

## Editors' Introduction

### Undoing the *Flaneur*

*Robyn Autry and Daniel J. Walkowitz*

Practices of urban engagement in city spaces take many forms, but walking—and how we do it—has always been central to the urban experience. Indeed, urbanites defined the parameters of the “walking city” historically by the time it took them to traverse space between home and work. But the practice of walking city streets was and is fraught with social meaning. The imagined urban walker occupies a commanding position in the way city officials and planners seek idealized settings for social, cultural, and economic exchanges. Their visions shape the practice of walking through the use of street signs, traffic lights, trails, historical markers, and other visual cues and technologies designed to control the production and experience of street life. Even in ostensibly progressive initiatives, such as the greening and re-pedestrianizing of cities, assumptions about active mobility and visible publics shape official narratives of urban life. The postwar growth of the walking tour industry and the reimagining of old industrial cities as sites for memorializing versions of the past have arisen alongside increasing post-9/11 concerns—indeed, near obsessions—with the surveillance of dangerous bodies. The historical is to be remembered and animates how people walk the city, and in tours, are instructed as to its meaning. However, as residents and visitors themselves navigate these streets, they produce their own meanings and strategies of maneuver, illuminating how the politics and social construction of walking from one street to another are contested, unstable and may differ in any given time period.

*Radical History Review*

Issue 114 (Fall 2012) DOI 10.1215/01636545-1597970

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In this special issue a range of studies take us across time and space to historicize and reconsider the *flâneur* as the iconic bystander to the spectacle of urban life and change. The bulk of articles and essays are concerned with the spatial practices and implications of political and economic systems of production and consumption, social control, and alterity on conceptualizations of urban walkers and walking, but we begin with three reflections that contextualize the history of the flâneur, the voyeur, and the urban walker.

In her reflection essay, historian Jennifer Tucker considers how much of what we believe about cities, the way they existed in the past as much as the way we experience them today, rests on the work of professional and amateur photographers. As much as advances in and access to modern photography prompted new understandings and appreciation of everyday life in the city and the growth of street art, they also led to distorted images and greater social control through refinements in surveillance. Tucker interrogates not only the photographs themselves, but also the producers of the images.

A second reflection by disability studies scholar and historian David Serlin turns our attention to how bodies circulate through urban space, with particular attention to the gender and bodily prejudices in the seen and unseen in street life. Reflecting upon the normative construction of the nondisabled heterosexual man as the embodiment of urban life, Serlin reviews the important urban theory that has informed studies of the flâneur and challenges urban scholars to do more than “queer” the streets they study. In Serlin’s terms, scholars need to “crip” urban histories in order to better understand how all bodies interact within and circulate through the city.

Finally, a third reflection echoes the studies about the effects of rapid urbanization and industrialization on the psyches and lifestyles of urban residents in the early twentieth century. In an insightful essay that draws on the comparative ways residents in a Ukrainian industrial city experience a one-time vibrant factory site, sociologists Anastasiya Ryabchuk and Natalia Onyshchenko reflect on how the public image, personal identities, and cultural practices of the working class have been rendered invisible with the rise of capitalism. They show that the ideological shift toward valorization of the middle class and consumption is mirrored in the transformation of the built environment as developers and city planners repurpose some parts of old factories as destination shopping malls, while other parts of the factory remain invisible and mute in the newly constructed narrative of consumer classlessness.

The feature essays in this issue, in considering the social-psychological and cultural elements of the postindustrial city, constitute a metanarrative on the insights and issues raised in the Reflections. They also demonstrate the traction of the issues over time and the salience of urban theory to the study of the politics of

walking and urban space. Historian Ralph Kingston studies the social construction of pedestrians as consumers during the commerce-driven remapping of Paris streets in the early nineteenth century, well ahead of Haussmann's grand redesign. Drawing on rich primary source material, Kingston demonstrates how shopkeepers and private property owners mobilized modest financial investments and worked with and around municipal authorities to recirculate people through the city. Their transformation of city streets into a thriving commercial zone with "pedestrian-friendly" amenities like sidewalks was designed to draw crowds and customers.

The change in the uses of urban space across time is also taken up in Latin American historian Heather Vrana's study of "funereal *flânerie*" in Guatemala City. She examines the way college students appropriated a public space in the heart of the city, one that has seen many lives, from an imagined public square to a commercial zone. Her work illustrates how radical students staged public mourning as a highly visible act of collective protest and, along the way, revolutionized popular notions of life and selfhood by drawing attention to the power and agency of dead bodies to remap public life and state politics. Vrana also considers how traces of these death commemorations appear in recent efforts to redevelop the site of the public funerals as a pedestrian shopping area. She demonstrates how the radical politics of college students triggered a revolution in public uses of space.

The way youth lay claim to the city and harness aspects of it to assert identities and make social demands is also addressed in Eva Giloi's article about schoolboys in Berlin. Giloi dissects autobiographies to understand how male youth in early twentieth-century Berlin defied customary child-adult relationships by charting new territory and paths through city streets swelling with rapid urbanization. She looks at the way upper- and middle-class male youth transgressed the expectations and control measures that parents and teachers designed to confine them to home or school. She also finds division between child and adult worlds more clearly demarcated than in the bustling streets of the metropolis, which much of the bourgeoisie viewed as a hub of depravity and social contamination. From crafting alternate routes to and from school to slipping out of the house to attend a theater production, their activities were not countercultural or revolutionary. Yet, they signaled a profound break with the unquestioning obedience to parental controls and hierarchical authority by privileged male youth, who found themselves lured to city streets as cultural consumers.

More than the object of speculative fantasies, the agency of the pedestrian is restored in Barbara Schmucki's feature article about rising public awareness of threats to pedestrian safety and mobility with increased automobile use and liberal traffic regulations in post-World War II Britain. By tracking the limited success and failures of Britain's Pedestrian Association through a treasure trove of archival material spanning four decades, Schmucki reveals how pedestrians saw themselves.

Being squeezed out or “evicted” from urban space under the pretense of public safety, they mobilized against the cultural and structural privileging of automobiles and driving. Over time, the advocacy organization lost ground and public support as cars came to dominate the urban landscape of Britain.

In the final feature essay, Tess Lea and her coauthors look at the way economic imperatives, much as Kingston illustrates in nineteenth-century Paris, intersect with racial imaginations to constrain the movement of Aborigines in two Australian commercial zones designed for white consumers. Here, the only value of indigeneity rests in its commodification for curious tourists and white locals. Looking at two frontier towns, Lea compares how settler mentalities marked the landscape and displaced indigenous people, many of whom resettled in urban centers only to find themselves routinely harassed and discouraged from lingering in spaces reserved for white middle-class consumption. Along with the spatial practices of racial domination, including antivagrancy laws designed to evict Aborigines from white consumer space, Lea and her coauthors also address forms of indigenous resistance in the urban core and in the suburban peripheries where many have been forced to relocate.

The geographer Don Mitchell, in a wide-ranging review entitled “Traffic Logic and Political Logic,” picks up the themes raised in all the features, albeit most explicitly by Barbara Schmucki for Great Britain. Mitchell analyzes how three authors in their recent books detail efforts to regulate urban vehicular and pedestrian mobility and how users, economic interest groups, and planners variously dictate or mediate struggles between them.

The final sections in this issue turn to the conventions of the walking tour, visibility, and the memorable on their heads, offering what might be said to be counter-tour perspectives that disrupt the received wisdom of how people are told to walk and see and be seen. First, in the “Teaching Radical History” section, architectural and urban historian Elihu Rubin, inspired by the Situationists, illustrates the wonders and possibilities unleashed by the urban *dérive*—drifting. Rubin argues that the theory and practices of *flânerie* and drifting can serve as a pedagogical tool to draw students out of the controlled setting of a college campus. To this end, he assigns his graduate and undergraduate students to drift through the inner-city streets of New Haven, without a predetermined destination or route. Students reflect on their sensorial experiences and encounters as they unsettle assumptions about urban design and everyday life.

Next, in an oral history, theater graduate student Hillary Miller interviews Todd Shalom, the founder of Elastic City, an alternative New York City-based tour group, and Niegel Smith, a theater director. In August 2011, Elastic City, an organization committed to offering city tours that challenge everyday people to reorient their minds and bodies as they drift through urban space, sponsored *Total Detroit*, a 57-hour tour-interrogation of urban history and memory. Shalom and Smith discuss

their creation of a sensory and conceptual tour of Detroit rooted in the participatory performance of walkers.

This turn to performance and visual art as a strategy to rediscover the city raises questions about the nature and limits of visual culture that are furthered in this issue's "Curated Spaces" section. In her visual essay, Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani describes how local residents harnessed the power of the image and public art to produce their own narratives about the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA) on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. From interactive tours to exhibitions, she works with students and local residents to visualize both the history and the future of a tract of land razed during the "slum clearance" of the 1960s. Bendiner-Viani's images show community members mobilizing through public artwork to reclaim the space and influence its redevelopment.

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue challenge conventional ways of understanding urban walking and street life. They engage the received literature on the flaneur, while also offering new directions for the study of street politics at this crucial moment when the international impulse to "occupy" the city as a form of social protest mandates innovative approaches. With this issue one can place such contemporary movements within the broader historical trajectory of struggles around public and private uses of urban spaces. As these essays suggest, elite visions of the flaneur as an idealized and commodified figure of the new millennium who consumes the city rest uneasily with the myriad ways that urban residents have historically occupied city streets.

