games of hopscotch, the photographs spoke to the Smithsons of the improvisatory qualities of street life and play, and as such, they informed their desire to address the city 'as found' and to 'evolve an architecture from the fabric of life itself' (Smithson and Smithson 1970:108).

In another short entry in *A Mis-guide to Anywhere*, Wrights & Sites suggest exploring with children. They state: 'let them choose a special way of travelling: As if the city were underwater. As if the city were a mountain. As if the city were…' (2006a:83). The proposal speaks to a utopian moment within mis-guiding that is concerned not with distant futures but rather with unsettling and opening up norms and perceptual apparatuses here and now, through imagining and acting *as if*. Ways of being in a city's spaces are tried out and played with. Objects are transmutable. The city is a 'potential space'. 'Windows as doors, doorsteps as playrooms, the garden as a bedroom, an ice rink or a far away land', states Cathy Turner, in a Wrights & Sites performance-lecture. 'Children remake their space all the time, dream of things as different, bigger, smaller, riskier, subject to different rules and customs. For them life is already a drift' (2006b:9). Many of the group's walks aim to regain a sense of discovery and even child-like wonder, a perception of the city prior to routinisation for which the child has often stood as a figure. Their emphasis on defamiliarisation relates to the perception 'at first sight' that Walter Benjamin, especially in his writings on Berlin childhood, saw as crucial to a critical and dereifying gaze. But, in this case, acting *as if* and playing with the city – in the process encountering, reworking and toying with objects and materials – steers attention more to the possibilities and constraints of world-making, both imaginatively and materially.

Turner expresses interest in situationist conceptions of 'playful constructive behaviour' and the 'constructed situation' and in how these not only theorised change but also actualised it, if only temporarily and partially. Play was indeed central to the situationists' ambitions to transform urban spaces and life, as they

sought to reappropriate spaces and to realise a ludic post-capitalist world in which 'cities will be constructed for drifting' (Debord 1956:10). The artist Constant had argued almost a decade earlier that learning from the spontaneous and untrained expression of children was crucial in this regard. 'The chalking on pavements and walls clearly show that human beings were born to manifest themselves', he wrote in a manifesto for the Cobra group (Constant 1987 [1948]:30). He saw awakening and unleashing human creativity as fundamental to the construction of what he and other situationists termed 'unitary urbanism'. In relation to such social and spatial transformation, drifts on foot were meant as strategic reconnoitres even as they also experimented with behaviour and urban spaces in the present. Yet this transformative dimension of the situationist project has largely receded from view within recent interest in the group from within art and performance; and, with that, the dérive has typically lost its strategic associations, becoming tied more to the subjective re-imagining and poeticization of urban environments (Pinder 2018).

A provocative explanation for the increased interest in walking as a subjective re-imagining of urban landscapes, and specifically in situationist psychogeography in these terms, was offered some years ago by film-maker Patrick Keiller. He read it in an economic and political context in the UK in which the potential for most people to enact material urban change, and to shape physical environments through new construction, was highly constrained. In this situation, he argued, 'the subjective transformation of landscape seems to offer the individual a way to oppose the poverty of everyday surroundings. As individuals, we can't rebuild the public transport system, or re-empower local democracy but we can poeticise our relationship with their dilapidation' (Keiller 2013 [2000]:71–72). He added: 'Incapable of magic architecture, we made art out of our deprivation' (73). There is much that could be discussed here. Should this poeticisation be understood as primarily compensatory, providing respite from current conditions and associated impasses but little more? Or does it constitute a form of reworking or resistance, one in which doing something poetic can become political (Lavery 2009:45, Pinder 2011)? More specifically, how might this diagnosis speak to the work of Wrights & Sites and to related tensions within its pedestrian performances?

Construction and possible spaces

Reflecting on the 'fraught' legacies of the situationists at a time when 'their aspiration to revolution can seem an untenable dream', Turner raises similar concerns to those posed by Keiller about the ability of pedestrian performance to effect

material change (2015:164). This is by way of discussing her own experiences of dérive, mainly with Wrights & Sites, where she notes how 'alongside exhaustion and frequent anxiety, there has often been a sensation of profound relief: as if, by constructing loose and improvisatory situations that are other to those of organized labour or leisure, possibilities are expanded, other ways of being are recollected, even temporarily realised' (165). Walking has attracted many other performers and theorists for similar reasons, appearing to offer a means for appropriating and reworking places and for expanding possibilities. In some hands, the emphasis falls on the creative and even emancipatory aspects of this practice. They construe it in performative terms as a means by which people 'can and do act with freedom to self-author, exercising agency, control and power through everyday acts of self-articulation and self-creation' (Harvie 2009:45). License for this is often sought from Certeau in particular who, as discussed earlier, writes of walking as an 'art of the weak' that manipulates, transgresses and recomposes spatial organisations, and who counterposes it to strategic planning and management 'from above' (1984 [1980]:37).

Yet such performative perspectives on walking risk losing sight of the material and structural conditions through which it operates, even if it exceeds their determinations. They are in danger of neglecting how 'what we can and cannot do is profoundly conditioned – or constrained – by the material conditions in which we try to do it' (Harvie 2009:68; see also Olsen 2019:25–26). Recognition of this lies behind how, according to Turner, Wrights & Sites came to wonder whether their 'tactics could bear the weight of our desire to reinvent the city' (2015:166). That was particularly in relation to the openness of their walks, the priority they gave to disruption, and their emphasis on revelation through defamiliarisation. The group early on largely refrained from proposing specific political or spatial plans and instead aimed more at opening critical perspectives on existing spaces and the potential for alternatives. One issue for Turner was how this left them vulnerable to being recuperated and put to work for contrasting political ends. But it also left in abeyance how critique 'might move towards reconstruction, towards direct intervention into the future of the architectural environment?' (2010:153). The group, therefore, became increasingly concerned with intervening more directly in construction and planning.

That is not to say that its earlier mis-guides ignored these issues. Far from it. Through walking, they solicit plans and proposals. They scour old maps for unrealised futures. They propose ways in which planners can learn from desire paths and trespass. But their critical take comes particularly from how they underscore the performative nature of space, and how they thereby encourage imaginings

of how it might be constituted differently. Performance studies scholar Simone Hancox argues that framing the works as participatory art is significant in this regard for enabling attention to, and critical distance from, everyday spaces and normative modes of walking. She acknowledges the considerable difference in tone and politics from the situationists, with the orientation of Wrights & Sites being more benign, moderate and diffuse. Drawing on theorist Jacques Rancière, she nevertheless finds political significance in how the walker is incited 'to act differently to her everyday self, to play and improvise', and in how her aesthetic co-ordinates are thereby changed (Hancox 2012:244). As a member of Wrights & Sites, Turner is circumspect, both alive to the dangers of art-world recuperation of the situationist dérive – where it risks disintegrating into 'self-indulgent musing' or becoming a 'whimsical form of window-shopping' (2015:165) – and hopeful, as she holds on to the idea of the walk as a creative outcome with the potential to re-invent and re-make. But she notes how the group's gravitation towards a 'commitment to constructive proposal' became more apparent in projects that followed the first mis-guides.

Among them is *Everything You Need to Build a Town is Here* (2010), which Wrights & Sites developed in the context of a UK government regeneration programme for coastal areas. Following months of walking in and around the coastal town of Weston-super-Mare, it solidified into 41 metal signs. Each sign presents a comment, proposal or provocation to be come across by pedestrians. Unlike conventional memorial plaques, they draw attention 'to the overlooked, the unremarkable or hint at an action which would divert the reader from their everyday activity'. They are an intimation of the many 'layers of meaning that can be excavated, felt or imagined' in this place (Wrights & Sites 2010:37, 52). A sign at the public library commands: 'Seek out master plans that never made it beyond the drawing board'. Another includes: 'Forget architectural training. Draw on the den-making of your childhood. Everything you need to build a town is here'. Noting the compromised nature of this officially sanctioned and supported project, especially in relation to requirements to negotiate all the wording, Turner nevertheless suggests that the signs hold open spaces 'that are, through their quiet address to residents, question marks in the bright fabric of assertive "regeneration"' (2015:167).

Holding open possible futures in a context that moved from cities to woodlands was meanwhile the aim of *Possible Forests* (2007), an earlier project developed with the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, near Exeter. This articulated different visions of woodlands through filmed and mapped drifts, each conducted with a specialist from a different field. Deliberately avoiding

resolution, the project juxtaposed possible futures for an area then being replanned, a strategy that can more generally be seen as challenging consensus-oriented approaches that serve to obscure conflicting views, and thereby as 'politicizing planning' and 'exposing political content' (Gunnarsson-Östling 2014:109). These and other engagements with planning and architecture underpin Wrights & Sites's most recent mis-guide, *The Architect-Walker*, a book that remains playful and open while marking the group's shift in perspectives through its combination of manifesto-like statements with invitations to engage with and make spaces. Foregrounding their lack of architectural expertise, they ask: 'what does it mean to walk with architecture in mind?' (2018:7). They subsequently turn to contemporary assaults on public space, to the significance of signs and monuments, and to multiple ways of materially and imaginatively intervening in built environments. Acknowledging their weakness as architect-walkers, they at times 'look to an imaginary architecture to exert pressure on a material one'. They nevertheless assert: 'Across an autotopographical terrain we subject repressive landscapes to our corrosive associations. And we will change it' (44). They also include a statement on privilege, a reminder of how much easier walking is for some than others, and of how the stakes involved in struggles over public space vary considerably (82–83).

When Jacobs called on urbanists to get out and walk more than sixty years ago, it was with the intention of defending and improving streets and public spaces. It was to shift perspectives so as to observe and learn from existing practices and places. It was to question assumptions of expertise. It was to open eyes to improvised movements and choreographies that are so often overlooked or disparaged by professional planners. Wrights & Sites and other current walking practitioners are operating in different contexts, yet finding means of encountering and learning from places and people remains crucial. That need has not diminished with the greater attention now paid to walking environments in many cities; on the contrary, as these spaces are framed and produced around specific interests and values, there is ever greater need to explore them critically. A crucial question in this regard, which is too often glossed over in much recent pedestrian performance, is that of power. This is the subject of the final section of *The Architect-Walker* where Wrights & Sites highlight the struggle: 'Architect-walkers enlist in the space wars for conceptual territory, without which real terrains remain under oppressive control'. But while proposing a range of tools, they are wary of exaggerating the transformative capacities of pedestrian performances in themselves. They write: 'architect-walkers generate certain "holding patterns" within the fortresses of our enemies, make provocations and installations that are kinds of waiting and from which, if we have any sense, we have built escape routes' (2018:110, 111).

Notes

1 As introduced in *Fortune* (1958, 135).
2 Debord published an earlier version in *Les Lèvres Nues*, in 1956.
3 Jane's Walks were started by friends of Jacobs after she died in 2006, becoming an annual festival. Another programme of Jane Jacobs Walks was subsequently established by the Center for the Living City, originally founded in collaboration with Jacobs (http://www.janejacobswalk.org).

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